



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

NAD Principals' Handbook excerpt

Principals need to ensure that the enrollment of international students is an effective part of the school's mission and that appropriate resources and courses are available to help the students succeed.

A school (or conference) accepting international students must be certified by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), and follow the protocols on the U.S. government's Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) [website](#). An individual on each campus must be designated as the school's contact.

Students who are not permanent residents of the United States must have a student visa in order to attend school. To begin the process for receiving the F1 immigration status, the school must issue an I-20 form. This should be done only after the application and admission process is completed.

Refer to the revised online version of the [Principals' Handbook](#). 🌐

CHALLENGES TO OPPORTUNITIES

Paul Negrete, Principal, San Gabriel Academy

San Gabriel Academy has had an international student presence for over twenty-five years. Today, a little more than a quarter of SGA is comprised of international learners. Many schools are eager to take advantage of this opportunity, but they may be hesitant due to some inherent challenges. Below are some lessons the SGA administrative team has learned in the past seven years on how to turn challenges into opportunities when dealing with this specific student population.

Setting the School Culture

Noted leadership pundit Barry Posner often states in his presentations that it is the people in leadership that make the difference in setting the culture and environment of an institution. In school, the principal is the head administrator of the campus, and the teachers are the leaders of their classrooms. Together, administration and faculty are the ones who are primarily responsible for determining school culture. If spirituality is high on campus, it is a direct result of the joint leadership effort of school administration and faculty. Should issues arise that threaten to destabilize or weaken the culture of the institution, the leadership team (administration and faculty) will work together to find solutions.

Creative Finance Solutions

When dealing with finances, schools should consider creative ways to make use of the opportunity God has provided with the international student population. A school may not want to be overly dependent on the tuition derived from foreign students. If so, it must focus

on building financial models that will maximize the opportunity that is available, while keeping in mind the needs of the school. Consider a financial benefactor wanting to give a donation of \$300,000 or more to your school. Would you say, "I'm sorry, but I cannot accept your donation because we might become financially dependent on this money in the coming years?" Another scenario might be a windfall of students who are carpooling from a local Christian school that closed down. We would not reject them due to the fact that they will only be on our campus for one year. We would figure out how to take advantage of each unique circumstance.

Dealing with Disciplinary Issues

Disciplinary issues in school will vary from year-to-year, depending on the students and their families. The same is true for international students. Some years will be easier than others. It is important to note that some trends will follow groups of people. Knowing this, a school can prepare to address the issues through policy, teacher training, student training and support, or by any other means that will help to bring about the desired result. Over time, certain problems will become less of an issue simply because the school's program is improving in addressing the needs of its community.

Building a Better School

Everyone wants to be a part of a school that is caring, loving, kind, and supportive of high-quality learning. Addressing the challenges that may come as a result of having international students on campus may actually serve to strengthen the overall program. School systems, or individual subsets thereof, need to have a fundamental philosophy that propels them to be excellent at addressing the needs of their learners.

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BLESSING OR CURSE?

Joe Lee, Registrar, San Gabriel Academy

An International Student Program (ISP) can be a blessing or a curse depending on its implementation. If done properly, an ISP can benefit a school financially, academically, and spiritually. The keys to an ISP are one that Attracts, Accepts, and Retains students.

To Attract. Finding students is the first step. The simplest method is to establish a connection with an international student agency. These agencies have direct connections to families looking to send their children to America. Be wary however, as they are in the business of profit. Thus, avoid exclusive contracts that bind the school's relationship to these agencies and always seek legal help for any contractual agreement.

The Acceptance process for international students can be an addition to a school's current admissions process. While TOEFL may be used to assess English abilities, a student interview is invaluable when determining a potential student's personality, character, and desire to learn. A well-mannered student with a desire to learn will add to a school environment, while an academic genius with little respect for Christian morals can be detrimental. A personal interview or one via the Internet (with audio and video capabilities), can help to discover a student's personality and "best fit" for a school environment.

The Retention process is twofold: academics and social. When a family decides to send their child to a distant country, the general intention is to attain the best academic education possible. As a result, an academic curriculum must be designed or redesigned to allow students to advance at the highest level. Honors and AP courses should be considered, as many higher education institutions are seeking

excellence in these areas. As international students are accepted to reputable colleges and universities, attraction will increase. Consequently, acceptance standards can also be increased in time to preserve an acceptable number of international students. These numbers or percentage should be determined with the school board. Administration, faculty, and school board must be in agreement to prevent an ISP from becoming a curse.

The social aspect of retention is to ensure that international students are genuinely enjoying their high school experience. Fortunately and unfortunately, students from around the world are attracted to the United States because of the media. Thus, international students must be able to integrate fully into a school environment to feel fulfilled. Without genuine integration, retention will be heavily reliant on the school's academic program.

There must be a conscious effort in school social activities, leadership positions, athletics, etc. to include international students. With a larger presence of international students on campus, a Vice-president of International Relations could be established in the student association to "bridge the gap" between the student groups. This would empower international students to integrate more fully into all facets of a school program, including spiritual things. International students who are integrated into the school's spiritual program can not only influence others on campus, but can have a world-wide influence, as people within their spheres of influence are given opportunities to enter into a saving relationship with Jesus.

A successful ISP should result in international students becoming agents seeking to recruit others by their testimonies of academic excellence, genuine social acceptance and integration, and love for their school. ☩

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Challenges to Opportunities (continued)

Successfully serving students from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as students with variant learning abilities, makes the school a stronger center of education. What is essential in accomplishing this task is that the school considers learning from the perspective of the student. This requires connecting with the students and families in an effort to understand their unique perspective. Implementing an international student program as part of a school's core philosophy strengthens the school's position in

the community as a premier education institution.

Focus on Opportunity

Perhaps the greatest blessing that comes from the presence of international students on campus has to do with the opportunity for ministry. God has sent us to go out into all of the world to preach His gospel. Through international students, the world has come to us. We should do everything possible to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity. ☩

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