AN ACT

To repeal section 160.545, RSMo, and to enact in lieu thereof one new section relating to A+ schools, with an emergency clause.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the state of Missouri, as follows:

Section A. Section 160.545, RSMo, is repealed and one new section enacted in lieu thereof, to be known as section 160.545, to read as follows:

160.545. 1. There is hereby established within the department of elementary and secondary education the "A+ Schools Program" to be administered by the commissioner of education. The program shall consist of grant awards made to public secondary schools that demonstrate a commitment to ensure that:

1. All students be graduated from school;
2. All students complete a selection of high school studies that is challenging and for which there are identified learning expectations; and
3. All students:
   (a) Earn credits toward any type of college degree while in high school; or
   (b) Proceed from high school graduation to a college or postsecondary vocational or technical school or high-wage job with workplace skill development opportunities.

2. The state board of education shall promulgate rules and regulations for the approval of grants made under the program to schools that:

   (1) Establish measurable districtwide performance standards for the goals of the program outlined in subsection 1 of this section; and
   (2) Specify the knowledge, skills and competencies, in measurable terms, that students must demonstrate to successfully complete any individual course offered by the school, and any course of studies [which] that will qualify a student for graduation from the school; and

EXPLANATION — Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets [thus] in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted from the law. Matter in bold-face type in the above bill is proposed language.
(3) Do not offer a general track of courses that, upon completion, can lead to a high school diploma; and

(4) Require rigorous coursework with standards of competency in basic academic subjects for students pursuing vocational and technical education as prescribed by rule and regulation of the state board of education; and

(5) Have a partnership plan developed in cooperation and with the advice of local business persons, labor leaders, parents, and representatives of college and postsecondary vocational and technical school representatives, with the plan then approved by the local board of education. The plan shall specify a mechanism to receive information on an annual basis from those who developed the plan in addition to senior citizens, community leaders, and teachers to update the plan in order to best meet the goals of the program as provided in subsection 1 of this section. Further, the plan shall detail the procedures used in the school to identify students that may drop out of school and the intervention services to be used to meet the needs of such students. The plan shall outline counseling and mentoring services provided to students who will enter the work force upon graduation from high school, address apprenticeship and intern programs, and shall contain procedures for the recruitment of volunteers from the community of the school to serve in schools receiving program grants.

3. Any nonpublic school in this state may apply to the state board of education for certification that it meets the requirements of this section subject to the same criteria as public high schools. Every nonpublic school that applies and has met the requirements of this section shall have its students eligible for reimbursement of postsecondary education under subsection 8 of this section on an equal basis to students who graduate from public schools that meet the requirements of this section. Any nonpublic school that applies shall not be eligible for any grants under this section. Students of certified nonpublic schools shall be eligible for reimbursement of postsecondary education under subsection 8 of this section so long as they meet the other requirements of such subsection. For purposes of subdivision (5) of subsection 2 of this section, the nonpublic school shall be included in the partnership plan developed by the public school district in which the nonpublic school is located. For purposes of subdivision (1) of subsection 2 of this section, the nonpublic school shall establish measurable performance standards for the goals of the program for every school and grade level over which the nonpublic school maintains control.

4. A school district may participate in the program irrespective of its accreditation classification by the state board of education, provided it meets all other requirements.

5. By rule and regulation, the state board of education may determine a local school district variable fund match requirement in order for a school or schools in the district to receive a grant under the program. However, no school in any district shall receive a grant under the
program unless the district designates a salaried employee to serve as the program coordinator, with the district assuming a minimum of one-half the cost of the salary and other benefits provided to the coordinator. Further, no school in any district shall receive a grant under the program unless the district makes available facilities and services for adult literacy training as specified by rule of the state board of education.

6. For any school that meets the requirements for the approval of the grants authorized by this section and specified in subsection 2 of this section for three successive school years, by August first following the third such school year, the commissioner of education shall present a plan to the superintendent of the school district in which such school is located for the waiver of rules and regulations to promote flexibility in the operations of the school and to enhance and encourage efficiency in the delivery of instructional services in the school. The provisions of other law to the contrary notwithstanding, the plan presented to the superintendent shall provide a summary waiver, with no conditions, for the pupil testing requirements pursuant to section 160.257 in the school. Further, the provisions of other law to the contrary notwithstanding, the plan shall detail a means for the waiver of requirements otherwise imposed on the school related to the authority of the state board of education to classify school districts pursuant to subdivision (9) of section 161.092 and such other rules and regulations as determined by the commissioner of education, except such waivers shall be confined to the school and not other schools in the school district unless such other schools meet the requirements of this subsection. However, any waiver provided to any school as outlined in this subsection shall be void on June thirtieth of any school year in which the school fails to meet the requirements for the approval of the grants authorized by this section as specified in subsection 2 of this section.

7. For any school year, grants authorized by subsections 1, 2, and 5 of this section shall be funded with the amount appropriated for this program, less those funds necessary to reimburse eligible students pursuant to subsection 8 or 9 of this section.

8. The department of higher education and workforce development shall, by rule, establish a procedure for the reimbursement of the cost of tuition, books and fees to any public community college or vocational or technical school or within the limits established in subsection 11 of this section for any two-year private vocational or technical school for any student:

(1) Who has attended a high school in the state for at least two years that meets the requirements of subsection 2 of this section and who has graduated from such a school; except that, students who are active duty military dependents, and students who are dependents of retired military who relocate to Missouri within one year of the date of the parent's retirement from active duty who meet all other requirements of this subsection and are attending a school
that meets the requirements of subsection 2 of this section shall be exempt from the two-year attendance requirement of this subdivision; and

(2) Who has made a good faith effort to first secure all available federal sources of funding that could be applied to the reimbursement described in this subsection; and

(3) Who has earned a minimal grade average while in high school or through the semester immediately before taking the course for which reimbursement is sought as determined by rule of the department of higher education and workforce development, and other requirements for the reimbursement authorized by this subsection as determined by rule and regulation of the department. When determining whether a student has earned a minimal grade average in the 2019-20 or 2020-21 school years for purposes of this subdivision, the department shall apply the student's highest available high school grade average so that the student is not adversely affected by any negative change in the student's academic performance directly caused by the coronavirus named SARS-CoV-2, the international outbreak of respiratory disease named "coronavirus disease 2019" and abbreviated as "COVID-19", or any changes in methods of instruction implemented by the student's school district because of COVID-19. Any rule establishing a requirement that a student obtain a certain algebra end-of-course examination score or other applicable standardized test score, as determined by the department, shall not apply to a high school senior graduating in the 2020-21 school year; and

(4) Who is a citizen or permanent resident of the United States.

9. The department of higher education and workforce development shall, by rule, establish a procedure for the reimbursement of the cost of tuition, and fees for any dual-credit or dual-enrollment course offered to a student in high school in association with an institution of higher education or vocational or technical school, subject to the requirements of subsection 11 of this section, for any student who meets the requirements established in subsection 8 of this section immediately before taking the course for which reimbursement is sought.

10. The commissioner of education shall develop a procedure for evaluating the effectiveness of the program described in this section. Such evaluation shall be conducted annually with the results of the evaluation provided to the governor, speaker of the house, and president pro tempore of the senate.

11. For a two-year private vocational or technical school to obtain reimbursements under subsection 8 or 9 of this section, the following requirements shall be satisfied:

(1) Such two-year private vocational or technical school shall be a member of the North Central Association and be accredited by the Higher Learning Commission as of July 1, 2008, and maintain such accreditation;
Such two-year private vocational or technical school shall be designated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization under the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended;

No two-year private vocational or technical school shall receive tuition reimbursements in excess of the tuition rate charged by a public community college for course work offered by the private vocational or technical school within the service area of such college; and

The reimbursements provided to any two-year private vocational or technical school shall not violate the provisions of Article IX, Section 8, or Article I, Section 7, of the Missouri Constitution or the first amendment of the United States Constitution.

The department of higher education and workforce development shall distribute reimbursements in the following manner:

To community college or vocational or technical school students;

After all students from subdivision (1) of this subsection have been reimbursed, to any dual-credit or dual-enrollment student on the basis of financial need.

Because immediate action is necessary to protect students from adverse impacts to student success in educational and career endeavors caused by COVID-19 and related disruptions in school routines, section A of this act is deemed necessary for the immediate preservation of the public health, welfare, peace, and safety, and is hereby declared to be an emergency act within the meaning of the constitution, and section A of this act shall be in full force and effect upon its passage and approval.