

**Montgomery County Public Schools Study Circles Program
Northeast Consortium Study Circle**

Below are selected notes from the third sessions. The notes are presented to illustrate the kinds of discussions that took place before getting to action steps. Each bullet represents a change in speakers. It is important to note that participants spent time developing trust and getting to know each other in sessions one and two.

In the Stereotypes Exercise, participants discussed racial and ethnic stereotypes and then stereotypes of the three high schools. In the Where Do You Stand Exercise, participants were asked their opinions about a different issues relating to race and school choice

John: Today’s exercises are about race. We’ve talked previously about similarities; now we are going to talk about differences. So let’s challenge each other in order to address real world stuff rather than being politically correct.

John: Let’s talk about race and stereotypes, both personal and about our schools. What does stereotypes mean?

- A stereotype is a generalization that all people are the same if they come from the same culture, and only based on 1 or 2 characteristics.
- A set of attributes.
- It’s a judgment based on generalizations.
- Stigma.
- An assumption.
- Based on incomplete information. A label.
- Generally negative and incorrect.
- Sometimes they can be correct.

John: We use a definition that encompasses a lot of what you’ve said: “Stereotypes are images, beliefs, assumptions...individual differences.” (*Explained stereotypes activity. Last week, we self identified our racial/ethnic group. For this exercise, write three words that you would use to identify your group. Then write three words others would use to stereotype your group.*

Participant	Self perception	Others’ perception
(Black/African American)	Perseverance through obstacles Strong parental influence and respect Spiritual	Loud, ostentatious Education not a priority Family dysfunction
(African Americans)	Proud Intelligent Strong-willed	Lazy Ignorant Needy
(Indian/Muslim)	Family-oriented Educated Hard-working	Misogynistic Uneducated Violent
(African American)	Loud Colorful – sense of humor Religious	Loud Aggressive/angry Intellectually inferior
(African American)	Loud Smart Fun	Loud Bad Attitude
(Black)	Loud	Lazy

	Family oriented Fun to be around (comedians)	No father figures Aggressive
(Hispanic)	Hard working Family oriented Talkative/friendly	Unintelligent Inferior Lazy
(Jewish White Woman)	Educated Family oriented Community oriented	Loud (rude) Smart (shrewd) Se-righteous
(Female African American)	Middle class Educational oriented Caring	Opinionated Self-centered
(African American Man)	Strong Family oriented Respectful	Poor Indigenous Uneducated
(Italian White Catholic)	Family oriented Judgmental Progressive	Mafia Entitled Conservative
(White American)	Privileged in the U.S. Justice Education	Superiority complex Unaware of racial reality Self-serving
(Cape Verdean)	Family oriented Good food Generational aunts	Players – men Good music What
(Non-Hispanic White Female)	Family oriented Hard working Generous	Not smart Intolerant Power hungry
(Hispanic Female)	Family-oriented Hard-working Fun-loving	Can't/don't want to learn to speak English Violent Resource drain
(Mixed)	Unique perspective Torn sometimes Tolerant	Confused Attractive Don't fit in anywhere/hard to classify
(White Irish American Female)	Family and Christian (not Catholic) Strong Giver	Catholic Drinkers Educated
(short Jewish hippy)	Big-mouthed Environmentalist Younger than I look	Cheap Funny Sloppy
(Jewish)	Hospitable Involved in the community Proud to be who we are and unique	Cheap Wealthy Intelligent
(Jamaican)	Kind (friendly) Talented Hard workers	Loud (rude) Ignorant Weed smokers
(Jewish)	Family minded Generous Loud	Rich Cheap Pushy

John: What did you notice about the answers?

- Self perceptions and stereotypes are negative.

- A lot of our self perceptions are the same.
- A lot of stereotypes are the same.
- Stereotypes are the complete opposite of how we view ourselves.

John: Was it hard?

- Most undervalue their own capability of who they are.
- When I thought about my people, the stereotypes kept coming to mind – I could easily write those. When I thought about us, they were based on stereotypes.
- Same stereotype of “loud”.
- The positive ones rang true with me. Is it still a stereotype if it is positive?
- I feel a positive stereotype is negative because it’s making a generalization about a group without getting to know them. (*She provided a stereotype of an Asian kid in special education as the anomaly to the stereotype, which can be damaging to that child.*)
- That kind of stereotyping is very different from other kinds because positive stereotyping can have opportunities.
- I think you lose opportunities either way. For instance, stereotypes like boys are not emotional and girls are – if you keep applying those stereotypes, it hurts the boy if he is emotional – he is labeled not masculine. A positive stereotype can become negative.
- I have worked with statistics for the government. Asians were not considered an unrepresented minority.
- Stereotypes about being intelligent can put a lot of pressure on kids to be smart; they think it has to be one way.
- Either way, it can be wrong because you miss an opportunity to get to know someone.
- There is a pretty specific way of talking about stereotypes. It is the thing the human mind does to narrow things down. For example, when we say Asians, we are talking about a lot of countries and cultures. It’s important to look at who’s telling the stereotypes.
- Was it different? I identify myself differently than people think of me. When I travel to South America, they think of me as a Euro Latina. Here people think I am White.
- For example, Cambodian and Vietnamese kids do not fall into Asian stereotype because they aren’t applied in those Asian stereotypes.
- We struggle with the word stereotype – in school, they are trying to group kids, and it adds stigma. At a teacher’s meeting, they all have a stigma against a child, and they put that child in the corner.
- In the classroom – part of the African American perceptions – a lot of people said loud, sense of humor. But often teachers do not see that as positive.
- My mom expected my brother to have good grades. The counselor looked White, but she could speak Spanish. My mom was not happy with my brother’s 2 Cs, and she wanted help and asked the counselor what she should do. The counselor said, “he’s fine, he doesn’t need to do anything.” She thought that was enough for his ethnic group.
- I have seen reverse discrimination. My son is White and high socioeconomic status. His guidance counselor is African American, and he has been ignored. He is getting Ds, and he is pursuing his guidance counselor, but it leads nowhere. And this is at Blake High School. This is not about one particular culture...it’s about personal perceptions influencing our actions.
- That is true. It happened in my experience. When you look at the frequency though: you may have 1% reverse discrimination. The majority is for discrimination against the minority.
- The bigger issue – in an ideal world, we would see each other as equals and treat each other with respect. Perceptions are individual. The challenge is to get through barriers so we can respect each other.

Ruby: There’s lots of conversation around positive and negative. It’s a stereotype regardless. Let’s think back to the definition of stereotypes: images, beliefs, assumptions, without taking into consideration individual differences. Keep that definition in your minds.

John: (Explained other activity of writing down own and others' perceptions of the school you are associated with.)

SPRINGBROOK

Own perception	Others' perceptions
Educational leader Equal opportunity Access to academic rigor Living diversity/global community	Gangster Low SES Not smart
Diverse Friendly/safe environment A lot of resources	Unsafe environment Violent kids
Amazing Academically oriented Diverse Strict	Ghetto Low achieving Dangerous
Zero tolerance – to a fault Diverse Strong principal	Too diverse Unsafe
Academically challenging Safe environment Diversity is a positive asset	Dangerous Do people actually graduate? Go to college? Not smart, low achieving Too many “minorities” – ghetto school
Safe Great AP and IB courses/programs Outgoing staff (down to earth)	Boring Dirty Poor
No gating (?) of high level classes Correct sports priorities: #1 academics, #2 sportsmanship, #3 winning Diversity that works! Dedicated staff	Ghetto school/poor Gangs/MS-13 IB program has all the smart kids
Well performing Culturally diverse Young staff	Title 1 Too many minority/subsidized lunch Non committed parents

PAINT BRANCH

Own perception	Others' perceptions
School spirit (lots) Many opportunities Great diversity	Ghetto school Violent Unsafe
Diverse High performing Very supportive parents	Too many Blacks Not academically sound Lacking resources
Wonderful, involved principal Many educational opportunities Family-like, cohesive diversity Award winning	Problems – behavioral Dangerous Predominantly Black
Caring Wonderful staff Many opportunities to be successful	Ghetto fabulous Blacks taking over Too many fights
Diverse	Dirty Bad Poor
Strong leadership	Black principal – White minded

Academic rigor Sports oriented	Mixed staff/communicative Mixed students
Very diverse Friendly Amazing staff	Bad kids/fighting Poor Only for math/science/media people

BLAKE

Own perception	Others' perceptions
Well-maintained/beautiful looking school A place where there are two schools without much overlap A place where kids have a sense of entitlement	Uppity/rich school All art/drama/dance oriented – no emphasis on science/math The White school
Wealthy – high budget Racially unbalanced with leadership Unempowered teachers – losing control/respect	Wealthy Award winning in multiple areas Overcrowded
High quality teachers High quality equipment Still racist experiences	White Rich Powerful
Very diverse – culturally and racially Students are respectful Not all angels (there are drugs and ???)	All White All upper class/rich All artists

John: What did you notice?

- Blake perceived as wealthy across the board with a high budget. If we ask for something, we get it. with being new, progressive, wanting to be athletic, extracurricular, stipends are found.
- I don't think it's because other school principles aren't asking for it. What about the PTSAs?
- Blake is perceived as a new school, but it is nine years old. I'm not privy to what you're talking about. Blake gets nothing they ask for.
- I would like to put this in the parking lot: budgets at schools.
- We're perceived to have all those resources... There are different perceptions about allotment. Isn't the national cutoff 28? We still have 32, 34. We're overcrowded, and it's not safe.
- It goes back to choice: 2 schools have overcrowding, 1 is under capacity. It doesn't make sense when they could send them the other school.
- With the perceptions of wealth – mixed socioeconomic families are at different schools.
- Being at all 3 schools, Paint Branch is an old building, and we don't have technology capabilities, whereas Blake has TV announcements, grades online. Not all teachers will put grades online. Spring Brook has been renovated, better facilities, etc. All kids took the same materials across the schools. The newer schools may have ended up with a bigger budget (???). The school that's been functioning may get less, whereas you may have to give more money to get new school off the ground.

Ruby: Springbrook (*referring to the memo stick-its about the HS*) – what others might say: ghetto, low achieving, dangerous, boring, poor...does it surprise you?

- I went to a physical therapist recently, and she asked me where I work. When I said Springbrook, she said, “are you scared to go to work everyday? It's such a bad school!” I said, “no, why do you think that?” She said, “I don't know. Doesn't everyone think that?”
- It's like what happened over the summer. It was blanketed on the school as the perception.

Ruby: (*Referring to the memo stick-its about the HS*) Paint Branch has similar comments: too many fights, dirty, ghetto.

- About the dirty comment: Paint Branch is old, but it's pristine. Springbrook – I don't understand the dirty comment. When you say it has a high percentage of arts, that's why they say dirty?

- The perception of Springbrook – the perception was there before the stabbing at Springbrook, but it validated previously held assumptions. That did not stick with Blake during the summer shooting.
- I was very involved. I heard haphazardly about Springbrook – that incident was not publicized. I heard about it through word-of-mouth. (*Several people corrected her that there had been significant coverage of the Springbrook stabbing.*) With Blake, it was huge. The main message was that these were not NEC students.

Ruby: (*Looking at memo stick-its about HS*). Blake stereotypes: overcrowded, White, rich, uppity.

- Springbrook was publicized for weeks. We had a meeting on that with the police about gang issues. As far as Blake – the difference was because at Blake, radio stations were made accessible to parents. I don't know if Springbrook had asked for those opportunities. But different is that you were able to diffuse the situation through PR.

John: Do you think these perceptions were around before the incidences (of violence)?

All: Yes.

- The issue is that children are trying to kill other children. But on the radio, we hear, “but they weren't from the NEC”. The Springbrook principal stood up and said, “this is our community”.

Joan: (*Explained the next exercise: Where do you stand? Everyone stands along a line on the ground, which represents a neutral position. Joan reads statements, and participants move to either side of the room, which represent either Strongly Agree or Strongly Disagree.*)

Joan: 1. Most NEC parents and students understand the choice process. (*Most participants disagreed, and a couple stayed near the line.*) Why?

- During the appeals process, information given to us was conflicting (???)
- When I would ask questions when my son was in the choice process, they gave me different answers at different times.

Joan: 2. Most students and families select their first choice mostly based on signature programs. (*Participants scattered throughout – no neutral.*)

- I strongly agree because most families that I have spoken with and that I know based their decisions on the different programs.
- I strongly disagree. People say that's why they choose – and survey data also shows that – but the real reason is because students go where their friends were going.
- (*Strongly disagree*) I can't believe 600 kids want one signature program.
- I don't think people understand how signature is implemented in the schools.

Joan: 3. Race and ethnicity impact school choice in NEC.

(*Everyone went to Strongly Agree, except ____, who stayed at neutral.*)

- I think what the school population is impacts choice.
- African American kids think Blake is mainly White. So Black kids go to Springbrook and Paint Branch because that's where we feel more comfortable.

Joan: 4. Overall, Blake has better academics than the other schools. (*Most participants scattered throughout Strongly Disagree. One participant at Strongly Agree.*)

- By my personal experience, I had kids at all 3 schools, and the academic program at Blake had more assets. I have less having to go interface to help kids at Blake.
- My friends were talking at lunch, and we thought that Springbrook had the best academics – it might be the artsy thing.

- No (*to the Blake assumption*) because there's a girl about to graduate with a full scholarship to Oxford at Springbrook.
- A magazine recently ranked the best high schools, and Springbrook is number 145, whereas Paint Branch and Blake were in the 400s and 500s.
- All schools in Montgomery County supercede other schools.

Joan: 5. Racial make-up of school impacts school's reputation. (Everybody moved way over the Strongly Agree).

- It does because I have friends who are doing choice, and my friend said, "I'm sending my kids to Blake because the others have too many Black people."
- That's a no-brainer (*referring to assumption #5*). Diversity might weaken perceptions, but I think diversity makes things stronger. It brings people together.

Ruby: 6. More efforts should be made to ensure racial balance among the 3 schools.

- (*Strongly Disagree*) More efforts should be placed on academics.
- (*Strongly Agree*) You learn most from people different from you.
- (*Strongly Disagree-Neutral*) It should be the choice of the parent. If parents don't care (???)
- (*Strongly Disagree*) Being a student, no matter how much you work to get choice balanced, it's all up to parents and students. I want to go where my friends are going, and where the academics are better. If you address racial balancing, it will address the academically balancing.
- I want my kids to grow up in a diverse environment. When you go to suburban schools – from my experience – it is not likely to upset the culture.
- (*Strongly Disagree*) More of a class issue than race. They don't mind if people look different as long as they have money. I would like to request data about affluence and achievement.

Ruby: That is in the MCPS data. (*Asked everyone to stand up.*) What insight or understanding did you gain tonight?

- I'm sad because people are choosing schools based on race, not signature program. And I am surprised by how much.
- We seem to want to defend our school. And that's OK, that's normal.
- The stereotypes I heard about my school – upsetting me a bit. (*Several people spoke aloud, saying, "it should!"*)
- It hurts me a lot. My kids go to good schools.
- Surprised that Blake is considered the White school because Blake is 50% White.