

Switzerland Host School FAQ

When does the school year begin and end?

Switzerland is divided into 26 cantons, and the school system is under cantonal authority. The structure of the school year varies among cantons. However, the following generalizations can be made: school starts in August or September and goes to the end of June or the middle of July. In addition to long summer vacations (in most cantons five-six weeks in July/August), pupils have vacations in the fall, at Christmas/New Year, in the winter, and in the spring.

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

The school week lasts from Monday through Friday. Usually students have an additional afternoon off during the week. Classes usually start at 8am. and may last until 6pm. On the whole, pupils have to attend approx. 35 lessons per week. Each lesson lasts 45 - 50 minutes. Students have 5-15 minute breaks between classes and about 1 hour for lunch.

What type of school will I be enrolled in?

The majority of exchange students are placed in Matura schools or in Specialized Middle Schools. Sometimes AFS students are placed in the Upper Secondary Level, depending on the age of the student and the school situation at his/her host place. Matura schools are academically competitive high schools that prepare students for university studies. They offer a broad general education and are divided into several sections (ancient languages, modern languages, scientific, commercial etc.).

In what grade level will I be enrolled?

Usually students are placed in the 10th or 11th school year. AFS Switzerland cannot guarantee placement at a particular level.

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

Students cannot choose their classes, but have to take a given subject combination (or "section"). Available sections include classical languages, modern languages, scientific, or commercial. German, French, a third language, mathematics, natural sciences, humanities and social sciences, and visual arts/music are compulsory for students in all sections in most schools. Exceptions are foreign languages of which the students do not have any previous knowledge. There might be opportunities for students to take subjects at a different level better suited to their ability, e.g. they might take German, French or Italian at a lower level, but this decision is up to the school.

In what language will classes be taught?

All instruction, with the exception of foreign languages, is done in German or French.

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

Exchange students have to buy (or borrow) the books used in school. AFS Switzerland will reimburse students for these books (excluding dictionaries and exercise books) at the end of the year as long as the students keep the receipts. Students must buy other school material such as pencils, writing pads etc, themselves. There is no need for uniforms in Switzerland.

Are extra-curricular activities available?

Since lessons cover most of the day, there are not many extra-curricular activities offered by schools. A few extra-curricular activities might be offered (sports, band, etc.), but they vary from school to school and cannot be guaranteed. Most Swiss students get involved in sports and extra-curricular activities through clubs and associations outside of school.

Are high school graduates accepted?

AFS Switzerland can accept graduates if they have completed high school no longer than one month before the beginning of the program. They strongly prefer non-graduates. Keep in mind: graduates must be recent grads, they must still be within the program age ranges, they must demonstrate that they understand they will be expected to participate fully in school, and they must understand that they may be placed in school with students younger than them.

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

A certificate of attendance is available. Some schools may be able to offer a transcript of grades, but that decision is the responsibility of the school and often depends on the commitment of the student. No guarantee and no discussion if school does not want to provide a certificate.

Can I get academic credit for my study abroad?

Maybe, but we can't guarantee it. The amount and type of credit you receive is determined by your high school in the home country, so it's important that you talk with your teachers and guidance counselor before you depart to see what is needed in order to be granted credit. In most cases, AFS students have received language, history, or social studies credits. Be sure to keep a copy of any formal grades or transcripts you receive from your host school. It is your responsibility to obtain any written information about your attendance and grades in your host school before you return home. AFS cannot assist you with course or grade information after you complete the program.