

Sagamok Language Forum 2012
Toward a long-term strategy for Sagamok Anishnaabemowin Language
Revitalization and Preservation
REPORT DRAFT STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN



Proposed Strategies

Primary Strategies

1. The **Establishment of a Sagamok Language and Cultural Institute**, with staff secure funding and a suitable dedicated space to do the important work of leading language and cultural education in the community. This Centre would also have a publication arm, historical archives, a living cultural museum, as well as lots of interactive programs for language and cultural learning. The Centre will be used for the education of our people, as a tourist attraction that will tell the story of our people, as well as a Centre of learning for all those interested in Anishnawbek culture and language. *[Note: Within this proposed strategy, the space is a critical component. The current program has been handicapped by lack of viable space to operate.]*
2. Return to full immersion programs in Biidaaban School from JK to grades 3-4, 50/50 English/Nish instruction in grades 5-6 and 80/20 in grades 7-8.
3. We need a focused strategy for **training a solid core of 20-30 younger people** (ages 28-35) to fluency in the language and linking their training to real economic opportunities (tourism, research, education, business, the arts, etc.)
4. **Develop and pass a community language and cultural preservation declaration/resolution** that states “Anishnaabemowin is our first language” and that we want our leadership to dedicate significant resources (people, money, infrastructure) to ensuring that the priority is successfully addressed.

Supportive Strategies

1. Language learning should be connected to practical-real world learning. We need to move away from the paper and pencil school style learning for adults. Adult learning needs to be fun, interesting and practical.
2. Language learning should be rooted in learning about our Anishnaabe culture, values, philosophy and way of life that is embedded deep **within** the language.
3. English literacy **and** Anishnaabemowin literacy **both** need to be taught. You can't expect students to just "pick-up" or "absorb" academic English just because they speak it outside school.
4. Produce audio-books in the language. Use stories.
5. Have beginner, intermediate and advanced levels/classes for adult learners. Don't try to lump them all together.
6. Start Anishnaabemowin language learning (immersion) in daycare, so by the time children hit JK and SK they already have a child's normal mastery of the language **before** you try to teach them to read and write it.
7. Every child should have grandparents or some other fluent speaker that is a regular part of the child's life, and that speaks to the child only in the language.
8. Language learning needs to be connected to the real world (beyond paper and pencil) through exercises, story telling and legends, environmental/nature learning, etc. The language should also be used to teach other school subjects such as math's, sciences, social studies, etc.

Supportive Strategies

9. Immersion learning is a necessary part of mastering the language for adults as well as children, so we should have staff cohorts go on 10-20 day immersions 3-4 times a year.
10. We should learn from what works in other First Nations.
11. Sagamok should adapt one consistent dialect that is our “official” Anishnaabemowin.
12. We need an **Anishnaabemowin Action Plan** for implementation over the next 5-10 years. This plan should be developed in consultation with our community and once approved, it should be supported for the long-term by Chief and Council.
13. We need to develop a business component of our language strategy that will make the program capable of generating some income to help sustain the long-term program effort.
14. Offering scholarships to community members who want to become Native language teachers or to work in the language and culture area (museum, tourism, etc.).
15. Increase Ojibwe signage in the community, including Ojibwe street names.
16. Find ways to recognize and honour the efforts of those who are working hard to learn the language or to help others to learn.
17. Rename Sagamok departments with Ojibwe names, such as “Sagamok Beesh”, “Sagamok Wigwaman”, “Sagamok Sconewin”, “Sagamok Naanwedjige gamik” N.O.T., CWD, “Sagamok Eskiniigejik”, etc.

Supportive Strategies

18. Phone and reception greetings in the language.
19. Increase staff learning time to ½ day per week.
20. Designate one day per week as Anishnaabemowin and conduct all community business in the language.
21. Re-learn; re-use; re-identify.
22. Linking language learning about our history and culture, and also to learning our traditional knowledge about the land, plants and animals, weather and seasons, and daily household life.

A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR LONG-TERM ACTION

This strategy consists of the following lines of action: 1) community engagement, 2) restoring the school immersion program, 3) establish a Sagamok Language and Cultural Centre, 4) adult education, 5) training a new generation of language and cultural priority, and 6) economic sustainability.

1. Community Engagement

Strengthen and expand the group of core actors who are promoting the strategy by establishing a **Sagamok Community Language Council** consisting of all community members who are committed to revitalizing and preserving the language.

- a. This Council would be the principal bundle holder for the community language strategy.
- b. The structure of the council would be a circle within a circle. The larger circle is all members. The smaller circle is an elected executive that focuses on implementing the decisions of the Council.
- c. The Council would be the authority to which Anishnaabemowin Language Programs would answer and report.
- d. Decision making of the Council would be by consensus of those participating in Council meetings.
- e. The Council Executive would be parallel to (not under) the School Committee.

Activities

The Council would meet quarterly for an immersion retreat to: a) reconnect the members to the vision, b) create a safe, warm and inviting community atmosphere in which to learn and practice the language with old and new members, c) to discuss and make decisions about actions to be taken, and d) to review the progress on the language strategy from time to time.

The Executive of the Council would meet monthly with the Coordinator of the Language Program to review progress.

A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR LONG-TERM ACTION

II. Restore School Immersion Programming

The Maori and Hawaiian experiences among many others demonstrate that Indigenous language learning can be successfully promoted in younger generations through school-based immersion programs. Essentially “immersion” can be defined as a high percentage of instruction and engagement occurring in the language.

The following pattern is proposed for immersion in Sagamok.

Additionally, immersion experiences out of the school are very important. Family camps, special retreats and excursions (like a nature walk or a trip to a special place) can also be immersion experiences.

Daycare	100%	Immersion (using the language nest model)
JK	100%	Immersion (using the language nest model)
SK	100%	Immersion (using the language nest model)
Grades 1	70 %	Nish (mostly oral)
2		
3	30%	English literacy (with occasional Nish phrases)
Grades 4	50%	Nish (mostly oral)
5		
6	50%	English literacy (with occasional Nish phrases)
Grades 7	30%	Nish (oral)
8	70%	English (oral)

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Curriculum Requirements

This proposed shift in the approach toward immersion favoring oral communication, (and if Sagamok follows the Ashkwasasne model, recitation, and other culturally appropriate oral uses such as clan speaking in consultation? Ceremonies?) would require a renewed investment in curriculum development and teacher refresher training.

Family Involvement

A strong component of family involvement needs to be built into the curriculum. Even if family members simply encourage oral mastery (without learning it themselves), this has been shown to bolster children's learning outcomes.

Why Make this Shift?

The traditional use of the language was oral, not written. There are certainly important uses for a written version of the language, and some students can and should go on to learn it (language teachers, etc.), but most Sagamok people only need to be able to understand fluent speech and to speak fluently. Why confront children with the daunting task of trying to learn to understand and speak a second language while also learning to read and write in that language? Why not let them acquire a strong oral foundation first?

World-wide education literature is clear that children should learn to read and write in their first language before they learn to read and write in a second language. English is really the first language of most (if not all) Sagamok children today. Trying to learn to read and write in a second language while still learning to speak it, and without having consolidated first language literacy has been shown to cause learning interference, and to delay learning in both languages (according to the research).

Once literacy is acquired in the first language, literacy in the second one will be easier to learn (transference). The proposed approach places a very strong emphasis on oral competency and only introduces the written version of the language incidentally within the context of English literacy. Written Anishnaabemowin could be introduced as an elective in grades 7-8 or beyond.

[Four Worlds Note: We realize that we are proposing a shift, and that the Language Committee may not agree with this proposed approach. We have done our best to propose a path that meets the demands and goals of the community (as expressed in the Forum), reflect what is being learned from best practice and literature, and also strike a balance in terms of community realities and needs.]

That serious attempts to teach the written form of the language be reserved for advanced speakers who have already acquired oral fluency.

III. Establish a Sagamok Language and Cultural Centre (Zagamok Wassegaankaan Teg)

There is a vital need to provide the language and cultural revitalization and preservation work a *viable and secure space* in which to operate. We propose the following possible strategies for consideration.

1. Rename the new office “Zagamok Wassegaankaan Teg”, i.e., Sagamok Language and Cultural Centre and let it be known that this is only the temporary centre.
2. Develop a renewed version of the 2006 “Zagamok Wassegaankaan Teg” proposal (including the living museum, archives and publishing house components) and seek funding to begin a phased site development process.
3. Develop a traditional “cultural centre” space from logs that is built by volunteer community labour. This could be a fairly large (possibly 8-sided, i.e., roundish) building with a hooded firepit in the center that could be used for classes, gatherings, ceremonies and retreats. While this centre is being built, put up large tents to accommodate outdoor classes and activities as weather permits.

[Note: The upshot of these proposed ideas is that the Sagamok Language Council take a pro-active stance toward acquiring the space needed to do its important work. The more the community is engaged in this space development effort, the more they will own the process and identify with its work. Passively waiting for government funding is definitely counter to the spirit of enterprise and self-reliance at the heart of Anishnawbek cultural teachings.]

IV. Adult Learning

Adult language learning, like all good adult education, needs to be self-directed by the adult learners and oriented to very practical application. We therefore propose that:

1. Adult classes focus on: a) oral comprehension and b) oral communication.
2. That the written form of the language be introduced mostly as a learning and memory aid.
3. That language learning be strongly rooted in cultural and historical learning.
4. That adults who are learning be connected to children who are learning.
5. That activities (i.e., doing things) be incorporated as a primary learning approach for adults. By “doing things” we mean practical hands-on experience that have application for daily life.
6. That adult classes be arranged according to levels of competency already acquired such as “beginner”, “intermediate” and “advanced”.
7. That a system of workplace incentives be developed to support staff language learning.
8. That staff learners be encouraged and aided to develop a vocabulary and oral competence related to their field of work.

V. Training a New Generation of Language and Cultural Promoters

It is proposed that a career track be identified and developed through which 20-30 Sagamok youth and younger adults (age 18-35) are: 1) provided scholarships, 2) offered a 2-3 year training program in Anishnaabe language, history and culture, and 3) in cooperation with Sagamok Development Corporation (SDC) that this training culminates in a one-year training opportunity in a range of fields, including language teachers, museum curator, historical research and archives, cultural tourism development, and living Anishnaabe arts (theatre, writing, dance, music, sculpture, painting, traditional arts and crafts, etc.)

VI. Economic Sustainability

It is proposed that (in cooperation with SDC) the Sagamok Language and Cultural Centre develop a business component of its programming, through which at least some of the cost of the centre's operations can be offset. Initial possibilities include marketing of curriculum and learning materials already developed to other Anishnaabe speaking First Nations, developing one or more tourist products such as a cultural show on an historical tour for the summer months, brokering Anishnaabe arts and crafts sales, and developing cultural and historical immersion experiences for schools that could be marketed to regional school boards.

Financial Viability

Part of a full-blown long-term plan is a projected cost analysis. The expansion and shifting of activities needs to be reflected in accurate costing for staff, facilities, materials, events and investments in new programs and initiatives.

Chief and Council, as well senior staff of the Centre will need a realistic budget forecast, so that funding can be sought.

One mechanism for long-term sustainability is a Trust Fund. It is proposed that Sagamok Chief and Council establish a **Sagamok Language and Culture Trust Fund**, with an initial goal of 5 million dollars. This fund would be contributed to through the terms of future IBA's, through private and government donors, through the earnings of various Sagamok enterprises, and through further land claim settlements. The purpose of this trust fund is to provide sustainable (minimum) core funding for Sagamok Language and Cultural revitalization and preservation activities in perpetuity. A trust fund of this size would need to be managed by a professional investment manager with previous experience in working with Aboriginal Trust Funds.