

Visiting International Teachers Handbook

Chicago Public Schools

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Please contact the Program Coordinator with any updates, concerns or questions.

Contact information: You must keep your contact information (address, phone number, and email address) up to date with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Talent Office at all times.

This handbook is meant to be an overview of the Chicago Public Schools Talent Office process and supports for hosting international exchange teachers. While every effort is made to be up-to-date, CPS is not liable for inaccurate information. Nothing in the handbook should be interpreted as binding, this is for informational purposes only. Please note that there will not be enough positions for all candidates that apply, thank you.

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Pre-Selection & Interview

Talent Office Team members must ensure the highest quality of international candidates for our schools.

The pre-selection process involves ensuring that potential candidates have:

- Completed a teacher preparation program in their home country
- Earned an advanced degree
- Experience teaching elementary (age 5-13) or secondary (age 14-18) students either as a full time teacher, or as a part of a clinical experience to earn their teaching credential
- Mastery of English as determined by the Nelson-Denny English proficiency test
- Desire to learn about American education systems and improve their teaching practice

The pre-selection process may involve reviews of a cover letter or letter of intent, resume or curriculum vitae, and the candidates' teaching portfolios. Universities or home country sponsoring institutions will be asked to assist with submission of post-secondary transcripts and proof of the candidates' teaching credentials as recognized by the host country.

During the in-person interview, candidates must pass an English proficiency test as determined by the Nelson-Denny test. It includes a vocabulary test, conversation in English, and a written composition. It will be administered by a CPS or Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) administrator.

Certification & Visa

Teacher Licensure

Visiting International Teachers are sponsored, by Chicago Public Schools, to receive a visiting international teacher license (ELS-VIT). It is valid for 4 school years, and includes authorization to provide World Language, Bilingual, and ESL instruction in addition to any content areas the candidate has experience with. With a VIT license, candidates may teach in any CPS school.

Transcripts must be submitted for translation by one of the providers authorized by the Illinois State Board of Education. ISBE licensure typically takes 4-6 weeks to grant, not including translation time by an approved [credential evaluation organization](#).

More information about the current program ISBE administers for Spanish visiting teachers can be found [here](#). Once a candidate has been selected for a position with CPS, we will sponsor a [Visiting International Teacher license](#) for the candidate.

J-1 Visa

The Exchange Visitor (J) non-immigrant visa category is for individuals approved to participate in work-and study-based exchange visitor programs. If you bring dependant family members, they qualify for a J-2 visa.

After being offered a position with CPS, candidates will submit a scan of their passport and provide the personal information necessary to be provided a DS-2019 form outlining their sponsorship. With a DS-2019, a candidate can apply for the J-1 visa in their home country. The wait time for an interview and processing for a J-1 Visa varies from country to country and is based on your individual circumstances. Learn more about interview wait and processing times by visiting www.travel.state.gov and selecting Appointment Wait Time. We encourage you to apply as soon as you receive the required documentation. Please note that exchange visitors beginning new programs may not enter the United States more than 30 days before their program start date. Costs for the J-1 visa application vary from country to country.

To apply for a J-1 Visa, a candidate must have:

- Form DS-2019 (Certificate of Eligibility) issued by CPS
- Other supporting documents – check the specific embassy or consulate website
- Passport valid for travel to the United States
- Completed Online Form DS-160, nonimmigrant visa application
- Fee receipt showing payment of the \$160 visa application fee
- 2×2 photograph, meeting format requirements

For more information about J visas, please see the Bureau of Consular Affairs' [exchange visitor visa website](#). For detailed information about how to make a visa interview appointment at an embassy or consulate, how to pay the application processing fee and more, go to the visa information on the [U.S. embassy or consulate](#) website where you will apply for your visa.

CPS strongly recommends that no plane tickets are purchased or travel arrangements are made until the J-1 visa is issued.

Moving to the US

CPS offers several institutes for new teachers to ease their transition to the United States. In addition to providing support around classroom and school expectations, our Talent Office and Office of Language and Cultural Education offer an orientation to help new international employees successfully navigate American culture and society and acclimate to Chicago.

Opening a Bank Account

If you are going to be in the U.S. for an extended period of time, it's a good idea to open a U.S. bank account to manage and access your finances. CPS offers direct deposit, a process through which your employer (CPS) will electronically transfer your paycheck directly into your checking account. Below are the necessary steps for opening a bank account in the U.S. and some things to keep in mind.

1. Explore your options

Most checking accounts in the U.S. are free to open! Do some research and visit some of the branches in your neighborhood. This is a great way to get information about the bank and their customer service because you can meet one-on-one with someone at the bank who will explain how it works. You could also ask roommates, American friends and co-workers which banks they would recommend using. You will want to think about where the bank is located and where they may have other branches and ATMs available.

2. Consider and ask a banker these questions

- Do you have a minimum required amount to open an account or a minimum daily balance? (Some banks require a certain amount of money to be in your account at all times)
- What are your interest rates? (For a checking account? Savings account?)
- Do you have a maintenance fee? (Some banks charge a monthly or yearly "maintenance" fee, usually about \$5, but this varies from bank to bank and depends how much money you keep in your account)
- What additional fees do you charge? (Are there overdraft fees? ATM fees? What extra fees might you incur?)
- How long does it take to "clear" a check? (How long from the time a check is deposited into your account before you will be able to access or withdraw your money?)
- Do you have online banking or an app? (Most banks have a secure website where you can view your balance and transfer money and many banks will now even let you deposit checks by taking a photo via your smartphone)
- Why should I choose to open an account with your bank?
- As an exchange teacher to the U.S. on a J-1 visa for x number of months, is there anything I should know about banking with you?

3. Bring the right documents

Keep in mind that each bank is different and may require different or additional documentation (particularly forms of identification) from the list we've provided below. Check your chosen bank's requirements online before going in person to open your account.

- Your passport with your J-1 Visa
- DS-2019 Form or DS-7002 Form (Training Plan)
- I-94 card
- Your Social Security card (if you have already received it)

- Your full name, living address in the U.S., phone number, place of employment (Some banks might ask for your lease or something showing your local address, i.e. a utilities bill)
- Your employee/teacher ID card
- Government ID from your home country (if you have one)
- A credit card (if you have one—can also be used as a form of ID)

4. What to expect

When you go into a bank (a branch office) someone will greet you and ask how they can help you. Tell them that you are interested in learning about opening an account with them. You might have to schedule a time to come back later and meet with someone, or they will see if an associate is available to help you right then. You will probably want to open a checking account, and these usually have a savings account attached. If you are doing direct deposit with CPS, we can automatically have your paycheck deposited into any number of accounts you select. You will set up your direct deposit through HR4U during the orientation.

The bank associate will go over some questions with you, such as biographical information and contact information, when setting up your account. Make sure you tell them that you are an exchange teacher in the U.S. for 36 months on a J-1 Visa, employed with Chicago Public Schools. They will probably ask you questions about what you are looking for in an account and assess your needs. As mentioned earlier, you will most likely want to open a basic checking account that will come with an ATM/debit card. You will be told to choose a pin number, which is the secret code needed to access your account at an ATM (cash machine) when you withdraw cash. If you wish to have checks, (to pay rent and bills) you will have to ask for and pay for them, and the bank will order them for you. Your ATM card will probably be mailed to you and will require you to go to call the bank or visit an ATM to activate it for the first time.

Make sure to take the bank associate's name and contact information so you can contact them in the future if you have additional questions or concerns. For day-to-day transactions and general banking, you can always wait in line to speak with a bank teller. For just withdrawing cash, you would only need to go to an ATM. You should also have the toll-free number for the bank in case of any emergencies, such as losing your card so they can cancel it and send you a new one.

5. Start banking

- Always keep anything banking related, such as account numbers and checks, in a safe place at home. You should never give out your checkbook to anyone. Don't share your ATM card or pin number with anyone. CPS will need your account and routing number if you wish to set up direct deposit, but they will never need your pin.
- Keep the phone number for your bank with you or stored in your phone. If your ATM card is lost or stolen, you will need to call this number to report it and have a replacement mailed to you.

- Always be aware of how much money is in your account to avoid any overdraft fees or bounced checks.
- Withdraw cash at ATMs associated with your bank to avoid fees/penalties for using your card through a different bank.
- Use ATMs at banks or inside stores. Try to avoid using ATM machines on sidewalks where passersby can see you withdrawing cash or entering your pin number.
- Check your account details on your bank's online site to ensure there are not any erroneous charges or fees that were not explained to you.
- If you will travel home during holiday breaks and wish to withdraw cash from your U.S. bank account or use your debit card, be sure to call your bank in advance to notify them of your travel plans. Otherwise, they may suspect someone stole your card. Many banks now will let you enter travel information through your online account.

Reference

Emergency Funds

We suggest that you budget between \$10,000 and \$15,000 to cover your initial costs, including: a plane ticket and relocation services; a hotel or hostel while you conduct a housing search; security deposits and first month's rent for your housing; transportation from the airport to your temporary or permanent housing; food and extra funds to cover any unexpected emergency situation while in the U.S. Because international teachers receive their first paycheck in early October, we recommend having two months emergency funding available.

Getting Here

There are two international airports in Chicago named Midway International Airport (MDW) and O'Hare International Airport (ORD). Both airports provide public transportation options, bus and train, into downtown Chicago. Public transportation in Chicago is called Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), which allows Chicago dwellers to travel all around the city limits. Passengers using CTA transportation must purchase a ticket to ride the train and/or bus. You can purchase a single ticket or monthly pass at the airport before entering the CTA station, which is attached to the airport grounds.

Finding a Home

Most apartments in the US come unfurnished with a stove/oven and refrigerator/freezer, but you'll need to get your own bed, sofa, chairs, and other furniture, as well as smaller items like kitchen utensils, television, and linens. If buying furniture is not an option, you can also rent furniture during the your time in Chicago. If you are renting an apartment, you should ask which utilities are included. Water, sewer, and trash collection are included in nearly every rental in the city. Usually, you'll need to contact utility companies to set up your service for electricity, cable and internet, natural gas, and so on. CPS will assist with your apartment search by providing a service free to you that will learn about your budget and housing needs and take you to visit apartments. You can visit chicagoapartmentfinders.com for a comprehensive resource about Chicago's neighborhoods including the average rent.

Reside Alone or Find a Roommate

Many CPS teachers (not just visiting teachers) live north and northeast of Chicago's downtown in Lakeview, Lincoln Park, Logan Square and West Town. There are over 250 individual neighborhoods in Chicago, and many represent ethnic neighborhoods. For example, Chinatown is one of Chicago's most ethnic representations of China and most Chinatown residents speak fluent Mandarin and/or Cantonese. Other examples of Chicago ethnic neighborhoods are Pilsen and Humboldt Park, which are predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods, rich in Puerto Rican & Mexican culture. We also have Greektown, Little Italy, Little India, and other African and Asian neighborhoods. Apartment costs vary depending on the neighborhood. It is best practice to set your budget and living expectations then search for your preferred neighborhood to reside in. If your living expectations and budget do not match your preferred neighborhood, many Chicagoans live with a roommate in a two or three bedroom apartment to subsidize the rent costs. If you plan to rent with others, you would have to find a roommate. There are several roommate services that can help you secure a roommate in Chicago.

Whether you chose to live alone or with a roommate(s), it is best practice to purchase renter's insurance.

Finding a Car

In the United States, Chicago is known for its efficient and convenient public transportation systems. Many Chicago residents do not own a car and rely solely on either the [CTA](#) bus and/or train to get to and from work. If the train or bus is not the best method of transportation, you can buy a car upon arrival to Chicago. There are many car dealerships in Chicago for you to find a car best for your lifestyle, i.e. compact car for single individuals/couple or a mid-size car for a family of four. Many Americans place a down payment on a car and make monthly payments. You can receive a loan from a bank to help pay for the car.

If you plan to purchase a car, you will need car insurance. Car insurance and renter's insurance can be purchased together.

Repatriation Insurance

Federal law requires individuals entering the U.S. on a J-1 visa must have medical health insurance for the full duration of your program. CPS will provide medical insurance options but you will have to obtain separate repatriation insurance. Repatriation coverage means that the insurance company arranges for and handles the transportation necessary to return a covered person's body to his or her home or to a nearby funeral or cremation facility. The US Department of State has minimum J1 health insurance requirements that your insurance plan must meet. The health insurance plans offered through CPS currently meet those minimum requirements. It is always a good idea to check with your local embassy when you receive the visa on if there are other insurance requirements you need to fulfill.

Bringing your Family

Documents: Dependents of J-1 visa holders are issued Form DS-2019 in order to apply for the J-2 dependent entry visa.

Employment: J-2 dependents can apply for employment authorization from US Citizenship and Immigration Services after they arrive in the US. However, any earnings must not be used to support the J-1 exchange visitor—income should only be used for recreational purposes. [How to apply >>](#)

Study: J-2 dependents can also study in the US, as long as that's not the primary reason they're here.

Health insurance: J-2 dependents are legally required to maintain health insurance while they are in J-2 status. You can select CPS health insurance that will cover your dependants.

Two-year home residency requirement: If you are subject to the two-year home residency requirement, your J-2 dependents are, also.

Other reporting requirements: While your dependents are in J-2 status, you'll need to keep their contact information up to date. Also, if a J-2 dependent leaves the US before the end date on their DS-2019, you should report their departure within 10 calendar days.

In the United States, children between the ages of 5 and 16 are required to attend school. You do not need to pay tuition to enroll your child in public schools, but there may be other school fees. The public school that your child will attend depends on where you live. Within Chicago, you can see the school your child may be assigned to attend by entering the address of your residence into the [CPS School Locator](#).

Private schools and charter school options are also available, but they may charge tuition. In order to register your child in school, you will need their:

- Birth certificate
- School records or transcripts
- Proof of immunization from a physician noting the day, month, and year of each immunization

Staffing Process

Staffing will send all on-boarding requirements via e-mail and will include the following tests:

1. Background check - will be submitted to staffing from facility

2. Drug Test - will be submitted to staffing from facility
3. Tuberculosis Test - must provide results to staffing

After completion of onboarding, candidate must report to the CPS staffing facility at:

**2651 West Washington Blvd.
Chicago, Illinois, 60612**

Documents to submit to CPS staffing:

- Two forms of identification (passport, birth-certificate, etc.)
- Social Security Number documentation*
- J-1 Visa
- Teaching certification
- Official university transcript
- Official Diploma
- Tuberculosis Test results form

** Social Security numbers are required to work for the district as a visiting international teacher. Once you have arrived in the United States, you must wait ten days, and then you can apply for a Social Security number in person at the Social Security Administration office. More information can be found at on the [Social Security Association website](#).*

CPS Institute: Professional Development

CPS offers several institutes for new teachers to ease their transition to the United States. In addition to orientation, CPS departments work collaboratively to provide information and professional development about the following topics. Dates for the next professional development sessions have not yet been scheduled. A brief overview of the topics covered in professional development are below. Please note that some of the links provided require CPS credentials to access, which will be assigned after the staffing process has been completed.

Some topics include:

- Classroom management
- Common Core and lesson planning: the Knowledge Center houses thousands of unit plans, lesson plans, resources, PD modules, and additional supports. [Click Here](#).
- REACH: teacher evaluations and components [Click Here](#).
- School System Basics: You will receive training on all these systems from your school during beginning of year professional development

- Kronos - compensation and time card management tool. [Click Here.](#)
 - CPS Email - central office and school based communication tool. [Click Here.](#)
 - HR4U - dashboard to view information about your pay, benefits, and other HR information. [Click Here.](#)
 - Direct Deposit - link to set up direct deposit of bi-weekly paychecks into a bank account of the employee's choice. Sign into [HR4U](#) and click on the "My Pay" located on the top of the home page.
 - Tax form - the W-9 form is provided, completed and submitted during the on-boarding process. Click [here](#) to view W-9 document.
 - Attendance - Teachers take daily attendance for all class periods. Clerks provide training to teachers about attendance procedures.
 - Grading System - Teachers submit frequent grades for all class periods. Principals provide direction to teachers about grading procedures. The grading system is called [Impact](#); go to [cps.edu/pages/staff](#) and click on "Student Portal".
- Supplemental Resources: You will receive training on all these systems from the Talent Office during beginning of year orientation
 - Knowledge Center - Gives access to common core and curriculum, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), framework for teaching, systems support, content and assessments support and REACH information. Click [here](#) or go to [cps.edu/pages/staff](#) and click on "Knowledge Center"
 - Frameworks for Teaching - Assist with domain and framework support. [Click Here.](#)
 - World Language Standards and Units - provides announcements, calendar timelines and due dates and support as a World Language, ESL or Bilingual instructor. [Click Here.](#)
 - Learning Hub - CPS' new collaborative platform devoted to employee learning and development. [Click Here.](#)
 - Safari Montage -View curriculum and standards focused educational videos from leading publishers. [Click Here.](#)
 - ACCESS for ELIS - sign in to view Illinois licensure status [here](#).
 - Language Development Standards - English Language Learners set of requirements for licensure [here](#).

Cultural Exchange

As a function of the J-1 Visa, it is expected that teachers facilitate a cultural exchange with their students and school community. The activities for the cultural exchange are at the discretion of the host teacher and support can be provided by the CPS Talent Office. Teachers must host at least 3 cultural exchange activities during the year, and will need to provide a report on those activities in the spring.

Exiting the Program

Some program participants wish to continue with the Exchange Program at the conclusion of the 3 years. When you agree to participate in an Exchange Visitor Program you will be subject to the two-year home-country foreign residency requirement if your exchange program is funded by either your government or the U.S. government, involves specialized knowledge or skills deemed necessary by your home country or you received graduate medical training. If this requirement applies, you must return to your home country for a cumulative total of two years at the end of your exchange visitor program. You are not prohibited from traveling to the United States but may not benefit from certain employment-based or family-based visas until the foreign residency requirement is satisfied.

Certain [exchange visitors](#) (J-1) are subject to a two-year home-country physical presence requirement which requires you to return to your home country for at least two years at the end of your exchange visitor program. This is also known as the foreign residence requirement under U.S. law, Immigration and Nationality Act, Section 212(e). If you are unable to return to your home country to fulfill the two-year requirement, you must obtain a waiver approved by the Department of Homeland Security prior to changing status in the United States or being issued a visa in certain categories for travel to the United States.

Select [Eligibility Information](#) for details about which J-1 exchange visitors are subject to the two-year home-country physical presence requirement and whether a waiver of this requirement is available to you.

When exiting the program and returning to your home country, you will need to complete a resignation form which releases your position. If you participate in the Early Notice of Resignation Program, you will continue to receive health insurance benefits through August 31st. Contact your program manager for questions and to receive the forms.

Thank You

Thank you for your interest in teaching with Chicago Public Schools, and participating in our cultural exchange program. Our students benefit immensely from interactions with teachers who have global perspectives. We look forward to working with you, creating a smooth transition into CPS, and serving you as an employer for years to come. Please contact your program manager with questions or concerns during your time with us.