BRITISH COLUMBIA

K–12 International Student Homestay Guidelines

MINISTRY *of* EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE | 2024

BRITISH COLUMBIA | Ministry of Education and Child Care

Introduction

ABOUT B.C. K–12 INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HOMESTAY GUIDELINES

The purpose of the B.C. K-12 International Student Homestay Guidelines is to provide consistent, province-wide best practice standards for B.C.'s K-12 homestay sector.

The Guidelines were developed between October 2014 and June 2015 by a working group comprised of K-12 school district, independent school and Ministry of Education & Child Care representatives. In 2017 and 2023, the Guidelines were updated with the help of expanded working groups including K-12 and post-secondary representatives to capture changes in the International Education sector relevant to homestay. They represent the commonly-held view on industry best-practice.

The Ministry of Education and Child Care wishes to acknowledge the following organizations for participation in the 2023 working group:

- **School District No. 6** *(Rocky Mountain)*
- **School District No. 42** *(Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows)*
- **School District No. 44** *(North Vancouver)*
- **School District No. 60** *(Peace River North)*
- **School District No. 72** *(Campbell River)*
- **School District 73** *(Kamloops-Thompson)*
- **Highroad Academy Christian School**
- **International Public School Education Association** *(IPSEA)*
- **Federation of Independent School Associations** *(FISA)*
- **British Columbia Council for International Education** *(BCCIE)*
- **Langara College**

HOMESTAY AND LEGISLATION

Federal, provincial, and municipal laws apply to homestays. It is the responsibility of each of the groups described in this document to be familiar with applicable legislation. Groups are each responsible for seeking legal advice as needed.

WHO SHOULD USE THESE GUIDELINES

B.C.'s K-12 International Student Homestay Guidelines consider short-term and long-term homestay placements of K-12 students as determined by B.C. international student programs or by professional homestay companies working with schools and districts.

The document provides best-practice standards, arranged in six sections, for groups involved in arranging, working with, or participating in homestays.

GROUP		SECTION
Homestay Program Providers	*Companies or organizations that arrange K-12 homestay placements in B.C.*	**Section 1**
International Student Programs	*B.C. schools or districts that enrol international students*	**Section 2**
Host Families	*B.C. families that host international students (also known as 'homestay families')*	**Section 3**
K-12 International Students	*K-12 students who ordinarily reside outside of B.C. and Canada who come to B.C. and enrol in a K-12 program of study*	**Section 4**
Parents/Guardians of International Students	*An international student's parent or legally appointed guardian*	**Section 5**
International Student Agents	*Individuals or companies that assist international students in selecting a suitable country, city and school in which to study*	**Section 6**

ABOUT HOMESTAY IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

The Province of British Columbia and B.C. school district and independent school international student programs are proud of B.C.'s world class education, our welcoming communities and our incredible natural environment. Recognizing that homestay plays a pivotal role in an international student's experience, B.C. is committed to high-quality homestay experiences for all students.

A **homestay** – *is a formal arrangement by an international student program, or its delegates, to house an international student with an approved family during the course of study. This family and its residence are both commonly referred to as the 'homestay'. B.C.'s Guidelines refer to this family as the host family. A K-12 homestay student is a minor child (i.e., under 19) from outside B.C. who pays a fee to stay with a homestay family in return for meals, a private room, family support, and various cultural experiences.*

In British Columbia, school districts and independent schools offer homestay using ***three different*** **administrative models**:

1. Some school districts and independent schools run their own homestay programs.
2. Some schools and districts contract the administration of their homestay programs out to other homestay providers.
3. Some school districts or independent schools keep lists of homestay program providers for international parents and students.

There are also homestay service providers, such as private companies or websites, which might not have a relationship with a K-12 school district or independent school. Some parents and/or international students may be considering working with such a homestay program provider or, alternatively, placing the student with a relative or family friend. Parents and international students considering these options may want to consult with the school district or independent school international student program before finalizing their decision. The international student program may have policies or information directly relating to these situations.

Guidelines

A homestay program provider is an organization or company that arranges homestays. Sometimes the homestay program will be provided by the school or school district. Sometimes the provider will be a third-party company or organization.

SECTION 1: HOMESTAY PROGRAM PROVIDER RESPONSIBLITIES

To promote the best possible homestay experience for international K-12 students, homestay program providers should:

1. Maintain a homestay screening process for host families and for international students to determine suitability. The host family screening process should be published and should include:
   A. *Scheduled host parent interviews and home inspections. Home Inspections should be scheduled at least once every two years*
   B. *Scheduled Criminal Records Checks with Vulnerable Sector Checks every three years for all adult household members*
   C. *Reference checks for the host family parent(s) where required*
2. Gather appropriate and up-to-date personal records/contact information for the student, parent/guardian, custodian and/or host family, including:
   A. *Legal first and last names (i.e., as they appear in a passport)*
   B. *Gender*
   C. *Age*
   D. *Relevant medical information*
   E. *Country of residence*
   F. *Address*
   G. *Contact phone number and email address*
3. Ensure that all data collected and any information distributed by the homestay program provider complies with protection of privacy legislation.
4. Deliver a comprehensive training program for new host families to ensure familiarity and understanding with best practices and develop a process for regular host families to stay current with best practices.
5. Place no more than two international students with a host family at the same time.
6. Avoid concurrently placing both adult and minor international students in the same home unless there is a clear rationale for how this benefits the students. In circumstances where minor and adult students are placed together, parents of the minor student must be informed of the situation.
7. Inform the host family of potential student placements by using a standardized student profile form that includes the dates of accommodation, special requirements, and relevant medical and behavioral background.
8. Liaise with the student, school, host family and parents/guardian and provide each with support.
9. Communicate with international students and host families on a regular basis.
10. Provide 24-hour emergency contact for international students and homestay families.
11. Implement and maintain quality assurance and program evaluation mechanisms.
12. Offer conflict resolution services *(and the opportunity to reach consensus)* to both the host family and the international student.
13. Maintain clear, published standards and procedures relating to homestay, including procedures for the dismissal of host families in warranted cases and procedures for transferring students to a different host family.
14. Develop separate reference manuals for host families and for international students *(and their parents)* that describe relevant legislation, standards and procedures. Manuals should contain standards and procedures applicable to the full range of a host family's and an international student's homestay experience.

15. Maintain clear, published fee information including:
    A. *Terms of Agreement – payment of fees to whom and when*
    B. *Per diem and monthly homestay fees*
    C. *Services included with fees*
    D. *Additional fees (e.g. airport pick-up or drop- off or storage fees)*
    E. *Refund policy*
16. Ensure published documents and templates use gender-inclusive language and include a place for legal and preferred names where appropriate.
17. Provide, as appropriate and where possible, the international student with access to a person who can speak the student's primary language. This may include agent, parent, or other contact via online communication.
18. Share medical or mental health concerns that arise during the course of the homestay with the international student program, the host family, the custodian or the student's parent(s)/guardian(s) as appropriate.
19. Provide additional standards and procedural supports and requirements for younger homestay students as appropriate.
20. Publish the homestay program provider's legal limitations.
21. Inform international students who are about to be placed with a host family about the following resources:
    A. ***B.C. Helpline for Children (Tel: 310-1234)*** *May be called to report when a child or youth under 19 years of age is being abused or neglected. There is a legal duty to report your concern to a child welfare worker*
    B. ***Kids Help Phone (Tel: 1-800-668-6868)*** *Provides counselling and mental health support*
    C. ***Kelty Mental Health Resource Center (http://keltymentalhealth.ca)*** *Resources regarding mental health issues, substance use, medications, and healthy living*
    D. ***HealthLink BC 8-1-1 Services (Tel: 811)*** *Free-of-charge provincial health information and advice phone line available in British Columbia*
    E. ***Suicide Crisis Helpline (Text/Tel: 988) https://988.ca*** *Confidential, free, 24-hour access to responders trained in suicide prevention.*
    F. *Medical insurance provider options*

SECTION 2: INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITIES

To promote the best possible homestay experience for international K-12 students, international student programs should:

The International Student Program is the administrative group or unit within a school district or independent school that arranges for and supports international students while they are studying in a B.C. K-12 school.

1. Identify the custodian, appointed by the parent/guardian, who is responsible for the care of each international student. The international student program should articulate its expectations of a custodian.
2. Develop clear procedures for host family parents in connecting with their international student's school. Host family involvement with ELL/ESL or with French language learning / French as a second language support, attendance, and extra-curricular activities will promote "school connectedness" and support student learning and success.
3. Develop procedures and templates for communicating with the parent(s)/guardian(s) and custodian.
4. Support host families with conflict resolution procedures and processes to resolve the variety of issues that may arise during the homestay. A clear outline of when and who to contact should additional support be required is highly recommended.
5. Encourage homestay families to be specific and thoughtful regarding the Code of Conduct. Considerations such as curfew, internet use, chores, etc. should be clearly outlined and communicated to the student. Ensuring that all responsibilities are developmentally appropriate and suitable within the context of the home is important.
6. Provide host families with a variety of resources to support their international student in acquiring English or French as an additional language.
7. Publish the international student program's legal limitations.
8. Develop a participation agreement with the student and parent(s)/guardian(s) that includes expectations of student behavior, conflict resolution processes and grounds for dismissal from homestay and/or the school/district program.

SECTION 3: HOST FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

To promote the best possible homestay experience for international K-12 students, host family parent(s) should:

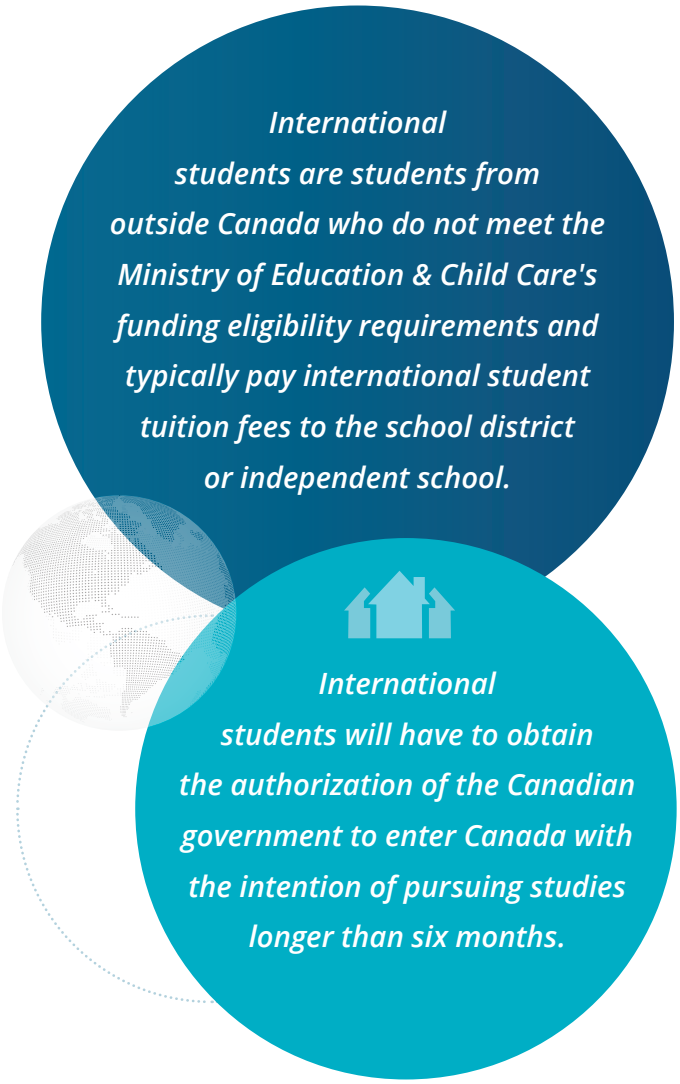
1. Provide a caring, nurturing, and supportive environment for international students.
2. Host families must provide a home free from discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, nationality, language, religion, and culture or cultural heritage.
3. Abide by all rules/guidelines established by the homestay program provider when hosting a student placed by that provider.
4. Be 25 years of age or older or receive approval from the international student program as an approved exception.
5. Ensure that all residents, long-term guests (i.e., those who stay for two or more weeks), and frequent visitors of the home over the age of 18 clear a Criminal Record Check with Vulnerable Sector Check.
6. Agree to scheduled in-home inspections by the international student program and/or the homestay program provider.
7. Homestay families must inform the homestay provider/program of all individuals living in the home including other students, frequent visitors or long-term guests, and those who take up residence after the student has arrived.
8. Have up to two international students in the homestay at the same time. It is recommended to have a mix of language groups in the home.
9. Consult with the Homestay Provider/ Program before concurrently hosting both adult and minor international students. In circumstances where minor and adult students are placed together, parents of the minor student must be informed of the situation.
10. Provide food for three nutritious meals and snacks each day.
11. Provide a clean and tidy home with a private, adequately furnished bedroom, with access to:
    A. *An area with a desk, chair and adequate lighting for homework*
    B. *A bathroom, linens and use of laundry facilities*
    C. *A clothing storage space*
    D. *Entry into the home like any other member of the family (e.g., house key and alarm code, if applicable)*
    E. *The Internet to support educational goals and consistent communication with home*
12. Ensure the house is safe and complies with the BC Building Code and any local building bylaws (as applicable) and with the BC Fire Code and local fire protection bylaws.
13. Ensure the student's general well-being, seek medical attention when necessary, and report any significant medical, behavioural, or mental health issues to the school, the custodian, the homestay program provider and the international student program.

The host family, also known as the 'homestay family', is the B.C. family that welcomes an international student into its home to live while the student studies at a B.C. K-12 school.

14. Inform the school or international student program if the student drinks alcohol, takes or possesses non-prescribed or illegal drugs, does not abide by homestay program or homestay family rules, or breaks the law.
15. Ensure the home and auto insurance policy adequately covers students residing within their home; some policies do not cover homestay students.
16. Ensure the home security system, in particular camera and video recording, is explained to the student during the home orientation, complies with privacy requirements, and does not invade the student's reasonable expectation of privacy.
17. Promote strong connections between an international student and their parents, schools and communities by:
    A. *Using the student's desired language of study (English or French) in the home*
    B. *Imposing reasonable limits on the student's personal use of the internet (i.e., number of hours/day and appropriate times of day)*
    C. *Negotiating and enforcing an appropriate and reasonable curfew and house rules for the student*
    D. *Assisting the student in seeking extra-curricular activities and sports*
    E. *Attending school or district orientation for host families and other cultural or education events*

SECTION 4: INTERNATIONAL STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

International students coming to British Columbia and entering a homestay should:



1. Abide by all rules/guidelines established by the homestay program provider when staying with a host family arranged by that provider.
2. Abide by municipal, provincial and federal laws.
3. Engage with the host family and the school and seek out opportunities to become involved in the school and family life.
4. Communicate regularly with their parent(s)/ guardian(s) and with their host family.
5. Communicate significant issues or concerns to the host family, parent/guardian, custodian, school principal, vice-principal or teachers, homestay program provider or international school program as appropriate. If you are not sure who to contact, speak with your homestay coordinator.
6. Understand that the international student program may require a student to move homestays or withdraw from the international student program in cases where accommodation that has been arranged privately is deemed to be unsafe or unsuitable, or if the student's behaviour in the home is unreasonable or unacceptable, or if the student fails to comply with program/ provider regulations and guidelines.
7. Respect and be responsible toward the homestay home and property and pay for any damage to family property if found to be responsible for the damage.
8. Understand that there are the following resources regarding child health and safety:
   A. ***B.C. Helpline for Children (Tel: 310-1234)***
   May be called in cases where the international student feels he/she is being mistreated or feels unsafe in the home or at school
   B. ***Kids Help Phone (Tel: 1-800-668-6868)***
   Provides counselling and mental health support
   C. ***Kelty Mental Health Resource Center (http://keltymentalhealth.ca)***
   Resources regarding mental health issues, substance use, medications, and healthy living
   D. ***HealthLink BC 8-1-1 Services (Tel: 811)***
   Free-of-charge provincial health information and advice phone line available in British Columbia
   E. ***Suicide Crisis Helpline (Text/Tel: 988)***
   https://988.ca *- confidential, free, 24-hour access to responders trained in suicide prevention*

SECTION 5: PARENT/GUARDIAN RESPONSIBILITIES

An international student's parent/guardian should:

1. Accurately complete the application and in-take materials and disclose all the student's relevant information, including medical conditions and medications, exceptional learning needs, behavioural or other concerns to the homestay program provider and the host family so that they are fully able to support and care for the student for the duration of the homestay.
2. Be familiar with the rules/guidelines established by the homestay program provider arranging the host family placement for the student and help ensure the student abides those expectations.

Parents are the biological or adoptive parents of an international student. Guardians are persons who have been legally authorized to act in place of the student's parents. The legal guardian is distinct from a custodian.

3. Stay in regular touch with the student to monitor that the student is coping well with the pressures and stresses that come with living and studying in a new country and learning a new language, while giving them the space they need to adapt to new routines.
4. Report significant concerns to the homestay program provider.
5. Understand that the international student program may require a student to move homestays or withdraw from the international student program in cases where accommodation that has been arranged privately is deemed to be unsafe or unsuitable, or if the student fails to comply with program/provider regulations and guidelines.
6. Understand that the international student program may require the student to move homestays or leave the program at any time if the student's behaviour in the home is unreasonable or unacceptable, or if the student fails to comply with program/provider regulations and guidelines. Parents may be responsible for bearing the costs of the move or program withdrawal.
7. Understand that there are the following resources regarding child health and safety:
   A. ***B.C. Helpline for Children (Tel: 310- 1234)*** *May be called to report when a child or youth under 19 years of age is being abused or neglected. There is a legal duty to report concerns to a child welfare worker*
   B. ***Kids Help Phone (Tel: 1-800-668-6868)*** *Provides counselling and mental health support*
   C. ***Kelty Mental Health Resource Center (http://keltymentalhealth.ca)*** *Resources regarding mental health issues, substance use, medications and healthy living*
   D. ***HealthLink BC 8-1-1 Services (Tel: 811)*** *Free-of-charge provincial health information and advice phone line available in B.C.*
   E. ***Suicide Crisis Helpline (Text/Tel: 988) https://988.ca*** *- confidential, free, 24-hour access to responders trained in suicide prevention*

SECTION 6: INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AGENT RESPONSIBILITIES

International students and their families sometimes hire agents to help place the student in an international student program. International student agents should:

1. Provide support to international student programs, homestay program providers, and international students and their families, particularly in regard to communicating with the parent/guardian if and when requested by the homestay program provider or the international student program.
2. Be familiar with the B.C. K-12 International Student Homestay Guidelines and the best practices expectations of the homestay sector in British Columbia.
3. Help students to understand and abide by all rules/guidelines established by the homestay program provider when staying with a host family arranged by that provider.

Agents are paid consultants, based in B.C. or abroad, who help to arrange aspects of an international student's education or travel. In cases where the agent arranges for the homestay, the agent would also be considered the homestay program provider and would be expected to meet the responsibilities described in Section 1.

Glossary/Definitions

FOR THE PURPOSES OF THESE GUIDELINES

Custodian – is a responsible adult, who is a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident, and is appointed by a child's parent/guardian, through an international student program's authorized document, to care for and support that child. International student programs and the Canadian federal government require that international students who are minor children have a custodian while studying in the province of British Columbia. A custodian is optional for minors 17 years of age and older, but an officer can request one on a case-by-case basis.

Code of Conduct – is a set of written rules on how to behave and interact with other people. Under the Provincial Standards for Codes of Conduct Order, boards of education must establish one or more codes of conduct for the schools within their jurisdiction and ensure that schools implement the codes.

Guardian – as under the *BC Family Law Act*, the parent of a child is generally that child's guardian. A guardian may also be a person who has been legally authorized to act in place of the student's parents. A guardian has legal responsibilities and rights for that child.

Homestay - is a formal arrangement by an international student program, or its delegates, to house an international student with an approved family during their course of study. This family and its residence are both commonly referred to as the 'homestay'.

Homestay Program Provider – is the entity that places students with a host family. Depending on the circumstances, the homestay program provider could be an independent school or school district, a company or organization contracted by the international student program, or a business or individual that is not in a relationship with the international student program.

Host Family or Homestay Family – is the family with which an international student resides during the course of a homestay.

International Student – refers to students from outside Canada who do not meet the Ministry of Education's funding eligibility requirements and typically pay international student tuition fees to the school district or independent school. Many international students will have to obtain the authorization of the Canadian government to enter Canada with the intention of pursuing studies longer than six months.

International Student Program – is an administrative unit within an independent school or school district. The international student program administers, facilitates or arranges for the education, accommodation and care of international students.

Minor Child – refers to any person below the age of 19 years. Minor children require certain care by either a guardian or custodian.

Parent – refers to the biological or adoptive parent of a child.

Private and/or Independently Arranged Accommodation – is accommodation that has been arranged for an international student that is not provided by a school or school district approved homestay program provider.

Residence/Boarding – refers to accommodation where two or more minor students live together, typically on the school property and administered by a B.C. independent school. Residence/Boarding situations are not covered by these Guidelines.

School Connectedness – is a term used by educators to describe the level of connection that a student feels for their school. Research shows that a strong feeling of connection to a school and to the adults in that school leads to stronger school performance.

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