Community-Based Program

Background Information

Institution: CATA Tibetan School

Program address: 120 Cherry St. SE, Vienna, VA 22180

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Contact person:

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Levels: PreK-8

Languages/dialects taught: Tibetan

Program Description

Purposes and goals of the program: The goal is to teach and preserve the Tibetan language and culture in a Tibetan-American context.

Type of program: Sunday school

Program origin: It was founded in 1996 through parent donations.

Parents

Parents’ expectations for the program: For their children to learn how to read and write in Tibetan and establish a relationship with it culture and religion.

Staff
Instructors’ and administration’s expectations for the program: To teach the language with an aim toward inspiring pride in the children for their language and heritage.

Students

Students: Students range in age from 4 years to 16 years old.
- First-generation immigrants: 30%
- Second-generation immigrants: 60%

Countries of origin: Tibet and India

Total student enrollment: 37

How the program identifies heritage speakers: First-or second-generation immigrants who have had exposure to the language and culture at home.

How the program determines the language background and language proficiency of students: Oral proficiency interviews performed by instructors

Instructors

Number of instructors in the program: 4 language instructors, 2 culture and dance instructors

Languages in which instructors are proficient: Fluent in English, proficient in Tibetan

Credentials: All instructors are parents who volunteer, most of whom work at the radio station Voice of America.

Instruction

Total contact hours per week: 3 hours per week

Times per week: 1 time per week

Student grouping: By language proficiency and age

Hours devoted to language teaching: 80-85% of the time

Hours devoted to culture teaching: 15-20% of the time

Language skills

Heritage language skills: Listening, speaking, reading, and writing
Levels of language proficiency reached by the end of the program: Fluency

Culture

Aspects of culture taught: History, festivals, customs, traditions/beliefs, religion, folktales, arts and crafts, dances, songs, rhymes, social and cultural norms, cultural appropriateness, literature, and sewing for custom dress

Kind of student identity program fosters: A Tibetan-American who is comfortable with and knowledgeable about their heritage language and culture

Methodologies

Methodologies and instructional strategies used in the program: Teachers use instructional strategies that are appropriate for instruction in the United States.

Materials

Textbooks: Teachers make their own textbooks, as well as using textbooks from Tibet and India.

Other materials used for instruction: Videos, songs, and audios

Assessment

Assessments used to evaluate students’ progress: Weekly quizzes, chapter tests, teacher observations, students’ self assessments

Articulation

Connections with other institutions: Universities in Tibet

Credit or recognition students receive: High school foreign language credit

How the program develops home/school connections or promotes parent involvement: A PTA organization coordinates home-school connections and participates during various lessons. We have very close relations with the teachers and parents.

Opportunities for using the heritage language and developing cultural knowledge outside the program: Students have the opportunity to speak Tibetan on a daily basis in their homes. Students also speak Tibetan with their friends at various Tibetan functions throughout North America.
What the program has in place

Financial support the program receives: Parents

Solicitation of funding: The CATA Tibetan Sunday School PTA officers

Assistance or funding the program would like to receive: We would like to receive financial collaboration in addition to assistance in acquiring a permanent venue for our classes. We have had to move the school venue four or five times since its inception. We would also like to receive accreditation from the Fairfax County school board.

Continuing heritage language development: Some students who have graduated high school still continue to use the Tibetan school, and are becoming more and more comfortable with the language. We have noticed that after attending our school, many students remain involved in the local Tibetan community.

Program research or evaluation: Instructors have noticed that the students in the Tibetan program also perform very well academically in their regular schools.

Special challenges

Challenges the program has experienced: Funding is a big problem. Finding a permanent venue is also quite a challenge, as well as the retention of students once they have reached high school.

Additional Information

Information for parents: We are planning to start a Tibetan newsletter. We will start with a one-page newsletter in English with various short articles and then move on to a combination of English and Tibetan. We have a professional broadcaster from Radio Free Asia who will train the students to write the articles, and eventually everything will be done by the students.