

***RACE RELATIONS CROSS CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND HUMAN  
RIGHTS SERVICES  
Within Nova Scotia's Schools***  
**A Discussion and Position Paper**

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**NOVEMBER 1999**

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## Introduction

We are pleased to present this discussion paper on issues facing Race Relations Cross Cultural Understanding and Human Rights initiatives (RCH) across the province. By reading this paper you are entering an important discussion. This discussion engages school boards, the Department of Education, The Council on African Canadian Education, The Black Educators Association, African Nova Scotian learners-their parents, communities, and school teachers, as well as RCH and Student Support Workers. Some people may find the issues and questions presented in this position paper to be provocative. However, it is our belief that these questions need to be asked in order to promote a healthy discussion and effective utilization of RCH resources.

CACE in association with the Black Educators Association took on the task of preparing this position and discussion document in response to repeated comments and concerns by many stakeholders. The core issue identified by stakeholders which prompted this paper are: the perception that some RCH staff are currently taxed with duties that do not relate to RCH, thereby reducing the amount of time available to perform RCH intervention duties; and the perception that most RCH service delivery units are under-resourced both in terms of human and financial resources. The information, comments, recommendations and prescriptions contained in this position paper were gathered from a variety of sources. Including parents, students, African Nova Scotian teachers and educators, volunteers and employees of educational organizations such as BEA, CACE, Education Committees, as well as from School Board staff and Administrators from around the province.

CACE and BEA recognize that the African Nova Scotian community and the Department of Education have made progress in addressing some of the needs of African Nova Scotian learners over the past four years with the acceptance of the *BLAC Report on Education* in 1994 and *The Government Response to the BLAC Report* in 1995. For instance, significant gains have been made in developing an educational infrastructure within the African Nova Scotian community as evidenced by the establishment of the *African Canadian Services Division* within the Department of Education; the entrenchment of the *Regional Educators Program* within the *Black Educators Association*; the elevation of the *BLAC* to the *Council on African Canadian Education*; and, the ongoing efforts to establish an *Africentric Learning Institute* which will undertake research, curriculum development, teacher education, and educational leadership training.

Correspondingly, the establishment of RCH services is an important part of the emerging educational infrastructure, as are the ongoing efforts to ensure African Nova Scotian representation on Nova Scotia's school boards. Further development of this infrastructure will depend in part on a thorough discussion and examination of the key initiatives implemented to date. Consequently, it is hoped that this discussion paper will contribute to further development of the educational infrastructure.

As we enter the Millennium, African Nova Scotians have a renewed commitment toward educational achievement and knowledge of their African past. The recommendations and initiatives stemming from the *BLAC Report on Education* (1994) are aimed at this renewed commitment. We must invest wisely and strategically in people and initiatives which contribute to the achievement of the educational vision outlined in the *BLAC Report on Education*. Consequently, it is necessary to periodically discuss and review these initiatives to ensure they are meeting their intended purpose.

## History and Background of Establishing RCH Services

The climate for the establishment of RCH services by Nova Scotia's school boards directly paralleled racial incidents at Cole Harbour High School in the Halifax Regional Municipality. The Cole Harbour incident sparked widespread debate and discussion on the issue of educational inequity and racism in education. This debate, which was spearheaded by members of the African Nova Scotian community and supporters, led to a process of community consultation and ultimately the establishment of an RCH position within the former Halifax County-Bedford District School Board in 1990.

Similar positions followed: The former Halifax City School Board established an RCH position in 1992 and the former Dartmouth City School Board established a position in 1993. It should be noted that each position pre-dated the *BLAC Report on Education*. However, each position was established, in part, due to the concerns and leadership taken up by members of the African Nova Scotian community and supporters.

Former Halifax Regional School Board Superintendent, Dr. Donald Trider, points out that, "*The amalgamation of school boards across the province provided an opportunity for the African Nova Scotian to lobby for the retention of the three positions, and provincially to request the implementation of RCH positions in each school board. This process was greatly supported by the research and recommendations contained within the BLAC Report on Education.*"

The *BLAC Report on Education*, which contains 46 recommendations, sought partnership between government, school boards, and communities for the purpose of redressing historical and systemic racial inequity in the school system. Several of the recommendations from this breakthrough piece of research speak to the need for RCH services in public schools. These are outlined in recommendation 5b, 5, 7a, 7b and 8.

- 5b**     "*Provide a support person in the school to whom Black learners can go to share their frustrations and experiences. Schools should respond to issues of loneliness, of feeling different from the majority.*" (BLAC Report, Vol.1, pg.19-5b)
  
- 6**        "*Through the new Council on Black Education, establish a strong mechanism to monitor the implementation of Multi-racial and Anti-Racism policies in the public schools, and implement an intervention process for non-conformance to the standards.*"
  
- 7a**     "*Communicate and enforce equality and anti-racist standards; and require all components of the education system, including school boards, to develop and implement anti-racism policies.*"
  
- 7b**     "*To facilitate the process, the Department should provide \$50,000 to every school board to ensure effective implementation or continuation of anti-racism initiatives.*"

- 8 *“Make cross-cultural and race relations training a mandatory component for all in-service and teacher training programs, including child care teacher training.”*

BLAC Report Vol.1, pg.19

The Department of Education & Culture and the government of Nova Scotia gave a specific response to recommendations 5b, 6, 7a, 7b, and 8. By agreeing to do the following:

**Response to 5b:**

*“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.”*

**Response to 6 & 7a:**

*“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.”*

**Response to 7b:**

*“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.”*

**Response to 8:**

*“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.”*

The Minister concluded with the following:

*“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.”*

*Response to BLAC Report on Education, Pg. 12*

## RCH Survey Results

The Council on African Canadian Education and the Black Educators Association held informal discussions with: Regional Educators, Education Committees members, Regional Representatives of CACE, and RCH personnel over the past year to ascertain the key issues and concerns regarding RCH services. In December of 1998, the issues and concerns identified were framed into five discussion questions which were presented to senior School Board Administrators for comment in the form of a survey. Five out of the six English school boards responded to the survey. The Chignecto Regional School Board did not return a survey. The results of the survey were compiled in the early months of 1999 and have been summarized in this brief *Position Paper*.

Although the responses and comments contained in this survey cannot be said to represent the view of all School Board Administrators on this matter, and nor should this survey be viewed as an attempt by CACE and BEA to evaluate RCH initiatives in any way - as this requires a much more elaborate effort - the survey results do aptly highlight significant gaps in RCH programming and therefore points to the reasons for the current concerns.

As CACE, in cooperation with its partner, embarks on the task of developing a mechanism for monitoring the implementation of recommendations contained in the *BLAC Report on Education*, the issues and questions posed by the CACE/BEA survey will serve to stimulate discussion and solutions toward maximizing the impact of RCH. The African Canadian community through CACE, with assistance from BEA, will need to conduct a more comprehensive assessment of the RCH initiatives and a broader consultation with stakeholders before developing policy options for presentation to the Minister of Education.

### Survey Questions:

A total of (6) questions were contained in the RCH survey. These are listed below:

1. *When was the position of Race Relations Cross Cultural Understanding and Human Rights Coordinator/Consultant established by your board ?*
2. *Please outline the process by which the RCH position was established and implemented (please give details regarding any formal proposal to your school board, any contact with the Department of Education, any community involvement which may have assisted in bringing this position about).*
3. *Does your board have a policy in place stipulating that the RCH Coordinator/Consultant must be a member of one of the official target groups ?*

4. *Does your Board have a plan in place to evaluate the impact of RCH on the target communities the position(s) serve?*
5. *Does the RCH Coordinator/Consultant position(s) apportion its time equally amongst the target groups it serves, or is some other formula for time allocation utilized? Please elaborate.*
6. *Please feel free to elaborate on any other relevant or pertinent areas*

## Survey Responses

- |                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. When was the position of Race Relations Cross Cultural Understanding and Human Rights Coordinator/Consultant established by your Board? |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### ***Halifax Regional School Board***

The Halifax Regional School Board positions were established prior to amalgamation. Therefore, there were different dates for establishment for each of the three former school districts. These are:

Former Halifax County/Bedford District Board      1991  
Former Halifax District Board                              1992  
Former Dartmouth District Board                              1993

### ***Valley Regional School Board***

The Position of RCH Consultant was established in 1996

### ***Strait Regional School Board***

The Position of RCH Coordinator was established in 1996

### ***Cape Breton Regional School Board***

The Position of RCH Coordinator was established in 1996

### ***Southwest Nova Regional School Board***

The Position of RCH Coordinator was established in 1996

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2. Please outline the process by which the RCH position was established and implemented (please give details regarding any formal proposal to your school board, any contact with the Department of Education, any community involvement which may have assisted in bringing this position about). |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### ***Halifax Regional School Board***

Each position pre-dated the implementation of the *BLAC Report on Education*. However, each position was in part a response to

concerns from the African Nova Scotian community and supporters. The climate for the creation of the Halifax County positions directly paralleled the first Cole Harbour incident. The climate for the creation of the Halifax City position directly paralleled a physical confrontation at a local club and subsequent march against racism held in the City. The climate for the creation of the Dartmouth position was supported through a parental group formed to support Black students in Dartmouth Schools and was also part of the Dartmouth School Board Strategy.

***Valley Regional School Board***

The position was proposed by the Department of Education to the Local Amalgamation Committee. It was also on the board's original organizational chart.

***Strait Regional School Board***

Pursuant to the new Education Act (1996) the position was on the organizational chart designed by the Amalgamation Coordinator.

***Cape Breton Regional School Board***

Following the recommendations of the BLAC Report and the amalgamation of the two school boards, the position was created.

***Southwest Nova Regional School Board***

The position was identified by the Local Amalgamation Committee. Through consultation with primarily the African Nova Scotian community, the position was elevated from a Consultant to a Coordinator.

3. Does your board have a policy in place stipulating that the RCH Coordinator/Consultant must be a member of one of the official target groups ?
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***Halifax Regional School Board***

No

***Valley Regional School Board***

No

***Strait Regional School Board***

No

***Cape Breton Regional School Board***

No

***Southwest Nova Regional School Board***

No

4. Does your board have a plan in place to evaluate the impact of RCH on the target communities the position

***Halifax Regional School Board***

The planning for an evaluation process is well underway. However, at present no formal evaluation process exists.

***Valley Regional School Board***

No

***Strait Regional School Board***

No - Evaluation is a function of Program and Student Services Directorship.

***Cape Breton Regional School Board***

The board is in the process

***Southwest Nova Regional School Board***

This will be accomplished through performance appraisals of the position by the Director of Learning Services

5. Does the RCH Coordinator/Consultant position(s) apportion its time equally amongst the target groups it serves, or is some other formula for time allocation utilized? Please elaborate.

***Halifax Regional School Board***

There is insufficient time/staff to address equitably all concerns of all groups under the RCH mandate. Three app

- ◆ The development of educational programming for each area
- ◆ The development of yearly goals
- ◆ Response to crises problems or concerns

***Valley Regional School Board***

There is at least an assumption that time would be apportioned equally

***Strait Regional School Board***

Overall time being well distributed.

***Cape Breton Regional School Board***

The RCH Coordinator also has a Consultant of Mi'kmaq Education working with him

***Southwest Nova Regional School Board***

The time is not apportioned amongst the target groups. The responsibilities of the position are carried out according to the job description.

6. Please feel free to elaborate on any other relevant or pertinent areas.
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***Halifax Regional School Board***

***Valley Regional School Board***

***Strait Regional School Board***

The RCH Coordinator has devoted significant time in the past 18 months to policy development, employment equity, harassment, and discrimination. Also, professional development for the board.

***Cape Breton Regional School Board***

The RCH Coordinator works closely with the regional representative of the Black Educators Association

***Southwest Nova Regional School Board***

The RCH Coordinator in the first two years has dealt with addressing acts of aggression, violence, and intolerance, not necessarily related to race.

## The Discussion

**Point #1:**

*The need for transference of knowledge as to the genesis and history of the RCH initiative and the loss of the original intent and focus of RCH as perceived by the African Nova Scotian community.*

**The Situation:**

Discussion participants agreed that very little information is provided by school boards to emphasize and honour the genesis of RCH initiatives. Many RCH positions were established as a direct result of the BLAC Report Recommendations. Even in situations where such positions pre-date the *BLAC Report on Education*, many of these positions were, however, established in response to concerns from the African Nova

Scotian community and supporters.

Whereas the history of the RCH and SSW positions is not explicitly acknowledged by many school boards, the focus and direction of these positions has in some instances lost their original intent. Most discussion participants note that many RCH positions have been adapted - without consultation with the African Nova Scotian community. It was also noted that some RCH Staff perform non-RCH related functions, which are mandated by their formal job descriptions (e.g. contract negotiations).

**The Proposed Direction:**

Most discussion participants agreed that the function, role, and job description of RCH should be designed to reflect the original intent of serving the needs of African Nova Scotian learners. Most discussion participants acknowledge that non-African Nova Scotian students are at risk and require support. They recommended that additional resources be hired in these instances, and that in no way should personnel originally hired to work with African Nova Scotian learners be forced to stretch their mandate to work with *all at risk* learners or *all the marginalized target groups*.

**Point #2:**

*The need for policy to ensure the integrity of stated goals of the RCH initiative*

**The Situation:**

Several discussion participants expressed concern that it is often the case that the African Nova Scotian community takes tremendous public risk and responsibility to ensure institutional change, however, these changes, even when reflected in the institutions' practices, often do not get reflected in the policies of such institutions. It was noted that when goals are not reflected in an institution's policies, it becomes very easy to abandon such goals, or leave such goals out of the loop when allocating resources. It was further noted that an absence of stated policies to support RCH goals has resulted in modifications to RCH programming which has compromised the integrity of RCH.

The example offered by all discussion participants is the fact that none of the school boards has a policy which states that the person(s) hired to do RCH work must be a member of the designated target groups. A further example was offered in reference to the Southwest Nova Board which hired a non-racially visible person, despite the fact that, according to the African Nova Scotian community, most of the contentious RCH matters revolve around racial intolerance.

A survey of five of the six English school boards concurs with the concerns of discussion participants. Survey results reveal that none of the five school boards surveyed has a policy which states that RCH personnel must be members of the designated target groups.

**The Proposed Direction:**

It was recommended that CACE and/or the BEA approach each of the school boards to request they adopt a policy which explicitly states that RCH positions must hire members from the target groups. It was noted that White women are an over-represented group in the make-up of employment equity hirings, despite the fact they are the least disadvantaged of the designated target groups. It was further noted that hirings should reflect the critical issues at hand. For instance, if race is the major issue, a person of color should be hired. It would not serve well to hire a person who is White and physically challenged, or White and female, when greater benefit can be obtained by hiring a person who is Black or otherwise racially disadvantaged.

**Point #3:**

*The need for measurable goals and outcomes for RCH*

**The Discussion:**

Discussion participants noted that there is concern by members of the African Nova Scotian community regarding the results and outcomes of RCH initiatives. Skepticism as to whether RCH is having an impact on the target groups served is very prevalent. It was noted that part of the problem in this area may simply be a matter of communication. It was further noted that members of the African Nova Scotian community are eager to celebrate positive results, but currently cannot enumerate what these positive results may be as information is not

A survey of five of the six English school boards, reveals that only two boards have begun a planning process to evaluate the impact of RCH on the target groups served. Of the two which have begun, there is no indication that anything substantial has occurred.

**The Proposed Direction:**

It was recommended that action be taken to ensure that all RCH initiatives be required to adopt a formal evaluation process. It was further noted that all RCH initiatives should have a strategic plan. This strategic plan must be communicated to RCH stakeholders. More importantly, a *Report Card* on the status of RCH goals and outcomes should be produced annually. This Report Card should be presented publicly to RCH stakeholders through the vehicle of the school board.

**Point #4:**

*The need to examine resources committed to RCH*

**The Discussion:**

Discussion participants expressed concern regarding the level of resources currently being committed to RCH. All participants feel that RCH is significantly under-resourced both in terms of financial and human resources. Participants called attention to the fact that the *BLAC Report on Education* recommended that each school board be allotted at least \$50,000 to undertake RCH initiatives, however, these funds have never been allotted. There is a perception by many that school boards view RCH as an *add-on*. Therefore, resources for RCH are inadequate. Moreover, there is a perception that school boards view RCH as a non-essential service which is expendable. Most discussion participants do not have faith that school boards will continue to grow their RCH resources over the next while.

A survey of five of the six English school boards, reveals that human resources are inadequate for all RCH initiatives across the province. For example, when asked whether RCH apportions its time equally amongst the target groups it serves, the Halifax Regional School Board noted that: *There is insufficient time/staff to address equitably all concerns of all target groups under the RCH mandate. There is insufficient time, because of staff and funding limitations, to address the need and the school board's responsibility to the needs of one group, let alone the needs of all groups under the mandate.*

**The Proposed Direction:**

Discussion participants recommended that school boards across the province be asked to adopt a motion which states that resources to RCH will not be cut or in any way diminished while school boards are attempting to eliminate their deficits. School boards should exempt RCH from budget

cuts because RCH is aimed at redress and correcting past inequities.

Participants recommended that CACE and the African Canadian Services Division revisit all BLAC Report recommendations that deal with resources to RCH. The Department of Education must be held to account for the implementation of these recommendations.

**Point #5:**

*The need to examine the position classification of RCH positions and to examine the location of RCH positions within the school board administrative structure and hierarchy.*

**The Discussion:**

Discussion participants feel that all RCH positions should be established at the Directors level. Participants also submit that RCH should be established as a Division within each school board, and be equipped with an appropriate level of human and financial resources as are all other Divisions (eg Human Resources, physical plant, Finance/Accounting etc.). In the view of discussion participants, the role and status of RCH within the school board structure should parallel the role and status of the African Canadian Services Division within the school board.

**The Proposed Direction:**

Participants recommended that the Department of Education facilitate discussion and negotiations between school boards and RCH stakeholders to establish RCH Divisions within all Nova Scotian school boards. Several discussion participants noted the amalgamation and the mere size of each school board dictates the need to centralize RCH resources to a Division within each board.

## CONCLUSIONS

**A**s a result of participating in dialogue with key RCH stakeholders, the Council on African Canadian Education has arrived at six central conclusions:

- (1) The Council on African Canadian Education believes that RCH initiatives are an essential component of the educational infrastructure in the African Nova Scotian community.
- (2) The Council on African Canadian Education believes that the global political climate of fiscal restraint, governmental disengagement, and the resurgence of racial and cultural intolerance poses a severe threat to the gains made by historically disadvantaged groups in having past inequities redressed through RCH initiatives. Moreover, CACE believes that as these unfavorable global trends persist this will signal the need for increased RCH resources in order to counter and neutralize the growth of anti-democratic and anti-libertarian attitudes and actions.
- (3) The Council on African Canadian Education believes that current attempts to restructure and review RCH initiatives are motivated by budgetary constraints. Thus, there is the risk that RCH programming considerations will be marginalized relative to financial considerations in any attempt to restructure RCH.

to restructure RCH initiatives. Such actions would be detrimental to both the existence and impact of RCH initiatives.

(4) The Council on African Canadian Education concurs with the view of discussion participants that the African Nova Scotian community holds a distinct place in any debate on RCH restructuring because of its significant role in advancing the establishment of RCH initiatives across the province. At the same time, CACE recognizes and supports the rights of all other historically disadvantaged groups to have equitable access to RCH programming in Nova Scotia's schools.

(5) The Council on African Canadian Education feels it is imperative that all decision-making stakeholders within RCH observe the fact that the African Nova Scotian Community has in the past and currently gives priority to issues of anti-racism over cross-cultural understanding and human rights issues. Further, BLAC Recommendations 7,8,9 and 10 focus on anti-racism and not necessarily RCH issues in general.

(6) The Council on African Canadian Education believes that the Government of Nova Scotia and the Department of Education must honour its legislative commitment to implement programs and services which support African Canadian Education - as prescribed by the Education Act: "*School boards shall provide and implement programs and policies promoting African-Canadian Education.*" Chapter 1, Education Act of 1995-96, Section 140(a)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with the conclusions presented, the Council on African Canadian Education is making the following recommendations to the Department of Education regarding RCH initiatives across the province.

It is recommended that:

- ◆ The Department of Education take immediate steps to open a dialogue with all school boards on the status of the BLAC Recommendations #7, #8, #9 and, #10.
- ◆ The Department of Education in consultation with CACE and the Black Educators Association, take immediate steps to develop a strategic plan to secure resources for the implementation and monitoring of recommendations #7, #8, #9, and, #10 of the *BLAC Report on Education*.
- ◆ The Department of Education take immediate steps to develop provincial standards for RCH programming and a formula for funding RCH programming to school boards.
- ◆ The Department of Education bring to completion and adopt its own Race Relations Policy, and that the Department of Education ensures that Race Relations Policies of Nova Scotia's school boards are congruent with that of the Department.