
U.S. Department of State Teacher Exchange Program

Background

The Teacher Exchange Program fosters mutual understanding, positive images of different cultures, and cross-cultural learning in the classroom, as well as the mastery of specific subject areas.

The purpose of the Teacher category of the Exchange Visitor Program is to:

- enhance mutual understanding between the people of the United States and people of other countries;
- allow U.S. students who lack opportunities to travel abroad to have early and meaningful relationships with individuals from other cultures;
- provide visiting teachers an opportunity to expand their understanding of U.S. education, culture, and society;
- provide U.S. teachers with a greater understanding of international teaching practices by their working alongside international colleagues; and
- create opportunities to develop lasting links between U.S. and international schools and communities.ⁱ

Exchange Teachers are hosted by U.S. schools, including pre-K (language immersion only), elementary, and high schools, for up to three years. After this period, Exchange Teachers may be eligible to apply for a one- or two-year program extension.

Exchange Teachers are well qualified: They have a minimum of two years of recent teaching experience, hold the equivalent of a U.S. bachelor's degree in education or the academic subject in which they will teach, and meet the educational standards of the U.S. state where they will teach.

Leveraging People-to-People Diplomacy to Prepare U.S. Students to Excel in Global Contexts

The Partnership for 21st Century Learning, whose founding members include the National Education Association and the U.S. Department of Education, indicates that global awareness is a key theme through which students should study key subjects like math, science, and world languages. Social and cross-cultural skills are also listed as critical life and career skills.ⁱⁱ

The Teacher Exchange Program is uniquely well suited to bringing global awareness and cross-cultural social and communication skills into the classroom.

Cross-cultural learning activities, such as virtual exchanges with a school in an Exchange Teacher's home country or presentations about teachers' home country in their host community, enable students and community members to improve their understanding of the world, learn to appreciate alternate viewpoints, and develop critical-thinking skills that take into consideration cultural variance.

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Bringing the Benefits of International Diversity to U.S. Classrooms

U.S. classrooms are more diverse than they were in the pastⁱⁱⁱ and education experts agree that it is critically important for cultural differences to be represented and addressed in diverse classrooms.^{iv}

Exchange Teachers provide unique role models and are one part of broader efforts^v to diversify school faculty and better serve our students.

Studies indicate international teachers may be additionally beneficial to students who perceive themselves as outsiders in some way and to minority students.^{vi}

Helping Meet Critical Teaching Needs

The difficulty of finding comparably qualified and experienced teachers in some districts is a factor prompting some schools to consider hosting an Exchange Teacher.

The Teacher Exchange Program is one small part of broader efforts to address well-documented teacher shortages,^{vii} but it is not intended—and is not in practice—shaping the U.S. teaching market.

With 2,876^{viii} new Exchange Teachers in 2017, the Teacher Exchange Program represent a miniscule fraction of the 3.581 million^{ix} people teaching in U.S. classrooms.

Providing Opportunities for Professional Development for both U.S. and Exchange Teachers

Exchange Teachers learn American teaching methodologies while bringing an international perspective to American classrooms.

Through participation in the Teacher Exchange Program, Exchange Teachers cultivate professional networks that they can call upon throughout their careers for advice, sharing of best practices, and collaboration.

A 2014 study finds ample evidence of Exchange Teachers learning American teaching methodologies and applying these upon return to their home countries.^x

U.S. teachers likewise stand to gain by working alongside international colleagues. In our increasingly interconnected world, direct interaction with international teachers is a valuable form of professional development. In fact, the same 2014 study suggests U.S. schools could do more to take advantage of the learning opportunities afforded by Exchange Teachers.

ⁱ The Partnership for 21st Century Learning, "Framework for 21st Century Learning," http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/docs/P21_framework_0816.pdf.

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ⁱⁱ Exchange Visitor Program – Teachers, Code of Federal Regulations

https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/retrieveECFR?gp=&SID=1bc531bf257789e45b3049bff8b50d64&r=PART&n=22y1.0.1.7.35#se22.1.62_124

ⁱⁱⁱ The National Center for Education Statistics report, "[Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups](#)," provides ample evidence of America's increasingly diverse primary and secondary school student population. [Here](#) is just one key finding: "Between 2000 and 2016, the percentage of U.S. school-age children who were White decreased from 62 to 52 percent and the percentage who were Black decreased from 15 to 14 percent. In contrast, the percentage of school-age children from other racial/ethnic groups increased: Hispanics, from 16 to 25 percent; Asians, from 3 to 5 percent; and children of Two or more races, from 2 to 4 percent."

^{iv} Jessica Besser-Rosenberg, *Teach for America*, "The Research Says: Diversity in Teaching Matters," October 1, 2015,

<https://www.teachforamerica.org/top-stories/research-says-diversity-teaching-matters>; Chrystal S. Johnson and Harvey Hinton III, "Addressing Culturally Consonant Character Development and Research," pp. 39-65 and Helen Mele Robinson, "Dynamics of Culture and Curriculum Design: Preparing Culturally Responsive Teacher Candidates," pp. 93-114 in *Handbook of Research on Effective Communication in Culturally Diverse Classrooms* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2016).

^v Jessica Besser-Rosenberg, *Teach for America*, "Student Diversity, TFA, and the Teaching Workforce: What the Numbers Tell Us," January 21, 2016, <https://www.teachforamerica.org/top-stories/student-diversity-tfa-and-teaching-workforce-what-numbers-tell-us>.

^{vi} See review of literature in Katharina Bense, "International teacher mobility and migration: A review and synthesis of the current empirical research and literature," *Educational Research Review* 17 (2016): 37-49.

^{vii} Stephanie Aragon, *Education Commission of the States*, "Teacher Shortages: What We Know," <https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Teacher-Shortages-What-We-Know.pdf>.

^{viii} Based on CY 2017 numbers from the U.S. Department of State's [Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs](#).

^{ix} Based on projections from the U.S. Department of Education's [National Center for Education Statistics](#).

^x Kara D. Brown and Doyle Stevick. "The Globalizing Labor Market in Education: Teachers as Cultural Ambassadors or Agents of Institutional Isomorphism?" *Peabody Journal of Education*, 89:1 (2014): 4-16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2014.862134>.