Foster Care-to-College

Resources for Higher Education

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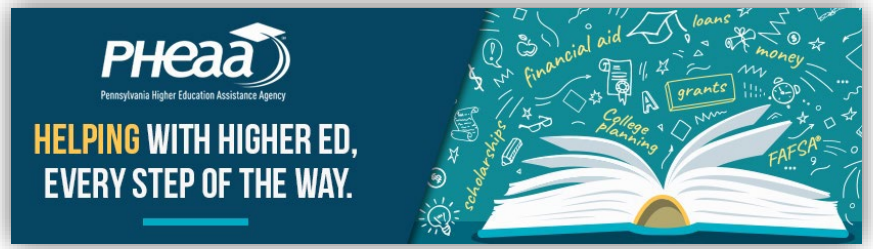


Learning Objectives

- Awareness of post-secondary financial aid resources available to PA youth who have experienced foster care.
- Understanding best practices for educators supporting youth who are navigating the higher education admissions and financial aid processes.
- Recognizing the importance of advocacy and the promotion of self-advocacy for youth during their transition from secondary to post-secondary education from application through graduation.

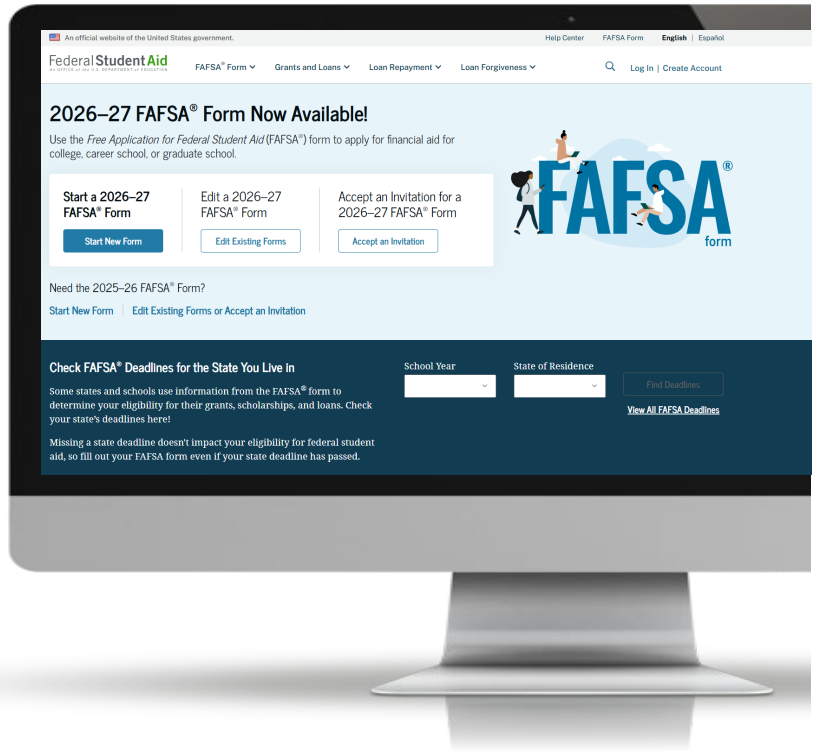
Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

The FAFSA is a student's connection to funding. It is a federal form used to determine student eligibility for the following:

- Federal programs (Federal Pell Grant, Federal Work-Study, etc.)
- State programs (including PA State Grant, Chafee, FosterEd, etc.)
- School programs

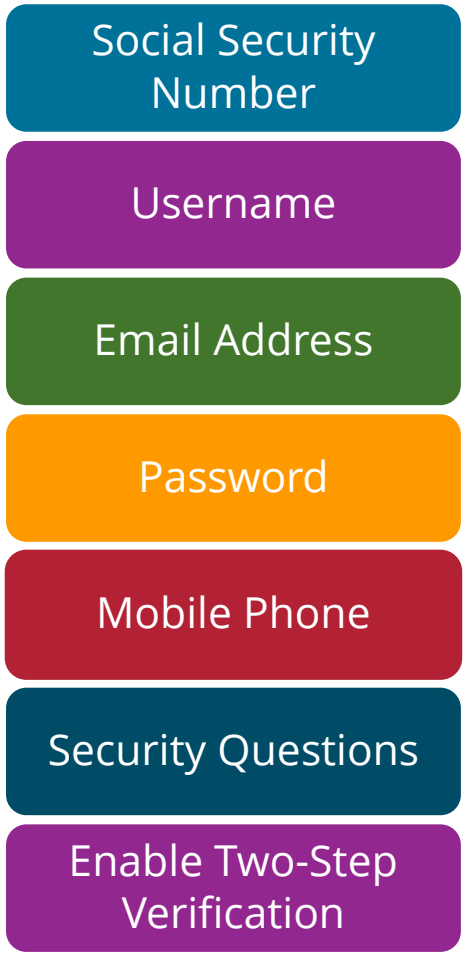
2026-27 FAFSA

- The FAFSA is available online in English and Spanish.
- Must file a FAFSA **each year** a student attends school to be eligible.
- While filing the FAFSA online is preferred at **StudentAid.gov**, a printable PDF version is also available.



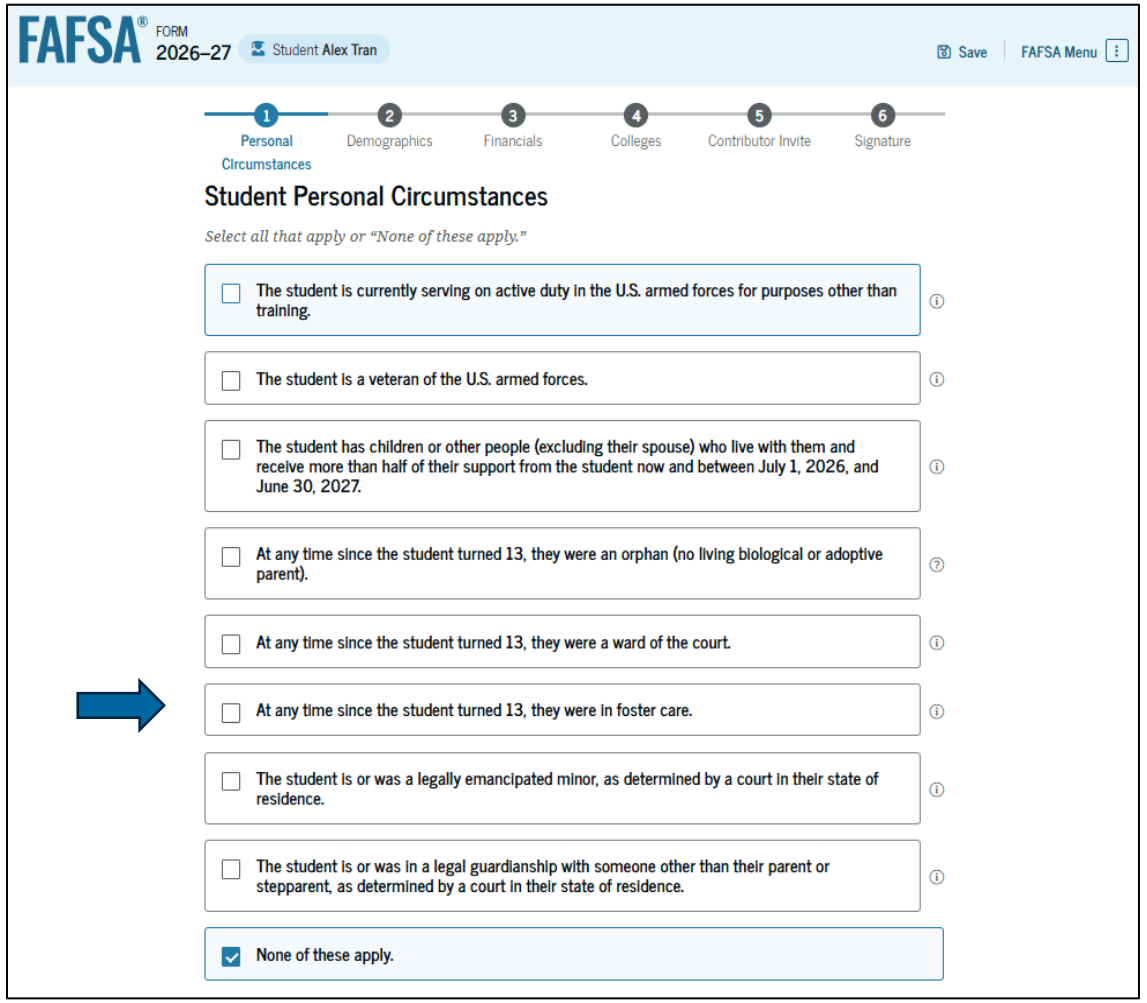
StudentAid.gov Account

- The student applying for aid and all contributors providing information on the FAFSA need to create a StudentAid.gov Account at **StudentAid.gov/fsa-id/create-account.**
- Students should use their **legal name**, as it is on their social security card. If a *name change* happens at any time, be sure to have student update their account.
- Legal signature for student and contributors.
- Users without an SSN will be able to acquire a StudentAid.gov Account.



FAFSA Personal Circumstances Questions

- A series of questions are asked to determine if the student is independent or dependent.
- If the student can say yes, to one of these questions, they are independent and will not provide parental information on the FAFSA.

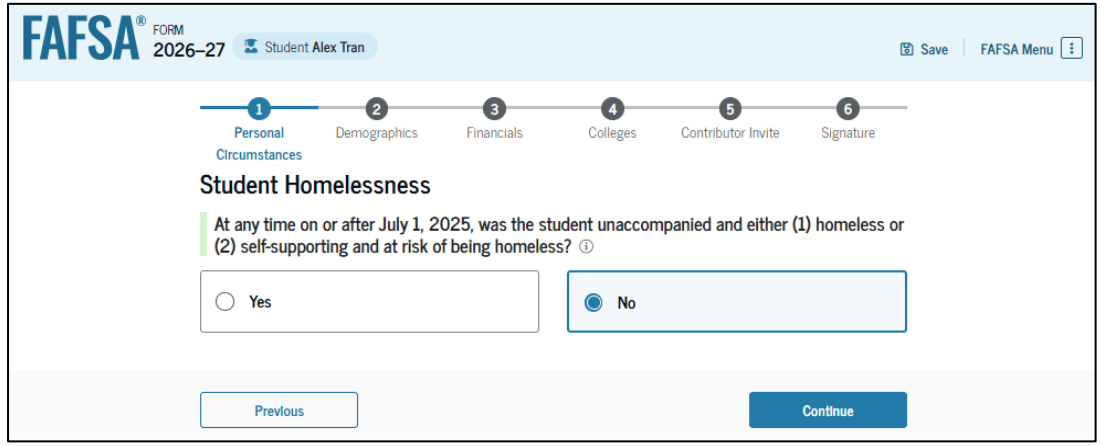


Foster Care and the FAFSA

- For the purposes of the FAFSA, a student is independent based on foster care status if they were **in foster care at any time since age 13**. This includes youth who were in foster care at age 13 or older and are no longer in foster care at the time they are applying for financial aid.
- If a student was in foster care or a ward of the court **before** age 13 but not after, they do **not** qualify as independent under this criterion.

Student Homelessness

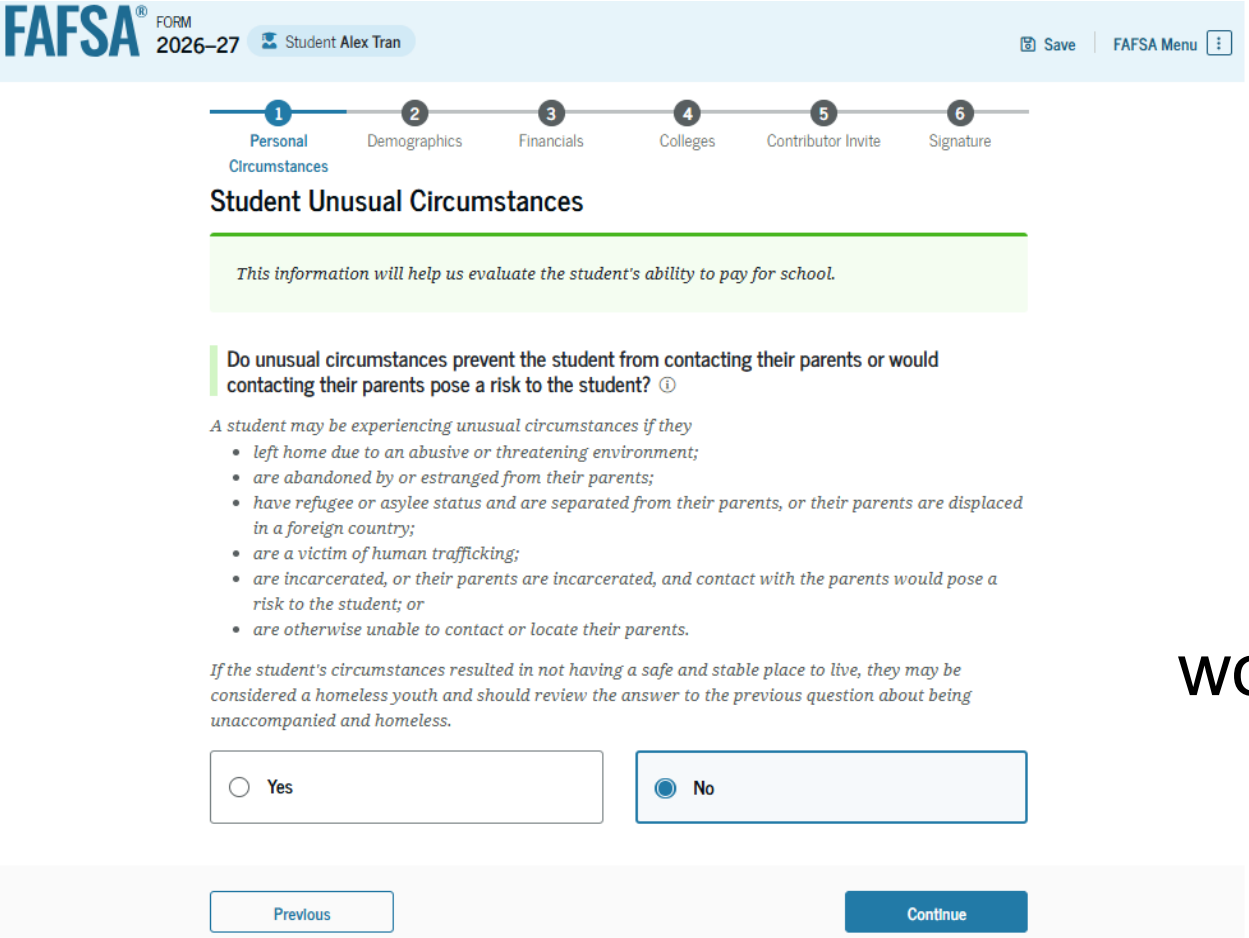
- **Unaccompanied** - not living in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.
- **Homeless** - lacking fixed, regular, and adequate housing (i.e. living in shelters, parks, motels, hotels, or “couch surfing”).
- **At risk of being homeless** - housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate.



Resources for Youth Experiencing Homelessness:

- School House Connection
- National Center for Homeless Education: Legislation
- FAFSA Tips for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth
- PA211.org

Student Unusual Circumstance



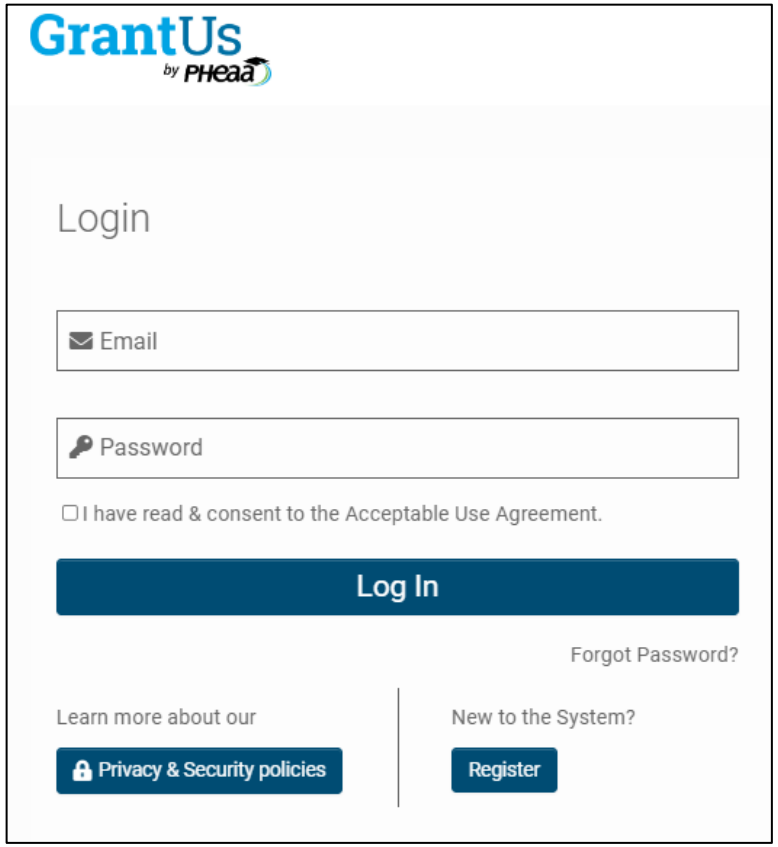
Do unusual circumstances prevent the student from contacting their parent(s)

or

would contacting their parent(s) pose a risk to the student?

GrantUs® - 2026-27 PA State Grant

- GrantUs® is PHEAA's PA State Grant and Special Programs online account management tool.
- Student's need to complete items such as the PA State Grant Form and High School Form within GrantUs® to be eligible for the PA State Grant Program.



Foster Care-to-College Education & Outreach Initiative

- New web page dedicated to resources and best practices
- Expanded outreach to spread awareness & accessibility
- Emphasis on educating youth, educators, community partners, and advocates
- QR code created for PHEAA's Chafee ETG and FosterEd materials

PA Chafee Education and Training Grant (ETG) Program & Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver Program (FosterEd)

Chafee Education and Training Grant Program

(Chafee ETG) is a **federal** program administered by PHEAA on behalf of the PA Dept. of Human Services that offers **grants** to PA undergraduate students who are or were in foster care and attending an eligible postsecondary institution.

- Application deadline: March 31st
- Maximum award: $5000

PA Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver Program

(**FosterEd)** is a **state** program that provides a **waiver** for **tuition and mandatory fees** charged by most postsecondary institutions **located in PA** for youth who are or were in foster care.

- Application Deadline: May 1st
- Award determined by unmet need for tuition and mandatory fees

**Please note that the maximum Chafee ETG award amount is subject to change due to Federal Grant levels.*

Chafee ETG & FosterEd Eligibility Requirements

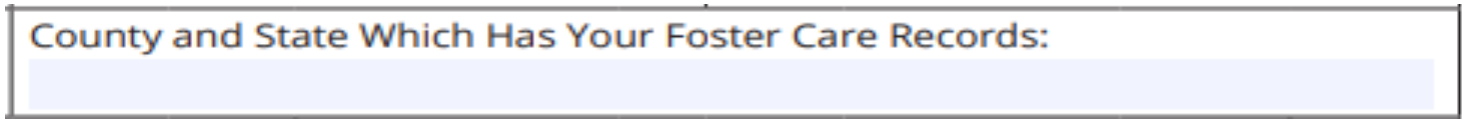
- **File the FAFSA!**
- Be a PA resident
- Have foster care experience at age 16 or older
- Be under age 26 by July 1 of the upcoming academic year for which Chafee ETG is received
- Be enrolled as an undergraduate at least half-time at an approved school
- Demonstrate financial need as determined by the school
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress as determined by the school
- Not be in default on a federal student loan or owe a refund on other Title IV aid
- Not received Chafee ETG awards or Foster Ed Waivers for 10 semesters or the equivalent, for undergraduate study
- Have graduated from high school or have a Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma

PA Chafee ETG & FosterEd

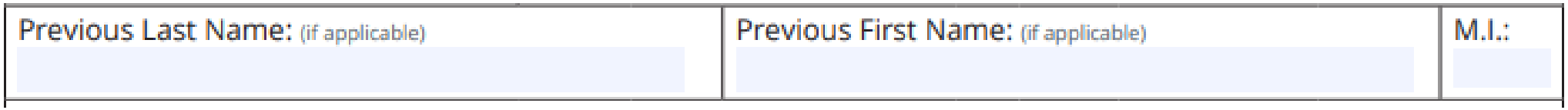
- Chafee ETG and FosterEd have **separate award counters.**
- PA residents attending **out of state** schools may be eligible for Chafee ETG but not FosterEd.
- Chafee ETG is available fall, winter, & spring terms.
- FosterEd recipients may utilize the program fall, winter, spring, & **summer** terms.
- FosterEd recipients **do not** have to be awarded Chafee ETG funds.
- FosterEd recipients **must file a PA State Grant form** but **do not** have to be awarded a PA State Grant.
- Eligible students **may still need alternate sources of aid** (e.g., loans) to cover costs beyond tuition and mandatory fees.

Application Tips

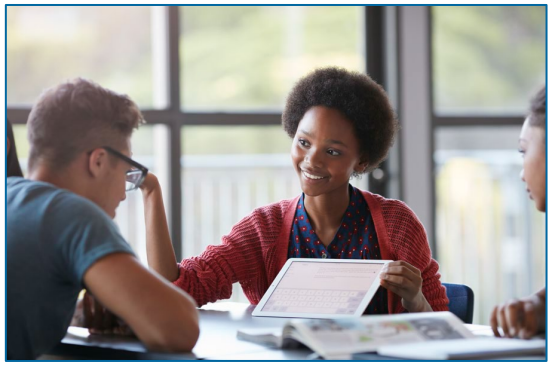
- 2025-26 Chafee ETG/FosterEd Program Application
- Ensure that all fields are completed and legible
- Application must be properly signed
- SSN and student name must match the FAFSA
- County that holds youth's foster care records is the county that had custody, which may not necessarily be the county of placement or the county of residence.



- If youth was adopted, ensure their birth name is included



What is a FosterEd Point-of-Contact (POC)



"Helping one person might not change the whole world, but it could change the whole world for one person."
– Author Unknown

Required

- Each campus must designate at least one employee to serve as a Point-of-Contact (POC) for FosterEd students.
- Contact information for the POC(s) must be posted and easy to find on the campus' website.
- Keep **POC information** up to date with PHEAA and on the web.
- **Review denial listings** and help students with denials that can be resolved (for example: unsigned application, blank county)
- Timely return of school certification documents to PHEAA

Recommended

- 2 POCs (no special training required)
  - Financial aid
  - Support and other resources
- Regular check-ins with students
- Network of resources identified for POCs and students
- Advocacy & compassion

What is a FosterEd Point-of-Contact (POC)

POC Responsibilities

- Serve as the **primary contact** for all eligible students applying to or attending the institution.
- Assist students in contacting DHS at **liglezen@pa.gov** if **help with eligibility** is needed.*
- Assist students in identifying and accessing **financial aid resources, scholarships, and grant opportunities**.
- Assist in connecting eligible **transfer students** with their new institution's FosterEd POC and inform PHEAA at **FosterEd@pheaa.org**.
- Provide applicants with information and referrals for **on- and off-campus support services and resources**, including but not limited to:

  - Admissions
  - Housing & transitional housing
  - Financial aid
  - Health
  - Mental health
  - Title IX
  - Academic advising
  - Learning support
  - Tutoring
  - Career services
  - Medical insurance programs
  - Food assistance
  - Other off-campus support services and social programs

I work with FC2C youth, how can I help?

- Help connect the student with their campus POC:
  - The Center for Schools and Communities': **Higher Education Single Point of Contact Directory**
  - Search the campus website for POCs and resources
  - Email **FosterEd@pheaa.org**
- Help with Chafee ETG/FosterEd application
  - Finding county of placement
  - Printing & scanning
  - Ensure legibility and that the **signature is valid**
  - Adding a .pdf or ZIP file password to protect student's sensitive information

- Advise students to verify identity when emailing PHEAA
  - full name, DOB, last 4 of SSN, current and/or former school
- Stay connected or provide a warm handoff to ensure support throughout their entire academic career
- Please do not send legal documents to PHEAA (court documents, social security cards, birth certificates, etc.)

FC2C Additional Resources

PHEAA Foster Care-to-College Education & Outreach Initiative

- Information on Chafee ETG, FosterEd, & PA State Grant
- PA Department of Human Services Resources
- PA Department of Education's FosterEd Annual Report
- Foster Care-to-College Contact Directories
- Homelessness Resources
- And more!

Additional Educational Resources for Youth

- Youth Advisory Board (YAB)
- Foster Youth College Resources - College Educated
- Know Your Rights Guide: Chapter 3 - Education And Getting To Graduation | Juvenile Law Center

PA State Grant

- Provides grant aid to applicants who demonstrate financial need and choose to attend a PHEAA-approved postsecondary educational institution.
- Eligibility is calculated in accordance with the Federal Need Analysis formula and PA State Grant policies
- Within Pennsylvania, eligible students may attend:
  - Most 2-year and 4-year colleges
  - Many Business, Trade and Technical (BTT) schools & Hospital Schools of Nursing, offering a program of at least 2 academic years in length

PA State Grant

Students must complete their FAFSA by the deadline to be considered for the PA State Grant.

- **May 1 -** If you plan to enroll in a degree program or a college transferable program at a 2-year private college or other college or university.
- **August 1 -** If you plan to enroll in a community college; a designated Pennsylvania Open-Admission institution; a business, trade, or technical school; a hospital school of nursing; or a 2-year program that is not transferable to another institution.

PA State Grant and Other Special Programs

- Grow PA Scholarship Grant Program **(Grow PA)**
  This program helps students pay for school and builds the workforce in PA for in-demand occupations.
- PA Blind or Deaf Higher Education Beneficiary Grant Program **(BDBG)**
  State-funded financial assistance to deaf or blind students attending a postsecondary institution
- PA Mental Health Education Learning Programs in Schools **(PA HELPS)**
  State-funded assistance for students completing internships in school-based mental health fields in PA
- PA National Guard Educational Assistance Program **(EAP)**
  Tuition assistance for members of the PA National Guard
- PA National Guard Military Family Education Program **(MFEP)**
  Tuition assistance for dependents (spouses & children) of PA Guard Members who enter an additional 6-year service commitment with the PA National Guard
- PA Partnerships for Access to Higher Education Program **(PATH)**
  Matching Funds program that partners with nonprofit, community-based PA organizations to leverage private donations as both a means and incentive to provide need-based educational grants to PA residents
- PA Postsecondary Educational Gratuity Program **(PEGP)**
  Honors people who lost their lives protecting the citizens of PA by helping their children fund their education
- PA Ready to Succeed Scholarship **(RTSS)** Program
  Awards to high achieving students whose family income does not exceed the income threshold for the award year
- PA Student Teacher Support **Program**
  Support for students enrolled in a PA Dept of Ed-approved teaching program who are completing their student teaching requirements
- PA Targeted Industry Program **(PA-TIP)**
  Need-based student awards for programs of study in: Energy, Health, Advanced Materials and Diversified Manufacturing, and Agriculture and Food Production

For more details, see the PA Student Aid Guide, or visit **PHEAA.org**

Additional PHEAA Resources

- PHEAA offers a large variety of materials that are **free** to order at PHEAA.org/order-online.
- Electronic Student Aid Guide **(SAG)**
- Statewide Virtual Events **(Register here)**
- PHEAA **Resource Page** for Counselors and Partners
- Higher Education Access Corner Podcast

  Higher Education Access Corner provides candid conversations around higher education access and affordability. Tune in **here** to hear a variety of engaging discussions with industry.
- PHEAA Access Partners

  Contact the **Access Partner** in your region for more information and ways we can partner together in assisting parents, students, and families!

Questions ?

PHEAA
Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency

Thank you!

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