

# Imagine a school where racial and ethnic differences are not barriers to success.

## Study Circles Program 2013-2014

The Study Circles Program is a vehicle to address racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement and parent involvement by engaging diverse staff, parents, and students in dialogue and problem solving.

Study Circles provides the structure for stakeholders to:

- Develop trust
- Hear different perspectives and experiences
- Confront perceptions and beliefs
- Develop a shared understanding of a problem
- Create mutual accountability
- Collaborate on actions that impact attitudes, practices, and policies

The Study Circles Program supports schools and departments with trained facilitators, focused discussion materials, comprehensive outreach strategies, and ongoing coaching.

"The staff climate is completely changed...people are working together and pulling together and laughing together and listening to each other in ways that have never happened before. The work we did with you led directly to this. We began to build a culture of trust and a culture of community."

*Mr. Floyd Starnes, Principal of Kemp Mill Elementary School*

"In combination with other initiatives, the Study Circles Program has contributed greatly to change at our school. It helped to create a climate of trust among staff, students, and parents and it provided a structure for opening honest dialogue about the barriers to student success in our school. Only then were we able to develop the strategies for success."

*Ms. Jeanie Dawson, Former Principal of Earle B. Wood Middle School*



The Study Circles Program offers different formats to meet the needs of each school or office:

**PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES/INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAMS**

*Participants:* staff, school leaders, administrators, and central office personnel

*Format:* retreats with follow up sessions throughout the year.

*Objective:*

- To create a learning community or leadership team that has the trust, awareness, and skills to confront the personal attitudes, practices, and policies that impact the racial achievement gap.

“In the four to five years that we have been doing study circles, referrals have decreased 91% and suspensions by 89%.

- Our student study circles helped us understand what students see as barriers.
- Our all-staff study circle opened up the door to develop the trust and awareness that we needed to tackle the achievement gap and to discuss the difficult issues of racial barriers on achievement.
- Our parent/staff study circles have led to parents trusting us more and staff who are less intimidated and see the value in working with parents.
- Our Spanish-language study circle led to an active and ongoing Latino Parent Group. “

*Ms. Jeanie Dawson, Former Principal of Earle B. Wood Middle*

**PARTNERING WITH PARENTS**

*Participants:* parents, teachers, administrators, staff (and students when appropriate)

*Format:* six 2-hour sessions. Usually in the evening.

*Objectives:*

- To build a unified group of diverse parents, teachers, and students that understands the challenges and benefits of a diverse school.
- To create personal and group action steps that address racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement and parent involvement.
- To encourage an environment in which racial and ethnic issues are talked about openly and productively.

**SPANISH LANGUAGE**

*Participants:* parents, teachers, administration, staff (an interpreter is provided for staff who do not speak Spanish)

*Format:* six 2-hour sessions. Usually in the evening.

*Objectives:*

- To create a partnership among Latino parents and school staff to improve student achievement and parent involvement for Latino students and families.
- To create an on-going Latino Parent Committee.

**STUDENTS**

*Participants:* students, staff, and administrators

*Format:* three 3-hour sessions.

*Objectives:*

- To understand the students’ experiences and perceptions on race, and how race impacts their education.
- To help students and staff talk together about racial barriers to achievement.