

SENIORS – APRIL NEWSLETTER

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Hello from the Counseling Center at Moon Area High School. My name is Julie Sitko and I am the College and Career Counselor. This is the time to think about life after high school. My role is to advise and support students and families in the college search and to help identify “best fit” colleges and universities, and to assist students in realizing their post-secondary goals. This monthly newsletter will keep you on track for post-secondary planning. Please reach out to me with any questions or concerns.

Here are some things to think about as you go through your child's senior year:

SPRING - Post-Secondary Timeline for seniors

- College applications should be completed and submitted. Have your children check their portal on the school's websites, to ensure their applications are complete.
- A copy of your child's most recent transcript (including first semester grades) was uploaded into the Portfolio section of Skyward recently. I encourage you to look over the transcript and save a copy for your records. If there are any questions or concerns about the transcript, please reach out to your child's school counselor. A final copy of the transcript will be uploaded to Skyward about two weeks after graduation. I highly recommend printing/saving a copy of the final transcript.
- Colleges will be hosting accepted student programs. Attend those for the schools your child is interested in. You'll get additional information about your desired program of studies. If you can get on the college campuses, this is a great opportunity to see the schools before your child makes a decision.
- Students should receive all college decisions by early April and will also be getting financial aid award letters. Be sure to look at financial aid awards prior to picking a college. This is huge investment – do your homework, do your research, and make an informed decision. If your child has specific questions about a financial aid award, contact the financial aid offices at the colleges. If you need general help understanding your child's financial aid award letter, let me know. Be sure you and your child understand what is a loan, a scholarship, a grant, and how much money they'll be paying out of pocket.
- Traditionally, May 1 has been the date to commit to a college. With the FAFSA issues this year, many schools have extended that date to May 15 or later. If your child's schools are holding to that May 1 date, you can ALWAYS ask them for an extension, due to financial aid. Most colleges should grant an extension. If the college will not give an extension due to financial aid, they are not putting students first, and that's a red flag (to me at least).
- If you haven't already, complete and file the FAFSA. The FAFSA will be based on your family's 2022 taxes.
- College is all about fit. What fits what you're looking for in academics? Social life? Distance from home? Affordability?
- It's a requirement for male students, when they reach the age of 18, register for the Selective Service. More information can be found here: <http://www.sss.gov>
- When a student decides what school they'll be attending, a final transcript will need to be sent to that school, after graduation. I'll let the students know, in May how we do that. Nothing needs to be done now.

Wear Your Future Day:

Wednesday, May 15 is Wear Your Future Day at Moon Area High School!

Let's celebrate the seniors!

Seniors – what are you planning on doing next year? Come dressed in appropriate clothing identifying what you'll be doing after graduation and we'll be taking a group picture during the activity period. If you're going to college or entering the military, wear a t-shirt from that school/branch. If you're going into the workforce, wear something appropriate to your profession. If you don't have clothing, you can make a small (and appropriate) sign.

FINANCIAL AID and the FAFSA

The new FAFSA..... I've heard most financial aid data has been sent to most colleges. Students should soon be getting financial aid award letters from each college they put on their FAFSA. When looking at the financial aid letters, be sure to understand what is a scholarship or grant (money that does not have to be paid back), what is a loan (money that

does have to be paid back – and understand the difference between a subsidized and unsubsidized Stafford loans), how much money is owed out of pocket and the full cost of attendance. Financial aid packages will look different school to school. If you have any questions about understanding the financial aid package, I'm happy to look at them with you, or reach out to the financial aid offices at the colleges – the people who work in those offices are very knowledgeable and helpful.

As of writing this, students still cannot make corrections to their FAFSA, but we're told that is coming soon-ish. I will let the students know when changes can be made. I still urge families to wait to commit/send in that non-refundable deposit until you know the cost of attendance of each school. Students and families should know how much it is going to cost to attend the school and be prepared to pay the tuition. Yes, that is going to be delayed this year, but I don't want students and families to get into a situation where they cannot afford a college or take out massive amounts of loan. A college education is one of the largest (monetary) purchases a person will make. Do your homework. Understand the costs and don't rush into a decision.

The hope is that the colleges will communicate with you when they anticipate sending aid letters.

Here are two good resources for paying for college and understanding financial aid:

www.mysmartborrowing.com

www.collegecosts.ed.gov

And here are some good websites for scholarship searches:

www.goingmerry.com

www.scholarships.com

www.fastweb.com

www.scholarshipamerica.org

www.finaid.org

www.thepittsburghfoundation.org

Transcripts for Scholarships: Most transcripts for scholarships can be unofficial transcripts. Check with the organization granting the scholarship. Your child can find their unofficial transcript in the portfolio section of Skyward. If they checked with the organization offering a scholarship and they absolutely require an official transcript, please have your child fill out [this form](#).

Scholarships:

All scholarships that come through our office are listed in Naviance. To find the scholarships, log in to your Naviance account, go to the colleges>scholarships and money>Scholarship Search. The scholarships we get in the counseling center are listed on the 'scholarship search' page. That site is updated regularly, so be sure to check back regularly as new scholarships are posted. You should be checking this site regularly. My favorite scholarship search sites are: www.fastweb.com, www.goingmerry.com, and www.pittsburghfoundation.org/scholarship_search#hs. The last site is local (Pittsburgh) scholarships. You do have to search through the site, but there is a lot of money available to students.

Local (Moon) scholarships are available in Naviance. Look for more information on the Seniors 2024 Teams page and email. These are the Scholarship Search in Naviance (colleges<Scholarships and Money>Scholarship Search>Local & Regional Scholarships), with a * before the name of the scholarship (*Moon Education Association Scholarship). You MUST follow the posted directions when completing these scholarships. Applications turned in without following the instructions will not be accepted. Continue to look at Naviance for new scholarship opportunities.

Students should check their email and college portals!

Colleges communicate with students through email or through the online admissions portal that was created when they applied for admission. They have to check email and portals. If they don't, they might be missing out on important information from the colleges, regarding admission status or scholarships. For example, if a student applies to Pitt through the Common Application; after they submit the application, they get an email from Pitt, telling them to complete the SRAR. If they miss out on the email, their application is incomplete and will not be read.

Visiting schools:

If you and your child have a chance to visit schools, here are things to think about when you're on campus:

--Talk to people in the department of anticipated study. Ask what students are doing when they graduate with a degree in X. What type of internships/research are students having while still in college? If your child is undecided, talk to the schools about what they do to help pick a major. Colleges have robust career centers and advising programs which help students pick a major, find internships and eventually jobs and graduate schools.

--Ask what is the four-year graduation rate? Colleges report a six-year graduation rate, due to financial aid. Ask about the four-year rate— schools should try to get students in and out in four years – make sure the school is going to help your child make the best use of their time and get the classes needed to get out in time.

--Ask what is the retention rate for returning sophomores? This number can tell you a lot about what schools are doing to make students happy and keep them enrolled. If a number is low, ask why students are leaving – what's going on? If the number is high, it's safe to assume students are generally happy and the college is doing a good job of educating students and keeping them happy.

--College is not just about getting a degree. It's about so much more. Is your child going to be challenged at each school? Are they going to have to put in more effort than they ever have? That's a good thing!

NCAA:

If your child is an athlete considering playing sports at a division I or II school, make sure to visit the NCAA Eligibility Center website www.eligibilitycenter.org. Student athletes need to submit an official high school transcript (requested through Naviance) and official test scores, if they are available. These scores must be sent directly from ACT or College Board. NCAA will not accept test scores from the high school transcript. If students haven't had an opportunity to test, they can still gain eligibility without test scores. More information can be found [here](#). *This registration does not apply to students attending division III or NAIA schools.*

Summer Opportunities:

[Sewickley YMCA](#) is looking for summer camp counselors, swim coaches, and lifeguards.

[Simcoach Games](#) is accepting applications for its 2024 Summer Apprenticeship in Game Design and Development starting on June 10, 2024 and running through July 19, 2024. They are looking for Summer Apprentices to build game prototypes as employees of Simcoach Games' Game Studio. You will PRACTICE PRODUCING (scheduling, team leader, organizing), STORYTELLING (business, marketing, game design), ART (2d/3d art, animation, concepting, performance), GAME DESIGN (goals, rules design, what content is translated to interactivity within a game framework) and DEVELOPING (coding) as part of a team.

Financial Aid Programs:

PHEEAA (Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency) is offering various virtual statewide webinars that are open to any student/family here: <https://www.pheaa.org/virtual/index.shtml>. A few of these webinars are listed below. Register for these webinars at <https://www.pheaa.org/virtual/index.shtml>. All workshops take place from 6 – 7 p.m.

FAFSA OVERVIEW—LINE BY LINE

Tuesday, April 9

PHEAA Access Partners will present an overview of the 2024–25 FAFSA process to guide students and families through a step-by-step process of filing the FAFSA and PA State Grant applications.

STUDENT LOANS 101

Tuesday, April 23

PHEAA Access Partners will present an overview of student loans including federal Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loans, PLUS Loans, and private education loans. This session will discuss the details of the loan programs including loan limits, interest rates, and repayment plans. We will also review Direct Loan Consolidation and the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.