



**Board Workshop Date:** 12/11/2023

**Title:** Costa Rica 7/8/2025 - International Travel Request - High School Science - Liz Houtz

**Type:** Discussion

**Presenters:** Jody De St. Hubert, Director of Teaching and Learning; Jenn Carter, Edina High School Assistant Principal; and Liz Houtz EHS Science Teacher

**Background:** In accordance with Policy 538, the following international student travel experience for up to 16 Edina High School students for ten days in June-August 2025 has received support from the school's administration. Participating students will not miss any school days for this summer travel experience.

This science research travel experience is coordinated by Seeds of Change-Costa Rica. (<https://www.socresearch.org/>) Seeds of Change is a Secondary Science Immersion program committed to inspiring high school students to pursue a career in science research. This group has strong partnerships with academic and industry scientists in Costa Rica and the US that act as the instructors for this ten day immersion program. Seeds of Change focuses on the scientific method and emphasizes student-designed and student-driven research, under the guidance of EHS teacher(s) and the program scientists. This student-driven approach is very unique, especially at the high school level.

**Summary of Travel Experience:** During the school year prior to departure (2024-25), students will start to learn about the biological diversity in Costa Rica and begin to think about their own research question. Once in Costa Rica, the lodging and research takes place at Finca la Anita, an eco-tourism lodge and farm in the rainforest. Food and lodging is provided by the owners/hosts. From their base at Finca la Anita, the students will spend 8 days applying the scientific method and collaborating with members of their team on their research question. Students work together to carry out their experiments. They learn how to work as a team to overcome challenges and rebound from failures within resource and time constraints, just as in any real-world project. They will use statistics to validate the results of their experiments. At the end of the eight days, each student team presents and defends their research project to the larger group of students and scientists, just like any research scientist would.

While the first eight days are very research focused, the students will also take outings to the local villages to learn about the culture of Costa Rica and experience many local activities with local residents.

During the last two days of the trip, the students visit the dry forest, have lessons on dry forest ecology from local ecologists, and visit the Pacific coast where they visit a sea turtle hatchery and conduct patrols of sea turtle nesting patrols.

Students have the option of earning three university credits at participating universities. Many former participants have also entered their projects into local, state, regional, national and international science competitions with excellent results. There is also the opportunity for students that have completed this first year experience to participate in a second year research program which focuses on microbial bioinformatics.

In addition to providing growth opportunities that align with the Portrait of a Well-Rounded Edina Graduate, this field-based, research-oriented, student travel experience supports learning across numerous Minnesota science, social studies, and language arts standards.

**Cost:** The anticipated inclusive cost of this experience is approximately \$4,350 per student. This price is inclusive of all transportation, accommodations, meals, transfers, and medical and repatriation insurance. Students will be responsible for all costs. There will also be extensive fundraising opportunities.

**Fundraising Plan:** Fundraising options for students include the following:

1. Coffee sales- Costa Rican coffee
2. Ann Bancroft Scholarship for Girls  
<https://www.annbancroftfoundation.org/programs/grants>
3. Rotary Scholarships
4. GoFundMe

**Transportation:** All students and chaperones will travel as a group from Minneapolis to Finca la Anita and return via a major U.S. international airline or partner.

**Accommodations:** Students and chaperones will be housed in modern cabins of 2-8 students while in the rainforest. At the dry forest and marine site, accommodations are provided by the local state park system.

**Supervision:** Staff members traveling with the group are Liz Houtz, EHS science teacher, and up to one or two additional licensed staff, one of which will be a licensed school administrator.

**Recommendation:** Review the international travel experience for discussion. An additional discussion will occur at the Board Meeting on 1.8.24 and action will occur at the 2.12.24 Board Meeting.

**Desired Outcomes for the Board:** Review the background information provided and provide feedback on the student travel experience.

**Attachments:**

1. Appendix III Board Policy 538 , [Extended Field Trip and Travel Application Preliminary Approval](#)
2. [Seeds of Change Tour Itinerary](#)