

NATIVE LANGUAGE IMMERSION INITIATIVE

First Nations Development Institute launched its **Native Language Immersion Initiative** in 2017 to build on its longtime efforts to support the revitalization and perpetuation of Native languages. Language is a vital asset for Native people and communities. It defines who we are, where we come from and our value systems that in many ways cannot be translated into English.

Language-immersion programs have been recognized as providing key benefits to Native communities by boosting educational achievement and student retention rates. They also support community identity, Native systems of kinship, and management of community, cultural and natural resources. We are pleased to share some of these efforts.



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Lakhol'iyapi Wahohpi

Growing “Fluent Speakers, Sovereign Thinkers”

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and Sitting Bull College partnered to establish Lakhol'iyapi Wahohpi (Lakota Language Nest), a preschool language immersion program dedicated to teaching the youngest members of the tribe to speak the Dakota

and Lakota languages. Its mission is to increase the number of Dakota and Lakota language speakers and equip Dakota and Lakota students with the knowledge and skills needed to be leaders and more conscientious citizens in their communities. Lakhol'iyapi Wahohpi's vision is: “Fluent Speakers, Sovereign Thinkers.”



In many ways, the Lakhol'iyapi Wahohpi is just like any other preschool where toddlers learn and play with other students. However, at the Lakhol'iyapi Wahohpi, all of the activities — books, games, songs, prayers and even meals — are conducted in the Dakota and Lakota languages. For eight hours a day, these preschoolers speak the Lakota language and then often go home at night and share the language with their families. “This isn't just a school. This is a movement,” says Yuliya Manyakina, Lakhol'iyapi Wahohpi Project Director.

To learn more, find Lakhol'iyapi Wahohpi on Twitter at @LakotaLangNest.

**“This isn't just a school.
This is a movement.”**

— Yuliya Manyakina, Lakhol'iyapi
Wahohpi Project Director

#NativeVoices

Waadookodaading, Inc.

Teaching Ojibwe Students to Speak, Read and Write Ojibwemowin

Waadookodaading, Inc. is an Ojibwe language institute founded in 2000 by a group of Ojibwe elders, language activists and community members. Waadookodaading started as a small program with two language instructors and six kindergarteners. Today, it boasts 12 teachers and 65 students grades K-7.

Over the past 18 years, Waadookodaading has been fine-tuning its standards, assessments, teaching strategies and lesson plans. The next goal is to develop Ojibwe texts for beginning Ojibwe readers. To achieve this goal, the program established the Agindamaadidaa! "Let's Read!" project to increase the next generation of fluent Ojibwemowin speakers. Over the next year, a team of linguists, language instructors and community members will translate math, science and social studies textbooks from



English to Ojibwemowin and also publish a new series of books from scratch based on the Ojibwe oral storytelling tradition.

To learn more about Waadookodaading's new reading program, visit www.waadookodaading.org.

"This is more than language revitalization. It's community revitalization. It's a wellness journey that promotes education and empowerment."

— Brooke Amman,
Waadookodaading Executive Director

Ya Ne Dah Ah School

A Comprehensive Approach to Language Revitalization

Alaska is home to 229 federally-recognized tribes. Chickaloon Native Village is the first and only federally-recognized tribe in Alaska to own and operate its own full-time, year-round school: Ya Ne Dah Ah School or "Ancient Teachings" School.



Formally established in 1992, Ya Ne Dah Ah School is intended to help to teach, preserve and rejuvenate Ahtna Athabascan culture, language, history and traditions. Only a handful of elders still speak the Ahtna language today. "Our elders are passing too quickly," says Health, Education and Social Services Division Director Lisa Wade. "Our language is passed down orally, and we are working hard to develop curriculum to continue teaching the language. Without the language being written down and taught in a very methodical and culturally meaningful way, we risked losing it."

Today, the tribe is preserving the language through the use of the Traditional Physical Response (TPR) method.

To learn more about TPR and the Ya Ne Dah Ah School, visit <http://www.chickaloon.org/departments/education/yaschool/>.

"We are trying to revitalize something that we know is vitally important to the survival of our families and communities."

— Lisa Wade, Chickaloon Native Village Health, Education, and Social Services Director

Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project

Reviving a Long-Silent Language

The Wampanoag Nation is one of the first tribes to reclaim an Indigenous language with no living speakers. The last speaker of Wôpanâôt8âôk (the Wampanoag language) passed away more than a century ago, and there were no first-language speakers for many generations. To revive the oral language, the Wampanoag Nation began studying written translations of the language recorded by their early ancestors and missionaries.

In 1993, the Wampanoag Nation, which consists of four tribes (Mashpee, Aquinnah, Herring Pond and Assonet), produced a 10,000-word Wampanoag-English dictionary that Jessie 'Little Doe' Baird, a Wampanoag tribal citizen and linguist, adapted into teaching materials that she used to train a small group of second language learners that have since achieved fluency in the long silent language. These teachers worked to develop new curriculum that grew into the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project, which now offers a full-time language nest, elder classes, community classes, summer camps



and language enrichment programming in the public schools.

To learn more about the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project, visit: www.wlrp.org.

“Our tribal children ... are showing tremendous potential as future bilingual speakers of Wôpanâak and English, and are the first generation to have the opportunity to attend school in their Native language in nearly 400 years!”

— Jennifer Weston, Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project Director

Benefits of Language Immersion Programs

Shared by Our Community Partners

- ✓ Increases educational achievement and student retention rates.
- ✓ Provides deeper cultural relationship between the educator and the student.
- ✓ Supports community identity, Native systems of kinship, and management of community, cultural and natural resources.
- ✓ Strengthens cultural awareness and practices.
- ✓ Sharpens cognitive, creative and social skills.
- ✓ Students who learn in an immersion environment gain more than an additional language, including strengthening identity.

#NativeVoices

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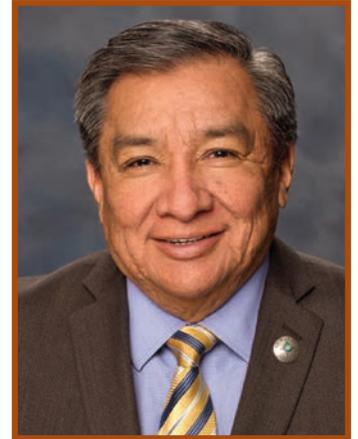
Board Chair, First Nations Development Institute

Q&A with Benny Shendo, Jr.

Why is language so important to Indian people and communities?

Language is a core part of who we are as Indian people. Each of us has our respective languages that connect us to our place of birth, teach us how to pray, and show us who we are as Indian people.

Language is sacred. For many of us, the only way for our languages and ceremonies to survive was to take them underground. To this day, there are some of us who won't even allow our languages to be written down. Each tribe has their own approach to preserving and protecting the language.



What impact will the language initiative have on tribal children and families?

Across the country, we're seeing a renaissance of Indigenous languages. In our community, Jemez Pueblo in New Mexico, we established one of the first tribal Head Start programs in the country, and it changed the entire dynamic of our community. Grandparents were able to talk to their grandchildren in their own language, which is something that many of them haven't been able to do for a long time.

What can individuals do to better support these efforts?

Support them in ways that allow the community to do what they need to do. At the end of the day, the communities are the ones who have the answers. They have the knowledge needed to help their communities flourish.

What should donors know about supporting Native language revitalization?

Respect tribes and tribal communities. Each tribe and language is different. It's important to respect those differences and the different ways they choose to revitalize languages.

Benny Shendo, Jr. is a member of the Jemez Pueblo Tribe and a member of the New Mexico Senate since 2013. He was elected Chairman of the Board of First Nations Development Institute in June 2016 after serving many years as a Board member.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit www.firstnations.org/NativeVoices for more information on the current Native Language Immersion Initiative grantees with expanded articles, blog posts and other resources. Please watch for more grantees soon.



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Our mission is to strengthen American Indian economies to support healthy Native communities. We invest in and create innovative institutions and models that strengthen asset control and support economic development for American Indian people and their communities.