

Two Ukiah High School Students Earn First Ever CA Seal of Biliteracy in Northern Pomo Language

Four Ukiah High students complete 4 years of Northern Pomo; two earn first-ever CA Seal of Biliteracy in the Indigenous language

UKIAH, CA, UNITED STATES, May 19, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Ukiah Unified School District](#) (UUSD) announced today that in a celebration of culture, language, and resilience, four seniors at Ukiah High School have completed four years of study in [Northern Pomo](#) Language and Culture, marking a major milestone for Indigenous language revitalization and for public education.



Tyeson Ramos, Nora Frease, Teacher Buffie Schmidt, Lily Elliott, Sonny Elliott

Among the four, two students, Nora Frease and Sonny Elliott, have been awarded the California State Seal of Biliteracy in Northern Pomo, the first such recognition in history for this once dormant Indigenous language native to Northern California. The other two students, Lily Elliott and Tyeson Ramos, also completed Level 4 of the program, achieving an extraordinary level of fluency and cultural proficiency that places them among the most knowledgeable young speakers of Northern Pomo anywhere in the world.

“

My students will be the first ever to earn the California Seal of Biliteracy in Northern Pomo language ever!”

Buffie Schmidt

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[Seal of Biliteracy](#) in Northern Pomo language ever!” said Buffie Schmidt, the course’s founding teacher. “It is a huge honor and blessing to be a part of history. For me and them, it’s more than a language class; we are discussing the history of the area, the culture of the original people of this land, revitalizing a dormant language, and healing our Native community.”

The course launched in 2021, after a decade of collaboration with community members and the

State of California, and is the first Northern Pomo Language and Culture class offered at the high school level. Two of those collaborators are Angela James-Maldonado and her husband, Julian. Both are members of the UUSD Title V1 Native American Parent Committee.

“My husband Julian and I are extremely proud to be part of the team that helped establish the Northern Pomo language program at Ukiah High School,” said Angela James-Maldonado, Vice Chairperson of Pinoleville Pomo Nation. “This historic collaboration between Ukiah Unified School District and the local Native Pomo community has been an incredible journey.”

Meet the Graduates and Their Journeys Forward:

Nora Frease (Shodakai/Coyote Valley Rancheria) – Attending California State University, Monterey Bay, where she plans to study Psychology.

Sonny Elliott (Shokawah/Hopland Reservation) – Studying agriculture and horticulture at Mendocino College.

Lily Elliott – (Shokawah/Hopland Reservation) Headed to UC Davis, where she will major in Sociology while continuing to teach Pomo words to her younger sister.

Tyson Ramos – (Shodakai/Coyote Valley Rancheria) Studying kinesiology at Mendocino College, with plans to transfer to a university.

All four students actively participate in community education efforts, teaching Pomo words and cultural concepts to younger generations. Their courage and commitment have helped create a space at school where Native students feel seen, valued, and empowered.

When asked what they liked most about the Pomo language class, Nora said, “The class has a different vibe because we all have similar lived experiences. We feel a sense of belonging here that we don’t feel in other classes.” Tyson added, “In this class, we can be our Native selves.”

Sonny shared that his parents thought it was cool to learn the ancestral language. “Every day they ask me what new words or expressions I learned.” Lily pointed out that in this class, “There aren’t any textbooks. They don’t exist. The only way to learn it is to talk it. And when you do, it’s surprising how much you retain.”

Schmidt says, “I’ve witnessed firsthand how this language brings healing, not just to students, but to their families and community elders.”

At the conclusion of their interview, the students offered two phrases in Northern Pomo to share with the wider community:

Hint̓il ma: ̓a: mina: mu:l t̓o: mayuji. “I understand that I am on Native Land.” And, k’edi wadi,

"walk well."

The students will be recognized at the Native American Graduation Ceremony on May 21 at 6:00 p.m. in the Ukiah High School Cafetorium. The public is warmly invited to attend.

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