

**House Education Committee Hearing**  
**PHEAA Testimony**  
**January 17-18, 2024**

Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Topper, and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding our administration and servicing of the Pennsylvania Mental Health Education Learning Program in Schools (PA HELPS).

As an agency firmly rooted and dedicated to providing affordable higher education for Pennsylvania students and families, our team at PHEAA is truly honored to contribute to this new and vital initiative for our Commonwealth.

Authorized under Act 55 of 2022 as the School-Based Mental Health Internship Grant Program, PA HELPS will provide a stipend to support school-based mental health professionals who must complete an internship before receiving their credentials.

PHEAA assumes the responsibility of administering the funding of PA HELPS, ensuring support for qualifying interns who are fulfilling Educational Specialist Preparation Program requirements at a Pennsylvania postsecondary institution. The funds are awarded and disbursed to the Pennsylvania Local Education Agency (LEA), where the intern successfully completes their internship.

To be eligible for a stipend, an intern must be a Pennsylvania resident enrolled in an Educational Specialist Preparation Program approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) that leads to educator certification as a school nurse, school psychologist, school counselor, or school social worker. The internship must be at an LEA that has been approved for participation in PA HELPS. Stipend recipients must agree to work in an LEA in Pennsylvania for a minimum of 3 years following completion of the respective Educational Specialist Preparation Program.

Recipients may be eligible to receive two awards. The award during the internship is paid to the LEA. The LEA must use those funds to compensate the intern for their work during the internship. There is also a commitment award that the recipient may be eligible for after working 3 years at a Pennsylvania LEA in their field. That award would be paid to the recipient. The award amounts by field are provided below.

<b>Field</b>	<b>Award During Internship</b>	<b>Commitment Award</b>
School Psychologist	\$25,000	\$5,000
School Nurse	\$2,500	\$5,000
School Counselor	\$10,000	\$5,000
School Social Worker	\$10,000	\$5,000

An interest survey began in spring 2023 and the application process for the 2023-24 award year began in August 2023. Initial stand up of the program required creation, completion, and processing of LEA and intern applications, along with agreements for the LEA to complete. As of January 10, 2024, \$160,000.00 in awards have been disbursed to LEAs.

The application process for the 2024-25 award opened at the end of December 2023, allowing LEAs and interns more time to complete this process.

PHEAA remains committed to advancing higher education and professional development in Pennsylvania. PA HELPS serves as a testament to this commitment and we are proud to contribute to the success of the program.

This initiative is designed to not only advance the professional growth of mental health professionals in Pennsylvania, but also to address the urgent need for mental health support within our educational environments. Additionally, by encouraging students to secure employment and certifications within LEAs, we make a substantial investment in the well-being of our state's educational institutions.

We welcome any inquiries or requests for additional information from the esteemed members and look forward to further collaboration in pursuit of educational and mental health support across Pennsylvania.