



# **Nak'azdli Whut'en Language Policy – DISCUSSION PAPER**

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## Introduction

Nak'azdli recognizes that the number of fluent Dakelh speakers has diminished over the past two generations. Children today rarely hear Dakelh being spoken at Bahlats, community meetings, and in smoke houses. While it is being taught as a subject in local schools, it is rarely being used at home or in the wider community. If the language is to be preserved and taught to future generations, the time to act is now. The purpose of this language policy is to create as many bilingual speakers as possible to ensure the viability of Dakelh in Nak'azdli, now and into the future.

The language policy will outline a multi-pronged and multi-stepped process to revitalize and retain Dakelh in Nak'azdli and beyond. This will include:

- increasing the number of fluent Dakelh speakers
- increasing the domain of Dakelh use
- documenting the language in as many ways as possible
- authorizing new vocabulary
- authorizing a standard writing system
- developing tests to determine language proficiency levels
- supporting teacher training
- certifying language teachers
- advocating for the language
- securing funding, when necessary, for language programs and projects

This work will be overseen by the Carrier Linguistics Society (CLS), who will act as the language authority for Nak'azdli. The purpose of the language authority is to:

- lead and guide the revitalization of Dakelh amongst Nak'azdlit'en
- develop a viable and sustainable plan for community language revitalization
- develop language-based policies for local schools and governments
- govern language-related initiatives

As language use increases, CLS may work with neighbouring Dakelh communities to standardize the language and orthography.

## Current Situation

Dakelh is being taught at Nak'azdli daycare, Nak'albun Elementary, David Hoy Elementary, and offered as an elective in the FSJ High School. There have been sporadic efforts for adult language classes but no on-going effort to increase language use and proficiency. Along with the dwindling numbers of fluent speakers, there are "silent speakers" who are not known or recognized for their ability to speak Dakelh. Silent speakers are those who once spoke Dakelh but do not now, even though they still understand the language. There are numerous factors that contributed to this phenomenon, and it will be beneficial to assist these speakers to use their language skills once again.

The Nak'azdli Whut'en administration (including the Health Centre) make very little use of Dakelh in its public information material, in its signage, or as part of the workplace language. From time to time, language classes may start but there has not been a policy outlining the goals and outcomes of language learning and use.

Using the Graded Intergenerational Disruptions Scale for Threatened Languages (First Peoples Culture Council [FPCC]), Nak’azdli rests at level 8/7, a dangerous level of language retention that requires immediate action. The community can move from grade 8 to 1 as the level of language use increases. A certain level of language proficiency is required in order to move through the grades.

Language retention /use level	Actions
Grade 8: only a few Elders speak the language	Master-Apprentice learning model; one-on-one teaching of young adults who want to learn
Grade 7: only adults beyond child-bearing years speak the language	Establish language nests for preschool immersion; promote language use in the home
Grade 6: some intergenerational use of the language	Develop places where language use is encouraged, such as home, community centres, public spaces, schools, etc.
Grade 5: language still alive and used in the community	Offer literacy programs in schools and other institutions; use language at local government functions; formally recognize efforts to learn and preserve language
Grade 4: language used in elementary schools	Teach reading and writing at a higher level (material written in Dakelh as a first language); language textbooks and other teaching materials; bilingual environment within community
Grade 3: language used in places of business by employees	Bilingual government documents and signage; bilingual bonus for employees; language requirements for managers
Grade 2: language used in communications and local media	Language used on local radio, podcasts, in newsletters, etc.
Grade 1: language used at high level of government and education	Develop oral and written literature; prizes for Dakelh language publications; public events held in Dakelh including Band Council meetings

### Language Promotion Projects

There are several immediate and future actions that will propel Nak’azdli towards becoming a bilingual community.

#### Immediate projects /programs

- 1) Master – Apprentice program to provide one-on-one learning. This project proposal has been submitted to Chief & Council for approval (see attached). Once approved, it will be in place from August 2021 to March, 2023.
- 2) language culture immersion camp to provide opportunities for family groups to participate in language and culture activities. This is aimed at those who live away from the area as they can have a cultural holiday connecting to their land, culture, and language. Proposal to be developed and approved for start in summer, 2022.
- 3) stickers for use in the home. Non-permanent stickers people can put up in their own home to learn names for common items and phrases. For example, a sticker at the front door that says,

*Hadih, da hoo ja* or *Hadih, ledee ha ninzen eh* (excuse my poor writing), along with words identifying items such as window, door, stove, bed, etc.

- 4) puzzles for children to put together as a computer game. When the puzzle is complete, it shows a sentence with the picture illustrating the sentence and a voice option so one can hear the language. For example, the puzzle reveals a woman cooking at a stove and the phrase says, "Atsu is making Bannock. Everyone likes Bannock." (in Dakelh)
- 5) Language Youth Forum – bring together youth delegates from Nak'azdli and neighbouring First Nations to address the current status of Dakelh and future initiatives.
- 6) community activities to promote the language. A variety of events can take place focusing on Dakelh use and learning, such as "tea and craft nights," short film production, immersion drumming and singing nights, etc.
- 7) community signage in Dakelh. All Band administration offices should have signs in both Dakelh and English, with Dakelh language more prominent. Telephone and in-person greetings must be in Dakelh.

#### Future projects /programs

1. early childhood language nests. An immersion program for pre-school children. Studies have shown that children are adaptable to bilingual environments, and this lays a foundation for life-long use and understanding of Dakelh.
2. language immersion programs at Nak'albun. This can begin as core Dakelh where certain classes are completely immersed in Dakelh and work towards full immersion in the lower grades as textbooks, bilingual teachers, and standardized teaching become established.
3. teacher and instructor training and certification. This can include opportunities for fluent teachers to mentor learning teachers.
4. develop textbooks and resource material for language instruction. The textbooks should work on building language skills as people work through the levels. Once language knowledge has been established, more complex textbooks on culture, history, literature, etc. can be developed.
5. standardize orthography within Nak'azdli and with neighbouring First Nations.
6. create new words for modern concepts, technology, jargon, etc.
7. language proficiency requirements for NW managers and Council. Tests will be created to determine language proficiency (similar to French levels ABC in the Federal government). A minimum language level will be required to occupy management positions or to be elected to Council. Employees or Council members will receive a bonus if they are fully bilingual. Public meeting or events will require at least 50% Dakelh spoken by those acting as emcee or hosts.
8. hire an official language translator to provide documents in Dakelh.

#### Discussion

This is a draft document and is meant to be the starting point for developing and adopting an official language policy for Nak'azdli Whut'en.