



U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
Private Sector Exchange



January 3, 2025

Dear American Host Family:

Welcome to the U.S. Department of State's BridgeUSA Exchange Visitor Program! On behalf of the U.S. Department of State, we would like to thank you for your decision to host an international exchange student. People-to-people exchanges are a valuable tool of foreign policy. BridgeUSA programs allow you to experience first-hand the richness and diversity of a culture different from your own, as you exemplify American values and culture to an exchange student. Through this program, you will join thousands of American families who serve as citizen ambassadors of the United States. Many families have found hosting an exchange student to be a rewarding and memorable experience.

High School exchange programs have been a part of U.S. public diplomacy efforts since 1949. Approximately 20,000 exchange students from around the world participate in this program each year. The good will of American host families in opening their homes to these young international visitors is vital to this program's success. The exchange student is a guest in your home and in our country and you may be the first Americans this young person meets. Your hospitality will create a lasting impression of our country and its people.

The health, safety, and well-being of the young people who participate in this program are our highest priority. A host family has many responsibilities, the most important of which is properly caring for an international student during his/her program. The regulations governing the secondary school student program are found at eCFR — [Exchange Visitor Program regulations](#) (22 CFR 62 - Exchange Visitor Program). These regulations address the most frequently asked questions about the program and provide the rules under which the program operates. It is extremely important that you notify your sponsor representative if you have any concerns or if the exchange student's personal health, safety, or well-being is threatened in any way. If the sponsoring organization is not responsive to your concerns, you should contact the Department of State directly through our J-1 Visa Emergency Helpline 1-866-283-9090, which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or by e-mail at JVisas@state.gov.

The BridgeUSA program will create a strong life-long bond between you, your international student, and your local community. We are pleased that you made the decision to be part of this impactful exchange program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Rebecca A. Pasini".

Rebecca A. Pasini
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Private Sector Exchange



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Dear Secondary School Student:

Welcome to the U.S. Department of State's BridgeUSA Exchange Visitor Program! This is the beginning of an exciting adventures in your life. During your time in the United States, you will obtain an American high school education and experience life as part of an American family. You will make friendships that will last a lifetime, get lots of practice in speaking English, and partake in family traditions. Since 1949, thousands of students from around the world have come to share their language, culture, and customs with their American host families, American schools, and the broader local community. Your participation in this exchange program fosters a greater understanding between our two countries and works towards peaceful relations throughout the world.

We want you to have a meaningful and successful experience. Your new school and host family may have different rules and ways of life from what you are used to, so keeping an open mind will be very important to your success. Your goal should be to learn as much as you can about American customs, values, and culture and to build strong relationships with your host family, classmates, and friends.

Your U.S. sponsor is your first point of contact throughout your stay in the United States. Their information is identified on your Form DS-2019, Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Program (J-1) Status. If you have any questions about your exchange program or need assistance of any kind while you are here, immediately contact your U.S. sponsor. It is their responsibility to help you with any problems, needs, or concerns you may have. Their emergency telephone contact number can be found in your program orientation materials and identification card, and is available to you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Add this phone number to your contact list.

If you have concerns and/or issues that your U.S. sponsor has not resolved, or you find you cannot reach your sponsor, please contact the Department of State through our J-1 Visa Emergency Helpline 1-866-283-9090, which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or by e-mail at JVisas@state.gov. Please add the helpline number and the email address to your contacts to ensure you receive important communications from the Department. Your sponsor and the Department of State are here to ensure your success and safety on the program.

We are pleased that you made the decision to study in the United States and hope you enjoy your stay.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rebecca A. Pasini".

Rebecca A. Pasini
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Private Sector Exchange



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Dear School Administrator:

Welcome to the U.S. Department of State's BridgeUSA Exchange Visitor Program. Your school and community are about to embark on an exciting journey through the enrollment of an exchange student from another country. Not only will your school experience the culture and traditions of another country through the eyes of your exchange student, but the exchange student will gain an American high school education and cultural experience of their own. The exchange student will also learn first-hand about the United States through your school, their host family, and the community. Now, more than ever, it is important to globalize our classrooms. As a school that supports an exchange student, you are part of a larger mission and vision that has been a part of U.S. public diplomacy efforts since 1949. This program is not only a unique opportunity for exchange students to experience the culture and diversity of the United States, but it allows U.S. students to expand their horizons, as well. Your school and community will share language, culture, and customs with your exchange students and will foster a deeper understanding between countries throughout the world.

In 2022, approximately 20,000 exchange students were welcomed and integrated into school communities like yours. If you have specific questions about the operational plans and best practices of these exchanges, we encourage you to reach out to the program sponsors in your area. What has remained clear in recent years is that the mission to foster global understanding through international student exchange is more important than ever. Your commitment to this mission is vital. Not only do these exchange students return home with positive views of the United States, but by studying and participating in school activities alongside your students, they help broaden the world view of your entire community.

It is critical that you notify the student's program sponsor if you have any concerns or if the exchange student's personal health, safety, and/or well-being is threatened in any way. If the sponsor is not responsive to your concerns, please contact the Department of State directly at our 24-hour toll-free number 1-866-283-9090 that has been established for this purpose. In addition, the program sponsor provides each student with an identification card which lists the student's host family address and telephone numbers, separate telephone numbers for immediate contact with the sponsor organization and the sponsor's local representative, and the Department of State's toll-free phone number and email address (JVisas@state.gov). Your exchange student should keep this card with him/her at all times.

The BridgeUSA program helps strengthen the State Department's ties with U.S. cities and states. Engaging educators, administrators, and students brings the benefits of foreign policy to the local level and encourages communities to increasingly participate on the international stage. Thank you for joining with us in this effort.

Sincerely,

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Rebecca A. Pasini
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Private Sector Exchange