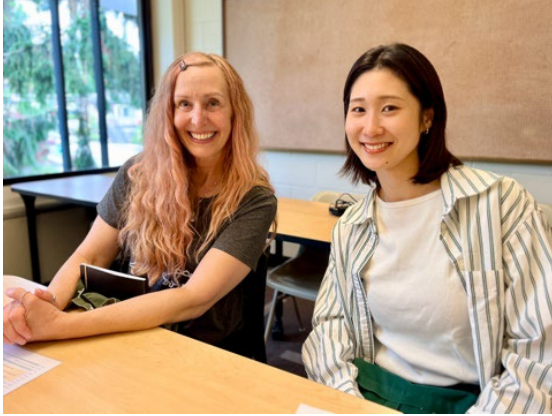


2025/2026 J-LEAP REPORT



By Koharu Shibuya

Harding Senior High School

Saint Paul, MN

Who am I?

こんにちは (Konnichiwa)! My name is Koharu Shibuya from Kanagawa, Japan. I am teaching Japanese as an assistant teacher at Harding Senior High School in Saint Paul,

Minnesota. It has been about three months since I started working at Harding with my amazing lead teacher (LT), Shannen Lach-sensei! Before I came here, I was teaching Japanese at the Japanese language school, working as a facilitator at the community-based Japanese class and supporting children who have plurilingual and pluricultural backgrounds in Japan. Through those experiences, I have been interested in Japanese language education especially for children, which is why I applied for J-LEAP. I also felt that stepping outside my comfort zone would be a good opportunity to grow both as a teacher and a person.

Where Am I Living?

Have you ever been to Minnesota? You might say “No,” but I am sure that many of you have already connected with something from Minnesota! Do you know 3M Post-it notes, Snoopy, Target or SPAM? They all come from Minnesota. To be honest, I didn’t know much about Minnesota before I came here. Although I am living here for only four months, I have realized what a wonderful and charming state it is. I already like Minnesota! Minnesota has so many great things, but this time, I’d like to talk about three: the people, nature, and diversity.

“Minnesota NICE” Everywhere

As soon as I found out where I would be assigned, I looked up information about Minnesota online. And then I learned that people there are known for being really kind, which is called “Minnesota NICE.” That was kind of reassuring, but at the same time, I couldn’t help wondering, “Is that really true?” Now that I have been living here, I’d like to tell my past self, “Yes, people in Minnesota really are nice!” Living in other country is sometimes (or always?) challenging. It takes long time to get used to it. However, I am really enjoying my life here because of the warm support from the people around me.

Harding Senior High School

Harding Senior High School is a public school with about 1,900 students. They offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. Among them, 160 students are taking Japanese. Our students are 56% Asian, 17% Black and African, 17% Hispanic Latino, 4% White and 3% Native American. One of the special things about the school is that it offers many language programs, such as Ojibwe, Lakota, Hmong, Karen, Spanish, French and of course, Japanese. I think it's a wonderful school with a lot of diversity, where you can experience cultures from all over the world. Harding is the only high school that has a Japanese program in the school district. There are three teachers teaching Japanese, including me. We have 10 classes from Japanese 1 to Japanese 5. In addition to these, we have Japanese 1, 2 and 3 online classes for other high school students who are eager to study Japanese. For me, it has been just 3 months to teach Japanese here, but I have many teaching opportunities. And I enjoy doing this. I am truly grateful to Lach-sensei and the other Japanese teacher, Hanna Brundt-sensei, for giving me wonderful opportunity to learn from them. The students who live a 12-hour flight away from Japan, are studying Japanese. There are many different reasons why they choose to learn Japanese. The students are very enthusiastic and always greet me with, "Konnichiwa, Shibuya-sensei! Ogenki desuka?" To get closer to the students, I created a "Kōkan Nōto" for Japanese 3, 4 and 5 students. This is a notebook that students answer questions I write or freely draw, and we pass it around in every class. This notebook helps me feel more "connected" to the students even on days I'm away for J-LEAP training or conferences. I hope they feel the same way too.



Host Family

I live with my host family, which includes my host mother, host father, a 7th-grade host brother, my host grandmother, and our beloved Shiba-Inu dog named Hiro. We've gone camping together and visited the Minnesota State Fair. I also love the times we watch movies

together with popcorn in hand. I'm happy that they like the Japanese food I make, especially my tuna mayo onigiri. I appreciate my host family for always being so kind and welcoming.

My Life in the “Land of 10,000 lakes”

One of Minnesota's nicknames is “Land of 10,000 lakes”. I heard that there are more than 10,000 actually! We have one of the Great Lakes, Lake Superior. Can you imagine how much nature Minnesota has? My hobby is taking a walk with my cameras. I enjoy taking photos of the wide and blue sky in summer and the colored leaves falling in fall. Now the long and very cold winter is around the corner. I am a little bit afraid of Minnesota winters. However, I am looking forward to seeing the Christmas decorations reflecting on the snow with a cup of cocoa! Also, Minnesota has the “Twin Cities,” Minneapolis and St. Paul. I like both cities because they have completely different atmospheres. I love going to St. Paul to see beautiful historical architecture and walk along the Mississippi river. And I love going to concerts and thrift shopping in Minneapolis.



I am honored to be a part of J-LEAP and very thankful for all the support I've received so far. At the end of this report, I would like to say “Arigatō gozaimasu” to Lach-sensei, my host family, the Japan Foundation, the Laurasian Institution, and everyone who has supported and cared for me!