

Atse Kituwah – New Kituwah



**KITUWAH PRESERVATION & EDUCATION PROGRAM
KITUWAH ACADEMY**

2009

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Atse Kituwah

HISTORY:

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians total enrollment is approximately 13,300 members. The rate of growth is approximately 2.5% per year.

There are approximately 300 fluent speakers with their average age being 53. It is becoming increasingly difficult to staff our teaching positions with fluent speakers who have teaching experience. Staffing is the single most pressing issue for KPEP.

Currently we have 10 fluent speakers and three second language learners who are proficient enough to function in a classroom. Only the second language learners are under 40 years of age. All of our fluent speakers are at least fifty and two of our teachers are at least sixty-two years old.

Our Cherokee communities are losing about three speakers every two months and as the speakers continue to age, the rate of loss will continue to accelerate. We predict that by the end of 2009 there will be less than 270 fluent speakers remaining and by 2011 there could be as few as 200.

Immersion programs across the country and the world have been proven to be the most effective means of producing a fluent speaker. As most child development experts will agree, introducing a second language during a child's formative years 0-5 is the optimum time and yields the best results.

The Cherokee Language Early Childhood program began April 19, 2004 with seven infants newborn to six months. By the end of 2004 this group was expanded to nine infants because of the demand and desire of parents for this service. The second room was added in September of 2005 and the third classroom was added in October of 2006. Our fourth classroom will be open in November of 2008 for children who will be five years of age on or before August 15, 2012.

IMMERSION TODAY:

Presently we have four classrooms with 32 students ages ranging from 2 years to 5 years. We are referring to the students groups as cohorts for tracking purposes. Cohort 1 is our oldest classroom with 6 students. This group will be our first kindergarten class in 2009.

Cohort 1: Graduating Class of 2009! These students are headed to kindergarten!!! They will be our first elementary students. Currently they are located at Agelink and will be the first students to move into the new facility.

Cohort 2: (Located at Dora Reed) Student age-4; three fluent speakers in the classroom with nine enrolled member students.

Cohort 3: (Located at Dora Reed) Student age-3; two fluent speakers and one second language learner in the classroom with nine enrolled member students.

Cohort 4: (Located at Dora Reed) – Students age-1 and 2; two fluent speakers in the classroom and one second language learner.

Licensing: Currently, we are licensed under Tribal Child Care for 3 rooms. Our oldest classroom was relocated to the Agelink Building and is operated under a separate license. When we move to the New Kituwah Academy in late July we will be operating under our own license through the state of NC.

Teacher qualifications: Our teachers are required to meet the same requirements as head start staff. Our teachers attend all in-service offered and we also send lead teaching staff to additional training when funding and time allows.

Administration:

Renissa Walker, Kituwah Preservation & Education Manager (MBA – Business Administration, 13+ years of service with the tribe)

Gilliam Jackson, Kituwah Academy Administrator (BS Secondary Education, MSW Planning & Administration - Fluent Speaker)

Martha Ledford, Early Childhood Supervisor (BS Business Administration – Fluent Speaker)

Curriculum Development Specialist – Bo Lossiah, BS Communication

Academy Teacher (Kindergarten)-Ellen Rainey Brake, MBA Teaching English as a Second Language, BS Education

Rationale for Preschool Immersion Dynamics: Early childhood development, the formative years have been identified as the best time to introduce a second language. According to research, children are born ready to learn numerous languages. This capacity, which is described as language acquisition ability, prepares the child to learn any language. As the child interacts with family

members and participates in the environment, those interactions influence and contribute to defining the language that the child learns.

Clarification: The children who attend our school now and in the future will always be second language learners. English is their first language. The womb is the child's first learning environment – they hear the language that their mother speaks. Our students will always be fluent in English and through hard work and continuing their immersion education they will be bilingual.

Why are our rooms different, why is instruction harder? Because our students are English speakers first, instruction is difficult – it requires more one on one attention. You cannot compare our rooms to other Head Start classrooms. Students in English classrooms come into their environment speaking the language that the teacher is using and instructing in – ours do not. They are learning the language as they progress through daily activities, curriculum, and through conversational exchange between teachers.

Are immersion classrooms meeting educational standards? Yes. Our teachers implement the head start curriculum – it is translated. The EBCI signed a MOA with Cherokee Central Schools in 2008 for the governance of the elementary portion of the immersion program. Through this partnership we have established our elementary classrooms as a satellite program underneath the CCS structure. They will provide oversight and guidance in the implementation of the NC Standard Course of Study.

Are immersion classrooms tested and assessed? Yes. Our teachers are trained on ELAP, LAPD, and other testing models that are used by head start. We are also working on a fluency assessment tool. However, our teachers and administration do constant observation and feedback on student progress in the language. Future plans entail working with Tracy Hirata-Edds and utilize the language assessment tools that they have recently developed and began using at the Cherokee Nation Immersion Program in Oklahoma.

Students in the elementary portion of the Academy will be assessed in both English and Cherokee according to the NC Standard Course of Study and requirements of CCS.

Finally, let's answer the biggest question out there – WHY DID IMMERSION NEED ITS OWN FACILITY? The main reason is English interference. We know that in a 365 calendar year – at 24 hours a day – minus weekends, holidays,

administrative leave, sickness, etc. – that our children receive only 21% Cherokee all year long. This means that nearly 80% of their time is spent in an all English environment; therefore, moving into a separate facility to avoid any further English interference was and is a top priority. Further, if Cherokee is a top priority of the tribe – it should be treated as such and showcased. It needs to receive the recognition and support of the tribe, which means giving it its own environment to grow. Fluent speakers are not created one hour a day – they are created by being surrounded by the language – just like all of our fluent speakers today were. They did not learn Cherokee in a classroom like our students are having to – they began their education in the womb. Remember – our fluent speakers use English. Some didn't speak a word of English until they reached the 1st grade and entered English-only classrooms. There are many fluent speakers, whose first language is Cherokee that are thriving, educated successful adults and operate in both worlds - Cherokee and English.

Will my child be a fluent speaker after leaving preschool? No, they will have a very high comprehension level and good verbal skills. However, when removed from their language environment and without continued nurturing they will eventually lose those skills.

What happens if I take my child out of immersion? Given the enormous responsibility to provide for the students who are in the program we do not provide any contingencies for students who leave the program. This means that it is the responsibility of the parent to ensure their child transitions into an English only classroom.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Building – our new facility is scheduled for completion late summer of 2009. Should construction be delayed we will institute a contingency plan, administration and kindergarten will move first and the students will remain in their existing space until we can move.

Teaching Staff – Our job descriptions were modeled after Cherokee Central Schools, therefore, we will be required to hire Highly Qualified Teachers which is a mandate of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Organizational Structure/Partnership- This relationship will allow us the benefits of their expertise, access to staff, access to transportation, inclusion in school activities and will allow some autonomy in daily operations.

Curriculum – We have taken the Cherokee Nation curriculum and made modifications as per our standards and dialect. As per the relationship that we have with CCS, our curriculum must meet the NC Standard Course of Study. KPEP and CCS work in partnership to achieve the mandated goals. All of the curriculum will be reviewed by:

- Additional fluent speakers – Gilliam Jackson, Stacey West, Wiggins Blackfox, and Myrtle Driver (these are the usual parties who work with our office)
- Certified teachers
- WCU's education department
- And through our partnership with CCS we have been working with the Cherokee Elem. Curriculum staff person

All reading materials in all classrooms will utilize the syllabary writing system. Most of the students in our pre-k classrooms already recognize most of the syllabary.

English:

In meeting with other immersion schools and administrators in NC we have made the decision to introduce English as a subject in Elementary and students who are in the 4 and 5 year old classroom and the kindergarten classroom. The Kindergarten teacher will hold an after-school English Language Arts program for students in the 4 and 5 year old classroom and kindergarten. Students will receive the same amount of English Language Arts instruction as students in an English only school. As students progress through the program their English Language Arts will meet the state standards at each grade level.

Math:

All math concepts utilize Roman numerology; therefore, students will be familiar with all math concepts and recognition of numbers.

HOW CAN MY CHILD BECOME AN IMMERSION STUDENT?

The requirements for admission into the immersion program have been developed to ensure families participate and ultimately have a desire to learn the language along with their child. Choosing immersion means making a commitment to stay with the program.

The following are the expectations and criteria for selection:

1st – Parents and grandparents must demonstrate a commitment to use the language in the home. Parents who have speakers living with the child or in close proximity are given preference. This increases the probability of the child's fluency.

2nd – Parents must demonstrate a willingness to learn the language by taking classes offered by KPEP at night and/or during lunch. Parents also have the option to take classes on-line during the day and may also attend speakers' gatherings which are held monthly from six to eight in the evening.

3rd- Siblings of existing immersion children will be given preference. Parents/guardians must be in good standing by: attending classes, volunteering and be current in payments.

4th-Parents must demonstrate the ability to pay and all payments and/or debts to the EBCI must be current.

5th-Parents must be willing to volunteer, activities include Adopt-A-Highway roadside cleanup, Kituwah mound clean-up, classroom volunteering, and or attendance and participation in KPEP sponsored events, such as the annual

Applications are accepted at any time.

We do not have a first-come, first-serve policy.

celebration at Kituwah and the Language Revitalization Symposium

6th-The applicant must meet the required age range for the cohort. We are accepting applications for all ages!!!!

LANGUAGE CAREER TRACKS

Are you interested in a career in immersion or as a language teacher? There are many opportunities for you with our program. We have established four language career tracks and have outlined the requirements for each.

Tier I Community Language Instructor

Knowledge, Skills, and Ability: Demonstrated language skills with ability to write in phonetics (Sequoyah syllabary). Must be able to translate from English to Cherokee and Cherokee to English.

KPEP provided training: Curriculum kit provided by KPEP along with notices of training available and sponsored by KPEP.

Tier II Kituwah Academy – Language Specialist Assistant and Instructional Assistant (Kindergarten through 5th Grade)

Knowledge, Skills and Ability:

-2nd language learner with Child Development I and II (preference will be given to Kituwah Mentors Program Participants)

-Fluent speaker with a minimum of a high school diploma or equivalent with college coursework preferred, must be willing to complete Child Development I and II upon hiring.

KPEP provided training: In-service and staff development training, Total Physical Response language classes.

Tier III Kituwah Academy – Language Specialist and Language Specialists assigned to elementary classroom

Knowledge, Skills and Ability:

- Fluent speaker with Child Development I and II, A.A. Degree preferred or 2nd language learner with a 4 year degree with college coursework, TPR classes with mentoring in immersion.
- Fluent speaker with high school diploma or equivalent, college coursework preferred.

KPEP provided training: In-service training and staff development.

Tier IV Kituwah Academy Teacher

Knowledge, Skills and Ability:

-2nd language learners with a minimum of 18 hours language coursework; TPR and KPEP Internship

-Must possess a NC Elementary Certified Teacher (K-5)

KPEP provided training: In-service and professional development in cooperation with Cherokee Central Schools.

INTERNSHIPS AND THE KITUWAH MENTORS PROGRAM

Kituwah Mentors Program

Over the years, volunteers and second language learners have been an important part of the Kituwah Immersion program. High school and college students, parents, extended family members, senior citizens, and community professionals have assisted us in our mission. Various people have offered assistance and helped help our program.

Because of the age gap between our fluent speakers and our immersion students it is essential that we develop second language learners speaking proficiency. We, at KPEP feel that this is best accomplished by placing the second language learners in the same environment as our youngest fluent speakers, the immersion classroom.

Our second language learners are students who have demonstrated a willingness to learn the language and who have career goals in education. Our students are mentored through the language learning process and are held to the same standards as the teaching staff. Every intern, volunteer and/or second language learner who enters the classroom must meet the following requirements:

- Drug testing
- Background checks
- CPR and First Aid Training
- Attend teacher required training, when possible
- Be willing to take Child Development I and II
- Be seeking a career in language teaching

Currently there are college internships available through the EBCI Education & Training Department. Interested students may contact – 828-497-7485 for information, application and guidelines.

Students must specifically request that they wish to be placed in the Kituwah Preservation & Education Program.

