The goal in our 2014-15 Business Plan is to prepare students for the 21st century. This articulates a priority to provide learning resources that reflect diversity and explore issues in a broader societal and global context. To that end, this report will focus on both activities during African Heritage Month and personnel who support our goal. The United Nations has declared 2015-2024 as the International Decade for People of African Descent. This designation by the international community recognizes that people of African descent represent a distinct group whose human rights must be both promoted and protected. In Canada and our home province of Nova Scotia, February 2015 is African Heritage month. The theme for this year is Social Justice. According to the Department of African Nova Scotian Affairs, over 50 African Nova Scotian communities throughout the province and 21,000 African Nova Scotians contribute to our rich diversity. February 16, 2015, was our first Provincial Heritage Day, and this first February holiday recognizes Viola Desmond. Born in Halifax in 1914, Ms. Desmond took a courageous stand against segregation laws in Nova Scotia.

Viola’s story is faithfully recorded by Ms. Wanda Robson, the author of Sister to Courage: Stories from the World of Viola Desmond, Canada’s Rosa Parks. Our very own African Nova Scotian trailblazer, Mr. Lorne Green, was featured in the Thursday, February 12th edition of the Cape Breton Star. Seven years ago, Mr. Green became the first African Nova Scotian to become School Board Chair, a position he occupies to the present day. During the month of February, you will notice many school personnel wearing beautiful and vibrant Kente cloth to symbolize African culture. Kente cloth is made up of strips of silk and cotton fabric, woven by hand in the colours that represent Africa: Red – life and blood Blue – innocence Green – Mother Africa, Mother Earth Black – people and unity Gold – strength and fortune Many activities to celebrate African Heritage Month are taking place in our schools. Some of these activities include presentations by Viola Desmond’s sister, Wanda Robson, a widely respected community volunteer from North Sydney, who at the age of 77 fulfilled a lifelong dream, graduating from Cape Breton University with a Bachelor of Arts Degree. Sergeant Craig Smith, author of The Journey Continues: An Atlantic Canadian Black Experience, will also present in our schools. He is the author of a chronology of black history from 1605 to December 2010. Malik Headley, a grade 11 student at Glace Bay High School, was the featured artist at the annual Black Reflections Art Gallery at the Menelik Hall. The art gallery is held each year and is an opportunity for African Nova Scotian students from our system to showcase their talents. The Black Learners Advisory Committee released a report in December 1994 entitled BLAC Report on Education, Redressing Inequity Empowering Black Learners. One of the recommendations of the report was to provide a support person in the school.
Black learners can go for assistance. As a result of this, the Student Support Worker program, already established in Halifax, was expanded across the province. Our six support workers are under the guidance of Ms. Lynn Crawford, Coordinator of Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understanding and Human Rights. The role of the student support worker in our system is both vital and comprehensive. A crucial aspect of the role, in collaboration with school staff, is the building of strong relationships among African Nova Scotian students, their teachers, school administration and their parents/guardians. The guidelines for African Nova Scotian student support workers were prepared by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in 2011 through collaboration with RCH coordinators throughout the province. As per the guidelines, Student Support Workers are based in schools with a focus on working with schools and home to support student success by promoting safe, supportive and respectful school climates. Through positive role modeling and extensive outreach within the school and community, areas that impact student achievement are supported. The job description of student support work specifically addresses the importance of familiarity with student needs, monitoring of progress and attendance and communication with home. Acting as a student advocate, the student support worker promotes increased contact with students, parents, teachers, as well as community supports. Student course selection and career planning are essential, integral elements of the program. During African Heritage month, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ms. Lynn Crawford, our RCH Coordinator for her leadership in the promotion of cultural proficiency in our Board and her dedication to the Student Support Worker program. I would also like to commend our student support workers for their day to day work with our students, monitoring progress and providing continuous support. I would like to draw your attention to our school websites and also our school board website that highlight the achievements of many students across our system.