

# 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 Students Can Do



## KNOW YOUR HERITAGE IS AN ASSET

Engaging in high quality heritage language programs will help you do better in all your subjects, give you an opportunity to learn about your unique culture in school, build a strong, positive self-identity, and help expand your opportunities after you graduate high school.

- Talk to your family and elders in your community about why you believe heritage language programs are important for your education and overall success.
- Talk with your school administrators about getting better access to heritage language classes, preservation of the heritage language, and culture in your schools.
- Take heritage language classes. If they are not high-quality or engaging, demand change and give suggestions on how to improve, so it is more relevant for you.
- Seek out the Minnesota Bilingual and Multilingual Seals and/or World Language Proficiency Certificates. You can get college credit while in high school!
- Seek out wisdom from your elders. Cherish the stories passed down to you.
- Seek out peers, adults, and student groups that will support you and empower you to advocate for yourself.
- You don't have to assimilate. Speak your truth. And your language. Bring your authentic self into every space!



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

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<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>.