

# Working Together to Remove Racial and Ethnic Barriers to Student Achievement



## Facilitator Discussion Guide

DRAFT  
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the Community Wide Dialogue program of the InterReligious Council in Syracuse, NY ([www.irccny.org](http://www.irccny.org))*

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# Using This Discussion Guide

## Key

**M**

= Model the exercise.



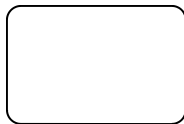
= Keep notes on chart paper OR  
prepare a chart ahead of time



= Materials needed for that session

**Facilitator  
Notes**

= All facilitator directions on how to lead the  
activity are listed in the grey boxes.



= Tips on how to handle situations that may  
come up in the activity.

## Definitions

It is hard to find a shared definition for terms such as race, ethnicity, culture and racism. The challenge is even greater when participants come from so many different countries and have different levels of education.

After a great deal of discussion, the writers of this guide decided not to offer definitions. If participants ask about definitions, have the group brainstorm the terms together.

When asking questions, facilitators should use the terms race and ethnicity together and let participants self define their racial/ethnic group.

# MCPS Study Circles Program

**Vision:**

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

**Goal:**

To remove racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement and parent involvement in Montgomery County Public Schools, and to increase parent involvement.

**Objectives for this study circle:**

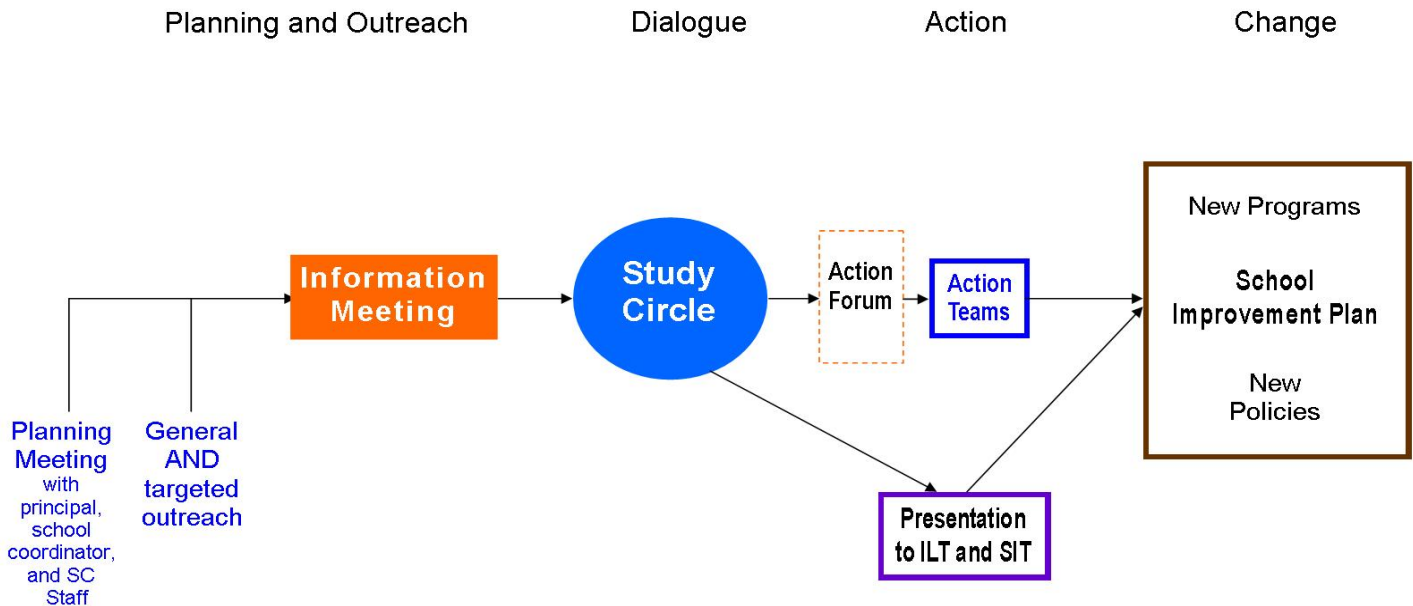
- To build a unified group of diverse parents, teachers, and students that understand the challenges and benefits of a diverse school.
- To create personal and group action steps that address racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement.
- To encourage an environment in which racial and ethnic issues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



**Study Circles are more than just the dialogue. They connect community organizing with dialogue and action. This year, we are adding more support for action after the six sessions.**



## Dialogue to Action



\*Action Forum is Optional

# Understanding the Sessions and Activities

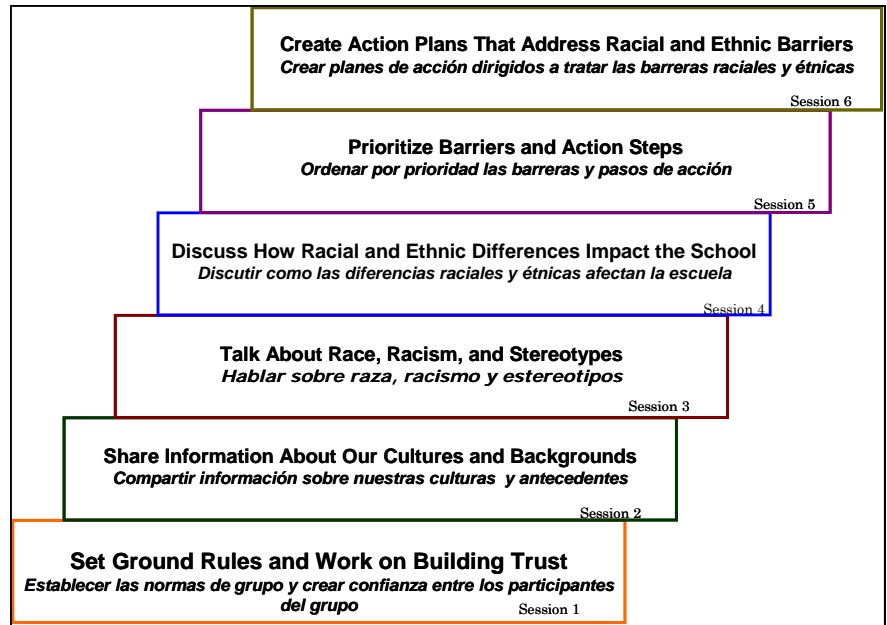


This facilitator guide is organized to help participants:

- Build lasting relationships among diverse stakeholders
- Become more aware of the issues, their own beliefs, and the perspectives of people who are from different backgrounds
- Develop action plans that will address racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement and parent involvement.

Each session, and each activity, are designed specifically to meet these goals. As a facilitator, you need to pay attention to all three of these goals throughout the study circle. Study Circle groups however, are always different. They won't respond the same way to all activities. You may need to adapt the sessions or activities to meet the specific needs of your group. To do this successfully, you must understand the goals of the activities, how they fit in with one another, and how they fit into the overall design of the study circle.

- Sessions one and two are designed to develop trusting relationships.
- Sessions three and four are designed to have honest and challenging conversations about race and the impact of race on the student achievement and parent involvement.
- Sessions five and six are meant to develop action steps that will address the racial and ethnic barriers.



Your role as the facilitator will change depending on the goal of the session.

For example in the first two sessions, you are trying to get people to share and feel comfortable. In the middle two sessions you should be asking probing questions and getting participants to react to one another. In the last two sessions, you become more of an action planning facilitator. You are pushing the participants to get to a specific goal.

## SESSION 1

Session one is designed to get participants ready for future sessions. They will not talk much about school. They get to know each other, develop ground rules, and begin to become a cohesive group. The trust being created is vital to insure the group is able to talk honestly in sessions three and four. The session begins with the facilitator explaining the process and where it will lead. After setting ground rules, participants engage in small group activities that help them feel comfortable, get to know each other, and begin building trust. Activities include:

- Welcome, Introductions, and Logistics
- Establishing Ground Rules
- Getting to Know Each Other
- Speed Meeting (NEW)



## **SESSION 2**

Trust building continues, as participants learn about each other's cultures. The opportunity to tell and hear their stories allows individuals to share the aspects of themselves that are more complex than what can be immediately seen about them or their position in the community. By the end of the session, most participants feel like they have gotten to know their fellow participants in a personal and deep level. Your role as a facilitator is to create an atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable to participate and to share personal stories. Activities include:

- Hello Circle
- Cultural Sharing (homework)
- Cultural Timeline

## **SESSION 3**

The focus and tone of the study circle changes in session three. The activities are meant to get participants to discuss and challenge each other about racial issues. The activities begin with a light conversation about the homework and get increasingly provocative. The facilitator's job in sessions three and four is to probe and push participants. Expect many of the participants to be uncomfortable and frustrated. Activities include:

- Reviewing the Homework (looking at their school and home through a racial lens)
- Stereotypes
- Does Skin Color make a Difference in Communities and Schools?

## **SESSION 4**

This session builds on session three by asking participants to discuss how racial issues impact the school. By the end of the session, the group should have identified and prioritized specific racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement and parent involvement that they want to address. Facilitators can change/adapt the statements in *Where Do You Stand* to make them more relevant to that specific school. Activities include:

- Looking at School Data
- Where Do You Stand? Does Race Affect Student Achievement in Our Schools?
- What are the Racial and Ethnic issues/problems related to Student Achievement and Parent Involvement?

## **SESSION 5**

The facilitator's role changes again in session five as the goal changes from facilitating dialogue to helping the participants do action planning. Facilitators need to be more directive. In session five, participants brainstorm a variety of different action ideas. Through the discussion, participants also get clearer on what the issues are that they want to address. Activities include:

- Prioritize issues/problems
- Work on Action Worksheet

## **SESSION 6**

By the end of session six, the study circle should have an action plan, or plans, and specific next steps that insure the actions will be implemented. Make sure you have discussed specific next steps before you conclude.

- Complete Action Worksheets
- Communication and Next Steps
- Personal Action
- Closing



**New  
2008-2009**

### **Why Study Circles?**

- Poor communication between parents and staff from different backgrounds
- Changing demographics of students
- School and parent leaders struggle to get participation from parents of all racial and ethnic backgrounds
- Students self segregate by racial and ethnic groups
- Many parents do not feel comfortable at the school
- Many African American and Latino students are not doing as well academically as white and Asian students

“We have run away from race for far too long. We are so afraid of inflaming the wound that we fail to deal with what remains America’s central social problem. We will never achieve racial healing if we do not confront each other, take risks, make ourselves vulnerable, put pride aside, say all the things we are not supposed to say in mixed company – in short, put on the table our fears, trepidations, wishes, and hopes”

*Harlan L. Dalton, author of Racial Healing*

# Session One – Getting to Know Each Other



Session one is designed to get participants ready for future sessions. They will not talk much about school. They get to know each other, develop ground rules, and begin to become a cohesive group. The trust being created is vital to insure the group is able to talk honestly in sessions three and four. The session begins with the facilitator explaining the process and where it will lead. After setting ground rules, participants engage in small group activities that help them feel comfortable, get to know each other, and begin building trust. Activities include:

- Welcome, Introductions, and Logistics
- Establishing Ground Rules
- Getting to Know Each Other
- Speed Meeting (NEW)



## **PART 1: WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND LOGISTICS (15 Minutes)**

1. Welcome! Many of you attended the information meeting on \_\_\_\_\_. We are so glad you decided to commit to the full six sessions.
2. Please tell the group your name and your connection to the school. If you have a child in this school, please tell us his or her name.
3. I am passing out a page that will help us understand why we are doing study circles and how the sessions will fit together. Some of you may have seen this at the information meeting, but its good to remind all of us why we are here and where we are going. The statements on the top are why other schools have told us they want to do study circles. (Read the statements one at a time).
4. I am also giving you a sample action worksheet. By the conclusion of this study circle, this group will develop action plans like this one. But they will be based on our discussions and the issues that impact this school.

### **How Sessions Fit Together**

1. Take a look at this piece of paper with all the different colored boxes on it. This model is a representation of our process for the next six weeks. Look at top right box. We're working towards creating the action plan we just discussed.
2. Right now, we're here in Session 1. Tonight, we're going to set ground rules and work on building trust. Next week, we'll be doing some activities that will help us share information about our cultures and backgrounds. In sessions 3 and 4, we'll be discussing the nature of the challenges in this school, and in sessions five and six, we'll talk about what we can do to address those challenges.
3. Read the Harlan Dalton quote.

**New**  
2008-2009

### **Facilitator Notes For Part 1**

- Make sure everyone signs the attendance sheet.
- Welcome everyone and introduce yourself.
- Have everyone introduce themselves.
- Handout the "Why Study Circles document" and use to explain why most schools do study circles.
- Handout the sample action worksheet and explain that this study circle will develop plans like this by the end of the study circle. (sample on page 27)
- Show how the sessions fit together and lead up to the plan
- Then explain why this school wants to do study circles and what will happen after the study circle. You should have a one-page sheet specific for the school. (make sure you have this before your first session).
- Read the Harlan Dalton quote.

## Hello Circle

Every week when we come in, we will spend 5 minutes in a Hello Circle to get us ready. When I say “Go”, everyone will get up and greet one another by saying hello or greeting in whatever way you want to greet. When we have finished, we’ll stand in a circle to see if we missed anyone.

## Role of Facilitators

Our role as facilitators is to help create a space for your discussion. We will not be sharing our own views.

## Journals

1. Right now, my co-facilitator is handing each of you a journal. These are yours to keep, and no one but you will see what you have written. As we go through these next six weeks together, you can use these journals as you please.
2. Some of the conversations we have in this study circle will be hard. They may bring up feelings or ideas that you do not want to talk about it. You can use the journals to write these feelings down.

## Posters (Put the posters up in all the languages of your participants)

1. You’ll notice that around the room we have hung up some pieces of paper. Let me take a minute to explain these. The *Action Ideas* Sheet: as we begin discussing things, ideas may come up about possible actions we can take. If we’re not at the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> session, we’ll want to hold onto that idea and come back and discuss it again when it’s the right time for it. So, if someone comes up with an idea for action, anyone can write that idea on the *Action Ideas* sheet and we’ll talk about it later.
2. The *Things We Are Already Doing* sheet is related. If someone comes up with an action idea, but someone else in the group knows that the school is already working on that idea, we can put that information up on the *Things We’re Already Doing* Sheet.
3. In session 5, you will work together to prioritize three barriers that you want to create action steps to address. The *Issues/Problems* sheet will help us keep track of barriers that come up each week. At the end of each session, we will list the issues that were discussed that session.
4. Finally, there’s the *Parking Lot*. Sometimes, we’ll begin a discussion which is important, but we might not have time to go into it right then and there. If we have time later in that session or another session we’ll return to it. Other times, the discussion may be a bit of a tangent. So, if that happens, we can write the idea on the *Parking Lot* sheet and return to it at another time.

## Facilitator Notes For Part 2

- The ground rules are very important to the discussion, especially as the sessions become more challenging. Take the time to explain the purpose of ground rules and to develop a list that the participants really own.
- Ask the group to come up with the ground rules. You can use the ones here to make suggestions or to ask questions, i.e. “what about confidentiality?”
  - ◇ Listen and treat one another with respect.
  - ◇ Each person gets a chance to talk.
  - ◇ One person talks at a time. Do not cut people off.
  - ◇ Speak for yourself. Don’t try to speak for “your group”.
  - ◇ If you feel hurt by what someone says, say so, and say why. (“Ouch”)
  - ◇ It’s okay to disagree.
  - ◇ Help the facilitator keep things on track.
  - ◇ Some of the things we will say in the study circle will be private (personal). We will not tell these stories to other people, unless we all say it is OK.
  - ◇ Everyone is willing to be open and honest.
- ✍ Make sure everyone understands the suggestion and buys into it before listing it on the chart paper.

**Facilitator Notes  
For Part 3**

**M** Facilitators should complete your own answers prior to session so you can model the exercise to encourage participants to share.

- Divide the circle into groups of 3 or 4. Make sure the groups are mixed by roles: parents, teachers, and students, as well as by race or ethnicity.
- Each group should record their answers on chart paper.
- Debrief in a large group. Go around the room and have some of the groups answer. You don't need to hear from everyone.

**New  
2008-2009**

**Facilitator Notes  
For Part 4**

**M** Facilitators can take turns modeling the answers to 3:00, 6:00, and 9:00. Facilitator should think of their own answer to the 1st and 2nd questions before the session.

1. Explain the Speed Meeting Activity
2. Remember to save about 15 minutes at the end for debriefing as a whole group when telling them how much time they have for each date.
3. During the debrief, you don't need to hear from everyone. Ask if anyone heard anything that stood out for them that they would like to share.
4. Have everyone read their answers to their 12:00 date.

*List the answers from the 12:00 date on chart paper.*

**PART 2: ESTABLISHING GROUND RULES  
(15 Minutes)**

Ground rules are meant to help us as a group have a productive and honest conversation. What would make you feel comfortable or allow you to go beyond your usual comfort zone? What would get in the way of being honest and productive?

**PART 3: GETTING TO KNOW  
EACH OTHER  
(15 Minutes)**

1. Each group will talk together and come up with 3 things they all have in common and 3 things that make them different from one another.

A note on **modeling**: Remember that the deeper you go, the deeper your participants will go. Try to find a balance between keeping your modeling brief (to show participants how long you want them to speak for) and disclosing something personal about yourself/your experiences.

**New  
2008-2009**

**PART 4: Speed Meeting  
(30 Minutes)**

1. I am handing out a page called *Speed Meeting*.
2. When I say go, find a "date" for 3:00, 6:00, 9:00 and 12:00. Pick people you do not know well. Write the person's name on the line. Your 3:00 has to be the same as your date's 3:00.
3. Write the person's name on the line and discuss the question that corresponds with your time.
4. You will have about 4 minutes for each question. I will tell you when its time to find your next date.
5. First, we will model the answers.

**Questions**

3:00 — What is your racial, ethnic, and/or cultural background? Talk a little about your background.

6:00 — Describe the community in which you grew up. What were the racial and ethnic makeup of your neighbors?

9:00 — Think about your own school when you were a child. What role did your parents or other adults play in your education? What were parents expected to do?

12:00 — What do you want to accomplish through participation in this study circle? What are your hopes and expectations for this study circle?

**PART 5: GIVE HOMEWORK FOR NEXT SESSION  
(5 Minutes)**

Bring an item to share with the group. It should be something that tells us about your racial or ethnic background. It may be a picture, a drawing, an object, a poem, food, music, or whatever you like.

**PART 6: CLOSING  
(10 Minutes)**

**Snacks**

The principal provided the food for tonight, but the school can't do it for each session. Many study circles create a list and different people bring in snacks each week. Do you want to take turns bringing in snacks and drinks?

**Positives and Changes**

1. Don't forget that our next session will be at the same time next week. We'll meet right here in the \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Each week we will end the session by asking you what went well and what should be changed for next time. This is important. If you don't tell us what was good and what needs improvement, we're going to do everything the same next time.
  - ◇ What went well today? What could have been better? OR What should we do differently next time?

**One Word Closing**

- ◇ We're going to do one last closing before we leave.
- ◇ Please stand up.
- ◇ Let's go around the circle and say just one word about how you are feeling about the study circle.


**Conclude.**

**Facilitator Notes**

**For Part 5**

**M** At least one of the facilitators should bring in an item to model this activity.

**Positives and Changes**

 Put a line down the middle of a piece of chart paper. On the top left write *Positives*. On the top right, write *Changes*.

Fill out the session notes as soon as possible after each session.

Make sure you let us know if someone did not attend the session.

If you are conducting a bilingual Study Circle, make sure the interpreter translates the ground rules and expectations before the next session.

# Session Two – Sharing Our Cultures



Trust building continues, as participants learn about each other's cultures. The opportunity to tell and hear their stories allows individuals to share the aspects of themselves that are more complex than what can be immediately seen about them or their position in the community. By the end of the session, most participants feel like they have gotten to know their fellow participants in a personal and deep level. Your role as a facilitator is to create an atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable to participate and to share personal stories. Activities include:

- Hello Circle
- Cultural Sharing (homework)
- Cultural Timeline

## Facilitator Notes For Part 1

- Make sure everyone signs the attendance sheet.
- In reviewing the ground rules, ask if there need to be any changes or additions.

Be careful of time management in Part 2. One suggestion is to "pass the watch". Decide on how long each person gets to share. Everyone will help keep time for the person to their right. So, if one person volunteers to share, the participant to his or her left will be the time keeper.

## PART 1: WELCOME BACK (10 minutes)

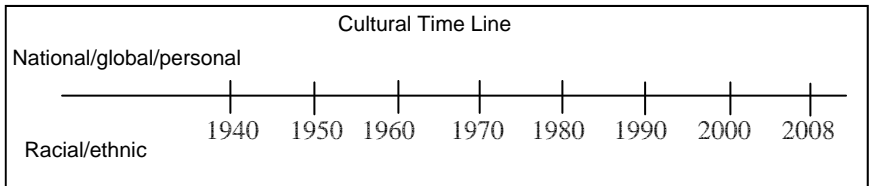
1. The goals for this session are to learn about different cultures and to continue creating trust among group members.
2. The agenda for today is...
3. Let's briefly review the ground rules. Does anything need to be added or changed?
4. Let's do our Hello Circle.

## PART 2: CULTURAL SHARING (GO OVER THE HOMEWORK) (45 Minutes)

1. Remember last week we asked you to bring in an item from your culture? Describe what you brought and say why you chose it. What does it say about your background and who you are today?
2. We want to hear from everyone, so please remember that there are many of us here and we all want to have a chance to talk.
3. If you forgot to bring something, tell us a story that describes something about your culture.

**PART 3: CULTURAL TIME LINE**  
**(25 Minutes)**

1. This next exercise will help us to continue knowing about one another. The goals are to help us share our personal stories and understand how we got to where we are today.
2. Take a few minutes to think about memorable events or turning points in your life. In your journals write down events in these three categories:
  - ◇ What are the important national or global events that you lived through (for example: the Assassination of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or war breaking out in your country of origin)?
  - ◇ What are the important personal events (for example: parents divorcing, your marrying, or moving to a new place)?
  - ◇ Think about an event or experience that impacted the way you think about racial/ethnic differences.
3. After you have written in your journal, put write one example for each category on the timeline. Several people can be writing on the chart at once.



Have the participants write on the timeline rather than use post-its unless you have no wall space. Groups often show the timeline in their presentations after the study circle. Its hard to see with the post its.

**Facilitator Notes**  
**For Part 3**

- Having participants share their stories is the most important part of this exercise. Make sure you leave time for story telling.
- After giving the directions, model this exercise. The more personal you are in your modeling the more the participants will open up. This is one of the times for the facilitators to take risks and be personal. Don't forget to explain how the event impacted you.
- Tape together a few pieces of chart paper on the wall. Put a line across the middle, with each decade listed sequentially.
- After people have finished writing their events on the paper, have everyone stand around the chart.
- Ask people to identify *one* item that is really important to them and to explain why.
- If you have time after everyone has shared, ask if anyone thought of similar stories after hearing someone else's.



**PART 4: GIVE HOMEWORK FOR NEXT SESSION  
(5 Minutes)**

1. Next week we really begin talking about our experiences and opinions on racism and cultural misunderstandings. The homework for next session will help us prepare for the conversation.
2. Think about and write down answers to the following questions regarding this school and your home. (Parents can ask their children for help with the school questions).

**School:**

- ◇ How does the racial/ethnic make up of the staff compare to the racial/ethnic make up of the students?
- ◇ Do kids from different racial and ethnic groups sit and play together at lunch, on the bus, etc.?
- ◇ Are the individual classes as diverse as the total school?
- ◇ Do parents of different backgrounds talk and have relationships with each other?

**Home:** What are the racial/ethnic backgrounds of:

- ◇ The friends you usually have at your house?
- ◇ Most of the customers who shop at your grocery store?
- ◇ The main characters in the last two or three movies you have seen and of your favorite television program?

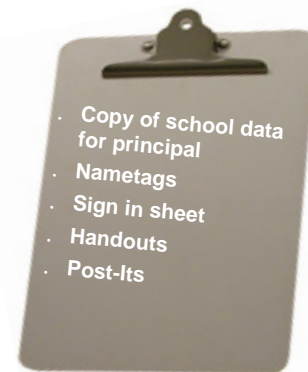
**PART 5: CLOSING  
(10 Minutes)**

1. Remember to write a journal entry reflecting on the process of the meeting you just experienced. Note the racial/cultural relations taking place within the group so far. This is an activity which you can do at the end of each session, but you should be thinking about it throughout each session.
2. What new insights did you gain today?
3. Let's do Positives and Changes.
4. One word about how you are feeling.

# Session Three – Talk About Race, Racism, and Stereotypes

The focus and tone of the study circle changes in session three. The activities are meant to get participants to discuss and challenge each other about racial issues. The activities begin with a light conversation about the homework and get increasingly provocative. The facilitator's job in sessions three and four is to probe and push participants. Expect many of the participants to be uncomfortable and frustrated. Activities include:

- Reviewing the Homework (looking at their school and home through a racial lens)
- Stereotypes
- Does Skin Color make a Difference



## **PART 1: WELCOME BACK (10 minutes)**

1. Over the past two weeks, we have talked about what we wanted to accomplish by participating in this study circle. We began learning about each other's cultures, and worked on developing trusting relationships among us. In this session, we will build on that trust to challenge each other. We will participate in activities that are designed to inspire us to talk about the differences we have in our experiences and our opinions about race, racism, and cultural misunderstanding. Although this session might be hard, it is vital if we want to create meaningful action steps in sessions five and six.
2. Let's briefly review the ground rules. Does anything need to be added or changed?
3. Let's do our Hello Circle.

## **PART 2: REVIEWING THE HOMEWORK (10 Minutes)**

Last week we asked you to think about or write down answers to the following questions about this school and your home.

### **School:**

- ◇ How does the racial/ethnic make up of the staff compare to the racial/ethnic makeup of the students?
- ◇ Do kids from different racial and ethnic groups sit and play together at lunch, on the bus, etc.?
- ◇ Are the individual classes as diverse as the school?
- ◇ Do parents of different backgrounds talk and have relationships with each other?

### **Home:**

What are the racial/ethnic backgrounds of:

- ◇ The friends you usually have at your house?
- ◇ Most of the customers who shop at your grocery store?
- ◇ The main characters in the last two or three movies you have seen and of your favorite television program?

### **Facilitator Notes For Part 2**

- They can do this in small groups.
- ✍ Questions can be recorded on chart paper before the session.
- After the small groups, debrief as a large group for a few minutes with the question:
  - ◇ Did anything strike you when you were doing the homework or participating in the discussion? If so, what?
  - ◇ Did any of the answers surprise you? If so, what?

Make sure you manage your time well in this session. It is very important to have enough time to fully debrief Part 4

**Facilitator Notes  
For Part 3:**

- This is an important exercise. Stereotypes will come up throughout the Study Circle.
1. Give each participant 2 post-its.
  2. Before you begin, ask a few people to explain what stereotypes are, then read the definition below:
    - ◇ *Stereotypes are images, beliefs, or assumptions about a group of people without taking into consideration a person's individual differences.*
- M** After explaining the directions, model the exercise for the participants before you ask them to do it.
4. After everyone has had time to write their answers, go around the room and ask people to read their answers one at a time. As they read their answers, participants should get up and tape their sheets to the wall.
  5. Put answers to the first question on one side and answers to the second on the other side.
  6. Debrief on what they noticed and how it made them feel.
  7. Then, talk about how stereotypes impact the school:
    - Have them pair up to tell each other examples/stories of how stereotypes impact the school
    - Bring back together and brainstorm as a group. Capture on chart paper.
- ✍ If a few issues stand out after brainstorming, ask if some of the participants would share specific examples.

**PART 3: STEREOTYPES  
(25 Minutes)**

1. Now we're going to do an exercise about stereotypes. But first, we should make sure we all understand what stereotypes are. What comes to your mind when you hear the word stereotype? What does it mean?
2. Please list your answers to the following questions on a post-it.
  - ◇ On one post-it, write your racial/ethnic/cultural group and list three words that you believe describe the racial/ethnic/cultural group you identify with.
  - ◇ On another post-it, write your racial/ethnic group and list three words that you believe *others might use to stereotype your group*.
3. How did it make you feel to answer the questions and listen to others? (Was it hard for anyone to answer?)



**Debrief Activity (10 Minutes)**

1. Pair up with someone from a different background (if possible). Talk for about 5 minutes about some examples of how stereotypes impact the school.
2. Now, as a group, lets brainstorm a list on how stereotypes impact this school.

People who are from a dominant group sometimes have difficulty with this question. For example, some white participants are not used to thinking of themselves in racial or ethnic terms. Try to push them to do the exercise even if they find it difficult.

Sometimes participants bring up positive stereotypes. For example, "Asians are smart". If this comes up, ask participants if they think stereotypes can be positive.

## PART 4: DOES SKIN COLOR MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOLS?

(30 Minutes)

1. This next activity is meant to help us go deeper in our discussion about race. Its going to make some of you uncomfortable. And, some of you are going to think that the activity is contrived. Remember, one of the goals of this study circle is to put on the table issues that some people in your school are thinking about. After the exercise we will discuss your reactions to the exercise, thoughts on the issue, and how it impacts your school.
2. In the last part, we asked you to self identify. This time, you should only respond to the questions based on your skin color. This activity is NOT about ethnicity, culture, gender, religion, accents, or what you wear. Its only about the physical parts about how you look.
3. Everyone needs to get up and stand in a line.
4. I will read different statements. Take a step forward if the statement is TRUE for you. Then, look around to see who has stepped forward and who has remained in place. We will do this for each statement.

- ◇ If a police officer stops me on the street, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my skin color.
- ◇ I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people that look like me.
- ◇ I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people that look like me widely represented, and represented positively.
- ◇ If dressed nicely, I can go shopping knowing that I will not be followed or harassed in the store.
- ◇ I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge", I will be facing a person whose skin is the same color as mine.
- ◇ Most of the teachers in this school are the same skin color as I am.
- ◇ Schools that have large numbers of students who look like me are usually considered good schools.

- Some participants may say that we are setting them up with this exercise; the line would come out differently if other questions were asked.
- Tell them that this is an issue that some people in the school feel strongly about. The exercise was written specifically to address this issue.

### Facilitator Notes

#### For Part 4:

- The goal of this exercise is to put a difficult issue on the table. Remember, this is not diversity training. We are not saying there is white privilege and we are not trying to make anyone feel guilty.
  1. Read Introduction
  2. Read the statements out loud.
  3. After each statement, ask participants to take a step forward if the statement is true for them. Have them look around the room to see who stepped forward and who remained in place.
  4. After the exercise, keep people where they are for the follow up questions. Make sure you ask people at the front, middle, and back for their reactions.
- Facilitators: you should place yourselves strategically. Make sure you don't leave people standing alone. One facilitator could be in front, the other in the back.

Remember to use the follow up questions on page 35 if you are stuck or need additional questions.



**New  
2008-2009**

**Facilitator Notes  
For Debriefing**

- Facilitators need to be able to read your participants. Each group is going to react differently.
- Start the debriefing while everyone is standing in place.
- For question 3, get different reactions. Ask people to react to what people say. Do not take silence as agreement.
- Question 4 is meant to switch the conversation from *What People Think* to *How Do They Feel*. Ask people how they are feeling. Give some people time to answer and react to each other.
- Then read the bulleted words. After each word, ask a few people why they feel this way. Then go to the next word. Try to pull out quiet people.
- The additional activity is optional. You and your partner need to decide in the moment whether it would be useful.

**Facilitator Notes  
For Part 5**

- It's common for participants to have feelings of frustration, sadness, or anger.
- Let people know that these feelings are okay and important to helping them create meaningful action steps in sessions five and six.
- Remind them that the study circle is a process. It will all come together by session six.
- Next session, you will be showing data. Give a copy of the data to the principal at the end of session three. Ask the principal to review and let the SC office know if there are any concerns.

**Debriefing Questions While Standing in Place**

1. What do you notice?
2. Read the following statement:

*Some people believe that in this society, people with light skin have advantages-or privilege-over people whose skin is darker. This advantage is often invisible and people who benefit from it often do not see it.*

3. What do you think of this idea?
4. What are you feeling right now? I will read some words that express the feelings that other study circle participants have told us. After each word, raise your hand if the word is how you are feeling right now. You can raise your hand for every word that relates to your feelings:

- |               |              |
|---------------|--------------|
| • Frustrated  | • Empowered  |
| • Hopeless    | • Victimized |
| • Embarrassed | • Vindicated |
| • Guilty      |              |

5. How does what we saw here impact the school?



**Additional Activity**

1. Have everyone stand in a circle.
2. Say: I will read a series of statements. After each statement, step forward if the statement is true for you.
  - I have spoken up to defend people who are not from my own racial or ethnic background
  - I live in a racially or ethnically diverse community
  - I have access to opportunities that were not available to my parents
  - I have adopted, married, or provided care for others who are not from my own racial or ethnic background
  - I have participated in programs or activities that deal with issues of racism or inequities
  - I want all of our students to succeed

**PART 5: CLOSING  
(10 Minutes)**

1. Take a few minutes to think or write in your journals about the feelings you are having right now.
2. Next week we will talk about how these issues impact our school.
3. What new insights did you get today?
4. Do we need to add any action ideas on the "Action" poster so that we can talk about them in Sessions 5 and 6. Do we need to list any ideas on the "Issues" poster?
5. Let's do positives and changes
6. Please share one word about how you are feeling now.

# Session Four– How Racial and Ethnic Differences Impact the School

This session builds on session three by asking participants to discuss how racial issues impact the school. By the end of the session, the group should have identified specific issues that illustrate racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement and parent involvement that they want to address. Facilitators can change/adapt the statements in *Where Do You Stand* to make them more relevant to that specific school. Activities include:

- Looking at School Data:
- Where Do You Stand?: Does Race Affect Student Achievement in Our Schools?
- What are the Racial and Ethnic Barriers to Student Achievement and Parent Involvement?

## PART 1: WELCOME BACK

1. Last week we talked about our experiences with and opinions about racism, stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings. In this session we are going to discuss how these issues impact student achievement at this school.
2. Next week, we will begin creating a work sheet for next steps. A sample is in your packet. Lets go over it so you can see where we are going.
3. Let's do our Hello Circle.

## PART 2: REFLECTING ON SESSION 3 (15 Minutes)

1. Did you have any experiences this week that made you think about our Study Circle? Did you write anything in your journal that you want to share with the rest of the group?

## PART 3: LOOKING AT THE DATA (20 Minutes)

1. We are going to spend just a few minutes looking at some of the assessment data at this school. Once we understand it, we will go right into another exercise that will help us talk about the challenges behind the data.
2. We are not going to spend more than 20 minutes on the data. If people want more data, we can give you suggestions for finding it after the session ends tonight.
3. We will first go through the data to make sure everyone understands what we are looking at.
4. Let's discuss the following questions:
  - ◇ What do you see? What factual statements can you make based on the data?
  - ◇ How does this make you feel? For example, what surprised you? What encouraged or discouraged you?
  - ◇ What new insights do you have?
  - ◇ What areas of need stand out?
- ◇ How do the issues we discussed in the stereotypes and skin color activities connect to the data?



## Facilitator Notes For Part 1

Remind the participants of what the action worksheet will look like at the end of session 6. They should all have a sample in their packet.

## PART 2 Alternative

If you think participants have a lot of feelings from session three, you can insert the following activity after the hello circle.

1. Split the circle into small groups of about 4 people.
2. Tell the participants, there were a lot of feelings after the last session. Several of you wrote your feelings in your journals.
3. In your small group, talk to each other about how you feel about the skin color activity and the discussion we had last session. Please focus on your feelings.
4. Give them about 10 minutes and then have them come back together. Debrief by asking for some feelings or thoughts that stood out for you in your small group discussions. (only debrief for about 5 minutes)



New

2008-2009

Facilitator Notes  
For Part 4

*The goal of the activity is to get participants to challenge each other AND hear each others perspectives on the issues specific to that school. The statements listed to the right are just examples. You can change them to be more applicable to your study circle. Call the Study Circles coordinator to help you revise the statements.*

1. Preparation: Use masking tape to put a line down the middle of the room. Put a sign on one side of the room that says STRONGLY AGREE. On the other side, put a sign that says STRONGLY DISAGREE.
2. Read the statements slowly, you may need to repeat if participants cannot hear you.
3. After everyone moves to a spot, make sure you ask two to three people why they are standing where they are.
4. Give participants the opportunity for cross conversations.
5. At the end of the exercise, give everyone a few minutes to think or write in their journal.

**PART 4: WHERE DO YOU STAND: DOES RACE IMPACT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN OUR SCHOOLS?  
(20 Minutes)**

1. Please stand up. This exercise is called *Where Do You Stand?*
2. I will read a series of views that participants in past Study Circles have given regarding how they believe race affects student achievement in their school.
3. After each statement, move to the part of the floor that best reflects your level of agreement or disagreement with the statement.
4. For example, if you totally disagree with the statement, you should move as far towards the STRONGLY DISAGREE sign as possible. If you totally agree with the statement move as far towards the STRONGLY AGREE sign as possible.
5. You can also stand anywhere in between the signs. The closer you are to the sign, the more sure you are about your answer.
6. The center line means that you are completely neutral.
7. After people go to different spots, I will ask two or three people why they are standing there.

**Statements**

- ◇ Too many parents at this school do not participate in their children's education.
- ◇ Cultural misunderstanding gets in the way of good communication.
- ◇ Too many students do not value education.
- ◇ Some groups do not feel welcome at this school.
- ◇ Active parents sometimes make it harder for other families to get what they need.
- ◇ Some students get pressure not to succeed.
- ◇ Racism keeps some students from getting access to good programs, while making it easier for other students to get access.
- ◇ Some teachers and staff members are not adequately prepared to work with such a diverse student body.

**Possible Follow Up Questions**

- Why do you think the other person is standing over there?
- Why would someone's opinion be so different than yours?
- What do you think about what the other person said?
- How do racial and ethnic difference impact these issues?

1. At your seats, take a minute to think or write in your journals: which statements need more discussion and why?

## PART 5: WHAT ARE THE RACIAL AND ETHNIC ISSUES WE WANT TO ADDRESS?

**(30 Minutes)** (Use the statements on page 25 and 26 if you do not think the participants are going deep enough or raising crucial issues.)

1. In your packet, we gave you a sample action worksheet. We will work on developing our own action worksheets in sessions five and six.
2. Over the past four weeks, we have been sharing our backgrounds, our beliefs, and our experiences. Now we want to focus in on what we think are the racial and ethnic issues that we want to address.
3. Just to make sure we understand what we are looking for, lets briefly talk about how we are defining issues.
  - “Issues” is a statement that describes a problem/concern.
  - A “barrier” speaks to why, (the conditions that cause the problem/concern).

*show the examples from the box to the right*

4. First we want to brainstorm a list of the issues. We’re going to go around the circle and everyone will have the chance to say something. We can go around a few times. At this point, lets just put things up without discussion.
5. After we have the list, lets go through it to see where we need clarification and discussion. This is the opportunity for you to really say how you feel about these issues, to challenge each other, and to make sure you understand why you each feel the way you do.

## PART 6: HOMEWORK

1. Point out the sample action ideas and say... “In your packets, there are action steps that other study circles have taken. Please review them before the next session”.

## PART 7: CLOSING (5 Minutes)

In the next session, you will create a shared vision for the study circle, prioritize racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement, and begin developing action steps.

1. What new insights did you gain today?
2. Let’s write down our action ideas on the “Action Ideas” sheet so that we can talk about them in Sessions 5 and 6.
3. Let’s do positives and changes
4. Please share one word about how you are feeling now.

### Facilitator Notes For Part 5:

1. Go over the definitions between issue and barrier and show them the issue/barrier handout.
2. Remind the participants about the barriers listed on the ISSUES POSTER that the study circle kept through out the sessions.
3. Also point out the statements from PART 4.
4. Facilitators should suggest issues that they heard in the conversations, but have not been raised in the brainstorm.
5. AFTER the brainstorm, push the participants to challenge each other and go deeper. You may want to remind them of the Harlan Dalton quote on page 10.

Issues	Barriers
Low percentage of African American and Latino students in higher level classes	Some African American and Latino students get pressure not to participate in higher level classes
African American students are suspended at a higher rate than other students	Some teachers will send an African American student to the office more often than a white student for doing the same thing.
The PTA does not represent the racial and ethnic make up of the school community	Many Latino and African American parents do not feel accepted at the PTA or other parent meetings

**New  
2008-2009**

- **Facilitators — Between sessions 4 and 5, try to categorize the issues to bring back to the study circle. This will help expedite the process in session 5. Feel free to call John or Ruby to help.**



## Experiences and Opinions From Other Study Circles

- You have copies of these statements for each participant in English and Spanish if you wish to use them.
- Facilitators should have participants read this sheet out loud if you do not think they are getting to crucial issues.
- Explain that these are statements that other Study Circle participants have said over the past three years.
- You could either point out a few or have the group take turns reading each statement and experience. (if you decide to have them read, remember to tell people that they can pass if they choose. Its okay for people to read out loud in Spanish.

### **Too many parents at this school do not participate in their children's education.**

- ◇ I want to know how my child is doing in school, but it's frustrating to get a report card sent home and I cannot understand it. This is a very diverse community. I don't understand why there isn't more effort to have report cards and other school papers in languages other than English.
- ◇ I try so hard to communicate with my students' families. I don't think there is anything else I can do. I get so frustrated. Most never come to meetings or oversee their children's work at home.

### **Cultural misunderstanding gets in the way of good communication.**

- ◇ I always believed that everyone was the same. Now I feel like my values are tested every day. When I'm teaching in a classroom, it takes everything I have to not look at African American boys as troublemakers. It's hard...I spend a lot of my time disciplining them.
- ◇ Every time I confront my son's teacher about a problem, he tells me to calm down. Rather than listening to me, I feel like he's stereotyping me as an angry black woman who is too emotional to understand the facts.

### **Too many students do not value education.**

- ◇ There is plenty of help at school for anyone who wants it. Many students of color just don't want to work hard.
- ◇ I think that African American and Hispanic kids use racism as an excuse to why they don't perform well. Asians are also a minority and they usually perform as well, if not better, than white students.

### **Some groups do not feel part of the school.**

- ◇ When I asked my daughter why she didn't participate in the school's dance club, she explained that the club was only for African American students.
- ◇ I feel really hurt that many of the friends I had in elementary and middle school no longer include me because I'm not from their culture.
- ◇ Our school is predominantly African American and Hispanic, yet there are only a handful of Hispanic teachers and they only teach ESOL classes.

### **Active parents sometimes make it harder for other families to get what they need.**

- ◇ I get calls every summer from parents who want me to put their child with a specific teacher. Their neighbors had told the parents which teachers were best. I have to be concerned for all our students, not just the ones who come from vocal families.
- ◇ I always feel like the parents at PTA meetings already know everything. They don't seem very interested in what I have to say.

### **Some students get pressure not to succeed.**

- ◇ Several students of color told me that they quit honors because the other students and some of the teachers make them feel like they do not belong.
- ◇ I sometimes get teased by my friends when they find out I do well in school. They say that I am acting "white."
- ◇ My calculus teacher told my mother that I would never do better than a C in her class and I should consider going into a lower level class.

**Racism keeps some students from getting access to good programs, while making it easier for other students to get access.**

- ◇ When I first became principal of the school, white children only made up 20% of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade population. However, ninety percent of the 5<sup>th</sup> graders recommended for the middle school Gifted and Talented classes were white. It turned out that there was no standard criterion for teachers to recommend the students. Teachers decided who would - and who would not - be recommended for Gifted and Talented. Working with the teachers, we created a set of criteria that all teachers would use. The teachers then went back and re-evaluated their recommendations. Fifty percent more students were recommended for Gifted and Talented using the more standardized criteria. Almost all the new students were African American and Hispanic. I asked a teacher why one of the students had not been recommended the first time, given that his grades and test scores were so high. The teacher responded that she thought the student had an attitude problem.
- ◇ I had straight A's in my old school. But when I moved here, my guidance counselor refused to let me sign up for honors classes.
- ◇ I was surprised when my 2nd grade daughter was put into a remedial reading class. The school never even tested her. I got angry when the teacher refused several requests for my daughter to be put in the more advanced classes. Because I'm also a teacher, I went to the principal who finally ordered a reading test for her. Even then, the teacher delayed the test for several months while my daughter sat in a class re-learning things she had known for a couple of years.

**Some teachers and staff members are not adequately trained to work with such a diverse student body.**

- ◇ As a staff development teacher, I often observe teachers who give African American and Latino students less time to answer when as a question. These teachers are not doing this intentionally, and do not believe it until I show them my notes.
- ◇ On the day of my son's parent/teacher conference, my boss told me that I had to work late. When I arrived late to the conference, the teacher told me to come back another day.
- ◇ I had signed up for several classes for the next semester, but my counselor registered me for Art, which I did not sign up for. When I asked him why he had registered me for Art, he said that he thought that since I was Asian I would do well in Art class.
- ◇ My English-speaking parents get a call or a note every week letting them know how their child is doing. I do not communicate as much with parents who do not speak English. Our school has resources to help teachers, but it's a lot more work.

Remember to have the interpreter translate any important notes.

Fill out the facilitator notes as soon as possible after each session.

Make sure you let us know if someone did not attend the session.

## Overview of Sessions 5 and 6



### Session Five

1. In session one, you should have explained to the participants how the school plans to support action. Remind the study circle about the path before moving into this activity.
2. List the issues from session 4.
3. Prioritize the issues by voting.
4. Complete the action worksheet for each issue. (If possible, try to keep the group together for this. At least try to get through the first few questions for each issue before putting them in small groups.

### Session Six

1. Allow small groups to complete the questions from session 5 as needed.
2. Report out.
3. Refine action ideas with input from large group.
4. Revisit the plan for implementing action and discuss with group to make sure it still makes sense.
5. Develop presentation for the Instructional Leadership Team or action forum using the sample agenda.
6. Talk about other forms of communication to the rest of the school community
7. Do personal action
8. Do evaluation
9. Close

# Moving from Dialogue to Action

By the end of session 6, the study circle should have an action plan that includes:

- The issue(s) you want to address
- The racial or ethnic barriers that cause the issue
- What success would look like (vision and goal)
- A few strategies for reaching the goal.



This action plan can be taken to the Instructional Leadership Team, the PTA, or the School Improvement Team. If the goal is measurable and specific, it can be put in the School Improvement Plan and monitored throughout the year. Below is an example:

## Sample Action Work Sheet

- 1. What is the issue we want to address?**
  - Low representation of African American and Latino students in AP and Honors classes
- 2. What are the racial and ethnic barriers that contribute to this problem? These should be based on the discussions from the first four sessions,**
  - Many African American and Latino parents and students don't know the pathways or programs offered
  - Peer Pressure not to take higher level classes
  - No motivation (self, school, parents)
  - Climate of some AP classes. Some AP teachers and students are not welcoming to African American and Latino students
  - Some guidance counselors and teachers steer African American and Latino students to less challenging programs.
- 3. List specific examples from the study circle that illustrate the racial and ethnic barriers**
  - I thought my child was doing well in middle school. His grades were good. I had no idea about Math A or Math B, so I never tried to advocate having him in the class.
  - My teacher always asks me how I'm doing or if I need help. My grades are better than most of the other kids, but I'm the only one she ever asks. I'm the only Latina in the class.
  - I had straight A's in my old school. But when I moved here, my guidance counselor refused to let me sign up for honors classes.
  - The other African American kids tease me for being in the AP classes. They constantly tell me that I'm acting white.
- 4. What would success look like? (Vision)**
  - All classes in this school represent the racial and ethnic diversity of the school community.
- 5. How will we get there? (Goal)**
  - Representation of African American students in AP classes increases 20% by the end of the year.
- 6. Is the school already doing things to address the issue? List activities that address it.**
  - The Instructional Leadership Team is participating in diversity training with the MCPS diversity team.
- 7. Brainstorm some action ideas that will help lead to the goal.**
  - Have high school students talk with middle school students about the pathways and benefits to AP classes
  - Plan a series of workshops for parents and students. Advertise them in language that everyone will understand.
  - Have successful African American and Latino college students do presentations at assemblies.
  - Provide training to help AP teachers make their classes more encouraging to students of color. Provide examples of how students of color feel in AP classes.
  - Organize a study circle that includes students and AP teachers that will result in more welcoming classes.
  - Develop a mentoring program for students of color in AP classes.
  - Create a plan for students to address conflicts or issues that are teacher specific.

# Session Five – Prioritize Issues And Begin Creating Action



The facilitator's role changes again in session five as the goal changes from facilitating dialogue to helping the participants do action planning. Facilitators need to be more directive. In session five, participants brainstorm a variety of different action ideas. Through the discussion, participants also get clearer on what the issues are that they want to change. Activities include:

- Prioritizing the issues
- Developing the action plan

## **PART 1: WELCOME BACK (5 Minutes)**

1. This is the session in which we begin to prioritize the issues and create a plan for next steps.
2. Remind the participants about the plan for implementing the action. (Facilitators should have received the information before the first session)
3. Go over agenda
4. Hello Circle

## **PART 2: PRIORITIZE THE ISSUES (15 Minutes)**

1. We are going to start working on creating action steps that address the racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement that we have discussed over the past four weeks.
2. We have talked about many important issues over the past few weeks, but we can not address everything.
3. To make it easier to move toward action, we need to prioritize the issues we want to work on first.
4. We are going to use dots to vote on the top three issues that we want to address.
5. You each have three dots. When you are ready, come up and place your dots on the issues you think we should address first. You can put all three dots on one, or one dot on three different issues.
6. Before you vote, think about whether or not the removal of the issue you are voting for would have an impact on realizing the vision we just discussed in the previous exercise.
7. When everyone has voted with their dots, we will see which three issues have the most dots.

### **Facilitator Notes For Part 3**

1. Post up Issues List from Session 4.
2. Remind everyone that the focus is on racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement, not every issue impacting the school.
3. After everyone has voted with their dots, determine the top three issues.

Some people may get frustrated that they have to prioritize only 3. Let them know that this is only a beginning. The circle and school can keep the list and work on additional barriers after the first 3 are tackled.

## **PART 3: Creating Action Large Group(30 Minutes)**

1. The goal of this activity is to create a road map for addressing the issues.
2. I am handing out a worksheet. We will work together to answer the questions for each issue.

**PART 4: GIVE HOMEWORK  
(5 Minutes)**

1. Bring your calendars to the next session in case you decide to meet again.

**PART 5: CLOSING (5 Minutes)**

1. **Potluck?** Next week is our last session. Many study circles decide to have a potluck dinner, with individuals bringing food from their different cultures. Do you want to do this? If so, is it possible for you to come early so we can begin eating before the session begins.
2. What new insights did you gain today?
3. Let's do positives and changes
4. One word about how you are feeling about the study circle.

Fill out the online facilitator survey as soon as possible after each session.

Make sure you let us know if someone did not attend the session.

# Session Six – Developing Action Plans



By the end of session six, the study circle should have two or three action plans and specific next steps that insure the actions will be implemented. Make sure you have discussed specific next steps before you conclude.

- Complete Action Worksheets
- Plan Presentation
- Communication and Planning Next Steps
- Personal Action
- Evaluation

## **PART 1: WELCOME BACK (5 Minutes)**

- This our last session. By the end of today, we will have specific group action steps, personal action steps, and a process for communicating with one another in the future.

## **PART 2: COMPLETE ACTION WORKSHEETS (30 Minutes)**

1. We will divide back into our “action work teams”
2. Each work team will complete an action worksheet

### **Facilitator Notes For Part 3**

1. Your school should already have dates planned for a presentation to the school’s Leadership Team, School Improvement Team, or other staff and parent group.
2. Review the dates with the participants.
3. Explain why the presentation is important and try to get participants to agree to attend.
4. Then, use the agenda on page 33.

**PART 3: COMMUNICATION AND PLANNING NEXT STEPS  
(15 Minutes)**

**Monthly Meetings**

1. Many study circles find it helpful to set up monthly meetings in case they want to continue the discussion or have more time to work together. The MCPS Study Circles Program will provide a facilitator if you want one.
2. Would you like to continue meeting? If so, what day of the week/month works best?
3. We need one or two people to be contact people for the group. Contact people will make reminder calls to everyone for the monthly meetings and communicate with the facilitator or Study Circles Program.

- Contact Person \_\_\_\_\_
- Monthly Meeting Dates \_\_\_\_\_

**Communicating to rest of the school community**

1. Are there any other ways we should communicate with the school?
2. For example, does anyone want to write an article about their experience for a school list serve or newspaper?

**PART 4: PERSONAL ACTION  
(5 minutes)**

1. Some people may not be able to participate in the action teams, but everyone can do something. Even small steps make a difference.
2. On the index cards write down 1 or 2 things you will do as a result of the study circle. No one will see this card except for you.
3. On the envelope, write your name and full address.
4. Put the card in the envelope and seal.
5. The Study Circles program will mail these back to you in a couple of months as a reminder.

**PART 5: EVALUATION**

**PART 6: CLOSING  
(5 minutes)**

1. Everyone please stand up.
2. Look at the expectations you wrote for this study circle in session one. Did the study circle meet your expectations?
3. Look around the room at the people you have spent so much time with. Say one word about your experience in this study circle or about a person you've met here and appreciated and why.

**Facilitators \*Must\*  
Keep the Action  
Worksheets and all  
documentation.**

Return these to the Study Circles Staff as soon as possible. We will type up the sheets and get back to the schools and participants.

When left with the schools, the action steps always get lost!

**Facilitator Notes  
For Part 5**

1. Everyone needs to fill out an evaluation before closing the study circle.
2. Return the evaluations to the Study Circles office

Hand out contact lists.



# Sample Agenda For Reporting To the School Community

*Several study circles have presented their actions to their community superintendent, school staff, or PTA. A sample agenda is below.*

<u>Item</u>	<u>Goal</u>	<u>Notes</u>
<b>Welcome and Agenda</b>		Set the tone for the meeting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community feeling and productive</li> <li>• Individuals should introduce themselves – name and connection to the school</li> </ul>
<b>Overview of Study Circle</b>	To explain the process and the questions discussed over the six weeks	Give a quick overview of sessions to show how the group arrived at the action steps.
<b>Testimonies</b>	To show that this was not just a traditional school meeting where a bunch of ideas were brainstormed	Two or three participants talk about what they personally got out of participating in the study circle. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What was good about participating?</li> <li>• What was difficult?</li> </ul>
<b>Presentation of Action Ideas</b>		The presentation should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barriers to be addressed.</li> <li>• A story from the SC that illustrates the barrier.</li> <li>• Specific recommendations or action steps for addressing the issue</li> <li>• Next steps</li> <li>• Need for additional people to help.</li> </ul>
<b>Dialogue</b>		Hear from others.
<b>Discussion of next steps</b>		Discuss what will happen when we leave.
<b>Closing</b>		

# Tips for Facilitators

From Study Circles Resource Center's *A Guide for Training Study Circle Facilitators (DRAFT)*

A study circle facilitator does not need to be an expert on the topic being discussed. The facilitator however, should be well prepared for the discussion. This means the facilitator:

- Understands the goals of the study circle.
- Is familiar with the subject.
- Thinks ahead of time about how the discussion might go.
- Prepares questions to help the group consider the subject.

A facilitator should be well prepared because it will make it easier for you to give your full attention to how the group is acting and interacting and to what participants in the group are saying.

## **Good Study Circle Facilitators:**

- are neutral; the facilitator's opinions are not part of the discussion.
- help the group set its own ground rules.
- help the group grapple with the content by asking probing questions.
- help the group identify areas of agreement and disagreement.
- work to make room for all voices.
- help the members connect their deliberations with taking action on the issue.
- AND
- are self-aware; they know their strengths, biases, and blind spots.
- are dedicated to serving the group.
- are knowledgeable and comfortable with all kinds of people.
- believe that people can relate across differences to work together for positive change.

## ***In addition, facilitators:***

### **Help the Group Do Its Work.**

- Keep track of who has spoken, and who hasn't.
- Consider splitting up into smaller groups occasionally. This will help people feel more at ease.
- Enter the discussion only when necessary. When the conversation is going well, the facilitator isn't saying much.
- Don't allow the group to turn to you for the answers.
- Resist the urge to speak after each comment or answer every question. Let participants respond directly to each other.
- Once in a while, ask participants to sum up important points.
- Allows response time so individuals can think before they respond. Don't be afraid of silence! Try counting silently to ten before rephrasing a question. This will give people time to collect their thoughts.
- Try to involve everyone; don't let anyone take over the conversation.
- Remember that a study circle is not a debate with winners and losers. If participants forget this, don't hesitate to ask the group to help re-establish the discussion ground rules.
- Keep careful track of time.

## **Tips for Facilitators (cont'd)**

### **Help the Group Look at Different Points of View.**

- Good discussion materials present a wide range of views. Look at the pros and cons of each view-point. Ask participants to consider a point of view that hasn't come up in the discussion.
  - Ask participants to think about how their own values affect their opinions.
  - Don't allow the group to get stuck on a personal experience or anecdote.
- Help participants see the things they have in common.

### **Ask Open-ended Questions.**

Open-ended questions can't be answered with a quick "yes" or "no." Open-ended questions can help people look for connections among different ideas.

### **General Questions:**

- What seems to be the key point here?
- Do you agree with that? Why?
- What do other people think of this idea?
- What would be a strong case against what you just said?
- What experiences have you had with this?
- Could you help us understand the reasons behind your opinion?
- What do you think is really going on here? Why is that important?
- How might others see this issue?
- Do you think others in the group see this the way you do? Why?
- How does this make you feel?

### **Questions to Use When There is Disagreement:**

- What do you think he is saying?
- What bothers you most about this?
- What is at the heart of the disagreement?
- How does this make you feel?
- What experiences or beliefs might lead a reasonable person to support that point of view?
- What do you think is really important to people who hold that opinion?
- What is blocking the discussion?
- What don't you agree with?
- What do you find most convincing about that point of view?
- What is it about that position that you just cannot live with?
- Could you say more about what you think?
- What makes this so hard?
- What have we missed that we need to talk about?

### **Questions to Use When People are Feeling Discouraged:**

- How does that make you feel?
- What gives you hope?
- How can we make progress on these problems? What haven't we considered yet?

### **Closing Questions:**

What are the key points of agreement and disagreement in today's session?

What have you heard today that has made you think or has touched you in some way?

## Tips for Facilitators (cont'd)

### **Work Effectively with Cultural Differences**

Awareness of cultural dynamics is important in a study circle setting. This is especially true when issues of race and ethnicity are a part of the conversation.

Even though some of the conversation may revolve around differences, set a tone of unity in the group. We may not agree on everything, but we have enough in common as human beings to allow us to talk together in a constructive way.

Sensitivity, empathy, and familiarity with people of different backgrounds are important qualities for the facilitator. If you have not had the opportunity to spend time with all kinds of people, get involved in a community program that gives you that opportunity and helps you understand cross-cultural dynamics.

Remind the group, if necessary, that no one can represent his or her entire culture. Each person's experiences, as an individual and as a member of a group, are unique and OK.

Encourage group members to think about their own experiences as they try to identify with people who have been victims of discrimination. Many people have had experiences that make this discussion a very personal issue. Others—particularly those who are usually in the majority—may not have thought as much about their own culture and its effects on their lives. It might help to encourage people to think about times in their own lives when they have been treated unfairly. Be careful not to equate the experiences. To support study circle participants who tell how they have been mistreated, be sure to explain that you respect their feelings and are trying to help all the members of the group understand. Remind people that no one can know exactly what it feels like to be in another person's shoes.

Encourage group members to talk about their own experiences and cultures, rather than other people's. This way, they will be less likely to make false generalizations about other cultures. Also, listening to others tell about their own experiences breaks down stereotypes and helps people understand one another.

### **Work Effectively With Groups Where Literacy is a Concern**

At the start, give a simple explanation of how the study circle will work, and tell participants the goal of each session. Each time you meet, state the goal of the session.

- If the people in your group can't read, or have trouble reading, limit your use of the flip chart.
- If participants are required to fill out forms, assign someone to ask the questions and fill out the forms with/for them.
- Be prepared to read aloud to the group, if participants are uncomfortable doing that.
- Ask people to rephrase or summarize to make sure everyone understands.
- Avoid using jargon or acronyms. When these terms come up and people look puzzled, ask: "What does that mean?"
- In between sessions, check with participants to make sure they know that what they have shared is very important to the group.

## Tips for Facilitators (cont'd)

### Work Effectively With Interpreters

- Remind interpreters that their job is to translate accurately, not to add their own opinions.
- When you open the study circle, explain that this will be a bi-lingual study circle. Encourage everyone to help make the conversation productive and meaningful.
- Acknowledge that it may be awkward at first, but it will get easier as the sessions progress.
- Look at the participant—not the interpreter—when speaking
- Give interpreters written materials ahead of time, and go over the process with them.
- Make sure the interpreter is comfortable letting the facilitator know if s/he needs more time.
- Remind interpreters that their job is simply to translate accurately. Tell the interpreters to let the facilitators know if they need more time or if they need something explained.
- Speak in short sentences and keep ideas simple. (This gives the interpreter time to catch up.)
- Pay attention to the interpreter. Even if you don't speak the language, you can tell if s/he is translating everything, or not.
- After every session, ask interpreters to translate discussion guidelines and notes that were posted on newsprint.
- Sometimes participants who speak a different language are reluctant to talk because they are afraid of making a mistake. One way to address this is to give participants time to collect their thoughts before speaking.
- Consider putting people in small groups, but don't separate people by language groups.

### Responses to Typical Facilitation Challenges

Most study circles go smoothly because participants are there voluntarily and care about the conversation. But there are challenges in any group process. Here are some common challenging situations, along with some possible ways to deal with them.

**Situation:** *Certain participants don't say anything, seem shy.*

**Possible Responses:** Try to draw out quiet participants, but don't put them on the spot. Make eye contact. It reminds them that you'd like to hear from them. Look for nonverbal cues that indicate participants are ready to speak. Consider using more icebreakers and warm up exercises in pairs or small groups to help people feel more at ease.

Sometimes people feel more comfortable in later sessions of a study circle program and will begin to participate. When someone comes forward with a brief comment after staying in the background for most of the study circle, you can encourage them by showing interest and asking for more information. Make a point of talking informally with group members before and after sessions to help everyone feel more connected and at ease.

**Situation:** *An aggressive or talkative person dominates the discussion.*

**Possible Responses:** As the facilitator, it is your responsibility to handle domineering participants. Once it becomes clear what this person is doing, you must intervene and set limits. Start by limiting your eye contact with the speaker. Remind the group that everyone is invited to participate. Use the ground rules to reinforce the message. You might say, "Let's hear from some people who haven't had a chance to speak yet." If necessary, you can speak to the person by name. "Ed, we've heard from you; now let's hear what Barbara has to say."

## Tips for Facilitators (cont'd)

Be careful to manage your comments and tone of voice. You are trying to make a point without offending the speaker. If necessary, you can speak to the person privately and ask them to make room for others to join the conversation.

You might also acknowledge what is happening, by saying, "I notice that some people are doing most of the talking. Do we need to modify our ground rules to make sure everyone has a chance?" Ultimately, your responsibility as facilitator is to the *whole* group, and if one or two people are taking over the group, you need to intervene and try to rebalance the conversation.

**Situation:** *Lack of focus, not moving forward, participants wander off the topic.*

**Possible Responses:** Responding to this takes judgment and intuition. It is the facilitator's role to help move the discussion along. But it is not always clear which way it is going. Keep an eye on the participants to see how engaged they are. If you are in doubt, check it out with the group. "We're a little off the topic right now. Would you like to stay with this, or move on to the next question?" If a participant goes into a lengthy digression, you may have to say: "We are wandering off the subject, and I'd like to invite others to speak."

Use the discussion materials with their suggested times to keep the conversation moving along. When a topic comes up that seems off the subject, write it down on a piece of newsprint marked "Parking Lot." You can explain to the group that you will "park" this idea, and suggest the group revisit the topic at a later time. Be sure to come back to it later.

**Situation:** *Someone puts forth information that you know to be false OR participants get hung up in a dispute about facts, but no one present knows the answer.*

**Possible Responses:** Ask, "Has anyone heard of other information about this?" If no one offers a correction, you might raise one. Be careful not to present the information in a way that makes it sound like your opinion.

If the point is not essential put it aside and move on. If the point is central to the discussion, encourage members to look up the information and bring it to the next meeting. Remind the group that experts often disagree.

**Situation:** *There is tension or open conflict in the group. Two participants lock horns and argue. Or, one participant gets angry and confronts another.*

**Possible Responses:** If there is tension, address it directly. Remind participants that airing different ideas is what a study circle is all about. Explain that, for conflict to be productive, it must be focused on the issue. It is OK to challenge someone's ideas, but attacking the person is *not* acceptable. You must interrupt personal attacks, name-calling, or put-downs as soon as they occur. You will be better able to do so if you have established ground rules that disallow such behaviors and encourage tolerance for all views.

Don't hesitate to appeal to the group for help; if group members have bought into the ground rules, they will support you. You might ask the group, "What seems to be the crux of this dispute?" This question shifts the focus from the people to their ideas. As a last resort, consider taking a break to change the energy in the room. You can take the opportunity to talk one-on-one with the participants in question.

## Tips for Facilitators (cont'd)

**Situation:** *Participant is upset by the conversation. The person withdraws from the conversation or begins to cry.*

**Possible Responses:** The best approach is to talk about this possibility up front when you are developing the ground rules. Remind the group that some of these issues are difficult to talk about and people may become upset. Ask the group how it wants to handle such a situation, should it arise. Many groups use the ground rule, "If you are offended or upset, say so and say why."

If someone becomes emotional, it is important to acknowledge the situation, rather than ignoring it. Showing appreciation for someone's story, especially when it is difficult, can be affirming for the speaker and important for the other participants. In most cases, the group will offer support to anyone who is having difficulty.

Ask members if they would like to take a short break to allow everyone to regroup. Check in with the person privately. Ask them if they are ready to proceed. When the group reconvenes, it is usually a good idea to acknowledge publicly what has happened, and then the group will be better able to move on.

**Situation:** *Lack of interest, no excitement, no one wants to talk, only a few people participating.*

**Possible Responses:** This rarely happens in study circles, but it may occur if the facilitator talks too much or does not give participants enough time to respond to questions. People need time to think, reflect, and get ready to speak up. It may help to pose a question and go around the circle asking everyone to respond. Or, pair people up for a few minutes, and ask them to talk about a particular point. Then bring everyone together again.

Occasionally, you might have a lack of excitement in the discussion because the group seems to be in agreement and isn't coming to grips with the tensions inherent in the issue. In this case, your job is to try to bring other views into the discussion, especially if no one in the group holds them. Try something like, "Do you know people who hold other views? What would they say about our conversation?"

## What Study Circles Are and Are Not: A Comparison

### Study Circles Are:

- small-group discussions involving deliberation and problem solving, in which an issue is examined from many perspectives; they are enriched by the members' knowledge and experience, and often informed by expert information and discussion materials; study circles are aided by an impartial facilitator whose job is to keep the discussion on track.
- discussions where people talk productively about a public issue that concerns them; participants work together to find solutions that can lead to change in the community.

### Study Circles Are NOT the Same as:

- *conflict resolution*—a set of principles and techniques used in resolving conflict between individuals or groups. (Study circle facilitators and participants sometimes use these techniques in study circles.)
- *mediation*—a process used to settle disputes that relies on an outside neutral person to help the disputing parties come to an agreement. (Mediators often make excellent study circle facilitators, and have many skills in common.)
- *focus groups*—small groups organized to gather or test information from the members. Participants (who are sometimes paid) are often recruited to represent a particular viewpoint or target audience.
- *traditional education*—usually classroom settings where a teacher instructs students.
- *facilitated meetings with a predetermined agenda*—such as a committee or board meeting with tasks established ahead of time.
- *town meetings*—large-group meetings where citizens make decisions on community policies.
- *public hearings*—large-group public meetings which allow concerns to be aired.



## Comparison of Dialogue and Debate

<p><b>Dialogue is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward common understanding.</b></p> <p><b>In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal.</b></p> <p><b>In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement.</b></p> <p><b>Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.</b></p> <p><b>Dialogue reveals assumptions for reevaluation.</b></p> <p><b>Dialogue causes introspection on one's own position.</b></p> <p><b>Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions.</b></p> <p><b>Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change.</b></p> <p><b>In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other peoples' reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.</b></p> <p><b>Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.</b></p> <p><b>In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements.</b></p> <p><b>In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other positions.</b></p> <p><b>Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks to not alienate or offend.</b></p> <p><b>Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution.</b></p> <p><b>Dialogue remains open-ended.</b></p>	<p><b>Debate is oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.</b></p> <p><b>In debate, winning is the goal.</b></p> <p><b>In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.</b></p> <p><b>Debate affirms a participant's own point of view.</b></p> <p><b>Debate defends assumptions as truth.</b></p> <p><b>Debate causes critique of the other position.</b></p> <p><b>Debate defends one's own positions as the best solution and excludes other solutions.</b></p> <p><b>Debate creates a closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right.</b></p> <p><b>In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.</b></p> <p><b>Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.</b></p> <p><b>In debate, one searches for glaring differences.</b></p> <p><b>In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other position.</b></p> <p><b>Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationship and often belittles or deprecates the other person.</b></p> <p><b>Debate assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it.</b></p> <p><b>Debate implies a conclusion.</b></p>
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Adapted from a paper prepared by Shelley Berman, which was based on discussions of the Dialogue Group of the Boston Chapter of Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR). Other members included Lucile Burt, Dick Mayo-Smith, Lally Stowell, and Gene Thompson. For more information on ESR's programs and resources using dialogue as a tool for dealing with controversial issues, call the national ESR office at (617)492-1764.

**WHAT is the problem we want to address?**

- PTA is not representative of the school community.

**What is our goal?**

- To increase representation of African American and Hispanic parents by 20% by the end of the year.

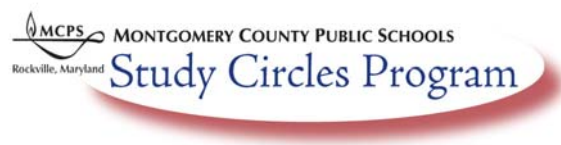
**Based on our discussions the past four sessions, what are the racial and ethnic barriers that contribute to this issue?**

- Many parents do not know the value of the PTA
- Some parents do not feel comfortable when they do attend, and then don't come back
- Leadership is made up of all one group and does not know how to engage parents from other backgrounds
- Meetings are not translated into other languages

**Is the school already doing things to address the issue? List any activities that specifically address this issue.**

- The Instructional Leadership Team is participating in diversity training with the MCPS diversity team.





MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Rockville, Maryland

Study Circles Program