

Dual Language Education of New Mexico



Support for Tribal Communities

The realities of colonization have impacted tribal communities in every facet of their existence, including the vibrancy of the local Indigenous language that has sustained the way of life and cultural identity of its members. Tribes are faced with the unique challenge of revitalizing and/or sustaining their community Indigenous language. This is necessary to ensure there will be future generations of speakers who will sustain the inherent right to a Native way of life that includes the gift of language.

Tribal advocates for language learning will need to look within their communities and focus on local assets and resources such as elders, tribal leaders, parents, and speakers of the language to begin defining the local cultural and linguistic expectations for language learning. There may also be a need to seek tribal permission to bring the language into the schools. This community-based narrative for language learning provides a blueprint for local schools to support what will ultimately be a local mandate on what is necessary to the survival of the tribal community language. This process supports an organic process of language sovereignty while honoring and respecting the community's cultural and social norms.

Community Partnership

Before any program planning or activities are developed, it is imperative for schools to engage and support the local tribal community in defining and articulating its narrative on language learning from an Indigenous perspective. Community forums are an avenue to engage tribal stakeholders on defining the role of the Indigenous language within the school context, and the purpose of learning and excelling in the colonizing language and its Western model of education.

Topics for community forums and/or focus groups should include:

- language shift and/or loss as a result of both the legacy of and ongoing forms of colonization,
- language equity within homes and the community,
- language perceptions and attitudes towards the local Indigenous language and English,
- language environment and the impact of the colonizing language,
- language politics, language sovereignty, and cultural identity,
- Indigenous language learning as a decolonizing process,
- language advocacy and community engagement to define the community narrative, and
- defining the local cultural and linguistic expectations for language learning—renewing an appreciation for the local community Indigenous language.

Other topics may arise from forum and focus-group discussions.



Indigenous Language Program Support

The decision to take the local Indigenous language on to the school campus presents a series of challenges. First, the school serving the tribal community will need to adopt and affirm the local narrative on language learning to move the pendulum toward *schools supporting tribal communities (and not the opposite)*. The Indigenous language program will need to focus on critical factors that impact its sustainability, including approaches to teaching (i.e., oral language development to produce speakers). Some languages are not written and tribal communities may have very few speakers of the language. Questions to ask include: 1) Is there a place for the local language in the school context? 2) Can it be used to teach academic content? and 3) What are the roles of parents and community members in doing this? Once these questions are answered, planning, development, and activities may begin in support of the Indigenous language program.

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