

FY 2007 QUESTION NUMBER: 1

QUESTION:

What is the value of the two parent outreach approaches, study circles and the school-based parent outreach programs? Why did the superintendent choose to expand study circles? How does the translation services unit relate to parent community outreach?

BUDGET PAGE REFERENCE: 5-62

ANSWER:

Montgomery County Public Schools' families are increasingly diverse and many need support in understanding how to access resources and information to help their children succeed. One of the primary ways parents are involved is through school-based parent outreach staff. The school-based parent outreach staff has as their focus activities that help to build and sustain community relationships with their schools. Additionally, they support individual parents in working with the school and supporting their children's progress. This approach is valuable because the school-based parent staff is identified in the school and available for direct interaction with parents, school staff, students, and communities as the need arises.

The Study Circles Program assists schools to address challenges by bringing together parents, teachers, and students from different backgrounds in roundtable dialogue. Study circles help participants learn about each other's cultures, discuss racial differences, and confront racial barriers to student achievement. Each study circle develops action steps for change through a series of two-hour sessions that include approximately 15 diverse parent, teacher, and student participants, led by two facilitators. An outcome of the study circle is the creation of action teams to carry out action steps developed by the study circle. Action teams continue to be monitored by the Study Circles Program. The value of study circles is in building stronger relationships among our diverse communities and to provide a plan with action steps to implement change that benefits the community, school staff, parents, and students.

When the Study Circles Program began in FY 2005, 15 study circles were organized and completed exceeding the planned number by five. For FY 2006, 20 study circles are planned, and as of January 10, 2006, 14 have been organized, and six more are in preparation. For FY 2007, additional funding will ensure that study circles can be provided at five additional schools. Although a comprehensive evaluation of the Study Circles Program is planned for FY 2007, the program already has shown some successes:

- An analysis of participant pre and post surveys during the FY 2005 school year found a significant increase among teachers in their understanding of racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement.
- Follow-up interviews documented a school that went from having no Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to having an active PTA as a result of the study circle action teams.

FY 2007 QUESTION NUMBER: 1 (Continued)

These initial successes of the Study Circles Program were the basis of recommending the continuation and enhancement of this program in the FY 2007 operating budget.

The ESOL Translation Unit provides translation services to all MCPS schools and offices upon request. School-based parent outreach programs and the Study Circles program use translation services in the same manner as other MCPS units for translating outreach and informational documents and for interpreting at meetings so more parents can engage in school activities and support their children's learning. The Translation Services Unit is one of a number of ways in which MCPS provides increased access to school system and student information to our non-English-speaking communities.