

Nurturing Well-being within African Nova Scotian Students

AFRICAN CANADIAN SERVICES BRANCH



“Every student deserves to belong (affirmed, validated, and nurtured), be safe, and feel welcomed in all aspects of their daily experience.”

— *Inclusive Education Policy* (2019, p. 2)

“Inclusive education is a commitment to honour and respect each student’s cultural and linguistic identities and knowledge systems.”

— *Inclusive Education Policy* (2019, p. 2)

The Commitment

Nova Scotia’s *Inclusive Education Policy* (2019) affirms a commitment to nurture the well-being and achievement of African Nova Scotian/Black learners. This commitment compels everyone within the provincial educational system to recognize and foster all aspects of students’ being and knowing, including the spiritual, emotional, social, physical, and environmental; to honour all students and treat them with care, respect, and dignity.

This commitment is aligned with African Nova Scotian cultural perspectives which embrace African Nova Scotian learners as descendants of rich, multi-generational and multi-ethnic histories of strength, resilience, and innovation. Nurturing and affirming Black students demonstrates care and value for their well-being and an appreciating of their gifts and talents within.



What's Important to Know?

Nurturing Black students' well-being and wellness within the education's system of care means:

- **Caring for** every Black child and youth in a culturally responsive manner that encompasses a combination of concern, compassion, commitment, responsibility, and action seeking to positively effect their personal well-being and academic success. (Gay 2018)
- **Challenging the narrative** of Black student underachievement. The narrative of Black student underachievement runs counter to how students are known in the community and is reflective of deficit thinking and educational practice.
- **Being aware** of the ways anti-Black racism shows up in the classroom and taking the necessary actions to eliminate it. Some examples of anti-Blackness in the classroom include:
 - disciplining Black students at a higher rate than their non-Black peers for doing the same thing
 - only interacting with Black parents when there is an issue
 - teaching students to ignore each others' differences (i.e., "colour blindness")
 - not granting Black students the patience and understanding shown to others



What Actions Can I Take?

Research findings suggest that for “schools to enable the well-being and positive self-esteem of young people it is important to promote and provide an educational experience that responds to every child's need for knowledge, linked to their unique experiences and histories. Though experiences in school are not the only factors that can affect the well-being of young people, it remains an important area to consider irrespective of ethnicity. (Ochieng 2011)

Some of the ways educators can ensure a welcoming and safe space for African Nova Scotian students and students of Black African ancestry include:

- identifying and eliminating discriminatory practices
- learning and correctly pronouncing the names of children and youth



- checking in with Black/African Nova Scotian students to make sure they feel safe, accepted, and that they belong at school and in their class—caring for their body, mind and Spirit
- learning about the historical African Nova Scotian communities and families through first-voice accounts
- inviting elders and community leaders as part of learning opportunities
- recognizing the importance and role of peer relationships in inspiring learning and achievement by creating opportunities for Black students to learn collaboratively with their friends and peer groups
- highlighting and embedding the many contributions of family, community, and the wider African diaspora year-round as part of curriculum learning resources
- respecting, appreciating, comforting and connecting with Black/African Nova Scotian students to ensure all aspects of a student's being and knowing (spiritual, emotional, social, physical, mental and environmental) are well.
- working collaboratively with Regional Coordinator, African Canadian Education Services and the Student Support Worker Program
- creating opportunities for outdoor learning and for students to be in nature and environments that are familiar and safe
- engaging in critical self-reflection to uncover your implicit bias and assumptions
- honouring and valuing the cultural and personal identities of all students



Helpful Resources and Learning Supports

The following resources support conversations about racism in our classrooms:

10 Tips for Teaching and Talking about Race:

www.embracerace.org/resources/teaching-and-talking-to-kids

Tips designed to help parents of all backgrounds talk to their children about race early and openly by lining up age-appropriate activities that can be incorporated easily into daily life.

Keynote: Why Cultural Responsiveness Matters for Social-Emotional Development:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vtC8qJXyL0>

Zaretta Hammond presents on why culturally responsive practices should be an important part of how we frame and practice social-emotional teaching and learning in schools.

3 Tips for raising equity:

<https://www.embracerace.org/resources/3-tips-for-raising-equity>

Tips compiled from research that can guide educators and parents in promoting equity with children.

6 ways to be an Anti-Racist Educator – Dena Simmons:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=UM3Lfk751cg

CRP Connect Series:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1PUruq7AGZwi3ZdSsx2ME54c9Yvbr6Ej2>

CRP Connect series from EECED consisting of videos and guiding questions to support discussion and learning.

For more information on nurturing well-being within African Nova Scotian students contact the African Canadian Services Branch at: (902) 424-3151.





References

Black Learners Advisory Committee. 1994. *BLAC Report on Education: Redressing Inequity – Empowering Black Learners*. Halifax, NS: Black Learners Advisory Committee. www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/blac-report-education-redressing-inequity.pdf.

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