

# **GUIDELINES FOR THE ADMISSION AND ENROLLMENT OF EXCHANGE STUDENTS IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of admitting exchange students in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is to enhance their cultural and academic background by participating in an American school program for one or two full academic semesters. The experience of living with a host family and the exposure to the amenities of the community will enrich the cultural horizon of the exchange student.

The International Admissions and Enrollment (IAE) office is the authorized unit in MCPS to monitor compliance with current procedures and regulations for the admission of exchange students. The IAE supervisor or designee will follow the established review process for each applicant to determine eligibility. IAE works with local organizational representatives, school principals and other school staff to facilitate this review process and to maximize a positive experience for the exchange students and their host parents. IAE also works to maintain a positive and collaborative relationship with all parties participating in the admission process of exchange students in MCPS.

## **II. DURATION OF THE PROGRAM**

The maximum length of the program is two full academic semesters. The regular school year is from September to June. Exchange students coming from a country with an academic year opposite to that of MCPS, may attend two consecutive school semesters in two different academic years. This must be clearly communicated with the IAE supervisor or designee during the application process. Exchange students are not admitted for less than one full semester of school. IAE accepts applications for the admission of exchange students between April 15 and June 30 for the first (fall) semester, and between October 15 and December 15 for the second (spring) semester of the current year.

The U.S. Department of State requires exchange students to return to their country of residency at the expiration of their visa status. Exchange students are expected to rejoin the secondary program of studies they were attending in their home country prior to their experience in MCPS. Exchange students are not eligible to graduate from MCPS.

### III. ADMISSIONS PROCESS

The admission of exchange students in MCPS is governed by MCPS Regulation, JEA-RC *Enrollment and Placement of International and Foreign Students* and the *Guidelines for the Admission of Exchange Students in Montgomery County Public Schools*. MCPS Form 335-66, *Application for Admission of Exchange Students in MCPS*, is the official document used for admission of exchange students in MCPS.

1. The Local Organizational Representative (LOR) must fully complete each item of Part I on the Application for Admission of Exchange Students in MCPS, and submit it with all the listed supporting documentation to IAE between April 15 and June 30 (for fall semester enrollment) or between October 15 and December 15 (for spring semester enrollment). IAE will not review incomplete applications. The LOR must present all required documentation by the last day of the respective deadlines: June 30 for fall semester enrollment and December 15 for spring semester enrollment. Approved exchange students must begin the first day of the semester for which they applied. No early enrollments will be approved.

Supporting documentation includes:

- Student's profile containing: biographical data; activities, achievements and interests; teachers' and counselors' comments with regard to the student's abilities and academic background, work habits, etc.; school letter with regard to the student's behavior and ability to adapt to changes, and any other related information.
  - Official school records for the two previous school years, and the first semester of the current year must be submitted. Official school records must bear the official school stamp and the original signature of the school principal. PDFs for a specific student will be accepted only if sent directly from the school administration to IAE. School records for the second semester of the current year may be presented during the intake interview. MCPS does not accept school records presented on Exchange Program forms. In addition, official English translations are required if the original school records are recorded in another language.
  - Documentation indicating the student's English proficiency is required when the student's native language is not English. Students are expected to function independently in school without English language support. Examples of this documentation may include a student's written essays in English, teachers' statements and comments, etc.
  - The host parent must provide a current lease or property tax bill and a current utility bill to show county residency.
2. IAE will notify the LOR if the supporting documentation is incomplete. The LOR must present the entire application including MCPS Form 335-66, *Application for Admission of Exchange Students*, the school letter with regards to student behavior and ability to adapt to

changes, evidence that the student did not graduate and host parent's current lease or property tax bill and current utility bill showing county residency by the last day of the respective deadlines: June 30 for first semester enrollment; December 15 for second semester enrollment. IAE will inform the LOR when the application is approved or when it is denied, including an explanation of the reason for denial.

3. If requirements are met, the IAE supervisor or designee approves enrollment of the candidate in the high school in the service area where the host parents reside unless the high school is closed due to enrollment limits. A host family may choose a different available school, but must provide a letter accepting responsibility for providing transportation for the student. A copy of the approved form is sent by IAE to the host parents with copies to the local representative and the school principal of the receiving school.
4. If the application is approved, the host parent will contact IAE at (240) 740-4500 for an intake appointment upon the student's arrival. At least one host parent must be present during the interview. The following documents are to be presented at the time of the intake interview at IAE:
  - Student's passport and visa
  - Official school records for the last school semester not previously presented with English translations if official records are printed in a foreign language
  - Student's immunization records
  - An official picture ID from the host parent
  - Copy of Federal Form DS-2019: *Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status* issued by the U.S. Department of State
5. Placements are considered final. Only in hardship situations will a change in the exchange student's placement be considered. In this situation, the LOR must notify the IAE supervisor or designee **in writing** explaining details of the situation, identify the new host family within the same school cluster, file another Application for Exchange Students with IAE and present the required supporting documentation related to the prospective host parents. The IAE supervisor or designee will review the new application and supporting documentation, meet with the new host parents, and approve the change of living arrangements according to the circumstances of each case. MCPS transfer request regulations are not applicable for exchange students.

The intake process can last from 1 ½ to 3 hours, and takes place at the Rocking Horse Road Center, 4910 Macon Road, Rockville, Maryland. During the intake process, the student also completes the Maryland State Health requirements for school admission. IAE provides the student with a folder containing the documentation required for enrollment at the receiving school.

#### **IV. APPLICANT'S REQUIREMENTS (See MCPS Regulation JEA-RC for complete details)**

1. All applicants must have a J-1 visa for the duration of the placement. MCPS does not admit foreign students with any other type of immigration status who are sponsored by student exchange organizations, including students under the visa waiver program who are allowed to stay in the United States for a maximum of 90 days or students with B-1 or B-2 Visitor's Visa.
2. Applicants must be enrolled in a secondary school program in their country of residency and must be between the ages of 15 and 17 at the time of enrollment in MCPS. Applicants who have graduated from an equivalent of high school are not eligible for admission in MCPS.
3. Applicants must have appropriate academic credentials, a grade of B or better average in a high school program, written evidence of appropriate behavior, and the ability to adapt to a different school and living environment.
4. Applicants must demonstrate ability to function academically in English without the support of the English for Speakers of Other Languages/Bilingual Programs (ESOL) support. We accept English Language Test for International Students (ELTIS) scores to show proficiency levels.
5. Applicants must meet the Maryland State health requirements for students enrolled in public schools.
6. Applicants must comply with MCPS rules and regulations during the entire period of their stay.

#### **V. HOST FAMILY REQUIREMENTS**

1. The host parents must reside in Montgomery County.
2. The host parents must not have a family relationship with the prospective exchange student.
3. All adult members (18 years or older) of the host family in contact with the exchange student must meet the requirements of the U.S. Department of State, including presentation of criminal background checks to the exchange program organization.
4. The host parents are responsible for the exchange student during the full period of stay. MCPS does not accept temporary placement or interim host parents.
5. New host parents assigned due to extreme circumstance/hardship of the first living arrangements of an exchange student, must meet with IAE staff before the relocation takes place. The new host parents must present clearance of criminal background checks (See item 3 above) and proof of county residency at the address of the new living

arrangements, if not previously presented.

6. The host family must present completion of the most current MCPS on-line training for Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse. Each adult host family member (18+) will be required to complete the online compliance training located on the MCPS website. When the training is completed, the certificate for each adult host family member must be printed and submitted along with application materials at the time of enrollment.

## **VI. EXCHANGE PROGRAM ORGANIZATION REQUIREMENTS**

1. The exchange program organization must be authorized by the U.S. State Department, in accordance with the administrative regulations issued under the Mutual Education and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961. The exchange program organization must comply with all current regulations of the U.S. Department of State with regard to their obligation to obtain criminal background checks and review local sex offender registry reports related to adults (18 years or older) living in the residence of the host family and from the LOR.
2. The exchange program organization is responsible for obtaining a J-1 exchange visa for each eligible applicant for the duration of the program. Applicants must have a J-1 visa for the duration of the instructional program.
3. The exchange program organization must have the official approval of the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET). CSIET's address is 1800 Diagonal Road, Ste. 600, Alexandria, Virginia 22314. The telephone number is (703) 739-9050.
4. The exchange program adheres to rules and procedures established by MCPS Regulation JEA-RC, *Enrollment and Placement of International and Foreign Students*, and the *Guidelines for the Admission of Exchange Students in Montgomery County Public Schools*.
5. The exchange program organization will send a letter of credentials to IAE each year, presenting its LOR. This letter must indicate the LOR's name, address, and telephone number. It must also state that the LOR successfully completed the training required by the U.S. Department of State. The exchange program organization must inform IAE of any changes of the LOR's status.

## **VII. LOCAL ORGANIZATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE (LOR) REQUIREMENTS**

1. The LOR must reside within a 120 mile geographical radius of Montgomery County.
2. The LOR is responsible for completing and signing MCPS Form 335-66, *Application for Exchange Students* and presenting the required supporting documentation with the application within the time frames for fall or spring semester entrance.

3. The LOR must be thoroughly familiar with MCPS Regulation JEA-RC, *Enrollment and Placement of International and Foreign Students*, and the *Guidelines for the Admission of Exchange Students in Montgomery County Public Schools* and maintain a close working relationship with IAE in matters pertaining to the admission of exchange students.
4. The LOR is responsible for confirming host parents for each exchange student according to the regulations of the U.S. Department of State. MCPS does not accept interim host parents or temporary living arrangements. In case of extreme/hardship situations that may result in the change of host family, the LOR is responsible for notifying the IAE supervisor in writing explaining the details of the situation, finding a new host family within the same school cluster, filing another Application for Exchange Students with IAE and presenting the required supporting documentation related to the prospective host parents.
5. The LOR is responsible for informing the prospective students and host parents of regulations governing the admission of exchange students required by the U.S. State Department and MCPS.
6. The LOR will provide specific information to host families interested in sending their children to reciprocal programs of studies abroad. The LOR will provide a list of MCPS students attending exchange programs of studies abroad to IAE every fall.
7. The LOR has the obligation to attend the annual information meeting organized by IAE to review matters related to the admission of exchange students.