

Springfield Public Schools



Program

Student/Parent Handbook

Requirements & Guidelines
for Eligibility



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Purpose of the Manual

The purpose of this manual is to provide students, parents, and staff with information about the guidelines and policies of the Springfield Public Schools A+ Program. It is the responsibility of the school to ensure that A+ designation is achieved and continued A+ status is maintained. It is the responsibility of the student and parent to read, understand and comply with program requirements.

Rationale

The A+ Schools Program* is a school-improvement initiative established by the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993. The program is raising academic standards, opening new doors to higher education, and introducing students to the teaching profession through tutoring and mentoring activities. The program provides incentives for local high schools to:

- Reduce the dropout rate
- Raise academic expectations and eliminate “general track” courses
- Provide better “career pathways” for all students
- Work more closely with business and higher education leaders

The primary goal of A+ Schools is to assure that all students are well prepared to pursue advanced education and employment. The program also offers state-paid financial assistance to students who graduate from an A+ designated high school and meet specific requirements.

By the year 2010, seventy-five percent of our jobs will require technical skills, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. The A+ Schools Program encourages all students to focus on a career early and set a goal which includes training beyond high school. The A+ Schools Program asks all students to select a career path, plan course work for all four years of high school, and progress toward their goal of obtaining additional training/education at the post-secondary level and/or obtaining a high-skill, high-wage job after graduation.

**Central, Glendale, and Parkview are fully A+ designated. Hillcrest and Kickapoo are seeking designation for seniors graduating in 2009.*

Participation Requirements

- The high school from which the student graduates must meet and maintain all the requirements for A+ schools designation.
- State funding must be available. As with any state program, A+ Schools Program financial incentives are subject to the political process of annual appropriation and legislative approval.
- The student must meet all eligibility criteria outlined in the *A+ Schools Agreement* and *A+ Citizenship Guideline*. The forms must be signed by students and parents to indicate participation in the program and must be turned in to the school’s A+ Office to be placed in the student’s file.

Springfield Public Schools A+ Program

The education of all students is important, regardless of their plans following high school. Some high school graduates will choose to attend a four-year college or university; others may go directly into the work force or military; and still others may seek additional training at a post-secondary career/technical school or community college. The A+ Schools Program is designed to ensure that no matter which option is chosen, all high school students will be provided selections of courses, career counseling, technology and/or workplace skill development opportunities which are appropriate to their career goals.

Springfield Public School students who meet all state-mandated A+ participation requirements may be eligible for these financial incentives, provided 1) state funds are appropriated by the legislature or 2) subject to state funding approval. If a student is a non-citizen, it is up to the post-secondary institution to determine whether they are eligible for the incentives for the A+ program.

Students must meet the following requirements to be eligible for tuition and common student fee reimbursement:

- Sign an *A+ Schools Agreement* and *A+ Citizenship Guideline* prior to high school graduation.
- Attend a designated A+ School for three consecutive years prior to graduation.
- Graduate from an A+ designated high school with a cumulative, non-weighted 4-year grade point average of 2.5 or higher.
- Maintain a cumulative, 4-year attendance record of at least 95 percent.
- Perform 50 hours of unpaid, school-based academic tutoring. Tutoring is usually completed during a student's junior or senior year. Tutoring must be academic in nature and completed in the Tutoring class or by prior arrangement with the A+ Coordinator. Only A+ Office approved tutoring will be included in the student's A+ eligibility file.
- Maintain a record of good citizenship and avoid the unlawful use of alcohol and/or drugs.
- File a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). A+ funding becomes available only after all federal aid has been determined and applied to tuition and fees.
- All individuals required to register under the United States Military Selective Service Act must show proof of registration to be eligible for state-supported financial assistance.

Maintaining Post-Secondary A+ Eligibility

The student must:

- Attend on a full-time basis a Missouri public community college or vocational/technical school.
- Maintain a college grade point average of 2.5 or higher on a 4.0 scale.

- Apply for federal post-secondary student financial assistance (FAFSA renewal) during subsequent semesters of enrollment.
- Follow the post-secondary institution's requirements.

A+ Program Enrollment

A+ participation is voluntary. Students may enroll in the program by completing and returning an *A+ Schools Agreement* and *A+ Citizenship Guideline* to the A+ office. Forms are available in the A+ office.

There is no specific deadline for enrolling in the A+ Program. Students are encouraged, however, to begin their participation in the A+ Program at the beginning of their freshman year. Enrolling early allows students and their parents to focus on compliance with A+ goals and meeting requirements of the program before graduation.

Q. What does signing the A+ Agreement mean?

A. By signing and submitting the A+ agreement, students and their parents are simply indicating an interest in the students' participation in the A+ Program and that they understand the requirements which qualify the students for that program. When an agreement has been signed by all parties and returned, a file will be established for that student and will be located in the A+ Program Coordinator's office. This file denotes the student's active participation in the A+ Schools Program and will contain all pertinent information relative to the student's eligibility for A+ funds.

Tuition Benefits

Students who successfully complete the requirements of the program may qualify to receive financial assistance for tuition and common student fees to attend any public community college or vocational/technical school in the State of Missouri. Under the program, the financial incentives may be available for eligible students for two years (6 semesters) during the four-year period immediately following graduation.

The tuition incentive is earned by each individual and is not transferable to any other student.

Receipt of private scholarships will not affect any student's eligibility to participate in the A+ program.

Financial need is not a factor in determining student eligibility for the A+ tuition incentive.

Q. Does participating in the A+ program restrict a student's choices?

A. Participating in the A+ Program in high school DOES NOT in any way restrict a student's educational choices. The A+ Schools Program is designed to provide greater opportunities for students. Signing up will not restrict the options available to a student while in high school or upon graduating from high school.

Q. What if an A+ participant decides to attend a four-year college or university?

A. There are no repercussions for participating in the A+ Program in high school and completing the student eligibility requirements. Many students will develop plans to attend a four-year college or university following high school. **(The A+ Schools Scholarship incentive MAY NOT be applied to costs associated with a four-year college or university.)**

- Students eligible for A+ tuition benefits may opt to attend a community college for two years, earn an Associates Degree, or simply earn basic credit hours; then transfer those credits to a four-year college/university.
- If an A+ eligible student should withdraw from a four-year institution with at least a 2.5 GPA, he/she could enroll at a Missouri public community college or vocational-technical school and may still be eligible for A+ tuition benefits during the four-year period immediately following graduation. Students should check with the institution's A+ Coordinator to determine eligibility status.

Q. What if an A+ participant decides not to attend a community college or vocational or technical school?

A. Participation in the A+ Program in no way restricts a student's post high school career or educational opportunities. It is simply a funding resource for post-secondary education should the student choose to utilize it. A student, who participates in the A+ Program, is NOT required to attend a community college or vocational or technical school.

Accessing Tuition Benefits

It is critical to the integrity of the A+ Program that A+ participants pay strict attention to all the guidelines, rules, and policies that govern the program. Some control is given to local school districts in establishing policy and administering the A+ Program. Most of the rules governing the administration of the program are found in state statutes and are not subject to local amendment.

The tuition benefits are not automatic. To access A+ funds, eligible graduates must request an official A+ transcript be sent to the institution they plan to attend after graduation.

Grade Point Requirement

Eligible participants must graduate with a cumulative non-weighted, unrounded grade point average of 2.5 or higher. For purposes of this program, grade point averages are not rounded (2.499 is not 2.5).

It is the responsibility of each participant to closely monitor his/her grade point average. Final determination of eligibility cannot be made until an A+ participant graduates and his/her final GPA is calculated on the official senior transcript.

Attendance Requirement

A+ participants are expected to attend school regularly. A+ participants must graduate with a cumulative (grades 9-12) attendance rate of 95% or higher. All absences, including those approved in advance by parents or school officials (except those for school-sponsored activities)

will count against a student's days absent. The student should be careful in the use of absences because excessive absences may affect a student's A+ eligibility. It is the responsibility of each A+ participant to closely monitor his/her attendance. For purposes of this program, attendance averages are not rounded (94.999 is not 95%).

Status Reports

Status reports will periodically be mailed to the homes of A+ participants. Reports will reflect the student's current status and compliance in meeting A+ requirements.

A+ Tutoring

A+ participants must perform a minimum of 50 hours of unpaid, school-based, academic tutoring. Students meet this requirement by enrolling in the Tutoring class during the junior and/or senior year. Tutoring must be academic in nature and completed in the Tutoring class or by prior arrangement with the A+ Coordinator. Only A+ Office approved tutoring will be included in the student's A+ eligibility file.

Tutoring Course Description [3020] (1/2 unit, Gr. 11-12) The intent of this course is to provide training and tutoring opportunities for A+ students. Students will gain skills in order to assist other students academically. During training students will be introduced to a variety of academic tools for use throughout their tutoring experience, such as learning styles, listening skills, positive reinforcement, and organizational skills. Other topics discussed will include professionalism, appropriate attire, privacy issues, responsibilities, and dependability. Once training is completed, placements will be made by the A+ Coordinator. Tutors will earn approximately 25-35 hours of supervised and documented tutoring in addition to required coursework. **To enroll in this class, students MUST receive A+ Coordinator approval AND meet the A+ Schools Program state regulation requirements (2.5 non-weighted GPA, 95% attendance, and good citizenship).** This course may be repeated for credit.

Tutoring must be performed in one (or more) of the public school buildings that are part of the SPS district in an approved program. Tutoring must be performed under the supervision of a certified teacher at an SPS site.

Tutoring time must be documented on the official A+ Tutoring Log. These logs are available in the A+ Office. No other record will be accepted. The participant is responsible for maintaining his/her tutoring log accurately, obtaining the necessary signatures, and submitting the log to the A+ Office/Lab in a timely manner. No credit will be awarded for logs that are misplaced or stolen - no exceptions.

Drugs/Alcohol

Any involvement with illegal drugs or alcohol (use, manufacture, possession, transport, distribution, under the influence, or sale) **both in school and away from school** will result in the immediate and permanent removal of the participant from the A+ program.

A student will forfeit the opportunity to earn the A+ schools financial incentives for any drug or alcohol violation committed **at any time throughout the four years the student attends high school.**

FAFSA

Making a good faith effort to first secure all available federal sources of financial aid that don't require repayment (*Free Application for Federal Student Aid*) is an import requirement of A+ eligibility.

If a student fails to file the FAFSA prior to graduation from high school, access to A+ funding may be in jeopardy. If all other A+ requirements have been met, the student is considered an A+ Certified graduate and can receive the A+ Stamp on their graduate transcript. *If the FAFSA is not completed, however, state funded tuition reimbursement will not be allowed.*

The A+ participant and his/her parents must complete and file the FAFSA (*Free Application for Federal Student Aid*) at www.fafsa.ed.gov The information found on the FAFSA is required by post-secondary institutions to complete the college enrollment process.

Selective Service

All individuals required to register under the United States Military Selective Service Act must show proof of registration to be eligible for state-supported financial assistance.

SPS A+ Program Senior Citizenship Review and Appeal Process

During a student's Senior year, the file for each potential qualifier will be reviewed for Program standards compliance. A determination will be made by the A+ Coordinator and the student's high school principal regarding whether the student has satisfied the Program guidelines.

Seniors who are notified that they are "out of compliance" may request a review of their Program status by preparing a written appeal, on the appropriate form, and filing it with the A+ office within 10 calendar days after the date the student received notice that they were "out of compliance." An Appeal may only be filed by a Senior who has been determined to be "out of compliance." **Appeals are allowed for non-alcohol and/or drug related citizenship violations only.** All appeals must be finalized before June 30 of the Senior's year of graduation.

An Appeal Team that generally consists of the student's high school principal, assistant principal, and the A+ Coordinator will review all pertinent information and make a decision about the student's status in the Program. The decision of the Appeal Team is final.

The student will be notified of the appeal conference and will be invited to attend. A good faith effort to invite parents/guardians to the appeal conference will also be made. Once a final decision is made by the Appeal Team, a written notice of the decision will be mailed to the parent/guardian and student within 5 school days following the date of the conference.

Springfield Public Schools Citizenship Appeal Form

Student Name (Print) _____ **Year of Graduation** _____

It has been determined that your status as an A+ student is in jeopardy as a result of violating the citizenship policy. The citizenship review team has examined your discipline record and finds that additional information is needed in order to determine your future eligibility for the program and the incentive. **Appeals are allowed for non-alcohol and/or drug related citizenship violations only.**

With this form, attach a typed narrative explaining why you feel you should still receive the A+ incentive. In your explanation, address each of the following points:

- **Describe the offense(s) for which you received ISS or OSS.**
- **Explain what you will and/or have done to avoid being in trouble. (Be specific)**
- **Provide evidence of why you feel you should be allowed to remain in the A+ program.**

Return the appeal form with the written explanation attached to the A+ Program Coordinator's office by _____. **Failure to return this appeal by the deadline will result in your loss of eligibility in the A+ Program.**

An Appeal Team that generally consists of the student's high school principal, assistant principal, and the A+ Program Coordinator will review all pertinent information and make a decision about your status in the Program. The decision of the Appeal Team is final.

Once a final decision is made by the Appeal Team, a written notice of the decision will be mailed to the parent/guardian and student within 5 school days following the date of the appeal conference. All appeals must be finalized before June 30 of the senior's year of graduation.

Student Signature

Date

Parent Signature

Date