Joe's Article: Did boarding school succeed?

Does anyone even care? 20 years ago when Amik was alive we had a meeting at UMD. Amik was concerned about the state of the language. We had met with a linguist, this linguist was able to shed light on things I had never realized about language. Amik asked us all in attendance “Where do you think we are with the language?” to which I responded “I think it's on life support”. So Amik would tell people after that conversation that our language was on life support. Dorthy Sam said if we don’t have our language we’re just like other people. People can complain all they want about the boarding school, but I believe that they succeeded, they did their mission of wiping out mass pieces of native language and culture.

Maybe I should ask what we need to do to get the language into people's homes and minds? Where is it on our priority list? All the distress signals we’ve sent out over the years seem to have fallen on deaf ears and closed minds because it hasn’t seemed to move up on many people's priority lists.

Like Uncle Sam said years ago “We need you” It’s true, rather than worrying about trivial things it's time for our people to collectively decide it’s time to take back who we are as a people. Any and all programs within the tribal government right now that are focused on language and culture are clearly not enough of an effort to create speakers otherwise we’d see results. There has been much talk about our treaty rights and our reservation boundaries lately, I don’t think that those will be important if there are no people to speak the language to care for the land and things given to us by the creator. Not to mention the number of people who are not employed in a full-time job should have a good amount of time to sink into the language. I’ve been told that some people might be afraid of saying things wrong or not having someone to speak with, find me and talk Ojibwe with me. I am always more than willing to take some time with young speakers and I can get you into contact with people and resources that can further assist your learning

Overall I am doing a call to action to our Anishinaabe members, this is your language, your culture, so let's not lose it. Let’s all start moving it up slowly on our priority list to ensure that after my generation and I are gone there will be others to continue on. I understand it might take a few generations before our homes and meetings are filled with Ojibwe again, but let’s start today. Miigwech, mii iw.