

# READY TO SUCCEED SCHOLARSHIP (RTSS) FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS



## General

- Q. Where can I find the RTSS Institutional Application and Program Guidelines?**
- A. The RTSS Institutional Application and Program Guidelines are available online at [PHEAA.org/rtss](https://PHEAA.org/rtss).
- Q. What is the first-come, first-served nature of the award based upon?**
- A. Assuming students have been properly nominated per RTSS Program requirements, the first-come, first-served funding order of the RTSS award is based upon the date students complete their FAFSA® and Pennsylvania State Grant (State Grant) Form. Please note the date a student is nominated is not taken into account by the first-come, first-served criterion of the RTSS Program.
- Q. Will the May 1/August 1 State Grant and FAFSA filing deadline date for students apply to the RTSS Program as well?**
- A. Yes. With the exception of financial need, students must meet all other State Grant eligibility requirements, including, but not limited to, timely submission of the FAFSA and State Grant Form. However, with the first-come, first-served provision of RTSS, students should file as early as possible.
- Q. Will there be a Summer RTSS award?**
- A. No. Unfortunately, funding is not available to provide Summer RTSS awards.

## Institution Eligibility

- Q. Do institutions need to re-apply every year to participate in the RTSS Program?**
- A. No. The RTSS Program Institutional Application is a one-time application form. Once approved, an institution's approval carries forward each academic year.

## Student Eligibility

- Q. Which students are eligible to receive RTSS funds?**
- A. With the exception of financial need, students must meet all other State Grant eligibility requirements with three additions:
1. Demonstration of outstanding academic achievement by attaining a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.25 as of the time that the student's school checks academic progress for the State Grant Program (either after Spring or after Summer of the award year immediately preceding the award year for which you wish to nominate the student)
  2. Completion of at least one academic year—defined as having earned at least 24 credits or the equivalent—by the time the student's school checks academic progress for the State Grant Program (either after Spring or after Summer of the award year immediately preceding the award year for which you wish to nominate the student)
  3. Proof of total annual family income not in excess of \$110,000
- Q. After level two, how are subsequent academic levels determined?**
- A. The institution is responsible for determining each student's academic level beyond that of the second year. Please note that schools should only report a student as a fifth year when that student is enrolled in a bona-fide five-year academic program.
- Q. Can Advanced Placement (AP) credits be included in the 24 credit minimum for RTSS nomination?**
- A. Yes. AP credits may be included as part of the 24 credit minimum needed for RTSS nomination eligibility.
- Q. After being nominated, should a student's GPA or Academic Level be updated as it changes throughout the award year?**
- A. No. For RTSS nomination purposes, GPA and Academic Level must be reported as snapshots of achievement. They are fixed values specific to the point in time the school reviewed academic progress prior to the current academic year (either after Spring or after Summer of the award year immediately preceding the award year for which you wish to nominate the student).

**Q. What happens if a student's GPA drops below 3.25 after the school year starts?**

- A. Because GPA must be reported as a snapshot of achievement, it is a fixed value for RTSS. This means that if a student's GPA changes after the time of academic progress review, that change should not be reported for RTSS for the current award year. So, if a student has a qualifying GPA at the time of review and meets all other eligibility criteria, that student may be nominated. If the student's GPA subsequently drops below a 3.25, the change in GPA should not be reported until the next academic year. The student remains RTSS-eligible for the current award year.

**Q. May schools include credits for remedial courses when determining a student's cumulative GPA and academic level?**

- A. Schools may include up to 12 total remedial credits when calculating GPA and academic level. The RTSS Remedial Counter will be created to function similarly to that for the State Grant Program.

**Q. Can transfer students participate even if they have not earned any credits or established a cumulative GPA at their new school?**

- A. Certain transfer students may be eligible to participate, provided that they meet the RTSS eligibility requirements and specific transfer student criteria.

For mid-year transfers:

- Both institutions of attendance must participate in RTSS.
- The student must have been nominated to receive a RTSS award by his or her previous school.
- The student must transfer at least 24 semester credits, or the equivalent, to his or her new school, thereby maintaining an academic level of two or higher.
- It should be noted that a student's award amount and eligibility may fluctuate after a mid-year transfer, since costs used in determining eligibility may be different at the new school.

For transfers beginning a new year:

- If a student with at least 24 transfer credits achieved at least a 3.25 cumulative GPA at all previous institutions prior to his or her latest transfer, the student's current institution may report his or her lowest cumulative GPA that meets RTSS requirements. This information can be found on the transfer student's transcript(s).
- Any GPA from a prior institution that is transferring credits that falls below the 3.25 minimum requirement will render the transfer student ineligible to receive RTSS funding.
- Institutions must maintain documentation of all previous cumulative GPAs for their records..

**Q. Can a student who does not have a cumulative GPA of 3.25 and/or 24 semester credits at the time the institution checks academic progress for the State Grant Program, but achieves the minimum requirements at the end of the subsequent fall term be eligible for a spring term RTSS award?**

- A. No. GPA and credit level are measured as snapshots of achievement. This means they may only be reviewed at a fixed point in time—after Spring or after Summer of the award year immediately preceding the award year for which you wish to nominate the student (depending upon when the student's institution checks academic progress for the State Grant). As a reminder, your institution is required to check State Grant Progress for the entire population of students at the same time annually, after the Spring or after Summer.

**Q. Does it matter if a student is dependent or independent?**

- A. No. Both dependent and independent students may be considered for RTSS eligibility.

**Q. How will State Grant Distance Education Pilot Program (SGDEPP) nominations affect RTSS eligibility? Are students who are enrolled in programs of study that are structured to be more than 50% online eligible to receive a RTSS award?**

- A. Programs of study that are structured to be more than 50% online are not State Grant eligible; therefore, students enrolled in these programs are not eligible for RTSS funding. This means that students currently eligible for the SGDEPP due to enrollment in a program of study greater than 50% online are not eligible to receive funds through the RTSS Program. Additionally, students who are enrolled for more than 50% of their term credits online are also ineligible for RTSS.

**Q. If the student's enrollment changes during the semester and the student is no longer enrolled in at least 50% classroom courses, do they become ineligible for RTSS?**

- A. Yes. Changes in enrollment status can render a student ineligible to receive RTSS funds. This includes, but is not limited to, changes in enrollment that cause the student to no longer meet the 50% classroom requirement. Schools must refund award amounts to PHEAA in the event awards are given to students who become ineligible for the scholarship after receiving RTSS funds.

## Student Nomination Process

### Q. How do students apply for the program? Are there any documents that they would need to fill out?

- A. There is no separate student application for the RTSS Program. Students will be nominated for award eligibility by approved, participating institutions. In order to be eligible, students must have completed the FAFSA and State Grant Forms. If any additional information is needed, the student will be contacted by PHEAA.

### Q. How do I nominate students to participate in the RTSS Program?

- A. Nominations will only be accepted through Partner Interface and Certification Transmissions. PHEAA will not accept nomination requests via email or spreadsheets. PHEAA will provide participating schools a list of potentially eligible student candidates, based upon each student's total family income (as reported on the FAFSA) and, if applicable, each student's total State Grant award amount. Schools must work from this list to complete nomination reporting for three groups of students:

1. Students eligible for nomination:
  - a. GPA: 3.25-4.0, and
  - b. Academic Level: 2-5
2. Students not eligible for nomination, but for whom reporting is still required:
  - a. GPA: 3.0-3.24, and
  - b. Academic Level: 2-5
3. Students not eligible for nomination (report as "excluded"):
  - a. GPA: <3.0, or
  - b. Academic Level: 1, or
  - c. Students not making satisfactory academic progress

### Q. Can I nominate a student for more than one term at the same time?

- A. It is acceptable to nominate eligible students for more than one term at a time. Because GPA and Academic Level are snapshots of achievement, a student who qualifies for RTSS nomination in the Fall may also be nominated for the Winter (if applicable) and Spring terms during the same nomination period, provided s/he meets all other program eligibility criteria for all terms in which s/he is nominated.

### Q. Why must I report students with a 3.0 GPA if they must attain a 3.25 cumulative GPA in order to receive a RTSS award?

- A. The reporting of this data is essential in helping PHEAA evaluate RTSS Program requirements and, if later determined necessary, propose future revisions to the GPA requirement.

### Q. What if I cannot nominate all eligible students in time for the first RTSS eligibility run? Can I continue to nominate students after this deadline?

- A. Once nominations open, schools can nominate student candidates at any time during the academic year, including after the initial program eligibility run. Because funding for the RTSS Program is limited, there is no guarantee that funds will be available after the first scheduled run.

### Q. What types of income are included in the "total family income?"

- A. For dependent students, total annual family income would include parents' taxable (AGI) and untaxed income and student's taxable (AGI) and untaxed income. For independent students, total family income would include the student's (and student's spouse, if married) taxable (AGI) and untaxed income.

### Q. What if my school has different income information for a nominated student than PHEAA appears to have?

- A. If you feel PHEAA does not have the correct income information for a nominated student, please email [rtss@pheaa.org](mailto:rtss@pheaa.org) or call **800.443.0646**, Option 3, Option 1. Students with discrepant income information may be placed under PHEAA income verification review.

## Disbursement Process

**Q. Does the RTSS Program disburse awards annually or by term?**

A. RTSS funds are disbursed on a term-by-term basis. The first disbursement typically occurs in late Fall.

**Q. Will institutions need to submit a new ACH form to receive disbursements for the RTSS Program?**

A. Once institutions are approved for participation in the RTSS program, PHEAA's Treasury Management will send an ACH form to the contact person specified on the institutional application. If your participating institution has already completed an ACH form with PHEAA for a different program and wishes to have RTSS funds transferred to the same account you currently use, please contact PHEAA's Financial Management Department after receiving notification of your institution's approval for participation in the RTSS Program. PHEAA's Financial Management Department may be reached via email at [fmftadmin@pheaa.org](mailto:fmftadmin@pheaa.org).

Once your institution is set up for ACH for the RTSS Program, you do not need to request a new ACH form unless your institution experiences any of the changes outlined in the Accounting and Cash Management section of the *RTSS Program Guidelines*.

**Q. When does institutional reconciliation occur for RTSS?**

A. Institution reconciliation rosters typically begin running in early May, and will be due back to PHEAA no later than June 30. As with the State Grant Program, failure to submit required reports or forms in a timely manner may prevent future disbursement of RTSS Program funds for all students. This includes, but is not limited to, late return of refunds and late return of the reconciliation roster certification.

**Q. How does the RTSS disbursement process differ from State Grant?**

A. Nominated students are processed and awarded (based on the first-come, first-served program criterion) in an eligibility run. Then, schools must review awarded students and certify their continued eligibility on a term-by-term basis. Once an award is certified by the school, PHEAA will disburse funds for that award to the school. Funds are certified, disbursed, and, if necessary, refunded on a student-by-student basis (meaning no netting of funds may occur between students). This is referred to as a student-level disbursement model.

**Q. When can I begin to certify student awards?**

A. Certification of term awards may not begin until the start of the term in question. For example, Spring RTSS awards may not be certified by a school until that school's Spring term start date.

**Q. What rosters can I expect to receive for the RTSS Program, and where can I find them?**

A. RTSS term disbursement and end-of-year reconciliation rosters generate with a disbursement run and are term- and period-specific. Rosters can be found on both Partner Interface and PageCenter.

## Awards and Refunds

**Q. Does the combined RTSS and State Grant award maximum include Summer Grant awards?**

**A.** No. This calculation only considers the academic year awards.

**Q. How does the \$500 minimum award work for the RTSS Program?**

**A.** Students are limited to a \$500 minimum award for the academic year. This means that the term award a student may receive can be less than \$500, but the total value of all term RTSS awards for the academic year for which a student could be eligible cannot be below \$500.

**Q. If a student experiences a change in eligibility after receiving an RTSS award, can they become ineligible for RTSS, and, if so, who must refund the award amount to PHEAA?**

**A.** Students can become ineligible to participate in the RTSS Program during the course of the academic year. Reasons for changes in eligibility can include, but are not limited to:

- Increases in a student's State Grant award amount that exceed the maximum RTSS and State Grant combined award amount. This may occur if a student transfers mid-year from a low-cost institution to a high-cost school or if a student files a reduced income form that results in an increased State Grant award.
- Changes in enrollment (i.e., a student who drops below the 50% in-classroom instruction requirement or a student previously disbursed a full-time award who then drops to half-time enrollment)
- Acceptance of less than 24 transfer credits by a new institution for students who transfer institutions mid-year. According to RTSS guidelines, this would change the academic level of the transfer student to below a level 2.

If a student does lose eligibility after receiving a RTSS award, the school must return these funds immediately to PHEAA. Please note that there are no PHEAA Collectables for the RTSS Program.

**Q. What is the maximum number of payments a RTSS student can receive?**

**A.** Students may receive up to three years (a 3.0 counter) of full-time RTSS awards. This can occur in conjunction with the State Grant award counter, meaning that a student eligible to receive up to four years of State Grant funding may also receive up to 3 years of RTSS funding. The receipt of a RTSS award does not impact State Grant eligibility. This means that a student who has exhausted the RTSS counter, but not the State Grant counter, may still receive State Grant funding so long as s/he meets State Grant eligibility requirements. However, students who have exhausted their State Grant counter are not eligible to receive RTSS funds. It should be noted that receipt of a bachelor's degree automatically ends a student's RTSS eligibility, even if their RTSS counter has not been fully exhausted.

## Reporting and Resources

- Q. Are schools that chose to participate in the RTSS Program required to complete any outcomes reporting?**
- A. No additional outcomes reporting is required for schools outside the nomination process. In lieu of institutional outcomes reporting for the RTSS Program, PHEAA will send students a short survey. Schools will be informed a week before PHEAA sends the survey so that schools can encourage students to complete it.
- Q. How do I sign up for RTSS Transmissions or Partner Interface? How do I use them?**
- A. To sign up for Transmissions or Partner Interface, schools can contact PHEAA's Public Service Systems department at **800.443.0646**. Schools who would like more information on how to use Partner Interface can visit [PHEAA.org/training](https://www.pheaa.org/training). This site offers RTSS Partner Interface resources, including webinars on RTSS processes and tutorials for using Partner Interface.
- Q. Where can I find the Transmission layouts and User Guide for the RTSS Program?**
- A. The layouts for the Status Transmission, Certification Transmission, Disbursement Transmission, and Refund Transmission are available in the Document Library under Main Menu / State Grant Program / Technical and Processing Information. The RTSS User Guide for Partner Interface is available on [PHEAA.org/training](https://www.pheaa.org/training).