

Woodstock Community Unit School District 200

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Nation's top education leader pushes multilingualism as D 200 Dual Language program continues to thrive

U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona has been making a push for more dual language programs across the country as the Woodstock Community Unit School District 200 program, which began in 2004, continues to grow and thrive.

Cardona recently brought a group of international educators to a dual language school in Arlington, VA and has consistently made multilingualism a priority in his administration.

"Let's build a new era of multilingualism in America – an era where our young people can lead thriving lives and careers with their knowledge of languages from Mandarin to French, Spanish to Japanese," Cardona said in a recent speech at a bilingual educators conference. "And let's foster a new multilingual generation of Americans – strengthened in their identities, supported in their education, prepared to lead in our country and around the world."

District 200's first Dual Language class began with 51 students at Mary Endres Elementary School, which has since been recognized as an International Spanish Academy by the government of Spain. There are now about 2,500 students in Dual Language each year representing 40 percent of all district students.

In May, a total of 89 graduates of Woodstock and Woodstock North High school earned the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy for completing rigorous written and speaking testing to complete their bilingual coursework, which for many began in kindergarten. An additional 39 students received the State Commendation toward biliteracy which is awarded to students who have demonstrated significant progress toward achieving a high level of proficiency in English and another language.

"The success of the program has helped it maintain its popularity. We also consider ourselves fortunate to be in a community where language and cultural diversity are embraced and fostered," said Keely Krueger, District 200 assistant superintendent for early learning and elementary education.

The greater Woodstock community is ideal for a successful dual language program with a population of about 36 percent Hispanic students. Students from families whose primary language is Spanish have been able to keep and flourish in their native language and achieve high competency in English while their native English speaking classmates do the same while learning Spanish.

In addition to language, cultural connections are fostered including middle and high school trips to Spain, Costa Rica and other Spanish-speaking countries. Students from Spain also visit Woodstock schools and stay with host families.

Dual language graduates have gone on to careers as language teachers in Woodstock and around the world. Some are nurses, construction managers or workers in many other fields where their ability to communicate in more than one language is considered a valuable asset.

“We agree with Secretary Cardona on the value of multilingualism and how these skills can have tremendous benefits for our students as they move on to compete in an increasingly global job market,” Krueger said.