

Ethnic Language Schools/ Community-Based Heritage Language Schools

In the Illinois School Code, community-based heritage language schools are referred to as “ethnic language schools.” Per [105 ILCS 5/2-3.44](#), “An ethnic school is a part-time private school that teaches the foreign language of a particular ethnic group as well as the culture, geography, history, and other aspects of a particular ethnic group.” Ethnic language schools will be the terminology used throughout this document. However, the term “ethnic language schools” also encompasses the preferred term of “community-based heritage language schools.”

Ethnic language schools are encouraged to apply for voluntary accreditation with ISBE. **Applications must be resubmitted annually.**

- Demonstrate language instruction is equivalent to content and rigor of a foreign language/world language offered at a public high school with a minimum of 120 hours of language (and culture) instruction per student.
- Give students the opportunity to earn high school credit hours.
- Advertise your program to local high schools and increase ethnic language school enrollment.



ARE YOU A LANGUAGE SCHOOL?

Apply Annually

Visit the [ISBE World Languages webpage](#) to see details about the Illinois School Code, to complete an annual [application](#) for accreditation, and to view this year's approved [programs](#). *Applications are open July 1–November 1.*

Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy

This is a high school graduation award. Only [approved assessments](#) proctored during Grades 9–12 may be considered for the award. Students in a program that provides language and culture instruction through Grade 8 are great candidates for the Seal of Biliteracy. An ethnic language school must test students after August 1 of the summer immediately before they enter ninth grade. If a student takes an approved language assessment prior to August 1 of their freshman year, the assessment will not qualify, and the student will need to reassess their language proficiency between Grades 9–12.



ARE YOU A HIGH SCHOOL?

World Language Credit

If a student attends an ISBE-accredited ethnic language school, a high school district may choose to award world language credit per [105 ILCS 5/10-22.43a](#). ISBE accreditation ensures that the program has reported 120-plus hours of language instruction per year.

Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy

It is possible that students who attend an ethnic language school have taken or will take an approved language assessment for this award. You may choose to accept score reports from [approved assessments](#) proctored by ethnic language schools during Grades 9–12 toward the Seal.

Students who have not taken an approved assessment are still candidates for the Seal and may be assessed during Grades 9–12 in high school.