
Issue Brief – Foreign Exchange Programs

MINIMUM SCHOOL PROGRAM

NUMBER MSP 5

SUMMARY

State financial support for foreign exchange students was eliminated during the budget reduction process occurring between FY 2002 and FY 2004. Initially, the Legislature attempted to mitigate the decline in the number of foreign exchange students by allowing a one-to-one student exchange, meaning, if a Utah student participated in an exchange a foreign student could attend (and be funded) in Utah. During the 2006 General Session, an amendment to the Minimum School Program (MSP) reinstated state funding for foreign exchange students on a reimbursement basis.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

According to the United States Department of State, the purpose of the foreign exchange program is to “increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchanges. International educational and cultural exchanges are one of the more effective means of developing lasting and meaningful relationships. They provide an extremely valuable opportunity to experience the United States and our way of life.”¹

Foreign Exchange Students

The high school exchange program allows foreign secondary students to attend up to one academic year in the United States. Visiting students reside with host families and participate in school and local community activities. Visiting students must be between 15 and 18 ½ years old at the time of school enrollment, or have not completed more than 11 years of primary and secondary school.

Program Participation in Utah

Prior to the elimination of state funding, foreign exchange student enrollment exceeded 300 annually. After state financial support was eliminated, annual enrollment of foreign exchange students decreased to fewer than 40 students. Fall 2006 estimates indicate that approximately 150 to 175 foreign exchange students are currently enrolled in Utah public schools.

Foreign student coordinating agencies facilitate the process of placing exchange students in Utah schools. Before the elimination of state financial support (and the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) program coordinator) agencies applied to the USOE for approval of students, coordinated with the school district for high school placement, and assisted in finding host families for the various students. Requests for placement of foreign exchange students exceeded available students. Currently, these agencies work directly with Utah school districts and charter schools.

Reauthorization of State Funding

Until the state subsidy for exchange students was eliminated in 2003, a total of 328 WPU's were allocated annually in the Grades 1-12 program in the MSP. Funding for the program exceeded \$700,000. The USOE also had dedicated staff to oversee the program, .25 FTE for an Educational Specialist, and .25 FTE for secretarial support.

During the 2006 General Session, Legislators adopted an amendment by Senator Karen Hale that reinstated state funding for foreign exchange students attending Utah's public schools. The amendment allows school districts and charter schools to be reimbursed with state funding for foreign exchange students enrolled the previous school year – up to a maximum of 328 students. Statute states:

¹ U.S. Department of State. Exchange Visitor (J) Visas. Overview – About the Exchange Visitor Program. Retrieved from: [http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types\)1267.html#1](http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types)1267.html#1). January 13, 2007.

UCA 53A-2-206(2)(b)(i) – Beginning July 1, 2007, the total number of foreign exchange students in the state that may be counted for the purpose of apportioning state monies shall be the lesser of: (A) the number of foreign exchange students enrolled in public schools in the state on October 1 of the previous fiscal year; or (B) 328 foreign exchange students. (ii) The State Board of Education shall make rules in accordance with Title 63, Chapter 46a, Utah Administrative Rulemaking Act, to administer the cap on the number of foreign exchange students that may be counted for the purpose of apportioning state monies.

Statute provides state funding to school districts and charter schools on a one year lag. This mechanism ensures that the state only funds the actual number of exchange students enrolled in Utah public schools and requires active participation by the school districts and charter schools during the enrollment process to ensure financial support.

Recommendations:

State support for exchange students that enrolled in Fall 2006 is not included in H.B. 3 ‘Minimum School Program Base Budget Amendments’ (Last, B) because student enrollment estimates were unavailable. Exchange student placement organizations estimate the number of students enrolled in Utah high schools at 150 to 175.

The Analyst recommends that the Legislature provide sufficient WPU in the Minimum School Program, Grades 1-12 Program to fund the estimated students. At the current WPU value of \$2,417 total cost would range from \$362,600 to \$423,000. The Analyst recommends that the subcommittee include this item as a high priority in its list submitted to the Executive Appropriations Committee.

Since the conclusion of the 2006 General Session, questions have emerged as to the intent of the Legislature in funding foreign exchange students. Public schools questioned if the Legislature intended to fund exchange students through reimbursement (on an actual student served basis). This mechanism provides some level of anxiety for local schools in fronting the educational cost of exchange students. Many districts have questioned if they can count on an annual appropriation to cover the reimbursement costs. Finally, many districts and placement organizations have questioned how the enrollment cap will be managed at the state level.

The Analyst recommends that the Legislature reaffirm its intent to fund foreign exchange students on a reimbursement basis. The annual WPU level for the Grades 1-12 program in the MSP should include the number of exchange students enrolled the prior year. After the program re-builds, the number of WPUs allocated to the program should level off at the statutory maximum of 328. Once a stable number of WPUs is in the Grades 1-12 program district concerns about the security of state revenues should diminish.

The Analyst recommends that the Utah State Office of Education, pursuant to statute, develop a mechanism to administer the cap on the number of foreign exchange students enrolled in Utah public schools. Many placement organizations have recommended an online tracking system that provides them up-to-date information on the number of students placed in the public schools. The Analyst further recommends that the USOE report the actual number of foreign exchange students enrolled each fall in its fall enrollment report. An annual fall reporting provides sufficient time for the Legislature, Governor, and State Board of Education to include foreign exchange students in the budget development process.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

This section provides a guide of what actions might be taken if the Legislature wishes to adopt the recommendations presented in this brief.

1. Increase the number of WPUs in the Minimum School Program – Grades 1-12 Program by 150 to 175.
2. Reaffirm the intent of the Legislature to provide state funds for exchange students on a reimbursement basis and direct the USOE through intent language to develop a mechanism for managing the exchange student enrollment cap and report actual student enrollment each fall.