

Important Information and  
Understandings  
for  
ASSIST Students

For J-1 Visa  
Students in  
Day Schools



Today's Scholars. Tomorrow's Leaders.

Please keep this booklet with you for  
reference during your American year.

2011/12 Academic Year

## Introduction

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Congratulations on your selection as an ASSIST student for the 2011/12 academic year! Your scholarship was earned through your accomplishments to date as well as by your participation in the scholarship competition conducted in your country. Many students desire to become ASSIST scholars, but only a limited number of outstanding young people are chosen for this special year.

While this scholarship is an honor and an opportunity, it is also a significant responsibility. You represent yourself, your family, your country, and ASSIST at the school you will attend. Much is expected of you, and we have full confidence that you will contribute significantly to your school community.

Before beginning your ASSIST year, you and your family should read, very carefully, all materials that are sent to you by ASSIST and by your school. You must come to the States embracing a spirit of cooperation, meaning that you have read, understood and are prepared to abide by the regulations governing your year in America.

It is disheartening for schools and ASSIST, and ultimately for you and your family, when you are not truly prepared to follow these important guidelines. We will work hard to support you, and we expect that you will honor these guidelines, which are established with your well being and success in mind.

These are a few examples of important rules that are not negotiable but often cause discord:

- Asking to stay for a second year of study in America.
- Asking to graduate from your American school.
- Asking to change schools.
- Asking to return home for a holiday or break.
- Asking to take a driver's education course or to drive a car.

If you have questions about any aspect of the rules governing this program, please clarify them in advance of your departure for America. The ASSIST representative in your country and those of us in America stand ready to help you.

## Mission Statement

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To promote mutual understanding, cultural interchange and a more peaceful world, ASSIST provides opportunities for outstanding international students to attend the finest American independent secondary schools on one-year scholarships, and for students and teachers from these schools to engage in educational experiences abroad.

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## You and ASSIST

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More than 4,000 students from 46 countries have now spent a year in America with ASSIST. You stand in a long line of successful and distinguished student ambassadors, and we believe that you are well prepared to contribute, as did your predecessors.

### **A Lifelong Relationship**

Your relationship with ASSIST does not conclude with Orientation in the U.S. – rather, our time together before you travel to your school is the beginning of a lifelong relationship. We will follow you closely throughout your American year, and recent initiatives allow us to maintain contact with you after you return home, continue your studies, and begin your career.

Owing to the power of the ASSIST experience and the opportunities afforded by the Internet and e-mail, ASSIST students now remain in contact with one another and with us long after their year of study concludes. In the years ahead, we envision ASSIST alumni helping one another with university selection, internship acquisition, career advice and placement, and identification of social and leadership opportunities.

You will share with other future leaders of many nations an unusual experience as an ambassador and scholar at a leading American independent school. With this experience as a frame of reference, your connection with ASSIST – and with each other – is a powerful foundation for your growth and future.

### **Support During Your ASSIST Year**

Each month, ASSIST will write you by e-mail with important information, with suggestions for making a smooth transition, and with requests for information. It is critical, therefore, that we have on file the e-mail address you intend to use during your exchange year. As well, we will also write your parents and host parents, so please report to us any changes in their electronic addresses.

It is not uncommon during the year to confront challenges where you will need ASSISTance – from your teachers, host families, schools, parents at home, advisor and ASSIST. We hope that you will reach out to us when we can be genuinely helpful to you and make us part of important decisions. These may include issues with your visa, travel you intend to undertake, medical conditions and emergencies, and academic or social difficulties at school. ASSIST is entering its 43rd year of service, meaning that we have deep institutional experience in helping international students at our schools.

### News of Your Experiences and Successes

We have developed an electronic newsletter – that is shared with the entire ASSIST family. During the year, we encourage you to write us with observations about American education and culture, with stories of interesting experiences you have had or trips you have taken, and with updates about academic, social, leadership and athletic awards you have earned. We are interested to hear from you, and we will also utilize some of these updates as stories in the newsletter.

### Developing Leadership Skills

As an ASSIST student, you will become an ambassador of your country and culture to your American school. An important component of our program is selecting students whom we feel can take a leading role in creating understanding across cultures, both during their exchange year and upon their return home.

At your American school, we encourage you to seek opportunities to share your perspective in classes, to speak publically before the student body and parent groups, to write articles for the newspaper or school web site, and to immerse yourself in the life of the community. You will enjoy your year more as you do so, and you will feel empowered by the contribution you make to the life of the school community.

Upon your return home, we also encourage you to take every opportunity to share what you have learned. Your school will often provide opportunities for you to speak about your experience, to write articles for the school or local newspapers, and to expand the power of your exchange year by sharing it with others. This helps to interest other talented students in an exchange year with ASSIST – and contributes to the ASSIST mission of creating a more peaceful, more understanding world.

We select students in part based on their academic abilities and personal qualities, but we also seek future leaders whom we feel will make contributions to their home cultures. Beginning with your ASSIST year, extending to your return to your home country, and with the support of the ASSIST alumni network, we know that many of you will become national and international leaders of note in the generation ahead.

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## Preparation

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The remainder of this booklet is devoted to helping you prepare for your ASSIST year. *Important Understandings* outlines the key points you must consider, the important rules you must abide by, and provides advice on how best to prepare yourself.

You will receive other information from your school and from ASSIST, and we encourage you to review it all carefully – and to reflect upon ways to prepare for a productive and enjoyable year. While no set of documents can fully anticipate every event in your life, we have found that this booklet, along with the other materials you will receive, form an excellent foundation for our students.

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## Important Medical Information

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### Health and Accident Insurance

ASSIST requires that all students have complete health and accident insurance coverage before their arrival in the United States. If you are uncertain about this, please contact the ASSIST representative in your home country or the office in the U.S.

### Physical Examination

Your American school and the United States Government require a yearly physical examination and specific vaccinations before entering the United States. ASSIST also highly recommends a thorough dental check-up, and an eye examination (particularly for those students with glasses), before leaving home.

The Student Medical Information form must be completed by your parents and your family physician – **and it is critical and required that all medical conditions are disclosed.** Copies must be sent to the ASSIST office in the U.S. and to your American school, as outlined in the memo entitled *Important Information About Your Year Abroad*. You will not be allowed to participate in the ASSIST Orientation and any school activities, especially sports-related activities, unless this form is completed as instructed.

You will receive medical forms from ASSIST and from your school. Please complete both sets of forms and ask your physician to complete his/her part and sign them during your physical examination. Return the school form to the

school, and send a copy to ASSIST. Return the ASSIST form directly to us. By receiving both forms, we can ensure that you meet the requirements both of your school and of the U.S Department of State.

### **Acute Medical Conditions**

During your stay in the United States, you may become ill or experience emergencies that will require medical attention. In most cases, these situations will be covered by the short-term medical coverage issued for your stay abroad. In some cases, however, there will be acute medical conditions that are not covered by the short-term medical coverage policy and/or that may require you to be sent home for more extensive care. Examples of such cases would be life-threatening illness, anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders, and depression.

### **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)**

HIPAA is the acronym for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996. HIPAA is the first comprehensive Federal legislation designed to protect the privacy of personal health information. If you are evaluated or treated by a health care provider during your stay in the U.S., you may be asked to sign an Authorization for Release of Health Information form, which will ask you to designate those individuals to whom information about your medical condition is released. If you or your parents wish ASSIST to be informed of your medical condition so that we may provide support, ASSIST should be listed on this form, in addition to your parents or guardian, host family, and school personnel. We encourage you to list us so that we may monitor your health and well-being.

### **Medications**

In the orientation packet you will receive from ASSIST, you will find a number of forms labeled “Authorization for the Administration of Medications during the ASSIST Orientation.” Connecticut State law and regulations require an authorized prescriber’s (Physician, Physician’s Assistant, Registered Nurse Practitioner) or Dentist’s written order – and the parent’s or guardian’s authorization – for a nurse to administer medications during the ASSIST Orientation. Please read this information carefully and organize your prescription and over-the-counter medicine carefully so that we can administer medication to you during the ASSIST Orientation.

Students are not allowed to take daily medications on their own in the State of Connecticut. All daily medications will be collected at the beginning of

Orientation, will be distributed by our staff nurse as prescribed, and will be returned at departure.

### **Information for Your Host Family**

It is also very important that your host family have a copy of all of your important medical documentation: your physical examination form, emergency treatment release form, and insurance identification card and claim form. Remember that your host family will function just as your family would at home, so we will provide them with the medical information and documentation that will allow them to support your health needs.

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## **Travel Preparation**

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### **Obtaining Your Visa**

The United States Department of State has designated ASSIST a special status qualifying us as an official Exchange Visitor's Program, which entitles students in our program to come to the United States on a visa for one year. The Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status Form DS-2019 allows the student to enter this country. This form is enclosed in this mailing. Present the original DS-2019 when you apply for your visa at the nearest American Embassy or Consulate.

Given the concerns regarding safety and exchange, we encourage you to begin the process for obtaining your visa as soon as you receive the paperwork from ASSIST. We anticipate that it may take longer to receive a visa in the coming years, and indeed visa regulations and processes are now undergoing significant change. Should any changes occur after this book is printed or distributed to you, we will contact you.

The original DS-2019 should be presented again to the Immigration Service at the point of entry to the United States. Although this form should be returned to you at this time, the Immigration Service may keep your DS-2019. Please do not panic. When you arrive at the Orientation site, please report to the ASSIST leaders that your DS-2019 was not returned to you when you entered the country. We will send a new form to you at your school or host family’s home after Orientation.

### **Packing**

*Please read your school catalog concerning clothing requirements at your school, and bring clothing appropriate for the climate.* A few schools ask that boys have

a dark jacket and white shirt for more formal occasions, and some schools require the wearing of a sport coat or blazer, shirt, tie, and slacks for classes. Requirements for girls vary also, so please check the catalog or contact the school.

Remember that closet space may be limited, and you will undoubtedly make purchases while here in the United States, so pack accordingly. Also, we strongly recommend that you ship any items that you will not be needing right away (winter clothes, etc.) by surface mail – the least expensive way possible – to your host family. When you arrive in the United States, you will be responsible for carrying all of your own luggage to the orientation site, and then to the home of your host family! You may also be charged by the airlines if your luggage is in excess of their limits.

Small musical instruments and sports equipment that will fit into your suitcase might be included. Remember to bring pictures or slides of your hometown and perhaps the area in which you live to show to your new American friends. Do not attempt to bring complete bed linens with you. Be sure to read your school catalog for details, and discuss any needs with your host family before you depart and with your advisor when you arrive.

#### **Mobile Phones, International Calling and Internet Use**

Although it is not necessary for ASSIST students to have *mobile phones* during their year in the U.S., many choose to utilize them. These are ASSIST's recommendations for mobile phone use:

- Students can check with their current mobile phone provider about a plan that will work in the U.S.
- Students may be able to purchase a U.S.-based SIM card for use with their personal mobile phone.
- Students may choose to purchase a prepaid phone package also known as a “pay-as-you-go” phone.
- Please do not expect your host family to add you to their family plan. Adding an extra line can be costly, and removing a line at the end of the hosting experience can pose additional challenges with their mobile plan carrier.

Students are expected to read, understand and abide by their school's mobile phone use policy, usually outlined in the student handbook.

For *international calling*, ASSIST recommends that each student use an international calling card, credit card, Skype or similar Internet calling program.

While it is important for students to stay in touch with families and friends at home, exchange students spending too much time on the phone or on Skype tend to have a difficult time adapting. It is important to remember why you are here, and to be sure your phone time use is not taking away from time with your host family and friends, or from schoolwork and activities.

We recommend that you limit your phone calls to an acceptable number per month (1-2 times/week), and limit the time spent on each call. E-mailing and letter writing can be great alternative forms of communication, and not only are they usually less expensive than a phone call, but they also allow the recipients to read your words over and over again and also forward them on to others who want to hear your stories.

The *Internet* can be a great tool for finding information, for entertainment, and for staying in touch with family and friends. However, it is important to remember that the use of the Internet at your host's home or at school is a privilege. Abuse of this privilege can create many problems for you, your host family, and your school. You are expected to read, understand, and abide by your school's policies on Internet and computer use.

In addition to being a great tool, the Internet can also be a great distraction, detracting from your immersion experience. We recommend that you limit your use of the Internet. If you or your host family has a computer, we strongly recommend that you talk to your host family about when and how often you may use the Internet. The more time that you spend on the Internet chatting to friends and family from home, the less time you are spending on homework or on socializing with your host family and friends here. You came to the U.S. to experience American culture. You cannot do this successfully if you are spending too much time focused on home.

#### **Travel in Safety**

A concern shared by all citizens in free societies is the safety of traveling to and living in another country. ASSIST is acutely aware of the changed landscape of international travel and study, as are our member schools. Our schools work very diligently to make their campuses as safe as possible, although we acknowledge that achieving absolute safety is beyond our power.

While the challenges encountered in traveling and studying abroad have increased, so has the mandate ASSIST feels to bring citizens from around the world together to develop friendships that will help form a more peaceful world in the generations ahead. As an ASSIST student, you will be part of this evolving world, and we hope your experience will prepare you to be an agent of positive change.

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## Arrival and Orientation

ASSIST representatives will meet you at the airport when you arrive. An orientation program, to be held prior to your travel to your host family, will be provided by ASSIST. Transportation, room and board are included. The purpose of the orientation is to provide a time for you to socialize with the other ASSIST students (including those from other countries) and with our staff, and to attend workshops that will help you with adjustment to life in the United States.

In this regard, we hope that you will make an effort to prepare yourself by reading something current in the areas of American politics, government, history, science, geography, or literature. We will be sending you ASSIST orientation materials to help you with your preparation for a cross-cultural experience, and it will be important that you give this material your thorough attention.

### Living with Your Host Family

We know that you will make every effort to get along with your host family, which is eager to show you something about the American way of life. While they might not expect you to agree with their way of doing things, or their political or religious philosophies, they will expect your cooperation in being willing to listen and learn, and in turn will want to learn something about your way of life.

Please keep in mind that this family has invited you to live with them because they are interested in you as a person, and they do not receive any financial compensation for this. Indeed, hosting an international student can be quite expensive. Therefore, you must expect to use some of your own money for personal needs. Your school may arrange to have you stay with more than one family during the course of the year. This policy works out very well, as it gives you the opportunity to experience American family life with different people, and to make more close friendships.

While you are with your American family, remember that although you will be treated like a guest in the beginning, you will soon become a member of the family and will be expected to participate in chores and responsibilities in the home. Family rules are expected to be observed by everyone, including you. Do everything you can to be of help to this family, which is giving you such a generous gift.

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## American Independent Secondary Schools

Attending an American independent secondary school will be a unique experience for you. You will find that the majority of students come from families which have had some higher education and are economically comfortable. Some students may come from very wealthy families, while others receive some form of financial help from the school. Please remember not to judge your fellow students by their economic backgrounds but rather as individuals who are interested in receiving the best education our schools have to offer. Have an open mind, and listen to their points of view, but at the same time share with them your own cultural and educational background in a manner that will encourage them to listen to your way of thinking. No one will expect you to like everything about America, but if you must be critical, do so constructively.

Since you have never attended an American independent school before, a new experience will be to conform to the regulations set by each independent school for its students. While rules vary in each school, generally they limit a student's freedom in a way that you may find difficult to understand. For example, there will be expectations about your behavior beyond the school day and away from campus; in most schools a dress code is established. You may be given "work" hours if you are late to class or do not appear at meals.

Please read your school handbook to familiarize yourself with these rules before school begins, and set a good example by following the rules without complaint. Remember that the school is giving you an ASSIST scholarship; your acceptance of it carries with it the obligation to conform to its rules and regulations. To quote an appropriate statement from a participating school's catalog:

*It is not the School's purpose to demand blind conformity, but to encourage and train imagination and individual leadership, to stimulate creative thinking and action, and to reward the courage to be different without harm to self or others.*

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## School Procedures

### Advisor

Each school will appoint a faculty or staff member as a personal advisor to give you individual assistance with academic, social, and personal matters throughout the year. Your advisor could be a teacher, a school counselor, or even the

Director of Admissions, and should be consulted about decisions with which you need help. The ASSIST representative at the school will also be available to help you.

### **ASSIST Representative**

At each school, we have designated an ASSIST representative, our local program representative, who is a key link between ASSIST at our offices and you at the school. This person will be identified to you by Orientation, and they will take a special interest in your well-being and adjustment. The ASSIST representative will check in with you monthly during the course of the year and is available, in addition to your advisor and teachers, for support and advice.

### **Books**

Try to purchase second hand books for your courses. If the school has none, perhaps you could purchase those you need from a student who previously took the course. See your advisor about this detail.

### **Academic Schedule**

Courses in American History and English (or American Literature) are required for ASSIST students. Other courses would be in accordance with your requirements in your home school and your personal interests. Math, science, and language, for example, could be taken in addition to American History and English. Whatever courses you choose, please keep in mind that you will not receive preferential treatment in workload or grading. Expect difficulties in the beginning, but later on you will be glad you were competing on the same basis as the American students.

If American History is not offered, or you are a tenth grader and are unable to enroll in American History, we ask that you select another course that has as its aim acquiring knowledge of American culture and history.

### **Spanish and Bulgarian Co-Validation**

Spaniards and Bulgarians will find a paper in this packet explaining the procedure for co-validation. Remember that ASSIST does not guarantee that co-validation is possible. If the school that you will be attending offers the courses that would make co-validation possible, and you can take them as a part of your normal academic schedule, then you can tell your advisor and academic dean in the fall that you will seek co-validation. It will be your responsibility to do all of the necessary paper work yourself well in advance of the close of school.

### **Driver's Education Course**

ASSIST students are absolutely forbidden to drive a car, motorcycle, all-terrain vehicle, motor boat or any similar vehicle while they are in the United States – even before or after the end of the school year. We ask you to be honest and observe this rule for your own protection and for reasons of legal liability. Equally important, ASSIST students may not enroll in a Driver's Education course in America, since such courses have as an integral part of the curriculum the practice driving of an automobile, and this is not allowed. If you violate this rule, you may be asked to withdraw from the ASSIST program.

### **The United States High School Diploma**

You are accepted by ASSIST and your school as a one-year exchange student and not as a candidate for a diploma. The most important factor is that you have a strong year as a good citizen and scholar, and receive the enthusiastic support of your school and ASSIST, should you ever want to return to the United States at a later date and attend an American university. You are not, under any circumstances, to ask the authorities at your school to award you a diploma, or to change your grade status from the grade that you would normally be enrolled in had you remained in your home country. The American school has the sole authority to determine grade status and a student's eligibility for receiving a diploma. This decision is made prior to acceptance and cannot be changed.

### **Personal Expenses**

We advise you to allow US \$1,800–\$2,500 for expenses such as the cost of books and supplies (you must purchase these in the U.S., and they are expensive), miscellaneous school fees, private lessons, entertainment, gifts, personal expenses, and transportation within the United States. Please bring only a small portion of that amount with you when you arrive. Your parents should contact your host family regarding transfer of the balance of your expense money. You will most likely want to open up an account at a local bank from which you can withdraw funds as needed. In some cases you will need to buy lunch at your school, and you should work out these details with the help of your advisor, host parent, or the ASSIST representative at your school.

*In this packet is a memo that will help you to project the amount of money you will need for personal expenses during your exchange year. We are happy to advise you, and the school will help you manage your funds, but ultimately the responsibility is yours and your family's to make sure that you spend wisely and retain enough money to cover your expenses.*

### **Part-Time Employment**

ASSIST students must provide their own money for personal expenses. While students are not expected to hold jobs during their year here, some of you may be interested in earning a little extra pocket money through part-time work. However, you must realize that your school will require you to be involved in the school program many hours during the day, in the evenings and on the weekends as well. Most likely you will not have time to add anything to your busy schedule.

You should know, however, that the United States government regulations permit you to do part-time, informal work not to exceed 10 hours per week. You may not appear on a payroll. The jobs of this type which might be available are language tutoring and baby sitting. Most often these jobs are done on a volunteer basis to show appreciation for the opportunities being provided. Many schools have community service jobs that all students do as part of a shared responsibility to their school, and no financial reimbursement is given.

### **School Rules and Regulations**

Your year in America is governed both by the rules of ASSIST and by the rules of your school (as well as the rules of your host family). It is important that you understand both sets of rules and embrace them. In the few instances where ASSIST students have violated major rules, their disappointment at being asked to return home has been keen.

Among the items sent you by your school should be a student handbook. If one has not been sent to you, please contact the school and request one. This should be read thoroughly, by you and your parents, in advance of your departure. Be clear that your school has its own philosophies and rules, and you cannot assume you will have a general knowledge that will suffice. **ASSIST supports the rules of each member school, and we are the school's partner in expecting you to abide willingly by those rules.**

A key issue regarding rules is the use of alcohol and illegal drugs. In American society, as in your own, there are concerns about the use of alcohol and other illegal substances. Use of these substances is forbidden in every ASSIST school, and you are expected to abide by this important rule. The use of tobacco, including smokeless tobacco, is also forbidden by ASSIST and your school.

If you are exposed to the substance use of other students, and are bothered by it, you should contact a trusted faculty member to discuss this in confidence. If you need further help, please contact the ASSIST office in Suffield for confidential help with your concerns.

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## **Participation in School Programs**

### **Leadership and Involvement**

Unlike many schools systems in Europe, American independent schools make the athletic, extracurricular, community service and leadership programs an integral part of the school experience. ASSIST students have made remarkable contributions to their school communities both in and outside of the classroom, and we encourage you to find meaningful ways to utilize your strengths and talents. This is an excellent way to develop leadership skills, to immerse yourself in the community, and to thank the school for granting the scholarship and opportunity to you.

### **Classroom**

Our hope is that each ASSIST student will be given an opportunity in the classroom to express his or her particular views, as an international student and as an individual. We encourage you to speak up as a representative of your country as well as an individual in these situations. You may not always agree with what is expressed in class, but we hope you will disagree in a constructive and respectful manner so that your classmates may benefit from your point of view. You will find enriching relationships with your teachers and enjoy learning from them outside of class as well.

### **Athletics**

International students will find that many American schools include athletics as a regular part of the school program. All students who are physically able are expected to participate in some form of sports activity each day. Your school catalog will show you the variety of sports offered, according to the season, and we hope you will be cooperative in participating in these activities. You will have an opportunity to participate in the sports you play at home, and it is also enjoyable to try new sports during seasons in which you do not have a sport you normally participate in.

### **Extra-Curricular Activities**

In addition to sports, we encourage you to participate in as many activities out-

side the classroom as time permits. There are many to choose from (see your school catalog). Your school will expect you to become involved in the life of the school community and welcomes your contributions.

### **Cultural Events**

Your school will provide opportunities for visits to museums, and to attend concerts, lectures, and plays in the area or nearby cities. There will also be cultural and social activities at your school. We hope you will take advantage of these opportunities to meet as many American students as possible and to learn something about the cultural life of Americans.

### **Public Speaking**

Your American school, community church or a club may ask you – or you may volunteer – to give a talk about your school at home or about your country. We encourage you to do so. It will be a great opportunity for others to have a chance to learn something about you and your country.

### **Academic Reports**

You will receive grades, effort ratings and comments for your academic courses several times during the year. These reports will be sent to your parents and to the ASSIST office in the USA. We know you will make every effort to do your best, but do not take your academic studies so seriously that you do not have time for anything else. We want you to take some time to develop friendships with other students and members of the faculty at your American school.

### **School Newspaper Pictures, Articles and Publicity**

We would appreciate it if you would make copies of any school news article, picture, or publicity which concerns you as an ASSIST student, and send them to our office. While we will be communicating with you often during the year, and welcome hearing from you and learning of your experiences, this material is also extremely helpful in our continuing effort to present ASSIST to others. Please send us information in electronic form and by electronic means, where possible, and accompanying pictures are very helpful. We hope to feature many of these stories in our electronic newsletter and on our web site.

## **Vacations and Travel**

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### **Vacations**

American students and families are quite generous in inviting international students to their homes to share holidays with them. As a student at a day school, it is likely that you will spend your holidays with your host family, but you may also choose to travel or stay with other friends, if this is acceptable to your host family. Please inform the ASSIST office of your plans for all school holidays, and especially notify us in April about the time period between the close of school and your return flight home.

### **Going Home for Christmas or Other Vacations**

You are expected to stay in the United States for the full ten months. If you violate this rule, you may be asked to withdraw. Our policy is that permission will not be granted to return home for holidays under any circumstances other than a death or grave illness in your immediate family. You will learn more about Americans by spending your holiday time in their homes. You will be in the United States for only ten months. Since you know in advance the exact dates you will be in the United States, you must arrange for special examinations and other personal matters before you leave home, or until you return home at the end of the school year.

### **Visits from Family and Relatives**

Since ASSIST wants you to receive as much exposure as possible during your American experience, and to make a smooth integration and adjustment to this way of life, we strongly discourage visits from parents, relatives, and friends from home for the first six months of your ASSIST year. Your parents may well receive invitations to attend school functions, including Parents Weekend in the fall, but we encourage them to decline these invitations. ASSIST, and all other exchange organizations, have learned that students have a much more successful exchange experience if they become fully integrated into a new culture and do not have visits from family until the latter part of their year in America.

If your parents or other relatives desire to visit, it is best if it occurs in the spring term. Professional or other unique travel opportunities may bring your family to the States before six months have elapsed, and we do not rule out visitation in this case if it is the only time your family members could visit with you. The six-month guideline is drafted with your adjustment and well being in mind, and we strongly encourage you to adopt it. If your parents do have a

chance to visit, please clear their plans in advance and receive permission from your host family and the ASSIST Representative at your school.

### **Staying in the United States After School Closes**

In most cases, your return flight home has been booked for the day after the conclusion of the academic year. If you plan to extend your stay in the United States beyond that point, you must find friends to visit or make travel plans for the period between the closing of school and the date of your return flight home. It is also possible that you might receive an invitation to remain with your host family, but you must not assume this, as they may have made other plans.

Discuss this with your school advisor and inform the ASSIST office of your plans (an e-mail reminder will be sent to you in this regard). This is VERY IMPORTANT, as we must know when you are leaving and how – and may need to contact you if we become aware of a change in the schedule of your flight. You are responsible for arrangement and payment of transportation to the airport from wherever you are vacationing.

Some ASSIST students ask to stay in the United States during the summer in order to travel. The following are important considerations:

- ASSIST's responsibility for you, and your school's responsibility for you, terminates with the end of the school year. Schools, host families and ASSIST expect you to leave for home at this time.
- ASSIST must have written permission from your parents if you are staying beyond the close of the school year.
- If you stay for part of the summer, you must arrange for your own transportation home, which cannot be later than your visa expiration date.
- You will need adequate funds and places to stay.
- You may not enroll in any other program, even a summer school, that requires a change of visa or that keeps you in the U.S. past the date of the visa issued through ASSIST (including the 30-day grace period).
- Your short-term health insurance covers you through your original departure date and would need to be extended at your own expense.

The main purpose of the ASSIST Program is for you to spend the year at an American school with its faculty and students, with American families, and with travel as an additional benefit. You may have more than two months of holiday time within your ten-month stay in the United States, during which

you may travel to other parts of the country. We recommend that you make wise use of your vacation time, and that you return home by the middle of June.

### **Travel Outside the United States**

During your ASSIST year, permission to travel to another country cannot be granted without (a) a letter from your family giving you permission to go to that country, and (b) a letter of invitation from the family or organization that will be hosting you. You must also mail your DS-2019 to the ASSIST office in Connecticut before you take any trip outside of the United States so that we may sign it. Without our signature, you may not be allowed to reenter the country. As well, you should plan to consult an official in the consulate of the country to which you plan to travel – requirements vary, both by country of destination and by country of citizenship. Leave plenty of time to get all of this done, as the entire process can take a month.

Permission to travel to Canada (which may also require a visa), Bermuda, the Bahamas and Mexico is generally granted by ASSIST, assuming that you have followed the steps outlined above. If you desire to travel to a country other than those noted, permission must be sought, in advance of making plans, with the ASSIST office in Suffield. Permission will be granted in those instances where the educational value of the trip is significant and enhances the overall experience of the ASSIST year.

### **Medical Emergencies When Traveling**

When you are away from your school, it is important to be prepared for medical emergencies that may arise. You should always carry your insurance card with you, even when school is in session, but you should also carry with you a copy of the form labeled "Parent Release for Medical Treatment and Emergency Medical Care." Should you require medical treatment when away from school or your permanent host family, and should your parents be unreachable, you will need this form to allow medical professionals to treat you.

## **Further Study at American Secondary Schools and Colleges**

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When you accept an ASSIST scholarship, you are making a philosophical commitment to a two-year experience: a year in the U.S. at an outstanding independent school, and a year at home sharing what you have learned. At the

conclusion of your ASSIST year, you may not remain in the United States to continue your studies at your American school, which as a member of our program has agreed that your scholarship will only be granted for one year.

ASSIST students may not apply for any further study at an American school, college or university until the ASSIST program has been fully completed and you return to your home country. We are designated by the United States Department of State as a "one-year exchange program." You are issued the J-1 visa and have been accepted into the ASSIST program with the firm understanding that you will return to your home country at the end of this one year in the United States.

An exception exists for postgraduate students who already have a diploma from their secondary school at home. Postgraduate students may apply directly to American colleges or universities and may enroll in the year following their ASSIST year.

Should you wish to return to the U.S. for college or university study, both your school and ASSIST can be helpful, but your pursuit of this goal must not interfere with your immersion experience. You must be respectful of your school's college counseling schedule, which generally focuses on 12th graders, although most schools will arrange meetings with 11th graders during the spring term. You should feel free to ask the college counselor(s) at your school about the process, and in what ways they can guide you and be helpful in your search. At most schools, you may be able to attend informational meetings presented by college admissions representatives visiting your school throughout the year. Please do not expect your host family to take you on tours of colleges unless they have specifically made the suggestion or have invited you along for a trip.

Through conversations with eminent universities in the U.S. and educational consultants abroad, it is our understanding that you will be a stronger candidate when applying from home rather than applying from an independent school in the U.S. Because American universities define "pools" of candidates, an international student applying from his or her "country pool" has a better chance of entering a competitive university than applying from his or her

"American school pool," which is filled with applicants to these very same universities.

Most ASSIST schools will be helpful in identifying potential universities that match you well, and American teachers will gladly write letters of recommendation. ASSIST also writes letters of recommendation on behalf of our alumni. More than 220 ASSIST alumni have returned to the States for university, with Harvard leading the way with 36 Scholars. We know a great deal about this process and strongly suggest you trust our judgment, and that of the school, in helping you.

After you return home to complete your secondary education, and as you continue the college search process, please inform us, and the ASSIST school that you attended so that we can support your application.

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## ASSISTance

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As you prepare yourself to become an ASSIST scholar, please call upon us to help in your transition. This is a lifelong relationship, one that begins with selection and placement, continues through Orientation and the ASSIST year, and continues through your university years and career. We look forward to being a part of your ASSIST year and future and hope we can provide helpful ASSISTance along the way.

## State Department Regulations

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ASSIST is recognized by the United States Department of State as a designated Exchange Visitor Program. ASSIST is also able to facilitate the issuance of the J-1 visa under which our students study in the U.S. for one academic year on Exchange Visitor status.

ASSIST's business model builds from the regulations enacted by the State Department as they cover secondary exchange students studying on J-1 visas. We have excerpted the State Department regulations below; the full version can be located at the State Department home page:

([www.gpoaccess.gov/index.html](http://www.gpoaccess.gov/index.html)).

### Summary

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The Exchange Visitor Program is carried out pursuant to the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, as amended.

Its purpose is to enhance understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries through educational and cultural exchanges.

Sponsors and exchange visitors are required to comply with the Exchange Visitor Program regulations. It is essential that they become familiar with these regulations.

#### **Student, Secondary (High School)**

Through the high school exchange program, foreign secondary school students enter the United States to complete up to one year of academic study at an accredited public or private secondary school. During their stay, participants live with American host families or reside at accredited U.S. boarding schools. Students attend school as full time students and may attend for not less than one academic semester (or its quarter equivalent) or more than a full academic year.

Eligible participants are between the age of 15 and 18-and-a-half years at the time of initial school enrollment (by the first day of school), or have not completed more than 11 years of primary and secondary school (excluding kindergarten). Students who have previously participated in an exchange program [semester-long or year-long] are ineligible for participation in the high school program.

Prior to the students leaving their home country, program sponsors are required to provide them with all travel arrangements and a profile of the school, host family and community in which they have been placed. Students and their parents should be made aware whether their host family is considered an arrival (temporary) family or a permanent family for the school year. Students may take part in school sanctioned extracurricular activities, including athletics, if the school district and the state authority responsible for determining athletic eligibility approve their participation. Students may not be employed on a part- or full-time basis, but may accept occasional work such as yard work or baby-sitting.

Sponsoring organizations may not under any circumstance facilitate the entry of any foreign student into the United States without a school placement. They must obtain written notice of a participant's acceptance by the school from the principal or other authorized school administrator. Sponsors may not enroll more than five students in one school unless so requested in writing by the school.

Sponsoring organizations are required to screen all potential host families with whom participating students are placed. Sponsors ensure that the family can provide a comfortable and nurturing home environment, and has adequate financial resources to undertake hosting obligations. Under no circumstances will a sponsor facilitate the entry of any student for whom a host family placement has not been secured. A second student may be placed with a host family only with the prior written approval of the Department of State.

Please refer to the program regulations for details on the screening and selection of the students, host families, and the sponsor's administrative obligations and procedures.

### Exchange Visitor Program 22 CFR 62 (updated March 2011)

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#### **Sec. 62.25 Secondary school students.**

- (a) Introduction. This section governs Department of State designated exchange visitor programs under which foreign national secondary school students are afforded the opportunity for up to one year of study in a United States accredited public or private secondary school, while living

with an American host family or residing at an accredited U.S. boarding school.

- (b) Program sponsor eligibility. Eligibility for designation as a secondary school student exchange visitor program sponsor is limited to organizations:
- (1) With tax-exempt status as conferred by the Internal Revenue Service pursuant to section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code; and
  - (2) Which are United States citizens as such terms are defined in Sec. 62.2.
- (c) Program eligibility. Secondary school student exchange visitor programs designated by the Department of State must:
- (1) Require all participants to be enrolled and participating in a full course of study at an accredited educational institution;
  - (2) Allow entry of participants for not less than one academic semester (or quarter equivalency) nor more than two academic semesters (or quarter equivalency) duration; and
  - (3) Be conducted on a U.S. academic calendar year basis, except for students from countries whose academic year is opposite that of the United States. Exchange students may begin in the second semester of a U.S. academic year if specifically permitted to do so, in writing, by the school in which the exchange visitor is enrolled. Both the host family and school must be notified prior to the exchange student's arrival in the United States that the placement is for either an academic semester or year, or calendar year program.
- (d) Program administration. Sponsors must ensure that all officers, employees, representatives, agents, and volunteers acting on their behalf:
- (1) Are adequately trained. Sponsors must administer training for local coordinators that specifically includes, at a minimum, instruction in: Conflict resolution; procedures for handling and reporting emergency situations; awareness or knowledge of child safety standards; information on sexual conduct codes; procedures for handling and reporting allegations of sexual misconduct or any other allegations of abuse or neglect; and the criteria to be used to screen potential host families and exercise good judgment when identifying what constitutes suitable host family placements. In addition to their own training, sponsors must ensure that all local coordinators complete the Department of State mandated training module prior to their appointment as a

local coordinator or assumption of duties. The Department of State training module will include instruction designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Exchange Visitor Program; its public diplomacy objectives; and the Secondary School Student category rules and regulations. Sponsors must demonstrate the individual's successful completion of all initial training requirements and that annual refresher training is also successfully completed;

- (2) Are adequately supervised. Sponsors must create and implement organization- specific standard operating procedures for the supervision of local coordinators designed to prevent or deter fraud, abuse, or misconduct in the performance of the duties of these employees/agents/ volunteers. They must also have sufficient internal controls to ensure that such employees/agents/volunteers comply with such standard operating procedures.
- (3) Have been vetted annually through a criminal background check (which must include a search of the Department of Justice's National Sex Offender Public Registry);
- (4) Place no exchange student with his or her relatives;
- (5) Make no exchange student placement beyond 120 miles of the home of the local coordinator authorized to act on the sponsor's behalf in both routine and emergency matters arising from that exchange student's participation in the Exchange Visitor Program;
- (6) Make no monetary payments or other incentives to host families;
- (7) Provide exchange students with reasonable access to their natural parents and family by telephone and email;
- (8) Make certain that the exchange student's government issued documents (i.e., passports, Forms DS-2019) are not removed from his/her possession;
- (9) Conduct the host family orientation after the host family has been fully vetted and accepted;
- (10) Refrain, without exception, from acting as:
  - (i) Both a host family and a local coordinator or area supervisor for an exchange student;
  - (ii) A host family for one sponsor and a local coordinator for another sponsor; or

- (iii) A local coordinator for any exchange student over whom he/she has a position of trust or authority such as the student's teacher or principal. This requirement is not applicable to a boarding school placement.
- (11) Maintain, at minimum, a monthly schedule of personal contact with the exchange student. The first monthly contact between the local coordinator and the exchange student must be in person. All other contacts may take place in- person, on the phone, or via electronic mail and must be properly documented. The sponsor is responsible for ensuring that issues raised through such contacts are promptly and appropriately addressed.
  - (12) That a sponsor representative other than the local coordinator who recruited, screened and selected the host family visit the exchange student/host family home within the first or second month following the student's placement in the home.
  - (13) Maintain, at a minimum, a monthly schedule of personal contact with the host family. At least once during the fall semester and at least once during the spring semester, (i.e., twice during the academic year) the contact by the local coordinator with the host family must be in person. All other contacts may take place in person, on the phone, or via electronic mail and must be properly documented. The sponsor is responsible for ensuring the issues raised through such contacts are promptly and appropriately addressed.
  - (14) That host schools are provided contact information for the local organizational representative (including name, direct phone number, and e-mail address), the program sponsor, and the Department's Office of Designation; and
  - (15) Adhere to all regulatory provisions set forth in this Part and all additional terms and conditions governing program administration that the Department may impose.
- (e) Student selection. In addition to satisfying the requirements of Sec. 62.10(a), sponsors must ensure that all participants in a designated secondary school student exchange visitor program:
- (1) Are secondary school students in their home country who have not completed more than eleven years of primary and secondary study, exclusive of kindergarten; or are at least 15 years of age but not more than 18 years and six months of age as of the program start date;
  - (2) Demonstrate maturity, good character, and scholastic aptitude; and
  - (3) Have not previously participated in an academic year or semester secondary school student exchange program in the United States or attended school in the United States in either F-1 or J-1 visa status.
- (f) Student enrollment.
- (1) Sponsors must secure prior written acceptance for the enrollment of any exchange student participant in a United States public or private secondary school. Such prior acceptance must:
    - (i) Be secured from the school principal or other authorized school administrator of the school or school system that the exchange student participant will attend; and
    - (ii) Include written arrangements concerning the payment of tuition or waiver thereof if applicable.
  - (2) Under no circumstance may a sponsor facilitate the entry into the United States of an exchange student for whom a written school placement has not been secured.
  - (3) Under no circumstance may a sponsor charge a student private school tuition if such arrangements are not finalized in writing prior to the issuance of Form DS- 2019.
  - (4) Sponsors must maintain copies of all written acceptances for a minimum of three years and make such documents available for Department of State inspection upon request.
  - (5) Sponsors must provide the school with a translated "written English language summary" of the exchange student's complete academic course work prior to commencement of school, in addition to any additional documents the school may require. Sponsors must inform the prospective host school of any student who has completed secondary school in his/her home country.
  - (6) Sponsors may not facilitate the enrollment of more than five exchange students in one school unless the school itself has requested, in writing, the placement of more than five students.
  - (7) Upon issuance of Form DS-2019 to a prospective participant, the sponsor accepts full responsibility for placing the student, except in cases of voluntary student withdraw or visa denial.

- (g) Student orientation. In addition to the orientation requirements set forth at Sec. 62.10, all sponsors must provide exchange students, prior to their departure from the home country, with the following information:
- (1) A summary of all operating procedures, rules, and regulations governing student participation in the exchange visitor program along with a detailed summary of travel arrangements;
  - (2) A copy of the Department's welcome letter to exchange students;
  - (3) Age and language appropriate information on how to identify and report sexual abuse or exploitation;
  - (4) A detailed profile of the host family in which the exchange student is placed. The profile must state whether the host family is either a permanent placement or a temporary arrival family;
  - (5) A detailed profile of the school and community in which the exchange student will be placed. The profile must state whether the student will pay tuition; and
  - (6) An identification card, that lists the exchange student's name, United States host family placement address and telephone numbers (landline and cellular), sponsor name and main office and emergency telephone numbers, name and telephone numbers (landline and cellular) of the local coordinator and area representative, the telephone number of Department's Office of Designation, and the Secondary School Student program toll free emergency telephone number. The identification card must also contain the name of the health insurance provider and policy number. Such cards must be corrected, reprinted, and reissued to the student if changes in contact information occur due to a change in the student's placement.
- (h) Student extra-curricular activities. Exchange students may participate in school sanctioned and sponsored extra-curricular activities, including athletics, if such participation is:
- (1) Authorized by the local school district in which the student is enrolled; and
  - (2) Authorized by the state authority responsible for determination of athletic eligibility, if applicable. Sponsors shall not knowingly be party to a placement (inclusive of direct placements) based on athletic abilities, whether initiated by a student, a natural or host family, a school, or any other interested party.

- (3) Any placement in which either the student or the sending organization in the foreign country is party to an arrangement with any other party, including receiving school personnel, whereby the student will attend a particular school or live with a particular host family must be reported to the particular school and the National Federation of State High School Associations prior to the first day of classes.
- (i) Student employment. Exchange students may not be employed on either a full or part-time basis but may accept sporadic or intermittent employment such as babysitting or yard work.
- (j) Host family selection. Sponsors must adequately screen and select all potential host families and at a minimum must:
- (1) Provide potential host families with a detailed summary of the exchange visitor program and the parameters of their participation, duties, and obligations;
  - (2) Utilize a standard application form developed by the sponsor that includes, at a minimum, all data fields provided in Appendix F, "Information to be Collected on Secondary School Student Host Family Applications". The form must include a statement stating that: "The income data collected will be used solely for the purposes of determining that the basic needs of the exchange student can be met, including three quality meals and transportation to and from school activities." Such application form must be signed and dated at the time of application by all potential host family applicants. The host family application must be designed to provide a detailed summary and profile of the host family, the physical home environment (to include photographs of the host family home's exterior and grounds, kitchen, student's bedroom, bathroom, and family or living room), family composition, and community environment. Exchange students are not permitted to reside with their relatives.
  - (3) Conduct an in-person interview with all family members residing in the home where the student will be living;
  - (4) Ensure that the host family is capable of providing a comfortable and nurturing home environment and that the home is clean and sanitary; that the exchange student's bedroom contains a separate bed for the student that is neither convertible nor inflatable in nature; and that the student has adequate storage space for clothes and personal belongings, reasonable access to bathroom facilities, study space if not otherwise available in the house and reasonable, unimpeded access to

the outside of the house in the event of a fire or similar emergency. An exchange student may share a bedroom, but with no more than one other individual of the same sex.

- (5) Ensure that the host family has a good reputation and character by securing two personal references from within the community from individuals who are not relatives of the potential host family or representatives of the sponsor (i.e., field staff or volunteers), attesting to the host family's good reputation and character;
  - (6) Ensure that the host family has adequate financial resources to undertake hosting obligations and is not receiving needs-based government subsidies for food or housing;
  - (7) Verify that each member of the host family household eighteen years of age and older has undergone a criminal background check; and
  - (8) Maintain a record of all documentation, including but not limited to application forms, background checks, evaluations, and interviews, for all selected host families for a period of three years.
  - (9) Ensure that a potential single adult host parent without a child in the home undergoes a secondary level review by an organizational representative other than the individual who recruited and selected the applicant. Such secondary review should include demonstrated evidence of the individual's friends or family who can provide an additional support network for the exchange student and evidence of the individual's ties to his/her community. Both the exchange student and his or her natural parents must agree in writing in advance of the student's placement with a single adult host parent without a child in the home.
- (k) Host family orientation. In addition to the orientation requirements set forth in Sec. 62.10, sponsors must:
- (1) Inform all host families of the philosophy, rules, and regulations governing the sponsor's exchange visitor program, including examples of "best practices" developed by the exchange community;
  - (2) Provide all selected host families with a copy of the Department's letter of appreciation to host families;
  - (3) Provide all selected host families with a copy of Department of State-promulgated Exchange Visitor Program regulations; and
  - (4) Advise all selected host families of strategies for cross-cultural inter-

action and conduct workshops to familiarize host families with cultural differences and practices.

- (5) Advise host families of their responsibility to inform the sponsor of any and all material changes in the status of the host family or student, including, but not limited to, changes in address, finances, employment and criminal arrests.
- (l) Host family placement.
- (1) Sponsors must secure, prior to the student's departure from his or her home country, a permanent or arrival host family placement for each exchange student participant.
- Sponsors may not:
- (i) Facilitate the entry into the United States for an exchange student for whom a host family placement has not been secured;
  - (ii) Place more than one exchange student with a host family without the express prior written consent of the host family, the natural parents, and the students being placed. Under no circumstance may more than two exchange students be placed with a host family, or in the home of a local coordinator, regional coordinator, or volunteer. Sponsors may not place students from the same countries or with the same native languages in a single home.
- (2) Sponsors must advise both the exchange student and host family, in writing, of the respective family compositions and backgrounds of each, whether the host family placement is a permanent or temporary placement, and facilitate and encourage the exchange of correspondence between the two prior to the student's departure from the home country.
  - (3) In the event of unforeseen circumstances that necessitate a change of host family placement, the sponsor must document the reason(s) necessitating such change and provide the Department of State with an annual statistical summary reflecting the number and reason(s) for such change in host family placement in the program's annual report.
- (m) Advertising and Marketing for the recruitment of host families. In addition to the requirements set forth in § 62.9 in advertising and promoting for host family recruiting, sponsors must:

- (1) Utilize only promotional materials that professionally, ethically, and accurately reflect the sponsor's purposes, activities, and sponsorship;
  - (2) Not publicize the need for host families via any public media with announcements, notices, advertisements, etc. that are not sufficiently in advance of the exchange student's arrival, appeal to public pity or guilt, imply in any way that an exchange student will be denied participation if a host family is not found immediately, or identify photos of individual exchange students and include an appeal for an immediate family;
  - (3) Not promote or recruit for their programs in any way that compromises the privacy, safety or security of participants, families, or schools. Specifically, sponsors shall not include personal student data or contact information (including addresses, phone numbers or email addresses) or photographs of the student on Web sites or in other promotional materials;
  - (4) Ensure that access to exchange student photographs and personally identifying information, either online or in print form, is only made available to potential host families who have been fully vetted and selected for program participation. Such information, if available online, must also be password protected.
- (n) Reporting requirements. Along with the annual report required by regulations set forth at Sec. 62.15, sponsors must file with the Department of State the following information:
- (1) Sponsors must immediately report to the Department any incident or allegation involving the actual or alleged sexual exploitation or abuse of an exchange student participant. Sponsors must also report such allegations as required by local or state statute or regulation. Failure to report such incidents to the Department and, as required by state law or regulation, to local law enforcement authorities shall be grounds for the summary suspension and termination of the sponsor's Exchange Visitor Program designation.
  - (2) A summation of all situations which resulted in the placement of exchange student participants with more than one host family or school placement; and
  - (3) A report of all situations which resulted in the placement of an exchange student with more than one host family or in more than one school. The report must be in a format directed by the Department

and include, at a minimum, the exchange student's full name, Form DS-019 number (SEVIS ID #), host family placements (current U.S. address), schools (site of activity address), the reason for the change in placement, and the date of the move. This report is due by July 31 for the previous academic school year.

(a) A sponsor shall terminate an exchange visitor's participation in its program when the exchange visitor:

- (1) Fails to pursue the activities for which he or she was admitted to the United States;
  - (2) Is unable to continue, unless otherwise exempted pursuant to these regulations;
  - (3) Violates the Exchange Visitor Program regulations and/or the sponsor's rules governing the program, if, in the sponsor's opinion, termination is warranted;
  - (4) Willfully fails to maintain the insurance coverage required under § 62.14 of these regulations; or § 62.42
- (b) An exchange visitor's participation in the Exchange Visitor Program is subject to termination when he or she engages in unauthorized employment. Upon establishing such violation, the Department of State shall terminate the exchange visitor's participation in the Exchange Visitor Program.



ASSIST is a non profit organization with tax exempt status and is incorporated in the state of Vermont. ASSIST is designated by the United States State Department as an authorized Exchange Visitor Program. ASSIST is also able to facilitate the issuance of the J-1 visa under which our students study in the U.S. for one academic year on Exchange Visitor status.

ASSIST does not discriminate nor does it condone harassment on the basis of gender, race, color, religion, national or ethnic origin, disability, age, sexual orientation or any other basis proscribed by applicable policies or laws.

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Printed in the U.S.A.

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