

# American Sign Language in Illinois K-8 Classrooms

## Importance and Benefits of ASL in the Early Ages

American Sign Language (ASL) is used across Illinois by deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing people. ASL is taught in some high schools as a World Language course but can benefit students of all ages. When introduced in early childhood, ASL allows preschoolers to express themselves before acquiring concise vocabulary. There are positive connections to pre-literacy and vocabulary-building skills as well.

Illinois recognizes learning multiple languages as a valued skill. "Multilingualism is a powerful asset — one that prepares graduates to lead, collaborate, and problem-solve in an increasingly interconnected world. [Its] continued expansion shows that more students than ever are seizing the opportunities that multilingualism creates," said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tony Sanders.

The Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy promotes the acquisition of multiple languages. In 2025, ASL was the fourth-most awarded language other than Spanish in Illinois. Illinois continues to recognize the importance of ASL by encouraging expanded opportunities for students to learn the language in school districts across the state. School districts can support ASL learning by collecting teaching resources for ASL programs. By highlighting the importance and benefits of learning ASL at an early age, Illinois can continue supporting communication, in multiple languages, and its importance as a 21st century skill.

## Implementing and Administering ASL in K-8 Curriculum

Within the context of local control, districts have discretion with implementation and administration of American Sign Language in their K-8 programs. Instruction should align with Illinois' World Language Learning Standards.

### World Language Learning Standards

ASL instruction in K-8 should align with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) standards, which Illinois has adopted as the state's World Language learning standards.

Instruction in ASL should focus on the Five C's:

- Communication – Students should learn to communicate effectively in ASL, both interpersonally and through interpretive and presentational communication.

- Cultures – Students should learn to interact with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) community with cultural competence and understanding.
- Connections – Students should make connections with other disciplines while using the language and evaluate information and diverse perspectives available through ASL and DHH culture.
- Comparisons – Students should use ASL to investigate, explain, and reflect on their own culture and on DHH culture and ASL in comparison to their own language.
- Communities – Students should use the language inside and outside of the classroom to interact with their community.

For more information, districts are encouraged to review the [World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages](#) document, which provides a short summary of the standards. For more in-depth information, districts should review the [ACTFL 2024 Proficiency Guidelines](#). Please note, a login must be created with ACTFL. There is no fee or membership required to create a login.

## Teacher Credentials

As of the writing of this document, Illinois does not have an ASL World Language teaching endorsement. Therefore, districts are able to determine the qualifications necessary for a teacher (who is licensed to teach in the appropriate grade band) to provide ASL World Language instruction. Districts should reach out to their Regional Offices of Education with questions regarding teacher qualifications.