



RED CLOUD INDIAN SCHOOL
Lakota Language Project, Phase II
PUBLIC INFORMATION BRIEF • JULY 2018

This information brief presents selected findings from the RMC Research Evaluation Report, based on data collected during the 2017-2018 school year.

Red Cloud Indian School is a private K-12 institution located on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. With separate elementary, middle, and high school buildings sharing one campus near the town of Pine Ridge and a K-8 building situated in the town of Porcupine, the school serves a total population of approximately 600 students.

The school provided instruction in the Lakota language to its students beginning in 1969. However, because the teaching of Lakota lacked a standardized and coordinated curriculum, student language acquisition was inconsistent and often fell far short of fluency. In response to these concerns, Red Cloud Indian School formed a partnership with the American Indian Studies Research Institute (AISRI) at Indiana University to strengthen Lakota identity through implementation of a comprehensive K-12 Lakota language curriculum. The ultimate goal of the program was to create Lakota proficiency in all Red Cloud students by the time they graduated from high school.

With funding from private sources as well as the federal Administration for Native Americans (ANA), the Lakota Language Project (LLP) was launched in the 2008-2009 academic year with introduction of curriculum at the fifth-, sixth-, and ninth-grade levels. Each subsequent year, curricular materials were developed and revised for several more grade levels. By 2014-2015, the final year of the project, the curriculum was available for all grade levels, K through 12. Multimedia materials as well as tests and worksheets for all grade levels were also developed by the AISRI staff. The school copyrighted all textbooks and now is in the process of copyrighting supplementary instructional materials so they can be shared with other schools. The formal partnership with AISRI ended in 2015.

In the fall of 2015, the school secured funding from the ANA and other sources to embark on a second major phase of the project. New efforts built upon the existing curriculum and teacher expertise and had three major goals:

- 1) To **develop Lakota language-based literature** for Red Cloud students at all grade levels and supplement curricular materials;
- 2) To **provide appropriate professional development opportunities** for Lakota language teachers; and
- 3) To **increase the use of the Lakota language** within the school, home, and surrounding community.

In the 2017-2018 academic year, several former AISRI staff members, now employed directly by Red Cloud Indian School, completed the intermediate set of literary materials in Lakota; the beginner set was finished the previous year. The two sets of intermediate readers contain vocabulary and sentence structure covered in the LLP textbooks and will be placed into 5th through 8th grade classrooms as well as high school level 2 classes starting in August of 2018.

All the Lakota language teachers were involved in various professional development activities, held during in-service days at the school or in individual sessions with the LLP Activities Coordinator. Sessions were focused on using the orthography, developing second language learner teaching methods, writing lesson plans, and applying technology in the classroom. Some teachers attended state or national trainings as well. In the fall of 2017, the project initiated a daily second language learner program for non-fluent Lakota teachers; the program continued in the spring 2018 semester with lessons provided twice a week.

Increased use of the Lakota language within the school, home, and community was evidenced by the presentation of weekly language classes at the school for parents and staff members, the integration of language activities during social and cultural events at the school, and more frequent Lakota usage by campus offices in emails, agendas, and meetings. In addition, Red Cloud teachers from other content areas received periodic trainings on ways to integrate the Lakota language into their respective content areas.

The evaluation of the LLP, Phase II at Red Cloud Indian School was a mixed methods formative and summative evaluation designed to assess program impacts on students, Lakota language teachers, families, and community members. Instruments for the LLP, Phase II were developed by RMC Research and revised and approved by Red Cloud administrators in the fall of 2015. Student pre/post-surveys were administered online to facilitate ease of data collection and analysis. A site visit was conducted in April 2018 and included interviews or focus groups with school administrators, project managers, Lakota language teachers, and students in middle and high school grades. Observations were conducted in classes led by each of the school's six Lakota language instructors.



A Lakota language instructor at Mackert Elementary School on the main Red Cloud Indian School campus teaches words for food items to kindergarten students.

SELECTED FINDINGS

- **Students made progress in learning the Lakota language.** Approximately 74% of the students who completed pre- and post- language assessments increased their scores. The average pretest score was about 35% correct, while the average posttest score was about 50%. However, these results fell short of the project's 60% proficiency criteria for first-year students and the more rigorous 75% criteria for intermediate students.
- **Students enjoyed learning to read, write, and speak in Lakota during language classes.** Students from the three focus groups said what they most enjoyed were experiential activities such as having a dialogue in Lakota with the teacher or another student; reading words in Lakota; taking nature walks and learning the Lakota names for plants and animals; giving a presentation to the class on Lakota language and culture; listening to the teacher tell stories in Lakota; and making flash cards to use with other students. What students liked least about the language classes were not having enough opportunities to practice dialogue with other students, insufficient numbers of interactive activities, and having some students in class who were not serious about learning the language.
- **The majority of students in two of the focus groups reported that language classes helped them to feel more engaged in school.** They found that the class motivated an interest in learning more Lakota and made their overall school experience feel more enjoyable.
- **Administrators and teachers generally thought that the curriculum could be engaging, but only if teachers were able to make the material compelling to students utilizing their own knowledge of the language and culture.** Both groups described aspects of the curriculum they thought could lead to engagement if used properly by teachers. These included questions and assignments included in each section; activities for writing and speaking; depictions of colors and plants and objects; readers with stories that students would enjoy reading; information on grammar; and pictures of students at the school.
- **Most teachers and administrators believed that implementation of the language program had a positive impact on academic engagement as well as behavior.** Both groups reported that studying Lakota helped students to perform better in all classes and take their studies more seriously. They thought that because the Lakota classes and the language itself teach respect for oneself and others, there were few issues with behavior in any of the schools.
- **Students in two focus groups indicated that the class had noticeable impacts on relationships with friends, family members, or others.** The majority of students in those groups said they were actively involved in teaching Lakota to siblings and/or were speaking Lakota with relatives, usually with grandparents, who had fluency in the language. Students in the third focus group did not think the class had any impact on their relationships with others.
- **A majority of administrators believed that the language program was having a profound impact on families.** They perceived that families were increasingly more supportive of the language program as they witnessed their children developing stronger cultural identities and values and becoming more engaged in school. Parents who participated in focus groups felt it was critical for them to learn Lakota so they could better support their children, reinforce the language at home, and help to restore a sense of cultural strength in the community.



Students in a Level 2 high school class practice Lakota vocabulary at Red Cloud High School.

- **Students valued participation in the language classes.** Students said the best parts of the Lakota language classes were feeling more connected to their tribal culture, history, and heritage, learning new words, understanding sentence structure, and sharing the language with siblings.
- **Teachers described the most positive aspects of teaching the Lakota language as hearing students respond in Lakota to questions asked and witnessing students speaking Lakota outside of language classes.** Teachers valued being involved in something that was so personally meaningful and seeing students understand the importance of learning the language. Teachers also appreciated receiving encouragement from LLP administrators as well as Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation staff, who operate a Lakota immersion elementary class at the school.
- **Administrators agreed with students and teachers that the most beneficial aspects of the project included students' development of a stronger cultural identity and ability to view their Lakota heritage as something powerful and positive.** Several administrators spoke about the way that language instruction has transformed the atmosphere of the school and created more caring, respectful, and enduring bonds between staff and students. Administrators also felt pleased with having increased outreach to families through events such as craft nights at the elementary school.
- **Most administrators thought that the LLP was instrumental in spreading the use of the language across the entire school.** They said the language was being used more frequently outside of classrooms by students and teachers and thought the immersion class was helping to accelerate use of the language, at least throughout the Mackert Elementary School building. Administrators mentioned that all classrooms used Lakota-language hallway passes and there was more Lakota being used in agendas and e-mails as well as during staff retreats and orientation days. Project administrators pointed out that the Heritage Center was making consistent efforts to use more Lakota in signage and publicity and that facilitators of sporting events integrated more Lakota into written and oral communications.