



Advocates for Language Learning - El Marino

2011-2012 Spanish Immersion Exchange Program

Program Introduction & FAQ's

A.L.L.E.M. has organized an academic and cultural student exchange with schools in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico since 1985. We feel that the opportunity to live as part of a Mexican family gives participating students an enriching and eye-opening view of a different culture and a new land. Frequently, it also provides the participants with an enhanced sense of self-confidence and independence and a new-found appreciation for their own home and culture. It definitely provides them with plenty of practice in communicating in Spanish. For many, it is the capstone experience of the Spanish immersion program at El Marino.

This document attempts to provide answers to the questions parents ask most often. It won't have answers to all of your questions, so feel free to ask any other questions that you like.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long and when is the Exchange?

Your child will be in Mexico for four weeks and your family will host for four weeks. These two things do not occur simultaneously. The dates are tentative and subject to change, but we anticipate that your child will be in Mexico from August 20 - September 17, 2011. In Mexico, they will be in school for the entire four week period, missing approximately two weeks of summer vacation and the first two weeks of school back home. We will host the group from Mexico in January of 2012.

Where will my child go to school in Mexico?

A.L.L.E.M. has had an excellent relationship with Colegio La Calma, a private school in the city of Zapopan (an affluent suburb of the greater Guadalajara metropolitan area) for 30 years. Colegio La Calma is smaller than El Marino and has classes from preK through 6th grade. Colegio La Calma offers an intensive English language program (similar in some ways to El Marino's Spanish program) and many activities and enrichment programs.

Where will my child live in Mexico?

Your child will be matched with a child who attends Colegio La Calma. We will send information about our participants to the school director in Guadalajara, who will select a host for your child based primarily on gender and grade level. Your child will be placed with a child of the same gender who is probably in 5th grade, but may be in 4th or 6th. We also try to match children based on their interests and personalities, but this is not an exact science. We will also address any special health needs. For example, if your child is allergic to dogs, we will make sure that the host family does not have a dog. It is important that you inform us of anything we should know to aid this process *at the time you apply*. Ideally, the child that your child lives with is the child you will host when he or she comes to Culver City. Again, it doesn't always work out this way, but that is the goal.

Is it safe?

There is crime in every major metropolitan area, including both Guadalajara and Los Angeles, and the "drug wars" in Mexico have certainly received abundant new coverage here in the United States. However, it is important to keep the news reports in perspective. Most of the drug war violence we have read about has occurred in Juarez and other border cities; Juarez is actually closer to Los Angeles than to Guadalajara. Also, Guadalajara, which is in the state of Jalisco, has a much lower crime rate than other cities in Mexico. The crime rate

there is reported to be less than Los Angeles. (Other areas in Mexico – or more accurately, the roads to and from other areas in Mexico -- have become unsafe in recent years and we have changed our weekend excursions to avoid any areas that might pose a significant security risk.) Moreover, La Calma is in a high-end neighborhood and the families that host our children are educated, caring and thoughtful parents who take great care with our children. In other words, our children stay with careful and concerned parents (just like ourselves) in an affluent neighborhood of the safest state in Mexico. Perhaps the best way to keep the news reports in perspective is to understand that every time there is a report of a car-jacking in East Los Angeles or a murder in Tucson, the families at La Calma get nervous about whether it is safe to send their children to Culver City. We are all parents and we all have the same concern for the safety of our children. In the end, though, whether to send a child on the exchange is a very personal decision and we respect every parent's right to choose what is best for their family.

Would we host a child as well?

When deciding whether to participate, you must also consider your ability and willingness to host. This is a two way exchange: every family must help with the hosting of the group that comes to Culver City from Mexico. If you are able, you will be expected to host a child or chaperone in your home for a month when they visit in Culver City. If, for any reason, you are unable to host a guest, you will be expected to help with a disproportionately large amount of the other hosting duties and help shoulder the expense of hosting. Some of the other duties include inviting chaperones to your home for dinner, acting as day guide and planning parties and excursions.

Who is eligible to apply?

Fourth grade students in SIP at El Marino apply to participate at the beginning of their fifth grade year. Only students who will attend El Marino for fifth grade should apply.

Is my child ready?

Please also consider your child's (and your own) emotional preparedness for this type of journey before deciding to participate. Our goal is that every child and every family have a good experience with the program. While the Exchange Program offers a wonderful opportunity for the child who participates with enthusiasm and a sense of adventure, it can be painfully difficult for the child who is not ready for such a trip. It can also be hard on a parent who is not ready to have their child away for a month. Please do not include your child in the program if either of you is not yet up to this adventure.

How does my child apply?

You and your child should complete an application form and submit it A.L.L.E.M. no later than *Friday, March 5, 2010*. It is important that all sections of the application are completed. Late applications will be considered only after on-time applicants have been placed in a participant group or wait listed.

What factors do you consider in reviewing the applications?

We consider both social and academic preparedness. This type of exchange requires that the child be adaptable, recognize and meet social expectations, and respect authority. Children with behavioral issues are not good candidates for the exchange. Academically, your child will be required to do the homework assigned by the school in Guadalajara, as well as keep up with certain work assigned by El Marino teachers. They will return to school approximately two weeks into the Fall semester. Children with poor work habits are therefore not good candidates for the exchange. Your child's 3rd and 4th grade teachers and the Principal may be asked to evaluate these characteristics in your child.

If there are more than 10 eligible applicants, how are the participants selected?

Some years we have had more than 10 eligible applicants for the program. Children who are eligible and are not selected for the participant groups are placed on a waiting list. Below is a description of the method used to select the participants and generate the waiting list.

Level 1 Selection: Children identified by their teachers and/or the Principal as being exceptionally good candidates are automatically selected as participants. Children identified by their teachers and/or the Principal as being exceptionally poor candidates are declined. Very few children fall into either one of these categories.

Level 2 Selection: Eligible applicants who remain in the pool after Level 1 Selection may be automatically included as a participant if (a) their parent is chosen as a chaperone or (b) their parent has been an active volunteer for A.L.L.E.M.

Level 3 Selection: All remaining eligible applicants are included in a lottery and are randomly selected to participate. The lottery is also used to determine position on the waiting list if there are more than 10 eligible applicants.

There is an exception to this method. If the SIP Exchange coordinators feel that your family did not meet the spirit of the hosting commitment when an older sibling was previously a participant in the exchange, your child will be declined. This is a subjective decision and will not be made lightly. We recognize that it punishes the child for the actions of the parent; however, every family must realize that the success of the exchange program rests as much on our ability to be good hosts as it does on our ability to send adventurous, mature, and respectful students.

Can I talk to my child in Mexico?

Yes, but we require that you limit your calls to once each week. Experience shows that this helps your child adjust to the new environment and alleviates homesickness. More often than not, your call will leave your child sad and homesick. The calls are scheduled for Thursday evenings because they are usually followed by a big weekend excursion that begins on Friday and alleviates the feelings of homesickness.

What if my child is unhappy with the host family?

It depends on the cause of the unhappiness. A range of actions can follow, including assistance by the chaperones to aid in your child's adjustment or, in extremely rare cases, finding a new host family for your child.

How much does it cost?

There is a non-refundable \$100.00 application fee and to apply and participate you must be a member of A.L.L.E.M. and keep up to date on membership dues (\$15.00/year). If you are selected, you should expect to pay approximately \$1,000-1,200 to send your child to Mexico. This includes airfare for your child, a portion of airfare and excursion costs for the chaperones, the cost of the weekend excursions, spending money and emergency money. Most children return home with all of their emergency money and some of their spending money.

There are also costs associated with hosting. You will have an extra person living in your home, so you should anticipate increased daily living costs. You will pay for all of the things for that child that you would pay for your own child, including small outings, such as, a movie, museum, or ice skating. The children from Mexico bring their own money to cover their weekend excursions, but your family or children may want to participate too, which will add expense. Other expenses include small gifts for each member of your child's host family and clothing or supplies you may need to purchase for your child.

Each participating family will be asked to provide a deposit towards hosting obligations prior to your child's departure for Mexico. Once you have successfully completed your hosting obligations, the deposit will be returned to you. If you do not fulfill your hosting obligations, the deposit will be applied to defray the costs of hosting and eliminate the extra burden on

the other families.

What are the weekend excursions?

Typically, our children take two weekend excursions while they are in Mexico. One of the trips is a beach trip to Puerto/Nuevo Vallarta where they stay in an all-inclusive hotel and enjoy all the smoothies they can manage. This is a highlight for many of the children. The other excursion is a tour of another part of Mexico, typically, either Guanajuato or Mazamitla, in neighboring states, where they may go horseback riding, visit archaeological and cultural sites, attend performances or see artisans at work.

While the group from Mexico is here, they spend one weekend at Disneyland and one weekend skiing in the Sierras. Many EMLS families join for the ski trip and a few go, for at least one day, to Disneyland.

What do I do if my child has health issues?

Anything that may affect your child's behavior or health while away from home **MUST** be disclosed to the chaperones and the host parents. This includes medical conditions, medications, emotional problems, stress behaviors, and adaptive mechanisms. We cannot overstate the importance of sharing this information with the people who will care for your child in your absence. If your child has an on-going and/or serious medical condition, you should consult with your child's physician to make sure the trip will not compromise your child's health. If your child sees a therapist, we request that you speak with the therapist to determine if this trip is suitable for your child.

Are children ever sent home mid-trip?

Although the program has never had to send a child home from Mexico in the middle of the program, we do reserve the right to take this unusual step should the circumstances warrant it. If, for any reason, the directors and chaperones determine that it is in the best interests of your child or the program for your child to return home before the end of the trip, the cost of the early return will be your responsibility. Also, your child will return home unchaperoned, unless you elect to travel to Mexico to accompany your child.

How are the chaperones selected?

Adults interested in being a chaperone must complete and submit a chaperone application no later than *March 23, 2011*. We send two chaperones with each group. Typically (not always), chaperones are parents of children participating in the exchange. They are selected based on their experience and skill with children, their availability to commit for four weeks, their history with A.L.L.E.M., especially the SIP exchange program, their ability to communicate in Spanish, and the results of the interview process. The selection will be made by the SIP Exchange Coordinators using input from the interview committee.

Are chaperone expenses covered by the program?

Some of the chaperone expenses are covered, including regular airfare and a portion of their excursion costs. The funds for this are provided by the parents who send their children to Mexico. Chaperones must cover all of their additional expenses, including, but not limited to, a portion of the excursions and outings and the cost of host gifts for their host family.

Whom do I contact if I have more questions?

Feel free to contact the coordinators with any questions that arise. They are:

Sandi Levin (310) 721-1984 or slevin@cllaw.us

Dave Stewart (310) 948 1628 or davidkstewart@hotmail.com

You should also speak with families who participated in the exchange in previous years. While most children and families see the exchange as a wonderful experience, there are

those who do not. Both groups can offer valuable insight and information. If you don't know any of the families, just ask around - they are everywhere.