



NEWS LET TER

April
2026

April Community Highlights

Featured by STEM Next & Apple

Freedom Scholars Learning Center was honored to be featured in STEM Next's April 21 article, *"How STEM Next and Apple Are Scaling Technology Education in Afterschool."*

The article highlighted the work happening inside our Seed Sowers & Storytellers afterschool program, where scholars are using iPads not only to learn, but to create, investigate, and advocate.



Through the Apple Tech & Careers Community of Practice, Jeremy Smith and FSLC staff have been engaging in hands-on learning, coaching, and planning around Challenge Based Learning, an approach that invites young people to use technology to explore real-world challenges, develop ideas, and create solutions connected to their communities.

As Jeremy shared in the article, *"These tools are actually developing kids with what they need."*

This feature reflects what we believe deeply at FSLC: when scholars are trusted with meaningful tools, strong guidance, and real community issues to explore, they become more than technology users. They become creators, advocates, and problem-solvers.

Read the full article: <https://stemnext.org/apple-tech-education-afterschool/>



During the featured visit, scholars Amaya Franklin and Ty'Quinn Fagan worked with program leader Qua'Je Lowry to record and review video footage for a presentation about pollinators. This work is part of a youth-led campaign to protect insects like bees, developed in collaboration with our 4-H Cornell Cooperative Extension partners.

As one scholar shared, *"We wouldn't have honey without pollinators."*





Celebrating PLTI Cohort 13

Freedom Scholars Learning Center is proud to celebrate members of Greater Rochester PLTI Cohort 13 and the Children's Leadership Training Institute.

The Greater Rochester Parent Leadership Training Institute helps build bridges and advocacy skills so parents can become leading advocates for children. This year's Cohort 13 Graduation was held on April 20 at the Memorial Art Gallery under the theme *"Voices of Impact: Families Leading Change."*

We are especially proud to celebrate the parent leaders connected to our extended community, including Jezare Hood and Zymereia Daniels.

Jezare's PLTI project, *"Hood Family,"* focuses on children's necessities, clothing, and bracelets for hope. Zymereia's project, *"Ruth's Sacred Garden,"* is a community-centered initiative focused on healing, connection, outreach, donation drives, creative engagement, and collective care.

These projects reflect the heart of parent leadership: seeing a need, gathering community, and creating something that helps families move forward. We celebrate this year's graduates and the work they are carrying into Rochester.

Summer Program Applications Are Full

We are grateful to share that interest in our upcoming summer program has been incredibly strong. At this time, our summer program classrooms are full, and new applicants are being accepted for the waitlist only.

This response reflects the trust families continue to place in Freedom Scholars Learning Center and the growing need for high-quality, community-centered learning spaces for children in Rochester.

Our team is preparing a summer experience rooted in literacy, cultural reflection, enrichment, family engagement, and joy. We are thankful for every family that has applied, shared our program, and helped make FSLC part of their child's learning journey.

Next steps

Join us this summer

Apply or reach out with questions about the **Children's Defense Fund** Freedom Schools® Summer Program at Freedom Scholars Learning Center.

Space is currently FULL

Summer Program begins in:

59	17	35	48
Days	Hours	Mins	Secs

FULLY BOOKED

Join the Waitlist

Lizmairi Vargas Wins U of R Ignite Impact Challenge

Freedom Scholars Learning Center is proud to celebrate Lizmairi Vargas, who won the Ignite Impact Challenge at the University of Rochester while representing FSLC.

Lizmairi participated through ENT 230: Ignite Impact, a course connected to the Simon School of Business where students are matched with local community-based organizations. This semester, Freedom Scholars was one of the community collaborators, alongside organizations including Rochester Refugee Resettlement Services and Foodlink. The course asked students to work directly with nonprofit partners, contribute weekly project hours, and develop reports, recommendations, and final pitches using a business framework for community impact.

Lizmairi's winning project focused on a key organizational need for FSLC: making our internship process more intentional with the University of Rochester and helping build a pipeline of paid, service-learning internships for U of R students. Her work offers a strong foundation for how FSLC can continue growing university partnerships while creating meaningful opportunities for students to support literacy, operations, programming, and community-based research.

Jeremy described Lizmairi as a strong partner who is excited about Freedom Scholars' literacy and literacy intervention work. We are also grateful that Lizmairi received an extension and will continue working with FSLC through September.

This kind of partnership matters because it strengthens both sides of the work. FSLC receives thoughtful support around real organizational needs, and students like Lizmairi gain hands-on experience serving community-based nonprofits that are building change from the ground up.



Intern & Fieldwork Highlights

This month, we are grateful to highlight college and university connections that continue to strengthen FSLC's work while creating meaningful learning experiences for emerging leaders.

Faith Orisakwe has been supporting FSLC through a longitudinal study focused on the long-term effects of the Freedom School model and the Freedom School way after scholars leave the program. Her work helps identify former scholars who spent meaningful time in Freedom School programming and better understand how those experiences continue to shape their education, careers, leadership, and community impact.

FSLC was also connected with Juminda Webb, an MCC Human Services student, through Robin Richardson, Fieldwork Coordinator in Monroe Community College's Department of Education and Human Services. Juminda expressed a strong desire to contribute to FSLC's mission after being inspired by her experience lobbying in Albany with Freedom Scholars.

Together, these connections show how FSLC is not only serving scholars today, but helping prepare the next generation of educators, researchers, advocates, and community leaders.

SOMETHING INSIDE

Rummage Sale Success

Thank you to everyone who supported this month's FSLC rummage sale. The turnout was incredible.

For the first time, there was a line of people outside the door before the sale began. Within the first hour and a half to two hours, about 80% of the items were sold. By the end of the event, the sale brought in close to \$1,500 to support FSLC's work and upcoming scholar opportunities.

This fundraiser showed the strength of our community. Families, staff, volunteers, donors, and supporters all helped make it possible. Whether you donated items, helped set up, shared the word, made a purchase, or simply showed up, you were part of this success.

The next rummage sale is planned for the fall, and we look forward to building on this momentum.



Ice Cream Plus Field Trip

This month, our scholars took a special trip to Ice Cream Plus, a Black-owned ice cream shop located near East Main Street and Alexander Street in Rochester.

The visit gave scholars more than a sweet treat. It created an opportunity to experience a local Black-owned business, practice community navigation, and use public transportation through RTS.

The joy was clear. Scholars were excited, engaged, and fully present as they shared time together outside the classroom.

East High Freshman Academy Career Day

Freedom Scholars Learning Center was grateful to participate in EAST Freshman Academy Career Day on April 24. Executive Director Jeremy Smith spoke with 9th grade scholars about what it means to lead a community-based nonprofit organization and serve as an Executive Director.

His presentation invited students to explore nonprofit leadership, including strategic planning, operations, fundraising, staffing, community partnerships, and mission-driven service.

We are thankful to Michelle Coccia and the EAST Freshman Academy team for creating space for these important career conversations. Opportunities like this help students imagine future pathways while seeing the value of leadership grounded in community care.



DNA Day: Strawberry DNA Exploration

In April, our scholars participated in a hands-on DNA Day activity where they analyzed the DNA of a strawberry.

This activity gave scholars a chance to step into scientific inquiry in a real and memorable way. Moments like this help make STEM learning accessible, engaging, and connected to the world scholars experience every day.

Chase Bank Financial Literacy Workshop

Freedom Scholars Learning Center was grateful to welcome Romanda Stevenson from Chase Bank for a two-day financial literacy workshop with our scholars and families.

The first session helped scholars build a stronger understanding of money, saving, decision-making, and financial responsibility. The second session created space for parents and caregivers to engage with financial literacy tools in a practical way.

At FSLC, literacy is bigger than reading alone. Financial education is one way we help scholars and families build confidence for life beyond the classroom.

Wegmans Site Visit

Freedom Scholars Learning Center was grateful to welcome representatives from Wegmans for a recent site visit. The visit gave them an inside look at the learning environment, scholar engagement, literacy support, and community-centered work happening across our program.

They left encouraged by what they saw and expressed interest in continuing to build a relationship with FSLC. For our team, that matters. When community partners see the work up close, they do not just hear about our mission. They witness the care, structure, joy, and growth happening with scholars each day.



Looking Ahead: Seed Sowers and Storytellers 5th Annual Finale Presentation

We are excited to invite families, partners, and community members to the Seed Sowers and Storytellers 5th Annual Finale Presentation.

- ◆ Date: May 21, 2026
- ◆ Time: 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM
- ◆ Location: St. Mark's and St. John's Episcopal Church, 1245 Culver Road, Rochester, NY

This year's finale will celebrate the learning, growth, and leadership of our scholars. The evening will include Harambee, scholar presentations, awards and recognitions, research presentations, and a Black History exhibit presentation.

The tentative theme centers around immigration, policy, and leaders of color, giving scholars space to connect history, identity, advocacy, and community impact.

The finale is more than a closing event. It is a chance to witness the voices, brilliance, creativity, and growth of our scholars after a powerful season of learning.

We hope families, partners, and community members will join us in celebration.

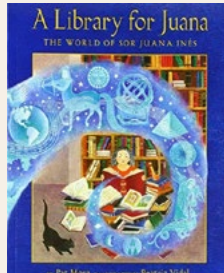
IRC Spotlight

Books We Read in April

This month's Integrated Reading Curriculum selections invited scholars to explore imagination, resilience, problem-solving, environmental change, and the power of using one's gifts to make a difference.

A Library for Juana

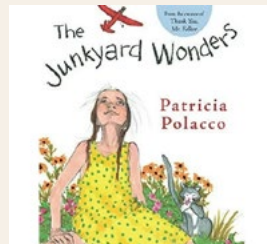
Scholars learned about Juana Inés, a young girl whose love of reading and learning opened doors for her voice, imagination, and future. This story encouraged scholars to reflect on curiosity, knowledge, and the importance of access to books.



Themes: love of learning, curiosity, literacy, voice.

The Junkyard Wonders

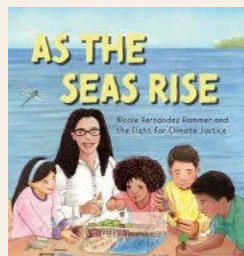
This story helped scholars think about creativity, belonging, and seeing brilliance where others may overlook it. Scholars reflected on how every person brings gifts, and how encouragement can help those gifts grow.



Themes: belonging, creativity, confidence, seeing potential.

As the Sea Rises

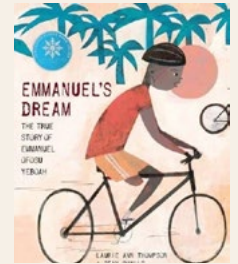
Scholars explored how environmental changes impact communities, especially those living close to the land and water. This selection opened conversations about climate, responsibility, and protecting the places people call home.



Themes: environmental change, community, responsibility, care for the earth.

Emmanuel's Dream

Scholars read about Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah and his powerful journey of courage, determination, and advocacy. His story reminded scholars that challenges do not define a person's future, and that one voice and one life can inspire change for many.



Themes: perseverance, disability awareness, courage, advocacy.

The Girl Who Figured It Out

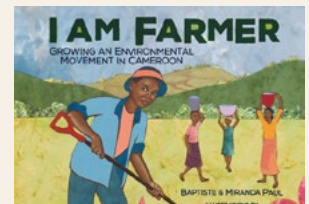
This selection invited scholars to think about persistence, problem-solving, and the confidence it takes to keep trying. Scholars reflected on how asking questions, testing ideas, and believing in your ability to learn can lead to discovery.



Themes: problem-solving, persistence, confidence, discovery.

I Am Farmer

Scholars learned about farming, sustainability, and the impact one person can make by caring for the land and community. This story connected well with FSLC's ongoing focus on environmental literacy, gardening, and collective responsibility.



Themes: sustainability, agriculture, community care, environmental leadership.