

Using Our Collective Power for Heritage Language Reclamation in Schools

A Call to Action

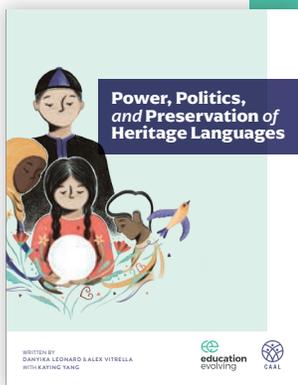
Every child has a basic right to a meaningful education. As Minnesota continues to grow in its diversity and our world continues to be ever more connected, we must adapt to support the success of every student. We must move away from the position that diversity is a “problem to solve for” in education. 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 State Agencies Can Do



INFLUENCE POLICY & SUPPORT TEACHERS

Minnesota demographics continue to change and we must adapt to support the success of every student. We are more diverse and multilingual than ever, and we must ensure teachers reflect the student demographics. Heritage language teachers have little to no opportunities for language-specific support with teacher licensure pathways or professional development programs, which do not have Hmong, Somali, Vietnamese, or Karen language instruction. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) are positioned to influence policy and support teachers.

- Make equitable decisions informed by the right data.
 - Work with legislators to develop a system to collect, track, research, and report achievement data of schools that teach heritage language.
 - Make data disaggregation a best practice and state policy.
 - Disaggregate student data and cross tabulate with academic data to get a clearer picture of multilingual and Hmong student achievement.
 - Follow the achievement data of schools that teach heritage language.
 - Allocate funding in your budgets for research to show that heritage language instruction will help close the achievement gap.
- Include heritage language reclamation in your policy agenda.
 - Advocate for heritage language reclamation and funding at the legislative level.
 - Request that heritage language classes meet credit/standard requirements across various disciplines, and is not just a standalone language credit.
 - Adopt or create heritage language standards at the state level.
- Remove barriers to teacher licensure.
 - Provide achievable pathways for professional learning and licensure of heritage language instructors.
 - Create supports to ensure teachers pass their content exams, understanding that these exams are often culturally biased, including extended test taking times and study workshops.
 - Regularly evaluate teaching exams and discontinue use of those with evidence of racial and/or cultural bias until those exams are changed to eliminate their bias.



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>.