



A+ SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE APPLICATION WRITING TIPS

Schools who earn the A+ School of Excellence Award designation go ***above and beyond the everyday practices*** that all schools are expected to implement. Applications should center around what makes your school exemplary. As the application is being compiled, consider:

What makes your school unique from other schools in your district or community?

Tip 1: Applying for A+ should be an inclusive process involving a variety of perspectives and voices from different stakeholder groups. The application should not be driven by a small group of individuals or be solely principal-written.

Tip 2: Designate your A+ application writing team. Consider including building administrators in addition to the principal; teachers; librarians and guidance counsellors; parents; and any other stakeholders whose voices may add value to your application.

Tip 3: Start early! Most school leaders consider the A+ application process one of the best strategic planning experiences their school undertakes. This is a time to reflect what you do well and how your school shines. Allow ample time for the writing team to explore, discuss, compile, and fine-tune.

Tip 4: Upload the Word version of the A+ application to Google Docs or another document-sharing site and allow stakeholder groups to research and write in small teams initially. Set deadlines for when sections should be completed, shared, and read by the rest of the team to allow time for further research and revision.

Tip 5: Work collaboratively throughout the entire process but, when you think you are ready to submit, designate one final writer to unite each section of application into one unified story. The final application should be cohesive in vision, thought, and voice. It is evident to Judges when an application has been wordsmithed and written by one final voice.

Tip 6: Be specific and support the claims made in your application with rich, relevant, and meaningful data and evidence. Keep the following in mind when preparing and writing your application:

- The prompts throughout the application are intended as useful tools for self-assessment, strategic planning, ongoing reflection, and involvement of all relevant stakeholders in a common school improvement process.
- It is important for the school's principal to play an active role in the self-evaluation process and application writing to ensure that the entire school has been thoroughly

assessed and analyzed. Not doing so usually results in a weak application that lacks the depth that true self-assessment and analysis provide.

- The A+ School of Excellence program examines schools in a comprehensive manner: Questions and prompts are intended to address important internal and external aspects of school operations, be broad enough to suit diverse school contexts, and accommodate new or changing goals and strategies within any particular school. Sections of the application are interrelated: questions and prompts address the multiple, embedded, and interacting contexts of school life. The systematic use of a broad composite of criteria helps to ensure that school improvement goals and strategies are balanced. Professional development, staff evaluation systems, budget challenges, implementation of the Arizona College and Career Ready Standards, use of appropriate curriculum and effective instruction, and other external influences should be embedded throughout the application.

Tip 7: Highlight the excellent and unique programs and practices that set your school apart from other schools and point to your successes. **Do not focus on examples of activities, strategies or programs that are expected or common among schools.** For example, having a safe campus is not unique. Safety is a concern that all schools address. When asked to highlight a unique curriculum program, highlight something that may not be commonplace in many schools or highlight how you might have adapted a widespread program but are implementing it in a unique or unexpected way. For example, Project-Based Learning is a very commonly used and popular curriculum among schools. While it may be worth mentioning, making this a focal point of the application would not set the school apart, unless your school was implementing it in a truly unique way.

Tip 8: Shy away from sterile writing. Reviewers want to hear your story. Give your application heart and soul. Paint a picture of your school, your community, your students, etc. This is an opportunity to showcase your school's uniqueness. Discuss your data in a human-centered way. Your application should make reviewers want to visit your school.

Tip 9: Word limits are designated for each question. Applicants are strongly advised to fully utilize word limits assigned to each section of the application. Underutilization of word limits might not provide sufficient evidence that a school is going above and beyond basic requirements and expectations.

Tip 10: Regardless of how many times your school has earned A+ or how great your school's test scores are, do not make the assumption that your school is "entitled" to the award. A+ Schools are more than test scores; they are complete and wholistic ecosystems where all aspects of a school community demonstrate excellence. It is the school's responsibility to ensure their application responses thoroughly satisfy the information requested. For renewal schools, "copying and pasting" responses from a previous application is highly discouraged.

Examples of evidence that schools may wish include:

- Academic and non-academic activities, programs, and practices; school-wide function
- Purpose, goals, outcomes as related to vision, mission, values, strategic plan, and goals
- Evidence of effectiveness and success as related to vision, mission, values, strategic plan, and goals
- Participation rates (raw numbers or percentages) compared to class size, grade level, overall student population, etc. disaggregated by grade levels, gender, other
- Well-documented, continuous, ongoing and sustainable assessment and improvement
- Qualitative feedback including satisfaction surveys, participant feedback, anecdotes, engagement surveys

Awards/Honors

- Meetings**
- Date received, by whom, and community members affected
 - Significance and relevance
 - Purpose of groups/committees as related to vision, mission, values, strategic plan, and goals
 - Make-up of groups/committees and how that is determined
 - Meeting frequency and attendance
 - What transpired; outcomes