



## **John Bapst Homestay Family Program** *A Guide for Parents and Students*

### **Introduction**

Opening a home to a guest from overseas is a wonderful, generous act on the part of a host family. The school, the international student's family, and the student are all appreciative of this generosity. The \$800 monthly stipend paid by the school is designed to cover food and basic expenses and to eliminate any appearance that this program is profit-oriented. Homestay families demonstrate a special interest in young people and in opening opportunities in America to students from other countries. Thanks to all who participate!

### **Why International Students Come to the United States for High School**

The United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the UK are magnets for large numbers of international students wishing to improve their English and thus their readiness for university studies. Colleges and universities in the US offer opportunities that students may not have in their homelands, where universities themselves may be in short supply or where places may be limited. To study in an American university with an international reputation – whether at a major research university like Berkeley, UCLA, Michigan, Illinois, Texas, or an Ivy League school or at a selective liberal arts college like Wellesley, Bowdoin, or Pomona – not only confers prestige abroad but offers a potential inside track to careers in global centers like Tokyo, Singapore, Hong Kong, Seoul, Beijing, Shanghai, New York, Los Angeles, Frankfurt, Madrid, or London. It is no wonder that international students at America's largest universities number in the thousands.

Getting into a good university requires planning and hard work. An academically focused high school like John Bapst, where the majority of day students already take AP courses and where all follow a college-prep curriculum, is an attractive step on the way to success. This is the opportunity John Bapst has: to offer its quality programs not only to students from the approximately 35 Maine towns currently served, but also to international students who are searching for this kind of school.

In addition to its strong core curriculum, John Bapst has an English support program. The program, based on the principle of immersion as the best way to gain fluency quickly, differentiates the John Bapst experience from that of schools where international students take ESL science, ESL social studies, and so on. Most international students at John Bapst take English as a regular school subject with extra support from the ESL staff. Like Maine students, the international students benefit from personalized attention to college counseling. The international enrollment is limited. Of the total school population of about 510, approximately 14% is international.

### **Expectations and Responsibilities of the Homestay Family**

Homestay families offer a representative American home environment where English is the predominant daily language. The international student is treated like a member of the family, eating

meals with family members, participating in family routines, and enjoying leisure activities.

The school assures its international families that each homestay family can provide the following basic requirements:

- a private bedroom or an ample shared bedroom in a clean, safe home, with a key to the house;
- adequate space to store and hang clothes;
- a pillow, sheets, blanket, and towels, with laundry facilities to keep these clean (students are expected to do their own laundry);
- access to a clean, well-functioning bathroom that is not shared by too many people;
- two meals a day when school is in session (note that lunch is offered at school at no extra charge to homestay students) and three meals a day (or the equivalent when school is not in session) with attention to good nutrition and to the student's needs, likes, and dislikes;
- transportation to and from school each day (this may be a public school bus, if available) that school is in session, along with transportation to school activities (some transportation is provided by the school, but this may include sports, clubs, dances, etc.) that the student wishes to take part in; and
- adult care and attention.

During the homestay, the American parent or parents act the responsible adult(s), including the homestay student in celebrations, family visits and outings, and cultural opportunities. The school will send a copy of grades, comments, and any disciplinary records so the family can support the parents abroad. Adult supervision must be regular and predictable. If parents are away for a weekend, for example, provision for substitute adult supervision should be made. A high school student cannot be left alone overnight.

The homestay family should not have unreasonable expectations of the international student. If there are younger children in the home, the homestay student should not be considered as a live-in babysitter. While basic chores are certainly permitted and encouraged, the homestay student should not be asked to do anything risky or dangerous, like using strong chemicals to clean, climbing a high ladder, using a table saw, or operating outdoor power equipment.

The *John Bapst Parent-Student Handbook* contains rules that all students follow while in school and while attending school events. The handbook provides a clear guide for community expectations. It makes clear that major school rule violations involving drinking, drugs, fighting, and vandalism can result in suspension and dismissal. With this in mind, the homestay family must understand that it is illegal in Maine for an underage person to possess tobacco and alcohol. John Bapst looks for nonsmoking households. Homestay students may not be offered beer, wine, or other alcoholic beverages at any time. The school reserves the right to make a change in a student's homestay family in the event that problems arise. The school will always attempt to communicate clearly and openly, but it must be understood that student safety, health, and care are of paramount importance.

Note also that while teenage smoking is more common in many other parts of the world than in the U.S. today, the school's no-smoking policy should extend to the homestay household as well. Let the school know if this becomes a concern.

### **Expectations and Responsibilities of the Homestay Student**

The school assures the homestay family that the students placed understand that they have responsibilities as well. These include:

- personal cleanliness, including taking a shower every day;
- helpfulness around the house;
- observance of family routines and rules;
- friendliness and politeness to adults and other family members;
- keeping the bedroom clean (including making the bed);
- working hard and staying up to date with school work;
- communicating plans and needs for transportation as far in advance as possible; and
- no smoking or drinking alcoholic beverages.

Homestay students are expected to have spending money from their own families. They take care of furnishing their own books, clothing, toiletries, and other personal items, but should not be asked to contribute to basic family expenses (gas money, meal money when the family elects to eat out, laundry detergent). In the event of a special opportunity (a ski trip, a concert, an athletic event), the homestay family should make clear whether they are able to cover the cost of a ticket. The homestay family's generosity is always appreciated, but this is not an expectation when it comes to special events.

Homestay students should be prepared to be cooperative, polite, sociable, and helpful, following the expectations of young people in the house. Although Americans are known for being informal, good manners as defined in this country are quite important in American culture. Saying thank you each time food is served or a ride to school is given is expected. Showing appreciation is an easy token of good character and friendship to offer, whether at home or at school. In restaurants where service is provided, tipping is not optional, and 15% is the customary minimum. The school and the student's family appreciates these life lessons.

It is typical in American households for household chores to be shared by family members. These may include laundry, vacuuming, making the bed, cooking, and yard work. It takes cooperation to make family life successful, and the international student is invited to and expected to embrace these aspects of family life. Joining in with chores builds reliability and a spirit of cooperation – two important qualities for adult life.

Depending on the way the house is set up, homestay students may find that studying is done in their bedroom, around the kitchen table, or somewhere else in the house. In many American households, the kitchen table or another area of the house may be a good place to do homework. Adults and other young people in the household can offer help when needed. The homestay student should not hide in his or her room – that defeats the whole purpose of the homestay and unintentionally sends a signal of unfriendliness.

A healthy daily routine for all family members requires adequate sleep. The school and the homestay family understand that when the student's own family and friends live in a time zone on the other side of the world, communication can be a challenge. It is very important to establish a healthy routine for

such contacts by phone and by computer. Teenagers need sleep, and a Skype call at 3 a.m. may prevent sleep and disrupt the household. There should be an agreement made about bedtimes during the week and on weekends.

Similarly, wake-up routines are important. If the homestay parent needs to be at work at 7 or 7:30, students must be prepared to wake up early enough to prepare for the day.

The international student must understand that household rules are meant to be enforced. In an American family, the typical consequence for breaking a rule is the loss of a privilege. For instance, a student who uses the computer in the middle of the night may be warned once or twice, but a further breaking of the rule could result in the loss of internet privileges. Similarly, a student who is asked to be home on a weekend night by 11 p.m. and who is late may not be allowed to stay out late the next night or the next weekend. In cases like these, all parties must communicate face to face. The adults must assure themselves that the student understands the rule. The student must be a good listener and a cooperative member of the household.

The homestay student must understand that drinking, drugs, fighting, vandalism, shoplifting, internet pornography, and other crimes are so serious that the student may jeopardize his or her entire educational opportunity in the US – not just at John Bapst. Smoking—common among teenagers in many parts of the world—is not allowed at John Bapst, and John Bapst boarding students are not permitted to smoke off campus.

### **Before the Student Arrives**

The school helps the homestay family and the international family to make contact before the student's arrival in the US. Sharing family information and photos, house and room information and photos, student information, likes and dislikes when it comes to food, and activities and hobbies.

Also important is to share arrival information: airline, flight number, expected date and time of arrival, and cell phone numbers and email addresses in case connections are missed or schedules change. Meeting the student upon arrival is the best way to get started. The host family should have a house key copy ready, along with anything they feel will help personalize that moment of introduction.

### **Starting Off Right**

Homestay families are encouraged to establish the normalcy of frequent verbal interaction. We all hope for a friendly, open, and rich relationship. Creativity in conversation is much less important than the conversations themselves, with each interaction offering opportunities to get to know one another and teach language and culture.

Here are just a few suggested ice-breakers (that's a good American English vocabulary term to teach!):

- for daily conversation: "Every day after school I'm going to ask you ..."
- for teaching customs: "This is how we set the table ..."
- for routines and chores: "Every night after dinner we ..."
- for daily life as language and culture lessons: "Let me show you how we ..."
- for sharing culture: "Show me your hometown on the map ... Show us some photos of your family ..."

- for problem-solving: “I’m noticing that you’re closing your door a lot ...”; “I got an email that you’re sleepy in school ...”; “Let’s talk to your guidance counselor together”

### **Medical Care, Health Insurance and Homestay Family Liability Insurance**

Homestay parents act *in loco parentis* – in the place of parents – when medical situations arise. Homestay parents have a copy of the student’s medical release and/or records. The homestay parent can take a temperature, give a student Tylenol or other over-the-counter medication to address a minor health situation, and generally treat the international student as one’s own child would be treated.

John Bapst School Nurse Shyla Waring is an important resource. In any health situation where professional advice would be helpful or important, she can be called at (207) 947-0313 ext. 122 (office); her email is [swaring@johnbapst.org](mailto:swaring@johnbapst.org). Call Head of School David Armistead (207) 521-4685 or Homestay Coordinator Angela Kearns (207) 992-3802 if Mrs. Waring cannot be reached.

John Bapst has a relationship with Penobscot Pediatrics, located at 1068 Union Street in Bangor. The practice has walk-in hours Monday through Saturday or call (207) 947-0147. Penobscot Pediatrics also has a copy of each student’s medical information. Homestay families may wish to use another doctor (for example, their own children’s pediatrician or family doctor); this is certainly permitted as well, but it is a good idea to make sure the practice is comfortable with the student’s and school’s health insurance and billing.

If an emergency room, late-night clinic, or other hospital visit is necessary, here are a couple of important points:

- Contact the School Nurse, letting her know what is going on. Use either of the backup contacts if necessary; call any time day or night.
- Upon check-in, use the school address as the billing address and add Mrs. Waring’s name and phone number as a contact person.
- Send us an email when you have a moment to update us ([darmistead@johnbapst.org](mailto:darmistead@johnbapst.org), [akearns@johnbapst.org](mailto:akearns@johnbapst.org)).

The international student's family is required to have health insurance for their student. John Bapst also has a supplemental health policy for international students, included in each student’s tuition.

The homestay family should check with their liability insurer to be sure they are covered for situations involving a boarder in the home. As noted above, the school's stipend is calculated to cover basic costs; insurance is a cost that may vary from household to household.

### **Safety**

Each international student’s experience with activities that may involve an element of risk will vary. *Safety first!* is all-important, and where you as a parent would like prior notification before your own child engaged in a particular activity, notify the student’s parents in advance before engaging in bicycling or skateboarding; winter sports like skiing, snowboarding, and ice skating; water sports including swimming, canoeing, whitewater rafting, and kayaking; ropes courses or zip lines; and the like. Please be sure students have helmets before engaging in any activity in which helmets are

normally recommended and have life jackets in the various on-the-water activities.

### **Communication, Weekend Activities, and Relationship to the On-Campus Boarding Program**

At least weekly, the school will include homestay parents and students in an email list of on-campus weekly and weekend activities. Homestay students, along with their homestay siblings and parents if applicable, are welcome to join in John Bapst activities. Examples are events like Homecoming, apple-picking in the fall, and trips to Portland and Boston. Be sure to let the Director of Residential Life know if you are *not* receiving this information once school begins.

The school's dormitories are not hotels. Homestay students are expected to have made transportation plans back to their homestays after on-campus activities in the evenings and on weekends. To stay in the dorm at any time, off-campus students must have the *prior* permission of the Director of Residential Life.

### **Academic Progress, Grades, and PowerSchool**

The degree to which homestay parents involve themselves in the academic life of the student varies. We all want to see these students succeed, and so homestay parents have a copy of the student's schedule and instructions for accessing PowerSchool, where student grades are visible.

Even if the homestay family does not feel comfortable accessing grades, it is important to keep abreast of the student's general progress. Teachers and administrators have a list of homestay families in the event a phone call home is necessary to communicate helpful information about missing homework, lack of participation, or an issue that may have come up at school. Similarly, call on John Bapst staff to help you. The school's guidance counselors are excellent resources (call the main school number at 947-0313).

### **Computer and Internet Access**

The school **requires** that each homestay family have internet access in the home. This may be wireless or through a wired connection. Note that computer use must be appropriate, whether wireless or not. The family is responsible for use in the home, and thus illegal and inappropriate uses are never permitted.

### **Dress Code**

The John Bapst dress code is part of the larger Student-Parent Handbook, available online at [www.johnbapst.org](http://www.johnbapst.org) and distributed to students early in the school year. The dress code requires students to be neat, modest, and in good repair. Students wear blue jeans only on designated days; note that the first two days of school are "B" days on which blue jeans *are* allowed. Boys wear collared (polo or oxford) shirts except on dress-down days; girls wear appropriate tailored tops (no undershirts). Skirts must be modest, and short shorts are not allowed. In the warm months of September, October, May, and June, knee-length shorts are allowed. Camouflage and warm-ups are not in dress code. Sandals and athletic shoes are permitted.

### **Driving and Rides**

John Bapst does not allow international boarding students to drive. Maine roads can be icy in the winter. Many of them are narrow, two-lane roads, and student safety is always a concern. We know

from statistics that teenagers are more likely to have an accident than older drivers. Students are permitted to ride with homestay parents *and* homestay students with a driver's license, subject to any State of Maine restrictions based on the driver's age. Each international family fills out a form indicating riding permissions; homestay families have a copy of this form.

### **A Note on Religious Practice**

When traveling or visiting with a family whose religious practice is different from one's own, attending a religious service can be an interesting window onto culture. International students are encouraged to take advantage of such cultural opportunities. Homestay families understand that while such events and services may be of cultural interest and helpful for language acquisition, it is inappropriate to require active participation (singing, reciting a litany, Bible study, taking communion) on the part of someone of a different religion.

Westerners sometimes believe, mistakenly, that certain Asian countries and China in particular are completely secular countries with cultures free of religious traditions. Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, and Buddhism are sometimes characterized as philosophies, but depending on family orientation, belief and ritual can have a parallel importance to religious practice in America. Sensitivity to this will help avoid the appearance of religion presented in an exclusive or intolerant way.

Note that John Bapst is a non-religious school. Religion classes and Bible studies are not offered. As a private school, however, it encourages its teachers, particularly in English and history classes, to incorporate teaching about world religion as a key part of understanding the human experience.

### **Vacations**

Homestay families agree to provide a place to stay throughout the school year. Some international students may elect to return home or visit friends or relatives elsewhere during the longer school breaks around Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's, Winter Break, and Spring Break. Others may take advantage of school trips offered. The school's Director of Residential Life and/or Director of the International Program manages travel permission forms with parent permission when students are making long weekend and vacation travel arrangements.

Students who are not able to take advantage of such opportunities continue their housing by the homestay family. The homestay family is welcome to invite their international student to participate in a family outing or vacation; be clear in advance about how much expense the student's family should anticipate. The school is happy to coordinate on the logistics of opportunities available to students.

### **Conflict Resolution**

American family culture strongly encourages face-to-face discussion as a means of resolving conflicts. The homestay family should be sensitive to cultural and language issues when it comes to clarifying a rule or explaining an expectation. Yelling is not appropriate, and physical contact when people are unhappy or angry with each other is to be avoided at all times. Approaches to constructive confrontation are heavily laden with cultural values. For example, an American parent might say to a child, "Look me in the eye"; in another culture, this may be a sign of defiance or disrespect. A student from China, for example, likely will feel ashamed and look down when confronted with a disciplinary situation. The school has resources that can help. Both the student and the student's homestay family

have the resources of the Admission and Counseling Office, the Director of the International Program, the Academic Dean, the Dean of Students, the Director of Residential Life, the School Nurse, and the Director of Admission. The office of the Head of School also acts as a liaison between the homestay family, the student, and the student's family overseas.

In rare cases, a family (homestay or international) may request that a new placement be found. Note that the school does not guarantee that such a placement is possible. All parties will work together to try to resolve situations before such a step is considered.

### **Key Contacts**

Emails at John Bapst are first initial/last name @johnbapst.org. All of the following can be reached at (207) 947-0313. Follow the prompts or enter your party's extension.

#### *Homestay Coordination*

Angela Kearns, Assistant to the Head of School and Homestay Coordinator  
Yue (Louisa) Deng, Director of the International Program  
Dave Armistead, Head of School

#### *School Nurse*

Shyla Waring

#### *Admission*

Beth Campbell, Director of Admission

#### *Academics*

David Armistead, Associate Head of School

#### *Student Life, Discipline, Activities*

Elizabeth Wood, Dean of Students  
Jordan Reeves, Director of Residential Life

#### *Athletics*

Dan O'Connell, Athletic Director

#### *Finances and Insurance*

Bill Meier, Director of Finance and Operations

### **Refer Your Friends**

Since 2011, many wonderful individuals and families have opened their homes to John Bapst international students. Each year, about a quarter of the international population of new and returning students request homestays. If you know someone who would be a good candidate for the Homestay Program, we appreciate your enthusiastic description of the opportunity, and we would be happy to send a program guide and application. Contact Homestay Coordinator Angela Kearns to help us build the roster of homestay families.