



GAKINO'AMAAGE
TEACH FOR CANADA
ENSEIGNER POUR LE CANADA

GAKINO'AMAAGE: TEACH FOR CANADA

Teacher Handbook



2026-2027

A photograph of two young people embracing. The person on the right is smiling and has a nose ring. The person on the left has long dark hair and is wearing glasses. They are both wearing dark blue clothing.

TEACHER HANDBOOK

Welcome to Gakino'amaage

Learn about our
Anishinaabemowin name,
Gakino'amaage, meaning
'one who teaches'.



SCAN ME



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Our Shared Vision	3-4
Part 1: How We'll Work Together	5-6
Scope of Our Work	5
Your Two-Year+ Commitment	6
Part 2: The Support You'll Receive	7-12
Pathways & Peer Support	8
Professional Support	9
Personal Support	11
Part 3: Your Role in This Work	13-16
Guiding Principles for Community-Rooted Teaching	14
Teach with a Focus on Community	15
Contribute to the Movement	16

“For us, education is not just about learning skills to get a job, it is about learning how to create or become positive members of our communities, better citizens and people who want to learn new ways to help our people.”

– First Nations youth in Feathers of Hope: A First Nations Youth Action Plan, Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2014



Our Shared Vision

Your journey as a teacher in the North is about more than just the classroom—it's about walking alongside communities to strengthen education systems shaped by local strengths, priorities, and values.

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

We selected you because of the strengths and qualities you bring to the classroom—qualities Community Partners have identified as essential for teaching in First Nations. The Summer Enrichment Program (SEP) is designed to build on those strengths, helping you grow personally and professionally.

We understand and appreciate that teaching in a remote northern community has unique challenges and opportunities. For that reason, we have created this Teacher Handbook.

This handbook outlines our support model. This model is rooted in our core values: humility, collaboration, respect, integrity, and learning. These values are our program's foundation, permeating everything we do.

We look forward to working with you this school year and beyond. Welcome to the Gakino'amaage community!

PART 1

This section outlines the relationship between you and the Gakino'amaage team, including what our role is (and isn't) while you're teaching in the North.

PART 2

This section explains the types of preparation and support available to you—from personal check-ins and professional development to resources and connection with peers.

PART 3

This section highlights what we ask of you during your time in the North, including professionalism, cultural humility, and a commitment to student success.



WHY THIS WORK MATTERS

We believe every student, no matter where they live, deserves access to a high-quality, equitable education.

Today, nearly 44% of First Nations people aged 15 and over do not hold a certificate, diploma, or degree. This reality is shaped by historical injustice, systemic inequities, and a continued lack of access to consistent, well-supported educators. Too often, teachers begin their roles in remote First Nations communities without the preparation, cultural understanding, or long-term support needed to thrive, and to stay. The twin challenges of teacher supply and turnover compound historical injustice and systemic inequities to produce an education gap between First Nations and non-First Nations students. The right teacher can help fill this gap.

Gakino'amaage exists to help break that cycle. Inspired by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action on Education, we aim to recruit, prepare, support, and sustain teachers who will engage in reciprocal learning with First Nations throughout their teaching commitment.

We are colleagues on a shared journey—one that is deeply rewarding and incredibly challenging. We believe that creating meaningful, lasting change is only possible when educators bring their holistic selves to this work, and commit not just to teaching, but to building trust, relationships, and community.

**Assembly of First Nations 2023 <https://afn.ca/community-services/education/> and C.D. Howe Institute, 2016 https://www.cdhowe.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Commentary_444_0.pdf.*

“We want teachers to be interested in more than their job and willing to be involved in extracurricular activities so they can add something to the life of the community.”

“What we want is a teacher who is not prejudiced, wants to be in the community, is educated and willing to teach us, believes in us, is willing to talk and listen to us, and knows their teaching area.”

Source:
Feathers of Hope: A First Nations Youth Action Plan, Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2014.





PART 1

How We Will Work Together

We are here to walk alongside you in your teaching journey, offering personalized, strengths-based support to help you thrive in your role and in community. The Teacher Development team brings firsthand experience teaching in northern and First Nations schools and is here to offer guidance, encouragement, and care throughout your time in the North.

What We Offer:

- We offer tailored coaching and support for your professional growth, classroom practice, and curriculum planning.
- We provide guidance in navigating complex interpersonal situations, support you in building self-advocacy skills, and connect you with mental health and well-being resources.
- We create space for listening, reflection, and collaborative problem-solving when challenges arise.

What We Do Not Provide:

- We are not your employer and cannot intervene in employment-related matters such as contracts, discipline, or negotiations.
- We are not a union and cannot represent you in labour disputes.
- We do not mediate or resolve interpersonal conflicts for you, but we can help you navigate them with empathy and professionalism.
- We are not mental health professionals, but we can connect you to resources and support systems that are.

Above all, we honour the authority and leadership of the Nations you are working in. Our approach is grounded in respect for community sovereignty, collaboration, and reciprocal learning.



A NOTE ON CONFIDENTIALITY

Every teacher's conversations with staff are treated with respect and care. While your chats with our team stay confidential within Gakino'amaage, we do take note of common themes or support needs (e.g. type of resource request) to help us better coordinate and tailor our support.

To ensure you are getting consistent and thoughtful support, we share this information internally on a need-to-know basis. When data is used beyond one-on-one support, like for planning or external reporting, it's always anonymous and aggregated. We remove all identifying details and suppress small numbers to protect your privacy.

Our goal is to offer support that feels respectful, collaborative, and rooted in trust.

OPEN AND HONEST COMMUNICATION

Strong relationships are built on clear and respectful communication. If, at any point, you feel that the expectations outlined in this handbook haven't been met, or if you experience challenges you'd like to talk through, we encourage you to reach out.

We hope that most questions or concerns can be worked through directly with your Teacher Development Manager. Because Gakino'amaage is not your employer, we're able to have open, objective conversations without employment-related consequences, and we strive to offer supportive, non-judgmental guidance. We look forward to collaborating openly, objectively, and honestly without fear of reprisal.

If you have concerns that your Teacher Development Manager does not address, you can ask to connect to the Director of Teacher Development. We hope that the concern will be resolved at this point. In exceptional circumstances, you can request that the Vice President of Programs be included in the discussion. We are here to listen, support, and collaborate with care.



YOUR TWO-YEAR+ COMMITMENT

We ask all Gakino'amaage teachers to commit to teaching for at least two years in the First Nation where they begin teaching.

Staying in your role makes a meaningful difference. Consistency helps reduce turnover, supports student success, and strengthens relationships within the school and Nation. Your commitment contributes to greater stability for students, families, and educators alike.

We know circumstances can change. If your contract ends early or you choose to leave your position, it is important to remember that Gakino'amaage is not your employer. We deeply respect the authority and autonomy of First Nations to manage and make decisions within their own education systems, and we do not intervene in employer-employee matters.

In some circumstances, teachers may be eligible to continue their journey with Gakino'amaage through a rematch to another First Nation. Eligibility depends on several factors and is reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Teachers who complete their commitment become part of our alum network. Many continue living and working in the North, while others carry their experiences into new roles and communities. Wherever your path leads, we hope you'll remain connected to the broader movement for education equity.

REMATCHING

Teaching in the North will challenge you in ways you don't expect, and reward you in ways you won't forget.

Gakino'amaage encourages all teachers to approach challenges with resilience and openness, making every reasonable effort to work through issues or concerns in partnership with the school and community. You may be eligible for rematching after completing two years of teaching in the community where you began, measured from the date you signed your teacher agreement.

You may also be eligible if your contract is not renewed for the following school year, or if you are terminated mid-year by your employing Nation. You are not eligible if you choose to leave mid-year, except in very rare circumstances.

All rematching decisions are reviewed case by case and are heavily informed by feedback from your employing First Nation. Rematching is not guaranteed. To learn more or explore your eligibility, please connect with your Teacher Development Manager.



PART 2

The Support You'll Receive

TEACHER PREPARATION

Preparing teachers before they move to teach in a First Nation involves building their understanding of the local histories, cultures, strengths, and priorities of the Nation they will join. It also means supporting teachers to reflect on their own identities, perspectives, and responsibilities so they can engage with humility, respect, and a commitment to reciprocal learning.

Gakino'amaage offers a range of teacher preparation pathways that support educators at different stages of their journey. Teachers are encouraged to deepen their understanding of the Nations they will join, strengthen their relationships with students and families, and approach their roles in ways that honour the cultures, knowledge systems, and lived experiences of First Nations communities.

PEER SUPPORT

We believe that one of the most powerful sources of support comes from fellow educators—those who share your experiences in the North. Whether they're in your school, your community, or another First Nation, these connections can provide understanding, encouragement, and practical advice.

The Summer Enrichment Program is just the beginning of building your peer network. Since 2015, we've supported over 350 teachers who have taught in northern First Nations. As this community continues to grow, we hope you will feel supported by, and contribute to, a strong, caring network of educators committed to learning and growing together.

1

STAYING CONNECTED ONLINE

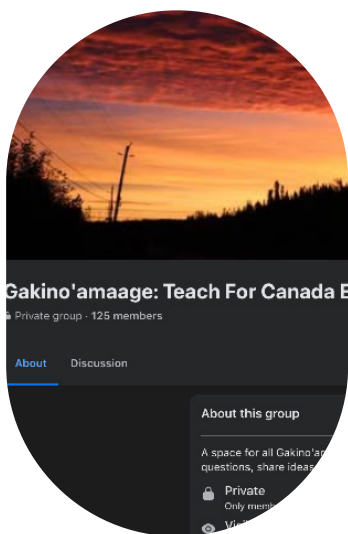
We know that connection and communication are essential throughout the year. That's why we offer online spaces to help teachers stay informed, share experiences, and learn from one another, no matter where you are.

Private Facebook Group

Our private teacher Facebook group brings together current and former cohorts in a shared space. It's a place to post classroom ideas, ask questions, share successes, and connect with others teaching in northern First Nations. We encourage you to use this space to support each other and build community.

Teacher Newsletter

We send out a quarterly newsletter to keep you informed. You'll find helpful resources, reminders, and ways to stay engaged with the broader teacher network.



2

CONNECTING WITH YOUR PEER NETWORK

During your two years (or more!) in the North, there will be many chances to reconnect with your cohort and build relationships across the Gakino'amaage teacher community. These opportunities might include webinars or professional learning sessions. Whether gathering in person or online, we hope you'll join when you can. These moments of connection are a meaningful way to share experiences, support one another, and grow together in community.





PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Too often, teachers arrive in remote communities without the professional support needed to thrive. Gakino'amaage is committed to changing that.

Our goal is to improve teacher success and, in turn, student outcomes in northern communities. We provide professional development opportunities encouraging growth, reflection, and long-term impact. Whether you're seeking resources, guidance, or mentorship, we're here to help you build your confidence and capacity as an educator in the North.

We believe the best teachers are those who feel supported. That's why we offer a range of professional supports, like in-school visits, one-on-one check-ins, tailored PD, and access to teaching resources. You can choose how and when to engage with what we offer—our role is to be here when you need us.

1

IN-SCHOOL SUPPORT

Your Teacher Development Manager (TDM) will offer to visit your classroom at least once per school year. During these visits, they can observe, co-teach, model lessons, or simply be a thought partner with you in your classroom. Support can focus on whatever is most useful to you, whether it's classroom management, differentiated instruction, planning, or integrating culturally responsive resources. Before their visit, your TDM will reach out with a “menu of support” so you can choose what's most helpful for you and your students.

2

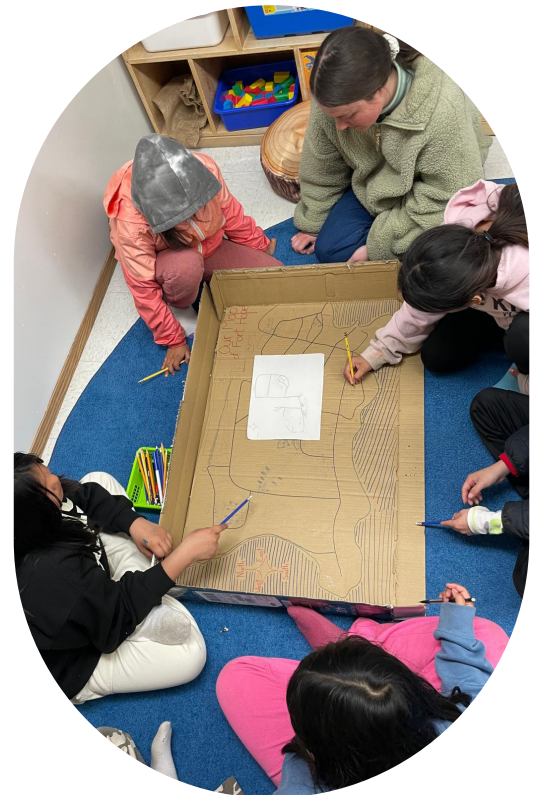
ONGOING CHECK-INS

TDMs provide regular check-ins, whether over the phone, by video, email, or text, depending on your preference. These conversations offer a space for problem-solving, reflecting on teaching, and discussing what's going well. We're here as coaches, listeners, and collaborators. Don't hesitate to reach out!

3

RESOURCES

We offer a wide range of high-quality, northern-specific resources that have been built and refined by experienced northern educators. These resources are designed to reflect the realities of teaching in remote and First Nations contexts, multi-grade classrooms, land-based learning, culturally relevant pedagogy, and more. Whether you're looking for unit plans, classroom strategies, or materials tailored to your subject and grade level, your Teacher Development Manager can help identify, curate, or even create what you need.





4

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This year, we'll offer facilitated professional development sessions throughout the school year, primarily online.

Holding Space

Holding Space is exactly that—a space for teachers in the North to bring whatever they may be carrying that day or week. This peer-driven gathering gives you an opportunity to connect with fellow teachers, share successes, challenges, and lessons learned, and ask questions in a judgment-free environment.

Often, you'll find that what you're experiencing is similar to what many of your peers are experiencing as well. Sessions focus on real experiences, open dialogue, and collaborative knowledge sharing. We'll also weave in short learning opportunities that are relevant to the time of year and the realities of teaching in the North. So bring your tea or hot chocolate and join us in good company.

5

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUBSIDIES

We know that the cost of professional development can be a barrier. Therefore, we offer a limited number of subsidies to help first- and third-year teachers access meaningful learning opportunities that might otherwise be out of reach. Our PD subsidy program is designed to support teachers who cannot access funding through their school or tribal council. The goal is to reduce financial barriers and invest in your growth, especially when that growth will directly benefit students in the North.

Subsidy Details:

- Up to \$750 toward course fees or tuition
- Available for first- and third-year teachers who have not previously received a subsidy
- Application window opens in January

Applicants Must:

- Demonstrate efforts to seek other funding first
- Share a short explanation of how the PD will support their work with students in the North
- Teachers who do not return to their matched community the following school year may be asked to repay the subsidy



PERSONAL SUPPORT

We understand that your well-being outside the classroom directly impacts your success inside it. That's why we prioritize personal support as a key part of our approach.

Our team has walked a similar path, relocating, adjusting, and learning to thrive in the North. We know that teaching in a new community can come with unique and unexpected challenges, and we're here to help you navigate them. Whether you're looking for a listening ear, need help brainstorming next steps, or want to talk things through, we're here for you. We also encourage you to create your own wellness plan and build routines that keep you grounded and healthy throughout the year. You don't have to figure it all out alone; personal support is always part of what we offer.

1

PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLING SERVICES

We recognize that there are times when support from a licensed mental health professional is the most appropriate option. Through our partnership with Strength Counselling Services, teachers and their partners and children living with them in the North can confidentially access up to four counselling sessions per year at no cost, without Gakino'amaage being notified. This year, couples counselling is also available. If additional sessions are needed, your counsellor may recommend an extension. We hope this service helps you feel supported throughout your time in the North. More information about accessing counselling will be shared during the Summer Enrichment Program (SEP).

2

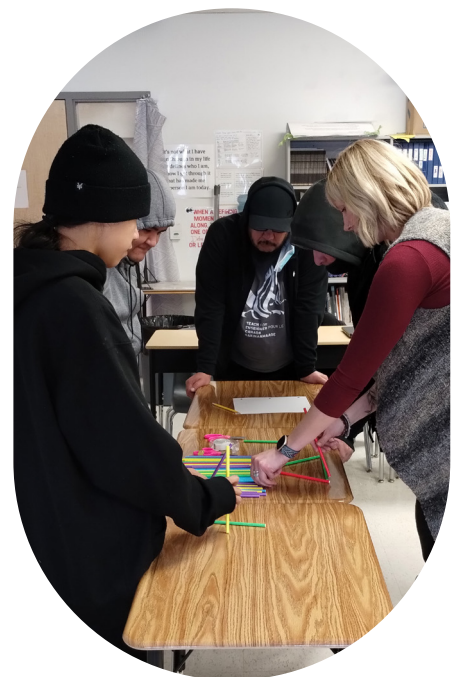
HEADSPACE APP

Gakino'amaage is pleased to provide teachers with complimentary access to Headspace, a guided meditation app, until December. Meditation can be an effective self-care strategy for many people, and we want to encourage you to engage in your self-care. We've partnered with Headspace to provide teachers free access to the app. Stay tuned at SEP for instructions on accessing this great resource!

3

CHECK-INS

Moving to a northern First Nation is a significant commitment, and we want to support you every step of the way. We know that settling into a new community and way of life can bring both exciting opportunities and unexpected challenges. Your Teacher Development Manager (TDM) is there to listen, help problem-solve when challenges arise, and celebrate successes along the way. Check-ins may take place by phone, video call, email, or whatever communication method works best for you. We want to hear about your experience—the highlights, the challenges, and everything in between.





PART 3

Your Role In This Work



GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY-ROOTED TEACHING

Gakino'amaage works closely with First Nations to understand the qualities that help teachers excel in the North.

These qualities reflect the values, mindsets, and commitments that support meaningful relationships, responsive teaching, and community connection. We encourage you to reflect on and strengthen these qualities as you navigate your time in the North, both inside and outside the classroom.



LOVE OF CHILDREN

You are intrinsically motivated to support the social-emotional development of students, and you focus on personal development and academic success. You value personal well-being and cultural identity in your students, and you learn about their lives outside of school.



STRONG TEACHING PRACTICE

You successfully organize lesson plans to achieve the goals you set. You excel at differentiating instruction, and you always set high expectations. You recognize when to focus on emotional needs when necessary, and you always focus on potential rather than current academic level.



RESILIENT

You adapt to external challenges, identify the resources you need to achieve a goal, and tailor your approach to align with changing situations. You maintain self-control in chaotic situations and think well on your feet.



COMMUNITY-FOCUSED

You align your interests with those of the community, and you are excited to infuse culture into the classroom. You recognize your biases and privileges, and you are eager to learn. You are interested in learning from community members about local activities, history, and tradition.



OPTIMISTIC

You see the best in people, and you seek to learn from others. You approach life with a set of fresh eyes and a strong sense of humour. You realize that you can be a part of a larger system of positive change, and you focus on the positive in each day.



SELF-REFLECTIVE

You have reflected on your life's experiences and you can predict how your strengths and weaknesses will play out in new settings. You seek feedback and act on it.



ADVENTUROUS

You enjoy the outdoors! You push personal boundaries and always seek out new methods and ideas in any setting. You are unafraid of change. You realize the importance of getting out of your teacherage and getting involved in community events.



TEACH WITH A FOCUS ON COMMUNITY

To support student success and help close the education gap between First Nations and non-Indigenous children and youth, you'll need guidance, collaboration, and strong relationships.

This work is shared. You are not expected to do it alone. Gakino'amaage staff, community members, Knowledge Keepers, and fellow educators are here to support your learning journey and walk alongside you. By building relationships and learning from those around you, you'll be better equipped to support students and contribute to the school community. We encourage you to invite students, families, Elders, and community leaders to share their strengths, knowledge, and perspectives in school life. A community-focused approach is grounded in the following four practices:

1

GET INVOLVED IN THE COMMUNITY

Strong relationships are at the heart of teaching when centering community. Building trust takes time, often months or years, and begins with getting to know the community where you will live and work. Start by showing up: attend events, spend time with Elders, and join in daily activities when invited. These small moments of connection matter. Given the impact of high teacher turnover in First Nations communities, there may be a hesitancy to reach out. Take the initiative and be prepared to make the first move more than once.

2

ENGAGE IN LAND-BASED LEARNING

The land and environment of the North are central to learning and teaching in many First Nations communities. Land-based learning brings history, art, geography, and science to life while fostering social skills and deepening connections to the more-than-human world. If the community you work in has a land-based learning program, collaborate with instructors, Knowledge Keepers, and Elders to root your teaching in local traditions. If not, consider how the land can inform your practice and support the students you teach.



3

SUPPORT LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

Language is at the heart of culture and identity in many First Nations. Supporting students' language learning, whether it's their first language or a language they are reconnecting with, helps strengthen their sense of belonging and pride. Incorporate Indigenous languages into your teaching by working with fluent speakers, Knowledge Keepers, and language instructors. This enriches the learning experience and honours and revitalizes the community's culture.

4

INVITE COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SCHOOL

Early in the year, consider inviting community members and local Knowledge Keepers into the school to give presentations, participate in class discussions, or mentor students working on a project. Students will still meet their curriculum expectations, and access to community knowledge and leadership will enhance the learning experience. Inviting community members into the classroom can complement your regular lessons, provide variety, and help you make connections between your classroom and the larger community.





CONTRIBUTE TO THE MOVEMENT

Gakino'amaage began in 2015 as a small, volunteer-led organization.

Over a decade later, we've worked with over 350 teachers, partnered with 34 First Nations, and facilitated 11 Summer Enrichment Programs. Our journey has been shaped by teacher voices, community wisdom, and the collective goal of strengthening education in the North.

As part of this year's cohort, you play a valuable role in helping us learn, grow, and improve. Here are some meaningful ways you can contribute to strengthening our programs and impact:

1

SURVEYS AND FEEDBACK

We send monthly check-in surveys, more in-depth surveys three times a year (October, January, and May), and a brief survey after each classroom visit. Your feedback helps us understand what's working, identify areas for improvement, and better support teachers, students, and First Nations.

Your feedback directly shapes our programming, strengthens our relationships with First Nations and other partners, and supports our efforts to advocate for additional resources. Consistently completing these surveys is one of the most meaningful ways you can contribute to our shared work and help improve the experience of future teachers and students.

2

SHARING YOUR STORY

You are about to embark on a life-changing experience, and we want to hear about it! Whether you enjoy writing blog posts, taking photographs, writing music, making art, or just sharing some insight into the rewards and challenges of teaching in the North, you can help inspire the next cohort of teachers.

We know how important it is for teachers considering Gakino'amaage to hear direct feedback from those who have lived and taught in the North—perhaps these stories inspired your journey. That's why you'll hear from our Director of Communications throughout the next two years with opportunities to share your experiences. Have an idea of your own? Get in touch, and let's brainstorm.

Sharing photos of your school or community on social media? We'd love to see them. Don't forget to hashtag #TeachForCanada or #Gakinoamaage and tag @TeachForCanada.

3

WEBINARS AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

Throughout the year, our recruitment team hosts webinars for new teachers. You may have attended some of them during your recruitment process! We recognize that nothing compares to speaking to a teacher who lives and works in a northern First Nation when you're a new Gakino'amaage teacher, so we ask teachers to join us in webinars to answer questions and discuss their experiences. We also ask alum teachers to share their knowledge at future virtual SEPs. You will have several opportunities to give back by helping new teacher cohorts.

4

TEACHER REFERRAL PROGRAM

Know a motivated teacher who would thrive in the North? Refer them to Gakino'amaage! If they're hired, you can earn \$250 after they complete their first year, plus an additional \$250 if they return for a second year—for a total of up to \$500 per successful referral.

To be eligible, the teacher must list your name as their referrer on their application.

Working together to make education more equitable 🦅







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