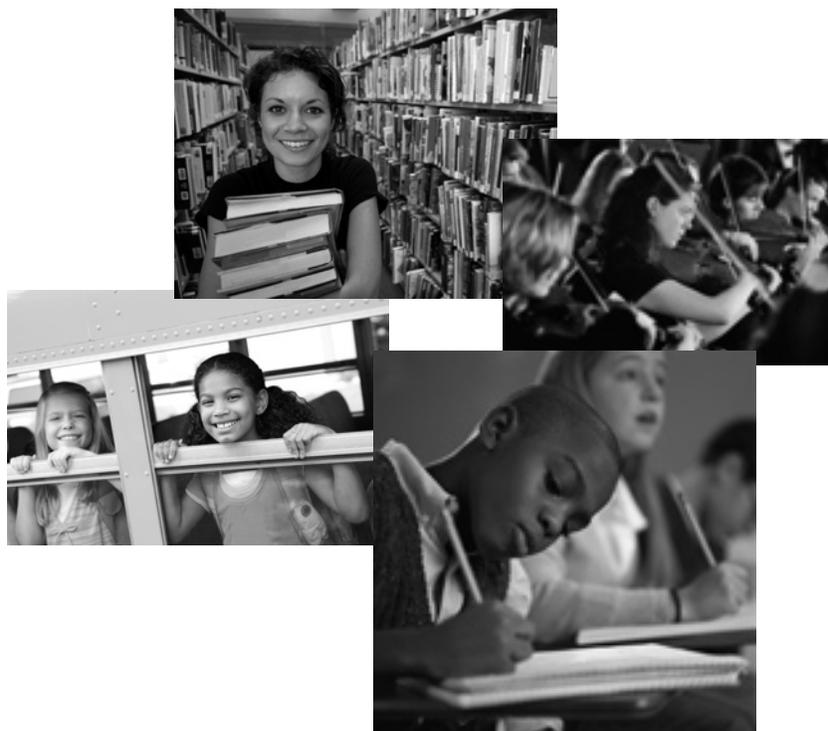# Learning Beyond the School Day

Working Together: Improving Learning for Youth

A guide for public dialogue and problem solving

A Program of the Arkansas Study Circles Project

Learning Beyond the School Day

Working Together: Improving Learning for Youth

Arkansas Study Circles Project

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Introduction

A Study Circle

- Is a small, diverse group of 8-12 people.
- Meets together for several two-hour sessions.
- Sets its own ground rules. This helps the group share responsibility for the quality of the discussion.
- Is led by an impartial facilitator who helps manage the discussion. He or she is not there to teach the group about the issue.
- Starts with personal stories, then helps the group look at the problem from many points of view. Next the group explores possible solutions. Finally they make plans for action and change.

This discussion guide will help us take a new look at when, where and what young people learn. We will talk about how to create the kind of community where all young people will have a chance to learn – in and beyond the school day.

Across America, people from all walks of life want to live in a place where they have the chance to thrive and where their children can learn and grow into adulthood happy, healthy and well prepared for life.

Think about the young people in our community:

- Where do our children spend their time?
- Are there safe and enriching places for young people to spend time when they aren't in school?
- Do students have an opportunity to connect their learning to real life?
- Where do they learn how to make choices?
- How are young people viewed in our community?

It's good to think about how to meet the needs of young people. They are the future of our community. When they grow up, they will be neighbors and the leaders in our community. They will have jobs as artists, teachers and business owners. They will give us their vision and leadership and be the role models for their children. Whether or not young people live in your home, they have a big effect on your life and our community.

The good news is that more and more communities are trying new ways to support young people. They are discovering that there are many places within a community where children can learn and develop skills. People from faith groups, businesses and government are working together in new ways to support learning for young people. Schools, police departments and other agencies are partnering for the benefit of children.

In many neighborhoods and communities, people are looking at when, where and what young people learn; they're talking, planning and working together to create learning opportunities for children – in and out of school.

Organizing Dialogue to Create Change

If we are going to make progress in our communities and our country, people from all backgrounds and views must work together to grow communities where everyone can prosper and thrive.

We need democratic dialogue, organized on a large scale so that people of all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds can:

- *Listen respectfully to one another.* Through dialogue, people can share experiences and concerns and rethink stereotypes. They can understand one another better and build relationships that help them work together.
- *Look at different sides of an issue and explore common concerns.* When people learn more about public problems and explore disagreements, they begin to find common concerns. Then they find out that they can work together, and they begin to solve problems.
- *Come up with practical ways to address issues that affect learning and the well-being of young people.* Through dialogue people develop new community networks and new ideas for action and change. Strong, community-based organizing helps them work with others to connect their talk to action.
- *Take action on their ideas and test their solutions over the long run.* Dialogue on issues concerning learning and the well-being of young people can lead to democratic problem solving on many issues in the community – education, health care, poverty, economic development and others. Over years communities can begin to take stock of their progress. Some may join other communities in their state and around the country to come up with regional and even national solutions.

A growing number of communities are creating ongoing democratic dialogue and action on the well-being of young people. They are finding ways to involve people from all racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, all political beliefs, all faiths, all education levels, all income levels and all walks of life. They are finding ways to move from dialogue to individual change, collective action and even policy change.

As more of us move ahead with this challenging work, we will find ways to honor the ideals of equality and justice. Together, we can build strong communities where everyone has a voice and all young people will have a chance to learn all they need to know to lead productive and fulfilling lives.

Why Use Study Circles to Talk about Improving Learning for Young People?

Some people may already be working on building a network of programs to support learning and the whole child. But to move ahead, more of us need to be a part of that work. Study circles can help people learn about what others are doing to support learning and the well-being of our young people. And they can get more people involved.

Study circles can bring new life and ideas to what people are already doing. They can make these efforts bigger and better. And they can help us see needs that have not been met.

Study circles are small, diverse groups of people who meet several times to talk about a key public issue, like the well-being of young people. When many study circles happen all at once, it is called a community-wide study circle program.

The goal is to find ways to make our community a place where young people from all walks of life can be active, safe, nurtured and well-prepared for life. First we will look at how young people in our community are doing. Then we will explore what's at the root of the problems our young people face and how to talk about solutions. Finally we will work on ideas for action.

This guide is a tool to help you facilitate community-wide conversations for change. Please don't just read it. Use it! These conversations – when they are part of a large-scale, diverse community program – can be at the heart of long-term change in the culture, institutions and policies of your community and state.

A Study Circle Program:

- Is organized by a diverse group of people from the whole community.
- Includes a large number of people from all walks of life.
- Has easy-to-use, fair-minded discussion materials.
- Uses trained facilitators who reflect the community's diversity.
- Moves a community to action when the study circles conclude.
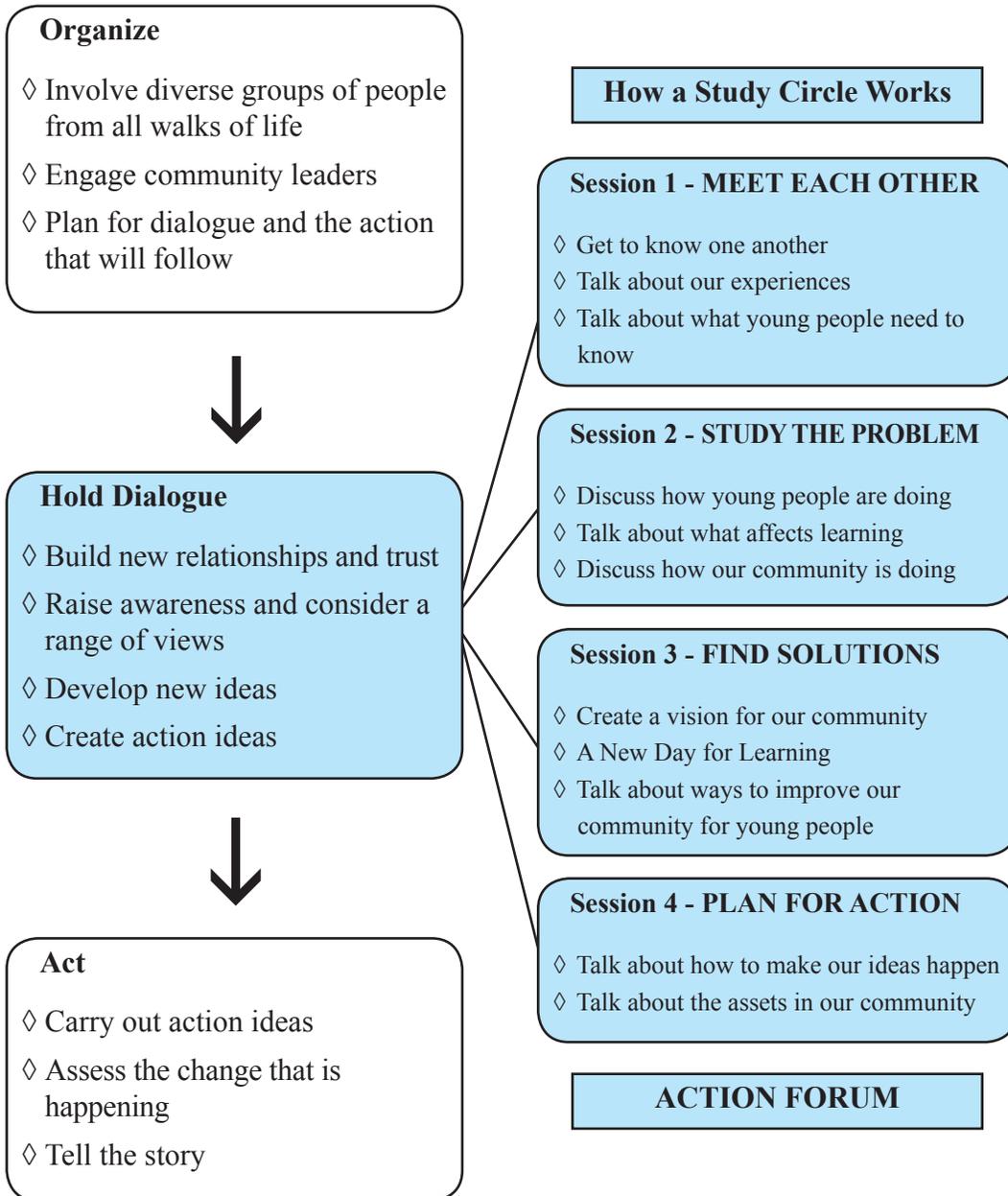
Making the most of your study circle

How people talk to each other is as important as what they talk about. Here are some tips on how to make it go well.

- *Attend every session*. Have people commit to come. This builds trust and friendship. People will talk more deeply about how they think and feel.
- *Be prepared*. Get familiar with the materials. Look over the study guide's questions, viewpoints and ideas. The guide will help you expand your own thinking.
- *Help with the discussion*. The facilitator keeps the discussion moving and on track. "Facilitate" means to "make easy." Everyone can do this. Learn to set ground rules and help people stick to them.
- *You are not alone*. If your study circle is part of a larger community-wide program, others will be talking about this issue. Here are some ideas to make it successful:
  - ◊ Have a kick-off session with all the groups.
  - ◊ Meet with public officials.
  - ◊ Have several groups meet with each other during the process.
  - ◊ Have a wrap-up "action" session with all the groups.

Why might a study circle program work for us?

- People care. They want to make things better.
- Complex problems call for many solutions.
- It takes people from all parts of our community to solve problems.
- When we all join in, we all win.
- When we talk face-to-face, we get to know each other. Trust builds. We can come up with new ideas and plans.

Overview of the Study Circle Process

Organize

◊ Involve diverse groups of people from all walks of life

◊ Engage community leaders

◊ Plan for dialogue and the action that will follow

Hold Dialogue

◊ Build new relationships and trust

◊ Raise awareness and consider a range of views

◊ Develop new ideas

◊ Create action ideas

Act

◊ Carry out action ideas

◊ Assess the change that is happening

◊ Tell the story

How a Study Circle Works

Session 1 - MEET EACH OTHER

◊ Get to know one another
◊ Talk about our experiences
◊ Talk about what young people need to know

Session 2 - STUDY THE PROBLEM

◊ Discuss how young people are doing
◊ Talk about what affects learning
◊ Discuss how our community is doing

Session 3 - FIND SOLUTIONS

◊ Create a vision for our community
◊ A New Day for Learning
◊ Talk about ways to improve our community for young people

Session 4 - PLAN FOR ACTION

◊ Talk about how to make our ideas happen
◊ Talk about the assets in our community

ACTION FORUM

Session 1: What is it like to be a young person?

By coming to this study circle, we show that we care about helping our community be a place where young people have the opportunity to grow up healthy, safe and well prepared for the life ahead of them. We care about the future of our community, and each of us has something important to offer. We all want to make our community a better place in which to live and learn.

In this first session we will get to know one another, decide how we want to work together and talk about our experiences growing up. Then, we will talk about what young people need to know and be able to do to be well prepared for life.

Facilitator and Recorder Tips

This session has six parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide.

Recorder – *Collect ideas for planning action*
From the start, participants may come up with ideas about what to do to support young people.
• Label newsprint paper "Guidelines," "Action Ideas," "Main Themes" and "Things Already Doing."
• Keep running lists and add to them from one session to the next.
• Always post the notes from the previous sessions where everyone can see them.

Facilitator – *Help the group work well together*
• Help everyone feel welcome. Be sure each person has a chance to speak and to hear the other group members.
• Some people find it easier to talk than others. Give everyone room and time to get comfortable with the issue.
• Ask for volunteers to read aloud rather then going "around the circle." Be prepared to do this yourself if no one volunteers.

Reminder
During Part 2 of Session 2 (page 10), participants will be looking at a Community Fact Sheet. Get copies of the fact sheet from your local study circle organizers to hand out to the participants at the *end of Session 1*.

Part 1: Introduction *(15 minutes)*

Working in pairs, answer the following questions:

- What is your name?
- How long have you lived in this area?
- How did you come to live here?
- Why did you want to join this group?

After 3 minutes, each person will introduce his or her partner to the group.

Part 2: Guidelines for this study circle *(10 minutes)*

To help the study circle work well, let's agree about how we are going to talk together. We can use the following list to start us thinking about guidelines for our own discussion.

- Listen to one another.
- Treat each other with respect.
- Share "air time."
- One person speaks at a time. Speak for yourself, not for others.
- It's okay to disagree – agreeably. Don't make it personal.
- If you feel offended, say so and say why.
- Stick to the issue.
- Personal stories stay "in the circle" unless the group decides it's okay to tell them to other people.
- Help the facilitator keep things on track.

Part 3: Icebreaker Exercise *(15 minutes)*

Think about what it is like – or was like – to be young. Take a few minutes to answer these questions about yourself.

1. The year is _____ , and I am _____ years old.
2. I live _____ .
3. I go to _____ .
4. I'm good at _____ .
5. Signs of the times (social/political) include _____ .
6. After school I usually_____ .
7. I like to hang out at _____ .
8. For fun, I _____ .
9. The music I listen to is telling me to _____ .
10. I'm worried about what will happen to me if _____ .
11. My parents most often give me advice about _____ .
12. I'm getting lots of pressure to _____ .
13. I like to learn when _____ .
14. One thing I really don't understand is _____ .
15. One thing I feel proud about is _____ .
16. My plans for the future include _____ .

Part 4: Where do people learn? *(40 minutes)*

Our own life stories often shape our ideas and beliefs. We will use this session to share parts of our life stories. This will help the rest of our sessions go better. Be as open and honest as possible with each other.

1. Tell us a little about your family and where you grew up. What stories can you share that give us a picture of what it was like for you when it was summer or when you came home from school?
2. What do you see young people today doing in the summer or when they aren't in school? What is different from when you grew up? What is the same?
3. Think about the people who influenced who you are and how you work. Who or what helped you learn or gain the experience that affects the way you work and live your life? Where did you learn?
4. Where do young people learn today?
5. What is our community like for young people? What is good about growing up here? What concerns you?
6. What makes you care about this issue? Why is it important?

Part 5: What do our young people need to know and be able to do? *(30 minutes)*

Before we talk about what keeps our young people from learning, let's think about why we send our children to school. What do we want our young people to know and be able to do when they graduate? What do they need to learn?

Using the views
These viewpoints are here just to help us get started. Each view is written in the voice of a person who thinks it is a very important idea. *Some viewpoints that are important to you might not be on this list. Feel free to add other views.*

First, someone will read each of the viewpoints aloud. (The facilitator or a volunteer can do this.) Then, we will use the following questions to help us talk.

Questions to Think About
1. Which view(s) come closest to your own way of thinking? Why?
2. What other viewpoints would you add? What is missing?
3. Which viewpoints do you think are most important? Why?
4. How do you think schools can make sure young people learn all they need to know?
5. Outside of school, where else can students learn some of these skills?

Viewpoints

View #1 *According to this view …*
It is important to stick to the basics: reading, writing and math.
Students need basic skills to be able to learn other things. Without these skills, graduates can't succeed in most jobs or in life. They need to know how to budget money, fill out forms and more. We should stick to the basics. When we try to teach too much, we don't spend enough time on the most important subjects.

View #2 *According to this view …*
It is important to prepare young people for jobs.
Our graduates must be prepared for good jobs. We need to teach math, computer and other high-tech skills. Graduates also need "people skills," such as how to work in teams. They need to be able to think critically and solve problems. We need to help students become dependable and able to adapt to change. Students should have the chance to get on-the-job training with skilled workers to teach them and help them connect learning with the real world.

View #3 *According to this view …*
It is important to focus on values like responsibility.
Being responsible means being able to show up and get the job done. It means being professional and having a good work ethic. It takes more than just skills to succeed in real life. Young people need to learn basic values, such as honesty, respect and service to others. If we don't teach these values, graduates won't have the moral strength to be good family members, workers and citizens.

Viewpoints continued next page

Facilitator and Recorder Tips for Part 5

- Tell them the "Questions to Think About" on this page will be discussed later, but while we are reading, think about which view(s) you agree with and what might be missing.
- Read all the views aloud or invite volunteers from the group to take turns reading them.
- Discuss the "Questions to Think About" on this page.
- *Record* "Main Themes."

View #4 *According to this view …*
Young people need skills for everyday life.

Young people need certain skills and information just to survive. They need to know how to make a budget, balance a checkbook, and how to pay bills. Young adults need to learn how to relate well to all kinds of people. They need to learn how to settle disputes. We need to teach them about hard issues like parenting, sex-related diseases, drugs, and alcohol.

View #5 *According to this view …*
It is important to prepare young people for lifetime learning.

Today's graduates live in a constantly changing global environment where thinking skills are one of the most important assets of society. They will probably change jobs many times. The best thing we can do is to teach students how important it is to be flexible and to keep on learning. They must have advanced knowledge of technology and know how to find, analyze and apply information they need through creative and critical thinking. And since they will probably work with people from many different cultures and countries, they must know how to work with different kinds of people.

View #6 *According to this view …*
Young people need opportunities to develop leadership skills and practice good citizenship.

We are facing real problems in our society. Graduates need to know how to take part in community life. They need leadership skills to help others in their community. They need to understand democracy, politics and social issues. They need to learn how to work with all kinds of people from different cultures and backgrounds. They must know how to work in groups and how to make decisions with other people.

View #7 *According to this view …*
Young people need a well-rounded education.

We should prepare all students to enter higher education. That way, they will be ready if they want to go. Graduates should learn not only the basic skills of math, reading and writing, but subjects such as history, art, science and poetry. All students need to learn about music, drama and sports to be well-rounded human beings. We need to educate the whole person – mind and body.

Part 6: Thinking about our discussion
(10 minutes)

- During our discussion today, what are the different names we used to refer to young people?
- What meaning and/or expectations do we have for each name?
- What worked well in today's meeting?
- What changes would you make next time?

Preparing for Session 2

In our next session we will look at some national, state and local data that affect young people. We will give you an information sheet that we will use to help us talk about how young people are doing in our community. Please take time to review this information.

Session 2: What challenges do young people face in our community?

In Session 1 we talked about our personal experiences and our connections to young people in the community. We asked, "What do we want our young people to know and be able to do?"

Before we can take action to change things, we need to understand what we are trying to change. This session helps us look at a range of views about the challenges young people in our community face. First, we will take a few minutes to look at some state and local data to help us understand how our young people are doing. Each of us may have different ideas about this. Next, we will discuss the views. After our discussion, we will create a community report card. This will help us develop goals and action ideas in the next sessions.

Facilitator and Recorder Tips

- Welcome everyone back
- This session has five parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide.
- In Part 2 you will need the Community Fact Sheet provided by the local organizers.
- Remember that in Session 3 you will need to have equipment to show a short DVD.

Recorder – Collect ideas for action.

- Post the discussion guidelines and notes from Session 1 where everyone can see them.
- Continue to record in these categories when appropriate.
- For Part 3 label a piece of newsprint "What Affects Learning."
- For Part 4 label two pieces of newsprint ahead of time. On one draw the Report Card, omitting the "Statement" column (see page 13) On the other piece label the top "Community," then draw two columns and label one "Successes" and the other "Challenges."

Part 1: Getting started *(5 minutes)*

- Read the Introduction
- Review the guidelines.
  - ◊ Does everyone still agree?
  - ◊ Do we need to add anything?

Part 2: How are our young people doing? *(15 minutes)*

At the end of our last session you were given some information about young people in our community and in our state. Now we are going to look at what is happening with our young people.

- When you look at the information, what stands out? What surprises you? Why?
- What concerns you?
- What is going well for young people in our commuity? What is not going so well?
- What are some of the factors that might affect how, when and what young people learn?
- What makes you hopeful? What worries you?

◆

Meet Each Other

◆

Explore the Problem

◆

Set Goals

◆

Plan for Action

◆

Facilitator Tips for Part 2

- Invite people to take a few minutes to look over the Community Fact Sheet.
- ***Record*** "Main Themes" and "What Affects Learning."

Part 3: What affects young people and their learning? *(60 minutes)*

These views are different ways of looking at the issues our young people face that affect their learning. Each is written as if someone who holds that view is saying it. We may agree with each other on some points and disagree on others. That is okay. *Remember that one view cannot tell the whole story. These views will spark our own ideas. Feel free to add your own views.*

Questions to Think About

These questions will help you talk about the views.

1. What other viewpoints would you add? What is missing?
2. Which of these views surprise you? Why?
3. Which of these views has the most impact on whether children in our community have a chance to productively learn all day, every day? Why?
4. What factor(s) affect whether young people can learn? How?
5. What life experiences or values have shaped your views?
6. Think about a view you don't agree with. Why would someone agree with that view? Try to come up with reasons to support that view.

View #1 *According to this view …*
Neighbors and communities don't support each other's children like they used to.

There's not much of a sense of community anymore. Relatives used to help one another and spend time telling stories to young people about life and family values. Too many children these days are just left on their own.

Today people are so busy it's hard to connect with one another. We don't reach out to people who aren't in our group. Many of us don't know our neighbors or their kids, and we don't look after each other. And there aren't as many mentors for young people to help them learn skills and gain experience and the importance of a strong work ethic.

View #2 *According to this view …*
When families struggle to make ends meet, they can't provide extra opportunities for their children to learn.

Families are working longer hours just to keep their heads above water. Many parents are working several jobs. They can't afford extras – like computers, tutoring or after-school programs and summer activities. So children are often unsupervised, hungry and lonely. Children struggle with learning when they are hungry and lose what they have learned when they don't have anything to do during the long summer break.

View # 3 *According to this view…*
Some young people live in families who can't find the services they need.

Some young people and their families need help – like health care, counseling, job training or child care. Some children may be hungry or upset due to situations at home. Young people can't learn if they are hungry, abused or neglected.

Families aren't sure where to get help, and services aren't always available where young people are – in schools or through community programs. Agencies don't work together; they deal with each issue separately, so families are not treated as a whole.

View #4 *According to this view …*
Some communities don't have the resources to provide activities that support learning.

Schools and organizations in some communities do not have the funds to provide quality after-school and summer programming. It can be difficult to get funding when organizations compete for limited resources. And in some communities, funding activities for young people is not a high priority. Schools and organizations should find new ways to partner to provide opportunities, like community-based apprenticeships, that help young people learn and stay connected to their community.

View #5 *According to this view …*
Some parents just aren't involved.

Some parents don't take responsibility for raising their children. They use the TV for a babysitter or keep older children home to care for their brothers and sisters. There's no discipline. They don't even feed their children. Sometimes grandparents raise their grandchildren because the parents aren't doing their job. When kids get out of hand, we let families off the hook and depend on the police, schools, counselors and after-school programs to step in.

View #6 *According to this view …*
The school system doesn't work well for everyone.

Some schools don't do a good job of welcoming all families – especially those with children who learn differently, speak a different language, live in poverty, or people of color. In some cases students may need extra help to learn. Some teachers just don't understand that not all young people learn the same way.

The school system no longer inspires young people to want to learn. Many students just quit learning or quit school because they are bored. All students want from their school is for teachers to care about them, challenge them and build a system that meets their needs and connects learning to their life and community.

Part 4: Creating a Community Report Card for Children and Youth *(30 minutes)*

Community Report Card for Children & Youth

Category	Statement	A	B	C	D	F	Q
Education	In our community the education system meets the needs of all children.						
Health Care	Our community's health care system serves the needs of all young people.						
Activities & Programs	All children and young people in our community have access to quality activities and programs when they are not in school.						
Leadership	Our community leaders (in government, financial institutions, education, law enforcement, etc.) make our young people a priority and provide resources to support their needs.						
Social Services	The social services system in our community (e.g., welfare, job training, etc.) is responsive to the needs of the young people in our community.						
Media	Local radio, TV stations and newspapers provide programs that help young people learn.						
Criminal Justice	The criminal justice system in our community works to help all young people stay out of trouble.						
Youth Development	In our community all young people have access to extracurricular activities, internships and projects.						

Explanation of Grading System

A – We are doing great!   C – We are doing okay.   F – We have taken steps backward.

B – We are doing well.   D – We've had no success.   Q – Not sure.

Read each statement on the Report Card. Think about what is happening for young people in the community. Then give a grade for each statement.

1. Which of these categories most affect whether young people learn? Why do you think that? How is our community doing in these categories?

2. When you look at the report card, what successes do you see?

3. What are some of the challenges you see?

4. How do these challenges relate to whether young people can learn all day every day?

Part 5: Thinking about our discussion
(10 minutes)

• What new insights did you get today?
• What are the main themes you heard?
• What worked well in today's meeting?
• What changes would you make next
  time?

Preparing for Session 3

This week find out how our community is
dealing with the issues we discussed this
session.

• What is already happening?
• What new ideas are people talking
  about?
• Are other communities doing things that
  seem like they could work here?

Session 3: Picture a community where all young people are thriving

Communities all across the country are building on their strengths and finding new ways to become better places for young people and their families to live. In our first session we spent time reflecting on our own experiences as young people and talking about what young people need to know. Last week we talked about what affects learning and how our community is doing. This week we will look to the future – we will create a vision. We will create a picture of a community where all young people are healthy, happy and engaged in learning.

Facilitator and Recorder Tips

- This session has five parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide.
- Review the discussion Guidelines.
- ***Recorder** – Collect Ideas for Action.*
- Post the Guidelines and all of the notes from Sessions 1 and 2 for all to see.
- You will continue to take notes on several of these categories.
- Label a piece of newsprint "Picture the Future."

Part 1: Getting started
(10 minutes)

Turn to your neighbor and discuss the following:

- How is the study circle going so far?
- What are your hopes for the final two sessions?

Facilitator Tips for Part 1

- Welcome everyone back.
- Ask everyone to turn to their neighbor and discuss the questions in Part 1.
- Invite a few people to share highlights of their one-on-one discussions.

Part 2 Picture the future *(20 minutes)*

Now, let's look 10 years into the future. It is the year _____. Your Community is a wonderful place for young people to grow up and do well. Young people here live to learn! Someone from Famous National Magazine has heard about the young people in Your Community and has written a feature article! What would you want this article to say?

- What is the most important message in the article?
- What are some of the activities the article describes?
- What is the community like for young people?
- How do young people spend their time when they aren't in school?
- When, where and what are they learning?
- Who is helping them learn?

Facilitator and Recorder Tips for Part 2

- Ask everyone to choose a partner, preferably someone they don't know.
- Read the introduction to the exercise.
- Tell them they have 12 minutes. Ask each group to discuss the questions and to write down the main ideas they want to see in the article. Ask for a headline for their article.
- Ask each group to report the headline and main ideas of their article.
- ***Recorder** - Record on newsprint as they report out.*
- Discuss as a whole group: What are the key themes? Ideas? Vocabulary? Where are they alike? Different?

Part 3: A New Day for Learning
(20 minutes)

- What stood out for you in the DVD?
- What did you like?
- What concerns you?
- How is your vision similar to what you saw in this video? How is it different?

Part 4 Pictures of an ideal community where young people are happy, healthy and engaged in learning *(60 minutes)*

We want our community to help all young people learn what they need to be well prepared for life. We spent time creating our vision. Now let's talk about some ideas of how to make that vision a reality. This will prepare us for Session 4, when we will choose specific action steps that will help us to make these visions happen.

Using the Sample Descriptions

We will use the following descriptions to help us think about a community where all young people can learn and do well in life. Talking about these ideas will help us think about what we can do to improve our young people's quality of life. *Some ideas that are important to you might not be on this list. Feel free to add new ideas*.

Questions to Think About

1. What other ideas would you add? What is missing?
2. Which ideas seem most important to you? Why?
   - How would your favorite ideas improve learning for young people?
   - What effect would these ideas have on you and your family?
   - What parts would be easy to do? Why?
   - What parts would be harder to do? Why?
3. Which ideas would have the greatest impact on improving learning for young people?
4. Have any of these ideas been tried in this community? If so, what happened?
5. Think about an idea that is not so important to you. Why would someone else think this is important?

Sample Descriptions

1. *In a community where all young people can learn*, **local government and civic leaders, schools, businesses and the community work well together and "put young people first."**

   It is important to all of us and the future of our community for our young people to do well. Schools, libraries, service groups, businesses, hospitals and the media can all have an effect on young people. We all need to work together, share knowledge and resources, and focus on the needs of all our young people.

   For example, young people learn in communities where ...
   - schools, libraries, businesses and other community organizations analyze community needs and partner in new ways to provide a variety of services and activities that engage all young people in fun and productive ways of learning every minute of the day.
   - local government, businesses, and other organizations allocate time and funding for community-based learning projects that give students a chance to be creative and to practice problem solving, while giving back to their community.
   - local businesses sponsor internships to help young people learn skills they will need to succeed in the workplace. This will help them connect what they learn in school to real world experiences.
   - the community partners with the schools to ensure that all young people have access to a well-rounded, challenging learning environment that supports creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving and connects to their world.

2. *In a community where all young people can learn,* **the whole family is involved.**

   Families need to take responsibility for their own child's learning and well-being. Parents know or can learn what is best for their children – from health to discipline to education. Schools and the community can provide tools for support, but families need to have the main responsibility of solving their own problems.

   For example, young people learn in communities where ...
   - family members take responsibility for their children, have consistent rules they enforce, monitor computer time and homework, arrange for quality care when family can't be there and sit down to a healthy family meal at night.
   - schools are "learning centers" for the whole family. They are open at nights and weekends. Families can go there to get help with homework, use the computers or attend parenting classes, parent leadership development programs or family support groups.
   - family members have access to a resource directory to help them know where to go when they have questions or need help.
   - faith-based and other organizations provide support groups for families that are struggling and feel helpless.

3. *In a community where all young people can learn*, **the education system works well for everyone.**

   We all need to think about when, where and what young people learn. Learning and student success can happen in many places in a community. It doesn't only happen in school. Young people want their learning to be challenging, meaningful and connected to their world. We need to help our young people learn wherever they are – all day, every day throughout the entire year.

For example, young people learn in communities where ...
- the entire community works together to secure and weave together funding so all children can have access to quality after-school and summer programming.
- schools partner with businesses and the community to provide community-based experiential learning opportunities – during and after school.
- educators, families, students, businesses and community members work together to design a school system that meets the needs of all young people in their community.
- students with young children have access to free quality early care programs and parenting classes that help them finish school, develop parenting skills and prepare their children to start school ready to learn.

4. ***In a community where all young people can learn,*** **children from all cultures, economic levels and races are welcome and supported.**

To help young people learn and feel connected to their community, they need to believe they have support from schools, local government and other community institutions. We should expect a lot of our young people. And we should provide opportunities to direct their energy and talents into projects that will benefit them and the community as a whole. This way, we can help them link learning and living.

For example, young people learn in communities where ...
- the entire community shows that it has high expectations and hopes for every child by providing quality activities and programs that develop and celebrate their strengths and talents.
- a community garden project provides opportunities for people of diverse ages and backgrounds to work and learn together and share experiences, knowledge, food and fun.

- schools work with families, health and service agencies, faith-based and community organizations and businesses to tailor services and learning opportunities so that every child has an equal chance to succeed.

5. ***In a community where all young people can learn,*** **the whole family has access to the resources and services they need.**

There are plenty of services in our community for young people and their families. We need to help people make the most of them. These services should provide a complete system of care, be easy to get to and be open during hours when families can use them.

For example, young people learn in communities where ...
- young people and their families can get the help they need through coordinated school health programs in the schools or after-school programs.
- the whole family has access to a complete system of care and services that are responsive to their needs.
- there is a comprehensive directory of services that is easy to access that helps young people and their family understand where to get the help they need.

Part 5 Closing *(10 minutes)*

1. What were the main themes of our discussion?
2. Did we agree on any ideas that could help our community make progress for young people? If so, what are they?
3. What new ideas or ways of thinking are you learning from others in your study circle?

Preparing for Session 4

Think about ideas to improve opportunities for young people to learn in our community. Look around for new ideas that might put these thoughts into action. You might talk with other community members about this. What do they think we should do to help young people learn? Get plenty of sleep. This will be our most important session!

Session 4: Moving to action: What can we do?

In this session we will move to action. We will start by brainstorming action ideas. Next we will look at the assets we have in our community. Then we will connect our action ideas with our assets. Finally, we will talk about what we can do – on our own, in partnership or groups and as a whole community – to make our community a place where young people have an opportunity to grow up healthy, safe and well prepared for life.

> ***Facilitator and Recorder Tips***
>
> • This session has five parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide.
> • Post and review the discussion Guidelines.
> • Review the Brainstorm technique on this page.
>
> *Recorder – Collect ideas for action*
> • Review this session ahead of time and prepare several pieces of newsprint. Label one "Priority Action Ideas" and "Policy Changes." Refer to this page and page 23 to see how to label the charts for the "Action Ideas" and "Community Assets" newsprint. Be sure to post all of the Action Ideas from previous sessions.
> • To help the group review its work, post the newsprint from the previous sessions.

> ***Facilitator and Recorder Tips for Part 1***
>
> • Welcome everyone back.
> • After a few minutes of discussion, ask people to share their thoughts on what has been most important.
> • Remind them to use this information to inform their work today.

Part 1: Making connections *(15 minutes)*

1. Turn to your neighbor and discuss the following:
2. What are the most important issues, themes or ideas that we have discussed during our study circle?

> **Brainstorming** is a way for our group to come up with lots of ideas.
>
> *Purpose:* To help us be creative. To come up with many different ideas in a short time.
>
> *Guidelines:* All ideas are okay. Don't stop to talk about ideas. Don't judge ideas. Build on others' ideas.
>
> *How to do it:* Anyone can offer an idea. You don't need to wait for your "turn." The recorder will write down every idea.

Part 2: Brainstorm action ideas *(20 minutes)*

Take a few minutes to look over the Sample Action Ideas on page 22. Then spend time coming up with your own.

1. Think quietly for a moment. What actions can we take to help young people in our community engage in learning so they can grow to be healthy, happy, well-prepared, contributing citizens?
2. Brainstorm a list of action ideas. Try to come up with different kinds of ideas. Some actions might involve other community groups. Some could focus on things we could do with institutions. And some could focus on things small groups of people or individuals can do.

Action Ideas

On our own or with others	With our neighbors or in small groups	As a community or with governments

SAMPLE ACTION IDEAS

On our own or with others we can:

- Volunteer at an afterschool program.
- Join a mentoring program.
- Donate children's books.
- Volunteer in a homework help program.
- Learn about quality afterschool and summer programming.
- Meet with other parents and share concerns.
- Encourage city officials to invest in programs for young people.
- Display student art in your place of business.
- Donate funds to support innovative youth learning opportunities.
- Encourage schools to seek new partnerships in learning.
- Help recruit parents to volunteer in schools and afterschool programs.
- Sponsor and coordinate a summer learning program.
- Help with a sports team or a Big Brother/Big Sister program.
- Mentor a young person in an apprentice program
- Spend time and get to know your neighbors and their children.
- Help out at local youth programs
  ◊ Share your skills, talents and life experiences
  ◊ Help with field trips
  ◊ Share hobbies

Working with our neighbors or small groups we can:

- Start a youth community arts project.
- Help students start a small business to meet a community need.
- Sponsor a youth project – design and paint a mural, keep a park clean, shopping service for older citizens, read to older citizens, visit eldercare centers
- Start multi-generational projects at your community center.
- Work with students to define a good education and quality afterschool programming.

- Start a community garden.
- Partner to raise funds with other groups to sponsor youth activities.
- Partner with schools to sponsor service learning projects.
- Encourage schools to start a coordinated school health program.
- Start a "poet's café" or have an art show so young people can display their talents.
- Encourage businesses to hire and/or mentor young people during the summer.
- Partner with schools and help coordinate a job shadowing program.
- Help young people develop projects to improve their community.

As a community or with government we can:

- Teach youth Life Skills like how to budget, keep a checkbook and handle money.
- Consider setting up AmeriCorps programs to bring in motivated young adults to work with children and youth.
- Prioritize funding to support the needs of young people.
- Write grants to secure funding for a youth theater, dance or arts program.
- Have students paint a mural in an area that needs improvement.
- Sponsor study circles to continue dialogue and action for youth issues.
- Sponsor youth summer employment programs.
- Develop and sponsor youth leadership development programs.
- Partner with schools to develop community-based learning opportunities for young people.
- Find new ways to partner so all young people can be engaged in fun and productive ways of learning every minute of the day.
- Work to pass policies that foster community-based learning opportunities.

Action ideas are things we can <u>do</u>. Be specific.
For example, instead of suggesting this:

"Public services need to be improved."

Try this:

"Meet with public works department to arrange weekly trash pickup along Elm Street."

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Part 3: Listing our community strengths (assets) *(20 minutes)*

Assets can be things or people. They are the things that people have or use to help themselves and each other. For example, you can use your car to drive someone who needs a ride to the store or to visit a sick person.

Some communities have a culture of taking care of one another. This is an asset too. Assets can be handed down in families or from group to group.

Brainstorm a list of our community assets.

Community Assets

People	Places	Institutions & Organizations	Other

Part 4: Setting priorities for action *(50 minutes)*

Most study circle programs end with a large action forum. At this event people from all of the study circles prepare to move from talk to action. People share their ideas for change. Now we will choose two or three ideas to present at the action forum.

As a group talk about all of your action ideas.

1. How can our community assets help us carry out our action ideas?
2. Narrow down the list. Pick the most important ideas. Think about the following questions:

    *   Which ideas really address the issues we've been discussing?
    *   Which ideas might have a long-term impact?
    *   Which ideas seem most practical or "doable?"
    *   What kind of support do we need to take these steps? Who else could we link up with?
    *   How do we begin?

3. Choose two or three ideas to present at the community action forum. Choose ideas that are not too big or hard to do. They should be things we can do on our own or in groups. Write the top two or three ideas on newsprint labeled "*Priority Action Ideas*" Then list any ideas for policy changes.

4. Choose someone to speak for your group at the action forum.

When the circles end, we will all meet at the action forum. We will share our ideas and sign up for action groups. We may want to write a report for public officials, leaders, the media and others.

Look at the box on page 26, "A Sample Action Forum Agenda." The facilitator will explain what will go on at this meeting.

Facilitator and Recorder Tips for Part 4

*   Post the list of "Action Ideas" next to the list of "Community Assets."
*   You may need extra newsprint to work through this process.
*   Remind people to focus on things they can do. This includes things they might do alone or with groups of people.
*   Some people may get bogged down in this session. They may get stuck thinking about big change projects instead of things that can be done within the community.
*   Steps for prioritizing action ideas:

    1. Use questions 1 and 2 to help the group talk about the action ideas.
    2. Help the group combine similar ideas to narrow the list. Invite them to make a case for their favorite idea.
    3. Next, ask people to put a check next to their top three choices on the list of action ideas.
    4. Cross out the ideas that have the fewest checks. Give people a chance to make a case for the ideas that are left.
    5. Then ask people to suggest other ideas to take off the list.
    6. Repeat this process until you have only two ideas left. Ask for a volunteer to present these ideas at the action forum.

*   If there are no plans for an action forum, ask the group if they would like to continue to meet to carry out their action ideas. If so, have them exchange contact information and ask a volunteer from the group to schedule another meeting. Let the organizers know your plans.

Part 5: Wrapping up *(15 minutes)*

Thank you for taking part in this study circle. You are making a difference in when, where and what young people have a chance to learn in this community. Please discuss these questions about your study circle.

1. What has surprised you?

2. How has your thinking changed about when, where and what young people can learn in our community?

3. How will you stay involved in addressing these issues?

4. Is there anything you will do differently because of these study circles?

5. What did you find most valuable about the study circle?

The Action Forum

An action forum is a large community gathering that happens after all the study circles finish. At this event, people present their action ideas and discuss them. Action groups or task forces form to move these ideas forward. There will be many ways for everyone to stay involved.

When programs last a long time, more and more people take many kinds of action. For more information about moving to action, please visit the Everyday Democracy (formerly Study Circles Resource Center) website at *www.everyday-democracy.org*.

A Sample Action Forum Agenda *(1 to 3 hours)*

1. Snacks, social time, music or poetry, and Gallery Walk (time to read summaries from each circle posted around the room)
2. Welcome everyone and introduce the sponsors
   - Review agenda.
   - Talk about the study circle effort in the community.
   - Thank facilitators and other key volunteers.
3. Reports from the study circles
   - Ask one person from each circle to make a brief report about action ideas from their group.
   - Or, when the group is large (more than 60 people), post summaries from the circles where everyone can see them. Invite a few people to report out on their circles.
4. Overview of community assets
   - A person from the organizing group reviews key community assets. These assets will help the community move action ideas forward.
5. Moving to action
   - The emcee (Master of Ceremonies) identifies the main ideas from all the circles.
   - People sign up for an action group or task force.
   - Action groups meet and begin their work. They also set the date for their next meeting.
6. Closing remarks
   - Closing remarks (including how the action efforts will be tracked and tied to further organizing).
   - Next steps (including plans for another round of circles, celebration or check-in meeting).
   - Thanks to all.

Dialogue versus Debate

Dialogue is collaborative: Two or more sides work together toward common understanding.	Debate is oppositional: Two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.
In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal.	In debate, winning is the goal.
In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement.	In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.
Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.	Debate affirms a participant's own point of view.
Dialogue reveals assumptions for re-evaluation.	Debate defends assumptions as truth.
Dialogue causes introspection on one's own position.	Debate causes critique of the other position.
Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions.	Debate defends one's own positions as the best solution and excludes other solutions.
Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: openness to being wrong and an openness to change.	Debate creates a close-minded attitude, a determination to be right.
In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.	In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.
Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.	Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.
In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements.	In debate, one searches for glaring differences.
In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other positions.	In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other position.
Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks to not alienate or offend.	Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationships and often belittles or deprecates the other person.
Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution.	Debate assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it.
Dialogue remains open-ended.	Debate implies a conclusion.

Working with Multicultural Differences

Be aware of the ways that cultural differences show up when people from different cultures interact:

- Communication styles:
  - ◊ Verbal communication – shades of meaning differ (even in the same language) from one culture to another. Volume: shouting may mean a person is excited, not angry.
  - ◊ Non-verbal communication: facial expressions and body language; personal space (seating arrangements matter!); sense of time; touching.

- Attitudes toward conflict:
  - ◊ In some cultures people deal with conflict directly.
  - ◊ In other cultures face-to-face conflict is embarrassing, and people prefer to work things out quietly, perhaps in writing.

- Approaches to completing tasks:
  - ◊ People have different notions about time and relationship building. In some cultures more value is placed on getting down to work first and building relationships along the way.
  - ◊ Other cultures start by building relationships; then people are ready to work together to complete the task.

- Decision-making styles:
  - ◊ In some cultures managers delegate responsibility for decision making to an assistant.
  - ◊ In some cultures people value being able to make decisions themselves.
  - ◊ Sometimes group decisions are made by majority rule.
  - ◊ Sometimes groups make decisions by consensus.

- Approaches to "knowing:"
  - ◊ People in some cultures learn by measuring and counting – quantifying things.
  - ◊ In other cultures "knowing" comes from experience and intuitive reasoning.

Working with Multicultural Differences – Adapted from an essay: "Working on Common Cross-Cultural Communication Challenges" by Marcelle E. DuPraw and Marya Azner in *Toward a more Perfect Union in An Age of Diversity*

Helping multicultural groups function will:

- Make people feel welcome. At the beginning, give participants time to share information about their culture.
  - ◊ Ask them to bring something to the circle that helps people learn about their culture.
  - ◊ Ask people to tell the story of their name/their whole name/all of their names. Give each person an equal amount of time.
- Think about how your own culture and communication style is affecting the conversation. You may need to ask questions in a different way.
- Set a tone of unity. Help people see their similarities as well as their differences.
- Help people understand that there is no one "right way" to communicate.
  - ◊ Help group members appreciate different communication styles. Talk together about things like body language, personal space and traditions of listening and speaking out.
- Avoid stereotyping. Cultural norms don't a/pply to all the individuals within a culture.
- Help the group understand that no one can represent his or her entire culture.
- Try to build empathy and understanding among group members, but remind them that no one can know exactly how it feels to be in someone else's shoes.
- After a couple of sessions, ask participants how culture affects the way they view the exercises and ideas that come up in the discussion. After the group develops a list of options for action, ask about the role of culture and race in developing and carrying out the options.

Working with interpreters:

- Remind interpreters that their job is to translate accurately, not to add their own opinions.
- Give interpreters written materials ahead of time and go over the process with them.
- Make sure the interpreter feels comfortable letting the facilitator know if s/he needs more time.
- Speak in short sentences and keep ideas simple. (This gives the interpreter time to catch up.)

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- 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 ground rules and notes that were posted on newsprint.

Working 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 restate 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.
- Give people extra time to collect their thoughts before they talk. Remember that this may be the first time they have spoken in public and/or in a different language.
- Consider putting people in small groups, but don't separate people by language groups. (You may need more than one interpreter per circle.)

For More Information

This is a sampling of resources for building, improving and sustaining After-school and Out-of-School Learning Opportunities.

After School Alliance works to ensure that all children have access to affordable, quality after-school programs. *www.afterschoolalliance.org*

Afterschool Investments Project supports states' efforts to provide quality after-school opportunities with technical assistance and grant funding to Child Care and Development Fund Grantees. *www.nccic.org/afterschool*

Arkansas Out of School Network works to create safe, healthy and enriching experiences for Arkansas youth during out of school times. *www.aosn.org*

Boys and Girls Clubs of America works to enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring responsible citizens *www.bgca.org*

Chapin Hall is an independent policy research center that works to build knowledge that improves policies and programs for children and youth, families and their communities. *www.chapinhall.org*

Coalition for Community Schools advocates for community schools as the vehicle for strengthening schools, families and communities so that together they can improve student learning. *www.communityschools.org*

Communities in Schools champions the connection of needed community resources with schools to help young people successfully learn, stay in school and prepare for life. *www.cisnet.org*

Edutopia's website spreads the word about ideal, interactive learning environments and enables others to adapt the successes locally. *www.edutopia.org*

Finance Project is a nonprofit that develops and disseminates research, information, tools and technical assistance for improved policies, programs and financing strategies. *www.financeproject.org*

Foundations Inc. is a nonprofit organization committed to improving educational experiences for America's children and youth – through the day, everywhere they learn. *www.foundationsinc.org*

The Mott's Foundation's *Pathway out of Poverty* program supports initiatives around the U.S. that promote learning beyond the classroom, especially for traditionally underserved children and youth as a strategy for improving public education. *www.mott.org*

National AfterSchool Association is the leading voice of the after-school profession dedicated to the development, education, and care of children and youth during their out of school hours. *http://naaweb.yourmembership.com*

National Governors Association, a bipartisan organization, has pushed the after-school movement through funding and publications.
www.nga.org

National Institute on Out-Of-School Time (NIOST) is an action-research institute providing a national perspective on the critical issues facing the out of school field.
www.niost.org

National School Boards Association's website is a clearinghouse of information for school board leaders to build and sustain quality extended learning opportunities for all students.
www.nsba.org

Rural and Community Trust is a national nonprofit organization addressing the crucial relationship between good schools and thriving communities.
www.ruraledu.org

Search Institute (Developmental Assets) is an independent nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide leadership, knowledge, and resources to promote healthy children, youth, and communities.
www.search-institute.org/content/what-kids-need

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), a private, nonprofit education research, development and dissemination (RD&D) corporation, works to improve the quality of expanded learning programs nationwide.
www.sedl.org

The Wallace Foundation seeks to support and share effective ideas and practices that will strengthen education leadership, arts participation and out of school learning.
www.wallacefoundation.org

Arkansas Resources

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families:
www.aradvocates.org

Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators:
www.aaea.ws

Arkansas Coordinated School Health:
www.arkansascsh.org

Arkansas Department of Education:
www.arkansased.org

Arkansas Department of Career Education:
http://ace.arkansas.gov

Arkansas Division of Early Childhood Education:
www.arkansas.gov/childcare

Arkansas Education Association:
www.aeaonline.org

Arkansas Out of School Network:
www.aosn.org

Arkansas PTA:
www.arkansaspta.org

Arkansas School Boards Association:
www.arsba.org

University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service:
www.uaex.edu

Resource Articles

A New Day for Learning. January 2007. (Time, Learning, and Afterschool Task Force)
www.edutopia.org/files/existing/pdfs/ANewDayforLearning.pdf

Are They Really Ready To Work? Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century US Workforce. 2006 (The Conference Board, Inc.) *www.21stcenturyskills.org/documents/FINAL_REPORT_PDF09-29-06.pdf*

Atienza, Astrid, Julie Keith, Laura Lippman, and Andrew Rivers. ***A Developmental Perspective on College and Workplace Readiness***. September 2008 (Child Trends and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation)
www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2008_09_15_FR_ReadinessReport.pdf

Berg, Amy C., Martin J. Blank, and Atelia Melaville. ***Community-Based Learning - Engaging Students for Success and Citizenship***. January 2006. (Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership) *www.communityschools.org.*

Bridgeland, John, John J. DiIulio, Jr., and Karen Burke Morison.***The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts***. March 2006.(Civic Enterprises)
www.civicenterprises.net/pdfs/thesilentepidemic3-06.pdf

Building and Sustaining After-School Programs: Successful Practices in School Board Leadership. 2005 (National School Boards Association) *www.nsba.org*

Enriching Arkansas Children's Lives Through High-Quality Out-of-School Activities: Final Report of the Governor's Task Force on Best Practices for After-School and Summer Program. August 2008. *www.aradvocates.org/_images/pdfs/AACFafterschoolsmall.pdf*

Fit Not Fat: Helping Arkansas Children Eat Healthy and Move More. 2008. (Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families)
www.aradvocates.org/_images/pdfs/Fit%20not%20Fat%20(2).pdf

Forbes, Roy. ***Additional Learning Opportunities in Rural Areas: Needs, Successes, and Challenges***. April 2008. (Center for American Progress) *www.americanprogress.org*

Leading After-School Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do. 2006 (National Association of Elementary School Principals and Collaborative Communications Group) *www.naesp.org*

The Learning Compact Redefined: A Call to Action A Report of the Commission on the Whole Child. 2007 (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development)
www.ascd.org/learningcompact

Little, Priscilla M. ***Supporting Student Outcomes Through Expanded Learning Opportunities***. January 2009. (President and Fellows of Harvard College)
www.hfrp.org/out-of-school-time/publications-resources/supporting-student-outcomes-through-expanded-learning-opportunities

21st Century Skills, Education and Competitiveness: A Resource and Policy Guide. 2008 (Partnership for 21st Century Skills)
www.21stcenturyskills.org/documents/21st_century_skills_education_and_competitiveness_guide.pdf

Arkansas Study Circles Project

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Fax: 501.375.2454

email: studycircles@arsba.org
On the Web: www. arsba.org

This guide is a manual for study circle participants,
organizers, facilitators and recorders