

PENNSYLVANIA • STATE AID REFERENCE

Pennsylvania State Aid Cheat Sheet (2027-2028)

A two-page reference for counselors and families. Free to copy, print, and share.

Pennsylvania has no statewide merit scholarship for entering freshmen. Its money moves along three tracks: need, workforce, and specific populations. The costly misunderstanding is that filing the FAFSA applies a student for Pennsylvania aid. It does not. **Three programs sit behind three different doors.** The PA State Grant is completed in **GrantUs**. Grow PA is a PDF uploaded through **PHEAA Account Access**, a separate portal nothing prompts you to visit. Ready to Succeed has no student application: the college nominates. No Pennsylvania state aid program uses a test score. Verified against PHEAA, August 2026.

The Programs at a Glance

Program	What it pays and who qualifies
PA State Grant (need-based)	Maximum \$6,000 for 2026-27, up from \$5,750 held for four years. No published ladder: PHEAA approves a new formula annually weighing family resources, tuition, applicant numbers, and funding. The 2027-28 maximum is set in spring 2027. Conditional eligibility posts in May; the final amount waits for the Commonwealth budget in late June. First-time applicants complete the State Grant Form and High School Form in GrantUs.
Grow PA Scholarship Grant (workforce)	Up to \$5,000 a year , maximum four years. PA residents at least half time in one of 460-plus eligible programs leading to an in-demand occupation, who have not earned a bachelor's degree. No income test, no age limit. A PDF uploaded through PHEAA Account Access. First-come by the date a complete application arrives. Requires a signed Master Promissory Note.
Ready to Succeed (RTSS)	Up to \$2,500 full time and \$1,250 part time in 2025-26 in combination with the PA State Grant, minimum \$500. Takes a 2.50 GPA, 24 completed credits , and family income under \$200,000. No incoming freshman can receive it. No student application: participating colleges nominate from a PHEAA list, ordered by FAFSA and State Grant Form completion date. See page 2.
Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver (FosterEd)	Tuition and mandatory fees waived, plus application fees, at every Pennsylvania college including private and state-related. Up to five years or age 26. For PA youth who are or were in foster care, eligible for Chafee services, in care or discharged or adopted at or after 16. Last-dollar, and it does not touch housing, food, or books. Gateway is the Chafee ETG application.
PA National Guard MFEP (family benefit)	Maximum set annually at the in-state tuition plus technology fee rate of a PA State System school, up to five years. For the spouse or children of a Guard member who enters an additional six-year service agreement. The parent earns it; the student receives it.
Also worth knowing	Guard EAP for members entering a six-year commitment; PA state grants cannot be reduced because of it. Chafee ETG. Blind or Deaf Beneficiary Grant. Postsecondary Educational Gratuities Program for children of public servants killed on duty. PATH Grant matching funds. POW and MIA Grant. PA-TIP for approved non-degree career programs.

Deadlines to Post on Your Wall

Who	Deadline	What is submitted
First-time applicant at a four-year college or university, or a degree or college-transferable program at a two-year private college	May 1 , prior to the academic year	FAFSA, plus State Grant Form and High School Form in GrantUs. Excludes community colleges and designated PA Open-Admission institutions.
First-time applicant, community college, PA Open-Admission institution, business, trade or technical school, hospital nursing school, or non-transferable two-year program	August 1 , prior to the academic year	FAFSA, plus State Grant Form and High School Form in GrantUs.
Renewal applicant	May 1 , prior to the academic year	Renewal FAFSA. Most renewals skip the State Grant Form, but some are asked for it.
Summer term	September 1 , for the summer attended	The online PA Summer Grant application , plus FAFSA and State Grant Form if not on file.
Grow PA	2026-27 closed January 7, 2027	PDF uploaded through PHEAA Account Access under File Upload, then PA Special Programs. Watch the program status tracker for the 2027-28 opening.
Guard EAP	June 30 academic year, May 30 summer	EAP Form-2 annually through the unit; first-time applicants add Form-1 and a note.

Say this out loud to every senior: the 2027-28 FAFSA is targeted to open **October 1, 2026**, and the 2026-27 form opened a week early. Two Pennsylvania programs are awarded in the order applications arrive, so being ready in late September protects money that filing in March cannot reach.

The Rules That Trip Families Up

- **The deadline is set by the school type, not the student.** Community colleges and designated PA Open-Admission institutions are on the **August 1** track, not May 1. Many handouts print this backwards and put families on the wrong calendar.
- **The FAFSA opens one door of three.** Grow PA lives in a different portal entirely and nothing emails you about it. A family that files the FAFSA, finishes GrantUs, and stops has skipped up to \$20,000.
- **The May number is not the real number.** Conditional PA State Grant eligibility posts in May against the first school listed on the FAFSA. The final amount waits for the budget, usually late June.
- **Miss the deadline and apply anyway.** PHEAA reviews late applications for terms other than summer if funding permits. **Summer is the exception**, and September 1 is the one date with no stated way back.
- **An unsigned form loses your place.** Grow PA is ordered by the date a **complete** application arrives, and PHEAA warns that signature errors cause delay or denial.

Ready to Succeed: The Program Families Talk Themselves Out Of

- **A 2.50 GPA and a \$200,000 family income ceiling.** That is not a narrow program. Most Pennsylvania families clear the income test, and most college students clear the GPA. Say the numbers out loud, because the name suggests something far more selective.
- **But no freshman can get it.** It requires 24 completed credits by the time the school checks academic progress for the PA State Grant, at the end of the spring or summer term. Sophomore year is the earliest.
- **Which means the freshman FAFSA date decides sophomore money.** RTSS is ordered by FAFSA and State Grant Form completion date. PHEAA's own advice to students who qualified but lost out to depleted funds is to file the next FAFSA as early as possible.
- **Ask the college two questions.** Does this school participate in RTSS, and was my student nominated. It is also capped **with** the State Grant, not on top of it: PHEAA lists a State Grant too high to leave room for the \$500 minimum as a reason a qualified student receives nothing.

Which Door Is Each Program Behind

Program	Where you apply	Does anything prompt you
PA State Grant	GrantUs	Yes. PHEAA emails an activation notice once the FAFSA processes. The link expires after five days. If it lapses, use Forgot Password rather than waiting.
Grow PA	PHEAA Account Access: Sign In, File Upload, PA Special Programs, Grow PA Scholarship Grant Application	No. Four clicks no email will ever ask you to make.
Ready to Succeed	Nowhere. The college nominates.	No. And if the school does not participate, the student cannot receive it.
Guard EAP and MFEP	PHEAA Account Access, plus the Guard unit	No. The service member starts it, not the student.

Counselor Calendar: What to Tell Students When

When	What has to happen
Sophomore and junior year	Check whether the intended major appears on the Grow PA eligible programs list before committing to a college; the CIP-coded list decides eligibility, not the job title. Pennsylvania state aid uses no test score at all.
August and September, senior year	Create student and parent FSA IDs while a three-day verification wait is an irrelevance rather than a missed deadline. Personal email, never the school one, and the name exactly as on the Social Security card. Locate the 2025 tax return. Decide which school goes first on the FAFSA.
Late September into October	File the 2027-28 FAFSA the day it opens. Target is October 1, 2026, and the prior form opened September 24. Within days, complete the State Grant Form and High School Form in GrantUs.
November to February	College scholarship deadlines cluster here, and this is where the largest dollars in a Pennsylvania offer are decided. Drexel's early plans open a higher merit range than Regular Decision. Pitt prioritizes December 1, Penn State November 1, Temple February 1, Saint Joseph's November 15.
Early 2027	Watch the Grow PA program status tracker for the 2027-28 application. The prior cycle closed January 7, 2027.
May through August 2027	PA State Grant deadlines: May 1 for four-year plans, August 1 for community college and open-admission plans. Conditional eligibility posts in May. In late June the Commonwealth budget passes and the final award is set. That is the number to budget on.

Three Mistakes That Cost Pennsylvania Students Money

- **Telling a community college student the deadline is May 1.** It is August 1 for first-time applicants at community colleges, open-admission institutions, trade and technical schools, and hospital nursing programs. This is the most commonly misprinted rule in the state.
- **Skipping the FAFSA on an income assumption.** It is a prerequisite for Grow PA, which has no income test, and for RTSS, which allows family income up to \$200,000. Skipping it forfeits both.
- **Treating Grow PA as free money.** It is secured by a Master Promissory Note. Fail to finish the degree, or fail to live and work in Pennsylvania in the in-demand occupation for one year per year funded, and the full amount converts to a loan with interest. A good trade for a student staying in Pennsylvania, a poor one for a student who is unsure, and nobody in the process says so.

Awarded and funded are two different things

- **PA State Grant:** conditional in May, final after the budget passes in late June.
- **Ready to Succeed:** notice of an award is not a guarantee of payment. PHEAA must collect institutional confirmation, a step called certification, before anything disburses.
- **Grow PA:** selection produces a provisional award, then the school certifies, then PHEAA disburses. This is why an amount can appear in an account in spring and never reach a bill in fall. It is usually not an error, it is certification working as designed.

Free Resources: No Account, No Cost, No Data Collection

All Pennsylvania programs and official rules	pheaa.org
PA State Grant deadlines and forms	pheaa.org/grants/state-grant-program
Grow PA status tracker and application	pheaa.org/funding-opportunities/grow-pa-scholarship-grant-program
PHEAA State Grant and Special Programs	1-800-692-7392
Our Pennsylvania state aid guide	collegereadyparent.org/pennsylvania
Scholarships at 400+ colleges, all 50 states	collegereadyparent.org/college-scholarships

Produced by CollegeReadyParent.org, an independent, parent-built resource. No paywall, no accounts, no lead forms, no student data collection. Counselors and educators: you may freely copy, print, and distribute this sheet. Questions or corrections: leo@collegereadyparent.org. Verified against PHEAA in August 2026; PHEAA resets the PA State Grant formula annually and the RTSS income and GPA thresholds are subject to annual change, so confirm current details at pheaa.org and with the college before applying. College figures come from the CRP scholarship database.