



**Creating a Family Literacy Program to  
Strengthen Hmong Language and Family  
Wellbeing in the Fox Valley**

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



## Fox Valley Literacy

Fox Valley Literacy uses the power of learning to transform lives and enrich the community. It provides learner-centered adult education services, including English language, HMoob language, family literacy, citizenship, digital, workforce, reading, math, college prep, career advancement, and leadership development programming.

## Project Team

Heather Chantelois-Kashal led design of the research project. Rita Moua and Amy Xiong led program design and implementation. All three contributed to research analysis, and Heather authored this report.

## Contributors

This work would not have been possible without the generous contributions of many community members. First, thank you to each of the parents who shared their experiences and priorities with us during our needs assessment and who trusted us with their families while participating in the classes. Thank you also to Dr. Pam Her of the Multicultural Coalition Inc. for trusting us to help address language preservation and family wellbeing priorities for HMoob families in the Fox Valley by helping to spark the idea for the Family Literacy program and by participating in the Planning Committee. We extend our sincere thanks to the other Planning Committee members, Sia Chang (Hmong Family Outreach Specialist), Pa Ja Yang (Senior Librarian), Meng Kha (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Coordinator), Mai Kou Heu (Principal) as well as three anonymous members. You were indispensable in helping us to understand the opportunity and context more deeply and to design a program that is grounded in community values, needs, strengths, and aspirations.

Thank you to our dedicated teachers, Sheng Lee Riechers and Jordan Suprise. Thank you to Highlands Elementary School and staff for hosting the classes and to Lake View Elementary school and staff and Principal Nou Vang-Vue for letting the team observe their HMoob Language classes. A special thanks to Pa Foua Thao, the Hmong Language-Cultural Curriculum Development Teacher Leader, for providing insight on building HMoob language curriculum and connecting our staff with the National Hmong Language Teacher Coalition, who shared their teaching strategies and ideas on the HMoob language. Thank you to Dominic Ledesma at Language Access Consulting+Solutions, LLC for providing recommendations and facilitator training for our needs assessment. Thank you to Holly Volkman for volunteering your graphic design skills.

## Funders

Thank you to the Mielke Family Foundation and the Wallace Family Foundation for providing the funding that made the pilot research and program possible.

© 2023 Fox Valley Literacy. All rights reserved.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HMoob<sup>1</sup> people began resettling in Wisconsin as refugees after assisting the United States in the Secret War during the 1970s. The third generation of HMoob Americans are now growing up in the Fox Valley, which is home to over 7,000 HMoob people<sup>2</sup>. In conversations with community leaders, the opportunity to respond to the resulting complex intergenerational communication, cultural, educational, and mental health dynamics was introduced. Specifically, community leaders mentioned the mental health and wellbeing challenges families face due to cultural adaptation and the loss of HMoob language. An adapted English and heritage (HMoob) language family literacy program emerged as a promising approach to meeting the literacy, educational, and wellbeing goals of many HMoob families.

Fox Valley Literacy received funding from the Mielke Family Foundation and the Wallace Family Foundation to design and implement an adapted English and HMoob languages family literacy program. We employed a community based participatory action research approach to program design. The initial stages involved consultations with a planning committee consisting of HMoob community members, followed by a needs assessment with parents who expressed interest in participating in the program. Research took place from June through November of 2022, and the program pilot began in March of 2023.

## Findings: Community Planning Committee Consultations

The planning committee members identified three primary goals that they hope the program will support. First is for HMoob children to embrace their heritage language, culture, and history. The second is to strengthen parent-child relationships, mental health, and time learning together. Third is that the program will contribute to the creation of equitable pathways for HMoob children and families to participate in education, gain a sense of belonging, and succeed in school and their broader academic and career goals.

Committee members identified several dynamics that are important to understanding HMoob family engagement in education and in intergenerational cultural and knowledge transmission. These include trauma, diverse educational backgrounds, community structures and power dynamics, and cultural beliefs, values, and practices. They also described opportunities and potential barriers for HMoob language preservation, English language acquisition, and child and family wellbeing and provided program design recommendations. (See [Findings: Community Planning Committee Consultations](#)).

## Findings: Participant Needs Assessment

Needs assessment participants clearly and emphatically repeated three themes related to HMoob language. First, the HMoob language is an essential component of HMoob identity, and it is being lost across generations. Second, children's ability to understand, speak, read, and write both HMoob and English is seen as critical for their family's wellbeing and success in the United States. Third, participants are dismayed that, even in homes where the parents intentionally speak only HMoob, children are using English at home more than HMoob. Participants hope that the Family Literacy program will provide the structure and motivation for their children to learn HMoob that might help to offset the forces pushing their children toward English monolingualism.

---

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, we use HMoob, which is a synonym for Hmong, that is inclusive of both main dialects of the HMoob language

<sup>2</sup> PBSWisconsin: [Living in Wisconsin: 'Hmong people are truly American, if not more American than most Americans' \(pbswisconsin.org\)](https://pbswisconsin.org)

They all greatly valued supporting their children’s education and wellbeing. They described various strategies to motivate their children to do well in school and to show their children that they support them. They also looked forward to the opportunity to learn more about child development and to improve their English since none felt that their own educations prepared them to support their children as they would like to.

Participants emphasized the importance of learning English in order to live more easefully in the United States and to support their children. They are most interested in immediately applicable skills and knowledge. They hope that the program will provide skilled and caring teachers and a supportive structure that will enable them to progress despite having limited time due to their parental responsibilities. (See [Findings: Participant Needs Assessment](#)).

## Program Design



Due to family difficulties and logistical reasons, only two families participated in the whole program session – two moms and 5 children total. The classes began on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and ended on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023. They were held at Highlands Elementary School on Monday and Wednesday evenings from 5:00-6:30. We hired one instructor for each group, and a volunteer helped with the children’s activities as needed.

The curriculum covered four themes: food, parent engagement in children’s education, social and emotional learning, and mental health. We employed a variety of reading, writing, speaking, listening, technology-based, game-based, and project-based activities.

Parents and children spent the first hour in adjacent classrooms learning in English and HMoob, respectively. They spent the last thirty minutes together doing projects or playing games that built on the content they learned in their cohorts. (See [Program Design](#)).

## Outcomes

Both parents felt that the program helped them to feel more connected to their children, to be more able to be involved in their children’s education, and to be more aware of their own thoughts and feelings. In responding to open-ended program exit questions, parents also stated that they valued the following program outcomes:

- **Better ability to express their thoughts and feelings**
- **Better general understanding of U.S. school practices and how to engage in their children’s education**
- **Increased knowledge of HMoob family resources in our community – i.e. warmline, therapy, etc.**
- **More connection with children through structured time together as a family**
- **More consistent monitoring of children’s homework completion**
- **Easier time talking to her children (one participant)**

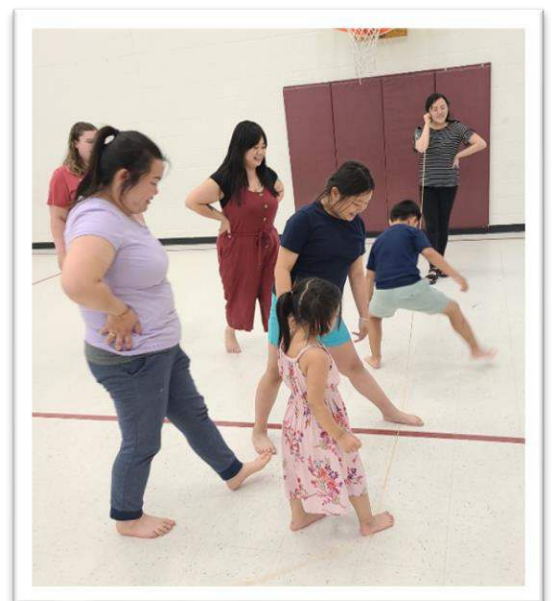
All the children noted improvements in their confidence with HMoob. All felt a little or a lot more confident speaking, understanding, and reading HMoob after participating in the program. 75% of children said they somewhat or strongly agreed that they speak more HMoob at home since beginning the program, and one child disagreed. Of note, none of their parents remarked an increase in the frequency of their children's HMoob use at home.

All the children also felt improvements in their expression of emotions and relationships with their moms. They all expressed that, before the program, they knew that they are different from other ethnic groups but the program helped them to have a better understanding of what it means to be HMoob. All of the children noted increased awareness of their thoughts and feelings, and 75% stated that they feel more connected to their moms, it is easier to talk to their moms, and easier to ask for help.

Challenges included recruiting families and teachers, inadequate teacher training, using an English language curriculum that was too difficult for the students, family life interruptions that negatively affected attendance or enrollment, and limited engagement with homework assignments or practice using HMoob lesson content at home. Parents would have liked more real-life, situation-based activities for the English class, such as filling out paperwork and paying bills. They also requested activities to make it easier to encourage their children to use HMoob at home and to talk with their children. Children wanted more opportunities to speak in class, more fun and active activities, activities to help them feel more capable of using the HMoob that they learn in class independently, more HMoob history, more opportunities to practice in class, and more help learning tones. (See [Outcomes](#)).

## NEXT STEPS

We are currently planning adaptations for the next session. Most significantly, we are re-assessing the dual English and HMoob language model. Despite receiving substantial expressions of interest and encouragement from many community members, recruitment was a significant challenge. Two frequent questions were whether children of parents who are already proficient in English could participate and whether we were going to teach HMoob literacy to adults who are proficient HMoob speakers. Therefore, over the summer of 2023, we held listening sessions and surveys with community members to assess the interest and feasibility of offering a family literacy program focused on family wellbeing and HMoob literacy (without the English language component). Through these efforts, we learned that HMoob language and identity strengthening are the greatest priorities for both adults and children. We will implement a second, HMoob-only, iteration of the program in January 2024.



If you are interested in learning more about these efforts, have priorities or ideas for the program, or would like to participate as a student, instructor, curriculum designer, researcher, or other volunteer we would love to hear from you! Please contact Rita Moua via email at [rita@foxvalleylit.org](mailto:rita@foxvalleylit.org) or by phone at (920) 234-8041.

# INTRODUCTION

In 2021, Fox Valley Literacy received funding from the Mielke Family Foundation and the Wallace Family Foundation to design and implement an adapted English and HMoob languages family literacy program. To that end, we hired a HMoob Program Specialist and initiated a community-based participatory action research project to design the program. Research took place from June through November of 2022, and the program pilot began in March of 2023.

## The HMoob Community in the Fox Valley

The HMoob<sup>3</sup> (or Hmong) people are an ethnic group originally from Southern China who now live primarily in China, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, and the United States. In the 1700s and 1800s, many HMoob people moved from China to Southeast Asia to escape persecution and discrimination. In the 1970s, HMoob people fought alongside U.S. Central Intelligence Agency against the Pathet Lao in Northern Vietnam. Upon U.S. withdrawal from Southeast Asia, the HMoob were targeted for persecution and genocide in retaliation for siding with the U.S. during the Secret War. Beginning in 1975, HMoob people began seeking political refuge in other countries, including the U.S. Formal refugee resettlement of HMoob ended in the 2000s, but HMoob migration to the U.S. has continued through family reunification and marriage<sup>4</sup>.

Wisconsin has over 50,000 HMoob residents, the third highest HMoob population in the United States. HMoob are the largest Asian American ethnic group in Wisconsin, and the Fox Valley is home to over 7,000 HMoob people<sup>5</sup>. The HMoob community in the Fox Valley has faced challenges associated with forced migration, discrimination, and cultural and economic marginalization, among others. Nevertheless, the community has established thriving businesses, community, and cultural organizations, and growing political and civic influence.

The third generation of HMoob Americans are now growing up in the Fox Valley. In conversations with community leaders, the opportunity to respond to the resulting complex intergenerational communication, cultural, educational, and mental health dynamics was introduced. Specifically, community leaders mentioned the mental health and wellbeing challenges families face due to cultural adaptation and the loss of HMoob language. To expand and deepen our services, Fox Valley Literacy was exploring new program model possibilities. An adapted English and heritage (HMoob) language family literacy program emerged as a promising approach to meeting the literacy, educational, and wellbeing goals of many HMoob families.

## Creating an Adapted Family Literacy Program

Traditional family literacy programs take a four-pronged approach to providing educational services to children and caregivers to improve literacy levels, educational outcomes, and child development:

- Adult education for caregivers, focused on literacy, numeracy, English language, or GED preparation
- Early childhood education for children ages 0-5 focused on literacy and numeracy
- Parent education on child development, parenting, and family wellbeing

---

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this report, we use HMoob, which is a synonym for Hmong, that is inclusive of both main dialects of the HMoob language

<sup>4</sup> Hmong American Center: [Hmong History – Hmong American Center](#) and Post Crescent: [Hmong arrive in Wisconsin after serving as US allies in the Secret War \(postcrescent.com\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> PBSWisconsin: [Living in Wisconsin: 'Hmong people are truly American, if not more American than most Americans' \(pbswisconsin.org\)](#)

- Interactive caregiver-child activities that give family members the opportunity to experience learning from and with each other and caregivers the opportunity to apply child development practices

To respond to the needs and priorities of the HMoob community, we are creating an adapted family literacy model that retains the four foundational components described above but integrates HMoob language and identity as well. Caregiver education will take place in English and focus on English language literacy, child development, and family wellbeing. Child education will take place in HMoob and focus on spoken HMoob, basic literacy, social-emotional learning, and HMoob identity. Interactive caregiver-child activities will integrate the themes and language development work done during the cohort-specific classes and provide an opportunity for caregivers and children to teach each other, create together, and celebrate each other's growth. Additionally, this program will serve elementary school-aged children, rather than children from 0-5 years, to not overlap with the Even Start family literacy program already being offered to Appleton and Menasha families.



## PROGRAM DESIGN METHODS

We employed a community based participatory action research approach to program design. This enabled us to learn from community members and to co-create the program with the people whom the program is hoping to benefit. The initial stages involved consultations with a planning committee consisting of HMoob community members, followed by a needs assessment with parents who expressed interest in participating in the program.

### Community Planning Committee Consultations

During June, July, and August 2022, Fox Valley Literacy staff met with nine HMoob community leaders and/or service providers who formed a Planning Committee. Members included two librarians, two school Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion coordinators, one school principal, one community activist, and one community organization leader. Over three two-hour sessions, committee members discussed the following questions:

- **What do we know about the 'HMoob community' in the Fox Valley?**
  - Contexts: What do we know about community members' experiences, history, environments, circumstances, goals, and vision for the future?
  - Culture: What do we know about community members' behaviors, norms, roles, beliefs, values, and traditions?
  - Structures: Who has power and influence, who is marginalized, who are gatekeepers, how the community structure might be changing?
- **What opportunity is there in the community that this program can contribute to?**
  - What is the opportunity for youth/younger generations learning and maintaining the HMoob language?
  - What is the opportunity for HMoob adults' development of English language?

- What opportunities are HMoob families facing in terms of family wellbeing and child development?
- What are the barriers that might affect the above three opportunities? What are the strengths and assets that might affect the above three opportunities?

During a fourth session, committee members discussed the ideas generated during the first three sessions. Analysis was informal but loosely followed grounded theory. Committee members highlighted themes to integrate into the program, topics that might be too sensitive or inappropriate to address through the program, and made recommendations. They also pulled forth a list of tentative questions to ask caregivers who would participate in a needs assessment focus group. From there, staff refined the questions, made focus group interview scripts, translated them, and shared the focus group interview guide in English and in HMoob with the Committee. They provided feedback to ensure that the questions were phrased clearly, translated well, and covered the most important questions for discussion with program participants.

## Participant Needs Assessment



To better understand the interests, needs, priorities, and concerns of families who might participate in the program, we conducted a participant needs assessment. Participants were HMoob parents with elementary school-aged children who were interested in improving their English language skills and in their children learning HMoob. In total, 7 parents participated. Six are married women, and one is a single mother. Three are in their late 20s, three in their 30s, and one in her 60s. Four are beginning-level English language learners, and three are intermediate level. All the participants speak HMoob White. Two speak both HMoob Green and HMoob White. We recruited participants through word of mouth, networking with HMoob organizations, attending community events, and sharing recruitment materials with HMoob service providers. Six participants were already studying English with Fox Valley Literacy when they signed up to participate in the needs assessment. One participant joined after speaking with Fox Valley Literacy staff at an elementary school event.

The needs assessment consisted of a pilot session and three 1-hour semi-structured focus groups, each on a different topic: HMoob language preservation, English language acquisition and parental involvement in



children's education, and community resources and program curriculum and logistics. Three people took part in the pilot and, in addition to participating in the discussion, provided feedback on the phrasing of questions pertaining to HMoob identity and language preservation. Four people participated in the first needs assessment session, three in the second, and two in the third.

A HMoob Fox Valley Literacy staff member who is leading the Family Literacy program and a HMoob librarian who was also on the Planning Committee facilitated the needs assessment. Both are women and had prior professional relationships with some or all the participants. A white Fox Valley Literacy staff member with a research background assisted in questionnaire design and data analysis. A meal of HMoob food and supervised children's activities in an adjacent room were provided for each session, and each parent was paid \$15 per session. Each session began with introductions, confidentiality, and verbal informed consent. Sessions were conducted in HMoob White, as was the participants' preference, audio recorded, transcribed, and translated. Questions were written using appreciative inquiry and analyzed using grounded theory.

## FINDINGS: COMMUNITY PLANNING COMMITTEE CONSULTATIONS

The planning committee members identified three primary goals that they hope the program will support. First is for HMoob children to embrace their heritage language, culture, and history. The second is to strengthen parent-child relationships, mental health, and time learning together. Third is that the program will contribute to the creation of equitable pathways for HMoob children and families to participate in education, gain a sense of belonging, and succeed in school and their broader academic and career goals.

### 1. Description of the HMoob Community in the Fox Valley

#### Context and Background

Because the HMoob community in the Fox Valley is internally diverse, with some parents and grandparents having come here as refugees, and other parents having been born in the United States, any brief summary of HMoob community background, structure, and values is an over-simplification. However, committee members identified several dynamics that are important to understanding HMoob family engagement in education and in intergenerational cultural and knowledge transmission.

**Trauma:** Family members who came to the U.S. as refugees may have complex trauma histories, particularly related to war, genocide, forced migration, poverty, discrimination, and shock due to abruptly transitioning from agrarian life pre-migration to highly industrialized contexts in the United States. They may consequently be living in 'survival mode' that minimizes time and energy available for reflection, relationship-building, and preservation of cultural forms, practices, and knowledge. One common concern that committee members expressed is that, due to both trauma and culture, HMoob caregivers may rarely offer praise or emotional support for their children. Significant work and family or community demands were felt to further decrease the frequency of intergenerational 'quality time,' exacerbating some of the impacts of trauma on families.

**Diverse Educational Experiences:** Parents or other caregivers who came to the United States as adults may have no or limited access to formal education in Laos or Thailand. This, and the demands of rebuilding a life in a new country, affect engagement in their children's education in the Fox Valley. Committee members felt that formal schooling has often been inaccessible to HMoob people, and so many are not familiar with the idea or practice of 'being your child's first teacher.' Consequently, committee members noted that many HMoob caregivers take a hands-off approach to their children's schooling, relying on their teachers to steward their children's knowledge and skills development. At the same time, second generation HMoob parents were felt to desire western education over heritage language or cultural identity development. Despite these somewhat

divergent generational attitudes toward the relative importance of formal education, committee members described a common expectation that children will perform well academically without parental assistance or intervention.

### Community Structures:

Committee members described several ways that the power structures within the community may affect individuals' and families' participation in the program. They noted that clan leaders traditionally hold significant power within HMoob communities, but that they are losing some of their impact, particularly among younger generations. HMoob professionals and highly educated individuals, who are often younger adults, also wield significant influence within their families and communities. At the same time, cultural transmission depends on elders within each family. Committee members noted that cultural knowledge is not given freely and that there is a sense of "not knowing who we are or where we're going as HMoob people." Community members who are illiterate in either or both HMoob and English, children, and speakers of HMoob Green are often marginalized or disadvantaged within the HMoob and wider communities. For example, school attempts to be inclusive, such as sending written materials home in HMoob White, may further disadvantage families who are not literate in HMoob or who speak or read HMoob Green.

### Cultural Beliefs, Values, and Practices:

Several cultural norms and practices also arose as potentially important to consider in program design and implementation. One is that parents tend to have high expectations for their children to be self-directed and self-responsible students and to succeed without their parents' intervention or support. Similarly, committee members felt that HMoob families rarely participate in school and community programs, though the reasons for this were less easily understood. They also noted that gender roles might impact family dynamics and children's participation and achievement in educational programs. For example, they described gender norms that frame girls as 'more responsible' and 'motivated' in family and academic life than boys and that simultaneously place significant pressure on boys to be responsible for cultural, religious, and/or traditional practices. Other cultural norms that were mentioned include living in multi-generational homes in which grandparents participate in childcare, a strong value placed on family, and a central importance of gatherings in family and community life.

## 2. Opportunities and Potential Barriers

### **HMoob Language Preservation**

**Opportunities:** Committee members were very enthusiastic about the multi-dimensional opportunities for HMoob language and cultural preservation that this program could offer. Most foundational is the opportunity to strengthen HMoob language transmission and cultural identity, thereby creating community and intergenerational connection and breaking the cycle of historical and generational trauma. Learning HMoob was also related to strengthening academic skills such as literacy, critical thinking, and collaboration more broadly. Participants noted that learning HMoob in an organized way now could empower children to teach it to others, might also help them to learn additional languages later in life, and could facilitate professional opportunities that require bilingualism or multilingualism. Having a program dedicated to celebrating and fostering HMoob language and cultural strength could also normalize speaking HMoob with peers and family members and inspire participants to advocate for HMoob language exposure and learning in schools and other institutions. It's also an opportunity to celebrate HMoob storytelling, music, visual arts, history, other cultural forms, and to potentially expand the availability of HMoob-language books and other materials.

**Barriers:** Barriers to HMoob language preservation include structural, linguistic, and psychological factors. Racism and discrimination in the forms of bullying for being ‘different,’ the expectation to ‘speak English’ because ‘you’re in America,’ and tokenism were all mentioned. Committee members also noted the lack of HMoob language integration and celebration in community institutions and a dearth of safe spaces in which to speak or learn HMoob and express HMoob identity. The above were related to resistance or a lack of interest in learning HMoob among youth. Generational differences in how individuals learned and speak HMoob also can affect whether and in which contexts young parents feel confident speaking, reading, or writing HMoob. At the same time, committee members described parents and HMoob peers as often holding high expectations for HMoob children to be able to speak HMoob just because that is their ethnicity and a pattern of bullying or shaming when someone speaks incorrectly or incompletely. Additionally, HMoob is historically not a written language, leading to a dearth of HMoob language learning materials and many fluent or proficient HMoob speakers who have no or limited reading and writing skills.

## English Language Learning

**Opportunities:** Community planning committee members discussed the benefits of developing their English language skills for parents themselves but focused primarily on the benefits for their children. Committee members mentioned the opportunity for parents to become more self-sufficient and sustainable, have more control over their lives, build stronger relationships through improved communication, and possibly advance their own formal education. These were then related to creating better lives for themselves and their children by making it easier for them to access community resources, advocate for their families, work more proactively with school staff, encourage their children to take advantage of extracurricular activities, help them with homework and to perform better academically, and cultivate academic, social, and leadership skills.

**Barriers:** Barriers to improving parents’ English language skills related primarily to experiences with and attitudes toward formal education and emotional and practical factors. Committee members worried that some parents might equate English with going to school and feel that going to school isn’t for them due to cultural differences in approaches to and priorities for learning, a lack of access to formal education earlier in life, or the fear that they are too old to learn a new language. Some parents might also not have the time, resources, flexibility, or necessary family logistical support to be able to attend. Others might be living comfortably with their children’s help as interpreters and not feel the need for their own English language development.

## Family and Child Development

**Opportunities:** Committee members described the opportunity for improved understanding of child development and family wellbeing and strategies for supporting mental health and positively dealing with prejudice and racism. The program could promote reflection on emotional health and wellbeing and connect families to appropriate resources. It might also support mental health by fostering a deeper sense of belonging in the school and wider community.

**Barriers:** Barriers include a lack of vocabulary and conceptual familiarity with child development and wellbeing concepts, tension between western and HMoob values around family, as well as some internal cultural norms and practices. The importance of saving face was mentioned as leading to a reluctance to acknowledge failures, mental health issues, or emotional wellbeing within the family and to minimal expression of emotions. A culture of having high expectations for one’s children while providing limited emotional support might also be a barrier for both parents’ and children’s engagement. There are also significant pressures within the HMoob

community to attain and maintain a respected social status. The related internal power dynamics could affect the extent to which adults participating in the program might trust each other or participate openly. Committee members also noted that the lack of culturally informed resources and the application of a western teaching lens could exacerbate other barriers to making a meaningful contribution to family wellbeing and child development outcomes.

## **Strengths and Assets**

Committee members noted that the HMoob community's history and traditions of collectivism, self-determination, and resilience provide numerous strengths that participants and partners will bring to the program. The determination to persevere as HMoob people despite persecution has led to innovative practices and collaborations to support community survival and prosperity. Many dynamic HMoob organizations exist in the Fox Valley and beyond that can offer insight, resources, and models. Similarly, the history of migration has led to adaptability and mental resilience. Having a collectivist culture means that participants will be more ready to learn together and from one another and to support each other. Lastly, education is seen as a priority for the community and within individual families, even while there is diversity in how education is defined and approached.

## **3. Program Recommendations**

### **General Recommendations**

- Normalize that it's okay not to know and encourage a growth mindset to minimize embarrassment and encourage participants to ask questions and for help
- Provide positive, rather than deficit-oriented, frames for empowering caregivers to be involved in their children's development, their own learning, and their family's wellbeing. Build on caregivers' strengths
- Provide HMoob role models
- Help connect what participants are learning in class to real life, especially when teaching about HMoob history or culture that may feel distant to children or young adults
- Build in opportunities to explore cultural adaptation
- Integrate culture as both deeply-held norms and values and as visible forms
- Religion is divisive. Avoid discussions of 'religion,' especially that frame one religious practice or belief as correct or superior. Instead, talk about spirituality or history and culture
- Look for concrete ways to make the program more accessible for families who are low income and who have less education, such as providing barrier removal resources, connecting participants to other community resources, and finding ways for caregivers to participate that are flexible in response to work and family realities
- Educate both HMoob and western communities in order to increase comfort with each other and dispel stereotypes or sensationalized images so that participants can be themselves in all contexts rather than having to code switch

### **HMoob Language Preservation**

- Teach in ways that are active and engaging rather than relying on top-down or memorization-based approaches
- Classes offered through the school system focus on culture, rather than language. Make sure our program does both, and seek participant feedback on the specific content

- Provide structure for families to apply classroom learning at home that motivate children to use HMoob at home
- Encourage caregivers to celebrate their children's HMoob language use, even when it's 'incorrect' or incomplete
- Encourage involvement of extended family members in the program, both in class and at home
- Expand children's knowledge, such as respectful forms of speech and familiarity with proverbs, so that they will be better able to communicate with elders
- Provide materials and lessons in both HMoob dialects, and educate funders on how this relates to efficacy and equity
- Provide HMoob books for parents to read to children
- Tailor strategies to caregivers' language and literacy skills and academic confidence

## **English Language Learning**

- Build vocabulary and communication skills that facilitate engagement with opportunities at school and in the community
- Help children see caregivers' strengths

## **Parent Engagement in Children's Education**

- Help parents understand the way that schools here work. For example, help parents understand why their children are taking tests, why extracurricular activities are important and how to access them
- Help caregivers to imagine possible ways to be involved in their children's education
- Build caregivers' communication repertoire so they have effective questions to ask their children
- Help parents understand the importance of early literacy development
- Expose parents to early literacy development resources and practices they can do at home
- Include approaches to support children's literacy development and academic success that don't rely on parents having strong literacy skills themselves
- Help parents to see and experience how they have a role to play in their children's academic development, not just their behavior at school

## **Child Development and Family Wellbeing**

- Include positive discipline, love and logic, age-appropriate communication, and other topics to expand parents' toolboxes
- Help caregivers understand the existence of interventions for 'invisible' disabilities and the importance of early intervention. Destigmatize screenings
- Frame social and emotional learning as a positive, not as a deficit. Teach social and emotional learning in ways that allow families to save face and that build on existing research on HMoob mental health
- Tailor curriculum and resources to multiple, contextualized definitions of family. Invite participants to define 'family'
- Approach mental health or emotional wellbeing gradually, with the understanding that these topics can be taboo and there is often an expectation that problems stay within the family
- Normalize a full range of emotional experiences
- Make sure that mentions of trauma or hardship are inclusive of diverse experiences and types of trauma
- Provide positive perspectives on emotion expression, while understanding how culture and trauma may make emotion expression more difficult or less valued

- Hold space for different perspectives and needs in relation to emotion expression, especially for different generations
- Protect confidentiality
- Normalize discussing gender and wellbeing, but tread lightly. For many, gender roles are non-negotiable even when harmful, and redefining gender roles is considered taboo

## FINDINGS: PARTICIPANT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

To understand participants' motivations for engaging their children in the Family Literacy program, we discussed several questions:

- 1) **What does it mean to be HMoob, and why is it important that your children learn HMoob?**
- 2) **How did you learn HMoob, and how are you teaching HMoob to your children? What works and what hasn't worked?**
- 3) **Which skills and dialects are most important to you, and why?**



## HMoob Language Preservation

### Why do you want your children to learn HMoob?

Participants all expressed strong hopes that their children would grow up feeling rooted in their HMoob language and identity as well as strong frustrations and regret over the loss of the language across generations.

They associate HMoob language with cultural identity and heritage, stating that it is important for their children to speak HMoob because they *are* HMoob. One participant (Y) described how her deep wish is that her children will call her “Niam,” instead of “Mommy,” saying “*We want them to call us by what we HMoob people have always been called. However, right now the children do not call [us] like that [anymore].*” When their children do speak HMoob with them, even if imperfectly, they noted feeling great joy.

*We want to have a way to teach them HMoob so that we do not lose our language. Because they are born here, they spend their time more at school than with us. At home, they have a phone, a computer, the internet, and Wi-Fi. They touch and use all these items and do not spend a lot of time with us which makes them not able to speak HMoob. For these reasons, I can see that maybe in the future other [non-HMoob] people will be translating our own language to our children.*

*We want our children to know how to speak, [read, and write] HMoob so that when we are no longer here, they know they are HMoob.*

Participants described feeling dismayed that, despite speaking mostly or exclusively HMoob at home, their children mostly interact in English, even before they begin attending school. They noted having limited power to affect their children's waning HMoob in favor for English as they grow older and become more integrated in dominant, Anglo-American society.

They listed the influence of English-language media, older siblings, and peers as frequent motivators for their children to use English. They worry that the HMoob language will be lost after their generation and hope that the family literacy program can solidify a way to preserve HMoob language and identity for the future.

They also described practical reasons for wanting their children to learn HMoob. Many participants noted that their children speak English much more proficiently than they do and that, if they also spoke and read HMoob well, they could help interpret for their parents.

They also worry about communication gaps between themselves and their children and hope that improved HMoob skills could lead to more easily and effectively supporting their children and keeping them safe.

For these reasons, participants agreed that improving their children's speaking skills is the first priority, but that learning to read and write is also important.

---

*Right now for our children, you teach them as much as you want; however, at a later time, it seems like they do not know it anymore. At home you do speak HMoob only, but you do not know why they cannot learn it. [!] do want there to be something or a way of teaching like this to help our children learn how to speak HMoob.*

*What is important is that if our children are able to [read and write], then they can preserve our HMoob language. One day they can teach their children, or [if] they want to do something like what you two are doing here to teach a lot of others in the future, that is a good way to preserve our HMoob knowledge [and language].*

---

*We came to this country as older people, so we do not know English. Nowadays, children text only. If you do not know English, then when they text ding, ding, ding, I do not know what they are texting about. If you know [HMoob], then they can text HMoob very fast then you know and understand better [what] children are doing what [and] where they are.*

---

*Sometimes the younger one has to tell the older one, "Oh, Mom said this." The younger one has not gone to school yet. So he still knows what I am saying, but the older one does not know anymore.*

***I can teach HMoob and they in turn can teach us English. This is something you can do to help your household, but it's better having a teacher.***

## **How did you learn HMoob? How do you teach your children HMoob? How is it going?**

Participants described learning HMoob primarily from their parents through immersion as children.

Like their parents, most participants rely on at home immersion to transmit the HMoob language to their children today. Almost all stated that they speak exclusively or mostly HMoob at home.

They also described varying degrees of semi-structured interactions to encourage their children to speak HMoob. Two of the most common strategies that participants mentioned are requiring that their children make requests in HMoob or repeat vocabulary in HMoob and trying to 'bribe' their children with favorite meals if they speak HMoob. Participants also sometimes play HMoob movies or music, read books in HMoob, and try to limit their children's exposure to English. One participant (K) noted that their children don't find HMoob media fun or interesting, and she has to 'joke with them' that they need to learn, otherwise "*in the future [when] I take you to visit grandma, you will not get to eat because you do not know how to speak HMoob.*"

Overall, participants noted a lack of support for children's HMoob language development outside the home, whether from extended family, other social networks, or community organizations. This is compounded by the fact that parents need to spend most of their waking hours at work, leaving them with limited time and energy for quality time with their children. Nevertheless, participants greatly valued the limited HMoob language programs at HMoob churches, public libraries, a summer school program at Highlands Elementary, and reading books they receive from their pediatricians.

---

*When [I] was a child and as I was growing up, my parents always spoke HMoob. So eventually, you just pick it up and can speak the language. You do not really know how you learned.*

---

*If you're asking for times in which I would sit down and teach them it's seldom because they are unwilling to learn. It's a bit of playing around and teaching them at the same time.*

---

*I give them encouragement. "Oh, you are speaking HMoob? [I am] happy, my son. [I am] happy you are speaking HMoob."*

---

*I have to beg them, "My dear, speak HMoob. Talk in HMoob. If you speak HMoob, I will take you to the store with me. I will buy you something." Or, "What do you want to do? What do you want to eat? I can make it, but today, we will speak HMoob only.*

---

*[He] speaks the easy words for a while then he does not know what to say anymore. He speaks a very hard word then he speaks the word in English right away.*

---

*For children to learn the HMoob language their parents spend time with them as well. A reason why children in America don't know HMoob is because their parents are always working. One comes, one goes. One comes, one goes. One comes back and sleeps while the other leaves.*

---



None of our participants felt that grandparents played a significant role in caring for their children due to age or distance. However, they still hoped that building their children's HMoob skills might make it easier for their parents and children to build relationships.

At the same time, participants noted that interacting with grandparents who speak exclusively HMoob wasn't significantly helping their children to learn HMoob because of cultural differences in language use. These differences make it difficult for grandparents and grandchildren to understand each other even when the children speak basic HMoob successfully with their parents or siblings.

Several parents mentioned that their own HMoob language skills are incomplete due to barriers to formal education growing up, migration, and HMoob historically being transmitted orally. Navigating multilingual contexts is a challenge for attaining HMoob proficiency that, in some cases, affects multiple generations.

Parents who migrated during their youth sometimes struggled to balance multiple languages. One participant mentioned that she doesn't speak HMoob fluently because she grew up in Thailand speaking HMoob, Lao, and Thai.

Participants similarly noted that their children often drastically cut their HMoob use once they start attending English language public schools in the Fox Valley and using English language media.

Another aspect of multilingualism that affected some families' HMoob proficiency is the use of both HMoob dialects in the home. This was the case in some families where each parent spoke either exclusively one HMoob dialect or one more proficiently than the other. In some of these families, the parents each use a different dialect with the children. In others, the household uses primarily one dialect, usually the dialect dominant on the father's side of the family. Regardless of their specific dynamic, all of our participants who spoke HMoob Green stated that they preferred their children to learn HMoob White before HMoob Green because they felt it would be easier to learn.

---

*[We] want to take [our children] to learn because right now, our elders [or older adults like us] know how to speak HMoob, but we do not know some words as well. [There are] still some words that are big and [have] deep [meaning] that we do not know of too. After us, our HMoob language will disappear.*

---

*I haven't learned HMoob. I've never been formally taught by a teacher, but I do like looking at songs. I don't have a complete understanding of the HMoob language. There are some letters that I can't pronounce, but I do know how to write and read so I teach myself in that way.*

---

*I'll see older children write words that I like, then I'll end up taking those words and start writing them myself. I haven't learned any other way.*

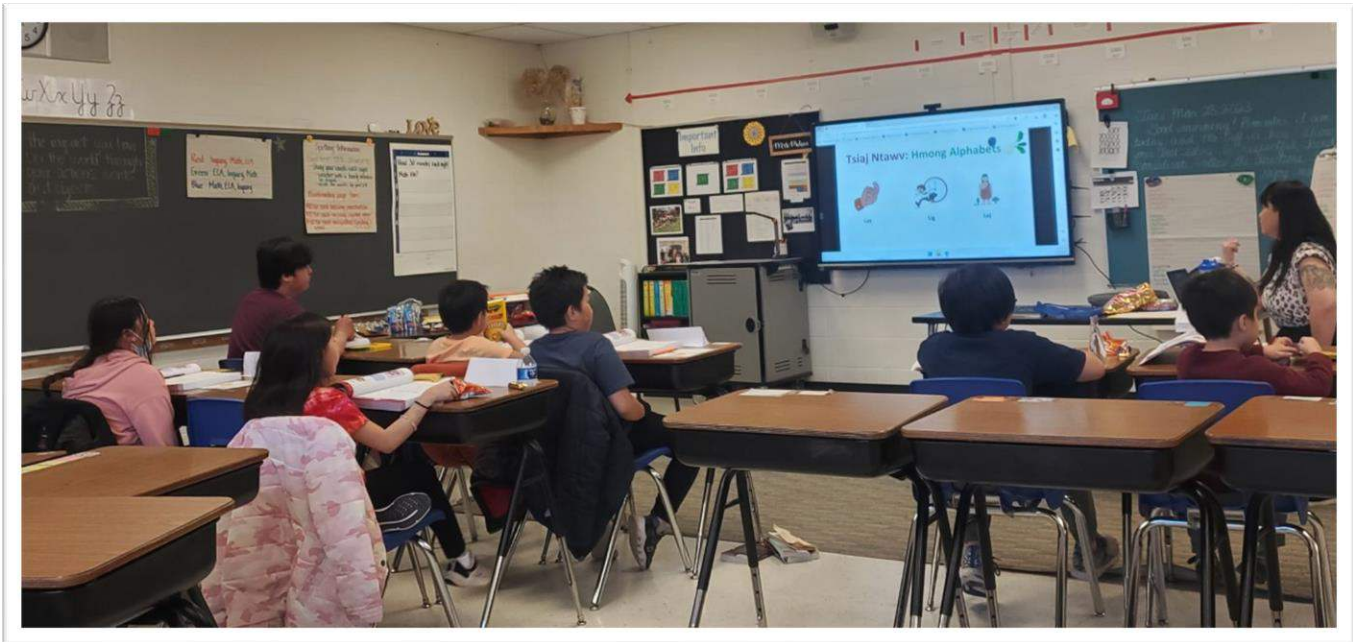
*One day when they already know a lot [of HMoob White], if they want to learn HMoob Green, we will teach it to them. [In] HMoob Green, it is hard to make the sounds with [your] tongue ...Speaking HMoob White is good [enough].*

## Conclusion

Throughout our discussions, participants clearly and emphatically repeated three themes.

- 1 The HMoob language is an essential component of HMoob identity, and it is being lost across generations.**
- 2 Children's ability to understand, speak, read, and write both HMoob and English is seen as critical for their family's wellbeing and success in the United States.**
- 3 Participants are dismayed that, even in homes where the parents intentionally speak only HMoob, children are using English at home more than HMoob**

Participants hope that the Family Literacy program will provide the structure and motivation for their children to learn HMoob that might help to offset the forces pushing their children toward English monolingualism.



To understand what participants would value from the English classes, we asked them about 1) their motivations for learning English; 2) past experiences and strategies learning English; and 3) what they hoped for from the class.

### Why do you want to learn English?

Participants were interested in learning English because they felt it's necessary for life in the United States and to support their children. Participants who had older children or extended family members who could translate expressed less overwhelm trying to use English to navigate U.S. institutions than those who only had young children and limited social support.

Those who were single parents or who didn't have a strong support network also expressed interest in learning computer skills to be more fully independent. They suggested that classes should focus on practical communication such as daily conversational skills, filling out paperwork, job applications, and language they can use at work or other places in the community.

All participants described wanting to learn English so they would be able to support their children, such as with homework, reading to them, answering their questions, and keeping them safe.

---

*[!] do want to know [English] so that [if] they want me to help with something, I can help them. If [!] do not know, then [!] cannot help them with anything. And, sometimes they get mad at you too.*

---

*Right now, when my children have homework from school, I do not have anyone [to depend on]. I know I am the only one who is supposed to help my child with what they learned [from school]. If I do not have anyone to help them, they cannot help themselves. So, the next day when they go back [to school], their homework is all incorrect. What is important is that there is a way to help me learn [so that I can help my children].*

*If we do not know the language, then it is very hard for us to live in this country. We have to know [the language], but because we have our family [to look after], then we cannot do what we want to do [all the time]. We are not able to go learn what our heart desires either. So even if we only have a little time [to learn], it is better than us not learning at all.*

## How have you learned English in the past?

## What would you like from the Family Literacy program English classes?

Participants had experience learning English through a range of strategies and resources, such as tutoring with Fox Valley Literacy, classes at Fox Valley Technical College, workplace English courses, talking with coworkers, self-study using resources like YouTube or TV, and from their children. Multiple participants expressed frustration with prior group classes that were too large for instructors to teach all the students well and in which there were groups of students from other ethnicities who spoke in their languages amongst themselves during class.

They therefore hoped that the Family Literacy English classes would be in small groups, and they were happy that the classes would be open only to HMoob students so that they would avoid cliques and more fully understand. They also requested that the teachers speak standard English because they had had difficulties understanding teachers with other accents. They suggested that the teacher should be patient, creatively use a range of teaching methods, and perseverant in helping them learn at their own pace. Most participants preferred multiple sessions a week, and they said classes should be in person because it would be too hard to concentrate if they joined class online from home.

*To learn in a big group of people is only good if the teacher is committed to teach [everyone in the class]. The teacher has to teach [and treat] everyone equally even if some get it and some do not get it. There are some teachers who [favor] or keeps talking to students who speak out more only. For those students who cannot speak the language or cannot read, [the teacher] does not put in effort to talk with them. They do not put in effort to talk with me either, so then you feel embarrassed and cannot learn well [in class].*

*Because we already have a lot of children, if we are at home then we do not have the time to do things... To have one or two hours only is good, but for each week, [hopefully], you can provide more hours for us so that we can practice more and understand better because you cannot get [things] done at home.*

## Conclusion

Overall, participants emphasized the importance of learning English in order to live more easefully in the United States and to support their children. They are most interested in immediately applicable skills and knowledge. They hope that the program will provide skilled and caring teachers and a supportive structure that will enable them to progress despite having limited time due to their parental responsibilities.

## Parent Engagement in Children's Education and Wellbeing

To understand participants' values, practices, and priorities regarding their children's academic development and wellbeing, we asked four questions:

- 1) **what motivates them to support their children's education;**
- 2) **how they support their children's education and wellbeing;**
- 3) **how their own parents supported their education when they were children;**
- 4) **what they would like from the program**



### Why is supporting your children's education important to you?

Participants described a variety of reasons for supporting their children's education. One said that she knows she will rely on her children when she is older. She therefore needs them to be knowledgeable so that they will be able to help her and other older people. Another participant appreciated that her children are already sharing what they learn to empower others.

Participants also connected education to their children's overall wellbeing and satisfaction in life, saying that they want their children to be "well-rounded" and be able to live their own lives according to their individual goals.

*You want your children to be a well-rounded person. Does well in school. [I] want them to be a person who knows how to do things. They do well in school and are able to help you because you are old, and you do not know a lot. [I] want my children to be knowledgeable so that they can teach old people. Or, teach others who do not have the same knowledge [or skills].*

*For me, I hope that my children will have a life goal. [I hope] in the future they have a goal that they can work towards and they know how to start [living] their own life. [I hope] they know what it is like when you help others.*

## **How do you support your children's education and wellbeing?**

Participants also used different strategies for supporting their children's education. One participant said that she shows her children that she supports their education by looking at their homework and making sure to complete the paperwork that the school sends home. Another participant noted that being able to help others was a strong motivator for her children to prioritize their education, and she supports them by encouraging them to participate in enrichment programs like volunteering to help other students who might be struggling.

Some participants also described the ways that they support their children's emotional wellbeing. They discussed being positive role models, making sure the home is peaceful, supporting their children's interests, and providing praise and encouragement.

One participant made an explicit connection between her children's overall security and wellbeing and their motivation to do well in school. She described teaching her children to take school seriously while also making sure that her children know she is providing for their other needs.

Participants also noted that school itself can play an important role in their children's wellbeing, especially when going through difficult times at home. Consequently, listening to what their children want and enabling them to spend more time at school, such as in after school programs, is one way parents can support their wellbeing.

---

*[First, I help] them be able to read and the second is to know how to speak and have knowledge. So, if you take them somewhere, or if they go somewhere themselves, they can do things themselves. You do not have that sense of hardship or worry that your child is not learning well [or doing well in school]. They are not able to help themselves, so that makes you stressed and worried about them.*

---

*So, your role is to support them and praise them as well as tell them to have motivation to do well in school. Help them do homework. And when they come [home], you have to check what they have to do. Then you tell them to do their homework.*

---

*You have to control them so that they do not have a lot of worry to think about. You have to talk with them too. You do not want to be a role model who argues all the time... So, you have to speak nicely to them and support your children so that they understand [you], and [they know that] they are okay.*

## How does the education you received as a child prepare you to support your children?

All the participants felt that they had received inadequate education as children, though for different reasons. One said that women of her generation were not generally allowed to study, so she learned “chores and work of adults.” Another said that she attended school until her parents were unable to afford her to continue studying. She also received resistance from elders because she was unable to quickly find a good job despite having studied.

Despite these challenges, her parents encouraged her to go to school when she was young so that she could at least read and write and “help herself.” Another participant grew up in a family with more financial resources and was able to attend school until she married, after which she no longer had time for her studies.

All participants therefore felt that their own childhood experiences with education didn’t adequately prepare them to help their own children succeed in school here.

---

*...The elders would say, “You learned and did not become or do something, so just come back to help us farm.” ... My parents were poor, and they could not support [or afford] me to go [to school]. There was not anyone to help my parents farm too, so [I] had to go help them. When [I] was little, they did say, “Go to school to learn so that you will have knowledge. Even though you may not end up having a nice job to do something, you know how to read and write the language. That is good enough for you to help yourself.”*

---

*[When I] was little, we did not have school. In our country, we did the chores and work of adults. There was no formal education anywhere, so they (parents) would [teach] us [the way of life in terms of] cooking and farming. There were some [schools], but they did not really let women go to [school] to learn.*

## How can the Family Literacy program help you to best support your children?

Participants requested to learn more English and more about child development in order to better support their children. As described above, they felt that they would be better able to help their children in school if their English were better. They also noted that they didn’t have the opportunity to learn about child development and how to best support their children across life stages or during difficult periods. They requested techniques that they could use to know how their children are doing academically and to effectively motivate them when there is resistance.

*For us, we do not have [a lot of ideas] because we do not have an education... But for us, we do not have that [education or] or knowledge. We came here, and we do (teach) the same thing that our mom and dad taught us to our children only.*

*So, I want to have an easy idea that is good and will have someone teach you how to teach your children. How long do you have to be patient so that your children can learn well? This is something that is very important to me. Sometimes you cannot get them to do what you tell them, and you become short tempered. So, I want to have someone teach me the idea... This is how you know how to change yourself to teach your children [better].*

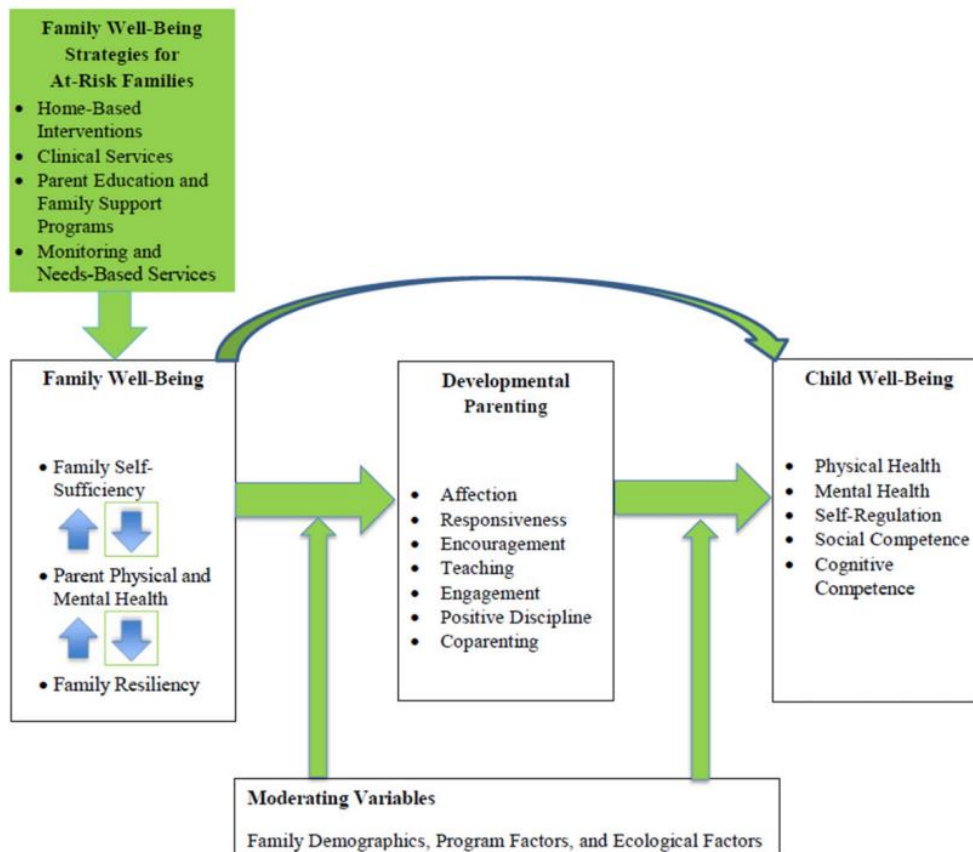
## Conclusion

Participants all greatly valued supporting their children's education and wellbeing. They described various strategies to motivate their children to do well in school and to show their children that they support them. They also looked forward to the opportunity to learn more about child development and to improve their English since none felt that their own educations prepared them to support their children as they would like to.

## FINDINGS: FAMILY WELLBEING LITERATURE REVIEW

We conducted a literature review of family wellbeing research to identify models that uplift the priorities identified through our community needs assessment. From that search, we identified Lisa Newland's 2020<sup>6</sup> model that demonstrates the interconnections between and aims to improve family wellbeing, developmental parenting, and child wellbeing. The model is based on a thorough literature review and builds upon understandings that ecological systems affect family and child wellness and health. It uses a strengths-based approach to address family wellbeing (parental wellbeing, family self-sufficiency, and family resiliency), developmental parenting (affection, responsiveness, encouragement, teaching, engagement, positive discipline, and co-parenting), and child wellbeing (physical and mental health, self-regulation, social and cognitive competence).

Figure 1: Newland Model of Family Wellbeing



<sup>6</sup> [Lisa Newland, 2020: Family well-being, parenting, and child well-being: Pathways to healthy adjustment](#)



While designing our program, we took direction from Newland’s model to ensure that each session would strengthen one or more of the indicators of family wellbeing, developmental parenting, or child wellbeing. First, we identified overlaps between the indicators in Newland’s model and the priorities identified by our participants and committee members. Based on participant and committee member input, most sessions target developmental parenting indicators, though the parent classes also aimed to bolster family self-sufficiency, parent mental health, and family resiliency. See Table 1 below for a detailed breakdown of how we integrated Newland’s model into program target outcomes.

## PROGRAM DESIGN

The overarching program goals are summarized in Table 1. Program goals are organized into columns by the four curriculum themes: HMoob identity and culture, HMoob language, English language, and Child Development and Family Wellbeing. Each row describes the priorities for each theme identified by the Planning Committee, our Needs Assessment participants, or the literature review. Each lesson plan aimed to support one or more of the outcomes described in the table.

**TABLE 1: Program Target Outcomes and Content**

Desired Outcomes	English Language	Child Development and Family Wellbeing	HMoob Language	HMoob Identity and Culture
<b>Objective Statement:</b>	<b>Parents will develop the English language skills to navigate life in the U.S., access resources and opportunities to thrive, and support their children’s academic success.</b>	<b>By increasing parents’ child development knowledge and giving parents and children opportunities to explore and practice key concepts, parents and children will build better communication and deeper trust, connection, and mutual understanding.</b>	<b>Children will develop HMoob vocabulary and sentence structures that will enable them to communicate with parents and other relations, especially elders. A secondary goal is that children will develop HMoob written skills to better interpret for their parents and to facilitate language preservation.</b>	<b>Children will feel proud to be HMoob, have a deeper and more complex sense of what it means to be HMoob, and be more confident to live their HMoob identities in all spaces of their lives.</b>
<b>From Planning Committee</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-sufficiency and autonomy</li> <li>• Improved communication</li> <li>• Open doors to continuing education</li> <li>• Help children with homework</li> <li>• Interact with children’s teachers and schools</li> <li>• Access community resources and opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social and emotional learning</li> <li>• Intergenerational mental health strengthening</li> <li>• Intergenerational connection and understanding</li> <li>• Parental involvement in children’s education</li> <li>• Trauma resiliency (though take care in addressing this. See NA Report)</li> <li>• Growth mindset</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage/ normalize speaking HMoob with family and peers</li> <li>• Expand availability of HMoob books</li> <li>• Build confidence to speak HMoob even if imperfectly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stories</li> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Proverbs</li> <li>• History</li> <li>• Arts</li> <li>• Counter ethnicity-based discrimination and bullying</li> <li>• Deeper sense of belonging without needing to code switch</li> </ul>

From Program Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding kids' homework</li> <li>• Helping with kids' homework</li> <li>• Computers</li> <li>• Fill out forms</li> <li>• Get better jobs</li> <li>• Resources for surviving and thriving in U.S.</li> <li>• General reading and writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to encourage and motivate their children in school</li> <li>• How to set expectations, boundaries, and discipline effectively and without yelling</li> <li>• How to protect kids from stress and worry</li> <li>• Positive communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spoken HMoob for everyday conversations</li> <li>• Spoken HMoob for transmission of histories, stories, and cultural practices</li> <li>• Spoken and written HMoob so children can interpret for parents</li> <li>• Vocabulary and sentence structure development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stories</li> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Food</li> <li>• History</li> <li>• “Know what it means to be HMoob, not just that they’re ‘different’ from the mainstream”</li> <li>• How to cope with/confront ethnicity-based bullying or embarrassment</li> </ul>
From Literature Review  <b>(bolded items are also priorities identified by the Planning Committee, program participants, or HMoob staff members)</b>	Family Well-Being:  Parent Physical Health  Family Self-Sufficiency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial literacy</li> <li>• Workforce readiness and career literacy</li> <li>• <b>Critical institutional literacy (i.e. health insurance)</b></li> </ul> Family Resiliency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mental health</b></li> <li>• <b>Coping skills</b></li> <li>• Mindfulness</li> <li>• Decision-Making</li> <li>• Self-Awareness</li> <li>• <b>Parenting Styles</b></li> <li>• Prevention of high-risk behaviors</li> <li>• <b>Healthy relationships</b></li> <li>• Nutrition</li> </ul>	Developmental Parenting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Affection</b></li> <li>• <b>Responsiveness</b></li> <li>• <b>Encouragement</b></li> <li>• <b>Teaching</b></li> <li>• <b>Engagement</b></li> <li>• Positive Discipline (maybe – some mentions)</li> <li>• Coparenting (maybe – some mentions)</li> </ul> Child Well-Being <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical Health</li> <li>• <b>Mental Health</b></li> <li>• Self-Regulation</li> <li>• <b>Social Competence</b></li> <li>• Cognitive Competence</li> </ul>	HMoob RPA Consonant Families <a href="https://docs.google.com/document/d/14nt_xBOaqBBOW9PEiD6XIsOsKM-pbLBBYSB_vLpikjQ/edit">https://docs.google.com/document/d/14nt_xBOaqBBOW9PEiD6XIsOsKM-pbLBBYSB_vLpikjQ/edit</a>	NA - We did not do a literature review of HMoob identity strengthening. Program participants, Committee Members, and staff identified the priority topics for this theme.

## Logistics

During the needs assessment, participants provided guidance on the scheduling and logistics. Based on their feedback and organizational capacity, classes began on March 20, 2023 and ended on June 7, 2023. They were held at Highlands Elementary School on Monday and Wednesday evenings from 5:00pm-6:30pm. Three families who participated in the needs assessment were unable to participate in the classes because their children were too young or because of conflicting family responsibilities. Eleven families initially expressed interest in the program. Due to loss of communication or time conflicts, the program began with 5 total families. 3 families withdrew from the program before finishing for personal or logistical difficulties, leaving two families who finished the whole program. We hired one instructor for each group and also had a volunteer who helped with the children’s activities as needed.

## Curriculum

We divided the curriculum into four thematic units. The first 2 weeks of class focused on food because we felt it would be a meaningful and accessible entry point into the program and a less sensitive topic through which students and instructors could build comfort and trust. The next 3 weeks focused on parent engagement in children’s education. Weeks 6 through 8 focused on social and emotional learning. The last 3 weeks focused on mental health. The curriculum employed a variety of reading, writing, speaking, listening, technology-based, game-based, and project-based activities. Parents and children spent the first hour in adjacent classrooms and the last thirty minutes together doing projects or playing games that built on the content they learned in their cohorts. Below is an example of the lesson plan for one of the weeks focused on Social and Emotional Learning.

**TABLE 2: Unit 3: Social and Emotional Learning Day 3**

**Parents Objective:** Parents will understand what empathy is and be able to identify their children's social skills. Parents will be able to use and model social skills and empathy with their children

**Children Objective:** Children will know what different emotions are called in HMoob and how to express them.

	Parent Class	Child Class	Parent and Child Together Time	Homework:
<b>Activities:</b>	<p><b>Warmup: Discussion questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are some things that make you feel happy, sad, or mad?</li> <li>- What are some things that make your children feel happy sad or mad?</li> <li>- Write a situation you felt ....</li> </ul> <p><b>Matching Vocab- activity social awareness cues and social styles.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empathy Defined</li> </ul> <p><b>Engen Lesson: Signs of Emotionally Healthy Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vocab</li> <li>- Activity</li> </ul> <p><b>Past participles- with -en Grammar review- with past participles words</b></p> <p><b>Discussion- How do you express your thoughts? What can you do to express your thoughts and feelings to yourself and others like your family?</b></p>	<p><b>Warmup: Naming emotions in English and HMoob if you know.</b></p> <p><b>Emotions and Feelings- vocabulary (6 in workbook)</b></p> <p><b>Expressions of feelings in sentences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adverbs to describe feelings (a lot or a little)</li> </ul> <p><b>Nearpod- matching emotions activity</b></p> <p><b>Teaching alphabets: reviewing all single consonants. Reviewing single vowels</b></p> <p><b>Consonants + Vowels + Tone = Word</b></p>	<p><b>I spy feelings challenge.</b></p> <p><b>My “I Can Get along” mini book</b></p>	<p><b>Parents: Engen Lessons-Giving students a place to calm down Caring for each other</b></p> <p><b>Children: Complete pages 367-370 and practice two emotions to share with class next time.</b></p>
<b>English Language</b>	<p>Writing for activity worksheets</p> <p>Review past participles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fill in the blank</li> <li>- Read sentences out loud</li> </ul>		<p>Discussion on I can get along mini book with parents</p>	

	Critical, situational, and conversational building			
Child Development and Family Wellbeing	<p>Understand empathy and identify children's type of social skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learn how to use and model social skills and empathy with their children</li> </ul> <p>Strategies on how to teach yourself and your child how to regulate their emotions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create opportunities to express emotions (drawing, reading book on emotions, nature)</li> </ul>	<p>Importance of emotions and feelings and being self-aware.</p> <p>Expressing emotions in healthy ways to others</p> <p>Social communication</p>	<p>Reading together</p> <p>Applying what empathy means and how it looks like in school or to other people.</p> <p>Identifying different types of emotions and social interactions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Having social skills to be able to communicate and interact with others.</li> <li>- Being socially aware of differences and similarities</li> <li>- Being respectful and having polite manners</li> </ul>	
HMoob Language		<p>Emotions and Expressions in HMoob.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expanding on the using the term <i>yog</i> when we are expressing our feelings.</li> <li>- speaking emotions during Nearpod game</li> </ul> <p>Explaining the significance of hearing the sound of a word even though it might not be a real word used. What's important is being able to dictate the consonant, vowel, and tone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- nag (rain) vs pag (not a word)</li> <li>- However, you can hear that the sound of the word rhymes because they have the same vowel and tone even though one is a word used</li> </ul>	<p>Practice saying emotions in HMoob</p>	

		and the other is not.		
HMoob Identity and Culture		Defining emotion and the multiple words used to explain it.		

## OUTCOMES

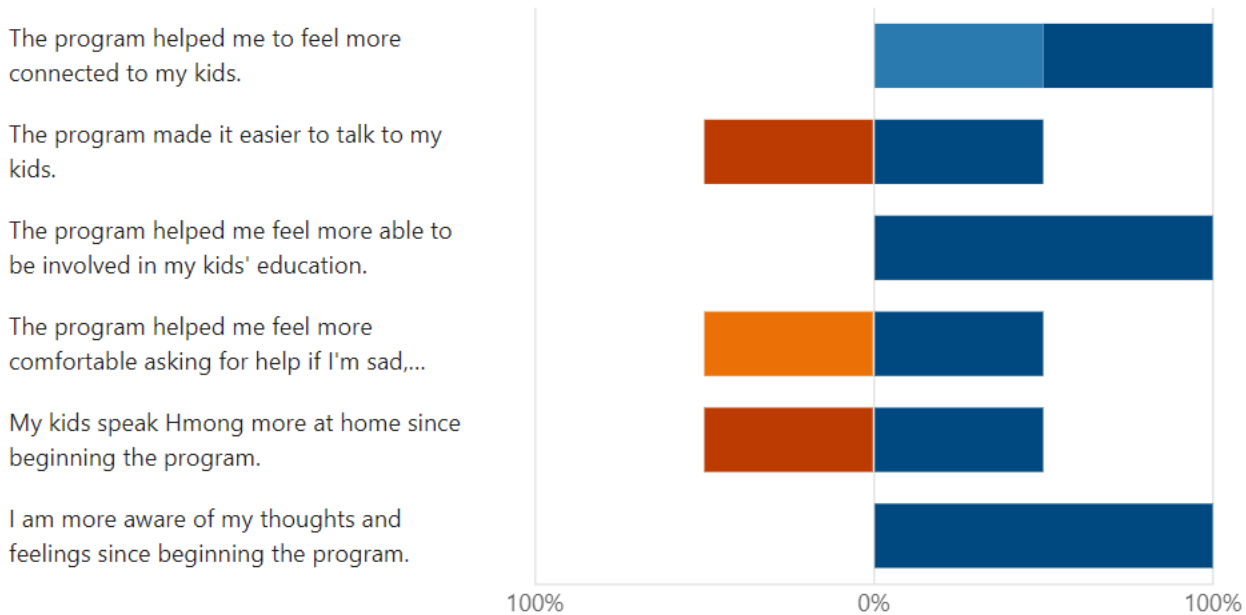
Due to capacity limitations, evaluation of the pilot program is based on staff observations and feedback from teachers, parents, and children. We did not pre- and post-test English or HMoob language skills, though we hope to for the next session. Some of the aspects of the program that worked well or that participants appreciated were using HMoob games as an entry point for children and parents to connect, using game based HMoob language lessons, showing real HMoob role models, and doing real-life problem-solving as the basis for English language activities.

Both parents felt that the program helped them to feel more connected to their children, to be more able to be involved in their children’s education, and to be more aware of their own thoughts and feelings. One participant agreed and one was either neutral or disagreed that the program made it easier to talk to their children, feel more comfortable asking for help with emotional or wellbeing concerns, and that their children spoke more HMoob at home since beginning the program. (See the chart below). In responding to open-ended program exit questions, parents also stated that they valued the following program outcomes:

- **Better ability to express their thoughts and feelings**
- **Better general understanding of U.S. school practices and how to engage in their children’s education**
- **Increased knowledge of HMoob family resources in our community – i.e. warmline, therapy, etc.**
- **More connection with children through structured time together as a family**
- **More consistent monitoring of children’s homework completion**
- **Easier time talking to her children (one participant)**

## Parents' Perceptions of Family and Child Wellbeing Outcomes

■ Disagree  
 ■ Neutral  
 ■ Somewhat Agree  
 ■ Strongly Agree



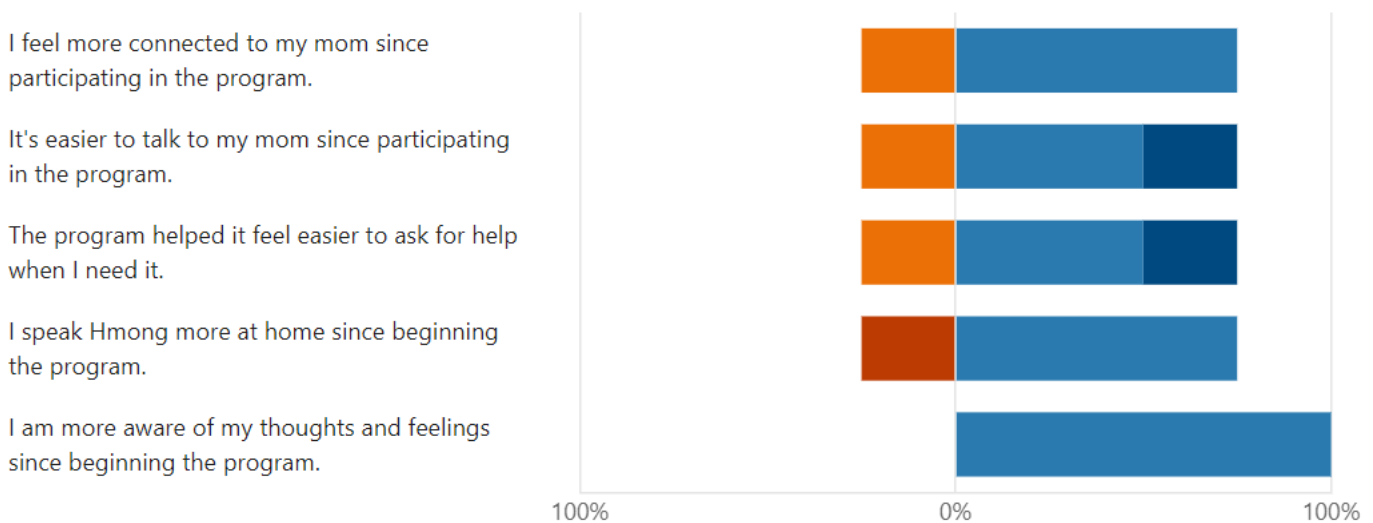
Parents expressed that they appreciated learning topics different from what they learn in standard English language classes, such as HMoob- and family wellbeing-specific subjects. They both stated that they felt a little more comfortable reading, writing, and understanding English after participating in the program. One participant felt a little more comfortable and the other felt a lot more comfortable speaking English. One of the participant is also receiving individual English language tutoring while she were participating in the Family Literacy program.

Children had various reasons for participating in the program, including being able to understand others when they speak HMoob to them, being able to use HMoob with their parents, and simply because HMoob is their language and culture. All the children noted improvements in their confidence with HMoob. All felt a little or a lot more confident speaking, understanding, and reading HMoob after participating in the program. 50% of the children felt a little or a lot more confident writing, and 50% did not feel more confident writing in HMoob. 75% of children said they somewhat or strongly agreed that they speak more HMoob at home since beginning the program, and one child disagreed. Of note, none of their parents remarked an increase in the frequency of their children's HMoob use at home.

All the children also felt improvements in their expression of emotions and relationships with their moms. They all expressed that, before the program, they knew that they are different from other ethnic groups but the program helped them to have a better understanding of what it means to be HMoob. All of the children somewhat agreed that they are more aware of their thoughts and feelings since participating in the program. 75% of children somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that they feel more connected to their moms, it is easier to talk to their moms, and easier to ask for help, and 25% felt neutral.

## Children's Perceptions of Program Outcomes

■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Somewhat Agree ■ Strongly Agree



### Challenges and Opportunities:

Challenges included recruiting families and teachers, inadequate teacher training, using an English language curriculum that was too difficult for the students, family life interruptions that negatively affected attendance or enrollment, and limited engagement with homework assignments or practice using HMoob lesson content at home. Parents would have liked more real-life, situation-based activities for the English class, such as filling out paperwork and paying bills. They also requested activities to make it easier to encourage their children to use HMoob at home and to talk with their children. Children wanted more opportunities to speak in class, more fun and active activities, activities to help them feel more capable of using the HMoob that they learn in class independently, more HMoob history, more opportunities to practice in class, and more help learning tones.

## NEXT STEPS

After assessing the challenges, feedback, and outcomes from the first pilot, we are currently planning adaptations for the next session. Most significantly, we are re-assessing the dual English and HMoob language model. Despite receiving substantial expressions of interest and encouragement from many community members, recruitment was a significant challenge. Two frequent questions were whether children of parents who are already proficient in English could participate and whether we were going to teach HMoob literacy to adults who are proficient HMoob speakers. Therefore, over the summer of 2023, we conducted listening sessions and surveys with community members to assess the interest and feasibility of offering a family literacy program focused on family wellbeing and HMoob literacy (without the English language component). These efforts confirmed that HMoob language and identity are the strongest priorities for both children and adults. We will implement a second iteration of the program in January 2024.

If you are interested in learning more about these efforts, have priorities or ideas for the program, or would like to participate as a student, instructor, curriculum designer, volunteer, or researcher, we would love to hear from you! **Please contact Rita Moua via email at [rita@foxvalleylit.org](mailto:rita@foxvalleylit.org) or by phone at (920) 234-8041.**