



# PROGRAM HANDBOOK



School District 64 (Gulf Islands)  
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# Fast Facts

## Studying in Canada

1. Canada has one of the best education systems in the world and **ranks in first place in the PISA** scores for English speaking countries.

## Studying in the Gulf Islands International Program

1. Gulf Islands Secondary School has one of the best average class sizes in British Columbia, 21.6 compared to the provincial average of 23.4, with no classes over 27 students. And all science classes have 24 students or less.
3. The **Graduation Rate** at Gulf Islands is 91% - the top performing school district in our region.
4. Students at Gulf Island Secondary School consistently score above the provincial average on the Numeracy and Literacy Graduation Assessments over the past five years.



## Quality of Life

1. Over **95% (98<sup>th</sup> percentile)** of students attending Gulf Islands Secondary School **reported feeling safe** at school. This compares with the provincial average of 75%.
2. **Less than one percent** of the students attending Gulf Islands Secondary School **reported being bullied, picked on, or teased**. This compares to an average of 8.3% for the rest of the province of British Columbia.
3. **97% (100<sup>th</sup> percentile)** of Gulf Islands Secondary School students **reported that they respected other students** who think, look or act differently than they do. 83% of the students in the rest of the province felt the same way.

# Introduction

In 2022, more than 65,200 K-12 students were approved to study in Canada. This represented a remarkable growth of 44% from the previous year and more than double that of 2016. In short, parents have shown more willingness to send their children to Canada for their education now than they had in recent years. This is mainly due to Canada’s educational, lifestyle reputation, PISA and United Nations rankings.

Gulf Islands International Program (School District 64) is dedicated to offering “comprehensive, government-approved curriculum and superior care and support for international students in both school and living environments”.

The Gulf Islands International Program is authorized by Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (DFAIT) and the provinces and territories, through the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC), to proudly use the *Imagine Education au/in Canada brand*, which ensures a commitment

“to providing a wide range of world-class programs and an academic environment that is welcoming, stimulating, and safe.

where tolerance and celebration of cultural and educational diversity are paramount”.

At the provincial level, the Gulf Islands International Program (School District 64) adheres to the principles of the British Columbia Center of International Education (BCCIE), a government sponsored agency that is committed to advancing the international education interests of the province of British Columbia.

The Gulf Islands International Program (School District 64) was one of the founding programs for the International Public School Education Association (IPSEA), a consortium of public-school international programs that encourages and promotes best practices in international education in the Province of British Columbia.



## Why study in Canada?

Every year, Canada welcomes hundreds of thousands of international students from around the globe. When you study in Canada, you invest in your future. Discover the top reasons why you should choose Canada as your international education destination!

### Enjoy our renowned quality of life.

You'll find a high standard of living in Canada. International students benefit from the same rights and freedoms that protect all Canadians: respect for human rights, equality, diversity, and a stable, peaceful society.

Canada ranks in third place globally for the best quality of life ([U.S. News & World Report, 2022](#)).

### Find flexible and high-quality education options.

From elementary to post-secondary studies, Canada is known for offering high quality education and research opportunities. You'll also have the flexibility to transfer between types and levels of education without running into roadblocks common in other parts of the world.

After graduation you'll be able to choose from more than 8,000 college and 16,000 university programs ([Universities Canada, 2022](#); [CICan, 2022](#)). 7 Canadian universities are ranked among the top 200 in the world ([Times Higher Education, 2023](#)).

### Feel welcome in a diverse and inclusive environment.

Canada is an open, safe, and culturally diverse society. You'll feel at home in both our communities and classrooms.

In Canada there are more than 250 ethnic origins along with 200 languages from around the world and 70 Indigenous languages spoken ([Statistics Canada, 2017](#)).

### Experience memorable adventures

Experience the richness of Canadian culture, social life, travel adventures and four seasons. You can choose from urban and rural areas across our [provinces and territories](#). No matter where you live in Canada, you can explore vibrant communities and spectacular landscapes. In Canada you also have a unique opportunity to study in either of Canada's official languages, English or French, from kindergarten through to postgraduate studies.

# Why Study in British Columbia?

## High Quality Public Education in British Columbia

According to the British Columbia Centre for International Education (BCCIE), “More international students are now choosing to study in BC than any other province in Canada. British Columbia cities regularly appear at the top of global rankings for livability and quality of life from sources as prestigious as *The Economist*. Our universities are consistently among the top-ranked institutions in Canada, and our highly integrated education system is a global model for progressive, flexible education. By choosing to study in BC, students will join more than 100,000 students from across the globe who are studying at all levels in our province”.

## Top Reasons to Learn, Live and Play in British Columbia

BCCIE lists the following as top reasons why international students should consider British Columbia as the best choice.

1. **Superior Education:** British Columbia teachers and institutions are ranked among the best in the world and BC is the only province in Canada with a provincial seal of quality for post-secondary education ([Education Quality Assurance](#)). All public-school teachers are certified by the British Columbia College of Teachers and the Provincial Government of British Columbia.

2. **Extraordinary Quality of Life:** British Columbia, with its cosmopolitan cities, vibrant and well-educated rural communities, regional access to post-secondary institutions, lush rainforests, coastal waters and impressive mountains is one of Canada’s most exciting and beautiful provinces. BC is a safe and peaceful place to live and study.
3. **Friendly and Diverse People:** The people of British Columbia are friendly and welcoming. People from many cultures call British Columbia their home, creating a diverse and vibrant society that models Canada’s `cultural mosaic` philosophy.
4. **Mildest Weather in Canada**  
British Columbia has the mildest climate in the country. British Columbia’s southern coastal region offers the mildest winter temperatures in all of Canada.

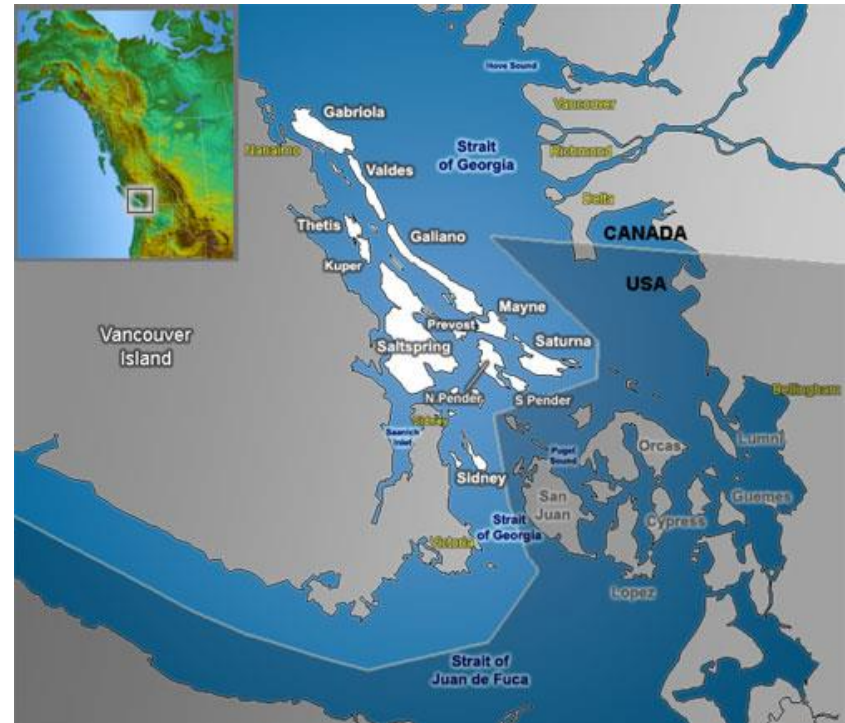


# Why Study in the Gulf Islands?

## A Quality Education and Quality Lifestyle

*“Living on Salt Spring Island was truly a great experience. Being a small island that was full of nature and a tight-knit community of friendly people, Salt Spring was a place where I always felt relaxed, safe and welcome. I learned a great deal about sustainability and the environment from living and spending time outdoors on Salt Spring Island and through the lifestyle of the people on the island - especially through my host family. I lived with a wonderful host family who really welcomed me in as part of their family and exposed me to so many different things. My experience on Salt Spring Island truly sparked my interest in sustainability and that has greatly affected the way I see the world today. Salt Spring, also being a community so enriched by the arts, gave me more motivation to explore my own interest in this area.” Yuko Okamura, Japan*

*After graduating from Gulf Islands Secondary, Yuko studied Architecture at the University of Washington, before entering the Master of Architecture program at the University of British Columbia.*



The Gulf Islands International Education Program is located on scenic Salt Spring Island, the largest of Canada’s famous Gulf Islands. This island community enjoys an ideal location. It is only 30 minutes from the provincial capital city of Victoria yet enjoys the natural beauty of the West Coast of Canada. Well known as a highly educated, creative and professional community, Salt Spring Island also enjoys a reputation for being one of the most desirable places in Canada to live with more sunshine and warmer temperatures year-round than any other place in British Columbia.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Record high °C (°F)	14 (57)	16 (61)	19.5 (67.1)	26 (79)	32 (90)	31.5 (88.7)	31.5 (88.7)	36.5 (97.7)	32 (90)	25.5 (77.9)	16.5 (61.7)	15 (59)	36.5 (97.7)
Average high °C (°F)	5.5 (41.9)	7.3 (45.1)	10.3 (50.5)	13.5 (56.3)	16.9 (62.4)	19.5 (67.1)	22.1 (71.8)	22.3 (72.1)	18.6 (65.5)	13 (55)	7.9 (46.2)	5.3 (41.5)	13.5 (56.3)
Average low °C (°F)	-0.4 (31.3)	0 (32)	1.3 (34.3)	3.1 (37.6)	5.9 (42.6)	8.5 (47.3)	10.3 (50.5)	10.3 (50.5)	7.6 (45.7)	4.4 (39.9)	1.5 (34.7)	-0.2 (31.6)	4.4 (39.9)
Record low °C (°F)	-14 (7)	-13 (9)	-10.5 (13.1)	-3 (27)	-1.5 (29.3)	2.5 (36.5)	3.5 (38.3)	3 (37)	-0.5 (31.1)	-5 (23)	-16 (3)	-17.5 (0.5)	-17.5 (0.5)
Precipitation mm (inches)	150.9 (5.941)	125.1 (4.925)	99.9 (3.933)	67.3 (2.65)	48.9 (1.925)	37.5 (1.476)	22.9 (0.902)	27.6 (1.087)	35 (1.38)	88.5 (3.484)	176.5 (6.949)	148 (5.83)	1,028.2 (40.48)

Although part of the charm of living on the Gulf Islands is being away from the hustle and bustle of the city, the residents of Salt Spring Island enjoy a fast and efficient ferry service to Vancouver, Victoria and Vancouver Island. British Columbia Ferries ([www.bcferrries.ca](http://www.bcferrries.ca)) have numerous sailings to these destinations every day.



Salt Spring Island is well known in North America as a center of the arts. Many of Canada's top writers, performing artists and visual artists choose to make Salt Spring Island their home. Salt Spring Island is also a very professional community and an ideal place to raise a family. The low crime rates and strength of community foster a sense of belonging and security. Many of our international students come from very large cities, yet the island quickly becomes their Canadian home, a place that they never forget.





*“Going to Gulf Islands Secondary School was the best choice of my life. The friendships that I made there will always be a part of my life. Salt Spring Island is my second home, and I will always appreciate the care and support that my host family gave me. I thank my teacher’s and friends for giving me the confidence and skills to go to university. The teachers at Gulf Islands Secondary are the best.” Robin Yin, Hong Kong.*

*Robin is a recent graduate from the University of Toronto and has been working as a research assistant at the university. He is currently pursuing a master’s degree and then will be doing his PhD.”*

The Gulf Islands International Program is truly committed to ethnic diversity and celebrates the synergy that results when young people from around the globe work together to create a better world. The Gulf Islands International Education Program has rapidly become one of the most popular international programs in Canada. The commitment to ethnic diversity, limits on enrolment from any one country, and a combined capacity of 75 students ensures that our international students receive a quality Canadian educational experience in two of the province’s best schools.

The Gulf Islands International Education Program offers a variety of quality high school (grades 8-12) courses, outstanding academic and elective course options, university preparation, intensive English as a Second Language (ESL/ELL) programs, tutor support and vocational programs. As a highly educated, creative and professional community, the Gulf Islands School District recognizes the importance of a quality education and has made the Gulf Islands International Program an educational priority. In the Gulf Islands,

dreams come true and there are no limitations to what you imagine you can do.



Graduates from the Gulf Islands International Program attend some of the most prestigious universities in Canada and the United States, including the University of Victoria, York University, the University of British Columbia, Carleton University, Purdue University, McGill University, Boston University, the University of Iowa, Simon Fraser University, Mount Allison University and the University of Toronto.

*“Every day at Gulf Islands Secondary School was a good memory for me. I learned so much about myself, other cultures and the environment. This experience gave me the confidence and the English and academic skills that I needed to pursue my post-secondary education in Canada”. Max Yaoshishen, China.*

*Max is currently studying at Carleton University on a full scholarship for his first year.*

Given the strong emphasis on intellectual and social development, the Gulf Islands International Program is a natural choice for highly motivated students who value personalized learning and a commitment to academic and personal development. The Gulf Islands International Program recognizes that students from different parts of the world have different reasons for studying in Canada. At the present time, the program hosts three specific ethnic groups: Asian students, European students, and Latin American students. Although there are some overlaps, these students have specific needs and reasons for coming to the Gulf Islands:

- High school graduation and post-secondary transition
- English as a Second Language or French Immersion
- A cultural and educational experience
- A short-term experience at our Pender Island school for Grades 8-10.



Despite these differences, there are several common reasons why studying in the Gulf Islands is an excellent choice.

- Outstanding ESL/ELL, academic and elective programming.
- The majority of our international graduates have successfully transferred to top universities or colleges.
- Safe, supportive school and “green” community.
- Small number of non-English speaking students and members of the community, which ensures a focus on developing English.
- School based administration and homestay program.
- Program where the emphasis is on quality, not quantity.
- Professional post-secondary and career counselling.
- Commitment to the ideals of respect, global awareness and cultural understanding.
- Emphasis on student-centered learning based on the development of 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills and the principles of Personalized Learning

# Programs

## Graduation Program

The Graduation Program is designed for students, who have chosen to study at Gulf Islands Secondary School until they graduate from school and earn the provincial Dogwood Graduation certificate. The majority of these students are enrolled in the program for two or more years. Previous academic transcripts, language and math assessments, and letters of recommendation help determine grade placement, level of language support, and the potential for transfer credit.

Like the Canadian students, the international students are expected to meet all of the graduation requirements as determined by the Ministry of Education of British Columbia. All of the students in this program share the same goal, that is, to successfully make the transition from high school to university or college in Canada, the United States, or perhaps even back at home.

It is important to note that Gulf Islands Secondary School is a comprehensive school serving the educational needs of the students who live in the Gulf Islands. As a comprehensive school, several distinct education programs are offered at the school, including academic, vocational and arts programs. The international students in the Academic Study and Graduation Program enroll in the academic program, but have the option of taking vocational and arts electives, as well as other elective programs.

To help our international students prepare for the transition to post-secondary, the Gulf Islands International Program and the school offer a number of support programs including post-secondary counseling, tutorial support and peer support. The Gulf Islands International Program also has transition partnerships with three Vancouver Island post-secondary institutions: the University of Victoria, Vancouver Island University and Camosun College.



### Focus on Academic Results



### Quality Instruction

Salt Spring Island is one of the most desirable places in Canada to live. Residents enjoy the best of both worlds. They are close enough to the city to get there with relative ease (a short ferry

trip and drive into Victoria or Vancouver), yet far enough away to enjoy the peace and quiet of the beautiful island setting. This relaxed, yet upscale, modern and safe, lifestyle attracts many top educators to the island. The teachers and administrators in School District 64 are among some of the best in the province. The schools boast having certified and well-educated teachers who are student-centered and dedicated to helping their students achieve their personal best.

All the teachers in the Gulf Islands are certified by the Ministry of Education and many of them hold Master of Education degrees and/or relevant industry experience.

### Unique Schedule

In 2004, the Gulf Islands School District 64 adopted an innovative four-day schedule that resulted in the students and teachers spending more time in the classroom four days of the week. Although the school week has been shortened by a day, the total amount of total instructional time per week remains the same. This immersion approach to scheduling has increased student results on provincial assessments, and the Gulf Islands students earn marks well beyond the provincial average on most mandatory government

exams. It has also improved student attendance as students are reluctant to miss any time away from the classroom.

Gulf Island Secondary School has a four-block rotation. These blocks rotate so that each course is offered at a different time of the day each day of the week.

The four-day schedule has proven an added benefit for the international students who are registered in the Gulf Islands International Program. These students have the option of participating in a Friday program that may include the popular Eco-Adventure program, as well as various activities through our International Program or the community offered both on and off the island.



Supplementary and Specialty programs include:

- Gulf Islands School of the Performing Arts, see [Gulf Islands School of Performing Arts \(GISPA\) \(sd64.bc.ca\)](http://sd64.bc.ca)

- French Immersion
- AP Studio Art \*
- SEEC which is the Saturna Ecological Education Centre. SEEC is a publicly funded outdoor school located on Saturna Island in British Columbia. It is part of School District #64. It operates three days a week, with students sleeping over on Saturna during the week.



- Saturna Island Ecological Centre program, see [www.seecsaturna.ca](http://www.seecsaturna.ca)



- Self-Directed Learning (SHIFT)\*
- Team sports such as soccer, volleyball and basketball which can also be taken as courses in Grades 10-12.



\*For more information about courses and programs please see [Course Selection Guide \(sd64.bc.ca\)](https://sd64.bc.ca)

### English as a Second Language and French Immersion

The Gulf Islands International Program offers a unique approach to learning English. Like the French Immersion Program, Gulf Islands Secondary School believes that English is best learned by being immersed in the language. All English as a Second Language (ESL/ELL) students are assigned to regular courses, including academic and elective courses, in addition to their ESL classes.

All new English learners are assessed for English proficiency during the orientation day. Depending on their needs, they are assigned to one of four levels of English as a Second Language. The greater the need, the more ESL/ELL support they will receive. Once they reach Level 4 they will be placed in the regular English program supported by an ESL/ELL block.

In the spirit of personalized learning, new English learners are enrolled in English classes as soon as possible so that they can.



work with local and other international students to perfect their English skills. All of the grade levels pursue the Prescribed Learning Outcomes of the Language Arts 8-12 curriculum that focus on reading, listening to, writing, and speaking English. Under the guidance of the English teacher, often supported by a well-qualified Education Assistant and/or peer coaches, international students work on the development of their English skills in a cooperative learning environment based on the personalized learning strategies for the 21st Century.

Because of the strong focus on English in the school and community, the ESL/ELL students in the Gulf Islands

International Program tend to learn English much faster than students in the larger city programs. The cap on the number of students from each country also results in English being the common language of the international students.

Some international students also choose to earn Peer tutor credit by helping local Canadian students learn the language of the international student.

### Cultural Awareness Education Program

The Cultural Awareness Education Program is particularly appealing to European and Latin American students who wish to learn more about life in Canada while studying in a Canadian school.

Students enrolling in this program generally plan to limit their Canadian educational experience to one term, one semester or one year. Every year about 60% of international students who are registered in the Gulf Islands International Program are enrolled in the Cultural Awareness Education Program. The performing and visual arts programs have attracted many of these international students to Salt Spring Island and the

Gulf Islands International Program. The natural beauty of the island and the recreational opportunities are also motivating factors.



The Cultural Awareness Education Program sometimes appeals to international students who are taking a GAP year before pursuing a post-secondary education. These students find the wide variety of elective programming, the work experience and volunteer programs, the possibilities for academic enrichment, and the supplementary programs that are offered by the program very enticing. It should be noted that to be considered for enrolment in a GAP year a student must be 18 years old or younger at the time of enrolment. The Eco-Adventure program on Fridays is often very popular with the Cultural Awareness students.



### Pender Islands Elementary and Secondary School

The Pender Islands Elementary and Secondary School Program is located on Pender Island, one of the other Southern Gulf Islands in our district besides Salt Spring Island.

As opposed to the defined ESL/ELL support blocks at Gulf Islands Secondary School, Pender Islands Elementary and Secondary School believes in an integrated approach to learning English. International students are totally immersed in a regular program of studies with Canadian students, although they are provided with ongoing ESL/ELL support as necessary and offered tutorials, if requested.



Pender Islands Elementary and Secondary School seeks to implement opportunities for student achievement that recognize diversity, differences in gender, and the unique needs of the students of this age. In addition to a full range of academic programs, the school offers numerous exploratory courses with an emphasis on the fine arts and technology.



The students that are fortunate enough to be enrolled in this program are likely to enjoy both an educational and cultural experience that they will never forget.



## Schools

Gulf Islands Secondary School [Gulf Islands Secondary School \(sd64.bc.ca\)](http://GulfIslandsSecondarySchool(sd64.bc.ca))



The award-winning Gulf Islands Secondary School, which was opened in 1994, boasts a reputation for academic achievement; winning sports teams; outstanding performing and visual art programs, including the Advanced Placement Studio Art and the Gulf Islands School of the Performing Arts programs; and exceptional computer technology programs, including computer animation, media arts, computer programming and computer assisted drafting.



Gulf Islands Secondary School serves the educational needs of 700 local students from Grades 8 to 12. With a capped international student enrolment of 10%, the school currently has a limit of 70 International students from as many as 20 different countries. Gulf Islands Secondary School serves the needs of a diverse population of students. Because it is a comprehensive school some students pursue academic studies, while other students choose to enroll in vocational programs. According to a recent study, about 80% of Gulf Island's graduates pursue an academic program while in high school, while the rest of the students choose vocational or career preparation programs.

While the majority of the students pursue an academic program, given the creative nature of the community and the school, many of these students also enjoy being part of the performing, visual and media arts programs.

Gulf Islands Secondary School is often seen as one of the model schools in the area of Personalized Learning and the teaching of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. British Columbia educators, Ministry of Education personnel, and university students often visit the school for observation purposes.

## Pender Islands Elementary and Secondary School

Pender Islands Elementary and Secondary School is located on Pender Island and has a school population of 130. Students in Grades 1 to 12. The school only accepts a maximum of 3 international students each year. For most students, the international program at Pender Islands Elementary and Secondary School has an English Immersion approach to studying in Canada. International students are placed in age-appropriate grade levels and receive supplementary ESL/ELL and tutoring support as necessary.



## GISPA – The Gulf Island School of Performing Arts

The Gulf Islands School of Performing Arts offers advanced education in Music, Dance and Theatre for students in grades 10-12. A student enrolled in GISPA receives ongoing, comprehensive training, master classes and workshops with visiting professionals, performance opportunities in various showcases and main-stage productions, as well as attending several professional productions and performances in Victoria and Vancouver.

GISPA students are given a unique opportunity. Together, they work on creating an original collective project between all three of our strands: Acting, Music and Dance. This means that our students work together, creating original music, choreography and scene-work geared towards a final year-end production. Collective creation aims to blend all our strengths into a sleek, powerful performance through which our innovation and skill can shine.

Situated on beautiful Salt Spring Island, The Gulf Islands School for Performing Arts is part of an island community with unceasing support for the arts. GISPA is a school within Gulf Islands Secondary School, a small, highly regarded high school renowned for its commitment to its students. GISPA proudly functions in a community so dedicated to theatre and performance.

[Gulf Islands School of Performing Arts \(GISPA\) \(sd64.bc.ca\)](http://sd64.bc.ca)



## Homestay and Medical Insurance

The Gulf Islands International Program is a homestay program and recognizes that a good homestay is essential to a sense of security and belonging. Our program is only as good as its homestays. International students need to feel happy in their homestays in order to thrive in their studies. The Homestay Coordinator is responsible for the homestay program. It is her goal to find the best match possible for all of our international students.

All international students are required to have medical insurance while studying in Canada. The Gulf Islands International Education Program provides a combination of

interim medical insurance and the British Columbia Medical Services Plan for our students, as well as a “top up program” for students staying beyond six months. It should be noted that the British Columbia Medical Services Plan is mandatory for all residents of British Columbia, including international students.

Also offered is an important program called “Stay Healthy at School” which allows students to access counselling, take workshops and ask questions about mental health 24/7 and often, in their native language.

## Mental Health

Recently, we have seen a significant increase in the number of mental health issues with students joining our program. These can be described but not limited to the following:

- Eating disorders (including and not limited to anorexia, bulimia, restrictive diets, excessive exercise)
- Depression (undiagnosed, not using medication)
- Depression (diagnosed, using medication, not using medication)

- Excessive Anxiety
- Self-Injurious Behaviour (including and not limited to cutting, hair pulling, scratching)
- Suicidal thoughts and attempts

We appreciate that as representatives you are requiring parents to disclose all medical and mental health concerns. This information is required on the program application. However, parents who, acting in what they may think is the best interests of their children are not reporting mental health concerns, with the hope that a new environment or chance will provide a “reset” of the issues they are experiencing.

Students struggling with their mental health, even if there has been improvement before departure, are best supported under the supervision of their parents at home in a familiar environment with timely access to professional medical care. We do not know how a new environment away from parents with a new language and culture will affect a young person. Even a student who is making progress can be triggered by the changes they are experiencing.

When a student joins our program and a mental health concern surfaces the onus is on the host family, counsellors

and the medical system to provide support. This support is away from the parents, in a different language and a new cultural environment. Adding to the situation is that the medical system has extremely long waiting times for specialist appointments including and not limited to the access of a child psychiatrist.

Furthermore, students using psychiatric prescription medication often need adjustments in their medication which requires appointments with specialists who may not be readily accessible.

*We must state that students, who have undisclosed concerns or issues around mental health will have to return home to be under the care and supervision of their parents and in a familiar medical system.*

We do not have the resources at school, with host families untrained in mental health issues and in the public medical system to provide the necessary care and treatment for a student who in extreme cases their life may be in jeopardy.

The risk with this policy is that a student in our program with a mental health concern requiring treatment will not seek help. To mitigate these chances, we request that our partners

*confirm and reconfirm* that parents and students understand these conditions and refrain from applying if their child has had or is currently experiencing issues related to mental health.

- **For clarification, temporary homesickness, or sadness due to family events at home (for example the passing of a grandfather), disengagement at school due to disagreements with local friends or host families *are not* mental health issues. These issues can be discussed in confidence with a school counsellor.**

## Cognitive/Developmental Disabilities

Students must disclose any diagnosed or suspected cognitive disabilities or neurodiversity. For example, and not limited to *Dyscalculia, Dyslexia, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).*

It is important that we understand the needs of each of our students to ensure if we can offer the appropriate supports for their success. Acceptance will be based on a case-by-case

basis as we will need to learn more about the diagnosis or suspected cognitive/developmental disability and if our school has the supports in place to accommodate the student's needs.

Students who arrive without disclosing their full diagnosis or suspected cognitive disability will need to return home to be under the care of their parents.

## Authorization of Grades

Some of our international students, most notably from Italy, Brazil and Spain, require an authorized statement of grades and/or a certificate of enrolment. We submit the necessary documents to the appropriate consulates and forward the authorized documents to the students. The process can take up to three weeks to complete. There is an additional charge for validations.

## Application Process

International students can apply online from our website. Click the APPLY tab at [studyinbc.ca](http://studyinbc.ca) to apply.

Activity waivers, which are required before a student can participate in any of the program's recreational activities, can also be downloaded from our website.

In addition to the student's demographic information, we also ask for transcripts of grades for the previous two years of study, a teacher's reference, a collage of personal and family pictures and a letter of introduction that can be used in the selection of an appropriate homestay.

All English as a Second Language (ESL/ELL) students should take the assessment test that will be sent to them once they apply as this will help us determine how many ESL/ELL classes we will need to plan for. It is important that all applicants need to understand that it is our goal to help you reach your educational goals.

## Refund Policy

- A full refund, less application fee of \$400 if the student's application for a Study Permit is rejected by Canadian Immigration. A copy of the letter of rejection must be included with the request for a refund.
- 45% of tuition, if the student withdraws prior to the commencement of the Start Date as posted in Section 16 of the Letter of Acceptance.
- Zero refund of the tuition fee, if the student withdraws at any time between the commencement of studies (defined as the first day of classes) and the end of the first calendar month of the program.
- A refund of prepaid homestay and medical if medical has not been used to date.

*Please ensure that your passport is valid for the duration of your stay.*

## Program Support and Contacts

Please email your questions to: Sheri Wakefield at:  
[swakefield@sd64.org](mailto:swakefield@sd64.org)

## International Student Program Team

Sheri Wakefield [swakefield@sd64.org](mailto:swakefield@sd64.org)

*International Program Managing Director*



Sheri always puts students first and has been working in the International Education program for the Gulf Island School District since the program began in 1999. As Managing Director, she is responsible for the program administration, student enrolment, reporting, programming, and advisement.

She also works closely with all members of the team, including the homestay coordinator and the international counsellor. Sheri is a Certified Executive Coach and has earned a Master of Arts Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies with a concentration of International Communication and Business from Royal Roads University.



Dan Sparanese [dsparanese@sd64.org](mailto:dsparanese@sd64.org)

*District Principal*

Welcome to the Gulf Islands School District International Student Program! My name is Dan Sparanese, and I have been an educator in this wonderful district for 25 years. Currently, I serve as a District Principal. I am thrilled to be part of this exceptional program and can confidently say that our district provides a world-class education in a community that genuinely cares about student success.

We have an amazing team and a network of dedicated homestay families committed to making this an experience of a lifetime. Our supportive and enriching environment ensures that every student can thrive and achieve their fullest potential.

Nia Williams [nwilliams@sd64.org](mailto:nwilliams@sd64.org)

*International Program Counsellor*



Nia Williams is a counsellor working with The Gulf Islands International Program. She received a bachelor's in education from University of Victoria and a master's in leadership and counselling from San Diego State University. Nia loves the West Coast lifestyle and particularly enjoys the wilderness with her family.

She has worked with School District 64 for over fifteen years, and greatly appreciates working in such a vibrant, welcoming learning community. Nia values the curricular and social growth that develops in international students, as they experience new adventures and create new friendships while studying abroad in Canada.

Sue Kernaghan [sue.kernaghan@shaw.ca](mailto:sue.kernaghan@shaw.ca)

*Homestay Coordinator*

Sue joined the Gulf Islands International Student Program (GIISP) as Homestay Coordinator in 2024.

She comes with a decade's experience as a homestay host and a passion for making the international experience the best it can be.

With a Bachelor of Commerce degree from the University of British Columbia, Sue has worked as a writer, researcher and editor in both the UK and Canada. In her spare time, Sue enjoys exploring the island's hiking trails and kayaking on nearby lakes. She is also an active volunteer in the community and is excited about her new role with the Gulf Islands International Program.

Chelsa England [cengland@sd64.org](mailto:cengland@sd64.org)

*International Student Program Assistant*



Chelsa has been with the Gulf Islands School District since 2011. She has worked as both an Elementary and Secondary School Administrative Assistant and spent two years at the School Board Office. As the ISP Assistant, Chelsa helps with communication between the school and students, agents and homestay families. Chelsa assists the ISP team by maintaining documentation, student files and helps to organize trips and activities for our students.

Chelsa is the proud mother of two GISS Graduates. She enjoys cooking, music, time with her family, camping, being outside and hiking with her dog. Chelsa is thrilled to be a part of the International Student Program.



## Additional Resources

### Program Questions and Answers

**Q: Where is the Gulf Islands International Program?**

A: The Gulf Islands International Program is located on beautiful Salt Spring Island, which is the largest of the five Gulf Islands in British Columbia, Canada.

**Q: Won't I feel isolated living on an island?**

A: Absolutely not. Salt Spring Island is one of the most desirable places in Canada to live. It is only a short ferry ride away from Victoria and Vancouver Island. There is also regular ferry service to the city of Vancouver. As the commercial center for the Gulf Islands, Salt Spring enjoys all of the amenities and services that can be found in larger communities. Part of the charm of living on Salt Spring Island is the fact that it is an island. Island life is fun!

**Q: What is special about Salt Spring Island?**

A: Salt Spring Island's reputation as an international center of the arts has contributed to its unique charm. The island has recently become one of Canada's most desirable places to live. Interest in the beautiful, tranquil setting has created a very upscale, highly educated and professional community.

**Q: What is the climate like on Salt Spring Island?**

A: The Gulf Islands enjoy the best climate in Canada. Because the islands are located in the "rain shadow" of Vancouver Island, they receive the least amount of rainfall and enjoy mild temperatures during the winter months. There is always a possibility of a few days of snow each winter.

**Q: What are the schools like?**

A: Both Gulf Islands Secondary School and the Salt Spring Island Middle School enjoy reputations for academic success, winning sports teams, outstanding performing arts and visual arts programs, and technological programs. Our schools are committed to social and human development. The schools actively and consciously promote student participation. The majority of students in the schools are involved in school activities, including sports and the arts. Leadership is a key value. It is our belief that the schools outperform other schools because of this focus on participation.

**Q: What percentage of the international students goes to university or college when they graduate?**

A: While this answer obviously depends on how hard an individual student works, but we are proud that almost all of our international grads have been accepted into post-secondary programs in the past. They universities and colleges in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, the United States and even back home. Over the past three years, all of our international students have eventually entered post-secondary programs.

**Q: Why are your international students so successful?**

A: Part of the answer is our recruitment policy. We look for students who are committed to making the best of their educational opportunities. We also believe that students who are actively involved in their school communities tend to do better academically. We look for students who express a willingness to get involved in some way. As a desirable place to live, Salt Spring draws highly professional and talented teachers. These teachers are committed to working hard on behalf of their students. We also provide our students with a lot of support, both personally and educationally.

**Q: How many students are there in the Gulf Islands International Program?**

A: Both the high school program and the middle school program have capped enrolments. The enrolment cap at Gulf Islands Secondary School, which has 600 Grade 8 – 12 students, is 10% of number of the Canadian students, which means a current cap of 60 international students. We also try to limit the number of students from any one country to 12 students.

**Q: Where do most of your students come from?**

A: The largest number of students come from Germany, Japan, Brazil and Mexico, with smaller numbers coming from China, Korea, Switzerland, South America, Austria, Slovakia, Italy, Spain, Sweden and Norway to name a few. We currently have 20 countries represented.

**Q: How do I apply to the Gulf Islands International Program?**

A: The first step is doing some research. Is this the program that you are looking for? Our program is somewhat unique. We are looking for students who are willing to work hard and get involved in our schools and community. Although it is relatively easy to go shopping in Victoria on the weekends, if you prefer shopping malls to being part of a school community, our program might not appeal to you. It is important to note, however, that the majority of our international students come from very large cities, but once they become accustomed to life on Salt Spring Island, they are often reluctant to leave it. Most students come back to visit. Once you think the Gulf Islands International Program might be for you, you can apply online on our website. Please see the Apply tab at

[www.studyinbc.ca](http://www.studyinbc.ca). Please take care in providing us with as much information as possible. We need transcripts for two reasons. We need to assess your academic strengths and weaknesses. They also help us determine course placements and support levels. Successful applicants will be issued a Letter of Acceptance and a Custodial Letter, which states that we will be responsible for you during your studies in the Gulf Islands International Program. These documents will need to be presented to the Immigration officials who will be reviewing your application for a Study Permit.

**Q: Do all students need a Study Permit?**

A: Technically no. Students who plan to study in Canada for less than six months are not legally required to have a Study Permit. It is our policy, however, that all students are required to apply for a Study Permit. It has been our experience that many of our one semester students decide that they would like to stay longer. It is expensive and challenging to apply for a Study Permit from within Canada. It is also not possible to apply for B.C. medical coverage without a Study Permit.

**Q: Do I need to take ESL/ELL?**

A: This really depends on your language proficiency and your reason for studying in the Gulf Islands International Program. You will be asked to complete an online language assessment after you have applied to the program. We offer four levels of ESL support, including Introductory ESL/ELL, Advanced ESL/ELL, Composition 11 and Advanced Writing/Composition 12. Advanced Writing/Composition 12 is the prerequisite to English 10. It should be noted that most European students do not require ESL/ELL support.

**Q. The Gulf Islands School District adopted a four-day week several years ago. Shouldn't I be worried that I will miss a lot of instructional time in the classroom?**

A. No. The total number of instructional hours is mandated by the Ministry of Education in British Columbia. In fact, the international students registered in a Graduation program actually have more instructional time. We offer these students a fifth-day program that could include English and ESL/ELL seminars, Math tutorials, homework assistance.

**Q: Are there any other activities available to international students on the fifth day?**

A. Yes. Many of the sports programs have their practices on the fifth day. Many of the Gulf Islands School of Performing Arts activities and work experience programs are scheduled for the fifth day. The Gulf Islands International Program offers a number of special events, such as field trips, ski trips, outdoor recreational activities, and artist workshops on the fifth day. In addition, many of the community activities are scheduled for this day. Some students like to use this time to visit Vancouver or Victoria. We are also the very popular Eco-Adventure Program.

Q: Do these extended activities cost extra?

A: Some do and some don't. Most recreational activities have a cost associated with them. The Gulf Islands International Program also offers a weekend trip to Whistler and an overnight trip to Vancouver. The cost of these excursions are based on cost recovery only. The Gulf Islands School of the Performing Arts is a separate program with their own tuition fees. Please the GISPA website for more information. The Advanced Placement Art program is subsidized by the Gulf Islands International Program so there is no direct cost to the student. There are no costs for the English or ESL/ELL seminars, Math tutorials or homework assistance program.

## Homestay Questions and Answers



### Q: How are homestays selected?

A: We believe that homestay is the most important part of your stay in Canada. The Homestay Coordinator, who is responsible for the homestay program, works hard to find you a suitable host family. We have many excellent host families to choose from and our Homestay Coordinator will try to find the family that best suits your requirements.

### Q: How do I ensure that I get the type of family that I am looking for?

A: We do our best to match each student with the “right” family. To help us do this, we ask you to provide us with as much information as possible about yourself and what you are expecting from a host family. Are you looking for a big family with many children who will give you lots of attention or are you looking for a more private experience? Do you like to play sports? Do you like pets? What are your hobbies? Answering these questions can really help us find the best possible family for you.

When applying for the school and our homestay program please feel free to tell us as much as possible about yourself!

Q: I am afraid of dogs. What if my family has a dog?

A: If we know in advance that you do not like dogs – you will not be placed in a home with dogs. Also, before you arrive you will be told of any pets that are in the home; you can notify us then and we will find you another home.

Q: Are any checks conducted to ensure my safety?

A: Yes. The Homestay Coordinator meets with the families before they are accepted. A criminal record check by the RCMP is a requirement as well as a home inspection. The Homestay Coordinator also meets with the student during the year to make sure they are happy and feeling safe and comfortable in their home. Salt Spring is also a community in which we all look out for one another— every student should feel safe here.

Q: Do I pay my homestay family?

A: You pay the program, and we pay the homestay for you.

Q: Will I have my own room?

A: Yes. You will have a private bedroom.

Q: What does my monthly homestay fee include?

A: Your monthly homestay fee pays for room and board. You will be given a private bedroom with a door. You will be also given three meals daily. The homestay also provides or arranges transportation to school and activities as well as help with the student's arrival and departure.

Q: What should I expect to have in my room?

A: The bedroom will contain a bed, dresser, closet space, desk and lamp. Again each house is different, but you can expect to have a room in which you feel comfortable to sleep and study. That means your room will be clean, private and have a bed and small study area.

Q: Will I be expected to do chores?

A: To feel as though you are part of the family, it is suggested that you help out with minor chores. You would only do what other children in the family may do and it should never interfere with your studies. This is different with every homestay and is something that will be discussed upon your arrival. The families only want you to feel comfortable and so would never ask you to do something



that you would not want to do. Keeping your room tidy, cleaning your share of the bathroom and washing up after you use the dishes are examples of what is commonly expected of students.

**Q: What is Canadian food like?**

A: Canada is a multicultural country and that is reflected in the food choices of many of our homes. The food you eat in Canada will most likely be quite different from what you eat in your home country. Every host family is different but you can probably expect the following:

Breakfast – cereal with milk, toast, juice and coffee or tea are standard. On the weekends, breakfast may be bigger and include eggs, waffles, pancakes, or bacon.

Lunch – most students pack their own lunch for school. Lunch usually includes a sandwich, a drink, some fruit and snacks like cookies.

Dinner — A family will often serve Italian one night, then Mexican, German, British, East Indian or Asian foods on the other nights. British Columbia is on the coast and so fish and seafood are always fresh. Beef and chicken are also common and all types of produce are available year round.

**Q: What do I do if I don't like the food?**

A: Talk to the family or if you are uncomfortable with that suggestion then talk with the homestay coordinator. She is there to help you and will find a way to explain to your homestay that you do not like the food in a way that will not hurt anyone's feelings.

**Q: Will the host family drive me to school, to school events, or to visit friends?**

A: The host family is required to drive you to school and school events or to help you catch the school bus. They will drive you to places you need to go — such as friend's homes and sporting events. Please understand that your homestay is not a taxi service though and you need to make sure it is convenient for them to drive you — if you give them enough notice it should never be a problem.

Q: If my host family invites me to go with them on a family outing will I be expected to pay for myself?

A: No, if it is a family outing then you are to be included. If it is to travel somewhere where there are large travel costs involved (such as a trip to Hawaii) then you are to help pay OR you can stay with a friend or a temporary homestay for no added cost. This would be your choice and you would never be required to pay for a trip unless you wanted to go.

Q: What happens if I need to see a doctor or dentist?

A: We have a doctor who will see you immediately and either your homestay or the homestay coordinator can set up an appointment for you or take you to the hospital if it is an emergency. Your medical fees cover this cost. If you need to see a dentist – the same applies except that your medical fees do not always cover this cost — you may have to pay for any dental work. It is suggested that you should go for a dental visit before coming to Canada.

Q: Do I need to have the British Columbia medical coverage?

A: All students, especially those in a graduation program, are required to have B.C. medical coverage. By law, any one who resides in British Columbia for six months or more must have provincial medical coverage.

Q: What services are covered by the British Columbia Medical Services Plan (MSP)?

A: Please see <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/msp/bc-residents/benefits> for complete details.

Q: According to the Health Services website site, an international student is expected to have interim medical insurance until they qualify for the British Columbia Medical Services Plan. Does the Gulf Islands International Program provide this interim medical coverage and what does it cover?

A: Yes, we provide interim coverage until the qualifying period is over. For more details of the interim coverage, go to [Home | Study Insured](#) for more information.

Q. Can I expect to have a phone line, internet connection or television connection in my room?

A. Your homestay will provide basic internet access, but not a phone line or television. The costs for these items and a higher speed internet connection are beyond the fee you pay for homestay and if you request them you may have to pay towards it.

Q: I think I will be quite nervous about living with a new family. What can I expect to experience as I adjust to the family?

A. The first few weeks of living in a new country with a new family, will at times, be difficult for some. You may feel homesick and frustrated with your new environment and language. This is natural. Give yourself time to adjust to your new surroundings. You may

go through what is called “culture shock”. If this happens it is best if you participate with the host family as much as possible. Also - feel free to talk with the Homestay Coordinator or the school’s counseling staff or peer counselors about what you are going through — they are there to help you.

**Q: What tips can you give me to help me make the most of my homestay experience?**

A: Communication, consideration and tolerance are the three most important things for a successful homestay experience. After all, cultural differences are just that – differences. Try to interact as much as possible with the family. Show them pictures of your home and family so they can get to know you better and ask them lots of questions. Homestays are always happy to help and they know they are vital in helping you understand our Canadian culture.

**Q: Who are Homestay families?**

A: Canada is a multicultural country made up of people from all over the world. There is wide variety among Canadian families, with different jobs, interests and ethnic backgrounds. Some Canadian families consist of a mother, father and children. There are also single parents with or without children, couples with no children, families with pets, and older, retired people who enjoy the company of international students.

**Q: Is my host family responsible for all my meals or will I be expected to make my own meals?**

A: This is something that you and your host family can discuss at the beginning of your stay as some students do like to do some cooking. The homestays are ready to prepare your breakfasts and dinners for you and to help you make up your lunch for school. Most students do put their own lunches together and often make their own breakfasts in the mornings as well. It is up to the individual and what they are comfortable with.

**Q: What do I do if I am unhappy in my homestay?**

A: The first step is to discuss the problem with your family and then the Homestay Coordinators, who are school based. We strongly believe that our students need to feel secure in their homestays if we expect them to succeed in school. The Homestay Coordinators will help mediate the process. Sometimes it is nothing more than a simple misunderstanding or a personality conflict. Every effort is made to match you with a Canadian family that is suited to your personality and lifestyle. Both students and families must realize that they are dealing with a new culture and both may need to make some compromises. Even if you are matched with a family that is different from what you expected, the homestay experience can be great. In unusual circumstances it may be necessary to move you to a new homestay.

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### Gulf Islands International Program Video

Please see [Salt Spring Island - Gulf Islands International Program \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

# We look forward to meeting you in the Gulf Islands!