



# Student Exchange Program Guidelines

*Alberta Education and the Alberta Teachers' Association have developed guidelines that must be followed by students participating in the student exchange programs. 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.*

*Alberta Education and the Alberta Teachers' Association assume no legal responsibility for the actions, debts, expenses, safety or health of students participating in the exchange.*

## BEFORE APPLYING

### 1. Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information

The information provided on the application form, other than medical information, will be shared between the Alberta Teacher's Association (ATA), Alberta Education, and cooperating ministries or educational organizations in Quebec or abroad to ensure the smooth operation of the program. Application information will also be shared with the proposed match and his or her family and with liaison teachers in Alberta and in the exchange destination.

The ATA will not release information about the Alberta student or his or her family to other Alberta students and families participating in the exchange unless appropriate consent has been given.

Information provided above and beyond the application form will be kept confidential by the Alberta Teachers' Association in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, unless otherwise stated.

### 2. Eligibility

2.1. **Language of Study** To be eligible for this program, students must be studying French, German, Japanese or Spanish. Participants ideally will have completed the 20 level of their language (or equivalent) before they leave to study in their exchange destination, unless special permission is received from the Student Exchange Program liaison. **For the Alberta/Macau program, the language of study is English.**

2.2. **No Multiple Applications per Student** An applicant may apply to only one program per program year.

- 2.3. **Multiple Applications per Family** Normally only one student per family may participate per program year, although exceptions may be discussed. Any exceptions to this rule must be approved by the Student Exchange Program liaison at the Alberta Teacher's Association prior to the submission of applications.
- 2.4. **Special Needs Students** Students with special needs are eligible to apply for Alberta's Student Exchange Program. A student's disability will not influence the selection process in Alberta. However, cultures and governments around the world differ in their services for individuals with disabilities or special needs. The program would not match a student who has special needs with a host family or school that is unable to properly accommodate and support him or her. As such, it is critical that students disclose their disability or special needs on the application form.

## APPLYING TO THE PROGRAM

### 3. Application Preferences and Matching

- 3.1. **Matching Process.** The Alberta Teachers' Association aims to match students with like interests and compatible housing requirements. Before a match is finalized, the Alberta student and his or her family **and** the exchange student and his or her family must agree to the proposal.
- 3.2. **Criminal Record Checks.** Hosting families are required to provide the ATA with copies of criminal record checks for every resident of the Alberta home who is 18 years of age or older. Failure to provide criminal record checks may jeopardize the student's participation in the exchange program. Any known criminal records should be disclosed to the Student Exchange Program liaison after the application has been submitted because, depending on the nature of the charge, participation as a host family may not be allowed.
- 3.3 **Religion** If church attendance is an important consideration for the student and factors highly in his or her decision to accept a match, this must be stated clearly in the application. Alberta students who wish to attend a Christian church in the exchange destination should note that
- in Québec, the majority of churches are Roman Catholic;
  - in Germany, the majority of churches are Roman Catholic or Lutheran;
  - in Spain, the majority of churches are Roman Catholic; and
  - in Japan, Christian churches are not as plentiful and church attendance may not be possible.
- 3.4 **Smoking** For matching purposes, it is important to indicate on the application form whether or not anyone in the Alberta family smokes. Alberta students that smoke are required to obey the host family's rules in regards to smoking (eg, not permitted in the house). Exchange students that come to Alberta are expected to do the same.

Since people in most current exchange destinations accept smoking more readily than we do in Alberta, any concerns regarding smoking must be clearly stated and discussed with the school liaison teacher at application time.

- 3.5 **Rematching** Sometimes applicants appear to be a good match on paper but, during the exchange, the pair may discover that they have little in common. Exchange partners cannot be rematched because of personality differences. Instead, Alberta students are expected to make the most of their experience and to be respectful to their exchange partners.

## PREPARING FOR THE PROGRAM

### 4. Commitment

- 4.1 **Student Commitment** Successful exchanges require keen motivation and a sustained commitment by participating students and families. While there will certainly be moments of excitement and joy, there may also be moments of confusion and frustration. Applicants should be prepared to commit to the exchange for the entire year, regardless of the difficulties encountered. They must also be prepared to prioritize their hosting duties and any ATA organized exchange meetings over their other interests (eg, **part-time jobs, special relationships and extracurricular activities should be of secondary importance**).

Written commitment to the program will be required once the Alberta student and his or her family accept a proposed match.

- 4.2 **Parental Commitment** Before committing to an exchange, Alberta parents should be aware that these reciprocal exchange programs require that they
- ensure that at least one parent is at home during the entire exchange period;
  - assume temporary legal guardianship of the exchange student while he or she is in Alberta; and
  - accept that the host family will assume responsibility for their child while he or she studies in the exchange destination (ie, the ATA requires Alberta families to sign a consent form that allows the host parents/guardians to make decisions on the behalf of the Alberta student if a medical or other emergency arises.)

### 5. Electronic Communication

Parents and students participating in the student exchange program will receive information most often through e-mail. It is therefore important that both parents and students check their e-mail at least once a week and that they inform the Alberta Teachers' Association of any changes to their e-mail account. A personal (not family) e-mail address is mandatory for all Alberta students.

## 6. Mandatory Orientation Meetings

All students participating in the student exchange program are required to attend two orientations: Getting Started and Predeparture.

- 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, and the guidelines and procedures of the exchange program.
- The Predeparture orientation will focus on preparing Alberta students to travel and adjust to life in their host destination. Topics discussed will include cultural adjustment, travel tips, healthcare, insurance, and so on.

The Alberta Teachers' Association reserves the right to withdraw a student from the exchange program if he or she does not attend the scheduled orientations. At least one parent or guardian is also required to attend both orientations.

## **PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAM**

### 7. General Responsibilities and Expectations

7.1. **Reports** Students participating in the exchange program are required to complete midterm and final reports and submit them to the Student Exchange Program liaison at the Alberta Teachers' Association. In these reports, students should reflect upon their experience during the hosting period (midterm report) and their experience away from Alberta (final report). The ATA will issue certificates of completion to students who submit their midterm and final reports by the established deadlines.

7.2. **Attendance and Performance** Regular, full-time school attendance is a requirement of the program, as is the maintenance of an acceptable academic performance throughout the program year. Incoming exchange students will be enrolled in full-time classes while in Alberta, and Alberta students will attend full-time classes in their exchange destinations. Alberta students must participate in class and make an effort to maintain their academic standing while they are away. They must also plan to complete the course work that they missed while in their host county/province. 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.

Nonattendance, poor performance and/or inappropriate behaviour may result in the termination of the exchange. If a student is expelled from the home or school, his or her exchange will be terminated and the return home arranged by the Student Exchange Program liaison at the ATA. The cost of the return travel will be the responsibility of the student's parents.

## 8. During the Hosting Period

**8.1. Hosting Expenses** Alberta schools will waive nonresident student tuition for the exchange student. Transportation costs to and from school are provided by the Alberta school only if the Alberta student is eligible for this provision (ie, the exchange partner is entitled to the same services as the Alberta student). If the school does not provide the transportation to and from school, the Alberta family is responsible to arrange and pay for transportation.

As a host family, the Alberta family is responsible to travel to and from the arrival site in Alberta to pick up the exchange student. Host parents must also 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. The Alberta family is expected to treat the exchange student as a member of the family. Therefore, if the Alberta parents organize a family activity or trip and pay for their son(s) or daughter(s), they should pay for the exchange student as well.

The exchange student is responsible to pay for his or her own long-distance telephone calls and other incidental costs or fees (eg, yearbook, surcharges associated with optional courses or field trips and so on). He or she is responsible to bring spending money to cover personal items (eg, souvenirs, clothes and so on) and social occasions (eg, birthday parties, movies with friends and so on).

When the Alberta student travels to the exchange destination, his or her host school and family will bear similar costs. Like his or her exchange partner, the Alberta student will be responsible to cover the costs associated with long-distance phone calls, incidentals, personal items and social occasions.

**8.2. Travel During the Hosting Period** Permission for the exchange student to travel with any party other than the Alberta host family or Alberta school representatives must be sought from the Alberta Teachers' Association.

Such trips may be permitted if the ATA is

- assured that the student will be safely transported,
- aware of the student's travel plans and travel itinerary, and
- convinced that travel will not interfere with school attendance.

The Alberta parent or guardian must show that these criteria have been met by submitting written notification to the ATA well in advance of the proposed travel dates. The ATA may terminate the exchange of a student who travels with a third party without the appropriate written permission.

- 8.3. **Privacy** The Alberta host family is expected to respect the exchange student's personal possessions and right to privacy. It is unethical and improper to examine or take any personal possessions (eg, diaries or letters). Violations along these lines have very serious consequences and may lead to the termination of an exchange.
- 8.4. **Employment** International exchange students are **NOT** legally allowed to work while in Alberta. Interprovincial exchange participants are legally allowed to work in Alberta, but are discouraged from getting a part-time job while they are here. Quebecois students who wish to take on a part-time job must consider how the job might affect their relationship with their Alberta partner and host family.
- 8.5. **High-Risk Activity** The Alberta Teachers' Association reserves the right to withhold authorization for any high-risk activity (eg, hang-gliding, parachute jumping, bungee jumping, mountain climbing, whitewater rafting and so on). Alberta families who are considering introducing their exchange student to high-risk activities require written permission from the Student Exchange Program liaison at the ATA and the exchange student's parents or guardians. Written permission must be secured before the activity is undertaken.

It should be noted that most out-of-country emergency health insurance does not cover injuries resulting from any high-risk activity.

- 8.6. **Extension of Stay in Alberta** The Alberta Teachers' Association will not permit exchange students to extend their stay in Alberta, because once the Alberta portion of the exchange is complete, the Alberta school and jurisdiction are no longer required to waive tuition. Exceptions will be made only when there is a medical emergency, in which case the student would not be attending school.

## 9. During the Study Abroad Period

- 9.1. **Passports** Students participating in an exchange with Germany, Spain, Mexico, Japan or Macau will require a passport. Some countries require that passports be valid for a specified number of months beyond the traveller's date of entry. **The ATA recommends that the passports of participating students be valid for at least six months beyond the date of the return from the exchange country.** For example, if the student will be returning on May 1, 20XX, his or her passport should have an expiration date of November 1, 20XX or later.

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.

- 9.2. **Visas** Canadian students participating in the exchange with Macau and Yamate will require a separate visa, and students must be prepared to meet all visa requirements. The Student Exchange Program liaisons can provide information and assistance in obtaining the correct visa. Final approval to travel will be based on the receipt of the visa. Visas to enter Canada will also be required for Mexican students, students from Yamate and some students participating in the Macau

program. Visa applications for exchange students are supported by our exchange partners.

Alberta students participating in the exchange who are non-Canadian citizens and will be travelling with a passport from another country may be required to obtain a visa for the exchange country. The student and his or her family are responsible to obtain the required visa.

- 9.3. **Travel To and From the Exchange Destination** Students who travel to and from the host destination will be chaperoned by an ATA representative or Alberta teacher. The chaperone will help students to check in, board and make flight connections. He or she will also ensure that the students are met by their host families.

Travel arrangements for the student exchange programs will be made through a travel agency determined by the ATA. Students participating in international exchanges must pay for their airfare by the deadlines outlined by the Student Exchange Program liaisons at the ATA. If these deadlines are not met, the student may not be able to travel with the ATA chaperone and other Alberta students. Purchases of airline tickets through points systems are not permitted.

For students travelling to Quebec, a travel grant is provided by the Official Languages in Education Programs (OLEP), which covers flight costs. However, if any alterations are required for any reason, parents will be responsible for change fees. **In order to secure flights, a \$400 deposit is required. This deposit will be returned once the Alberta student has completed the program.**

- 9.4. **Travel Medical Insurance** It is mandatory for students participating in an international student exchange program to have travel medical insurance. **Alberta Health Care does not provide sufficient insurance** for students outside of Canada. Mandatory travel insurance for students will be included in the cost of the flights, unless proof of adequate coverage is submitted to the ATA by the established deadline. All Alberta students are required to maintain a valid Canadian government health insurance plan.

Although they will remain in Canada, students participating in the Alberta–Québec student exchange program should consider purchasing travel medical insurance. Because of the Interprovincial Hospitalization Agreement, an Alberta Health Care card will enable students to access services at hospitals across Canada. If the student needed to see a physician, he or she would be required to pay up front and make a claim to Alberta Health Insurance Plan at a later date. While on exchange to Québec, the student may also have opportunity to participate in a school trip to the United States. In such cases, travel medical insurance for the United States is required.

It should be noted that, typically, emergency medical travel insurance does not cover and no benefit is payable from any claim arising from

- a pre-existing condition or related medical condition that was not stable and controlled during the three-month period before the effective date of the insurance;
- participation in some sport activities;
- intentional self-inflicted injury; or
- abuse of drug(s), medication(s), including over-the-counter medications, alcohol or other intoxicants, or illicit drugs, or any condition (including death) resulting therefrom.

**9.5. High-Risk Activity** The Alberta Teachers' Association reserves the right to withhold authorization for any high-risk activity (eg, hang-gliding, parachute jumping, bungee jumping, mountain climbing, whitewater rafting and so on). It should be noted that most out-of-country (or province) emergency health insurance does not cover injuries resulting from any high-risk activity.

**9.6. Visits to the Exchange Destination** Alberta family and friends are strongly discouraged from visiting the Alberta student while he or she is on exchange and away from Alberta. Relatives or friends of the family who are living in the vicinity of the exchange destination are also discouraged from visiting. Such visits disrupt the relationship with the partner and host family and are detrimental to the language-learning process.

Permission for this type of contact must be given by the Student Exchange Program liaisons at the ATA and the student's partners from the exchange destination. Requests for permission must be in writing and submitted to the ATA at least three months prior to the proposed contact date.

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

**9.7. Extension of Stay** Alberta students are expected to return to Alberta once the "study abroad" portion of the exchange is complete. The exchange period for international programs is limited to either 60 or 90 days, and according to the program agreement, the host family and host school are absolved of any responsibility once that time has elapsed. Requests for an extension must be made in writing and addressed to the Student Exchange Program liaisons at the ATA, and must be submitted by the deadline established by the ATA. An original, signed Deviation Form must accompany the request (forms available from the Student Exchange Program liaisons).

Any visa extensions required as a result of an extension of stay are the responsibility of the Alberta family to obtain.

**9.8. Illegal Activities and Criminal Prosecution** Alberta students who are in other provinces or countries 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, the Alberta Teachers' Association must be notified immediately and the student's exchange may be terminated.

Once charges are laid, the student will likely face judicial proceedings in the jurisdiction where the crime was alleged to have been committed. If convicted, the Alberta student will be sentenced according to the laws of that particular country. Incarceration of the student in the host country is a real possibility. The host country may also choose to deport the student, although the initial charges may prevent the student from ever returning to that province or country.

***PLEASE NOTE: There is little that Alberta Education, the ATA or the Canadian Embassy can do to assist a student who is charged with or convicted of breaking the laws of another country.***

## 10. Medical Treatment and Costs

**10.1. Medical Treatment** The Alberta family agrees to treat the exchange student as they would treat their own child when it comes to medical treatment. If a medical issue is **not time sensitive**, it is wise to consult with the parents of the exchange student and to get their written permission to proceed with treatment.

**10.2. Medical Costs** The cost of medical treatment should be paid by the student at the time of treatment. If the student is unable to pay, the host family is obliged to pay on his or her behalf and then seek reimbursement from the student's parents. The student's parents may then seek reimbursement from their insurance company.

For example, if an Alberta student broke a limb while abroad and did not have the funds to cover the cost of medical care, his or her host family would pay for the treatment and then contact that Alberta family, who would reimburse them. The Alberta family would then contact its insurance provider to discuss reimbursement.

**10.3. Early Termination for Medical Reasons** A student who has serious physical or psychological problems that can be more appropriately treated at home will be sent home, presuming that he or she can travel safely. Any necessary supervision will be organized by the Student Exchange Program liaison in concert with the student's parents or guardians. The student or the student's parents or guardians will be required to pay any costs associated with his or her return home.

## 11. Early Termination of An Exchange

There are two types of early termination of an exchange: voluntary, at the request of the student or family; or involuntary, upon a decision by the Alberta Teachers' Association. In both cases, the Student Exchange Program liaisons, in conjunction with the exchange partner organization, will make the necessary arrangements for the return of the student to his or her home airport.

**11.1 Voluntary Termination** Voluntary termination has serious consequences for the partner in the other province or country, as the exchange partner may not be able to study in Alberta or host a student in his or her home province or country.

If the Alberta student chooses to withdraw from his or her exchange prematurely, any associated additional costs involved in returning home are the responsibility of the student or his or her family.

When voluntary returns involve a medical or family crisis, the ATA will assist with the return to ensure that minimal travel costs are incurred by the participating student or family.

**11.2 Involuntary Termination** When the Alberta Teachers' Association terminates a student's exchange (for any of the reasons below and otherwise contained herein), the student or the student's parents or guardians are required to pay any costs associated with his or her return home.

**11.3 Alcohol** Use of alcohol by Alberta students participating in any of the exchange programs is strictly prohibited and will result in termination of student's exchange. Exceptions will be made only if the student was

- a) offered alcohol by his or her host parents as part of a meal or cultural celebration and*
- b) appropriately supervised during the consumption of said alcohol.*

If an exchange student is caught drinking alcohol while in Alberta, the host family and/or school liaison teacher must report this to the Student Exchange Program liaisons at the ATA.

**11.4 Attendance** If the student is absent from the host school, family or other designated place (program activity sites) without the approval of the Alberta Teachers' Association, the student's exchange will be terminated.

*This provision includes attendance at the Getting Started meeting and/or Predeparture orientation.*

**11.5 Criminal Charges** The ATA will terminate a student's exchange if (during the exchange year) he or she is charged with a criminal offence by authorities in Canada or in the exchange destination.

**11.6 Driving** Participating students are not permitted to drive motorized vehicles in the host province or country. This includes cars, motorcycles, mopeds, quads, ski-doo's or farm equipment. Students are not allowed to participate in driver education classes in either Alberta or the host province or country. If this policy is violated, the student's exchange will be terminated.

**11.7 Drugs** The use of drugs or other illegal substances by the Alberta student or the exchange student in Alberta or in the exchange destination will result in the immediate termination of the student's exchange.

**11.8 Inappropriate Behaviour** While on exchange, Alberta students are ambassadors of Canada, Alberta and their school. The Alberta Teachers' Association will not tolerate disrespectful, malicious or otherwise poor behaviour. The ATA will terminate a student's exchange if he or she is behaving inappropriately.

**11.9 Pregnancy** If a student discovers that she is pregnant while on exchange, her parents or guardians will be notified and the exchange will be immediately terminated.

## **12. Off-Program Designations**

When an exchange is involuntarily terminated by the Alberta Teachers' Association, the natural parents or guardians of the student and exchange office in the exchanged destination are notified immediately.

***Once a student's exchange is terminated, he or she is considered off-program.***

The ATA will accept no responsibility for the student. If an off-program student is an international exchange student, Canadian immigration officials will also be notified.

## **13. Program Cancellation**

The Alberta Teachers' Association reserves the right to cancel a student exchange program prior to its commencement or at any time during its operation if

- the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade or Canada Health issues a Travel Report for the exchange destination, which indicates that Canadians or permanent residents should not travel to and/or should leave the country or region; or
- the ATA thinks that the situation in a country or region poses a significant risk to the safety and security of Alberta students.

If Alberta students are already in the exchange destination, they will be obliged to leave in a manner directed by the ATA.