Education

The three levels of education in Brazil are fundamental, secondary, and higher education. Most public and private schools operate on a part-time basis, with students attending either in the morning or in the afternoon. New guidelines have established a 200-day scholastic year.

Most public schools offer a very low standard of education. It is unlikely that expat families would send their children to public schools. On the other hand, public universities enjoy an extremely high academic reputation, and competition for admission is keen.

TYPES OF SCHOOLING OPTIONS

Church-affiliated schools
Mostly Roman Catholic, they offer good standards of education to students of all faiths.

International and bilingual schools
International schools follow the curriculum of their country of origin—usually, American, British, or French. Bilingual schools follow the Brazilian national curriculum. Bilingual schools are typically Portuguese-English or Portuguese-German. However, the language expertise of the teachers in some “bilingual” schools may be somewhat rudimentary. Best practice is to visit the schools and speak with the teachers to assess their language proficiency.

The reality is that there is scant inventory of schools considered international with English as the language of instruction. These few offer an American, British, or International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. The majority of students in these international schools are Brazilian, not expats. All international schools are considered bilingual in that, in addition to offering a foreign curriculum (such as French, British, or German) in that foreign language, they are also required to offer the Brazilian curriculum in Portuguese to their native Brazilian students.
International Baccalaureate

Founded in 1968 in Switzerland, the IB curriculum offers the Primary Years Program, Middle Years Program, and Diploma Program. While the IB curriculum may be an excellent alternative for some expat families, the IB does not offer an instant school solution. Not every IB school offers all three programs. Not every child is well-suited to be a successful IB learner. And not every family embraces the IB pedagogy, especially families coming from more traditional educational systems. Further, the IB builds a high degree of integration among all subjects. This may not be ideal for students who wish to be specialists and devote high school years to advanced work in science, mathematics, or linguistics. Also, the Diploma Program is extremely rigorous. Students must demonstrate a high level of research and writing skills, as well as dedication to the arts, athletics, and community service. This may not be the optimal educational setting for all students.

Every IB school must achieve accreditation from the governing IB body, but some schools fare better than others in actual implementation. It would be prudent to validate the reputation of each IB school, the amount of experience in delivering the curriculum, and exam results. Importantly, most IB schools are taught in English. Not every expat family, however, is English-speaking.

Availability

Until recently, Brazil’s rapid economic growth had created an extreme shortage of places in desirable schools. Waitlists may now be shorter, but there is still an extremely limited inventory of international schools for the world’s fifth largest country. Expat families arriving after admissions deadlines face difficult placement challenges. And, with most international schools enrolling many Brazilian families, there is limited mobility within the student population. Expats come and go, while locals tend to remain from kindergarten through graduation. This affords expat families little chance of claiming an open seat.

Additional Challenges

Cost: International Schools in Brazil can be very expensive. As a result of the very high demand and scarcity of available spots, schools often charge “over-the-top” prices including one-off payments made during the enrollment of the child.

Academic Year: All Brazilian schools operate on the Southern Hemisphere school calendar—beginning in late February and ending in December. The international schools vary in their school calendars, so determining grade placement can be challenging. In the transition between Northern and Southern Hemisphere scholastic calendars, students will typically either have to repeat six months of school or leap ahead six months. Further, birthdate cut-offs for grade placement may vary, adding an additional degree of complexity to grade-assignment considerations.
Thus, assignees are faced with the possibility that their child is ready for grade four, but may be reassigned to grade three in the host country. Not surprisingly, parents often object strongly. They are also quite concerned about repatriation issues, fearing that their child will be “behind a grade” and unable to re-enter with his or her peers in the home country.

**Special Needs:** The local school systems are not equipped to support students with learning difficulties. Families must rely on private schools to offer programming for these students—and options are few. Some schools offer programming for mild to moderate learning differences, but several are fairly limited in what they can actually provide and can also become over-subscribed.

There is an openness to permitting outside teachers or assistants/therapists to supplement classroom instruction for special needs students. Note, however, that these outside educators most likely speak Portuguese. Few local therapists speak English.

**TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS**
- Explore schooling options early; with limited spaces and schooling choices, it is important to start the process far in advance of arrival.
- If possible, visit schools to get a firsthand view of level of desired language among the instructors, as well as overall facilities.
- Consider location of the school before selecting housing—traffic is a huge issue in Brazil, and some schooling choices can result in long commutes for both students and parents.
- It is important to utilize professional school placement experts to provide the most prudent strategies for selection, approaching calendar differences, and other challenges.

For more information on challenges and solutions in Brazil, request a copy of *Best Practices for Effective Relocation to Brazil: A Guide for Mobility Managers* or email trustedguidance@cartus.com.