



Board of Directors

Chair,

KERI DOOLEY,
AFS-USA

Chair-Elect,

KERWIN URHAHN,
National Federation of State High School
Associations/Missouri State High School
Activities Association

Treasurer,

ROBERT ZAYAS,
New York State Public High School
Athletic Association

Secretary,

VICKIE McCORMACK,
Pan Atlantic Foundation

Officer (At-Large),

PAUL REAGAN,
North American Youth Exchange
Network

AMY BALLARD,
YFU-USA

TAMMY BECKER
Tower Bridge International Group

BOBBY COX,
Indiana High School Athletic Association

STEVE GERDES
NAYEN

RANDY MAHLERWEIN
Mesa Public Schools, Arizona

PAUL McLAUGHLIN,
Educatus North America

PETER SZECHENYI
Cambridge Network

CHRISTOPHER B. PAGE,
Executive Director

April 7, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232 Capital Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204 Capital Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230 Capital Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-221 Capital Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

**RE: Federal Assistance for the International Secondary School Exchange
Community Impacted by COVID-19**

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leaders McCarthy, McConnell, and Schumer:

We, the undersigned, represent the wide range of stakeholders who make international high school exchange programs in the United States possible. We write to urge that Congress include the high school exchange community in any new relief measures passed in response to the new coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

International high school exchange programs that support J-1 and outbound activity are the backbone of American people-to-people diplomacy. Without these programs, the reach of U.S. foreign policy is diminished and national security is weakened. Urgent financial support is needed to bolster international high school exchange programs and mitigate the devastating economic impact throughout the international high school exchange community and in communities across the country. As a 501c3, CSIET seeks financial assistance, not corporate welfare. Our programs contribute to our communities uniquely, by providing additional cultural resources to families and schools, as well as additional financial resources to local communities. Our programs also contribute to a more positive view of America because exchange visitors return annually to their home countries and tell others about the US and its people.

The Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 seeks to strengthen our national security and economy, and enable world peace, through international educational exchange programs. The annual impact from these programs is significant. International students contributed \$44.7 billion dollars to our economy in 2018. One in three current world leaders today has been on an exchange program to the United States. Moreover, a series of reports on privately funded exchange programs demonstrate that on average 74% of participants have an improved image of the United States after their program and 89% maintain friendships in America after their program ends.

The secondary school exchange community has been severely impacted due to COVID-19. We request urgent financial support. Program sponsors, high schools, families, and exchange visitors are all being devastated by the impact of COVID19.

Many exchange and study abroad programs are being cancelled or shortened, some with associated expenses in the millions, including from the cost of repatriating both US and non-US students safely back home to their families. Meanwhile, other sponsors are financially supporting current exchange program participants in the United States who do not have adequate resources of their own and no way to return to their home countries given the unfolding crisis. American secondary schools, and families who would otherwise open their hearts, homes and schools to exchange students, feel they cannot do so under present circumstances, jeopardizing the ability to conduct any high school exchanges in the coming academic year. Most high school exchange organizations do not possess reserves sufficient to bridge an academic year without programs. Many secondary school sponsor organizations are preparing employee layoffs, and some face bankruptcy in the coming months. Secondary school sponsor organizations are nonprofit organizations, who carry on the more than 70-year-old tradition in the United States of conducting some of the most important diplomatic efforts of all – grass-roots, people to people ties and mutual good-will that last a lifetime.

Policy solutions:

- Federal loan/grant assistance
 - Ensure that relief and stimulus legislation designed to assist for-profit businesses in the areas of unemployment insurance, employee retention and risk insurance must address the unique challenges and realities that nonprofits face.
 - Provide loans equal to lost revenue during emergency periods to adversely affected organizations, potentially converting to grants under certain conditions.
 - Streamline the federal application and grant process for COVID-19 economic assistance for non-profits.

- Tax Relief
 - Increase monthly tax deduction to \$400 per month for host families. Currently, volunteer host families participating in public diplomacy programs are eligible for a \$50 per month tax deduction enacted under President Eisenhower and not since increased. This deduction offsets expenses associated with hosting an exchange student, providing relief to American host families, as well as incentive to continue their important contributions to people-to-people diplomacy through continuing to host international exchange students.
 - To incentivize all Americans to support our vital work, we call on Congress to enact an “above-the-line” or universal charitable deduction for contributions through the end of 2021. Further, Congress should permit taxpayers to donate today and claim the benefit from these deductions on 2019 tax returns.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Academic Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (AFICE), La Jolla, CA
AFS-USA, New York, NY
American Cultural Exchange Service (ACES), Bellevue, WA
Aspect Foundation, San Francisco, CA
Ayusa International, San Francisco, CA
Borderless Friends Forever (BFF), Cary, NC

Children of All Nations, Austin, TX
Council for Educational Travel USA (CETUSA), Grand Rapids, MI
Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET), Alexandria, VA
Cultural Academic Student Exchange, Montclair, NJ
Education, Travel & Culture Inc., Portland, OR
Educational Merit Foundation for Student Exchange, Sachse, TX
Educational Resource Development Trust, Santa Monica, CA
Foreign Links Around the Globe (FLAG Inc.), Portage, MI
Forte International Exchange Association, Falls Church, VA
Foundation for Worldwide International Student Exchange (WISE), Dyersburg, TN
Global Insights, Marietta, GA
Greenheart Exchange, Chicago, IL
Inter-Ed, LTD (International Education Student Exchange Program), Dyersburg, TN
International Cultural Exchange Services, Henderson, NV
International Student Exchange (ISE), Bayshore, NY
Nacel Open Door, St. Paul, MN
Northwest Student Exchange (NWSE), Seattle, WA
NW Services, Inc PEACE Program, Caldwell, ID
Organization for Cultural Exchange Among Nations (OCEAN), Temple, AZ
Program of Academic Exchange and Laurasian Institution (PAX), Port Chester, NY
States' 4-H International Exchange Programs, Seattle, WA
Student American International (SAI), Myrtle Beach, SC
Terra Lingua USA, Terryville, CT
The Foundation for Academic Cultural Exchange, Reno, NV
UCEUS Corp., Upland, CA
United Studies, Hot Springs, AR
Youth for Understanding USA, Washington, D.C.