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## **STUDY CIRCLES**

### **Baltimore City Public Schools, Southern Area**

#### **Baltimore, Maryland**

This year the Southern Area of Baltimore City Public Schools and the Baltimore Education Network (BEN) organized Cross City High School Study Circles. The study circle process is a “grass roots” concept that was first used in Connecticut. A study circle is a small group of ten-to-fifteen people who meet regularly for a period of time to address a major public issue in a democratic and collaborative way.\*

The Baltimore Education Network offered to pilot the study circles in the Southern Area because of our success and history with school, family, and community partnerships. BEN met with the Area Executive Officer (AEO) and the District Facilitator for School-Family-Community Partnerships. We discussed the goals and objectives that we hoped to accomplish through the study circles. With the approval of the AEO, the leaders of BEN targeted the principals in the Southern Area.

We held the study circles four times at a convenient location not connected with the school system. At these meetings, school administrators, staff, students, parents, and community members discussed school issues and problems that were relevant to the Baltimore City Public School System. BEN provided trained study circle facilitators to lead the discussions. The Southern Area provided participants with a light dinner, childcare, and transportation. By the end of the fourth session, each group had to create an Action Plan. The Action Plans outlined activities that they were willing to implement, as well as suggestions for school administrators. The Action Plan delegated responsibilities as well as tasks in a time-oriented fashion.

One high school, in particular, had numerous problems with neighbors objecting to facility repairs. We implemented the study circles for this school and held meetings at a local church. Through the process of discussion and planning, many positive changes occurred because of various members coming together in a collaborative, proactive manner.

The study circles are an excellent example of “tri-collaboration” between the school system, communities/businesses, and families for the purpose of enhancing the school system. This

activity helped alleviate some of the misconceptions and stereotyping of school officials and parents. Now, parents, the school system, and businesses work together on achieving the same goal: student achievement and success.

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\*More information about study circles can be obtained from Study Circles Resource Center, 697 Pomfret Street, P.O. Box 203, Pomfret, CT 06258, Tel: 860-928-3713 E-mail: [scrc@neca.com](mailto:scrc@neca.com).