

HALIFAX REGIONAL SCHOOL BOARD
Update on Improving 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.

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)

On November 26, 2015 the Governing Board received report 14-10-1491 “Improving the Achievement Results for African Nova Scotian Students” for information. This report outlined how the Halifax Regional School Board was working to improve the achievement results of African Nova Scotian students.

CONTENT: Appendix A provides an overview of continuing and new strategies to support the Superintendent’s priority to increase academic achievement results for students of African descent.

COST: N/A

FUNDING: N/A

TIMELINE: N/A

APPENDICES: Appendix A

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

COMMUNICATIONS:

AUDIENCE	RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE

From: For further information please contact Wendy Mackey, Senior Diversity Advisor, wmackey@hrsb.ca, 902-464-2000 ext. 2311

To: Senior Staff - December 08, 2015
Governing Board -December 16, 2015

Board Services Department

The Board Services Department was restructured to include a **Diversity Team**. This team brings together employees who have primary responsibilities in areas of diversity and inclusion. The Diversity team is led by a Senior Diversity Advisor. The Senior Diversity Advisor guides, supports and supervises the team focusing on the improvement of student achievement, provincial and municipal immigration strategies and community engagement. Members of the team include:

- Senior Diversity Advisor
- English as an Additional Language Consultant
- RCH Facilitator and African Nova Scotian Student Support
- RCH Facilitator and Mi'kmaq and Aboriginal Student Support

The work of the Diversity team will focus on building capacity throughout the system to create welcoming schools that are responsive to the needs of all students, valuing their culture, race, socioeconomic status, country of origin, and sexual orientation. This will be accomplished through the development and facilitation of professional learning for central office staff, school-based administrators and school staff. This work will encompass the principles of Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understanding and Human Rights (RCH) and strengthen the system's understanding and skills in the area of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understanding and Human Rights (RCH)

The RCH Facilitators roles have been expanded to provide support to schools in areas of RCH. When helping schools to problem solve and educate students and staff, RCH Facilitators are available to all school administrators.

African Nova Scotian Student Support Program

The work of African Nova Scotian Support Workers is guided by the RCH and African Nova Scotian Student Support Facilitator. The African Nova Scotian student support program continues to provide co-curricular opportunities for our students of African descent. For example, through strengthening partnerships with local, municipal and provincial departments, already during the 2015-2016 school year, African Nova Scotian High School and Junior High School Students have participated in two Leadership conferences, a Health Care career development conference, a conference to encourage African Nova Scotian Youth to get involved in Municipal Governance and a tour of Dalhousie University.

This year the African Nova Scotian support program has been expanded to include students in schools that are not serviced by one of the 17 African Nova Scotian Support workers.

Literacy and Mathematics Support

Extra support is being provided in literacy at the lower elementary level and literacy and math at the junior high level in 16 schools. These schools will receive 23 teaching days to provide one-on-one and small group instruction to students who have self-identified as being of African descent.

While this support is not new, this year the schools that will receive the support were strategically chosen because they have been identified as priority schools, or a junior high feeder school and they had a significant population of students who have self-identified as being of African descent.

Direct School Support

The Diversity team will provide continued support to school administrators and staff in the six schools that have implemented culturally relevant pedagogy during the 2014-2015 school year. One more school has been added to receive direct support for the 2015-2016 school year.

School Administration Department

Self-Identification

Increasing self-identification by students and families continues to be a focus for principals. Supervisors' work with school principals has resulted in 84.5% of HRSB students self-identifying. This is an increase of almost 1.9% since April, 2015. Ongoing discussions at principal and vice principal meetings, individual discussions between supervisors and principals, as well as, principals identifying an action plan specific to their school have contributed to this increase. Continued attention to ensuring all primary students and new students registering in the HRSB are aware of the need to self-identify will increase self-identification for all students.

School Administration Supervisors

School Administration Supervisors will participate in professional learning sessions with the Senior Diversity Advisor on culturally relevant instructional leadership. These sessions will build on their prior learning experiences to support school principals and vice principals in providing culturally relevant learning environments at their schools.

School Administration Supervisors continue to collaborate with the Senior Diversity Advisor to create professional development sessions for School Principals on cultural proficiency, culturally relevant pedagogy, and developing a deeper understanding of how to value students' cultures.

Program Department

Continue to analyze assessment data by ancestry

The analysis of the provincial student assessment data by ancestry is ongoing, both at the board and individual school level. Research and Data Consultants have analyzed the data from 2014-15 (Grades 3, 4, and 6) as well as any data recently received by the province. This analysis of data drives the work of the system in achieving our goal of improving achievement for African Nova Scotian students by letting us know where we are making improvements and the areas we need to focus on.

Continued funding for Early Learning Opportunities programs

HRSB continues to offer five elementary schools Early Learning Opportunities program. These programs, for 3 and 4 year olds, are in communities where there are significant numbers of African Nova Scotian students: North Preston, North End Halifax, North End Dartmouth, Spryfield, and South Woodside.

Administration of the Observation Survey

The Nova Scotia Action Plan includes Administering an Observation Survey of Early Literacy Assessment to all grade one students. As part of the training to administer the Observation survey, all Early Literacy teachers, Reading Recovery teachers and Resource teachers developed a deeper understanding of the importance of valuing students' *home language*, specifically that of African Nova Scotian students. The key messages teachers learned were:

1. How to incorporate the Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada For example: ensuring the administering of the survey took into account a) the backgrounds and prior experiences of students; and b) that the results should be interpreted in relation to a student's background, personal and social context, and learning experiences.
2. Every child has a home language that may influence the results in some tasks. Teachers were taught to note this and make adjustments so that students were not penalized due to language used. For example, when a student knew a word but pronounced it using his/her home language they were marked correct.

A Literacy Coach at Nelson Whynder Elementary School

The placement of a full time literacy coach at Nelson Whynder Elementary School to support teachers and students will continue for the 2015-16 school year. The selected teacher for this position is of African Ancestry and provides cultural relevant professional development to staff.

Professional Development for staff who support classroom instruction

Math and literacy coaches, as well as math support teachers, have engaged in professional development on culturally relevant pedagogy. During the school year 2014-15, all instructional coaches engaged in professional learning in cultural proficiency provided by the EECD. This year the professional development for coaches and support teachers, led by the board's Senior Diversity Advisor, builds on previous work to deepen their understanding of how to use students' cultures as the medium to begin instruction that makes curriculum meaningful to students' lives. Developing this capacity allows instructional coaches to support teachers to ensure they are instructing using a culturally relevant approach. This four part professional learning series will also build capacity among coaches to work in partnership with principals to support teacher learning.

Professional Development for Program Department Staff

Professional development sessions on culturally relevant pedagogy took place throughout the 2014-15 school year for all Program staff in relation to the Superintendent's priority of improving student achievement for African Nova Scotian students. Capacity has been built

within the Program teams to ensure these approaches are imbedded in the professional learning opportunities they develop and facilitate for teachers and administrators throughout HRSB.

Collaboration with Program Staff

Program staff regularly collaborates with the Senior Diversity Advisor to ensure professional learning sessions have a culturally relevant approach. This involves providing feedback and/or co-planning/facilitating PD as well as on-site support.

Monitoring African Nova Scotian Students on Individual Program Plans (IPPs)

Student Services staff participated in a review of students on IPPs. One of the findings of the review was that there is a large number of students who have self-identified as being of African descent on IPPs compared to other groups of students categorized by ancestry. The HRSB is committed to monitoring the number of African Nova Scotian students on IPPs and educating school administrators and teachers of the correct procedure and criteria required to place a student on an IPP to meet their individual learning needs.

Provincial criteria for the development of an Individual Program Plan (IPP) were released in June 2015. Program Planning Specialists continued to provide direct support to teachers, particularly resource and learning center teachers with respect to the Program Planning Process, and writing and reviewing Individual Program Plans. Prior to the opening of school, all principals received professional development and directives outlining these new criteria, in the context of the findings of the 2014-2015 IPP Review. During the month of September, new principals, as well as new resource and learning center teachers, received TIENET professional development inclusive of new provincial criteria and key messages around culturally responsive instruction.

Human Resources Department

Recruitment and Retention of African Nova Scotian Teachers

Through an Expression of Interest for equity candidates, Human Resources (HR) awarded the number of contracts allowed (16) in the NSTU collective agreement under the employment equity provision. Through this process nine African Nova Scotian teachers were awarded contracts. 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 (ISANS) and the Watershed Association Development Enterprise (WADE) and the YM/YWCA. These partnerships allow HR to work with organizations in attracting staff from various cultural backgrounds for the benefit of students.

Educational Study Leaves

Under the Teacher's Provincial Collective Agreement, teachers can apply for a full time "educational leave" to pursue studies to improve their practice. Each year, the HRSB must identify course criteria that will be given priority by the Professional Development Committee in selecting successful applicants for these leaves. The HRSB has identified

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as one of the priorities as well as applicants who self-identify as being of African descent are given priority.

Professional Learning for HR Staff

Through collaboration between the Director of Human Resources and the Senior Diversity Advisor, staff from the HR Department will participate in a professional learning session on Culturally Relevant Instructional practices and its alignment with the teacher evaluation tool. The session will also cover developing a deeper understanding of the skills of a culturally relevant teacher as it relates to staffing our priority schools, specifically those with higher populations of African Nova Scotian students.

Promoting Teaching as a Career for African Nova Scotian Students

Recommendations resulting from the Aboriginal and African Nova Scotian Teachers Task Force include various strategies to support recruitment and retention such as the promotion of teaching as a career to high school students before they enter university. HR participated in the HRSB Career Fair which saw over 1400 grade 9-12 students in attendance to explore career and post-secondary options.

Continuous School Improvement for Priority Schools

During the November Bus cluster professional development days, all School Administrators, Teachers and Student Support Workers received professional development in culturally relevant pedagogy from Dr. Kimberly McLeod, from Houston, Texas. Dr. MacLeod has been providing professional development for school-based administrators and board staff over the past year.