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DC PARENTS WANT TO TALK ABOUT RACE AND CLASS TO WORK TOWARD EQUITY

Study by Community Science validates Kindred's parent dialogue model, highlighting desire for DC parents to advance educational equity and racial justice at their children's schools

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Parents want to play an active role in addressing the roles that race and socioeconomic status play in student outcomes, according to a new study released today. Community Science released the findings with Kindred, a nonprofit organization that commissioned the report. The study examined the impact of Kindred's dialogue-to-action model in four diverse Washington, D.C. public and public charter schools during the 2017-18 academic year and found that after engaging in facilitated conversations about themselves, their children, and the role of race and class in our schools and society, **diverse groups of parents embraced the opportunity to do something together about systemic disadvantage.**

"Being a part of Kindred has changed my school experience," said Erica Walker, a parent at Amidon-Bowen Elementary School. "Before Kindred, parents would greet each other in the hall, but that was it. Now, there is a group of us from different backgrounds really talking about how we could make things better for all kids in the school. It's really exciting."

Erica is among the more than one hundred parents who have taken part in a Kindred dialogue group. The groups, which meet ten times, are designed to create an inclusive space for parents from diverse backgrounds to have courageous conversations about race, privilege, and inequity – all to develop authentic connections, understand multiple perspectives, build empathy, grow their advocacy skills, and begin to cultivate a more welcoming school environment and equitable access to resources.

Community Science concluded that Kindred's dialogue groups have proven to be a positive and transformative experience for parents across all four schools. "Our research revealed that Kindred's parent dialogues provided participating parents with a safe space to build trusting relationships and acquire the tools, language and confidence to talk about racial equity in their schools and to speak up on related issues, even when they do not directly affect their child," said Michelle Revels, senior associate at Community Science. This willingness to advocate beyond parents' individual needs represents progress toward Kindred's vision of communities that care for all children as if they were their own.

The organization's potential for school-wide impact was also confirmed by the study, which found evidence that **after two years of Kindred's program, the principal and parents observed a shift in school culture, resource allocation (through school budget and PTA funds) and approach to family engagement toward greater inclusivity, with an increased focus on elevating the voices of families from marginalized backgrounds.** This finding is

unique in that parents from all backgrounds, together with the school administration, worked collaboratively on change, without agitation or malaise.

“What we are learning has the potential to transform the experiences of students, their families and staff in our elementary schools,” said Laura Wilson Phelan, founder and executive director of Kindred. “The assumption that parents from different backgrounds inevitably will be at odds with one another simply isn’t true. All parents want what is best for their children, and, when given the chance to understand how race and inequity perpetuate disadvantage, they are excited to advocate for the well-being of all children in their school.”

Although Kindred is off to a strong start, further research into the impact of its model presents an opportunity to understand the potential of diverse parent coalitions to address enduring opportunity gaps in student experiences and outcomes. In the 2018-19 school year, Kindred launched programs in two additional elementary schools for a total of six across the District. Over the next two years, the organization will expand to an additional six schools in Washington DC, begin working with DC Public Schools to integrate its approach into their own practices, and develop and launch an online network that provides access to resources and connects parents across all schools to each other.

For more information on Kindred and how to support its activities, please visit www.kindredcommunities.org. The full evaluation may be found here: <https://kindredcommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Community-Science-Evaluation-Report-2018.pdf>.

About Kindred

Founded in 2016, Kindred is a nonprofit that builds diverse coalitions of families in elementary schools who have the mindsets, relationships, and tools to increase equity so that student outcomes are not predictable by a student’s background. To empower parents to be school-based advocates, Kindred works with a school community for three years, beginning with interracial and interclass dialogue and leadership capacity-building among parents. Through this work, Kindred builds a diverse coalition of families with the mindsets and tools to increase equity and meaningfully improve outcomes within their children’s elementary school so that all students thrive.

About Community Science

Founded in 1997, Community Science is an award-winning research and development organization that works with governments, foundations, and non-profit organizations on solutions to social problems through community and other systems changes. Using state-of-the-art qualitative and quantitative methods, Community Science’s goal is to strengthen the science and practice of community change in order to build **healthy, just and equitable communities**. The organization’s services include research and evaluation services, capacity-building products and services, and initiative management and support.

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