

Please describe how your program will provide students tribal language instruction for at least 50% of the day in accordance with the immersion program definition listed above. Be sure to include a thorough explanation of your program, the grade levels served, and any other information that might help OPI fully understand your program. (Attach an additional sheet if needed)

Browning Public Schools (BPS) continues to make meaningful and measurable progress in revitalizing and sustaining the Blackfoot Language through the development of high-quality educational resources. These efforts have produced a robust suite of materials, including online resources, multimedia tools, comprehensive dictionaries, and interactive word lists with accompanying grammar lessons. A major accomplishment has been the district-wide adoption of a unified writing system for the Blackfoot Language; an important and culturally sensitive achievement given the Blackfeet traditional reluctance to formalize a written form.

In addition to literacy, BPS places strong emphasis on oral fluency, implementing proven instructional strategies such as ASLA (Accelerated Second Language Acquisition) and TPR (Total Physical Response). Daily routines, including morning circle gatherings and the presence of Blackfoot signage and visual supports throughout classrooms and hallways, help foster immersive, language-rich environments. Our curriculum is intentionally scaffolded to guide students in progressing naturally from one level of proficiency to the next.

The district provides Blackfoot Language instruction and resources across all grade levels, from early childhood programs through high school. Professional learning opportunities are offered regularly to all educators and staff, with workshops also extended to surrounding schools. The preK–8 Immersion Program delivers intensive Blackfoot instruction designed to build a strong foundation for lifelong language learning.

The Blackfeet Native American Studies (BNAS) Department includes 20 dedicated staff members: eight immersion teachers, eleven BNAS specials teachers, one instructional coach, and one department director. Ongoing professional development ensures consistency and quality across all classrooms and programs.

BPS actively collaborates with East Glacier Public Schools, De La Salle Blackfeet School, the University of Montana, Blackfeet Community College, and other schools across Montana serving Blackfeet students who wish to reconnect with their heritage language. The program also maintains enduring partnerships and friendships within the broader Blackfoot Confederacy, reinforcing cultural exchange and shared linguistic growth.

Please describe how your program will specifically address the goal of perpetuating cultural integrity and promoting bilingualism and biliteracy

Our district is deeply committed to advancing Blackfoot language literacy through the use of a phonetic writing system developed by fluent speaker William Big Bull. This system accurately represents the sounds of spoken Blackfoot, providing students with a reliable framework for reading and writing as their language proficiency grows. The adoption of this system has been

instrumental in preserving the language and increasing its daily use among students, teachers, and community members.

Building on this foundation, we have developed interactive word lists and grammar lessons that promote discovery-based learning. Students are encouraged to apply what they know to explore new patterns, make linguistic connections, and strengthen their comprehension. This approach cultivates authentic Blackfoot literacy, empowering learners to engage with the language in both written and spoken forms.

In tandem with the writing system, Browning Public Schools continues to emphasize immersive instructional methods, including ASLA (Accelerated Second Language Acquisition) and TPR (Total Physical Response). These approaches establish a classroom environment where Blackfoot is not just taught but lived and experienced. Through repetition, movement, storytelling, and contextualized use, students gain confidence and fluency naturally.

We have also observed that as students develop greater fluency and literacy in Blackfoot, they demonstrate improved language awareness, comprehension, and reading skills in English. The process of learning and thinking in two languages strengthens their overall academic growth, critical thinking, and cultural identity—core outcomes at the heart of our district’s mission.

1. School districts are encouraged to create Tribal Language immersion programs and in doing so,

a. Collaborate with other school districts such as the Montana Digital Academy, tribal education departments, and tribal colleges;

In previous years, Browning Public Schools partnered with the Montana Digital Academy (MTDA) to host our Blackfoot Language assessments online. While we have since transitioned away from technology-based assessments to more in-person approaches, we recognize the importance of maintaining our strong partnership with MTDA.

Through continued collaboration with Anna East at MTDA, we are now focusing on developing additional classroom materials to support Blackfoot language instruction across our district. In alignment with our broader mission of Blackfoot language preservation and accessibility, we have also made the decision to make these materials available to all schools throughout the state of Montana. This effort reflects our commitment to sharing resources that promote Indigenous language learning and cultural understanding statewide. The finished product is still being refined but we are eager for their potential.

b. Utilize materials produced in the Montana Indian Language Preservation pilot program.

N/A

c. Utilize tribal Language and culture specialists as teachers of language and

culture;

Our schools maintain strong and collaborative relationships with cultural and linguistic experts throughout the Blackfoot Confederacy. Within our own district, we are fortunate to have 20 highly skilled educators dedicated to Blackfoot language and culture. Among them, teacher Kevin Kicking Woman was honored as Montana Teacher of the Year for 2023–2024, a recognition that reflects the excellence and commitment within our team. In addition, one of our Immersion Teachers, Marci Bird, is a finalist for Montana Teacher of the Year 2025-2026.

Each member of our staff brings specialized knowledge rooted in cultural practice—ranging from the creation of traditional clothing and material arts to teachings that support mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being through song, story, and ceremony. These areas of expertise are central to the holistic approach we take toward language and cultural education.

All BNAS staff are provided extended contracts, which allow them dedicated time to develop instructional materials and curriculum resources that capture and share their cultural knowledge with the district. Our long-term goal is to extend these materials and best practices to the broader Blackfoot Confederacy, strengthening language and cultural continuity across communities and generations.

d. Look to existing Native language schools in Montana and around the world for guidance and best practices.

Building connections with other Indigenous language programs has provided valuable insight into effective approaches for language revitalization. Browning Public Schools has embraced and adapted methods developed by Indigenous leaders who share similar goals of preservation and fluency.

Our program incorporates **ASLA (Accelerated Second Language Acquisition)**, a method created by **Dr. Neyooxet Greymorning**, an Arapaho scholar who established the Arapaho Language Immersion School on the Wind River Reservation. This approach has significantly influenced our instructional design and helped shape a dynamic, student-centered model for learning. In addition, the **Big Bull writing system**, developed by **William Big Bull** of Brocket, Alberta (North Piikuni Reserve), serves as the foundation of our Blackfoot literacy curriculum, ensuring accurate and consistent representation of the spoken language.

The Director of the Blackfeet Native American Studies (BNAS) Department, **Robert Hall**, actively engages in professional networking and collaboration with language programs, educators, and institutions across the United States and Canada. These relationships foster the exchange of knowledge, best practices, and resources that strengthen our collective efforts to sustain and grow Indigenous languages.