



## EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM

### Secondary School Student Category

#### **Paying Host Families**

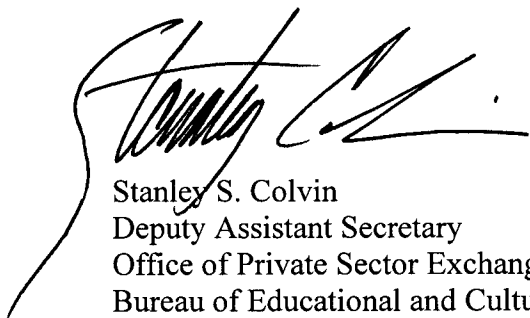
**The Department concludes as a matter of policy that host families should not be paid for hosting exchange students.**

Secondary School Student exchange programs have been part of U.S. public diplomacy efforts since 1949. These programs promote mutual understanding by providing foreign students the opportunity to study in American high schools while living with an American host family. Not only are the students themselves transformed by these experiences, so, too, are their families, friends, and teachers back home. Americans, such as the host families, students, and sponsor representatives whose lives intersect with these students benefit as well.

Historically, this program has been carried out through the use of voluntary host families. However, the Department has learned that some sponsors are currently or intending to soon begin compensating American families to host secondary school students. Existing regulations governing this category of exchange do not specifically address payment of host families. Concerns have been raised by several sponsors regarding this practice and the Department, in response to these concerns, canvassed the Secondary School Student exchange community requesting their comment on this practice. There are 102 organizations designated by the Department to conduct Secondary School Student exchange programs. Fifty organizations provided comment. Of these, 4 indicated that they were currently paying host families and 6 believed that host families should be paid. The remaining 40 sponsors opposed the payment of host families, citing that paying host families would not serve the program well and that the long-term success of the current model is based on the relationship between the participant and the host family, the success of which is the result of an act of generosity and citizenship. We agree.

Many commenters also voiced the concern that the payment of host families would likely affect the attitude of American high schools toward the program. These sponsors believe that hosting would become a commercial transaction and schools would almost certainly view the program differently, and might be less willing to accept exchange students or grant tuition waivers. We agree. If schools did not grant tuition waivers, this added cost would put the program out of reach economically for many foreign families. This outcome is counter to the Department's efforts to encourage participation by fewer elite and more socially and economically diverse populations.

While the Department agrees that recruiting host families in a changing American social environment remains a major challenge, we have determined that paying American families to host students will have an overall negative effect upon our public diplomacy interests. Consequently, as a matter of policy, the Department has concluded that host families should not be paid for hosting exchange students.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stanley S. Colvin', is written over a large, faint, stylized graphic element that resembles a large letter 'S' or a similar shape.

Stanley S. Colvin  
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Office of Private Sector Exchange  
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