SANKOFA

African Nova Scotian
Student Support Worker
Guidelines

NOVA SCOTIA

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"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 African Canadian Services Branch materials as a reminder that "in order to understand our present and ensure our future, we must know our past."

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African Nova Scotian Student Support Workers

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Regional Coordinators and Facilitators of African Canadian Education Services (ACES)

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Guidelines Working Group

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Working Group Members:
- Lisa MacNeil, SSW CBVRCE
- Lorraine Reddick, SSW SRCE
- Ashley Taylor, SSW HRCE
- Kathy Rhodes, Regional Coordinator ACES, SRCE
- Tracey Mulder, Regional Coordinator ACES, SSRCE
- Frances Waterman-O'Connell, Facilitator ACES, HRCE
- Melissa Downey, Student Services Consultant, ACSB

Education and Early Childhood Development Partners

We appreciate the efforts of our department partners, whose attention to detail and commitment to clarity have greatly improved the quality of these guidelines.

Community

Finally, we thank the broader community for their ongoing support. Your participation and enthusiasm have been the driving force behind the continued success of the Student Support Worker Program.

This document is a testament to the collaborative spirit and dedication of all involved. We are confident that these guidelines will serve as a valuable resource, and we look forward to continuing our work together to achieve our shared goals.

Contents

Overview

The African Nova Scotian Student Support Worker (ANSSSW) Program is dedicated to nurturing well-being, supporting academic achievement, and improving self-esteem (both academic and cultural) for African Nova Scotian/African Ancestry (ANS/AA) students. Framed by the pillars of the *African Nova Scotian Education Framework* rooted in *Ubuntu* philosophy, the program ensures deliberate integration of ANSSSWs into the fabric of educational institutions to establish and cultivate a culturally safe, supportive, and respectful school climate. ANSSSWs actively mobilize and integrate both school and community resources, aiming to enhance their impact on student learning. Collaborating with administrators, teachers, parents/guardians, and the community, ANSSSWs seek to directly influence the educational experience of all ANS/AA students throughout Nova Scotia.

Background

Students who self-identify as ANS/AA want to feel safe, cared for, and inspired within our provincial education system. Throughout our history, deliberate attempts through policies and practices to keep ANS/AA individuals as an economic, social, educational, political, and cultural underclass has been well-documented. Being denied equal access to and full participation in citizenship has created conditions in which low educational attainment, higher unemployment, and poverty are realities for a higher proportion of the African Nova Scotian population. The disparities in income, housing, education, occupation, and various other domains, as highlighted in the *Black Learners Advisory Committee (BLAC) Report: Volume 3* (1994), substantiate the enduring historical injustices experienced by African Nova Scotians, revealing persistent systemic and institutional racism. These injustices continue to exist in our society creating opportunity gaps for ANS/AA students, therefore, understanding the dynamics and impact of systemic racism is fundamental in understanding the importance of programs such as the Student Support Worker Program.

In the analysis of the education system for the *BLAC Report*, the Black Learners Advisory Committee identified several factors behind the difficulties that ANS/AA students face within the provincial education system. The *BLAC Report* highlighted systemic issues within the school system, including a lack of ANS/AA role models, a sense of exclusion experienced by ANS/AA students, curriculum that was lacking adequate representation of ANS/AA experiences and often minimized the significant contributions made by ANS/AA individuals. Additional challenges were also identified in the *BLAC Report*, such as teacher insensitivity, low expectations, limited engagement with the ANS/AA community, ineffective disciplinary measures, high dropout rates, lower graduation rates, and an overrepresentation of ANS/AA students in non-university courses and/or with specific educational interventions. The report emphasizes the negative impact of racism on the achievement and well-being of ANS/AA students, resulting in differential outcomes and opportunities for success.

It is clear that "Racism and racist practices in schools negatively impact the achievement and well-being of Black students and create differential achievement outcomes and opportunities for success" (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Education 2020) and for ANS/AA students, racism is a pervasive factor significantly affecting the quality of education, the educational environment, and the ability to achieve success within the school system. "Because of the under-representation of Black teachers and administrators in schools in Nova Scotia, it was proposed by the researchers of the *BLAC Report* that the presence of at least one adult with whom Black students could identify racially and culturally would improve the quality of the learning environment in schools." (Lee and Marshall 2009, 29)

In recent years, the education system has witnessed positive transformations, particularly in progressing towards inclusive education for all students. Despite these advancements, some aspects have remained unchanged. With its implementation in 2020, Nova Scotia's *Inclusive Education Policy* (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2019a) brought hope for enhanced equity in our education system, emphasizing the need for ongoing and active engagement towards creating and sustaining a more equitable system. The policy acknowledged a commitment by the education system to providing a high-quality, culturally, and linguistically responsive, and equitable education to support the well-being and achievement of every student. The policy states that all students should feel a sense of belonging in an inclusive school—accepted, safe, and valued—enabling them to learn and succeed optimally. Within the policy, roles of learning support teachers and teams, including student support workers, are clearly identified as crucial to fulfilling this commitment. The ANSSSW plays a key role in implementing inclusive practices and ensuring that the diverse needs of ANS/AA students are met. ANSSSWs help ANS/AA students be heard, seen, and supported in a way that provides opportunities for them to reach their "promise and potential."

Context

Research shows that students who feel safe, accepted, and connected to their school are more likely to stay in school, develop social skills, and do well academically. Being part of a supportive and empathetic community fosters a sense of connection, safety, and shared values. This, in turn, contributes to an individual's overall well-being by providing emotional support, a feeling of inclusion, a sense of belonging and opportunities for collaboration and growth.

To enhance this sense of well-being within schools, the role of student support workers becomes essential. These professionals play a significant role in providing additional emotional support, guidance, and resources to students, helping to create a school community where students feel understood, valued, and equipped to navigate challenges effectively. The presence of ANSSSWs contributes to forming a positive and nurturing school environment that prioritizes the well-being of every student.

The task of cultivating and sustaining positive relationships among African Nova Scotian students and students of African ancestry, their teachers, school administration, and families requires coordination and cooperation and demands time, effort, and energy. These positive relationships provide a pathway to effective learning, benefiting all involved. ANSSSWs play a pivotal role in fostering these relationships within the school environment, collaborating closely with the school staff to ensure a supportive learning atmosphere for everyone. (Hammond 2015)

By aligning with the essence of *Ubuntu*, the ANSSSW Program seeks to create a nurturing and inclusive educational environment that acknowledges the unique strengths and challenges of each student. By embodying the principles of empathy, compassion, and unity, the program aims to cultivate a supportive community where every student is recognized, valued, and empowered to thrive.

Ubuntu

Ubuntu philosophy serves as a foundational principle for the African Nova Scotian Student Support Worker Program, introducing a profound and holistic perspective to education. Rooted in African traditions, *Ubuntu* emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals within a community, fostering a spirit of shared humanity and collective responsibility.

Nguzo Saba

The *Nguzo Saba* principles support the realization of *Ubuntu* through their focus on positive identity development by affirming cultural heritage, promoting self-awareness and agency, fostering collective responsibility, and nurturing a sense of purpose and belonging within the community. By embracing these principles, persons of African ancestry can cultivate a strong and positive sense of identity that is grounded in their cultural heritage and collective experiences.

In fostering a sense of shared identity and belonging, the Student Support Worker Program creates environments where students feel affirmed, validated, and supported. In this way, the program plays an integral role in delivering on the priorities of the *African Nova Scotian Education Framework* (Education and Early Childhood Development 2021) which is designed to serve as a comprehensive guide, encompassing several pillars that collectively shape a commitment to inclusive education. The purpose of the framework is to move the system forward and address the systemic power structures and inequities that create barriers for ANS/AA students. These pillars not only demonstrate a dedication to leadership in fostering inclusive learning environments but also actively address the historical implications of anti-Black racism. The framework goes beyond individual competencies, aiming to enhance system-wide proficiency, bolstering confidence, and fostering shared accountability among all partners in the pursuit of educational excellence.

AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

| AUTHENTIC SELF-IDENTIFICATION | KNOWING THEM AS THEY ARE KNOWN | EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES | EMPOWERING PARENTS AND FAMILIES | EQUITABLE ACCESS AND INVOLVEMENT |
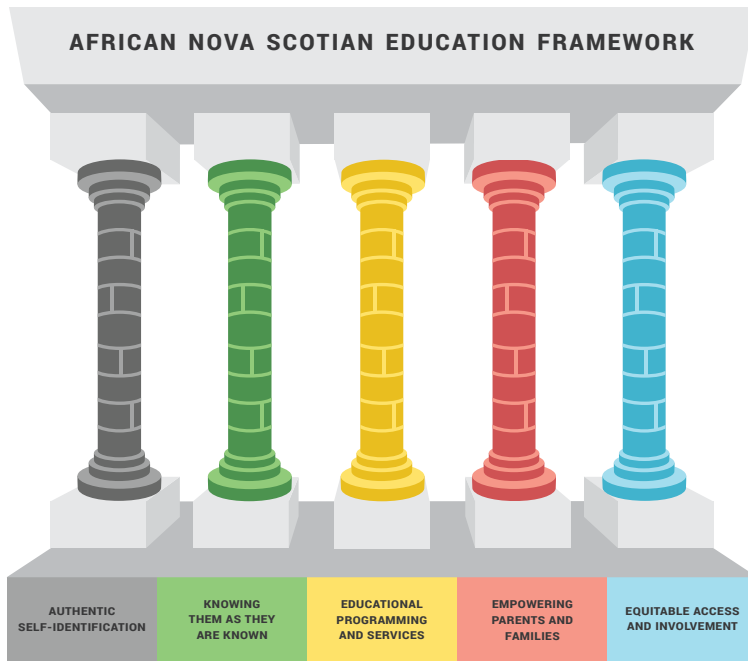
Section 1: Key Attributes and Qualifications

Key Attributes

ANSSSWs possess, and will use, a diverse range of skills and qualities necessary for guiding students through their educational journey. Under the supervision of regional coordinators/facilitators of African Canadian Education Services and school administrators, ANSSSWs are committed to forming meaningful relationships and empowering ANS/AA students within the educational system. They offer both universal and direct support, equipping ANS/AA students with the necessary tools, resources, and insights for personal growth, well-being, and achievement.

Empathy and Support Skills

- Demonstrated ability to work closely with referred ANS/AA students to provide day-to-day supports and implement strategies to build confidence, resilience, and consistent engagement in learning opportunities.
- Ability to develop positive relationships built on mutual respect and rapport and maintain open communication and trust with students.

Problem Solving and Advocacy

- Proficiency in developing strategies to address challenges affecting students' well-being and academic progress.
- Capacity to advocate on behalf of students and respond promptly to their needs.
- Demonstrated skills in mediation and conflict resolution.

Communication Skills

- Strong communication skills to maintain positive and open communication with referred students, their parents/guardians, and school staff through various channels such as phone calls, emails, and meetings.

Record Keeping and Reporting

- Ability to maintain accurate written records/case notes and provide reports to the Regional Coordinator/Facilitator of African Canadian Education Services and principal or designate, as required.
- Proficiency in utilizing student information systems to maintain electronic student information files, respecting privacy and confidentiality of student personal information.

Collaboration and Teamwork

- Capacity to work collaboratively with principals, vice-principals, regional coordinators/facilitators, and other partners to support initiatives that promote student achievement for ANS/AA youth.
- Attendance at staff meetings, planning meetings, professional development sessions, etc., as required.

Cultural Knowledge and Awareness

- General knowledge and understanding of culturally relevant practices and ability to recommend and promote culturally relevant, anti-bias, and equity-focused resources/materials.
- Demonstrated ability to contribute to the development and implementation of culturally relevant programming in collaboration with the Regional Coordinator/Facilitator of African Canadian Education Services.
- Possesses knowledge of educational and societal issues as they relate to ANS/AA students to provide an atmosphere of respect by applying principles of anti-racism and anti-discrimination in supporting students.

Community Engagement

- Willingness to be involved actively in community meetings/events relevant to the Student Support Worker Program mandate.
- Ability to maintain a working knowledge of educational resources, supports, and services available ANS/AA students and to inform students, families, and staff when relevant.

Flexibility and Adaptability

- Willingness to undertake additional duties as required within the scope of the Student Support Worker Program mandate, including but not limited to, supporting smooth transitions for ANS/AA students between different levels of schooling and participating in regional sessions for students when necessary.

Professionalism

- Demonstrates a commitment to continuous learning and development.
- Ability to work independently and collaboratively as part of a team, involving students, teachers, families, support agencies, and the surrounding communities.

Qualifications

Beyond the standard qualifications of formal education and technical skills, being a person who self-identifies as ANS/AA brings a crucial cultural understanding and sensitivity to the role. This enables the ANSSSW to develop a deeper connection and empathy with the students, fostering trust and rapport essential for effective support, providing guidance and advocacy, and helping students navigate and overcome academic, social, and personal barriers.

The following qualifications, required for the role of an ANSSSW, support them in fulfilling the responsibilities of the position effectively:

- this position is designated for a person of African descent with excellent knowledge of African Nova Scotian history, culture, traditions, and educational issues
- post-secondary certificate, diploma, or undergraduate degree in social sciences (e.g., child studies, community services, social work, or human services), or equivalent through a combination of work experience, life skills training, and training in working with students
- minimum of three years of demonstrated experience providing targeted support to youth
- experience working with ANS/AA students and communities through approaches that enhance the greatness, strengths, and abilities ANS/AA students
- experience with case management and/or record keeping is considered an asset
- valid Nova Scotia driver's license and access to a reliable vehicle to travel between assigned schools, or access to other reliable transportation
- Vulnerable Sector Check, Criminal Record Check, and Child Abuse Register Search in accordance with RCE/CSAP policies and procedures
- ability to work independently

Section 2: Allocation, Hiring Process, and Work Environment

Allocation

In allocating ANSSSWs across RCEs/CSAP, the focus is on fostering a culturally safe, supportive, and respectful school climate. Through a proactive and inclusive approach to allocation, SSWs can effectively fulfill their mandate of nurturing the holistic development of ANS/AA students across RCEs/CSAP ensuring that all ANS/AA students have access to necessary resources and support.

The allocation of ANSSSWs is to be determined at the RCE/CSAP level. It is recommended that the school allocation be based on a family-of-schools model to support the continuity of services, transition planning, and familiarity with school staff. It is also recommended that ANSSSWs be assigned a reasonable number of schools to ensure effective contact with each assigned school, thereby facilitating meaningful interactions with students and staff alike. This approach fosters stronger connections within the school community, providing vital support for ANS/AA students.

Hiring Process

The hiring process and probationary period for new ANSSSWs will be determined by the RCE/CSAP, typically involving a selection committee composed of key partners. The following construct is an example of a hiring selection committee:

- Regional Coordinator/Facilitator of African Canadian Education Services
- RCE/CSAP Human Resources personnel
- the home-base principal

Probationary period: It is recommended that during the probationary period the ANSSSW meet monthly with the Regional Coordinator/Facilitator of African Canadian Education Services.

Work Environment

A suitable and well-equipped work environment plays a crucial role in enabling ANSSSWs to fulfill their duties effectively, fostering collaboration, professionalism, and ultimately, better outcomes for the students they support.

Work environments should include designated office space, with opportunity for privacy, at every school site, as well as necessary equipment such as computer, desk, phone, and lockable file cabinet.

Section 3: Job Description and Performance Expectations

Although the specific duties of a student support worker will vary to reflect the uniqueness of RCEs/CSAP and the environment of the school community, there are some common core duties performed by student support workers. These duties have been grouped into four main strands: **direct student support/advocacy**, **home-school liaison**, **professionalism**, and **cultural enrichment programming**.

The responsibilities listed below under each of these strands are not meant to be exhaustive; rather, they provide an outline of the major responsibilities that ANSSSWs may perform. As well, additional duties that are within the scope of the mandate of the Student Support Worker Program, may be assigned by the Regional Coordinator/ Facilitator of African Canadian Education Services as needed.

Direct Student Support/Advocacy

- Work closely with referred students to provide day-to-day supports and develop strategies to promote regular attendance, enhance self-esteem, and achieve success in school.
- Support students to develop positive work habits and problem-solving strategies both in class and during transitions to classes.
- Stay informed about students' experiences to address potential challenges affecting their well-being or academic progress, enabling effective support and advocacy on their behalf.
- Respond to student referrals promptly to provide targeted support.
- Support a smooth transition for students from one level of schooling to the next in collaboration with the regional coordinator/facilitator under the direction of the principal/vice-principal.
- Maintain accurate written records/case notes and provide reports to the regional coordinator/facilitator and principal/vice-principal, as required.
- Utilize student information systems to maintain electronic student information files as required.
- Support principals on initiatives that promote student achievement for ANS/AA students.
- Maintain positive and open communication with referred students.
- Other duties as required[1].

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1 Other duties will be determined through consultation and collaboration between regional coordinators/facilitators of African Canadian Education Services and principals.

Home–School Liaison

- Maintain positive and open communication with referred students and their parents/guardians, in the form of phone calls, emails, and meetings.
- At the request of the principal/vice-principal, or under the direction of the Regional Coordinator/Facilitator of African Canadian Education Services, build and maintain relationships with support agencies and community groups to enhance and support program initiatives for students and increase student achievement.
- Other duties as required.

Professionalism

- Attend staff meetings, planning meetings, professional development, etc., as required.
- Support implementation of School Planning Team strategies under the direction of the principal/vice-principal.
- Maintain regular communication with the principal/vice-principal in the assigned school(s).
- Commit to ongoing self-reflection and professional development through participation in professional learning sessions, incorporating and promoting acquired culturally responsive, anti-bias, and equity-focused knowledge into practice.
- Participate, as requested, in RCE/CSAP sessions for students under the direction of the Regional Coordinator/Facilitator of African Canadian Education Services.
- Other duties as required.

Cultural Enrichment Programming

- Under the direction of the Regional Coordinator/Facilitator of African Canadian Education, create and implement culturally relevant programming.
- Maintain a working knowledge of the educational resources, supports, and services available to ANS/AA students.
- Attend community events relevant to the Student Support Worker Program mandate.
- Inform school staff of community events and celebrations and encourage their participation.
- Other duties as required.

Section 4: Roles and Responsibilities

The following lists outline examples of the roles and responsibilities associated with the ANSSSW. The items listed are provided as examples and are not intended to be exhaustive.

Regional Coordinator/Facilitator of African Canadian Education Services

Student support workers are integral to educational programming and support services. The responsibility for their overall daily management, supervision, and evaluation lies with the regional coordinator/facilitator who

- informs new student support workers about relevant policies, procedures, and guidelines, including, but not limited to, first-aid and medication administration, reporting procedures (e.g., sick days), technology use, privacy, confidentiality, FOIPOP, duty to report, etc.

- communicates program guidelines to the principal/vice-principal and engages in discussions regarding the role and responsibilities of the ANSSSW

- arranges to meet the professional development requirements of the Student Support Worker Program through collaborative work with regional partners

- collaborates, as needed, with the principal/vice-principal and ANSSSWs to discuss matters related to the Student Support Worker Program

- reviews work performance, strengths, and areas of growth with the ANSSSW as part of the performance evaluation process

- annually communicates information about the Student Support Worker Program during presentations to principals at the beginning of each school year

- develops permission forms for one-on-one assistance in accordance with RCE/CSAP policies/procedures

The ANSSSW will

- understand and adhere to the protocols of confidentiality and privacy as they relate to them working with students and school staff

- connect, as needed, with the regional coordinator/facilitator to discuss significant incidents occurring within their school community

- attend monthly meetings with the regional coordinator/facilitator and RCE/CSAP SSW group to provide updates and share what's happening, review policies, develop ideas for the year and take part in professional learning opportunities

- engage in discussion with the regional coordinator/facilitator to review their work performance, recognize strengths, and identify areas for growth as part of the appraisal process

Principal/Vice-principal

ANSSSWs are members of the school staff, and as such, the on-site supervision of the ANSSSW will be the responsibility of the principal/vice-principal(s) who will

- develop a thorough understanding of the daily responsibilities of the ANSSSW at their school site

- maintain open and ongoing communication with the ANSSSW regarding the students assigned to their caseload, as well as any other necessary information

- consult and collaborate with the regional coordinator/facilitator when needed

- ensure ANSSSWs are included in Student Planning Team and Teaching Support Team meetings so their knowledge and expertise can be contributed meaningfully

- clearly communicate the job functions and expectations of the Student Support Worker Program to both staff and parents/guardians, verbally and in writing, as outlined by the regional coordinator/facilitator

- provide information regarding schedules, procedures, and protocols of the school

- address any concerns about the Student Support Worker Program with the regional coordinator/facilitator

- ensure that the ANSSSW's job duties align with their job description

- provide input to the regional coordinator/facilitator about the ANSSSW's work performance, as part of the evaluation process

The ANSSSW will

- communicate regularly with principal/vice-principal to provide updates (formal/informal) on the students assigned to their caseload, and other information as deemed necessary

- when requested, provide advice and recommendations to the principal regarding program implementation

- provide the principal/vice-principal with their weekly schedule

- obtain consent for students to participate in the ANSSSW Program
  (Note: Parent/guardian consent is required for grades P–6, however is not required for grades 7–12.)

- demonstrate openness to feedback from the principal/vice-principal regarding their work performance as part the appraisal process coordinated by the regional coordinator/facilitator

Teachers

Teachers whose student(s) receive support from an ANSSSW, have the responsibility to

- inform the ANSSSW of classroom procedures, rules, and expectations
- collaborate with the ANSSSW and, when appropriate, the Student Planning Team and Teaching Support Team to discuss and clarify the support to be provided to the student(s), based on their needs and in relation to the responsibilities of the ANSSSW
- ensure ongoing communication with the ANSSSW is maintained to discuss progress of the student(s)

The ANSSSW will

- provide updates and maintain open communication with the teacher about students from that teacher's class
- offer advice and expertise to the Student Planning Team and Teaching Support Team, when requested, to ensure adequate support for students
- maintain a high degree of professionalism and ensure that confidentiality and impartiality remain paramount
- ensure ongoing communication with the classroom teacher is maintained to discuss progress of the student(s) on their caseload

Students

Students who receive support from the ANSSSW will

- meet with the ANSSSW when requested (parent/guardian consent is required for grades P–6 student participation in the ANSSSW Program)
- be confident that there is a high degree of confidentiality/privacy when information is shared with the ANSSSW
- be responsible for making themselves available for meetings with the ANSSSW
- participate actively and positively in academic, cultural, and social-emotional support activities

Note: The degree to which the student is able to fulfill the above expectations will be closely linked to the age, grade, and maturity level of the student.

The ANSSSW will

- facilitate access to appropriate resources to support the discovery of career information among students and assist them in utilizing technology to organize and plan for their future options effectively
- establish a non-judgmental/trusting relationship with all students
- be actively engaged in advocating for students within academic and social-emotional support systems, prioritizing their holistic development, well-being, and ensuring these systems are culturally responsive
- provide information and resources that are culturally responsive

ANSSSW and School Counsellor

The ANSSSW will

- collaborate with the school counsellor to provide study-skills instruction/workshops, input on academic support for student activities, and support mediation/conflict resolution in challenging situations
- identify and refer students to professional services (counselling) as needed
- develop strategies with the school counsellor to support the social and emotional well-being of students
- provide cultural insights, through collaborative efforts with the school counsellor, regarding ANS/AA culture
- collaborate with the school counsellor to ensure students regularly receive information about choosing courses and career options

ANSSSW and Parents/Guardians

The ANSSSW will

- meet with parents/guardians at the school to outline ANSSSW services and involvement (orientation)
- ensure ongoing communication with parents/guardians
- in collaboration with the teacher, communicate with parents/guardians regarding well-being, homework, attendance, academic progress, events, meetings, and activities

Glossary

advocacy: In the context of the Student Support Worker Program, advocacy refers to the organized efforts to empower students and amplify their voices within an educational context. Guiding, assisting, and advocating for the rights, needs, and well-being of those they support. It involves raising awareness, influencing decision makers, and promoting positive change to address systemic issues and contribute to enhancing the lives of the students they support.

Africentricity: A way of thinking that prioritizes African perspectives, achievements, and cultural heritage, aiming to counter the effects of colonialism and marginalization. By reclaiming their history and culture, individuals of African descent can foster pride, self-affirmation, and empowerment, overcoming the legacy of Eurocentric oppression and miseducation.

African Ancestry (AA)/descent: Genetic heritage from Africa; refers to cultural and historical connection to Africa specific to the Black experience. Encompasses Black people worldwide who identify with African roots; acknowledges the shared history, struggles, and legacy of African-descended communities across different regions.

African Nova Scotian (ANS): African Nova Scotians, also known as Indigenous Black people, are a distinct people with roots tracing back to free and enslaved Black Planters, Black Loyalists, Black Refugees, Maroons, and other Black individuals who inhabited the original 52 land-based historical Black communities in Nova Scotia. Despite experiencing structural discrimination, they exhibit resilience, creativity, spirituality, and hope that have profoundly shaped their families, communities, and the province of Nova Scotia. (Dalhousie University African Nova Scotian Advisory Council. n.d.)

Black: The term refers to individuals or communities with African ancestry or heritage. It encompasses a diverse range of ethnicities and cultures and is often used to describe people of African descent who have been subject to historical and systemic oppression based on their race. This construct acknowledges both the shared experiences and unique identities within the Black community.

culturally relevant/responsive student support: Culturally relevant/responsive student support recognizes and values students' diverse cultural backgrounds. It involves integrating cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and perspectives into mentoring and support practices. By being culturally relevant and responsive, support workers create an inclusive environment that promotes authentic engagement, rigor, and equitable outcomes for students.

cultural enrichment: Empowering ANS/AA students with knowledge, literature, and experiences that celebrates their heritage and challenges Eurocentric narratives, to foster a sense of identity, pride, and connection to their roots. Africentricity plays a crucial role in this process by emphasizing African-centered knowledge and experiences, encouraging exploration of literature by ANS/AA authors and promoting a direct connection to their history and culture.

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