Tab K
Suspension of Certain Provisions of the A+ Scholarship Administrative Rule
Coordinating Board for Higher Education
March 8, 2018

BACKGROUND

Subsection 8 of Section 160.545, RSMo, provides the Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE) with the authority to administer the scholarship component of the A+ Schools program. Paragraph 3 of that subsection grants rulemaking authority to the department in order to establish high school grade point and other requirements for A+ scholarship eligibility. Based on this authority, the Coordinating Board has outlined the high school eligibility criteria for the A+ Scholarship Program in administrative rule 6 CSR 10-2.190. Section 3 of the administrative rule includes the following eligibility criteria.

“(A) To qualify for A+ tuition reimbursement, an initial recipient must meet the following criteria:

8. Beginning with the high school senior class of 2015, meet one (1) of the following indicators of college preparedness…:

A. Have achieved a score of proficient or advanced on the official Algebra I end-of-course exam, or a higher level DESE approved end-of-course exam in the field of mathematics; or

B. Meet other criteria established by the CBHE.”

For the graduating class of 2018, students who do not score proficient or advanced on one of the indicated EOC exams must achieve a MDHE-prescribed combination of ACT math subscore and high school grade point average.

CURRENT STATUS

In November 2017, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) announced the administration of new mathematics EOC assessments in the 2017-18 school year. As a result of the new exams, DESE’s standard-setting process will not occur until summer 2018. Once the standard-setting process is complete, DESE will ask the Board of Education to approve performance-level cut scores identifying the scores that correspond to proficient and advanced designations. Based on this timeline, DESE expects to release the Algebra I EOC exam results in fall 2018. The delayed score release will impact A+ Scholarship eligibility for some 2018 seniors who have not yet achieved a qualifying combination of ACT math subscore and high school grade point average, and who will not know if they have achieved a qualifying Algebra I EOC score until after summer or fall 2018 enrollment has begun.

To ensure postsecondary education remains readily accessible for all eligible students, the department proposes the CBHE temporarily suspend the Algebra I EOC requirement for 2018 high school seniors impacted by the delayed score release. This would allow 2018 high school seniors who took a mathematics EOC during their senior year and are otherwise eligible for the A+ Scholarship to receive reimbursement pending release of the Algebra I EOC scores. Under the suspension, A+ designated high schools would continue to verify a student has met the A+ eligibility criteria, but would delay affixing the A+ stamp to the transcript for the affected students until DESE releases the Algebra I EOC scores. Although staff is still working on the logistical details, we anticipate requiring the high school to provide a letter to accompany the unstamped transcript that would verify the student is part of the waiver population. Those students who had already achieved a qualifying Algebra I EOC score or met the alternative would receive the A+ stamp on the transcript as usual. Until MDHE sends notification of the score release in fall 2018, A+ participating postsecondary institutions would be able to request reimbursement for 2018 seniors without an A+ stamped transcript if the student’s file includes the verification letter. After the notification, institutions would be required to collect an A+ stamped transcript for all students prior to requesting reimbursement. Because A+ is a reimbursement program, we expect the greatest
impact will be to summer 2018 reimbursement. However, spring 2018 reimbursement could be affected for mid-year high school graduates and fall 2018 reimbursement could be affected, depending on the timing of the score release.

While this proposal risks paying some students who are later determined to be ineligible, the benefits to students outweighs that risk. Spring 2018 is the optimum time for students to make enrollment decisions for the summer and fall 2018 terms. However, the delayed release of the 2017-18 Algebra I EOC scores has created uncertainty for the affected 2018 seniors, which may create an access barrier for eligible students and discourage future enrollment. In addition, the proposal will ensure that all eligible students receive timely reimbursement, eliminating the need for unnecessary out-of-pocket expenses. Furthermore, although the department recommends the affected students continue to try meet the ACT math subscore/high school grade point average alternative prior to graduation, students who believe they have achieved a qualifying Algebra I EOC score will not be required to pay out-of-pocket for one or two ACT assessments that may be unnecessary.

NEXT STEPS

Upon the board’s decision, MDHE will notify the A+ community of the action taken. We will then work with the A+ designated high schools and participating postsecondary institutions to ensure student eligibility is handled appropriately for the spring, summer, and fall 2018 terms.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Coordinating Board for Higher Education approve the temporary suspension of the A+ Scholarship Program’s Algebra I end-of-course exam requirement for the spring 2018 term, the summer 2018 term, and the fall 2018 term as described above.

NO ATTACHMENTS