



# Kindred Pilot Study

## Summary of Findings from Parent Surveys and Focus Groups

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Kindred offers dialogue groups for parents to tackle issues of racial and economic segregation in DC schools and communities. In June 2017, the Urban Institute conducted surveys and focus groups to assess participant perceptions of Kindred's program and staff. Participants responded favorably to their experiences. Survey and focus group data suggest that Kindred activities produce the shifts in parent perceptions and behaviors outlined in its logic model. Parent perceptions of each other improved over the course of the Kindred sessions, with parents attributing increased empathy, diversified relationships, increased access to resources, and greater locus of control to the program. Focus group data suggest that some parents are particularly motivated to expand the Kindred model.

## Program Description and Logic Model

Kindred is a new organization in Washington, DC, that addresses the gap in social networks between parents of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. In the District of Columbia, students of color score more than 40 points lower than white students on standardized tests of math and reading, and this trend has persisted for decades.<sup>1</sup> Kindred founder Laura Wilson Phelan views institutionalized racism in our child care and education systems as a key driver of the differences between test scores for white students and students of color. Institutional racism manifests, among other ways, through stratified parental social capital networks where families build relationships with families like themselves. Because parent behavior is linked with student outcomes and because networks play a

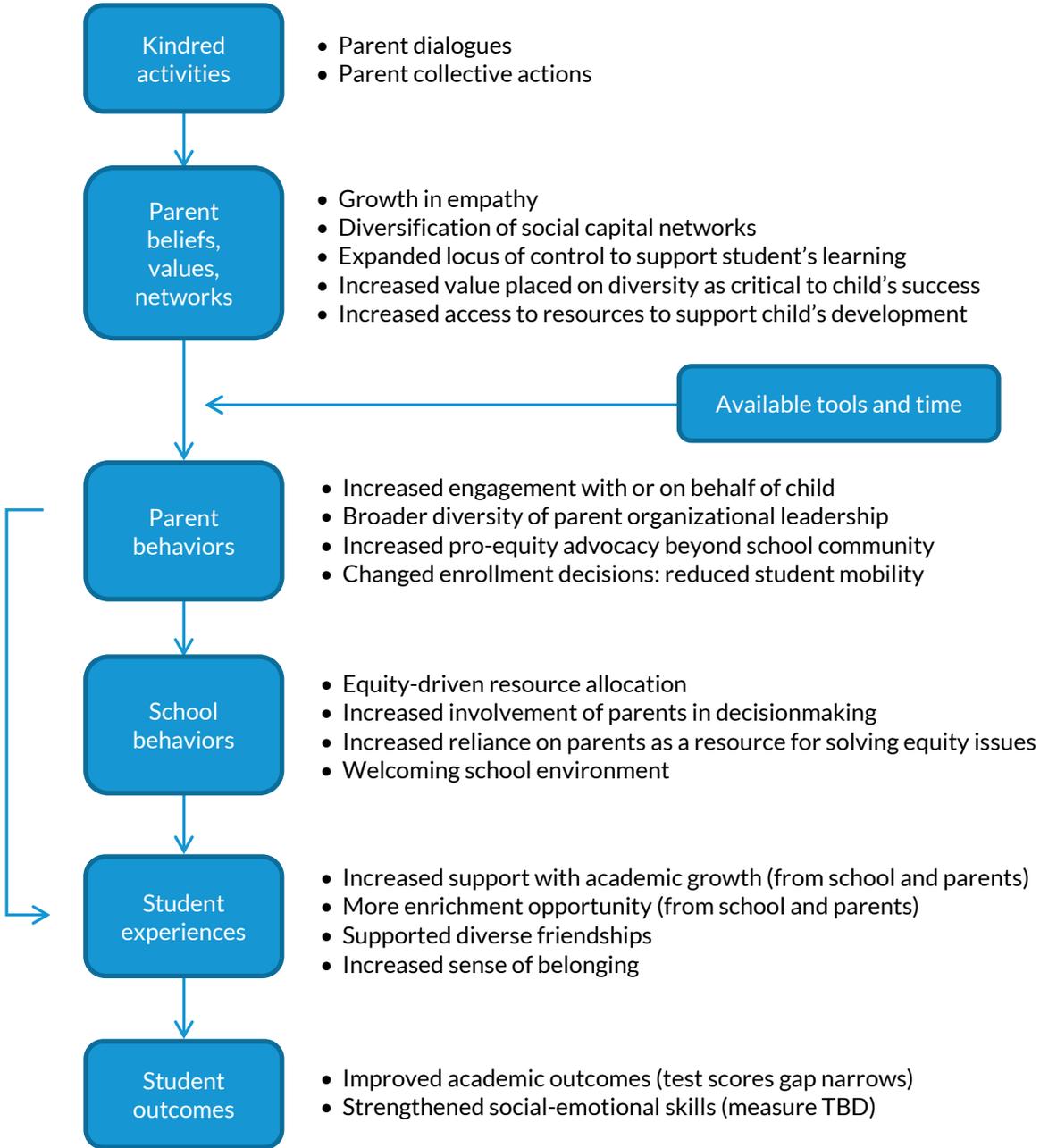
significant role in our socioeconomic status, Kindred seeks to connect families of different backgrounds through dialogues that develop interracial and interclass relationships.

Kindred brings together diverse sets of parents to discuss their identities, histories, and aspirations for their children. Through dialogue, they aim to build empathy, increase how they value diversity in the raising of their child, expand their locus of control over their child's educational path, and share resources in effort to both support their own child's development, as well as work collaboratively to close the opportunity gap at their child's school. The Kindred logic model shows how the program is intended to work (figure 1).

Research for this brief was conducted in summer 2017, and data represent program participants at the Marie Reed Elementary School site. Kindred expanded to three additional elementary schools during the 2017–18 school year and four more communities during the 2018–19 school year while maintaining its program at Marie Reed. Data from new sites were not included in this brief, but findings from an evaluation of the second programmatic year may be found on Kindred's website: [www.kindredcommunities.org](http://www.kindredcommunities.org).

FIGURE 1

Working Kindred Logic Model as of June 2017



# Evaluation Approach

To inform its ongoing and expanded activities, Kindred hired the Urban Institute as a research consultant to conduct an evaluation of its pilot program. The evaluation measured outcomes described in the first stage and part of the second stage of Kindred's logic model after Kindred's activities at its pilot school. Specifically, we asked whether Kindred activities influenced parent beliefs, values, and networks, including

- growth in empathy,
- diversification of social capital networks,
- expanded locus of control to support student's learning,
- increased value placed on diversity as critical to child's success, and
- increased access to resources to support child's development.

We also asked parents about available time and resources, and plans to reenroll their children at Marie Reed (i.e., student mobility).

Our study hypothesized that if Kindred's dialogues were effective, participants would report changes in the beliefs listed above and begin to act on these changed beliefs. Because of the limited sample size and scope of our study, our research can only determine whether Kindred's activities were perceived by parents as having their intended effect. We cannot assume causality or size impact from this study. Our research approach included surveys and focus groups with 14 parents, so the data are self-reported. We were not able to perform a pretreatment survey, which means that the posttreatment survey asks parents about changes but does not allow us to compare pre- and posttreatment responses. The limited scope of the study also prevented a thorough literature review and pre and post controls. We recommend that future studies include these elements.

## Data Collection

This study draws on insights from Kindred dialogue group participants at Marie Reed Elementary School. Marie Reed is in the Adams Morgan neighborhood of Washington, DC, but, because of renovations, was moved to MacFarland Middle School during the 2016–17 school year. Kindred groups were held at MacFarland and at H. D. Cooke Elementary School to meet the needs of morning and evening group attendees, respectively. Marie Reed serves over 400 students from prekindergarten to grade 5. Study participants were recruited from two Kindred discussion groups formed during the fall and winter of the 2016–17 school year.

Urban Institute researchers planned the study with the assistance of Kindred staff. We employed two data collection strategies to capture the perceptions of Kindred discussion group participants. First, we worked with Kindred to develop a 35-item survey that covered parent perceptions and reported behaviors related to empathy, social capital, locus of control, value of diversity, access to resources, and

student mobility, as well as personal identification questions related to race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (SES). The surveys were translated into Spanish and provided to participants who prefer Spanish. Next, we developed focus group discussion guides to complement survey responses, as well as explore what attracted participants to Marie Reed and Kindred, what their experience was like, and what they will do next.

## Findings

### Parent Characteristics

We collected socioeconomic and demographic data from 14 study participants (table 1). Participants were overwhelmingly female (86 percent). Race and ethnicity data suggest that the largest group of participants identify as of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin (43 percent), followed by black, non-Hispanic (29 percent); white, non-Hispanic (21 percent); and other race, non-Hispanic (7 percent).

Socioeconomic status was defined using the highest grade or level of school completed. Participants with less than a bachelor's degree were categorized as "low SES" (29 percent), and those with a bachelor's degree or higher were categorized as "high SES" (71 percent). Several other measures of economic well-being were included in the survey, including whether the participant currently works for pay (86 percent) or experiences food insecurity over the past year (7 percent).

TABLE 1

**Kindred Pilot Parent Characteristics**

Total survey sample (N = 14)

	Number	Percentage
<b>Demographic characteristics</b>		
<i>Race or ethnicity</i>		
Hispanic	6	42.9
White, non-Hispanic	3	21.4
Black, non-Hispanic	4	28.6
Other race, non-Hispanic	1	7.1
<i>Gender identity</i>		
Female	12	85.7
Male	1	7.1
Prefer not to answer	1	7.1
<b>Socioeconomic characteristics</b>		
<i>Highest grade or level of school completed</i>		
Elementary, middle, or high school but no diploma	1	7.1
High school diploma	1	7.1
Associate's degree	2	14.3
Bachelor's degree	7	50.0
Graduate or professional degree	3	21.4
<i>Employment</i>		
Work for pay	12	85.7
<i>Food insecurity</i>		
Reduced meals in the past year	1	7.1
<b>Other characteristics</b>		
<i>Enrollment in Marie Reed</i>		
Enrollment next school year	13	92.9
<i>Kindred group</i>		
Morning	7	50.0
Evening	7	50.0

Source: Authors' calculations using the Kindred–Urban Institute Pilot Study parent survey.

## The Marie Reed Experience

### CHOOSING MARIE REED

To understand the role that school characteristics such as student diversity played in informing parents' decisions to enroll their child in Marie Reed, focus group questions explored parent beliefs and values related to selecting Marie Reed. Focus group participants explained that they were drawn to Marie Reed because of the dual-language immersion program or because they were attracted to the school's diversity, favorable ratings, and location. Some attended Marie Reed as children. Some parents in the group went through the lottery process and selected Marie Reed among other schools, while others attend Marie Reed as their neighborhood school-of-right. A few of the parents who planned for their children to attend only prekindergarten at Marie Reed have decided to stay. Parents described a friendliness and a sense of community among Marie Reed families.

Some participants described diversity among Marie Reed students and families as reflecting a variety of races, languages, cultures, and incomes. As one parent of a 6-year-old described, “[Marie Reed has] always had that representation of the African American culture in DC—that’s always been very prominent and helpful in developing an ideal of being a minority in this country. My parents come from different places, so it made sense to me to go somewhere like that. It’s about being proud and confident. I want that diversity in my daughter’s life.” One parent described Marie Reed as being Hispanic and African American, with an increasing number of whites. Another described how diversity varies across the grade levels in the school, with higher grades being less diverse than lower grades.

One parent noted how the changes in the neighborhood, including gentrification and increased home prices, could lead to more high-SES families enrolling in Marie Reed and disrupt its diverse student population.

### IDENTIFYING AREAS FOR ACTION

Despite their regard for the school, focus group participants see room for improvement at Marie Reed. Parents mentioned a desire for more out-of-school-time programming and more multicultural parent-teacher association (PTA) programs. Renovations during the 2016–17 school year may have played a role in shaping both sets of activities, though it was difficult for study researchers to understand whether and how they may change once the school returns to its home campus.

Marie Reed has a PTA, but program participants explained that it struggles to engage and retain diverse parents. As one parent with children in prekindergarten and kindergarten noted, “For the PTA you see the parents with the heavy careers, white and everything, we are here with the different groups to try to get everyone together. The Coffees with the Principals are the Latina moms and stay-at-home moms and both are friendly, but [we need to figure out] how to get them together.” One parent reflected on the socioeconomic divide among different parents at school events. Before joining Kindred, some parents participated in workshops during the previous school year about race and equity dynamics within the PTA, but those conversations have not continued or been available to the broader school community.

Although the Head Start staff works hard to engage parents of prekindergarten students by creating workshops and inviting parents to events, these specific efforts are funded by Head Start and therefore do not include parents of children in higher grades.

Being off-campus has posed some additional challenges to parent engagement in 2016–17, making it hard for parents to gather informally. Preparations for the new school building have also raised questions about how the whole school community can celebrate.

## The Kindred Experience

### CHANGING BELIEFS AND VALUES

According to the Kindred logic model, parents’ participation in Kindred activities (i.e., dialogue groups and taking collective action) will change their beliefs, values, and networks, especially as related to

building empathy, valuing diversity, expanding their locus of control, and diversifying their social capital networks.

The survey was designed to detect a relationship between Kindred's activities and its expected outcomes. In their survey responses (table 2), parents reported growth in empathy, indicated through improved ability to imagine what it is like to be a parent of a different race or class at Marie Reed, understand others' feelings and assumptions, and identify how their assumptions affect their behavior. In addition, they all felt more comfortable talking with parents of different races and classes than themselves. They all agreed that participation in the parent dialogue group enhanced their belief that they can influence their child's success in school, improved their ability to make a difference at Marie Reed, and increased their responsibility to do something about educational inequity at the school, indicating expanded locus of control.

The focus groups were designed to add context to the answers parents provided to survey questions. During the focus groups, parent discussion supported survey responses related to growth in empathy, as well as increased value placed on diversity. Parents described an increased willingness to learn and an openness that bridges languages and other demographic and socioeconomic differences. One parent talked about the slow process of breaking down her own barriers and building trust among parents in the group and with other adults in the school. Other parents admitted to having joined the group with strong and confident voices but having learned how to listen actively to people they would not ordinarily listen to. Three parents articulate these perspectives and experiences:

- “[Kindred] allowed me to be more open in how I receive information. It’s made me want to have that conversation more with people, out of curiosity. We are all at a different spectrum in learning about it and experiencing it. I feel like I’m experiencing it fuller now, because I’ve learned more about myself and where I am at and what I’m identifying. And also supporting my child in learning what she’s really identifying with.”—Parent of a 6-year-old child
- “The Kindred mind-set is getting away from your own assumptions. And seeing things from other peoples’ perspectives, and being open to other peoples’ perspectives...[Those] who are white and upper class, they think, ‘I value diversity, and I will come into Marie Reed and give everyone a taste of the privilege I have. We’ll make Marie Reed better by making it more like us. So, we will elevate the value of these brown faces and make Marie Reed better.’ That was part of my mind-set when I came in. I’m putting it bluntly. I feel like being part of Marie Reed has given me an opportunity to see that ‘more like me’ isn’t necessarily better, not for the community or everyone else in the community. At times, it’s a little uncomfortable, but I think it’s also hard to get there unless you have something that is more immersive like the Kindred experience.”—Parent of children in prekindergarten and first grade
- “There is more communication between us. We’re more open to dialogue. We benefit from each other, and we hear each other speak in conversation. It’s taking into consideration other people having a say and being open and receptive to the conversation. Instead of just hearing it and not really understanding it.”—Parent of a child in fourth grade

## CHANGING NETWORKS, BEHAVIORS, AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES

According to the Kindred logic model, changed perceptions lead to changed behaviors, particularly when parents have tools and time to take action. We sought to understand parent perceptions related to whether they diversified their social capital networks outside of their own race and socioeconomic class, whether they gained access to additional resources, and whether they intended to leave or reenroll their child at Marie Reed the following year.

Most parents (71 percent) reported that they have the resources to act on what they learned in dialogue group. Few (14 percent) reported not having time to act on what they learned, but *all* reported that they will find time.

In the focus groups, parents explained that their behaviors have already changed over the Kindred sessions. For example, parents now communicate with each other by phone, by email, or in person. One mother of a child in third grade shared, “I would not have talked to [another Kindred parent] every afternoon. I wouldn’t have texted [a third Kindred parent] about games. I wouldn’t have taken [a fourth Kindred parent]’s tips for things to do at home and implemented them, although not nearly as well [laughing]. I think we have all become more open, and willing to learn, across language barriers and other differences.” All of them reported having had at least one conversation with a parent of a different race and class for 10 minutes or more since joining Kindred’s dialogue group.

Most parents reported having increased resources for their child since joining the dialogue groups, either by helping their child with an idea or resource learned during the parent group or by being comfortable going to another parent in the group. All believe that they can find the resources to ensure that their child succeeds in life.

Some focus group participants explained that this year’s dialogue group is just the beginning of a bigger effort and that there is a lot more to do. Looking ahead, they are thinking about how to connect with other parents at the school or at the bus stop to expand the network. One of the parents described how outreach to future Kindred participants will reflect her own experience with Kindred: “We will have to build the community with the parents in the same kind of way. Not just ‘I’m so-and-so’s mom.’ But really building relationships and culture within Marie Reed on a larger scale.”

Others are committed to organizing inclusive school events, including those involving the PTA, cultural events, and celebrations of the new school facility. One parent described a renewed commitment to raise her voice and volunteer at Marie Reed. Another parent with two young children described her expectations: “I feel like we’ve just scratched the surface. I’m excited about where we can go and what we can do. But at the same time, real change takes the hard work. There is no 10-to-15-minutes-a-week solution that will get us to where we want to be. I’m hopeful that we can recruit enough people in this to start growing and maybe one day reach critical mass and find other ways to integrate it into the community.”

All Kindred parents stated that they planned to reenroll their child in Marie Reed the following school year. Survey responses are summarized in table 2.

TABLE 2

## Kindred Pilot Parent Survey Responses (percent)

	All Kindred parents N=14	Group 1 N=7	Group 2 N=7	Low-SES parents (less than BA) N=4	High-SES parents (BA or above) N=10
<b>Parent perceptions</b>					
1. The parent dialogue group was a good use of my time.	100	100	100	100	100
2. Parent dialogue group helped me feel more welcome at Marie Reed.	92.9	100	85.7	100	85.7
3. At parent dialogue group, my voice was heard.	100	100	100	100	100
4. Since joining the parent dialogue group, I feel more confident in my ability to make a difference at Marie Reed.	100	100	100	100	100
5. Since joining the parent dialogue group, I am better able to imagine what it is like to be a parent of a different race or class at Marie Reed.	100	100	100	100	100
6. Since participating in the parent dialogue group, I am better able to understand other parents' feelings and assumptions.	100	100	100	100	100
7. Since participating in the parent dialogue group, I am better able to identify how my assumptions affect my behavior.	100	100	100	100	100
8. Since participating in the parent dialogue group, I feel more responsible to do something about educational inequity in my school community.	100	100	100	100	100
9. Since joining the parent dialogue group, I feel more comfortable talking with parents of different races and classes than me.	100	100	100	100	100
10. Since joining the parent dialogue group, I believe more strongly that if I put my mind to it, I can have important influence over my child's success in school.	92.3	100	83.3	100	88.9
11. I feel that having students from different racial and class backgrounds in my child's school is more important than I did before joining parent dialogue group.	78.6	85.7	71.4	100	70.0
<b>Perceptions of facilitators</b>					
12. Parent dialogue group facilitators listened to me.	100	100	100	100	100
13. Parent dialogue group facilitators were responsive to input from members of our group.	100	100	100	100	100

	All Kindred parents N=14	Group 1 N=7	Group 2 N=7	Low-SES parents (less than BA) N=4	High-SES parents (BA or above) N=10
14. Parent dialogue group facilitators were unfair to some members of our group.	14.3	28.6	0.0	25.0	10.0
15. When I need ideas or resources to help my child, I feel comfortable going to parent dialogue group facilitators.	64.3	71.4	57.1	50.0	70.0
<b>Ability to take action</b>					
16. I have the resources I need to act on what I learned in parent dialogue group.	71.4	85.7	57.1	100	60.0
17. I do not have time to act on what I learned in parent dialogue group.	14.3	0.0	28.6	25.0	10.0
18. I will find time to act on what I learned in parent dialogue group.	100	100	100	100	100
19. Since joining the parent dialogue group, I have had at least one conversation with a parent of a different race and class for 10 minutes or more.	92.9	85.7	100	100	90.0
20. Since joining the parent dialogue group, I have helped my child using an idea or resource I gained through the parent dialogue group.	92.9	100	85.7	100	90.0
21. When I need ideas or resources to help my child, I feel comfortable going to one or more other parents in parent dialogue group.	85.7	85.7	85.7	100	80.0
22. I will recommend the parent dialogue group to other parents.	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Participation this academic year</i>					
23. Attended a school or class event	100	100	100	100	100
24. Served as a volunteer in your child's classroom or elsewhere in school	100	100	100	100	100
25. Attended a meeting of the parent-teacher association	85.7	71.4	100	75.0	90.0
26. Gone to a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference with your child's teacher	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Parent beliefs</b>					
27. Most of my child's success is a matter of how hard he or she works and how well I guide him or her.	78.6	85.7	71.4	100	70.0
28. I believe I can find the resources to ensure my child succeeds in life	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Authors' calculations using the Kindred–Urban Institute Pilot Study parent survey.

Note: Percentages capture affirmative responses “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” or “yes,” as included in the survey instrument.

## Joining and Strengthening Kindred

### JOINING KINDRED

Parents shared various ways that they became connected to Kindred. Some were encouraged by the principal and school staff to participate, while others were encouraged by friends and neighbors. Kindred staff also actively reached out to parents and encouraged them to participate. One parent of a 10-year-old explained how she had come to join Kindred: “I basically just read that it was a parent group, and I’m all for being a voice for the children at the school, and I thought it would be a good idea. For me, it’s a way to meet other parents.... And really, my schedule. I don’t have the flexibility I used to have, where I could go to the school to volunteer. This is my way of giving back.”

A few parents mentioned difficulties balancing work and child care with their commitment to Kindred, but all of them reported that it was a good use of their time. In particular, parents attending the evening group noted the importance of having an after-work option, and some shared that they would not have been able to participate if only morning sessions had been offered.

Parents reported that facilitators created safe space for open conversations. As one noted,

Diversity is a buzz word. There aren’t many safe places to talk about the difficulty of diversity—the fear, the bias. I hold myself back because I don’t want to look different or stupid. Diversity becomes very rich when you can start talking with each other. This has been so unique. I don’t know any other group where you can do that.

All parents reported that facilitators listened to them and were responsive to input from the group. One parent of two Marie Reed students explained, “Even though [the facilitators] had a vision and structure bringing this group together, they were really open to allowing us to help navigate and figure out the way.... I really respect that. They designed and conceived it but were really open to input from members of the group. That made it stronger.” Most reported feeling comfortable going to facilitators if they needed ideas or resources and that facilitators were fair to all participants.

Parents appreciated the honesty of other participants, as well as the ability to focus on issues they care about. They also valued the discussions, individual relationships, and meeting and talking to people from different walks of life. All participants will (and have) recommended Kindred dialogue groups to other parents.

### STRENGTHENING KINDRED

Parents had several suggestions for improving Kindred in the future. At the recruitment stage, some parents suggested providing more information for recruits regarding the agenda and goals of the discussion groups. One parent desired “having a clear outcome in the beginning about what to expect or what we think we’ll accomplish at the end. That wasn’t clear to me in the beginning. It would be helpful if the parents could know the goal, even though you can go different ways about it, but that it’s the outcome they would like to see based on the concerns parents would bring up.... I am happy to be here, but I want to be effective. Sometimes it’s hard to think right on the spot.” Others felt that the ambiguity

allowed them to join without reservations that they may have had if they had known more about the discussion groups.

Additional suggestions from parents include offering Kindred sessions year-round, in other schools, and in different locations in the city.

Parents discussed Kindred program expansion and had differing opinions about the ideal number of parents; some liked the current group size, and others would like larger group sizes or multiple groups to have a greater influence on the PTA. Still, they cautioned against losing the intimacy of Kindred groups: said one parent of a child in third grade, “You could add two more, but I liked that it was small-ish. Everyone had a chance to share and to talk. I think if it was much bigger, people might be shy.” They think that expanding Kindred in the school will require Kindred staff to evaluate the timing of the discussion group meetings and the required time commitment and whether the program can adequately treat the topics in less time.

## Conclusion

### Further Research Questions

This study was limited in its scope by the small sample size, the absence of pretreatment data, and the lack of an accompanying literature review that links the elements within Kindred’s logic model to its stated outcomes. In addition, this study does not capture the perspectives of two parents who joined Kindred but did not complete the program. Parents who participated in the first year of Kindred are likely to differ from future participants along several dimensions, including general levels of school engagement, motivation, and experiences related to enrollment at Marie Reed versus other schools in Washington, DC.

Given the novelty of Kindred’s approach to working with parents, further research into the impact of its model presents an opportunity to understand the potential of building diverse parent coalitions to address enduring opportunity gaps in student outcomes. Future studies should include controls for pre- and posttreatment or a more rigorous design that better assesses program impact. Future studies could also capture and assess the impact of the second year of Kindred’s model, which involves training and supporting parents as facilitators of dialogue groups to assess impact on both the parent volunteer facilitators and the parents in their dialogue groups. Assessment of the second year should also measure expected impacts at later stages of the logic model. For example, while we did not set out to study the effects of Kindred’s model on later stages of its logic model (school behaviors, student experiences, student outcomes), survey responses indicate that all parents felt their voices were heard during dialogue groups, and most felt more welcome at Marie Reed because of their participation in Kindred.

### Future Opportunities

Kindred is off to a strong start. Parents described positive and even transformative experiences as a result of their participation in the program. They also offered ways to improve recruitment, restructure

sessions, and expand offerings. As some pilot-year parents become facilitators, and as many more serve as ambassadors for Kindred in their schools and communities, their perspectives and experiences will shape the future of the program.

Kindred continues to expand its activities in new schools and communities. The pilot-year program offers valuable insights to guide expansion, illustrating the potential for an intervention focused on parent dialogue to promote the development of interracial and interclass relationships that shape parent attitudes and behaviors. Following the Kindred logic model, we look forward to observing how these changes may affect school behaviors, student experiences, and, ultimately, student outcomes.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> District of Columbia National Assessment of Educational Progress 2015 reading and math scores for white students in grades 4 and 8 are 43 to 59 points higher than those of students of color. See “District of Columbia Overview,” The Nation’s Report Card, accessed January 28, 2019, <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/DC>.

## About the Authors

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