

Stakeholder summary

New graduates offer insights on teaching in First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities

A group of recent Bachelor of Education graduates from Laurentian University share their perspectives on teaching in northern, remote, First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) communities in a new report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO).

Project description

Between June 2013 and June 2014, 11 graduates were interviewed about their experiences teaching in northern Ontario to better understand how the concurrent education program prepares graduates for teaching in FNMI communities. Five administrators or school principals were also interviewed to gather feedback on how to better prepare new teachers to work in these communities. Data were collected from interviews, questionnaires, observations and document analyses.

Preparing Bachelor of Education Candidates to Teach in Ontario's Northern, Remote, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Communities is a follow up to an earlier study that tracked labour market outcomes of graduates from the concurrent education program at Laurentian University between 2008 and 2012, and found that many had secured teaching positions in FNMI communities. Of the 285 graduates tracked, 23 were working in northern, remote or FNMI communities and 11 participated in the follow up study.

Findings

Understanding the unique social dynamics of northern communities was essential to a teacher's successful transition into the area. Graduates found that becoming involved as early as possible by volunteering, coaching or attending events made it easier to build trust within the community. This sentiment was echoed by administrators.

Graduates found their placements to be the most valuable aspect of their program as it gave them connections and the teaching experience that employers were looking for. Teacher candidates at Laurentian must complete at least 90 days of practicum in Ontario schools, more than twice the current provincial requirement.

The legacy of residential schools, mistrust with the education system and local politics often impacted a teacher's success, according to the report. While some parents were very involved in and supportive of their child's education, others were sometimes hostile toward the education system and those who work in it. Establishing relationships with parents, and sometimes grandparents, was integral to the success of new teachers.

Graduates must also be prepared to implement creative teaching and assessment methods as there are often significant gaps between the grade level and grade ability of students. One graduate was responsible for teaching the Ontario grade six curriculum but had to find ways to make the curriculum accessible for students who had not yet reached that level. Several graduates noted that moving to a remote, rural or FNMI community allowed them to be creative and take risks with their teaching.

Every community is unique and the new teachers recommended that all students in the concurrent education program complete a placement in a FNMI community. While the Laurentian program has a strong indigenous focus, with every undergraduate and senior course including FNMI content and opportunities to interact with Elders and work in band-run schools, some graduates felt that more could have been done to prepare them for the realities of working in a FNMI community.

Authors of Preparing Bachelor of Education Candidates to Teach in Ontario's Northern, Remote, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Communities are Patricia Danyluk, University of Calgary and George Sheppard, Laurentian University.