

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 Families & Community Leaders Can Do



ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CHILD'S RIGHT TO A FULL EDUCATION

Your heritage language is an asset to our community, and you deserve to have a fully accessible place at the table to design your child's educational experiences! Don't believe the myth that in order to learn English, your child has to lose their heritage language. Heritage language programs help strengthen the relationships and roles of families, communities, and students, and offer more opportunity for family leadership and involvement in their child's education.

- Talk with your children and in your community about why you believe heritage language programs are important for your children's education, community relationships and overall success.
- Encourage your child to take the language assessment for the Minnesota Bilingual and Multilingual Seals and/or World Language Proficiency Certificates.
- Seek out support from other parents, parent or community groups, or educators to help you advocate for supports, like district funded and language-specific parent networks.
- Seek out the extensive research, starting with this paper, behind the power and benefits of being bilingual and share the facts widely in your community.
- Advocate with districts and legislators for heritage language instruction and other culturally appropriate curriculum to be permanently funded, institutionalized, and credit-bearing.
- Advocate with legislators about policy changes that can support heritage language instruction, including funding programs and support for teacher and (para) professional development.
- Continue to strengthen and deepen your child's connection to their heritage and culture, so that they carry your traditions and history onward.
- Share your stories of how you and your family have personally been impacted from either language loss or language reclamation.
- 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>.