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*Hopilavayi pas himu*

KYKOTSMOVI, AZ – In the 2002 *Hopit potskwani’at*, The Hopi Tribal Council directed the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office and the Hopi Office of Education and Workforce Development “to promote and preserve the Hopi language by developing a total cultural immersion program”. While the dream of a total cultural immersion program has not yet been realized, one of the key aspects of this directive was the teaching of the Hopi language and the assurance that “instruction in the language would be made available to students of all grade levels, in all Hopi schools serving the Hopi nation.” Additionally, in resolution *H-010-2006*, The Hopi Tribal Council recognized a series of Language survival goals drawn from the *Hopit potskwani’at* which included “Teacher training and certification in Hopi language and culture.”

To this end the Hopi Department of Education and Workforce Development, the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office and the Hopi Office of the Vice-Chairman, have recently made substantial progress toward fulfilling these two particular directives by developing a Hopi Language Proficiency Exam. The exam, administered for the first time on December 7, 2018 to a pilot group of 13 Hopi educators seeking certification, is slated to be conducted on a quarterly basis.

“In order to ultimately provide instruction in the Hopi language to students of all grade levels, in all Hopi schools serving the Hopi reservation, we must first ensure that we have educators certified to teach the Hopi language.” said Dr. Noreen Sakiestewa, Director of the Hopi Department of Education and Workforce Development.

Impetus to create such an exam also came from a 2012 State Board of Education ruling regarding Native American Language Certification in which a certificate would be “issued to individuals qualified to teach only a Native American language in Grades pre-K-12.” However, one particular requirement of this certification was that “proficiency shall be verified on official letter head by a person, persons, or entity designated by the appropriate tribe.”

Therefore, as the manner in which Hopi language proficiency is verified is left to the Tribe’s discretion, the Hopi Department of Education, the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office, and the Hopi Office of the Vice-Chairman aimed to develop a proficiency exam that would serve as an unbiased yet quantifiable measure of one’s linguistic abilities. To do this the Hopi Proficiency Exam was structured to assess one’s proficiency in four fundamental areas: Comprehension, Reading, Speaking and Grammar. These four fundamental areas were meant to correspond with the Hopi language instruction requirements also set forth by the Hopi Tribal Council resolution *H-010-2006*, which stated that “Hopi language instruction shall include to the greatest extent practicable...speaking, comprehension, reading and writing skills and study of the formal grammar of the language”

“One of the biggest misconceptions regarding language is that fluency is purely about speaking the language, when in reality, learning how to speak is only part of the process,” said Dr. Sakiestewa, “in academic terms, Linguistic Proficiency is the ability of an individual to demonstrate adequate mastery of the language in a range of skills and applications, which is why

we endeavored to develop an assessment that took into consideration as many of the key areas of language as possible.”

“It is important to understand that Language is a living thing and it always takes place within a relative context,” said Stewart B. Koyiyumptewa, Manager of the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office, “fluency is not an absolute status and the use of language constantly changes, matures, and grows, and while this exam is meant to be a tool for assessing one’s language proficiency, it can also be a great motivator for Hopi people to perfect their language abilities and take their Hopi language skills to the next level.”

“Being able to teach and utilize a language in an academic setting is often very different from the casual everyday use of the language, even for a fluent Hopi speaker,” said Vice-Chairman Clark Tenakhongva, “so it is unfair to place teachers or paraprofessionals, without proper assessment and excellent preparation, in situations where teaching conventions and students’ expectations may be quite different from their earlier experiences.”

Ensuring a quality education for Hopi students and promoting the use of the Hopi Language have been top priorities for the Office of the Vice-Chairman, and have been priorities that he and his staff have worked on diligently with other tribal programs and departments since the start of the current administration.

“By establishing consistent protocols to test language proficiency, we are not only being considerate of the welfare of both the teachers and the students that will learn from them,” said Vice-Chairman Tenakhongva, “we are also establishing the foundation on upon which we can build a comprehensive Hopi language program and curriculum in the future.”

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