



# BLACK EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION

RESPONSE TO

## REALITY CHECK:

**A Review of key program areas in the BLAC Report for their effectiveness in enhancing the educational opportunities and achievement of African Nova Scotian Learners**

**February 24, 2010**

## ***Introduction***

The Black Educators Association (BEA) has read the Reality Check Report and would like to acknowledge the amount of work that the consultants undertook to produce this report. The Association understands this report reviews twelve programs and services that were selected from the entire BLAC Report.

The Association remains fully aware of the connection between the BLAC Report and the Association and the many implications the BLAC Report has for the programs and services BEA delivers to African Nova Scotian learners. As a long-standing grass roots educational organization, BEA understands the importance of communication and the effectiveness of programs and services. These two components are fundamental to the overall delivery of the programs and services BEA offers, and they are often the Association's greatest challenge.

After reading the entire report, the Association must say the timelines for completion of the recommendations are not realistic. It should also be noted that even though the Association agrees with some of the recommendations, some of them are outside the Association's responsibility or our programming. However, the Association agrees with most of the findings in full or in part. The Association will continue to work to improve the delivery of our services and programs for African Nova Scotian learners. The Association will continue working with our educational partners and seek new partners to ensure that African Nova Scotian learners have access to the greatest possible opportunities and resources to support their educational journey.

The Black Educators Association (BEA) will respond to both the findings and recommendations in each of the four sections:

Executive Summary

Black Educators Association

Regional Educators Program

Cultural Academic and Enrichment Program

The Association will give a general response to the Executive Summary and provide a more in-depth response to the Regional Educators Program and the Cultural Academic and Enrichment Program.

## **Executive Summary:**

### ***Finding***

**Two community-based programs—the Regional Educators Program and the Cultural Academic and Enrichment Program—of the Black Educators Association meet important social and cultural needs; however, to enhance the educational achievement of African Nova Scotian students, a need for continued realignment, refocusing and resources is clear.**

The Association agrees with this finding. Both the Regional Educators Program and the Cultural Academic and Enrichment Program have been in place for over fifteen years, and neither program has had a major change since its inception. The Regional Educators Program underwent a review and, as a result, a new program focus and job description have just been implemented this year. The Association knows it will take some time to fully implement the program changes, but it also knows that the changes must not be done in isolation. They must align to the Cultural Academic and Enrichment Program.

### ***Recommendations***

**The Black Educators Association re-establish greater communication with its base across the province through listening sessions, and report back to the groups with it met in three months on the results of its earlier meeting. – 3 months**

The Association agrees with this recommendation. It is important to communicate with the base in order to keep the base informed of the programs and services the Association offers and to seek the base's comments on the programs and services within the BEA's scope. It will be beneficial to both BEA and the communities to understand where each sees the gaps and or strengths of the programs and services, as well as to identify other concerns. It will be important to let the community know what it is within our scope to do and, when needed, to help the communities re-direct their concerns to the appropriate agency.

It will be important to reassure the community that the Association will meet with them again, within a reasonable time of the earlier meeting. It is important to note that BEA has already started this consultation which will be on-going and a regular part of what the Association will do yearly. BEA will establish an overall framework for community consultations within the next three months to be implemented in the fall of 2010.

**The Black Educators Association be designated a partner within the tripartite monitoring structure designed to address the recommendations of this report. - 3 months**

The Association agrees with this recommendation. However, the proposed time line is not realistic. A realistic time line can be determined only as a result of the first several meetings. It is important for the partners within the tripartite structure to review each partner's response to all of the recommendations and establish an overall framework for their implementation within the human and financial environments of each of the partners. It is important to establish an appropriate time line for the implementation with targets for implementation and accountability measures. The meeting to start the process can happen within the three months; however, the overall design phase and implementation will take much longer.

**The Black Educators Association fully implement the findings of the 2006 Review of the Regional Educators Program. – 6 months**

The Association agrees with this recommendation. BEA has already started to implement the findings of the 2006 Review of the Regional Educators Program. To fully implement those findings there are financial and human resource implications that the Department of Education and the Council on African Canadian Education must address. If they can commit to the financial and human resources needed, BEA will be in a position to fully implement the findings. Unfortunately, until an adequate financial and human resource commitment is made, this recommendation will take longer than six months to fully implement.

**The Black Educators Association review and restructure the Cultural and Academic Enrichment Program (CAEP), where necessary. – 6 months**

The Association agrees with this recommendation. The review can start within the timeline given, however it will take longer than six months to review and restructure the CAEPs. This program has not had any major changes since its inception. Therefore, the timeline of 6 months is not realistic. BEA will strike a committee to start the process within the given timeline. It is important to make sure this program is restructured in such a way that it meets the needs of ANS learners for the next several years. It is also important that once the program is restructured it be monitored and adjusted as required.

**The Black Educators Association increase the professional development opportunities for tutors and site co-coordinators to enable them to program for multi-age groups and to document their student's growth and learning. – 6 months**

The Association agrees with this recommendation. The timelines presented will be more conducive when the restructured program is being implemented. As the majority of the CAEPs now have instructors with various skill levels of the instructors and variations in programming, this recommendation will be more difficult to implement in the current environment. This recommendation will have a better fit and application once the review and restructuring has taken place. BEA will currently continue with professional development. Future professional development will be more focused as it must reflect the restructured program's outcomes.

**Black Educators Association**

***Findings***

**BEA is identified as an organization that assists parents in addressing the issues of racism in schools.**

The Association agrees with this finding. BEA continues to work closely with parents in addressing the issues of racism in schools. It is important to be both proactive as well as reactive when dealing with issues of racism. The Association must continue working to provide strategies to parents when dealing with issues of race. BEA acknowledges it must empower parents and community members to work as partners when dealing with issues of race.

**BEA is meeting the needs in terms of tutoring in some communities.**

BEA agrees with this finding. It is important to note that BEA provides academic, cultural and social support to African Nova Scotian (ANS) learners through its after school program (CAEPs). The Association does not call it tutoring, as this often implies "tutoring" in the very narrow sense, in which the tutors have a knowledge level of the subject area. This is not the case in many of the programs BEA delivers. BEA continues to stress the importance of having the program offer academic, cultural and social support for ANS learners.

**BEA as an organization needs to improve communication with the Black communities.**

BEA agrees with this finding. The Association understands the importance of consistent, appropriate and informative communication. It must engage in two-way communication. The Association needs to continue to develop and highlight varied communication modes and explore other ways to improve communication. The Association has taken the initiative to reconnect with ANS communities, and it acknowledges that this communication needs to be delivered in a way that allows communities to make sense of it. This will be incorporated in the Association's overall communication strategy.

## ***Recommendations***

### **The Black Educators Association re-establish greater communication with its base across the Province. -3 months**

BEA agrees with this recommendation. The Association has already started to re-engage the community by holding town hall meetings, and it understands this is only one part of a comprehensive communication strategy. The Association recognizes that it needs to access resource people with expertise in this area to help develop an overall communication framework for the Association and its programs. Due to the complexities associated with a communication strategy, this will happen in phases over a period of time. The Association will strike an ad-hoc committee that will include community representation to work with industry experts to develop various communication models, necessary for an effective communication strategy. The Association will assess the effectiveness of this communication strategy and amend it as necessary.

### **The Black Educators Association fully implement the findings of the 2006 Review of the Regional Educators Program. – 3 months**

BEA agrees with this recommendation. The Association has started and worked on the implementation process throughout this year. A new position description for the Regional Educators Program, coupled with a companion Performance Appraisal tool, has been implemented this year. The Association must begin to educate our base on the new direction of the Regional Education Program that was a result of the program review, which included community voice. The Association will activate the Regional Educators Program Advisory Committee to work on implementation. However, in order to fully implement the Regional Educators Program Review, the Department of Education and CACE will need to provide the additional funding necessary for increasing personnel and the associated operational cost. BEA will meet with all parties to request the additional financial aid needed to fully implement the Regional Educators Program Review.

### **The Black Educators Association be designated a partner within the tripartite monitoring structure designed to address the recommendations of this report. – 3 months**

BEA agrees with this recommendation. The Association believes this to be a critical component in order to monitor the recommendations and work to combine our resources to foster the future growth and development of ANS communities. To act on this recommendation it must be decided who takes the lead in organizing the first meeting, in developing a mandate and in creating accountability measures. BEA looks forward to being a part of this tripartite structure. The President or the President's designate will represent the BEA on this tripartite structure. It will not be the BEA's representatives on CACE.

## **The Black Educators Association seek funding to document and disseminate its work with African Nova Scotian learners and families. -6 months**

The BEA agrees with this recommendation, but it will need time and funding to identify, design, collect, correlate and finally disseminate various data about our programs. This will require BEA seeking out some resource people to assist us in establishing this process. The Association will need to be knowledgeable about data and records management, recognizing the importance of data to guide direction as well as measure accountability and success. This will require funding from government and other sources. The timeline stated in this report is not realistic for our Association considering its resources and capacity at this time. This must be a priority of the Association within the next year and beyond.

## **Regional Educators Program**

### ***Findings***

#### **Regional Educators provide a much-needed service in African Nova Scotian communities in terms of assisting parents in navigating the school system.**

BEA recognizes the important role Regional Educators play in ANS communities. The Regional Educators work with parents, students and schools to improve the educational experience of ANS learners in the school system. There are many challenges associated with working as intermediaries between communities and the school system. As a result, Regional Educators are constantly challenged to perform a difficult balancing act.

#### **There is a need for clarification of roles and focus.**

The Regional Educators new job description will take time to implement as they are making the change. It is important that the Association assist the Regional Educators to share this new direction for the Regional Educators' Program and the job Regional Educators do within the communities and the schools system. Since there are other complementing positions in the education system that also support ANS learners, it is critical that everyone knows what the role and responsibilities of the Regional Educators are at this time. This will minimize confusion and duplication, thus giving maximum benefits to ANS learners.

#### **Regional Educators attempt to meet needs in a community with many needs.**

The Association is aware this happens. While the Association acknowledges the difficult position of Regional Educators, it informs them of the Regional Educators Program's mandate and their job description and encourages them to redirect communities to government organizations and other agencies whenever appropriate.

## **Current geographic region too large.**

The Association is fully aware of this issue. The Association worked to make sure this issue was addressed in the Regional Educators Program Review, but we are awaiting the financial resources necessary to address this concern. Due to the ANS communities being spread out throughout all regions, more personnel is needed to cover the region effectively. This is an issue BEA has raised and continues to raise with the Department of Education and CACE.

## **Advocacy and Adversarial Roles**

The Association understands this will happen as a result of different perceptions; however, ongoing training on effective advocacy, mediation and overall communication must be a major aspect of the overall professional development of all staff.

## ***Recommendations***

### **The Black Educators Association (BEA) continue to implement the recommendations of the Program Review of the Regional Educators Program, February 2006. – 3 months**

BEA agrees with this recommendation. The Association has started the implementation process throughout this year. A new position description for the Regional Educators' Program, coupled with a companion Performance Appraisal Tool, has been implemented this year. The Association must begin to educate our base on the new direction of the Regional Education Program, which came about as a result of the program review that included community voice. The Association will activate the Regional Educators' Program Advisory Committee to work on the implementation. In order to fully implement the Regional Educators' Program Review, the Department of Education and CACE will need to support this effort by providing the additional funding necessary for increasing personnel and the covering the associated operational costs. BEA will meet with all parties to determine the amount of additional financial resources needed to fully implement the Regional Educators' Program Review. This process has begun, but it will take longer than 3 months to complete.

### **The Department of Education provide funding for another Regional Educator for the most geographically challenged area. – 3 months**

BEA supports this recommendation. When BEA considers the challenges for the Regional Educators, there are two challenges, one being population density, the other being geographical area. It is important to try to find a balance that can meet both challenges. In order to achieve that end, it would be ideal to have two additional Regional Educators. This is necessary to ensure that the Regional Educators' Program meets the needs of ANS learners in the various regions. BEA would like the Minister of Education to set up a meeting with CACE, ACSD and BEA to action this recommendation for the fiscal year 2010- 2011. The process can begin within the timeline indicated.

**The Black Educators Association (BEA) continue to review and restructure its program to maximize the use of its personnel, assets and resources. -3 months**

BEA agrees with this recommendation. The process can begin within the next several months, however it may be impacted by some of the recommendations related to the Regional Educators' Program Review. This review and restructuring process will be done based upon the current environment and the future direction BEA has chosen for the programs and services it delivers.

**The Black Educators Association (BEA) evaluate the Parenting Workshops to gather more concrete data on their impact on parent involvement in their child's education and their performance. -6 months**

BEA agrees the Parenting Workshops needs to be evaluated and data collected and analyzed to determine the impact of the workshops. This is not a BEA program but a program of the African Canadian Services Division. The Regional Educators assisted with the logistics of the workshop. BEA would be very interested in the information gleaned from such an evaluation.

**The Black Educators Association (BEA) provide more regular and detailed accounts to the Department of Education on the work of Regional Educators and the relationship of that work to ANS students.- Ongoing**

BEA agrees with this recommendation. BEA will continue to provide written reports to the Department of Education, specifically the African Canadian Services Department. BEA will work with the African Canadian Services Division to provide more informative reports.

## **Cultural Academic and Enrichment Program**

### ***Findings:***

**CAEP provides opportunities for developing a positive cultural and academic sense of self among ANS students.**

BEA agrees. The CAEP continues to provide many opportunities for ANS students. The BEA must also acknowledge that the CAEP is challenged in parts of the province to acquire staff with the skills necessary to move the literacy and numeracy components forward. The CAEP is very good at presenting the cultural component for ANS students. More work must be done to provide support to staff in this program.

## **CAEP faces a number of challenges as a program.**

BEA acknowledges the challenges become more pronounced each year for various reasons. The CAEP was designed to meet the needs of the average student. However, the program has students with various ability levels as well as special needs. This creates a challenge for the staff and more importantly for the student. The program must move toward a sharper focus in literacy and numeracy.

## **CAEP tutors and staff have important assets and commitments to the students and the program, and these need to be recognized and developed further.**

BEA agrees and will continue to assess and develop the human resources of the program in a variety of ways.

## ***Recommendations***

### **The Black Educators Association review and restructure the Cultural and Academic Enrichment Program, where necessary.**

The Association agrees with this recommendation. The review can start within the timeline given. However, it will take longer than six months to review and restructure the CAEPs. This program has not had any major changes since its inception. Again, the timeline of 6 months is not realistic. BEA will strike a committee to start the process within the given timeline. It is important to make sure this program is restructured in such a way that it meets the needs of ANS learners for the next several years. It is also important that, once the program is restructured, it be monitored and revised as required.

### **The Black Educators Association increase the professional development opportunities for tutors and site co-ordinators to enable them to program for multi-age groups and to document their students' growth and learning.**

The Association agrees with this recommendation. The timelines presented will be more appropriate after the restructured program is implemented. As the majority of the CAEP's instructors have various skill levels and variations in programming, this recommendation will be more difficult to implement in the current environment. It will be easier to apply once the review and restructuring has taken place. BEA will currently continue with professional development. Future professional development will be more focused as it must reflect the restructured program's intended outcomes.

### **School administrators, teachers and families establish links between schools and the Cultural and Academic Enrichment Program.**

BEA agrees with this recommendation. This will be part of the overall communication strategy to be developed by BEA for the organization and all of the programs it delivers.

Currently, some CAEPs operate in some schools, and the principals of these schools have a greater awareness and knowledge of the program than other administrators. Regional Educators are encouraged to communicate with school administrators and staff about the program on a regular basis. This is critical, as schools are the place where students are recruited to join the program. More work has to be done in this area.

**The Africentric Learning Institute (ALI) conduct follow-up research on the impact of the Cultural and Academic Enrichment Program on the development of numeracy, literacy and positive cultural identity.**

BEA agrees with this recommendation. BEA will work with ALI to provide the information required to undertake this research and analyze the impact of CAEP. This data will help shape and guide the future of the CAEPs.

***Conclusion:***

In conclusion, BEA has found this report to be mindful of work that all the stakeholders undertake and engage in to support ANS learners and ANS communities. This report also identifies what has to be done and identifies critical actions that must be undertaken by all stakeholders, such as self-identification, data collection and analysis. Overall, this report informs all stakeholders of the work which is being done, but equally importantly of the work which has yet to be done. The Black Educators Association looks forward to the Minister of Education's response to this report and to learning what resources are going to be put in place to action many of these recommendations.