



RED CLOUD INDIAN SCHOOL
Lakota Language Project, Phase II
PUBLIC INFORMATION BRIEF • SEPTEMBER 2017

This information brief presents selected findings from the RMC Research Evaluation Report, based on data collected during the 2016-2017 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 has provided instruction in the Lakota language to its students since 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 develop a new curriculum that would strengthen Lakota identity through the 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.

The Lakota Language Project (LLP) was implemented 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 has copyrighted all textbooks and is in the process of copyrighting supplementary instructional materials so they can be shared with other schools.

In 2015, the school secured funding from the federal Administration for Native Americans (ANA) and other sources to embark on a new phase of the project. New efforts build upon the existing curriculum and teacher expertise and have 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 2016-2017 academic year, former AISRI staff, now employed directly by Red Cloud Indian School, completed the first set of literary materials in Lakota. The materials were reviewed and edited by a local fluent speaker and implemented at the elementary school level. All the Lakota language teachers have been involved in a variety of professional development activities, held both at the school and at state or regional conferences, which were focused on developing second language learner techniques and employing engaging instructional strategies in language classes.

Increased use of the Lakota language within the school, home, and community is being realized by offering family language nights at the school for parents and other relatives, and by holding community outreach activities. In addition, Red Cloud teachers from other content areas receive periodic trainings in ways to integrate the Lakota language into their respective content areas.

The evaluation of the LLP, Phase II at Red Cloud Indian School is 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/postsurveys were administered online to facilitate ease of data collection and analysis. A site visit was conducted in April 2017 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 class at Our Lady of Lourdes School in Porcupine, SD.

SELECTED FINDINGS

- **Students made progress in learning the Lakota language.** Approximately 71% of the students who completed pre- and post-assessments increased their scores. The average pretest score was about 36% correct, while the average posttest score was about 49%. Engagement in the Lakota curriculum was a significant predictor of Lakota language scores.
- **Students described the activities they most enjoyed in their Lakota language classes.** Students from the three focus groups said the activities they most liked were speaking the language; receiving helpful feedback from the teacher and other students; finding support from the teacher when struggling with the language; and taking turns reading from the textbook. Students also said they liked taking walks outside the school to learn Lakota names for plants, animals, and objects.

- **Teachers and administrators generally thought that language classes enhanced students' interest in learning about Lakota history, culture, and spiritual practices.** Administrators perceived that Lakota language classes were having a positive impact on students' interest in learning about Lakota history and culture. They pointed out many cultural expressions, such as kinship ties and views of the natural world, were embedded in the language and so enhanced students' sense of Lakota identity. They also agreed with teachers that while the curriculum contained some information about the culture, it was the extent of teacher understanding and experience that shaped the depth of cultural information shared in the classes. Administrators stated that some teachers incorporated far more of the culture than did others.
- **Teachers and administrators viewed the LLP curriculum as valuable and thought it provided needed structure and guidance to language instruction.** Teachers and administrators agreed that while the curriculum provided a useful basis for instruction, it was teachers' approaches to instruction that made classes compelling. Administrators believed that the curriculum only was engaging when teachers "made it their own" and contributed their personal insights, passion, and resources. Teachers said it was the use of teacher-developed activities and encouragement for students to learn and speak the language that prompted student motivation.
- **High school students believed that language classes positively impacted feelings about school.** While middle school students in two focus groups said the language classes had no impact on feelings about school, all students in a high school focus groups said that classes positively affected their feelings about education. They reported increased motivation to graduate from high school and attend college so they could help revive the language. They also said it would influence their choice of college, as they wanted to attend an institution where they could continue to study Lakota.
- **Most teachers and administrators agreed that implementation of the LLP had a positive impact on both academic engagement and good behavior.** Both groups said that since Lakota instruction became an essential part of all students' education, students acted in ways that were more settled and respectful, and classroom management problems throughout the school were now a rarity. They also thought that the process of learning another language helped to sharpen students' academic skills.
- **Administrators and teachers believed that use of the Lakota language readers enhanced skills in reading, writing, and speaking.** Those familiar with the readers said they helped students utilize vocabulary they had already mastered, uncover vocabulary they still needed to learn, and develop appropriate grammar. They believed that students enjoyed the illustrations and stories contained in the readers.
- **Students in two focus groups noted some impact in relationships with friends, family members, or others.** While students in one focus group did not report any change in relationships with others resulting from their Lakota language class, students in two other focus groups reported some impacts. Students in the two focus groups described helping younger siblings learn the language, telling others in the family about events or ideas they discussed in class, speaking Lakota with older relatives, and/or communicating with friends in Lakota.

- **Teachers and administrators agreed with students in the two focus groups that language classes were having an impact in families and community members.** Teachers recalled how in the past, some families were highly resistant to students learning Lakota because they regarded it as something that was useless and feared it might detract from students' academic progress. In contrast, teachers reported that many family members now have an increased interest in learning the language since their children are regularly speaking Lakota at home. Administrators said that learning the Lakota language is now one of the main reasons that a large majority of families give on applications for wanting to send their children to Red Cloud. Administrators echoed the words of teachers in saying that the resistance from parents to children learning the language has all but disappeared, and more parents are expressing a desire to learn Lakota themselves.



Students practice Lakota names for fruits, vegetables, plates, cups, and eating utensils in a second grade class at Red Cloud Indian School in Pine Ridge, SD.

Administrators were unanimous in saying the use of the Lakota language was becoming more prevalent across the entire school. They described how the LLP office distributed hallway passes and other materials in Lakota to all teachers and trained all staff to use basic commands in Lakota. They recounted hearing the Lakota language with greater frequency both inside and outside of classrooms and saw students frequently texting in Lakota on their Smartphones. Campus centers such as the Advancement Office are now incorporating more Lakota into letters, e-mails, and newsletters and are coordinating with the LLP office to ensure that Lakota words and grammar are correct.

NOTE: A site visit for the evaluation will take place in the spring of 2018 and the third year annual report will be issued in June of 2018.