

Education

Teach for Canada heading to Pikangikum in 2018



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

Sachigo Lake's Clifford Tait speaks about duty to report responsibilities during a Teach for Canada Summer Enrichment Program Duty to Report panel discussion session at Lakehead University's Faculty Lounge.

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

This year's group of Teach for Canada Summer Enrichment Program teachers includes 11 teachers headed for Pikangikum, which is a first-time Teach for Canada community.

"There is a good number of us going up to Pikangikum and we are all excited to learn more about the community as well as start our journeys," says Monica Ignacio, a teacher with one year of experience who studied at Lakehead University. "So it should be a wonderful start to an already amazing opportunity."

Ignacio enjoyed the opportunity to learn more about First Nations people through the Summer Enrichment Program, which was held from July 15-Aug. 4 at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay.

"I loved learning about the history and the culture and connecting the practicalities this week," Ignacio says. "You can never be fully prepared, but just having a good amount of information and insight and knowledge is really important to making learning more meaningful for students."

Ignacio and the other teachers also visited Big Grassy in Treaty #3 territory for five days during the second week of the Summer Enrichment Program.

"That was really good to have that experience with the land and doing all the outdoor activi-

ties like learning how to fish," Ignacio says. "For a lot of us, it was our first experience going to a First Nation, so that was really good. We learned about being in community and having a feast and learning about some of the traditions and how to go about taking our students outside for outdoor education."

Ignacio is one of 47 teachers who participated in the Summer Enrichment Program to prepare for their upcoming teaching roles in 18 fly-in and road-access First Nation communities across northern Ontario, including Pikangikum and Big Grassy.

"It is the biggest and most diverse cohort yet," says Kyle Hill, executive director of Teach for Canada. "We have 47 teachers who come from all across Canada and all across the world who range in experience from new teachers to 31 years of teaching experience."

Hill says the opportunity to teach at Pikangikum's recently opened Eenchokay Birchstick School is "a really exciting opportunity for the teachers."

"There are a lot of language speakers there — the vast majority of the community speaks Ojibwa," Hill says, noting that he visited the community for about a week this past year. "And in the school you will hear announcements in both English and Ojibwa because the Indigenous language retention is so strong in Pikangikum, which is good for the commu-

nity and good for the teachers who are going up to learn a little bit of the language."

Hill says the Summer Enrichment Program included three hours of Ojibwa language lessons for teachers going to Ojibwa communities, three hours of Oji-Cree language lessons for teachers going to Oji-Cree communities and three hours of Cree language lessons for teachers going to the one Cree community, Fort Severn.

"Those language lessons are delivered by community citizens," Hill says. "For the first time we've had community citizens from three communities come to Thunder Bay and teach the teachers as much as you can learn about the language in an hour a day for three days."

Kurtis Hansen, a Teach for Canada teacher associate who attended last year's Summer Enrichment Program and taught in Big Grassy for the past two years, says he felt proud when the Teach for Canada teachers visited his classroom and school during the community visit.

"They were really inspired and there was a lot of positive feedback about my classroom and 'Wow, what a lovely school,'" Hansen says. "And Big Grassy, that is just what it is, it's an incredible school and the staff there is amazing."

About 94 Teach for Canada teachers are scheduled to teach in northern Ontario First Nation schools this upcoming school year.



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