



News Release

August 24, 2009

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Students, Schools Achieve More with A+ Program

This month, thousands of college students are starting classes with tuition money they earned from the state through a program unique to Missouri.

High school students who complete the state's A+ Schools Program earn two years of state-paid tuition at a public community college or an eligible career or technical school. Many of the students who take advantage of the A+ program credit it with their decision to go to college.

"It's not just the money," said Jocelyn Strand, director of A+ Schools at the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. "A lot of these kids are first-generation college students. We often hear that never before had someone told them that they could go to college or succeed in college. Every A+ high school has an A+ coordinator who works with students and encourages them."

As high school students get back in school this month, Strand encourages them and their parents to check out the A+ program. She especially wants to alert ninth graders to the advantages of signing up sooner rather than later.

"The earlier students sign up for the program, the easier it will be for them to meet the state requirements and avoid the missteps that might make them ineligible," Strand said. "All four years of high school matter in determining eligibility."

Established by state law in 1993, the A+ program is open to all public schools. To receive designation, high schools must meet requirements aimed at improving coursework rigor, supporting at-risk students to lower dropout rates and involving community stakeholders in the education process. The program also requires schools to track objectives for each student, which generates data schools can use to keep improving.

Currently, 274 of Missouri's 570 high schools are participating, and more than 100 other schools are in the process of seeking state approval. Many schools seek designation because parents and students push for it.

"The A+ Program is a Missouri success story," said Chris L. Nicastro, Commissioner of Education. "Overall, schools that participate have lower dropout rates, higher GPAs, lower remediation rates, higher college entrance test scores, and a higher percentage of students continuing to postsecondary education."

Students who take part in the A+ program must meet requirements for GPA (2.5 points or higher on a 4-point scale), attendance (an overall rate of at least 95 percent for grades 9 through 12) and good citizenship (standards are set by schools and so vary). Students must also spend 50 hours doing district-supervised unpaid mentoring or tutoring (in many A+ schools, tutoring is offered as a course). Once students earn the A+ award, they have up to four years after high school graduation to use the benefit.

In the past four years, nearly 50,000 high school students graduated with A+ eligibility. The state legislature appropriates about \$25 million to the program each year.

More information on the A+ program, including a list of A+ designated high schools, is available on the Missouri Department of Elementary and Education Web site at www.dese.mo.gov/divimprove/aplus.

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Fact sheet and additional quotes are available at www.dese.mo.gov/divcareered/missouri_connections_news_room.htm

The Missouri Connections Public Outreach Partnership workgroup represents a collaboration of state agencies concerned with education and workforce development who are helping inform and build awareness among the public, particularly students and potential students, of targeted careers, educational and industry trends, and workforce development priorities. Workgroup members represent the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; Department of Higher Education; Department of Economic Development, Division of Workforce Development and Missouri Economic Research & Information Center; Missouri Center for Career Education; and Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Freelance writer is Anita Harrison.