



American Indian Language Instruction Report

2025 Minnesota Public Schools and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) Schools

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Purpose of the study

Midwest Indigenous Immersion Network (MIIN) conducted its second bi-annual survey of K-12 public schools and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools in Minnesota for the 2024-25 school year. The purpose of this survey is to learn more about American Indian language teachers, curriculum, and instruction in Minnesota schools.

Starting in April 2025, MIIN contacted the 197 public schools and districts in Minnesota that served 20 or more American Indian students based on their official student count from October 1, 2024. These school districts have preliminary eligibility for American Indian Education Aid through the Minnesota Department of Education.¹ A total of 194 public school districts in Minnesota, including all four BIE schools, completed the survey for a response rate of 99%.

MIIN relied on contact information provided by the administrators who completed the school district survey to locate and survey 87 American Indian language teachers. A total of 55 American Indian language teachers completed the survey for a response rate of 63%.

The survey data represents a majority of Minnesota public and BIE schools and the American Indian language teachers who work at these schools. Because of the high degree of cooperation from school administrators and American Indian language teachers who completed this voluntary survey, we believe the data provides a very accurate picture of the current status of American Indian language instruction, curriculum, and teachers in Minnesota schools. Districts that chose not to participate in this survey include Athlos Leadership Academy (29 American Indian students); Wayzata Public Schools (75 American Indian students), and Wilmar Public Schools (57 American Indian students).

The remainder of this report highlights the key findings from these surveys, including strengths and gaps in American Indian language instruction in Minnesota. MIIN intends to continue conducting this bi-annual survey to assess changes over time. MIIN would welcome additional insights from American Indian language teachers and others working in this field to add more nuance and depth to these findings.

MIIN (and many other language champions) continue to work on many of the needs and gaps identified in this report, with the ultimate goal of increasing the quantity and quality of American Indian language instruction available to Minnesota's American Indian students and beyond.

1 <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/indian/tribnatmn/>



American Indian students in Minnesota public school districts and BIE schools

The Minnesota Department of Education reports that in 2024-25 there were 31,105² American Indian students in 327 Minnesota public school districts and four Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools³ (Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig School, Circle of Life Academy, Fond du Lac Ojibwe School, and Nay-Ah-Shing Schools). American Indian students make up 3.5% of the state’s total public K-12 student population.

Minnesota public school districts or schools that enroll 20 or more students who identify as American Indian, according to the State (not Federal) definition, are eligible to receive American Indian Education Aid Formula Grant funding from the state of Minnesota. A total of 197 Minnesota districts, including the four BIE schools, were eligible for this funding in 2024-25. There were 29,365 American Indian students who attended these districts and schools in 2024-25, including 519 students who attended one of the four BIE schools in Minnesota.⁴ The intent of American Indian Education Aid in Minnesota is to enable districts and schools to expand and enhance American Indian education programs and initiatives, or, in the case of those newly eligible to receive aid, to build sustainable American Indian Education programs that are culturally and academically tailored for American Indian students.

“What does a second-language program look like? How does it differ from other subjects taught within a school? How do we perform assessments? How do we advocate to school administrators to explain that language is not like any other specialist (physical education, art) and that best practices will look different?” – an American Indian language teacher

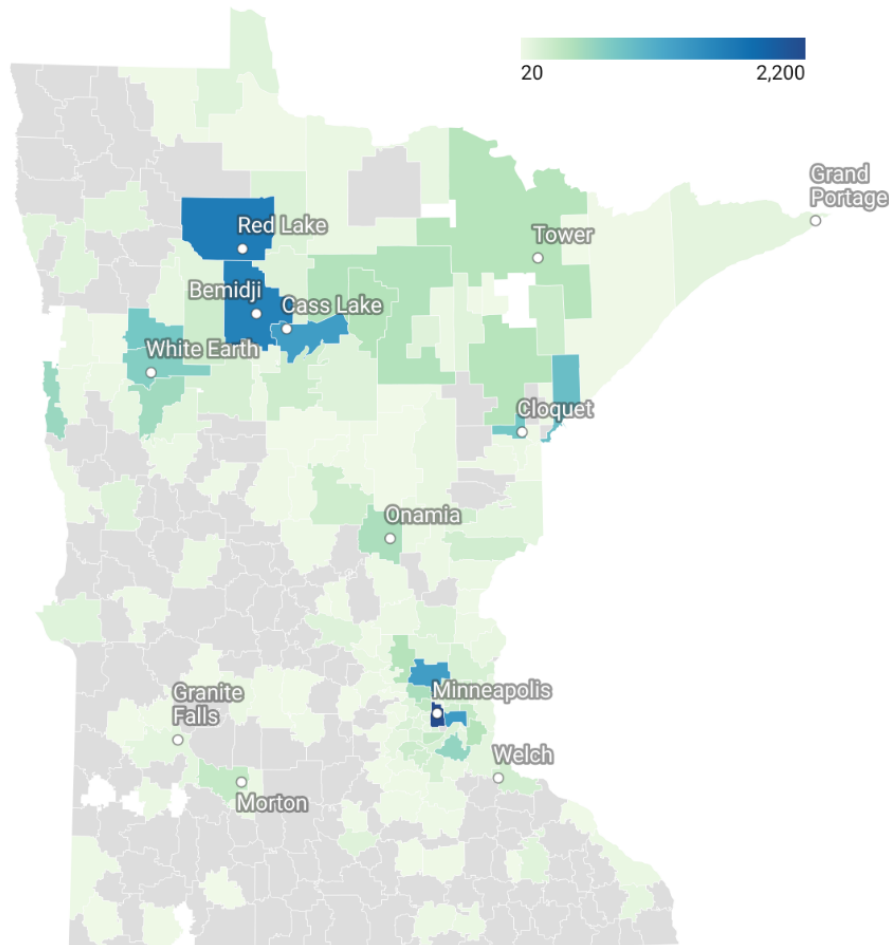
² https://rc.education.mn.gov/#demographics/orgId--999999000000_groupType--state_year--2026_p--1

³ The purpose of BIE schools is to provide American Indian students with a high quality, culturally relevant education that supports both academic success and preservation of cultural identity. The vast majority of students at these BIE schools identify as American Indian.

⁴ <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/indian/tribnatmn/>



1. Number of American Indian students by school district in Minnesota (for school districts with 20 or more American Indian students)



2022 Minnesota School District Map; MIIN added the American Indian student counts from Tribally-controlled schools, charter schools, and cooperatives into the nearest public school district count for this map.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education: SY 2025-26 American Indian Education Aid (AIEA) Eligibility List. Map created with Datawrapper.



6 out of 10 school districts in Minnesota have funding and associated obligations to the American Indian students and families in their district.



9 out of 10 American Indian students attend a school district that receives funding from the State specifically for Indian Education.



Key findings

#1: There is a shortage of American Indian language classes and teachers in Minnesota schools

Minnesota Statute 124D.74 American Indian Education Programs⁵ states that “a district or participating school that conducts American Indian education programs... must provide American Indian culture and language classes if: (1) at least 5% of students are American Indian students, or (2) 100 or more students are American Indian students.” According to this law, a total of 140 schools and districts in Minnesota should be providing American Indian culture and language classes. The survey responses received by MIIN identify only 51 districts providing American Indian language classes. Another 17 districts reported offering partial access to American Indian language instruction through Rosetta Stone, other online independent learning options, or language programming through Indian Education, language tables, etc.

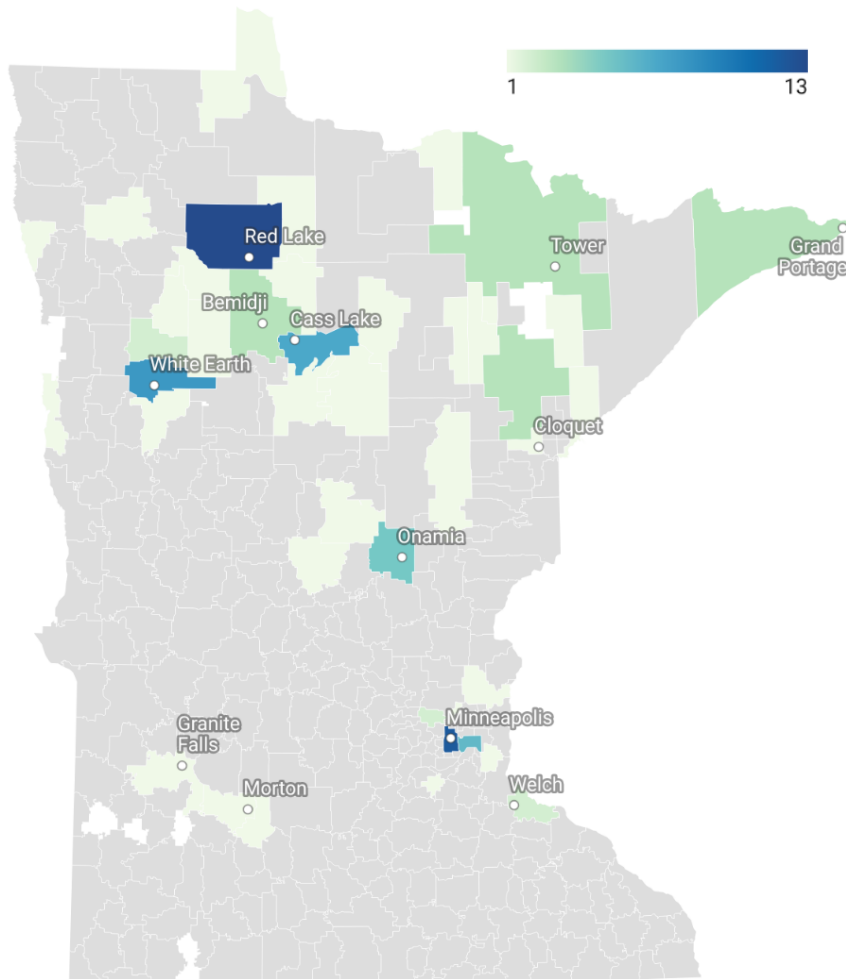
A total of 98 American Indian language teachers⁶ are employed by the 51 school districts in Minnesota that reported offering American Indian language classes. There are also two American Indian language teachers offering online supplementary education for school districts, for a total of 100 teachers. Six school districts in Minnesota (Red Lake, Minneapolis, Wabun-Ogema-White Earth, Cass Lake-Bena, Saint Paul, and Onamia) employ half of the American Indian language teachers in the state.

"I'm hoping to improve on my Ojibwe language skills, with emphasis on immersion-style teaching. I would also like assistance with curriculum development and lesson plan creation."- an American Indian language teacher

⁵ [Sec. 124D.74 MN Statutes](#)

⁶ This study is focused on American Indian language classes, not American Indian language-immersion classrooms. Immersion educators at Misaabekong - Duluth Public ISD 709 (4), Endazhi-nitaawiging Charter in Red Lake (1), Niigaane - Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig School (1), and Bdote Learning Center in Minneapolis (4) were not included in this count.

2. School districts in Minnesota employing American Indian language teachers




2024-25 K-12th grade American Indian Language Teachers by school or district
Source: MIIN K-12 Public School Survey, 2025. Map created with Datawrapper.

These data illustrate a significant gap in availability of American Indian language instruction to serve all American Indian students in Minnesota. Many districts are falling short of their legal obligations to American Indian students and communities. However, it is important to note that funding shortages and a lack of qualified American Indian language instructors creates barriers for some school districts to meet this obligation.

Comparing the number of American Indian students and American Indian language teachers in the school districts that participated in the survey, we find there is a 1:257 teacher-to-student ratio among the school districts in Minnesota that are required to provide language and culture classes.

If we assume that each language teacher is able to teach four language classes per day and that the ideal teacher-to-student ratio is 1:25 per class (for a total ratio of 1:100 American Indian language teachers to American Indian students), Minnesota would



need to add at least an additional 157 American Indian language teachers, and 89 school districts would need to add American Indian language classes to meet legislative requirements for American Indian students in Minnesota. Even more American Indian language teachers would be needed to provide access to language instruction for all American Indian students in Minnesota.

LANGUAGES PROVIDED

Participating school districts were also asked which American Indian languages they offer classes in.

- 43 districts reported offering Ojibwe language classes
- 13 districts reported offering Dakota and/or Lakota language classes
- 17 districts reported offering American Indian language options other than full classes, such as Rosetta Stone or other online options, community language tables, American Indian language units as part of world languages classes, and language and culture activities as part of Indian Education programming

AMERICAN INDIAN LANGUAGE TEACHERS

Half of the American Indian language teachers who completed our survey (29 teachers) work 20 hours per week or less teaching American Indian languages. Only 11 teachers are teaching American Indian languages full-time.

Furthermore, all of these teachers offer instruction across multiple grade levels: 30 of the teachers teach elementary (grades K-5), 33 teach middle school (grades 6-8), and 31 teach high school (grades 9-12). Nine of these teachers reported that they are required to travel between various sites in the district, while the remainder work at just one site. More than half of the American Indian language teachers who we surveyed also have other job duties in addition to language instruction.

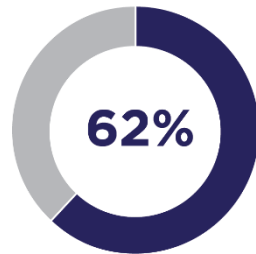
This indicates that the few American Indian language teachers who are working at Minnesota public and BIE schools are stretched thin by teaching multiple grades, often at multiple sites and with only a portion of their full-time job devoted to language instruction.

3. Challenges offering American Indian language classes

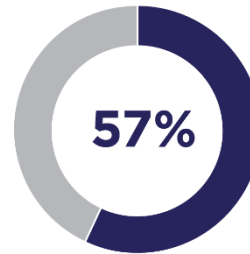
In terms of being able to offer American Indian language classes in their district, nearly two-thirds (62%) of all the school districts that responded to this survey indicated that **teacher recruitment** is a challenge. In addition, well over half (57%) of school districts that responded to the survey reported that **funding** is a challenge for their district to be able to offer American Indian language classes. A few of the district administrators also noted that they have too few American Indian students to be able to put together a class

at any given school within the district (10 school districts), and others indicated a lack of interest among students and/or families for language classes (8 school districts).

Teacher recruitment



Funding



How can Midwest Indigenous Immersion Network help?



MIIN has developed partnerships with Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe University (LCOOU) and Bemidji State University (BSU) to offer American Indian language-specific teacher licensure programs:

BSU:

- Middle & High School Dual-license program
- American Indian Language and Culture
- 2nd license in English or Social Studies

LCOOU:

- Wisconsin licensed PreK-9 teacher
- Ojibwe immersion track available for qualifying students

For information, contact Zhaangweshi@miinojibwe.org.

MIIN provides support to individuals who are working to become Ojibwe language teachers, including:

- Recruitment
- Financial assistance
- Retention and job placement assistance
- Access to MIIN professional development opportunities

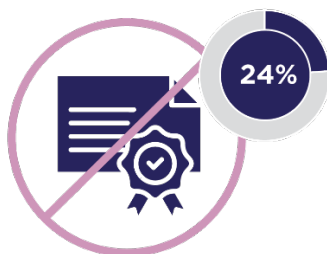
#2: American Indian language teachers need more training and support to increase the quantity and quality of American Indian language instruction available for Minnesota’s American Indian students

There are gaps in postsecondary credentialing programs that train teachers to teach in American Indian immersion classrooms and/or in higher level American Indian language classes. There is also a need for more professional development and on-the-job training for American Indian language teachers. American Indian language teachers generally need and want more support and training to improve their language proficiency to the level needed for immersion classroom and higher-level language classes.

We learned from previous research that significant support and practice outside of the classroom setting is needed for Ojibwe speakers to increase their language proficiency.⁷ This can take the form of individual study or mentoring from a First Language Speaker, peer mentoring, translation and transcription, creating an immersive space, and real-life practice in various settings, including ceremony.

In addition to supporting teachers to improve their own language learning and growing their skills and toolbox to teach the language, schools must also be able to *retain* skilled American Indian language teachers. In many cases, individuals who speak Ojibwe or Dakota/Lakota well enough to work as immersion teachers or in higher-level language classes are in great demand and can often find other positions that are higher paying and less stressful than being a K-12 teacher. Some states have addressed retention challenges by offering a pay differential for qualified language teachers. For example, the Hawai’i State Department of Education offers an \$8,000 pay differential for educators who are speakers of the Hawaiian language.⁸

We asked the school districts that completed this survey what types of licenses their American Indian language teachers have, if any.



About one-quarter (24%) of the school districts that reported having American Indian language teachers said their teacher(s) is/are unlicensed.

⁷ <https://www.wilder.org/stories/how-to-become-a-highly-proficient-ojibwe-speaker/>

⁸ <https://hawaiipublicschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2025-HIDOE-Teacher-Compensation-Report.pdf>



Among the American Indian language teachers who work in one of the participating school districts, 31 have an American Indian Language and Culture License.⁹ Additionally, 29 of the American Indian language teachers who were reported by participating districts have Minnesota Teaching Licenses (some teachers held more than one license). There are an additional 7 American Indian language teachers who are not currently providing American Indian language classes; some of these districts reported that these teachers are helping them to prepare for a future class.

4. Licenses and credentials held by American Indian language teachers in Minnesota’s public schools



SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND TEACHERS WANT MORE SUPPORT FOR AMERICAN INDIAN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

American Indian language instruction experts have established best practices for teaching languages and how to scaffold (modeling and guiding practice, breaking larger concepts into manageable chunks, and building on prior learning) to support students to master the material and advance to the next level of learning. However, because there are only a few postsecondary programs specifically focused on American Indian language instruction, very few licensed American Indian language teachers and other advanced speakers of American Indian languages are trained in these necessary building blocks for effective language instruction.

When they were asked what types of supports would be most beneficial to their district with regard to American Indian language instruction, over half of the districts surveyed said they need better access to advanced speakers (54%) and help establishing connections with Tribes, American Indian-led organizations, and/or language experts (53%).

⁹ <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/8710.4100/>

Similarly, more than half of the districts we surveyed want help with professional development specific to American Indian language instruction (53%) and teacher training (51%). In addition, nearly half (41%) want to have access to Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for language instruction. When we asked teachers, 40% said they want to develop their network of partners in American Indian language instruction.



Professional development



Teacher training



PLCs

“I am new to teaching and would greatly benefit from mentorship and community building. Mentorship, particularly on ways to navigate teaching in a public school with majority non-indigenous staff.” – an American Indian language teacher

“[I hope to] further my own language skills; create more engaging, innovative assignments... collaboration with other schools where students can practice the language. I feel like any collaboration will make us all better Anishinaabeg.” – an American Indian language teacher

“I would be happy to network with other Ojibwe language instructors to share materials and support professional development.” – an American Indian language teacher

“I’d benefit greatly from any trainings or professional developments offered that covered immersion methods.” – an American Indian language teacher

How can Midwest Indigenous Immersion Network help?



MIIN offers the following recurring supports for Ojibwe language instructors:

- Online Professional Learning Communities
- Language learning support and instruction
- In-person Ojibwe language specific professional development opportunities

For information, contact Niigaanigwaneb@miinojibwe.org.

MIIN also offers:

- Collection, organization, creation, and dissemination of Ojibwe language curricula and materials
- Yearly Fellowship opportunities through MIIN's Weshki-ganawenjigaazojig Fellowship

3: More curriculum and resources are needed to strengthen American Indian language instruction

A major challenge for school districts and American Indian language teachers is the lack of standards, curriculum, resources, and assessments for American Indian languages. This lack of infrastructure for American Indian language instruction sets students up for inconsistent instruction, expectations, and outcomes in their American Indian language classes. **The language learning experience should be consistent across the state. This will be an important consideration for any student who must move between districts.**

The State of Minnesota does not currently have clear standards for American Indian languages like it does for other academic topics including reading, math, science, and social studies.¹⁰ Minnesota's academic standards for world languages use the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) standards as a guide. Not having clear standards for American Indian languages makes it difficult for districts and teachers to know what is most important to teach at which points in a student's language learning experience.

No comprehensive curriculum exists for teaching Ojibwe language at any level, from early childhood through high school. Some teachers and schools, in some cases in partnership with Tribal Nations, have developed a variety of partial curricula (materials and resources) to support language instruction, but these resources fall short of a comprehensive curriculum with increasing levels.

¹⁰ <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/stds/world/>

Having access to a curriculum is absolutely necessary for *all* levels of language classes. While American Indian language teachers are expected to produce their own resources, teachers in other subject areas are not expected to develop their own curriculum.

Sixty percent of the school districts we surveyed said that lacking a curriculum is a challenge for their district in terms of providing American Indian language instruction.

Of 55 teachers surveyed, it was overwhelmingly reported that they are responsible for the development of the American Indian language curriculum for their district:



Three-quarters (78%) of American Indian language teachers reported being responsible for all or most of their curriculum, and 20% reported that they are responsible for some of their curriculum. Just one American Indian language teacher reported being given sufficient curriculum from their district.

Teachers and school districts also lack access to effective assessment tools and processes. Assessments of language-level for American Indian language teachers are essential to ensure they have the necessary skills, or can grow into the necessary skills relatively quickly, to be successful as language educators. Better assessment tools and processes to evaluate student learning are also a necessity. Assessments will help teachers and districts learn where improvements are needed to hold themselves accountable for the quality of American Indian language instruction. The assessments should be aligned with the curriculum, which should be aligned with the standards, to produce the best results.

Like any government, Tribal Nations have many roles and responsibilities to their people. As nonprofit partners, MIIN and similar organizations are able to help fulfill specialized needs for language curriculum and resources, ensuring that the work is addressed and that Tribal Nations' perspectives are represented.

“Additional support in best practices for teaching reading in Ojibwe would be helpful.” – an American Indian language teacher

“I would like more curriculum to use in a non-immersion environment, as well as an environment where there is only one teacher for 5 different schools. Also, I would love more training on the best practices for teaching the Ojibwe language.” - an American Indian language teacher

“Scope and sequence of leveled Ojibwe for high school.”
- an American Indian language teacher

“Since I am not a traditional educator having gone to college for an education degree, I would like to see more resources for language teachers geared towards lesson planning, developing curriculum aligned with state standards, district wide scope and sequencing, scaffolding, and support and help when experiencing push-back from district admin, supervisors, and other staff members and how to handle micro-management or lack of buy-in from admin that claim they want culture and language in the school, but do everything they can to prevent it from happening.” - an American Indian language teacher

How can Midwest Indigenous Immersion Network help?



Starting in the spring of 2026, MIIN is planning the following initiatives to address Ojibwe language curriculum development for use in Minnesota schools:

- With the help of existing Ojibwe language educators, inventory existing curricula and materials
- Request feedback from state and Tribal agencies concerning the development of Ojibwe language standards and curriculum
- Encourage districts to utilize Rosetta Stone Ojibwe and accompanying teacher's guides as primary high school curriculum
- Hire a Curriculum Coordinator
- Develop curriculum specific to the needs of BIE and Minnesota public school Ojibwe language educators



Recommendations for school districts, state leaders, Tribal Nations, and funders

Midwest Indigenous Immersion Network (MIIN) recommends the following solutions to address the challenges in American Indian language access for American Indian students in Minnesota. This includes increasing the quantity and improving the quality of American Indian language instruction.

First, we recommend increasing the American Indian Education Aid formula grant to allow school districts to hire qualified American Indian language teachers in accordance with Minnesota Statute 124D.74.

Second, we encourage the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), Tribal Nations, postsecondary institutions, and other interested agencies and parties to provide more support for teacher training specific to the needs of American Indian language and immersion teachers. This includes investing in effective training programs and providing support to aspiring language teachers to increase interest, access, and ability to complete their training and be successful as new language teachers. MIIN provides training and support for Ojibwe language teachers, and we are eager to partner with MDE, Tribal Nations, and others to increase the number of qualified American Indian language teachers in Minnesota and throughout Ojibwe Country.

Through partnership, we can ensure all districts and schools that are required to provide American Indian language instruction are able to provide access to *quality* American Indian language instruction. Supporting the creation and development of postsecondary programs that produce highly proficient trained American Indian language teachers is crucial. This includes supporting Postsecondary Education Options (PSEO) for high school students. MIIN is making progress toward these recommendations through our teacher licensing partnerships with Bemidji State University - BSU (MN), and Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe University - LCOOU (WI).

Third, we recommend that MDE consult with Tribal Nations and American Indian language experts, including at MIIN, to establish academic standards, curriculum, materials and assessments for the primary American Indian languages in Minnesota (Ojibwe and Dakota/Lakota). The current expectation that American Indian language instructors develop their own curriculum and course materials is unrealistic and unfair. Student language learning outcomes will also be stronger if a comprehensive, effective curriculum is available and used.

MIIN is excited to help in this capacity. MIIN presently hosts and stewards materials and resources for teaching and learning in an Ojibwe immersion environment. We hope to build on this effort by developing a comprehensive curriculum which includes teaching and learning resources that are proven to support language acquisition. MIIN will also provide professional development consistent with these new resources through our



recurring Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings and bi-yearly in-person trainings.

In conclusion, this survey of K-12 public and BIE schools and districts in Minnesota has revealed a significant gap in American Indian language access for students across the state. There is great need for all interested parties to come to the table to work collaboratively to quickly address this need by supporting teacher recruitment, training, and professional development, and access to high quality curriculum and resources. Midwest Indigenous Immersion Network is ready and excited to partner with Tribes, schools, districts, and the State of Minnesota. We have a lot of resources and skills and connections to support these efforts. Will you join us?

Acknowledgments

Midwest Indigenous Immersion Network (MIIN) would like to thank the school district administrators and American Indian language teachers who took the time to complete our surveys. We would also like to thank the language champions, including American Indian language teachers in Minnesota for the hard work you are doing every day to increase American Indian students' access to quality language instruction!

Miigwech (thank you) to the Henry Luce Foundation and Bush Foundation for funding for this study and report.

We would also like to thank Dr. Nicole MartinRogers (White Earth Nation descendant) from Advance Consulting LLC and Wilder Research for their help with this report.



Miigwech.



Midwest Indigenous Immersion Network

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