



Harvard Community Unit School District 50

Located in Harvard, Illinois, Harvard Community Unit School District 50 (CUSD 50) emphasizes three major areas instrumental to its approach to becoming a future-ready system. Active and experiential learning helps “stretch students toward their futures,” and stresses students’ readiness for college, career, and life-long learning. It became a designed Lighthouse System because of this commitment, exemplified in its transformational approach to meeting the needs of English Language Learners. CUSD 50 has developed a dual language immersion program to support its growing English Learner (EL) population. It is also deeply committed to serving all families who value the benefits of being bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural. The program has blossomed into a shared district and community commitment and shared vision.

Transitioning to this dual language model has involved extensive planning, community support, and professional development. From the program’s beginning in 2007 to the present, the district has persisted in its belief in the importance of dual language education for all students. Consequently, CUSD 50’s dual language program meets the needs of ELs, providing student-centered, equitable educational opportunities for them and native English speakers. Within the district, 54 percent of Harvard kindergarten families declare their native language Spanish, with classroom composition reflecting a distribution of one-third monolingual Spanish, one-third bilingual, and one-third monolingual English.

Another key element of Harvard’s approach to transformation includes its articulated vision for a future-driven design that supports all students on their language acquisition journey, including a bridge program from junior to senior high school. Multiple support resources and programs are available to students, including SAT Prep and ESL Summer Extension options. The system also emphasizes equity-focused staffing, ensuring that highly qualified Dual Language teachers are hired and become a part of Harvard’s sustained approach to professional development. The district has participated in the Illinois Visiting International Teacher Cultural Exchange and recruits teachers from Puerto, Paraguay, Argentina, and anticipated hires from Chile and Brazil. According to district leaders: “Not only does our District work to make equity-focused decisions, but we also believe in the power of student experience and global awareness through all our international teachers.”

Personalized learning and cross-institutional partnerships reinforce the district’s instructional programming impact. For example, its dual language programming for ELs provides the necessary support for high levels of academic achievement and language acquisition. At its core, dual language is personalized to meet the needs of the whole learner. This personalization is a key theme in *the District 50 Newcomer Intake Guide*, developed based on faculty input. It provides a framework for building leaders and outlines the timeline and necessary steps to prepare for the arrival of a new student. The guide states: “By implementing academic and social-emotional support for each student based on their unique skills, abilities, preferences, background, and experiences, we provide every tool necessary to succeed in their transition.”

Partnering with local secondary institutions has enhanced the system's ability to provide "Future-Driven Pathways." This collaborative process ensures that staff is prepared to meet the unique needs and challenges faced by English Language learners. The district is especially dedicated to addressing the national bilingual teacher shortage, including using *Bilingual Educator Pathway* funding to absorb the cost of coursework necessary for licensure and endorsement for current and future teachers. This approach accompanies a systemic commitment to creating and sustaining a culture that embraces a future-driven mindset. Harvard strives to emphasize sociocultural competency among staff and students as part of its mission. It actively monitors student progress to reinforce student-centered development using a Whole Learner approach. This process includes AVID and Academic Language Scripts. The system's dual language program has grown to 1,174 students enrolled in Pre-K-8th grade and another 386 students taking language classes at the district's high school, including a systemic goal of 50% of graduates earning the Seal of Biliteracy.