



# ISBE's Visiting International Teacher (VIT) Program

Bilingual Directors Meeting  
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# Program origin

The BridgeUSA Program is administered at the federal level by the U.S. Department of State (DOS) to promote international cultural and educational exchange. ISBE is designated by DOS as a program sponsor for the exchange visitor category of teacher.

Program participants are “exchange visitors,” and enter the U.S. on the J-1 visa, which provides employment authorization for activities strictly related to their program category. The program is primarily focused on intercultural exchange and is temporary in nature with a maximum duration of five years. Teachers must demonstrate an intent to return to their home country at the end of the program.

ISBE has been a designated program sponsor since 1999. We partner with Illinois school districts and international educational organizations to facilitate the recruitment and placement of highly qualified teachers in public schools across the state at grade levels PK–12.

# VIT program numbers



- ISBE has sponsored 1,014 VITs since 2007.
- 173 VITs are returning to teach in Illinois this year.
- 123 new VITs placed in 30 host districts to begin their programs in SY 2024-25.
- 57 host school districts/charters currently have signed agreements with ISBE to participate in the program.
- VITs and host school districts agree to an employment contract on an annual basis.
  - The maximum program duration for J-1 teachers is 5 years.

# VIT host school districts and charters

Beach Park CCSD 3\*  
Beardstown SD 15  
Bellwood SD 88  
Belvidere CUSD 100\*  
Berwyn North SD 98  
Big Hollow D38  
Bloomington D87\*  
Carpentersville CUSD 300\*  
Cary SD 26\*  
Champaign Unit 4 SD\*  
Cicero SD 99\*  
Crystal Lake CCSD 47\*  
DeKalb D428  
Delavan CUSD 703  
Dolton SD 149  
East Aurora USD 131\*  
East Maine SD 63  
East Moline SD 37  
Elgin SD U-46 \*  
Elk Grove Village CCSD 59\*  
Elmhurst CUSD 205\*

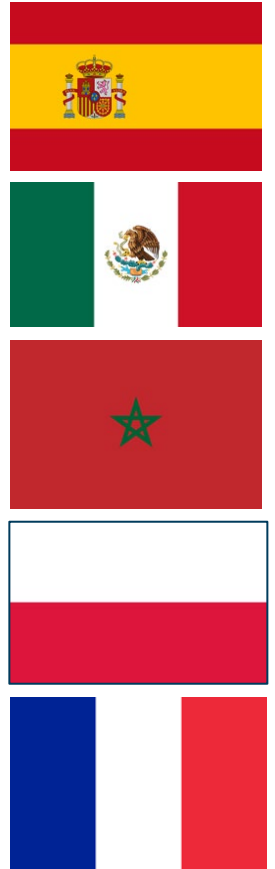
Freeport SD 145  
Galesburg CUSD 205  
Grayslake CCSD 46\*  
Great Lakes Academy Charter\*  
Harvard CUSD 50\*  
Horizon Science Academy Charter  
Kankakee SD 111\*  
Learn Charter Schools  
Mahomet-Seymour CUSD 3\*  
Moline-Coal Valley SD 40  
Monmouth-Roseville CUSD 238  
New Holland Middletown D88  
Norridge SD 80  
North Chicago SD 187\*  
Oregon CUSD 220  
Palatine CCSD 15\*  
Posen-Robbins ESD 143.5\*  
Putnam County CUSD 535  
Rantoul City Schools 137\*  
Rhodes SD 84.5  
Rochelle CCSD 231\*

Rockford SD 205\*  
Round Lake CUSD 116\*  
Schaumburg CCSD 54  
Summit SD 104\*  
United CUSD 304  
Urbana SD 116\*  
Vienna HSD 13-3  
Wauconda D118  
Waukegan CUSD 60\*  
West-Harvey Dixmoor SD 147  
Woodland CCSD 50\*  
Woodstock CUSD 200  
Yorkville CUSD 115\*  
Zion-Benton Township HSD 126\*  
Zion ESD 6

*\*Districts with new VITs in 2024*

# International partners

- **Spain:** Spanish Ministry of Education
  - Carlos Berrozpe, Academic Advisor, Education Office - Embassy of Spain
- **Mexico:** Medina-Ramos Global Education Group
  - Margarita Ramos, Executive Director
- **Morocco:** Teachers of English Association of Morocco (TEAM)
  - Ahmed El Farmaki, Ourahhal Larbi and Moulay Youssef Elomari, TEAM Directors
- **Poland:** Polish Ministry of Education
  - Barbara Talik, Deputy Director for Professional Promotion of Teachers, Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad
- **France:** Academic Region of Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes
  - Nathalie Laine, International Affairs Officer



# ISBE's role as program sponsor

## Visa Matters

- Issue Form DS-2019 and maintain exchange visitor records in federal "SEVIS" database
- Advise VITs and host school districts on J-1 visa regulations

## Licensure

- Ensure VIT applicants meet all program requirements and will qualify for an Illinois educator license
- ELS-VIT licensure endorsements: Bilingual, World Language, ESL

## Partnerships

- Recruit qualified teachers through established international partner organizations
- Place VITs for interviews with participating host school districts



# Teacher eligibility requirements

- Program requirements are set by DOS and are federal regulation.
- Meet qualifications for teaching in primary or secondary schools in home country of legal residence.
- Working as a teacher at the time of application with at least two years experience teaching full-time or have completed an advanced degree within one year of application and have at least two years of experience within the past eight years.
- Have a degree equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's degree (or higher) in education or a field related to the content area in which they intend to teach.
- Satisfy the standards of the U.S. state in which they will teach.
- Be of good reputation or character.
- Seek to enter the U.S. for the purpose of full-time teaching.
- Possess sufficient proficiency in the English language.

# Visa matters

- VITs apply for the J-1 visa at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in their home country after ISBE has issued the Form DS-2019.
  - Spouses and children under the age of 21 may accompany them on the J-2 dependent visa.
- Both the initial DS-2019 and J-1 visa are valid for three years with the option to extend for an additional two years (five years maximum).
- J-1 status provides work authorization strictly related to PK-12 teaching in the host school district.
  - J-2s of working age may apply for employment authorization (EAD card).
- VITs expected to return to home country at conclusion of program.



# ELS-VIT licensure

- All ELS-VIT licenses are endorsed for ESL, Bilingual and World Language in teacher's native language (all PK–12).
  - Additional grade level and content area endorsements based on teacher's foreign credential evaluation.
  - ILTS testing not required; cannot add subsequent endorsements after issuance.
- ELS-VIT is valid for five years and is non-renewable
  - VITs returning to the program for a second time must apply for PEL or ELS-TBE.
- Requirements:
  - ISBE-approved foreign credential evaluation (i.e. WES, ECE, etc.)
  - Proof of English proficiency
    - Cambridge English Assessment: CEFR level B2 or higher
    - TOEFL: Reading - 18; Listening - 17; Speaking - 20; Writing - 17
    - Degree with English major or where primary language of instruction was English
  - Form 73-03F – Application for VIT Endorsement
    - Hiring district completes and submits to ROE

# Host district responsibilities

- Must sign intergovernmental agreement (MOU) with ISBE to participate in program.
  - Email [exchangeteachers@isbe.net](mailto:exchangeteachers@isbe.net) to inquire about process.
- Interview VIT candidates and offer an appropriate teaching position in grade levels PK–12.
  - DOS requires that J-1 teachers are full-time teachers of record.
  - Compensation must be commensurate with teacher's experience and academic background in accordance with district salary scale as with any other licensed teacher.
- Detailed onboarding that explains all relevant benefits and salary deductions (TRS, taxes, insurance).
  - Ensure teachers comply with standard background checks and employment history screening.
  - In consultation with teacher's union, address how union matters relate to VITs.
  - Thorough training on professional code of conduct and expectations.
  - Provide teacher mentorship and professional development opportunities.

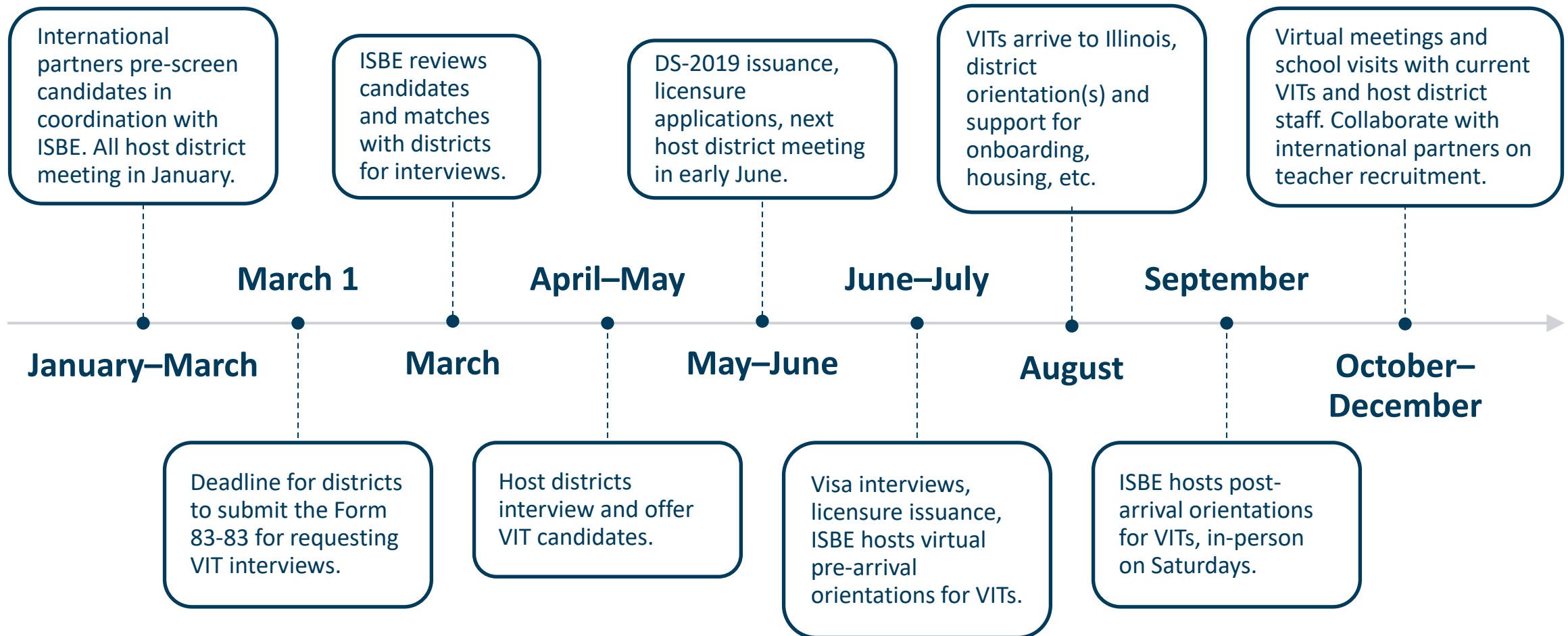
# Host district responsibilities

- Upon VIT's first arrival, provide transportation from airport and temporary housing for at least seven days.
  - We encourage additional local support during first weeks, especially in assisting with transportation.
  - Other supports commonly requested: transportation to SSA office for SSN application, long-term housing resources, where to bank, where to purchase a car and get a driver's license, cell phone and internet providers, etc.
- Maintain contact with ISBE VIT program staff throughout the entire program duration of any VIT placed in the district.
  - Must inform ISBE within five days of any employment-related changes, issues, or concerns.
  - VIT program staff available year-round to collaborate and support host district.

# Program costs

- **ISBE costs:** ~\$4,000 sponsor redesignation fee paid to DOS every two years.
- **Host district costs:**
  - Transportation from airport for VIT's first arrival to Illinois.
  - Temporary housing for their first week.
  - If they choose to request a program extension for two additional years after VIT's third year, \$367 fee paid to DOS per extension.
- **VIT costs:**
  - ISBE licensure application fee (\$150) and license registration fees (\$60).
  - SEVIS fee (\$220) and J-1 visa application fee (\$185) paid to relevant U.S. federal agencies (DHS/DOS).
  - English proficiency exam and foreign transcript evaluation (est. \$300–\$500).
  - VITs pay for their airfare, long-term housing, and other typical cost-of-living expenses during their stay in Illinois.

# Annual program timeline



# Private program sponsorship

- Districts may opt to host J-1 teachers through private program sponsor organizations or become a program sponsor themselves.
  - Sponsors apply for designation from DOS. Requires a “letter of no objection” from ISBE.
  - Public school districts must sign an MOU with ISBE to recruit and hire J-1 teachers through private sponsor programs.
  - Private schools are not eligible to host ISBE-sponsored VITs and are not required to sign the private-sponsor MOU.
  - ISBE’s involvement strictly limited to ELS-VIT licensure for private-sponsored VITs.
- 13 private sponsor organizations and two school districts are currently approved to sponsor J-1 teachers in Illinois.
- Districts may host both ISBE-sponsored and private-sponsored VITs.
  - ISBE’s international partner organizations exclusively place teachers through ISBE’s program sponsorship in Illinois, with exception to Chicago Public Schools.



## Cultural impact





## Questions?

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