

# 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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](http://educationevolving.org/heritage-languages) or [caalmn.org/community/education](http://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 Schools and Districts Can Do



## MAKE HERITAGE LANGUAGES A CORE PUBLIC EDUCATION OPTION

You have an important role in ensuring that your schools and districts celebrate who students are. Many students feel the pressure to reject their culture and language in order to access a 'quality education'. By supporting heritage language programs and including them in your equity frameworks and funding designations, you will see remarkable growth in academic success, cognitive and social-emotional skills, as well as economic well-being from your multilingual students. Heritage languages are an incredible asset that must be treated as such. Your students need your help to access the education they deserve.

- Recruit, support, and retain teachers who provide heritage language instruction.
  - Recognize the additional capacity it takes to be a heritage language teacher, and ensure that work gets compensated.
  - Create and fund opportunities for heritage language-specific support and professional development.
  - Champion and support access to teachers' supportive peer and community networks (which includes elders, who are knowledgeable native speakers) to build high-quality and culturally relevant curriculum.
- Make equitable decisions informed by the right data.
  - Develop a system to collect, track, research, and report achievement data of schools that teach heritage language.
  - Disaggregate the academic data to get a clearer picture of multilingual students' achievement.
  - Allow for programs to show and measure learning, proficiency, engagement, and success through multiple methods- outside of Western educational methods like written works and standardized tests.<sup>1</sup>
- Expand access to well-funded and well-staffed heritage language literacy programs.
  - Offer heritage language instruction beyond elective classes<sup>2</sup> and/or after school programs.
  - Demand that heritage language classes meet credit/standard requirements across various disciplines, and not just a standalone language credit.<sup>3</sup>
  - Remove barriers to sharing intellectual property between schools and districts.
  - Set targets to increase the number of Minnesota Bilingual and Multilingual Seals and/or World Language Proficiency Certificates.
  - Support efforts to make the Hmong and Somali languages a World Language through International Baccalaureate (IB) programs.
  - Respect the oral histories, traditions, and cultures and support broader forms of literacy.



## WHAT ACTION WILL YOU TAKE FOR HERITAGE LANGUAGE PROGRAMS?

---

---

---

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> As a note, only IB schools have a requirement for a second language.

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