

First year Mohawk language program may get axed

By Jen Mt. Pleasant

The first year program of the Mohawk Immersion Program offered through the Six Nations Language Commission (SNLC) may be in jeopardy if it doesn't receive funding for next September. If cuts are made, the Mohawk language program taught by Brian Maracle may not be able to take any new students for next school year.

"We sent in a proposal to the Six Nations Language Commission who is under Six Nations Elected Council. (In that proposal) we submitted a budget for first year language program," stated Maracle.

Depending on the annual budget, funding for first year students for the Mohawk Language Program usually allows for ten students. "But this year we have 13 first year students," said Maracle. The cost of one student to attend the program for one year is \$10,000. "Students get paid \$10 an hour for attending the program," said Maracle, "multiply that by 10 students and you're looking at a lot of money." Other associated costs include, teacher salaries, teacher assistant salaries and rental fees.

Each applicant must

demonstrate his or her commitment in learning the language as part of the application process for first year students. "They need to know 40 words and be able to go from English to Mohawk and from Mohawk to English. What this is doing, is they are demonstrating a commitment to learn the language," explained Maracle.

Asked what sets his program apart from other immersion programs on Six Nations, Maracle stated that, "My classes are based on the teaching method. It's an immersion program which means there is very little written component. We're creating speakers," stressed Maracle.

Questioned on what will happen if his language program does not get funding for first year students next year, Maracle stated he'll still be busy running the second year program and a new online language program which just started recently. The online language program takes 30 students and is already full to capacity.

According to Student Success Officer, Michelle Thomas, the Ogwehoweh Language Diploma offered at Six Nations Polytech, is a two year program. Languages offered

are Cayuga and Mohawk. "The focus of this program is on grammar," stated Thomas. "It is not an immersion program meaning that it is not fully 100% spoken in the language. The focus is on the structure of the language." The capacity for each language program at Six Nations Polytech is approximately 26 students in both Cayuga and Mohawk and is now taking applications.

Karen Sandy, Coordinator for the Six Nations

Language Commission which operates under the Six Nations Elected Council (SNEC) was asked on whether or not she expects the budget to get approved. Sandy stated, "The SNEC is very supportive of the language. There are many programs they have to prioritize and to my knowledge since the SNLC has been around (2007-2008) they have not denied funding languages. The SNEC are responsible for starting the language commission

so they definitely support it. The allocation has to be worked out though."

The Two Row Times also spoke with a few first year students of Brian Maracle's Immersion program.

Tehakanere Henhawk stated, "If you compare the dedication that the Government of Canada and the Churches put into building the residential schools: hiring the staff to work at those institutions and taking all the kids from the fam-

ilies, if you compare that to the (lack of) effort the Government of Canada is putting into helping revive our languages and cultures, it's a joke. It is absurd that the first year program may not get funding. The Harper government has millions and millions to help build pipelines and spy on the so called 'Mohawk tobacco Trade' but can not put money forward to help revive what it had a hand

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in destroying."

First year Mohawk language student Artie Martin told the Two Row Times, "It's not just our program, all programs that teach languages are in need of funding: the Onondagas need help, the Cayugas, Everlasting Tree School, Kawenniyo, I.L. Thomas, Polytech etc. Funding for all our language initiatives/pro-

grams has been declining ever since the Conservatives held the majority. When it comes to funding, reserves get basic funds: basic emergency services, basic education, basic everything. To them, they (the government) are upholding their fiduciary responsibility by giving us just enough, and then we fight over it."

Ken Montour also spoke of his discontent for funding cutbacks in language programs, "I come from the school of thought that if people want to learn, they should be given that opportunity. No one gets turned away. It saddens me that people may be denied the opportunity to learn the language next year."