

HMT Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – March 2021

Advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within our organization and in our work with students is critical to accomplishing our mission. To effectively support students and maximize Heart Math Tutoring's impact, we must have diversity of thought, identity, and experience within our staff and volunteer base; an inclusive workplace where people of all backgrounds are welcomed, celebrated, and cherished; and an ongoing, strong commitment to understanding and addressing the needs of our students, their families, our team members, and our community.

The team at Heart Math Tutoring (HMT) is specifically committed to supporting racial equity, recognizing disparities in education, employment, and other outcomes by race and ethnicity shaped by history and still present today. These disparities impact our students, 90% of whom are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), the adults involved in Heart Math Tutoring, and the larger community. We are committed to operating with a racial equity lens in understanding and addressing needs, evaluating our program, and proactively pushing for opportunities for all.

Ultimately, we aspire to see our students consistently understood, celebrated, and empowered in the program and to see talented people of all backgrounds thrive as leaders at Heart Math Tutoring.

Our team's journey

Heart has had mixed success achieving a racially diverse staff, so far. Since incorporating in 2013, individual leaders have made intentional decisions hoping to achieve racial and gender diversity amongst the staff, but the gap between intentions and impact leaves HMT a mostly white organization with missed opportunities diversity could bring.

In the past several years, our now 25+ person team has begun building a shared understanding of DEI and racial equity work. We have leveraged external resources and wisdom from within. Our team is made of individuals with a wide range of experiences in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion and racial equity work. Each of us is at a different place on a shared journey, and we are all committed to our growth mindset core value and to continuous learning.

We have engaged team members of all levels to collectively evaluate progress (e.g., growth in percentage of tutors who are BIPOC, increased dialogue and understanding of DEI within our team, new initiatives supporting families and students, diversity at the board level), gaps (e.g., staff turnover, staff is disproportionately white and female), and next steps for Heart Math Tutoring.

We are currently focused on three efforts as of January 2021, and we will update this statement over time:

- Building an inclusive culture within Heart Math Tutoring – We asked, “What aspects of our culture have developed that might be comfortable for some and not others? How do we expand our culture to ensure talented people from all backgrounds will enjoy working here and thrive?”
- Our responsibility to share more context with the community on the causes of the racial disparities in education they hear about from us and that tutors see firsthand.
- Honoring and supporting the “whole child,” ensuring students receive culturally proficient support and experience empathy, compassion, and empowerment while in our program.

Inclusive Culture

At a retreat in 2019, our team codified the importance of diversity in our definition of a healthy culture, officially stating that “we believe our differences make us stronger.” We wondered how to live this out. In 2020, we started asking, “What aspects of our culture have developed that might be comfortable for

some and not others? How do we expand our culture to ensure talented people from all backgrounds will enjoy working here and thrive?"

What we found was an unintended tendency to be task-oriented at the expense of relationships, and we noticed elements of perfectionism at the expense of learning and risk-taking, among other observations. These tendencies, or "hidden values," are nowhere reflected in our actual Core Values or Mission, but they seep in through our actions because of who we are as people, strengths and flaws included. Our team is now engaged in proactive work - structured and organic - to tip the scale more towards relationships and to lean more heavily on our *growth-mindset* core value that was meant to support a learning culture all along. What better time to shift to a fail-forward, learning, risk-taking culture than in a year we must entirely rebuild our program. We hope successful learning leads to another core value, *precision*, but we won't mistake precision for perfection. Also, what better year to prioritize relationships and a supportive work environment than in the middle of the care needed during a pandemic.

Through open, honest dialogue, including voices of future team members, we will continue becoming aware of and unlearning any unhealthy hidden values. Partnerships and third-party facilitated trainings remain key to fostering an environment where we can openly assess our culture. You can read about recent initiatives [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) and on [our blog](#).

Responsibility to share more context about our students and racial disparities

HMT creates opportunities for volunteers and partners to learn through trainings, presentations, and hands-on experience. Our materials now better explain the full picture as to why Heart does the work it does and who it is impacting the most. Heart Math Tutoring's mission and math strategies apply to all students, but we strategically focus first on students who may not have resources to access private tutoring. Over 90% of Heart Math Tutoring students are BIPOC, mirroring the demographic makeup of high-poverty concentration schools across CMS more broadly. "Looking upstream," this concentration of poverty reflects the barriers to wealth generation BIPOC face in the U.S. such as housing policy, hiring practices, and access to higher education ([Source](#)). CMS did a thorough job of outlining the correlation between race, economic resources, and school outcomes in their Breaking the Link Report ([Source](#)).

We have a responsibility to share this context to avoid perpetuating negative and limiting stereotypes of students who lack access to tutoring resources and to support our partners in dismantling racism in their spheres of influence. Math skills and confidence are important pieces of the academic puzzle; our students deserve a society, where a person's race is not statistically predictive of educational outcomes.

How we work with students

Our desire is that students are seen, valued, cared for and respected as their full selves during tutoring in a culturally responsive environment facilitated by our volunteers and staff. The Tutor Code of Conduct now outlines this vision with more specificity, and language has been added to tutor orientation materials and monthly correspondence. In 2020/21, we initiated a DEI Network with over 280 volunteers electing to receive additional resources and be invited to occasional events and online conversations on the topic. (Interested tutors [sign up here](#).) In 2019/20, we partnered with Charlotte Resilience Project to train staff on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and host an event for volunteers to deepen understanding of students' needs related to trauma.

Understanding the whole child and culturally responsive student support has never been more important than in the COVID-19 environment. We have a much more intimate view into children's worlds when meeting them (virtually) in their homes rather than the classroom. We must reflect on how our differences in identity and background may be shaping how we view students, listen and learn from

our students, and express unconditional belief in our students' potential. We operate with an asset-based approach, focusing on students' strengths and potential rather than needs and gaps.

The COVID-19 environment, with students logging in from homes, has also opened new relationships between Heart staff and students' families. We are committed to investing time and resources to ensure families can help students attend their sessions and have resources to support math development between sessions. In 2020/21, Heart staff are spending an additional 3-5 hours per week, per school, working with families (applications, text messages, phone calls) to ensure tutoring can be accessed equitably. The connection between families and Heart staff/volunteers was more limited when tutoring took place at school facilities, and it creates a great opportunity for partnership.

We know students benefit from working with adults from ALL backgrounds and that they gain specific benefits from working with adults of racial/ethnic backgrounds that match their own. We are being intentional to recruit tutors who are BIPOC through networking and partnerships that can strengthen diversity of the volunteer base. The tutor base is becoming increasingly racially diverse each year, with more progress to go.

Ongoing Journey – Looking Forward

This statement is meant to clarify the direction of our most recent DEI efforts, which we believe are critical to fulfillment of Heart Math Tutoring's mission. It reflects recent dialogue from staff and is the result of multiple authors and editors. This statement can be a rallying cry for our team and partners as we join to make these words come to life. We will update this statement at least annually.

Beyond the statement and more important than the statement - we hope that you see the impact of these efforts in your daily interactions with Heart Math Tutoring.

Tutors will see a focus on meeting the needs of the whole child in our Tutoring Tips, blog posts, and trainings. Donors will see student voice and a broader context of community need in our communications. Staff will continue participating in formal projects and trainings focused on building an inclusive work environment and providing culturally competent support to our students.

Accountability lies in several areas. To name a few:

- Heart's Racial Equity Change Team evaluates the organization's progress on racial equity and provides accountability for the next steps of impact. The Change Team is comprised of ~17 leaders from all levels of the organization's staff and was formed with guidance from the United Way's Racial Equity Learning Cohort in which Heart program leaders participated. Change Team meetings have resulted in many of the specific areas of impact mentioned above, and this document is reflective of conversations and themes emerging from Change Team meetings.
- DEI-focused targets are woven into the quarterly and annual goals of Heart's strategic plan around which HMT's entire staff and board organize, spanning from staff/tutor/board recruitment goals to student outcomes, professional development targets, and more.
- Heart's Board of Directors hears a report on DEI and culture efforts from the Executive Director at each board meeting and is committed to making resources available to support DEI at Heart.

We will share our reflections throughout ([example here](#)), and we invite you to join us in action in the meantime, as we leverage DEI efforts to ensure all elementary students develop the strong foundation in math and enthusiasm for academics needed for long-term success.