

ISBE's Visiting International Teacher (VIT) Program

Statewide Meeting for Administrators Supporting English Learners
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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 is limited to sponsoring no more than 155 new VITs each school year
- 182 new VIT candidates recruited with our international partner organizations for SY 2025-26
- 99 accepted offers from 29 different school districts
 - 97 from Spain
 - 1 from Morocco
 - 1 from Mexico
- Of 49 VIT host districts, 38 requested interviews, and all 38 were matched with at least one candidate to interview
- 2 new school districts hosting an ISBE VIT for the first time

VIT host school districts and charters

Beach Park CCSD 3*
Beardstown SD 15
Belvidere CUSD 100*
Big Hollow D38
Bloomington D87*
Carpentersville CUSD 300*
Cary SD 26*
Champaign Unit 4 SD*
Cicero SD 99*
Crystal Lake CCSD 47*
DeKalb D428*
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
Grayslake CCSD 46

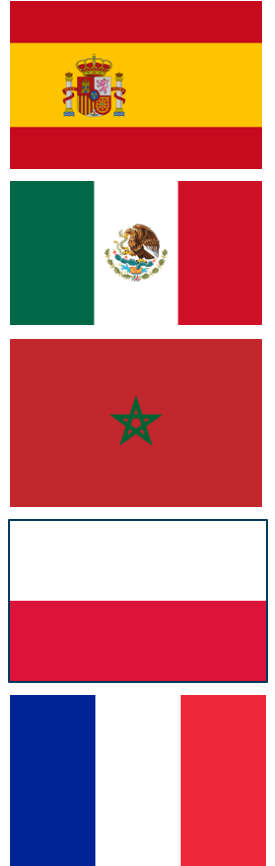
Harvard CUSD 50*
Hazel Crest SD 152.5
Hoover-Schrum SD 157
Kankakee SD 111*
La Grange SD 102
Learn Charter Schools*
Mahomet-Seymour CUSD 3
Monmouth-Roseville CUSD 238*
North Chicago SD 187*
Palatine CCSD 15*
Posen-Robbins ESD 143.5
Proviso Township HSD 209*
Rantoul City Schools 137*
Rhodes SD 84.5
Rochelle CCSD 231
Rockford SD 205
Round Lake CUSD 116*
Schaumburg CCSD 54*
Steger SD 194*

Summit SD 104*
Urbana SD 116*
Valley View CUSD 365U
Vienna HSD 13-3
Waukegan CUSD 60*
West-Harvey Dixmoor SD 147
Woodland CCSD 50*
Woodstock CUSD 200*
Yorkville CUSD 115
Zion-Benton Township HSD 126*
Zion SD 6

**Districts with new VITs starting SY 2025-26*

International partners

- **Spain:** Spanish Ministry of Education
 - Rodrigo Hidalgo, 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.

J-1 visa basics

- 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 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.

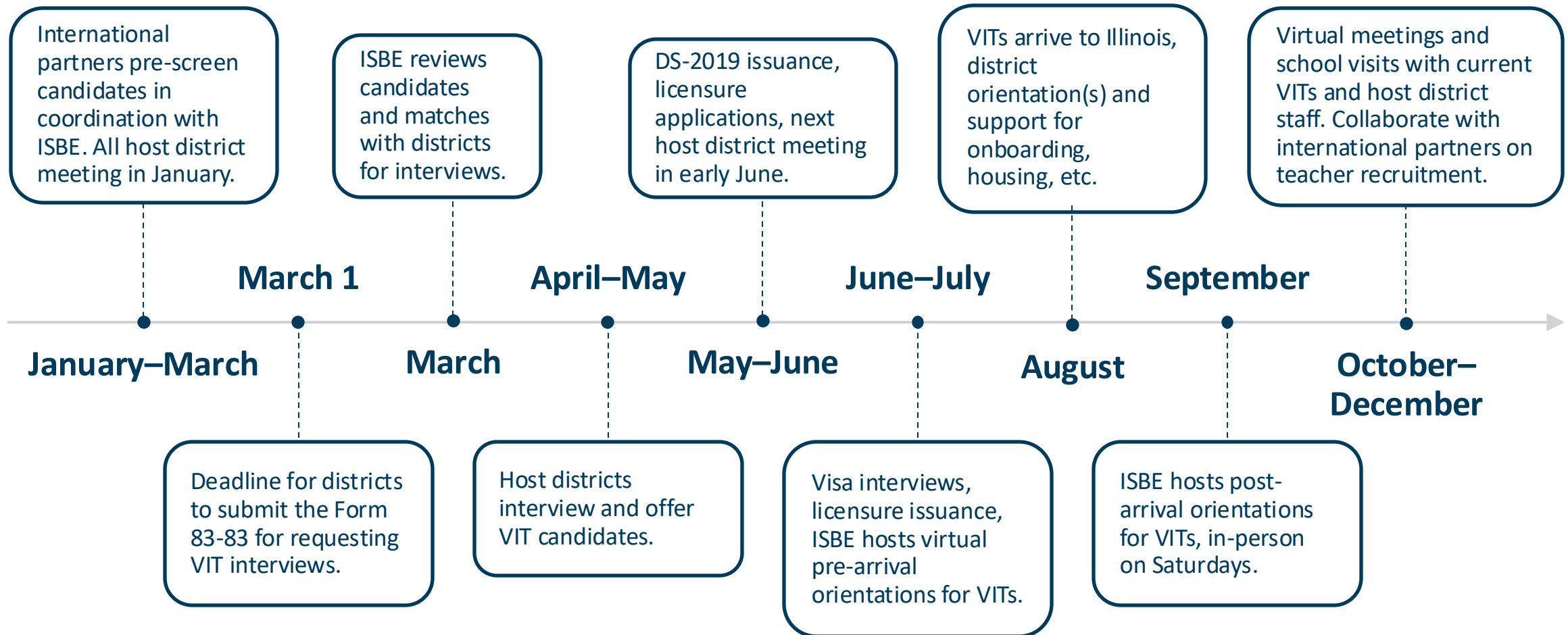
Host district responsibilities

- 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



Other J-1 exchange teacher programs in Illinois

- Two school districts have their own J-1 sponsor designation from DOS: Chicago and Peoria Public Schools
- There are also third-party J-1 sponsor organizations that may place exchange teachers in Illinois
 - These programs are typically supported by teacher application fees and may also include fees for host schools/districts
 - Sponsors require a letter of no objection from ISBE
- These districts sign a separate IGA; more responsibility on the district's part for screening and licensure. Districts may host both ISBE and third-party VITs.
- All J-1 exchange teachers in Illinois are eligible to apply for ELS-VIT licensure

Cultural impact



Questions?

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