

# **Black Excellence Day Report Year in Review: 2022**



**“Sankofa”** is derived from the Akin Twi and Fante languages of Ghana, loosely meaning “to retrieve.” The concept is represented by the Sankofa bird, with feet facing forward and head turned to retrieve an egg on its back. The symbol is presented on ACSB materials as a reminder that “in order to understand our present and ensure our future, we must know our past.”



**SANKOFA**



## Overview

Nova Scotia's [Inclusive Education Policy](#) is a commitment to ensuring a high-quality, culturally, linguistically responsive, and equitable education for all students. The commitment to an equitable education echoes sentiments contained in the [BLAC Report on Education: Redressing Inequity—Empowering Black Learners](#), which was commissioned by the Government of Nova Scotia in 1994 to conduct a thorough review of the status of education for African Nova Scotian learners.

The [Inclusive Education Policy](#) calls on all partners within education to support the success of African Nova Scotians/Black learners, providing them with opportunities that inspire them to reach their promise and potential. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development through the African Canadian Services Branch, along with Regional Centres for Education and Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, invited students and staff in Nova Scotia's public schools, and all supporters, to wear black t-shirts to celebrate and stand in unity in support of the success of Black students. Black Excellence Day celebrates Black achievements, Black stories, Black art, Black innovations, and Black people and their communities. Black Excellence Day was first launched in June 2022.

Black Excellence Day recognizes the commitment to focus on equity by supporting the success of Black students and establishing safe and caring schools where all students feel they belong. Black Excellence Day acknowledges the authentic and diverse intersectionality of the African diaspora as beautiful with many diverse cultures, ethnicities, faiths, and lived experiences, and the 400-year legacy of people of African ancestry within the province of Nova Scotia.

It is a day to celebrate and recognize the many accomplishments of people of African descent and to undo the damage caused by biased/prejudiced and sometimes racist curricula or resources formerly used in schools that do not affirm African Nova Scotian and Black learners.

Students of African ancestry (African Nova Scotian and Black) are descendants of rich, multi-generational, and multi-ethnic histories of strength, resilience, and innovation. Thus, the value in such a day as June 17, 2022, when Nova Scotia's public schools celebrated their first Black Excellence Day.

Black Excellence Day focuses on recognizing the authentic and diverse intersectionality of the African diaspora. Students, staff, and other supporters were encouraged to stand in unity in support of the many successes shown by Black learners.

School community support was welcomed in celebrating Black Excellence Day in meaningful ways that resonate with individuals. Black Excellence is a day for every student to both acknowledge and celebrate Black Excellence.

This report provides highlights on the 2022 Black Excellence Day as celebrated in the RCEs and CSAP, and includes the following:

- messages from partners and community
- Black Excellence Day across the province
- how Black Excellence Day was acknowledged
- recommendations
- conclusion
- Black Excellence Day 2023

# Partner Messages

## Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

On June 17, Minister Druhan visited Dr. John C. Wickwire Academy where she was able to engage with students reading *Change Sings*, a book that is part of the new Diversity Library Collection. Minister Druhan and department staff also visited Liverpool to be part of the Black Excellence Day event hosted by South Shore Regional Centre for Education students and staff.



LEFT:  
Minister Druhan and department staff at Dr. John C. Wickwire Academy.

**“All students should feel valued, included, and celebrated.”**

*—Becky Druhan, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development*

## African Canadian Services Branch, Education and Early Childhood Development

**“Black Excellence Day contributes to realizing the vision begun in the BLAC (Black Learners Advisory Committee) Report on Education by highlighting the brilliance, gifts, and talents of Black students. Black Excellence Day honours the first-voice accounts of Black educational leaders, historical and current, and their allies throughout the province, as well as the educational opportunities which are inspiring African Nova Scotian students to achieve their promise and potential.”**

*—Dr. Marlene Ruck Simmonds, Executive Director of African Canadian Services*

**African Nova Scotian Affairs,  
Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage**

Dwayne Provo acknowledged the importance of not only celebrating but learning about Black Excellence in a recorded message. Full message can be viewed at:

<https://www.facebook.com/AfricanNSAffairs/videos/1203485997153743>

“Today, June 17, is the first Black Excellence Day in Nova Scotia public schools ... It’s a great initiative to help deepen the understanding of intersectionality while recognizing the importance of representation, particularly in the educational system ... Our Black youth must see themselves represented in the achievements, successes, and innovations across this province.”

—Dwayne Provo, Associate Deputy Minister (ANSA)

## Community Messages

“Today is Black Excellence Day across Nova Scotia. A chance to celebrate our successes and for allies to learn, reflect and question their opportunities to raise Black excellence in education and beyond.”

—Dr. Claudine Bonner, Associate Professor at Acadia

“You are brilliant, inspiring, creative, amazing leaders ... All that and so much more! Not just *one* day, but *everyday*.”

—Sharon Paris, Literacy Coach (HRCE)



LEFT:  
Black Excellence Day is a community/  
family affair.

# Connecting to Nova Scotia's Action Plan

Black Excellence Day not only aligns with the Inclusive Education Policy's guiding principle (4.5) that "every student deserves to belong (affirmed, validated, and nurtured), be safe, and feel welcomed in all aspects of their daily experience," it also connects to two pillars listed in [Count Us In: Nova Scotia's Action Plan in Response to the International Decade for People of African Descent 2015–2024](#):

## Recognition

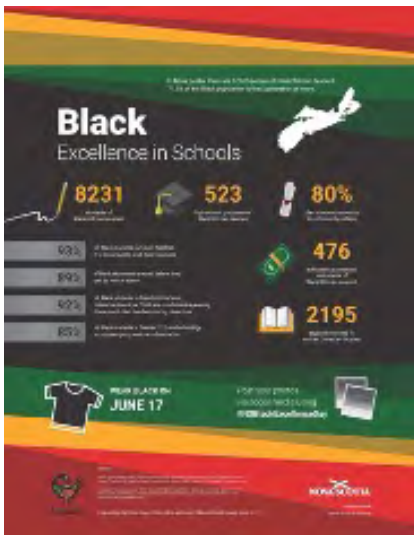
"This pillar is about recognizing and celebrating the important contributions of people of African descent ... and to ... emphasize that African Nova Scotian history is our shared history..."

## Development

"One of the goals of this pillar is to close the opportunity gap in education to promote lifelong learning."

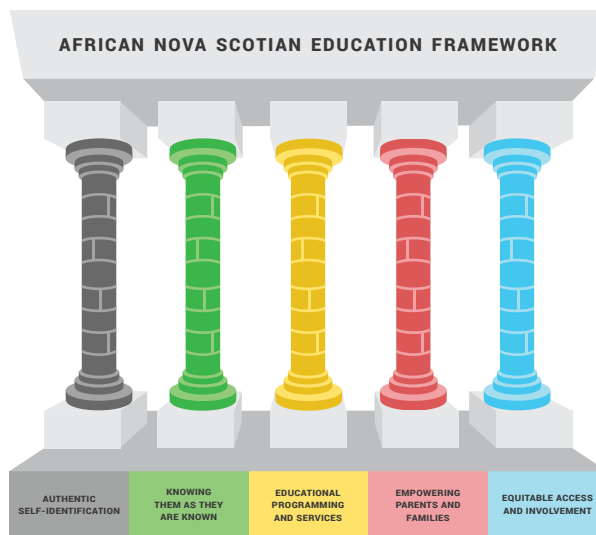
## Across the Province

Acknowledging Black Excellence in schools across the province serves to continue the work already in progress to build an educational system that is equitable and linguistically and culturally responsive to diverse lived experiences. Black Excellence Day acknowledges African Nova Scotian/Black trailblazers from the past and present. On the following pages, the selected images represent the future generation of positive changes we want to see in society and school communities. These images align with the themes represented by the five pillars listed in the [African Nova Scotian Education Framework](#).



ABOVE:

EECD's poster was distributed to schools to invite them to acknowledge Black Excellence.



ABOVE:

The five pillars of the African Nova Scotian Education Framework.



BELOW and RIGHT:  
Students learn about accomplished people of African descent who have created a path for future generations.





ABOVE:  
School staff and students serve African cuisine in celebration of Black Excellence Day.

RIGHT:  
African Nova Scotian and Black students are recognized for their achievements.



# Notable Highlights

## “Ubuntu” Aspiring African Nova Scotian Leaders and Youth Conference

In preparation for Black Excellence Day, Chignecto Central Regional Centre for Education hosted the “Ubuntu” Aspiring African Nova Scotian Leaders Youth Conference. The NSCC (Truro Campus) was actively involved in this initiative. Approximately 135 ANS youth from across the region attended the full-day event. Black Excellence was highlighted throughout the day. Participants were able to attend workshops ranging from financial education to mental health and wellness, etc.

The conference engaged ANS and Black learners in meaningful conversations and learning opportunities where they can grow in strength and understanding of their rich heritage. That same empowerment is what 18-year-old Sheraton Simmonds from Sydney Pier in Cape Breton said she felt. “It’s been really eye-opening,” said Simmonds. “I get to know that I’m not alone in this.”



## First Voices: Why Black Excellence Day Matters

ANS Student Support Worker for Rockingstone Heights Junior High and J.L. Isley High Schools, Lem Sealey, commentary in the Halifax Examiner on the necessity of Black Excellence Day for students who are unlearning Eurocentric focussed history/information and embracing the truth about who they are and where they come from:

“At my school, I have a lot of kids that are from Africa, the continent, various countries, and sometimes even in Global Geography class, they’re talking about where they’re from as third world countries. And they’re not telling the truth in the whole context that these countries are where they’re at because they’re not reaping the benefits of their own natural resources because there are countries in Europe that are taking their resources ... and even the US and Canada. When they’re teaching these lessons, how the kids feel goes totally out the window.”

“It’s unfortunate that it didn’t happen earlier,” Sealey said. “But sooner is better than later. And hopefully next year it could just be added, and it won’t just be a day of quote-unquote ‘celebration,’ but it’ll be a day of action and, awareness, and activities.”



## Successful Ideas

Black Excellence Day 2022 was acknowledged by:

- artwork
- bulletin boards
- classroom conversations about initiatives taken throughout the year to celebrate Black Excellence
- Diversity Library reading circles
- guest speakers
- luncheons
- music and song, such as the Black National Anthem, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*
- news/media announcements
- posters
- social media postings
- student projects and presentations
- trivia quizzes
- wearing black shirts/t-shirts
- wearing bracelets

## Conclusion

The first Black Excellence Day 2022 was filled with positive representations of individuals who have historically faced discrimination and racism not only in schools but in society. To celebrate and elevate people of African ancestry in this province gives all an opportunity to pause and acknowledge the many accomplishments and resilience of African Nova Scotian and Black individuals. This day acknowledges the strength of our ancestors, the fight in their descendants, and the hope for a future where African Nova Scotian and Black students will only be known as they are known in their respective communities. The African Canadian Services Branch hopes that Black Excellence Day and the many connections that will ensue will increase access to resources

## Recommendations

- 1 Have consistent messaging across the province that provides opportunities for all students to celebrate and acknowledge the achievements and successes of individuals of African descent.
- 2 Create a common area (e.g., online submission form) for RCEs and CSAP to share images, quotes, and other highlights of how Black Excellence Day was celebrated in their respective region.
- 3 Collect qualitative data (first voices) from all the RCEs and CSAP to determine the impact on students and staff of African ancestry.
- 4 All t-shirts in distribution across the province should highlight the Black Excellence Logo and have a common message(s) (e.g., I Am Black Excellence, or I Celebrate Black Excellence).

and meaningful involvement in future decisions that will positively support African Nova Scotian/Black students, parents, and staff within our schools and communities.

### Black Excellence Day 2023

Black Excellence Day acknowledges the authentic and diverse intersectionality of the African diaspora as beautiful with many diverse cultures, ethnicities, faiths, and lived experiences and the 400-year legacy of people of African ancestry within the province of Nova Scotia. Next year's celebration will take place on May 15, 2023.