

# J1 and F1 Student Programs

## Synopsis

Thousands of international students come to the US every year. Many of them are looking for just the type of quality education that is offered in our schools. Should your school be open to these types of students? This workshop will address topics such as: what is the difference between a foreign and a foreign exchange student; what are the costs and benefits of having them in your school; do they pay tuition or not.

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## About Lehigh Valley Christian High School ([www.lvchs.org](http://www.lvchs.org)):

LVCHS began in 1988 as a cooperative effort of the Christian schools of the Lehigh Valley. These schools, our founding schools, are Lehigh Christian Academy, Bethlehem Christian School, and Philipsburg Christian Academy. The founding schools each serve students up through grade 8; LVCHS serves students in grades 9-12. The majority of the students at LVCHS come from the founding schools, with others coming from area public schools, from home-school situations, and, increasingly, from other countries.

## About the speaker:

Dr. Russell ([a.russell@lvchs.org](mailto:a.russell@lvchs.org)) served on the board of LVCHS for 17 years and was its chairman for 15 years. When he retired from over 30 years in industry and 25 years as an adjunct computer science professor he also retired from the LVCHS board. Now he volunteers as the Director of Admissions and International Student Coordinator. His wife was a Christian preschool teacher for over 25 years. His children are both graduates of Lehigh Christian Academy and LVCHS.

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## **Definitions**

A foreign student is here in the US on an F-1 visa. This is a multi-year visa and the student generally expects to stay here for the duration of their education. They must be authorized by the school which they are attending in the US which is then responsible for ensuring that they arrive, that they attend school, etc. While recruitment of the students, making travel arrangements, finding a host family, etc. *may* be coordinated by an agency, the school they are attending is ultimately responsible for them. Schools wishing to host foreign students must apply for approval by the Immigrations and Customs Enforcement Agency, part of the Department of Homeland Security.

A foreign-exchange student (herein called just an “exchange student” to avoid confusion) is here in the US on a J-1 visa. This visa is for “cultural exchange” and is limited to one year. They are *always* represented by an agency which is responsible for recruitment, orientation, travel arrangements, finding host families, and supporting the students while they are here. Reputable agencies are generally accredited by CSIET (Council on Standards for International Educational Travel). Regulations for J-1 students are administered by the US Department of State.

## **Common Benefits**

Whether you accept either foreign or exchange students into your school some of the benefits will be similar.

This is an opportunity to expose your students to others who are from another culture. Culture is more than just language – it also includes food, family relationships, and a host of other things – some more visible than others. And, while these students will be high-school aged you can feel free to have them make presentations to your elementary and middle-school students about their country and culture.

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## Costs

While the above benefits apply to both types of students, there are other things which are quite different.

## Foreign Students

Because you would be providing the education to any foreign student, you will also be able to charge them your full tuition. In addition, since you may have to provide them additional services, there may be additional fees which are applicable. However, there are also additional costs associated with having these students in your school.

### Costs to school

- Application to and approval by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement Agency
- Cost of issuing I-20s, tracking student progress and changes in SEVIS
- Mailing documents such as the I-20 to another country
- Annual signing of student I-20 and any other required documentation
- Providing either ESL classes or other forms of English language support
- Involvement in student support issues
- Assistance in housing support for any students not represented by agencies

### Corresponding tuition and fees (example from LVCHS)

- Application fee is double that of US students
- International Student tuition is higher to cover higher academic costs
- Annual International Student Services fee to cover administrative costs
- Tuition must be paid in full at beginning of year (i.e. no monthly tuition)

## Exchange Students

As opposed to Foreign students, Exchange students are here for the purpose of cultural exchange. While they receive a transcript or grade report for their time in your school, you are not required to give them a diploma (or to ensure that their academic program meets the graduation requirements of your school). Because the student is here under the auspices of an agency which must meet Department of State regulations, there is much less for the school itself to do. However, the students do not generally pay tuition for their year here, so the school must agree to waive tuition in order to host them. Also, you must be an accredited school in order to host any exchange students.

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## Other Issues

- The vast majority of foreign students are from a handful of countries (principally China, India, South Korea), although there are some from other countries
- Because foreign students are here for academic purposes, they are often focused solely on their academics and less likely to mix and/or share their culture with US students, etc.
- Exchange students are here from a variety of countries on every continent so your students can be exposed to a wider variety of cultures
- Host families for exchange students are not allowed to be compensated. However, agencies which place foreign students often pay generous host family stipends
- While exchange students are always high school age, foreign students may come at an earlier age (for non-public schools only). LVCHS has been authorized to place elementary/middle school age students in our three sending schools and we have had a few 8<sup>th</sup> grade students the past few years.
- F-1 students are only allowed to attend public schools for a single year (although there is a bill currently being considered by the U.S. Senate that would remove this restriction).

## Sample Policies

The below policies have been adopted by LVCHS over the past several years in order to address all the different situations that arise because of foreign and/or exchange students.

This first policy addresses admissions. LVCHS has as its mission support to Christian families, not being an outreach program to non-believers. Enrollment of non-Christians is limited to 5%. The wording in the first paragraph is related to the fact that we waive tuition for exchange students sponsored by agencies that require it and want to limit the number of “free” students (see tuition policy below). But in order to increase the exposure of our students to those from a variety of countries and situations, we do not require them to be Christians.

Exchange students (J-1 visas) may be enrolled so long as all other admissions criteria are met and the total exchange student population is equal to or less than 2% of total enrollment. We will only accept exchange students who are hosted by a Christian family who is committed to Christian education.

Foreign students (F-1 visas) may be enrolled so long as all other admissions criteria are met. Either the student must be a Christian, or the host family must be Christians.

This next policy covers tuition issues. Note that while we will waive tuition for exchange students for agencies which require it, we do not do so for foreign students. We also charge higher fees for foreign students to cover the additional expenses. The last sentence is because LVCHS does not want to have to be responsible for finding host families for all these students.

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For exchange students (J-1 visas) we will adhere to the provisions of the exchange student agencies regarding their policies on tuition. Foreign students (F-1 visas) will pay the full tuition in advance. Scholarships are not available for foreign students. Additional fees may be charged to foreign students to cover the costs of administering the foreign student program. All foreign (F-1) students and foreign exchange (J-1) students must either be under the auspices of an agency which is responsible for them (including their housing), they must be living with close relatives, or, if moving away from the care of an agency, must continue to be hosted by the same host family.

While foreign students are placed in the appropriate grade based on their academic standing and are generally at LVCHS for several years until they graduate, exchange students are only in the US for one year. While LVCHS is responsible for the education of the foreign students and grants them a diploma like any other student, exchange students are not given a diploma as the school in their home country is responsible for their education. Also note that we allow our own (US) students to participate in an exchange experience. (This is another advantage of being associated with an exchange agency in that cultural exchange can be two-way.)

Foreign exchange students who attend LVCHS will generally be placed in the junior or senior class. The guidance office will make this determination upon review of the student's prior education and English language ability. Students placed in the senior class will be allowed to participate in the graduation ceremony, but will be awarded a certificate of attendance instead of a diploma.

Students from LVCHS who participate in a foreign exchange program may receive credit for academic work completed during the program. They will need to secure approval from the guidance office in advance and should discuss what documentation is needed. Course credit will be granted after the student returns and upon review of this documentation. The student is responsible for obtaining the necessary documentation. If the student is completing his/her senior year during the foreign exchange program, a diploma will be granted upon his/her return provided the necessary documentation is obtained and the student meets Pennsylvania graduation requirements.

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### **The Bottom Line**

LVCHS has had exchange students as a part of its student body for over 15 years. We have hosted students from Germany, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Netherlands, Indonesia, Costa Rica, Ghana, Thailand, China, Switzerland, Italy, Brazil, Malaysia, Norway, Denmark and Turkey. We have had foreign students since 2003 – most of them from Korea and China, but also a few others from India, Japan, Brazil, Vietnam and Germany. In recent years our foreign and exchange students have accounted for 15-20% of the student body.

All these students have been impacted by their time at LVCHS, but some more than others. We have also had some of our own students participate in an exchange program with students going to Norway and Honduras.

All of our students have been enriched by these experiences. It is one thing for a teacher to talk about other countries and other cultures – it is a far more personal experience when a person their own age from another country and culture is sitting next to them in class. In this age of social media such as Facebook, many of our students maintain contact with their classmates from another country.

Is it a “no brainer” to decide to have foreign and/or exchange students in your school? No. There are costs associated with all such decisions. You need to consider such things as your willingness to waive tuition for exchange students; your ability to support students whose command of English might not be as advanced as the other students you serve; the amount of administrative overhead to authorize foreign students; and all the other factors discussed above.

But the benefits are also numerous – the most important being the impact that you can have not only on the foreign/exchange student, but upon the rest of your student body. And, in an increasingly “small” world and a global economy, is bypassing these benefits something you can afford to do?

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## Exchange Students

### Accreditation

By Department of State regulations, exchange students may only be placed in private secondary schools if the school is accredited.

### Policies

It is always best to have written policies (see sample policies above). Things to consider in your policies are:

- How many students will you waive tuition for (can be for a fixed number or based on total enrollment)?
- Will you also waive fees, or are there certain fees that exchange students would still have to pay?
- By DoS regulations, exchange students will all be between the ages of 15 and 18.5 when they arrive. Will you accept students who may have graduated in their home country? Note that some countries only send “gap year” students, other countries have a “graduation” that happens after the equivalent of grade 10 but before the student enters another level of high school. I personally do not recommend excluding graduates.
- Will you only deal with certain agencies or may any agency approach you for placement?
- Will you assist the agency in finding a host family from within your existing school body, or will you accept placements from other families in your community?

### Agencies

Some agencies operate with local paid staff, others rely on local volunteers. In either case, you will want one who has a representative close to your school who can provide the necessary support. Always use an agency which has a “full listing” with CSIET (Council on Standards for International Educational Travel). LVCHS has been working principally through AFS Intercultural Programs ([www.afsusa.org](http://www.afsusa.org)) (formerly American Field Service) as they have a very broad range of programs (more than 50 countries) and support students going abroad as well as those coming to the US. If you contact me, I will be happy to put you in touch with a representative in your area.

If your policy is that students only reside with one of your existing school families, then the agency will likely request your assistance in advertising for a host family. They will handle all the necessary interviews, background checks and paperwork.

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## Foreign Students

Because foreign students are here under the authorization of the school rather than an exchange student agency, there is far more involved.

## Policies

It is very important that this be an effort that is appropriate to the mission of your school. If it is, then write the necessary policy statements first to avoid having problems later. You can use those in this packet from the previous workshop as samples. Even with the many years of experience that LVCHS has had with foreign students, we are still making adjustments to our policies to handle new situations which we did not anticipate (for example, this past year we had a few requests for graduating seniors to return to their home country early and miss our graduation ceremonies because of a significant birthday of a grandparent (years divisible by 10 are culturally significant in some Asian countries).

Also, while exchange students are always secondary school students, it is possible to have foreign students in your elementary and middle-schools (this applies only to non-public schools). You will need to decide if this is something you would accept (LVCHS does).

## Admissions Policies

The admission of foreign students is a bit more complicated than for US students where the family lives in your community. As an example, here are the admissions requirements for LVCHS.

- Completed application (available on our website – [www.lvchs.org](http://www.lvchs.org)). *An agency application may be substituted for this as long as it includes the essential material.*
- SLEP test (**minimum score of 50**)
- Immunization records – Pennsylvania requirements are:
  - DPT/DTap/Td – 4 (one after age 4)
  - Hepatitis B – 3
  - MMR – 2 (after age 1)
  - Polio – 3
  - Varicella (chicken pox) – 1 (or history of chicken pox)
- Recent report card or transcript
- Non-refundable registration fee
- Proof of family ability to pay (copy of bank statement or other sworn testimony)
- Introduction of student (why do you want to study in the US; why have you chosen to apply to LVCHS; etc.)

Because these students and their families cannot come to your typical open house or visit the school to learn about you, you may need to provide information to them that fulfills that requirement. Additionally, the types of questions that these students and families ask may be culturally different than

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those asked by US students and families. There is often much more concern about your school's academic preparation, etc. We provide a detailed information packet on our school's website which covers all these requirements (SAT scores, schools that our graduates attend, courses offered (especially advanced/AP courses), etc.) Please see our school's website ([www.lvchs.org](http://www.lvchs.org)) for details.

Because it will not be possible for these students (and their parents) to come to the school for a traditional interview, you will need to decide whether you will require some alternative. Interviews by phone may be possible, but parents may or may not speak English. Or you may simply choose to accept any interview that the sending agency has had with the student as being sufficient. Or you may need to accept the student without any such interview.

### Financial Policies

As noted in the previous workshop, you will need to have tuition and fee schedules that take into account the additional costs in administering your foreign student program. You might consider any or all of the following:

- Enrollment/admissions fee – to cover the expense of reviewing the application from a foreign student, preparation of the I-20, mailing to a foreign country, etc. This is typically payable with the application and is non-refundable since the costs will be incurred regardless of whether the student is ultimately accepted. [LVCHS foreign student enrollment fee is double that of the fee for US students.]
- Higher tuition or academic fees – to cover the costs to your academic program. You could have a fee to cover an optional ESL course for students who fall below a certain level of English proficiency. Or you might consider having a fee for all foreign students as even those with a higher level of English proficiency who might not need a formal ESL class will still put an additional burden on the faculty who in addition to dealing with non-native English speakers would have to offer additional explanations for things which are perhaps not part of the students cultural background. [LVCHS foreign student tuition is 1/6 higher than tuition for US students.]
- International student services fee – to cover the costs of the individual who is coordinating the foreign student program, making any updates to SEVIS, preparing additional paperwork for any students who are graduating from your school and going to a US university, etc. In addition, this would be the mechanism to recover the initial approval from the Immigrations and Customs Enforcement Agency (see below). Finally, we have found that foreign students place an additional burden on the guidance department as they often apply to ten or more US universities. There is also an additional cost in reviewing transcripts from prior schooling in another country to ensure that these students meet the graduation requirements of your school. [LVCHS charges \$1000/year to cover these additional costs.]

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### Choosing a PDSO and DSO(s)

Decide who on your school board/administration/staff will be the PDSO (primary designated school official) and the DSO(s) (designated school official(s)). These individuals will be responsible for the issuing of the I-20 to the potential student, verifying that the students arrived in the country, noting when they leave, etc. Do not include individuals as DSOs if they are not going to be regularly involved in the foreign student process. There is a requirement that each DSO sign on to SEVIS monthly and change their password every 90 days or their designation will expire.

### School Approval

The process to gain US Government approval to host foreign students is a lengthy one. Therefore, you should consider beginning this process in parallel with all the items above.

Prior to 9/11/2001, the procedure for approval was simpler. However, since the individuals who piloted the planes on that memorable day were in the US on F-1 visas, the government has greatly enhanced the procedure. In addition, following a review of the actual costs of administering this program for the first few years, the fees for application have also been increased to cover those costs. Currently the costs are \$1700 for filing the application and \$655 for each site to be visited (for multi-campus schools – parochial school systems are considered to be a single site).

The program that you are applying for is called the “Student and Exchange Visitor Program” (SEVP) and the computer system that you will need to interface with is called SEVIS. The form to be submitted for approval is called the I-17. However, in addition to this form, which captures basic information about the school, there are a number of other documents which are required. I’m not going to try and list them all here – a full list is available on the website for Immigrations and Customs Enforcement ([www.ice.gov/sevis/](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/)). There is one set of documents required if you are an accredited school, but a more extensive list if you are not an accredited school (another benefit to accreditation!)

Once all the paperwork has been submitted and the appropriate payment made, a SEVP inspector will come to the school. This visit is like a one-day accreditation visit – the inspector will need to tour the school, examine all your school records, see your school policies, ensure that the PDSO/DSO is familiar with all the regulations, etc. Again, all the requirements are listed on the above website.

Finally, like accreditation, the government has allowed for a periodic renewal process. In addition, any changes to the I-17 are generally “adjudicated”, i.e. while you can submit the changes to your I-17 online, they must be reviewed by ICE before they are accepted.

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### Agencies

Unlike Exchange student agencies where the agency issues all the paperwork and manages all the government requirements, agencies which handle Foreign students may not handle the full range of services. Some, working with their counterparts in the other country, will have their own application and will handle the interview of the student. In addition, the student's family will pay the agency for all their services (including the costs of the foreign agency, the US agency, the tuition and fees for the school, and a host family stipend). This can be \$25,000 or more. The agency then pays the tuition and various fees to the school.

Other agencies may handle only a subset of these items. They may have the student fill out your school's application, find the local host family, and arrange for travel, but the student's family will pay you directly (using wire transfer) and they will send money to the student to pay the host family stipend.

When working with an agency, be sure to ask what the arrangements will be so that you can set your expectations appropriately.

Be advised that not all students come to the US as 9<sup>th</sup> graders and stay for the full four years at one school. It is not unusual for students to come in 10<sup>th</sup> grade (which is a normal break in many countries between one school level and another). Also, students may come in even later years so you will have to consider whether to allow students to only come for two or even one year. Finally, while some agencies enforce policies that any student under their care may not leave the support of the agency unless they also leave the school, other agencies are less strict. In those cases, your school will need to decide if you want to have non-agency students as they are lacking that level of support.

You will also likely receive requests for non-agency students directly – through family friends here in the US, through contacts with former Foreign students at your school, or even through students finding out about you from your school's website. The individuals on your staff who receive these requests will need to have previously made policies to guide their responses, or you will have to deal with these situations on a case-by-case basis.

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### English Language Support

Unlike exchange students who are here for cultural exchange and for whom you do not need to make any adjustments, foreign students are here to receive their education from you. At the secondary level, most foreign students are coming from countries where an English-based education is not readily available and they are doing so in order to help ensure entrance to a US university. English education is very much a part of what they are coming here to receive. Thus, your school must be able to provide this.

While some students may do well in your normal classes, others will need assistance in achieving the level of English proficiency necessary to do well academically. Some will need formal ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, others may not. But all will likely require some level of adjustment on the part of the faculty to deal with English Language Learners. You will need to make a decision on what level of English language support you will be able to provide and thus both what your admissions criteria might be and what type of training your staff may need.

### Host Families

Unlike exchange students where the agency (by Department of State regulations) is responsible for finding, interviewing, and supporting the host family, there are no such regulations for foreign students. Even if you are working with an agency who has a local presence and can provide these services, they will often want your assistance in “advertising” for host families from within your current student body. There are a number of different decisions that you must make. Should host families be only current school families, or not? Will all host family stipends be payable directly to the family or will the school act as an intermediary? Will you provide tuition breaks to families in lieu of direct family stipends? Do you expect the agency to handle any student-family support issues or will you be involved? What will be your policy if the student wants to change families?

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## Accepting Juniors/Seniors

Unlike exchange students who are here for the purpose of cultural exchange, foreign students are here to receive an education from a US school and expect to graduate from your school and then go on to a US university. Thus, while you are not required to give a diploma to an exchange student, even if they are placed in the senior class, you do need to give a diploma to a foreign student. However, you should only do so if they meet the graduation requirements for your school. This will require your guidance office to do a thorough evaluation of the student's transcript from their home country to determine what courses they need to take to meet your graduation requirements. The later that a student enters your school, the more difficult it will be for them to meet these requirements.

Once you let it be known that your school accepts foreign students, you will likely receive requests for students to come here as late as the 12<sup>th</sup> grade – with these students expecting that they can attend your school for only one year, graduate, receive a US high school diploma, and then go on to a US university. Accept these types of requests with great caution. Not only will it likely make it difficult for your school to ensure that the students meet your graduation requirements with only a single year, but you may be giving the student unrealistic expectations. LVCHS has a policy (which applies to US students as well) that the only students accepted into the senior class are those who are moving into the area and transferring from another Christian school. Any other requests must be reviewed by the administration and be accepted by the school board.

## Other Issues

There are a number of other situations where you will need to decide what your position will be:

- If you have multiple foreign students from the same country, will you allow them to speak to each other in their native language? In class? In the halls? When one student wishes to assist a new student whose level of English would make it advantageous to have someone translate for him/her?
- Because these students are not living with their parents, they are more mobile – how will you handle students transferring to/from your school?
- Foreign students may apply to many US universities in the attempt to get into the one deemed most prestigious to them – do not underestimate the impact of this on your guidance staff in preparing transcripts, etc.
- Students may wish to skip graduation or other end-of-year ceremonies and return to their native country. Is this acceptable to you and under what circumstances?