

SCHOOL FORUM REPORT *SEPTEMBER 2009*

COUNCIL ON STANDARDS FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL TRAVEL

OVERVIEW

The CSIET School Forum project facilitates educator-to-educator discussions on the benefits of hosting international students and sending American students abroad. Besides addressing challenges and obstacles that educators and school officials may face when working with international exchange programs, the School Forum seeks to formulate workable ideas and suggestions that schools can use in their communities.

These forums, in the form of conference calls, are intended to be used as training tools for local exchange program representatives, field staff and volunteers. By providing an “educators’ perspective” on youth exchange programs, CSIET is working to build stronger relations between the U.S. school community and international youth programs.

The following is a summary of the second CSIET School Forum held on September 10, 2009. To access an audio recording, visit the “Members-Only” webpage at: <http://www.csiet.org/members-only/SchoolForum.htm>.

Participants discussed how their schools accept incoming Foreign Exchange Students:

Phil Boley stated it is important to have exchange students in-country by mid-August, to leave time for acclimation before school starts near the end of August. He said the first stop for a foreign exchange student arriving at his school, hopefully joined by their host parents, should be the guidance counselor or the exchange coordinator. Phil recommended enrolling foreign exchange students in U.S. history and government classes, as well as getting them involved in welcoming activities. He encouraged schools to consult CSIET’s Model School Policy for guidance on intake of foreign exchange students.

Ruth Warren reported that she comes from a large school district, one of four high schools, with her school enrollment at around 1,500 students. Because of its proximity to Notre Dame, her district already boasts many international students. She is pleased to say that her school district accepts many foreign exchange students with no cap on the numbers (just as many host families as programs can find), and even welcomes high school districts if those in their enrollment past, her school has foreign exchange students but she felt that due to international economic downturns have come her school usually accepts foreign exchange students as seniors. As a performing arts magnet school, she explained that her school places exchange students in very social classes including music and theater. Ruth and her colleagues also tailor schedules for each exchange student.

The schedule is really tailored for the particular interests of the student because... they don’t qualify for a diploma, so they can take pretty much whatever they are interested in.

-Ruth Warren

PARTICIPANTS

PHIL BOLEY

SUPERINTENDENT

CLINTON CENTRAL
SCHOOLS

MICHIGANTOWN, INDIANA

TARA BROWN

STUDY ABROAD

SPECIALIST

CHARLOTTE-
MECKLENBERG SCHOOLS

CHARLOTTE, NC

KAREN COGGINS

VICE PRINCIPAL

JOHN A. ROWLAND
HIGH SCHOOL

ROWLAND HEIGHTS, CA

RUTH WARREN

PRINCIPAL

CLAY HIGH SCHOOL
SOUTH BEND, INDIANA

**JOHN HISHMEH—
MODERATOR**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CSIET



Karen Coggins improves the welcoming process by taking preventative measures, such as ensuring that the exchange programs being used are legitimate and listed in the *CSIET Advisory List*. She recommended that schools work and coordinate with exchange programs first then ask the host family to come in with exchange students to register with guidance counselors. Junior-level standing is preferred in her school for foreign exchange students.

Tara Brown reported that her school district, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), is the largest school district in North Carolina. She described their make-up as being extremely diverse with over 140 languages being spoken and 160 countries being represented. Tara acknowledged this naturally lends itself to an interest to these programs and very open policy in regards to foreign exchange. Within the districts 34 high schools, they allow up to five students per school, which is how 62 foreign exchange students were able to find a place in the CMS system this year. Tara expressed her position as being a very centralized one, where she assigns students to schools and enrolls them. Soon after arriving in-country, Tara recommended setting up interviews between foreign exchange students and guidance counselors to discuss requirements for graduation and to try and meet the needs of the exchange students.

What types of activities does your school have for welcoming new exchange students?

At the beginning of the year, **Phil Boley's** school system coordinates an International Student Night in the school courtyard. A dinner was hosted and with pictures of the exchange students their presence and make them feel suggested encouraging extra- and clubs. He cautioned against students, as their experience should

We would mount those flags and the pictures of the students to recognize them and make them feel good about being there, and that we celebrated their presence.

-Phil Boley

country flags are mounted dents in order to celebrate more comfortable. Phil also curricular activities like arts “spoon-feeding” the exchange be a growing one.

Ruth Warren stated that her student orientation night soon after ents and students can ask questions

first days in school. She advocated that after the exchange students have been there for a month to pull them together and “debrief” them on their experiences so far. She found that this experience really built connections between the exchange students because of the shared experiences, so they do not feel so isolated. In addition to this, their school newspaper had an article at the beginning of the year featuring the new foreign exchange students.

school also hosts a new- the start of a term, where par- that have arisen from their

As the study abroad specialist, **Tara Brown** chooses to meet directly with the exchange students and run through a checklist sent to host parents and exchange students, which covers initial activities that occur at the beginning of the school year. She found this especially helpful for host families who have not had children for some time, and therefore may be unfamiliar with current school processes. Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools provide exchange students athletic passes to attend athletic events during the year. Her school district has been very accommodating towards elementary schools that have exhibited interest in activities that expose their students to other international cultures. She stated this can be a psychological benefit to the exchange student who might gain some confidence from the situation knowing that other students are interested in learning about their culture.

Just because we are a large, urban school district... it sometimes is a little overwhelming for students when they arrive, especially when they're coming from a very small, private school setting... I feel like that's part of the learning process, part of the cultural experience.

-Tara Brown

Karen Coggins' school utilized groups called "Link Crews," which are groups of highly qualified upperclassmen overseen by volunteer teachers. These upperclassmen met with the exchange students and keep in touch with them throughout the school year. This allowed the Associated Student Body to provide new student guidance, which naturally lent itself to integration of exchange students with their peers. Rowland High School has organized these groups for over ten years now.

How is course registration effected by testing requirements and how state requirements are set up?

The panel agreed that exchange students are required to take grade-level requirements in many schools such as English and history. The panel discussed that as far as testing goes, most exchange students are enrolled as juniors or seniors, which fall past the time for state testing requirements. **Phil Boley** stated that if an exchange student does have to test for a state, many times this is not a hindrance on scores because exchange students tend to do very well, sometimes better than American students. Often exchange students are not placed in advanced placement classes, due to testing requirements from the previous years (freshman, sophomore). They usually do not have to take graduation-qualifying tests, because exchange students most often are not part of the U.S.-based degree program.

How do you prepare American students and staff for incoming exchange students?

The panel agreed that perhaps the most important thing is to make the students and faculty aware of the new foreign exchange student's presence, which can be done by introducing the students at a staff meeting or school assembly, etc. A great idea described was to get the foreign exchange students in front of the school population; perhaps in social studies, English, geography, or social foreign language classes, to encourage U.S. students to study abroad. This proved to have a couple different benefits because the American students are not only encouraged to travel internationally, but also because they become familiar with the exchange student provided was for the student body how to say "hello" as a schoolmate. Another idea change student to teach the student body how to say "hello" in their native language. This gesture allowed the student body to acknowledge the new exchange student and to learn about a different culture as well as emphasizing the accepting nature of the new exchange student's high school.

I see where having foreign exchange students on a campus works tremendously well for morale and promoting internationalism."

-Karen Coggins

Phil Boley mentioned it was sometimes necessary to place students with teachers who had some level of cultural sensitivity, because there are teachers who had difficulty embracing foreign exchange students in their classrooms.

Ruth Warren recounted a specific example regarding American student adjustment difficulties when encountering incoming foreign exchange students. She spoke of a recent Chinese exchange student who wasn't as strong on English language skills, and talked to his host family about being bullied by an American student at school. After the school identified the specific American student, they provided sensitivity training to help build empathy towards the exchange student. The situation was vastly improved after that; so much so, that the Chinese student felt a little scared afterwards because the American student was suddenly being so nice to him.