

Transcript Evaluation

At times, high school students will arrive with international transcripts that can be used to award credit for prior learning. Districts must carefully examine the document for authenticity or contract with an organization that specializes in this service. The majority of students will have attended the local public school in their home country. The transcript will typically include information about the school and courses taken along with a signature and the school seal (usually raised and/or embossed). A stamp may also appear around the signature. At times, the student may bring an official, certified copy that has been notarized and authenticated by either the home country and/or a US consulate.

Once the transcripts are available, many will need to be translated. Although districts may have translators on staff, many do not and will need to seek a translator. There are a number of organizations that will both translate and authenticate international transcripts. *Ideally, the school will seek a literal translation rather than an interpretation and be formatted exactly as the original.* For the purposes of translation, grades should not be changed. Keep in mind that translating course names and grades is usually not sufficient to award credit due to details such as course content, hours of instruction, and grading practices.

Although rare, some students may come from a private, international school in which case the transcript will likely be in English and will include an accrediting agency in addition to the school's official identifying features. Accredited private international schools will typically follow either the British or the American system, utilize content standards from the accrediting country, staff the school with teachers certified in an English-speaking country and use similar resources. If the school is accredited through the United States, there will be a notation that the school is accredited through one of six regional accreditors recognized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation:

- Middle States Commission on Higher Education
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges
- Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
- Higher Learning Commission
- Southern Association of Schools and Colleges
- Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Interpreting the transcript and awarding credit for prior learning is a complicated process. The decision to award credit for classes taken abroad is entirely a local decision and should be made by a team of stakeholders including the principal, teachers and district-level personnel. **The team should make all efforts to find a balance between being fair to the student and maintaining the integrity of the district's diploma.** This decision can significantly impact the student's life and is a primary factor in some students' decision to stay in school or to seek work.

Some countries offer many more classes in a school year than are typically taken in Missouri. *It is recommended that the number of credits awarded per year do not exceed the number of credits that can be earned in a Missouri school year.*

Awarding core or elective credits is also a source of confusion. The following guidelines will help district personnel decide which to give and how they appear on the transcript:

Mathematics: Most countries will not specify which math course is taken, such as Algebra and Geometry. Rather, many countries offer integrated mathematics courses. Districts may choose to research the mathematics curriculum of the country or administer a mathematics assessment to assign credit. Partial credits may be awarded if the district deems it appropriate. As a reminder, if a student enrolls in a course with an EOC, that student must take the assessment prior to graduation.

Science: Most countries will list the specific science class taken and credits can be assigned accordingly. Some countries offer multiple science courses in a school year. A student interview discussing the courses taken and the content learned is recommended to better understand what competencies they hold. An assessment is another viable option. Again,

partial credits may be awarded and if the student is enrolled in a course with a mandatory EOC, the student must take the assessment prior to graduation.

Social Studies: World History should be considered a core credit. If a history class is on the transcript, it can be considered as World History. Other classes, such as Civics or Government, should be considered electives because they are not specific to the United States. Missouri expects that students living in our state have coursework involving Missouri and US government as well as take the required assessments.

English: Many transcripts will have a class called English which is similar to studying a foreign language. These courses **can be** considered as ESOL courses and assigned English content credits.

Literature-Related Courses: Courses where students studied literature in their native language **can be** counted as ELA core credits. Although the language of instruction was different, the skills and knowledge acquired during this course is similar.

Since the names of the classes will vary, the suggested method of entering these courses on the transcript is to use terms similar to the courses offered by the district with a notation that the course was taken abroad. This is the easiest and clearest method that offers the most flexibility, but does not suggest that the courses are replicative. Due to the transient nature of this population, a foreign course name familiar to one counselor may not be understood by a counselor in another district.

Transcript Resources

There are a few resources available to assist school personnel in interpreting transcripts. Beyond these two resources, consulting the Ministry of Education of the students' home country is recommended.

[Evaluating Foreign Transcripts: The A-Z Manual](#)
[Classbase](#)

Fraudulent Transcripts

Unfortunately, fraudulent documents do show up. Identifying a fraudulent transcript requires specific knowledge about the country of origin. Here are some hints for spotting them:

- There is no seal, stamp and/or signature.
- Interview the student about prior learning. Note any inconsistencies between the interview and transcript.
- Compare biographical information with other documents and the student interview.
- Research the governing body that recognizes the institution.
- When possible, compare with another transcript from the same country.
- Verify that the school exists.
- Look for inconsistencies in typeface or handwriting.

Students without Transcripts

Some students will arrive without official transcripts. There are a number of reasons that a district may not be able to obtain this information:

- The student attended a school that no longer operates.
- The student is in the United States as a refugee or asylee and cannot contact the home country
- The student is from a country where the government agency responsible for transcripts no longer operates or exists.

Students who fit this scenario are at a high risk of dropping out (Umansky et al, 2018, Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017). The graduation requirements should be explicitly conveyed in person as well as the requirements of relevant post-secondary institutions. Many times, district staff will need to frequently counsel the student to express the importance of spending the time now to better prepare for the future as many students are pressured by the family to start earning money. Some students may not understand the need to continue their education as their immigration status will prevent them from attending a post-secondary institution in Missouri. As a reminder, federal law prohibits districts from inquiring about immigration status (Plyler v. Doe, 1982).

It is important that districts make an attempt to obtain the transcripts from the student’s home country. Per federal guidelines, obtaining official transcripts can be a long process and students must not be asked to wait to enroll until their transcripts arrive. *If districts have exhausted all options to obtain the transcripts, Missouri allows for proficiency-based credits that are earned through assessments.* A proficiency-based credit must have adequate policies and procedures in place to justify the award of credit, which ensures the integrity of awarding the credit is readily defensible. There are two strategies that can be used in these situations that qualify as readily defensible which can stand alone or be used in tandem. The student may take a comprehensive assessment inclusive of all course learning expectations, such as an existing final exam. Additionally, the student could be placed in an advanced course and if successful, credit for prior learning can be applied retroactively.

A final option is to place the student in ninth grade and develop a formal Individual Career and Academic Plan in collaboration with school personnel, the student and the family. The Graduation Handbook specifies that international students may be graduated upon successful completion of an individualized graduation plan which school officials, parents and students agree will allow the student to graduate college or career ready, even if the program of studies may not include the 24 hours of credit as defined in Missouri. An example of this procedure would be that certain core credits are waived in favor of English-development and/or remedial courses. Local board policy specifically allowing these plans is required. **Again, it is important to find the balance between being fair to the student and maintaining the integrity of the district’s diploma.**

Older students without transcripts

At times, districts are faced with an older student who wants to enroll without transcripts. Some of these students may reach the age of 21 prior to earning enough credits to graduate. Districts are obligated to enroll a student if they have not yet turned 21. Some districts have policies that permit the student to stay in school provided they can earn enough credits to graduate within 12 months even though they do not receive funds. Others refer the students to [MO Connections](#), [Adult Education](#) or [Fresh Start](#).

Transcript Translation Companies

5T Language LLC 1504 NW 54 th St. Kansas City, MO 64118 816-256-8176 5tlanguage.com	LAMP Interpreters 8050 Watson Rd Ste 340 St. Louis, MO 63119 314-842-0062 Lampinterpreters.org	Day Translations 415 Madison Avenue New York, NY 10017 800-856-2759 Daytranslations.com
International Institute of STL 3401 Arsenal St. St. Louis, MO 63118 314-773-9090 www.iistl.org	Global Village Language Center 8428 Delmar Blvd. St. Louis, MO 63124 314-989-9112 Globalvillagelanguagecenter.com	Bilingual International 1329 Macklind Ave St. Louis, MO 63110 314-645-7800 Bilingualstl.org
International Language Center 1416 S Big Ben Blvd St. Louis MO 63117 800-445-4440 Ilcworldwide.com		