

Dear Parents and student ambassadors, I know that we are giving you a ton of information in a very short amount of time, so this letter is to help reiterate some of the key points.

There is a saying, "It takes a village to raise a child". It is especially true of this program. I know our program is very conservative, and that requires much of you, but it is what we must do to ensure the safety of our students and our Mexican visitors, and to ensure the longevity of our program.

There were some very helpful suggestions made by some of the parents who have experienced the exchange for many years. Here is a summary of those key points:

- We briefly discussed culture shock at our Cultural Workshop. **Culture shock is inevitable for our guests.** Many of them have never been away from home, let alone out of the country. Our language, food, customs, etc. are different. Common signs of culture shock are: withdrawing, being very shy, wanting to be alone, any minor health problems become exaggerated. You can help by recognizing culture shock in your guest, and by being as supportive as possible. Be sure to SMILE often. Use the computer to communicate, play games, look at magazines, get together in small groups, etc. PLEASE READ THE CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT HANDOUT ON THIS WEBPAGE. IT WILL GIVE YOU MANY MORE THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND SUGGESTIONS!
- It is EXTREMELY IMPORTANT, that our Mexican guests **NOT swim** while they are here. If you have a pool, they can sit and dip their feet in, but will not be allowed to swim. It is just another conservative precaution that we take, but well warranted. Many of our guests do not swim well, or do not swim at all, as pools are not common in the region where they live. After talking with the coordinator in Mexico and with the parents, they asked and I assured them, that we would not allow their children to swim while they are here. Even if your guest is a good swimmer (not likely), please do not allow them to go swimming.
- Please be aware that dogs and other pets are seen by many people in Mexico as an animal to be used for protection, rather than a "pet". Many dogs and cats in Mexico are not allowed in the house, and live outside in the yard. They are often not petted and coddled like many of us do with our pets. If you are hosting a child from Mexico, they may not be used to seeing pets inside the home, and may be afraid of your cat or any exotic pet (they are not common pets) or dog, especially if it is a big dog. I would suggest you slowly integrate your pet with your guest, keeping this in mind.
- In almost all bathrooms in the town where our Mexican guest are from, they do not flush the toilet paper, but put it in the trash can instead. You may want to take them in the bathroom, tear off a piece of toilet paper and flush it, and say with sign language and a few words (sí/OK) that it's OK to do that here. In any event, they will probably forget, so you'll want to take out the garbage in the bathroom each day.
- Be sure to show your guest how to work the shower and show them the hot water. In many of their homes, they only turn on the boiler to heat hot water right before someone plans to shower. So, if you don't show them, they may take a shower in cold water, assuming there is no hot water and being too shy to ask.
- We talked about needing to give them filtered or bottled water, NOT directly from the tap, since our tap water will likely give them stomach troubles. We have an RO filter, so I always show my guest that they need to drink the water from that special tap, and not from the regular faucet. You can do that with sign language and a few words too.

- We suggest that you wash fruits and vegetables with a special wash (available in the grocery store. Be sure to rinse them in filtered or bottled water, since rinsing in tap water would defeat the purpose.
- You might also want to use the triple washed lettuces, etc. that we can buy in the store. Those would be fine to use. If you want to freshen them by rinsing, be sure to use bottled or filtered water.
- Another great suggestion by Mrs. Kretschmar and Mrs. Adams (they have had several children participate in HATB/FAB over the years) is to prepare a basket with snacks and a couple of bottles of water and put it in the room where your guest is staying. Many of the students are very shy, and would go hungry and/or thirsty rather than ask.
- Please ask *frequently* if your guest is hungry, thirsty, or would like to rest.
- Feel free to involve your guest with your regular family routines. They want to know what our typical daily routines are.
- Your largest amount of free time will be Friday after school and in the evening. With 23 years of experience, we suggest that you get together in small groups, because it is more fun and comfortable for everyone involved. You might consider something like going to a Spring Training game, bowling, sightseeing, pizza and a movie (with Spanish subtitles) at one of your homes, etc. Please make sure that at least one adult is present at all times with our students and their visitors!
- Please avoid going to the movie theater. They will not be able to understand much, and movie behavior in Mexico is much different (lots of talking, walking around, etc., which is very much frowned upon in our theaters).
- Once you receive the itinerary, please **read over the itinerary carefully, especially paying attention to the last page**. If you (parents) or other children in the family would like to accompany us on any activity, know you are welcome. Because of our budget, you will need to pay your entrance fee, but you will be able to pay reduced school rate.
- Do not hesitate to call **at any time**, day or night, if you have questions. During the time that our visitors are here, I will NOT be checking my email regularly, so if you need to speak with me, call me on my cell.
- Finally, I know I do not need to say this, but I would like to touch upon why Blair and I sponsor this program. It is not for the money, nor for the perks (there are none). It is because both of us experienced programs such as this. I was part of a medical team, traveling to South America when I was in high school and college. Blair has traveled extensively and very much values the experiences she has had learning about other cultures. We both were touched by our experiences, and continue to hold the lessons we learned and the friendships we cherish in our hearts. Our experiences colored our view of the world, and continue to affect the people we are. We believe it is our gift to be able to allow others to share a similar experience.
- We live in global economy. Helping our children become global thinkers is critical now, more than ever, for the future of our nation. Thank you so much for being our partners in this process!