

High School in America 2026-27 Program Frequently Asked Questions

1. Youth Exchange – A Vision

Exchange programs grew from a desire for nations and their peoples to build bridges of understanding after World War II. Since then, youth exchange has grown and gained popularity in many countries throughout the world, including yours! Youth exchange is successful because teenagers have the opportunity to learn about another country and culture by living as a member of a host family, not as a guest. By sharing their daily activities, people have the chance to learn about each other's lives and cultures. Exchange participants gain lifelong friendships and a "second family" in another part of the world. Youth exchange creates the possibility for positive impact with the student's peers, schools, communities, parents, and ultimately, relationships among nations. Many of today's leaders have themselves participated in an exchange experience and can attest to its positive impact on their lives.

2. What is the High School in America program?

The High School in America program is an academic-year program for secondary school students interested in living and studying in the United States of America. Participants will live with volunteer host families and will study at an American high school. Over the course of the program, students will also develop leadership skills by engaging as cultural ambassadors and growing in confidence, independence and the ability to communicate with different people. Many alumni have pointed to their exchange experience in shaping their future studies and career and in preparing them for a global world.

3. What do program fees cover?

- a. Placement with a selected and screened U.S. host family
- b. Enrollment in a U.S. secondary school
- c. Program orientation activities including pre-program preparation and re-entry preparation
- d. Program activities arranged in local U.S. communities
- e. Medical insurance, excluding pre-existing conditions, copays, and dental care
- f. 24-hour student support while in the U.S.
- g. Overseas support for parents during the program year

4. What is NOT provided?

- a. Any costs associated with receiving an international passport
- b. Round-trip domestic and international travel (from the gateway city in your home country to the U.S. host community and back)
- c. Costs for obtaining a U.S. visa
- d. Required immunizations
- e. School fees
- f. Personal expenses
- g. Excess baggage costs
- h. Cellphones, cellphone plans
- i. Computer or other supplies for study

5. Who is eligible to apply?

- a. Eligible applicants must:
 - i. Meet the grade and age requirements set for their country
 - ii. Be enrolled in a secondary school at the time of application and not to have completed secondary school before arriving to the U.S.
 - iii. Be born between July 15, 2008 - July 15, 2011
 - iv. Have an academic standing of good or better
 - v. Have previously studied English and demonstrate English language ability at the time of registration
 - vi. Meet the U.S. visa eligibility requirements
 - vii. Reside in and be able to receive an international passport in the country where they apply to the program

6. Who is NOT eligible to apply?

- a. Students are not eligible to apply if:
 - i. Applicant does not meet the criteria above
 - ii. Applicant has studied in the U.S. before on a J-1 or F-1 visa
 - iii. Applicant's family (or a member of the family) applied or is applying to emigrate to the U.S., made plans to emigrate to the U.S., or has already emigrated to the U.S.

7. When and how can I apply?

- a. Interested candidates who meet the eligibility requirements are invited to complete a preliminary online application located at <https://ais.americancouncils.org/hsamerica>. Pre-Application will be available on September 15, 2025.
- b. A selection committee will evaluate online pre-applications and select semifinalists. Semifinalists will receive a longer application, take an English language proficiency test, write an essay, and be interviewed by program staff. Applicants will then be asked to complete an online application with more detailed information.

8. What happens after notification?

- a. Upon notification, finalists, alternates, and their parents will receive information to prepare them for their departure. They must officially notify the program in writing that they accept a spot in the program and must provide any additional documentation requested within two weeks of acceptance and pay a deposit of \$1000. Students must begin the process of applying for or renewing their international passport immediately upon acceptance to the program. The program will instruct participants on the process of applying for a U.S. visa.
- b. The program will match finalists with qualified U.S. host families and arrange for enrollment in local secondary schools. Participants will have pre-departure orientations in June/July and will then travel to their U.S. host families and communities to begin their U.S. exchange experience in August 2026.
- c. Please note: Students participating in the program must return to their home country at the end of the program on the date assigned by the sponsor. The U.S.

visa issued for program participants will not be amended or extended beyond the program end date for any reason.

9. What should you consider before applying to the program?

- a. Students who are interested in the program should consider whether taking part in a year-long exchange program may have an adverse impact on their academic or personal future. Things to consider include but are not limited to:
 - i. Will I have to repeat a year of school after returning home?
 - ii. Will I be home too late in 2027 to take final school examinations or university/institute entrance examinations? Program participants return to their home countries in late May and June 2027.
 - iii. Will I be required to serve in the military upon return to my home country?
 - iv. Will I be eligible to graduate with honors at my home school?
 - v. Certain classes needed for school in my home school are not available in U.S. high schools.
 - vi. Depending on the school and state, you may not be eligible to participate in competitive athletic competitions due to local and state regulations.
- b. Finally, although students attend a U.S. high school, the curriculum is substantially different from that in other countries, and it is likely you will not learn the same subject material. The program cannot guarantee you will receive a U.S. high school diploma during your exchange year but will provide a record for the coursework you do complete. Receiving academic credit for your year abroad cannot be guaranteed.

10. Where will I stay while in the U.S.?

The program will identify a host family and community for you. Students have been placed with families in all fifty states. Most placements are in smaller towns and with many types of families. From families with teenagers to retirees and others. Requests for a specific type of family or geographic area in the U.S. are not granted. Living with family members in the U.S. is strictly prohibited.

11. Who organizes the program?

American Councils for International Education is proud to organize the High School in America (HSA) program. American Councils has been working on exchange programs for almost 50 years. Together with our partners, we have helped young people from over 65 countries have life-changing experiences.

12. How can I get more information?

Email us at: hsa@americancouncils.org. Please include what country you are from in your email.

13. Apply now! <https://ais.americancouncils.org/hsamerica>