

HALIFAX REGIONAL SCHOOL BOARD
**Response To *Actions Speak Louder Than Words* Report of the African Nova Scotian
Advisory Committee**

PURPOSE: The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with a staff response to the *Actions Speak Louder Than Words* report (February 2006) of the African Nova Scotian Advisory Committee.

BACKGROUND: At the Board Meeting on April 26, 2006, Board member Sparks presented the *Actions Speak Louder Than Words* report. The following motion was carried.

It was moved and seconded (Sparks/Marshall) that the February 22, 2006 African Nova Scotian Advisory Committee Report "Actions Speak Louder Than Words" report be accepted by the Board for information and forwarded to staff for review and response to the ANSAC with recommendations and appropriate action to be taken.

CONTENT: Staff has reviewed the report and attached (Appendix 1) is the response to the African Nova Scotian Advisory Committee with recommendations and actions to be taken.

Appendix 1 outlines each recommendation and the staff response to the recommendation. During budget deliberations, a position of Coordinator – Diversity Management was approved. This position is a part of the Senior Staff team. The Coordinator - Diversity Management will have responsibility for all matters of diversity within the Board, including responsibility for Race Relations, Human Rights, and Cross Cultural Understanding (RCH). Once the Coordinator is in place, the successful applicant will be able to develop both short term and long term plans to assist the Board in managing diversity, including RCH issues, within the Board. The Coordinator – Diversity Management will also be able to keep the African Nova Scotian Advisory Committee informed on actions that the Board is taking to address issues of diversity.

COST: N/A

FUNDING: Within current budget.

TIMELINE: For immediate implementation.

APPENDICES: Appendix 1: Response to *Actions Speak Louder Than Words* report of the African Nova Scotian Advisory Committee

RECOMMENDATIONS: That the Board receive this report for information.

COMMUNICATIONS:

From: For further information please contact Carole Olsen, Superintendent, email colsen@hrsb.ns.ca or Judy White, A/Senior Staff Advisor, email jwhite@hrsb.ns.ca

To: The report will be distributed to the following for information and for implementation by assigned staff.

Senior Staff	June 19, 2006
Draft to Board Members	June 28, 2006
African Nova Scotian Advisory Committee	September 18, 2006
Committee of the Whole	September 20, 2006
Director- Program	September 21, 2006
Director – School Administration	September 21, 2006
Consultant- Diversity Management	September 21, 2006
Coordinator – Diversity Management	On appointment

File name: *jwhite/mydocuments/senior staff reports*

date last revised: *September 14, 2006*

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM
ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS
June 2006

Recommendations:

- 1) **A group of African Nova Scotian professionals and tradespersons to rotate through the schools, providing information and motivation to African Nova Scotian students about their respective careers. At the upper elementary level, where students are more engaged this could take the form of Career Days for all students. At junior and senior high, where it's more difficult to motivate youth, sessions would involve only African Nova Scotian students. Examples at the junior and senior high levels would be a Career Jam, Career Days and employability workshops.**

Providing students with examples of successful African Nova Scotian professionals and tradespersons is an excellent idea. Currently, many schools host events such as career days or career fairs. The Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understanding and Human Rights Program Advisor will survey to determine how many of our schools offer these opportunities to students and to determine whether or not schools attempt to have African Nova Scotian professionals and tradespersons participate in these events. Schools will be encouraged to provide opportunities that allow students to be exposed to a wide range of opportunities for the future and to include representation from the African Nova Scotian community.

It would be helpful if the African Nova Scotian Advisory Committee would take on the task of developing a list of resource persons from various geographic areas who would be willing to participate in school career days. This list could be provided to the Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understanding and Human Rights Program Advisor.

- 2) **The African Nova Scotia Advisory Committee to host a social gathering/information session year for African Nova Scotia parents to provide information about the Committee, policies and procedures of the Board (e.g. race relations, code of conduct, parents' rights and responsibilities)**

Sponsoring an information session for African Nova Scotian parents is an excellent role for the African Nova Scotian Advisory Committee. Staff would be able to make a facility such as the Gordon Bell Building available for the committee one or two evenings per year or on a Saturday should the committee determine that they would like to host this event and would like such a venue. Staff (relevant to the topics on the agenda) would be willing to attend the event and provide a workshop on the assigned topic. Once the committee begins the planning of such an event, a senior staff member could be assigned to work with the committee if desired.

- 3) **School to include community outreach activities in their school profiles. In addition, all schools to hold at least one parent workshop each year, with an African Nova Scotian cultural theme. A Parent Appreciation Day could be an appropriate title.**

All schools are encouraged to involve the community as a partner in education. It would be possible to add outreach activities to the school profile, but currently profiles are not posted on the website. The *Planning for Improvement* plan is posted, but this plan is about the school's goals for improving education for all learners. Currently, staff is developing professional standards for principals as part of the evaluation process. One of the standards is community involvement. As the standards are developed, community outreach will be a part of the

evaluation of the administrator. This will highlight the importance of community outreach in all schools within the Board. This recommendation could be part of the examples provided to administrators when the professional development work on “standards” begins.

- 4) **Graduation ceremonies for grades 6, 9, and 12 to incorporate kente cloth graduation banners. (This could be done in coordination with a community-based organization)**

Students choosing to wear kente cloths (banners/sash) during graduation ceremonies can be accommodated. Usually formal graduation ceremonies in our Board only occur at grade 12; however, some schools have closing ceremonies at other grade levels. The School Administration department could provide a memo to schools suggesting that this practice may be one that students within their school might wish to follow and if students wish to wear their kente cloth then they should be encouraged to do so.

- 5) **Videos to be created – on specific topics, which would be beneficial to the African Nova Scotian community. Parents would have access by means of a sign-out system, e.g. supports available for African Nova Scotian students, parents, and guardians.**

Currently, the Board does not have videos of this nature, but it is an area that could be investigated under the Business Plan goal on partnerships. A brochure on *Parents’ Rights and Responsibilities* has been designed and another brochure on various ways parents can support their children’s learning at home is being developed. Program staff may be able to look at video development for some aspects of student learning.

Staff will approach the Department of Education to request that they partner with HRSB staff to develop videos that would assist parents of African Nova Scotian students. The Department of Education has the resources through Learning Resources and Technology division and HRSB staff would assist with the writing and enactments.

Currently, there are print resources available at the Teachers’ Centres and parents could have schools access them if they are interested. The Program department will continue to make schools aware of the available print resources to assist parents who would like to borrow them.

- 6) **Recognizing the contributions of African people to society, has reinforced positive learning experiences for African Nova Scotian learners and the general population, thus it is important that all schools participate in African Heritage Month celebrations. This should not just be limited to the month, but be a minimal requirement of all schools. This could be a great opportunity to utilize community-based resources. (Speakers, crafts people, choirs, videos and elders.)**

Each year the Superintendent communicates to schools the importance of African Heritage month and encourages all schools to take the time to celebrate African Heritage not just during February but throughout the year. Schools within our Board do plan activities to celebrate African Heritage Month. This year schools were asked to submit their activities to the Communications division and they were promoted on our Board website.

Schools host a number of speakers and activities during the month of February. The RCH Program Advisor provides support and resources to schools who wish to access speakers for African Heritage Month activities. It would be helpful if the African Nova Scotian Advisory Committee could provide names of additional speakers who are available to speak at schools and who are willing to travel to schools throughout our jurisdiction.

DISCIPLINE

Recommendations:

- 1) **That the Board for the 2006/2007 school year put in place a tracking system to monitor the number of suspensions of African Nova Scotian learners and rationale for such.**

The Halifax Regional School Board has started the data collection process through the Student Identification Survey. In order to track and monitor the number of suspensions of African Nova Scotian learners, the students and/or families need to complete the Student Identification survey. Currently, there is no provision for identification of race and ethnicity on the *Regional Code of Conduct* suspension forms. Staff will need to investigate how to link the Identification Survey information with the data base on suspensions. Once the self-identification has been completed and the databases are linked, administration will be able to track students based on race and ethnicity. Reasons for suspensions are indicated on the suspension form.

- 2) **That parents/students have a right to make presentation in person to the school-based discipline committee.**

Staff is aware that some individuals would prefer face to face presentations at appeals; however, our process only allows for a review of the suspension in writing to the School Discipline Committee. In order to support parents who are uncomfortable with this format, the School Administration Department can be contacted and support will be given to prepare for the review.

- 3) **That training is provided to all members that sit on a discipline committee in the area of sensitivity and alternative means of discipline.**

Training for School Discipline Committees on the role of the committee and the procedures in the *Regional Code of Conduct* will be provided by the School Administration Department and part of this training will involve sensitivity training. Under the Education Act Section 123 (3), School Discipline Committees do not make decisions on alternative means of discipline. Their role is to confirm or revoke decisions/recommendations made by the principal.

- 4) **Consideration should be given to the creation of a central committee of the board to address all suspensions greater than 5 days. The individuals that will sit on this committee will be trained in the areas of consideration re: recommendation 3. (The African Nova Scotian Advisory Committee is willing to have further dialogue with the Board in developing such structure and consideration for diversity.)**

Section 125 (1) of the Education Act indicates that the powers and duties to confirm or revoke a suspension greater than five days can be designated by the Board to the School Advisory Council or a committee of the School Advisory Council. The Halifax Regional School Board has designated these duties to the School Discipline Committee comprised of parent/community members of the School Advisory Council.

With 138 schools, the formation of a central Board committee to address all suspensions greater than five days would not be practical due to the time commitment necessary to address these recommendations within the mandated time frame of seven days as outlined in Section 124 (3) of the Education Act. Another factor that would preclude the use of one committee to address all suspension recommendations is the geographical size of the Board.

5) **In-school suspension should be the practice.**

The new HRSB *Regional Code of Conduct* that was approved in April 2006 recommends a proactive approach to address inappropriate behaviour through setting expectations, communicating those expectations to the school community and reinforcing appropriate behaviour in the school so that all students understand what is expected of them in a school setting. The Positive Effective Behaviour Supports (PEBS) system adopted by the provincial Department of Education provides a framework for the provincial *Code of Conduct* on which our Board policy is based. This proactive approach encourages the use of in-school suspensions for offenses other than those for severely disruptive behaviour. There are offenses for which an out-of-school suspension will be required. For the Halifax Regional School Board to implement an in-school suspension model for all schools, additional staff may be required for supervision and in some schools, space constraints may be a factor.

6) **Expand the Youth Pathway Transitional Program model at St. Pat's High to other regions of the Board and to those students in crisis at the elementary level.**

The *Youth Pathways and Transitions* program will be formally evaluated at the end of the 2006. Should the data indicate that the program is supporting students to stay in school and be more successful upon their return to their home school, the Program Department will make a recommendation to Senior Staff to expand the program to other regions of the Board.

7) **Strong communication is required between the school and parents at an early stage when issues of discipline arise and that there be a level of trust built between both parties on how best to deal with inappropriate behaviour.**

The Halifax Regional School Board agrees that communication between the school and the home and vice versa is critical to the success of our students. It is important that parents are notified at an early stage when issues of discipline arise and it is an expectation of the Board that this communication occur. Principals and parents need to work together to support the student to change the inappropriate behaviour and to be successful in school. The importance of this ongoing communication will be discussed with all administrators as part of their professional development.

8) **Schools need to be more open to the community and outside agencies in providing resource materials to parents and learners through outreach.**

A committee recently developed a brochure entitled *Parent' Rights and Responsibilities*. The School Administration department, in consultation with the Black Educators Association (BEA), has been developing a protocol for schools and outside agencies to use in order to open communication between external organizations and agencies.

Currently, a committee is developing a series of supports to assist parents with helping their child at home to achieve academic success. The first communication will be a brochure for parents of elementary students and it should be ready for circulation in the fall of 2006.

9) **Student support workers need to play a more active role in helping parents understand how the school system works, to be a link between the school and home, and have the respected member of staff, included, invited to all school events and committee. (E.g. Planning for Improvement)**

The Halifax Regional School Board has two positions that are identified as Student Support Workers. In the Supplementary Funded areas, there are Student Support Workers who work with all students in their assigned schools. In addition, there are African Nova Scotian Student Support Workers whose positions are focused solely on supporting African Nova Scotian students in pursuing their educational goals. All Student Support Workers work collaboratively with School Administration and other school based staff to support students, working one on one with students and participating on school-based teams.

Both African Nova Scotian Student Support Workers and Student Support Workers frequently liaise between families/students and School Administrators and staff to assist with cultural differences and to avoid communication difficulties. Information is provided to families to assist with interpretation of School Board policies, school protocols, and classroom practices. A range of supports and program initiatives are extended to students in keeping with the ultimate goals of keeping them in school, engaged in the classroom, and achieving success.

A half-day workshop is planned for September to discuss the role of the Student Support Workers with principals. Staff will also look at developing a brochure for parents that explains the role of the Student Support Workers.

LITERACY AND NUMERACY

Recommendations:

- 1) **That the Halifax Regional School Board tracks the literacy and numeracy success of African Nova Scotian learners.**

The board is interested in tracking the results of many varied groupings of students including African Nova Scotian learners. The Student Identification Survey is a first step in allowing the Board to track the results of African Nova Scotian learners in literacy and numeracy. Currently, the HRSB is working with Canadian Test Centre to investigate how many groups may be identified in Math and Literacy Assessments. The responsibility for identification would still rest with the student or student's family for this tracking.

- 2) **To support "early years" literacy and mathematics within the five schools identified in the literacy assessment and monitor the success of these initiatives.**

The work of the five schools will continue throughout the 06/07 school year. Professional Development, technology, tutoring and assessments will be the focus of the support next year. Establishment of common assessments as well as board and provincial assessments will be used to monitor and track successes and areas identified as needing further attention. Continued additional literacy coordinator, math coordinator and Reading Recovery time will be used to assist teachers and students in the early years work.

- 3) **The formation of a literacy and numeracy committee that would focus on:**
 - a. **Reviewing models of best practices and the development of a strategy (outreach support to families and communities)**
 - b. **Work with the School Board to secure funding to pilot a model in addressing the needs of African Nova Scotian learners at a school/community-based level.**
 - c. **Monitor the results of strategy in making adjustments to strengthen its delivery to be expanded to other sites.**

The Halifax Regional School Board recognizes the need to support and learn from the families and communities identified as having significant African Nova Scotian learners within them. In discussions with the Department of Education, Council on African Canadian Education and Black Educator's Association, the board has stated that this was the next logical step to be taken. The formation of this committee could begin during 2006 – 2007.

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

Recommendations:

- 1) The hiring of an Employment Equity Officer, in the Department of Human Resources, with a primary focus to provide leadership to the Board and working with various departments, community agencies, employees and potential employment candidates to improve the employment profile of the Board, as it relates to employment equity.**

In January 2006, the Human Resource Services Department hired a Recruitment & Retention Advisor and employment equity is a critical component of this position. It is expected that a significant amount of time will be spent promoting, implementing and monitoring employment equity initiatives. It is expected that this work will be done in consultation with the Policy Consultant, Diversity Management. Steps have already been taken to increase the level of outreach to external community agencies such as participating in various community based job fairs. The Recruitment & Retention Advisor has also developed a draft "Recruitment & Retention Plan for 2006-2007" which is expected to go to Senior Staff for implementation in the Fall 2006. A significant part of the plan will include increasing our efforts to recruit and retain affirmative action candidates, increasing the level of outreach and providing training and development opportunities. Human Resources will also take the lead in developing a succession plan that will identify affirmative action candidates interested in leadership positions and provide increased opportunities for success.

- 2) Follow the Halifax Regional School Board Employment Equity Policy.**

The Affirmative Action and Employment Equity Policy is currently under review. The Program and Policy Committee in June 2006 approved the schedule for consultation. The policy's name has changed to the *Diversity Management Policy*. While it is acknowledged that the policy has not been fully implemented, Human Resource Services is taking positive steps in the area of employment equity and progress is being made to identify, recruit, and retain affirmative action candidates. The new policy will include clear, concise procedures.

- 3) Identify and provide professional development for experienced principals and permanent teachers who want to mentor new African Nova Scotian teachers and existing teachers who wish to go into administration or non-classroom assignments.**

Mentoring is a proven and effective way to help employees improve their skills and learn the culture and practices of a new organization. The Halifax Regional School Board agrees with the Committee that good mentorship practices begin with training the mentors. An effective mentorship program would include the appropriate release time for both parties in a mentorship relationship. To date, there are no such formal mentorship programs other than the provincially-funded math and literacy mentorships. In recent years, the Program Department has helped in the professional development of teachers in extreme need (beyond math and literacy), but this has been beyond normal job expectations and has put a strain on resources.

Staff recommends that the costs and benefits of an effective mentorship program for African Nova Scotian teachers, along with a consideration of other groups that may likewise benefit i.e. all new teachers, all racially visible teachers, teachers with poor performance appraisals, etc. be explored with the expectation that any recommendations be considered as a business plan initiative in the context of the business planning process in the Spring of 2007.

- 4) **Track the progress of African Nova Scotian teachers and non-teaching staff within the system.**

To date, this data has not been tracked as there has been no formal mechanism to identify the African Nova Scotian teachers within the system. It is hoped that the data gathered in the Workforce Survey combined with the self-identification portion of the on-line employment application will provide HR with the necessary information to track the progress of African Nova Scotian employees within the HRSB.

- 5) **More direct efforts needed to recruit within the African Nova Scotian community by posting with African Nova Scotian agencies, participating in job fairs, having clear protocol for applications of targeted populations, establishing an inventory of potential African Nova Scotian employees, establish a casual roster (this would be the first point of recruitment contact, when the Board requires temporary staff, in recognition of collective agreements) all non-teaching staff and the PEG employee group.**

Over the past year, staff within Human Resources has increased efforts to recruit potential employees within the African Nova Scotian Community. Efforts in this regard include attending job fairs sponsored by various community organizations such as Watershed Area Development Enterprise (WADE), Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association (MISA) and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), creating a directory of agency contacts to recruit potential candidates and communicating the job application process to such agencies. All applicants who self-identified as part of the Nova Scotia Department of Education Early Hire Job Fairs were granted an interview. The Human Resources Department has also been successful in recruiting fourteen (14) new teachers pursuant to the employment equity provision in the Nova Scotia Teacher's Union Local Agreement.

In addition, a voluntary self-identification section has been added to the HRSB employment application to identify potential candidates. Special efforts have been made to recruit candidates from designated groups to the casual and substitute lists by providing increased priority in the interview process.

- 6) **Provide mentoring opportunities for new and existing teachers employed by HRSB.**

Please see the response to #3 under Employment Equity section.

- 7) **Implement an all employee self-identification survey. (For teaching and non-teaching staff)**

On May 31, 2006 a Workforce Survey was distributed to all employees within the Halifax Regional School Board, including teaching and non-teaching staff.

CONCLUSION

Recommendation:

That the RCH (Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understanding and Human Rights) Department be reinstated.

The Department of Education has determined the structure for School Boards in Nova Scotia. The Halifax Regional School Board has a variance to allow six departments due to responsibility and size of our jurisdiction. The Structure consists of the six departments: Board Services, Program, School Administration, Operations, Human Resources and Financial Services.

During budget deliberations, a position for Coordinator –Diversity Management to be part of Senior Staff was approved. This position will provide leadership for issues of diversity, including the Race Relations, Cross-Cultural Understanding and Human Rights work of our Board.