

Chapter 13

International Student Programs



What Are International Student Programs?

International student programs promote diversity and cross-cultural interactions by bringing international students into Alberta schools. Unlike reciprocal student exchange programs, international student programs do not involve Alberta students travelling abroad. Instead, these programs focus on attracting motivated and successful students from around the world to study in Alberta. These students are high achievers in their home countries, and experience has shown that they continue to excel here.

International students come to Alberta for a variety of reasons. Some students seek cultural and language immersion, while others hope to graduate with an Alberta High School Diploma and continue on to a post-secondary institution in the province. It is important to keep these motivations in mind when planning and managing an international student program, as they will influence everything from recruitment strategies to program development.

As the goals of international students differ, so do the programs themselves. Most programs in Alberta welcome international students during the regular school year. Some school authorities also offer short-term summer programs for groups of international students who would like to improve their English or French and gain exposure to Canadian culture. School authorities with a large number of international students interested in Alberta post-secondary institutions may also offer university preparation courses for these students.



Who are international students?

With the influx of students from other countries into Alberta's school system, identifying international students can be confusing.

The term "international students" refers to non-Canadian students who are currently studying in Alberta but whose parents are citizens of and reside in another country. These students are not entitled to education under section 8 of Alberta's *School Act* and are not funded by Alberta Education. As a result, many school authorities opt to charge tuition or international student fees, and international students are often referred to as fee-paying students.

The following groups are not considered international students:

- Canadian citizens returning to live in Canada (non-resident fees may apply)
- landed immigrants or approved refugees living in Canada
- students participating in a reciprocal exchange program
- students whose parents have been issued a permit to study or work in Canada (including children of temporary foreign workers).

Note that this list is provided for quick reference only and is not exhaustive. For detailed and up-to-date information on international students, refer to *Access and Funding for International Students in Alberta: Frequently Asked Questions* (see Appendix G: International Student Programs or visit Alberta Education's Web site at <http://education.alberta.ca/students/internationaleducation/resources/schools.aspx>).



Why Should I Start an International Student Program?

International student programs have numerous benefits for the school authority, the local students and the international students.

Perspectives and Diversity

When managed successfully, international student programs can bring diversity to Alberta classrooms and expose students to new cultures and ways of thinking. One Alberta social studies teacher described his experience with international students as follows:

“Last year was the introduction of the social studies curriculum for Grade 10. I had students from Brazil, Germany, Afghanistan and Pakistan in my class. With an emphasis on globalization, these students brought a healthy variety of differing perspectives on this and many other topics. Their contributions were very valuable and our Alberta students greatly benefitted by having international students as classmates.”

Brian Plastow, Teacher, Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School,
Red Deer Public School District No. 104

International student programs can also have a significant impact on the international students who study here, as illustrated by this Japanese student’s reflection:

“Somehow strangers smiled at me. But that was not something uncomfortable. Actually, I liked it. Very much. I believe that it was the best part of the Canadian style. SMILE. So I tried to smile back. But sadly it’s not often that I see that in Japan. Even if I smiled at strangers they would think that I was weird. In Canada, there are so many people who had foreign culture. But somehow they didn’t think it was unusual or special. They accepted and shared each culture. In Japan, many people tend to avoid communicating with foreigners. But in Canada, my host family, friends and teachers talked to me a lot and helped me to learn English, even though I was a foreigner. I was able to survive in Canada for a year. And I believe that was because a number of people helped me a lot. Now I’m trying to accept other cultures and to help each other like them.”

International student from Japan, Edmonton School District No. 7

Enrollment and Programming

Increased enrollments allow school authorities to expand programming, which directly benefits Alberta students. International students can also create the critical mass necessary for a school authority to offer particular courses or programs, especially in rural areas. For example, if a school does not have enough students enrolled in a particular course to justify offering it, international students, who are capable and interested in taking that course, can increase enrollment to a viable level. The result is a win-win situation because international students are able to attend school in Alberta and Alberta students are able to enroll in classes that otherwise may not have been offered.

Networking

Relationships that are formed during international student recruitment can have a number of positive spin-offs. For example, while abroad, the coordinator of the international student program may form relationships with administrators or teachers who are interested in developing learning partnerships or exchanges with schools in Alberta. These kinds of partnerships can enrich the learning of all Alberta students in all subject areas (see Chapter 10: International School Partnerships).

Moreover, since many recruitment fairs span all levels of education, international student coordinators for K–12 programs often have the opportunity to travel, network and align their efforts with coordinators from Alberta’s post-secondary institutions. These partnerships can result in a wide range of joint initiatives that benefit Alberta students and teachers.

Funding

Fees paid by international students can provide school authorities with the funding needed to enhance other international education activities, such as:

- hiring an international program coordinator to spearhead initiatives
- improving English language learning programs
- enhancing international student support programs or services
- establishing scholarships for Alberta students to study abroad.

How Do I Start an International Student Program?

What does it take to create an international student program? What kind of commitment, resources and expertise does it require? This section outlines steps to follow as you consider, develop and implement an international student program.

- Step 1: Developing a Program Framework
- Step 2: Implementing the Program
- Step 3: Supporting the Transition to Alberta

Step 1: Developing a Program Framework

The impetus to establish an international student program can come from anyone within the school authority; however, final approval of the program lies with the school board. To satisfy the board, you will need more than a convincing argument about the benefits of an international student program; you must also develop a program framework that outlines the resources required and the overall feasibility of the program. This framework should align with the school authority's vision and goals and with the comprehensive plan discussed in Chapter 4: An Internationalization Strategy.

Developing a program framework involves a number of important tasks. The order in which these tasks are completed may vary from school authority to school authority.

Read Guidelines for Managing International Student Programs

Read the Guidelines for the Management of a Successful International Student Program in Alberta School Authorities on page 171. These guidelines were established to assist Alberta school authorities in developing successful international student programs. They identify best practices and communicate Alberta's commitment to providing international students with quality education experiences. They also outline measures that ensure decisions are made in the best interests of both the international student and the hosting school authority.

For help in understanding and applying these guidelines, see the accompanying commentary provided in Appendix G: International Student Programs.

Identify or Appoint a Coordinator

Developing a program that adheres to the above guidelines requires substantial time and commitment from the school authority. It is important to identify one staff member to coordinate and champion the program. This person is key to the success of the program and may be responsible for tasks such as:

- representing the school authority at educational functions abroad
- serving as a central contact point for international students and their families
- providing support to schools and teachers hosting international students.

Determine School and Community Capacity

When considering an international student program, it is critical to determine the capacity of the school and community to support such a program. This means answering key questions such as the following.

- **Is there room for international students in schools?** If so, how many? Which schools have capacity? Are principals and teachers in these schools prepared to work with the school authority to ensure that international students are welcomed and supported?
- **Is there room for international students in the community?** Are there places for them to live; e.g., homestays, dormitories? If so, how many? Are community members willing to work with the school authority to ensure that international students are welcomed and supported?



To answer these questions accurately and encourage school and community involvement, consider setting up a steering committee where all those who would be affected by the program are represented.

Estimate Costs and Set Fees

School authorities do not receive funding from Alberta Education for international students. The *School Act* specifies that school authorities can determine how much tuition to charge an international student, and most boards set tuition fees to cover the full cost of the student's education. School authorities can also choose to waive tuition fees at their own discretion; however, this is quite rare.

When setting fees, it is important to estimate costs for all elements of the program, including costs related to:

- classroom instruction for the international student
- student support, including English language learning support, guidance counselling and special needs assistance;
Note: International student programs do not traditionally include international students with special needs because, in most situations, the cost of providing quality special education is extensive and once these costs are added to the base tuition amount, tuition becomes unaffordable
- administration of the international student program, including salary and travel expenses of a coordinator, development of promotional materials, compensation for homestay families and other administrative overhead
- school maintenance
- transportation.

How did they do it?

To get their international student program up and running, Edmonton School District No. 7 committed a set amount of money to facilitate a small-scale recruitment campaign. To build the program, the board reinvested some of the fees of incoming international students into recruitment. Edmonton School District No. 7 now has the largest international student program in Alberta and is cost neutral, as the tuition fees of incoming international students cover all of the program costs.

Developing a successful international student program requires more than a year-long investment. When initiating a program, school authorities should prepare a program budget to be included in the school authority's three-year plan.

Develop a Recruitment Plan

Some school authorities begin their international student program almost accidentally, by welcoming nieces, nephews and cousins of community members into their schools. While positive word-of-mouth can help initiate and sustain a program, a successful program also requires a detailed recruitment plan. The recruitment plan should take into account the budget available and the number and type of students you wish to recruit (see side box).

Who are we recruiting?

Are you targeting students:

- of a particular age?
- with particular motivations; e.g., intensive English language training versus cultural immersion versus high school graduation?
- with a particular level of English or academic achievement?
- with a particular educational interest; e.g., schools with a religious or non-religious focus, schools with alternative programming?

The best recruitment plans are based on sound research, including a thorough investigation of what type of student the school authority is able to support and which countries or regions have these students. This research may include consultations with local schools, community organizations, other International Education Advisory Council members and Alberta trade offices abroad.

With a targeted audience in mind, the school authority may then identify specific recruitment strategies to:

- develop an international student Web site
- distribute promotional material
- locate and work with agent partners
- participate in study abroad fairs
- advertise in magazines.

Successful recruitment requires developing a presence in the region of focus and gaining the trust of prospective students and their parents. It takes time to develop this rapport and trust in the target market. Often, parents will attend the same fair several years in a row before deciding to send their son or daughter to a particular school authority (see side box). For this reason, school authorities should commit to a multi-year recruitment plan and expect it take some time before they see an increase in student numbers.

The Importance of Presence

“In Monterrey, Mexico, I met Oscar and his family over the course of three years. Oscar eventually decided to come to Red Deer where he completed a full IB program. After careful planning his family is now immigrating to Canada.”

— Rob Porkka, Director, International Services, Red Deer Public School District No. 104

Develop an International Student Web Site

The Internet is the most widely used source of information for international students. Students should be able to find critical information such as tuition fees and program offerings. Schools should post information for international students on their Web site in English and in target languages (see Tips for Developing Web or Print Promotional Materials on page 182).



The sophistication of the Web site can range from posting a PDF document to creating a separate group of Web pages aimed specifically at international students. Regardless, the text should include as much information as possible on the critical topics identified in the guidelines at the beginning of this section. You may also want to highlight the unique strengths of the school authority and the local community.

Once information for international students has been posted on the Web site, notify Alberta Education's International Education Services Branch so that it may include a link on the Study in Alberta Web site at <http://www.studyinalberta.ca>.

Distribute Promotional Materials

Another way to get the word out that your school authority provides quality education programs and welcomes international students is to design and distribute a brochure or print package of promotional materials. These materials can be distributed directly to students at study abroad fairs or through an intermediary (See Tips for Developing Web or Print Promotional Materials on page 182).

Reputation Helps!

During a work trip to China in 2004, I unexpectedly became acquainted with the principal of a large co-ed school of about 4000 students. In casual conversation, the principal told me he knew Edmonton School District No. 7 had worked in China for many years and that students applying to our programs were often successful in obtaining visas. He also told me that many parents in his community wanted to send their children to a western destination for a language immersion experience, preferably to a place where their children would have the option of moving on to a good university.

The next day I visited the school, met with many of the administration, and two days later, presented to approximately 600 students. Our partnership was inked, and since that time we have hosted over 30 students from that school in several of our schools.

The benefits of knowing your partner is immeasurable. Things happen quickly in China when compatible goals are identified!

– Ann Calverley, Supervisor, International Programs, Edmonton School District No. 7

Tips for Developing Web or Print Promotional Materials

- Know your audience. Some international students and their parents will value optional courses and the liberal nature of education in Alberta; others will focus almost exclusively on excellence in core courses. Talk to representatives in the country where you are sending/bringing your material to gain insight into what kind of information is important to the students and parents who live there.
- Contextualize your school authority. Most international students are not familiar with the province of Alberta, never mind its cities or school authorities. They are, however, familiar with the country of Canada. Therefore, it is important to lead students to your school authority by first identifying Canada, then Alberta, and then highlighting the region or city in which your school authority is located.
- Translate important information. To assist students and parents who are not fluent English speakers, it is worthwhile to translate your promotional material into key languages. However, translating promotional materials in their entirety can be very expensive and may require continual updating. Instead, translate only key sections of your material and post or hand out this summary sheet.
- Design print materials to last. Do not include details such as tuition costs or specific application dates, which are likely to change from year-to-year. Instead, highlight program information that is unlikely to change. Provide more specific details on the school authority Web site or in a one-page sheet that can be updated and reprinted at minimal cost.
- Maximize portability and variety of use. Remember when you are designing your promotional materials that at some point you will have to ship them overseas or carry them with you. Also, consider the various contexts in which you may use the materials. Are they written in a way that appeals to multiple audiences (e.g., parents, students, agents) and cultures?
- Print a strategic amount. Estimating how many brochures or promotional packages to print can be difficult and depends on a number of variables including the size of the school authority's program, budget and the size of the fair you may be attending. School authorities that have well-established international student programs may be able to provide some guidance on printing quantities.
- Consider printing and shipping costs. In some cases, it may be cheaper and less hassle to have your promotional materials printed overseas rather than printing them in Canada and shipping them.



Some Alberta international trade offices actively encourage student recruitment and are willing to accept materials for distribution to interested parties. You can find a list of Alberta's international trade offices on the Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations Web site at <http://www.international.alberta.ca/933.cfm>. Please contact Alberta Education's International Education Services Branch before contacting these offices directly.

Finally, Alberta Education publishes a catalogue of school authorities with active international student programs. This catalogue is circulated to recruitment and trade offices abroad. To be included in the catalogue, contact Alberta Education's International Education Services Branch.

Locate and Work with Agent Partners

There are a variety of terms used to describe individuals who recruit international students on a school authority's behalf, including authorized representatives, overseas recruiters and agent partners. In this handbook, we use the term agent partners. You may wish to consult with your school authority's legal department to determine which term is appropriate for you when drafting a contract.

Agents are individuals or organizations that connect international students who are looking to study abroad with schools and institutions that are willing to accept them. They are for-profit businesses and make their income by charging the school authority, the student, or sometimes both, for their services.

In some countries, such as China, it can be difficult to penetrate the market without an agent providing in-country support. For example, the agent may assist students in filling out applications, obtaining study permits and transferring tuition from the parents to the school board. Agents also act as a liaison between the student's family and the school authority while the student is in Alberta.

Agents take some of the guess work out of a student's decision to study abroad and the school authority's decision to admit an international student. They are usually well briefed on the school authority's offerings and expectations and, therefore, can recommend the school authority to students who would be a good match. Moreover, because they are located in-country and speak the local language, agents can more easily develop relationships of trust with local schools and community members.

Steps to Take Before Entering into an Agreement with an Agent Partner

- Review the agent partner's business plan and any other corporate material.
- Request and check references.
- Check to see if the agent partner has a local office in the country in which you wish to recruit. In order to be an effective liaison, an in-country office is essential.
- Provide a copy of Guidelines for the Management of a Successful International Student Program in Alberta School Authorities and ensure that the agent partner is willing to abide by them.
- Consider and agree upon how the agent partner will be paid.
- Determine a title for the agent partner that is acceptable to your school authority's legal counsel.

A sample questionnaire for agents is also included in Appendix G: International Student Programs.

Agents vary in quality and reputation. Locating one that works well with your school authority can be a process of trial and error. School authorities tend to meet and make arrangements with agents at study abroad fairs (see below).

Working with agent partners is most effective when the school authority and agent have a relationship of mutual trust and open communication. While the former may take time to establish, the latter may be facilitated through the creation of an agent's guide. Agent guides provide agents with critical information on the school authority and clearly outline the expectations that the school authority has of the agent. They often contain general information, similar to that on your Web site or in your brochure; however, they also contain more specific information, such as an agent agreement.

Participate in Study Abroad Fairs

Study abroad fairs are similar to career fairs. Schools, universities and language institutions are charged for space in a hotel or conference centre, where they have the opportunity to promote their programs to students who are interested in studying abroad. Participating in these fairs is labour and cost intensive as it requires a school authority representative to travel to the fair location. It also requires the school authority to develop a lightweight, easy-to-assemble display that will attract potential students.

Study abroad fairs are organized by a number of different groups. The following list may provide a starting point for your planning.

Sample Study Abroad Fairs

Alberta Education and Alberta Advanced Education and Technology Sponsored Events

Alberta Education and Alberta Advanced Education and Technology sponsor study abroad fairs in countries they have identified as strategic markets (see Provincial Leadership in Chapter 3: Leadership and Collaboration). They support school authorities and post-secondary institutions either by subsidizing the cost to participate in a fair or by organizing a "mini" fair that includes only Alberta institutions. The departments encourage Alberta institutions to attend fairs together in order to create a stronger Alberta presence and to minimize the likelihood of a school authority or institution becoming lost in a sea of international schools. Government-sponsored fairs also provide international education administrators with the opportunity to network with their counterparts from other Alberta school authorities.

Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) Canada Sponsored Events

DFAIT and Canadian embassies abroad organize events that feature Canadian educational institutions. These fairs encourage participation from institutions all over Canada. Often, Alberta Education is aware of these fairs and distributes information to members of the International Education Advisory Council. For example, there are often embassy-sponsored fairs in Seoul, Korea and Tokyo, Japan. For more information on embassy-sponsored events, visit <http://www.international.gc.ca/ciw-cdm/embassies-ambassades.aspx?lang=en>.

Business Marketing International (BMI) Events

BMI organizes study abroad fairs and agent fairs around the world. BMI agent workshops are country specific (i.e., BMI will educate agents about Canada or the United States), while BMI study abroad fairs include schools and post-secondary institutions from around the world. For more information, visit <http://www.bmimedia.net/bmi>.

Chinese Education Expo (CEE)

The CEE is a series of study abroad fairs held in various cities throughout China. It is organized by Fairlink Exhibition Services Ltd., sponsored by the China Education Association for International Exchange, and approved by the Chinese Ministry of Education. For more information, visit <http://www.chinaeducationexpo.com/english/index.shtml>.

Co-Ex Convention Exhibition Centre

Co-Ex is Korea's largest study abroad and language fair. Held every year in Seoul, Co-Ex is organized by Korea Trade Fairs Ltd. For more information, visit http://www.yuhak2min.com/eng_yuhak/main.asp.

International Consultants for Education and Fairs (ICEF) Events

ICEF is a Germany-based organization that organizes agent fairs around the world and offers recruitment training and market intelligence seminars for recruiters. For more information, visit <http://www.icef.com>.

World Educate Business Association (WEBA) Events

WEBA is a member organization that builds relationships between agents, education providers and study abroad counsellors by organizing fairs and workshops around the world. For more information, visit <http://www.webafairs.com>.



Advertise in Magazines

There are numerous publications worldwide for students who are considering studying abroad. Some school authorities choose to advertise their programs in these magazines; however, because this advertising can be quite expensive, it is important to carefully select magazines that will appeal to the target audience.

The following list is meant to give international education administrators some examples of recruitment magazines. The list is not exhaustive nor has it been vetted for quality.

Name of Publication	Publisher	Target Market/ Distribution
<i>Study in Canada Guidebook</i>	Keibunsha	Japan
<i>Guide to Secondary Schools</i>	ALC Global Publications	Japan
<i>Education Travel Magazine</i>	Hothouse Media	Global

Plan Student Living Arrangements (if applicable)

Once a recruitment plan has been developed, school authorities should consider where international students might live.

Living arrangements depend on the capacity of the school authority and the surrounding community. Many school authorities work with homestay companies or coordinators to locate host families for international students (see Chapter 16: Hosting International Visitors for more information). Alternatively, school authorities may arrange for international students to live in a supervised dormitory. Finally, some students will arrange to stay with friends or family; school authorities are rarely involved in coordinating these arrangements.

Develop Policies

Written policies protect both the international student and the school authority by clearly outlining the expected behaviour of both parties throughout the study period and appropriate courses of action if these expectations are not met. At a minimum, school authorities should have written policies governing “the placement of international students; the payment and refund of tuition and fees; the handling of international student crises; and the selection of homestay parents and lodging, where applicable” (see the Guidelines for the Management of a Successful International Student Program in Alberta School Authorities on page 171).

Develop a Staffing Plan

In order to effectively integrate international students into the school environment and make the most of the experience for all involved, it is important to properly prepare school authority staff. Consider the following questions.

- What will be expected of school authority staff?
- Will additional staff need to be hired or will work need to be contracted out?
- What information or special skills might staff require? What resources or training might be available to assist staff in acquiring these skills?
- How will the school authority adapt its staffing plan when the international student program grows; e.g., from 5 students to 40 students?

Key Knowledge and Skills

All educators who work with international students should have an understanding of the cultural adaptation process and intercultural communication concepts (see Chapter 6: Cultural Considerations and Supporting the Transition to Alberta in this chapter). A list of other important knowledge, skills and attributes is included in Appendix C: Cultural Considerations.

Commit to providing staff members with the professional development they require so that the host school(s) will benefit fully from hosting international students.

Propose a Framework for Approval

The final step, when planning for an international student program, is to present the framework to senior administration and the board of trustees for approval. Frameworks that articulate the opportunities created by an international student program and that recognize and plan for potential challenges are most likely to be successful.

You may find the following sections in this handbook helpful:

- Appendix C: Intercultural Competence: Key Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes
- Appendix G:
 - *Guidelines for the Management of a Successful International Student Program in Alberta School Authorities*
 - Sample agent questionnaire

Step 2: Implementing the Program

Once the superintendent and board of trustees have approved the framework, it is time to begin implementing the program. Building an international student program involves following the approved framework and completing the tasks below.

Create an Application Package

An application package should collect information the school authority will need to evaluate the suitability of an international student. If the school authority offers a homestay program, a supplementary application may gather information needed to match the student with a host family. Sample application forms are included in Appendix A: Leadership, or can be found on the Web sites of International Education Advisory Council Members, accessible through the Government of Alberta's Study in Alberta Web site at <http://www.studyinalberta.ca>.

Implement the Recruitment Plan

The recruitment plan sets a strategic direction for international recruitment. Now is the time to make some concrete decisions that will move your recruitment plan forward. For example, is it worthwhile for the school authority to join the Canadian Education Centre Network? If you have decided to participate in study abroad fairs, which ones will you join?

Successful recruitment requires developing relationships of trust with students, parents and partners in other countries. Keep this in mind as you implement the recruitment plan.

What to Include

Application packages include information such as the following.

- *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy* (FOIP) notice.
- Application form (see Appendix G for a sample; additional samples are available on the Study in Alberta Web site at <http://www.studyinalberta.ca>).
- Explanation or summary of the school grading scheme.
- Waiver outlining school authority policies and regulations regarding conduct, refunds, placement and health insurance.
- Form or clause that assigns custodianship.
- Notice describing how to pay tuition fees.

Application packages request information and documents such as:

- copy of the student's passport
- certified copy of the student's transcript for the past two years with an official school stamp (translated into English, if necessary)
- letter of intent from the student
- references or letters of recommendation
- school preferences
- copy of the student's vaccination records
- description of where the student found out about the program.

Culture Point

Scenario

You are on a recruiting mission in another country and are speaking with a father who plans to send his son to attend (and graduate from) a Canadian school. You are discussing the possibilities that exist in your school authority when the father asks you which school in your school authority is “the best.” You reply that all the schools offer the same excellent academic program and vary only in terms of size, location, optional course offerings and extracurricular activities. The father seems unconvinced and asks which school would provide his son with the best education. When you start to repeat your earlier explanation, he becomes frustrated and leaves. What happened?

Analysis

This is an example of conflicting notions of power distance (see Chapter 6: Cultural Considerations). Canada is a country of relatively small power distance. As Canadians, we strive for equality and it shows in the provincial/territorial policies on education; Alberta taxpayers invest in public education to ensure that young people have access to quality education regardless of what their name is, where they live or how much money their parents make. However, the man to whom you were speaking comes from a culture of large power distance. He lives in a highly stratified society where some people and institutions are considered to be superior to (and fundamentally different from) others. He was asking you to situate your schools within a hierarchy that makes sense in his cultural framework but not in yours.

Parents who come from a culture of large power distance may assume that Canada and its school systems are also highly stratified. Explain to them that in Alberta, students of diverse backgrounds and talents and of varying levels of academic achievement attend school together.

Accept Applications and Fees and Issue Letters of Acceptance

To officially accept a student into its schools, the school authority must issue a letter of acceptance. This letter confirms that, upon arrival in Canada, the student will be admitted to a school within the school authority. The international student will need this letter in order to obtain a study permit from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and to enter the country. Acceptance letters carry considerable weight with CIC and should be issued with care.

Some school authorities issue their own letters of acceptance on school authority letterhead, while others use the sample letter of acceptance suggested by CIC (see Appendix G: International Student Programs). It is up to school authorities to determine which format they will use. Note that the Korean Embassy requires that specific information be included in letters of acceptance (see Appendix G: International Student Programs for an example).

Before officially accepting a student, the school authority should collect tuition fees. This practice ensures that funds are available to provide for the student’s education upon arrival. To protect prospective students, many school authorities have policies guaranteeing that tuition will be refunded if study permits are denied by CIC. Sample refund policies can be found on the International Education Advisory Council Members’ Web sites, which are listed on the Study in Alberta Web site at <http://www.studyinalberta.ca>, and in Appendix A: Leadership.

Arrange for Custodianship

CIC stipulates that minor children coming to study in Canada need a custodian. “All minor applicants must supply a notarized declaration—one signed by the parents or legal guardians in the country of origin, as well as one signed by the custodian in Canada—stating that arrangements have been made for the custodian to act in place of a parent.” (<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/study/institutions/index.asp>) See the Glossary in this handbook for the definition of a *custodian* and *legal guardian*.

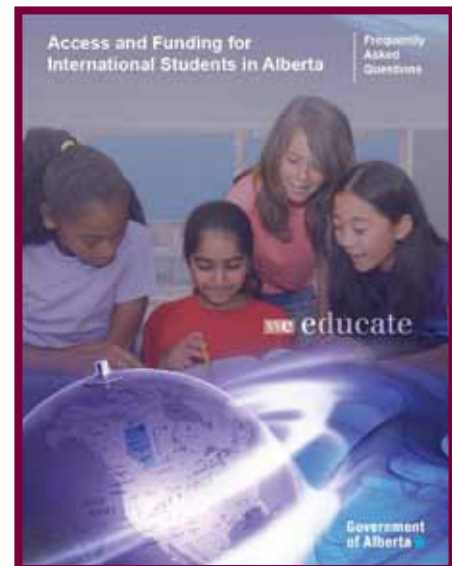
School authorities should arrange for custodianship by taking the following steps:

- notify incoming students and parents of this requirement
- arrange for the host families or residence supervisor to assume custodianship for students
- have a staff member or other adult assume temporary custodianship of the student if a host family has not been located yet
- ensure that a notarized declaration is provided as required by CIC
- obtain evidence of agreement if custodianship is arranged independently by the parent or agent partner.

Sample custodianship forms may be found in Appendix G: International Student Programs. Note that the custodianship declaration for Korean students is unique. A sample is included in Appendix G: International Student Programs.

Notify Appropriate Authorities

Once a student has been admitted and enrolled in a school, notify the principal of the school and provide a complete briefing on the student, including the student’s arrival date, academic background, English proficiency and other key information. If this is the school’s first international student, be sure to provide information on how to properly code international students (see *Access and Funding for International Students in Alberta: Frequently Asked Questions* in Appendix G: International Student Programs), as well as strategies for placing them in courses (see *Supporting the Transition to Alberta* in this chapter).



Prepare for Student Arrival

School authorities should put together a standard orientation for international students so that they are appropriately prepared for the term or year ahead. Ideally, the orientation includes a face-to-face session that allows students to ask questions, as well as a written handout that outlines important information that students may need to reference at a later date.

A sample international student orientation package is included in Appendix G: International Student Programs.

School authorities should also identify one or more advisors who will be available to assist international students with personal and academic concerns. It is best to identify both a male and female advisor so that the student may approach the person (gender) with whom they are most comfortable. Advisors should be well prepared to assist international students and, according to the Guidelines for the Management of a Successful International Student Program in Alberta School Authorities, should be aware of school authority policy and cross-cultural communication strategies. Advisors should also be aware of social supports in the community that international students may draw up on, such as people or organizations that can interact with the student in his or her first language. Where this expertise does not exist, the school authority is responsible for providing potential advisors with appropriate information and training.

Develop a Tracking System for International Students

The Alberta Student Information System does not collect all information that may be useful in the administration of international student programs. For this reason, school authorities may wish to develop or purchase an information system to track additional details about international students; e.g., passport number, citizenship, parental and homestay family contact information.

You may find the following sections in this handbook helpful:

- Appendix G: International Student Programs
 - *Guidelines for the Management of a Successful International Student Program in Alberta School Authorities: A Commentary* (sections 2–5)
 - Sample International Student Application Form
 - Sample letter of acceptance from CIC (also available from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/study/index.asp>)
 - Sample letter of acceptance for Korean students
 - Custodianship Declaration (CIC)
 - Sample custodianship letter – Korean students
 - *Access and Funding for International Students in Alberta: Frequently Asked Questions*

Step 3: Supporting the Transition to Alberta

Welcoming international students to Alberta is always an exciting time. However, it can also be a confusing time; international students may feel disoriented in their new environment and administrators or counsellors may be unsure of what courses to place students in or how to code them. The following steps may help to ease the transition of international students into Alberta schools.

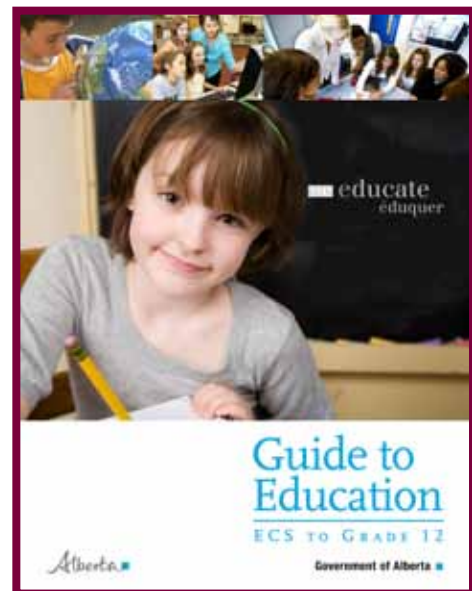
Provide Social and Emotional Support to Incoming Students

Providing social and emotional support to incoming students is of critical importance. Consider the following strategies.

- Provide an orientation for international students as soon as possible after their arrival.
- Repeat orientation information formally or informally throughout the school year to help students absorb this information.
- Introduce students to their assigned advisors as soon as possible after their arrival.
- Arrange for international students to have “student buddies” who are Alberta students or returning international students from other countries who can provide invaluable peer support.
- Ensure that administrators and advisors are prepared to assist students through the cultural adaptation process. Chapter 6: Cultural Considerations provides administrators and teacher advisors with a basic overview of intercultural communication and cultural adaptation. The overview is not exhaustive and administrators and teachers who are not familiar with its content should consider participating in additional intercultural training and/or referencing expert materials (see Chapter 5: Professional Development).

Provide the School with Placement Tips

Alberta’s *Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12* gives principals the authority to place students in the appropriate course or grade level. Placing students is not a perfect science. Often, it is a matter of making an educated guess, monitoring the progress of each student and making adjustments, as necessary, to ensure the best learning environment.



Culture Point

Scenario

After a few weeks of school, one of your international students tells you that she is uncomfortable with the attention that she is receiving from the male students in the school. When you ask her for specifics she tells you that they approach her and make romantic insinuations. To your knowledge, this kind of harassment has not happened with any other female students, international or Albertan. What's going on?

Analysis

When you ask the international student's friends, they tell you that they are surprised she feels uncomfortable. They figured that she enjoyed the attention because she is always flirting with the boys. When you ask them to describe the interaction, you realize that this is not a case of sexual harassment but of cultural miscommunication.

As discussed in Chapter 6: Cultural Considerations, nonverbal communication cues vary significantly from culture-to-culture. In this international student's culture, it is common to touch people when you are speaking to them. In Canada, however, touching during a conversation can have romantic or sexual connotations, particularly when it is between a female and a male who are the same age and are not related. So when the international student spoke with male students and put her hand on their arm or shoulder, she thought she was being polite and they thought she was flirting.

It would be worthwhile to explain to the student that in Canada people, generally, do not touch while having casual conversation and that her body language is being misinterpreted. Suggest that she refrain from touching male students when she talks to them. Also, be sure to explain to the student when touch is common and appropriate.

The following tips may be helpful in determining student placements.

- Start with the student's age

Research has shown the benefits of placing students (particularly those in grades 1 to 9) in a developmentally appropriate grade level. International students are no exception. They will have most in common with students of their own age and will practise their English or French language skills predominantly with their peers.

In some cases, school staff may find that international students who have been placed according to their age do not find their courses well suited to their needs. For example, an international student may struggle in social studies either because it demands strong reading and writing skills in English or French or because the course builds on knowledge that was established in previous social studies courses. In the reverse scenario, a student may feel unchallenged by a particular course because he or she has already mastered the content while in his or her home country.

- Assess and consider knowledge level and language ability

To avoid situations like the one described above, schools may choose to place students based on their knowledge and language ability. Assessments may take place at school authority sponsored testing centres or in the school. This strategy is more commonly used with senior high school-aged students.

- Review previous educational experience

Students' transcripts or previous school records may help schools determine appropriate placements. For example, students from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries will generally have comparable knowledge of mathematics and science as Albertan students (for a list of OECD countries, visit <http://www.oecd.org>).

Tip on Placement

International students benefit from being placed in high interest and highly interactive courses, such as art, drama, food studies and physical education, during their first semester. These courses give students the opportunity to develop the confidence and communication skills they need to function effectively in the school environment and to succeed in core courses.

Transcripts from other countries may require a more specialized evaluation. Guidance counsellors who are unsure of how to evaluate transcripts should contact the international coordinator or bureau at their school authority for additional advice and support. Some school authorities have also found the following publication useful:

International Education Research Foundation. *The New Country Index: Making Sense of International Credentials*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2004.

- Consider students' interests and program objectives

International students come to Alberta for a variety of reasons; some come for a language and cultural immersion experience while others aim to graduate with an Alberta High School Diploma. The personal goals and interests of the student should be taken into account when placing the student in certain subjects and grade levels.

Register the Student and Provide Information on Proper Coding

International fee-paying students should be given a Citizenship Status Code of 5 – “Temporary Resident (student)” and an Enrollment Code of 416 “Visiting Student.”

For more information on student coding, see Alberta Education’s *Student Information System User Guide* available at http://education.alberta.ca/media/511491/sis_user_guide.pdf and *Access and Funding for International Students in Alberta: Frequently Asked Questions* available online at <http://education.alberta.ca/students/internationaleducation/resources/schools.aspx> or in Appendix G: International Student Programs.

By properly registering the student in the Student Information System, you will ensure the student receives a welcome letter from the Minister of Education. Welcome letters are sent to the school and are distributed to international students who have recently arrived.

Properly registering students also enables Alberta Education to maintain statistics and identify trends within the international student population, including their performance on standardized tests and transition to post-secondary education.

Provide the School with Tips on Awarding Credit

Alberta Education’s *Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12* gives school principals the authority to award credit to senior high school students. The following strategies are all valid ways to determine how and when to award credit to international students.

- Review the student’s previous school records, compare them to Alberta programs of study and draw logical parallels.
- Allow the student to challenge a course examination.
- Award credit for all prerequisite courses once the student has successfully completed a course in the Alberta school; e.g., upon successful completion of English Language Arts 20-1, the principal may award credit for English Language Arts 20-1 and English Language Arts 10-1.

You may find the following sections in this handbook helpful:

- Chapter 6: Cultural Considerations
- Appendix G: *Access and Funding for International Students in Alberta: Frequently Asked Questions* or at <http://education.alberta.ca/students/internationaleducation/resources/schools.aspx>.

