

Hessen - Wisconsin High School Student Exchange Program

Information for Students, Parents, Teachers, and Districts

Introduction

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and the Hessisches Kultusministerium (Hessen Ministry of Education Department) have established a student exchange program. In this program, students from Hessen and Wisconsin are given the opportunity to spend up to one full semester of a school year at their partner's school and to live with the family of their exchange partner.

The Department of Public Instruction and the Hessisches Kultusministerium sponsor this program. School districts are responsible for all onsite coordination.

Purpose and Goals of the Program

Participating students improve their linguistic proficiency in English and German and become more familiar with a new culture and a new school system. They will grow through new challenges and become more mature and independent. The increase in linguistic and cultural proficiency as well as personal growth can only be achieved in long-term exchange programs.

Program Description

The DPI and the Ministry jointly sponsor this student exchange program. This program is a unique, high visibility program created in the context of a quarter-century old sister state partnership. It is reinforced by people on both sides of the Atlantic who have participated in previous cultural and business exchanges. The parent-to-parent investment ensures that each family will give the visiting student as rich an experience as the one they hope their own child would receive.

The family investment, school participation, and government coordination provide young people with a wonderful, meaningful introduction into contemporary culture in a German or American community.

Each Wisconsin high school student selected will be paired with a German high school student for a full school year. Participants should be committed, motivated, mature, adaptable, and serious high school students who wish to be ambassadors for their schools and the State of Wisconsin.

Selected Wisconsin high school students will host the German high school student for the first semester, (September through January, with arrival in late August and departure on or around January 31). During this time the German student will attend the high school of his/her Wisconsin host. The Wisconsin student will travel to Hessen with the German guest and live with his/her family and attend school for three months (return to Wisconsin on or around April 30). The Wisconsin student will return to his/her high school in early May to complete course and graduation requirements if applicable. The stay in Hessen can be extended if host families and school districts agree.

1. German Students

The program will begin in the first semester with German students coming to Wisconsin in late August. These students will attend the high school of their Wisconsin partner and live with the family of their partner. Because of their years of study of English as a foreign language, the proficiency level of these students is generally adequate for comprehending and completing class work in English. The participating Wisconsin school district agrees not to charge tuition for the visiting student, due to the reciprocal nature of the program, and the fact that the German students will hold a J-1 visa.¹ The visiting student shall pay for other school fees such as fees for field trips.

2. Wisconsin Students

The Wisconsin exchange students will attend a high school in Germany. The German schools will arrange a flexible schedule for the Wisconsin students to allow them to increase language proficiency in the German language and to do independent work associated with classes in which they are enrolled at their home school in Wisconsin. Depending on level of proficiency in the German language, Wisconsin students' participation in classes at the secondary level may vary in Germany. Wisconsin students will consult with their Wisconsin teachers to make sure all assignments, tests, and course expectations are clarified before departure. Students may send assignments periodically to their Wisconsin teachers to keep them apprised of their progress. The German schools shall not charge tuition and shall waive other school-related fees. By special arrangements, Wisconsin students may be able to take Advanced Placement or college SAT exams at participating high schools while in Germany.

3. Program Dates

German students in Wisconsin: Arrival in late August, departure on or around January 31 the following year

Wisconsin students in Hessen: Departure on or around January 31, return on or around late April/early May – The stay can be extended if all parties agree.

Selected Wisconsin participants and their families will be invited to attend an on-site orientation meeting in Madison several months before the program begins, while German students will undergo a similar orientation in Germany. Department of Public Instruction staff will conduct the Wisconsin meeting.

4. Placements

The Wisconsin applicants may indicate their preferences for either a larger city or a more rural community in Germany. Final placements, however, will be based on availability.

5. Program Costs

Host families provide room and board at no charge for the visiting student.

Airfare (roundtrip Chicago-Frankfurt) will be paid by each family for their own child. Families will make their own flight reservations.

A chaperone appointed by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction will accompany the students on their travel to Frankfurt.

¹ Immigration Visa Type J-1: Issued for exchange visitor who is a student, trainee, or researcher.

Modest living allowances or spending money will be the responsibility of the student's parents. Host families will not be expected to pay for clothing or other personal needs. Students must have full health and dental insurance that covers all medical costs, including emergency evacuation and repatriation to the home country. Information on insurance options will be available from the respective agency or ministry of education during the program orientation.

Participating schools waive tuition payments for visiting students under this program.

The Department of Public Instruction charges an administration fee of \$450.

6. Eligibility

Male or female applicants must be at least 16 years of age by the time they travel to Germany. U.S. applicants must have studied German as a foreign language for at least one semester, be currently enrolled in a German language class, and commit to continued enrollment in German for the school year following his or her return.

The school principal, German teacher, and/or guidance counselor will nominate Wisconsin students and host families. A school may submit multiple names of eligible students. The application deadline for participation in the exchange is **February 15** every year.

Students in Germany will ascribe to similar eligibility requirements. Selection of student participants who will travel abroad will be done by a committee in each state-level agency or ministry of education, comprised of a foreign language teacher representative and agency or ministry staff.

7. Contact Information

Questions about the program can be addressed to:

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To the Student

Before the Exchange

Congratulations! You have made up your mind to apply for this wonderful program. This is probably one of the biggest decisions you have made in your life so far. It is perfectly normal to be a little nervous and apprehensive about this step, but you know that the experience that you are about to go through will be worth every bit of anxiety.

Please take some time to read about the program below.

Step One--The Application

You have already taken this step. This shows initiative, interest in your own education, a willingness to meet new people, openness toward new situations, and an overall readiness to take risks. These are all qualities that we are looking for in an applicant who will be a good ambassador of Wisconsin to our German sister state Hessen.

We also know that you have been recommended by your German teacher and your principal for participation in this program. This shows that others have put a great deal of trust in you. They know that you will not disappoint them. You should be proud of this.

Step Two--Hosting a Student from Germany

You have been accepted to the program and you have been given the name and address of a student from Hessen. You will be spending a lot of time with this person during the next school year. She/he will live with you in your house for almost the entire fall semester, and you will be living with her/his family for three months the following spring. Chances are that you are going to be very good friends.

As soon as you know who your guest is going to be, send her/him a first letter. Introduce yourself, describe your family and send a few pictures. Just imagine what you would like to know about your host family before you live with them for quite a long time, and you will know what to include in your letter.

Should you write this first letter in English or in German? For several reasons, we suggest that you write in English. Remember that your guest is interested in learning English and that you are probably much more comfortable writing in English.

Step Three--When Your Guest Arrives

Your German partner will arrive in Wisconsin for the first semester in late August and stay through the end of the first semester. As you can imagine, she/he will be quite nervous about meeting you and your family. You will also understand that it is hard to speak a foreign language all day long. The first days will be quite overwhelming for your guest, and you should go out of your way to make this transition as smooth as possible.

- **Arrival**

You and your family are expected to welcome your guest student at O'Hare Airport in Chicago, Illinois. You may have a long drive to your home. Bear in mind that your guest had to get up early to catch a long international flight. Even though fatigue does not set in immediately, do not plan many activities for the rest of this first day. This is not the time to introduce her/him to all of your friends. Make sure that your guest is comfortable around the house and show her/him everything they immediately need to know. A short walk around the neighborhood may help to give her/him a first sense of what her/his new environment looks like.

- **School**

The first school day should be used to introduce your partner to key staff and to some of your friends. Your German teacher will probably be the first teacher to meet your guest. Your teacher will take you and the exchange student to the principal and introduce your guest to staff in the office. Bear in mind that German schools look quite different from American schools. A tour of the building will be necessary.

You may not be with your partner the whole day. Your partner will need to meet with the school counselor and German teacher to confirm her/his academic schedule.

Make sure that you take your partner to each class during the first two or three days. If you cannot join her/him, please talk to your German teacher and ask that someone share this responsibility. You and your partner do NOT – indeed should NOT – be in all the same classes. She/he will have different interests, make her/his own set of friends and join different clubs.

You may have to go over some rules and regulations a few times. Again, the structure of the school day is very different here than in Germany. You should also know that American schools have many more rules in place than German schools. Be patient if your partner does not understand all of them right away. There may be linguistic challenges, but cultural differences are also hard to understand right away. So you will have to be even more patient and understanding during these first days.

- **Friends**

Your friends will be more than happy to help you in your efforts to make your guest feel welcome and included. Please include the German exchange student in the activities of your friends, but leave her/him enough space to form her/his own friendships. Treat your German guest like a family member, but bear in mind that you do not have to do everything together.

To the Host Family

You are providing your child with an excellent educational opportunity. Spending time in another country will allow your daughter or son to mature and learn much more than just another language. This experience may someday be the deciding factor for an employer to hire your child to a position of leadership and responsibility.

Please take a moment to review the description of this program. Be assured that the Hessisches Kultusministerium and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction will do everything they can to guarantee a memorable year both for you and your child.

When you have questions regarding this program, please do not hesitate to contact the Department of Public Instruction for more information. While you are hosting a student from Germany and when your son or daughter is in Germany, we suggest that you *first* contact the German teacher at your school. If there are any questions that cannot be answered, then please contact us as a second line of coordination.

You are going to host a young student from Germany. We know that you will provide a wonderful home and include your guest in your regular family activities. Do not hesitate to ask her/him to take on the same tasks you expect your own child to do. We recommend that you get in touch with your guest's parents early on and stay in touch to make sure everyone feels comfortable with the hosting situation. You will, of course, have many questions for that family when your child travels to Hessen during the second school semester. In times of difficulty when or if discipline seems required, consult the teen's parents. A compromise is usually possible.

In general, all rules that apply to your own child should also apply to your guest. You are expected to act, with qualifiers, as a "substitute parent."

The Department of Public Instruction is required by law to conduct criminal background checks for all household members age 18 or older. You will be asked to provide necessary information including social security numbers. Participation in the program is contingent on the results of these checks.

To the District

Thank you for accepting an international exchange student. This particular program is unique to Wisconsin and has grown out of our Sister State–Sister School, Hessen–Wisconsin partnership. On the German side, this program is approved by their “DPI” – The Hessisches Kultusministerium.

The huge number of applicants for this program on the German side has guaranteed us a group of mature, energetic, curious, and excellent students. We think a student of this caliber presents a special opportunity to Wisconsin students to make a friend from Europe, and to see the caliber of scholarships and language abilities that a peer from abroad possesses.

We value your feedback. We have summarized nine expectations of participating school districts.

Responsibilities of the Wisconsin school district for a student applying for the exchange program

1. The school principal, the guidance counselor, and the German language teacher will approve the students' applications, attach a letter of recommendation for each applicant, and mail to the DPI.
2. The school principal will appoint a teacher, preferably a German-speaking teacher, as liaison teacher to work with the program and monitor the visiting student(s) from Germany.
3. The school principal may be involved in the interviewing of the candidates and the ranking of the applicants before submission to the DPI, or will appoint a staff committee to do so.
4. Initiated by the German teacher, the school counselor or principal's office will send the student in Germany enrollment information, in particular a listing of courses. A cover letter should specify how and when the information should be returned or if enrollment will occur on his or her first day in the Wisconsin school.
5. The guidance counselor will work out a program for the Wisconsin students that guarantee they will not lose credits during their stay in Germany. The schedule at the student's host school in Germany will be arranged flexibly, so that the Wisconsin guest students will have time enough to satisfy requirements and complete assignments necessary to obtain their credits for their Wisconsin home school. The counselor will help the student make arrangements to evaluate German course requirements which might be acceptable for credits at their home school, i.e., physical education, mathematics, an advanced placement English literature class, and German language classes.

Responsibilities of the Wisconsin school district for the German guest student

6. Exchange students selected by the Hessen Ministry of Education shall be accepted by the school board of their Wisconsin host school as regular students.
7. German exchange students shall hold a J-1 visa which qualifies them to attend an American high school without paying tuition fees.
8. The school district agrees to waive tuition payments for the visiting students.
9. Any other costs such as fees for field trips and daily lunch are to be borne by the visiting students.
10. German exchange students shall carry their own full health and travel insurance including emergency evacuation and repatriation to the home country.

To the DPI

Responsibilities of the DPI

DPI staff shall:

1. Coordinate and administer the program.
2. Send timely information to superintendents, school principals, guidance counselors and German language teachers.
3. Accept and process applications.
4. Conduct criminal background checks, required by U. S. Department of State, of all family members 18 and over who will be living in the host family household while hosting the German student. If the results of the background checks are positive, the application will not be considered.
5. Process SEVIS Visa approval of the German students, coordinate the pairing process, and finalize all matches.
6. Coordinate the reception and transfer to host family custody of the German exchange students upon arrival.
7. Chaperone student travel from Chicago O'Hare Airport to Frankfurt International Airport.
8. Conduct liaison teacher meetings and orientations for Wisconsin students and their families.
9. Resolve problems which may not be resolved at school or district level.

To All Program Participants

Program Policies

1. Parental Responsibility

Host families assume all rights and responsibilities for the exchange student in their homes. Close contact with the parents of the host student is strongly recommended.

2. School attendance

Exchange students are required to attend school full-time. Host families and schools are expected to ensure student participation in all required classes and activities, and to present them with options for electives, club activities, and after-school events.

3. Alcohol, Drugs, etc

The exchange student will have to follow all laws and rules that apply in the hosting country. Participation in the program may be terminated in case of rule violations.

4. Driving

German exchange students are not allowed to drive nor can they participate in driver's education classes while in Wisconsin. Exceptions cannot be made. Likewise, Wisconsin students will not be permitted to drive in Germany.

5. Employment

Exchange students are not legally permitted to accept employment. This is a requirement of the U. S. Department of State and exceptions cannot be made.

6. Extension of Stay

Extensions of stay are possible if all parties agree.

7. Early Returns

Voluntary early returns are possible at the request of the student and family. In rare cases, students may be sent home due to disciplinary action. In either case, all costs incurred by the early return are the responsibility of the student and their parents or guardians.

8. Disclaimer

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the Hessisches Kultusministerium (HKM) will make every effort to match Hessen and Wisconsin students for a long lasting partnership. Should families and students decide at any point during the exchange that students or families are not compatible, the exchange will be terminated. The DPI and the HKM will not be responsible for any costs incurred during the initial partnering period. The DPI and the HKM will make a reasonable effort to find alternate hosting arrangements in such an event but cannot guarantee a positive outcome.

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