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Teachers,

As you know, the Northwest Territories is home to 11 official languages, nine of which are Indigenous Languages. But as you also may know, the past fifty years have been witness to a dramatic decline in the number of fluent speakers in the north. You have a chance to be part of a dramatic effort to reclaim this heritage and revitalize these languages in all our northern communities. If you look and listen carefully, you may see Indigenous language signage appearing on road signs and in stores in your community and if you listen carefully, you may hear more and more parents talking to their children in their language and the language being used on the playground and throughout the community. These are all hopeful signs that these languages will once again become strong and vital throughout the North.

The Government of NWT has been a strong supporter of these efforts to revitalize our Indigenous languages. One of the more important initiatives in this area of language revival comes with the introduction of a brand new Indigenous language curriculum designed to support language instruction in all grades and in all communities. *Our Languages* curriculum was introduced in 2017 in a very successful small scale pilot and is now in the second year of a large scale pilot being implemented in all NWT schools.

*Our Languages* curriculum is intended to develop strong and capable speakers and youth committed to maintaining their language through to adulthood and beyond. This curriculum is designed to provide the foundation of language skills, competencies, values and attitudes that will prepare them for these critical roles.

*Our Languages* is a fully resourced curriculum with instructional resources, games, planning and assessment tools that are being used for the pilot. It comes with videos and articles that reveal several strong, research-based instructional strategies that, if used with fidelity, commitment and creativity, can help push Indigenous language learning to new levels in all our schools and communities.

**But our Indigenous language instructors and this new curriculum will need all of our help if these languages are to thrive as we hope they will.**  It is everyone’s responsibility – administrators, teachers and support staff alike - to support the students as they learn to speak their ancestral language and to foster a climate where the language is truly valued.

Here are some ways that you, as teacher or support staff, can help.

* Learn to greet your students in their language and also learn the responses so that you can inquire about their well-being every day – in the language. Change it up – don’t just use with the same phrase. Challenge yourself! Make this a daily routine. Once you are comfortable with the greeting dialogue, challenge yourself to greet others in the community and at community functions. The language will open doors and help support you in your role as teacher.
* Learn the language for routine classroom commands and responses (Time to clean up, May I get a drink …). Establishing the expectation that the students will speak their language in classroom routines will greatly support the students and help them see their language as a proud and functional language that others – teachers and support staff – seek to learn and use.
* Make language learning a part of your own identity and professional development – if your classroom timetable permits, take the time to sit in on the language learning classes of your students and learn shoulder-to-shoulder with them. If this is not possible, quiz the students on the new sentence structures, vocabulary and dialogue they are learning. This will demonstrate your commitment to their cultural well-being and help solidify their language learning as well. At the very least seek out language learning classes in the community and build the confidence you need to speak to Elders, parents and your own students.
* Plan with your Indigenous language Instructor so that you are better prepared to embed cultural concepts, traditional knowledge and some of the language into your lessons. With a creative approach to unit building, local and cultural content and the language can supplement instruction in all subjects and you will probably find that through this approach, student learning is greatly enhanced. Don’t forget to invite Elders and community experts into your classroom to provide new perspectives and traditional knowledge to help enrich your subject matter.
* Perhaps the Indigenous language instructor in your school could use some help planning. Respectfully ask if your skills as a trained teacher are useful to the language instructor who may be a fluent speaker but may not have had the years of teacher training that you have had. This reciprocity for their help with your lessons and cultural understanding with your help in planning is a great way to build relationships.
* Be a visible and welcomed member of the community by participating in community cultural events and on-the-land experiences and always try to interact with others in the language. Use these opportunities to quiz your students and learn some of the specialized language associated with these experiences from Elders and other community members.
* Be bold and challenge yourself to develop a lesson in the language. This may not be as hard as you think especially if you work with the Indigenous language instructor to teach the students the vocabulary they need to actively participate in the learning experience. Students can learn to play games in Phys Ed in the language, or learn cooking terms in their language and use these in class. Providing these authentic experiences in the language greatly enhances learning.

These are just a few ideas that will greatly enhance language revitalization in your school and community.

Remember, providing a welcoming environment for the language in your class and committing to learning and using the local language is a very tangible act of reconciliation and that demonstrates cultural appreciation and respect.

For more information about the *Our Languages* curriculum, the resources, the teaching strategies or other ways you can help our languages thrive in your community please speak to your principal, your Indigenous language Instructor or visit the website: https://www.ourlanguagesnwt.com/

Thank you **(in your language)**,

Principal