

Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT ARE THE VISION, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE STUDY CIRCLE?

Vision: A school system where all students succeed regardless of racial or ethnic background.

Goal: To remove racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement in MCPS.

Objectives:

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

WHAT IS A STUDY CIRCLE?

- About 15 to 20 participants who make up the racial/ethnic diversity of the school.
- Different formats are offered depending on the audience: 6 weekly two-hour sessions, two half days, or one full day.
- Facilitators ensure that everyone has a chance to talk, and that the conversation is productive.
- Discussion questions draw on everyone's experiences—parents, staff, and students are equally important.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE STUDY CIRCLE CONCLUDES?

Participants create action plans to address racial and ethnic barriers. The Action Phase begins at the conclusion of the study circle. The Action Phase may include:

- Holding an Action Forum with the whole school community
- Action teams working on specific strategies
- Presentation to Instructional Leadership Team
- Inclusion of action plans into School Improvement Plan

WHAT DOES THE STUDY CIRCLES STAFF PROVIDE?

Organizing a study circle is a collaboration between the school and Study Circles staff. Study Circles will provide:

- Two trained facilitators
- An interpreter and translation equipment (when needed)
- All discussion curriculum
- All recruitment and advertising materials
- A two-hour information meeting for all potential participants
- A presentation at a staff meeting to help staff understand the goals of the program
- Oversight and weekly support of facilitators
- Recruitment phone calls in needed languages
- Weekly reminder phone calls in needed languages
- Facilitators for follow up action meetings

WHAT IS THE PRINCIPAL'S TIME COMMITMENT?

- Assign a staff member to coordinate the study circle and communicate with SC program staff.
- Meet once with the program staff in to plan out the schedule and again between sessions five and six to evaluate and discuss next steps.
- Participates in the information meeting and all sessions of the Study Circle
- Plan a process for supporting and incorporating action steps

WHAT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SCHOOL COORDINATOR?

- Communicate with the SC staff and principal regarding recruitment, logistics and action
- Work with SC program staff to ensure that advertising and targeted recruitment are done in a timely fashion
- Provide SC program staff with a list of participants who received letters of invitation
- Arrange for meeting space, food, childcare for information meeting and study circle sessions
- Coordinate action steps that result from the study circle.

WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY CIRCLE?

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.

- Most study circles include administrators, school staff, parents, and students.
- It is important to recruit active parents *and* parents who are not active.
- Study circles are most successful when families from all racial and ethnic backgrounds participate.
- Supporting as well as professional staff should also be included.

HOW ARE PARENTS RECRUITED?

- An information meeting will be held for each school that is considering a study circle. The school should advertise the information meeting to the whole school community at Back to School Night, in the school newsletter, through PTA list serves, and with flyers that we provide. The school should also make CONNECT-ED calls the night before the meeting.
- More targeted recruitment will be needed to engage parents who do not usually attend school meetings. The principal will send a personal letter to 50 to 70 parents to invite them to attend the information meeting. The Study Circles staff will then follow up with personal phone calls to the same list of parents. Our staff can call in English, Spanish, and Korean. We can get volunteers to call in other needed languages. We will then make reminder calls the night before the meeting.
- At the meeting, parents will be given information about the program, take part in a sample study circle, and then fill out a registration form if they want to participate in the actual study circle.

HOW ARE TEACHERS RECRUITED?

- We will provide a 20 minute overview at a staff meeting. It is also suggested that the principal personally invite specific staff members who would be good for the study circle. Only 5-7 staff members are needed for the Study Circle and should include administrators, classroom teachers, and support staff.
- Some schools have let staff members use part of their *flex time* to participate in study circles.

DO STUDY CIRCLES EVER INCLUDE STUDENTS?

- Yes! When we run a Study Circle in high school or middle school (with parents, teachers and other staff), we have found that having student participation is valuable. A staff member will need to specifically target and recruit a diverse group of students. We would be willing to have an additional information meeting during the day just for students.
- We have also had several successful student-only Study Circles at both the high school and middle school levels. High School study circles are usually one full day. Middle School study circles are usually twice a week during the school day for three weeks.
- Student study circles conclude with a presentation to the school's Instructional Leadership Team or full staff.

HOW OFTEN/WHEN/WHERE DO STUDY CIRCLES MEET?

Parent/Staff study circles meet for six 2-hour weekly sessions in the evenings. Student Study Circles are during the school day. Office and staff study circles are usually during the day.

IS CHILDCARE PROVIDED? TRANSLATION? FOOD?

- The school is responsible for providing childcare at the information meeting and all six sessions.
- The Study Circles program will provide an interpreter for the information meeting and all sessions. All recruitment discussion materials are bilingual.
- The school provides pizza at the information meeting and the first study circle session. After that, participants will take turns bringing in snacks.

ARE STUDY CIRCLES EVER HELD IN LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH?

Many study circles are bilingual. This is a great way to encourage communication between parents and teachers who speak different languages. We have also organized successful Spanish-language study circles focused on creating a group of Latino parents working together to increase parent involvement.