

Halifax Regional School Board

Update on 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. The results revealed an achievement gap between African Nova Scotian learners and their counterpart.

On November 26, 2014 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. Significant changes included the reassignment of staff to support central office staff and school administration in their ability to positively impact student achievement.

The Governing Board received report 2015-12-48 *“Update on Improving Achievement Results of African Nova Scotian Learns”* on December 16, 2015 This report provided an update on the strategies which Halifax Regional School Board’s implemented in support of increasing the academic achievement results for students of African ancestry.

Content

Improving the achievement results of African Nova Scotian learners is a collaborative inter-departmental priority. Over the year, departmental staff within Board Services, Program, Human Resources and School administration have continued to focus concerted effort on implementing initiatives and enacting practices which create a more equitable and responsible educational system for learners of African ancestry.

Board Services

The Diversity Team is comprised of a Senior Diversity Advisor, a Facilitator-RCH and African Nova Scotian Student Support, a Facilitator-RCH and Mi’kmaq/Aboriginal Student, a Consultant – English Second Language, two Culturally Relevant Specialists and 29 Student Support Workers. The mandate of the Diversity Team is to build the Halifax Regional School Board’s capacity to create welcoming schools that are responsive to the needs of all students. Diversity Team members provide executive advice to Senior Staff, develop and facilitate professional learning on culturally relevant practice for central office staff, school-based administrators and school staff and provide consultative leadership to school administration supervisors and principals on matters pertaining to Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understanding and Human Rights (RCH).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) as conceptualized by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings, is the framework that the HRSB is intentionally employing to promote the increased achievement of learners of African descent. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy “not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequalities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.469). This framework is instrumental in both highlighting the systemic causes of underachievement for students of African ancestry (i.e. racism, deficit belief systems) and the necessary changes needed for schools to cultivate school cultures which produce successfully achieving learners of African descent. Culturally relevant pedagogy asserts that the achievement of learners of African ancestry is non-negotiable. Student achievement must be expected with learning experiences designed to evoke and bridge the students’ knowledge with curriculum content. By adopting a culturally relevant pedagogy, the Halifax Regional School Board continues to affirm that the

heritage, identities and experiences of African Nova Scotian learners are vital to the achievement equation. As such, educational experiences must ensure that learners of African descent develop and maintain students' cultural competence. Finally, culturally relevant pedagogy recognizes that schools exist within a socio-economic and political context. Education must therefore prepare learners of African ancestry to be critical agents in transforming schools and their world.

Throughout 2015-2016 central office and school staff continued to analyze priorities utilizing a culturally relevant lens. In addition, 16 schools received focused professional development around implementing culturally relevant leadership and instructional practice.

Since September, 2016, the Diversity team has provided 249 teaching staff from 29 of the 34 proposed schools with professional development in area of culturally relevant pedagogy.

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

In 2015-2016 members of the Diversity Team continued to provide system leadership in the area of race relations, cross cultural understanding and human rights. Culturally relevant pedagogy was embedded within professional learning opportunities and was utilized as a means of assisting vice-principals and school liaisons in developing the competencies necessary to analyze the rights protected under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act and the Provincial School Code of Conduct. Sessions examined the fundamental beliefs which promote equity and inclusion and intentionally explored aspects of language, power, historical representation and social change. Emphasize was further placed on accurately responding to and recording events within the provincial online system. Since September 2016, a total of 207 individuals have participated in RCH professional development.

The Diversity Team was further instrumental in supporting school staff, school administration supervisors and principals in their ability to enact a culturally relevant approach to conflict resolution in ways that were historically informed, restorative of school-community relations and non-marginalizing and facilitative of Halifax Regional School Board's priority of increasing the achievement of African Nova Scotian students.

Reading and Mathematical Literacy

In keeping with our Board's priority of increasing the achievement of African Nova Scotian learners, additional literacy support has been provided to 16 schools to support instruction in the areas of reading and mathematics. Schools were selected because they had a high percentage of students of African ancestry. All students receiving support self-identified as African Nova Scotian, Black or of African descent. Each school received a total 30 teaching days to provide enhanced individual and small group support to learners of African ancestry. In total, 240 students received additional instruction including 160 students at the elementary level who received reading support and 80 students at the junior high level who received support in math. Success was reported across all schools as a result of the additional support provided.

During the 2016-2017 fiscal year, 13 schools received additional instructional days to support African Nova Scotian learners in the areas of reading or mathematics. Assessment and demographic data were utilized to select sites and provide schools with a total of 40 teaching days of enhanced learning. Schools were initially provided with 30 teaching days and were subsequently supplemented with an additional 10 days of support. Teachers received professional development in culturally relevant instruction. An update around the impact of this support will be provided following the conclusion of support.

African Nova Scotian Student Support Worker Program

As outlined in the African Nova Scotian Student Support Worker Guidelines, Standards, and Evaluation documents (2011), the African Nova Scotian Student Support Program is integral to supporting and monitoring the achievement of African Nova Scotian learners. As a result, program components continue to be aligned to ensure that the roles, responsibilities and activities strengthen staff members' abilities to promote achievement and support learners in areas of advocacy, cultural identity and home, school community relations. In particular, changes have been made to the referral and consent forms to better reflect the job competencies and support the goals outlined in HRSB's Business Plan Goals and Priorities. Staff members are scheduled to receive professional learning in culturally relevant pedagogy, documentation and advocacy for student learning.

Under the leadership of the Facilitator, RCH and African Nova Scotian Student Support, African Nova Scotian youth continue to participate in school and community based learning endeavors designed to enhance their awareness of educational opportunities and career options. School-based programming as implemented by student support workers provides valuable opportunities to build supportive relationships, cultural awareness and increased self-esteem towards

learning and achievement. Student support workers further provide guidance to school staff around matters of home, school and community relations.

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. Our research and Data consultants continue to analyze board and provincial data by ancestry. In addition to the provincial assessments at grades 3, 4, 6, 8, and 10, Reading Recovery and Early Literacy Support data are all disaggregated by ancestry. This analysis of data drives the work of the system. The analysis results indicates where we are making improvements and the areas we need to focus on in reaching our goal of improving achievement for African Nova Scotian students.

Professional Development to support the implementation of culturally relevant teaching practices

Culturally relevant pedagogy continues to be an integral part of all profession development (PD) planned and facilitated by the Program department. Professional development is provided to educators at all levels within our system.

In the spring, 2016, mathematics and literacy program staff facilitated a session for junior high principals in collaboration with the Senior Diversity Advisor. This session focused on supporting their African Nova Scotia learners. They were presented with the provincial grade 8 assessment (RWM8) data for their students disaggregated by African ancestry. This prompted conversations regarding the gap in achievement for these individual students. The session included effective instructional strategies and how to plan instruction and assessment responsive to students' background, culture and experience, as well as creating conditions for success when writing assessments, including the RWM8.

Program and School Administration staff met with high schools principals in October to assist them in understanding how to disaggregate their student assessment data by African Ancestry and Aboriginal Identity using Power School. This data will be further examined in future meetings to identify additional strategies to support students.

Program staff continue to collaborate with members of the Diversity Team to plan and deliver professional development for literacy and mathematics coaches with a focus on integrating culturally relevant pedagogy within our daily instructional and assessment practices. Coaches use their new learning to support teachers in implementing these approaches.

Mathematics coaches and mathematics support teachers received two full days of culturally relevant teaching professional development with a specific mathematics focus from Dr. Lisa Lunney Borden from St. Francis Xavier University. This session was built on the learning that began with members of the HRSB Diversity Team and extended to specifics within the context of mathematics.

The Program department continues to work with teachers to assist them in implementing culturally relevant practices. Teachers in priority schools received professional development in the spring related to effective assessment practices in mathematics which embedded Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.

In the spring of 2016, all grade 4-6 classroom teachers, resource teachers and elementary administrators attended PD to support the implementation of the new streamlined curriculum. This session had components dedicated to culturally relevant pedagogy with specific references to supporting African Nova Scotian and Aboriginal students.

In the fall of 2016, all P-3 classroom teachers, resource teachers and elementary administrators attended one day of professional development as part of the EECD P-3 Literacy Strategy. Both the HRSB Diversity Team and the provincial Diversity Team supported the development of the Culturally Relevant Pedagogy messages that were part of the provincial PD day for these teachers.

As part of the continued training in the administration of the *Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement*, teachers new to Reading Recovery, Early Literacy, and resource as well as all grade 1 classroom teachers attended professional development to strengthen their understanding of the importance of valuing students' *home language*, specifically that of African Nova Scotian students.

Program staff continue to develop their understanding of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy through conversations with the Diversity Team and focused reading. Staff also work to ensure PD opportunities build on teachers' understanding of meeting the needs of students through a culturally responsive approach.

Classroom resources to reflect and support our diverse student population

In collaboration with the HRSB Diversity Team, the Program department developed an oral language rubric to be used by primary teachers to assess students in the speaking and listening outcomes of the English Language Arts Curriculum. This rubric highlights the value of a student's home language and supports teacher understanding of how to build the bridge between home and school language. Program staff also developed rubrics and assessment tools to assess mathematical understanding at multiple points throughout the school year. These resources highlight that students have multiple ways of representing their understanding in mathematics.

The Program Department continues to focus on infusing school and classroom libraries with resources that reflect our diverse student population.

Student Success Planning with a focus on culturally relevant teaching practices

Program staff have made adjustments to the Student Success Planning (SSP) process to make culturally relevant teaching practices a focus. The SSP self-assessment was revised to include questions regarding teacher degree of implementation of culturally relevant teaching and assessment practices. The questions in the Getting to Great Survey in relation to culturally relevant pedagogy have been refined and the report generated from this survey has been reorganized so Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is highlighted. The information from this report is allowing schools to develop plans that outline strategies and professional development specific to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. In 2016, four priority schools developed SSP plans in which Culturally Relevant Pedagogy has been developed as a central focus in the plan.

Continued funding for Early Learning Opportunities programs

HRSB continues to offer the Early Learning Opportunities program in five elementary schools. This program, for 3 and 4 year olds, is located in communities where there are significant numbers of African Nova Scotian students: North Preston, North End Halifax, North End Dartmouth, Spryfield, and South Woodside. This program supports optimal early childhood development which is key to a strong start in school.

Continued monitoring of African Nova Scotian students on Individual Program Plans (IPPs)

The Program department continues to monitor the number of African Nova Scotian students who have IPPs. In response to disproportionate findings of students with IPPs, we reached out to families to help us learn more about their personal experiences with the Program Planning Process with the aim of making improvements to it.

In the winter of 2016, 59 parents/guardians were contacted whose children had IPPs that were found to be in need of more information when examined during the 2014-2015 provincial review. Individual interviews were held with 26 families across the system. Conversations were typically held in neighborhood coffee shops; some at the office of the Black Educators Association; others chose by phone. Families appreciated the opportunities to talk and to tell their individual stories.

Insights gleaned from the interviews with the families continue to be used to inform professional development and other learning opportunities for school staff to define and refine practices and procedures relative to the Program Planning Process.

Human Resources Department

Recruitment of African Nova Scotian Teachers

Through an Expression of Interest for equity candidates, Human Resources may award up to contracts (16) in the NSTU collective agreement under the employment equity provision. Through this process, priority will be given to qualified applicants who self-identify as African Nova Scotian (and Aboriginal) in an effort to increase African Nova-Scotian candidates within the teaching population. The job posting closed on February 22, 2017 and decisions regarding contracts will be made prior to May 1, 2017.

Over the past year, HR has participated in a number of events and initiatives to work towards hiring a more diverse staff. HRSB has maintained effective partnerships with community organizations like Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services (ISANS) and the Watershed Association Development Enterprise (WADE), the YM/YWCA and NSCC. These partnerships allow HR to work with organizations in attracting staff from various cultural backgrounds for the benefit of students.

Educational Study Leaves - Teacher's Provincial Collective Agreement

Teachers can apply for a full or part-time time "educational leave" to pursue studies to improve their practice. Each year, the HRSB must identify program areas that will be given priority by the Professional Development Committee in selecting successful applicants for educational leave. In an effort to further promote culturally responsive teaching

practices, the HRSB has identified “Culturally Relevant Pedagogy” as one of the program priorities. In addition, applicants who self-identify as African Nova Scotian are given priority.

School Administration Department

Self-Identification

Increasing self-identification by students and families is an ongoing focus for School Administration supervisors in their work to support principals. As a result of this dedication 91.9% of HRSB students have self-identified. This is a 7.4% increase since the *Update on Improving Achievement of African Nova Scotian Learners (December 16, 2015)*. Working with principals, supervisors will ensure continued attention is paid to having all new students self-identify during the registration process.

School Administration Supervisors

School Administration supervisors continue to engage in professional development to enrich their understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy to support their work with principals. Supervisors have scheduled a professional development session for new principals (March 30, 2017) on culturally relevant pedagogy. They continue to collaborate with the Diversity Team to support principals and schools in cultural proficiency, culturally relevant pedagogy, and developing a deeper understanding of how to ensure all students succeed in school.

Aspiring School Administrators

The Leadership Development Program (LDP) supports aspiring school leaders. The purpose of this program is to provide its participants with professional development that further develop and enhance their leadership skills as future vice principals/ principals. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is imbedded in many of the LDP sessions. All participants attended a full session dedicated to CRP on October 26, 2016.

Funding Details

N/A

Timeline

N/A.

Appendices

Recommendations

N/A.

Communications

N/A

AUDIENCE	RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE

Contact

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