

Chamorro language immersion program approved

Haidee V Eugenio, Pacific Daily News 10:31 p.m. ChST October 27, 2016



(Photo: PDN file photo)

Guam has taken another step forward in developing a program that would help reverse a steep decline in the number of Chamorro speakers on island.

With a vote of 7-0, the Guam Education Board approved on Tuesday night the Draft Chamoru Immersion Program Master Plan which has the potential to create an emerging generation of Chamorro language speakers through an immersion program, its proponents say.

Under the program, all participating students would be taught their subjects, communicating only in the Chamorro language.



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The education board's approval allows the Guam Department of Education's Chamorro Studies and Special Projects Division to move forward in implementing the language immersion program master plan, said Jimmy Teria, school program consultant with the division.

"We will move in the planning and pre-implementation phase," Teria said Thursday. Teria's division provides and implements educational programs that will revive and maintain the language and culture of Guam's indigenous people.

Guam has English and Chamorro as its official languages. But English is more widely spoken these days than the indigenous Chamorro, even at the homes of the indigenous population.

Luckily for Guam, there has been a steady interest in the proposed Chamorro language immersion program, Teria said.



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From 1990 to the present, Guam has lost about 10,000 Chamorro speakers, Teria said, citing data based from the U.S. Census of 1990, 2000 and 2010 which show the number of Chamorro speakers declining from 34,598 to 25,827. He said between 2010 and 2016, thousands more have been lost, bringing the estimate to 10,000.

Most Chamorro speakers are over age 55, so they are considered a part of the older population, Teria said. The challenge is to create a new generation of Chamorro language speakers.

On Tuesday night, Dr. William "Pila" Wilson, a Hawaii-based language revitalization expert, addressed the education board at Finegayan Elementary School in Dededo, saying Guam is already "far in advance than most other places in the United States in your support of the indigenous language."

"So you have the opportunity to charge, with an emerging program, way beyond what exists in most native peoples in the United States," said Wilson, a founding member of the board of the 'Aha Punana Leo,' a non-profit, family-based educational organization dedicated to the revitalization of the Hawaiian language.

Education board chairwoman Lourdes San Nicolas thanked Wilson for supporting the Chamorro language immersion program, which she said will benefit students.

Teria said Guam tapped Wilson's expertise to meet the requirement of including consultative services with an experienced indigenous organization in implementing a full immersion program from pre-K to 12th grade.

"Our vendor Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, or PREL, was able to consult with the 'Aha Punana Leo' organization, a leader in indigenous full immersion programs," Teria added.

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Teria said those interested in this type of education for their children are encouraged to contact Guam DOE's Chamorro Studies Division at 300-5048.



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