

Alberta's International Education Exchange Program for Students

Program Guidelines

ALBERTA EDUCATION HAS DEVELOPED A NUMBER OF GUIDELINES WHICH MUST BE FOLLOWED BY STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN ALBERTA'S INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION EXCHANGE PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS. FAILURE BY AN ALBERTA STUDENT OR AN EXCHANGE STUDENT TO ADHERE TO THESE GUIDELINES MAY RESULT IN TERMINATION OF THE STUDENT'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM.

Commitment

The nature of these student exchange programs requires keen motivation on the part of both student and family, as well as a year-long commitment. Application may be made to only one program in any given year. Only one student per family may participate in any program year. While the exchange partner is in the Alberta home, he or she must be the first priority. Other interests – for example, part-time jobs and special relationships-- must come after the exchange partner.

For an effective exchange, all family members must enthusiastically accept the exchange partner in their home. The commitment to the program must be made when accepting the proposed match. At that time, the Alberta student and family undertakes to participate solely in this program for the year.

Parental Responsibility

The nature of these reciprocal exchange programs requires Alberta host parents/guardians to:

- assume temporary legal guardianship responsibilities for the exchange student in their home for the duration of the hosting period
- ensure that at least one parent be at home during the entire exchange period; and
- accept that the host family in the province/country of exchange will have responsibility for their child.

Alberta Education requires Alberta families to sign a consent form to allow the host parents/guardians to make necessary decisions for the Alberta student in the event of a medical or other emergency.

Objectives/Matching

The primary objectives of the program are those of language learning and enhanced cultural understanding. It is important to realize that, even with the best efforts of matching, people may change and appear different in "real life." The most important element for the success of the exchange is mutual respect and appreciation of the exchange partner.

Since exchange partners cannot be rematched simply because of personality differences, the student-participants must be mature, flexible problem-solvers who are able to compromise.

School

Regular, full-time school attendance is a requirement of the program, as is the maintenance of an acceptable academic performance throughout the program year. Exchange students will be provided a full-time school program in the host school and must be able to maintain their academic standing despite an extended absence from the home school. Alberta coursework must be done in Alberta and, generally, no Alberta schoolwork is to be done in the host school or community, unless it is the target language course work.

Allowing for an initial linguistic and cultural adjustment period, students are expected to achieve adequately in the host school. Non-attendance, poor achievement or motivation, or inappropriate behaviour are causes for the organizers to consider termination of exchange. If a student is expelled from a host or home school, the student's participation is terminated.

Student and Family Expenses

Participating families agree to provide the exchange student with room and board (that is, a separate bed and three meals a day) as well as adequate parental care and supervision. Either a bag lunch or lunch money must be provided if the student does not come home for lunch.

While host schools provide tuition for the exchange student, the cost of "user fees" or incidentals is borne by the exchange student. These include: yearbook, home economics or shop fees, gym clothing, field trip costs or the costs of music lessons. The student and family are responsible for travel to and from the arrival site in Alberta, spending money and personal expenses (for example: telephone bills, toiletries, souvenirs, correspondence costs) and any travel expenses involved in the program.

Transportation costs to and from school are provided by the Alberta school only if the resident student is eligible for this provision. The exchange partner is eligible for the same services as the Alberta student in this regard. If the school does not provide the transportation to and from school, this becomes the Alberta family's responsibility.

Contact From Home (Family or Friends)

Alberta family and friends are strongly discouraged from visiting the Alberta student while they are on exchange and away from their Alberta home. Also strongly discouraged is any travel by the Alberta student to relatives or friends living in the vicinity of the exchange destination.

Such visits and travel disrupt the continuity of the relationship with the partner and host family, and are detrimental to the language-learning process integral to exchange.

Any requests for this type of contact or travel during the exchange period need to be authorized by program officials in both provinces or countries.

Therefore, any requests must be in writing and submitted to Alberta Education at least 3 months prior to the proposed contact date.

The above guidelines also apply to the visiting exchange student, while he or she is in Alberta.

Religion

The choice of church attendance should be left to the exchange student. In most cases the only available church in Québec will be Catholic. In Germany, the available churches will be Catholic or Lutheran (Protestant). In Spain, most churches will be Catholic, although other denominations may be represented. In Japan, church attendance may not be possible. If church attendance is an important consideration in the family life and factors highly in the decision to accept an exchange, this must be stated clearly in the application. It is important to note that Alberta Education cannot guarantee a match based on this request.

Confidentiality

Exchange participants can expect personal information to be kept confidential by liaison teachers, Alberta Education, and co-operating ministries of education. Alberta Education will release personal information about participants only with the consent of the student, parents, or guardian concerned. Thus, information regarding a student's address and telephone number, or status on program will not be released without the permission of the student or family concerned. Liaison teachers will advise students of the limits of confidentiality, particularly in the counselling and mediation aspects of the exchange at the school level.

Closely related to the matter of confidentiality is the aspect of respect of an individual's privacy. Both the host family and the exchange student are expected to respect the individual's personal possessions and right to privacy. It is unethical and improper to examine or take any personal possessions (for example, diaries or letters). Violations along these lines have very serious consequences and may lead to the breakdown of an exchange.

Medical Treatment

Host families agree to treat the exchange student as their own child in terms of seeking any required medical treatment. The costs of the medical treatment is paid either by the student or host family at the time of the treatment. Should a student not be able to pay, the Alberta family is obliged to reimburse the host family any outstanding medical costs, then recover them from their own insurance carrier at a later date.

A condition of student authorization in another country is proof of comprehensive health care coverage throughout the duration of the stay in the host country; therefore, students are required to purchase adequate medical insurance coverage for the duration of stay in the other country.

Students participating in the Alberta-Québec Student Exchange program are also advised to investigate medical insurance. There is an Interprovincial Hospitalization agreement, and so the Alberta Health Care card should be adequate at hospitals across Canada, but Québec is not otherwise involved in medical services agreements with Alberta. This means that Alberta Health only reimburses funds at Alberta Health rates. Any costs above what Alberta Health would pay become the individual's responsibility. Furthermore, while on exchange in Québec, the student may have opportunity to participate in a school trip to the United States. In such cases extra medical insurance is an absolute necessity.

Please note that some medical treatments require written consent from the natural parents. In cases of pregnancy, the exchange student will return home immediately upon notification of the natural parents or guardian for medical, personal and placement considerations.

In the event of any serious physical or psychological problems, which can be more appropriately treated at home with the support and care of the student's own family and in his or her own language, the student will return home as soon as arrangements can be made and he or she is safely able to travel. Any necessary supervision will be organized with the student's parents or guardian.

Travel & Health Insurance

It is mandatory for students participating in an Alberta Education student exchange program to purchase travel and health insurance and submit proof of coverage to Alberta Education. Students can purchase insurance from any insurance provider.

Passport

Students participating in an exchange with Germany, Spain, Mexico, and Japan require a passport for travel. Several countries require passports to be valid for a number of months beyond the date of a visitor's entry. It is therefore recommended that each student's passport is valid beyond their expected date of return home.

Students participating in the Alberta-Quebec exchange are encouraged to take their passport with them in case they decide to partake in a school trip to the United States.

Travel Arrangements

Travel arrangements for all Alberta Education student exchange programs will be made through Alberta Education. Students must make payments towards their airfare by deadlines outlined by Alberta Education. Failure to do so may result in the loss of space availability on designated flights.

Student travel to and from the host destination will be chaperoned by an Alberta Education representative or an Alberta teacher. The chaperone will assist students with airport check-in, safety during travel, as well as ensure that they are met by their host families upon arrival.

Orientations

All students participating in an Alberta Education student exchange program are required to attend 2 orientations: the “Getting Started” and “Pre-Departure” orientations.

The “Getting Started” orientation will provide students and their families with information regarding the arrival of the incoming exchange students, the responsibilities of the Alberta host families and schools, as well the guidelines and procedures of the exchange program. The “Pre-Departure” orientation will focus on preparing Alberta students for their travel and life in their host destination. Topics discussed will include cultural adjustment, travel tips, healthcare, insurance, etc.

Alberta Education reserves the right to withdraw a student’s application from the exchange program should they not attend the scheduled orientations.

Reports

Students participating in an Alberta Education exchange program are required to complete mandatory mid-term and final reports and submit them to Alberta Education. These reports are to reflect the student’s experience during the hosting period (mid-term report) and their experience away from Alberta (final report). Alberta Education will issue a “Student Exchange Certificate” signed by the Minister of Education to the student upon receiving their mid-term and final reports. A “Student Exchange Certificate” will not be issued to a student if their mid-term and/or final reports have not been submitted to Alberta Education.

Electronic Communication

Students participating in an Alberta Education student exchange program will receive information regarding their exchange program through e-mail. It is therefore important that students check their e-mail at least once a week and inform Alberta Education of any changes to their email account. Parents are also required to submit their email address to Alberta Education so that they are included in these e-mail communications.

Students with Disabilities & Special Needs

Students with disabilities and special needs are encouraged to participate in an Alberta Education student exchange program. A student's disability will not influence the selection process nor determine their eligibility in participating in an exchange program.

The International Exchange Liaison will work closely with students to ensure that they receive the appropriate accommodation in their host destination. It is important to realize that cultures and governments around the world differ in their services for disabilities. This may serve as a criteria in the selection of a suitable host family, host school, and exchange destination. It is therefore required that students disclose information about their special needs to ensure that any necessary accommodation requests can be considered.

Smoking

For matching purposes, it is important to indicate on the application form whether or not anyone in the Alberta family smokes. If a student begins to smoke during the exchange period, the host family's expectations and regulations regarding smoking must be respected and obeyed. Since people in most current exchange destinations seem to accept smoking more readily than we do in Alberta, any concerns regarding smoking must be clearly stated and discussed with the liaison teacher at application time.

Alcohol

Use of alcohol by students participating in any Alberta Education exchange program is strictly prohibited and will result in termination of exchange participation. If the offender is in the host community at the time of violation, any additional costs associated with the return are the responsibility of the offender or his or her parents/guardians.

Host families and liaison teachers are responsible for reporting any use of alcohol during the hosting period to Alberta Education. If a student is placed in a home where members of the host family abuse alcohol, the student will be moved and placed with a new family.

Drugs

The use of illegal substances (drugs) will result in termination of exchange participation. If the offender is in the host community, any additional costs associated with the return are the responsibility of the offender or his or her parents/guardians.

If a student is placed in a home where members of the host family use illegal substances, the student will be moved and placed with a new family.

Illegal Activities

Alberta Education must be informed immediately of any incident involving illegal activities such as theft or shoplifting or assault. If formal charges have not been laid, the student's exchange may be terminated and the student will be responsible for any additional costs associated with the return. If charges have been laid, the student will likely face judicial proceedings in the jurisdiction where the crime was committed.

Criminal Prosecution

Students who are physically in other countries or provinces are subject to the laws of those jurisdictions. Laws in other countries can be very different, and in most instances, harsher than those in Canada. If students are charged with a criminal offence while living in another jurisdiction, Alberta Education must be notified immediately and the student's exchange participation may be terminated.

Once charges have been laid, the student will most likely face criminal proceedings in the country or province where the crime was committed. International exchange students should note that if a student is convicted, he or she will be sentenced according to the laws of that particular country. Incarceration of the student in the host country is a real possibility.

If the authorities decide not to proceed with the charges, the exchange may be terminated. The host country may also choose to deport the student. Criminal charges may prevent the student from ever returning to the country where the charges were laid.

It is important to note again, that once a student is physically in the exchange country, he or she is subject to that country's laws. Alberta Education or the Canadian Embassy can do little to assist once the student is charged with or convicted of breaking the laws of another country.

Driving

Exchange students are not permitted to drive motorized vehicles in the host province or country. This includes: cars, motorcycles, mopeds, trail bikes, ski-doo's, or farm equipment. Exchange students are not allowed to participate in Driver's Education classes in either Alberta or the host province or country. Students violating this policy will not be allowed to continue with the program, and will return home.

Dangerous Activities

Alberta Education reserves the right to withhold authorization for any activity deemed to be dangerous: e.g., hang gliding, parachute jumping, piloting a private plane, bungee jumping, mountain climbing, white-water rafting. Upon notification in writing, activities which involve an element of danger will be considered in consultation with both natural parents/guardian and host family. If agreed upon, the written permission of both families must be on file before the activity is undertaken.

Employment

International student exchange participants are generally not permitted to accept employment as a condition of the student authorization. Any violation results in termination of exchange. Interprovincial exchange participants are allowed remunerated activities (work) but must consider the impact on the exchange relationship, and avoid any imposition on the host family before accepting any type of job.

Student Travel

Any student travel which does not occur either with the host family or with the host school must be authorized by Alberta Education and its partner agencies. Students may be permitted to travel if there is:

- assurance of student safety;
- knowledge of the plans and location of the student;
- no interference with school attendance.

The Alberta parent or guardian must show these criteria have been met by submitting written notification to Alberta Education well prior to the proposed travel dates.

The above guidelines also apply to the visiting student. It is important to keep in mind that the host family is legally responsible for the exchange student during the hosting period.

Extension of Stay

Alberta Education will not grant an extension of stay to exchange students in Alberta unless there is demonstrated evidence of a medical emergency. The Alberta school/jurisdiction has no further obligation to provide tuition after the program's termination.

Alberta students are expected back in their Alberta schools after program completion. As the exchange period for international programs is limited to a maximum of 60 or 90 days, the host family and school must be absolved of any responsibility at that time. Any requests for an extension must be addressed to Alberta Education.

Early Returns

Early returns normally are of two types: voluntary, at the request of the student or family, or involuntary, upon a decision by Alberta Education.

If voluntary returns involve a medical or family crisis, Alberta Education will endeavour to assist with the return, and usually only minimal travel costs are incurred by the participating student or family.

In the case of involuntary return due to infractions of program guidelines leading to the termination of exchange, any associated additional costs involved in returning home are the responsibility of the student or family.

Program Cancellation/Termination due to Safety and Security

Alberta Education reserves the right to cancel a student exchange program prior to its commencement or at any time during its operation if:

1. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade issues a Travel Report for a country that indicates that Canadians or Permanent Residents should not travel to and/or should leave the country.
2. Alberta Education regards the situation in a country as posing certain risks to the safety and security of students. Students will then be required to leave that country.

Withdrawals/Off-Program

A successful exchange will be determined by the drive and desire to follow through until the end of the exchange period, regardless of the difficulties encountered.

A withdrawal will carry serious consequences for the partner in the other province or country; the exchange partner might not be able to continue participating in the program.

If the Alberta student or family chooses to withdraw from the exchange prematurely due, for example, to personality conflicts or adjustment problems, any associated additional costs involved in returning home are again the responsibility of the participating student or family.

If the student is absent from the host school, family or other designated place (program activity sites) without the approval of Alberta Education, the exchange participation for that student will be terminated.

Should a student fail to comply, and stay in Alberta or Canada despite exchange termination, he or she is considered "off-program". Alberta Education accepts no legal responsibility for the student, and will immediately notify the natural parents or guardian, and the exchange counterparts of program termination. If the incident involves international exchange students, immigration officials will also be notified.

FINAL NOTE

Using these guidelines as a guide, Alberta Education reserves the right to terminate student exchanges for any reason outlined therein, and may also require the student or the student's parents or guardian to pay any additional costs associated with the student's return.

Alberta Education assumes no legal responsibility for the actions, debts, expenses, safety, or health of the students participating in the exchange.