

Niangua R-V High School A+ Handbook

Introduction

In an effort to make college or vocational/technical education available to every Missouri high school graduate, the Missouri General Assembly established the A+ Schools Program as part of the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993.

Graduates of designated A+ schools who successfully complete the requirements of the program are eligible to receive tuition reimbursement by the Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE) to any public community college or any two year vocational/technical school in Missouri for up to 48 months after high school graduation, the completion of an Associate's Degree, or 105% of the credit hours required of the student's certificate or degree.

The purpose of this handbook is to provide parents, students, and staff with a clear understanding of all aspects of the A+ Schools Program as it applies throughout Missouri high schools and at Niangua High School.

Any questions regarding the A+ Schools Program should be directed to the A+ Coordinator at Niangua High School, (417) 473-6101. Additional information regarding the A+ Schools Program can be obtained from the Missouri Department of Higher Education web site: <https://dhe.mo.gov/ppc/grants/aplusscholarship.php>

Goals of the Niangua R-V High School A+ School Program

1. Ensure that all students graduate from high school.
2. Ensure that all students complete a selection of high school studies that is challenging and has identified learning expectations.
3. Ensure that all students proceed from high school graduation to a college, post-secondary vocational/technical school, or a high wage job with workplace skill development opportunities.

Student Benefits

- Money for tuition and common student fees for up to 48 months after high school graduation, the completion of an Associate's Degree, or 105% of the credit hours required of the student's certificate or degree.
- Opportunity to learn about careers at the place of business as well as in the classroom.
- Tutoring and mentoring experience.
- Career Pathways to help provide a focus and guidance.
- Encouragement to attend school regularly and work hard.
- Experience using computers and other technology to solve problems.

- Participants are under no obligation to use the A+ benefit. The tuition benefit is earned by each student and is not transferrable to any other student.
- Participants will have up to four (4) years, or 48 months, from the date of high school graduation to access the A+ tuition benefit.

A+ Financial Incentive

Students graduating from Niangua High School who meet the A+ Schools requirement are eligible to receive financial assistance to cover the costs of tuition and general student fees towards any two year Missouri public community college or any two-year vocational/technical school.

A+ Program Requirements

- Enter into a written A+ School Agreement prior to graduation.
- Be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident.
- Attend a designated A+ high school for three (3) years immediately prior to graduation.
- Graduate with an overall GPA of 2.5 or higher on a 4.0 scale.
- Have at least a 95% attendance record overall for grades 9-12.
- Perform at least 50 hours of unpaid tutoring or mentoring, of which up to 25% may include job shadowing prior to graduation.
- Maintain a record of good citizenship and avoid the unlawful use of drugs and/or alcohol while in grades 9-12.
- Have achieved a score of Proficient or Advanced on the Algebra I end of course exam or a higher level DESE approved end of course exam in the field of mathematics.*
- Enroll and attend full time (12 credit hours in the fall/spring semesters, 6 credit hours during the summer term) at a participating public community college or vocational/technical school, or private two-year vocational/technical school.
- Maintain a good faith effort to secure all available federal financial aid by completing the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**.
- Achieve at least a 2.0 cumulative grade point on a 4.0 scale at the end of the first attending semester. Maintain a 2.5 cumulative grade point average on a 4.0 scale for all subsequent semesters.

* If a student does not have an Algebra I EOC of Proficient or Advanced there are still two ways a student can become A+ eligible:

- First, score Proficient or Advanced on a higher level math EOC (Geometry, Algebra II).
- Second, a sliding scale of ACT math subscore combined with the student’s overall GPA.

ACT Match Score

- 17 or higher
- 16
- 15

High School GPA

- 2.5 or higher
- 2.8 or higher
- 3.0 or higher

The A+ Schools Financial Assistance program is dependent upon continued funding from the Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE) and is not the responsibility of the Niangua R-V School District.

A+ Schools Agreement

The first step in participating in the A+ Program is for the student and parent to read and sign the A+ School Agreement. The student must turn in this agreement to the A+ Coordinator. The A+ Coordinator will establish an A+ School file for the student. Documentation of all A+ activity will be kept in this file.

Grade Point Average

- Grade point requirement for the A+ School is based on cumulative grade point average for all four years at graduation.
- Averaging or rounding up to the next highest grade point is not allowed.
- The student's official transcript will serve as evidence of grade point average for the A+ School Program.

Attendance Requirement

- Participants in the A+ program are expected to attend school regularly. Students must graduate with a minimum cumulative (grades 9-12) attendance rate of 95%.
- The A+ Program makes no distinction between excused and unexcused absences.
- Attendance is based on Tuesday through Friday when school is in regular session, or on a Monday in the event of a make-up day. Only the days and times, which are calculated for Average Daily Attendance (ADA), will be used to determine the 95% attendance requirement.
- Rounding up of attendance percentage is not permitted.
- It is the responsibility of each A+ participant to closely monitor his/her attendance.
- The A+ Attendance Policy provides for relief in cases where the absence was beyond the control of the A+ participant. A request for a waiver must be submitted on the *Request for Attendance Appeal* form in accordance with the established policy guidelines. Each A+ participant should read and understand the attendance policy.
- Students will be allowed one appeal prior to their final semester before graduation.

Attendance Waiver Guidelines

- At the time an attendance appeal is filed, official documentation stating the reasons the student was absent from school must be provided to the A+ Coordinator.
- Reason for Absence Documentation is required and may cover:
 - Hospitalization - Health Care Provider Letter
 - Chronic Health Problems - Health Care Provider Letter
 - Court Appearance - Court Letter
 - Funeral - Obituary or Memorial Pamphlet
 - Religious Holiday - Minister Letter
 - Personal/Family Calamity - Parent and School Counselor Letter

- Catastrophic Illness/Injury - Health Care Provider Letter
- Dentist/Orthodontist and other Health Care Provider Visits - Health Care Provider Letter
- Attendance Waiver will NOT be granted for the following:
 - Truancy
 - Skipping
 - Suspension
 - Personal/Family Vacations
 - Transportation Issues (unless issue with the school provided transportation)
 - Work
 - Other non-emergency situations
- **A+ attendance requirements are not to be confused with the general attendance requirements as printed in the Niangua R-V Student/District Handbook.**

Attendance Appeals

- The A+ Attendance Appeal Form included at the end of this handbook should be used in filing an attendance appeal.
- When an Attendance Appeal Form is filed with the A+ Coordinator, the coordinator will meet with the Attendance Appeal Committee. The A+ Attendance Appeal Committee will be comprised of the following members:
 - High School Principal
 - A+ Coordinator
 - Attendance Secretary
 - High School Counselor
 - Two faculty members
 - One faculty member of the student's choice (non-voting member)
 - Two community members
- After the committee reaches a decision, the coordinator will notify the student in writing of the results of the decision.
- Upon receipt of this letter, the parent/student has five (5) working days in which to appeal this decision to the Superintendent.
- Upon receiving the Superintendent's decision, the parent/student has five (5) working days in which to file an appeal with the Niangua R-V Board of Education.
- The Board, or the Board's committee, will hear the student's appeal in closed session within 20 working days of having received the notice of appeal. The Board will notify the student of its decision in writing within five (5) working days of the appeal.

Tutoring/Mentoring

- Tutoring/mentoring **must** be school sponsored, have prior approval from the A+ Coordinator, and be performed under the supervision of a certified employee of the Niangua R-V District.

- All A+ students must sign an A+ Tutoring/Mentoring Contract. The student, his/her parent or guardian, the high school principal, and the A+ Coordinator must sign the contract.
- Tutoring/mentoring must be done during the regular school year or summer school (if available) and must be completed **before** graduation.
- Only time spent working directly with students will be counted towards the required 50 hours of unpaid tutoring/mentoring.
- Students may elect to take an A+ tutoring/mentoring class during the day at the high school for 11th and 12th grade students. Students may enroll in the course for .5 credit (one semester) of elective credit. In addition to tutoring, students will be expected to complete appropriate assignments made by the teacher.
- Tutoring may begin as early as 10th grade. All tutoring must be supervised by a teacher and verified by a teacher, principal, and/or the A+ Coordinator.
- The signature of the supervising employee must verify all tutoring/mentoring time. Tutoring/mentoring time must be recorded and verified on the A+ Student Tutor Log. Students will not receive credit for unverified tutoring activity or for activity documented on forms that are lost by students, or not turned in.
- Tutoring/mentoring activities used to earn credit in a class may not be counted toward A+ tutoring/mentoring hours. (With the exception of the A+ tutoring class).
- Students are expected to be present at the agreed-upon day and time for tutoring or mentoring. If an absence must occur, the A+ participant is responsible for notifying the adult in charge of the tutoring/mentoring experience. Failure of notification may result in removal from the tutoring experience.
- Participants should consider themselves a guest of the school and the supervising teacher and should conduct themselves in accordance with all rules, regulations, and guidelines in the student handbook. A+ participants that do not meet behavioral expectations during any portion of the tutoring experience risk forfeiture of tutoring opportunities.
- Opportunities for students wishing to tutor/mentor are as follows:
 - Volunteer to provide tutoring for same age or younger students.
 - Work with the supervising teacher to promote student learning.
 - Read and/or help students develop reading skills.
 - Assist students with homework/class assignments.
- Up to 25% of the required tutoring hours may be direct job shadowing experience.
- Hours completed at job shadow site must be logged, and verified by supervising instructor, just as tutoring/mentoring hours.

A+ Citizenship Policy

Participation in the A+ School Program is an honor and a privilege. The A+ School Program encourages students to maintain a “record of good citizenship” at school and away from school, and develop behaviors that will help them become productive, successful citizens. A student demonstrates good citizenship by showing respect for self, law, property, and the rights of others. It is expected that students will exhibit standards

of behavior that will bring credit to them, the A+ School Program, Niangua R-V Schools, and the Niangua community.

To qualify for the A+ financial incentive, a student's behavior shall be in compliance with the Board of Education policies, the Niangua R-V High School guidelines on student discipline as outlined in the student handbook, the A+ School guidelines, the Safe Schools Act, and the state and local regulations and laws.

- A good citizen not only stays out of trouble, they make an effort to do something positive in their community. Therefore, students are encouraged to demonstrate good citizenship by performing community service during their high school career. Students should document community service hours for use when completing scholarships and other applications.
- At the end of each semester student discipline records will be reviewed. Student discipline records will be maintained their four years of high school. In school and out of school suspension days are accumulative over the four years a student attends high school. Citizenship/discipline violations that may jeopardize a student's A+ status include, but are not limited to, the following:

Suspension (In-School)

Any student who receives discipline referrals which results in an accumulation of six (6) days in-school suspension will receive a written warning. An accumulation of six (6) additional days of in-school suspension (total of 12 days) will result in a student being placed on probation. An Additional accumulation of three (3) days of in-school suspension (total of 15 days) will result in immediate removal from the A+ Program.

Suspension (Out-of-School)

Any student who receives three (3) days of out-of-school suspension will be placed on probation and will receive a written notice. A student who receives an additional three (3) days of out-of-school suspension (total of 6 days) will result in immediate removal from the A+ Program.

ACTION

- **WARNING** - A written warning will be issued to the student.
- **PROBATION** - A letter will be issued to the student placing that student on probation and a copy of the letter will be sent by mail to the parent/guardian as well as a call to the parent/guardian.
- **REMOVAL FROM THE PROGRAM** - The student and the parent/guardian will be notified via certified mail that the student has been removed from the A+ Program and will no longer be eligible to receive A+ financial aid.

Automatic Ineligibility

In compliance with regulations of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education A+ Schools Program, a student will be **removed immediately** from the A+ School financial assistance program and thus forfeit the opportunity to receive funds through this program for any of the following:

Drugs / Alcohol / Substance Abuse

- Violation of the Niangua R-V District Drug/Alcohol/Substance Abuse policy outlined in the Board Policy during the contract time.
- Unlawful use or possession of drugs, drug paraphernalia, or alcohol on or off school property during the four-year period immediately prior to graduation.

Violation of Local, State, or Federal Criminal Laws

- Pled guilty or *nolo contendere* (no contest) to, received a suspended imposition of sentence or suspended execution of sentence for, or have been convicted or found guilty of a misdemeanor or felony.
- Criminal activity which is formally reported to the schools by the juvenile officer as defined by the Safe Schools Act. Convictions include:
 - First and Second Degree Murder
 - Kidnapping
 - First and Second Degree Assault
 - Forcible Rape or Sodomy
 - First Degree Burglary
 - Robbery
 - Distribution of Drugs
 - Distribution of Drugs to a Minor
 - First Degree Arson
 - Voluntary/Involuntary Manslaughter
 - Sexual Assault
 - Felonious Restraint
 - First Degree Property Damage
 - Possession of a Weapon (provisions of Chapter 571 MO revised statutes)

Citizenship Update

The principal will update each student's citizenship status on a semester basis with the A+ Coordinator. The updated information will be used to fulfill the citizenship requirement of the A+ Tuition Reimbursement Program.

Appeals

An Appeal Form will be mailed with the notice of ineligibility or may be picked up from the Niangua A+ Coordinator. Appeals may be submitted in writing to the Niangua High School Citizenship Committee in care of the A+ Coordinator. Upon receiving a written

appeal, the A+ Coordinator will convene the A+ Citizenship Committee composed of the following persons:

- High School Principal
- A+ Coordinator
- High School Counselor
- Teacher of student's choice
- Advisory Board Member

After the committee has reviewed the appeal and reached a decision, the A+ Coordinator will notify the parents/guardians in writing. Upon receiving written notice of the committee's decision the parents/student may file an appeal with the Superintendent. Upon receiving the Superintendent's decision, the parents/student may file an appeal with the Niangua R-V Board of Education. The Board will hear the student's appeal in closed session and will notify the student of its decision.

Good Faith Effort to Secure Funding

- Parents and students must complete and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA information must be sent to the community college or technical school that the student is planning to attend.
- Before filling out the FAFSA students AND parents must BOTH create a Federal Student Aid ID (FSA ID). The link to create an FSA ID is: <https://fsaid.ed.gov>
- The FAFSA application is online and may be found at: <https://fafsa.ed.gov>
- The FAFSA may now be filled out using the prior year's tax information (Prior Prior Year policy) and can link directly to the IRS to pull tax information from the previous year.
- **The FAFSA is available to fill out starting October 1st. The window is from October 1st through June 30th of the academic school year. Parents and students are highly encouraged to fill out the FAFSA as early as possible.**

A+ Fulfillment

All records for A+ eligibility will be maintained and reviewed by the A+ Coordinator. Upon graduation citizenship, GPA, and attendance will be reviewed for accuracy and eligibility. A student is not officially certified eligible for A+ tuition reimbursement until the final review is conducted.

Eligible student's transcripts will be stamped with the official Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education A+ stamp. When a student applies to a qualifying post-secondary institution, he/she should inform that school of A+ eligibility for tuition reimbursement. The student's transcript will verify eligibility. The post-secondary institution will then apply to the state for the tuition funds. All awarded funds will not be paid directly to the student or parents.