

Q&A: Heritage Language Teaching in Minnesota

What is a heritage language?

A student's home language or that of their wider community other than English.

Who speaks heritage languages?

148,000 Minnesota students — about 17% of students in the state. The most common heritage languages spoken at home in Minnesota are Spanish, Somali, Hmong, Karen, and Vietnamese.

Why do heritage languages and multilingualism matter?

Research demonstrates multilingualism **increases academic achievement**, as well as:¹

- **Improves linguistic development and executive function** in students who process information through more than one language.
- **Builds positive identity and belonging** and makes students less likely to drop out of school than their English-only speaking immigrant peers.
- **Strengthens families and communities** by empowering their involvement in their children's education—and valuing multilingualism as a powerful asset, not a deficit hindering the development of English language literacy.

How are heritage language teachers licensed today?

For the most part, **they are not**. Most continually re-apply to teach on a variance.

- The most common pathway for Tier 1 and 2 heritage language teachers to move to Tier 3 would, unfortunately, be eliminated by another bill being considered this year, HF 1224.
- Educators licensed in another subject may apply for a Tier 3 license via portfolio, but no heritage language teacher has ever successfully completed this archaic, opaque process.
- Concordia University launched the state's first heritage language licensure program last year—an option for incoming teachers, but not for great teachers already in classrooms.

How does this bill help? (HF 1137/SF 663)

The bill **creates an explicit pathway for these valuable teachers**, via:

- Demonstration of competency through language-specific assessments adopted by other states, certification as a translator or interpreter, or completion of a degree from an accredited university where the coursework was taught in their target licensure language.
- Ongoing support and guidance from a dedicated staff person at PELSB.
- A portfolio review committee created by PELSB.

¹ For a thorough review of academic literature supporting heritage languages see our report *Power, Politics, and Preservation of Heritage Languages at: www.educationevolving.org/heritage-languages*