

**Missouri Department of Higher Education
State Student Financial Aid Committee
Recommendations**

1. To simplify the overall program structure and to improve the marketability of the state aid programs, it is recommended that all major state aid programs be organized under a single banner. The goal of the reorganization is to develop better program integration, particularly with regard to need, merit, and completion components, allowing “stackability” of awards to better target student needs. Each major pathway through the program (early commitment, access and success, and workforce incentive) would retain some distinctiveness in order to minimize the disruption and allow more focused marketing to specific student groups.
2. To strengthen the preparation and success of entering students, it is recommended that the early commitment component of the A+ program be enhanced by including the following revised and additional eligibility requirements.
 - a. Initial contact about the program should occur no later than the completion of the eighth grade
 - b. Commitment to meet the program requirements (A+ agreement) must be signed by the end of the student’s freshman year in high school.
 - c. Development of a career pathway plan should be required by the end of the high school freshman year or when enrolling in a Missouri high school and should be updated annually through high school graduation
 - d. Documentation of postsecondary and career exploration activities which can include participation in career and technical education designated coursework
 - e. Broaden the mentoring/tutoring requirement to include community service, postsecondary preparation and/or adult mentorship component and establish a minimum requirement for participation while in high school
3. To broaden participation in the A+ program, it is recommended that Missouri extend eligibility for the A+ program to all students who have successfully completed a high school educational program (including home schooled individuals) and satisfied the program specific eligibility criteria.
4. It is recommended that the MDHE develop additional options beyond the end-of-course exam assessments and the ACT to demonstrate postsecondary readiness, particularly for students pursuing skill-based training.
5. In order to prioritize students with financial need, it is recommended that A+ awards be allowed to cover a limited amount of educational costs above tuition and general fees for students that are determined to have financial need. It is recommended that this

Note: Current program attributes not specifically referenced would generally remain unchanged.

additional cost be offset by capping the maximum payment to a student who does not meet the need criteria. The cap would be established at a level that provides savings sufficient to cover the cost of the additional payments to students with need.

6. To encourage and reward persistence and completion, it is recommended that Missouri develop a transfer scholarship to assist A+ eligible students who successfully transition from a two-year to a four-year institution. Eligibility for the program should be contingent upon successful completion of the A+ program while in high school and successful completion of the general education requirements included in the Core 42 system at a public community college.
7. To promote participation in postsecondary education by adults and other underserved populations, prorated awards for part-time attendance should be incorporated into programs, including need and merit-based programs, as appropriate. Award requirements should, however, require at least half-time attendance in order to remain eligible.
8. In order to encourage high academic performance, it is recommended that the Higher Education Academic Scholarship program (Bright Flight) incorporate the following changes.
 - a. Add a high school GPA component to the eligibility requirements in conjunction with the ACT/SAT score component.
 - b. Establish the ACT/SAT cutoff as a specific score level rather than as a percent of test takers.
 - c. Extend eligibility to a wider range of high performing student by reducing the minimum qualifying score.
 - d. Awards should be scaled across the range of GPAs and ACT/SAT scores with higher performance resulting in larger awards.
9. To promote on-time completion of programs, it is recommended that Missouri develop a progression award that is linked to the merit and need-based programs. This program should provide a monetary bonus for students that complete the number of hours in a prior academic year needed to graduate on-time (30 SCH or equivalent).
10. In order to address existing workforce gaps and to encourage adults to pursue education linked to high wage and high growth employment fields, it is recommended that Missouri develop a grant program focused on career-focused education programs. Fields of study eligible for inclusion in this program should primarily prepare the recipient for direct career entry and should be identified periodically by the Coordinating Board for Higher Education. Recipients should be limited to individuals who are age 25 and above or, if younger, recipients must not have been enrolled in postsecondary education within the last two years. This program should have a financial need cap and be integrated with the existing need-based program. Recipients

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that attend part-time should receive a reduced award. Awards should cover actual tuition and fees, after all other federal and state non-loan aid has been applied, with a guaranteed minimum award for eligible students.

11. In order to streamline state aid process for some students, it is recommended that the MDHE allow institutional student aid directors to exercise limited professional judgment relating to state student assistance programs. Such professional judgments would be limited in scope and subject to review and approval by MDHE staff.
12. In order to address the workforce needs of the state, it is recommended that the MDHE expand educational program eligibility to some short-term programs that are not eligible for federal student aid (Title IV). Eligibility of the instructional programs should be limited to those that are high demand and/or lead directly to an industry-recognized credential. Instructional programs included in this expansion would be reviewed and approved annually by MDHE staff.
13. Because state aid deadlines create barriers for adult and non-traditional students, it is recommended that the MDHE review options for altering the current deadline structure for need and merit-based programs and implement options that are determined feasible given the current program structures and appropriation levels.