



# **International Host Handbook (for hosts placed by FPS)**

Questions or Concerns?

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OR

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## **Program Overview**

Furtah Preparatory School has been welcoming students from around the globe for over 15 years. We have hosted students from nearly three dozen different countries. Our program is family-centered and values full cultural and academic immersion. Students live with host families, adapting to the lifestyle and expectations of an American household while maintaining a full time course load at FPS.

Because the host family acts on behalf of the student's natural parents, the host family is an essential participant in the life of the international student while attending FPS. By opening your home and heart to an international student, you and your family will gain a new global perspective while enriching your host student's life and exposing them to a new culture.

## **Assignment as a Host Family**

Host parent(s) assigned by FPS must have a current background check on file as well as documentation proving US citizenship or resident status. The host family and international student's family will receive each other's contact information during the summer, so you can get to know one another and plan for the student's arrival.

We encourage you to get to know your student's home country. The more you can learn about your student's culture, the better you will be able to understand and appreciate your cultural differences. This knowledge will prevent some potential misunderstandings between you and your student and will help you to get started in a positive manner. Keep in mind, adjustments are a natural part of the process while you and your student are getting to know each other.

## **Guardianship**

International students enrolled at FPS are officially under its guardianship while school is in session (known as "in loco parentis"). In turn, a host family agrees to provide a safe, supportive home life for the student and serves as the daily guardian for the student while in the home.

## **Student Arrival & Departure**

International students may arrive up to 30 days prior to the first day of school although most come the week before school. Any student wanting to arrive earlier will need to obtain a visitor's Visa for that additional time. As a host family, you are not required to host the student any earlier than a week before school. If you do, you may request payment from the parents for an earlier arrival.

Students are expected to arrive before the FPS first day of school (usually the first Tuesday of August). Late entry to the U.S. after the first day of school is not guaranteed and is at the discretion of the Port of Entry Officer at the airport.

All students are required to email their host families during the summer to keep them informed of their travel plans to the United States. Host families will meet the students at the airport and bring them to their new home in the States. Students usually return home after the end-of-year ceremonies (towards the end of May). Students returning for the following school year will be required to have their I-20 Form updated by the PDSO prior to their departure home (which requires a deposit on the next year's tuition). Failure to renew by the end of May will result in cancellation of their I-20.

*\*\*\*Students are required to give all travel plans directly to the PDSO. Communicating with anyone else does not waive the requirement to communicate with the PDSO.\*\*\**

### **Tips for the Student's Arrival**

- Speak slowly and clearly, in a normal tone, to help them understand you. Our students know English, but it might be their first time using it outside of the classroom.
- Upon arrival, show them the essentials of your home (bedroom, bathroom, etc.) The next day, give them a full tour of the home and how things work within the home. In the first week, give them a tour of the neighborhood and town.
- After the student has settled in (after a day or two), discuss house rules. Provide a written copy of the house rules either at this time or in advance of the student's arrival.

\*House rules should be similar to expectations set for your own children. Students are expected to follow these rules and help with basic chores around the house. However, students should not be expected to serve as babysitters or housecleaners. Take some time to really develop these rules and even the little expectations that your own children have come to understand over time.

*\*See our template at the end to assist with setting or discussing house rules and expectations.*

## **Host Family Assignments**

In most cases, our hosts are families who have a son or daughter attending FPS. The School makes housing assignments based on the information collected from the student after they enroll and does its best to match students with a family who can meet their housing requests. FPS will provide each student with contact information for their host family so students and host families can begin communicating over the summer.

Changes to housing assignments are not permitted unless a formal request has been reviewed and approved by FPS. We implement a month waiting period at the beginning of the school year before considering requests for housing changes. Often, students who are uncomfortable with their housing are experiencing culture shock and simply need some time to adjust. In the rare case where a change is deemed appropriate, the School will work to identify a new host family and facilitate the move.

## **Living with an International Student**

### **Participation in Family Life**

At FPS, international students are fully integrated into the classrooms, as well as into interscholastic and extracurricular activities. In the host home, we expect students to be integrated into your regular family life. This includes participating in family activities and traditions. Don't assume anything, as families are all different—especially families from other cultures. Explain what your family does and why; this will help avoid misunderstandings and foster a sense of belonging. FPS expects both the student and their host family to make a genuine effort to communicate and nurture a mutual understanding and friendship.

### **Room Furnishings**

International students at FPS might have their own room, or they may, with permission of the natural parents, share a room with another student. (Youth sharing rooms must be of the same gender and within 4 years of age.) Each student will have their own bed (with linens), place to study, and access to a bathroom with a shower or bath. Students provide all their basic toiletries, such as toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, hair and eye care products, deodorant, etc. Explain expectations regarding making the bed, maintaining a certain level of cleanliness, doing laundry, etc.

## **Meals**

FPS believes in the value of a nutritious diet. We ask our host families to provide healthy menus in their homes. Host families provide a nutritious breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snack. (On school days, students will pack the lunch items to take to school.) Students should feel comfortable talking directly to their host family about foods they prefer to eat and foods they do not like. If the student has any specific dietary needs (such as food allergies) it is important to inform the host family so they may provide appropriate meals that meet those needs. Talk to your student about their normal meal patterns and, where possible, keep some consistency for them. For example, if a student is accustomed to having rice at every meal, try to have rice available to them. However, if a student desires specific items that you do not provide, the student is responsible for purchasing those items.

Learning about food is an important part of understanding a new culture. Students are encouraged to embrace the cultural experience of the family meal as prepared by the host families as part of their learning experience. Often, the international students will have an opportunity to teach their host families about food from their own countries as well.

## **Curfew**

Students are expected to maintain healthy sleep habits in order to be productive and engaged in their school and community. Therefore, host families may set “lights-out” times or quiet hours. As part of their house rules, families will set a curfew that students must respect.

## **Culture Shock**

Culture shock is a phenomenon that many international students encounter, and it is often related to homesickness or difficulty adapting to a new environment. Studying in a foreign country is exciting, but can be overwhelming at times- especially at the beginning of the school year. Culture shock and homesickness can sometimes feel like sadness, loneliness, fatigue, or depression. Speaking with family from back home can help, but the best way to overcome culture shock is to try connecting with new friends and family in the United States.

The faculty and staff at FPS are always willing to talk to a student who is experiencing feelings of sadness or loneliness. Students should also feel comfortable speaking with the International Coordinator, the PDSO, and the Principal.

## **Cycle of Adjustment**

Many students will experience a pattern of adjustment during the first year living abroad. While feelings and timing can vary from student to student, here's the typical cycle to be aware of:

- I'm here! — This is the “honeymoon” period filled with excitement.
- I'm settling in — They have settled into the routine and the “newness” has worn off. They may be overwhelmed by house rules, schoolwork, and speaking English all the time.
- Why am I here? — This down period comes close to holidays with the student missing home.
- I'm almost done — They start feeling like time is ticking down but they're enjoying life here. They may feel happiness about returning home soon yet sadness over leaving new friends.

## **Religion**

Host families may invite students to attend worship services as part of the cultural experience, but students are not required to participate. Host families are accommodating of religious differences and students are allowed to practice and worship according to their own belief system.

## **Cultural Customs**

Customs vary widely from one culture to another, and we often view these differences as “bad manners” or “good manners”. It's important to realize many manners are not actually bad versus good, but are different ways of upbringing. Before judging or even scolding your student for something you perceive as bad manners, talk to them openly about how the issue at hand is seen in their culture. Here are a few common oddities:

- Making a slurping noise while eating can be seen as a compliment.
- Being slightly late can be a sign of respect.
- It can be polite to leave some of your food on the plate.
- Making eye contact can be seen as disrespectful.
- Burping at the end of the meal can be expected as a show of thanks.
- Giving a monetary tip can be seen as an insult.

There are many differences between all cultures, so the key is to not assume. This is also where it can be very helpful to research your student's culture ahead of time. It's also valuable to ask them to tell you about their culture. They have been studying American culture ahead of their travels, so they might enjoy talking about their perceptions of America too!

## **Academics**

### **Course Schedule**

International students carry a full course load appropriate for a college-bound, high school student. The Georgia Department of Education requirements for high school are followed and adhered to. Class placement is based on previous transcripts and is adjusted as needed according to demonstrated ability within the classroom.

### **ESL**

Students are expected to speak and write English with enough proficiency to keep pace with classes and manage basic conversations with families, teachers, and other students.

### **Field Trips**

Students at FPS may take field trips throughout the school year. There may be additional costs associated with these field trips, and that cost is the responsibility of the student or natural parents.

### **College/Career Counseling**

High school students at FPS have the opportunity to meet with the principal regarding their plans for after high school. Juniors and Seniors may take the college planning class which includes standardized test preps and college visits. As a senior, all students take part in career planning. International students are encouraged to take advantage of college visit opportunities while at school, as it can be very difficult to stay in the United States after graduation long enough to visit, apply, and be accepted into a program.

## **Student Expectations**

International students are held to all the same FPS academic and behavioral standards as our domestic students. All students must read and abide by the Student Handbook, Code of Conduct, and Technology Honor Policy. Additionally, they must abide by the International Student Handbook.

### **FPS Dress Code**

International Students must abide by the FPS Dress Code and are expected to dress in a manner that is neat, clean, and appropriate. The Dress Code can be found in the FPS Student Handbook and on the FPS website.

### **FPS Code of Conduct**

International Students are held accountable to the FPS Code of Conduct as described in the Student Handbook. As international students are always under our care and supervision, the code of conduct applies to both their school and home lives.

International Students found in violation of a major school rule, state law, or federal law will be required to see the PDSO and will be subject to school disciplinary consequences.

Decisions and discipline regarding academic distress or violations of the Code of Conduct are in the domain of the Principal.

Students with serious or repetitive academic and/or behavioral issues may be removed from FPS at the School's discretion, and sent home.

In terms of communication normally conducted with parents (i.e. discipline, progress reports and parent conferences), FPS will keep both the host family and the natural family informed as appropriate. Both families will have access to Family Portal.

## **Attendance and Vacation Periods**

### **Attendance and Sick Days**

Students are expected to arrive by the FPS first day of school (early August) and stay through the FPS last day of school (late May). Students are expected to attend school every day and be on time unless they have an excused tardy or absence that is reported to the Main Office. If a student repeatedly misses school, FPS reserves the right to re-evaluate that student's ability to remain enrolled.

### **School Holidays and Vacations**

The host family is expected to host their student for all school breaks during the school year from August to May. Students are *allowed* to return home during the December break in order to spend time with family and friends. However, students are expected to be present for the first day of the new semester (early January).

### **Travel**

International students are not permitted to travel outside the state without school approval. Students are required to communicate all travel plans during the school year **in advance of purchasing any tickets for travel**. This includes arrival date, departure date, and any travel (even within the United States) from August to May. This communication can be done via email or in person to the PDSO. Any travel that requires missing class will require additional approval from the Principal. Any travel that requires missing scheduled sports practices or games will require additional approval from the Athletic Director. **Please note: Communicating travel plans with the Principal, Athletic Director, Host Family, or other FPS Staff does NOT waive the requirement to communicate with the PDSO.** In the case of unusual travel plans, FPS reserves the right to confirm these plans with the student's natural parents and secure permission in writing.

*It is the student's responsibility to make sure they have a current I-20 prior to travel outside the U.S.*

## **Health Information**

### **Health Insurance**

All international students are required to purchase a health insurance plan before arrival and maintain coverage throughout their stay.

### **Georgia Immunization Form 3231**

FPS requires all immunization forms to be transferred to the official Georgia Immunization Form 3231. There may be certain immunizations required upon arrival according to the Georgia State law. During the student's stay, there may be additional immunizations required by the law. These immunizations and the necessary forms can be obtained at the local health department. It is the responsibility of the Host Family to help ensure the International Student is in compliance with Georgia law regarding immunizations.

### **Physicals to Play Sports**

International students who want to play a winter or spring sport may need to get an updated physical in the United States if the one they have on file expires during the school year.

### **Doctor's Visits and Emergency Treatment**

The costs associated with Doctor's visits and other medical treatments are the responsibility of the student and natural parents. The host family is not responsible for paying the costs associated with medical care and should NEVER sign any medical forms on behalf of a student accepting responsibility for payment. (The student should write their natural parent's name and contact information for any guarantor sections of medical forms.)

In the event of a medical emergency, the guardianship form proves the ability for a host parent to make decisions. However, the natural parents should be contacted and consulted as soon as possible. The International Coordinator should be contacted immediately after contacting the natural parents.

## **Transportation and Other Logistics**

### **Transportation**

The host family is responsible for providing transportation to and from school and school functions including school sports practices and games. The host family and student should work out an agreement regarding extracurricular activities, such as non-school athletics, social gatherings, etc. Students are allowed to obtain and pay for ridesharing (such as Uber) for non-school activities if the host family does not provide transportation for those activities. As in any family, the goal is to find a good balance between allowing the student to experience a range of activities while respecting the family's availability to provide the transportation. **Students are NOT allowed to hitchhike at any time for any reason.**

International students are not prohibited from obtaining a driver's license, and should consult the local DMV for current requirements. However, it is strongly recommended that the host family DOES NOT allow the student to drive any of their vehicles. If allowed, all liability falls upon the host family to ensure that the student is fully covered through car insurance, and the host family knowingly accepts all responsibilities and risks that come with allowing the student to drive their vehicles.

### **Cell Phones & Computers**

Students are responsible for establishing and paying for a personal cell phone plan. They should not be placed on the Host Family's plan. Students are responsible for bringing their own computer or laptop and obeying house rules regarding devices. Home families are expected to provide basic internet access.

### **Money**

Students usually come with debit or credit cards from their home country plus some amount of cash, but it can be a good idea for them to get a bank account here in the United States. (While international credit cards usually work, debit cards can have issues.) Students can set up a bank account in their own name starting at age 16. A PayPal account can also be useful for funding group payments (such as friends paying each other for activities).

### **Employment**

International F-1 Visa students in K-12 are NOT allowed to work during their stay in the United States. This is a federal law with serious consequences if the law is broken. They are not allowed to do

even “small jobs” like babysitting or yard work. They may do volunteer work, but cannot do anything that will provide any type of recompense (ie, money or items).

### **Graduation**

Whether an international student has been with us for one year or all four years, it is always a joy to celebrate graduation. The last official day of school is typically the last Friday of May, but seniors will take finals early and finish a week before the rest of the school. Graduation is typically held on the next to last Saturday of May (which is often around May 20th). For those participating in sports, there is typically a sports banquet held a night or two before graduation. We hope that your family can visit and join in these celebrations.

Students are allowed to leave after graduation ceremonies are complete. If they plan to continue education in the United States, they will need to request a transfer from the PDSO within 60 days of graduation. The request must include proof of acceptance to SEVP-certified college/university.

### **Communication with the Natural Parents & FPS**

Communicating with your student’s natural family can be enjoyable and helpful to all. Even though there may be a language barrier, your emails or texts will most likely be reassuring to them regarding their child’s welfare. In most cases, your student’s natural family will be able to translate these digital messages easily. Try to make the natural family a part of their student’s experience with frequent check-ins focusing on the positives where possible.

If any concerns or issues arise, talk with the International Coordinator before speaking with the natural parents. We can usually help resolve issues before worrying the natural parents. If you have any additional questions, we’re also here to provide insight based on years of experience with international students.

The key to a successful year with your international student is communication. Keep in mind that there are countless differences between our culture and your student’s culture. Ask your student questions and give kind explanations on all the nuances of American life. This will lead to your family and the student having a rich understanding of one another and a wonderful cultural experience.

## **House Rules Template**

This template can be used directly or amended to fit your particular needs.

### **Names**

I should call my host parents:

My host family can call me:

### **Food**

Food can be eaten in these areas:

#### ***Breakfast***

I will/will not be expected to make my own breakfast.

A typical breakfast includes:

Times for breakfast on the weekdays:                      and on the weekends:

#### ***Lunch***

I will/will not be expected to pack my lunch (weekdays) and make my lunch (weekends).

A typical weekend lunch includes:

Times for lunch on the weekends:

#### ***Dinner***

I can/cannot make dinner for the family. If so, when and how often?

A typical dinner includes:

Times for dinner on the weekdays:                      and on the weekends:

If I will be home later and would like to eat dinner, I should:

#### ***Snacks***

I do/do not have access to food in the house at any time.

These food items or food storage areas are off-limits:

#### ***Allergies & Dislikes***

I am allergic to these foods:

I have these non-food allergies:

My host family has these allergies:

My favorite foods:

My least favorite foods:

\*I understand, as a host student, my family may set reasonable limits to food I eat and may offer different food than I am used to. I will try to embrace the culture of my home and try new things. If I want additional food or special items, my host family does not have to provide this. (It is my responsibility to buy those additional or special items.)

## **Routine**

On weekdays, I must be up by:

I need to be dressed and ready to leave for school by this time:

The family has quiet time during this time frame:

My family has the following regular activities:

I am allowed/expected to attend these activities:

On weeknights, I should be in my room by:                      with lights out by:

On weekend nights, I should be in my room by:                      with lights out by:

I am allowed to be out with friends a maximum of this many nights/days:

My curfew on weeknights (Sunday-Thursday) is:                      on weekends (Friday-Sunday) is:

I can/cannot entertain friends in my host home. These are the guidelines (frequency, time, number)

## **Bathroom**

I should take a shower at least this often:

My shower should last no longer than:

I should store my personal hygiene items here:

## **Chores**

I am expected/not expected to keep my room clean.

I am expected/not expected to make my bed.

Chores will/will not change during my stay.

These are areas I am not allowed in:

These are items I am not allowed to use:

My other chores, including how often it should be done and when it should be done:

*\* I understand that my host family will teach me how to complete the assigned chores.*

## **Other**

My host family has these rules about using the internet:

When traveling together (on weekends or holidays), my host family requires me to pay for:

*\*I will pay for my tuition, supplies, field trips, clothing, and personal items. I will never borrow from the host family.*