

HOST FAMILY HANDBOOK 2024-25

MoundsPark
A C A D E M Y

MPA International Student Program: Host Family Handbook



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome to MPA.....	1
Who's Who at MPA.....	1
Inclusion.....	2
Anti-racist Mindset.....	2
LGBTQ Identities.....	2

Becoming an MPA Host Family

Conversation.....	3
Application.....	3
Initial Home Visit.....	3-4
Paperwork & Background Check.....	4
Student/Homestay Placement.....	4

Welcoming Your International Student

Homestay Notification.....	5
Learn about Your Student's Home Country.....	5-6
Preparing Yourself & Your Family.....	6
Preparations for Student Arrival.....	6
Student Arrival.....	6
The First 48-Hours.....	7-8

Things You Should Know

Cultural Adaptation Cycle	8
Culture Shock.....	8-9
MPA Culture Shock Cycle.....	9
Navigating Upper School.....	10-11
Friends.....	11
Keep Them Simple & Few.....	13
Setting and Adjusting Expectations.....	13
Extracurriculars, Clubs & Sports.....	12-13
United States Laws.....	13

General Expectations: Host Family

Stipend.....	14
Respite Care.....	15
Home Visits.....	15
Lodging.....	15
Food & Meals.....	15
Transportation.....	16
School.....	17

General Expectations: Students

Homestay.....	17
School.....	18
Medical Insurance.....	18
Spending Money.....	18
Phone.....	18
Travel.....	18
Supervision.....	19

MPA Student Support Network

Trusted Adult.....	19
Mental Health & Social-Emotional Well-Being.....	19
Diversity & Inclusion.....	20
College Counseling.....	21
Academic.....	21-22



Welcome To MPA

Dream Big. Do Right.

Mounds Park Academy is a PreK-12 private college preparatory school in St. Paul, Minnesota where academic rigor with purpose prepares students to stir the human spirit, stand for justice, and shake the world.

You are a freethinker. A free spirit. A risk taker. A right maker. A dreamer. A doer.

Mounds Park Academy, one of the best private schools in the Twin Cities, engages students in a rigorous college-preparatory experience that cultivates dreamers and doers. Our academic program is demanding, but not draining, and goes far beyond memorization. Students are challenged to apply their understanding to stir the human spirit, stand for justice, and shake the world. This is what we call rigor with purpose and it grounds our students in the radical idea that their identity in the world is not measured by a test score, but by the depth and decency of their impact on the world.

You stand ready to push the limits of your own capacity for innovation, kindness, and respect.

Mounds Park Academy students dream big, roll up their sleeves, and take risks to build their creative confidence. They apply the principles of design thinking to create real-world solutions. Extraordinary access to the latest technology allows them to transform the wildness of their imagination into inspiration for others. Students are encouraged to question the answers and by doing so, they find confidence in their voices and are ready and willing to speak.

At Mounds Park Academy, our program is designed to inspire and energize. Students of all ages feel great about school and treat each other with respect. They develop meaningful, collaborative relationships across grade levels.

Students are self-directed, internally motivated, and as proud of their own accomplishments as they are of their classmates'. Only through this type of positive, supportive community are students able to discover who they are meant to be.

WHO'S WHO AT MPA

Head of School: Dr. Bill Hudson
bhudson@moundsparkacademy.org

International Student Program Director:
Cory Becker-Kim
cbeckerkim@moundsparkacademy.org

Middle School Director: Paul Errickson
perrickson@moundsparkacademy.org

Middle School Administrative Assistant:
Ashley Riihiluoma
ariihiluoma@moundsparkacademy.org

Upper School Director: Mark Segal
msegal@moundsparkacademy.org

Upper School Administrative Assistant:
Chanda Williams
cwilliams@moundsparkacademy.org

Assistant Upper School Director: Jay Dean
jdean@moundsparkacademy.org

Middle/Upper School Counselor:
Ashley Cooper
acooper@moundsparkacademy.org

Middle School Learning Specialist:
Robyn Kramer
rkramer@moundsparkacademy.org

Upper School Learning Specialist:
Liz Schwalen
lschwalen@moundsparkacademy.org

Director of Equity and Belonging:
Lamar Shingles
lshingles@moundsparkacademy.org

Assistant Director of Equity and Belonging
Eddie Grant
egrant@moundsparkacademy.org

Director of College Counseling: Lisa Pederson
lpederson@moundsparkacademy.org

Athletic Director: Dan Haase
dhasse@moundsparkacademy.org

INCLUSION

MPA strives to be an inclusive and equitable place for all community members to feel welcomed, valued, and safe. For this to happen, we hope that students, employees, and families (including host families, too!) share this basic goal.

We know that each employee and family member bring their own values, biases, deep-culture, and beliefs to our school every time they walk through our doors, send an email, or participate in class – and we can only hope that each of these interactions, while markedly different from one another, share a base of kindness, equity, and acceptance.

In hosting an MPA international student, we hope you extend this kindness and understanding, respect and empathy, to your student. As mentioned above, the student will experience a significant culture shock in acclimating to MPA, Minnesota, and the United States – and they will navigate these differences as a teen who is somewhat ego-centric, impulsive, tactless, and, perhaps, not their best selves yet.

In traveling across the globe, they have identified themselves as open-minded, inclusive, and thoughtful, but all of this is still wrapped in a teen brain and body that still, developmentally, has much room for growth.

As a member of the MPA community, your student will have open and mutually-respectful conversations about social justice issues in their classes and student clubs. They may come home with questions. As an MPA host family, we hope that you will support our mission and values in discussing these topics with your student.

As the adult(s) in their home, anything you can do to have open, honest, thoughtful, and loving conversations – with an open, honest, and loving heart – around issues of social justice, acceptance, and equity with your international student will bring growth and understanding to you both.

MPA Code of Ethics

- **Respect Policy**
- **Respectful Discourse Policy**
- **Bullying Prohibition Policy**
- **Religious Holidays**
- **Transgender & Gender Diverse Guidelines**

ANTI-RACIST MINDSET

The MPA community is diverse, with approximately 40% students of color in PreK-12th grades. Through its curriculum, student-led clubs, professional development, community education classes, and character programs, MPA strives to provide a safe, equitable, and respectful environment for all, where system issues can be dismantled, biases broken, and mindsets changed.

Your student walks the world as a person of color. Please consider how this may impact their lives in Minnesota and be the loving ally and fierce advocate they may need. Likewise, feel free to bring any concerns you may have to the International Student Program Coordinator on your student's behalf.

LGBTQ IDENTITIES

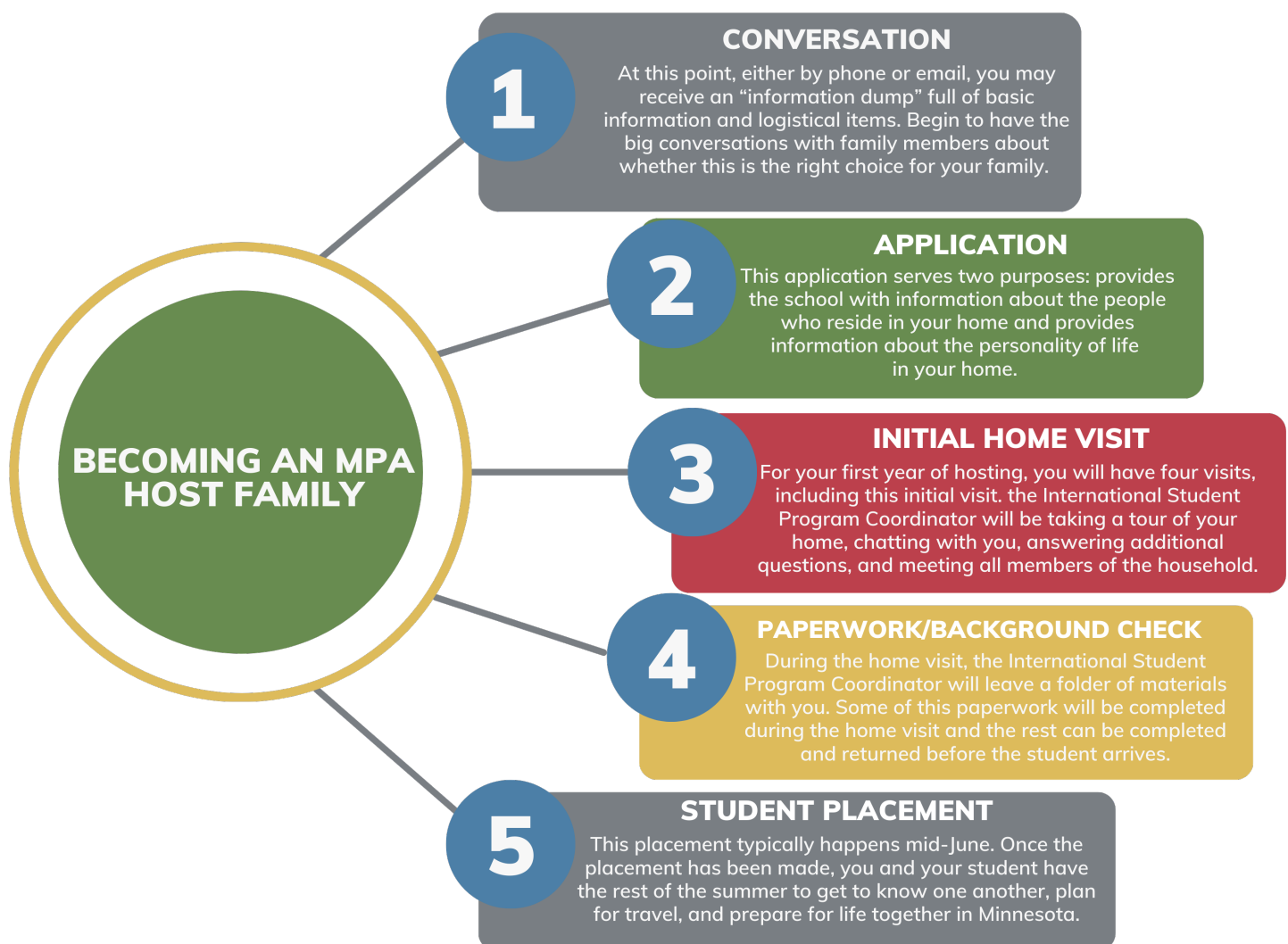
The MPA community is diverse; many of our students, employees, and families are members of the LGBTQ community. Likewise, many of our students, international and domestic, are questioning, seeking, and coming into various facets of their whole-person, sexual and gender identities. We ask you to support open and inclusive dialogue with your student, answering questions and providing information in an unbiased and nonjudgmental manner.

Becoming an MPA Host Family

The path to becoming an MPA host family is a meaningful one with pieces that are conversational, probing, and thoughtful in nature. This process is designed to ensure you and your family are ready to embark on this journey with an MPA international student—which is no small feat and should be entered into with open eyes and hearts and realistic expectations by all.



Please note: In some cases, MPA has more host families than international students and may not begin hosting immediately. Completion of this process does not guarantee a student will be placed in your home the following year. However, once your file is complete and you have been vetted for hosting, you are eligible to host in subsequent years without repeating the process. We will take time to update your file and quickly revisit your home, and that's it!



HOST FAMILY AGREEMENT

The Program Coordinator and host parents will work through the agreement, line by line, together during the home visit, collecting signatures upon completion. The agreement oftentimes summarizes things that have already been discussed, but it can also generate additional questions, too.

In either case, going through it together allows the host family and Program Coordinator to be on the same page and have the same expectations upon entering the agreement.

DIRECT DEPOSIT & W-9

Your homestay stipend will be directly deposited into your account the 1st of the month for the previous month's work. Your homestay stipend is not pre-taxed, so please plan accordingly as you prepare your taxes. You will receive a W-2 from MPA in January for the previous year's wages and should file taxes accordingly.

BACKGROUND CHECK & FINGERPRINTING

To ensure our international students are placed in safe homes, MPA requires a background check and fingerprinting of all its employees and volunteers. The background check and fingerprinting will need to be done on-campus, in our business office, prior to the student's arrival. A student will not be placed in your home until the background check and fingerprinting have been completed and the results received.

HOST FAMILY RECRUITMENT FLYER

Your folder will contain the Program Coordinator's business card and a recruitment flyer. We are always recruiting good, caring host families for our international families. Feel free to pass along the flyer or the Program Coordinator's contact information to anyone who may be interested!

STUDENT/HOMESTAY PLACEMENT

After all other steps have been completed, the final piece is being matched with your international student. This placement typically happens mid-June for the following school year. Once the placement has been made, you and your student have the rest of the summer to get to know one another, plan for travel, and prepare for life together in Minnesota.

WELCOMING YOUR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

LEARN ABOUT YOUR STUDENT'S HOME COUNTRY

Any understanding you and your family can have of the vast, deep, and immense cultural difference the student will be navigating as they enter your home, the American education system, and all aspects of life in America, the better you will be able to support your student, frame the differences you see and experience in your home, and navigate potential conflicts with your student and within your family throughout this process. To do this, it is important to learn about your student's home country and culture before and throughout the hosting experience. While this will not make you an expert, it will provide context, understanding, and empathy. The more you know about the country and culture your student comes from, the better prepared you'll be to appreciate and understand the differences in attitudes and behaviors you may encounter, allowing you to empathize with the student and the vast cultural experience they're having.

One way to understand the depth of differences your student will be navigating is to look at the [Cultural Iceberg](#). This graphic shows not only the visible aspects of American culture they'll experience, but the hidden aspects of deep culture they'll be attempting to understand as well.

Immersing oneself in a new culture while holding closely to or letting go of pieces one's parent culture can be extremely difficult and can result in an identity crisis and/or culture shock (discussed later) for the student.

Your student will be trying to cope with many unfamiliar American customs and may find it hard to let you know when and/or what they do not understand. Feel free to express your interest in learning about your student's family, friends, life, and home country. Remember, in a world of new-ness, this is one of the things they know and can speak confidently about. If you ask questions about your student's country and culture, you'll not only learn so much, but you'll also make it easier for your student to ask you questions in return.

PREPARING YOURSELF & YOUR FAMILY

Hosting a student from a culture different from your own can be an exciting growth experience for your family. In order to maximize your experience, it is important to understand the ways in which cultural differences will actually have an impact on your family's life.

Each family member probably has a fairly clear idea of how they imagine the student fitting into your family life. However, depending on the family member, these ideas might be very different and might only include the interpersonal aspects of adding a member to the family without thinking through the "less fun" logistics of sharing space or the cultural aspects of blending lifestyles.

In thinking through the ways your family's life will change, consider discussing the following topics with one another prior to and after the student's arrival:

- Personal space, shared space, and privacy
- Communication within the family
- Family or household routines and schedules
- Activities outside the home (Little League, clubs, etc.)
- Family personality and beliefs: mealtimes, relaxing/down-time, weekends, cleanliness, chores, religion, hobbies, together-time, timeliness, etc.

PREPARATION FOR STUDENT'S ARRIVAL

Something to consider as you prepare for the student's arrival is that initial entrance into their new home and bedroom. Think of the amazing impact you can have on setting the tone for the student's time in your home and for the school year overall with a few small-but-meaningful gestures.

Consider one or more of the following as you prepare for your student's arrival. **NOTE:** These are entirely optional, but give you some good ideas as you prepare to welcome your new family member!



- Welcome package: welcome card, family photo, set of house keys, picture frame, small gift card to local business, USA outlet adapter, post-it notes & pen, coffee mug, slippers, etc.
- Small set of toiletries to get them through jetlag: shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, soap, lotion, tampons/pads, Kleenex, etc.
- Clean bedroom: remove extra items, empty dresser drawers and closet, dust and vacuum, etc.
- Freshen-up bedroom: clean linens on the bed, windows open or room aired-out, lamp turned on, colorful throw pillow or small rug, curtains/blinds open, etc.
- Food on-hand as their bodies adjust: individual noodle/rice/soup cups, fresh fruit, snack foods, single-serve items, hot teas, etc.

STUDENT ARRIVAL

Your student will be arranging and booking their own travel to Minnesota. Depending on their age and family, they may be traveling solo or with parent(s). It is your responsibility to meet the student and/or family at the airport. As you receive your student's itinerary, add it to your schedule and plan to pick them up from the airport.

Due to airport restrictions, you will meet your student at the baggage carousel of the MSP Airport, Terminal 1. You will need to identify which baggage carousel based on the student's itinerary; they will not know this information.

Things to plan for and consider on the day of arrival:

- **ARRIVAL TIME:** Many international flights arrive very early in the morning or very late at night. They may arrive during a time you are normally asleep, at work, or busy. It is very important that you are there to welcome the student – whether it is their first, second, or third year in Minnesota and in your home – so please make arrangements to meet them at the airport.
- **DELAYS:** Please watch for delays and cancellations in the student's arrival time.
- Unless it is a direct flight, the student may have one or more connecting flights in one or more cities along their journey.
- Each of these presents an opportunity for delays.
- **CUSTOMS:** Depending on the student's port of entry, they may be going through customs in MSP. If this is the case, please be patient and care for yourself as you wait. You do not want to be frustrated, impatient, nor tired when your student meets you.
- **SIGNS:** Your student may not recognize you amidst the sea of faces, even if you have shared photos. To help your tired, travel-weary student find you, please create a sign with their name on it, in big letters, that they can see from a distance. As you're holding it, be sure to smile!
- **PHOTO:** Please take your first "family photo" capturing this moment at the airport! The student may feel grungy from traveling, but this will be a moment everyone looks back on fondly. Also, share this photo with the Program Coordinator to let them know the student has arrived safely and is in your care. They will be able to share this message with the student's parents, too.
- **INTRODUCTIONS:** While at the airport, be sure to make introductions and discuss what each person wants to be called: given name, American name, Mr/Ms, Mom/Dad, etc. In some cases, options may need to be given so the student feels comfortable addressing their host parents. Be let them know that whatever options you are providing them are respectful and acceptable for you and your family.
- **LEAVING THE AIRPORT:** Before getting into the car, discuss how your student is feeling and what they may need: restroom, water, snack, etc.

- Students may be embarrassed or unsure of how to ask about these basic needs and will count on you for direction and guidance. Tell your student that you understand how tired and jetlagged they must feel; encourage them to take it easy and rest the first few days.

THE FIRST 48-HOURS

Please be very aware of the fatigue your student will feel for the first few days after their arrival in your home. Often, their travels can take a full day to complete, with multiple layovers and the time-consuming trek through customs.

Not only will your student be extremely jet-lagged, they will be physically exhausted from their travels as well. The more you remember this and are sensitive to their immediate needs in your home upon arrival, the better their recovery and overall tone of their transition to your home.

During the first 48-hours, your student will feel overwhelmed, nervous, anxious, exhausted, and unsure of everything. They won't know how to behave with their new family members, what the expectations are in their new home, what school will be like, who their friends will be, what questions they can ask, and whether they're going to be successful.

They're struggling with leaving everything and everyone they know behind and entering a country where everything and everyone is new and different.

With this in mind, think carefully about the first few days in your home should feel. As much as possible, try to avoid information overload. Be conscientious of what you're saying and try to keep the information you give your student in the first 48-hours to the bare minimum.

Consider: What do they need to know, right now, to feel safe and comfortable in my home? What can I make available to them, in advance, so they don't have to ask?

- **BATHROOM:** Be sure your student is familiar with the bathroom in your home: where the toilet paper is and how to load the dispenser, what you can/cannot flush, where towels are kept, how the shower works, etc. As mentioned above, consider having a toiletry-basket on the counter with mini-shampoo/conditioner, bar soap, tampons/pads, mini-deodorant, roll of toilet paper, Kleenex, lotion, nail-clippers, etc. readily available and easily accessible for your student. Install a night-light for overnight trips to the bathroom.



- **KITCHEN:** Be sure your student is comfortable in the kitchen: how does the microwave work, where are plates/cups/silverware, what to do with dirty dishes, what can they eat, where are snacks, where is the trash can, etc. For now, they don't need more than this; stove, dishwasher, and other appliances/cookware can wait. Again, consider having a snack-basket on the counter with tea bags, fresh fruit, granola bars, fruit snacks, hot chocolate packets, instant oatmeal pouches, candy bars, individual rice/noodle/soup cups, etc. For now, nutrition isn't going to be the most important thing. Their eat-schedule is going to be out-of-sync and their tummy may not feel good. The student is going to need calories and, possibly, comfort-foods/drinks. Once they acclimate, this will change as they acclimate into a routine.

- **BEDROOM:** Be sure your student knows where extra blankets and pillows are kept, how to turn on the lamp/lights, where they can put their things, how to work the curtains/blinds, and any other nuances of their bedroom.

Likewise, avoid over-scheduling activities for the student and your family for the first few days. While you may be excited to show them Minnesota, have them meet people, and explore the outdoors (and I guarantee your student is, too!), now is not the time to do this. You will have 10-months to several years to experience Minnesota together; the first week needs to be focused on settling into their new home and life.

In the first 48-hours, you can expect your student to:

- Sleep
- Unpack
- Call parents and friends
- Spend some time alone in their rooms
- Talk to people in their home language
- Begin having conversations with host family
- Have questions about school and day-to-day life
- Want to go to Target/Cub for a few items they forgot or were unable to pack

While trying to get to know your student a bit, please be aware that their needs, their stress, and their exhaustion may outweigh and take precedent over your needs and wants. Try to be sensitive and supportive, friendly and caring! Your student will appreciate it so much!

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW: CULTURAL ADAPTATION CYCLE

Upon their arrival, the student you are hosting is being completely immersed in a new culture. While there will be some similarities and aspects they find familiar and comfortable, these will most likely be overshadowed by plethora of unfamiliar, strange, and new experiences they're bombarded with on a day-to-day basis. And this can be extremely exhausting, especially for our teenage students experiencing this for the first time while also navigating the complexities

of high school life and second language, all at the same time.

The more you wrestle with, understand, and remember all your student is carrying throughout their day, the better you will be able to help them through their first year, empathize with them, and forgive them when they're less-than-ideal teens.

RESOURCES

- Culture Shock & The Cultural Adaptation Cycle: What it is and what to do about it. (video, 4:41)
- Why Culture Shock Is Good For You (article & infographic)
- Culture Shock & Cycle (graphic & descriptors)

CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is the reaction of the mind and the body to overwhelming change. It is never through one event or happening, but through a continuous succession of events, where definite patterns of behavior are disrupted and the individual feels a loss of control of the known and the familiar. There are typically four or five stages associated with culture shock: honeymoon, culture shock, recovery/adjustment, acceptance/adaptation, re-entry.

Your student may cycle through these stages multiple times throughout the year with varying degrees of difficulty.

Every person's cultural adaptation experience is vastly different and unique to the individual. Be sympathetic, supportive, hopeful, and understanding. The way you help your student navigate these stages will greatly impact the experience for everyone!

MPA CULTURE SHOCK CYCLE

For our MPA students, the culture shock stage tends to show itself towards the end of January, for a number of reasons. Given our Upper School schedule, the students experience "newness" with the beginnings of Quarters 1 and 2: new teachers, changing classes, new friends, new daily schedule.

These new experiences – alongside the carryover of semester-long classes which helps anchor the students at the same time – keep our students interested and distracted and excited throughout much of the first semester.

Towards the middle/end of January, though, we tend to see things bottom-out and fall apart, again for many reasons. In January the students are knee-deep in Minnesota winter, the holidays have passed, they've returned from Winter Break travels, and they see a long stretch of nothing but exams and classes and winter-dreariness ahead of them.



At the same time, many experience a second, equally strong wave of homesickness. At this point, their resilience wavers, their determination fades, they lose sight of their goals, and their longing for home increases.

During this time, your student may exhibit a wide variety of emotions and changes in behavior (see list below). This is not an exhaustive list, and your student may work their way through this phase in an altogether unique manner. The list does, however, give you some common emotions to look for. The more perceptive and in-tune with your student's emotions, the better you'll be able to place their changes in behavior into the correct context and, hopefully, help them work through this phase with compassion.

- Exhaustion
- Change in sleep patterns: insomnia or over-sleeping

- Change in eating patterns
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Withdrawal
- Homesickness
- Irritable or excessively critical
- Anger or frustration, often with one's self or characteristics of the foreign culture
- Idealization of everything at home; critical of all things foreign

NAVIGATING MPA

MPA international students are diploma-seeking students who plan to matriculate to a well-ranked American university after graduation. Our students are here to fulfill their dreams and pave the road for a successful career, either in their home country or in the United States. Our students and their families have high expectations and will work hard to achieve them – sometimes, in a way that seems unhealthy or “wrong.”

This may be a time where their cultural values and parents' expectations run counter to our American ideals and your own parenting style; as such, this may become a source of confusion, misunderstanding, or contention. It is important to have conversations with your student about what they want to achieve at MPA, in the United States, and in your home. At the same time, feel free to share your own values, hopes, and dreams for yourself and them, knowing they may be significantly different. From this, the most successful relationships and experiences will be based on an agreed-upon compromise that values both cultures, hears both voices, and understands all needs.

Going to a new school is difficult for any teenager. Attending a new school in a foreign country, communicating all day in a second language, forever second-guessing while trying to fit in, wanting to make friends, and experiencing a dozen different ways of doing things can be overwhelming and exhausting.

Every student has a different learning curve, and some students may take more time than others to get adjusted to their new school. Remember, although our international students arrive in Minnesota with very strong English language skills, it is still not their home language and they are constantly translating, recalling, and accessing grammar and vocabulary in order to communicate effectively socially and academically. Additionally, students are trying to navigate an entirely new school system as well. Non-lecture classes, small-group work, critical thinking questions, research essays, and labs or projects may all be new experiences for our international students. Navigating these cultural, educational differences alongside the English language immersion is extremely difficult, and students may find their semester grades to be lower than they expected or lower than they typically receive. This can be extremely disheartening, too, as they've worked so hard to succeed.

Every student has a different learning curve, and some students may take more time than others to get adjusted to their new school. Remember, although our international students arrive in Minnesota with very strong English language skills, it is still not their home language and they are constantly translating, recalling, and accessing grammar and vocabulary in order to communicate effectively socially and academically. Additionally, students are trying to navigate an entirely new school system as well. Non-lecture classes, small-group work, critical thinking questions, research essays, and labs or projects may all be new experiences for our international students.

Navigating these cultural, educational differences alongside the English language immersion is extremely difficult, and students may find their semester grades to be lower than they expected or lower than they typically receive; this can be extremely disheartening, too, as they've worked so hard to succeed.

Even with strong language skills, it often takes 8-12 weeks for students to begin to feel truly comfortable in their new school. During this time, their teachers, school counselor, Upper School Director, and International Program Coordinator are keeping a close eye on how the students are adjusting to MPA. We are constantly questioning and assessing answers to these, and other, questions: Are they making friends? Do they seem happy? Are they getting enough sleep? Are they eating in the cafeteria? Are they falling behind in their classes? Are they learning the routines of MPA life?

Communication between the host family and school are vitally important during the first few months of the school year. Based on what we are seeing at school, we will communicate concerns with the host families, to be sure we are all on the same page and supporting our students. Likewise, host families are expected to communicate any concerns they're having with the school, primarily the International Program Coordinator, for the same reason. Together, we can be sure our students are acclimating well to and finding success in their school life.

FRIENDS

Making friends is an important part of the student's life and experience at MPA. While it can be incredibly intimidating to enter a new school at any point in a student's life, it is even more difficult and daunting when doing it in another educational system, in another country, and in a foreign culture. Students have left their support system of family and friends behind and will be navigating the high school social scene on their own. As host parents, be sensitive to this and support your student through the socialization, friend-making, and loneliness they may experience during the first few months at MPA.

When your student starts to form friendships, be sure they understand your family's rules about inviting friends over, visiting friends' homes, and riding in cars with friends.

You want your student to follow your family guidelines but still be able to enjoy time with their new, American friends, as well. Communicating this will allow the new friendships to deepen while still being respectful of family expectations, cultural norms, and school-life balance.

Students are encouraged to participate in all aspect of American life, including social activities. MPA encourages students to make new friends, attend community and school events, and act responsibly and according to host family rules at all times when socializing. MPA students are expected to abide by all U.S. laws and school rules when out with friends, are expected to communicate their whereabouts, and should ask permission before going out with friends, just as your own child would. If the student feels as though this is overly restrictive, remind them that it's merely for their own safety and a responsibility you hold as an MPA host parent.

EXTRACURRICULARS, CLUBS, & SPORTS

MPA encourages all students – international or domestic – to become an active member of the student body, either through sports, clubs, or extracurricular activities. According to the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL), international students who are studying under F-1 visas or are living with host families are eligible to practice and compete at the C-Team or Junior Varsity (JV) levels in Middle and Upper School sports throughout their time at MPA. Unfortunately, they are unable to participate in or compete at the Varsity level while attending school in Minnesota.

To participate in a sport, the student will need a sports physical on-file and will most likely need to attain this after arriving in Minnesota. Host families are encouraged to help coordinate this, so students can participate in athletics. A sports physical is not needed for participation in Physical Education classes, during the school day, at MPA. Students will cover the cost of the sports physical.

MPA strongly believes participation in athletic and academic teams complements the students' academic experience, provides balance in their lives, and fosters school spirit. MPA has a no-cut policy that encourages inclusion and sportsmanship and creates lifelong memories. Whether a student wants to pursue academic or athletic competition at the collegiate level or try something for the first time, they'll be welcomed to the team. If students are looking for a non-competitive way to engage in extracurriculars, they are also encouraged to join MPA clubs. All Middle and Upper School clubs take place during the school day and are open to all students. MPA clubs are student-organized and lead and can provide an opportunity for students to explore passions and hone their leadership skills.

School activities are an excellent way for students to make friends with American peers who share common interests. It is important that host families encourage students to become involved, as it will help them grow, socialize, and round out their experience in the United States. Likewise, participation in additional activities is important for our students' physical, emotional, and mental health.

For host families, a student's participation on a school team or in a performing art (band, choir, orchestra, theatre) will add new dynamics to family scheduling, communication, and transportation. Please work with your student to allow them to participate in the after-school activities they want, just like you would your own child. Feel free to carpool with other parents and think creatively to enable your student to participate.

Likewise, we encourage you to attend your student's activities, cheering them on and supporting them as they, again, show courage in trying new things. This can be a wonderful way to show your student that you care, can generate great conversations and shared experiences, and can deepen the relationship you are striving to build.

- MPA Clubs & Activities
- MPA Athletics
- MPA Fine & Performing Arts

RESPITE CARE

When a host family is unable to care for their student for a short amount of time, a respite care family is found. Typically, respite care is provided by another host family who has an additional bedroom available for the student. Sometimes, respite care is provided by past host families or MPA employees who are not currently hosting but are willing to provide temporary care.

Respite care can be requested at any time, for any reason. While everyone appreciates the continuity of the student staying in one home throughout the school year, respite care is sometimes necessary and, overall, helpful for the host family and student.

Timely communication is key. All respite care placements are coordinated by the International Student Program Coordinator; host families cannot make their own respite care arrangements. Please provide as much notice as possible for the Program Coordinator to find respite care for your student. The homestay stipend follows the student and, therefore, is given to the family providing respite care. The Program Coordinator coordinates this with the MPA business office so direct deposit payments are accurate and reflect the care provided by host families.

HOME VISITS

By law, all host families of F-1 visa students must have a minimum of two home visits by a school official per year. At MPA, the International Student Program Coordinator does a minimum of three annual home visits each year to all new and returning host families. Additional meetings can be requested and scheduled anytime and on an as-needed basis. The student and all host parents are expected to attend the home visit meetings.

These home visits will include but not be limited to:

- Quick tour of the house and student's bedroom.
- Informal conversation about how things are going in the home.
- Problem-solving conversation about issues or concerns.
- Updates about travel plans, and events.

LODGING

As part of your Host Family Agreement and while living in your home, you will provide your international student the following:

- Their own bedroom. While in your home, the student's room is their private space and should not be shared by other members of the family. Likewise and to the best of your ability, the room should be emptied of personal items to make room for the student's belongings.
- A bed with a bedframe, mattress, linens, blankets, and a comforter. No futons, convertible beds, Murphy beds, cots, or mattresses on the floor are allowed.
- Storage space for clothes and personal belongings: closet, footlocker, dresser, shelves, etc.
- A quiet place to study with sufficient lighting, electricity, and internet: desk in bedroom, separate study or den, basement rooms, desk lamp or overhead lighting, plug for laptop and/or phone, etc.
- Personal or shared bathroom with space for toiletries. Bath towel, washcloth, and hand towel for use in your home.
- House key or code for access to home

FOOD & MEALS

Your responsibility as host parents is to provide a balanced diet and adequate food for the healthy growth and well-being of your student. During the week, you should provide breakfast and dinner.

All international students receive hot lunch at school. During the weekend, then, you are responsible for providing three meals each day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Students should have full access to the kitchen, refrigerator, and pantry and should be encouraged to create a shopping list and meal plan with the host parents.

If you eat a meal at a restaurant as a family or are ordering food to be delivered, you are expected to pay for the student as you would any other member of your family. This restaurant-meal is taking the place of you preparing a meal in your home. If the student is out socially with friends, the student is responsible for purchasing meals or snacks during that time.

Your student may be accustomed to different food at home, which means they may take some time to adjust to your family's diet and American food altogether.

They may grow to love some foods you share as a family, and may never grow to like others, as with any of us and our unique tastes and preferences.

Find out in the first few days if there are foods that your student cannot eat due to specific dietary restrictions, allergies, or religious reasons.

Beyond this, however, you should just prepare your usual meals. Be patient with your student and encourage him or her to try new things. Food and meals can be an exciting, fun thing to explore together! Be sure to enjoy these new moments and laugh through them.

Host families, especially those in which there are no teenagers, are sometimes amazed by the quantity of food exchange students consume. It's important to remember that growing teens of any culture require a lot of nourishment and sustenance to maintain their energy levels.

Ensure that your student has had enough to eat, and be sure to discuss the protocol for asking for more food, snacking between meals, and eating after dinner.

It's also important to be aware that eating habits can change or fluctuate as a result of culture shock or homesickness; students may eat more or less than usual during these times. If you suspect this is the case, talk about it with your student; talking is a great way to address adjustment issues and open a dialogue about healthy eating habits. Some students may be concerned that they are going to gain weight in the U.S., which may influence some of their dietary choices. It's important to remind your student that maintaining a balance of a healthy diet and exercise is the best way to stay healthy, while still enjoying food and trying new things. If you feel that your student's eating habits are affecting their overall health, it is important that you contact your International Student Program Coordinator so they can help ensure the safety and health of your student.

TRANSPORTATION

Your responsibility as host parents is to provide transportation for your student in the same way you would for your own child. This includes but is not limited to:

- Daily transportation to/from school on all school days. This can be via car or city bus. If MPA international student and MPA host family elect to utilize the MPA bus transportation, that additional MPA bus cost is the responsibility of the host family.
- Transportation to/from school-related activities.
- Transportation to/from social events, as planned and agreed upon by you and your student.
- Transportation to/from the airport when traveling.

Your student may not be used to coordinating with nor being reliant on other family members for rides in their day-to-day life. If your student is from a large city, they may walk or use public transportation often and are accustomed to much freedom in traveling around their city. They may need to learn how to work with you, thoughtfully, to plan rides because this is a new skill for them.

With this, they may feel a loss of independence or that their world has gotten smaller in their dependence on you in this way. Finding a thoughtful, common ground for the student and host parent to work from is key.

Respectful, timely communication around transportation needs is incredibly important in managing expectations, maintaining schedules, and having a positive experience throughout the school year. Let your student know how they should communicate with you concerning rides and what your schedule is.

Make sure you discuss how far in advance they need to schedule rides; it may help to have a weekly conversation and create a weekly family schedule so everyone's needs are met and compromises can be made ahead of time. It is not your responsibility to provide rides to all of your student's social activities, and having open, honest, timely conversations about this will enable everyone to participate in the activities they want and plan accordingly to do so.



SCHOOL

While hosting an MPA student, you are expected to interact with MPA as any other parent of a domestic student. This includes but is not limited to:

- Attending host family orientations and new-to-MPA orientations when hosting a first-year international student.
- Attending parent-teacher conferences.
- Attending some of your student's performances and competitions: athletics events, performing and visual arts showcases, academic competitions, etc.
- Communicating with MPA teachers and staff, as needed, to support your student's academic success and social-emotional well-being.
- Supporting MPA and your student by reinforcing the importance of good attendance, importance of homework completion, and importance of following MPA's student handbook.

GENERAL EXPECTATIONS: STUDENT

HOMESTAY

While in your home, MPA international students are expected to be a respectful, engaged, caring member of your family and contributor in the household. What this will look like is unique to each student and each host family, and it may take some time for each family to find their new "groove." As you and your student acclimate to life together, remember that this is a time for those pieces of everyone's deep culture to begin surfacing.

You should expect the student's family life to be very different from your own and, for this reason, expect the student's acclimation to your home to take a while.

As you and your student start identifying your hopes and expectations of this experience together, perhaps ask yourself and your student these questions:

- Who lives in your home?
- How does your family spend time together?
- What does parent-child respect look like in your family?
- How does your family express love? How does your family express anger or frustration with one another?
- How does your family coordinate schedules?

- What roles do parents and children play in your family?
- Who prepares meals? Who cleans up afterwards?
- Who cleans the house? Your bedroom? The common rooms?
- Who does the laundry?
- Who drives the children to school?
- What do your family members do in the evenings, after work and school?
- What do your family members do on the weekends?
- What are you hoping to experience in this homestay?

REMEMBER: Both you and your student are excited for the year and want this to be a wonderful experience!

SCHOOL

All international students are expected to follow the MPA Community Handbook, attendance policies, and guidelines for academic integrity. They are attending MPA as any other domestic student would with the same expectations on homework and credit completion, moving them towards graduation. Students are expected to adhere to MPA's rules governing on-and-off-campus behavior; they will report to the Upper School Director for disciplinary reasons and may serve detention and be suspended/expelled, if appropriate.

The Upper School Director works closely with the International Student Program Coordinator, Director of Guidance, and School Counselor to be sure international students are acclimating well to MPA, are emotionally and physically healthy, and are academically successful. Above all, MPA strives to provide a safe, equitable environment in which to live and learn for all students.

SPENDING MONEY

All students have their own credit/debit card and spending money, although the amount of their allowance varies student-to-student. As a rule of thumb, if it is related to the daily meals, transportation, lodging, or general care of the

student, then the host family should pay for the expense.

With this in mind, students are expected to pay for all extras, including but not limited to:

- Toiletries & personal care items
- Clothing & winter wear
- Sports equipment & fees
- Extracurriculars & fees
- School supplies
- Expenses from social events with friends: movies, meals, etc.

MPA allows host families the discretion to make decisions about the items on this list. If the family is at the store and you purchase the student's shampoo alongside your own, that is perfectly fine. If the student wants an expensive bottle of shampoo, feel free to let them purchase it. If your family's getting haircuts together and you want to pay for the student's, that is your decision. If the student wants a blow-out and dye and styling, feel free to have them pay for it. In these cases, it's good to identify what you're willing and unwilling to pay for; then everyone goes into the situation with the same expectations.

We do not want money to become an issue between the host family and student. In rare cases, there is an unforeseen expense or a question of responsibility that is truly confusing.

In these cases and with all questions about money, please contact the International Student Program Coordinator.

UNITED STATES LAWS

All international students are expected to follow government laws and age restrictions while living in the United States. This includes but is not limited to drinking, drugs, smoking, firearms, truancy, government-enforced curfews, gambling, etc.

Likewise, F-1 visa students cannot work or earn income; this is in direct violation of their visa status.

Breaking the law as an international student can have a significant, long-term, and life-changing impact. Depending on the infraction, their age, and the type of visa they are studying under, students may be deported, their visas may be revoked, they may be jailed/detained, or they may be fined.

SETTING AND ADJUSTING EXPECTATIONS

Both you and your student are entering this arrangement with preconceived ideas of how things will go, what to expect, and what will be gained; there are going to be similarities and differences in these ideas. The key is to identify and celebrate the similarities while, at the same time, identifying and discussing the differences so that a common, middle-ground and understanding is found. This will be a gradual process; it won't happen overnight. The more patient and communicative you can be, the more of an open-mind and listening-ear you have, during this transition and settling time, the better and happier household you'll have!

KEEP THEM SIMPLE & FEW

Before your student arrives, think about the house rules and family expectations that are absolutely essential for everyone to identify together. These rules should be centered on everyone's safety, well-being, and happiness; they should not get too bogged-down into details nor be too specific.

The more "house rules" your family and student can identify together, the better! If the student is able to be a part of the process, they will have more buy-in and understanding; they will be able to ask questions and express their opinions; they will see the importance in everyone adhering to these rules, not only the student.

In helping your family and student create the house rules together, consider these questions, conversation-starters, and potential ways to steer the conversation:

1. What do family members need to do to ensure a safe home?

- Communicate schedule and whereabouts
- Be honest and respectful

2. What do family members need to do to have a healthy home?

- Sleep and allow others to sleep at night
- Eat meals together

3. What do family members need to do to create a happy home?

- Spend some time together in the evenings and weekends
- Embrace new experiences, foods, cultures, language, etc.
- Laugh together

Remember, keeping the "rules" open-ended, general, and positive – rather than restrictive, specific, and consequence-based – is going to help everyone get on-board with them!

Once you have created them, feel free to write them down and post them where everyone can see (refrigerator, cork board) and remember what you've agreed to do.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Religion is not a part of MPA school life; MPA is not religiously affiliated and is an independent, private school. However, as church is deeply rooted in the culture of the United States, international students are encouraged to attend church and church activities with their host family, if that's a part of their host family's life. While invited and encouraged to attend, they must not be required to participate.

Feel free to respectfully and supportively discuss religion with your student, sharing how your family practices their faith and asking how your student's family does as well. During this discussion, feel free to extend an open invitation to your church, knowing that the student may not feel comfortable right away but may appreciate the opportunity later. Additionally, students who wish to practice their family's religion should be encouraged to do so, and transportation to an appropriate place-of-worship should be provided, if needed.

MEDICAL INSURANCE

All international students will have medical, health insurance during their time at MPA. All students will have an insurance card, with a copy given to host parents and a copy in their files at MPA. Each family chooses their own insurance company and plan; MPA does not recommend any particular plan nor level of coverage.

Students and their families are responsible for paying any co-pay, deductible, and medical expenses. Host families are only responsible for helping the students get the medical care they need and assisting with the healing process.

Based on the nature of the illness or injury, please reach out to the International Student Program Coordinator for assistance with appointments or care.

Likewise, please notify MPA anytime your student needs medical care, even if the illness/injury is minor but requires a trip to the doctor.

GENERAL EXPECTATIONS: HOST FAMILY

STIPEND

The host family stipend is paid by the student's family and covers all expenses directly tied to hosting their child while in your home, in Minnesota, and in attendance at MPA. In general, the stipend covers lodging, meals, and transportation, in addition to the time and care you will give the student as well.

As part of your Host Family Agreement and while hosting an MPA student, you are not allowed to ask the student nor their parents for additional funds to cover these expenses. Money between the student/parents and host family should rarely, if ever, change hands. If you feel additional funds are needed to cover the care you are providing the student, you should bring your concern and request to the International Student Program Coordinator, not to the student or family directly. If you have questions or concerns about this or any other aspect of your homestay stipend, please speak directly with the International Student Program Coordinator.

SUPERVISION

For safety reasons, international students need adult supervision overnight. No student should be in a home without an adult overnight. Likewise, no student should spend the night in a hotel – alone or with friends—unsupervised, unless an adult is in an adjoining room. If the student is spending the night at a friend's house, an adult must be present.

To ensure the safety and well-being of our students, MPA has this expectation for all international students, of any age, while they are attending MPA and living with an MPA host family. If respite care is needed to provide adult supervision overnight, please contact the International Student Program Coordinator to make arrangements.



MPA STUDENT SUPPORT NETWORK TRUSTED ADULT

Throughout the student's time in Minnesota, we want them to have at least one adult in their lives, locally, they can talk to and lean on. For many of our students, this trusted adult is one or both host parents. For others, this person is the International Program Coordinator.

For a few, they find comfort in talking with a specific teacher or school counselor.

It is less important who this person is in our student's life and more important that they simply exist.

In an age where our student's friends and family "back home" are so easily accessible via phone, video chat, and even travel, it is incredibly important that our students have an adult here, in Minnesota, in their day-to-day lives that they can speak to, relate with, and ask for help.

If you do not feel as though you are connecting on this level with the student, that is okay. While this is ideal and what everyone wants to come out of the homestay experience, things simply don't click on a deeper level sometimes.

Even if this is the case, know that you can still have this conversation with the student, giving them permission to name any adult they are connecting with and removing the pressure from it being you.

If after a couple months in Minnesota and at MPA, your student cannot name a trusted adult, please let the International Program Coordinator know.

MENTAL HEALTH & SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

All mental health concerns are brought to our Student Support Team and, through them, to the MPA teachers: Director of Guidance, Upper/Middle School Counselor, MPA Psychologist, and Upper/Middle School Learning Specialist.

Your student may experience feelings of sadness, loneliness, stress, or anxiety during the program year. This is typical of any teenager, and for your student, it may be a bit worse given the life they're living in a new country, new home, at a new school, and with new parents. Learning and adapting to a new culture and language is a stressful experience that requires patience, maturity, and adequate coping skills, skills your student is probably still developing as they mature and grow-up.

Navigating all of this can be difficult and we encourage students and their host parents to speak candidly about any sad or negative feelings they are experiencing, so that they can effectively process through them with care and support.

As you get to know your student, you will play an important role in seeing the student's day-to-day attitude, emotions, and personality and placing any changes you see into the context of your individual student's norm.

While the student is at MPA and in your home, we want to support them in all things, and cultivating positive mental health is equally important as their academic success and social adjustment. If you see drastic changes in your student's mood or behavior that seems out-of-the-norm, please contact the International Student Program Coordinator.

They can reach out to teachers to see if similar/different behaviors are evident in the classroom, cafeteria, and recess, and from here, help you and the school best support your student.

Changes to watch for may include but are not limited to:

- Anxiety, agitation, or restlessness
- Lack of grooming, hygiene, or self-care

- Noticeable weight loss/gain
- Using drugs or alcohol; engaging in risky behaviors
- Intentionally disruptive or disrespectful
- Excessive anger or frustration
- Feelings of sadness or hopelessness
- Feelings of worthlessness, self-criticism, or self-blame
- Self-harm
- Thoughts or talk of suicide or death
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Lack of interest in school; declining academic performance; additional school absences

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

All issues around marginalization, prejudice, and racism are brought to our Upper or Middle School Administration: Upper or Middle School Director, Director of Guidance, Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, and Upper/Middle School Counselor. MPA's teachers, administrators, staff, and families are committed to creating and providing a safe, inclusive, equitable space for all students and community members. If your student experiences marginalization, prejudice, or bias during their time at MPA – whether in our school building, in your neighborhood, via social media, or in greater-Minnesota – please support them by listening to their experience, communicating with the International Student Program Coordinator, and reaching out to any member of the Administrative Team listed above. We want to support you and your student in all diversity, equity, and inclusion concerns you may have.

COLLEGE COUNSELING

All students receive comprehensive college counseling at MPA: Director of College Counseling, District College Counseling Assistant, Director of Guidance, and Upper School Director.

Throughout their time at MPA, your student will receive thoughtful, timely, and thorough college counseling guidance. For our international students, this is incredibly helpful as they navigate the American higher education system, college application requirements, standardized testing, and college entrance essays. A complete overview

of the College Counseling Program can be found on our [website](#).

As your student enters their Junior and Senior years, they will begin researching and creating their college application list. In doing so and based on your relationship with them, they may want to discuss this process with you, use you as a sounding board, and get your opinions.

This is great! The more opportunities they have to discuss their hopes and dreams and colleges-of-choice, they better equipped they'll be to make the best-fit decision upon graduation.

However, in talking with your student about the college selection and application process, please remember these few, but important, things:

- You are not their parent. I know that sounds harsh, but it's so easy to get caught-up in the discussion and decision-making process and lose sight of this. You will not be paying for their education; you will not be co-signing their loans; you are not the decision-maker in their lives.
- You are not the expert. Again, I know that sounds harsh, but it's true. We have professionals at MPA to help with every little nuance of the college choice and application process. Feel free to give your thoughts and opinions, if asked, but try not to provide information that contradicts or confuses what the student's hearing in school.
- You are available to listen, support, and care, above all! The college application process is incredibly amazing and fun and exciting and stressful – all the emotions!
- Allow your student to talk about it with an open heart and mind, so you can hear their concerns, disappointments, and dreams. More than anything, this may be what they need. Feel free to share in their excitement, comfort them through the tough parts, be their biggest fan and confidant.

ACADEMIC

All academic concerns are brought to our Student Support Team and, through them, to the MPA teachers: Director of Guidance, Upper/Middle School Counselor, MPA Psychologist, and Upper/Middle School Learning Specialist.

SEMESTER ONE: The first semester at MPA for our new students (and even some of our returning ones) can often be incredibly tough. Classes move quickly, teachers speak super-fast, everyone around them seems to know what's going on, there are lots of assignments to juggle, there are gaps in their prior knowledge, and the homework takes longer each night than expected. With all of this in mind, our international students' grades – especially in semester one of their first year – are often significantly lower than they were expecting. Often, our international students transfer into MPA having been in the top 10% of their school, and now they find themselves struggling to get the A's they want. Many feel as though they are destroying their GPA and digging themselves a hole they can never crawl out of.

This is so difficult for them. Any support and pep-talks and bolstering you can do is incredibly helpful. Reassure them that things will get easier, that their grades will improve (with hard work!), that they will learn valuable lessons from this, and that they ARE overcoming amazing hurdles to do as well as they are. If your student is really feeling disheartened during this time, academically, feel free to let the International Program Coordinator know.

TEACHERS: All MPA students receive amazing academic support—especially our international students. One of the benefits of being at a small school is the individualized attention our students receive from their teachers. As our international students acclimate to MPA, they will begin to notice and understand the unique relationship our students have with their teachers.

Our teachers' doors are always open, and students are encouraged to walk through them anytime, for any reason, with any question. This may be very different from your student's experience in their home school, and it may take a while for them to embrace this at MPA. Encourage your student to ask their teachers for help; they're their students' greatest resource!

YOUR ROLE: As a host parent, you have the ability to view your student's grades in Schoology (our online learning platform) just like any other parent. While we don't require you to do so, we do encourage you to check their grades occasionally – not to micromanage them, but to be sure that they're doing okay in their classes. The International Student Program Coordinator and the student's teachers are also doing this, but they're doing it for a longer list of kids. Your eyes on the one (or two!) student living in your home can sometimes catch something small before it snowballs into something much bigger. If you notice a decline in grades or an increase in the number of missing assignments, please feel free to reach out to any of the Support Team members listed above or, as always, contact the Program Coordinator. A simple "heads-up" to someone can be exactly what's needed to get the student back on track.

ADMINISTRATION: If a student is failing one or more classes, they will probably meet with the Upper/Middle School Director and/or another member of the Support Team. This meeting will discuss their class(es), their struggles, their needs, and their plans. The Support Team will help the students get back on track in order to be able to move forward in their classes successfully. If this does not happen and a student's grades do not improve, additional meetings may happen, more structured plans may be put in place, or the student may be placed on academic probation. We will do everything we can to enable student success!



