



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: County of Henrico
Program Title: Black History Month Poetry Slam
Program Category: Regional Collaboration

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Program Overview

Students now, more than ever, require the ability to see themselves reflected in their learning environments, as well as the ability to appreciate other points of view. Seeing the world from one's point of view and someone else's allows us to perceive the world in three dimensions. The Henrico County Public Schools Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity is working to ensure this occurs for all students at the school division level, encouraging school-based efforts. As part of its Cultural Heritage Series, the Office, in collaboration with the Henrico County NAACP and Too Smart 2 Start, hosted its first annual Black History Month Poetry Slam. The theme was "I Have a Dream, Too." Middle and high school students submitted poems and were selected to perform original poems, addressing such themes as Black joy, the current social, intellectual and cultural identities of African Americans, Black identity, resilience, struggle, professionalism, academia and activism.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

The Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity recognized the need for student voice, choice and expression to foster belonging, agency and self-efficacy. As recognized by inclusive education methods, students, educators and the larger community require a cultural understanding of themselves and others to succeed in school. Inclusive education recognizes the need to empower students, faculty and members of the larger community to participate in their learning. Still, it is also critical to promote, inform, direct and cultivate learning opportunities. One way HCPS accomplishes this is by promoting heritage and history months, helping people learn about other viewpoints, distributing a newsletter and supporting the provision of insightful and exciting programming. The Black History Month Poetry Slam was designed using this framework.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

The Cultural Heritage Series has connected Henrico County Public Schools stakeholders with noteworthy, authentic cultural opportunities. The Black History Month Poetry Slam offered students the opportunity to share their thoughts, their voices and their power through artistic written expression. Students were able to meet students from other schools with shared interests and they supported each other in their performances. Schools were proud to celebrate with their student representatives and overall, the community was happy to hear young people's thoughts. The Black History Poetry Slam created space for students to hear and see themselves and each other.

How Program Was Carried Out

In December 2023, the Black History Poetry Slam competition was announced to middle and high school principals, teachers and students, requesting submissions. The Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity received more than 40 submissions. Poems were screened and selected by HCPS Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity representatives, the Henrico NAACP and Too Smart 2 Start. Nine students were selected to perform their poems in the competition. They were notified in January. Students whose submissions were not selected were offered the opportunity to assist as hospitality hosts and backstage crew for the Slam. The selected poets attended poetry workshops in January and early February, facilitated by an HCPS AP English teacher, in which they were given help fine-tuning their poems and learned the art of their delivery and stage performance. Students attended a mandatory practice prior to the event. Over the two-and-a-half months, students developed friendships and opportunities to connect with participants from other schools with a shared interest in poetry.

On the night of the Black History Poetry Slam event, participants supported and encouraged each other. Although they knew that some performance standouts would be recognized, they also understood that they were contributing, collectively, to a greater purpose. The Poetry Slam was held at the newly remodeled Oak Avenue Complex, which occupies the former Highland Springs High School building. The Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity collaborated with HCPS' visual arts program to decorate the event entrance with artwork from the HCPS annual Black History Arts Show. The Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity asked that the fine arts program provide entertainment for the event. A student soloist graced the stage with "Lift Every Voice and Sing" to open the show. The Poetry Slam included a slideshow with music, videos produced by HCPS students and artwork celebrating Black History Month. Judges were selected to represent the event's three organizing groups. Judges were provided with a rubric and a copy of each performer's piece, which they used to score the participants. Organizers acknowledged all nine participants' outstanding work and presented the highest scoring participants with awards:

- **The Langston Hughes Recognition for Rhythm and Flow** was presented to one middle school and one high school poet who demonstrated exceptional delivery and stage presence.
- **The Maya Angelou Recognition for Voice and Activism** was presented to one middle school and one high school poet who demonstrated exceptional content and depth.
- **The Amanda Gorman Recognition for Change/Best Overall Performance** was presented to the top scorer — essentially the poet whose piece and performance stood above the rest.

Students received golden microphone trophies for the recognition and the school attended by the winner of the Amanda Gorman Recognition received a trophy to display in its front office. The trophy will be held until the following year's Slam competition, when a new poet and school will

have a chance to win the trophy. All student participants received a certificate and a small token of appreciation.

Refreshments were provided at the end of the event and informational tables were opened for attendees to visit and learn more about the Henrico NAACP and Too Smart 2 Start programs. The HCPS Division of Communications was asked to capture the event on video (see enclosed video link in Section 9 of this document). The Black History Month Poetry Slam will be an annual event to celebrate the contributions of Black figures through students' voices.

Financing and Staffing

The development and implementation of the Black History Poetry Slam event involved capital and operating costs, reflecting a commitment to excellence and inclusivity. The primary resource was the expertise of a school division staff specialist, who dedicated months to meticulously plan and organize the event. This professional ensured the alignment of the program with the goals of HCPS' Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity. The event costs approximately \$700, which is used for various elements essential for its success.

The HCPS Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity hosted the event at the newly remodeled Oak Avenue Complex, a new HCPS-owned community hub open for public use. The event was free and open to the public. Refreshments were provided on behalf of Too Smart 2 Start. Organizers provided tokens of appreciation for the students, which included certificates, swag items and trophies. The Office also compensated the poetry workshop facilitator/host for her work. Snacks and writing supplies were provided for students during the poetry workshops. Janitorial services were compensated for the night of the Poetry Slam and the date of the workshops and practice.

Program Results

The Black History Month Poetry Slam enabled students, faculty, staff, families and community members to interact directly with current, real-life notable figures who provide authentic presentations of their represented heritage, thereby combating stereotypes or inauthentic depictions of their cultures. It provided students a platform to be heard, organically and celebrated by their peers, families and community. The free event was well-received, and several community attendees requested that the event continue the following year. Student participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate and parents expressed surprise at seeing their children perform on stage for the first time. HCPS School Board representatives bestowed words of encouragement on the students as well.

Brief Summary

The Black History Month Poetry Slam provided a vital platform for middle and high school students to express their thoughts and emotions on themes such as cultural empowerment, identity and activism through original poetry. By involving students in poetry workshops and a live performance, the program fostered a sense of community, belonging, and mutual support among participants from different schools. The event, held at the newly remodeled Oak Avenue Complex, showcased not only the students' talents but also highlighted how the school division's infrastructure is able to promote valuable programs from the EDO office, as well as others.

The Poetry Slam exemplifies the commitment of HCPS to promoting equity, diversity, and opportunity in education. By empowering students to share their voices and perspectives, the program addressed the critical need for inclusive educational practices that reflect and respect diverse cultural backgrounds. The enthusiastic reception from students, families, and community members, along with the encouragement from Henrico School Board representatives, underscores the event's positive impact. The Poetry Slam successfully created an inclusive space

for authentic cultural exchange and will continue to be an annual community celebration, reinforcing the significance of student voice and cultural understanding in the broader educational landscape.

Black History Month Poetry Slam Supplemental Material

The video of the event is here: [Black History Month Poetry Slam 2023](#). The Equity and Diversity website address is <https://henricoschools.us/equity-and-diversity/>. The YouTube channel is [Equity, Diversity and Opportunity YouTube Channel](#). The flyer is below.

