

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 Legislators Can Do



MAKE HERITAGE LANGUAGES A CORE PUBLIC EDUCATION OPTION

Minnesota demographics continue to grow more diverse and we need your help to support the success of every student as we look to be globally competitive. As lawmakers, you are uniquely positioned to make decisions that center students' assets and help them more successfully mandate quality student-centered education equity. If our students are successful in schools, it provides a stronger pathway to economic stability, and helps build a stronger Minnesota economy.

- Make equitable decisions informed by the right data.
 - Work with MDE to develop a system to collect, track, research, and report achievement data of schools that teach heritage language.
 - Demand academic data disaggregation to get a clearer picture of multilingual student achievement. This will enable you and your colleagues to make better decisions and equitably allocate resources to ensure every student has access to a quality education.
 - Authorize funding to research how heritage language instruction can help close the achievement gap.
- Expand on current legislation.
 - Support and allocate funding for the Learning English for Academic Proficiency and Success (LEAPS) Act.
 - Ensure key provisions, such as increasing support for English learner students with limited or interrupted formal education and requiring districts to collect data on DLL native language literacy skills are implemented.
 - Clarify in statute that instruction in a heritage language can meet credit/standard requirements across various disciplines.
- Be open to continuously improving access to heritage languages in schools.
 - Remove educator-identified policy barriers.
 - Work with state and local agencies to set targets for increasing access and funding to heritage language programs.
 - Remove barriers to sharing intellectual property between schools and districts.
 - Support legislative efforts to increase the number of teachers of color and American Indian teachers in the state.
 - Position leaders from within the community to lead the efforts on heritage language reclamation in schools.



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>.