



Academic Year in America
School Administrator's Guide

“Bringing the AYA exchange students into our school system has helped our students to fulfill our Mission Statement, which is: To empower our students to succeed in the 21st century. This program helps the students to see the world through the eyes of someone from another culture. Because of this program, our world is becoming more closely connected in many great ways...”

—Andrew Wielgus, Principal
River Forest High School, Hobart, IN

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The AIFS Foundation and The Academic Year in America Program

The American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS) Foundation, an independent, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) charity, was established in 1967 with the assistance of the late Senator Robert Kennedy to help young people from many nations and diverse cultures understand each other better. The AIFS Foundation provides grants and scholarships to students for participation in study abroad programs and provides grants to high schools and institutions to encourage international and educational travel. The Foundation is governed by a board of trustees that includes prominent educators and international business leaders. The board meets regularly to assess the Foundation's AYA program to ensure standards of excellence, effectiveness, and quality are being upheld.

The AIFS Foundation's Academic Year in America (AYA) program is one of the nation's most respected cross-cultural educational exchange programs. AYA is an exciting program that gives international students ages 15-18 the opportunity to experience our culture. American families who host an AYA student learn about another culture and build a relationship with the student, who is/becomes like a son or daughter to them. AYA enables high school students from more than 35 countries to visit the United States and live with American families while attending high school for a semester or an academic year. Students participating in the AYA program learn more about America and its culture while improving their English language skills and achieving their educational goals. At the same time, American students have the special opportunity to increase their knowledge of foreign countries and languages, and learn more about lifestyles different from their own.

The Foundation has been designated by the United States Department of State as an Exchange Visitor Program authorized to issue the Form DS-2019, which enables qualified participants to apply for a J-1 exchange visitor visa from the nearest U.S. Consulate or Embassy. Because of the program's official government designation, a high school is not responsible for a student's visa and does not need to register with the SEVIS Immigration Database.

Since its founding, AYA has enabled over 30,000 international students to come to the U.S. and experience the American way of life. The AYA program is recognized by the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET), the national organization that reviews high school exchange programs.

Benefits of hosting an AYA student in your school

- **Tony Cook Memorial Grant**

Every year, the AIFS Foundation awards grants to assist schools in developing programs that increase international understanding. These grants are in memory of Tony Cook, a former Trustee of the AIFS Foundation. For almost 30 years, Tony Cook served his country as a career officer in the United States Information Agency and dedicated his life to the ideals of fostering international understanding.

The Tony Cook Memorial Grant provides each selected high school with a \$1,000 grant. All AYA participating schools are invited to submit an application outlining a program or project of international dimension. Projects have included the purchase of foreign language tapes, sponsorship of a cultural event during Foreign Language Week, and the purchase of international flags. Through the Tony Cook Memorial Grant Program, the AIFS Foundation hopes to demonstrate its dedication to the highest ideals in international education.

- **Intercultural learning in your classroom**

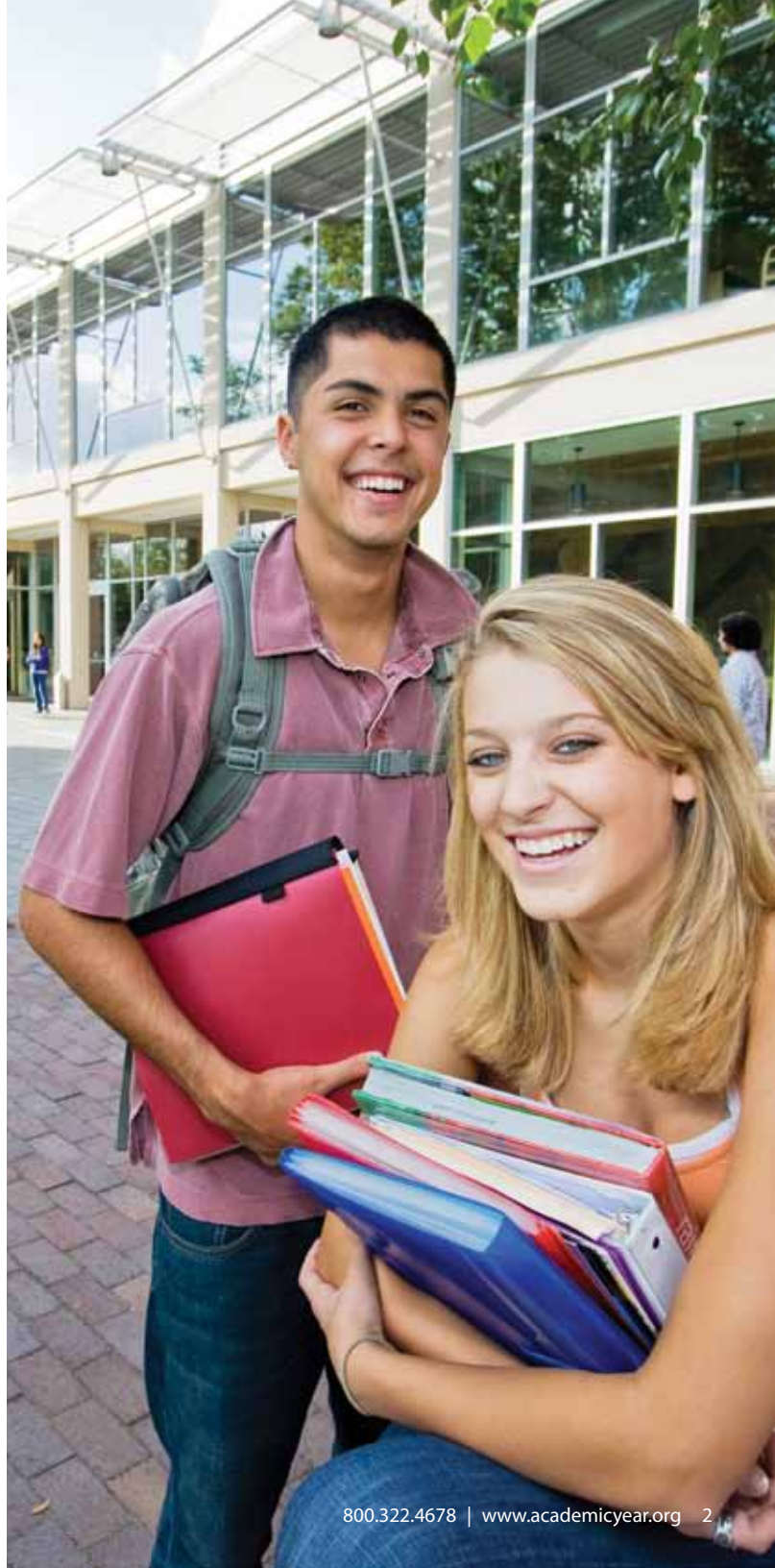
Hosting exchange students allows intercultural learning to come alive in classrooms. New perspectives are added to discussions that had previously been limited to American teachers and students trying to imagine beyond their own cultural biases and experiences. Classroom discussions shaped by different cultural perspectives and experiences are often richer and more engaging. They prepare students for multicultural life events that may occur in their future. American students in language classes have an added benefit when native speakers contribute to linguistic and cultural background information.

- **Exposure to diversity**

Recent studies have shown that American and exchange students grow in their understanding and appreciation of diversity when friendships develop during hosting experiences. This understanding will lead to an increase in tolerance.

- **A tangible connection to world events**

World events take on a new significance when we have personal relationships with people from the places in the news. This new significance is just the beginning of bridging the gaps of intercultural differences. Exchange students are a group of brave, young people who are eager to share their cultural knowledge with your teachers and students. However, they have come to the United States to learn about our culture, our people, and our language. These students share a desire to be academically successful in America and will strive to be at the top of the American classes. Records indicate that hosting



exchange students can and usually does improve the scholastic scores of a school. In addition, federal funds are often provided to schools that host exchange students.

- **Annual scholarship eligibility**

All participating high schools are eligible to receive an annual scholarship from AYA, which can be awarded to a worthy American student from the school community. One of the advantages of enrolling an AYA student in your school is the access to the AIFS family of programs. AIFS offers a world of college study abroad opportunities open to American students. In addition, AIFS's sister organization, the American Council for International Studies (ACIS), offers short-term travel programs for students, teachers, and adults. The scholarship can be used toward the following AIFS programs

- **A globalized campus**

AYA students allow intercultural learning to come alive. Classroom discussions are richer and more engaging when shaped by different cultural perspectives. Language classes benefit when native speakers contribute linguistic and cultural knowledge. World events take on new significance when personal relationships influence opinions.

AYA High School Liaison

AYA has a dedicated staff member who acts as a High School Liaison. The High School Liaison is there to serve as your direct point of contact with AYA in addition to Local Coordinators. He or she will work closely with public and private high schools across the U.S. to assist with student enrollments. The liaison, having specialized training in school partnerships with exchange programs, will act as a resource to school administrators for federal requirements, policies, and procedures to make successful placements. The liaison is available to conduct conferences or in-service trainings to promote intercultural exchange for the school's faculty, staff, and parent groups. The high school liaison can also provide assistance to schools regarding the Tony Cook Grant and special scholarships.

AYA Local Coordinators

AYA has a network of several hundred dedicated Local Coordinators throughout the U.S. Local Coordinators are men and women of all ages—teachers, retirees, professionals, and homemakers. They share a deep belief in the value of cross-cultural exchange. They also receive ongoing instruction and direction from AYA and attend annual training sessions.

Local Coordinators serve as community representatives for AYA, finding homes and enrolling AYA students in area high schools. The Local

Coordinator is the person when the school, student, and host family can turn to with any questions or concerns.

Local Coordinators interview families interested in hosting a student; all family members are requested to be present. The purpose of the interview is to ensure that the family understands the responsibilities of hosting, examine the room where the student will sleep and study, and determine if all family members agree to support the experience. To the question, "Would I place my own son or daughter in this family?" the Local Coordinator must answer a resounding "Yes!"

Local Coordinator responsibilities

- Screening, interviewing, and selecting host families
- Providing host families with a pre-arrival orientation
- Acting as a local liaison to the high school
- Supervising and supporting families and students throughout the program year
- Sending monthly student reports to the national office, based on monthly student visits and communications with host families and high schools



- Providing emergency assistance to the AYA student, host family, and high school (should it ever be required)

AYA host families

AYA host families are volunteers; they are not paid for hosting students. AYA carefully selects and conducts background checks on all host families. Host families are expected to provide a safe, comfortable home to ensure a positive cultural experience for students studying in the United States. People of all ages, and from diverse backgrounds, volunteer to serve as host families. Grandparents, families with younger children, single-parent families, and traditional two-parent families have all successfully hosted with AYA.

AYA host family responsibilities

- Providing the student with a home for the academic year or semester
- Welcoming the student as a member of their family and encouraging him/her to participate in all aspects of family life
- Providing the student with his/her own bed and place to study, either in a room shared with a family member of his/her own sex and in the same age range, or in his/her own room
- Providing the student with all meals (except school lunches)
- Assisting the student with course selection and registration
- Encouraging the exchange of ideas through involvement with the AYA student and providing for the student's exposure to the cultural and social environment of the home and neighborhood
- Providing the love and understanding a young person needs to enjoy a successful academic year in America

AYA students

AYA students are carefully screened and selected by AYA's designated network of overseas partners. Students submit a thorough application and are personally interviewed, with a portion of the interview conducted in English, to ensure that the student has the appropriate motivation to participate in the program. Complete applications must be submitted to AYA and are carefully reviewed by AYA staff before students can be considered for placement in American schools and homes. All students have full medical insurance coverage. In some cases, students elect to enroll in private/independent schools.

Reprint from the Code of Federal Regulations

Washington, D.C. 20547

Criteria for Exchange Teenager Program sec. 22 CFR 62.25 Secondary school students

Program eligibility

Secondary school student exchange visitor programs designated by the Department of State must:

- 1 Require all exchange students to be enrolled and participating in a full course of study at an accredited academic institution;

Student enrollment

- 1 Sponsors must secure prior written acceptance for the enrollment of any exchange student 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 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.

Student extra-curricular activities

Exchange students may participate in school sanctioned and sponsored extracurricular 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.



Students must meet the following requirements to be enrolled in the AYA Program:

- Demonstrated proficient English language ability to study effectively in U.S. high schools. Students must have studied English for at least three years.
- Maintained a grade point average of "C+" or better in academic courses (math, history, science) for the past three years.
- Reached 15 years of age, but have not exceeded 18 years of age at the start of the program.

Student applications include:

- Personal essays written in English
- Letter from natural parents
- School transcripts for the past three years with school seals
- Teachers' recommendations
- Standardized test of English proficiency (if necessary)
- Health records with required immunizations
- Passport photographs and personal photograph albums

Our AYA students express many reasons for wanting to participate in a cultural exchange program:

- AYA students would like to experience the American educational system, which is quite different from the systems in their own countries. Program participants may find that American schools are more flexible and offer more extracurricular activities. Some students may never have experienced playing an active role in planning and selecting courses to fulfill their particular educational goals.
- Students are interested in experiencing the "real" United States after having been exposed to American culture through newspapers, books, radio, television, internet, and films.
- Students want to improve their English skills by living with a family and attending school in the United States.
- AYA students are also motivated by their desires to experience life outside of their home country. The AYA program offers exchange students the opportunity to grow and become more independent, with the support and supervision of a caring family.

AYA students come from more than 35 countries, including:

Armenia	India	Russia
Austria	Indonesia	Saudi Arabia
Azerbaijan	Italy	South Korea
Brazil	Kazakhstan	Spain
Chile	Kenya	Switzerland
China	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan
Colombia	Luxembourg	Thailand
Egypt	Malaysia	Turkey
Georgia	Mexico	Turkmenistan
Germany	Moldova	Ukraine
Ghana	Mozambique	Uzbekistan
Guatemala	Philippines	
Hungary	Poland	

Student orientation

AYA understands the importance of making sure that students are prepared for their experience in America. We require students to take part in orientation programs, both in their home country before departure and upon arrival in the U.S. All overseas partners provide pre-departure orientation that includes (but is not limited to) information regarding travel procedures, responsibilities and expectations, student safety, rules and regulations, and American high schools. Each student is issued a Pre-departure Guide, a publication of AYA. This guide includes facts about the AYA experience, such as student safety, financial information, host family changes, insurance, etc.

Upon arrival, students attend a comprehensive orientation in the U.S. organized by our experienced and professional staff. The arrival orientation begins with getting the students acquainted with their surroundings while helping them prepare for the life-changing experience that lies ahead. The arrival orientation focuses on students' adjustment in America, having realistic expectations, living with American host families, attending a U.S. high school, AYA rules, student safety, regulations, and emergency procedures. The students receive additional information on topics like American culture, budgeting, the Local Coordinators' role, volunteerism, and special cultural opportunities. All students receive a student handbook to use as a guide during their stay in America. This handbook gives the students answers to frequently asked questions. AYA believes preparation for students is the key to a successful exchange year in America.

Enrollment procedures

High school enrollment procedures

The Local Coordinator will meet with the school principal or designated administrator within the school district to explain the program. The Local Coordinator is always available to answer any questions the administrator may have about the program.

The school will be notified when a family under consideration has been selected for hosting, and the Local Coordinator and AYA will provide the school with a copy of the complete student application. The school must then complete AYA's High School Enrollment Form, acknowledging acceptance of the student. The Local Coordinator will also complete a high school profile with information about your school that will be forwarded to the student.

High schools may determine the appropriate grade level for each student, based on school policy and examination of the AYA student's academic

"Life is all about choices. And no matter how great or seemingly insignificant the decisions might be, our lives will be affected by the choices we make. Rarely has our family made choices that have brought us such love, joy, excitement, pride, and a sense of accomplishment as hosting an exchange student."

—Beth, AYA host mother, Arkansas



history. (AYA can assist in evaluating a student's academic history at the school's request.)

AYA values its partnerships with high schools. We understand the pressures and demands schools face daily, and our goal is to work with you to ensure a positive experience for all involved.

AYA appreciates your school's feedback. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the placement of one of our students, please inform your Local Coordinator or the AYA High School Liason in the National Office.

Course of study

Academic Year in America offers programs for 10 months of study (August through June) or for five months of study (August through January or January through June). Accordingly, students arrive in the U.S. in August or January.

AYA's commitment to the educational component of student exchange ensures that students are of high academic caliber. All participating students are expected to carry full course loads and participate in school as any American student would. AYA requires its students to take at least four academic subjects, always including an English Language/Literature course and an American History/Government course.

Most AYA students do not receive credit for the courses taken while in the U.S. Although, a few educational systems allow students to receive full academic credit or to "convalidate," for their year or semester of study in the U.S. Most students from Brazil, Italy, and Spain have this opportunity



and may need assistance in choosing the appropriate courses in order to receive credit for their studies in the U.S. It is the responsibility of the convalidating student to prepare his/her documents prior to returning home. Our overseas partners have provided students with detailed instructions. High schools are not expected to provide AYA students with extra help, tutoring, or other assistance beyond what is normally provided to American students.

Importance of extracurricular activities

AYA supports the diversity of extracurricular options available to exchange students, and the contribution that these activities can have on the international student's general education regarding American life. AYA students are encouraged to participate in sports, clubs, music, and other social activities that are equally important to enriching their stay in the U.S. The students who take part in the whole academic experience enhance cultural exchange within their communities. AYA students are advised that their eligibility for participation in extracurricular activities, including sports, depends upon school, local, and state requirements and policies.

Graduation policies

AYA's Local Coordinator may ask you if a student enrolled in the senior class will be able to graduate upon successful completion of course work and receive a diploma at the end of the program. Please confirm at the time of initial placement whether this will be possible and what courses the student must complete in order to meet graduation requirements. Please also indicate whether or not a Certificate of Attendance can be issued to the student.

Diplomas and participation in graduation ceremonies are not promised or guaranteed to AYA students. AYA respects the right of the hosting high school to determine policies concerning graduation ceremonies and diplomas.

Special grant programs

AYA is proud to be a grant recipient to administer the prestigious FLEX and YES scholarship programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. These programs are identified by both the State Department and by members of Congress as important initiatives in U.S. public diplomacy in helping to promote mutual understanding between U.S. citizens and key foreign policy countries. These scholarship programs are merit-based and highly competitive. The students selected are rigorously screened and identified as potential future leaders in their home communities. While in the

U.S., these scholarship students participate in many different activities that enhance their experience, including local community service, International Education Week presentations in schools, and many different leadership and enhancement activities.

Future Leaders Exchange Program (FLEX)

The FLEX Program encourages long-lasting peace and mutual understanding between the U.S. and the countries of Eurasia. The FLEX Program was established in 1992 under the FREEDOM Support Act and is overseen by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in cooperation with private, not-for-profit grantee organizations such as AYA. Since 1993, more than 18,000 students from 12 Eurasian countries have participated in the program and returned home to become active members of their home community alumni associations, where they are becoming agents of change based on the leadership skills they acquired while on the program. FLEX students become active members of their host communities by participating in community service projects and leadership workshops, and by making presentations in their schools for International Education Week.

Youth Exchange and Study Program (YES)

The YES Program is an innovative high school exchange program funded by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs and administered by private, not-for-profit grantee organizations such as AYA. Founded in the wake of 9/11, the YES program aims to promote mutual understanding between the United States and countries with a significant Muslim population. AYA YES students come from Brunei, Egypt, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Mozambique, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Thailand, and Turkey. YES students enhance their communities by participating in local community service projects and by doing numerous presentations about their home country to schools and other local community groups. Identified as potential future leaders, YES students become involved in numerous community and leadership projects when they return home as alumni.

Program guidelines

AYA academic policy

AYA monitors each student's school performance and quarterly grades. AYA students are advised that they are subject to the same academic and social rules as their American classmates. Teachers and guidance counselors are asked to contact the Local Coordinator and host family immediately if any problems arise.

"I have hosted students for the past four years and have been very blessed by this experience. I wanted friends and other families to enjoy hosting a student, so I decided to become a Local Coordinator. I am also a teacher at a private school and the Headmaster wanted our school to become more international, so I was encouraged to enroll more students."

—Kelly Pedersen,
Teacher at Christian School of York, PA



To remain in good standing in the program, a student must enroll in an appropriate English language course and an American studies course and maintain a “C” average in all core classes. A failing grade in an academic course is considered unacceptable and is grounds for probation. Each case is evaluated on an individual basis; attitude and effort are taken into consideration.

Student disciplinary policy

In addition to academic guidelines, students are obligated to sign a copy of AYA rules prior to their arrival in the United States. All students receive a handbook detailing AYA rules and disciplinary procedures during orientation in the United States. Students are expected to follow all AYA rules and behavioral guidelines. If the student does not comply, he/she will face disciplinary action. Any disciplinary action is considered serious, and the Disciplinary Committee will implement a reprimand. Action may include:

- Warning
- Probation
- Disqualification from the program (if necessary)

Throughout this process, the student is formally advised in writing of the unacceptable behavior or the program infraction. A timetable for reviewing the student’s performance and recommendations for improvement are established. Circumstances are carefully documented, and everyone involved is consulted prior to the Disciplinary Committee’s actions.

As a last resort, any student who fails to comply with program, family, and, school rules, or applicable U.S. laws, may be terminated from the Academic Year in America program and must return to his or her home country immediately. Every effort is made to be fair in dealing with any problems that may arise from a program participant’s behavior.

If AYA receives notification from any high school administrator that a student has been asked to leave his or her current high school, this is considered immediate grounds for dismissal.

School fees, expenses, etc.

AYA students, like American students, are responsible for school fees and other incidental expenses. Prior to the student’s arrival in the U.S., students are informed about their financial responsibilities. Students are informed that schools and school districts are not expected to provide any financial assistance or benefits. Program participants bring money for any expenses they will incur, such as school trips, yearbooks, or prom.

The AYA support network

AYA National Office

A dedicated professional staff supports students, host families, Local Coordinators, and schools. The AYA office is comprised of a caring, committed team of professionals who work long hours to ensure that all involved receive the support they need and have access to AYA’s comprehensive resources.

Regional Directors from the National Office who have access to AYA’s comprehensive resources supervise Local Coordinators. Regional Directors serve as a point of contact for all communication between students, host families, Local Coordinators, and schools. Regional Directors are also responsible for maintaining contact with overseas partners. AYA staff receive detailed reports of student progress, evaluate the information, and take appropriate action when necessary.

The AYA High School Liaison is also there to serve as your direct point of contact with AYA in addition to Regional Directors. He or she will work closely with public and private high schools across the U.S. to assist with student enrollments. The liaison, having specialized training in school partnerships with exchange programs, will act as a resource to school administrators for federal requirements, policies, and procedures to make successful placements. The liaison is available to conduct conferences or in-service trainings to promote intercultural exchange for school’s faculty, staff, and parent groups. The high school liaison can also provide assistance to schools regarding the Tony Cook Grant and special scholarships.

24-hour emergency coverage

AYA provides 24-hour service and access to our staff via telephone for the convenience of students, host families, Local Coordinators, and high schools. Round-the-clock coverage includes a program counselor, a toll free number, and a 24-hour emergency telephone service.

Partnering with an educational exchange program can be very beneficial for a high school. However, it is crucial when selecting an exchange program to choose a well-respected and qualified program. AYA’s more than 25 years of experience in international exchange gives high school administrators the assurance that this program is an excellent choice.

AYA is the right choice for the following reasons:

- Well-screened volunteer host families
- Trained Local Coordinators
- Support staff available 24 hours a day
- Academically oriented program with detailed progress reports
- Pre-departure and arrival orientations for students
- Comprehensive medical insurance for all AYA students
- U.S. Department of State Grant Recipient
- CSIET-approved program

The above list contains just a few reasons why AYA is recognized as one of the most respected educational exchange programs in the United States. We are pleased with our reputation and encourage you to be a part of our efforts in promoting international exchange.

CSIET Member

The Academic Year in America program is a member of the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET). CSIET, established in 1984, is a non-profit organization that oversees quality international educational travel and exchange. It establishes standards for organizations operating international educational travel and exchange programs at the high school level, monitors compliance with those standards, and disseminates information regarding international educational travel organizations. AYA is listed in the 2011–2012 CSIET Advisory List for high schools, which ensures a high quality program for participants, students, host families, and high schools. AYA participates in the CSIET evaluation process annually.

On the basis of materials submitted and reviewed, the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel grants full listing to Academic Year in America in the 2011–2012 Advisory List. The CSIET certification mark certifies that this organization complies with the standards set forth in the CSIET Standards for International Educational Travel Programs.



“The foreign exchange students bring such a positive atmosphere to our school. They show our students what it means to take academics seriously. 95% of the students that attend our school (11 this year) are in the honors and advance courses with A’s and B’s. They are truly a joy to have at our school, and we welcome them.”

—Gina Williams, Principal
Winter Haven Sr. High, FL



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On behalf of our students, our staff and the Board of Trustees of the AIFS Foundation, AYA would like to take the opportunity to thank members of the educational community who help make our program possible.