



**Evaluation of the  
Montgomery County Public Schools  
Study Circles Program**

**Department of Shared Accountability**

**December 2007**

**Julie Wade**  
Analyst, Program Evaluation Unit



*DEPARTMENT OF SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY*

**Michael Perich, Acting Director**  
**850 Hungerford Drive**  
**Rockville, Maryland 20850**  
301-279-3925

**Jerry D. Weast**  
*Superintendent of Schools*

**Jody Leleck**  
*Chief Academic Officer*

**Table of Contents**

Executive Summary . . . . . iii

Background . . . . . 1

Methodology. . . . . 2

    Evaluation Questions. . . . . 2

    Data Sources. . . . . 2

        Data Analysis . . . . . 4

Findings. . . . . 5

    Context of the Program. . . . . 5

    Implementation Evaluation. . . . . 6

    Impact Evaluation. . . . . 8

        Impact on Study Circle Participants . . . . . 9

        Impact on the School Community. . . . . 20

        Schoolwide Measures of the Impact of the Study Circles Program . . . . . 26

        Communicating the Impact of Study Circles . . . . . 28

Discussion. . . . . 29

    Recommendations . . . . . 29

References. . . . . 32

Appendix A: Number of Interviews Conducted for Evaluation of Study Circles Held During 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 School Years. . . . . 33

Appendix B: Study Circles Interview Protocol. . . . . 34

Appendix C: Pre-Study Circle Survey Administered to Parents. . . . . 37

Appendix D: Response Rates for Parents, Staff, and Students at Each Survey Point for 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 School Years . . . . . 39

Appendix E: Pre-Study Circle and Post-Study Circle Survey Responses of Matched Samples of Parents and Staff . . . . . 40

Appendix F: Schools Conducting Study Circles in 2005–2006 and 2006–2007, With Additional Factors Noted . . . . . 43

Appendix G: Study Circle Participants’ Countries of Origin and Languages Spoken at Home, Reported During 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 School Years. . . . . 44

**List of Tables**

Table 1	Number of Study Circles Held During 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 . . . . .	5
Table 2	Racial/Ethnic Group Identification of Study Circle Participants and Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity in Participating Schools and MCPS. . . . .	6
Table 3	Reasons for Joining a Study Circle: Percentage of Parents, Staff, and Students Endorsing Survey Options. . . . .	7
Table 4	Number of Participants Registering and Number and Percentage Completing Study Circles . . . . .	8
Table 5	Percentage of Parents Indicating Agreement with Survey Items About Relationships at School. . . . .	12
Table 6	Percentage of Staff Indicating Agreement with Survey Items About Relationships at School. . . . .	13
Table 7	Percentage of Students Indicating Agreement with Survey Items About Relationships at School. . . . .	14
Table 8	Percentage of Parents, Staff, and Students Reporting Involvement in School Activities, 2006–2007 . . . . .	15
Table 9	Percentage of Parents, Staff, and Students Indicating Agreement with Survey Items About the Impact of Race/Ethnicity, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007. . . . .	17
Table 10	Percentage of Parents Agreeing with Survey Questions by Race/Ethnicity. . . . .	19
Table 11	Barriers Identified in Study Groups During 2005–2006 and 2006–2007. . . . .	20
Table 12	Results of School Environment Survey for Middle and High School Students in Schools Holding Study Circles During 2005–2006 . . . . .	26
Table 13	Results of School Environment Survey for Parents in Schools Holding Study Circles During 2005–2006 . . . . .	27

**List of Figures**

Figure 1	Parent, staff, and student (combined) perceptions of the study circle experience. . . . .	9
Figure 2	Percentage of parents and staff in post-study circle survey indicating an increase in understanding and ability to communicate. . . . .	11
Figure 3	Attendance rate by racial/ethnic group for study circle schools and MCPS . . . . .	28

## Executive Summary

This report summarizes the findings from an evaluation of the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Study Circles Program. The MCPS Study Circles Program provides an opportunity for diverse members of the school community to work together to address racial and ethnic barriers affecting student achievement and parent involvement. A comprehensive evaluation of the Study Circles Program was conducted to examine implementation, participation, and effectiveness. This report presents findings for two years of the Study Circles Program: the 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 school years.

Evaluation data were collected using multiple methods, including participant surveys, interviews, Study Circles Program records, and MCPS archival records. In addition, results from the Surveys of School Environment, which are administered by MCPS, were used to assess student and parent perceptions of school climate.

Findings from surveys and interviews provide evidence that the Study Circles Program is having a positive impact on both the participants and the school communities and is providing opportunities for school community members to discuss racial/ethnic issues. Evaluation of the broader impact of the program using measures of school climate, student engagement, parent involvement, and progress on study circle action plans, shows positive gains in many areas of the school community.

During the 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 school years, 674 parents, staff, and students participated in the Study Circles Program. In their survey responses, participants gave the Study Circles Program high ratings; positive responses were reported both immediately following participation, as well as in a follow-up survey (at least two months after participation), indicating a lasting positive perception of the experience. Opinions and attitudes expressed by survey respondents after study circle participation were different from those expressed at the start of the study circle. After study circle participation, larger percentages of survey respondents (parents, staff, and students) agreed that racial/ethnic differences affect student achievement and parent involvement, and that some teachers do not know how to work with children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. This finding, combined with interview data, suggests that participants are sharing and learning from one another through the study circle, and that the attitudes they express after the study circle may reflect this shared experience and increased awareness.

Survey results also suggest that study circle participation helps parents become more knowledgeable about their child’s school and provides them with increased sources of support. After study circle participation, larger percentages of parents reported having other parents or teachers to speak with at school. In addition, parents responding after study circle participation were more likely to know what classes their children need to take in preparation for college. Students surveyed after study circle participation were more likely than those surveyed before to agree that “I have the ability to make positive change at this school.” Parents and staff reported increased levels of understanding and communication after participation in a study circle.

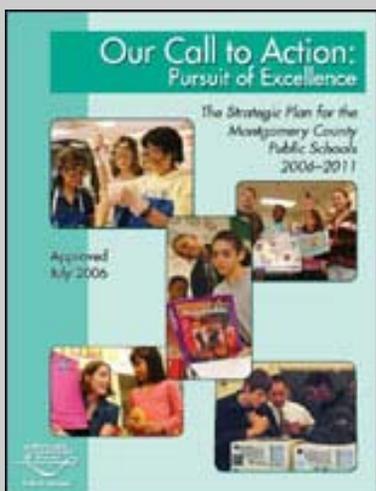
Priority action plans were developed in each of the study circles; most action plans were related to parent involvement, opportunities for student involvement and achievement, staff development, and issues affecting the school community. Data from interviews and follow-up surveys indicated that progress has been made in implementing many of the action plans. Second-year interviews with principals provided reports of continuing progress on the action plans, and presented evidence of further impact of the study circle on their school communities, such as increased parent and student involvement.

Drawing from survey and interview data collected over two years, recommendations for strengthening the Study Circles Program include the following:

- Refine procedures for monitoring action plans
- Continue to aim for diverse groups
- Continue supports for consistent attendance
- Support student involvement
- Support study circle schools during change in school administration
- Continue to monitor and support each school's needs in terms of the structure, format, and progress of the study circle
- Continue efforts to track pre-program and post-program surveys
- Examine ways to coordinate the efforts of the Study Circles Program with those of other MCPS initiatives and programs

## Background

The MCPS Study Circles Program is designed to help school communities address racial and ethnic barriers affecting student achievement and parent involvement. Using the nationally recognized study circle model (Study Circle Resource Center, 2006), diverse groups of parents, teachers, and students at schools throughout MCPS are building relationships, developing a better understanding of challenges, and planning action steps to help all students succeed. In conjunction with other ongoing MCPS initiatives, the Study Circles Program addresses the achievement gap by helping school communities confront racial and ethnic barriers affecting student achievement and develop action steps for change. Thus, by providing an opportunity for diverse members of the school community to work together, the Study Circles Program is supporting Goal 3 of the MCPS strategic plan, *Our Call to Action: Pursuit of Excellence*—Strengthen Productive Partnerships for Education (MCPS, 2006a).



The Study Circles Program supports Goal 3 of *Our Call to Action*—Strengthen Productive Partnerships for Education—by providing opportunities for the “participation and collaboration of all segments of the community to promote student success.”

A study circle is a diverse group of about 15 parents, students (where appropriate), and school staff members that meets weekly for six 2-hour sessions. Two trained facilitators ensure that everyone has a chance to speak and that the conversation is productive. While the specific goals for each study circle vary, the aim of the program is to provide an experience in which participants build relationships based on trust, learn about each other’s cultures, talk honestly about racial differences, confront racial and ethnic barriers affecting student achievement, develop a shared vision, and create action steps for change (MCPS, 2006b).

The MCPS Study Circles Program began in 2003 with four study circles. Each year the number of study circles held in elementary, middle, and high schools throughout MCPS has grown. During the 2006–2007 school year 23 study circles were organized, including three at schools that were holding their second or third study circle.

## Methodology

A comprehensive evaluation of the Study Circles Program was conducted to assess implementation, participation, and immediate and long-term impact. This report presents findings for study circles held during the 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 school years.

### Evaluation Questions

The guiding questions for this report are the following:

1. **What was the context of the program?** What are the demographic characteristics of the Study Circles Program school communities and the demographic characteristics of the participants?
2. **How was the program implemented?** What was the number and composition of the study circles? How were participants recruited? What was the participation rate?
3. **What was the impact of the program on participants and on schools?**
  - a. Immediate, short-term impact
    - Did participants change attitudes or behaviors? What action plans were developed by the study circles?
  - b. Long-term impact
    - Were changes observed in school climate, student engagement, and parent involvement? What long-term progress has been made on the action plans?

### Data Sources

Study Circles Program records were used to document participation, implementation, and attendance, while MCPS archival data provided the context of the wider school community. Surveys completed by participants and interviews conducted with principals and staff provided data to assess the impact of the study circles on participants and schools.

*Demographic data.* At the start of each study circle, participants completed a questionnaire collecting basic demographic information, including age, race/ethnicity identification, language spoken at home, country of origin, connection to the school (i.e., parent, student, or staff member), and contact information. MCPS records provided systemwide demographic data so that the study circles could be compared with the wider school populations in their representation of racial/ethnic groups. American Indian participants are included in totals but not listed as a separate group, because the small number of respondents may not result in reliable estimates.

*Interviews.* Structured interviews were conducted by a staff member from the Department of Shared Accountability at least one month after the completion of each study circle. Twelve principals (representing 80% of the study circle schools) and 11 teachers or other school staff (representing 72% of the schools) were interviewed after the completion of the 2005–2006 study circles. Nine principals (41% of the schools) were interviewed after the 2006–2007 study circles. Second-year follow-up interviews were conducted with eight principals (representing 53%) of schools that held study circles during the 2005–2006 school year. Appendix A details

---

the number and type of interviews conducted during the two years. An interview protocol is provided in Appendix B.

*Surveys.* During both the 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 school years, surveys were administered to all participants at the first and last (sixth) sessions of each study circle, and at least two months after the study circle had ended (follow-up survey). The pre-study circle survey (pre-SC, first session) and the post-study circle survey (post-SC, last session) were both paper-and-pencil questionnaires, administered and completed during the study circle meeting. The follow-up survey (administered at least two months following the end of the study circle) was conducted online for all study circle participants who had provided e-mail addresses and by mail for study circle participants who had not provided e-mail addresses. A copy of the survey instrument is included in Appendix C. Survey response rates ranged from 62% to 85% for the pre-SC surveys, from 52% to 79% for the post-SC surveys, and from 4% to 51% for the follow-up surveys. Response rates for parents, staff, and students at each survey point for each year are presented in Appendix D.

During the 2005–2006 school year, surveys were administered without individual identification, so pre-SC surveys, post-SC surveys, and follow-up surveys could not be individually matched. In addition, not all study circle sites administered both pre-SC and post-SC surveys. To reduce the additional variation that would be created by different combinations of study circle sites, the survey results presented for 2005–2006 include only data for study circles in which both pre-SC and post-SC surveys were administered. (This limitation lowers the “response rate” for 2005–2006, since some surveys, by design, were left out of the presentation and analysis of results.) In addition, this restriction results in too few student surveys during 2005–2006 to be included in this analysis of results.

In an attempt to improve the precision of the analysis of the survey data in the 2006–2007 study circles, efforts were made to include a coded identification on the pre-SC, post-SC, and follow-up surveys. The procedure had moderate success, but a substantial number of survey respondents did not include any identification. Therefore, survey results are reported using the procedures similar to the previous year (all respondents at each survey point are reported; all 2006–2007 study circles administered both pre-SC and post-SC surveys). For both years, caution should be used because the actual makeup of the responding groups is not identical for the three surveys reported. For the 2006–2007 survey results, additional analyses were conducted using data that could be matched across at least two time periods; findings for this subset of survey respondents are reported separately.

*Schoolwide measures.* The broader, long-term impact of the study circles was measured in part using data sources independent of the Study Circles Program. The Student Survey of School Environment and the Parent Survey of School Environment (MCPS, 2007) were used to assess perceptions of school climate in the study circle schools. MCPS attendance records were used to examine student engagement. Schools that held study circles during the 2005–2006 school year were included in the examination of broader impact so that schoolwide measures collected during the following year could be used. Only schools that held study circles on site (not clusterwide) were included in this analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

Survey data were summarized for parents, staff, and students, and presented as the percentage of respondents endorsing the survey response option, such as “% Agree.” Survey results presented for all respondents (unmatched samples) were analyzed using 95% confidence intervals and testing the difference between proportions of interest. Survey data from the subset of respondents with matched surveys over two survey points (matched samples) were analyzed separately using a McNemar chi-square test. Only matched samples of parent and staff surveys were large enough for analysis. Survey results for the matched samples are presented in Appendix E.

## Findings

### Context of the Program

Twenty study circles were held during the 2005–2006 school year, including 2 clusterwide, 1 consortiumwide, and 17 school-based study circles. Twenty-three school-based study circles were held during the 2006–2007 school year. During the two school years, 14 of the study circles were bilingual, and four of the study circles were conducted in Spanish. Six of the study circles were made up entirely of students. The number of study circles held at each school level is detailed for each year in Table 1.<sup>1</sup> A list of schools that held study circles during 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 is presented in Appendix F.

Table 1  
Number of Study Circles Held During 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

School Level		Number of Study Circles Held
2005–2006	Total	20
	Elementary	4
	Middle	6
	High	7
	Clusterwide or consortiumwide	3
2006–2007	Total	23
	Elementary	9
	Middle	10
	High	4

The racial/ethnic composition of the study circles is summarized in Table 2; race/ethnicity was self-reported, based on participant’s response to the initial program questionnaire. The racial/ethnic composition of the population of schools holding study circles, and of the MCPS population (MCPS, 2006c), also are presented. Three of the study circles in 2005–2006 and one of the study circles in 2006–2007 were held in Spanish and all (or nearly all) of the participants in those study circles were Hispanic, so the proportion of Hispanic participants among all study circle participants may be higher as a result.

In light of the goals of the Study Circles Program, racial/ethnic diversity among the group members is important. Among the 20 study circles in 2005–2006, the participants in 3 were all or almost all Hispanic, and 15 of the 17 other study circles had at least three racial/ethnic groups

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the study circles included in this evaluation and report, several additional study circles were organized by program staff. In 2005–2006, Study Circles Program staff organized *Post-Katrina Dialogues*, made up of representatives from Silver Spring community organizations, and *Project Change*, in which MCPS AmeriCorps volunteers participated. In 2006–2007 program staff organized a study circle for Americorps members throughout Montgomery County, and a study circle for the Superintendent’s Youth Leadership Program. Additional information about these study circles can be obtained from the MCPS Study Circles Program office.

represented. Nineteen of the 23 study circles in 2006–2007 had at least three racial/ethnic groups represented. Many of the participants interviewed reinforced the value of a diverse group of parents and staff, reflected in comments such as the following: “I learned a lot of information ...we had a really diverse group...that was my favorite part...learning about people and...their growing up and talking about their experiences. That was probably the most needed thing. I learned a lot of things about all different cultures and groups of people.”

**Table 2**  
**Racial/Ethnic Group Identification of Study Circle Participants and Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity in Participating Schools and MCPS**

	2005–2006 School Year		2006–2007 School Year		2006–2007 Enrollment in MCPS N=137,798
	Study Circle Participants N=308	Enrollment in Participating Schools N=26,094	Study Circle Participants N=366	Enrollment in Participating Schools N=19,975	
Race/Ethnicity	%	%	%	%	%
African American	28.4	29.9	29.1	21.3	22.9
Asian American	5.3	13.0	8.2	13.9	14.8
Hispanic	29.4	24.5	25.5	17.7	20.7
White	29.1	32.3	32.9	46.6	41.3
Other (or not designated)	7.8	NA	4.3	NA	NA

Representation of the broad race/ethnicity groups as defined by MCPS, however, reveals only part of the diversity picture. In addition, study circle participants during the 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 school years—

- represented 57 different countries of origin; and
- named 24 different languages spoken at home

A list of the study circle participants’ countries of origin and languages spoken at home is provided in Appendix G.

The following sections present results from implementation and impact evaluations of the Study Circles Program during the 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 school years.

### **Implementation Evaluation**

*Starting a study circle.* Formation of a study circle is a process initiated by the school principal or MCPS administrator and then developed in collaboration with Study Circles Program staff and school community members. Most principals (14 of 21 interviewed about study circles held during 2005–2006 and 2006–2007) reported that their interest in forming a study circle stemmed from recognition of issues or problems at school that they thought could be addressed through the study circle process. Principals identified a range of issues, including their school’s achievement gap, communication concerns, underrepresentation of minority families in PTA and

other school community activities, addressing self-segregation of students, and the desire to create a welcoming environment for all members of the school community.

*Recruitment of participants.* When a school, with the support of the Study Circles Program, plans to hold a study circle, staff and parents (and in some middle and high schools, students) are invited to attend an information session and, if interested, join the study circle. The study circles that were held during the 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 school years used a variety of methods for informing and recruiting participants. The most frequently reported strategies were presentations at Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) and staff meetings, brochures, letters of invitation, and personal contacts with key staff members or parents.

At the start of the 2006–2007 study circles, participants were asked (on the pre-SC survey) to indicate reasons for joining a study circle. Responses were spread over a number of possible factors. Table 3 presents the percentage of parents, staff, and students responding to each of the reasons presented in the survey.

Table 3  
Reasons for Joining a Study Circle:  
Percentage of Parents, Staff, and Students Endorsing Survey Options

Survey Option	% of Parents (N=149)	% of Staff (N=94)	% of Students (N=48)
Opportunity to build relationships with other parents	68.4	75.5	na
Opportunity to build relationships with staff	61.7	54.2	na
Opportunity to build relationships with others in the school community	na	na	27.1
Work with people with different backgrounds	66.4	72.3	37.5
Understand others' attitudes and beliefs	68.4	76.6	52.1
Understand my own attitudes and beliefs	51.7	60.6	31.2
Help work on problems here at school	68.4	77.6	47.9
Get more involved in the school	61.7	na	35.4
Become more comfortable talking about racial issues	43.6	39.4	33.3
Learn more about the school system	52.3	na	27.1
Learn more about what my child needs to be successful in school	39.6	na	na

The highest percentages of participants in each of the groups indicated that understanding others' attitudes and working on problems at school contributed to their decision to join a study circle. Among parents and staff, the opportunity to build relationships also was an important factor. In general, the options presented on the survey appeared to better represent the reasons of parents and staff than those of students. In the survey, participants also had the opportunity to respond with their own reasons. Eleven of 48 students (23%) named a parent or teacher as the deciding factor in getting involved in a study circle. Other students viewed the program as a good opportunity to be involved in the school community, as reflected by a high school student, who wrote: "I want to make a difference in the Hispanic population at this school."

*Participation.* During the 2005–2006 school year, a total of 308 parents, students, and staff members joined a study circle, and 255 completed the six study circle sessions, yielding a

follow-through participation rate of 83% across all study circles. During the 2006–2007 school year, 366 parents, students, and staff members joined a study circle, and 321 completed the six sessions, a follow-through participation rate of 88%. Table 4 summarizes the number of participants involved in the study circles during these two school years.

Table 4  
Number of Participants Registering and  
Number and Percentage Completing Study Circles

	N registering	N completing	% completing
<b>Parents</b>			
2005–2006	149	104	69.8
2006–2007	190	163	85.8
<b>Students</b>			
2005–2006	97	92	94.8
2006–2007	66	50	75.7
<b>Staff</b>			
2005–2006	62	59	95.2
2006–2007	110	108	98.2
<b>Total/Overall</b>			
2005–2006	308	255	82.8
2006–2007	366	321	87.7

Staff follow-through rates were higher than other groups during both years. The percentage of parents completing the six sessions was higher in the 2006–2007 study circles compared with the previous year (16 percentage points). Review of program records and procedures indicate that adjustments were made during the spring of 2006 that may have had a positive impact on parents' attendance. After program personnel recognized that fewer Spanish-speaking participants were completing the study circles, new interpreters were recruited who were Hispanic and had personal experiences similar to the Spanish-speaking parents (previously, some of the interpreters were fluent in Spanish, but were not Hispanic). In addition, more frequent follow-up calls were made to the parents. Together, these adjustments and additional efforts appear to have helped increase the attendance of parents.

### Impact Evaluation

The impact of the Study Circles Program was examined at several levels. For individual study circle participants, changes in attitudes, understanding, knowledge, and behavior were measured. Changes at the school level were assessed with an examination of the progress of the action plans and the perceived impact of the study circle on the school community. Longer-term impact was evaluated by assessing progress of action plans over a second year, and examining changes in school-level measures, such as school climate, parent involvement, and student engagement. Since the impact of the Study Circles Program may reach outside the individual school communities to the wider school system, the ways in which the program communicates findings with school administrators and the MCPS school community also were examined.

### Impact on Study Circle Participants

*Experience of the study circle.* During both school years, parents, staff, and students who participated in study circles indicated high ratings for the program. Responses of participants to two survey questions about overall perceptions of the Study Circles Program are shown in Figure 1. Post-SC survey responses and follow-up survey responses for each school year are shown for the combined groups of participants.

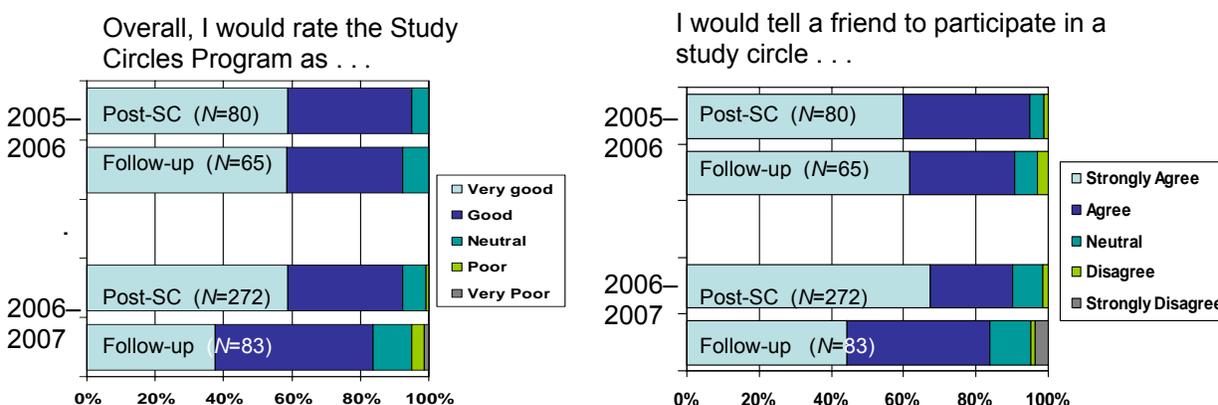


Figure 1. Parent, staff, and student (combined) perceptions of the study circle experience.

Perceptions of the study circle experience were highly positive, both immediately following the six sessions (post-SC survey), as well as two or more months after the sessions ended (follow-up survey). During each of the two years, 90% or more of the parents, staff, and students responding to the post-SC survey rated the Study Circles Program as “Very good” or “Good,” and reported that they would tell a friend to participate in a study circle (“Strongly agree” or “Agree”). In response to the follow-up survey, more than 80% of the participants during both years rated the Study Circles Program “Very good” or “Good,” and indicated “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” that they would tell a friend to join. Responses of the 2006–2007 Study Circles participants showed somewhat less consistency between the post-SC survey and the follow-up survey than those of the 2005–2006 participants. In 2006–2007 ratings were less positive in the follow-up survey than in the post-SC survey, particularly in the percentage of participants indicating “Very Good,” or “Strongly Agree” to the two overall ratings. It should be noted that the number of participants responding to the follow-up survey during each year was small—about a quarter of the participants overall (see Appendix D)—so that percentages are based on relatively small numbers of respondents.

In the follow-up survey, participants were invited, through open-ended questions, to describe the impact the study circle had on them and on their school. Among parents, staff, and students responding, 72 wrote comments regarding their perceptions of the impact of the study circle. Of those, 58 (81%) were positive, 6 (8%) were negative, and 8 (11%) were mixed or neutral in their comments. These findings were consistent with the responses to the overall survey questions (Figure 1). Positive comments included remarks about gaining important insights (“opened our eyes”), developing new relationships, and descriptions of new initiatives at school, among others.

Participants who perceived a negative impact of the study circle reported dissatisfaction with the format of the study circle or frustration with a lack of follow-through on action plans.

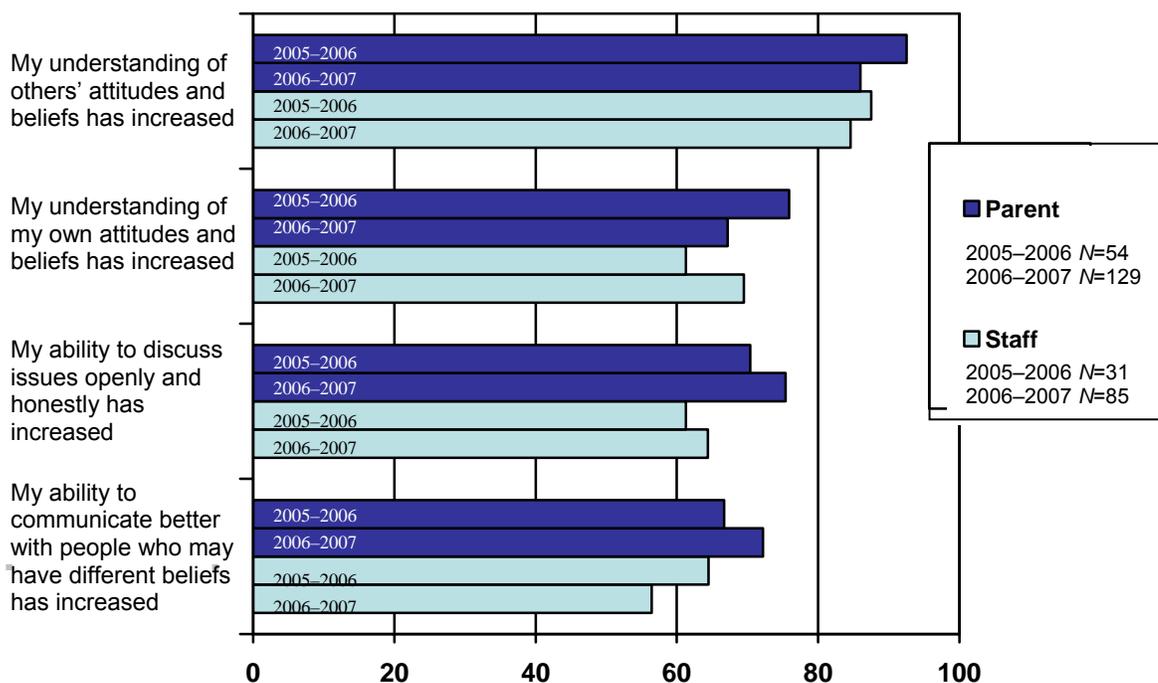
Participants also were asked in the follow-up survey to provide suggestions for the study circle organizers. Among the parents, staff, and students responding to the follow-up survey, 55 wrote suggestions for the program organizers. Suggestions followed four main themes: (1) follow-through; (2) study circle format; (3) diversity; (4) expansion.

- **Follow-through.** The area that generated the most comments and suggestions from participants was concern about follow-through on their school's action plans. While some study circles moved seamlessly into position to work on the action plans developed in the group, a few had difficulty with this step, leaving the members feeling frustrated and uncertain. Several participants suggested that some form of follow-up be built into the study circle schedule, such as additional meetings, follow-up by the facilitators, or a plan for monitoring.
- **Format.** A number of participants felt that a more flexible format would have been more effective in their group. Concerns about the study circle format were reflected in comments indicating that the exercises were “‘one size fits all’ ...and often quite time-consuming.” On a related note, several participants wanted to spend more time on the action plans.
- **Diversity.** A diverse group is at the heart of the study circle experience, and several participants reinforced the importance of involving members from the whole community. A number of participants made recommendations for increasing the diversity of their study circle, notably, inclusion of more White and Asian American parents.
- **Expansion.** A number of respondents commented that they would like to see the program available to more people, both in their school and in the wider MCPS community. In addition, quite a few participants suggested an extended format, so that study circle groups could meet for more than the scheduled six sessions.

*Communication and school relationships.* Study circle participants also were asked to indicate the effect of the study circle on their understanding of themselves and others and their ability to communicate with others. Responses of parents and staff to the post-SC survey for each year are summarized in Figure 2. (Too few student surveys were completed for reporting in 2005–2006, and this set of questions was inadvertently left off some student surveys in 2006–2007, resulting in too few to report.) A majority of parents and staff reported increases in their understanding and ability to communicate as a result of the study circle experience. The largest reported increase was in the participants' understanding of others' attitudes and beliefs. In study circles during the two years, 92% and 86% of parents and 87% and 85% of staff reported an increase in “My understanding of others' attitudes and beliefs...” This perception was captured by the comments of a principal as he described how sharing experiences helped their group work together: “When you hear some of those experiences, all other differences kind of melt away... the study circle helped make people stronger to deal with these issues.”

Smaller percentages, but still in most cases more than 60%, of parents and staff indicated an increase in understanding of their own attitudes, in their ability to communicate with people who

have different beliefs, and to discuss issues openly. Overall, greater percentages of parents indicated an increase in each of these areas than did staff but, with no baseline as a reference, comparisons between groups are not very informative. Indeed, a number of staff participants described ongoing efforts at their school to address these issues, as reflected in this comment on the follow-up survey: “At this school, the staff continuously address the impact that race has on student achievement. Because of this, I don’t feel that my comfort level talking about racial issues or ability to discuss them changed.” Nevertheless, these data show that most participants reported an increase in their understanding and ability to communicate.



Note. Percentage reported represents percentage of participants indicating “Increased” on a 3-point scale (scale categories were “Increased,” “No Change,” “Decreased”).

Figure 2. Percentage of parents and staff in post-SC survey indicating an increase in understanding and ability to communicate.

*Knowledge and relationships at school.* Parents, staff, and students responded to several survey questions about their relationships at school and knowledge of school procedures. Different issues were addressed in the surveys completed by parents, staff, and students; responses to items representing several issues for each of the groups are summarized in Tables 5–7. Survey results for 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 are presented for parents and staff; a large enough number of student surveys were available only for 2006–2007.

As shown in Table 5, parents involved in the study circles reported—both before participation and after—that they feel comfortable talking to teachers who come from a different background than their own. Compared with results from the pre-SC survey, a larger percentage of parents surveyed after study circle participation in 2005–2006 reported that they had people to talk with when their child needs help at school; in 2006–2007 a larger percentage of parents agreed with this statement at follow-up, although the difference was not statistically significant. During both years, percentages of parents who indicated that they know what classes their children need to take to get into college was higher after study circle participation (in response to the follow-up survey) than before the study circle (pre-SC survey). One parent reported, “It helped me to a [better] understanding about the American school system and the efforts Latino parents and students need to develop in order to feel comfortable as a [school] community member.” Another parent described the relationships developed in the study circle, “It helped me to make connections to other parents, students and teachers and to better understand others from different background in terms of their education needs.”

Table 5  
Percentage of Parents Indicating Agreement with  
Survey Items About Relationships at School

Survey items		% Agree*		
		Pre-SC	Post-SC	Follow-up
	2005–2006	N=93	N=54	N=31
	2006–2007	N=149	N=129	N=37
I have a group of parents or teachers whom I can talk to when my child needs help at school.	2005–2006	56.1	75.0 <sup>a</sup>	74.2
	2006–2007	62.6	64.3	75.6
I know what classes my children need to take to get into college.	2005–2006	52.4	62.2	77.4 <sup>a</sup>
	2006–2007	61.7	63.6	86.4 <sup>a</sup>
I feel comfortable talking to teachers who come from a different racial or ethnic background than my own.	2005–2006	81.2	88.6	93.5
	2006–2007	86.8	86.8	83.7

\* % Agree represents percentage of respondents answering “Strongly agree” or “Agree” on a 5-point scale (scale categories were 5=“Strongly agree,” 4=“Agree,” 3=“Neutral,” 2=“Disagree,” 1=“Strongly disagree”).

<sup>a</sup> Significant difference from pre-SC survey, test of proportions (z-ratio),  $p < .05$ .

Note. McNemar chi-square tests were conducted on a subset of respondents with both pre-SC and post-SC surveys ( $N=81$ ); no significant differences were detected (see Appendix E, Table E-1, for percentages).

Table 6 summarizes responses of staff to survey items about relationships at school. During each of the two years, more than two thirds of the staff member respondents at each survey period reported that they know how to work with students and families of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. At the start of the study circles, 23% of the staff during 2005–2006 and 9% of the staff during 2006–2007 indicated that their stereotypes sometimes get in the way of teaching. Among staff participating during 2006–2007, a larger percentage of respondents indicated after completing the study circle (both post-SC and at follow-up) that stereotypes sometimes get in the way. While relatively few teachers believed that their teaching was negatively influenced by stereotypes, several reported on their increased awareness and professional growth, and how changing perceptions may be a starting point for changes in practice. This view was captured by comments such as these:

I believe awareness is the first step. Now that we are in an awareness phase, I am trying to implement strategies to help close the gap.

I think it made teachers and parents who participated more aware of...racial issues that we didn't know we had. And it set us on the path to deal with those issues. Also it helped us to think about not being so complacent about kids, minority kids who are not being successful. Instead of kind of nudging them, we're going to be pushing them...and not waiting until something desperate happens, but starting now.

Table 6  
Percentage of Staff Indicating Agreement with  
Survey Items About Relationships at School

Survey items		% Agree*		
		Pre-SC	Post-SC	Follow-up
	2005–2006	N=40	N=31	N=30
	2006–2007	N=94	N=85	N=43
I know how to work with students and families of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.	2005–2006	70.0	69.6	80.0
	2006–2007	69.1	66.7	72.1
My own racial or ethnic stereotypes sometimes get in the way of my teaching.	2005–2006	23.3	17.4	10.0
	2006–2007	9.6	27.7 <sup>a,b</sup>	18.6
I take full advantage of the resources my school has to communicate with families who speak a different language than me.	2005–2006	58.8	81.5	79.6
	2006–2007	65.2	57.6	69.8

\* % Agree represents percentage of respondents answering “Strongly agree” or “Agree” on a 5-point scale (scale categories were 5=“Strongly agree,” 4=“Agree,” 3=“Neutral,” 2=“Disagree,” 1=“Strongly disagree”).

<sup>a</sup> Significant difference from pre-SC survey, test of proportions (z-ratio),  $p < .05$ .

<sup>b</sup> Significant difference between pre-SC and post-SC survey, McNemar chi-square test conducted on a subset of respondents with both pre-SC and post-SC surveys ( $N=52$ ),  $p < .05$ ; see Appendix E, Table E-2, for percentages.

Students responded to several survey questions about their relationships with other students who have backgrounds different from their own, and their perceptions of their school experience. Large enough numbers of respondents were available for reporting on the pre-SC and post-SC surveys in 2006–2007, but not on the follow-up survey. Table 7 summarizes the students' responses. Most students found it easy to have relationships with students from other backgrounds, and most students reported that they knew what classes to take for college. A relatively small percentage of students agreed that their own racial or ethnic background affects how they do at school. The survey item that showed the greatest difference in the responses of students before and after study circle participation was "...the ability to make a positive change at this school." After participating in the study circle, 85% of the respondents agreed with this statement, compared with 65% of the students responding to the pre-SC survey, a statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ ).

Table 7  
Percentage of Students Indicating Agreement with  
Survey Items About Relationships at School

Survey items	2006–2007	% Agree*		
		Pre-SC N=48	Post-SC N=39	Follow-up
It is easy to have close relationships with students from racial or ethnic backgrounds that are different from my own.	2006–2007	72.9	64.1	NA**
I have the ability to make positive change at this school.	2006–2007	64.6	84.6 <sup>a</sup>	NA**
My OWN racial and ethnic background affects how I do at school.	2006–2007	20.8	25.6	NA**
I know what classes I need to take to get into college.	2006–2007	77.1	87.2	NA**

\* % Agree represents percentage of respondents answering "Strongly agree" or "Agree" on a 5-point scale (scale categories were 5="Strongly agree," 4="Agree," 3="Neutral," 2="Disagree," 1="Strongly disagree").

\*\*Too few students completed the follow-up survey to report.

<sup>a</sup> Significant difference from pre-SC survey, test of proportions (z-ratio),  $p < .05$ .

*School involvement.* Participants in the 2006–2007 study circles were asked to indicate their level of involvement in various school activities. Responses of parents, staff, and students are summarized in Table 8. Overall, relatively high levels of involvement were reported by each of the groups at each survey point. A greater percentage of parents reported school involvement at the follow-up survey than in the pre-SC survey, but the small number of respondents at follow-up may not have been a representative sample of the parent study circle participants. The commitment to increasing involvement, however, was notable in the comments provided by participants in their follow-up surveys, exemplified by the following report from a school staff member: "...the study circle has mobilized a group of people with a common goal of increasing community participation and relationship building in the school."

Table 8  
Percentage of Parents, Staff, and Students Reporting Involvement in  
School Activities, 2006–2007

How often do you...	% Responding “Almost always” or “Sometimes”		
	Pre-SC	Post-SC	Follow-up
Survey items for parents:	N=149	N=129	N=37
Volunteer in your child’s class or school?	52.7	63.3	72.9 <sup>a</sup>
Participate on a parent or school committee?	55.6	66.7	78.3 <sup>a</sup>
Attend school activities such as plays, family math nights, etc.?	84.7	86.7	97.2
Survey items for staff:	N=94	N=85	N=43
Participate in school committees, or other school-related extracurricular activities?	97.8	94.2	95.3
Participate in school district committees, events, or forums?	58.5	55.9	53.5
Think about how racial and ethnic differences affect what goes on at school?	89.0	93.1	97.6
Survey items for students	N=48	N=39	
Participate in school committees, clubs, or other extra-curricular activities?	81.3	87.2	NA*
Attend school events, such as sports, plays, music performances?	81.3	82.1	NA*
Eat lunch with students who are from a different racial/ethnic background than you?	72.9	74.4	NA*

\* Too few students completed the follow-up survey to report.

<sup>a</sup> Significant difference from pre-SC survey, test of proportions (z-ratio),  $p < .05$ .

Note. McNemar chi-square tests were conducted on a subset of respondents with both pre-SC and post-SC surveys (parent  $N=81$ , staff  $N=52$ ); no significant differences were detected (see Appendix E, Table E-3, for percentages).

In addition, parents in 2006–2007 were asked to assess the effect, if any, of the study circle on several aspects of their connection with the school. More than two thirds of the parents (69%) reported that their “understanding of the school system has increased;” 70% indicated that their “participation with the school has increased;” and 88% indicated that their “connections with staff or other parents have increased.”

*Opinions and attitudes.* Several survey questions were designed to assess participants’ attitudes about the impact of race and ethnicity on school achievement and involvement. Responses of parents, staff, and students are shown in Table 9. Overall, greater percentages of staff indicated agreement with the survey items about the impact of race and ethnicity than did parents or students. On most questions, the difference between staff percentage agreement and that of the other groups was greatest at the pre-SC survey and less pronounced at later survey points.

Differences were also seen within each of the groups over the three survey points: pre-SC survey, post-SC survey, and follow-up survey. In response to the survey prompt “Racial

differences affect student achievement at this school,” parents, staff, and students during both years reported higher levels of agreement after their study circle experience (post-SC survey). Differences in percent agreement between pre-SC survey and post-SC survey ranged from 11% (parents in 2006–2007) to 37% (students in 2006–2007). Among parent respondents to the follow-up survey in 2006–2007, an even greater percentage (84%) agreed with this statement than at either the pre-SC or post-SC survey.

A similar trend was observed in response to the statement, “Racial and ethnic differences affect parent involvement at this school.” Again, compared with pre-SC survey responses, greater percentages of parents, staff, and students agreed with this statement after participating in study circles.

Large differences at the pre-SC and post-SC surveys were also seen in response to “Some teachers at this school do not know how to work with children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.” Among parents and students, about half of the respondents agreed before participating in the study circle, but percentages were at least 20 percentage points higher at the post-SC survey, and (for parents) at follow-up as well. Staff had, relative to parents and students, higher levels of agreement before the study circle; percentages were higher at the post-SC survey, and remained high at follow-up.

Finally, the statement “Some teachers at this school think that White and Asian students are smarter than African American or Latino students,” generated a wider range of responses among parents, staff, and students. Responses of parents and staff participating in study circles during 2006–2007 showed greater differences between the pre-SC and post-SC surveys than responses of those groups the previous year.

Table 9  
Percentage of Parents, Staff, and Students Indicating Agreement with Survey Items  
About the Impact of Race/Ethnicity, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

Survey Item/Respondent Group		% Agree*					
		Pre-SC		Post-SC		Follow-up	
<b>Racial differences affect student achievement at this school.</b>							
Parents	2005–2006	53.0	N=93	73.1 <sup>a</sup>	N=54	71.0	N=31
	2006–2007	67.6	N=148	78.5 <sup>a</sup>	N=130	83.7 <sup>a</sup>	N=37
Staff	2005–2006	73.0	N=40	96.3 <sup>a</sup>	N=31	80.0	N=30
	2006–2007	75.3	N=93	88.0 <sup>ab</sup>	N=89	81.4	N=43
Students	2006–2007	52.1	N=48	89.7 <sup>a</sup>	N=39	NA <sup>**</sup>	
<b>Racial and ethnic differences affect parent involvement at this school.</b>							
Parents	2005–2006	73.4	N=93	88.4 <sup>a</sup>	N=54	83.9	N=31
	2006–2007	65.8	N=148	89.1 <sup>ab</sup>	N=130	83.7 <sup>a</sup>	N=37
Staff	2005–2006	80.6	N=40	92.8	N=31	90.0	N=30
	2006–2007	79.6	N=93	94.6 <sup>a</sup>	N=89	88.3	N=43
Students	2006–2007	42.6	N=48	69.2 <sup>a</sup>	N=39	NA <sup>**</sup>	
<b>Some teachers at this school do not know how to work with children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.</b>							
Parents	2005–2006	52.5	N=93	73.6 <sup>a</sup>	N=54	71.0	N=31
	2006–2007	45.3	N=148	71.3 <sup>ab</sup>	N=130	70.3 <sup>a</sup>	N=37
Staff	2005–2006	83.3	N=40	92.8	N=31	83.3	N=30
	2006–2007	66.7	N=93	89.1 <sup>ab</sup>	N=89	86.1 <sup>a</sup>	N=43
Students	2006–2007	45.8	N=48	66.7 <sup>a</sup>	N=39	NA <sup>**</sup>	
<b>Some teachers at this school think that White and Asian students are smarter than African American or Latino students.</b>							
Parents	2005–2006	40.5	N=93	52.7	N=54	61.3 <sup>a</sup>	N=31
	2006–2007	35.3	N=148	61.2 <sup>ab</sup>	N=130	48.6	N=37
Staff	2005–2006	51.3	N=40	53.5	N=31	36.7	N=30
	2006–2007	46.7	N=92	64.6 <sup>ab</sup>	N=89	58.2	N=43
Students	2006–2007	51.1	N=47	69.2	N=39	NA <sup>**</sup>	

\* % Agree represents percentage of respondents answering “Strongly agree” or “Agree” on a 5-point scale (scale categories were 5=“Strongly agree,” 4=“Agree,” 3=“Neutral,” 2=“Disagree,” 1=“Strongly disagree”).

\*\* Too few students completed the follow-up survey to report.

<sup>a</sup> Significant difference from pre-SC survey, test of proportions (z-ratio),  $p < .05$ .

<sup>b</sup> Significant difference between pre-SC and post-SC survey, McNemar chi-square test conducted on a subset of respondents with both pre-SC and post-SC surveys (parent  $N=81$ , staff  $N=54$ ),  $p < .05$ ; see Appendix E, Table E-4, for percentages.

---

*Experience of different subgroups of participants.* Since participants of different racial and ethnic groups bring diverse perspectives to the study circle, the experiences they gain from the program may be different as well. The survey responses of parents from different racial/ethnic groups were examined for the pre-SC and post-SC surveys (Table 10) during both the 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 school years. Too few follow-up surveys were received from parents to permit analyzing results by race/ethnicity. Likewise, groups of staff members and students responding to the surveys were not large enough to permit examination by race/ethnicity. It is important to note that the numbers in each group were small, so caution is advised when examining the results.

Some trends appear in the survey results for the racial/ethnic groups. In response to each of the survey items during the two years, percentage agreement was higher at the post-SC survey for almost all groups. Overall, the highest percentage agreement after study circle participation was seen on items relating to the effect of race/ethnicity on student achievement and parent involvement. Specifically, the percentages of parents in different racial/ethnic groups agreeing that “Racial differences affect student achievement at this school,” and “Racial and ethnic differences affect parent involvement at this school,” were, with only a couple of exceptions, more than 80% for all groups during both years at the post-SC survey.

A somewhat different pattern was observed in the responses to two questions about how teachers view and work with students of different backgrounds. In response to the survey item “Some teachers at this school do not know how to work with children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds,” higher percentages of parents in all of the racial/ethnic groups agreed after the study circle than before (but only one of the comparisons was statistically significant, see Table 8). However, there was still a relatively large range of percentages, with Asian American and Hispanic parents agreeing in smaller numbers during both years.

Finally, in response to the survey item “Some teachers at this school think that White and Asian students are smarter than African American or Latino students,” parents in most of the race/ethnic groups agreed in larger numbers after study circle participation than before, but were further from consensus for this item than for other items. For many of the racial/ethnic groups of parents, percentage agreement was between half and two thirds on the post-SC survey.

Survey data for both years show that, after participating in a study circle, higher percentages of parents of all races and ethnicity agree that racial and ethnic differences affect student achievement and parent involvement. A number of participants reported in interviews how much they learned from other members of the group and how much their “eyes were opened.” Many participants described profound changes in their perceptions as a result of the study circle experience, as captured by the remarks of one staff member: “When I heard her talking about her childhood and what her experiences were, that was a huge ‘ah-ha’ for me. Where she was coming from made so much more sense to me.”

Table 10  
Percentage of Parents Agreeing with Survey Questions by Race/Ethnicity

		Pre-SC Survey		Post-SC Survey	
		N	% Agree*	N	% Agree*
<b>Racial differences affect student achievement at this school.</b>					
African American	2005–2006	23	82.6	23	86.9
	2006–2007	37	72.9	29	86.2
Asian American	2005–2006	6	Too few to report	5	Too few to report
	2006–2007	14	35.7	12	83.4
Hispanic	2005–2006	34	38.2	11	45.5
	2006–2007	45	62.2	36	80.6
White	2005–2006	20	40.0	13	84.6
	2006–2007	31	80.7	24	79.2
<b>Racial and ethnic differences affect parent involvement at this school.</b>					
African American	2005–2006	23	78.3	23	91.3
	2006–2007	38	63.2	27	81.4
Asian American	2005–2006	6	Too few to report	5	Too few to report
	2006–2007	14	50.0	12	100.0
Hispanic	2005–2006	31	54.9	12	81.9
	2006–2007	45	62.2	36	83.3 <sup>a</sup>
White	2005–2006	19	94.7	13	84.7
	2006–2007	31	80.6	24	100.0
<b>Some teachers at this school do not know how to work with children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.</b>					
African American	2005–2006	22	68.1	23	87.0
	2006–2007	39	61.6	28	75.0
Asian American	2005–2006	6	Too few to report	5	Too few to report
	2006–2007	14	7.1	12	58.4
Hispanic	2005–2006	31	45.2	12	50.0
	2006–2007	46	50.0	36	63.9
White	2005–2006	19	52.6	13	76.9
	2006–2007	31	48.4	24	83.3 <sup>a</sup>
<b>Some teachers at this school think that White and Asian students are smarter than African American or Latino students.</b>					
African American	2005–2006	22	63.6	23	61.9
	2006–2007	38	44.7	28	57.2
Asian American	2005–2006	6	Too few to report	5	Too few to report
	2006–2007	14	21.4	12	50.0
Hispanic	2005–2006	33	30.3	12	50.0
	2006–2007	45	26.7	36	63.9 <sup>a</sup>
White	2005–2006	18	38.9	13	38.5
	2006–2007	32	37.9	24	58.3

\* % Agree represents percentage of respondents answering “Strongly agree” or “Agree” on a 5-point scale (scale categories were 5=“Strongly agree,” 4=“Agree,” 3=“Neutral,” 2=“Disagree,” 1=“Strongly disagree”).

<sup>a</sup> Significant difference from pre-SC survey, test of proportions (z-ratio),  $p < .05$ .

*Impact on the School Community*

*Identifying racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement.* During each study circle, participants discussed the question, “How does racism and cultural misunderstanding affect student achievement at this school?” From these discussions, each group identified racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement at its school. The barriers that were identified in the 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 study circles fell mainly into six broad areas: (1) attitudes or perceptions; (2) behavior; (3) lack of skills; (4) communication and information; (5) community; and (6) school or system operation and procedures. Table 11 provides examples of barriers identified by the study circles during the two years.

Table 11  
Barriers Identified in Study Circles During 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

<b>Barriers Related to Attitudes or Perceptions</b>
High achievement not equaling cool
Jumping to conclusions about students based on race/ethnicity
Students’ perceptions of programs, classes, activities
How kids feel their teacher perceives them (does teacher like them?)
Kids stereotyped as “bad kids”
Peer culture—different along racial/ethnic lines
School does not feel welcoming to all students and families
<b>Barriers Related to Behavior</b>
Self-segregation
Inequitable treatment by staff
Fear of confronting race issue
Clothing—“some kids come dressed to work; others don’t”
Bullying and lack of staff intervention
Inconsistency in disciplinary action
<b>Barriers Related to Lack of Skills</b>
Some staff not adequately trained to work with diverse student body
Lack of support from home (language, knowledge of school system)
Need for bilingual staff
<b>Barriers Related to Communication and Information</b>
Message about the achievement gap is diluted
Information about available resources does not get to students and parents
Selection process for GT/Honors not clear
Not all materials are translated; language barrier
Reluctance of staff to contact parents
<b>Barriers Related to Community</b>
Lack of diversity among parents, teachers, and students in school activities
Inadequate parent involvement
Lack of sense of community
Not enough parent and community tutors
Lack of diversity of staff
African American students do not have enough mentors and role models at school

---

**Barriers Related to School or System Operation/Procedures**

- Lack of opportunities for students to interact socially and academically across racial/ethnic and other groups
  - Curriculum not multicultural
  - Teachers assume students have resources they may not have
  - Student recognition—need ways to recognize diverse students' contributions
- 

*Identifying priority action areas.* Following the discussion of barriers, participants in each study circle generated action ideas to address them; in the last two meetings, study circle participants identified three priority action areas that would guide the work resulting from the efforts of the group. The priority action areas developed by the 43 study circles held during 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 fell mostly into the following four broad categories:

- Support for parent involvement (37 action areas identified)
- Opportunities for student involvement and achievement (36 action areas identified)
- Schoolwide issues (33 action areas identified)
- Staff development (13 action areas identified)

*Parent involvement.* The largest number of priority action areas identified by the study circles was in the area of parent involvement. Thirty-seven of the action areas resulting from the study circles were designed to support parent involvement; many efforts were specifically aimed at increasing involvement of parents who had been underrepresented in school participation and leadership. Plans in this area included the following:

- Buddy system/mentors for new parents
- Outreach to parents of low-achieving students
- Outreach and recruitment of parents from underrepresented groups
- Additional efforts at translation
- Identification of a teacher to work with Hispanic members of the PTSA
- Survey of parents to identify concerns
- Parent workshops addressing student issues
- Parent group meetings with the principal
- Development of a “Parent Expectations” session

*Opportunities for student involvement and achievement.* Nearly as many priority action areas (36) were aimed at increasing opportunities for students. Both mixed (parent, staff, and student) study circles and student-only study circles developed action plans intended to provide additional opportunities for student involvement, both in academic areas and in extracurricular activities. Participants of several study circles identified as a priority action area the establishment of a student study circle, and several all-student study circles have been successfully organized as a result. Other student action plans included the following:

- Series of “Homework Help Nights”
- Student mentor program; peer mentors
- Improved access to computer lab and library
- Motivational workshops for Latino students
- Mixed activities for magnet students, students identified as gifted and talented (GT), and students receiving English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services

- Organizing a dance with focus on cross-cultural relationships
- Examination of GT/Honors course enrollment; offering different levels of classes
- Support for after-school activities; examine who is participating
- Mixing students in classes and lunchroom
- Presentations about different cultures each month
- Creation of a Diversity Club
- Looking into the issue of school uniforms
- Fact/information sheet about availability of college financial assistance

*Schoolwide issues.* A large number (33) of the priority action areas addressed issues that affect the whole school community, such as communication and safety. Some of the action plans in this area included the following:

- Creation of conflict resolution group
- Recommending changes to address safety concerns
- Establishment of working group to address race/ethnicity issues
- Identification of staff or community members to be bilingual contacts
- Improving communication through various means, including Web site changes, to extend and enhance publicity for programs
- Addressing issues of stereotyping in school choice
- Planning school and family activities (e.g., movie night, picnic, international night)

*Staff development.* Thirteen priority action areas were aimed at supporting staff development or providing resources for staff in the area of cultural competency. Action plans in this area included the following:

- Cultural competency/diversity training
- Support for use of the translation telephone line
- Additional staff communication/meetings about ineligible students
- Support for staff to increase communication with parents

*Progress of action areas reported: First year after study circle.* In interviews with 21 principals (12 in 2005–2006 and 9 in 2006–2007) during the year following their school’s study circle, all reported that at least some progress in the priority action areas had taken place. Of those, 14 indicated some progress on all of the action areas, and 7 reported progress on some, but not all, of the action areas. The principals described a range of approaches being used to follow through with the action areas. In several schools, action areas were included in the School Improvement Planning process. Some study circles have joined with the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) in efforts to reach out and recruit underrepresented parents, as well as plan school and family activities. Study circle members have worked with school administrators to advocate for changes in school procedures. Overall, reports from principals suggested that the action plans are being implemented and that study circle members, including parents, staff, and students, are following through with the plans. Ten of the 21 principals reported that both staff and parents (and in some middle and high schools, students) were working on the action plans.

The majority of parents and staff responding to the follow-up survey in 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 were positive in their comments about the continuing work of the study circle. Examples of the work under way include these:

Our study circle has met three times over the summer to maintain the momentum. All information and action plans were shared with the school leadership team and have been included in our School Improvement Plan. We have a group that is working on creating a family mentoring cadre who will work on increasing family participation in school events.

I am involved with...increasing the number of minority students taking honors level courses and succeeding in these classes....We will be closely monitoring the data...to help us see where students need support or where there is potential that is not being tapped.

In an interview following a 2005–2006 study circle, a teacher described the continuing efforts of the study circle after the six sessions were completed as follows:

You have to be really dedicated to want to do it because it doesn't just stop after 12 hours. It doesn't just stop....It goes on from there to take the next steps and to get more people going and all that. So you...have to be willing to put in the time, but I think on the other end it will be very gratifying. So if [you're] willing to put in the time, I think [you'll] get to know people better and have a better grasp of the school and the community.

Some parents and staff, however, expressed disappointment about the lack of progress or resolve after the study circle ended. This view was reflected in comments such as the following: “Unfortunately we have been unable to really implement any of the plans that we made during our sessions. I feel that the study circle had a more personal impact on each of us.” Another parent stated, “There was no commitment from the school to actually put in place any of the recommendations.” Several parents and staff members recommended additional follow-up to help ensure the study circle work continues, including this suggestion:

I think there should be contact after the formal sessions end. What gets monitored gets done and I think if they checked in every month or so with what needs to be done and who is responsible it would keep everyone on track.

*Progress of action areas reported: Second year after study circle.* Eight principals of schools that held study circles in 2005–2006 were interviewed for a second time the following year to assess subsequent progress and changes resulting from the study circle. (Two of the principals at second-year schools were new to their schools, so interviews followed up on information provided by the previous principals.) Taking a longer view, all eight of the principals indicated some further progress, although in two of the eight schools the additional progress was limited to part of the action plans. Three of the eight schools had held another study circle, and at least one more was planned. Several of the principals talked about the lasting importance of the relationships built in the study circle, as captured in the comments of one principal: “Listening to people’s stories builds your own character...helps in understanding your community,...wonderful learning experience.”

---

Principals who were new to the school during the year following a study circle expressed the concern that the work and plans of the study circle were not systematically shared with the incoming principal. As a result, one principal reported, there was no follow-up on some of the action plans.

*Perceived impact on the school.* Information about the impact of the study circles on the school community was collected through additional questions in interviews with principals and staff, as well as in the follow-up surveys. In first-year interviews, 15 of the 21 principals who were interviewed identified ways in which the study circle has impacted the school community. Many principals remarked that the study circle provides a forum for difficult but important conversations, and that those conversations and relationships have led to greater focus and understanding of the impact of race and ethnicity. There was a recognition that these issues “have to be put on the table.” The value of working together as a community was a sentiment expressed by many participants, reflected by one principal in this way: “Whenever parents are involved in discussion it is beneficial to the school. The Study Circles Program brings a lot of new voices and new ideas to the discussion.”

In response to the follow-up survey, parents, staff, and students described ways in which the study circle has had an impact on the school. One member of a 2006–2007 study circle reported, for example, “The study circle has had a positive impact on my school. Administration is working with the team to try to implement the strategies that were suggested during our sessions.” Several participants reported specific and tangible outcomes from the study circles. Members of a 2005–2006 study circle that was held in Spanish invited their community superintendent to the last meeting to hear the group’s concerns and ideas. An interpreter translated the discussion. Study circle members identified several safety issues at the school and proposed changes to address them, including signs and lighting. The community superintendent followed up with the appropriate offices, and the improvements were made.

*Partnerships and involvement.* Principals described changes in the ways that staff in their school have reached out to parents. Two thirds of the principals (14 of 21) reported that outreach strategies have been changed or added at their schools. Several described more personal contacts with parents, such as phone calls to encourage attendance at a school activity, and plans for small get-togethers, such as “Principal Chats” and parent mixers. Others reported on ways that study circle action plans have been adopted by the PTSA, such as organizing phone trees. Several principals identified translation of more materials as an important change.

Principals were asked whether they had observed any change in parent involvement. In first-year interviews, 12 of 21 principals (57%) reported increased parent involvement; in second-year interviews, six of eight principals (75%) reported increased parent involvement. Reflecting this view, one principal remarked that the study circle participants were now active in the PTSA and added that these parents had not been involved in school activities prior to the study circle. Another noted that “the PTSA Board looks very different this year; it is not all white women.” Several principals interviewed after the second year described regularly scheduled parent or family activities that are now in place, such as a Book Club, Parent Dinners, and Family Movie Night.

Teachers also expressed a sense of appreciation for parent-teacher partnerships and increased involvement from parents who had not been previously involved in the school community. Their views were captured by comments such as the following:

Parents are looking more closely at what happens in school and are getting more involved.

We're all caring about our children and there's that desire to help. Sometimes when you work at a school, you're not working with parents and you lose sight of how invested they are.

The experience has made a significant difference in understanding how a variety of stakeholders view the school and staff. I have established relationships with individuals that will help me provide a more inclusive school environment.

In first-year interviews, only 4 of 21 principals (19%) reported increased school involvement among students. Many of these principals indicated that not enough time had passed since the study circle ended, and action plans to address student involvement were only in the early stages of implementation. In second-year interviews, six of eight principals (75%) reported increased student involvement, including plans in at least three schools for student study circles. Several principals also expressed strong support for students' involvement in study circles, as reflected in these comments: "Students were the greatest participants—they truly spoke with no hidden agendas." Another principal described the impact he saw on students who had been involved: "...how it changed them as people—how accepting they are of themselves and others."

Responses to the post-SC survey in 2006–2007 indicated that a majority of the parents who participated in the study circles have increased their involvement in the school community. (See discussion following Table 8.) Seventy percent of parents responding to the post-SC survey in 2006–2007 reported that "My participation in the school has increased." Most comments from parents responding to the follow-up survey reinforced the finding of increased involvement, as reflected in the following comments:

I feel that more minority parents are becoming involved in school activities and programs. I think it has brought us together and better enabled us to work as a team.

The people whom I work with are wonderful and positive. They made me feel that there is hope after all! I think this year is going to be great in terms of bringing a positive outlook in all of us and working together!

Not all parents, however, were positive about their continuing involvement. As one parent reflected, "I think that we kind of dropped the ball, probably due to heavy work and social schedules," and another parent acknowledged, "I pretty much disconnected after my involvement," some parents did not feel a continuing connection to the study circle after the six sessions ended.

---

*Schoolwide Measures of the Impact of the Study Circles Program*

*Student and parent perceptions of school climate.* A school that is welcoming and engaging, with teachers who respect and hold high expectations for all students, is a goal of all schools. Many of the action plans developed by the study circles address these indicators of school climate, directly or indirectly. Activities such as mentoring programs, multicultural activities, outreach to parents, and enhancing communication may all have an impact on school climate as well as on student achievement. Each year MCPS conducts surveys of school climate, gathering the perceptions of parents, students, and staff. These survey results provide an opportunity to examine schoolwide perceptions related to some of the issues addressed by the study circles. Table 12 summarizes relevant survey results from students in six middle and five high schools that held study circles during the 2005–2006 school year. (Surveys of elementary students included fewer items relevant to the evaluation of the study circle.) Survey data are presented for the year concurrent with the study circle (2005–2006) as well as the year following the study circle (2006–2007).

Table 12  
Results of School Environment Survey for Middle and High School Students  
in Schools Holding Study Circles During 2005–2006

	% Agree*			
	Study Circle Schools		MCPS	
Number of Respondents	2005–2006	2006–2007	2005–2006	2006–2007
Middle School Students	2,455	2,353	17,020	16,029
High School Students	3,955	3,404	17,991	16,507
<b>My teachers have high expectations for me to do well in school.</b>				
Middle School Students	90.5	88.9	88.3	89.1
High School Students	85.7	86.2	85.9	87.2
<b>School staff treats students fairly.</b>				
Middle School Students	65.3	63.3	63.1	65.0
High School Students	60.1	63.0	63.4	66.4
<b>My teachers respect all students.</b>				
Middle School Students	68.9	66.7	65.8	67.9
High School Students	62.0	66.3	66.9	68.9
<b>I feel welcomed at this school.</b>				
Middle School Students	78.6	76.3	77.1	78.8
High School Students	75.2	77.9	77.7	79.3
<b>Students have the opportunity to take part in school activities.</b>				
Middle School Students	89.9	87.7	87.9	88.8
High School Students	89.8	90.7	89.6	90.9

\* % Agree represents percentage of respondents answering “Strongly agree” or “Agree” on a 4-point scale (scale categories were 4=“Strongly agree,” 3=“Agree,” 2=“Disagree,” 1=“Strongly disagree”).

Overall, the perceptions of students in study circle schools were similar to perceptions of students throughout MCPS (Table 12). Highest levels of agreement were in response to items regarding teacher expectations and opportunities for students to participate in school activities. On most items, student perceptions were similar over the two years. In response to survey items addressing fairness and respect from staff, however, high school students in study circle schools were more positive in the year following the study circle (2006–2007) than in 2005–2006. The largest difference—66% in 2006–2007 compared with 62% in 2005–2006, in response to the survey item “My teachers respect all students”—approached, but did not reach, statistical significance ( $z=1.76, p=.08$  [2-tailed]). An examination of responses to this item by students in different racial groups revealed that the largest differences (from 2005–2006 to 2006–2007) were among Asian American students (7 percentage points), African American students (6 percentage points), and Hispanic students (6 percentage points).

Table 13 summarizes the survey results of parents from four elementary, six middle schools, and five high schools at which study circles were held during 2005–2006. Survey data are presented for the year concurrent with the study circle (2005–2006) as well as the year following (2006–2007).

Perceptions of parents in study circle schools were similar to perceptions of parents throughout MCPS, and responses did not vary significantly over the two years. Parents at all three levels responded with high levels of agreement in both years to questions about teachers’ expectations, a welcoming environment, and open communication at their school.

Table 13  
Results of School Environment Survey for Parents with  
Students in Schools Holding Study Circles During 2005–2006

Number of Respondents	% Agree*			
	Study Circle Schools		MCPS	
	2005–2006	2006–2007	2005–2006	2006–2007
Elementary	178	160	5,828	4,274
Middle School	501	267	3,478	1,783
High School	678	350	3,175	2,101
<b>My child’s teachers expect my child to do well in class.</b>				
Elementary	97.8	95.4	98.2	97.7
Middle School	96.0	95.6	95.0	96.0
High School	94.5	94.5	94.2	94.3
<b>I feel welcomed at this school.</b>				
Elementary	92.5	94.8	94.3	94.2
Middle School	93.5	92.8	92.0	91.9
High School	92.3	87.8	90.4	90.3
<b>There is an atmosphere of open communication in my child’s school.</b>				
Elementary	90.2	90.1	90.8	90.8
Middle School	90.2	85.0	87.3	87.1
High School	87.5	86.3	85.9	86.7

\* % Agree represents percentage of respondents answering “Strongly agree” or “Agree” on a 4-point scale (scale categories were 4=“Strongly agree,” 3=“Agree,” 2=“Disagree,” 1=“Strongly disagree”).

*Student engagement.* As an indicator of engagement, attendance rates over two years were examined for the schools holding study circles in 2005–2006. Figure 3 shows the average daily attendance for students in the 2005–2006 study circle schools (four elementary; six middle; and five high schools) and for all students in MCPS by racial/ethnic group.

In the study circle schools, attendance rates for each of the racial/ethnic groups were similar to those of MCPS during each of the years examined. All but one of the study circle schools met the attendance standard of 94% set by MSDE. The one school (a high school) that did not meet the standard increased its attendance rate from 92.2% in 2005–2006 to 93.7% in 2006–2007.

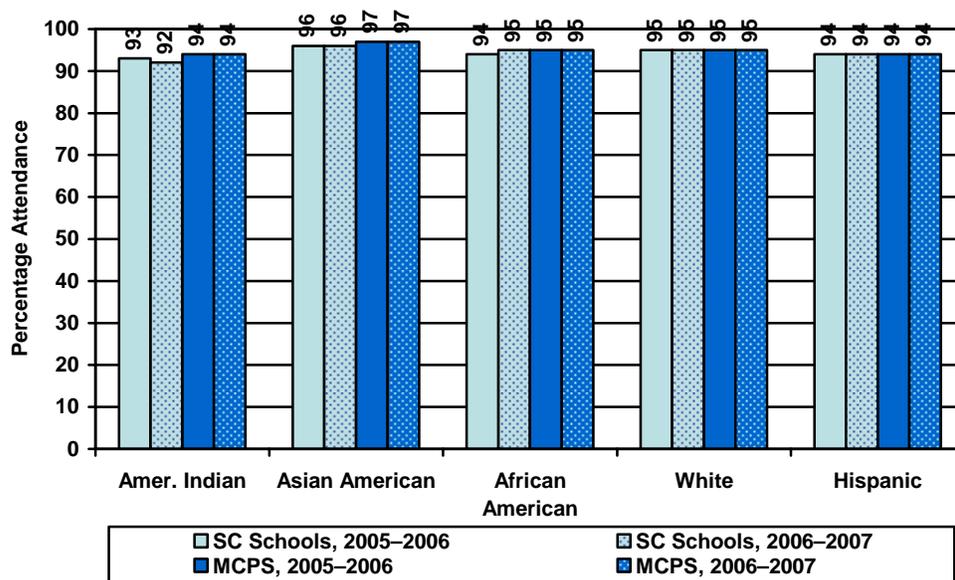


Figure 3. Attendance rate by racial/ethnic group for study circle schools and MCPS.

### *Communicating the Impact of Study Circles*

Members of the study circles shared the results of their experience beyond the group, both informally and formally. Study circle members spoke about their experiences at PTSA meetings and consortium forums. Several principals noted that they have talked with their colleagues about the program. Members of three study circle groups presented their insights and ideas to their community superintendent. Program staff presented papers at two national conferences sponsored by The Coalition of Essential Schools and the Study Circles Resource Center. A paper reporting on the evaluation of the Study Circles Program was accepted for presentation at the 2007 meeting of the American Evaluation Association. In addition, a Web site, [www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/studycircles](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/studycircles), and newsletter, *Inside the Circle*, helped to communicate the work of the Study Circles Program.

---

## Discussion

The MCPS Study Circles Program provides school communities with a process for addressing racial and ethnic barriers affecting student achievement and parent involvement. Results of the multiyear evaluation of the Study Circles Program indicate that the process is working and that diverse groups of parents, school staff, and students are having meaningful discussions that are leading to action plans for change.

Forty-three study circles were held during the 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 school years. Parents, staff, and students gave the program high ratings, both immediately following participation as well as in a follow-up survey, indicating a lasting positive perception of the experience. Opinions and attitudes of participants surveyed after involvement in the study circle were different from those reported at the start of the study circle. After study circle participation, larger percentages of survey respondents agreed that racial differences affect student achievement and parent involvement. The survey findings, together with interview data, suggest that the study circles are promoting understanding and helping to build relationships among school community members.

Survey results also suggested that participation in the Study Circles Program helped parents become more knowledgeable about their child’s education and provided them with increased sources of support. Parents and teachers reported increased levels of understanding and communication, and parents indicated that as a result of the study circle, their participation with the school had increased. Students’ perception that they “have the ability to make positive change at this school” was higher after study circle participation. These gains—parents’ increased school involvement and students’ feelings of empowerment—have the potential to extend the effects of the study circle, as individual participants use their experience in support of the wider school community.

The action plans developed by the study circles provided a guide for the work to continue after the sessions were completed. Data from interviews and follow-up surveys indicated that progress is being made in the study circle action plans. In many schools, procedures have been changed to support the action plans, and participants reported numerous examples of innovative programs and practices now in place that were first formulated in the study circles. As a result of the Study Circles Program, relationships have been formed that continue to strengthen the schools. As one principal explained, the study circle “brought staff and community together—put all of us on this joint mission—it did a lot to unify [the school].”

### *Recommendations*

Drawing from the survey and interview data collected over two years and from conversations with program and MCPS administrators, recommendations for strengthening the Study Circles Program are as follows:

- **Refine procedures for monitoring and following up on action plans.** While many study circles were able to move on to work on action plans without losing momentum, a few groups faltered at this stage. Based on principal interviews as well as responses to the follow-up surveys, the lack of follow-through was a source of frustration for some

---

participants. Additional tracking and follow-up by the Study Circles Program staff may help study circles in the transition from group meetings to the work on action plans. Program staff have implemented procedures for the 2007–2008 school year to support schools in following through with action plans, including scheduling follow-up meetings before the study circle gets under way. In addition, reports from program staff and participants suggest that it may be helpful in some cases to involve higher-level management, such as the community superintendent, in following up on study circle action plans.

- **Continue to aim for fully diverse groups.** In interviews and surveys, participants stressed the value of a diverse group; several respondents made recommendations for increasing the diversity of the study circle, notably inclusion of more White and Asian American parents. In this regard, a principal cautioned that, at the recruitment stage, some White parents may not see the study circles as relevant to them—that it is a “minority thing.” Explore ways to balance targeted recruitment with the representation of the whole school community.
- **Continue supports for consistent attendance.** Phone calls to parents, interpreters with an understanding of the school community, and reliable child care appear to have helped improve the consistency of attendance among parents during the 2006–2007 study circles. Continue providing these supports, and regularly solicit feedback from members regarding needs. An additional issue was raised in interviews with principals of 2006–2007 study circle schools: A small number of principals felt that in their school, the cost of food could not be handled by the PTSA or by the members without undue burden. It may be appropriate for the Study Circles Program to provide some financial support for food in schools with very limited resources.
- **Support student involvement.** Several principals were very enthusiastic about the involvement of students in study circles, both mixed (i.e., with parents and staff) as well as those made up entirely of students. It was noted that, in organizing a student study circle for the first time, it would be helpful to have additional materials specific to students—one principal suggested a video with students talking about their experience. A similar approach was used in a school organizing a second student study circle: Students who had participated in a previous study circle were instrumental in informing and recruiting students to participate in the new study circle—students made posters and talked to other students about the experience. Explore ways to provide schools with the opportunity to hear students talking about their study circle experience.
- **Support study circle schools during change in school administration.** When a school has a change of principal, it is important that the history, action plans, and progress of the study circle are passed on to the incoming administrator. The Study Circles Program staff needs to communicate the expectation and work out procedures to make sure that study circle work is included in the transition to the new administrator. Procedures have been developed for the 2007–2008 school year to support new principals in study circle schools; it is recommended that these procedures be monitored and adjusted as necessary to keep the study circle on track during the administrative transition.
- **Continue to monitor and support each school’s needs in terms of the structure, format, and progress of the study circle.** Program administrators have implemented a process that follows the progress of each study circle and allows adjustments in format based on the needs of the school. It is recommended that program staff monitor and follow up so that the need for and potential effects of changes in format can be understood.
- **Track surveys.** Continue efforts to link surveys to individual participants while maintaining confidentiality so that it will be possible to examine changes across time with matched

samples. Procedures implemented this year were partially successful, but a sizable number of pre-SC and post-SC surveys could not be matched. A new system has been planned for 2007–2008 study circles; monitor its implementation and adjust if necessary.

- **Examine ways to coordinate the efforts of the Study Circles Program with those of other MCPS initiatives and programs.** Consider how the Study Circles Program fits within a systemwide framework for addressing the impact of race/ethnicity on student achievement and parent involvement. Analyze how best to organize the related systemwide efforts that bear on this work.

## References

- Montgomery County Public Schools. 2006a. *Our Call to Action: Pursuit of Excellence. The Strategic Plan for the Montgomery County Public Schools 2006–2011*. Rockville, MD: MCPS. <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/about/strategicplan/>. 27 October 2006.
- Montgomery County Public Schools. 2006b. *Study Circles: Working Together to Remove Racial and Ethnic Barriers to Student Achievement*. Rockville, MD: MCPS.
- Montgomery County Public Schools. 2006c. *About Us*. Rockville, MD: MCPS. <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/about/>. 27 October 2006.
- Montgomery County Public Schools. 2007. *School Survey Results*. Rockville, MD: MCPS. <http://sharedaccountability.mcpsprimetime.org/SurveyResults/>. 27 September 2007.
- Study Circles Resource Center. 2006. *Study Circles Resource Center: Helping People Work Together for Creative Community Change*. Pomfret, CT: SCRC. <http://www.studycircles.org>. 3 November 2006.

APPENDIX A

Number of Interviews Conducted for Evaluation of Study Circles Held  
During 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 School Years

School Level	Number of Study Circles Held	Teachers/Staff Interviews	Principal Interviews	Second Year Follow-up with Principal
<b>2005–2006</b>				
Elementary	4	3	5 (incl. 1 AP)	1
Middle	6	6	5	5
High	7	2	2	2
Clusterwide	3			
<b>2006–2007</b>				
Elementary	9	<i>Not conducted</i>	4	
Middle	10	<i>Not conducted</i>	4	
High	4	<i>Not conducted</i>	1	

APPENDIX B  
Study Circles Interview Protocol

**Interview of PRINCIPAL participating in Study Circle, 2006-2007 school year**

Principal Interview number: \_\_\_\_\_ Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Confirm Study Circle info (when and where held) with participant:  
Study Circle held \_\_\_\_\_ (month & year) at \_\_\_\_\_ (school).

Introduction: My role as project evaluator; quick overview of purpose\* and process of evaluation (including other sources—surveys, interviews); assure principal that info discussed in interview will not be reported individually or in a way that would identify principal or school, but rather summarized with information from other principals.

\*We are trying to figure out:

- What's working/ what's not with the program
- What's been the impact on the school?

**Background:**

**How did your school get involved in the Study Circles program?**

How was the decision made to get involved?  
Were there concerns or issues that prompted involvement?

**Action plans:**

(Prior to interview, list action plans developed in the Study Circle; explain that **SC records show these action plans were developed:**)

<i>Action Plan</i>	<i>Progress</i>	<i>Changes resulting; follow-up</i>

**For each action plan:**

- ▶ Any issues identifying and focusing on action plan?
- ▶ Progress on action plan? ▶ Changes at school resulting from action plan?
- ▶ Follow-up? ▶ Is there anything the Study Circles program could have done differently to further support the action plan?

**Impact of the study circle**

- 1. How has your school's involvement in the Study Circles program impacted your school community?** This may be redundant with discussion of action plans, need to prompt for other outcomes, such as...
  - a. Other outcomes or follow-ups from action plans?**
  - b. Any changes in school procedures?**
  - c. Has there been a change in the way the school reached out to parents and students?**  
e.g., communicating school news, meetings, parent-teacher communication, PTA, student activities
  - d. Has there been a change in parent involvement with the school?**  
e.g., meeting attendance, PTA, parent contacts, attendance at events, parent involvement/support of school activities
  - e. Has there been a change in student participation in school activities or student involvement in school leadership?**  
e.g., after-school activities, attendance at events, SGA, initiating projects?
  - f. Has there been a change in staff attitudes or behavior?**  
Examples of staff thinking or acting differently since SC?  
Any follow-up activities by or for staff?
- 2. Do you think the Study Circle was worth the time and effort? Why or why not?**
- 3. Anything else you would like to add about your experience with the Study Circle? Any other observations? Anything else you learned?**

***If time allows...***

***Study Circle processes and procedures***

**1. Any suggestions for the Study Circles Program to improve the process? (of organizing, recruiting, implementing) (additional monthly meetings?)**

**2. Suggestions for principals organizing a study circle next year?**

*Thank you very much for your time. Your feedback is important.*

APPENDIX C  
Pre-Study Circle Survey Administered to Parents

**Montgomery County Public Schools Study Circles Program  
PARENT SURVEY**

Please answer the questions below and on the reverse side of this page. The information you provide will help us make the program better. Your answers are **confidential**.

*Thank you very much for your help.*

<b>Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following by placing a <math>\surd</math> or X in the appropriate box.</b>					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Racial differences affect student achievement at this school.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. Some teachers at this school do not know how to work with children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. Some teachers at this school think that white and Asian Students are smarter than African American or Latino students.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. Racial and ethnic differences affect parent involvement at this school.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5. I know what classes my children need to take to get into honors or advanced placement classes.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6. I understand the materials that the school sends home.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. I know which classes my children need to take to get into college.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8. I have a group of parents or teachers whom I can talk to when my child needs help at school.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9. I <i>often</i> have conversations with parents who come from a different racial or ethnic background than my own.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10. I feel comfortable talking to teachers who come from a different racial or ethnic background than my own.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
11. How often do you...	<b>Almost always</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>	
a. Volunteer in your child's class or school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
b. Participate on a parent or school committee?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
c. Attend school activities such as plays, concerts, family math nights, etc.?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
d. Participate in school <u>district</u> committees, events, or forums?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

How did you decide to get involved in the Study Circles program?

Which of the following contributed to your decision to join a study circle? (Mark all that apply)

- Opportunity to build relationships with other parents
- Opportunity to build relationships with staff
- Work with people with different backgrounds
- Understand others' attitudes and beliefs
- Understand my own attitudes and beliefs
- Help work on problems here at school
- Get more involved in the school
- Become more comfortable talking about racial issues
- Learn more about the school system
- Learn more about what my child needs to be successful in school
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please tell us about you:**

Please answer all the questions. We will *not* use your answers to identify you. This information helps to evaluate the program.

Race/Ethnicity/Cultural background \_\_\_\_\_

Country of Origin (Nationality) \_\_\_\_\_ Language spoken at home? \_\_\_\_\_

Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the following best describes your level of education:

- Some Elementary School     Some Middle School     Some High School
- High School Graduate     College Graduate     Graduate School (advanced degree)

1.

*Thank you very much for completing the survey!*

## APPENDIX D

Response Rates for Parents, Staff, and Students at Each Survey Point for  
2005–2006 and 2006–2007 School Years

	Pre-SC Survey		Post-SC Survey		Follow-up survey	
	Survey N	Response %	Survey N	Response %	Survey N	Response %
<b>Parents</b>						
2005–2006	93	62%	54	52%	31	30%
2006–2007	149	78%	129	79%	37	23%
<b>Students</b>						
2005–2006	(0)	(0%)	(0)	(0%)	(0)	(0%)
2006–2007	48	73%	39	78%	2	4%
<b>Staff</b>						
2005–2006	40	65%	31	53%	30	51%
2006–2007	94	85%	85	79%	43	40%
<b>Total/Overall</b>						
2005–2006	133	43%	85	33%	61	24%
2006–2007	291	80%	253	79%	80	25%

Note. Response rates are based on the number of surveys completed divided by the number of participants enrolled at the time of the survey. Pre-SC survey response rates are computed with the number of participants enrolled at the start of the study circle sessions; post-SC and follow-up survey response rates are computed with the number of participants completing the study circles.

APPENDIX E  
Pre-SC and Post-SC Survey Responses of Matched Samples of Parents and Staff

Table E-1  
Percentage of Parents Indicating Agreement with  
Survey Items About Relationships at School, Matched Sample, 2006-2007

Survey items	% Agree*	
	Pre-SC	Post-SC
	N=80	
I have a group of parents or teachers whom I can talk to when my child needs help at school.	63.8	67.5
I know what classes my children need to take to get into college.	62.5	63.8
I feel comfortable talking to teachers who come from a different racial or ethnic background than my own.	85.2	88.9

Table E-2  
Percentage of Staff Indicating Agreement with  
Survey Items About Relationships at School, Matched Sample, 2006-2007

Survey items	% Agree*	
	Pre-SC	Post-SC
	N=54	
I know how to work with students and families of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.	61.5	63.6
My own racial or ethnic stereotypes sometimes get in the way of my teaching.	15.4	36.5 <sup>a</sup>
I take full advantage of the resources my school has to communicate with families who speak a different language than me.	68.0	58.0

\* % Agree represents percentage of respondents answering “Strongly agree” or “Agree” on a 5-point scale (scale categories were 5=“Strongly agree,” 4=“Agree,” 3=“Neutral,” 2=“Disagree,” 1=“Strongly disagree”).

<sup>a</sup> Significant difference between pre-SC and post-SC survey, McNemar test,  $p < .05$ .

Table E-3  
 Percentage of Parents and Staff Reporting Involvement in School Activities,  
 Matched Samples

How often do you...	% Responding "Almost always" or "Sometimes"	
	Pre-SC	Post-SC
<b>Survey items for parents</b>	<b>N=81</b>	
Volunteer in your child's class or school?	55.6	59.3
Participate on a parent or school committee?	65.4	71.6
Attend school activities such as plays, family math nights, etc.?	86.3	83.8
<b>Survey items for staff</b>	<b>N=54</b>	
Participate in school committees, or other school-related extracurricular activities?	96.2	92.5
Participate in school <b>district</b> committees, events, or forums?	62.7	54.9
Think about how racial and ethnic differences affect what goes on at school?	93.6	91.5

Note. McNemar chi-square tests were conducted to analyze differences between pre-SC and post-SC survey results; no significant differences were detected.

**Table E-4**  
**Percentage of Parents, Staff, and Students Indicating Agreement with Survey Items**

Survey Item/Respondent Group		% Agree*	
		Pre-SC	Post-SC
<b>Racial differences affect student achievement at this school.</b>			
Parents	N=81	75.9	83.5
Staff	N=54	74.1	92.6 <sup>a</sup>
<b>Racial and ethnic differences affect parent involvement at this school.</b>			
Parents	N=79	68.4	91.1 <sup>a</sup>
Staff	N=54	81.5	100.0 <sup>b</sup>
<b>Some teachers at this school do not know how to work with children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.</b>			
Parents	N=80	48.8	73.8 <sup>a</sup>
Staff	N=54	67.3	89.1 <sup>a</sup>
<b>Some teachers at this school think that White and Asian students are smarter than African American or Latino students.</b>			
Parents	N=80	35.9	59.0 <sup>a</sup>
Staff	N=54	42.6	63.0 <sup>a</sup>

\* % Agree represents percentage of respondents answering “Strongly agree” or “Agree” on a 5-point scale (scale categories were 5=“Strongly agree,” 4=“Agree,” 3=“Neutral,” 2=“Disagree,” 1=“Strongly disagree”).

<sup>a</sup> Significant difference between pre-SC and post-SC survey, McNemar chi-square test,  $p < .05$ .

<sup>b</sup> No test of association can be computed because there is no variation in post-SC survey results.

APPENDIX F

Schools Conducting Study Circles in 2005–2006 and 2006–2007,  
With Additional Factors Noted

<b>2005–2006 Study Circles</b>	
<b>Elementary Schools</b>	
Clearspring ES	
Clopper Mill ES	Bilingual
Highland View ES	Bilingual
Sligo Creek ES	
<b>Middle Schools</b>	
Eastern MS	Bilingual, included students
Farquhar MS	
Julius West MS	
Montgomery Village MS	Bilingual, included students
Shady Grove MS	
Sligo MS	
<b>High Schools</b>	
Einstein HS	Conducted in Spanish
Paint Branch HS (2)	Two study circles, all students
Sherwood HS 1	Included students
Sherwood HS 2	All students
Springbrook HS	All students
Watkins Mill HS	Included students
<b>Cluster or Consortiumwide</b>	
Blair Cluster	Conducted in Spanish
Northeast Consortium	Included students
Wheaton Cluster	Conducted in Spanish
<b>2006–2007 Study Circles</b>	
<b>Elementary Schools</b>	
Bells Mill ES	
Cannon Road ES	
Georgian Forest ES	
Harmony Hills ES	Bilingual
Maryvale ES	
Lois P. Rockwell ES	
Dr. Sally K. Ride ES	Bilingual
Twinbrook ES (2)	Two study circles, fall and spring
<b>Middle Schools</b>	
Benjamin Banneker MS	
Col E. Brooke Lee MS	Bilingual
Eastern MS	All students
Rosa Parks MS	Included students
Thomas Pyles MS	
Redland MS	Bilingual
Ridgeview MS	Included students
Rocky Hill MS	
Shady Grove MS	
Tilden MS	Bilingual
<b>High Schools</b>	
Bethesda Chevy Chase HS	Included students
Winston Churchill HS	Included students
Sherwood HS	All students
Springbrook HS	Included students, conducted in Spanish

Note: Unless otherwise noted, study circles were made up of parents and school staff.

APPENDIX G

Table G-1  
Study Circle Participants' Countries of Origin  
Reported During 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 School Years

Afghanistan	Ireland
Argentina	Israel
Bangladesh	Italy
Bolivia	Ivory Coast
Brazil	Jamaica
Burma	Japan
Cameroon	Korea
Canada	Liberia
Cape Verde	Malawi
Chile	Mexico
China	Netherlands
Colombia	Nicaragua
Cuba	Nigeria
Dominican Republic	Pakistan
Ecuador	Palestine
Egypt	Peru
El Salvador	Philippines
England	Puerto Rico
Eritrea	Rwanda
Ethiopia	Scotland
Germany	Taiwan
Ghana	Togo
Guatemala	Trinidad
Guinea	U.S. Virgin Islands
Guyana	United States
Haiti	Uruguay
Honduras	Venezuela
India	Vietnam
Iran	

Table G-2  
Languages Spoken at Home Reported by Study Circle Participants  
During 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 School Years

English	Chinese
Spanish	Persian/Farsi
French	Mandarin
Korean	Jamaican
Haitian Creole	Tigrigna
Gujarati	Japanese
Urdu	Fanti
Portuguese	Amharic
Burmese	Telugu
Yoruba	Kinyarwanda
Arabic	Hindi
Bengali	Creole