

African Nova Scotian Student Support Worker
Guidelines, Standards, and Evaluation

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Background and Rationale

The struggles of African Nova Scotians for the past 300 years have been well documented. From their first arrival, there was a deliberate attempt through policies and practices to keep African Nova Scotians as an economic, social, educational, political, and cultural underclass. Being denied equal access to and full participation in citizenship has helped to create the condition of a higher proportion of the African Nova Scotian population with low educational attainment, higher unemployment, and poverty. The disparity in income, housing, education, occupation, and other areas, identified in the *Black Learners Advisory Committee (BLAC) Report: Volume 3* (1994), has reconfirmed the long-standing historical grievances that African Nova Scotians have held regarding systemic and institutional racism.

Understanding the dynamics and impact of systemic racism is fundamental in understanding the importance of programs such as the Student Support Worker Program. It should be recognized that no malice is required to participate in someone else's oppression, not even one's own. Prevailing ideas and systemic practices can create a condition of exclusion for groups of people in our society. This leaves people to proceed with a sense of "perceived fairness vs. equal treatment." Misinformation or no information at all regarding the creation of an unfair advantage for some, at the expense of others, leaves people proceeding in the "equally unequal" (creating a disadvantage and then deciding that somehow everyone would be equal without redressing the disadvantages).

For African Nova Scotians, racism is the most pervasive factor impacting their quality of education, the educational environment, and ability to achieve success in the school system. In 1993 the Black Learners Advisory Committee developed an analysis of the education system and identified several factors behind the difficulties that Black learners face within the provincial education system. The following were identified within the *BLAC Report*:

- a lack of Black role models in the school environment
- the alienation of Black students in the total school environment
- a lack of visibility of Blacks consistently in the curriculum
- minimization of Black contributions to society
- a lack of a clear understanding of Black culture, behaviour, and activities by the teachers
- a low expectation for Black students
- a lack of relationship between the school staff and the Black community
- teacher insensitivity toward Black students
- ineffective discipline procedures
- a reluctance of administration to deal with social confrontations
- the high drop out rate of Black students
- the lower graduation rate of Black students
- the inability to motivate Black students
- the Black students guided to select non-university programs
- a disproportionate number of Black students in resource programs

Many positive changes have occurred in the education system in recent years. Much

progress has been made toward inclusive education for all students. However, changes that are intended to improve the quality of education for all students frequently require additional resources to meet the needs of students who are marginalized as a result of their race, culture, language, and/or ability.

With the publication of the *BLAC Report* in 1994 and the government's response in June 1995, a new comprehensive strategy was created to assist the Department of Education and the education system in redressing the condition of African Nova Scotian learners.

Student Support Worker Program

Context

Research shows that students who feel safe, accepted, and connected to their school are more likely to stay in school, develop social skills, and do well academically. Students, teachers, and other adults benefit from caring relationships, opportunities for participation, and an atmosphere of high expectations.

Strong relationships are prerequisites of growth and learning, and the relationship between students and teachers must be supported by strong relationships among adults. Significantly, the world of the African Nova Scotian student is often radically different from the world of the teacher. Economic, social, racial, and other differences are part of the fabric of most schools in the province. It is crucial that students know that the adults in each of those worlds have a shared mission.

The task of developing and maintaining positive relationships between African Nova Scotian students, their teachers, the school administration, and their parents/guardians requires coordination and co-operation. Building strong relationships also takes time, work, and energy. However, positive relationships offer a means to effective learning, which benefits everyone. Building relationships in the school is one of the roles of the student support workers, in collaboration with school staff.

Program Description

Student support workers, together with school efforts, work to promote a school climate that is safe, supportive, and respectful and that connects African Nova Scotian students to a broad array of school and community resources. Student support workers are based in schools and work with the school staff and the home to support students' school success.

By supporting the efforts of the classroom teachers and the principal and facilitating the communications between the school and the home, the Student Support Worker Program strives to achieve improved attendance rates, greater contact with supportive adults, greater compliance with school assignments and rules, and reduce the school suspensions and drop out rate among African Nova Scotian students.

The student support worker mobilizes and integrates school and community resources, improves the impact of these resources on student learning, and supports principals and teachers as they continue to work to meet the students' needs. He or she can inform students of outside resources. Additionally, student support workers who are of African descent serve as cultural role models.

Mandate and Objectives of the Program

The mandate of the Student Support Worker Program is to support academic success and improve self-esteem (both academic and cultural) for African Nova Scotian learners through positive role modelling and collaboration with administrators, teachers, parents/guardians and the community. By providing positive role models and ongoing opportunities for collaboration with administration, teachers, parents/guardians and the community, it supports African Nova Scotian students in areas that impact educational achievement.

Section 1:

Student Support Worker Qualification

The qualifications for a student support worker include being a person of African descent, having a specified minimum level of formal education¹, knowledge of and experience working with educational and societal issues as they relate to African Nova Scotian learners, and certain personal qualities and technical skills. In addition to these general qualifications it is recommended that the successful candidate have a valid driver's licence and a vehicle or access to a vehicle.

1. This includes an NSCC Certificate or Diploma in Human Services, Community Service, or Youth Worker Program, or undergraduate degree in Social Sciences or Social Work (or acceptable post-secondary training equivalent) plus three to five years of experience working with at-risk youth.

Section 2:

Student Support Worker Competencies

The following student support worker competencies are required:

- a demonstrated knowledge of the issues and concerns facing at-risk youth
- excellent interpersonal, written, and verbal communication skills
- a demonstrated knowledge of educational and societal issues as they relate to African Nova Scotian learners
- demonstrated skills in mediation and conflict resolution
- a demonstrated ability to work collaboratively as part of a team, involving students, teachers, parents/guardians, support agencies, and the surrounding communities
- the abilities to work on and follow through with assigned tasks independently
- the willingness to attend community meetings
- the ability and desire to engage in continuing education and skills upgrading
- the ability to use current technology
- the ability to maintain confidentiality as the norm in all issues related to students, parents/guardians, and the school
- the ability to provide an atmosphere of respect by applying the principles of Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understandings and Human Rights
- the abilities to monitor, assess, evaluate, and report on the progress of African Nova Scotian youth

Core Skills and Attributes

Recognizing the complex and unique nature of the Student Support Worker Program, coupled with the job responsibilities, the student support worker will be required to use a variety of core skills and attributes to effectively perform his or her duties.

Core Skills

The following core skills are essential to perform the student support worker position:

- analytical and problem-solving
- communication (written, oral, and technical)
- knowledge (the educational issues of African Nova Scotian communities and learners)
- leadership
- listening and responding
- networking
- organizational
- teamwork

Attributes

The student support worker (or potential candidates) should possess the following attributes:

- ambition
- empathy
- enthusiasm
- knowledge of the Public School Program
- professionalism
- self-confidence/self-esteem

Note: Pay should be commensurate to the job requirements, skills, and experience.

Section 3:

Job Description and Expectations of Student Support Workers

Although the specific duties of a student support worker will vary to reflect the uniqueness of school boards and the environment of the school community, there are some common core duties performed by student support workers. These duties have been grouped into four main strands: direct student support, parent/guardian liaison, school climate, and external/community linkages.

The responsibilities listed below under each of these strands are not meant to be exhaustive; rather, they provide an outline of the major responsibilities that student support workers may perform. As well, additional duties may be assigned by the RCH coordinator/facilitator of African Nova Scotian Support/Coordinator of African Nova Scotian Services, and/or the principal as needed.

Job Description

Direct Student Support

- Monitor student attendance (punctuality, truancy, illness) and relay relevant information to the home.
- Act as a positive role model with respect to professionalism and involvement with students in school and community activities.
- Assist students with developing organizational and study skills.
- Work closely with students to develop strategies to enhance self-esteem and success in school in a variety of settings.
- In collaboration with staff, assist students and parents/guardians with educational goal setting by exploring appropriate course selections and the various paths that facilitate a successful school completion as well as a post-secondary career and education options.
- In consultation with the principal, establish links with feeder/receiving schools to provide a smooth transition for students.
- Work with and encourage students to monitor their assignments, tests, and project schedules and advise teachers when there are concerns.
- Encourage and support student participation in extracurricular activities.
- Maintain comprehensive records of all student contacts.
- Keep apprised of student disciplinary difficulties in order to take action in an attempt to avoid the need for suspension or expulsion. In the case of a suspension, ensure that steps are taken to minimize its impact on academic performance.
- Perform other assigned duties that are within the scope of the mandate of the Student Support Worker Program as assigned by the principal and/or RCH coordinator or facilitator of African Nova Scotian students.
- Act as an advocate for students when necessary.

Parent/Guardian Liaison

- In collaboration with staff, assist students and parents/guardians with educational goal setting by exploring appropriate course selections and the various paths that facilitate a successful school completion as well as post-secondary career and education options.
- Facilitate open communication among African Nova Scotian students, parents/guardians, staff, and school personnel to meet students' needs.
- Establish and maintain (as necessary) personal contact with parents/guardians by telephone or through home visits. (Refer to board protocol for home visits.)
- Encourage parents/guardians to attend school-wide parent-teacher days and accompany parents/guardians (if necessary or when requested) during parent-teacher meetings.
- Invite parents/guardians to school events and encourage them to volunteer in school if possible, e.g., School Advisory Committee.

School Climate

- Identify and recommend culturally relevant, anti-bias, and cross-cultural resource materials for use within the Student Support Worker Program. (Refer to *Bias Evaluation Instrument*, Nova Scotia Department of Education 2001; www.EDnet.ns.ca.)
- Perform other assigned duties that are within the scope of the mandate of the Student Support Worker Program as assigned by the principal and/or RCH coordinator/facilitator of African Nova Scotian students.
- Maintain regular communication with the in-school designate.
- Maintain regular communication with the RCH advisor in the assigned school.
- Participate in cultural awareness/sensitivity sessions for students under the direction of the RCH coordinator or facilitator of African Nova Scotian students.

External/Community Linkages

- Keep up-to-date information on external educational support initiatives (e.g., target population support programs, the Cultural Academic Enrichment Program (CAEP), scholarships and awards, and cultural activities).
- Perform other assigned duties within the scope of the mandate of the Student Support Worker Program as assigned by the principal, and/or RCH coordinator or facilitator of African Nova Scotian students.
- Inform school staff of events and celebrations occurring in the students' communities and encourage school staff to participate in these events.
- Attend community events relevant to the Student Support Worker Program mandate.

Student Support Worker Expectations

Professional Behaviour

Student support workers are expected to

- promote an atmosphere of respect for students and adults
- demonstrate responsible behaviour toward their work, attendance, and work schedule
- work cooperatively as a member of a school team (e.g., case management team, program planning team, school improvement/planning for improvement team)
- participate in in-service and professional development activities as appropriate (e.g., school based, board level, provincial)
- make positive contributions to the school's functions and activities
- be knowledgeable of and follow board and provincial policies and procedures (i.e., those dealing with human rights, race relations, discipline, code of conduct, racial equity, communication, harassment, students with special needs)
- demonstrate ethical behaviour
- foster positive relationships with community-based organizations that support African Nova Scotian learners, (e.g., Regional Educators Program, Cultural Academic Enrichment Program, the Council on African Canadian Education/Africentric Learning Institute, and the Black Educators Association)
- show patience and understanding toward students
- demonstrate appropriate and timely response to student-initiated interactions

Section 4:

Responsibilities and Relationships between Principal, Teacher, Students, Guidance Counsellor, Parents/Guardians

Principal and Student Support Worker

Student support workers are part of the school staff; therefore, their daily management, supervision, and evaluation are the responsibility of the school principals, who

- are responsible for informing “new” student support workers of the relevant school, school board, and provincial policies, procedures, and rules, such as first-aid administration, medication administration, appropriate practices and reporting procedures (e.g., sick days)
- in collaboration with the RCH coordinator and the director of Programs and Student Services, should arrange to meet the professional development needs of the Student Support Worker Program
- have the overall responsibility to communicate to staff, verbally and in writing, specific job functions and performance expectations (as developed by the RCH coordinator) of the Student Support Worker Program
- are responsible for getting written consent from parents/guardians to authorize the student support worker to work with the student, as required by provincial or school board policy
- are responsible for monitoring the day-to-day work of the student support worker, as per board guidelines
- are responsible for ensuring that the student support worker’s job functions are implemented in accordance with their job specifications (e.g., performing non-teaching job functions under the supervision of a teacher or school administrator)
- are responsible for informing all school staff of the student support worker program and the roles and responsibilities of the student support worker
- should arrange to meet formally with the student support worker regularly (i.e., once every two weeks)
- should address any concerns regarding a student support worker to the RCH coordinator or facilitator of African Nova Scotian students

Student Support Worker and Principal

The student support worker will

- arrange to meet formally with the principal regularly (i.e., once every two weeks) to provide updates (formal/informal) on the students assigned to his or her workload and other information as deemed necessary
- when requested, provide advice and recommendations to the principal regarding the program
- provide the principal with his or her weekly schedule

Teacher and Student Support Worker

Classroom teachers whose student(s) receive support from a student support worker, have the responsibility of

- informing the student support worker of classroom procedures, rules, and management strategies
- in collaboration with the student support worker and (when appropriate) the program planning team, discuss and clarify the types of supports to be provided to the student(s), based on the needs of the student(s) and the student support worker's responsibilities
- ensuring an on-going communication with the student support worker through regular meetings for collaborative monitoring and ongoing discussion of the progress of the student(s)

Student Support Worker and Teacher

The student support worker will

- provide updates and have open dialogue with the teacher about students from that teacher's class
- maintain a high degree of professionalism and ensure that confidentiality and impartiality remain paramount

Student and Student Support Worker

The student will

- agree to meet with the student support worker (with prior approval from his or her parent/guardian)
- provide the student support worker with information, knowing there is a high degree of confidentiality
- be responsible for making himself or herself available for formal meetings with the student support worker

- have a responsibility to participate actively and positively in any academic or behavioural support activities

(Note: The degree to which the student is able to fulfill the above expectations will be closely linked to the age, grade, and maturity level of the student.)

Student Support Worker and Students

The student support worker will

- arrange appropriate resources to provide career information to students
- act as a role model
- establish a non-judgmental/trusting relationship with all students
- be involved in the academic and behavioural support system for students
- provide information and resources for cultural awareness to students

Student Support Worker and Guidance Counsellor

The student support worker will

- work with the guidance counsellor to provide study-skills instruction and workshops
- provide feedback and input on academic support of student activities
- work with the guidance counsellor to provide mediation in conflict resolution and problem situations
- work with the guidance counsellor to identify the need for referral to professional services (counselling)
- work with the guidance counsellor on strategies to address discipline issues and lessen out-of-school suspensions
- assist the guidance counsellor in understanding the cultural nuances of the African Nova Scotian culture
- work with the guidance counsellor to ensure that course selection, career information, etc., are provided to students on a regular basis

Student Support Worker and Parents/Guardians

The student support worker will

- meet with the parents/guardians at the school to outline the services and involvement (orientation)
- ensure ongoing communication with the students' home
- in collaboration with the teacher, communicate with parents/guardians regarding homework, attendance, and academic progress
- invite parents/guardians to school events, meetings, and activities

Section 5:

Supervision and Evaluation of Student Support Workers

Supervision

- The central-office supervision of the student support worker will be the responsibility of the RCH coordinator or facilitator of African Nova Scotian students.
- The on-site supervision of the student support worker will be the responsibility of the school principal.
- The scope of the supervision should be limited to the job description of the student support worker and the elements of the Student Support Worker Program.
- Procedures should be developed at the school to ensure that the student support worker is aware of and adheres to the protocols of confidentiality as they relate to them working with students and school staff.
- Formal and informal supervisory arrangements should be pursued.

Note: The RCH coordinators or facilitators of African Nova Scotian students should arrange to meet monthly with school principals to discuss the student support worker and the Student Support Worker Program.

Evaluation

- A blank copy of the performance evaluation should be shared by the RCH coordinator or facilitator of African Nova Scotian students with the student support worker at the beginning of the school year.
- The performance evaluation of the student support worker should be completed by the “home base” principal, with input from the other principals, in early June.
- An evaluation should be conducted by the RCH coordinator or facilitator of African Nova Scotian students based upon school visits, scheduled meetings, and a discussion with school-based principals and the student support worker in early June.
- A meeting regarding the student support worker’s performance evaluation must be completed by the principal, the student support worker, and the RCH coordinator or facilitator of African Nova Scotian students and signed off by all parties before the end of June.

Section 6:

Monitoring, Assessment, and Evaluation of the Student Support Worker Program

Monitoring

- There should be a process in place that is both formal and informal as a way to monitor the Student Support Worker Program. In an informal environment, it is even more important to exercise confidentiality and professionalism.
- As well as the student support worker's written reports, the principal and the student support worker should meet regularly to provide each other with updates, highlights, comments, issues, questions and/or concerns.
- In addition to the student support worker's written reports, the RCH coordinator or facilitator of African Nova Scotian students and the student support worker should meet at least every two months (with the principal as needed) to provide each other with updates, highlights, comments, issues, questions and/or concerns.
- Teachers and student support workers should interact freely and keep notes of meetings and action plans for students (or monthly throughout the student support worker's probationary period).
- The development of multi-use form/data collection sheets would allow the student support worker to gather data on a global nature to further analyze the relationship between the Student Support Worker Program and the student demographics (e.g., the number of students referred to in a month) as well as the local profile (e.g., how many males in grade 7 are on the honour role).

Assessment

- By the end of May (or early June) the RCH coordinator or facilitator of African Nova Scotian students, the principal, and the student support worker should meet to assess the student support worker's performance. There should be an assessment of the achievement of the Student Support Worker Program mandate and goals as they relate to students.
- Program assessment should result in the identification of issues/concerns, should recommend adjustments for the next year, and should propose professional development for the student support worker.
- Assessment is an opportune time for the Student Support Worker Program, through the student support worker, to begin the transition process for students moving to another school. (This should include meetings with the student support worker, students, and parents/guardians.)

Evaluation

There should be a summative evaluation of the Student Support Worker Program once every three years. There should be some measure of community involvement in the evaluation of the program. The research methodology must allow the evaluation to

- identify the program's intended outcomes and impacts and a participation analysis (this identification would be both anecdotal from respondents' accounts and from statistically analyzed quantitative data)
- assess the program's objectives and achievements
- determine strategies to enhance the program
- recommend alternative programming approaches or what future forms programming might take that would meet the overall goals of the Student Support Worker Program

Section 7: Hiring Process, Probationary Period, School Allocation, Work Environment, and Protocols for Family Visits

Hiring Process

The hiring process will be determined by the school board. The following construct is an example of a hiring selection committee.

The hiring selection committee:

- RCH coordinator or facilitator of African Nova Scotian students
- school board Human Resources personnel
- home-base principal
- school board member

Probationary Period

This is to be determined at the school board level. It is recommended that during the probationary period the student support worker meet monthly with the RCH coordinator or facilitator of African Nova Scotian students.

School Allocation

This is to be determined at the school board level. It is recommended that the school allocation be based on a family-of-schools model to support the continuity of services, transition planning, and familiarity with school staff. It is also recommended that student support workers be assigned a reasonable number of schools to ensure effective contact with each assigned school.

Work Environment

- work space: office, office space, and an opportunity for privacy at every school site
- work equipment: desktop computer, desk, phone, and lockable file cabinet

Protocols for Family Visits

This is to be determined at the school board level. It is highly recommended that parents/guardians be invited to meet the student support worker at the school site.

Section 8:

Student Support Worker Program Communication Strategy

The RCH coordinator or facilitator of African Nova Scotian students and student support workers should develop an information brochure or pamphlet describing the program specifically, for students and parents/guardians who want to be involved.

- Educational leaders at schools where Student Support Worker Program services are being provided should ensure that school newsletters, handbooks, memos, and calendars all are used to communicate the program.
- Student or parent/guardian permission forms should be developed when students are recommended or referred to the student support worker for one-on-one assistance. The permission form should reflect current school board policy and practices with regards to age of consent for school-based services.

The RCH coordinator or facilitator of African Nova Scotian students should make a presentation during a principal's meeting about the program at the beginning of each school year.

Suggested Professional Development

- African culture and history
- *Bias Evaluation Instrument*
- communication skills
- goal setting
- mediation and conflict resolution
- organizational/time management
- report writing
- working with at-risk students (e.g., crisis intervention, suicide intervention)

Appendices

Appendix A: The Cultural Competence Continuum

1. Advanced Cultural Competence
 - culture held in high esteem
2. Basic Cultural Competence
 - acceptance and respect for difference
 - continuing self-assessment regarding culture
3. Cultural Pre-competence
 - weaknesses recognized in working with minorities
 - attempts made to improve practices and increase knowledge
4. Cultural Blindness
 - belief that colour or culture makes no difference
5. Cultural Incapacity
 - intent is not to be intentionally culturally destructive
 - lack of capacity to work with minorities
6. Cultural Destructiveness
 - attitudes, policies, and practices that are destructive to culture and the individuals within them

(Terrell and Randal 2009)

Appendix B: Sample Performance Appraisal

Source: Annapolis Valley Regional School Board

CONFIDENTIAL

Student Support Worker

Sample Performance Appraisal

(Name of School Board)

Name of Employee	Position Title	Location
Date of Current Review		Date of Last Review
Supervisor's Name	Supervisor's Position/Title	

SECTION 1: PERFORMANCE RATING SCALE

EXCEEDS JOB REQUIREMENTS: Designates a level of performance that is well beyond the normal requirements of the job. Performs additional duties and demonstrates initiative as a highly qualified and experienced member.

MEETS JOB REQUIREMENTS: Designates a level of performance that meets the requirements of the position; normal management support.

REQUIRES DEVELOPMENT: Performance indicates that the individual could benefit from additional development areas. Performance may still be in the development stage in some aspect(s) of the job; may not necessarily be considered a negative assessment of the employee's abilities.

BELOW JOB REQUIREMENTS: Performance is clearly below the standards expected in the position being rated. If overall performance is below job requirement, clearly defined plan for development is to be initiated to improve performance.

SECTION 2: SPECIFIC PERFORMANCE FACTORS

Please check off appropriate rating scale category for each rating factor below. Support your rating in the comments section.

Category	Exceeds Requirements	Meets Requirements	Requires Development	Below Requirements	Comments
GENERAL EVALUATION CRITERIA					
Maintains confidentiality					
Demonstrates responsible behaviour regarding attendance and schedule					
Demonstrates rapport with students					
Treats students in a respectful, responsible, and fair manner with consideration for the students' physical, social, and psychological development					
Maintains comprehensive records of students contact					
Keeps apprised of students disciplinary difficulties, taking or recommending appropriate action					
Communicates effectively with parents/guardians					
Works cooperatively as a member of the school team					
Participates in in-service and other school activities					
Communicates schedules and issues with principal and RCH coordinator or facilitator of African Nova Scotian students					
Completes and submits SSW monthly reports to principals and RCH coordinator or facilitator of African Nova Scotian students					
Demonstrates knowledge of external supports and external educational initiatives					
Demonstrates knowledge of African heritage					
Demonstrates mediation and conflict resolution skills					
Demonstrates desire to increase skills through PD, research, developing student activities/workshops, etc.					
Participate in community events relevant to the SSW Program					
ATTITUDES AND ABILITIES					
Organizes tasks and uses allotted time effectively					
Works effectively and responds to changing needs of students with minimal direction					
Displays a commitment to job requirements					
Shows good judgment and makes sound decisions					
Follows direction and follows through on tasks					
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS					

Signature of Employee

Date

Signature of School Administrator

Date

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