

FAQ: Heritage Language Teaching in Minnesota

What is a heritage language? Who speaks heritage languages?

A **student's home language** or that of their wider community other than English. 148,000 students in Minnesota speak a heritage language—nearly 20% of students in the state. Common languages spoken at home are Spanish, Somali, Hmong, Karen, and Vietnamese.

Why do heritage languages and multilingualism matter?

Learning one's heritage language makes it easier to learn English. And, research shows 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**, making students less likely to drop out of school than their English-only speaking immigrant peers.
- **Strengthens families and communities** by empowering them in their children's education—and by valuing multilingualism as a powerful asset, not a deficit falsely believed to hinder English language literacy.

How does HF 1418/SF 1462 help?

This legislation maintains the successful, innovative pathway by which heritage language teachers earn a license through cohort portfolio process. Prior to 2023, there was *no viable way* for these talented, in-demand teachers to achieve full licensure and stay in the classroom.

Who are these heritage language teachers?

47 educators representing nine unique languages comprised the first licensure cohort last spring. These educators hailed from 18 school districts across the state—from Austin to Pine City. Already, 40% of the cohort have attained full licensure, including Minnesota's first licensed heritage language teachers in Somali, Karen, and Amharic.

The demand continues: The Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) recently opened applications for the second cohort and has already received 64 applicants.

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