



Information for School Teams

Cultural Information for Students from Ukraine

What is school like in Ukraine?

The Ukrainian educational system is organized into five levels: preschool (for children from three to six years of age), primary (first to fourth grade), basic secondary (fifth to ninth grade), upper secondary (tenth to twelfth grade) and postgraduate education. Since September 2018, 12-year secondary education replaced 11-year which was mandatory before that. As a rule, schooling begins at the age of 6, unless your birthday is on or after September first.

The objective of general schooling is to give younger students knowledge of the arts and sciences and teach them how to use it practically. The middle school curriculum includes classes in the Ukrainian language, Ukrainian literature, a foreign language, world literature, Ukrainian history, world history, geography, algebra, geometry, biology, chemistry, physics, physical education, music, and art. At some schools, students also take environment and civics classes.

Students attend each class only once or twice a week. Ukrainian schools use a 12-point scale: 1-3 - unsatisfactory; 4-6 - satisfactory; 7-9 - good; 10-12 - excellent. The school year lasts from September first to June first and is divided into quarters. There are four vacations: a week in early November, two weeks for the New Year holidays, a week at the end of March, and two to three months in the summer. School is held five days a week, classes last from 35 to 45 minutes. The intervals between them are from 5 to 25 minutes.

There are rarely school transfers, usually the whole schooling is done in one place. It means students from 1 to 12 grades study in the same school building. There are "teachers of the primary classes" which are from 1 to 4 grades, and then there are subject teachers for all other classes. Children cannot choose subjects they want to learn - everybody has the same curriculum. Children have set classes throughout the school. This means from grade 1 till grade 12 they are always at all lessons with the same other 30 or so children. They attend the same classes; they are stuck together for 12 years. Therefore, Ukrainian 'secondary school' children form very strong and close bonds with classmates.

Greetings

- Добрий день! [dobryi den'] – Hello! (formal)
- Добридень! [dobryden'] – Hello! (Shorten form of “добрий день”)
- Доброго ранку! [dobroho ranku] – Good morning!
- Привіт! [pryvit] – Hi! (informal)
- Ласкаво просимо! [laskavo prosymo] – Welcome!
- Вітаю! / Вітаємо! [vitaju / vitajemo] – Welcome! / Greetings! / Congratulations!

Important Cultural & Religious Observances

Religion in Ukraine is diverse, with most of the population adhering to Christianity. The dominant religion in the country is Orthodox Christianity. There are also a significant and growing number of Jews, Protestants and Muslims.

Ukrainians are extremely generous and hospitable. All social occasions include food. Visitors are always offered something to eat as well as a beverage. It is considered the height of rudeness to eat in front of another person and not offer them something.

The typical greeting is a warm, firm handshake, maintaining direct eye contact, and repeating your name. In schools, students refer to their teachers by their first name and middle name, which is a patronymic, or a version of the father’s first name formed by adding “-vich” or “-ovich” for a male and “-avna”, “-ovna”, or “ivna” for a female. For instance, the son of Alexi would have a patronymic of Alexivich while the daughter’s patronymic would be Alexivina.

Ukrainians exchange gifts with family and close friends on birthdays and the Orthodox Christmas. If you are invited to a Ukrainian home for a meal, it is polite to bring something such as a cake, flowers, or a small present for a child. Flowers should only be given in odd numbers and some people believe that yellow flowers bring bad luck. Gifts are generally not opened when received.

Tips for Communicating with the Student’s Family

A good way of addressing potential breakdowns of communication with families arriving from Ukraine is to make it clear that the learning environment is a safe space in which everyone is allowed to express themselves freely. This means that everybody is expected to be open and to show respect towards others, and to be aware that differences, including differences in the ability to use language, are normal and can be overcome with patience and help. In general terms, respect families’ privacy by not asking detailed questions about their family, their home in Ukraine, their journey to Canada etc.

All school staff, especially teachers, need to pay special attention to the vulnerable emotional state of children arriving from Ukraine and their pre-arrival traumatic experience. It is important to avoid discussing topics that may distress these children or make them feel uncomfortable in class. Different children behave differently: one child may talk about his or her life in Ukraine or recent experiences, but this does not mean that all children will want to do the same.

In Ukrainian schools students expect teachers to correct their mistakes because teachers are seen as experts. However, frequent correction may result in children losing confidence and keeping quiet to avoid making mistakes. It is important to strengthen their self-confidence by showing them that they can communicate successfully in the new language even if they make mistakes.