

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



The mission of the Study Circles Program is to identify, examine, and eliminate institutional barriers to African American and Latino student achievement in Montgomery County Public Schools.

The program engages staff, parents, and students in facilitated dialogue and problem solving. Study Circles provide the structure for diverse stakeholders to:

- Engage in honest and productive dialogue around race and equity
- Hear a broad range of experiences and perspectives
- Identify and examine institutional barriers (beliefs, practices, and policies)
- Collaboratively work to eliminate the barriers

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

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

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

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The Study Circles Program offers different formats to meet the needs of each school or office. While some of the specific questions and activities are different, all Study Circle formats follow the same steps.

We generally start with ILT meetings, but we offer different formats to meet the unique needs of the school, including:

Instructional Leadership Team Study Circles

A year long program that includes a two day retreat, bi-monthly coaching sessions, and a summer retreat.

- Outcomes include helping leadership teams having the trust and skills to engage in racially conscious conversations and decision making.
- Leadership teams develop strategies to engage the entire school community in eliminating institutional barriers.

Student Study Circles

These Study Circles facilitate dialogue among students, staff, and administrators over three, 3 hour sessions.

- Outcomes include staff gaining a better understanding of the students' experiences and perceptions on race.
- To help students and staff talk together about how race impacts their education and racial barriers to achievement.

Partnering with Parents and the Community

The Study Circles Program works with the school to determine the best format for partnering with parents.

- Participants are a combination of parents and staff who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the school.
- Some parent/staff study circles become a committee that continue to work together. Other formats include:



Spanish Language Study Circles

These Study Circles are facilitated in Spanish and interpreted to English.

- Outcomes include new Latino Parent Committees and professional development for the school staff based on the concerns and ideas from the Study Circle.

African American Student Achievement

These Study Circles facilitate dialogue specifically with African American parents and school staff members.

- Outcomes include strengthened relationships between African American parents and school staff, new parent advisory councils, improved cultural awareness and strategies to support African American students.

Principal Advisory Committee

These Study Circles facilitate dialogue among students, parents, staff, and the principal of a school.

- Outcomes include becoming a Principal Advisory Committee that has the trust, skills and structures to talk about racial barriers to student success and develop strategies for the different stakeholders to address the barriers.

Multicultural Study Circles

These Study Circles provide a structure for stakeholders of all backgrounds to engage in honest and productive dialogue around race and equity at their school.

- Outcomes include identifying and examining institutional barriers (beliefs, practices, and policies) that are affecting student and teacher achievement and collaboratively working to eliminate the barriers at their school.