
Response to the Black Learners Advisory Committee Report on Education



Message from the Minister

The *BLAC Report on Education* represents a major effort on the part of the Black Learners Advisory Committee and has raised a number of very important issues that must receive the full consideration of both my Department and Government. I am struck by the thoroughness of the report and by the balanced and thoughtful approach that it outlines to address the legacy of inequity that is documented. You are to be complimented for an exemplary study of a difficult subject.

I find in the *BLAC Report on Education* a disturbing portrait of a severely disadvantaged community of Black Nova Scotians. I have no doubt that, as BLAC suggests, this results in large measure from systemic racism and reflects the historic failure of the educational system to address the needs of the Black community. Thus, the Report's focus on institutional and systemic barriers is appropriate. It requires that the Department of Education and Culture's response ensures the issues raised are addressed in a fashion that will result in real change with lasting benefit to Black Nova Scotians.

I believe that it is important that the response to the Report puts in place a mechanism that will ensure the Black community works with and as a part of the Department of Education and Culture. Together, we can use the recommendations in the Report as a springboard to innovative approaches to improve learning that extend from pre-school to post-secondary education.

I have consulted with my Cabinet colleagues on the *BLAC Report on Education* and on my proposed response. I have received their support on the approach I am recommending. I also have their commitment to work with the Department of Education and Culture to support this work and to do their part to enhance learning opportunities for Black Nova Scotians. In the following, a summary of the main recommendations from the Report is listed and a description of the action to be taken by the Department of Education and Culture to respond to the recommendation.

To ensure that the desired results are being achieved, a complete review of actions taken in response to the BLAC Report will be undertaken in 24 months to measure success and determine how to make further improvements.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSE

1. Elevate the Black Learners Advisory Council (through legislation) to a Council on African Canadian Education to monitor the policies of the Department with regard to Black learners.

The Department accepts this recommendation. A Council on African Canadian Education (CACE) will be legislatively mandated through the *Education Act* in the fall of 1995 with terms of reference developed in consultation with BLAC and established through regulation. CACE will provide guidance to the Minister on programs and services in public schools and on adult education. It will work directly with staff in the Department responsible for programs and services for Black Nova Scotians. The Department will provide logistical support along with travel and meeting expenses for CACE.

In addition, the Minister will appoint Black Nova Scotians to the Council on Higher Education and to the new board of governors to be created for the Nova Scotia Community College. The Minister has also appointed a representative from the Black community to the Board of Governors of the Nova Scotia Museum and to the Steering Committee for a Nova Scotia Arts Board. The Minister will ensure that appropriate mechanisms are put in place to ensure on-going representation from the Black community on the Museum Board and the Arts Board.

- 2a,b. Establish an African Canadian Education Branch in the Department headed by an Executive Director reporting to the Deputy Minister with responsibility for the direction and coordination of all African Canadian education programs provided by the Department (elementary/secondary, adult, and community college).

The Department will create an African Canadian Services Division by September 1995. It will be headed by a Director and will be responsible for developing and coordinating public school programs and services for Black Nova Scotians. The Division will ensure that curriculum and materials reflect the cultural diversity of the province. It will provide advice and guidance to other divisions and branches of the Department regarding services to Black Nova Scotians and about the need for learning materials to reflect the heritage, culture and traditions of the Black community. It will have a mandate to liaise with other government departments, the federal government, and other agencies regarding the broader implications of the *BLAC Report on Education*. The Director of the African Canadian Services Division will attend and participate in senior management meetings. The Division will have sufficient staff to fulfil its mandate and the staffing level will be reviewed annually to ensure that appropriate resources are available.

CACE will meet regularly to review the activities of the African Canadian Services Division and will be consulted on the job descriptions and involved in the hiring process for staff in the African Canadian Services Division. The Director of African Canadian Services will, in turn, participate on CACE and will be responsible for providing staff support to CACE.

Funding for the new African Canadian Services Division will come from the existing budgets of BLAC and the Program Branch. Planning will begin immediately to hire initial staff including a Director, two consultants and secretarial support. The Department will review the operation of the African Canadian Services Division within the next 24 months to assess its success and to identify how to make further improvements.

3. Establish an Afrocentric Learning Institute to assist in curriculum development and conduct ongoing research on issues impacting on Black learners, act as a clearinghouse for information on strategies for education of Black learners, hold conferences and provide province-wide professional development.

The Department accepts this recommendation and will create an Afrocentric Learning Institute. Alternatives for placement including the desirability of locating the Institute in conjunction with a university will be explored with CACE. The Nova Scotia Council on Higher Education will work with CACE to develop a specific proposal and funding options for such an institute by January 1996.

Elementary/Secondary Education

- 7a. Communicate and enforce equity and anti-racist standards,
6. Establish a strong mechanism through the Council on Black Education to monitor the implementation of multicultural and anti-racism policies and ensure compliance.

The Department accepts these recommendations and will complete a draft multicultural and anti-racism policy and distribute it for input by spring 1996. The policy will clearly identify responsibility for implementation and outline the process for accountability. The new African Canadian Services Division will play a lead role in developing the policy and CACE will have a role in monitoring its implementation.

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- 7b. Provide \$50,000 to every school board to ensure effective implementation of anti-racism initiatives.

The Department will address this recommendation when the content and implication of the new anti-racism program and policy are known. The Department will identify specific funding requirements to ensure implementation and determine how the funding is to be provided.

8. Make cross-cultural and race relations training mandatory for all teachers including those in teacher training.

The Department accepts and will act on this recommendation. The draft Report on Teacher Certification requirements recommends cross-cultural and race relations training as a prerequisite for admission to both elementary and secondary education programs. The Department will also work with universities and school boards to implement mandatory training programs for current employees.

- 9a. Develop programs, resources, and learning materials on Black people, history, tradition, and culture.

The Department accepts and will act on this recommendation. A particular emphasis will be placed on developing materials through the new African Canadian Services Division in cooperation with other Program Divisions and other Branches. The Department now asks publishers to provide learning materials on the history of Black people and also provides funding and other assistance for Black writers/publishers to produce and distribute materials to Nova Scotia schools. The Nova Scotia Museum has been working for the past two years on developing a Black Cultural Database. Nova Scotia Museum research and collection information will be entered on the database and made available to schools and the public. Financial support for the Black Cultural Centre will also be continued.

- 9b. Allocate sufficient funds for additional staff to revise curriculum at every level to reflect the cultural diversity of Nova Scotia.

The Department accepts and will act on this recommendation. The new African Canadian Services Division will work with the English Program Services Division to ensure that all curricula, at the end of a five-year review process, reflect the cultural diversity of Nova Scotia. The Director and consultants in the African Canadian Services Division will have a direct role to play in this process.

10. Establish student assessment and testing practices that recognize racial, cultural, and gender diversity.

The Department accepts and will act on this recommendation. In the past, staff from the Race Relations and Cross Cultural Understanding Office reviewed provincial assessment practices for racial, cultural, and gender bias. This review will continue by staff in the new African Canadian Services Division and the Student Services Division. The Department will work directly with school boards and schools to discourage the use of tests which might discriminate based on race or culture.

- 13a. Continue to support the Regional Educators Program.

The Department accepts and will act on this recommendation. The Department will continue to support the Regional Educators Program and will work with CACE to ensure it remains a strong community-based resource. Management responsibility for the Regional Educators Program will be transferred to the Black Educators Association. The program will be reviewed annually by the Department and CACE with a particular view toward strengthening the relationship with school boards where and as that becomes possible. The Department and CACE will also develop a proposal regarding the desirable long-term relationship among BEA, the Regional Educators Program, and the Afrocentric Learning Institute.

- 13b. Financially support an education program for parents of Black students on how the school system works and to equip them to assist their children at various stages of development.

The Department accepts this recommendation and will act by working with school boards to develop an outline for such a program. A proposal will be completed by January 1996 and will include recommendations on funding requirements and possible funding sources.

- 14a. Establish a plan for learning centres in communities to provide academic and cultural enrichment programs for Black students after school or on weekends,
14b. Provide funds in the 1995-96 budget for community learning centres.

The Department accepts and will act on this recommendation. The Department will build on the work of BLAC to extend supplemental education programs to additional areas of the province. A plan for extending the program will be prepared by November 1995. It will identify priority locations across the province to be phased in, resources required per pupil, existing financial, physical and equipment resources that can be used for the program, and the additional

funding required and options to secure it. The amount of service being provided and the budget required to deliver effective services will be reviewed each year and actions taken to improve the program as required.

School Boards

- 5a. Hire Black teachers, guidance counsellors, and administrators to serve as role models.
- 16. Provide race relations and cross-cultural training for all teachers, staff, administrators, and school board members.

The Department accepts and will act on these recommendations. The Department will establish a new Affirmative Action Coordinating Committee to address these two recommendations and those of the previous Affirmative Action Committee. The NSSBA and the NSTU will sit on that committee and the new Director of African Canadian Services will play a lead role. The Committee will report by January 1996 on specific actions taken by each board to implement these recommendations. The new committee will also recommend additional actions to ensure the number of Black teachers, guidance counsellors, and administrators increases and that all staff receive race relations and cross-cultural training.

- 5b. Provide a support person in the school to whom Black learners can go for assistance,
- 17. Collaborate with communities in resolving discipline problems.

The Department accepts these recommendations and will act by working with the Nova Scotia School Boards Association to determine the best means of implementation. In addition, school councils will have a particular role to play in developing ways to implement this recommendation in local schools. The Department will work with the NSSBA and others to develop a report by March 1996 on actions that should be taken and who should have the responsibility for them.

Teachers

- 18. Ensure that academic expectations are communicated and reinforced regularly,
- 19. Watch the progress of Black children as early as grade primary and focus on assistance with basic skills in reading and mathematics.

The Department accepts and will act on these recommendations. The Department will work with school boards and schools to ensure the importance of this message is communicated to all

teachers. The new African Canadian Services Division will be asked to prepare materials that reinforce this theme for distribution to all teachers during the 1995-96 school year. Work will also be done to enlist the support of school board special education supervisors.

Teacher Education

4. Provide scholarships for 20 Black youth annually for the next 10 years to undertake teacher training.

The Department accepts and will act on this recommendation. Beginning with the 1996-97 budget year, a full tuition scholarship program for Black youth to take teacher training will be phased in, starting with 5 scholarships. In addition, universities will be asked to reserve the same number of seats for Black students in their teacher education programs.

- 15a. Teacher education programs incorporate anti-racism as a key element and reflect it in all documents,
- 15b. Sponsor cross-cultural and anti-racism training programs for faculty and staff,
- 15c. Develop guidelines for evaluation of teaching and learning materials and resources for race and cultural bias.

The Department accepts and will act on these recommendations. Work will be done with the Council on Higher Education and the teacher training institutions on implementation issues. Teacher training institutions will be asked to report on the status of these recommendations by June 1996. The draft Report on Teacher Certification also recommends anti-racism training as a prerequisite for admission to both elementary and secondary teacher education programs.

Preschool

8. Make cross-cultural and race relations training mandatory,
11. Provide quality preschool educational opportunities for African Canadian children with priority to rural areas and the inner-city.

The Department of Education and Culture has forwarded this recommendation to the Department of Community Services and discussed a response with representatives of that Department.

The Department of Education and Culture will consult with the Department of Community Services on developing pre-school programs to provide a structured entry into the school system.

Education and Culture will provide program planning assistance to ensure that the programs serve the needs of Black children and will explore funding options with Community Services. Specific proposals identifying priority locations, time lines and the funding required will be completed by September 1995. The intent of this initiative is to promote the development of structured programs to serve the needs of Black children without adversely affecting existing daycare programs.

The Department of Community Services established an Advisory Committee on Cultural Sensitivity in the fall of 1992, including senior Department managers and representation from the Black community. That committee is responsible for training Community Services staff in providing culturally sensitive community services. To date, over 350 staff have received two days of training plus follow-up sessions. Training caregivers and educators working in licensed day cares and pre-schools has also been a priority. In 1992 Community Services, in cooperation with Child Care Connections, developed a two-year Anti-Bias Project. To date, over 120 staff have received this training. Community Services will be reviewing these initiatives in light of training opportunities being provided by the Human Resources Department to ensure this training is having the greatest impact and to avoid duplication of services.

Adult Education

20a. Link upgrading and job skills training to employment by targeting jobs and provide work placement for at least a year.

The Department accepts and will act on this recommendation. A proposal for a pilot project in Whitney Pier which will provide innovative approaches to learning at work, work experience, and structured learning opportunities has been developed. In addition, project proposals have been submitted for consideration under the Community Learning Initiative for an African Canadian Business Centre and an Employment Centre to offer employment skills training to Black adults. Projects should begin this spring.

20b. Establish adult literacy programs in Black communities which are owned and run by the community,

20c. Extend the time frame of learning centres to provide more time to get the GED.

The Department accepts and will act on these recommendations. More than 19 literacy programs developed and implemented by the Black community have already been funded through the Community Learning Initiative and additional programs are being considered. The Literacy Facilitator for the Black community provides support for these programs, conducts tutor

training, and identifies resources. In 1995-96, level 3-4 (grades 9-12) training is being added to the Community Learning Initiative to assist learners in upgrading their skills to the GED level. An African Canadian curriculum for level 3 and 4 upgrading is also being developed.

- 20d. Human Resource Development Canada should provide increased allowances for people in training or retraining to cover essential living expenses.

This recommendation will be forwarded to Human Resources Development Canada with the Province of Nova Scotia's endorsement within 30 days.

Community College

- 21a. Make every effort to recruit in the African Nova Scotian community and develop better communication with those communities,
- 21b. Set up support systems on Community College campuses to help with transition and retention of African Nova Scotia students.

The Department accepts and will act on these recommendations. A Coordinator of Black Studies has been appointed for the Akerley Campus to strengthen communication with the Black communities and develop and implement a recruitment strategy. The Coordinator will also establish a support system for Black students, specifically focused on improving the transition of Black students to the campus, as well as student retention, and success. This initiative will be reviewed in one year with the goal of adapting the approach for other campuses serving Black communities.

- 21c. Develop and implement race relations policies for the college system.

The Department accepts and will act on this recommendation. The College will implement a training program for all staff to increase their understanding and sensitivity to the challenges Black students face in our society. The College is also currently reviewing all existing College policies to develop and implement a comprehensive policy framework in preparation for self-governance in April, 1996. The College places a high priority on the development and implementation of comprehensive race relations, employment and educational equity policies within this framework.

- 22a. Increase access to apprenticeship programs for African Nova Scotians by providing better coordination between community college placement offices and the Apprenticeship Division and ease restrictive grade requirements.

The Department accepts and will act on this recommendation. The College, as part of its admission policy, reserves one seat in each section of every core program on each campus for qualified Black students. This policy will continue and may expand if demand increases. There is an assessment policy for all non-Community College graduates who apply for the Apprenticeship Program. While individuals are encouraged to participate in upgrading if necessary, they are not denied access to the Apprenticeship Program, providing there is a willing employer.

- 22b. Provide scholarships for apprentices and technical trainees in the same way as in post-secondary fields of study.

The Department accepts this recommendation. The Apprenticeship Division will work with the Provincial Apprenticeship Board and the business community to develop funding programs to sponsor scholarships for Black students. A report on the success of this initiative will be completed by March 1996.

University Education

- 12a. Provide scholarships and financial assistance to Black learners and extend the Incentive Fund to cover all Black students in post-secondary institutions with an increase in the amount provided,
- 12b. Provide scholarships for Black students who wish to enter professional programs from which Blacks have traditionally been excluded.

The Department accepts these recommendations. Beginning with the 1996-97 university year, the Department will phase in a scholarship program for Black students pursuing studies in professional areas such as medicine, pharmacy, dentistry and engineering. The program will begin with two scholarships in the first year, three in the second and four in the third. The target professions will be treated as a group and scholarships allocated based on demand and priorities. The impact of the scholarships and the number required will be evaluated every three years.

The Department is committed to increasing the budget for the Black Incentive Fund within overall budget guidelines. Input will be sought from CACE and the Fund Advisory Committee on how to apply the increased funds.

Parents and the Community

23. Become active participants in the education of their children,
24. Find educational assistance, enroll children in supplementary educational programs, participate in school activities,
25. Develop alternative discipline measures to help children understand the choices they are making and the consequences,
26. Establish heritage schools for African Canadian children on Saturdays,
27. Set up an African Canadian Education Foundation and solicit corporate funding,
28. Provide programs for youth to build self-esteem and awareness of life choices,
29. Establish effective networking among all Black communities and start a political skills training program to increase leadership.

The Department accepts these recommendations and will develop programs to assist in providing appropriate support to the parents and communities to implement these activities. Projects will be developed with school boards to provide tutoring and student support programs. School Councils, as outlined in *Expanding Horizons: New Roles and Responsibilities to Support Student Success*, provide a particularly appropriate means to bring parents and schools together. The African Canadian Services Division will be charged with maintaining liaison with the community on these initiatives and identifying appropriate support from the Department.

- 30a,b. The final recommendations call for implementation of the report to begin in the 1995-96 financial year and for each recommendation to be in place no later than June, 1999. The Minister of Education is asked to make an annual report to the House regarding action taken on the report.

The Department will act in partnership with the Black community to have the African Canadian Services Division established and staffed by the fall of 1995 and to also have the mandate of the Council on African Canadian Education formalized by that time. The Department will begin immediate discussions with the Council on Higher Education on formalizing a proposal for the Afrocentric Learning Institute. Implementation will begin on many other recommendations immediately. Annual reports of progress will be provided by the Minister. A complete review of actions taken will be undertaken in 24 months to measure success and determine how to make further improvements.

CONCLUSION

The *BLAC Report on Education* presents a significant and vital challenge to the Department of Education and Culture and to Government. This response is not the end of the process; it is the beginning of the second stage of our journey. With the Report as our guide, we will now set in place the staff, policies, materials, and activities that will contribute to improving learning opportunities for Black Nova Scotians of all ages. More importantly, we will engage in a joint effort to address systemic issues that have disadvantaged the Black community, develop innovative approaches to creating new opportunities, and ensure that Black youth benefit from a fully supportive learning environment. I am excited to be able to work with you on these initiatives and offer you my complete support.