Administering Youth Exchange Guide

The U.S. High Schools’ Guide on International Student Exchange

Section 6
“Helping Exchange Students Succeed
Tips for Teachers”
Helping Exchange Students Succeed: *Tips for Teachers*

International students are an exciting resource. Many schools create special events and programs to make the most of this opportunity of hosting exchange students. Special events encourage all students to get to know these guests from another culture, thus expanding their own horizons. The following suggestions for welcoming international exchange students and working with international student exchange programs may be helpful.

In order to create a welcoming classroom environment, teachers should provide opportunities for the exchange student to watch, listen, adapt and learn from their peers. The exchange student’s primary focus is to fit in, to learn and to make friends. They may need a little help adjusting, especially in the beginning. These suggestions may also help teachers and American students in making exchange students feel welcome.

◊ **Make their presence known to school staff.** Notify all relevant staff and administrative personnel that the school will be welcoming exchange students. You may want to introduce the new exchange student at a teachers’ or staff meeting, if possible. This helps the student feel welcome while also helping administrators and teachers think of ways to incorporate the student into their day-to-day lessons. If possible, provide copies of relevant parts of the student’s application to each of his/her teachers prior to the start of school so they will learn about the exchange student’s background, both personally and academically.

◊ **Encourage American students to interact with the exchange students.** Establish a “buddy system.” Ask willing students who are involved in student council, clubs, sports or foreign language classes to pair up with one of the exchange students. This enables the exchange student to establish a support network. Their “buddy” may assist the exchange student with answers to questions that he or she is uncomfortable asking another. This person can also introduce them to all facilities, clubs and other opportunities your school offers. Many schools provide a similar service to new students of all sorts, but such a welcome is particularly important for the foreign guest.

◊ **Internationalize your classrooms and school with the help of the exchange students.** Trying to help the exchange students adjust to life in America does not mean assimilation, but rather adaptation. The student should add another dimension to the classroom, not merely blend in.
   ♦ *Invite exchange students to present on their culture.* Students can do presentations about their home culture in relevant classes, explain their take on current events, or discuss the differences in holiday traditions. This not only educates American students, but tends to bring a lively discussion to the class, forging friendships and fostering better understanding. Don’t forget to include American students who have returned from exchange programs in the same way.
   ♦ *Help internationalize your hallways:* Put up maps, have cultural days or events, present news stories from around the globe. These activities help all students become more aware of world events and culture.
   ♦ *Ask American students studying abroad to serve as foreign correspondents for the school paper, or publish their travel journals in print or electronic media.*
   ♦ *Frequently, schools will prominently display the flags of the countries from which their exchange students come.*
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- **Foster open communication between and with the students throughout the year.** All students will have some adjustment issues along the way, especially when they first arrive, and then again around major holidays or personal events. It is helpful to touch base with them so they know they have a support in the school. Contact a student’s local representative sooner rather than later if the student seems to be consistently unhappy or has other problems.
  - *Have the exchange students get together with one another:* Bring all exchange students together to see how things are going. Are they making friends? Are they having trouble with a particular course or teacher? They will likely feel most comfortable talking about these issues around one another, and will be comforted to know others feel as they do.
  - *Give the exchange students a high school handbook which will explain school policies as well as make them aware of the facilities, services, and opportunities available to them.*
  - *Touch base with faculty who are around the students often:* These people are most likely to notice any behavioral or mood concerns. If the student appears to be troubled, contact the local representative of their sponsoring organization. If a student is having problems with his or her host family, it is particularly important to call the local representative or sponsoring organization. These parties can mediate between the student and family and arrange a student move if the differences between the two remain irreconcilable.

International students and American student returnees of exchange can be an invaluable resource for teachers and students to help bring global education competencies to your school population. Helping them feel welcome and accepted in the school, while valuing their experiences and perspectives, is a large part of turning them into active contributors to your school community.