

PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL J-1 vs. F-1 Visa Program – What’s the Difference?

Often people get confused between the high school J-1 and F-1 visa programs. Both the F-1 and J-1 visa programs have multiple program categories from F-1 Kindergarten to J-1 Physician or Professor. Requirements for each category can be very different. This information sheet only covers the high school category and the important distinctions between them.

	F-1 International Student	J-1 Exchange Visitor
US Government Agency	Dept. of Homeland Security (DHS)	Dept. of State (DoS)
Responsible Party	DHS approved, SEVP-certified public school	DoS designated, SEVP-certified Sponsoring Organization
Authorizing Document	Form I-20 Certificate of Eligibility for <u>Nonimmigrant</u> Student Status – For Academic and Language Students	DS-2019 Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status
Governing Regulations	8 CFR 214.2(f) and SEVIS compliance <i>For purpose of gaining an education in the United States.</i>	22 CFR 62 Exchange Visitor Program and SEVIS compliance <i>Cultural exchange program specifically, promoting mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries.</i>
Ages	Grades 9-12 Birthday cut-off as specified by school district	15-18.5 years old Age eligibility is based on age at program start date
Purpose of Visa	Education Full course of study	Cultural Exchange Full course of study
Limit of Stay	12 months includes aggregate period in F-1 status.	Academic semester or year
Cost of Tuition	Must pay the full, unsubsidized per capita cost of attending public high school for the period of attendance	Not required
2-year Home Residency	Not applicable	Applicable for sponsored program students
Host family reimbursement	Monthly stipend	Families are allowed a \$50/month deduction on their taxes
Host Family	Can live with U.S. citizen relatives while attending school	Cannot be placed in the home of relatives
Sports	Can participate in interscholastic varsity athletics but education must remain a priority***	<i>Direct placement****</i> participants are reported to NFHS* and school and are subject to district policy regarding sports participation.

*National Federation of State High School Associations

**Council on Standards for International Educational Travel

*** in the F-1 context, schools must report to the NFHS any F-1 student for whom participation in interscholastic varsity athletics was a known motivating factor at the time of application.

****A Direct Placement is one in which either the student or the sending organization in the foreign country is party to an arrangement with any other party, including school personnel, for the student to attend a particular school or live with a particular host family.

F-1 Visa Overview

This allows students to enter the United States as a full-time student at an accredited college, university, seminary, conservatory, academic high school, elementary school, or other academic institution or in a language training program. Students must be enrolled in a program or course of study that culminates in a degree, diploma, or certificate and the school must be authorized by the U.S. government to accept international students.

Schools wishing to host foreign students must apply for certification with the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency, which is under the Department of Homeland Security and comply with the regulations governing the program.

A foreign agency may be responsible for recruiting students, making travel arrangements, finding a host family, coordinating school attendance etc. but ultimately the school they are attending is responsible for them.

The US Government only allows F-1 students to attend public secondary schools for a single year and only if they pay the full unsubsidized cost of tuition at that public school. However, approved private/parochial schools may accept an unlimited number of F-1 students and they may attend until they graduate and move on to undergraduate and post-graduate education.

J-1 Visa Overview

The primary goals of the Exchange Visitor Program are to allow participants the opportunity to engage broadly with Americans, share their culture, strengthen their English language abilities, and learn new skills or build skills that will help them in future careers. There are fifteen different categories of participants under the Exchange Visitor Program which include professors, research scholars, alien physicians, camp counselors, au pairs, etc. Exchange visitors on private sector programs may study, teach, do research, share their specialized skills, or receive on-the-job training for periods ranging from a few weeks to several years. In addition to the thirteen private sector exchange categories, the Exchange Visitor Program also includes two categories that are publicly funded: International Visitors and Government Visitors.

The State Department-designated sponsors are responsible for all aspects of the exchange program, including screening and selecting of foreign national participants and monitoring the participants throughout their exchange visitor program in the United States. Reputable agencies are accredited by Council on Standards for International Education and Travel (CSIET), and must adhere to regulations which have been established by the US State Department.

The Exchange Visitor Program fosters global understanding through educational and cultural exchanges. All exchange visitors are expected to return to their home country upon completion of their program in order to share their exchange experiences.