

Using Our Collective Power for Heritage Language Reclamation in Schools

A Call to Action

Every child has a basic right to a meaningful education. As Minnesota continues to grow in its diversity and our world continues to be ever more connected, we must adapt to support the success of every student. We must move away from the position that diversity is a “problem to solve for” in education. Rather, education systems and policies must shift how they view heritage language instruction as a way to embrace students’ full range of racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds in our schools.

The programs featured in the paper *Power, Politics, and Preservation of Heritage Languages* underscore the power that families and communities hold to initiate systems change. Quality education cannot make students feel they must reject their culture and heritage language in order to succeed, and schools can no longer play a part in separating the bonds between communities and families and students. Heritage language programs are an asset-based way to help strengthen these bonds—and offer more opportunity for family leadership and involvement in their child’s education.

Heritage language programs build upon the 21st century workforce skills most valued by employers in our changing workforce such as flexible thinking, executive function, problem solving, and cultural competency—giving multilingual speakers advantages in college and the workforce. Schools must see multilingualism as an asset, and not a threat to learning English or acculturation into American society.

At the heart of heritage language reclamation is the desire for decolonization and liberation. Institutionalized racism and white supremacy in American education strip students of color of their cultural identity and self-worth. Destroying a child’s language disrupts their relationships with parents, grandparents, and their heritage community—and perpetuates appalling academic disparities for students of color.

Through heritage language reclamation, we have the collective power to shift the tide and reimagine student-centered, equitable education that prepares all students for their global futures.



We have created a series of Calls to Action to help you advocate for heritage language programs from your respective lens. Each of these Calls to Action—along with the accompanying paper, *Power, Politics, and Preservation of Heritage Languages*, can be found at educationevolving.org/heritage-languages or caalmn.org/community/education.

The Calls to Action are for:

- Students
- Families & Community Leaders
- Teachers
- School & Districts
- Legislators
- Teacher Preparation Programs & Higher Education Institutions
- Minnesota Department of Education & PELSB
- Foundations/Philanthropic Community, Employers & Workforce

What Teachers & School Administrators Can Do



COLLABORATE, EDUCATE, & INFLUENCE

A 2018 report from the Minnesota Department of Education estimated that 142,000 students across the state speak a primary language other than English. You likely teach some or many of these students and your actions and attitudes towards them can have unintended and lasting effects on their success. By advocating for heritage language programs in your school, you are advocating for the academic, social-emotional, and economic success of your students.

- Collaborate:
 - Invite families and community to help shape and advise your curriculum.
 - Partner with teachers in other schools and districts who are doing this work.
 - Build a heritage language reclamation network with educators, community members, and elders.
- Educate:
 - Share the research with both students and families showing the real academic and economic benefits of enrolling in quality heritage language programs.
 - Gather data to show the impact of heritage language programs at your school.
- Influence:
 - Encourage your multilingual students to enroll in heritage language programs.
 - Give your students' opportunities to use their assets by building partnerships with local businesses, government offices and organizations that value their language and cultural knowledge.
 - Model having pride in being bilingual and all the benefits that come with it.
 - Encourage high school students to take the language assessment for the Minnesota Bilingual and Multilingual Seals and World Language Proficiency Certificates.
 - Speak your truth. And your language.



WHAT ACTION WILL YOU TAKE FOR HERITAGE LANGUAGE PROGRAMS?

¹ To learn Hmong from authentically Hmong ways, as it is based on oral traditions and seeking knowledge from elders and not in research papers and volumes of books.

² As a note, only IB schools have a requirement for a second language.

³ IB world languages are currently limited to English, Spanish, and French. More information: <https://www.ibo.org/benefits/teaching-ib-in-your-language>.