

Magdalena Municipal School District K-12 Program

Background Information

Institution: Magdalena Municipal School District

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Type of institution: Public school district

Grades taught: 1-12

Languages/dialects taught: Navajo

Program Description

Purposes and goals of the program: The purpose of the program is to create biliterate, bilingual Navajo students and to build cross-cultural connection within the school and the community.

Type of program: Navajo heritage language revitalization program

Program origin: The program was founded in 2003-2004 through a four-year grant issued by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Acquisition/Native American in Schools program. The program also receives funding from the New Mexico Public Education Department, Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau.

Parents' expectations for the program: Parents expect that the program will provide literacy in the Navajo language to their children and teach them the history and culture of the Navajo people.

Instructors' and administration's expectations for the program: Staff expect that the program will increase the literacy skills of Navajo students by using their home language to increase English language acquisition.

Students

Countries of origin: All students are Native American

Total student enrollment: 150

Age of students: 6-18

How the program identifies heritage speakers and determines language proficiency:

- Home language survey
- New Mexico English Language Proficiency Assessment
- Navajo proficiency assessment
 - Assessment created in conjunction with education specialists from the Navajo Nation, Office of Dine Language, Culture, and Community Services

Percentage of students who complete the program: 80%

Percentage of students who continue to study the heritage language after completing the program: Unknown

Possible reasons for student withdrawal: Scheduling conflicts are the main reason students do not complete the program. The Navajo classes are held during the regular school day and scheduling issues at the middle and high school frequently occur.

Students' attitudes toward the language varieties they speak: Our students are learning their heritage language, which most of them know orally, but have never read or written. To these students and their parents, the program is vital to preventing further loss of their language and culture.

Instructors

Number of instructors in the program: 5

Languages in which instructors are proficient: English and Navajo

Proficiency level: Navajo staff members are working toward the advanced level.

Credentials: New Mexico allows Native language teachers to earn certification for Native American language and culture through a process with local tribes. Our Navajo language teachers had to take and pass a Navajo language and culture assessment administered at the Navajo Nation Office of Dine Language. That assessment score is then sent to the NM Public Education Department along with the teacher's application for licensure and then the license is granted.

Professional development opportunities for instructors: New Mexico provided numerous indigenous language, dual language, and bilingual education conferences for staff. The grant allowed for a partnership with the Center for Applied Linguistics and we have received long-term, sustained professional development from CAL over the last four years.

Professional development opportunities instructors need: Our Navajo teachers specifically need further training in advancement of the Navajo language and culture.

Instruction

Total contact hours per week: 4

Student grouping: Students are grouped by their proficiency level.

Language skills

Skills developed by the program: Listening, speaking, reading, and writing in Navajo and English.

Levels of language proficiency reached by the end of the program: Over the four years, proficiency levels in listening and speaking are still higher than reading and writing, but the overall goal is that students will reach proficiency in all levels of language.

Culture

Aspects of culture taught:

- History
- Festivals

- Customs
- Traditions and beliefs
- Folktales
- Arts and crafts
- Songs and dances
- Social and cultural norms
- Cultural appropriateness
- Literature

Methodologies

Methodologies and instructional strategies used in the program: Best practices in teaching language and literacy are used in the Navajo language classrooms. These include:

- cooperative groups
- holistic approach to learning language which relies on student background knowledge
- strategies specific to working with ELLs

Materials

Textbooks: Goosen, I.W. (1995). *Dine' Bizaad: Read, write, speak Navajo*, Salina Bookshelf.

Other materials used for instruction: Navajo/English materials published by numerous companies throughout New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah

Technology used for instruction: Students use the Internet to research history and culture and use computer programs that allow them to engage in aural/oral practice.

Assessment

Assessments used to evaluate students' progress:

- Chapter tests
- Mid-term tests
- Final exams
- School/district developed tests
- Teachers' observations
- Task-based assessment
- Portfolios
- Program exit test

Articulation

Connections: Colleges and universities

How the program develops home school connections and promotes parent involvement: This program showed parents and the community that we value the Navajo language and culture and increased cultural awareness communitywide. It increased Navajo parental involvement on a large scale.

Opportunities for using the heritage language and developing cultural knowledge outside the program: Students use the language and culture everyday on the reservation. Students can go on to college and continue studying the language to become consultants, teachers, politicians, and leaders for the Navajo Nation.

Financial Support

Types of financial support the program receives:

- U.S. government
- Local and state government

Types of support the program receives from these or other entities: The New Mexico Public Education Department's Bilingual Unit provided technical support for the implementation of the program. The Office of Dine' Language also provided technical assistance in implementation and helped in the development of the curriculum with both state standards and the Navajo Nation standards and helped in the creation of the language and culture assessments.

System for graduating students and granting credit: The courses are counted as elective credit in the middle and high school.

Research

Research on heritage language issues: There has been ongoing evaluation of the program from external evaluators hired through the grant to monitor implementation, professional development of the staff, use of best practices in the classroom, development of curriculum, materials and assessment, and the academic performance of the students in the program.

Comments: After having the program in place for 3 full years, students made huge gains in core content areas including, reading, math, and science.

Special challenges

Challenges the program has experienced:

- Finding continued funding
- Scheduling conflicts
- Conflicts in staff expectations of the program
- Maintaining continued support when changes are made in the administration

Insights: Those looking to start Navajo programs will be surprised at all the resources out there, especially, the number of Navajo materials that can be found. Most people starting Navajo/Native American programs will likely be pleasantly surprised at the support they will receive from parents and local tribes.