

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update (05/03/20)

The district youth exchange committee has had several meetings on COVID-19 and the impact it is having on the lives of our Youth Exchange family. We have heard questions and concerns from many students, families, clubs, and Rotarians. Many are worried about finances. Without a vaccine, there are questions about when any of us will be able to travel. We are all anxiously awaiting positive news and direction from our health authorities and governments, that will guide us toward a return to our new 'normal' habits and livelihoods. These concerns are not being taken lightly by the district youth exchange committee as we investigate the options which are available for the program as we head into the 2020-21 Rotary year.

As a district, we have canceled the short-term summer exchange program (STEP) for 2020 as the departure dates would have been too early. The students, families, and clubs involved in this program have all been informed. We will, of course, welcome these students back again next year, if they are interested and fall within the age requirements.

We have set May 31st as a deadline to make a decision about whether it is safe to send students on long term (LTEP) academic year exchanges as planned. We feel that by the end of May we will have the information we need to make an informed decision. A variety of options are being considered and the decision will be based on many factors. If the virus outlook and travel restrictions suggest that it would not be prudent to send and receive students for a full year, we will then review whether alternative programs might be possible. This could include one semester exchanges, summer exchanges, or a complete suspension of the program for a year.

The youth exchange program is a complex one that involves a partnership comprised of many individuals, clubs, school districts, and governments. Members of our district youth exchange team are in regular contact with the students, families, clubs and our global partners to get feedback and commentary on what they are experiencing and planning. We are working in concert with Rotarians worldwide to ensure open communication while protecting our youth.

We want to ensure that this important peacebuilding program will not only survive but will thrive post-COVID-19. Our update on the Long Term Program for 2020-21 will be communicated and posted here on May 31.

If you are a current or future exchange student and you have any questions, we encourage you to reach out to your Country Officer. If you have general questions about the program please contact the Rotary Youth Exchange Chair for 2020-21, Mike Cloutier.

Links to our email addresses can be found here: <https://rye5020.org/100792/Page/Show?ClassCode=Page&Slug=district-committee>

On behalf of the District 5020 Youth Exchange Committee, thank you for your commitment to Rotary Youth Exchange!