

PHEAA REGIONAL SERVICES

Counselor Connection

■ working for you and with you.

Introducing Counselor Connection!

We are proud to introduce the new e-newsletter for school counselors from the Regional Offices at PHEAA – *Counselor Connection!*

Counselor Connection will be distributed via email tri-annually throughout the school year. It is designed to supplement information disseminated at the annual PHEAA/PASFAA November Financial Aid workshops.

For those of you who are not familiar with this group, PHEAA's regional offices were created in 1966, three years after the Agency's enabling 1963 legislation, Act No. 290 of the Pennsylvania State Legislature. PHEAA is required "to improve the higher educational opportunities of persons who are residents of this State and who are attending approved institutions of higher education, in this State or elsewhere."

Each of PHEAA's six regional offices serves a region of the Commonwealth. Many offices are staffed by a Regional Director, Assistant Regional Director and support personnel. These offices' mission is simply outreach. In addition to counselors – teachers, students, parents, the general public, staff from community and social agencies are included in the offices' outreach efforts.

Regional office staff explain and encourage the use of EducationPlanner.org, the Agency's free college and career-planning website. Our team conducts workshops and in-service training for elementary, middle and high school teachers and counselors on PHEAA's program and services. We conduct annual sessions to help families complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). We also work directly with students and their families to ensure they have accurate information on available financial aid.

If you would be interested in hosting a financial aid night or FAFSA completion session, in having someone from your PHEAA regional office provide training on EducationPlanner.org, or in having a PHEAA speaker at an in-service day, student or parent meeting, staff meeting or other function, please contact [your regional office](#). PHEAA takes great pride in delivering to the public the most accurate and up-to-date financial aid information possible.

- 2 Facts on the Robert C. Byrd Scholarship Program
- 3 Beware of Scholarship Scams
Subscribe to eNewsletters on EducationPlanner.org
- 4 Nationally, Pennsylvania Ranks Well for High School and College Graduation
- 5 What's New with EducationPlanner.org?
New Student Aid Guide Distribution Plan
- 6 Planning a Financial Aid Awareness Program
- 8 2009 School Counselor Workshop Series

Facts on the Robert C. Byrd Scholarship Program

The **Robert C. Byrd Scholarship Program** is a federally funded program offering a merit scholarship for outstanding high school seniors who meet the eligibility requirements and have been accepted at an institution of higher education. The Byrd Scholarship Program rewards academic excellence in high school and encourages students to continue their education. The federal government allocates the funds that determine the amount of the scholarship award.

Each year the Byrd Selection Committee meets to review the policies associated with the program and to identify the new Byrd recipients through a random lottery process. The Byrd Committee is composed of teachers, counselors, principals, superintendents and other school officials.

This year the committee met on May 14, 2009 to select 246 new recipients and 103 alternates for 2009-10. These students were notified of their eligibility in June, 2009. Scholarships are up to \$1,500 annually and may extend over 4 years, dependent on students meeting continuing eligibility criteria.

» Eligibility Requirements

TO BE CONSIDERED FOR A BYRD SCHOLARSHIP YOU MUST:

- Be a high school graduate or receive a GED during the same academic year in which the scholarship is awarded. Be accepted for enrollment at an eligible institution of higher education.
- Be a resident of Pennsylvania.
- Be a U.S. citizen or national, or be able to provide evidence of permanent residency.
- Expect to be a full-time freshman student enrolled at an eligible institution of higher education, in the United States, following high school graduation.
- Submit a letter of acceptance from the school or college with the application. (It does not have to be from the institution of your final choice.)
- Submit completed application by April 1st of the student's senior year of high school.

» Must meet the following three educational standards:

- Rank in the top 5 percent of your graduating class, or hold a ranking of 1, 2 or 3 in classes of 60 students or less.
- Grade point average of 3.50 or above on a 4.0 (unweighted) scale.
- SAT = 1150 combined critical reading and math only; or ACT = composite score of 25 or above; or GED = score of 3550 or above. TOEFL = not accepted.

» Eligible Institutions

Eligible institutions include proprietary institutions of higher education and postsecondary vocational institutions, as well as public and private nonprofit institutions of higher education.

For the 2009 Fiscal Year the Federal Government has funded the award at the level of \$1,500 per year per student.

NOTE: Scholarship may not be used to attend a foreign school. Awards for this program are contingent upon federal funding.

Beware of Scholarship Scams

Fall is the perfect time for high school seniors to begin searching for scholarships. But it's also when scholarship scams come out of the woodwork.

HERE ARE SOME OF THE SCAMS AND SALES PITCHES YOUR STUDENTS MAY EXPERIENCE AND SHOULD AVOID:

The Guaranteed Refund	The company charges a fee for their scholarship information and guarantees results "or your money back". Typically the results are not good and the chances of getting a refund are nearly impossible. Have your students avoid any scholarship opportunity that involves a fee.
The Unique Opportunity	The company claims that their information is not available elsewhere. The truth is they typically use free scholarship search databases that are widely available.
The Credit Card Request	The company says they need a credit card or bank account number to "hold" the scholarship funds for the student. Reputable scholarship organizations release their funds directly to postsecondary schools and do not need bank account information on their recipients.
The Sweepstakes	The company claims that the student is a finalist in their scholarship sweepstakes and asks them to take some form of action to stay in the running for the award. If the student did not apply for a scholarship, they are not very likely to be a finalist for it.
The Fancy Letterhead	The company has a fancy seal and a fancy name on their letterhead, often with a Washington, DC post office box. This gives unsuspecting customers the false impression that they are affiliated with or endorsed by the federal government, when in fact no such relationship exists.
The Sales Pitch	The company offers a free seminar on college financial planning or scholarships, but the event soon turns into a sales pitch for financial products such as insurance. Legitimate scholarship sources do not use these kinds of tactics.

Subscribe to eNewsletters on EducationPlanner.org

Did you know that counselors, parents and students (13 years of age and older) can subscribe to AES newsletters on EducationPlanner.org? It's a simple and convenient way for your students and parents to stay informed throughout their journey through higher education!

[Click here to view the application form.](#) In order to sign up, they'll need a valid email address, state of residence, first name, last name and preferred type of newsletter. Enewsletters are offered for parents, school counselors, high school or middle school students, college students and recent college graduates. Enewsletters, which are focused on college and career planning, will include articles on **Discovering, Preparing, Selecting, Applying, Deciding** and **Paying** for college to assist those students who are college bound, their parents and counselors.

Nationally, Pennsylvania Ranks Well for High School and College Graduation

Kudos to Pennsylvania’s educators, counselors, school district officials, and collegiate professors who are working earnestly to educate our students residing in the Commonwealth! Nationally, Pennsylvania ranks very high among the 50 states in successfully graduating its secondary and post-secondary students. But, there is certainly room for greater reforms and implementation of proven best practices to bolster the quality of secondary and post-secondary education, access to higher education and financial aid, and educational support services delivered to our students.

According to the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), **Pennsylvania ranks 11th (78.9%) in America for graduating its public school students**, while New Jersey (86.3%), Iowa (85.4%), Minnesota (85.1%), Nebraska (82.2%) and South Dakota (82%) round out the top 5 states, respectively, with the highest percentages for graduation of its public school students.

NCHEMS lists the top 50 rankings of states with the best college graduation rates, and Pennsylvania tied 3rd on the list; the top five states, in rank order, include:

1.	Massachusetts	68.0%
2.	Delaware	65.7%
3.	Rhode Island	64.9%
3.	Pennsylvania	64.9%
4.	Maryland	64.6%
5.	Vermont	63.7%

Statistically, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania does a good job of educating its students. With that said, the reported percentages are well below the 90%-100% levels, which should motivate all educators, counselors, professors and administrators to rally in implementing proven best practices that produce higher success rates of educating and graduating our secondary and post-secondary students. Although Pennsylvania ranks 3rd in the nation for college graduation (64.9%), the reality check is that it’s a below average ranking. If these national

graduation rankings for secondary and post-secondary schools reflected scholastic test scores, Pennsylvania would score a “C” for high school graduation performance and an “F” for college graduation performance.

Nationally, what are some top reasons why our students are not graduating in greater numbers from college? From a variety of resources and statistics, QuintCareers.com compiled the following list:

THE TOP TEN REASONS WHY COLLEGE STUDENTS LEAVE OR DROP OUT OF COLLEGE:

1. Too much fun at the expense of classes and grades
2. A sense of not belonging; a sense of isolation, homesickness
3. Academically unprepared; burned-out on education
4. Financial constraints; low on funds
5. Personal family issues
6. Academic climate/fit
7. Choice of wrong major; major not offered
8. Lack of advising, guidance
9. Demands from part-time or full-time employment
10. Move to a different geographic location

Secondary school and post-secondary school educators and administrators should utilize this top ten listing to orientate students about how to avoid the common pitfalls that encumber them from graduating in greater numbers from America’s institutions of higher learning.

For decades, PHEAA has been a proud regional partner with secondary and post-secondary educators and administrators, conjoined to help increase greater access

Pennsylvania Ranks Well – continued –

to higher education, via our award-winning college planning services (i.e., EducationPlanner.org), Financial Aid Nights, school and community presentations about how to access higher education, and workshop presentations and exhibitions at legislative and professional association conference events.

Each year, PHEAA conducts and participates in hundreds of free college planning workshops, college fairs, financial

aid nights, PTO meetings, career days, special legislative community events, etc., to ultimately help create greater access to higher education. For information about scheduling a PHEAA representative to come out to your school to conduct free workshops, exhibits or motivational presentations regarding college planning, financial aid and career development services, click here to contact the nearest PHEAA Regional Office that serves your area.

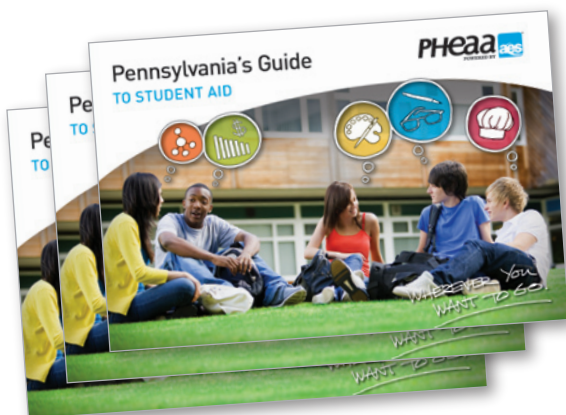
What's New with EducationPlanner.org?

Education Planner presents a student online Portfolio Planner! This free online tool offers easy-to-follow guidance for preparing students with clear, reliable and detailed information on how to make well-informed and wise decisions about their future. The Portfolio Planner will enable students to record their achievements and aspirations to their My Planner account on Education Planner. It also efficiently directs students to self-discovery tools such as, the Learning Style Quiz and the Career Key Assessment. The online student Portfolio Planner is for students in 6th thru 12th grade.

Innovating the journey of higher education and a brighter future, EducationPlanner.org, your one-stop career and college planning website! Contact your PHEAA Regional Office for details.

New Student Aid Guide Distribution Plan

We recently provided your school with a copy of our 2010-2011 Pennsylvania Guide to Student Aid. This free guide is designed to assist you in counseling students and families about the federal financial aid process and provides information on all Pennsylvania-specific student aid programs.



Since 1964, we have devoted our energy and resources to creating affordable access to higher education for students and their families. Preparing today's youth for successful careers tomorrow is an extremely rewarding endeavor, and we are pleased to assist you in these efforts.

Should you wish to order additional guides to use with your students and families, please visit PHEAA.org/counselors. **Please note that supplies are limited.** We also encourage you to direct your students to the electronic version of this guide available at PHEAA.org/SAG.

Planning a Financial Aid Awareness Program

Are you considering hosting a financial aid awareness program within your school district? We can help!

The first 3 steps in planning a financial aid awareness program are to decide on a:

1 LOCATION:

- Is the facility in a convenient location?
- Is the room large enough to comfortably seat the number of people you expect?
- Can the room's lighting be adjusted when using audiovisual equipment?
- Is a microphone(s) needed?
- What are your audiovisual needs? PowerPoint projector and laptop?
- Is there a screen that's at least 8' x 8' (preferably 10' x 10')?
- Is the temperature of the room adjustable?
- Is the facility/room available for the date(s) you have in mind?

2 DATE:

- Recommended date(s) for financial aid presentation(s) which suit your school's needs.
- Don't hold the program so late in the winter that many seniors will have missed colleges' financial aid deadlines. (Many school deadlines are in February.)
- After you narrow down the time frame, you need to look carefully for potential conflicts that would prevent people from attending. You probably won't be able to avoid every possible conflict, but if you find a date when there are no major events affecting your school's population, you are more likely to draw a crowd to your financial aid program.

For example, consider:

- Does the date conflict with any holidays, religious observances, deer season or planned school closings? Attendance and focus are usually down around these times.
- Are schools sporting events or other extracurricular activities being held that day? If so, will their start and end times conflict with the times of the aid event? How much of your potential audience would be involved?
- Are there any major community-wide events occurring on that date?
- Is the date far enough in advance that you have time to publicize the program and parents have enough time to make plans to come?
- If possible, try to schedule the event a year in advance so that you have plenty of time to get it on the school website, calendar and publications (sports programs, etc.)

3 TIME:

- When setting the time to begin for evening events, remember to allow time for parents to get home from work and get a bite to eat before going to the program.
- Set a time for the program to end. People usually like to know in advance how long they need to stay. The amount of time you schedule for the program will depend on what activities you have planned. Try to stick to the times you publicize.
- Typically, starting between 6:00 and 7:00 p.m. works well. Be sure, however, to consider any special patterns and needs in your area. For instance, in some areas, a weekend program or an afternoon program might be more effective than an evening program.

Announcement and promotion of your event

You can't publicize your financial aid awareness program too much! Get the word out as early as possible and in as many ways as possible. The target audience should be 9th–12th grade parents/students. Hearing this information more than once is to everyone's benefit and ultimately acts as a "de-stresser" for the parent because they will know what needs to be done and when it needs to be done.

Consider sending an email or postcard to your parents, or contacting them directly by phone with a pre-recorded message. You could also post event information on "Twitter" for your students/parents. Often the local newspaper's website will have a "Community Calendar" on which you can manually add to the schedule of events.

» OTHER IDEAS TO CONSIDER:

- Hanging flyers and/or posters in school;
- Posting announcements on the school's public address system;
- Putting advertisements and/or articles in the school newspaper;
- Placing a notice in the parent/teacher/student association (PTSA/PTO/PTA) newsletter;
- Adding a message at the bottom of report cards about upcoming events;
- Offering door prizes, raffles or drawings (ex. scholarships, movie passes, gift certificates, etc.);
- Serving food / refreshments;
- Providing baby sitting service;
- Giving extra credit for students that bring one or both parents (or caregivers as appropriate) to aid night.

» EVERY ANNOUNCEMENT SHOULD INCLUDE:

- The key subject points that will be covered in the program, such as giving instructions on sources/types of financial aid; how to complete the FAFSA; etc.
- The date (and if applicable the "snow date");
- The location, including the address and room;
- The start time and program length;
- A telephone number to call for more information;
- You might also include the presenter's name and affiliation, parking instructions, child care information, and other important details.

Financial Aid Seminars that Utilize Professionals

Consider calling in a variety of professionals with specific expertise during the school year to do a series of "Getting Ready for College" seminars for parents. Maybe hold multiple concurrent sessions at one event and let students/parents pick and choose which sessions they want to hear.

» EXAMPLES OF SESSIONS MIGHT INCLUDE:

- How to identify your student's interests and aptitudes.
- Matching up your student's interests with possible career choices / educational paths.
- Writing a college essay.
- "Paying for College" seminar.
- FAFSA completion session for seniors.
- Panel of recently graduated students that have moved onto higher education to share their experience on what they did and did not do right in preparing for higher education.

– continued on page 5 –

- “Choosing the Right School”. Bring in an admission officer(s) from a higher education institution to speak to the parents about what admissions officers look for in applicants.
- “Caveat Emptor”. Don’t be a sucker. Beware of the various scams that prey on students and their families.
- Is the Military right for my student? Have a local recruiter come in and talk and answer questions from interested parents.

Organize for Success

If possible, consider organizing with a neighboring high school for more efficient use of everyone’s resources. It helps to be organized if you want to produce a useful awareness program. Consider creating a checklist itemizing the tasks you need to complete. Remember, with good planning, your awareness program is sure to be a success. Good luck!

2009 School Counselor Workshop Series

The 2009 Fall School Counselor Workshop series presented by PHEAA and PASFAA will be kicking off again this November. These no cost workshops address the needs of school counselors and community agency staff as they assist students, parents and clients through postsecondary education financial aid options. With the current economic conditions and rising education costs, these workshops can help provide solutions and tips for helping students and families in finding financial aid choices for higher education.

Attendance at a PHEAA-sponsored workshop will result in participants receiving three (3) hours of Act 48 credits. Those wishing to receive these credits will need to provide their Personal Professional ID number to enable PHEAA to submit this request. Registration for the November workshops can be done online at pheaa.org. [Click here](#) to register. We look forward to seeing you at one our 41 workshops provided throughout Pennsylvania and encourage you to share this workshop series announcement with anyone else you feel may benefit from attending. For additional information, contact the regional office that serves your county.

FOR ALL WORKSHOPS, registration will take place from 8:30 – 9:00am. Workshops will begin **promptly** at 9:00am and conclude by 12:15pm.

NORTHWEST	DANIEL JOHNSTON, Regional Director – Sharon Regional Office 724.347.5891	
November 3, 2009	UNIVERSITY OF PITT-BRADFORD CAMPUS	Bradford
November 4, 2009	CRAWFORD COUNTY VO-TECH	Meadville
November 5, 2009	MIDWESTERN I.U. #4	Grove City
November 9, 2009	CLEARFIELD HIGH SCHOOL	Clearfield
November 10, 2009	GANNON UNIVERSITY	Erie
November 12, 2009	CLARION COUNTY CAREER CENTER	Shippenville
November 13, 2009	WARREN COUNTY CAREER CENTER	Warren

SOUTHWEST	C.A. (JIM) CARDINALE, Regional Director – Pittsburgh Regional Office 412.690.6980	
November 2, 2009	WAYNESBURG UNIVERSITY/SOUTHPOINTE CENTER	Canonsburg
November 3, 2009	PENN STATE/FAYETTE CAMPUS	Uniontown
November 4, 2009	ARIN INTERMEDIATE UNIT #28	Indiana
November 5, 2009	PENN STATE/ALTOONA CAMPUS	Altoona
November 6, 2009	ALLEGHENY INTERMEDIATE UNIT #3	Homestead
November 9, 2009	PENN STATE/BEAVER CAMPUS	Monaca
November 10, 2009	UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH/GREENSBURG CAMPUS	Greensburg
November 12, 2009	CCAC/NORTH CAMPUS	Pittsburgh
November 13, 2009	CAMBRIA ROWE BUSINESS COLLEGE	Johnstown

NORTH CENTRAL	DONALD SHADE, Regional Director – Williamsport Regional Office 570.323.7001	
November 4, 2009	NORTHERN TIER CAREER CENTER	Towanda
November 5, 2009	BLOOMSBURG UNIVERSITY	Bloomsburg
November 6, 2009	NEWPORT BUSINESS INSTITUTE	Williamsport
November 10, 2009	MANSFIELD UNIVERSITY	Mansfield
November 12, 2009	SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY	Selinsgrove
November 13, 2009	SOUTH HILLS SCHOOL OF BUSINESS & TECHNOLOGY	State College

SOUTH CENTRAL	BRUCE DIEFENDERFER, Regional Director – Harrisburg Regional Office 717.720.2055	
November 2, 2009	TUSCARORA INTERMEDIATE UNIT #11	McVeytown
November 3, 2009	GETTYSBURG COLLEGE	Gettysburg
November 4, 2009	SHIPPENSBURG UNIVERSITY	Shippensburg
November 5, 2009	HACC - WILDWOOD CAMPUS	Harrisburg
November 6, 2009	HACC - LEBANON	Lebanon
November 9, 2009	PENN STATE UNIVERSITY - YORK	York
November 10, 2009	HACC - LANCASTER	Lancaster

NORTHEAST	THOMAS O'DONNELL, Regional Director – Wilkes-Barre Regional Office 570.826.1476	
November 5, 2009	GWYNEDD-MERCY COLLEGE	Gwynedd Valley
November 6, 2009	BUCKS COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE	Newtown
November 9, 2009	COLONIAL IU #20	Easton
November 10, 2009	MARYWOOD UNIVERSITY	Scranton
November 13, 2009	MCCANN SCHOOL OF BUSINESS / POTTSVILLE CAMPUS	Pottsville
November 17, 2009	DESALES UNIVERSITY	Center Valley
November 18, 2009	ALVERNIA COLLEGE	Reading
November 19, 2009	LUZERNE COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE	Nanticoke

SOUTHEAST	CHERYL BROWNING, Regional Director – Philadelphia Regional Office 215.735.2877	
November 4, 2009	CHESTER COUNTY INTERMEDIATE UNIT	Downingtown
November 10, 2009	COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF PHILADELPHIA - NORTHWEST BRANCH	Philadelphia
November 19, 2009	DELAWARE COUNTY INTERMEDIATE UNIT, EDUCATIONAL SERVICES	Morton
November 24, 2009	COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF PHILADELPHIA - NORTHWEST BRANCH	Philadelphia

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PA Department of Education

PHEAA's mission is to create access to higher education. We're about making Pennsylvania smarter. The resources we provide to Pennsylvania each year through scholarships, grants, outreach, loan forgiveness programs and many other services allow Pennsylvania students to reach their full potential. To go beyond. To discover.

THINK PHEAA FIRST FOR STUDENT FINANCIAL AID.

REGIONAL SERVICES
1200 N. SEVENTH STREET
HARRISBURG, PA 17102-1444
800.692.7392

PHEAA/AES is one of many Guarantors participating in the Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP). A student or parent borrower may obtain a FFELP loan from a lender that uses PHEAA/AES as the Guarantor or any other participating lender. These materials have been developed and paid for by PHEAA/AES for informational purposes. The information contained herein is believed to be accurate at the time of printing. Due to the rapidly changing nature of the law and the industry, information contained in this document may become outdated and PHEAA/AES does not guarantee the accuracy of the information herein. You should verify that this information is correct.

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