

Illinois Virtual School

KEY FEATURES

Illinois Virtual School (IVS) instructional staff are used when additional tasks (depending on their availability and expertise), such as redeveloping courses, mentoring new teachers, and designing new curriculum are needed.

IVS implemented Teaching Online 101, a course that candidates have to complete before being considered. After an online interview, IVS also enrolls candidates in their LMS to see if candidates have technical skills.

A single mentor teacher who has been teaching with IVS for about 12 years works with each of the new hires throughout their first year.

Teachers report on a Communication Plan for connecting with students: giving out general information, reporting student progress, providing instruction for students, and connecting with schools. This information is shared with schools so that they know what to expect from students' online teachers.

Introduction

Illinois Virtual School “is the Illinois State Board of Education’s Statewide Virtual School. The IVS program is designed to allow students who are enrolled in a public or private school to supplement their education by taking courses that are educationally appropriate. The IVS program is administered through the Peoria County Regional Office of Education, a member of the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS). The Peoria ROE was awarded the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) contract to manage and operate the Illinois Virtual School (IVS) on April 1, 2009. For the past 13 years, ISBE’s virtual program (IVHS and now IVS) has provided leadership to accelerate the adoption and use of online learning within Illinois. Working in partnership with public and private schools, IVS offers classes to students and professional development programs for educators. IVS provides:

- Opportunities for students to take *full service courses* not offered by their face-to-face school, such as Advanced Placement, foreign languages, and other enrichment opportunities;
- Flexibility in scheduling;
- *Credit recovery options* for students to graduate on time; and
- Individualized instruction that occurs anytime, anywhere, and *any pace* through teacher-managed courses.

IVS provides schools and students a Completion Certificate that includes a suggested final grade and percent. The local school determines the final grade that is added to the official transcript for the student. Since IVS partners —not competes— with schools, the local school retains their students and is able to offer expanded learning opportunities.”¹

IVS is managed by a staff of eight, including the Director, Director of Operations, Coordinator of Professional Development (who manages the state-level educational opportunities for educators), Coordinator of Curriculum, LMS & SIS Specialist, Technical Support Lead, Course Builder, and Operations Assistant.

IVS Instructional Staff

IVS has 55 instructors divided up among departments. Most teachers have one to two course assignments, the equivalent to 60-70 students, depending on teacher availability, track record, and the intensity of the course content. Pay is based on student enrollments. Instead of having lead teachers or department heads, they have instructional staff take on additional tasks, such as redeveloping courses, mentoring new teachers, and designing new curriculum, depending on their availability. When this is possible, the instructors are given an addendum to their contract for the additional tasks. All IVS instructors are part-time and include teachers that teach face-to-face in a traditional brick-and-mortar setting, as well as stay-at-home parents and retired teachers. Their teacher names, subjects they teach, and their email addresses are shared with the public via IVS’s website and are categorized by department. When a teacher is hired, IVS keeps a folder that holds all of their licenses, other credentials, and forms. Each teacher has an Illinois Educator Identification Number (IEIN), which allows IVS to go into the state system and see that their teachers are keeping up with their licenses, etc., allowing IVS to make sure that the teachers teaching their courses are in fact qualified to teach the subject area.

An online survey was administered to instructors using a survey tool called Opinio. The data is shared below. Out of the 49 respondents who completed the survey, 75.5% are female. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the ethnicity of the staff, while Table 2 shows their educational background.

Table 1. Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
Hispanic or Latino	2	4.1%
Black or African American	2	4.1%
American Indian or Alaska Native	-	-
Asian	-	-
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	-	-
White	45	91.8%

1 <http://www.ilvirtual.org/about-ivs/about-ivs>

Table 2. Highest degree earned

Degree	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelor’s degree	9	18.4%
Master’s degree	36	73.5%
Professional degree – Ed.S.	1	2.0%
Doctorate degree – Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D.	3	6.1%

The median number of classes teachers have taken online for a degree and/or professional development purposes is eight courses (with a maximum number of 100 and a minimum of zero). When asked if they had ever been a face-to-face teacher, 100% said yes. When asked if they taught face-to-face currently, 53% said yes. Table 3 shows the grade levels that the instructional staff is teaching/has taught face-to-face. Table 4 shows the subjects that the instructors have taught/are currently teaching face-to-face.

Table 3. Grade levels taught face-to-face

Grade Levels	Frequency	Percentage
K-2	4	8.3%
3-5	6	12.5%
6-8	24	50.0%
9-12	47	97.9%
Higher Ed	19	39.6%

Table 4. Subjects taught face-to-face

Subject	Frequency
English	16
World Languages	17
Math	11
Science	5
Social Studies	16
Other*	18

* Other – Music, Business, Literacy, Technology, Art, Health, Career and Technical Education, Latin American Studies, Computer Science

The staff’s median years of teaching online was 8 years with a minimum of one year and a maximum of 18 years. When asked how many years they had been teaching at IVS specifically, the median was 7.5 years, maximum 15 years, and minimum one year. Table 5 shows the grade levels that instructional staff is teaching or has taught online. Table 6 shows the subjects that the instructors have taught/are currently teaching online.

Table 5. Grade levels taught online

Grade Levels	Frequency	Percentage
K-2	-	-
3-5	-	-
6-8	15	30.6%
9-12	48	97.9%
Higher Ed	7	14.3%

Table 6. Subjects taught online

Subject	Frequency
English	8
World Languages	16
Math	7
Science	5
Social Studies	12
Other*	13

* Other – Music, Business, Education, Teacher Professional Development, Parenting, Technology, AP Economics, Health, Art History, Career and Technical Education

The majority of the instructors are located in Illinois. Table 7 illustrates the counties in which the teachers reside. Two teachers reported that they live outside of Illinois, within the following cities and states: Naples, Florida, and Highland, Indiana.

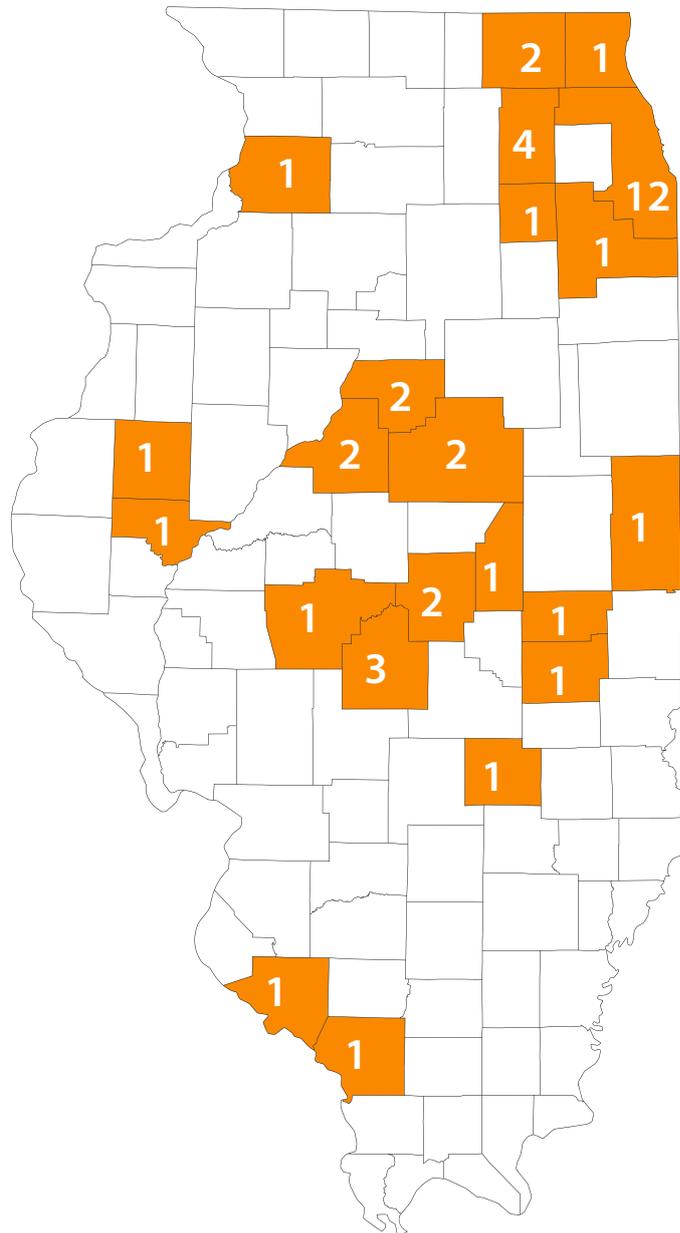
Table 7. Instructor locations in Illinois by county (ordered by high to low frequency)

County (IL)	Cities	# of Instructors
Cook	Chicago (2), Chicago Heights (2), Country Club Hills, La Grange Park, Lemont, Norridge, Palos Heights, Park Ridge, Schaumburg, Streamwood	12
Kane	St. Charles (2), Batavia, Geneva	4
Christian	Pana (2), Edinburg	3
DuPage	Downers Grove	2
Macon	Decatur, Maroa	2
McHenry	Harvard	2
McLean	Bloomington, Heyworth	2
Tazewell	Morton	2
Woodford	Metamora	2
Coles	Ashmore	1
Douglas	Newman	1
Effingham	Effingham	1
Jackson	Carbondale	1
Kendall	Newark	1
Lake	Lake Zurich	1
McDonough	Macomb	1
Piatt	Monticello	1
Randolph	Sparta	1
Sangamon	Springfield	1
Schuyler	Rushville	1
Vermilion	Sidell	1
Whiteside	Prophetstown	1
Will	Lockport	1

*Number in parentheses is the number of instructors from that city. If there is only 1 instructor from a location, parentheses are not used after a city.

The following map shows the instructors' distribution per county across the state of Illinois.

Map. IVS instructors per county in the state of Illinois



Recruit & Hire

Instructor employment opportunities are posted to the Illinois Education Job Bank hosted by the Illinois Association of School Administrators. IVS also utilizes its current instructors to recommend potential candidates. In 2013, they implemented a new process, requiring teacher candidates to complete Teaching Online 101 first. This course is self-paced and takes approximately 10 hours to complete. Lead Teachers are the facilitators/coaches for the course. There are five modules: the first one covers online learning in general; the second is about the virtual instructor and how the role differs from a traditional face-to-face teaching position; the third deals with time management; the fourth explains establishing rapport with the students; the final module is about feedback and giving appropriate and substantial amounts of it. A link to apply for IVS instructional positions is provided at the end of the course.

Within the application, candidates provide their IEIN, how many years they have been teaching online, how many years they have been teaching in general, their highest degree, and their employment history. They are also asked to rank their mastery of a series of technology skills. Once the application is complete, IVS matches content area needs with potential instructors. The next step is scheduling an online pre-interview in Lync. IVS provides the candidate information about IVS in order to ease the stress of the interview. At this time, the candidate is asked to submit a resume and three references. Concurrently, IVS conducts a background check utilizes both the Illinois and United States databases. The candidates teaching credentials are also verified.

The two purposes of this phase of the interview are to get a first impression of the candidate through questions, answers, and scenarios; to share information about IVS; and to outline the actual role of the IVS teachers. They also have a document they use during the interview process called “Qualities of a Successful Online Instructor” that they expect their teaching staff to possess:

- Are they visible?
- Are they organized?
- Are they highly motivated?
- Are they enthusiastic?
- Are they committed to teaching?
- Do they possess a philosophy that supports student-centered learning?
- Do they demonstrate creativity?
- Are they responsive to students’ needs?
- Are they good at managing time? and
- Are they reinforcing of student expectations?

At the end of this interview, IVS staff shares their thoughts with the candidate, letting him/her know if the teacher is a good fit and making sure that the candidate feels it will be a good fit as well. If both agree.

IVS enrolls the candidate in a Sandbox, which is a supportive space for the candidates to learn more about Desire2Learn, IVS's learning management system (LMS). A set of 11 lessons helps the candidate learn about the LMS, including but not limited to introduction to Desire2Learn, and getting to know the calendar, the news tool, how to maintain content, how to manage students and discussions, providing feedback in the dropbox, grading quizzes, adding content, and managing the course. Once the candidate is familiar with the content in the Sandbox, IVS creates a demo course for the one that the candidate would potentially be teaching, and he/she uses the demo to apply what he/she has learned. Questions go to the Coordinator of Professional Development Services. Then IVS assesses the candidate's technology skills. Seeing the teacher as a student helps reviewers see how the candidate can help students with tech issues. Following satisfactory performance throughout the process, the candidate is offered a one-year contract and given a course assignment. The teacher is also fingerprinted.

Train & Support

After hire, webinar trainings begin in the student information system, including how to access the student list, contact information, etc. New instructors are assigned an experienced mentor who is one of the instructors that has been teaching the longest with IVS. This mentor works with new instructors throughout their first year. The instructor can go to the mentor with questions and problems. The mentor sets up webinars as open forums around certain topics of interest for new teachers, but then she also opens the floor up for any pressing issues that have not been covered. Some common challenges new teachers face include getting students started in the course, solving platform issues, using Dropbox, and assessing discussion boards. According to IVS, it typically takes the new teachers one year to become comfortable.

IVS reports to the state all of the professional development that they provide their teachers. They conduct quarterly professional development web conferences in the evening; the topics are pre-determined based on needs or align with issues that are timely. IVS also offers a three-day, face-to-face summer professional development event; sometimes they do a one-day session on a Saturday in the winter. Communication was the topic for the summer 2014 three-day professional development event with the focus on effective strategies and new tools. The culminating activity for the teachers was to create a communication plan for the year. This session was also a way for teachers to come together and revamp curriculum. Teachers were put into teams and participated in game-like activities so they could collaborate on curriculum restructuring.

At the beginning of the Fall, Spring, and Summer school sessions, the technical working group delivers information about any upgrades to the systems that the teachers are using. These sessions are done virtually and teachers are highly encouraged to participate because attendance counts towards professional development units that will help them maintain their license. There is also a "Teacher Resources" module that all teachers can contribute to and learn from. Starting this year, in addition to the tech session, the departments will hold department meetings.

Evaluate

Teacher contracts delineate expectations for the teachers in terms of the roles they play in the online learning environment, including but not limited to the following:

- Logging into the learning platform at least every other day.
- Showing presence in the classroom.
- Maintaining grade book.
- Communicating with students and staff.
- Completing initial student contact at the start of the term.
- Reaching out to at-risk, struggling students.
- Participating actively (quarterly meetings, professional development).

These items are logged in the Instructor Participation Report. (See sample Instructor Participation Report in Appendix IL-1). They also ask that teachers use the Communication Plan (See Appendix IL-2) and be responsible for five key items:

- Connecting with students;
- Giving out general information;
- Reporting student progress;
- Providing instruction for students; and
- Connecting with schools.

The teachers have to report on what activities they will do, what tools they will use, and with what frequency they will implement this communication plan. This communication plan is shared with schools so staff knows what to expect for their students. Teachers are asked to keep a weekly communication log in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. IVS will share this data with their state board of education.

Each year, IVS collects three data points (in December, April, and July) for their instructors as part of the evaluation process. These three data points include student enrollments (how many students the teacher had in the course), what communication teachers had with the students, and how successful the students were. The data points also include how many days the teachers logged into the learning platform and how many times the teachers were actively involved with professional development and IVS administrative-related activities. This report is a concrete evaluation tool for the Director of Operations. It is also an effective conversation piece for the teachers and a reflection on their work at IVS. This approach does not assign a label or category in which a teacher would be placed, such as “successful,” “satisfactory,” or “needs improvement.” Instead, this is a subtle approach to constructive evaluation where the school works together with the teacher to improve his/her concrete effectiveness in his/her teaching role at IVS. An end-of-course survey is used to gather student feedback and is reported to the state in terms of the students’ satisfaction; however, it is not included in the teacher evaluation process. Additionally, the evaluation expectations require teachers to answer students who have emailed or called them within 24 hours, and graded assignments are expected to be returned to students within two to three days (including weekends).

Retain

At IVS, most of their teachers stay on from year to year. Only 10 instructors have left since IVS has been in operation. Staff attribute retention to having an approachable administrative staff and offering teachers multiple lines of support. It is a culture of community that they foster while the teachers are helping and supporting each other. IVS is thinking about implementing a five-year teaching award. Currently there are no formal means for recognizing stellar performance of teachers; however, they do “shout-outs” at the start of the school term to recognize teachers’ efforts and recognize instructors with gift bags and tokens of appreciation at the face-to-face meetings over the summer. They also hold after-hour socials and a sit-down dinner at the annual meeting.

Appendix IL-3

Sample Instructor Participation Report

Lastname, Firstname - FY14 Data Points

EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS and COMPLETION RATE

Identified Non-Starters email was not sent for the June Terms.

	Enrollments	Completion Rate	Welcome Email Sent	Identified Non-Starters	Enrollments Confirmed
8/22/2013	4	100	Yes		
9/5/2013	3	100	Yes		
9/17/2013	0	NA	NA		
10/15/2013	3	100	Yes		
11/5/2013	1	100	Yes		
12/3/2013	2	100	Yes		
1/7/2014	3	100	Yes		
1/22/2014	1		Yes		
2/20/2014	3		Yes		
3/18/2014	1		Yes		
4/3/2014	6		Yes		
5/8/2014	4		Yes		
6/5/2014	8		Yes		
6/19/2014	6		Yes		

COURSE MANAGEMENT

Days logged in D2L

September 2013:	29	January 2014:	30	May 2014:	28
October 2013:	30	February 2014:	26	June 2014:	29
November 2013:	28	March 2014:	27	July 2014:	31
December 2013:	29	April 2014:	26		

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN FACULTY MEETINGS

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Participation</i>
11/21/2013	Overview FY14	Attended
1/29/2014	Email Transition	Attended
4/14/2014	D2L Upgrade	Attended
4/26/2014	F2F	Attended
5/7/2014	D2L Upgrade	Attended
5/14/2014	D2L Upgrade	Didn't Attend
7/22/2014	F2F	Attended
7/23/2014	F2F	Attended
7/24/2014	F2F	Attended

Appendix IL-4

Communication Plan

Purpose of the Communication Plan is to have a way of sharing with students, parents/guardians, and schools what to expect as far as communication from the teacher. The plan focuses of five “purposes” for communication.

1. Connecting with Students
2. General Information
3. Reporting Student Progress
4. Instructional Support
5. Connecting with Schools

Under each purpose please identify/describe how you communicate with students, parents/guardians, and/or schools (activity), the tool you will use for this communication (tool), and identify when and/or in what situation(s) you will use the communication strategy (frequency).

This document will be available in D2L and shared on our website. Please make sure it is “public” ready when submitting it to the dropbox. Remember that not everyone will understand teacher lingo :)

Caution: When possible, describe the circumstance instead of using “When Needed” in the frequency column. What would need to happen for it to be needed?

Sample Activities:

Connecting with Students:		
Activities	Tool	Frequency
Student will receive an Initial Pager Greeting when s/he logs in to class.	Pager	Once, tool use is on-going
General Information:		
Activities	Tool	Frequency
News tool will be used to provide general information, updates, changes, etc. about course and due dates.	News Widget	Weekly
Teacher will send out Twitter updates	Twitter	Reminder of deadlines, special announcements, etc...

Reporting Student Progress:		
Activities Students will receive a personalized missing work report each month that lists all missing assignments for the term.	Tool MAESTRO Email	Frequency Once per month
Instructional Support:		
Activities Teacher will provide any additional instructional support that is requested by students. Students will receive reminders and tips. Students will have opportunities to ask individual questions and discuss concerns.	Tool Phone, email, news item News, Email Email, Text, Phone, Web-conferencing	Frequency Instructional support is provided for on-going and just-in-time bases throughout the class. As needed On-going Upon student request
Connecting with Schools:		
Activities School personnel are invited to attend an Open House at the start of each term.	Tool Web-conference	Frequency Within the first two weeks of the term

The Communication Plan is one piece of documentation that will be shared with districts partnering with IVS in Remote Ed. It also aligns with the Quality Matters framework for online courses.

During the year, you will need to log the communication. This documentation will be used as a data point when reporting communication frequency to ISBE. Please note: This document will capture the frequency not the quantity.

Directions for Communication Log

Please use the following codes to document communication under the tool used. Communication needs to be kept up-to-date (weekly) per course. This document will be an Excel workbook that is shared via Google Doc between the teacher and Barb. Teachers having more than one course will complete the log for each course – course names will be recorded on each tab of the Excel workbook. Teachers will be compensated \$25.00 monthly per course for communication logs that are maintain weekly. Logs will be checked each Monday. Compensation will be added to the following month’s payroll.

Directions: For each day communication is made, please use the letter codes on the left to identify the purpose of communication under the tool used. In some cases, the communication may serve several purposes. Please use your Communication Plan to determine the primary purpose of the communication, and use the most appropriate letter code for that primary purpose. For example: If you put the Welcome email in the Connecting with Students section in your plan, please code that communication with “A.” Remember that the purpose of the Log is to report frequency of tools used and purposes of communication. Numbers are not needed :)

It is important that this documentation accurately reflects what is happening. There will be days when you are communicating more than others. The goal is to be able to accurately share the frequency of communication, along with the purpose and tool used, to our stakeholders.

PURPOSE CODES

A – Connecting with Students C – Reporting Student Progress E – Connecting with Schools
 B - General Info D - Instructional Support

Sample documentation...

	Individual Email	Phone	Sync -Web (individual)	Sync - Web (group)	News Item	Social Tools	MAESTRO - Bulk
8/21/2014							A
8/22/2014					B		
8/23/2014						B	
8/24/2014							
8/25/2014							
8/26/2014							
8/27/2014							
8/28/2014	D				D		
8/29/2014							
8/30/2014				B			