

DODE holds trainings to preserve Navajo language

Written by Staff Reports

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. - Programs within the Department of Diné Education are about performance and assessment. On a periodic basis throughout the year, DODE holds trainings for teachers, school board members, and school administrators to improve performance in teaching and school operations. Teachers must be highly qualified.

On Aug. 30, the Office of Standards, Curriculum and Assessment Development of the Department of Diné Education completed a training on Oral Diné Language Assessment. The training is about preserving the Navajo language.

From throughout the Navajo Nation, teachers and school administrators, who will assist with administering the ODLA, came together to attend. Over 70 participants joined in on the training, which was held at the Gallup McKinley Council School Administration Building in Gallup.

Peter Thomas, who attended the training, is the program director of Navajo language and culture at the Shonto Preparatory School in Arizona. Thomas said Children in grades K through Second at Shonto do not know the Navajo language and only speak English.

“In middle school, 20 percent of the student know Navajo,” Thomas said. “In High School, there is a turnaround. They are starting to speak Navajo. About 35 percent of the students speak Navajo.”

Thomas said he grew up speaking Navajo.

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“English is a second language to me,” he said, adding that when he was young, he went to school at the Rock Point Boarding School, where he was told not speak his native language.

After completing the ODLA training, teachers become eligible testers or qualified trainers when completing the requirements of participating in two consecutive years of ODLA trainings and administering two ODLA with an OSCAD education specialist.

Once a teacher is ODLA certified, the certification is valid for four years.

During the training, Dmitriy Neezzhoni, a senior education specialist, presented information on the Navajo Sovereignty in the Education Act of 2005. Senior Education Specialist Afton Sells’ presentation covered scoring instruction. A presentation presented by Maggie Benally, a senior education specialist, was on tally scores. Reuben McCabe presented information on Navajo expression skills.

The audience participated by reading the Navajo language presented on the slides. After each presentation, OSCAD staff had equal opportunities to respond to questions raised by the audience.

According to the presentation, ODLA pre-assessment and annual assessment are administered to all students in grades K, 4, 8, 9, and 12 attending grant and contract schools, including public schools that have a memorandum of agreement with the Navajo Nation.

According to the information distributed at the training, schools administer fall pre-tests in August or September and administer spring post-tests in April of each year.

Schools are responsible for administering the ODLA tests. After the assessments, schools submit score sheets to the Department of Diné Education.

“In the old days, we used to speak Navajo at home,” Thomas said. “Today, children are

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speaking English at home. Even parents and grandparents are speaking English at home.”

Thomas said the school is trying to preserve the Navajo language, but he’s not sure schools can succeed.

“The parents must understand first the Navajo language in order to preserve the Navajo language,” he said. “At home there is no one speaking in the Navajo [language], that is why children are not speaking Navajo. Parents and grandparents must change it by speaking the Navajo language at home.”

All participants of the training received certifications for completion.

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