



DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

A+ Scholarship COVID-19 Accommodations for the 2020-2021 Academic Year

Issued October 20, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to disrupt education at both the secondary and postsecondary levels. As a result, the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development has determined that accommodations are necessary for the A+ Scholarship for the 2020-2021 academic year.

Although disruptions continue, the circumstances for the 2021 seniors are different than those faced by the 2020 seniors. The accommodations for the 2021 seniors reflect those differences and are not necessarily a continuation of the accommodations provided to the 2020 seniors. The following accommodations seek to strike a balance between assisting students and maintaining the integrity of the A+ Scholarship.

1. Attendance Requirement for 2021 Seniors Enrolled in Virtual Courses

- a. *Standing requirement:* Have at least a 95% attendance record overall for grades 9-12
- b. *Issue:* Many more students are enrolled in virtual coursework this year as a result of revised course delivery methods by school districts and student/family concerns relating to COVID-19. In addition, students enrolled in on-site coursework may experience attendance issues due to fear of contracting and/or spreading the virus.
- c. *Accommodations:*
 - i. Consistent with DESE guidance, attendance of students enrolled in on-site courses should reflect actual attendance, even if the course or courses are delivered through MOCAP or other accepted virtual methods.
 - ii. Students enrolled in off-site virtual courses must meet the guidelines for A+ candidates outlined by DESE in the Non-Traditional Methods of Instruction section of the Attendance Hour Reporting guide for the 2020-2021 school year (<https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/sf-AAttendanceReporting.pdf>). This section provides that attendance for A+ candidate students enrolled in and completing MOCAP courses should have attendance recorded as 95%. *Although DESE's guidance for A+ candidates is limited to students enrolled in MOCAP courses, DHEWD is extending this A+ Scholarship accommodation to ALL virtual*

courses, including but not limited to Launch courses. This may require the high school to record attendance differently for A+ than for attendance reports to DESE.

- iii. High schools may establish a policy that provides for a blanket appeal of the attendance requirement for students in identified categories affected by COVID-19 rather than requiring students to submit individual appeals. High schools opting for this approach must establish the criteria students must meet to qualify for the blanket appeal, such as being required to quarantine.

2. Tutoring Mentoring Requirement for 2021 Seniors

- a. *Standing requirement:* Have performed 50 hours of unpaid tutoring or mentoring, of which up to 25% may be job shadowing, prior to graduation. When there are circumstances beyond a student's control, the high school may extend the time period for completing this requirement on a case-by-case basis, not to exceed six months beyond high school graduation.
- b. *Issue:* For students enrolled in off-site courses or those with a hybrid attendance schedule (a mix of virtual and on-site courses), achieving the full 50 hours of tutoring and mentoring may be extremely difficult. In addition, many districts are now restricting movement between buildings and/or grade levels, making tutoring lower grade levels impossible.
- c. *Accommodation:* 2021 seniors completing 25 hours of unpaid tutoring or mentoring will be considered to have met this requirement. High schools may temporarily or permanently amend their A+ policies to help students find creative ways to meet this requirement.

3. Receipt of the Award for Class of 2021 Mid-Year Graduates at High Schools with Late Ending Fall Terms

- a. *Issue:* Mid-year high school graduates can be eligible to receive the A+ Scholarship in the spring term immediately following their graduation, which typically occurs in December. However, for the 2020-2021 school year, some students will not graduate until after the A+ institution's spring term has begun in January.
- b. *Accommodation:* Mid-year high school graduates who are allowed to enroll in an A+ eligible postsecondary institution for the spring 2021 term prior to high school graduation may receive the A+ Scholarship at that institution. Funds cannot be requested until after the student has graduated and the postsecondary institution has received the stamped A+ transcript verifying the student's eligibility.

No accommodations are being made for the following A+ eligibility requirements. As a result, students must meet the standing requirement.

1. Algebra I EOC Requirement for Students Impacted by DESE's Cancellation of the 2019-2020 Algebra I EOC

- a. *Standing requirement:* Have achieved a score of proficient or advanced on the official Algebra I end-of-course exam, or a higher level DESE approved EOC in the field of mathematics, or meet other criteria established by the CBHE. The current alternative is a sliding scale of high school grade point average and ACT math subscore.

- b. *Issue:* DESE’s waiver of the EOC testing requirements for spring 2020 means that a group of students will never have to take the Algebra I EOC exam or were unable to take the exam within the time period when they were most likely to be able to demonstrate their mastery of the subject.
- c. *Rationale:* The alternatives (higher level EOC or ACT math subscore) are available to all students. While the 2020 seniors who had not already met one of the alternatives did not have sufficient time or access to achieve a qualifying ACT score, students in the class of 2021 and beyond can still meet this requirement or an alternative. This is consistent with the treatment of students attending private high schools for whom the Algebra I EOC is never an option.

2. 2.5 Cumulative Grade Point Average for 2021 Seniors.

- a. *Standing requirement:* Graduate from an A+ designated high school with an overall grade point average of at least 2.5 on a 4.0 scale, or the equivalent on another scale.
- b. *Issue:* Some students may be forced to take coursework delivered through a method (virtual) that is not suited to the student’s learning style, resulting in grades that do not represent the student’s actual abilities.
- c. *Rationale:* The situation has changed since the spring 2020 term in which everyone was unprepared for the shift to alternative learning conditions. High schools had time to prepare plans and inform students of instructional changes related to COVID-19 going into the 2020-2021 school year.

Following is a brief summary of the A+ accommodations. The accommodations apply only to the 2021 seniors unless otherwise noted.

Requirement	Accommodation
95% Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For students enrolled in on-site courses: Actual attendance, even if the course or courses are delivered through MOCAP or other accepted virtual methods • For students enrolled in any off-site virtual courses (MOCAP or other): Meet the guidelines for A+ candidates outlined by DESE in the Non-Traditional Methods of Instruction section of the Attendance Hour Reporting guide for the 2020-2021 school year (https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/sf-AAttendanceReporting.pdf) • HS A+ policy can establish criteria students must meet for a blanket appeal for students in identified categories affected by COVID-19 as an alternative to individual appeals.
Tutoring/Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 hours of unpaid tutoring or mentoring instead of 50 hours
Mid-Year Graduates when Fall Term Ends Late	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can receive A+ in spring term if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allowed to enroll in an A+ institution given the later than usual graduation date ○ A+ institution has the A+ stamped transcript on file
Algebra I EOC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None. All students graduating after 2020 who were unable to take the Algebra I EOC in the 2019-2020 academic year, regardless of their graduation year, must meet one of this requirement’s alternatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Proficient or advanced on a higher level math EOC ○ Qualifying combination of HS GPA/ACT math subscore
2.5 HS GPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None. Students must have a 2.5 CGPA to qualify.

The department will continue to issue guidance when necessary as this situation unfolds. If you have any questions, please contact the following staff. At this time, email is the preferred method of communication.

Connie Bestgen, financial aid specialist

(800) 473-6757, option 4, (573) 751-1722, or connie.bestgen@dhewd.mo.gov

Amy Haller, financial aid specialist

(573) 526-7958 or amy.haller@dhewd.mo.gov

Kelli Reed, senior associate

(573) 751-2444 or kelli.reed@dhewd.mo.gov