

HELPING THE FOREIGN STUDENT *A Guide for School Personnel*

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An Open Letter to School Staff

This bulletin was compiled for your use as a teacher, counselor and/or administrator in working with students whose first language is not English and are most likely in the USA as a foreign exchange student.

Students from other countries come in just as many "packages" as do our own "born and bred in the USA" students. However, certain qualities are usually present. These students are "a cut above" most of their peers in their native countries. Students pass rigid interviews and are observed interacting with other students on numerous weekend outings by their local representatives. They are not chosen solely for their academic records, but on their willingness to learn from a new culture, open-mindedness, for their flexibility and ability to adapt to new situations. They are going to have adjustment problems similar to many other USA transfer students within public and private schools, but it will be more intense as language and family will also be different.

The success or failure of most exchange students in a secondary classroom rests with each individual teacher in his/her classroom. Exchange students exhibit special needs and their teachers should be chosen with this in mind. All teachers are not mindful or sensitive that these students bring with them a wealth of information that cannot be discovered without encouragement and understanding. Teachers must look for creative ways to tap into these resources. Many of these students will have difficulty adjusting to the reading load in English and American history, regardless of their English speaking and reading level. The first 2-6 weeks will set the tone for the rest of the year or semester. Adaptations in assignments may need to be made. Teachers must keep in mind that maintaining the integrity of the students is of the utmost importance and essential to insure the student's willingness to work for them throughout the year or semester. The actual grade is secondary. Most of the students will receive no credit in their native countries for the work they do here. Therefore, discovering their strengths and weaknesses, in their subject areas, should be a must as soon as possible to ensure a high motivational level through out the year.

Students must be encouraged to get the most from their intercultural experiences here in the USA. They will get only what they put into their exchange experience. They must be encouraged to ask questions (most other cultures do not stress this) in and after class.

1. Students do better when challenged. Students should be placed in American history and American literature or American studies, if at all possible. (All exchange students should take American history or government and economics and English at some time during the year.)

2. Try AP and honors classes first. Traditionally the type of students in these classes will be more accepting of exchange students and include them socially. This can only be done if the student is a better than average student in his/her native country and the teacher is willing to do some individual and adaptive work with the student. Many teachers feel that the exchange students inspire their other students to work harder.

3. Students should be encouraged to take courses not offered in their country. Examples are: madrigals, chorus, piano, guitar, commercial art, accounting, keyboarding, computer technology, child care, imaginative writing, creative thinking, drama, speech and debate, drafting, art, band, etc.

4. Students should be assigned a buddy from his/her grade level who isn't his/her host brother or sister. It works better if the student is in at least one class with the student and eats lunch on the same period. Volunteers for buddies may come from the AFS, student council or language clubs. Responsibilities should be explained to these volunteers and those actively serving should meet periodically to discuss progress. Meeting with buddies and the students with the faculty advisor and/or counselor should also be planned.

Responsibilities of the buddies could be as follows:

- meeting the student and exchanging addresses and phone numbers
- helping the student with transportation as he/she can not drive or hitch hike
- introducing her/him to their friends and families at home, church and community. This should involve inviting him/her to his/her home for dinners and/or overnights and other activities with their family and friends
- helping tutor or finding a tutor for the student in a particular subject, if needed
- informing the faculty advisor and/or counselor of any special needs problems that the student may be having and encourage the student to talk with those who can offer help (foreign exchange liaison and host family)
- encourage service groups and teachers, who do not teach the student, to do special things for the student and ask him/her to speak to their classes and/or clubs to include them in their activities, including conventions and conferences (DECA, student council (maybe make the student an honorary member), foreign language clubs, teachers' sororities, honor clubs, Beta, Interact, Rotary, Civitan, Future Teachers, 4-H, etc.

Principals need to be aware that two (2) students who speak the same language other than English should not be placed in the same high school, unless it is unusually large. It is

recommended that each exchange student speak a different first language and that the nationalities represented enhance the ethnic makeup of the school. English progress is hindered if he/she can rely on his/her fellow native speakers for companionship. These students will clique together and not integrate with other members of the student body. Principals also need to be aware that they do not have to take every student that could be placed in their school zone by an exchange representative. The best programs will contact the school well in advance to be certain that a placement is possible. A representative or hosting coordinator should be a local person and should make her/himself known to the local school. Quality programs have student and family liaisons who have been hosts and gone as exchange students themselves. Ask plenty of questions and ask for literature from the local representative. Very few exchange organizations have long outstanding "track records." Ask for statistics and who and where you should go for help should there be a problem. The best organizations have many volunteers in your area. Ask to see local newsletters on what the organizations are doing locally. If they cannot produce it, beware.

Quality foreign exchange programs usually send and host students and are run by volunteers, not paid recruiters. Keep in mind that there are many organizations and they are not all created equal by any means. School systems should have a written policy in regard to foreign exchange students in their rules and regulations. If you do not, it should be written to protect all individuals involved.

Consultation services and programs concerning foreign exchanges are available.

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HELPFUL HINTS & Reminders

1. Give yourself and the student time to progress and adjust.
2. You aren't expected to make wholesale changes in the way you do things, just simple modifications.
3. Foreign students are accustomed to certain formalities. Asian students, for example, do not like to be touched beyond a handshake. Latin Americans greet each other with more affection than we do.
4. Foreign students may find the following experiences new and difficult:
 - class changing
 - group work
 - pep rallies
 - coed schools
 - volunteering a response
 - dating and social customs
 - fire drills
 - class discussions
 - noise in the hallways
 - informal classrooms
 - American humor
 - sarcasm and teasing
 - school cafeteria
5. Listening to a foreign language (English) all day can be very tiring to the foreign students.
6. Foreign students should be able to participate in mathematic classes; especially in work with fundamentals and computations. Use the students to show how the same operation may be done in their country after their language skills have improved.
7. Some foreign students need to practice forming English letters. They copy better from paper than from chalkboard or overhead to paper.
8. Students learn language from each other. Allow and plan for informal student communications.
9. Foreign exchange students should take the TOFEL in the spring before they return.

DO's and DON'T's

DO–

1. Convey warmth and acceptance. Create a comfortable learning climate. Take time to introduce the students to others.
2. Enlist the aid of students. Initially, they can help the foreign student with the routines. Later they can provide informal teaching, tutoring and friendship.
3. Appoint a buddy to help students as needs arise. It may prove beneficial to change buddies from time to time.
4. Speak naturally and in a normal tone. Loudness will not help students understand. When necessary, simplify and rephrase statements for foreign students.
5. Modify assignments and requirements initially. Give work that entails the vital vocabulary and information, rather than complex reading and writing. When feasible, use illustrations and diagrams.
6. Use all types of realia and audiovisual equipment whenever possible. Examples are:
 - talking books
 - tape recorders
 - language masters
 - filmstrips with records and tapes
 - videos
 - movies
7. Place foreign students in the top and average reading groups as listening members only. These groups provide good language models and foster positive self-concepts.
8. Teach reading through a modified language experience approach.
9. Praise foreign students frequently.
10. Be a good listener. Initially, the emphasis is on two-way communication rather than perfection.
11. Encourage them to tell about their countries and cultures as their English proficiency increases. They might also bring in some native costumes and artifacts and do a lesson for your class. Help find other opportunities in other classes, clubs and civic groups for them to share this material also.

12. Make some adaptation in testing situations when appropriate:

- provide additional time
- have questions read aloud
- permit oral, rather than written, responses.

13. Encourage foreign students to watch TV and participate in school activities and sports.

14. Provide foreign students with magazines and catalogues from which they may select pictures to discuss with peers or in other English learning experiences.

15. Consult your special education and ESL teachers in your school as well as your student's counselor for help in making adaptations and modifications. They are generally masters at this.

DON'T-

1. Go it alone. There are resources available. (see 15 above)
2. Panic. You aren't expected to help the foreign student achieve grade level in all areas immediately.
3. Seat foreign students in the back of the room. In some cultures this is an affront. Sitting in the front enables the student to hear directions and see the gestures the teacher makes.
4. Embarrass foreign students by asking them to speak in class before they are willing or ready.

An interesting Tennessee State law...

From the Tennessee Code Annotated ("T.C.A."), Section 49-6-405©,-- "*If there are foreign exchange students in a high school, the local school board shall provide for the recognition of such students during the high school graduation ceremony.*"