



Connecting Lives, Sharing Cultures

United States Host School FAQ

When does the school year begin and end?

School starts in August or early September and ends mid-May to mid-June. In addition to a 10-11 week summer vacation (May-August), students typically have two weeks for winter holiday in late December/early January and, for some, a week of spring vacation in March or April. Schools also close during most federal and state holidays.

What is a typical school day? How many classes per day?

A typical school day is from 7:30am to 2:30pm with 30 minutes to an hour for lunch. The day is usually divided into six or more one-hour classes or four 90-minute classes with 5 minute breaks between classes. Unlike many countries, teachers stay in one classroom, while the students move from class to class. Classes in schools are held from Monday through Friday and there are no lessons on Saturdays or Sundays. Extra-curricular activities and sports are scheduled after school hours.

In what type of school will I be enrolled?

Most AFS students are placed in coed public schools, however, there are some students who are placed in private schools. Private schools are often times (but not always) run by religious organizations. Boarding schools are not very common in the US but do exist. A small number of high schools specialize in the Arts, Science or Vocational courses, as well as a few "alternative" high schools that focus on experiential learning and that offer a non-traditional curriculum.

In what grade level will I be enrolled?

AFS students are usually placed in 10th or 11th or 12th grade. AFS-USA can't guarantee placement of AFSers at a particular grade level. US high schools place students in grade levels based on their academic transcripts, skill level, district policy and/or age.

Will I be able to choose my classes? What classes are available?

Every school has a different system for allowing students to select classes. Availability of specific classes varies based on the size of the school. AFS-USA cannot guarantee that students will be able to take specific classes while on exchange. Some schools may require exchange students to take a specific course load and others will let the student choose. Some common courses are American History, foreign language, English, and math.



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In what language will classes be taught?

All teaching, with the exception of foreign languages, is done in English.

Will I need to buy a uniform, books, or other school supplies?

Most public schools provide books to students, but students are responsible for school supplies and for clothes to conform to the uniform or dress code. Most private schools do not provide books, uniforms or school supplies, so the student is responsible for purchasing them.

Are extra-curricular activities available?

Students may participate in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, although some schools will not allow exchange students to participate in Varsity level sports. Activities may include team and individual sports, theatre, debate, community service, language clubs, musical groups and dance teams. It is common that students who have graduated from high school are not allowed to participate in high school athletics. In these cases, community or recreation leagues might be an option.

Any fees charged by the host school - whether a public or private school - in order to participate in sports or other extra-curricular activities are the responsibility of the student.

Can I get an official transcript or a certificate of attendance?

No participant is guaranteed a transcript or diploma. It is your responsibility to obtain school documents before leaving the United States if your school is willing to provide them. Many high schools will award an honorary diploma for hosted students placed in the 12th grade. Such a diploma does not indicate student has achieved necessary graduation requirements and should not be confused with an official academic diploma.

Anything else I should know?

Secondary schools in the US are regulated by each State's Department of Education. Because of this, there is relatively little uniformity among the schools in the US. Requirements and the school calendar vary from school to school, also depending on whether the school is public or private.

U.S. high schools often have high security with police and/or other law enforcement representatives stationed throughout the school campus. This does not imply that the school is unsafe, but is a commonality among U.S. high schools. Students should be aware of this and not be alarmed.