

# 'Full immersion has better effects'

LANGUAGE continued  
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Program, 18 kindergarten through third-grade students and 15 high school students.

The Tribe is now exploring the possibility of continuing the half-day K-3 program through fifth grade.

Planning and Grants Development Manager Kim Rogers said, pending Tribal Council approval, the Education Department will apply for a \$90,000 First Nations Language Immersion grant for curriculum development, facility planning/design and other education-related activities, and re-apply for an Administration for Native Americans grant.

Year one would include hiring a teacher and an apprentice, and fine-tuning the fourth-grade curriculum. In year two, fourth grade would officially be added and fifth-grade curriculum would be designed. In year three, fifth-grade students would be included and additional curriculum developed.

"We look for other funding opportunities to expand the program and apply there as well so that we don't just rely on Tribal funding," Rogers said. "Several staff have participated in providing input on the new planned application and we have been collecting input from parents and from other Tribal members. We plan to submit a Tribal Council meeting request by March 8 to request their approval to apply."

The Tribe partners with the Willamina School District to educate 18 students in Chinuk Wawa during the morning, where they focus on reading and writing. The students are then taken to Willamina and learn the rest of the day's subjects in English. After-school, spring break and summer Chinuk Wawa language programs, family nights and adult classes also are offered. Additionally, students can take up to two years of Chinuk Wawa for dual credits at Willamina High School.

"In high school, it helps them get more of a sense of identity of who they are," Cole said. "It helps teach them more about what it means to be Native American."

Currently, the K-3 program includes teachers Justine Flynn and Ali Holsclaw, and apprentices Santiago Atanacio and Jade Colton. They work with Master Chinuk Speaker Henry Zenk on Mondays for two hours, learning language use and translation.

Holsclaw, 31, has been studying Chinuk Wawa since she was 14 and is a certified Chinuk teacher through the state of Oregon. Before serving in the teacher role, she worked in the Pre-K and after-school programs.

"The best aspect of the language program is the relationships we are able to develop and maintain with students and their families," she said. "Being able to work with them over the years and help instill a sense of confidence, identity and pride is awesome."

Holsclaw said that she finds that



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

**From left, Cohlman Hubbell, Auburn Mercier and Tiberius Bailey use flash cards to review words during their Chinuk Immersion class held in the Tribe's Adult Education Building on Monday, Feb. 26.**

the greatest challenge in her job is having to develop all of the Chinuk curriculum used in class, and to help students keep up with their language skills after they leave the program.

"Full immersion has better effects," she said. "The students are able to pick up more than when you are not doing 100 percent of either Chinuk or English. They really end up understanding everything better."

Flynn, one of the teachers, began learning Chinuk Wawa from her grandmother, Tribal Elder Jackie Whisler, who walked on in 2007 after a battle with cancer. Whisler was a key figure in both the Tribe's Restoration efforts and in the early immersion preschool.

"I remember she only spoke Chinuk to me growing up," Flynn said. "She was passionate about the language and I want to continue the legacy that she started. When the opportunity for this job came up, I jumped at it."

To improve her writing skills, Flynn took two years of Chinuk Wawa while at the University of Oregon earning her degree in ethnic and Native American studies.

"Being immersed in the language makes it easier to learn," she said. "The kids here aren't judging you for accuracy. They are learning with you. It felt intimidating at first but it gets easier. ... We use lots of gesturing and modeling to help them understand."

Flynn said the best aspect of her job is the opportunity to help youth become comfortable with their culture, language and customs.

"They learn to embrace it and feel proud," she said. "That is our goal."

Atanacio, 26, is in his third year with the program, but has been working for the Tribe since he was in high school. He first became interested in the language as a teen when he lived with foster parent, Tribal member and Cultural Advisor Bobby Mercier.

"I really liked it," he said. "I interviewed in high school to help with the Lilo preschool immersion program and that is when I really got into it."

The best aspect of Atanacio's job

is working with the children, especially when he gets to sing with them.

"We are able to give kids more one-on-one time here," he said. "It helps give us a better feel for where they are at and what they are going through."

The most challenging part is staying in the language.

"When you are working with students and your path crosses with others, it is easy to get distracted," he said.

## Parents, youth enthusiastic

Tribal member and 477 Employment and Training Specialist Angey Rideout's daughter Lyliana, 9, has been a part of the program since she was in preschool.

"There are so many benefits to this program," she said. "Lily has really grown to look at her Chinuk immersion staff as family. She loves them and they provide a nurturing and educational environment for her, which in turn I believe fosters the learning process. She feels safe and confident, and has really come into her own. She self-identifies with the language and culture that she has been taught."

Rideout said that a drawback to the program is that it currently ends at third grade.

"The program provides these children and families with a connection to their culture and language they may not otherwise have," she said.

"It keeps our culture alive. ... Our blood quantum will continue to fade and dilute, but if we have our language and carry forward our traditions, our culture will not be lost in the amount of Native blood flowing through our veins, but be renewed in the histories we keep alive by teaching ourselves and our youth."

When Lyliana entered fourth grade, her mother made a decision to homeschool her so that she could continue with the Chinuk Wawa program.

"Our family lives out of the Willamina School District," she said. "We have made it a point to drive Lyliana to and from school every day since before kindergarten so that she could be out here in this program."

Lyliana said her favorite aspect of the Chinuk Wawa class is learning the language itself, along with culture and customs.

"I really enjoy all of the activities," she said. "The language helps you learn more."

Tribal member and Parks and Recreation Coordinator Jerry Bailey has 4-year-old Riker in the preschool class, and 7-year-old Tiberius and 9-year-old Ezri in the K-3 program.

Ezri has been in the program since kindergarten.

"Learning the language is definitely my favorite part," she said.

Bailey said he decided to enroll all of his children because he felt that it was an important opportunity to learn the language and be involved with the Tribe.

"It helps connect them with this area and our Tribe and culture," he said. "Also, learning a second language gives them a boost in their cognitive abilities as they grow older, so that is also a plus. One thing my children really appreciate is that since they know a language that I don't, they can talk with each other in front of me and know that I don't quite get what they are saying."

Micah Bruckner, 8, has been in the immersion programs for five years.

"I really like doing all of the fun stuff like art and playing new games," he said. "It's a very good school here. I have great teachers and most of the language is easy except for the handwriting books." ■