



Tab 10

Revision of the A+ Scholarship College Readiness Options

Coordinating Board for Higher Education

March 5, 2024

BACKGROUND

Over the past several years, the department has heard from school counselors, parents and students about the barriers students encounter with achieving eligibility for the A+ Scholarship. While there are several issues that need attention, the most common issue raised by these groups is difficulty meeting the “college readiness” eligibility criterion.

CURRENT STATUS

At present, there are three options for meeting this requirement. The primary requirement is that the student score proficient or advanced on the Algebra I End-of-course (EOC) exam. Most students take this required exam during their eighth grade or freshman year in school. The other two options are 1) scoring proficient or advanced on a higher-level math EOC (Geometry or Algebra II) or 2) achieving an ACT math sub-score and high school GPA combination as listed below.

ACT Math Score		High School GPA
17 or greater	And	2.5 or greater
16	And	2.8 or greater
15	And	3.0 or greater

We continue to believe it is appropriate that a merit-based program this broad-based should have some indicator that the recipient is prepared to succeed in postsecondary education. While we believe the existing structure provides that indicator, it is not perfect and there are several issues with the existing options that can result in a “deserving” student not meeting this eligibility requirement. For the Algebra I EOC, many students fail to make the connection between their performance on the test and its impact on their A+ eligibility. In part, this is likely the result of the time between taking the test and a student focusing on A+ eligibility. Because taking this test is a high school graduation requirement, in most instances, a student’s performance has no impact on their grades or ability to graduate. Because it is seen as a low stakes test, many students do not take it seriously. While the other EOC tests provide some flexibility, in many instances, the issues are the same.

There are two different issues with the ACT Math sub-score. First is the cost of taking the exam, which is \$68 for the entire exam. At least at present, students cannot independently take the individual sub-tests so they must pay for and take the full test each time. Second is general test anxiety. For several reasons, taking the ACT is a high stress activity for virtually all students but particularly for those that live with test anxiety. The test is high stakes, administration is highly structured and regulated, and it requires the investment of considerable time outside of the regular classroom.

For all these reasons, the state aid staff has been discussing possibilities for additional options. The staff has been working with a small group of high school counselors and ACT representatives to consider the possibility of adding an option to use a student's math score from the Pre-ACT test, which is typically taken during a student's sophomore year in high school. Based on our conversation with this working group, this would provide a less stressful option for students by allowing students to take the test in their home district (administered by someone they already know), by adding additional flexibility in terms of the timing and structure of the test, and by reducing the testing cost from \$68 for the ACT exam to \$18 for the Pre-ACT. Based on our conversation with ACT representatives, the scoring structure is the same for both tests, meaning we could use the existing sliding scale without revision.

NEXT STEPS

Below is an excerpt from the administrative rule for the A+ program which contains the authority relating to the proposed alternative.

Beginning with the high school senior class of 2015, meet one (1) of the following indicators of college preparedness, . . . Meet other criteria established by the CBHE. The CBHE will develop these criteria in consultation with participating A+ institutions and A+ designated high schools and may revise these criteria annually.

This provision allows the Coordinating Board to revise, including expand, these options without requiring amendment of the administrative rule.

Upon approval, this change would be implemented for the 2024 high school seniors. Although the timing is not optimal, steps would be taken to ensure high school counselors and other interested parties are aware of the additional option and, based on our conversations with our working group, students would either have already taken the test, since many high schools already offer this exam, or they would still have time to arrange for a test before the end of the school year.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommend approval of the math component of the Pre-ACT as an option for meeting A+ eligibility requirements on the same basis as the current provision for the ACT math sub score.

NO ATTACHMENTS