

Teaching K-12 Subjects Abroad

Teaching is a regulated professional occupation everywhere in the world, and as such is governed by local laws and policies concerning who can practice, what their qualifications must be, and other requirements.

You cannot simply take a U.S. teaching license, or education degree, and try to get a job in another country without first learning about, and then following, that country's rules and regulations regarding both foreign workers in general and teaching in particular.

There are generally four types of employment opportunities for teachers and other educators overseas:

1. U.S. public schools located overseas and operated by the U.S. government for families of employees and contractors stationed abroad. The Department of Defense and the Department of State operate schools that provide a kindergarten through 12th grade education for children of federal employees. Teacher applicants are required to be U.S. citizens, certified teachers, and have at least one year of current teaching experience.
2. International schools, usually private, that offer American-style curricula and programs. These schools are primarily American or use an English-language based curriculum. The students and teaching staff of these schools are comprised mostly of American and British students, as well as students from the host country. Teacher applicants must have a Bachelor's degree and at least two years of current, successful teaching experience. In some cases the teaching experience requirement may be waived. This is especially true of certified teachers in areas of mathematics, sciences and technology.
3. Programs hiring persons to teach English as a foreign language or other skills. These are not always located in school settings.
4. Regular temporary or permanent employment as a teacher in a foreign school, public or private,

operating under the regulations of another education system.

U.S. education credentials are most likely to be recognized by U.S. schools operating overseas or other schools or programs organized and structured to provide American-style education. U.S. certified teachers may also find some success in teaching English as a foreign language. Teaching opportunities in foreign public schools is less likely to occur because of labor laws that give employment preference to local citizens; linguistic and cultural barriers; and differences between American and foreign professional qualification requirements.

Foreign Country Employment Information

It is imperative to check the requirements for working in a foreign country, including obtaining a work visa or permit, with the embassy or consulate of that country's government. Go to the "Foreign Diplomatic and Consular Services" on www.ed.gov to locate the nearest embassy or consulate of the country in which you are interested.

You should also explore the educational system of the country in which you may work, regardless of whether you want to work in a local American or international school or in a local public school. Links to national education sites can be found by going to the "National Information Sources" on www.ed.gov.

Other Useful General Information

For information on foreign travel and living conditions, predeparture preparation, and special requirements for U.S. citizens entering specific countries, visit the section of U.S. Network for Education Information site called "Going Abroad" on www.ed.gov.

American Overseas Schools

By Charles R. Duke and Robert J. Simpson

American overseas schools are kindergarten through twelfth grade institutions that have U.S. sponsorship through private businesses, churches, parent groups and/or government agencies and serve eligible U.S. students in foreign nations. In Latin American nations, however, such schools are not classified as *overseas*.

These schools typically have a basic American curriculum. Instruction is in English, although other languages - especially that of the host nation - may be emphasized as well. Attendance by students from the host nation and from other countries is encouraged. Wherever appropriate and applicable, schools attempt to honor host-country rules related to education, so that school years and holidays can vary widely. Many schools in the Southern Hemisphere are in session only from March to December, and church-supported schools often observe special holidays of the sponsoring sect. Most of the schools observe holidays of the host nation - especially in Muslim nations - and some observe holidays of developing countries that have many students in attendance.

Not addressed in this discussion are college programs; special international programs in elementary and secondary schools, such as the International Baccalaureate; schools sponsored by foreign governments and international schools that operate in the United States (such as the United Nations school); and church mission schools in foreign lands, which are aimed primarily at host-nation children.

Two major classifications of American overseas schools exist: (1) dependent schools, operated by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD); and (2) independent schools, some of which are sponsored by the U.S. Department of State (DoS). Either type of school can accept students from private and military sectors. In instances where there are not enough students to operate a DoD school, tuition is paid by the U.S. military to independent schools. Similar arrangements exist where private-sector dependents are located on or adjacent to a U.S. military site. In 2000 approximately 250,000 U.S. school-age children were overseas; most were enrolled in DoD schools, but these enrollments are dropping and independent schools' enrollments are increasing, a cycle that occurs when cold-war tensions ease.

Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS)

Military schools officially started on American frontier posts in 1821, often under the leadership of a chaplain who doubled as the schoolmaster. These schools fluctuated in the recognition and support they received until schools were established in Germany, Japan, and Austria in 1946.

DoDDS enrollment then grew rapidly, and by the end of the 1946 - 1947 school year enrollment had reached 2,992. By 1949 the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force were independently operating approximately 100 such units around the world, and by the late 1960s more than 300 schools were operated abroad. Then, in 1964, the Secretary of Defense combined the three separate school systems within the department, and by 1969 more than 300 DoD schools existed.

During the 1960s and 1970s, worldwide K - 12 enrollment averaged 160,000 students. In 1976, the Department of Defense assumed the direct management of all of the schools. In 1979, the name for the system became the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS), the name still commonly used to identify the system. After the Cold War ended, DoDDS schools decreased in number. As of 2000 approximately 220 schools existed in fifteen foreign countries and Puerto Rico, with about 68 percent of the students enrolled in elementary schools, 15 percent in middle schools, and 17 percent in high schools. All DoD programs are accredited by the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges.

State Department Schools (DoS)

The major purpose of Department of State (DoS) supported schools, other than educating American dependents, has been to provide a foreign showcase of democracy through high-quality education programs that are open to both host- and third-nation students. Curricula often are binational for acculturation purposes - and to meet host-nation regulations along with U.S. accreditation standards. In 1998 Congress strengthened U.S. educational activities overseas by returning the U.S. Information Agency to the Department of State. Overseas schools continued to expand and flourish.

In 2000 the State Department supported 181 schools in 131 nations. There is great variety among these schools, ranging from tiny schools such as the American Independent School in Sierra Leone and the American Embassy School in Reykjavik, Iceland, with about a dozen students each, to the

Singapore American School, which has more than 2,500 students. Facilities for the schools range from rented homes and American Embassy rooms to multimillion-dollar campuses in such cities as London, Singapore, Madrid, and Manila. A few even have boarding facilities.

Independent Schools

Originally, independent schools, at least those sponsored by U.S. government agencies prior to World War II, were limited in number. The Office of Overseas Schools' records list eighteen such schools that existed in the early 1940s, mostly located in Latin America to combat the influence of German-sponsored schools. Before then, few employees took their families overseas. During World War II, the U.S. Department of State did provide some support via grants through the American Council on Education to a small number of schools. Nelson Rockefeller, a presidential adviser at the time, is credited with initiating this effort. During this period, American students either attended a DoD school, a corporate school, a mission school, a boarding school, or they stayed at home in the United States.

By the beginning of President John F. Kennedy's tenure in 1961, many government agencies and private businesses were expanding overseas. Groups of parents started their own schools, but without the benefit of federal aid. In 1961, the Fulbright-Hays Act established the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and the Foreign Assistance Act created the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), both of which could give limited grants-in-aid to K - 12 efforts. A 1963 Foreign Service Act provision allowed aid for dependents of persons carrying out U.S. government activities overseas. The U.S. Department of State established its Office of Overseas Schools (OOS) in 1964.

Types of Schools

Independent schools fall into five major categories:

Community schools, which are nonprofit units supported by governmental and business interests and are established through parents in the area. These schools are the most common type supported by the DoS.

Embassy schools operate within an embassy or consulate, often for security purposes, and have small enrollments. As the American presence grows in the areas where these schools exist, community schools are often formed and ultimately replace the embassy schools.

Corporate schools, such as those operated by oil companies, primarily provide private education for children of company employees, whether they are from the United States or other nations. These schools are usually in nations where other U.S. schools do not exist. More than one language track is often involved, and nonemployees' children generally are accepted into the school.

Proprietary schools, as the name indicates, are established as a business, with a definite profit motive in mind, or at least with the expectation that sufficient income will be generated to remain *solvent* as a not-for-profit corporation. Such schools are often started in developing nations, or as exclusive private schools in established areas.

Church schools with varied curricula and open admissions policies often can meet the American student enrollment needs in a community, and they can also receive *tuition aid* or special grants for secular purposes to assist with operating costs. These schools, however, are not to be confused with church mission schools, which have a completely different, and definitely religious, purpose.

Governance systems for American independent overseas schools vary. Although local control of public schools in the United States is a well-established feature, such control is often tempered by state and federal regulations. Independent schools overseas attempt to offer opportunities for more direct input from parents because of the insular nature of the enterprise. The bylaws of these schools usually mandate the direct participation of all stakeholders in governance decisions, usually to a much larger extent than would be experienced in American public schools.

Most American overseas schools, however, end up looking very much like schools in the United States. Curricula have common elements, pupil-teacher ratios are similar, texts are standard and represent those usually found in stateside schools; extracurricular activities, including athletics, are numerous and resemble those found in U.S. schools. Part of the reason for this similarity is that the American schooling model is a familiar one; but this also happens because parents are eager for their children to have the same, or at least a similar, school experience as those children "back home." In many ways, this desire is also prompted by the knowledge that, at some point, children from the overseas school will have to transition back into the stateside school system.

As much as the American overseas schools may wish to mirror those in the United States, the schools are subject to

local (foreign) governmental regulation. Schools must follow the laws of the host nation, even if they conflict with the stated mission of the school. Some nations, for example, require instruction in the official national language. Others control who can become a teacher, using requirements quite different from the licensing standards associated with American teacher preparation. However, if a school wants stateside accreditation, it has to meet the American licensing standards. American over-seas schools may also have to incorporate under local law if they wish to conduct business activities in the host country, such as hiring employees, purchasing supplies, maintaining bank accounts, and building or renting facilities. Without such legal status in a country, a school could not operate. The U.S. Embassy in most areas has a legal attaché, provided by the U.S. Department of Labor, who can assist schools in personnel matters.

Factors Affecting Overseas Schools

American overseas schools are not immune to changes in world policy. The number of DoD schools overseas decreases along with the number of U.S. military personnel located overseas during peaceful times. However, all other types of American overseas schools increase and become more multi-ethnic in the constituency of their governing boards, their staffs, and their students. In fact, in most independent schools in the early twenty-first century, U.S. children were in a minority - although the curriculum had to still meet American criteria and accreditation standards.

All of the schools try to keep up with the latest developments in schooling. Technology, for example, is important, and distance education is a popular means of instruction. However, incorporating the latest innovations is not always easy. For example, at the Karl C. Parrish School in Barranquilla, Columbia, the administrative team made a commitment to build a computer lab. The construction began and all the necessary wiring and furnishings were put into place; even air conditioning was installed. Then the country had a drought and the government declared that there would be daily twelve-hour blackouts because of the shortage of hydroelectric power.

Attracting and retaining qualified teachers and administrative staff can also be a challenge. As attractive as the idea of teaching abroad may be to educators, particularly the notion of travel and new experiences, there are some potential disadvantages to consider. Moving overseas to

teach is not a good way to escape problems at home, whether those problems are personal or professional. Such problems can be magnified in new surroundings, and without well-established support networks in place a newcomer can be at a distinct disadvantage. Foreign environments have a way of testing people; often the greatest test is unpredictability. Therefore, flexibility is one of the most helpful traits a person who wants to embark on an overseas assignment can have. Other attributes that prove helpful are patience and tolerance. There also needs to be an understanding that teachers or administrators who move abroad to accept positions in American overseas schools will become foreigners themselves. And, as foreigners, American teachers abroad may face indifference, intolerance, or outright hostility - just as foreigners in the United States sometimes encounter these attitudes among Americans.

Living and working overseas is often easier on a military base, where the people, customs, and routines are familiar, than it is for educators who choose to work in independent schools. Yet the amount of cultural experience and travel is primarily the choice of the individual teacher, and the opportunities are obvious and unlimited for those who relish exploring new cultures and expanding their global awareness.

Internet Resources

Association for the Advancement of International Education
www.aaie.org

U.S. Department of Defense Educational Activities
www.dodea.edu

International Schools Services
www.iss.edu

European Council of International Schools
www.ecis.org

Search Associates
A private agency comprised mainly of former directors of international schools, www.searchassociates.com

The Office of Overseas Schools
U. S. State Department, www.state.gov/m/a/os/

American Overseas Schools Historical Society
aoshs.org