



Immediate Release

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Waikato rangatahi step up to shape the future of Māori health

Te Kauwhata College Year 13 rangatahi are taking charge of a leadership hui that will bring a Member of Parliament, a Black Fern and a young Māori climate advocate to their school tomorrow.

Hauraki-Waikato MP Hana-Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke, Black Fern and Chiefs Manawa captain Kennedy Tukuafu MNZM, and rangatahi climate advocate and COP30 delegate Taane Aruka Te Aho will join more 130 students including five visiting kura at the Te Kauwhata Leadership Excellence Hui on Tuesday 22 September.

“Kia Tū is about more than teaching rangatahi about hauora. It is about creating the conditions for them to find their voices, understand the issues affecting their whānau and communities, and recognise their own capacity to influence what happens next,” says Te Tiratū Tumu Whakarae Brandi Hudson.

The Te Kauwhata Leadership Excellence Hui on Tuesday 22 September is the latest stage of the Kia Tū Rangatahi Māori Hauora Leadership Programme, an initiative of Te Tiratū Iwi Māori Partnership Board now expanding across seven secondary schools in the Waikato.

“Our early Te Tiratū survey results show rangatahi are consistently telling us that school pressure, stress and sleep affect their wellbeing, while mates, whānau and physical activity help keep them strong,” says Te Tiratū Tumu Whakarae Brandi Hudson.

There have been 117 responses to the survey, including 38 from Te Kauwhata. Among those who answered, the most commonly identified barriers were concerns about privacy, fear of being judged, a preference to sort things out themselves and not knowing where to go.

The pattern is reflected in a separate August engagement with 70 rangatahi from schools and kura across the wider Waikato, which identified similar challenges.

“They are also telling us that privacy concerns and fear of how others might react can make reaching out for help harder,” Hudson says.

“We have seen that beginning to happen at Te Kauwhata. Rangatahi have moved from participating in the programme to helping shape what leadership opportunities should look like for their own school, including this Leadership Excellence Hui.”

The three speakers will share their leadership journeys before taking questions directly from rangatahi.

“This hui, developed by Year 13 students, takes its inspiration from the whakataukī ‘Mā te huruhuru, ka rere te manu’ adorn the bird with feathers so it can fly, which is part of the Kia Tū kaupapa running in schools,” Hudson says.



All the students have challenged themselves to step outside their comfort zones, building confidence through public speaking and learning to use their voices with greater impact. They've also explored issues and ideas that matter to them through video, spoken word, art, waiata and interviews.

The programme is an opportunity to learn about hauora issues including mental health and suicide prevention, vaccination, dental care, vaping and smoking, while strengthening connection to culture, identity and each other.

At the hui, Hana-Rawhiti will speak about identity, courage and having the confidence to use your voice. Raised in Rāhui Pōkeka and educated at Te Wharekura o Rākaumangamanga, she won the Hauraki-Waikato seat in 2023 at the age of 21, becoming the youngest Member of Parliament in Aotearoa in 170 years.

Kennedy Tukuafu will bring her experience as a Black Fern and Chiefs Manawa captain. The Ngāti Maniapoto and Ngāti Māhanga wahine debuted for the Black Ferns in 2019, was named Player of the Year in 2021 and co-captained the team to Rugby World Cup victory in 2022. She is now captain of Chiefs Manawa and was appointed a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2024.

Taane Aruka Te Aho will bring the perspective of a young Māori leader working at the intersection of rangatahi, whakapapa and te taiao. A recipient of the 2024 Prime Minister's Indigenous Exchange Scholarship, Taane was selected in 2025 for Te Kāhu Pōkere, the first iwi-mandated Māori youth delegation to attend COP30 in Brazil, where he presented on iwi-led climate solutions.

The focus will then return to the students, with an interactive 'Design Your Hauora Day' session where rangatahi will work in teams to develop and pitch their own ideas for a hauora-focused day.

The schools currently involved include Te Kauwhata College, Putāruru College, Ōtorohanga College, Tai Wānanga Ki Ruakura, Te Kōpuku High School, Tokoroa High School and Te Kūiti High School.

For Te Tiratū, the programme is about ensuring rangatahi are not simply recipients of information about hauora, but active participants in conversations about the issues affecting their lives, whānau and communities.

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Background

Locality of Te Tiratū Iwi Māori Partnership Board represents the local Māori voice from:

1. **Waikato** – Central North Island, extending from the west coast (Raglan) inland to Hamilton and south towards Taupō.
2. **Hauraki** – Northern Waikato and the Coromandel Peninsula, bordering the Firth of Thames.
3. **Maniapoto** – Western-central North Island, covering the King Country, including Te Kūiti and Ōtorohanga.
4. **Raukawa** – South Waikato and central North Island, including Tokoroa, Putāruru, and Tirau.
5. **Ngāti Hāua** – Western-central North Island, around Taumarunui and the western Ruapehu district.