

F.A.Q. - May 23, 2013

Mnidoo Mnising Anishinaabek Kinoomage Gamig (MMAK)

To create fluent speakers of the Ojibwe language who are able to meet the challenges of our rapidly changing world. We expect that students will be grounded in Ojibwe language, culture and traditions, while aware of global concerns. Our aim is to foster the love of learning which will enable students to create solutions for our community and our planet.

Waadookodaading Immersion School

- Do our UCCMM communities want to firmly support an Immersion approach to Education for our children?
- Do you want your children to speak Anishnaabemowin?
- Do parents want a choice to send their child to an immersion school?
- Do you have concerns that your child will be held back academically if they go to an Ojibwe Immersion school?

Why is this program being done now?

While language, culture and immersion education has been at the forefront of Anishinaabek education for the last 20 years, in January 2012, KTEI undertook another community survey to identify and determine current community support/climate to establish immersion education.

This survey was largely undertaken as result of the current reality that in the UCCMM Territory, current strategies, while good intentioned, have not generated new Ojibwe speaking citizens under the age of 40 from 1970 to 2013. In response to these results, the Mnidoo Mnising Anishinaabek Kinoomage Gamig (MMAK) is a new strategy and initiative that will center on Ojibwe based language learning program for children, an initiative that will be led by KTEI with the support of the UCCMM Tribal Council to be completed in three phases over the next 6 years beginning 2013.

In this final report of 475 respondents, results indicated very high levels of support for Anishnaabemowin initiatives in our communities. Some of the survey results are as follows:

- 95% or 19 out of every 20 respondents believe it to be very important or somewhat important to learn to speak Ojibwe and to provide language teaching in Ojibwe.
- 90% or 18 out of every 20 respondents want their children and grandchildren to learn traditional life skills and to speak, read, and write in Ojibwe.
- 85% or 17 out of every 20 respondents agreed that they would be willing to attend an Ojibwe language program.

•Interestingly, however, parents continue to express their cautious support for a full immersion school as concerns do continue to persist that their child(rens) education may/may not be compromised in an immersion learning format: 55% or 137 out of 251 respondents who have children at home agreed that they would wish for their children to attend a full Ojibwe immersion school (compared to the higher survey results in the first three items listed here)

What is the difference with this program as compared to other kindergarten programs?

It will be 100% instructed in the Ojibwe Language. It will include the teachings around the medicine wheel, Anishinaabek calendar and use the principles of the seven grandfather teachings of the Anishinaabek. It will be focused on including the Anishinaabek worldview and the connectedness to mother earth.

Language immersion offers students with more than a single class of Ojibwe. Instead, Ojibwe would become the language of instruction for all courses: art, history, math, etc. All staff would speak to the students in Ojibwe and students would be encouraged to use the language throughout the school day.

Why is ‘Immersion’ Education important?

Children have a special ability to learn languages. They can adopt the sound system quickly to speak without a “foreign” accent. They also are less shy than adult learners and more adaptable to being immersed in another language. Many studies have shown that language immersion students perform better than non-immersion students in other academic skills and show increased cognitive function.

What will they learn in this program?

Learning expectations of the Ojibwe immersion kindergarten program are essentially the same as in the program offered to other kindergarten children, and is centred on the whole child (refer to attached summary of regular Ministry Kindergarten Expectations). It takes into account the child’s particular needs and strengths, learning style and interests. The early Ojibwe immersion program, also called total immersion, utilizes Ojibwe as the language of instruction for the majority of class time (100% of class time in Ojibwe is the goal). The Ojibwe immersion approach is based on the premise young children learn a second language best when a “gentle approach” is used. They learn Ojibwe in somewhat the same way they acquired their first language at home.

The teacher welcomes the children into the program and progressively introduces them to the kindergarten environment and the Ojibwe language. The children are given time to become acquainted with each other and with classroom activities and materials. Gradually, children gain a sense of belonging because they know the routines and school layout. Instructional strategies and materials support the acquisition of the Ojibwe language by building on the language skills the children have already acquired in their first language. With encouragement and time, children show increased confidence in using the words they learn in Ojibwe to express themselves and their learning, just as they learned to speak their first language through repetition, imitation and trial and error, moving from uttering single words to saying simple sentences.

The Ojibwe immersion kindergarten program exposes the child to rich and varied language activities to promote the acquisition of Ojibwe in meaningful ways. The child learns to think in Ojibwe over time by building two distinctive labels for one concept. All this helps the child to develop the fundamentals of language that are the building blocks for listening, reading, speaking and writing in Ojibwe.

How old do you have to be to enrol in this program?

For this brand new program, we will start with a cohort for 4 year olds and run the program to grade 4. In grade 4 the program will transition to English in some subjects. Phase I, is Junior Kindergarten starting in September 2013 and Senior Kindergarten in September 2014.

What does “immersion” in this program really mean anyway?

Ojibwe immersion kindergarten is the first step in your child’s journey towards acquiring another language and gaining an appreciation of its culture. At the same time, it offers the possibility of a range of other cognitive, social, cultural and economical benefits.

Immersion education is an umbrella term. Canadian immersion programmes differ in terms of the following:

- **age at which a child commences the experience. This may be at the kindergarten or infant stage (early immersion, which is the most popular route); at nine to ten years old (delayed or middle immersion), or at secondary level (late immersion);**
- **amount of time spent in immersion. Total immersion usually commences with 100 % immersion in the second language, after two or three years reducing to 80% per week for the following three or four years, finishing junior schooling with approximately 50% immersion in Ojibwe per week. Partial immersion provides close to 50% immersion in the second language throughout infant and junior schooling.**

How long is this program going to be?

It will be from JK to Grade 4 which is a total of 6 years to fully realize the goals of the program, September 2013 to June 2019)

What are the goals of the program?

The main goals of the Ojibwe immersion program are:

- full mastery of the English language
- functional fluency in Ojibwe
- understanding and appreciation of the Ojibwe culture

Does my child have to attend school when they are 4 years old?

Many parents have chosen to give their child the opportunity to learn another language by enrolling them in an immersion program. In this case, it is a program designed for non-Ojibwe speakers to become functionally fluent in Ojibwe while achieving the learning expectations of the regular program.

Will there be teachers that are qualified?

Yes. We will do our best to recruit teachers who are engaging, caring, nurturing, well suited, and energetic who will deliver the program in the Ojibwe Language who are trained as teachers and familiar/experienced with early learning. We will be hiring a fully qualified teacher who is registered with the Ontario College of Teachers and is a fluent Ojibwe speaker. There will also be an Early Childhood Educator in the classroom who also speaks Ojibwe fluently. Community resource people who speak the language will also be enlisted to share their expertise in the program.

Language human resources and the traditional knowledge of Elders of Mnidoo Mnising represent our greatest cultural assets and will be a significant strength contributing to MMAK's implementation success; creating a UCCMM collective engagement strategy that mobilizes these tremendous resources that other regions are not as fortunate to have, will be of utmost importance not only in the next 1-3 years but also for overall language continuance.

What will the students learn?

Learning expectations of the "Ojibwe immersion kindergarten program" are essentially the same as those in the program offered to all other kindergarten children.

Where will the program be held?

Tentatively, we have selected the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation as the site for September 3, 2013.

How will my child get to the program?

We will determine bussing/transportation once we know which communities the students are residing from and which students will need transportation.

Who pays for the program?

If your child is First Nation residing on reserve, we will work with your community and with AANDC, just as we do currently.

Will my child be left behind in other academic skills, like math, english, science, etc?

Recent studies show not only that learning another language can have a positive impact on your child's first language, but also that it actually enhances learning in all areas. Current research has shown that exposure to a second language can:

- enhance the complexity of a person's first-language syntax;

- enhance their language-use skills (using narrative strategies, reading and writing in the first language, learning vocabulary);
- enhance non-linguistic skills in areas such as divergent thinking, metalinguistics, attitudes toward others and mathematics.

Will my child still graduate high school?

This is the goal of every student who goes to school.

What if my child has an exceptionality or special needs?

Currently, First Nation Schools are responsible for meeting the special education needs of students/children. In a program such as this Ojibwe immersion kindergarten program, children with a variety of needs and skill levels work and learn together. The teacher ensures that all children are included in activities that help them build their skills.

Some young children may have special intellectual, emotional, sensory, physical or communication needs that affect their learning. Others experience situations that can also influence their learning, such as frequent changes of residence or significant changes in the home environment.

Children with special education needs are identified so that they and their families may receive appropriate services and support. Some children will need special supports or adaptations, such as personal help or large print books. These approaches allow children to increase their potential for learning and to make the most of learning opportunities.

Our program of MMAK will provide information to parents about available special education services to assist them in meeting the needs of their children. Special support services may include health, social and family support agencies, recreational and cultural associations, and a wide variety of other groups that work with children in the community. Coordination of services supports the integrated learning needs of children.

There is a wide range in children's abilities and development throughout the early learning years. Parents who are concerned about their child's learning needs should communicate this with the teacher and vice versa. Teachers who are concerned about the student's learning needs will contact the parent to discuss concerns and a plan will be collaboratively established to best support the learning and development for the student's success.

How do children learn in Ojibwe immersion kindergarten?

Purposeful play is an important way children learn.

The learning environment is organized to actively engage the child in learning and using the Ojibwe language.

How could we prepare our child for Ojibwe Immersion before the program starts in September 2013?

Much like Ojibwe immersion programs that are done, the Ojibwe immersion program is designed for non-Ojibwe speaking children. These children and their parents are not expected to have any knowledge of Ojibwe.

Is there other Immersion Programs?

Yes, but few Ojibwe Immersion Programs. Please see the initial literature review completed by Dr. Brock Pitawanakwat that was included in the final report completed for MMAK in December 2012.

How will Queen's University be involved?

Dr. Lindsay Morcom of Queen's University has identified an interest to work with the Anishinabek language on Manitoulin Island in this new initiative, both in terms of working toward documentation and language pedagogy, as well as using data from these languages to inform current theory, especially in the areas of typology and morphology. Lindsay is now an Assistant Professor at Queen's University Faculty of Education, and she also coordinates the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program.

Lindsay holds a doctorate in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology from the Faculty of Linguistics, Philology, and Phonetics as a Rhodes Scholar at the University of Oxford. Her doctoral research was a typological study of parts of speech categories in Salish and Wakashan languages and Michif, and applies prototype theory to functional data to explore the nature and diversity of lexical categories across languages.

Are there another Ojibwe Immersion Program in the area like this one?

There are language enhancement programs, but technically no "immersion" education program in the UCCMM territory.

In addition to existing Provincial and Band Operated education schooling options for Anishinaabek children, our own Anishinabemowin Immersion school needs to be the third educational choice offered to existing and future Anishinaabek citizens of the UCCMM territory. An informed and conscious choice for parents to send their children to a third educational option – as created by the MMAK initiative; there is currently no model to help ensure the Ojibwe language continues in perpetuity for Mnidoo Mnising and our traditional territory.

Three member schools in the UCCMM territory currently have a JK and SK program none of which are immersion programs to date – so this may be an opportunity(s) to partner with agreeable local existing school(s) to run a magnet-type immersion program model for ALL member First Nations of the UCCMM Tribal Council.

What does a sample day plan look like in Kindergarten?

Students will do many of the things other kindergarten students are doing: group time, self-initiated learning centre time, sharing, story/movement and outdoor play (See sample kindergarten day plan).

Can I withdraw my student after 1, 2 or 4 years in the program?

Yes, that is always an option. But to realize the full potential of the program it is strongly recommended that parents carefully consider enrolling their child for the full duration of the program, 6 years.

How can parents be involved?

As a parent, your role in your child's life is central. You are responsible for meeting your child's physical, social and emotional needs. You are the child's first teacher, and family influences are lifelong.

When children begin immersion kindergarten, parents and teachers enter into a partnership to support children's learning. For the well-being of their children, parents are encouraged to become involved in the immersion kindergarten experience, to the degree that both teacher and parent feel is appropriate.

Parents can share expertise and skills with the class, help organize activities or school/family functions, assist on field trips, prepare materials at home, and give ideas or input to the program.

■ AT SCHOOL

Each teacher invites parents to get involved in various ways. Even if you don't speak or understand Ojibwe, your presence is very precious to your child and to the teacher. You can participate in classroom or outside activities. Some Ojibwe immersion kindergarten teachers have scheduled helper days, while others encourage more informal, drop-in visits.

Here are some typical tasks carried out by parents in the Ojibwe immersion kindergarten classroom:

- assisting at a learning centre
- helping with snacks
- listening, with the children, during the reading of a book
- learning new Ojibwe vocabulary with the children
- supervising simple games
- obtaining, preparing or cleaning materials
- sharing personal expertise with the children
- organizing and supervising the classroom library
- listening as children read or share a nursery rhyme
- preparing materials for art activities
- helping children with their clothing
- assisting with field trips or special activities
- providing clerical assistance (typing, filing, sorting or photocopying for the teacher)
- preparing bulletin board displays
- preparing charts, posters and booklets

Communication between the school and the families in their early years is very important to the children and their parents. It is common practice for kindergarten teachers to use newsletters, notes and telephone calls to share information with parents. In turn, you are encouraged to become involved and communicate with your child's teacher and school with any concerns.

Below are but a few suggestions on how you can continue to support your child's Ojibwe immersion kindergarten experience through at-home activities.

■ AT HOME

Things you can do to help develop your child's first language and culture:

- read stories aloud at bedtime
- tell your own stories and share your childhood experiences with your child
- sing songs, nursery rhymes and poems with your child, putting the emphasis on similarities and differences in sounds
- help your child to print his or her name
- be a reader and a writer, in order to provide a role model for your child
- use good speech, as a model for your child's language skills
- celebrate and encourage your child's early attempts to communicate through writing and reading
- listen to your child and encourage him to talk about everyday activities
- expose your child to your own traditions, folklore and stories.

Things you can do at home to support your child's Ojibwe language learning

- include some Ojibwe in your everyday home life, for example, watching a Ojibwe program on television, a video, attending a cultural event in Ojibwe or listening to a CD of Ojibwe songs. (You'll learn some Ojibwe too, and the whole family will have fun!)
- review the Ojibwe vocabulary of the week or month with your child
- listen to, repeat, recite, sing along with your child as they share their latest Ojibwe song or story.

Things you can do at home to encourage your child to be more self-sufficient

- encourage your child to make decisions by offering them choices
- encourage your child to take responsibility for some tasks
- provide opportunities for your child to practise buttoning, doing zippers, drawing, cutting, blowing nose and tying shoelaces.

Things you can do at home to promote your child's good health to be more self-sufficient

- ensure plenty of rest, with early bedtime routines
- ensure that your child eats a variety of nutritious foods from each food group
- encourage your child to walk, stretch, hop, jump, run, dance or skip, both indoors and outdoors.

Things you can do at home to nurture your child's artistic growth and creativity

- reserve an area in your home for drawing, painting, building or sculpture making. Basic materials such as coloured crayons, paper, accessories for role-playing and homemade musical instruments will be enough to trigger your child's creative mind
- encourage your child to solve everyday problems and find new solutions
- be positive and encouraging when your child is drawing, painting, dancing, playing music and role-playing. Ask questions about what they are doing and follow their lead when playing
- display your child's artwork at his eye level in a special place in your house; they will get the message that you value their work
- avoid giving your child models of objects and things to copy or imitate. Your child's creations are much more real and meaningful to them. Value the authenticity of their artwork.

- encourage your child to listen to a variety of music
- expose your child to the works of many artists: visit an art gallery, attend a music recital, dance performance or play
- invite your child to observe colours, shapes, textures, sounds and smells in his environment.

Young children need lots of practice and patient encouragement in their learning. Working together is just as important as completing the task.

Include your child in everyday activities to practice new skills and explore new concepts

- baking—have your child help to measure ingredients
- walking—encourage your child to observe their environment and to develop an active lifestyle
- shopping—point out the names of stores, gas stations, businesses, restaurants and schools; notice traffic signs
- gardening—give your child a small section to plant and care for
- writing—include a note from your child in letters to family; have the child write telephone messages and lists
- cleaning and tidying up—help the child sort toys into categories: cars, blocks, dishes, puzzles.

Parents are in the best position to help children make connections between past experiences and current ones.

■ AFTER THE KINDERGARTEN DAY

Each new experience adds to a child's knowledge, and when the child shares an experience with an adult, there is great potential for reinforcing the learning. Parents are in the best position to help children make connections between past experiences and current ones.

Still, talking with children about their experiences in Ojibwe immersion kindergarten sounds easier than it is! The question, "What did you learn in school today?" often receives the response, "Nothing. All we did was play!" These are some alternative questions that might help your child share more specific information with you:

- What new Ojibwe word did you learn today?
- How did you make that?
- What are you learning about now?
- What learning centres did you go to today?
- What was in the sand table today?
- Can you tell me about the story you heard today?
- Where did you play today?
- Who did you play with today?

Reference and Source for this F.A.Q.:

Alberta Government. 2012. Ojibwe Immersion Kindergarten in Alberta. A Handbook For Parents.