

Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Student Visa Department

Frequently Asked Questions Support for M-1 Visa Students

M-1 Vocational Student Visa

What is the M-1 visa?

The [M-1](#) visa is a student visa reserved for nonimmigrant students who wish to pursue vocational or technical careers in recognized nonacademic institutions in the United States.

What is an M-1 student?

An [M-1](#) student is a nonimmigrant student allowed to remain in the United States for as long as he or she is a full-time student making satisfactory progress at the school he or she is approved to attend.

What is the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)?

The [Student and Exchange Visitor Information System \(SEVIS\)](#) is the Web-based system that the [U.S. Department of Homeland Security \(DHS\)](#) uses to maintain information on [Student and Exchange Visitor Program \(SEVP\)-certified schools](#), [F-1](#) and [M-1](#) students who come to the United States to attend those schools, [U.S. Department of State](#)-designated Exchange Visitor Program sponsors and [J-1](#) visa Exchange Visitor Program participants. It is a critical tool in their mission to protect national security while supporting the legal entry of more than one million F, M and J nonimmigrants to the United States for education and cultural exchange.

What is a Form I-20, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status?

The [Form I-20](#), Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status, is a paper record of the student's information in the database of the [Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, SEVIS](#). The [Form I-20](#) is issued by a designated school official (DSO) from the M-DCPS Student Visa Department to the nonimmigrant student who is accepted into a technical program of studies. The [Form I-20](#) is a required document for student entry into the United States and the student should carry it at all times.

What should a nonimmigrant student consider before filing to obtain an I-20/M-1 student visa?

The nonimmigrant student should:

- Be sufficiently fluent in English.
- Have a sponsor with sufficient funds to cover the complete program of studies.
- Have a permanent residence in the home country.
- Have strong family ties in the home country such as parents, siblings.
- Intend to leave the United States upon completion of the program of study.

What are the requirements to file the I-20/M-1 student visa with Miami-Dade County Public Schools?

The following are the requirements for obtaining the [Form I-20](#) with M-DCPS:

- **Affidavit of support.** Notarized affidavit of support from the sponsor. If the nonimmigrant student has two sponsors, two affidavits of support must be provided and two bank letters.
- **Bank letter.** Bank letter must be written in English including U.S. amounts and issued within 3 months from creating the [Form I-20](#). Bank letter has to provide specific sources of financial support and the minimum amount required to study at M-DCPS for the first year.
- **Employer's letter.** Sponsor(s) must provide original letter written in English indicating length of employment and salary.
- **English literacy.** Student must be able to speak, read, and write English.
- **Educational record.** Provide diploma or transcripts of highest education attained. Some programs of study require completion of high school and will require passing scores in standardized exams.
- **Photographs.** Provide two current passport photos.

What are the limitations of the M-1 student visa?

The [M-1](#) visa student may not:

- Transfer from one school to another without the authorization of [SEVIS](#).
- Change the intended program of study.
- Work while following the course of study.
- Allow [M-1](#) student dependents to work or study while in the U.S.
- Travel outside United States after filing with [USCIS](#) for the extension of stay.

What is the extension of stay?

The extension of stay is a request to extend the program of study beyond the authorized period of admission of one year. The M-1 visa student must file, [Form I-539 “Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status”](#), at least 45 days prior to the end of the program date in the nonimmigrant student’s [Form I-20](#). The fee required must apply together with any initial evidence specified in the applicable provisions and on the application, [Form I-539](#).

The application approval or denial is adjudicated by [USCIS](#). If [USCIS](#) approves the application, the student will receive a [Form I-797A, “Notice of Action”](#). As soon as the M-1 visa student receives the [Form I-797A, “Notice of Action”](#), he or she must immediately notify the DSO at M-DCPS Student Visa Department. The decision process may take as long as six months, and approval is not guaranteed. Leaving the U.S. while an application is pending will automatically void the request for the extension and the student must immediately return to the home country.

What is the USCIS Form I-797, Notice of Action?

The [Form I-797A, “Notice of Action”](#), is issued as a result of an application or a petition submitted to [USCIS](#). The M-1 visa student will receive a [Form I-797A, “Notice of Action”](#) a few months after he or she has filed for the extension of stay of the M-1 visa, reinstatement, or change from one nonimmigrant classification to another. If the application or petition is approved by [USCIS](#), it will issue the [Form I-797A, “Notice of Action”](#) to verify its approval of the action.

What if an M-1 student wants to transfer to another school?

According to the [Department of Homeland Security Study in the States](#) official website, M-1 visa students may only transfer programs within the first six months of arriving in the United States. The only exception to this process is, if the M-1 visa student is unable to stay at a school because of circumstances beyond his or her control, such as if a school closes. The conditions for transferring remain the same as the requirements for admission as an M-1 visa student, inclusive the same program of studies.

To transfer from one [SEVP Certified School](#) to another [SEVP Certified School](#) the M-1 visa student must:

- Apply and gain admission to another [SEVP Certified School](#).
- Inform the current designated school official (DSO) at M-DCPS Student Visa Department about his or her plans to transfer out, and provide the name of the transfer-in school and proof of acceptance. The DSO at the current school will change the M-1 visa student’s record to “transfer-out” status.

- Receive from the DSO at the transfer-in school a new [Form I-20](#), “*Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (M-1) Student Status.*”
- Submit the request to [USCIS](#) for approval to transfer with a [Form I-539](#) “*Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status*” and the new [Form I-20](#) .

If [USCIS](#) approves the transfer application, they will endorse the name of the new school on your [Form I-20](#) and return it.

To be eligible to transfer, the [M-1](#) visa student must continue attending all of his or her classes at the current school while waiting to transfer out; that is, until he or she has submitted the [Form I-539](#), application to [USCIS](#) for approval to transfer. While the application is pending, the [M-1](#) visa student must enroll at the new school at the next available session. It is important to maintain the status while waiting for [USCIS](#) adjudications.

How long can an M-1 nonimmigrant student remain in the U.S.?

The [M-1](#) nonimmigrant student may remain in the U.S. for one year or for as long as he or she is enrolled as a full-time student in a technical program, plus thirty days to prepare to leave the country, whichever is shorter. If the technical career that the nonimmigrant student is pursuing is longer than a year, then the nonimmigrant student should request from [USCIS](#) an extension of stay.

Are there travel restrictions for an M-1 visa student?

According to [immigration law](#), there are no travel restrictions for the [M-1](#) visa student while the [Form I-20](#) is valid. When traveling the student must:

- Present a properly endorsed page 2 of [Form I-20](#) if there has been no substantive change in the information on the student’s most recent [Form I-20](#), a valid passport, and initial application documents.
- Present a new [Form I-20](#) if there has been a substantive change of information on the student’s most recent [Form I-20](#) since the form was initially issued, a valid passport, and initial application document.

What are the travel reminders for M-1 students?

The following are the [five travel reminders by the Study in the States](#) website:

- [M-1](#) visa students are not eligible for an annual vacation. However, [M-1](#) visa students may travel abroad during times when school is not in session, such as weekends, holidays, or time between terms.

- If an **M-1** visa student wants to travel abroad while school is not in session, they must continue to maintain their status, which includes staying enrolled in and attending a full course of study.
- In case of a family emergency or other emergency, **M-1** visa students must contact their designated school official (DSO). A student's DSO may grant an authorized early withdrawal or a permitted temporary absence. During this absence, an **M-1** visa student's record in **SEVIS** will be terminated. The student must contact their DSO to get an updated **Form I-20**, and set their **SEVIS** record to active prior to re-entering the United States.
- If an **M-1** visa student travels abroad and returns to the United States using the same **Form I-20** and **SEVIS** identification number that they used for initial entry, their duration of status will not change. This means that if an **M-1** visa student is eligible to travel abroad and does so, their duration of status will not start over when they re-enter on the same SEVIS ID.
- When traveling, **M-1** visa students should hand-carry all important travel documents with them, including a signed, a valid passport, the emergency contact information for their DSO and for their school. Additionally, the **M-1** visa students should also carry their admissions letter or registration information from their school and proof of finances. Prior to departure, students should verify that their names and other important identifying information is the same on all travel documents.

What should a nonimmigrant student present at the Port of Entry (POE) upon returning to the United States?

The nonimmigrant student should provide the immigration officer at the POE with:

- Valid passport and initial application documents
- Current **Form I-20** signed by the DSO. The **Form I-20** needs to be signed each time the **M-1** visa student wishes to temporarily travel outside the U.S.
- Valid **M-1** entry visa stamped in the passport (if necessary)

When should the nonimmigrant student arrive in the United States?

Once the nonimmigrant student receives the **M-1** student visa, he or she is allowed to enter the U.S. up to 30 days before the start date on the **Form I-20**. The student should not try to enter more than 30 days before that date as entry in the U.S. as a consequence the student will be denied entry and will have to return home.

When should the nonimmigrant student leave the United States upon the completion of the course of study?

Once the student completes their vocational career, he or she is allowed to remain in the U.S. up to 30 days after the program end date on the [Form I-20](#). The nonimmigrant student should not try to remain more than 30 days before that program end date as he or she will be considered out of status and breaking immigration law.

What if the nonimmigrant student cannot arrive within 30 days of the start date of the program of study?

If the nonimmigrant student cannot arrive within 30 days of the “the program start date” listed on the [Form I-20](#), he or she should request a deferral of the program. The [SEVIS](#) system automatically cancels immigration records of those students who do not check in at their program within 30 days of the begin date. (If a student arrives more than 30 days after the “program start date,” the nonimmigrant student will have to file to request a reinstatement. This is a process that will involve financial expenses and submission of documentation to [USCIS](#).)

What obligations must an M-1 student fulfill in order to remain in good standing?

The [M-1](#) visa student must comply with the following [SEVIS](#) regulations to remain in the United States in good standing:

- Pass the full course of study every trimester.
- Pay tuition full time schedule fees on time.
- Maintain an international address to which the student intends to depart upon completion of studies.
- Always maintain the same educational objectives.

Can an M-1 student work while studying?

No, an [M-1](#) visa student may not work on or off campus while studying.

Can an M-1 student bring dependents to the United States?

Yes, the [M-1](#) visa student can bring the spouse and unmarried children under 21 years of age to the United States as Dependent. The [M-1](#) visa student dependents have the [M-2](#) status.

Can the M-1 visa dependents work and study?

No. Dependent spouse and unmarried children of the M-1 visa student cannot work. The spouse of the M-1 visa student must not engage in full-time study and the children may only engage in full-time study if the study is in an elementary or secondary school.

Can the M-1 student change status upon completion of the program of study?

Yes, the M-1 visa student may apply for change of status to most other categories of nonimmigrant visas. However, they may not change to F-1 visa status or H-1B visa status if the job offered is based on skills gained through studies while in M-1 visa status.

What is the difference between an M-1 and F-1 visa?

The F-1 student visa is for nonimmigrant students that will attend an academic or language-training program that typically provides a degree or certificate after the completion of program. The M-1 visa is for nonimmigrant students that will attend a non-academic vocational study or training school, not including a language-training program. A vocational or trade school typically refers to programs that are career-focused and offer instruction related to job training. For more information, click on the graph to view the difference between the F & M visa: [F & M Student Status: Know the Difference](#)