

Otsistakta Language and Culture Program Handbook

Academic Year 2026-2027
Oneida Language Department

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**Otsistakta Language and Culture Program
2026-2027 Calendar**

December		
	1	Start of 2 week review
	10	Final day of class for cohort #1
	11	Final drop in day
January		
	12	Cohort #2 begins
	TBD	Mid Winter ceremonies
March		
	4	Final regular class of 8 weeks
	9	Start of 2 week review
	18	Final day of class for cohort #2
	19	Final drop in day
May		
	4	Cohort #3 begins
	25	No Otsistakta - Memorial Day
July		
	15	Final day of class for cohort #3
	16	Final drop in day

I. Vision

Otsistakta envisions a future where the Oneida language is spoken naturally within families, guiding daily life and strengthening cultural identity. By weaving language and traditions into the seasonal cycles of our community. Otsistakta seeks to nurture a generation that carries the knowledge, values, and spirit of Oneida people forward with pride and purpose.

II. Mission

The mission of Otsistakta is to connect families to the Oneida language and culture by providing a seasonal curriculum rooted in traditional teachings, ceremonies, and activities. Through family-centered learning, the program strengthens language use in the home, nurtures cultural identity, and builds lasting connections across generations.

III. Program Overview

The 1st Family Language Session will run from October 12th 2026-December 11th 2026

The 2nd Family Language Session will run from January 12th 2027-March 16th 2027

The 3rd Family Language Session May 4, 2027- July 16, 2027

Otsistakta is a family-centered program designed to strengthen connections to the Oneida language and culture. The program provides families with tools, resources, and opportunities to build language use in the home while deepening cultural knowledge and practices. At the heart of Otsistakta is a seasonal curriculum that follows the natural flow of the year. Families will engage in learning that is grounded in traditional ceremonies, stories, and activities unique to each season. This approach reflects the cycles of Oneida life, encouraging participants to live the language in ways that are meaningful and practical.

- A. Create a safe, educational space and environment where our language is spoken and heard.
- B. Connecting Oneida community members to language and culture by bridging a pathway to encourage speakership in their homes.
- C. A safe learning space for parents, guardians and caregivers of children.
- D. Increase speakership for new learners.
- E. To bring language into the homes through adults interacting with children.
- F. Give adults the confidence to use the language.

IV. Otsistakta Goals

- A. **Increase Language Use in the Home:** Support families in learning and using Oneida words, phrases, and conversations in daily life.
- B. **Strengthen Cultural Knowledge:** Connect participants to the teachings, ceremonies, and traditions that guide each season.
- C. **Build Family and Community Connections:** Create shared experiences that bring families together and foster a sense of belonging in the broader community

V. Program Approach

- A. **Family Focused:** Materials and activities are designed for parents, caregivers, and children to learn together.
- B. **Seasonal Curriculum:** Lessons flow with the seasons, highlighting cultural practices and traditional knowledge.

- C. **Hands-On Learning:** Activities, storytelling, and ceremonies help families experience language and culture in action.

Through Otsistakta, families are empowered to carry the Oneida language and traditions into their daily lives, ensuring that both continue to grow for future generations.

Oneida Language and Culture Program Information

Address:

**N7210 Seminary
Road P.O. Box 365
Oneida, WI 54155**

Program located within the Oneida Nation High School (ONHS) in the Norbert Hill Center

**ROOM 181, 182, 183 (through the glass doors on the 1st floor near ONHS culture classes)
Classroom Phone #: 920-869-4445**

Language Program Staff

Staff hours: Monday to Friday from 8:00am – 4:00pm

- **Yutlatakwas Jessica Powless:** Immersion Program Administrator and Interim Director of Oneida Language Department
- **Artley Skenandore:** Immersion Program Administrator and ONHS Principal
- **Jaisah Lee:** Language Instructor
- **Autumn Webster:** Community Outreach Advocate
- **Jessica House:** Language Instructor
- **Yakatahawine:** Program Volunteer
- **Katsitsyanolu Keshia Belisle:** Contracted Curriculum Support

VI. Weekly Program Schedule

The program operates 3 days a week, Monday to Thursday at the hours listed below. Please see the program calendar for any alterations in this weekly schedule. Program times are subject to change yearly.

Program Hours Of Operation:	
Monday	First Session 8:30am - 10:30am Second Session 5:00pm-7:00pm
Wednesday	First Session 8:30am-10:30am Second Session 5:00pm-7:00pm
Thursday	Drop In Sessions open to appointments from 7:00am - 3:30pm

VII. Enrollment Requirements

- A. Must be enrolled or descendent of the Oneida Nation
- B. Proof of Indian blood quantum for the child or proof that the child is a Native American descendant, and their blood quantum is accumulative of ¼ blood degree.
- C. Be a parent(s) or caregiver(s) of an eligible Native American child/student, prenatal to 5 years old, and agree to actively participate in language sessions.
- D. All parent(s) or caregiver(s) must pass a background check as per the Oneida Nation and Bureau of Indian Education guidelines

VIII. Priority for Participant Enrollment

- A. Teenage parents with children prenatal to 5 years of age
- B. Families or Caregivers with children from prenatal to 5 years of age

IX. Additional Oneida Language Department Services

The Oneida Language Department is dedicated to preserving, revitalizing, and promoting the use of the Oneida Language. The department offers a variety of resources to support language learners at all levels, and community members with and using the language. For more information please contact Jessica Powless jpowles3@oneidanation.org

- 1. Language Classes
- 2. Curriculum & Learning Materials
- 3. Digital Tools
- 4. Partnership & Education Programs
- 5. Documentation and archives

X. Attendance Policy

Otsistakta is a family-centered program that depends on consistent participation to build language, strengthen cultural understanding, and create community connections. We encourage families to make every effort to attend all scheduled sessions, as each builds upon the previous one and follows the flow of the seasonal curriculum.

A. Expectations:

1. Families are expected to attend each session and actively participate in program activities.
2. If a family is unable to attend, they should notify program staff as soon as possible.
3. Missed materials and resources will be made available so families can stay connected to the curriculum

B. Excused Absences:

We understand that family, school, and community responsibilities may occasionally prevent attendance. Absences due to illness, family emergencies, or cultural/community obligations will be considered excused with notice.

C. Continued Participation:

1. Families with frequent unexcused absences may be asked to meet with program staff to discuss continued participation.
2. Our goal is to support families in staying engaged, not to remove them, so we will work together to address any challenges.

D. Commitment

Attendance is more than showing up, it's about honoring the language, culture, and each other. By participating fully, families help ensure that Otsistakta remains a strong and supportive space for everyone.

XI. Additional Otsistakta Services

A. Field Trips

1. Field trips are exciting opportunities for students to learn outside the classroom and experience hands-on education activities.
 - a) Field trips are allowed based on funding availability. It is important to secure necessary funding and approvals to ensure that students can benefit from these educational experiences.
 - b) During field trips, all school rules apply, which include prohibitions on smoking, chewing tobacco, and the use of drugs and alcohol. Maintaining a safe and healthy environment is crucial for the well-being of all participants.

- c) If another parent who is not already enrolled in the program wishes to attend the field trip, they must have a current approved background check on file and be fingerprinted prior to the trip. This requirement is mandatory for ensuring the safety and security of all students during the field trip.
- d) Parents who do not have background clearance will not be allowed to remain with the students during the field trip, even if they plan to take their own vehicle or meet the class at the destination. This strict policy is in place to safeguard the well-being of the students and maintain a secure environment during the trip.

By adhering to these guidelines and requirements, schools can help ensure that field trips are not only educational but also safe and enjoyable experiences for all participants.

B. Incentive Plan

- 1. Incentives will be determined based on funds of the program

C. Meals

- 1. A light snack will be available. Lunch will not be provided. Dinner will be provided for the Monday evening sessions. If you bring your own food, please check with staff for any potential food allergies.

D. Transportation

- 1. Bussing or any other form of transportation will not be provided.

XII. Parent Visitor Background Check

It is important to prioritize the safety and security of students in educational settings. Requiring background checks for parents and relatives who wish to volunteer in the classroom or chaperone field trips is a common practice to ensure the well-being of all students.

- A. Prior approved background checks and fingerprints are necessary for all parents and relatives who want to volunteer in the classroom or chaperone field trips. This process is essential for screening individuals and ensuring the safety of the students.
- B. Background checks can take time to process, so it is recommended to allow at least two weeks for approval before volunteering or chaperoning. This advance notice helps in ensuring that all necessary checks are completed before individuals are allowed to participate in school activities.
- C. Individuals who have not passed the background check mandated by the Bureau of Indian Education are restricted from entering certain areas of the school building. They may be limited to accessing only specific locations such as the

school office or attending specified events like parent-teacher conferences, open house, concerts, athletic events, cultural events, or meetings with staff.

- D. All parents, visitors, and guests are required to sign in with security when entering the building. This sign-in process helps in tracking who is present in the school premises and enhances overall security measures.

By following these guidelines and procedures, schools can maintain a safe and secure environment for students and staff members.

XIII. Code of Conduct for Otsistakta Parent/Guardian/Other Family Members

All parents, students and staff have the right to feel safe in school without fear of threat or harm from harassment, bullying, slander, abusive language, threatening behavior, retaliation, sexual harassment, gossip, intimidation, striking or any other misconduct. An individual who violates the Otsistakta Code of Conduct may: be asked to leave the program for the day; or receive a suspension (the number of days will be determined by Otsistakta Staff); or be expelled from the program.

Possession of weapons, whether concealed or unconcealed, on school grounds is prohibited and will result in immediate expulsion of the student/family. No exceptions. This includes illegal or unauthorized possession of firearms, explosives, or other weapons, even if legally possessed, when such weapon is used in a manner that harms, threatens, or causes fear to others, or any other device which, in the manner it is used, is intended to cause bodily harm to another person.

XIV. Additional Policies

Suspected Child Abuse

Any staff member who has reasonable cause to believe or suspects that a person seen during their duties is or is at risk of; being abused or neglected shall report the situation to the proper authorities. All Oneida Nation School staff, including Otsistakta staff, are mandated reporters as defined in Wisconsin State statute Chapter 48.981 (2); the Oneida Policy on Reporting Child abuse and Neglect; and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This means no spanking, shaking, hitting, or using abusive words with children.

Drug Free Policy

To provide a safe, healthy environment, our Otsistakta participants must be alcohol and drug free while in attendance at the Otsistakta Program. This includes smoking and chewing tobacco in the parking lot or anywhere else on school grounds and includes field trips.

Lockdowns

All parents and children are expected to follow the directions of the building staff and administration during lockdown drills and actual lockdowns. Lockdowns may require students to stay in the building, in the classroom, to continue to participate in learning, or to stay quiet depending on the level of the lockdown. Lockdown drills will be held at least once a year. If a

lockdown is put in place, the safety for students and staff is the priority. All lockdowns are done in coordination with law enforcement. Please do not leave your classroom to be with your child.

Medications

Staff will not administer prescription or non-prescription medicine to a child. All medications required by the child while at school will be stored in the school nurse's office.

Illness or Accident

Parents and Caregivers of children must give the name and phone number of an emergency contact for the child and for themselves.

If you or your child(ren) are ill, please stay home. However, please be sure to contact the Otsistakta staff. Should the child or adult become ill during the school day, the child and parent will be sent home together.

Allergies

Please let the staff know if you or your child(ren) are allergic to certain types of food, or something else you or child may encounter while at the school.

Headlice

"Pediculosis (head lice) is considered a nuisance only. When a parent or child is found to have live lice and/or nits within 1 cm of the scalp, the parent will be notified. The child and parent will complete the remainder of the day at school. Parents will be provided with instructions on treatment of head lice infestation and how to remove nits and live head lice and must provide appropriate treatment before the child may return to school. Under normal conditions, the child should not need to miss more than one day of school. No treatment is 100% effective after the first round of treatment therefore, children or parents with nits noted in hair after receiving proper treatment will be allowed to return to school and will be monitored for signs of re-infestation as appropriate."

XV. Supporting Children with Diverse Learning Needs

Every individual learns in their own way and at their own pace. Some individuals may have diverse learning needs that affect how they process information, communicate, focus, remember, read, write, or participate in learning activities. These differences do not define an individual's intelligence, potential, or ability to succeed. Everyone brings unique gifts, strengths, and perspectives that enrich our community.

Our program is committed to creating an inclusive environment where all individuals can meaningfully participate in language learning, cultural activities, and community experiences.

We recognize that everyone learns in many ways, cultural knowledge and language can be shared through storytelling, observation, hands-on activities, movement, music, art, conversation, and community engagement.

Our Commitment

We strive to:

- Create a welcoming and supportive environment for all children and families.

- Recognize and honor diverse learning styles and abilities.
- Provide flexible teaching approaches that meet everyone where they are.
- Encourage participation through a variety of learning methods and activities.
- Work collaboratively with families, caregivers, educators, and support providers when appropriate.
- Celebrate each individual's growth, achievements, and contributions.

Partnering with Families: Language and Culture Belong to Everyone

Families are a child's first teachers and know their children best. We encourage open communication about each individual's strengths, interests, learning styles, and support needs so that we can create meaningful and successful experiences for every participant. By working together, families and program staff can help build confidence, develop skills, and strengthen their connection to language, culture and community.

We believe that language and culture belong to everyone. Every individual has the right to participate in and access their heritage language, cultural teachings, traditions, and community experiences. We recognize that everyone learns in different ways, and we are committed to honoring those differences by providing inclusive opportunities that allow everyone to engage, learn, and thrive.

By embracing diverse learning needs and celebrating each individual's unique gifts, we strengthen our community and help foster a sense of identity, belonging, and pride. Our goal is to ensure that every child and family feels welcomed, respected, valued, and supported throughout their journey in our family culture and language program.

XVI. Dress Code

Children: Your child's health is one of our major concerns. Please ensure that your child is dressed appropriate for the weather. We do go outside during the winter months. Also, please be sure to bring your child extra clothes and replace them as needed.

Adults: Adults may not wear nor display gang related attire, including bandanas or any articles of clothing bearing gang symbols, names, initials, insignia, jewelry, emblems, or other things which signal gang affiliation. Hats, caps, bandana, or other head coverings, immodest clothing, tank tops, transparent tops, belly shirts, or cut off shorts are not appropriate, and parents will be asked to change. Clothing which promotes alcohol, drugs, gang symbols or colors, inappropriate language or sexual references will not be permitted.

XVII. Technology

The Oneida Nation School System offers the privilege of internet access for students and staff. With this learning tool, students and staff must understand and practice proper and ethical use.

XVIII. Weather and School Closing

Schools are closed during inclement weather by the School Administration, at their discretion if the weather conditions are such that it endangers the students' well-being and safety. If it is necessary to call school off due to inclement weather or other justifiable conditions, the following plan of action will be put into effect:

1. The decision to close will be made at the earliest possible time, utilizing all available information regarding current weather conditions.
2. A message will be sent out via email/text to parents and will be posted on the school's website and FACEBOOK page.

XIX. Signature Page

An Otsistakta Language and Culture Program Handbook has been provided to me. I have read, understand, and agree to follow all guidelines outlined in the Otsistakta Language and Culture Program Handbook. I understand that I am expected to come to school in a good way, with a good mind and by being respectful to my fellow peers, children, and all school staff.

Parent Name _____

Parent Signature _____

Date Signed _____