

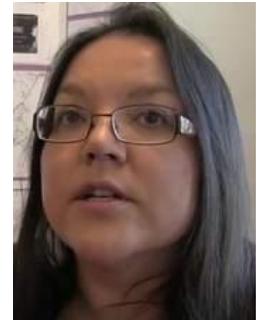
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## Wampanoag Language Reclamation Project sets aside pursuit of charter school

MASHPEE — The Wampanoag Language Reclamation Project has temporarily dropped its pursuit of the Weetumuw Wôpanâak Charter School and has a new plan to launch a language immersion preschool next fall.

Although the project is keeping the charter school as an “option for the future,” it has partnered with the Montessori Academy of Cape Cod to launch the Wopanaot8ay Pahshaneekamuq Preschool.

Fourteen slots will be available for the fall 2016 launch of the preschool, according to the project's website. The school will be at the Montessori Academy, a state-licensed early childhood education facility in North Falmouth.



Jenn Weston

“We are stepping away from the charter process this current cycle due to numerous uncertainties, including the fact that the first two charters annually must be granted to schools serving students in the lowest 10 percent of MCAS scores,” said Jennifer Weston, director of the Mashpee Wampanoag Language Department. “Since we didn't meet that statutory requirement, our application's fate rested on two other groups being approved first.”

Although Gov. Charlie Baker's administration hopes to lift the cap on charter schools in the state, a competing bill seeks a moratorium. The project did not want to wait to see which legislation would prevail, Weston said.

The planned charter school would have served children in kindergarten through Grade 8, with about 75 percent of the day in Wôpanâak k, then transition to 50 percent before moving to 25 percent of the day in later grades.

Although the Montessori Academy of Cape Cod will offer only pre-K in 2016, possibly adding kindergarten a year later, Weston expects that at least 90 percent of the classes will be taught in Wôpanâak.

With a charter school, the state would have required more English in the school because of concerns over standardized testing, according to Weston.

“It's nice to have that flexibility with the private program,” she said.

Siobhan Brown and Tia Pocknett, who are already reclamation project certified teachers, began a training program at the Montessori Academy in October funded primarily by a federal grant and will continue their classes into next summer.

They will be certified and ready to teach in the fall, Weston said.

The preschool program will provide a free or reduced-cost educational option for tribal families, Weston said in an email, as families may apply for vouchers and are eligible based on a sliding income scale.

Mashpee Public Schools don't currently offer a credited Wôpanâak language option, but students can partake in extracurricular language sessions during their lunch hour or after school through the reclamation project once a week, Weston said.

It can take 1,500 to 2,000 hours to train someone to be a conversational Wôpanâak speaker, Weston noted.

“It's very time-intensive,” she said. “Obviously, you don't achieve a level of fluency with just one day a week.”

Beginning in January project teachers will offer free daily after-school language immersion programs at the Mashpee Wampanoag Community and Government Center for students in kindergarten through Grade 8.

*Follow Haven Orecchio-Egresitz on Twitter: @HavenCCT.*