

Learning through International Networking for Knowledge and Sharing



LINKS German Student Exchange

Shaping the Future
Through Education
**Gratiot
Isabella
RESD**

History

The 2019-2020 school year is the 20th year that the LINKS German exchange has been in operation. During this time period, over 2,300 German, Gratiot and Isabella County students have participated in the exchange. In 1998, Gratiot County officials visited the northern County of Mecklenburg Vorpommern and set up “sister county status”. This region of northern Germany is about one hour southeast of Hamburg near the Elbe River. From there, a school exchange program was created. Our 2017-2018 exchange included over 70 students and advisors from Gratiot-Isabella Regional Education Service District (GIRESD) area schools.

Rational

The LINKS program provides an educational experience for our local students that impacts and supports school related subject matter. Students are immersed into the German culture, architecture, language and history. This area of northern Germany has an incredible history. Students learn about the monarchy of Germany in the early 1600s to the 1800s, local castles, the Nazi Government/Final Solution, Russian occupation and Iron Curtain, and now their contemporary governmental system. We also know that the experience of this exchange includes traveling abroad, going through customs, shopping in Germany, visiting German cities, and working together for a goal. All the accomplishments of this adventure are important life lessons students value well beyond their high school years.

LINKS Program

The LINKS program sets up a sister school relationship with a GIRESD high school and a high school in the Mecklenburg Vorpommern County. A 2-week German student visitation is scheduled in the fall and a 2-week GIRESD visitation is made in the spring/early summer. German students are matched with local students by the school advisor. The German students then become a valued member of each of our student’s families where they stay during their visit and learn our customs and traditions. Local families will take their German student to local and statewide sites and attractions. The German advisor stays with the local advisor so they can also learn from each other and coordinate their stay. In the spring or early summer, our students stay with the family of their German friend they hosted in the fall. They are embraced into these families and become a member of this family during their experience. Students go to school and learn about school life, as well as presenting to classes in both high school, middle school and elementary levels. Many times these personal relationships are maintained for years after their LINKS experience.

Advisor Role

The LINKS program cannot exist without the dedication of the local school advisor. We are greatly indebted to these people. The advisor selects students to be a part of their cohort. Selection should take into consideration maturity, ongoing student behavior, enthusiasm, etc. Note: hosting families also need to have a private room that the German student sleeps in. Some schools use online criminal background checks to insure a positive environment. Advisors, with help from administration, create a schedule of activities for the German visitation. The advisor provides fundraising activities and communication to parents and school administration. School board presentations at the conclusion of the German visit may be made.



GIRESD Role

GIRESD offers this program to all GIRESD high schools. The GIRESD coordinates both the German fall visit and the GIRESD spring or early summer trip to Germany. The following highlights GIRESD's role:

- Fall German visit
- Facilitate Advisor meeting
- Motor coach pick-up and delivery to and from Detroit Metro Airport
- Tour of State Capitol and Historical Museum (local school bus)
- Alma College (local school bus)
- Spring or early summer Germany trip
- Develop ticket payment schedule
- Purchase tickets
- Motor coach pick-up and delivery to and from Detroit Metro Airport
- Facilitates Advisor/Parent/ Student Meetings
- GIRESD trip escort

Timeline

April

Advisor makes selection of new student cohort

Advisor emails and makes contact with German advisor. Information pertaining to number of students, gender, and student bios are exchanged.

Fundraising and planning on-going

August/September

GIRESD - Fall visitation dates are confirmed

Advisor - Fall visitation schedule of events developed

October

Fall visitation

Spring or Summer Dates confirmed - agreed upon by German and local schools - priority for travel over all or part of our spring break or early June

November/December/January

GIRESD ticket payment schedule - paid in full by February 1

February

GIRESD Advisor/Student/Parent Meeting
Medical and Behavior forms completed and notarized

March or early June

Trip to Germany

Costs

The cost of this program for students and local schools is **very reasonable**. Students only need to pay the cost of the airline ticket (which includes travel insurance) and any spending money. Advisors in most schools coordinate **fundraising activities that pay for most, if not all, of student ticket costs**. Local school boards support this program in various ways. Some pay a stipend to the advisor or some pay for their air fare ticket. Some boards allocate money for school trips, banquets, etc.

School Exchange

Beal City Schools - Hagenow Gymnasium
Fulton/Ashley Schools - Wittenburg Gymnasium
Breckenridge Schools - Ludwigslust Technical
Ithaca Schools - Ludwigslust Gymnasium
Mt. Pleasant Schools - Crevitz Gymnasium
Shepherd Schools - Domitz Gymnasium
St. Louis Schools - Boisenburg Gymnasium

Contact Information:

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