

Introduction

A+ Schools of North Carolina began in 1993 with two pilot schools that were the inspiration for the development of the current statewide network. Initial implementation is a three-year process, after which schools continue to work with A+ staff to collaboratively plan professional development to sustain and strengthen their A+ school over time. A+ also works with other states to develop large statewide A+ Networks similar to ours, or to develop one or two schools as pilot A+ schools for their district, region or state. We will assist you in planning the scope and development of your initiative.

Overview of Key Components of Implementation

A+ Institutes: While becoming an A+ school is a process that involves the entire school over several years, the key event that launches a school into their first year of A+ implementation is a five-day A+ Institute for all staff members. The Institute is conducted by our A+ Schools staff and designed to prepare your staff, including teachers, administrators, special area teachers and teacher assistants, to begin implementing the eight A+ Essentials™, the key philosophical commitments made by all A+ schools. More than 20 years of program evaluations from teams of researchers and from participants have identified the five-day Institute as a transformative process and the primary change agent in becoming an A+ school.

In years two and three, schools attend a three-day, whole-school summer A+ conference. In subsequent years schools attend one, two or three-day summer conferences as needs and resources indicate.

Pre-application Meeting: Prior to submitting an application, potential new A+ schools participate in a mandatory pre-application meeting conducted by A+ Schools staff and designed to assist schools in making an informed decision about becoming an A+ school. These are hands-on, experiential sessions that have proven to be a key step in developing the staff buy-in and level of commitment needed for successful implementation and sustainability of the program. Attendees from each school are assisted in creating a plan for sharing new information with their staff and gaining the required 85% school commitment prior to submitting an application.

On-site Professional Development: During the first three years of implementation, A+ Schools staff offer onsite professional development designed specifically for schools new to A+ practice and philosophy. After the initial three years, schools are offered onsite professional development as needed that is planned collaboratively with individual schools. Throughout the process, A+ schools learn to conduct self-assessments to determine their particular needs and goals for each year.

A+ Network: One of the benefits of being an A+ school is the networking that occurs that provides mutual support and opportunities for resourcing and shared practice as each school works to develop their unique creative, engaging learning environment. In North Carolina, and in other states with which we have worked, we have developed strong A+ Networks that include within it A+ principals, A+ Coordinators, A+ teachers and A+ Fellows (professional development facilitators) who can offer mentoring, support, connections and resources on a wide range of A+ practices and challenges.

A+ Network Events: It is expected that the principal and A+ Coordinator(s) attend two bi-annual A+ Leadership Meetings. These dates are provided well in advance and most costs for attending are covered by A+. Schools are also expected to maintain regular communication with A+ staff, send new teachers to the fall A+ New Teacher Training, participate in twice annual A+ Liaison visits to their school, occasionally allow pre-scheduled visitors to their school, and keep abreast of current happenings in the A+ Network.