
Student Exchange Programs 2026/27

Program Guidelines

Education and Childcare has developed guidelines that must be followed by students participating in the in-person student exchange programs. Failure by an Alberta student or an exchange student to adhere to these guidelines may result in termination of the student's participation in the program. Education and Childcare assumes no legal responsibility for the actions, debts, expenses, safety or health of students participating in the exchange.

Before applying

1. Confidentiality and disclosure of information

The information provided on the application form, other than medical information, will be shared between Education and Childcare and cooperating ministries or educational organizations in Quebec or abroad to ensure the smooth operation of the program. Application information will also be shared with the proposed match, their family and with liaison teachers in Alberta and in the exchange destination. Education and Childcare will not release information about the Alberta student or their family to other Alberta students and families participating in the exchange unless appropriate consent has been given. Information provided above and beyond the application form will be kept confidential by Education and Childcare in accordance with the Protection of Privacy Act, unless otherwise stated.

2. Eligibility

2.1 Language of study

To be eligible for this program, students must be studying French, German, Japanese or Spanish. Participants ideally will have completed the 20-level of their language, or equivalent, before they leave to study in their exchange destination, unless special permission is received from Education and Childcare.

2.2 No multiple applications per student

An applicant may apply to only one in-person exchange program per program year.

2.3 Multiple applications per family

Normally only one student per family may participate per program year, although exceptions may be discussed. Any exceptions to this rule must be approved by Education and Childcare prior to the submission of applications.

2.4 Learners with special needs

Students who receive specialized supports and services are eligible to apply for Education and Childcare's Student Exchange Programs. A student's receipt of specialized supports and services will not influence the selection process in Alberta. However, cultures and governments around the world may differ in provision of reciprocal services. The program would not match a student with a host family or school that is unable to properly accommodate and support a student with specialized supports and services. As such, it is critical that students disclose all relevant information on the application form.

Applying to the program

3.1 Matching

Education and Childcare aims to match students with like interests and compatible housing requirements. Before a match is finalized, the Alberta student and their family and the exchange student and their family must agree to the proposal. Sometimes applicants appear to be a good match on paper, but exchange partners may discover that they have little in common during the exchange. Exchange partners cannot be re-matched because of personality differences. Instead, Alberta students are expected to make the most of their experience and to be respectful to their exchange partners.

3.2 Criminal record checks

Hosting families are required to provide Education and Childcare with a police information check with vulnerable sector check for every resident of the Alberta home 18 years of age or older. All record checks must be submitted within one month of the student acceptance in an exchange program. Failure to provide criminal record checks within the one-month time frame may jeopardize the student's participation in the exchange program. Additionally, any known criminal records must be disclosed to Education and Childcare after the application has been submitted, as participation as a host family may not be allowed depending on the nature of the charge.

3.3 Vaccination

Participating students must obtain appropriate medical testing and/or appropriate vaccinations to attend an international school or to allow for international travel to and from Canada for the exchange destination. The exchange destination may revise required vaccinations without notice. Students are responsible for providing any required proof of vaccination or proof of exemption from vaccination requirements when traveling.

Routine vaccinations include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR), diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio and varicella.
Germany – Influenza, Hepatitis B, Measles is recommended*
Japan – Influenza, Hepatitis B
Mexico – Influenza, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis
Spain – Hepatitis B

*Non-vaccinated individuals may also show a satisfactory titer test (a blood test that measures the presence and amount of measles antibodies present). The list of recommended and required vaccines may be revised by the destination country without notice and the obligation to confirm and obtain the required vaccinations or exemptions rests with the student at all times.

3.4 Religion

If attendance at worship is an important consideration for the student and factors highly in their decision to accept a match, this must be stated clearly in the application. Alberta students who wish to attend a place of worship in the exchange destination should conduct their own research on its availability.

3.5 Smoking

For matching purposes, it is important to indicate on the application form whether or not anyone in the Alberta family smokes, including cigarettes, e-cigarettes and vaping. As smoking is more readily accepted in most current exchange destinations than in Alberta, any concerns regarding smoking must be clearly stated and discussed with the school liaison teacher at the time of application.

Preparing for the program

4. Commitment

4.1 Student commitment

Successful exchanges require keen motivation and a sustained commitment by participating students and families. While there will certainly be moments of excitement and joy, there may also be moments of confusion and frustration. Applicants should be prepared to commit to the exchange for the entire year, regardless of the difficulties encountered. They must also be prepared to prioritize their hosting duties and any Education and Childcare organized exchange meetings over their other interests (e.g. part-time jobs, special relationships and extracurricular activities, etc.). Written commitment to the program will be required once the Alberta student and their family accept a proposed match.

4.2 Parental commitment

Before committing to an exchange, Alberta parents/guardians should be aware that these reciprocal exchange programs require that they:

- ensure that at least one parent/guardian is at home during the entire exchange period;
- assume temporary legal custodianship of the exchange student while they are in Alberta;
- accept that the host family will make decisions on behalf of their child while they live and study in the exchange destination;
- Education and Childcare requires Alberta families to sign a consent form that allows the host parents/guardians to make decisions on the behalf of the Alberta student if a medical or other emergency arises. A similar process takes place in Alberta's partner regions.

5. Electronic communication

Students and parents/guardians participating in the student exchange programs will often receive information through e-mail. It is therefore important that both students and parents/guardians check their e-mail at least once a week and that they inform Education and Childcare of any changes to their e-mail account. A personal (not family) e-mail address is mandatory for all Alberta students.

6. Mandatory orientation meetings

All students participating in the student exchange programs are required to attend two orientations: getting started and pre-departure.

- getting started orientation will provide students and their families with information regarding the arrival of the visiting exchange student, the responsibilities of the Alberta host families and schools, and the guidelines and procedures of the Student Exchange Programs;
- pre-departure orientation will focus on preparing Alberta students to travel and adjust to life in their host destination. Topics discussed will include cultural adjustment, travel tips, healthcare, insurance, and so on;
- Education and Childcare reserves the right to withdraw a student from the exchange program if they do not attend the scheduled orientations. At least one parent or guardian is also required to attend both orientations.

Participating in the program

7. General responsibilities and expectations

7.1 Reports

Students participating in the exchange program are required to complete a final report and submit it to Education and Childcare's Student Exchange Programs. In this report, students should reflect upon their experience during the hosting period and their experience away from Alberta. Education and Childcare will issue certificates of completion to students who submit their report by the established deadline.

7.2 Attendance and performance

Regular full-time school attendance is a requirement of the program, as is the maintenance of an acceptable academic performance throughout the program year. Visiting exchange students will be enrolled in full-time classes while in Alberta, and Alberta students will attend full-time classes in their exchange destinations. Alberta students must participate in classes and make an effort to maintain their academic standing while they are away. They must also plan to complete the course work that they missed while in their exchange destination. Ideally, Alberta coursework should be done in Alberta. However, limited Alberta schoolwork may be done in the host school or community, as long as it does not negatively impact overall participation in the school and family life in the exchange destination.

Non-attendance, poor performance and/or inappropriate behavior may result in the termination of the exchange. If a student is expelled from school, their exchange will be terminated, and the return home will be arranged by Education and Childcare. The cost of the return travel will be the responsibility of the student's parents/guardians.

8. During the hosting period

8.1 Hosting expenses

Alberta schools will waive non-resident student tuition for the visiting exchange students. Transportation costs to and from school are provided by the Alberta school only if the Alberta student is eligible for this provision (the exchange partner is entitled to the same services as the Alberta student). If the school does not provide the transportation to and from school, the Alberta family is responsible to arrange and pay for transportation.

As a host family, the Alberta family is responsible to travel to and from the arrival site in Alberta to pick up the visiting exchange student. Host parents/guardians must also provide the exchange student with room and board as well as adequate parental care and supervision. Either a bag lunch or lunch money must be provided if the student does not come home for lunch.

The Alberta family is expected to treat the exchange student as a member of the family. Therefore, if the Alberta parents/guardians organize a family activity or trip and pay for their child/children, they should pay for the exchange student as well.

The exchange student is responsible to pay for their own long-distance telephone calls and other incidental costs or fees (yearbook, surcharges associated with optional courses, field trips or sports teams, etc.). They are responsible to bring spending money to cover personal items (souvenirs, clothes, etc.) and social occasions (birthday parties, movies with friends, etc.).

When the Alberta student travels to the exchange destination, their host school and family will bear similar costs. Like their exchange partner, the Alberta student will be responsible to cover the costs associated with long-distance phone calls, cell phone costs, incidentals, personal items and social occasions.

8.2 Travel during the hosting period

Permission for the Alberta students participating in exchanges to travel independently or with any party other than the host family or school representatives must be sought from Education and Childcare in addition to the student's parent/guardian. Individual travel by Alberta students outside of the Student Exchange Program is strongly discouraged. Students who travel independently during the host phase of the exchange temporarily remove themselves from the Student Exchange Program. Education and Childcare is not responsible for the student's activities during this period and will not be available to support the student from the date the Alberta student is no longer under the care of the host family until the student returns to the supervision of the host family.

Such trips may be permitted if Education and Childcare is:

- convinced that the travel is necessary;
- assured that both the host family and the Alberta student's parents are in agreement;
- in receipt of the authorization documents as completed and submitted by the Alberta student's parent/guardian well in advance of the proposed travel dates.

There are two relevant authorization documents:

- the Request for Student Travel Deviation Form;
- the Independent Travel for Alberta Students Form.

8.3 Privacy

The Alberta host family is expected to respect the exchange student's personal possessions and right to privacy. It is unethical and improper to examine or take any personal possessions e.g. diaries or letters. Violations along these lines have very serious consequences and may lead to the termination of an exchange.

8.4 Employment

International visiting exchange students are not legally allowed to work while in Alberta. Inter provincial exchange participants are legally allowed to work in Alberta, but are discouraged from getting a part-time job while they are here. Quebecois students who wish to take on a part-time job must consider how the job might affect their relationship with their Alberta partner and host family.

8.5 High risk activity

Education and Childcare reserves the right to withhold authorization for any high-risk activity (e.g. hang-gliding, parachute jumping, bungee jumping, mountain climbing, whitewater rafting, etc.). Alberta families who are considering introducing their exchange student to high-risk activities require written permission from Education and Childcare and the exchange student's parents/guardians. Written permission must be secured before the activity is undertaken. It should be noted that most out-of-country emergency health insurances do not cover injuries resulting from any high-risk activity.

8.6 Extension of stay in Alberta

Education and Childcare will not permit exchange students to extend their stay in an Alberta school because once the Alberta portion of the exchange is complete, the Alberta school and jurisdiction are no longer required to waive tuition. Exceptions will be made only when there is a medical emergency or other extenuating circumstances, such as quarantine requirements, in which case the student would not be attending school.

9. During the study abroad period

9.1 Passports

Students participating in an international exchange will require a passport. Some countries require that passports be valid for a specified number of months beyond the traveler's date of entry. It is recommended that the passports be valid for at least six months beyond the date of the return from the exchange country.

9.2 Visas and other travel documentation

Alberta students participating in an international exchange and who are non-Canadian citizens and will be traveling with a passport from another country may be required to obtain a visa for the exchange country. The student and their family are responsible to obtain the required visa.

In late 2026, European travelers will be required to get a European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS) for exchanges shorter than 90 days.

9.3 Travel to and from the exchange destination

Students who travel to and from the exchange destination will be accompanied by an adult chaperone assigned by Education and Childcare. The chaperone will assist students with check-in, boarding and flight connections. They will also ensure that Alberta students are met by their host families.

Travel arrangements for the Student Exchange Programs will be made through a travel agency determined by Education and Childcare. Students participating in international exchanges must pay for their airfare by the deadlines outlined by Education and Childcare. If these deadlines are not met, the student may not be able to travel with the student group and chaperone. Purchases of airline tickets through points systems are not permitted.

9.4 Travel medical insurance

To ensure a consistent and effective response in the event of a health or security emergency, Education and Childcare mandates a standardized insurance policy. All Alberta students are required to purchase travel medical insurance through the insurance provider approved by Education and Childcare. All students are also required to maintain a valid Canadian government health insurance plan for their travels.

9.5 Visits to the exchange destination

Alberta family and friends are strongly discouraged from visiting the Alberta student while they are on exchange and away from Alberta. Relatives or friends of the family who are living in the vicinity of the exchange destination are also discouraged from visiting. Such visits disrupt the relationship with the partner and host family and are detrimental to the language-learning process.

Permission for this type of contact must be given by Education and Childcare and the student's parents/guardians from the exchange destination. Requests for permission must be in writing and submitted to Education and Childcare at least three months prior to the proposed contact date.

The above guidelines also apply to visiting exchange students while they are in Alberta.

9.6 Extension of stay

Alberta students are expected to return to Alberta once the "study abroad" portion of the exchange is complete. The exchange period for international programs is between 6–12 weeks. Requests for an extension must be made in writing.

9.7 Illegal activities and criminal prosecution

Alberta students who are in other provinces or countries are subject to the laws of those jurisdictions. Laws in other countries can be very different and, in most instances, harsher than those in Canada.

10. Medical treatment and costs

10.1 Medical treatment

The Alberta family agrees to treat the visiting exchange student as they would treat their own child when it comes to medical treatment.

10.2 Medical costs

The cost of medical treatment should be paid by the student at the time of treatment.

10.3 Early termination for medical reasons

A student who has a serious physical or psychological condition that can be more appropriately treated at home will be sent home.

11. Early termination of an exchange

11.1 Voluntary termination

Voluntary termination has serious consequences for the exchange partner as they may not be able to study in Alberta or host a student.

11.2 Involuntary termination

When Education and Childcare terminates a student's exchange, the student or the student's parents/guardians are required to pay any costs associated with their return home.

11.3 Alcohol

Use of alcohol by Alberta students and exchange students, regardless of age, is strictly prohibited.

11.4 Cannabis

Use of recreational cannabis and cannabis products is strictly prohibited.

11.5 Smoking

Alberta students and exchange students are prohibited to smoke cigarettes, vaping, e-cigarettes.

11.6 Attendance

If the student is absent without permission, consequences may include termination.

11.7 Criminal charges

Education and Childcare will terminate a student's exchange if they are charged with a criminal offense.

11.8 Driving

Participating students are not permitted to drive motorized vehicles.

11.9 Drugs

The use of illegal drugs will result in immediate termination.

11.10 Inappropriate behavior

Education and Childcare will not tolerate disrespectful, malicious or otherwise poor behavior.

12. Off-program designations

Once a student's exchange is terminated, they are off-program.

13. Program cancellation

Education and Childcare reserves the right to cancel a student exchange program if risks arise.