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

BridgeUSA

January 3, 2025

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,

Rebecca A. Pasini
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Private Sector Exchange