

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 Teacher Preparation Programs & Higher Education Institutions Can Do



EVOLVE

Minnesota is more diverse and multilingual than ever, and research shows that bilingual children of immigrants are more likely to attend a four year college and are more likely to have higher incomes. Higher education must ensure teacher preparation candidates are not only prepared for teaching, but also work to recruit teacher candidates who reflect the student demographics.

- Create learning environments where heritage language teachers can thrive.
 - Evaluate institutional policies from an equity framework model that includes heritage language preservation, and prevents student heritage erasure in schools. This includes critically exploring the different styles of knowledge acquisition and pedagogy.
 - Start teacher recruitment efforts early. Recruit and fund more multilingual teachers into the teaching profession, especially Hmong, Somalia, or Karen speaking teachers.
 - Connect with middle and high schools that teach heritage languages to support recruitment of Hmong, Somali, and Karen speaking students as teacher candidates.
 - Advocate for heritage language reclamation at the legislative level.
- Be leaders in language pedagogy, curriculum, and development.
 - Continue research efforts to show how heritage language instruction could help close the achievement gap.
 - Use teaching experiences from 'Less Commonly Taught Languages' to support heritage language teachers to build culturally responsive teacher preparation programs for Hmong language teachers.
 - Support Hmong teacher development in the area of curricula and assessment creation, heritage language pedagogy.
 - Respect the oral histories, traditions, and cultures of Hmong people.
- Remove barriers to teacher licensure.
 - Simplify pathways for professional learning and licensure of heritage language instructors.
 - Create supports to ensure teachers pass their content exams including extended test taking times and study workshops.



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>.