

## **Santee Students Receive First Place Award at Indigenous Language Fair**

Ten Dakota Language high school students from Santee Community School in Santee, NE, traveled to Norman, OK, March 31-April 2, to participate in the Indigenous Language Fair. They received first place in the competition. They were championed by their instructor, Redwing Thomas. Jay Canning, Marvel Handboy, and Kelsey Medina also accompanied them. They traveled 20 hours with their drivers Melvin Pike and Cindy Lempke.

There were 1000 participants and 27 languages present at this competition. The Santee students displayed courage, skill, dignity, and respect. Mr. Thomas said that the students marched in as one speaking Dakota. They named the body parts "head to toe" and then spoke as "one voice." They then gave the translation of what they had said at this point. "I stand before you as a Dakota. We all are Dakota. I am learning my language so in the future the people will speak. The Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota people shall be as one once again. I cherish my Dakota ways and this is why I am before you. Look at me; I am Dakota. We are the Dakota!"

One elderly woman put it this way, "just like the Sioux to make themselves known!" The students did very well and everyone is very proud of them: the school, their families, the Santee Sioux Nation. They represented us all very well. They marched in as "one," spoke as "one" and shared the victory as "one." The name of their presentation was "Operation Bring Our Language Back." The Santee Sioux Nation H.E.A.R.T. Program provided financial backing and support to make this trip possible for the students. The Santee Community School provided a bus, drivers, and staff substitutes.

The Dakota program plans to defend their championship next year.

### **A little bit more about the event they attended:**

6th Annual Oklahoma Native American Fair...

Each category was judged by a panel of Native elders. All students are winners when they speak their Native language! Students of Native American languages from grades ranging from preschool to high school are invited to enter the Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair at the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, OK. Performances over the two-day event range from skits, stories, poetry, drama, song, and even dance that incorporates use of Native language. High school students also have a chance to exhibit their persuasiveness and advocacy for Native languages in the Language Advocacy Essay which focuses on the continuing importance of Native languages.