

Spring 2021, Volume 1, Issue 1



The Journal of Peer Tutoring in Secondary Schools

The Journal of the Secondary School Writing Centers Association

The Journal of Peer Tutoring in Secondary Schools



Volume 1 • Issue 1

Spring 2021

Secondary School Writing Centers are Sites of Social Justice Work: A Preamble to SSWCA's Inclusivity Statement

Kate Hutton, *Herndon High School (VA)*

Follow this and additional works at <https://sswca.org/journal/>
Part of the Secondary School Writing Centers Association

Recommended Citation

"Secondary School Writing Centers are Sites of Social Justice Work: A Preamble to SSWCA's Inclusivity Statement" *The Journal of Peer Tutoring in Secondary Schools*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2021, <http://sswca.org/journal/1-1/>.

This article is brought to you for free and open access by The Secondary School Writing Centers Association. It has been accepted for inclusion in the JPTSS by authorized peer reviewers and copyeditors. For more information, please contact jpts.editor@gmail.com.

© JPTSS & Authors.



Secondary School Writing Centers are Sites of Social Justice Work: A Preamble to SSWCA's Inclusivity Statement

Kate Hutton, *Herndon High School (VA)*

In the summer of 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement gained significant traction, state legislatures introduced laws that restricted the rights of trans youth, and the world grappled with questions of equity in and access to education amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It became clear to us, the members of the Secondary School Writing Centers Association (SSWCA) Board, that our organization needed to clearly articulate our position on the characteristics of inclusive peer-led tutoring centers and the importance of creating them. As the Immediate Past President of SSWCA, I felt particularly compelled to ensure that, as the secondary school writing and peer tutoring center movement grows, we pause and reflect on what we value most in our centers and what the larger purpose of our centers and our organization is.

My own interest in writing center work grew out of my belief that being an educator is inherently intertwined with social justice work. For much of the last decade that I have directed my school's center, I believed that our very existence was an act of advocacy for student voices and student-centered learning opportunities. Our center did so much early on to position itself as a welcoming space: we recruited tutors who spoke Spanish so that our English Language Learners would feel comfortable in our center; we partnered with English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers to work with their students on specific writing assignments; we hosted school-wide writing events that encouraged students to find joy in writing; we created a Courage Wall, which invited students to share their hopes on a giant chalkboard outside of our center.

However, as I found myself feeling deeply inspired by the ways in which young people were taking charge and leading our national conversations about much-needed change, I also began to reflect on whether or not our center was really the inclusive space I thought it was. When I looked at our tutoring data more carefully, I realized that our tutees overwhelmingly came from our Honors and AP courses, that our tutors also came from predominantly Honors and AP courses, and that, despite our school being one of the most racially and economically diverse in our district, our tutoring staff did not reflect our school's diversity.

Beginning in late summer 2020, with support from the SSWCA Board, the SSWCA president Renee Brown and I began crafting this inclusivity statement. Our goal was to ensure that SSWCA's first position statement explicitly recognized all underrepresented and underserved groups. Over the past year, this statement has been revised and polished by several members of the SSWCA Board, who contributed insight and invaluable perspective as we prepared this statement for publication.

Our intent with this statement is to establish SSWCA's position on writing and peer tutoring centers as inclusive spaces. The statement begins with our explicit position and then offers directors and tutors a series of questions for reflection about their center's current positions and practices and how they might evolve. In the future, SSWCA plans to offer resources for further reading from within the writing center community and beyond. Moving forward, we also intend to treat this statement as a living document that we will revise as we continue to grow and learn.

I am very grateful to the members of the 2020–2021 SSWCA Board, who provided suggestions for revision and offered resources to crafting this statement over the course of the past year.

In solidarity,
Kate Hutton, SSWCA Immediate Past President
Herndon High School, VA

Kate Hutton is the Immediate Past President of the Secondary School Writing Centers Association (SSWCA). She has codirected the Herndon Writing Center in Fairfax County, Virginia, since 2012. She cofounded the Capital Area Peer Tutoring Association (CAPTA), and as SSWCA President, she led the organization's transition into a national network and affiliate of the International Writing Centers Association. She has presented on writing center work at the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), has published pieces on the Writing Lab Newsletter Journal (WLN) blog, and has led professional development on peer-centered writing instruction in Fairfax County Public Schools. She believes in the power of writing centers to transform school communities and the world.