Community Engagement

Harvard CUSD 50



Our district is one of the most unique school districts in the entire state, combining diversity with a multi-generational history and a small town feel with a spirit of innovation.

This special culture creates amazing opportunities for students to experience the world through rich programming that embraces our diverse population.

At Harvard Community Unit School District 50, we believe in educational excellence and lifelong learning for all.

We are preparing a community of learners by cultivating academic, social, and emotional skills to maximize each student's potential.





We invest in professional learning for our teachers and staff and empower them to think outside the box.

This has resulted in innovative programs designed to meet the needs of all our students.



For example, our DUO program gives high school students an opportunity to earn an Associate of Arts degree from McHenry County College while completing their high school education.

Our ETCHED transitional program helps students learn life skills and prepare for independent adult life.

Our HIVE program provides intensive supports for students with disabilities, keeping them here in their home district and helping them progress towards graduation.

And our preschool program prepares students for success in school, while our AVID program prepares students for success in pursuing a four-year college degree.





Harvard truly is rising.

While we know we have more work to do, we are excited to see our students progressing and our schools improving.

We've improved in 9th Grade on Track, a key predictor of high school success, from 58% in 2022 to 82% in 2025.

Our high school graduation rate has increased substantially, now up to 88%.



Source: Illinois School Report Card



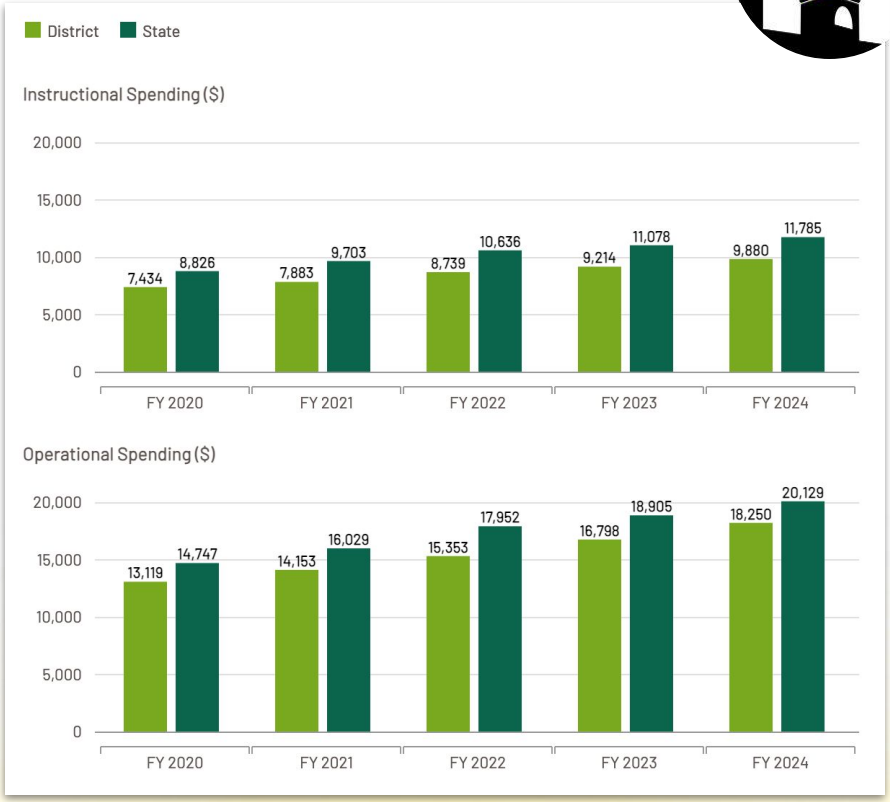
We enroll 24% of students in dual-credit courses, well above the state average.

The state reports at preschool we've achieved "exemplary inclusion for young children" with IEPs at 96%, vastly surpassing the state's 48% target.

And our district was named the best school district to work in for three straight years.

We've achieved these improvements while remaining fiscally responsible.

We maintain balanced budgets and a healthy fund balance, with expenses coming in consistently below budget since 2020. In fact, we spend just $18,000 per student, well below the state average of $20,000 per student.

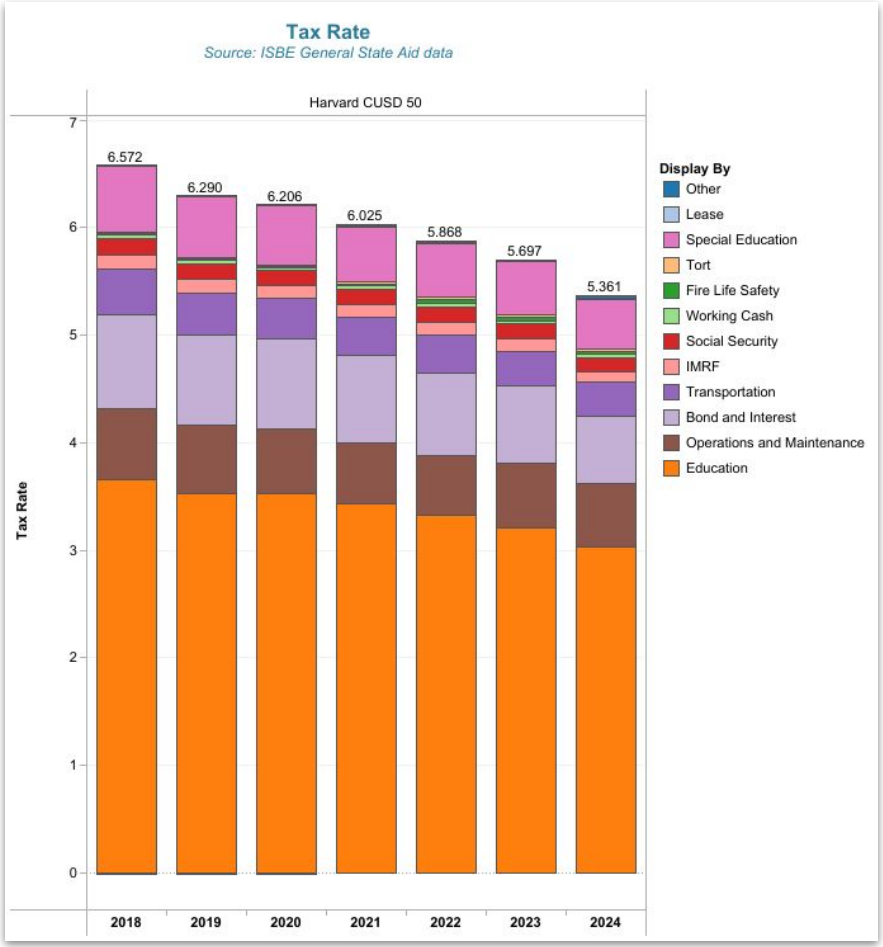


Source: Illinois School Report Card



We focus our available resources in classrooms, supporting our teachers and students as much as possible.

Since 2018, we have made significant progress paying off debt, with multiple bonds due to be paid off in the coming years.

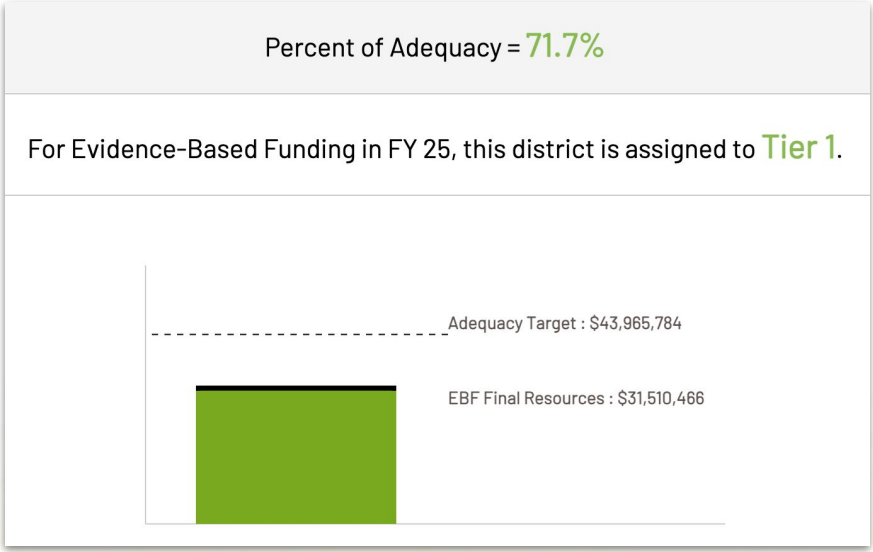


Our wise financial decisions have led to our tax rate dropping from 6.57% in 2018 to 5.36% in 2024.

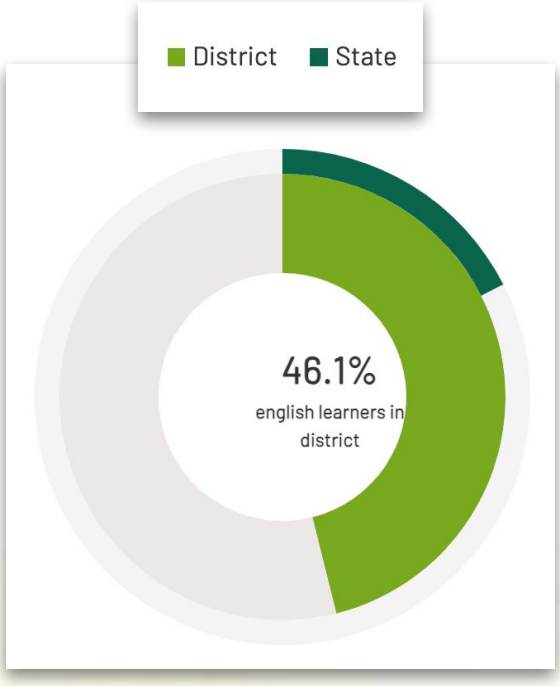
We've even been able to give back to taxpayers, abating over $650,000 to district taxpayers over the past three years.

More improvements are needed, and we are committed to that work—but our limited funding makes this extremely difficult.

Our district is funded at only 72% adequacy, designated by the state as a Tier 1 district, meaning we are among the lowest funded districts in the state. Our community has the lowest Equalized Assessed Value (EAV) per pupil of any district in McHenry County.



Source: Illinois School Report Card



Source: Illinois School Report Card

Making this even more challenging is the rising cost of education, with students needing more support today than ever before.

For instance, 46% of our students are English learners, while the state average is 12.5%. 55% of our students are low income and 15% of our students have IEPs, both higher than the state average.

While our staff and teachers do the best they can with the funding we have available, this limited funding slows our ability to make the improvements we desire, our community demands, and our students deserve.

We know we can make even more improvements to academic achievement, college and career readiness, English Learner (EL) and Students with Disabilities (SWD) performance, and student wellness.

With the hard work our teachers put in and the potential of our students, we know if we give them the learning environments and tools they deserve, their performance will skyrocket.





Even with our limited budget, we have made improvements to our facilities in recent years to support our students.

But there is only so much we can afford to do, especially with our school buildings aging—Harvard High School opened in 1921.





Parts of our buildings still feel like they did in the 1970s. Health and life safety improvements are needed.

The district has placed a high priority on safety and security, yet there is still much more we can do.





We need dedicated spaces for career and technical education (CTE) and career pathways as well as improved science labs.

Demand for our early childhood programs is much higher than we can accommodate with the space we have.

Unlike our surrounding districts and communities, we do not have an auditorium or dedicated performing arts space.

We need improved spaces for student services and special education. Accessibility is a challenge in our older buildings.





Some of our athletic facilities are reaching the end of their useful life.

Our technology infrastructure continues to need improvement, especially in our older buildings.

And the educational experience for students across the district is not balanced, with some students having access to newer facilities while others continue learning in older facilities.

The good news is that our district's fiscal responsibility provides a unique opportunity to make significant progress improving our infrastructure and enhancing learning environments at limited-to-no additional cost to taxpayers.

With bonds being paid off, and with land already purchased near the high school, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to change the trajectory for our district, our students, and our entire community.





<u>This would give our kids the high-quality education they deserve.</u>

It would greatly increase academic achievement and opportunities. It would give our students and community hope, pride, and a sense of belonging. And it would increase property values for district homeowners.

Today is part of our formal community engagement efforts that will be conducted throughout 2026 to develop a plan for the future of our schools that is driven by the community.

Working together, we are developing a community-driven plan that will make our schools better than ever so we can continue to deliver the excellence that everyone has come to expect.

Please Share Your Thoughts

- What are our schools doing well?
- What challenges do our schools face and what could we do better?
- What changes and improvements would you like to see to our schools?
- What resources do our teachers and students need to be successful?
- Are you willing to invest more in our schools to achieve some of the improvements discussed today?
- If so, how much would you be willing to invest monthly?
- If not, which improvements should be prioritized in the current budget and which should not be pursued?



Discussion and Feedback Form

Please scan the QR code to take the survey.



Thank you for being part of this collaboration!

If you have additional feedback, please contact Andrew Goetz at agoetz@cusd50.org.

For more information, visit cusd50.org.