

School Counselor UPDATES

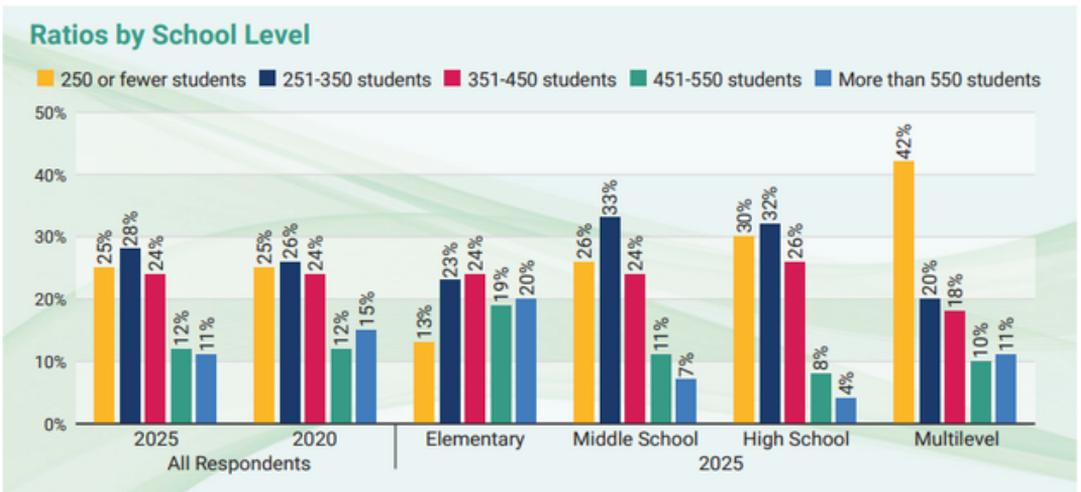
Department of Education

March 2026

STATE OF THE PROFESSION

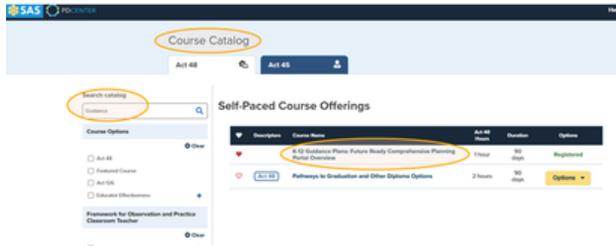


The **American School Counselor Association** has published the State of the Profession 2025. In October 2025, **ASCA** distributed a state-of-the-profession survey to nearly 66,685 members and nonmembers. The data shows that school counselors continue to experience substantial role strain: 59% cite assignment of inappropriate duties and 54% cite high caseloads as significant challenges (extremely challenging/challenging). Additionally, although 81% say their programs use data informed decision-making, alignment with the ASCA National Model declined slightly to 74%.

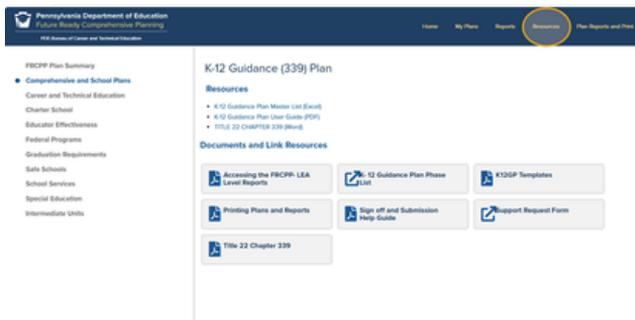


ASCA also released the Student-to-School-Counselor Ratio 2024–2025, which notes that **Pennsylvania** has 5,330 school counselors and 1,691,456 students, which results in a 317:1 ratio.

K-12 Guidance Plans in **Phase 3** are due by **March 31, 2026**. To support your team, a free, self-paced tutorial in the **SAS PD Center** titled “K-12 Guidance Plans: Future Ready Comprehensive Planning Portal Overview” has been developed. You may locate it by using the search feature in the Course Catalog/Registration.



K-12GP Templates and other resources are available in the Resources section of FRCPP.



The **Commonwealth** employs recruiters who can participate in your career fairs and speak at school events. If you are interested in requesting either virtual or in-person attendance at an event, please send the event invitation to the **Commonwealth of PA's** event request resource account at RA-OAEventRequest@pa.gov.

By using the links below, you can help educate students about the wide range of opportunities the Commonwealth offers – whether students are planning to enter the workforce right after high school or continue on to college. Apprenticeship opportunities are available now.

- [Open Positions](#)
- [Link to Internships](#)
- [Recruitment Events](#)
- [Job Alerts](#)
- [Commonwealth Careers](#)
- [PA Outdoor Corps](#)



PASAP RECOGNITION

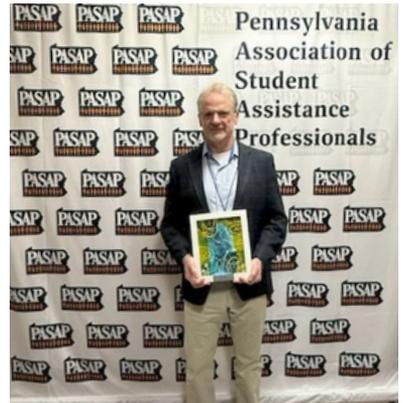
The **Pennsylvania Association of Student Assistance Professionals (PASAP)** recognized several individuals and SAP teams at their recent annual conference. Congratulations to all!

Distinguished
Secondary
SAP Team
Award

Wyoming
Valley West
High School



Ray Killen, School Counselor at **West Hempfield Middle School**, received the **Distinguished Service Award**.



Teresa Detweiler, Prevention Specialist, **Council on Chemical Abuse**, received the **Visionary Service Award**.

ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

Identifying content areas where students stumble isn't difficult for teachers. It's as simple as spotting a wrong answer on a test or a skipped question on a homework assignment. What's trickier is diving into the "why" behind the confusion and frustration. **K-12 DIVE** shares why [Learning the reason behind students' struggles sets them up for testing success](#).

All4Ed has published the second in a five-part series called, [Beyond Random Acts: Rethinking Dual Enrollment as a Pathway Strategy](#), which details why access to college credit alone isn't enough without intentional alignment to a coherent, equitable pathway.

Across the country, states stand at a defining crossroads. More than any other level of government, states hold the power to shape the future of American education—and with it, the future of our economy, workforce, and communities.

XQ has published [The Future is High School: A Strategy for State Leaders to Accelerate Learning, Work, and American Renewal](#). **XQ** also follows [policy actions by state, including Pennsylvania](#).

Rize has released [The Hybrid College Wins: What Students Are Telling Us That Schools Ignore](#), a compilation of survey findings from over 1,500 high school and college students.

What the data reveals about what students actually want

91%

of high school students want at least one online class per semester

66%

of undergraduates want more online courses than their college offers

31%

of high school students would switch to their second-choice college for online courses

Celebrate International Women's Day with a Virtual Technology Career Panel!



March 11, 2026 from 12 - 1 PM

Who Should Attend:

- Students of all genders in grades 9-12
- Educators, families, and community members interested in technology and STEM careers

What You'll Learn:

- Real-world experiences from women working in technology at Microsoft and UPMC
- Discussion about technology career paths
- How to start preparing now for a future in tech

[👉 Register today to save your spot!](#)



DID YOU KNOW?

Women hold ~27% of computing and technology jobs in the U.S., despite making up 57% of the overall professional workforce.

Computer and Information Technology occupations are projected to grow much faster than average from 2024-2034, with ~317,700 job openings per year due to growth and replacement needs.

Women earned just 22% of U.S. bachelor's degrees in Computer & Information Sciences, a figure that has remained largely flat in recent years.

Only 23% of tech executive (C-suite) roles in Fortune 500 companies are held by women.

Sponsored by:



UPMC
WOMEN IN IT

Collaboration with:



Microsoft



Phone 877-272-2425
www.paschoolcounselor.org
info@paschoolcounselor.org

PSCA 2026 Scholarship Competition

One Scholarship Awarded \$1,000

Eligibility & General Guidelines:

- Participants should be high school seniors planning to pursue a post-secondary education at a 2 or 4 year institution or trade school.
- Please submit a one (1) page essay of no more than 750 words on a School Counselor who has made a difference in your academic, career and/or social-emotional development. The body of the essay should be double-spaced. Your essay must include three examples. The essay must focus on one of your current or previous school counselors. The school counselor about whom you are writing must be a certified school counselor, currently employed as such in Pennsylvania.
- The School Counselor you are writing about must be a certified School Counselor, employed as such in Pennsylvania.
 - **Use the proper terminology of "school counselor." The use of "guidance counselor" will result in the deduction of points.**
 - **Essays will be checked for AI assistance. Those identified as generated or heavily assisted by AI tools will not be selected. The selected essay will reflect the author's authentic voice, creativity, and unique experiences.**
 - **Please place your last name and high school in the upper right corner of the essay.**
 - **Do NOT include a resume.**
 - **All submissions should be in Word Document or PDF format.**
- ALL Essays must be submitted electronically at the link below.
- Create an account [LINK](#) to apply or scan the QR Code.



Deadlines:

April 1, 2026 11:59 PM—
Deadline for submissions

May 8, 2026—
Recipient announced



Questions can be directed to:

Mrs. Laura Zaharakis
School Counselor
PSCA HS Scholarship Committee Chair
Email: zaharakisl@allentownsd.org
Phone: 917-981-9939

**Chartered Division of the American School Counselor Association*

ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT



If you work with a high-achieving high school junior from a low-income background, the [QuestBridge College Prep Scholars Program](#) can help you **dream big about college and beyond!** QuestBridge works with [55 college partners](#) across the nation as well as premier service providers to equip you with the knowledge and confidence to apply to – and afford – a top college. The deadline to apply is March 24.

The **Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA)** encourages 2026-27 college students, graduate students, and their parents to enter for a chance to win a \$2,500 no essay scholarship sweepstakes through the PA Forward Student Loan Program. Anyone who opts in to receive communications, which will include tips on planning for and paying for college, between January 5 and May 1, 2026, will be entered into the scholarship sweepstakes. A total of 12 winners will be selected in May of this year. The PA Forward Scholarship Sweepstakes, offered by the PA Forward Student Loan Program, is open to Pennsylvania residents only. ***Enter the sweepstakes.***



The [2026 ARTEFFECT Competition](#) for middle and high school students is open through April 21, 2026! The first step for young artists in creating an ARTEFFECT submission is to select an LMC Unsung Hero –an individual who resonates as a role model.

Going Merry is ceasing operations at the end of March, 2026. Students are asked to complete applications by March 5.

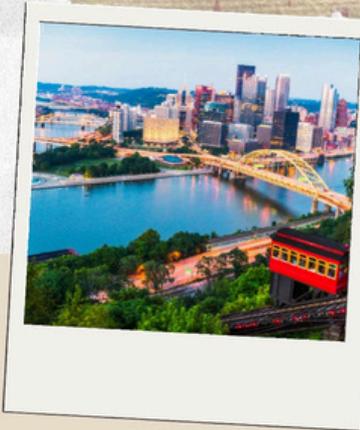
FREE



WATERSHED PROTECTION

Student Field Experience

Students will complete hands-on watershed conservation tasks led by local industry experts, such as water quality testing and macroinvertebrate sampling. Students will also tackle a watershed conservation escape room, a holistic STEM challenge that applies mathematics skills in the real watershed protection work performed by the professionals at the CEC Inc.



THIS EVENT MADE POSSIBLE BY:

MOONSHOT GRANTS



WASHINGTON COUNTY
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

**April 13-17
PennWest California
SAI Farm**



**SCAN OR CLICK
TO LEARN MORE AND REGISTER**

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Forbes has released [The Importance Of Relationship Building In School Counseling](#),



SEL4 PA has been rebranded as the [Pennsylvania Alliance for Social, Emotional, and Mental Wellbeing!](#) PA4SEMW's vision is to ensure that every child in every Pennsylvania community has access to proactive, aligned, sustainable, and effective social, emotional, and mental wellbeing resources to ensure career readiness and healthy engagement with their families and communities. Check out the website to find information and resources for practitioners, families, and policy makers, and an organization committed to action locally and Statewide to advocate for better SEMW systems and supports across Pennsylvania.

The **Prevention Learning Portal** is offering a one-hour free course on [PAYS: How to Utilize Your Data with the PAYS Guide](#).

The Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) is sponsored and conducted every two years by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. This survey has been implemented across the Commonwealth since 1989 for school students in the 6th, 8th, 10, and 12th grades to learn about their behavior, attitudes, and knowledge concerning alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and violence.

This course aims to engage learners in how to utilize the PAYS Guide to better analyze and increase the use of PAYS data, materials, and resources.



Active Minds has released the [2025 Impact Report](#).

COLLEGE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

On February 6, the **Department** issued a [Dear Colleague letter](#) to Chief School Administrators alerting them to the new Universal FAFSA requirement for the 2026/2027 school year.

The Hechinger Report published an article called [OPINION: There is no clear strategy to prepare U.S. high schoolers for life after graduation, and that must change](#), that surmises “until college and career readiness is fully embedded into how schools are organized, funded and led, even the best-intentioned supports will continue to fall short of their potential and fail students who are trying to figure out what’s next.”



Inside Higher Ed offers [The Challenges Rural Students Face After Admission](#), sharing this statistic: “Recent data from the Common App shows that [applications from rural youth](#) grew by 15 percent year over year, compared to 6 percent for students from metropolitan areas.”

[‘We’re now seeing the results’: Education Department officials tout FAFSA progress.](#) **Higher Ed Dive** reports on updates provided at the National Association of Financial Aid Administrators’ legislative conference.

The **National College Attainment Network** shares suggestions for how to [Reduce Summer Melt with Evidence-Based Approaches](#).

Research consistently shows that students who engage with counselors are more likely to complete college applications, enroll in postsecondary education, and achieve better academic and behavioral outcomes. However, students who would benefit most from counseling—particularly those in marginalized communities—often face the greatest barriers to access, with high student-to-counselor ratios and non-counseling duties diminishing counselors’ effectiveness. **Ed Research for Action** has published a brief, [Building High-Quality School Counseling Programs to Ensure Student Success](#).

EDUCATION LAW CENTER



The [Education Law Center's](#) mission is to ensure access to a quality public education for all children in Pennsylvania. They pursue this mission by focusing on the most underserved students: children living in poverty, children of color, children with disabilities, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, children experiencing homelessness, multilingual learners, LGBTQ and gender-nonconforming students – and many who are at the intersection of these identities. Resources include information on current law and policy, fact sheets, analysis and research, and training opportunities. The Education Law Center publishes an annual [Back to School Guide](#), focused on topics relevant for students, families and child-serving professionals.

The publication's content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the PDE, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the PDE.

KAREN RUBICAN, MS.ED, NCC, LPC
SCHOOL COUNSELOR ADVISOR
KRUBICAN@PA.GOV
717.395.9007