MAFSA General Meeting November 13, 2026

Quick recap

The MAFSA (Metropolitan Area Foreign Student Advisors) fall 2026 meeting was held to discuss updates and address questions from member districts regarding international student services. Silvia Hoke, the secretary, opened the meeting and explained the purpose of MAFSA as a support network for transcript evaluators and international student professionals, noting that membership requires attending at least one of three annual meetings and includes access to password-protected transcript evaluation charts. The group discussed several key topics including accessing Cambridge exam results, with Silvia explaining that MAFSA has submitted a request for system-wide access that could take 3-4 weeks to approve. Members shared experiences with foreign exchange students, with varying approaches across districts regarding screening and providing English language services to J-1 visa holders. The discussion covered transcript verification best practices, with participants sharing strategies for confirming the authenticity of international student records, including reaching out to schools directly and being cautious about AI-generated documents. Members also discussed challenges with the IB (International Baccalaureate) Middle Years Program, particularly around transferring credits for 9th and 10th grade core courses, with several districts reporting they transfer these as honors credits after consulting with IB coordinators. The conversation ended with updates on country-specific information and a discussion of current trends in international student enrollment, including decreases in some areas and shifts in the geographic origins of arriving students, with members noting increased complexity in supporting students with special learning needs and educational disruptions.

Next steps

Cynthia

- Share the link to the VDOE SLIFE registration form in the chat/with the group.

Silvia Hoke

- Send out the meeting minutes early next week and include a mention of the CHARTS training.
- Send out a poll to determine a date for the CHARTS training, likely in December.
- Coordinate with the list of people interested in becoming trainers to develop a training schedule.

Collaboration

- All members: Sign in on the attendance sheet by 12:00 PM today to maintain active membership.
- All members: If not already done, make a donation to support the MAFSA website via Zelle, Cash App, or PayPal, classifying it as a donation.
- All members: Review the updated transcript evaluation charts on the password-protected MAFSA website.
- All members: If any membership changes are needed for their district, email Silvia Hoke.
- All members: If interested in CHARTS training, provide name and email address in the chat or contact Silvia Hoke.
- All members: If they have suggestions for a speaker for the February meeting (30-45 minute presentation), send suggestions to MAFSA.

Summary

MAFSA Membership and Cambridge Exams

The meeting began with introductions and technical setup, including managing the recording and agenda access for participants. Silvia Hoke explained MAFSA's purpose, membership structure, and the importance of donations to maintain the website, while emphasizing that membership is free but requires attendance at at least one meeting per year. Margarita Borges took over to address member questions, focusing on challenges with Cambridge exam results and enrollment processes. The group discussed accessing Cambridge exam scores, noting that MAFSA had submitted a request to Cambridge to help member districts obtain student results and transcripts more easily, particularly for summer enrollments.

Cambridge Results Access Update

Norka explained that Cambridge and O-level test results are available through different organizations, with Pearson being one source that requires specific information to access results. Silvia Hoke clarified that MAFSA has requested access to the Cambridge results service, which could take 3-4 weeks to approve and would allow up to six MAFSA members to access the system. She encouraged members to use the MAFSA website's contact page for questions about IGCSE and O-level exams, and Jacob confirmed that the best practices survey remains available for completion.

Foreign Exchange Student Policy Variations

The group discussed how different school districts handle foreign exchange students with J-1 visas. Cynthia from Powhatan County shared that Virginia state guidance requires screening these students through home language surveys, but she discovered that other districts have different approaches. Margarita from Montgomery County explained that their district does not provide ELD services to foreign exchange students, while Jackie from Henrico County noted that their district now provides services but limits enrollment due to capacity issues. Jennifer from Loudoun County shared that their district only allows 5 foreign exchange students per school and has specific enrollment restrictions based on school capacity and host family location. The discussion highlighted varying policies across different districts in Virginia and Maryland regarding foreign exchange student screening and services.

Kindergarten EL Program Discussion

Cynthia discussed serving kindergarten students in her EL program and sought input from colleagues about their practices. Margarita and Jackie shared that their districts in Montgomery County and Loudoun use push-in models for kindergarten services, with screening starting in April and pull-out models for levels 1 and 2. The group also discussed SLIFE student identification, with Cynthia sharing a new VDOE registration form and asking how other districts handle SLIFE determination. The conversation ended with an unresolved question from Erin about transcript verification that Candice mentioned would be addressed in the next meeting.

Student Transcript Verification Strategies

The group discussed strategies for handling suspicious or inaccurate student transcripts, particularly those that appear to be AI-generated or copied multiple times. Participants shared best practices including reaching out directly to schools for verification, requiring families to provide legitimate school contact information, and explaining to families that universities later require original transcripts. Margarita emphasized that while these measures may seem like additional barriers, they are important for students' future college enrollment, as transcripts do follow students to higher education institutions.

IB Middle Years Credits Discussion

The group discussed how to handle IB Middle Years program credits, particularly for 9th and 10th grade core courses like social studies. Vanessa from Loudoun County Public Schools sought guidance on credit awarding practices, and participants shared their approaches, including transferring core courses as honors credits in Montgomery County and evaluating courses through IB coordinators in Henrico and Anne Arundel County. The discussion highlighted the importance of verifying whether schools actually offer IB programs versus just bearing the IB name, and participants agreed to share contact information for IB coordinators to help Vanessa further investigate alignment with Virginia graduation requirements.

Chart Updates and Country Reports

The group discussed updates to charts, with Marissa confirming that recent changes had been implemented and the most current charts were available on the MAFSA website. Marissa clarified that while some updates were made in April, the May 2026 charts should be the most recent version for use moving forward. The team also discussed country updates, with Candice noting she would prepare Ukraine updates for the next meeting. When asked about breaking out into state groups, the group decided to remain together to share learnings across states. Candice mentioned a notable trend of small decreases in multilingual learners reported to the state, suggesting others might be seeing similar patterns.

Student Enrollment Trends Discussion

The group discussed trends in student enrollment across different counties, with participants noting decreases in some areas and increases in others (like South Africa). Jackie reported that over half of their enrollments now present with complex learning needs or formal diagnoses impacting learning, while many students arrive from online homeschool programs with low literacy levels despite conversational English skills. The group also observed a trend of

students being diagnosed with ADHD, with both formal diagnoses and suspected cases being reported, though the cause of this high prevalence remains unclear.

Middle East Returnee Student Enrollment

The group discussed preparing for an influx of families returning from the Middle East due to U.S. embassy staffing caps, with Margarita sharing information from the State Department about potential enrollment challenges. Members shared their approaches to enrolling these students, with most using case-by-case assessments rather than defaulting to McKinney-Vento placements. The conversation ended with plans to schedule Charts training in December and the next MAFSA meeting for February 12th, 2027.