

GUTEN TAG: Norman North hosts German students for foreign exchange program | News | normantranscript.com

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Norman North High School is playing host to 19 students from Germany who are learning English. In return, select students from the school's German department will travel to Germany this spring.

Vincent Fechner has been studying English for 11 years, and he, like his 18 other classmates who came to Norman, attends Gymnasium Hechingen in Hechingen, Germany.

He has also studied Latin for five years, but he came to Oklahoma to get a chance to learn about a new way of life. "The landscapes are very different. It's just completely flat, here," Fechner said. "Where we are from, there are just very many mountains and hills." [...]. He said he has enjoyed getting to make American friends. "It is a very nice place. People are way more open-minded and more extroverted here," he said.

Leon Fischer, a German student, said he has enjoyed exploring the landscapes during his time in mid-America.



“The cars are a bit different as well. People like to drive big cars here,” he said.

Elliot Holland, Norman North German teacher, said German students are required to study English at an early age, which is why many come to the U.S. to take part in study abroad programs.

The students are teamed up with German-learners at Norman North, but while the German students are here, families are encouraged to only speak in English.

“On the other side in Germany, they will switch to German in order to improve their language proficiency,” Holland said. “However, they’ve been learning German for less time because we don’t offer languages in lower grades. While they are in Germany, they’ll be surrounded with German. They’ll be immersed in school and at home.”

Victor Clayton, a senior at Norman North, started taking German four years ago. “I had heard about the other programs like the year long program and other exchange programs, but I didn’t want to do them because I didn’t want to be alone for a year,” Clayton said. “When I heard about this one, I was like ‘Great! I get to travel with a whole group. It will be so much fun.’”

Clayton is looking forward to going to Germany this spring to better understand different German communities. “I’m also really excited for architecture – I love religious architecture, so I’m really excited to see churches and stuff like that,” Clayton said. “America is kind of like a bubble. We don’t have much interaction with other countries, and we don’t really travel that often, so I think having exchange programs is important.”

Azriel Haussman, a junior at Norman North, said she enjoys having the German students in Norman. “It is so fun. I love learning about their town and getting to talk to them about their lives there, too. It’s very interesting,” she said.

Isabelle Hiller, English teacher at Gymnasium Hechingen, is accompanying the students to America and said she first took them to Chicago to acculturate to America before they met their host families.

In Chicago, the students took a river and lake cruise, ascended the Hancock 360 Tower, and visited a number of the Windy City’s museums and other attractions.

In Oklahoma, the students have visited the Oklahoma Land Run Monument, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum and the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum. With their host families, some students have gone to the First Americans Museum and the State Fair of Texas in Dallas.

“We also went to Roosevelt Elementary to see what an American elementary school is like, and we went to Spooktacular [at Norman North],” Hiller said. “Even things that you probably would not even think of may be interesting. For example, today we had a baseball lesson, because we don’t do baseball [in Germany]. On Saturday, host families took them to the homecoming football game, which was gigantic, it was an awesome experience for us.”

She said she hopes that her students get a chance to better learn English, but more importantly, she hopes they learn to engage with another culture.

“Of course, it’s about learning a language too, but for me, that’s not even the main thing. It’s not the most important aspect of this,” she said. “They may not be aware they are learning other things, like personality skills, soft skills and how to adapt to a new family.”

“They learn to broaden their view, and they may not realize until after it’s over how much they’ve really learned.”

Dana Rex, a host parent who helped launch the program a few years ago, said she loves hosting German students to help expand their horizons and make connections.

“We live in a global world, but so much we forget that there is much more going on in the world outside the U.S.,” Rex said. “Sometimes we fear others from other countries or cultures than ours. Hosting exchange students helps my family recognize the value of getting to know people and building relationships with others, even if they are different from us.”

Holland said neither he, nor Hiller are paid for the work they do to put on these study abroad programs. He said it is a unique experience because at no other time in a person’s life are they able to immerse themselves in another country with a host family.

“To really stay in someone’s house from a different culture than you is an experience that’s totally unique and hard to prepare for, but it’s worthwhile for them to have this experience,” Holland said. “Only when you’re staying in someone’s home do you get that kind of immersion, and that often will be a once in a lifetime opportunity for our students. You can’t even get that in college.”