

Planning Heritage Language Instruction

Heritage Language programs are powerful [schoolwide reforms](#) because they are designed for people, not textbooks. Students who participate in heritage language programs have a connection to the language prior to participation in the program, but do not all enter with the same level of proficiency in the language. When describing ML/heritage language learners, there are three levels of connection to the heritage language that guide planning and instruction:

- **Heritage Speakers or Signers** have acquired their heritage language skills in their home or community. They have always been in a multilingual environment but have most likely experienced subtractive bilingualism.
- **Heritage Language Learners** are trying to regain or improve their understanding and use of a heritage language through formal study or in the classroom.
- **Heritage Motivated Students** have a cultural heritage connection to the language but have not had the opportunity to acquire the language in the home. In the classroom, heritage motivated students may have extensive knowledge of the social expectations and cultural dimension of the language but begin producing language in a classroom setting. Heritage motivation is an essential aspect of language revitalization.

Standards-based Heritage Language Instruction

Braiding language and literacy standards with content learning and identity-based pedagogy is essential in heritage language education. Braiding standards allows educators to develop programs that foster multiliteracy and the development of academic identity in ways that are authentic and culturally and linguistically sustaining. In some cases, that will mean designing instruction around the ACTFL proficiency benchmarks or a CTE framework. In others, CCSS literacy standards are more appropriate. It depends on how old students are and their current proficiency level in the heritage language.

Heritage Motivated Learners

Across age groups, using [World Language standards](#) can support Heritage Motivated students who are healing their connection to the language. These students are learning to have conversations in the language of their family and community, but educators should plan for accelerated learning, knowledge of community wisdom and practices, and prior fluency in culturally appropriate communication styles.

Elementary Heritage Language Learners

When students enter HL instruction with more developed language skills, other standards become the focus. At the elementary level, [language specific literacy standards](#) are generally used. They can be used in the same way that [English Language Arts standards](#) are used in English literacy instruction in early education, programs designed for primary grades or as part



of [Title I](#) or [LAP](#) services, and with students who have age-appropriate oracy skills. In these cases, access to literacy instruction is facilitated through the use of language development standards (e.g. [WIDA español](#), [ACTFL proficiency benchmarks](#)) and the use of inclusionary practices.

Middle School Heritage Language Learners

At the secondary level, programs also support on-time graduation by granting credit and supporting overall academic development. Middle school heritage language programs have an obligation to provide equitable access to high school credit opportunities. This is primarily achieved by offering courses using state course codes for native speakers of signers that grant world language credit and braiding the ACTFL proficiency benchmarks with language specific literacy standards.

High School Heritage Language Learners

At the high school level, Heritage Learners who can earn 1-3 [WL competency credits](#) can be placed in classes that offer WL credit and use the ACTFL proficiency benchmarks when they are designed for heritage and multilingual learners and taught by educators who have knowledge of heritage language acquisition. Courses specifically designed for students at this level can also be cross listed as world language courses for native speakers and ethnic studies, social studies, or arts courses. Cross-listing courses provides flexibility for [HS and beyond planning](#), a clear context for learning, and are allowable under [school-wide Title I](#) or [LAP](#) plans. Cross credit courses use the course appropriate standards and a language acquisition framework to facilitate access to content and support content-based language development.

When high school students have met the proficiency requirements for the [Seal of Biliteracy](#) and have age and developmentally appropriate oracy or signed production, planning focus shifts to college and career readiness. Students can be placed in dual language pathways or in Dual Language Arts courses with college in the high school or other dual credit opportunities even if a school does not have a DL program. Heritage Language programs can also be developed as part of a district's "grow your own" educator careers program through a CTE pathway such as bilingual education or translation and interpretation. In each case, the content standards of the course should be used to promote grade-level and above language use, while the appropriate language development framework matched with inclusionary practices accelerate multiliteracy development.

For more information about Heritage Language Programs and instruction, visit our [website](#) or contact Ema Shirk at ema.shirk@k12.wa.us.