

## Immersion School is Saving a Native American Language



Lynette Stein-Chandler is director of the White Clay Immersion School where children learn the White Clay language and culture in addition to subjects they'd normally study in public school.

ICTMN Staff

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The White Clay Immersion School on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in Harlem, Montana is trying to save the A'ani language. Thanks to the school's efforts 26 students, a record for the school, are currently studying the [Native American language](#).

"The concept of learning your own language, gives you a real sense of identity. It makes you unique not only to the outside world, but unique to yourself," Michelle Lewis, the parent of a former student, told KFBB, a television station in Black Eagle, Montana, recently.

Traditional classes like math and reading are taught alongside Native American values like respecting elders and honor.

Dr. Lynette Chandler, the school's director, feels immersion in the language is key to revitalizing it and keeping the [Native American history](#) alive. According to KFBB, A'ani is not spoken anywhere else.

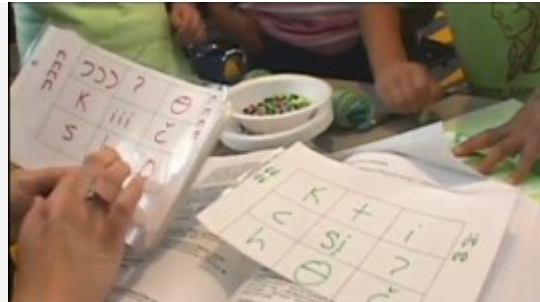
"Historically, Native people have not had a good relationship with [education](#). So I wanted to turn that around and make it a holistic experience --basing it first and foremost on bringing back our language, revitalizing it, having it spoken every day, and used every day," Chandler told KFBB.

A 2008 [Montana State University \(MSU\) story featured](#) Chandler and her husband, Sean Chandler, who teaches at White Clay. The two graduated from MSU and learned the language as adults.

Sean told MSU that the language also teaches the philosophy of White Clay Indians. Like the word for chief actually translates to “generous man.”

"That right there tells you what our way of thinking was," he told MSU. "It wasn't the guy who had everything, but the guy who was kind of a benefactor, who looked out for everybody."

The White Clay Immersion School got some attention back in 2006 as well when it was featured by Terra, a video podcast. At that time the school had only 11 students.



This image from the Terra video shows a bingo game Chandler created to help children learn the A'ani language. “There’s a familiar saying among Indian people that you have to walk in two worlds,” Chandler told Terra. “Well here at this school I believe we can make those two worlds into one world. You’re not a fractured person anymore. You’re whole and you walk in one world.”

She created a bingo game to make learning the language more fun for students. She says the sound and they match it to the letter on their bingo board.

In the Terra video parents discuss how grateful they are to the school for bringing the language back. Some students even started passing on what they are learning to their parents. This spells success for Chandler.

“This is the last step for the A’ani language and so far we’re winning it. We’re winning the battle, we’re winning the war,” Chandler told Terra. “I would want community members and other tribes to know that all this language immersion school takes is a dream and hard work and anyone can do it.”

## **White Clay dream comes true with first grads**

*By Rebecca Bishop*



WHITE CLAY GRADS. The White Clay Language Immersion School's first graduating class included, from left: Wozek Chandler, Teche Ereaux, Dr. Lynette Chandler (White Clay Language School's director), Samantha Werk, and Jenessa Talks Different. Photo by Helmbrecht Studio

The White Clay Language Immersion School's very first graduating class was included in the Fort Belknap College (FBC, Harlem, MT) commencement. The four graduates included Wozek Chandler, Jenessa Talks Different, Samantha Werk, and Teche Ereaux.

These four young women plan to enter high schools. Wozek Chandler, 13, (A'aniinin and Nakoda) is the daughter of Sean and Lynnette Chandler. Teche Ereaux, 14, (A'aniinin and Nakoda) is the daughter of Delvin Ereaux and Leslie Cochran. Samantha Werk, 14, (A'aniinin and Nakoda, Cree) is the daughter of Susan and Clyde Werk. Jenessa Talks Different, 14, (A'aniinin and Nakoda) is the daughter of Ira Talks Different and Annie Blackbird.

The four students have attended White Clay classes and school since kindergarten. They have learned the A'aniinin language and cultural ways during this time from their teachers and A'ani language instructor Sean Chandler. "We started the school years ago; it began as an after school program, and it was all volunteer for the first three years. It's amazing to watch a dream come true," says Dr. Lynette Chandler. "It is emotional and sad... it's hard to let go of our kids because we've watched them grow up, but they know that we will always be there for them! We are very proud of their accomplishment and hope that one day they will return to teach others."

## WCLIS Students Share Cultural Knowledge

*By Rebecca Bishop*

Recently, **Dodson Public Schools** invited **White Clay Language Immersion School's** (WCLIS) eighth grade students to give a presentation on language and cultural activities to junior high students.

Eighth graders **Jaidyn Bishop**, **Anita Bentley**, and **Mari Ereaux** were joined by White Clay alumni **Wozek Chandler** and **Samantha Werk**. The A'ani speakers/teachers taught Dodson students nouns, verbs, and commands using a variety of teaching methods they learned from their A'ani language teacher, **Sean Chandler**.

The WCLIS students then shared the history and teachings of Native stick games to the students. "I appreciate the opportunity Superintendent **Dolly Ann Wilcut** and teacher **Wendy Hopkins**

provided for us to collaborate once again,” says director of WCLIS, **Dr. Lynette Chandler**. “Our alumni and current eighth graders are excellent speakers and teachers of our A’ani language and we are so pleased we can reach out and share our knowledge with area school children.”

During Native American Week, the WCLIS students participated in several activities hosted by the **Aaniih Nakoda College**, including the Moccasin Mile Run/Walk in which third grader **Miguel Guzman** was the overall winner. The students blessed the food at the naming ceremony on Wednesday and held a mini-stick game tournament, which Team Neeth won. Players on the winning team included **Caitlyn Ironman, Serena Chandler, Cecelia Helgeson, Miguel Guzman, Amari Stanley, and Ithey Heck**.

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## **ANC preserves language through translation**

*By Eva English*

May 15th, 2013

The **Aaniih Nakoda College** (ANC, Harlem, MT) Library, with funding from the **Institute of Museum and Library Services** through the **Fort Belknap Indian Community**, is undertaking a two-year project to translate 21 popular children’s books into the Aaniih and Nakoda languages. Once each book has been translated and prepared, readings will take place at three sites across the reservation— including the ANC Library.

Translated books will then be given to local tribal Head Start centers, grade schools, public libraries, and the **White Clay Language Immersion School**. The project is an important step in the preservation of the Aaniih and Nakoda languages.

