



Heritage Voices: Programs



HindiUSA

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[Visit the HindiUSA Web site](http://HindiUSA.org)

About the Director



Devendra Singh is the director, teacher, and coordinator of the 28 schools that are part of HindiUSA. Mr. Singh started the institution approximately 10 years ago because his children were born in the United States and he wanted them to learn Hindi. Having lived in India until he was a teenager, Mr. Singh has always spoken Hindi, in addition to English. Hindi connects him to his roots and his friends. He explains, "We share jokes and understand them much more clearly in Hindi. Sometimes, when you translate, the essence can get lost. You feel more comfortable and it just brings out stories. I am able to maintain my roots and culture by speaking in Hindi with my friends. The language maintains friendships much better."

The language also allows him to relate to his American-born children on a heart-to-heart level. The fact that his children know Hindi just as he and his wife do has allowed them to be a closer family unit. He also notes that it is important for his children to speak Hindi because, "Hindi is a growing language, the 2nd largest spoken language in the world with 700 to 800 million Indians speaking Hindi in India." Outside the Indian subcontinent there are many Hindi heritage speakers, including "two million Indians in the United States." Of these, he explains, "more than half speak or understand Hindi."

Mr. Singh and his wife, both Hindi speakers, started the program because they “wanted people to have the opportunity to learn.” Mr. Singh says, “I was born in India, and I wanted to bring Americans and Indians together through cultural exchange and language learning.” It is a goal that he is achieving. The program that began with two students has expanded to become an institution with schools across the United States and more than 2,000 students.

“A heart language,” Mr. Singh explains, “is one that allows communities of people to communicate on a deeper level so that strong connections can be made. “If I know your language, then we can connect more easily. Even though we can both express our views very clearly and forcefully in English, English cannot become ‘a heart language’ [to me].” Mr. Singh believes that speaking Hindi brings Indians closer to their culture because it allows children and youth to communicate with their grandparents and family in India:

“Since they know Hindi they are on better footing. They can express their ideas and enjoy interacting with people. If they do not know Hindi they will not enjoy visiting India as much. In my opinion knowing the language connects you better with your people, your culture, and your roots.”

Insight from a Program Coordinator: Manak Kabra



Manak Kabra, the program coordinator of the largest HindiUSA school, in New Jersey, agrees with director Devendra Singh that the language is an important connection to maintain one’s heritage.

“My insight is that we need to keep our national Hindi language in our heart and spread between people and communities. We should not forget our origins. Wherever we are, we should respect our culture and language and pass it to the next generation.”

The program Mr. Kabra coordinates is in Edison, New Jersey, and the classes are taught at James Madison Intermediate School, located on Dover Avenue, Edison, New Jersey. He explains that the program is crucial because it motivates heritage students to know their culture and promotes family values. One way it motivates students is by sending some of them to India so that they get to know more about their historical roots, meet people from different walks of life, and experience the culture. In the academic year 2008-2009, Mr. Kabra explains that they “sent 12 students to India with 2 teachers and participants visited historical places, met high authorities in India, and visited cultural sites. Once students came back they wrote in Hindi about their experiences visiting India for 12 days. Students shared their experiences going to India with the program, and they found this visit completely different than visiting with their parents.”

Participating students visited many places in India. After returning their thinking about India changed significantly. Mr. Kabra points out that one of the students noticed that India is more beautiful than what he hears on the news and than what many people think of when they think of India. The student notes,

“When I saw City palace [in Rajasthan], I was surprised to see this very old Palace of Maharana Udeay Sing so clean and beautiful.”

This is one of the impressions from students in the Karmbhoomi magazine published by HindiUSA. More than 360 students attend HindiUSA Edison. Through the program they are able to visit India, they can fulfill a high school and college requirement, and they receive personal attention. There is a huge demand from parents and students who want to learn Hindi. Mr. Kabra explains that due to limited capacity of the school, “either we have to keep students on the waiting list or give them the option to attend other Hindi language programs in the area conducted by HindiUSA.” Nonetheless, every year more than 360 students benefit from the program.

About the Program

HindiUSA, also known as Learn Hindi, is arguably one of the finest Hindi institutions in the United States. Accountability measures and other quality controls are integral components, cultural and language opportunities are ensured and expanded, all teachers become skilled through professional development, and students are enthusiastic about the program.

HindiUSA has 28 schools, primarily in New Jersey but also in Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New York, Florida, and Delaware. It is steadily moving into other geographical areas as well. The mission of HindiUSA is twofold: 1) to help students become successful global citizens through helping them connect with their language and culture and 2) to bring Hindi as an elective language to U.S. schools so that students can communicate with family members in America and when they visit India. Currently this is done through an effort that consists of 200 teachers, over 2,000 motivated students, and over 60 volunteers.



HindiUSA teachers – annual meeting

The program is committed to producing qualified teachers and quality results through a grassroots effort. Mr. Kabra explains that it is important for HindiUSA to provide quality Hindi language training and familiarity with Indian culture to students. Mr. Singh stresses that quality education is a result of high standards, accountability, and teacher quality, which is why all HindiUSA teachers get certified, receive supplementary training each year, and have a ratio of 2 teachers for every 20 students. "A lot of time and energy is spent so that there is accountability and students benefit from these efforts and get a good education," says Mr. Singh. HindiUSA does this through the development of its own curricula for all levels and of its own books and other pedagogic materials for students. "We hold regular activities in a very disciplined and systematic manner and emphasize integrating cultural values through the learning of Hindi."

Classes remain small so that students get the attention they deserve and are offered each Friday for 90 minutes in 9 different levels, from basic to advanced adult classes. As Mr. Singh explains, "Each [of the 28] schools follows the same syllabus, uses the same books and, in May, all schools participate in the same standardized exams for students." Since all schools follow the same established curriculum, if a student moves from one state to another where there is a HindiUSA school, they can enroll and continue their Hindi classes at their new school without interruption. The school is not focused on deriving profits from HindiUSA and only charges a one-time fee for books and school rent, examination costs, custodian, and other expenses. Rather, the focus is on producing quality results.



HindiUSA students at the Poem competition - 2009

Quality results are evident through the high passing rate of students who take the standardized exam, Hindi Mahotsav (festival), inspections carried out at the school, and success stories.

In addition to a high exam passing rate and students speaking good Hindi in class, Mr. Kabra and Mr. Singh proudly reveal that students exhibit their talent at the two-day Hindi Mahotsav program in New Jersey. For example, Mr. Singh states,

"The Hindi Mathosav is a stage for people to speak Hindi. If you teach them and allow them to showcase their skills, it brings out the best in them. They are very enthusiastic and excited the last couple of months as they practice and learn poems in Hindi. Students participate in Hindi Jeopardy and essay competitions, with the more than 2,000 people that attend Hindi Mahotsav seeing for themselves that other students are achieving results."



Hindi heritage student reciting poem at the Mahotsav festival

To ensure high-quality results at the Mathotsav and throughout the program, HindiUSA has a standardized curriculum that emphasizes integrating cultural values through learning Hindi, and allowing students who go to an approved high school to get high school credit. This makes the program interesting and successful, because the students want to be in a program that reflects who they are while also preparing for the demands of college. There are three school districts in New Jersey -- Edison, Piscadaway, and Franklin Township -which teach Hindi in their high schools with the HindiUSA curricula and allow students to receive academic credit. Mr. Singh and Mr. Kabra are confident that eventually most K-12 schools in the U.S. will offer Hindi as an elective as part of their K-12 curriculum, and that they are doing their part with HindiUSA by providing high schools with certified teachers and the established HindiUSA curriculum.

It is this strength in vision and hard work that, in Mr. Singh's words, "have perfected the program" and allow students to learn and experience the Hindi language and Indian culture. Mr. Singh concludes, "This is a success story, and that is why we have been able to replicate our programs. We have shown by example, and now many parents are accepting that it can be done. It has become very popular." With this confidence and ability to motivate students and parents, HindiUSA will continue to grow.

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The Heritage Voices Program Profile on HindiUSA was written by Jacqueline Lopez for the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages, Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), Washington DC.

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