

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## STATEMENT FROM JOHN HISHMEH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE COUNCIL ON STANDARDS FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL TRAVEL (CSIET)

ALEXANDRIA, VA – More than 29,000 high school students participate in international youth programs across the United States each year. While the vast majority of exchanges are safe, meaningful experiences for the participating students, families and schools, we recognize that unforeseen complications can occur, despite even the most careful oversight. One of the reasons the Council on Standards for International Education Travel (CSIET) was created 25 years ago was to identify, support and promote safe, meaningful exchanges.

CSIET has a rigorous set of standards detailing proper program management in nine areas — from participant screening and eligibility, to host family screening, to orientation and support. As part of our accreditation process, each of our listed program members undergoes a comprehensive compliance audit conducted by independent, certified public accountants. Our accreditation of individual program members is in addition to the U.S. State Department’s formal review, which exchange programs must undergo to be designated J-visa sponsoring organizations.

Recently, CSIET convened a Task Force on Program Quality and Student Safety, comprised of member representatives from the various areas of the youth exchange community — from exchange sponsors, to educational nonprofit organizations, to school districts. The Task Force’s charge is simple: review our community’s safety guidelines and our accrediting procedures and recommend ways to improve youth exchange program operations.

In addition to our members, the Task Force will reach out to other groups committed to issues of student safety to obtain input and incorporate best practices.

CSIET also has recently published “Keeping Our Students Safe,” a series of guidelines and best practices for the youth exchange program community to ensure the continued safety and well-being of exchange-program participants. The guidelines are available here: [http://csiet.org/publications-resources/docs/CSIET\\_Student\\_Safety\\_Guidelines-Final\\_6-23-09.pdf](http://csiet.org/publications-resources/docs/CSIET_Student_Safety_Guidelines-Final_6-23-09.pdf)

Our nonprofit member organizations are comprised of individuals devoted to offering unique cultural opportunities to their participants and CSIET is proud to represent them. We will do all we can to continue to support our members as we promote the highest levels of safety in foreign exchange programs.

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*About CSIET: The Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET) is a not-for-profit organization committed to quality international educational travel and exchange for youth at the high school level. The purpose of CSIET is to identify, promote and support reputable international youth exchange programs. For more information, visit [www.csiet.org](http://www.csiet.org).*