

Information & tools for abrupt relocations

A WORLD OF CHOICE

School Choice
International



Articles for Families

Minimizing child challenges when repatriation is abrupt

How does an abrupt repatriation affect your kids? How will it affect their schooling and emotional well being?

The Social Experience

It is commonly known that repatriation is difficult. Repatriation for children may be as hard, if not harder, than it is for adults. Just as for their parents, children have changed as a result of their time abroad, and so have their friends back home. Fitting in with the old group isn't easy and, in fact, may not be possible.

Expectations of the return home are typically high. For many children, the entire assignment has been spent waiting for this date. Invariably, hopes are shattered, and the former community doesn't meet a child's expectations.

The Academic Experience

Among children who repatriate, whether or not they return to their previous town or city, curriculum rarely matches, courses may be taught in a different sequence and students may find that they lack prerequisites for classes they are about to take.

Other children find that they have already read the books on their reading list, or may be ahead in their foreign language. Teachers may feel threatened by their advanced levels of knowledge or simply may not know how to teach a child who is out of step with his or her classmates. For high school students, meeting exit requirements for graduation may not be possible or may require significant negotiation or manipulation.

The Current Climate

In addition to the typical challenges that repatriating children face, children moved home abruptly may have a more difficult time getting into private or specialized public schools that do not offer mid-year admissions.

They may not have the ability to participate on sports teams or in plays or musical groups because these roles already have been filled. They may lack knowledge or prerequisites to thrive in classes in a different country where a different curriculum is studied.

Even able children who may succeed without a foundation in a given subject may not be allowed to enter a class mid-year if placement testing is required. Time is a luxury that sudden repatriations do not permit.

Got to Go, What to Know

Tips for Emotional Departure Success:

- Say goodbye well
- Take lots of pictures
- Revisit favorite places
- Get all important email addresses
- Have a party

Tips for Academic Departure Success:

- Identify key supporters at school and obtain contact details
- Take hard copies of transcripts and know how to obtain soft copies
- Ask school to write up basis for grading if appropriate
- Get teacher recommendations
- Talk to teachers about types of school where child would thrive in their new home
- Bring a description of curriculum by subject
- Gather awards, certificates, or physical evidence of qualifications achieved
- Bring medical certificates in hand luggage

Tips for Academic Success on Arrival:

- Have any documents translated
- Find out health requirements for the new school, and plan for a medical exam in the new home
- Understand age/grade relationships as well as schoolwork/grade relationships
- Discuss relative merits of age vs. schoolwork for grade placement with head of school
- Understand the curriculum
- Learn the application process and deadlines
- Be an advocate for your child about entering sports and other extracurricular programs mid-year

Most of all, parents must understand and take the time to explain to their children that they have done nothing to cause the premature move. Children have to be able to save face in front of their friends.

Families might want to develop a script explaining the circumstances that have affected the family and letting their children know that the situation will be resolved.

*Written by Elizabeth Perelstein, President and Founder of School Choice International
www.schoolchoiceintl.com. This article is also featured online at www.expatica.com.*



International School or Local School: A Complex Decision

International School or Local School? This article is designed to shed some light on the decision.

Understand the Alternatives:

International Schools

International schools originally were founded to serve expatriate populations. Many of the early international schools were founded as a result of a foreign state department or military presence in a country. In today's global economy, demand from multinational corporations has vastly increased the number of international schools in destinations where these companies have a significant presence. In some cases groups of companies joined together to start a school. Most commonly demand for international education led to founding an international school by a third party – sometimes a “not-for-profit” and other times a “for-profit” entity.

International school instruction may be offered in a language other than that of the host country. They also offer choices for families who prefer curriculum and/or school-leaving qualifications not available through the local school system. International schools were created in response to expatriate families' desire to preserve their home culture as well as a concern for the ability of their children educated abroad to repatriate and resume entry into their home educational system. International schools also provide a built-in community for expatriates and therefore typically extracurricular activities and events are available every day of the week.

International schools can be defined by their curriculum: they either offer a national curriculum other than that of the host nation, and/or they teach a specifically international curriculum such as the International Baccalaureate. While they cater to international families for the most part, during the economic downturn many international schools survived by accepting local students. Therefore schools that boasted an international demographic composition until recently may now have limited space for international students as the local population is more stable than the former mobile population. In cases where demographics have changed substantially, the character of the school may have changed as well. Therefore it is wise for parents to inquire about the relative mix between local and international students if they are deliberately choosing an international school for the diversity it offers.

Local Schools

Language is the obstacle most commonly thought of when a family evaluates local schools as an alternative for their children. But integrating families into a local educational system

where culture, goals, philosophies and teaching methods are new suggests complexity beyond language and requires a different type of preparation on the part of the family.

Parents selecting local schools should be thinking about issues as mundane as the calendar of the school year (will they be able to coordinate their home leave), the length of school day (do they need childcare in the afternoons), lunch (is the local custom to expect children to eat everything on their plate), homework customs as well as parental involvement, which differ widely between cultures. In addition, parents can be confident that an international school community can open up an entirely new life for them while living abroad. Does the local school provide a network of welcoming parents?

While financial considerations and an interest in fostering global competency have stimulated a new level of interest in local schools among internationally mobile families, even these parents can be quite uneasy about relocating with children unless and until they understand the local educational system and curriculum differences in their new country.

Consider these facts:

1. Some local schools in India consider handwriting so important that teachers may not consider content if handwriting falls short of expectations.
2. A study by the University of New Hampshire indicates in many European countries, parental involvement is not permitted.
3. In some countries, schools “stream” students into tracks as early as 12 years old, and this could affect the ability to gain admission to universities in other countries. Admissions decisions based on an “entry examination” or prerequisites make this a clear challenge for those who do not have the language or curriculum background.
4. Religious education is a fundamental part of national curriculum in many countries, such as Ireland. This may meet an unenthusiastic response from families not accustomed to such arrangements or those that practice a different religion. And, even if considered acceptable, students may not have the religious background to fit in.
5. Special education is handled in varied ways throughout the world, from mainstream educational options in the United States, to China, where few schools have an open-minded approach, and few teachers are taught to teach children with learning or other disabilities.

Tips for Success:

Here is a short checklist that companies and their assignees with children may find helpful in examining educational options before any overseas assignment, as well as before their eventual return home:

1. Allow time and provide assistance for families to review the curriculum of schools in the host country, and discuss it with teachers back home. Identifying specific areas where a child may be ahead or behind enables parents and schools to put in place supplemental programs to assist children in entry as well as re-entry.

2. Provide opportunity for students to become proficient in reading and writing as well as speaking of the new language well before the move; in fact, as soon as the move is announced is best.
3. Recommend that families bring along books, course outlines and any other available materials so that they can, if desired, maintain academic skills that children are missing while abroad.
4. Suggest that families learn the exit requirements for schools in the home country well before leaving an overseas assignment. These, in particular, will determine curriculum areas that a child may wish to continue to study while abroad. Consider supplemental or alternative education to ease the transition for children, particularly at key grade levels. These may include tutoring, on-line courses, summer school, home schooling or boarding schools.
5. If re-entry at a particular grade will be totally incompatible, is it possible for the employee or the family to repatriate either a year earlier or later, as appropriate to facilitate the transition?
6. Engage a professional who understands discrepancies in curriculum as well as culture to recommend individualized support so that students can be prepared before returning home.

There is no doubt that the experience of attending a local school and learning first-hand about a different culture can't be surpassed. Families who have overcome these obstacles and successfully educated their children in local schools find the rewards to be significant. Children truly learn new languages, cultures and curricular subjects and enjoy an unprecedented window into the customs of a different country. As schools are a microcosm of the cultures they inhabit, children raised in local schools abroad can be our true ambassadors in the global world of the next generation. However, children who have attended local schools in remote areas may be unprepared to attend school back home or even to know the process for enrolling in university in their home country.

Parents should understand that whether the child attends international or local school abroad, repatriation always is difficult. Even international schools of the child's home nationality vary the curriculum, offer courses in different sequences, offer different foreign languages and certainly promote different viewpoints when teaching history.

When considering local as well as international schools for a child during an overseas assignment, be sure to pay careful attention to home and host country requirements before the assignment begins. The steps indicated above are offered to make for a softer landing.

Source: [School Choice International](#)



Moving With Children: Which are the Top Ten Schools?

Relocating families often rely on friends, colleagues and the internet when they face the daunting task of finding the right school for their child in a new location. In the

frenzy of things they need to accomplish in order to actually move, numbers or statistics are a reasonable proxy for quality – or at least the easiest one that is available. In some places, schools, both public and private, are ranked on a national level. In others, only the public sector may be ranked and comparison may only be possible state-wide rather than at the national level. And then there are many locations where private, fee-paying, schools simply do not allow themselves to be evaluated. So at best, relocating families using rankings to identify suitable schools will find only a percentage of those actually available.

Anyone who understands children or child development is aware that **not every child thrives in the same academic environment**. Despite this obvious point, even under stable circumstances, well intentioned but impressionable parents use every tool in their arsenal to “get their children in” to the schools that someone has identified as “top” or “best.” The sad result has been revealed to me in countless conversations with private school admissions officers and psychologists: **“getting in” isn’t enough**. Children pushed beyond their capacity – either intellectual or emotional, are those who fail, get counseled out, or who inevitably suffer from low self-esteem. Often they are subjected to daily tutoring rather than using the hours after school to play with friends, participate in sport, or learn music or ballet.

The debate around rankings centers on the tension between accountability, which most consumers of education agree is worthwhile, versus the ability of statistics to accurately capture what a school, is about – particularly as it is a “people” business. When numbers refer to class size or teacher/student ratio, there is little doubt that small classes, individualized attention and ready access to faculty provide students with unparalleled opportunities. But in some instances rankings rely on **university admissions – a criterion which is imperfect**, at best. Are university admissions determined by high test scores or rigorous curriculum? Are they a function of which schools the kids attend or how they perform? Or are students admitted based on family connections, monetary donations or other measures that a new parent seeking a school for his/her child may not be aware of?

Unfortunately, parents and students take lists of “top” schools very literally; **they reinforce the natural insecurity in human nature and encourage parents to focus exclusively on the name brand. For families in transition, there may be few other mechanisms to determine quality.** Do facilities matter? Do children need – or even benefit from – country

club like campuses? Should parents be looking at access to facilities rather than grounds and equipment per se? Who gets to play on the 15 tennis courts or the eight lane competition swimming pool or the golf course? Will their child have that opportunity? Do these schools use their lavish facilities to teach sportsmanship or to win? Is the risk-taking behavior and self-confidence encouraged by favorable teacher/student ratios undercut by the exclusivity and competitive spirit that characterize some of these schools?

Parents need to ask the right questions to assess whether a particular school is right for their children. And the right list of questions depends on the child, his or her background as well as personal qualities – not on factors intrinsic to the school alone. For families on the move it may be desirable to get objective assistance to help make a school selection for their child that is right for today, as well as for tomorrow.

Tools For Finding New Schools

Knowing Your Child

Your goal is to select the school where

your child will do his/her best,

and have a fulfilling and challenging experience.

You will find that you are uniquely positioned to do this once you have evaluated the schooling customs and system in your destination country, and have compared the curriculum and assessments with those of your child's educational program at home.

At School Choice International, we believe that in order to find the right match, the process *must* begin with the child and family, rather than the names of schools. By acknowledging your child, his or her strengths and weaknesses, including those that are academic, social and emotional, as well as her/his style of learning, you can narrow your school list to consider only those that are an appropriate placement, saving you valuable time and energy.

The following set of exercises will enable you to begin the school search process on the front foot, knowing what you are looking for, and easily eliminating those schools that would not make sense for your child or family.

In 12 years of placing children in the schools that fit them best,

we have found that what parents **think** they are looking for at the outset of a search,

is seldom what they really are concerned about!

An initial list of criteria set forth by parents may look something like this:

1. Presence of corporate peers' children
2. Rank
3. Prestigious university acceptances
4. Reputation
5. Facility
6. Challenge
7. Location
8. Curriculum

At the end of the process that we suggest below, (including fun worksheets) you will find that you, as parents, will have a much more personal set of characteristics that you are seeking, which are tailored to your individual child and your unique family needs. The pages that follow will enable you to identify the critical lines in the sand for you and your

child. By keeping your key criteria in mind, and using the questions and templates provided in this booklet, you will find that schools reveal their overall missions, philosophies, learning strategies, and also their more specific programs and practices to parents who ask specific and pointed questions.

Worksheets

Your Concerns

You learn that you are moving to a new location and you have children. You have to find and enroll them in schools by the time you arrive.

What are your top concerns?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Who Is Your Child?

1. **Socially:** _____

2. **Emotionally:** _____

3. **Academically:** _____

4. **Special Needs: (does s/he have special needs, including giftedness?)** _____



5. **Interests, special talents:** _____

6. **Does s/he engage in activities to support these interests? If so, describe:** _____

7. **Based on the above, describe his/her ideal school:** _____

Family Values:

Name your top 3 family values when it comes to your child's schooling:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Are there logistical factors that play a significant role in your school choice?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Do you have any other issues or concerns that you feel should be taken into account in choosing the best school for your child?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Revised List of Critical School Attributes:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Questions to Help You Identify the Right School for your Child

Evaluate the Schools

- How would you describe a school that would suit your child(ren)? In what ways does the school you are visiting echo your feelings of what is right for him/her? In which ways might this school be less than ideal for your child(ren)?
- Are there features of the school that you really like? What are they?
- Are there features of the school that make you uncomfortable? If so, what are they?
- Is there something pushing you to make this choice even if it does not feel comfortable?
- Have you viewed and thought enough about the other available educational systems to comfortably rule them out? What would the logistics of your life look like if you send your children to each of these schools? Could you live with them?
- How will this curriculum help your child in the next stages of school and life?
- How do the children look at the school – happy, engaged, and active, disciplined?
- How do the teachers look – interesting, animated, hands-on?
- Is the classroom environment stimulating, overfull?
- Do the teachers have the time and means to address the learning and emotional needs of each child regardless of ability level? Are there specific programs in place to differentiate instruction according to individual need?

Ask the Schools

Academic

- What kind of testing will the children undergo? Subjects? Length of the test? On arrival or at their current school?
- How will my child(ren) be challenged academically?
- What kind of additional help will be offered if my child is struggling in some area?
- What percentage of students receives after-school academic tutoring?
- How does the school provide feedback once the child is enrolled? Report cards, progress reports, parent teacher conferences, other communication channels?
- How are individual differences among children handled? Children who need extra help? Children who need extra challenge? Other?
- What foreign languages are offered, beginning at what grade level, and what method of instruction is used?
- What method is used for teaching mathematics and given my child's background, how would he/she be brought up to speed or challenged?
- What reading program is offered?
- In what grade do you begin homework, and what are your homework expectations in terms of time commitment going forward? What do you hope to accomplish in terms of homework?
- Does the high school follow the AP/IB curriculum? If so, what courses are taught at the AP level? If not, what kinds of challenging courses are offered in their place?

- Is interdisciplinary instruction used in high school? To what end, and how is it implemented?

Transitioning

- How have other children who have joined your school mid-year been assimilated by other children and teachers?
- What special provisions been made to bring those children up to the level of your school work?
- Is a new child able to join sports teams or dramatic productions already in progress?

School Population

- What kind of child thrives here?
- What kind of child struggles here?
- How many nationalities/ethnicities are enrolled?
- Does one nationality/ethnicity dominate the student population?
- What is the school's policy on diversity and how do you encourage relationships among children of different backgrounds, and appreciation for each other's heritage and beliefs?

Community

- What is the nature and extent of parental involvement?
- How do students address teachers (formality)?
- What are the school rules?
- What is your philosophy on disciplining students?
- Is there a religious affiliation? How is it demonstrated and how would it impact the experience of a student from a different religion?
- How have students of different cultural backgrounds been received?
- What type of mentor/advisor programs do you have in place? How will they aid in and monitor the development of my child?
- What kinds of financial donations are expected above and beyond tuition and fees?

Admissions

- What is your admission policy regarding sibling preference? Children of alumni?

Extracurricular Activities

- What sports are offered? What is the athletic facility like? Describe the athletic program. What are the rules about who plays on teams and who doesn't?
- What arts (music, drama, visual arts) are offered? What is the system for enrolling children in an arts class? What about auditioning for a play or a music performance?

- Is there a summer program offered?
- What are the after school activities offered? Timing? Cost?

Transport

- Where do other students live predominantly?
- Is there a bus pick up and drop off offered?
- Is there a late drop off offered for children doing after school activities?

Questions You (or Your Child) may be asked

- What do you like about your current school?
- Is there anything that you don't like about your current school?
- What are some important qualities for you to have in a school?
- Why have you chosen this school to apply to?
- What do you hope this school will offer your child and you as a family?
- What do you feel your family will offer to the school?
- What are your child's interests?
- How do you spend your time after school?
- What do you like to do on the weekends?
- What are your child's strengths?
- Talk about one of your academic strengths.
- What are your child's weaknesses?
- What is an academic area in which you would like to improve?
- Tell me about an accomplishment that you are proud of.
- Do you have a favorite book? What is a good book that you have recently read?
- Do you have any questions for me or questions about our school?
- If offered places, would you send all of your children here?

Be prepared with a well thought out answer, even if your experience differs from the typical student the school serves. Also be prepared to describe your school system and how it differs, from that of the educational culture you may be entering so that admissions personnel understand the reasons behind your answers, your child's body of prior knowledge, and your circumstances.

School Choice International's

Top 10 Tips

1. Separate your child from yourself. Learn all you can from your colleagues and friends, but recognize that your child is an individual and a solution that works for one child will not necessarily work for another.

2. Consider all possible options - public/private, local, national and international schools. Don't narrow your options by approaching the situation with preconceived notions.

4. There is not just 'one' school that is right for your child. There will be many good options; each choice will have pros and cons. Do your homework. When visiting schools, ask a lot of questions and get as much information as you can.

5. There is no substitute for a visit. Make sure to visit a range of schools which include those you think you want to see as well as those that seem somewhat less obvious.

6. Don't be fooled by scores. Numbers don't tell the whole story. Statistics can be manipulated to make any case. Test scores often reflect teaching to the test rather than teaching critical thinking skills. Test material may not challenge the top learners.

7. Facilities matter more to parents than they do to children. Think about what your children really need to have a successful educational experience. In most cases, relationships with teachers and the peer group make a much greater difference.

8. Children in transition have difficulties. What are the support systems when things break down? Is the school proactive along these lines? What kind of communication is built in between faculty and parents?

9. Focus on the needs of *your* child. Families who have never moved, and are not planning to move, have very different needs than children in transition.

10. Be open-minded. Sometimes a school that you don't think you want is the one in which your child will thrive.

Dear Parents,

We are all still in shock from the events of the last week in Japan, as well as the political unrest in the Middle East. Transitions are hard enough when there is plenty of time to plan for them. We hope that these articles and worksheets can provide some assistance to families who find themselves in the position of having to make a sudden change in their children's educational situation.

Our thoughts and prayers are with you. If we can help in any way please do not hesitate to reach out to us by email at info@schoolchoiceintl.com.

Warm regards,

Liz Perelstein

President