



## **Racial Equity Position Statement**

### **A Position Statement of the Wisconsin Mathematics Council**

*This is a position statement addressing racial equity in mathematics education in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Mathematics Council believes that inequitable educational practices have contributed to a race-based, deficit narrative around students of color that are not acceptable. More specifically, the mathematical outcomes in the state of Wisconsin show us there is an educational debt ([Ladson-Billings, 2006](#)). Our systems/policies must change to meet the needs of each and every student. We are math educators in Wisconsin and we understand a myth exists that schooling is an equalizer for all scholars. As an organization, we are making a statement that is long overdue to acknowledge the continuous harm inflicted upon Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other children of color in our math classrooms. Historically and currently in mathematics, we have maintained deficit views of our Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other scholars of color. We do believe it is important to acknowledge the Anti-Blackness and other forms of race-based discrimination sentiments ingrained in our society and educational systems and how these sentiments are indicative of how we treat and educate all scholars of color.*

*From early elementary through higher education race-based inequitable teaching practices and procedures are especially harmful in mathematics education. When we mention procedures, we are referring to how we assess, track, place and assign status to students in mathematics classrooms across all grade levels. We limit access to cognitively demanding math courses, seek to remediate content and underestimate the math abilities of our Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other scholars of color (Martin, 2019). Mathematics and other math-intensive courses are some of the most tracked content areas in a scholars' higher education. Often, success in math defines who is deemed intelligent and who is not in the classroom. Mathematics should not be a gatekeeper content area but rather open to each and every student. TODOS has stated "We are mathematics educators. We cannot look away or claim a privileged stance because we might prefer to believe mathematics is a culturally or politically neutral subject. All levels of teaching mathematics are imbued with the same racism and violence that permeates all schooling. "*

*WMC is committed to interrogating these systems in order to help abolish harmful systems and practices while also highlighting successes across our state at all levels of education. We seek to help Wisconsin mathematics classrooms to be a place for each and every scholar to succeed and show their brilliance.*

**Important Terms:**

**Scholar** is used rather than student because we want to highlight our students as intellectuals and active in their education.

**Anti-Blackness:** *The Council for Democratizing Education defines anti-Blackness as being a two-part formation that both voids Blackness of value, while systematically marginalizing Black people and their issues. The first form of anti-Blackness is overt racism. Beneath this anti-Black racism is the covert structural and systemic racism which categorically predetermines the socioeconomic status of Blacks in this country. The structure is held in place by anti-Black policies, institutions, and ideologies. (The Movement for Black Lives).*

[Anti-Blackness in mathematics](#) can include “diagnosis of deficits, intervention, remediation, and repair rather than taken-for-granted assumptions about their brilliance” (Gholson, Bullock, and Alexander 2012; Leonard and Martin 2013; Martin, 2012).

**Educational Debt:** *“The achievement gap is one of the most talked-about issues in U.S. education. The term refers to the disparities in standardized test scores between Black and White, Latina/o and White, and recent immigrant and White students. This article argues that a focus on the gap is misplaced. Instead, we need to look at the “education debt” that has accumulated over time. This debt comprises historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components.” (Ladson-Billings, 2006)*

*An example of the educational debt of mathematics education are the issues that occur when we continuously seek to remediate content, focus on “basic skills” and track students of color at a disproportionate rate to white students.*

**Gatekeeper Content Area:** *Mathematics is a highly tracked content area that limits access to students' ability to take high-level courses and in turn has effects on their ability to find success in higher education and in society. “ So Algebra, once solely in place as the gatekeeper for higher math and the priesthood who gained access to it, now is the gatekeeper for citizenship; and people who do not have it are like the people who could not read and write in the industrial age. But because of how access to - the learning of- algebra was organized in the industrial era, its place in society under the old jurisdiction, it has become not a barrier to college anymore but a barrier to citizenship (Moses and Cobb, 2001)*

## Narrative

*“Instead of shying away from the political nature of mathematics and mathematics education, we instead assert a need to understand their dynamic, political, historical, relational, and cultural interplay.”*

-Rochelle Gutiérrez (2013)

Our scholars deserve to be seen and appreciated for who they are, and deserve the chance to flourish in reimagined math classrooms across the state. Our classrooms are places where students can engage in challenging mathematics, to learn in community, but also be honored for the genius they already possess. We are constantly faced with data that speaks to the deficits in students, yet we must examine how we engage in deficit practices within math education. No one can do this work alone; it is through relationships and community that we can create joyful mathematics spaces.

Our scholars enter classrooms with many mathematical experiences. Yet, at times these mathematical experiences are not always honored or valued. As we look at the events within our country, it has been reaffirmed the necessity to state unequivocally that Black lives matter. We have reached a crossroads where we must be honest about the state of mathematics education for scholars in Wisconsin. Math educators must make a concerted effort to reassess how we engage our Black, Indigenous, Latinx and scholars of color in the learning of mathematics. Mathematics has been and is currently used as a gatekeeper content area that denies access to or delays future coursework and/or careers. Ability grouping and tracking has had adverse impacts and are failing to prepare our scholars for later in life. We must reflect and admit that what we have been doing has not worked for our Black, Latinx, Indigenous and scholars of color. As an organization we support the vision statement [“The Mo\(ve\)ment to Prioritize Anti-Racist Mathematics: Planning for This and Every School Year,”](#) which provides powerful actions to improve learning for each and every scholar in our state.

*In 8th grade all the students in my class were put into 8th grade Algebra. It was confusing and the teachers expected us to have the understanding we needed for the course but most of us didn't. I was getting a D most of the year and not understanding. The following year I was in Algebra again as a freshman because anyone who received a D or F needed to retake Algebra. My freshman classes were mostly scholars of color. Myself and most of my close friends are black and we were all in Algebra while the Geometry classrooms were mostly white scholars. I always liked and understood mathematics before 8th grade but my confidence went way down that school year.*

Paraphrased from Wisconsin High School scholar

This statement is an example of harm inflicted upon scholars and shows the impact educators have on these scholars' mathematical identities. We have a tremendous responsibility to the scholars who walk through our doors to help them see themselves as mathematicians. As we take the difficult look at how we have failed our Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other scholars of color, we can begin to construct better systems for all scholars. When we address marginalized groups in mathematics, we typically look at how they differ from white scholars. Our way forward is to put at the center those scholars that the mathematics educational system has failed and not valued. We must focus on students' brilliance instead of on tracking, remediation and how to "repair deficits" (Martin, 2019). We seek the outcome of every scholar in our state having a positive mathematical identity and agency in the math classroom.

*"It's not until we go to school that we're taught that we're no longer mathematical. Everybody, humans and actually living beings are mathematical. "*

-Rochelle Gutiérrez

*"The student came to us in the office and would not talk with anyone. He is usually very friendly and easy to start a conversation with. After checking in a few times, he finally opened up. He was in the office because he wouldn't go to Algebra. He said that he had that teacher before and that she was racist. When asked for examples, he said that she only disciplined black kids and would not call out white kids for the same actions. He said he did not feel respected in her room."*

Assistant Principal from a Wisconsin high school

Our Black, Indigenous, Latinx and scholars of color are often hypervisible for all the wrong reasons. For example, a student's behavior is highly scrutinized. For instance, how they dress, speak or act in the classroom determines their perceived academic abilities. As outlined in Noguera (2008), Black students are evaluated and subjected to negative consequences in comparison to their peers. As hypervisible as our Black, Indigenous, Latinx and scholars of color are, they are often invisible in the recognition they receive for academic successes, especially in mathematics. It is vital that we highlight the thinking and work of our Black, Indigenous, Latinx and scholars of color within the math classroom. We must create spaces where our Black, Indigenous, Latinx and scholars of color feel safe and brave to share their thinking, and to help break down stereotypes our scholars hold. All scholars deserve to be enriched by Black, Indigenous, Latinx, scholars of color, and other mathematical examples of brilliance and joy.

It is imperative to understand the different intersectionalities within equity and we will honor them in the future. We acknowledge we are in a moment in which we must make a statement regarding racial equity within our state. As we move forward with future statements in this regard, we must be aware and understand the intersectionality of how we teach mathematics and who is learning mathematics. It is vital to constantly seek to transform our teaching practices and systems policies for our Black, Indigenous, Latinx and scholars of color. It is also vital that our scholars become racially conscious so as to not perpetuate systemic harm.

Wisconsin Mathematics Council (WMC) has created specific action steps for mathematics education partners in Wisconsin. We will work to provide guidance around these action steps and highlight schools and districts that are successfully implementing these action steps across our state. As we grow and learn, we must be willing to dig deep into these action steps and apply new knowledge to engage in anti-racist teaching practices. This work is overwhelming and uncomfortable, however, we can transform mathematics education in Wisconsin through our collective work to address the systemic inequity present in mathematics education. Abolishing harmful structures is difficult work and it is important to find support in colleagues. We must work together regardless of the position we hold and the location we educate scholars. Our scholars deserve to be seen and appreciated for who they are, and also deserve the chance to flourish in reimagined math classrooms across the state.