

HALIFAX REGIONAL SCHOOL BOARD

Improving the Achievement Results of African Nova Scotian Learners

PURPOSE: To provide the Governing Board with a report outlining how the Halifax Regional School Board is working to improve the achievement results of African Nova Scotian students.

BACKGROUND: On May 28, 2014, the Governing Board received report *14-05-1470 “Focus on Learning: Grade 3 and 6 Provincial Assessment Report”* for information. This report provided an overview of Grade 3 and Grade 6 literacy results.

Thanks to students and their families completing self-identification information, for the first time, the HRSB was able to disaggregate or “pull apart” data by ancestry and report on the achievement results of African Nova Scotian students.

At its regular Board meeting on September 24, 2014, the Governing Board approved the following motion:

*“WHEREAS the Governing Board received data from the Provincial Assessment results in May 2014 that assisted in highlighting challenges experienced by many African Nova Scotian learners;
WHEREAS the African Nova Scotian community has expressed concerns about these challenges for a number of years;
WHEREAS we have an opportunity to use data to better address the needs of African Nova Scotian learners;
I move that the Governing Board request a staff report by the November Regular Board Meeting to outline how the Halifax Regional School Board is responding to needs of African Nova Scotian students as highlighted in the Provincial Assessment results.” (Daye/Jakeman)*

CONTENT: The Halifax Regional School Board has been focused on the achievement of *every student* for many years. Although the ability to report with confidence the achievement results for African Nova Scotian students is new, directing resources to support African Nova Scotian students is not new. Appendix A briefly describes supports currently in place for African Nova Scotian students. Many of these have been grown and developed over a number of years, while others are new. A brief description of each item is included in order to illustrate the current focus of each support.

COST: within existing budget

FUNDING: N/A

TIMELINE: N/A

APPENDICES: Appendix A

RECOMMENDATIONS: That the Governing Board accept this report for information.

COMMUNICATIONS:

AUDIENCE	RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE
Governing Board	Elwin LeRoux, Superintendent	November 26, 2014
Website	Doug Hadley	November 26, 2014

From: Elwin LeRoux, Superintendent, eleroux@hrsb.ca, (902) 464-2000 ext. 2312

Appendix A

Improving the Achievement Results of African Nova Scotian Learners



Make the achievement of African Nova Scotian students a priority

Following the identification of an achievement gap between our African Nova Scotian students and their peers, the Superintendent established this as a system priority. Senior Staff and the Continuous School Improvement (CSI) Lead Team set goals aligned with this priority. This leads to priority actions, many of which are included herein.



Focus Superintendent's meetings on the achievement of African Nova Scotian students

The focus of the Superintendent's meetings with principals this year, beginning with the August opening session, is on improving achievement results of African Nova Scotian students. A core team, including School Administration and Program staff, has provided leadership in planning these meetings. The outcomes for the Superintendent's Meetings focus on historical context, culture, belief systems and culturally relevant pedagogy.

Mr. Robert Upshaw, Executive Director of the Black Educators Association, facilitated the October 30 session, sharing insights and experiences as a strategy to explore historical context, culture and belief systems. The session had a positive impact on participants.

"The session was truly inspiring, Robert is a great speaker/teacher/educational leader, the historical context was great to put everything in context, the resources presented will be great, the ability to start to re-think about what we do every day and how it affects student achievement is the biggest take-away and that teachers are models, again 'always pushing' the envelope and having those courageous conversations- are we doing all that we can for all the students we see every day..."

Future sessions will focus on culturally relevant pedagogy and will be facilitated by both local and international experts in this field.



Reassignment of staff

There are many things that make a positive difference in student achievement. Most important are classroom instruction and instructional leadership. To expand the current resources and supports available in HRSB, the Superintendent has temporarily reassigned Wendy Mackey from her position as a School Administration Supervisor. Wendy will work collaboratively with central office staff and school-based staff to positively impact classroom instruction. Her recent Master's degree and experience teaching at St. FX University assure a focus on culturally relevant pedagogy and instructional leadership to enhance the

achievement of African Nova Scotian learners. This work will complement and enhance the efforts of current central office staff.

Ongoing work with administrators on Cultural Proficiency

Cultural Proficiency has been an agenda item on each Family of Schools meeting for the past several years. Our goal has been to increase the understanding of cultural proficiency and develop a critical lens for school leaders. The book, *The Cultural Proficiency Journey: Moving Beyond Ethical Barriers Toward Profound School Change*, has been a foundation text for discussions. The same professional development was provided to vice-principals at their Family of Schools meetings. As a result of this learning, principals have been engaging in conversations and activities with their staff to broaden teachers' understanding of cultural proficiency. Each session with principals has built on the previous learning in the area of cultural proficiency and has provided principals with guided activities they can use with their staff to engage in the same learning and thought provoking conversations to examine belief systems and expectations. This year, based on the foundation of learning we have set in understanding the diversity and culture of the students we serve, we will move to a focus on providing leadership to culturally responsive instruction and assessment.

Ongoing efforts to promote student self-identification

Each year, School Administration Supervisors have discussions with individual principals regarding their success to date and strategies for increased student self-identification. In Family of Schools and Unit Meetings, self-identification continued as an item on each agenda. Principals are given the opportunity to view their current school data in relation to other schools as well as an opportunity to share strategies for encouraging self-identification. Collectively, principals are invited to maximize upcoming opportunities to increase self-identification, including Primary Orientation, Late Registration and Student Verification Forms (at the beginning of the school year), parent-Teacher Nights, and personal follow-up with parents/ guardians. Our aim is to have 100% of students in our schools self-identified in order to support programming decisions and student learning. Self-identification will also assist us in determining the allocation of resources and personnel to best support the achievement of all students. We are encouraging all parents and students to identify their Ancestry and Aboriginal Identity.

Hiring decisions to promote African Nova Scotian administrators

School Administration reviews the list of candidates who express an interest for administrative positions or the Leadership Development Program. When candidates have self-identified, the Director/ Coordinator weigh that in making selection decisions for positions as a means by which we support the promotion of African Nova Scotian administrators prior to making recommendations to the Superintendent. School Administration encourages current principals in our system to self-identify and support

candidates of African descent who show leadership qualities that we wish to promote in accordance with *Policy D.003 Recruitment and Selection of Principals and Vice-Principals* and *Policy D.004 Recruiting and Hiring Staff*. School Administration believes that the promotion of candidates of African descent will provide role models for students and staff that reflect our Board's diverse population and ultimately impact student learning.

Efforts to recruit and retain African Nova Scotian teachers

Human Resources (HR) successfully recruited applicants for the number of contracts allowed (16) in the collective agreement under the employment equity provision. Of the 16 contracts awarded, nine applicants self-identified as African Nova Scotian, four self-identified as Aboriginal and three self-identified as racially visible.

Over the past year, HR has participated in a number of events and initiatives to work towards hiring a more diverse staff. HRSB has also developed partnerships with community organizations like Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services and the Watershed Association Development Enterprise (Preston area community development). These partnerships allow HR to work with organizations in attracting staff from various cultural backgrounds. There have also been job fair opportunities with these groups, which have been valuable in making community connections.

Continuity in Schools

Relationships are important. This is especially true between teachers, students and their families. Strong positive relationships assure a foundation of caring and trust, which are particularly important when working to improve achievement results. While not absolute, continuous staffing changes at a school can have a negative impact in this regard. Strategic use of the staffing provisions in the Teacher's Regional Collective Agreement can increase continuity in schools.

HR continues to promote the use of "Article 10.04" whereby up to 38 positions can be targeted for the purpose of diversity and schools who meet the definition of "high needs" under the NSTU Regional Collective Agreement. This provision allows the principal to select a qualified, permanent teacher for a posted position without consideration of seniority. The teacher must commit to remain at the school for a minimum of three years providing greater continuity and stability for the school.

 Recent advances in the collective agreement include the ability to recall a term teacher to a vice-principal relief position for the following year, to a maximum of 25 schools. In addition, if an "Article 10.04" position noted above does not get filled by a permanent teacher, the principal can rehire the term teacher for the following year. These changes provide greater stability for schools, often in areas of high turnover.

Continued priority to applicants who self-identify for educational leaves

Under the Teacher's Provincial Collective Agreement, teachers can apply for an "educational leave" to pursue their studies full time. Each year, the HRSB must identify program areas that will be given priority by the Professional Development Committee in selecting a limited number of successful applicants. The HRSB has identified Diversity as a program priority and applicants who self-identify are also given priority.

Developing a partnership with the BEA to support new African Nova Scotian teachers



HR and the BEA have met to discuss opportunities to partner together to support the hiring and retention of African Nova Scotian teachers. The new African Nova Scotian teachers who were awarded a contract this year were invited to attend a session on October 30, 2014 hosted jointly by HR and the BEA. The session was intended to be an informal discussion and sharing of ideas of how we can support new African Nova Scotian teachers.

Aboriginal and African Nova Scotian Teachers Task Force



The HRSB led the creation of a provincial Task Force to make recommendations regarding the recruitment and retention of African Nova Scotian and Aboriginal teachers. The committee included representation from a number of school boards, community partners and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD). The final meeting was held on September 19, 2014 and the recommendations are now being finalized. It is expected the recommendations will be communicated to all stakeholders who participated on the Task Force by the end of December, 2014.

African Nova Scotian Student Support Workers

Seventeen African Nova Scotian Student Support Workers provide targeted support to students in our schools. Primarily they provide support to students in junior high and high schools. Support sometimes extends to elementary schools as needed.

The Student Support Worker Program continues to be acknowledged by students, families and staff as being a very significant and effective support for students.

Provincial targeted grant funding for literacy and mathematics

African Nova Scotian Student Literacy and Mathematics Projects will support 16 schools this year – seven elementary, six junior high, three P-9 and one senior high. A combination of tutors and substitute teachers will deliver individual and small group instruction in collaboration with administration and classroom teachers.

Provincial Racial Equity Policy implementation

Last May, new teachers (1-5 years experience) received a professional development session on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Anti-racist Education and their relationship to the Board's RCH in Learning Policy and the EECD's Racial Equity policies. Participants were provided with three relevant resources.

New teachers also received a professional development session on Connecting Curriculum and Classroom Practice Using a Cultural Lens and Using a Critical Eye When Reviewing/previewing Curriculum and Resource Materials. These professional development sessions will also be delivered to teachers who are new to HRSB this year.

In September, African Nova Scotian Student Support Workers received professional development on the topic of Understanding Cultural Proficiency, Cultural Relevancy and the Anti-Racist Education. Participants were provided with a relevant resource.

Professional development opportunities are provided to other teachers as well. These include sessions on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Anti-racist Education and their relationship to the Board's RCH In Learning Policy and the EECD's Racial Equity policies, Bias Evaluation Instrument and its use to identify examples of bias that may be found in curriculum/resource materials.

Individual schools will receive professional learning opportunities that will increase their knowledge of the principles of cultural proficiency with emphasis on culturally relevant pedagogy and what it looks like in their classrooms and schools.

Updating the Continuous School Improvement (CSI) school self-assessment



In September 2014, the CSI school self-assessment was revised. At the elementary and junior high levels, this revision included explicitly worded questions for teacher reflection with respect to the cultural relevancy of their instruction and assessment practices. These reflective questions provide schools with the opportunity to develop and implement instructional strategies to support their mathematics and literacy goals in the area of culturally relevant pedagogy. The high school self-assessment also underwent revision. Within this document, cultural proficiency and culturally relevant teaching are clearly defined and six questions for teacher reflection were developed. The resulting information will inform schools' CSI plans.

Continued efforts to analyze assessment data by ancestry

In June 2014, Grade 8 students took part in the RWM8 (reading, writing, mathematics) provincial assessment. The analysis of this data by ancestry is ongoing, both at the board and individual school level. Research and Data Consultants are also in the process of

analyzing the 2013-14 Grade 4 math data and two years of Grades 6 and 8 math data (by ancestry).

Continued funding for Early Learning Opportunities programs

HRSB has continued to fund five elementary schools to support Early Learning Opportunities programs (from supplementary funding). These programs, for 3 and 4 year olds, are in communities where there are significant numbers of African Nova Scotian students (Nelson Whynder, Joseph Howe, Rockingstone, South Woodside and Harbour View).

Strategically locating SchoolsPlus in identified schools

SchoolsPlus sites have been expanded within the HRSB to now include the Cole Harbour and Sackville High families of schools.

Targeted support to students who did not meet expectations (Grade 3 literacy results)



As a part of this support, schools with high populations of African Nova Scotian students, who did not meet expectations on the Grade 3 assessment, will be receiving additional support from an Early Literacy Support teacher. This Early Literacy Support teacher will provide direct instruction to these Grade 4 students who did not meet expectation of last year's Provincial Grade 3 Reading and Writing assessment. The students' progress will be tracked.

A Literacy Coach was assigned to Nelson Whynder Elementary School



A literacy coach of African Ancestry with a strong understanding of early literacy acquisition, and who is skilled in culturally proficient practices, has been placed at Nelson Whynder Elementary School full time to support teachers and students for the 2014-15 school year. This teacher is a member of the EECD Cultural Proficiency lead team.

Professional Development for staff who support classroom instruction



Math and literacy coaches as well as board staff who support them from the Literacy, Mathematics, Assessment, Curriculum Implementation and CSI teams, will be engaging in professional development on cultural proficiency and culturally relevant instructional practices. This six part module is being facilitated by a provincial lead team including members from the province's African Nova Scotian Services and Mi'kmaq Services Divisions. This professional development began in October and will be completed in June. Along with attending the professional development, this group will also be reading and discussing the professional resource, "The Cultural Proficiency Journey" by Franklin Campbell Jones, Brenda Campbell Jones and Randall B. Lindsey. A session will also be provided to coaches and board

staff to review Dr. Noma LeMoine's work, as it relates to literacy learning for students of African descent.

Professional Development to Program Department Staff

NEW

Professional development sessions have been scheduled for all Program staff in relation to the board's strategic plan, specifically emphasizing the focus on improving student achievement through culturally responsive instruction and assessment (with an emphasis on improving student achievement for African Nova Scotian learners). This mirrors the professional development for principals being delivered through the Superintendent's Meetings.

Exploring best approach to analyze the details of IPP data

NEW

With support from EECD, we are currently investigating a process by which we will examine data about students who follow Individualized Program Plans and who have self-identified as African Nova Scotian.

Changing delivery model of coaching support

NEW

Literacy and Mathematics coaches are being assigned to schools not only based on teacher requests but also based on school/student need as determined by HRSB's CSI lead team.