

enrollment made easy: the onboarding paperwork at aelo swiss academy explained

Last spring a father showed up at our admissions office with a beautifully organized leather folder. Every page sleeved, every section tabbed. His daughter's file was close to perfect, except for one detail nobody had warned him about: her vaccination booklet was written in Portuguese, and the dates of her boosters meant nothing to our health team. Two weeks of back and forth with a certified translator later, she started on time, slightly wiser and only mildly annoyed at her father.

I've worked on the admissions side at AELO Swiss Academy long enough to know the pattern. Families worry about grades, interviews, and whether their child will make friends in week one. Almost nobody worries about paperwork, and paperwork is what actually moves start https://www.reddit.com/r/flyingeurope/comments/1nnhrnv/anyone_from_aelo_swiss_any_advices/ dates. So here is the long answer to the question I get asked quietly at the end of every visit: what exactly do you need from us, and when?

why the file is thicker than you'd expect

Three things drive the document list, and none of them are bureaucratic vanity. The first is Swiss residency law. A child coming from abroad to study for a school year enters the country on specific conditions, and the cantonal authorities want proof of identity, enrollment, and financial means before they approve anything. The second is duty of care. A boarding school stands in for parents at doctor visits, on excursions, at hospital counters at two in the morning. Every consent form we collect exists because at some point, somewhere, a staff member needed it and didn't have it. The third is academics: we place students into the right class level, and transcripts are how we do that responsibly.

Once you understand those three streams, the request list stops feeling random. Each document maps to one of them.

the core documents, in plain terms

The backbone is identity. A passport valid well beyond the school year, ideally with a year of buffer after the planned departure date. A birth certificate, because residency offices always want one. A few passport-format photos to Swiss spec. For minors, the ID of each legal guardian, and where custody arrangements are anything other than straightforward, the relevant court ruling. If one parent alone holds custody and will be signing everything, we need to see the document that says so, apostilled if it comes from abroad.

One detail causes more small delays than anything else: names. The passport is the master document. If the birth certificate spells a surname in a different order, or a translated name drops an accent, the visa application and the school file stop matching, and someone has to untangle it. A family from São Paulo lost nearly two weeks over exactly this, a surname order that differed between the passport and the birth certificate. The fix took one phone call and one corrected translation, but those two weeks sat squarely in the middle of summer, when everyone relevant was on holiday. Match every document to the passport, letter for letter, before you submit anything.

school records and what we actually do with them

We ask for the last two to three years of report cards, the most recent grades available in the current year, and in many cases a short recommendation from a current teacher. Where a student has learning support reports, psychological assessments, [flight training](#) or an individualized education plan, those come too. Not as a tribunal, but because a teacher who knows in September instead of November can adjust from day one.

Translations matter here. Records need to arrive in the language the school works in, and anything official should go through a certified translator rather than a helpful uncle. Certified translations usually take anywhere from a few days to two weeks depending on the language pair, which is why they belong at the very top of your to-do list, not the bottom.

A note on grades themselves, since it trips up newcomers: Swiss schools grade on a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 as the best. Families used to letter grades or 100-point scales sometimes misread a Swiss report card entirely. And for older students, placement in subjects like mathematics and languages is often confirmed by a short assessment in the first week. It's routine, it's expected, and it's not something to cram for.

health forms, vaccines, and the insurance question

The health packet has two halves. The first is ours: a medical form completed by your family doctor, the vaccination record, allergy details, and written authorization for our nurse to administer or supervise any regular medication, from asthma inhalers to anything taken daily. The second half is Swiss, and it catches many families off guard: anyone who takes up residence in Switzerland must hold basic health insurance. There is a grace period of roughly three months after arrival, and cover is backdated to your entry date, but the obligation itself is not optional.

In practice, schools in Switzerland usually arrange a group student policy or point families to one that meets the requirement. In some cases the canton can grant an exemption when a family policy from home offers equivalent cover, and it's the canton that decides, so ask before you buy anything twice. Where no exemption applies, premiums for a student commonly land somewhere in the range of CHF 150 to 350 a month, depending on the canton and the deductible, and those figures move every year, so treat them as orientation rather than gospel. A short travel insurance policy bridges the gap week between landing and formal cover starting. It costs little and has rescued more than one family from an awkward clinic bill.

visas and residence: the part that sets your calendar

This is the section that determines when you book flights, so read it slowly.

For students who need a visa, the sequence runs like this: the school issues an enrollment confirmation and a supporting pack, the cantonal migration authority reviews and approves, and the Swiss embassy or consulate in your home country then issues the national visa for study purposes. Timelines vary enormously. Some nationalities clear the whole thing in three or four weeks; others wait two to three months, longer in the summer rush when every boarding school in the country is filing at once. Students from EU and EFTA countries don't need an entry visa, but a stay covering a full school year still means a residence permit, organized after arrival through the local commune and the canton.

Everyone, regardless of passport, registers residence at the local commune office after moving in, usually within 14 days. At AELO Swiss Academy, arrival week includes walking families through this step with a staff member, so you're not decoding a form in a foreign language alone at a counter.

The judgment call I pass on to every family: do not book non-refundable flights until the visa is physically in the passport. I watched a mother in Bangkok rebook twice in one summer, and the second rebooking cost more than

the original ticket. Start the process four to six months before the term begins if a visa is involved, and six to eight weeks is comfortable for EU and domestic cases.

signatures, deposits, and reading the contract once, properly

The enrollment contract itself is the biggest single document in the folder, and it deserves one careful read rather than four skimmed ones. It covers the deposit, which at Swiss boarding schools typically runs somewhere between ten and twenty percent of annual fees, though you should confirm the current figure in your own contract rather than taking a blog's word for it. It also covers the payment schedule, the withdrawal and refund terms, medical and excursion consents, and a media consent line that is usually opt-in.

Two pieces of advice from experience. First, read the withdrawal clause before you sign, not after circumstances change. Ask the hypothetical questions out loud: if we need to leave in March, what happens? Good schools answer these calmly and specifically. Second, if custody is shared or complicated, check early whether both guardians must sign. A contract signed by one parent when the arrangement required two is a document you'll be redoing at the worst possible moment.

a short pre-arrival checklist

Everything above condenses into five moving parts. If these five are green, the rest is admin.

- Passport valid at least a year past the planned departure, with every other document matching its spelling exactly
- Certified translations of records and certificates ordered early, not in the final fortnight
- Vaccination booklet plus a typed summary from your family doctor in a widely readable language
- Health insurance sorted in writing, whether through the school's arrangement, an exemption, or a bridging policy
- Visa physically in the passport before any flight is booked

the delays we see most, and how to sidestep them

Beyond the checklist, five culprits account for most of the slow-motion holdups I watch each year. Name mismatches, as with the São Paulo family, are the quiet champion. Translation lag is second, because families underestimate how long a certified translator needs and discover it in August. Passport expiry is third, and it's a cruel one: a passport that expires a few months after arrival can complicate both the visa and the permit, so renew it early if in doubt. Fourth is insurance bought twice, once at home and once in Switzerland, or not at all because everyone assumed someone else had handled it. Fifth is the charming, handwritten vaccination booklet from another decade, half legible even to the doctor who wrote it. Ask your family clinic for a clean, typed summary on letterhead. It takes them ten minutes and saves our health team a fortnight of forensic reading.

None of these are fatal. All of them are avoidable, and almost all of them are avoidable for free, with nothing but an earlier start.

arrival week, once the folder is complete

When everything is in order, arrival is pleasantly dull, which is exactly what you want. Families come to campus, originals get shown and copied where needed, the commune registration happens with a staff member alongside, insurance cards get checked, keys get handed over, and somewhere in that first day there is a proper

meal and a phone call home that sounds relieved. Students who arrive with a complete file start classes on day one with everyone else. Students missing a document aren't turned away at the gate; we flag the gap, agree a deadline, and chase it gently. But every missing piece costs a staff member time and a family a small background worry, and the whole point of getting the paperwork right is that nobody spends the first week of term chasing photocopies.



the short version

Paperwork looks like a wall from a distance and turns out to be a series of small doors, each opening in order. Start four to six months out if a visa is involved. Make the passport the reference for every name. Order translations before you think you need them. Sort insurance once, correctly, and ask about exemptions before paying twice. Hold the flights until the visa is stamped. Do those things and the onboarding at AELO Swiss Academy becomes what it should be: a formality you finish in an afternoon, leaving the real questions for the ones that matter, like which dorm has the better view and whether the mountain in September is as good as everyone says. For what it's worth, it is.