

New Study Circle Facilitator Training

Are you interested in helping diverse parents, teachers, and students confront racial barriers to student achievement? The MCPS Study Circles Program is training a team of facilitators who have the skills and passion to lead dialogues on race and achievement.

The MCPS Study Circles Program helps schools to organize roundtable dialogues that provide a facilitated process for diverse parents, teachers, and students to form relationships, understand racial barriers, and create action steps for change. Each study circle is assigned two trained facilitators.

Facilitators must have strong process skills, experience working with racially and ethnically diverse participants, and some knowledge of racial barriers to student achievement. Facilitators in study circles are not the experts or teachers, and do not give their opinions. Facilitators manage the discussions from a neutral perspective, create a safe space for participants to take risks, and help participants examine issues from many points of view.

Participants in our facilitator training receive instruction in multicultural and group process skills, a certificate of completion, and a \$500 stipend when they facilitate a full study circle. Because of the immediate need for strong facilitators, the next training will be limited to facilitators who already have some related experience. Interested participants must submit an application and attend an information meeting. We regret that we can only accept a limited number of participants in our training at this time.

Please review the Step-by-Step process below and contact us with any questions at (301) 279-3455 or studycircles@mcpsmd.org. More information about the program and an application can be found on our website: www.montgomerycountyschoolsmd.org/departments/studycircles.

STEP-BY-STEP APPLICATION PROCESS

We recognize that the application and training process is a long one. We think it's necessary to ensure strong facilitators for the parents, teachers, and students who participate in the program. We will work hard to provide a high quality comprehensive training—and we think it is worth the time it takes. Training and all meals are completely free. Please note that not all applicants will be selected to attend the training and that completing training does not mean that you will automatically be asked to facilitate a study circle.

1. Information Meeting – Wednesday, June 27, 2007

- The meeting will give an overview of the study circles process as well as specifics on the role and expectations of facilitators
- 7:00pm-8:30pm at the MCPS Carver Education Service Center Auditorium, 850 Hungerford Drive, Rockville MD

2. Application Forms Due – Friday, July 27, 2007

3. Selection Committee will notify everyone of advancement to “Sample” Study Circle

4. “Sample” Study Circle -- Wednesday August 8 or Saturday August 25

- All applicants must participate in a sample study circle. This will provide an understanding of the process and give facilitators an opportunity to experience a Study Circle from a participant's perspective
- 9:30am to 4:30pm – must attend the entire session

5. Attend 14-hour facilitator training (must attend all sessions)

- Saturday, September 8, 2007 from 9am-5pm
- Monday, September 10, 2007 from 6-9pm
- Monday, September 17, 2007 from 6-9pm

FACILITATOR TRAINING APPLICATION

Please Print or Type

GENERAL INFORMATION

Name: _____ Organization: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Preferred Phone Number: _____ Alternate Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

How did you hear about the training? _____

Are you an MCPS employee? If so, what school/department _____

Will you need any special accommodations during the training? _____

BACKGROUND-We work hard to make sure study circle participants and facilitators are representative of the diversity of our community. The questions below help us achieve this goal.

Ethnic, Racial, Cultural Background: _____

Age (Please Circle One): under 25 26-35 36-50 51-65 above 65

Do you speak a language in addition to English? If yes, what languages?

EXPERIENCE- It is important that you answer the questions below honestly. Since each study circle will have two facilitators, inexperience alone will not keep you from becoming a facilitator. However, honestly knowing your skills will help us make appropriate matches. Please attach your answers to the following questions, or if you have additional experience that you think may be relevant to the position, such as public speaking skills, experience leading groups or volunteer work at your child's school, please let us know about that as well. Thank you.

1. Please provide a description of any experience you have with facilitation and/or with diversity/education issues.

2. In your opinion, does race/ethnicity affect student achievement in MCPS? If so, how and if No, why not? Please briefly explain your answer.

SAMPLE STUDY CIRCLE- Everyone must participate in a sample study circle before the training. Please check the appropriate box.

- I will attend the sample study circle on Wednesday, August 8th from 9:30am to 4:30pm
- I will attend the sample study circle on Saturday, August 25th from 9:30am to 4:30pm
- I have already participated in a study circle at _____

Frequently Asked Questions

How are Study Circles organized?

The Study Circles staff works with school personnel and outside organizations to reach and recruit families and teachers. There are six Community Superintendents within Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) who supervise all principals. Each Community Superintendent identifies a few schools that they think could benefit from having a Study Circle. Study Circle staff members then meet with principals to plan goals, organize strategies, and set dates. Information is sent to all school stakeholders (see “how are participants recruited?” below). Facilitators are not responsible for any part of organizing or logistics.

How are participants recruited?

An ideal Study Circle is made up of a diverse mix of participants; both in terms of their racial/ethnic/cultural backgrounds and their roles in the school. We recruit teachers and school staff, including administrators, when we give a presentation at a school staff meeting. We try to get both parents who are quite involved in the school and parents who are not-so-involved. Usually, the school picks a list of parents who are mailed a personal invitation to come to an information meeting. Our staff then follows-up with reminder phone calls/e-mails. Next we provide targeted outreach to recruit parents and students who would not normally come to such a meeting. After the information meeting, we make sure the circle is diverse, send confirmation letters, and make reminder calls and e-mails.

What happens at a Study Circle information meeting?

Usually, the information meeting lasts 90 minutes, and happens about 2-3 weeks prior to the beginning of the Study Circle. When participants arrive, we serve pizza, make introductions, and lead a short activity which helps reveal people’s perceptions of the school. After a presentation which explains the basics of the program, we give everyone an opportunity to participate in a 20 minute sample Study Circle. At the end of the meeting, we ask those who are interested to fill out registration form.

How often/when/where do Study Circles meet?

Each Study Circle meets for six 2-hour weekly sessions. The circle meets at the school, in the library, gym, or media center at 7-9pm or 6:30-8:30pm.

Do you provide childcare? Translation? Food?

We provide childcare on request. All of our written materials are bilingual (English/Spanish) and we provide simultaneous interpretation if needed. Pizza is served at the 1st session.

How many people are in a Study Circle?

Anywhere from 12-20. Again, an ideal Study Circle is made up of a diverse mix of parents, staff and administrators; both in terms of their racial/ethnic/cultural backgrounds and their roles in the school.

Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

Do Study Circles ever include students?

Yes! We have had several student-only Study Circles and more are being planned. When we run a Study Circle at the High School level (with parents, teachers and other staff), we have found that having student participation is great. Several middle schools have also included students, and we recently had our first middle school student-only study circle.

What kind of support can facilitators expect from Study Circles Program staff?

The Study Circles program will provide you with all the materials needed for a 6-session Study Circle. Everything will come to you neatly labeled. You will have an initial meeting before the beginning of your Study Circle to help you get started and answer any questions you may have. You will also be assigned an experienced point person from our staff who will check in with you weekly to help you plan, brainstorm, and troubleshoot any concerns.

What is the time commitment for facilitators?

About 3-4 hours per week. A typical Study Circle meets once a week for 2 hours. It is a good idea for one or both facilitators to get there a half hour early to set up, make final planning arrangements, and greet participants as they arrive. Beyond the actual Study Circle, you can anticipate 1-3 hours of preparation per week with your co-facilitator. Weekly phone check-ins with your staff point person usually last about 1 hour. The Study Circles Program staff takes care of all the organizing aspects, including reminder phone calls to participants.

Once trained, how are Facilitators placed in a Study Circle? Do we get paid?

Once trained, facilitators self-evaluate their readiness to facilitate. The training team looks at this in combination with their own assessments of facilitators' perceived skill, personality, adaptability, strength in working with a co-facilitator, and neutrality. Every facilitator will receive a personalized written evaluation, indicating strengths and areas for improvement. At that time we will indicate whether we think you are ready to be placed in a study circle, or what skills we would like to see you practice. Once dates have been set for a new six-session study circle, and we have heard from you about your availability and location preferences, our staff will select/match two facilitators based on skill level, personality, and racial/ethnic background. All study circles are led by facilitators from different backgrounds. Facilitators this year were provided a \$500 stipend for a 6-session study circle.

Facilitator's Job Description

- Manages the discussion
- Facilitates from a neutral perspective
- Helps the group develop and follow ground rules
- Helps participants examine issues from many points of view
- Handles group behaviors
- Helps the group move from dialogue to action
- Is not an expert on the issue
- DOES NOT JOIN THE DISCUSSION (except to add probing questions)

MCPS Study Circles Program (301) 279-3455 www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/studycircles



Department of Communications
Division of Family and Community Partnerships