



School District of South Orange and Maplewood  
**COLUMBIA HIGH SCHOOL**

17 Parker Avenue • Maplewood, New Jersey 07040  
973-762-5600 x1012 FAX 973-378-5234

Mr. Frank Sanchez  
Principal  
[fsanchez@somds.k12.nj.us](mailto:fsanchez@somds.k12.nj.us)

Ms. Abiodun Banner  
Mr. Phil McCormick  
Ms. Tracie Morrison  
Mr. Lamech Obwoye  
*Assistant Principals*

---

Dear CHS Families

This has been a great start to the school year. Everyone at Columbia High School hopes your child is having an incredible few weeks, and we look forward to an inspiring, productive, and fun 2025-2026!



I hope you enjoy the first of many CHS Family Updates. Excelsior! Frank

**School-Family Communication**

Our goal this year is to be right on that line of overly communicative but not too annoying. Let's hope we kick it off on the right side of that line.

Here are some highlights from the past few weeks:

1. The District's Curriculum & Instruction office recently sent out this document, [2025 - 2026 Parental Notification of Standardized Assessments.pdf](#). Our first test, a mid-October sitting for the PSAT, is for 11th graders only. We will send out more information very soon.

- Letters from CHS Administration highlighting key aspects from the [CHS Family-Student Handbook](#), including this memo sent last week, [The Importance of Wearing Your CHS ID](#)



**columbiahighschool\_chs** 09/09/25

...

Students, please remember to bring your ID. We are starting to swipe in every day! #CougarNation



- Our yearbook partner, Lors, has now completed portraits for our Seniors and all upperclassmen. (See [Picture Day](#) info.) If your child needs a make-up, they can attend on October 16 (Grades 9 -11) and October 20 - 22 (Senior Portraits).
- We shared [a video](#) with tips on drop-off and pick-ups since Maplewood implemented bike lanes. Please check it out if you haven't seen it!
- We share great posts throughout the week through our social media handle on both Instagram and Threads. Just click on this link to follow us:  
[https://www.instagram.com/columbiahighschool\\_chs/](https://www.instagram.com/columbiahighschool_chs/)
- Also, we send students [daily announcements](#) on Canvas. [Follow the H&SA's handy guide to update notification settings in your Canvas account.](#)



## Counseling

We are so excited that **Dr. Jennifer Antoni** has joined our great team of counselors. She has hit the proverbial ground running and helped us roll out the master schedule. You can learn more about the Counseling Department from the September [2025 CHS Counseling Newsletter](#).

**College Visits.** Ms. Petroccia, our Counseling Administrative Assistant, has scheduled 100s of college admissions visits. Your child can use their SCOIR account to sign up for a visit. Then they go to the “SCOIR Board” outside the counseling center for a pass to enter the sessions. These visits happen every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and they are held in the Commons.



columbiahighschool\_chs 09/09/25



Juniors & Seniors, make sure to schedule college visits through SCOIR. Today, we had Chapman, U Chicago, Rutgers Newark, and Chapman! @somsdk12



**Grade-level Information Nights.** Each year, our counselors and administrators start the year by holding grade-level meetings. Don't worry if you can't make the meeting because we will also post the video recording and slide deck right after the virtual sessions!

- Freshmen Parent Meeting [Slidedeck](#) & [Video](#)
- Sophomore Parent Night - OCTOBER 7, 7pm Virtual ([Webex link](#))
- Junior Parent Night - SEPTEMBER 30th, 7pm Virtual ([Webex link](#))
- Senior Parent Meeting [Slidedeck](#) & [Video](#)

**During the 12th Grade Information Night, Mr. McCormick showcased his Senior Website**

<https://columbia.somsk12.org/students/seniors>

Hello, CHS Class of 2026!

Welcome to Senior Year! We are so proud of you all on making it to this milestone year in your academic career!

Included you will find various senior-specific resources to support you as you embark on this exhilarating leg of your educational journey! Please be sure to check back often - as this page will continue to be updated as information is made available.

If you have any additional questions, don't hesitate to reach out to me at [pmccormi@somsk12.nj.us](mailto:pmccormi@somsk12.nj.us) and/or stop by my office in A-103-f (in the Main Office).

It is a privilege to serve as your Class of 2026 Assistant Principal!

With excitement,

Mr. McCormick

Assistant Principal, Senior Class



**Philip McCormick, Ed.S.** (he, him, his)  
Assistant Principal, Senior Class  
Columbia High School  
Room A-103-f  
17 Parker Ave.  
Maplewood, NJ 07040  
973-762-5600 ext. 1022

**NJ Car Workforce.** We thank Mr. Bing for bringing this opportunity to our students. This year, as part of our career pathways project, we are looking for professional opportunities for our students outside of the traditional college journey. Five CHS students have signed up for our first [NJ Car Workforce](#) partnership. Last week, these students, along with Dr. Antoni and counselor Mr. Clyburn, attended their first session, and they are looking forward to learning more and being mentored by car industry folks.



## Freshmen Academy

We are very happy with our start this year on this special project. We applaud Ms Banner, the faculty, and the teacher leaders of each house for a great start. Please remind your child that if they want to take the online course this semester, then they need to sign up using [this link](#) by THURSDAY, September 25th.

***Our Freshmen Academy Team was quite busy this summer. The teachers and grade-level leaders met this summer for several instructional workshops. They also led multi-day orientation sessions with parents and students. We look forward to sharing more highlights throughout the year!***



**COLUMBIA HIGH SCHOOL**

**LOCKER DECORATING  
COMPETITION**

**FRESHMEN ONLY**

**SEPTEMBER 29TH**

**OUTSIDE OF LOCKER WILL BE JUDGED**

First Place: \$75    2nd Place: \$50    3rd Place: \$25 

### Construction Update

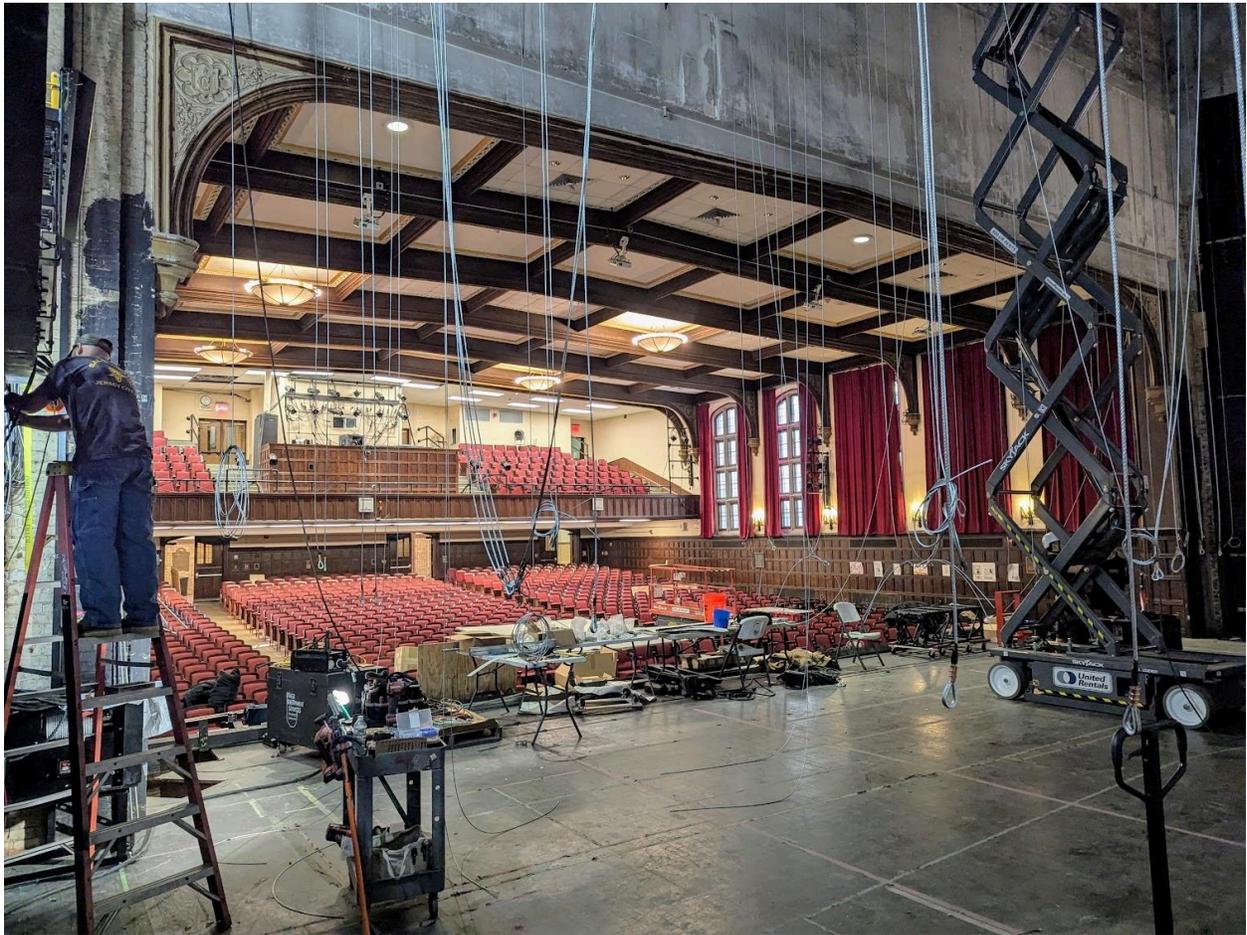
This summer, we finalized several of the last projects from the referendum projects approved years ago.

**Elevator.** We have a new elevator at CHS. If your child ever needs it due to an injury, make sure to contact the CHS nurses for elevator passes.

**CHS Stage.** The rigging work began right after the school year ended, with the removal of the asbestos fire curtain, taking down the old rigging, and addressing safety concerns such as lead paint on ceiling beams. Demolition revealed several issues now being addressed, including lead paint on I-beams, welded pipe organ and lighting components, and wiring within the former fire curtain's smoke trap.

One of the most significant challenges was discovering damaged cables between the balcony lighting control area and the stage-likely impacted during unrelated classroom construction above the balcony.

The district is now preparing for Phase 2 of the project: replacing and upgrading the stage lighting system. Parent and community feedback will help shape the final plan, ensuring compatibility with existing equipment such as the house lights installed in 2015. Once approved, materials will be ordered and installed, bringing Columbia's stage one step closer to being fully performance-ready.



**Clocktower.** Two years ago, we asked the public to help us raise funds for the clock tower, and this past summer, the first stage of the work was completed. You can click [here](#) to read more about the work from the Village Green. If you would like to hear the bell (which now tolls every hour from 8am - 6pm), click [here](#).

## Columbia High School's Clock Tower (With Bell!) Restored in Time for Centennial Celebration

*After over a decade of being broken, and years of fundraising, the iconic tower's bell and clock have been fully repaired.*

Written By [Annabelle Mecca](#) August 3, 2025

**CHS Library.** Our library is open again and available to our teachers and students every day until 4 pm.



**The CHS Main Gym.** We thank the BOE for funding a repair of the main gym which was needed for our students. In the images below, you can see some of the work that was done in August and how it looked last week when we held a ribbon-cutting ceremony before our first home Volleyball game.





### **CHS Clubs**

On the first day of school, we started with nearly 2000 students on Ritzer Field participating in our annual Club Fair. It was a great scene, and it allowed students to learn about all of our clubs. As I write this update on a Sunday evening, I just saw members of the Astronomy Club and Mr. Post climbing the stairs to the observatory to see Saturn tonight!

Your child can find information on the Astronomy Club and the [complete list of clubs](#) on our website. We also list which clubs meet on a given day in our daily Canvas announcements. Remember, students can join clubs throughout the school year!

**SGA.** Our CHS Student Council meets weekly on Tuesday mornings. In addition to running the Club Fair, they have started planning for the Hall of Fame Ceremony and next month's Homecoming Dance! Two student Council members also participate in Board of Education meetings. The BOE welcomed both Scarlet Strogov and Penuel Shapiro as the 2025 - 2026 BOE representatives.



**gMAC.** Members of the Global Majority Achievement Community have served as guides in our Freshmen Academy orientation and at each Back to School Night across the District. gMAC had an open house last week, and the membership drive continues this week. Student interviews will begin the week after. Students can always meet with Ms Marcia Hicks in the CHS Library.



## CHS Athletics

**Communications.** The Fall season is well underway, and we are excited about the progress of our student-athletes and coaches. Click here for the [CHS Athletic Newsletter](#) that just came out a few days ago to learn about our sports programs. The [website](#) is also constantly updated, so be sure to check it out, including the great images from our student photographers!

Here are the key members of our Athletic program

- Athletic Trainer Mr. Yusuf Odubayo [yodubayo@somsd.k12.nj.us](mailto:yodubayo@somsd.k12.nj.us)
- Athletic Director Ms. Sjoquelyn Winstead [swinstea@somsd.k12.nj.us](mailto:swinstea@somsd.k12.nj.us)
- Facilities Assistant Mr. Lys Blanc [lblanc@somsd.k12.nj.us](mailto:lblanc@somsd.k12.nj.us) / Facility website <https://www.somsdk12.org/community/facility-use>

**Student Registration.** This year, we started using a new sports platform called ArbiterSports. Here are detailed step-by-step instructions to available to guide you through the entire process for Winter sports. Please see the links below to begin:

- Columbia High School Registration Website ([CLICK HERE](#))
- How do I create an account to register my student-athlete? ([CLICK HERE](#))



columbiahighschool\_chs 09/11/25

Our Fall Sports Captains attended a leadership council with AD Winstead and Coach Green. #CougarPride





### **CHS Alumni**

Over the summer, NJ.COM ran a [“Mount Rushmore” poll](#) in which they asked readers who the four greatest athletes/coaches in our school’s rich history were. Here is who the voters chose

- No. 4 - Kristen Bowsler, 1984 (Girls Soccer Player)
- No. 3 - Coach Gene Chyzowych, 1963-2014
- No. 2 - Joetta Clark Diggs, 1980 (Track & Field icon)
- No. 1 - Dave Donovan, 1987 (Boys Soccer Player)

It was great that our current Senior softball player, Claire Shupe, was even nominated with just 3 years of stats!



Claire Shupe (35) of Columbia delivers the pitch during the softball game between Columbia and Livingston at Meadowland Park in South Orange, NJ on Friday, April 25, 2025. Mile Djordjiovski | For NJ Advance Media

## CHS Student Achievements

**Football.** Congratulations to Carlo Magyarits, who was chosen to represent Columbia High School for the [2025 Steve DiGregorio Young Man of the Year Award](#). The SDYMOY focuses on student community service, strong character, selflessness before selfishness, and the positive contributions to team culture.



**CHS Photography.** It was announced this summer that former Senior Jules Mehlmen won 1st place at the congressional art show at Montclair State University. That means that his photograph, "Rooftop Vista," is now in Washington DC, hanging in the US Capitol building! Special thanks to AP Studio Art teacher Alexandra Pahlke and Photography teacher Richard Cutrona for mentoring Jules!



Caption

### **Rooftop Vista**

Jules Mehlman  
Film Photography

#### **DESCRIPTION**

Columbia High School

### In the Classroom

Students have been enjoying their classes these past weeks. One of the most exciting programs I have seen so far is the new partnership we will be launching this year with Yuxin High School in Beijing. Last week, Mandarin teacher Ms. Lipeng Meng and I met with teachers and administrators from our new “sister school,” and we brainstormed projects that our students can do in their classes before proposed exchange visits with our students next year. We can’t wait to share more information as the partnership grows.



### CHS Arts

Our Fine & Performing Arts teachers were so excited to hear that the [Music & Arts Education Project \(MAEP\)](#), a new parent organization in SOMA, offered each fine and performing arts teacher at Columbia High School \$1,000 worth of supplies to directly support their program. Our faculty members were so appreciative, and they have already sent their requests! THANK YOU, MAEP!



EXCELSIOR! Frank

**Frank Sanchez**

Columbia High School Principal

17 Parker Avenue, Maplewood, NJ 07040

Pronouns: he/him/his

Instagram/Threads: [columbiahighschool\\_chs](#)

[fsanchez@somsd.k12.nj.us](mailto:fsanchez@somsd.k12.nj.us)

**2025 - 2026 School Year ([Link to CHS Activities Cal](#))**

**September 23 - 24 -- NO SCHOOL Rosh Hashanah**

September 27 - [CHS Scholarship Fund's](#) Annual Red 7 Black Gala, 7pm

September 29 - Freshmen Academy Locker Contest ([FLYER](#))

September 30 - Junior Parent Night (11th Grade), 7pm Virtual ([Webex link](#))

September 30 - Vector Training/District Meeting 3:15pm

**October 2 - NO SCHOOL Yom Kippur**

October 3 - Football Game at Underhill 7pm

October 4 - SAT Offered @ CHS (See [CollegeBoard](#)) 7:45am entrance

October 5 - Fall 2025 Military Service Academy Info Forum with Congresswoman Mikie Sherill 2pm - 4pm  
Montville High School ([Flyer](#) & [RSVP Info](#))

October 6 - 9 -- NJGPA Make-ups (Select Seniors)

October 6 - 10 -- NJ Week of Respect

**October 6 - 10 -- [National Voter Education Week](#)**

October 7 - Faculty Meeting 3:15pm

October 7 - Progress Reports **DUE**

October 7 - Sophomore Parent Night (10th Grade), 7pm Virtual ([Webex link](#))

October 9 - [Black Poster Project](#) (Drug Awareness)

**October 9 - Half-Day 12pm Dismissal for Back-to-School Night ([Schedule](#))**

October 9 - Back to School Night 6:30pm

October 10 - Pep Rally @ Underhill

October 10 - Homecoming Night Game 7pm

October 10 - 1st MP Progress Reports **Published**

October 11 - Homecoming Dance (11th & 12th Graders only)

**October 13 - Indigenous Peoples' Day Observed (School is Open)**

**October 14 - Half-Day BUILDING PD with 12pm Dismissal for Students**

October 14 - College Finance Information Night (Webex Link to Follow)

October 16 - Underclassmen Make-ups (School Pictures)

October 16 - CHS Choir Pizza Night 3pm - 7pm CHS Auditorium

October 16 - Cougar Boosters Event at St. James Gate ([See Flyer](#))

October 17 - PSAT 11 (Free to all Juniors!) 7:55am (Delayed Opening for all other grades)

**October 20 - Celebrate Diwali**

October 20-22 -- Senior Portraits Make-Ups CHS Auditorium 2:30pm - 9pm

October 21 - Department Meeting 3:15pm

October 24 - Winter '25 Sports Deadline ([Registration Website](#)) See [How-To Flyer](#)

October 24 - Football Game at Underhill 7pm

October 28 - Vector/District Meeting 3:15pm

**November 4 - Half-Day DISTRICT PD with 12pm Dismissal for Students**

**November 4 - Election Day (Make sure to vote!)**

November 5 - Quarter 1 Drivers Ed Test (During PE Classes)

**November 6 - 7 -- NO SCHOOL (NJEA Teachers Convention)**

November 10 - Last day of the 1st MP

November 11 - Faculty Meeting 3:15pm

November 11 - First day of the 2nd MP

**November 11 - Veterans Day Observed (School is Open)**

November 12 - National Honor Society Induction Ceremony 6:30pm

November 14 - 1st MP grades **DUE**

November 14 - Paranassian Club Performance 7pm Black Box Theater

November 15 - Paranassian Club Performance 7pm Black Box Theater  
November 18 - Vector/District Meeting 3:15pm  
November 19 - 1st MP grades Published  
November 20 - Paranassian Club Performance 7pm Black Box Theater  
November 21 - Paranassian Club Performance 7pm Black Box Theater  
November 22 - Paranassian Club Performance 7pm Black Box Theater  
November 25 - PLC Meeting 3:15pm  
**November 26 - Half-Day 12pm Dismissal for all**  
**November 27 - 28 -- NO SCHOOL for Thanksgiving Break**  
December 2 - Faculty Meeting 3:15pm  
December 6 - SAT Offered @ CHS (See [CollegeBoard](#)) 7:45am entrance  
December 9 - Department Meeting 3:15pm  
December 11 - Winter Choir Concert 7pm CHS Auditorium  
December 13 - TENTATIVE H&SA ACT/SAT Practice Test  
December 16 - Vector/District Meeting 3:15pm  
**December 14 -22 -- Celebrate Hannukkah**  
December 18 - 2nd MP Progress Reports **DUE**  
December 18 - CHS Winter Band Concert 7pm CHS Auditorium  
December 19 - H&SA Teacher Brunch  
December 23 - 2nd MP Progress Reports PUBLISHED  
**December 23 - Half-Day 12pm Dismissal for all**  
**December 24 - January 2 -- NO SCHOOL for Winter Break**  
January 5 -- Return to School  
January 5 - Staff Vector Training Due ([Flyer](#))  
January 6 - Faculty Meeting 3:15pm  
January 9 - Middle School Band Day @ CHS (All Day) Auditorium  
January 10 - Robotics Competition / CHS Cafeteria  
**January 13 - Half-Day BUILDING PD with 12pm Dismissal for Students**  
**January 19 - NO SCHOOL - MLK Day**  
January 20 - PLC Meeting 3:15pm  
January 26 - Last day of the 2nd MP  
January 27 - January 30 -- CHS Midterms (Schedule forthcoming)  
February 2 - First Day of the 3rd MP  
February 3 - Faculty Meeting 3:15pm  
February 5 - 2nd MP & X1 Grades **DUE**  
February 10 - PLC Meeting 3:15pm  
February 11 - 2nd MP & Midterm Grades PUBLISHED  
**February 13 - 16 -- NO SCHOOL Mid-Winter Break**  
**February 24 - Half-Day PD with 12pm Dismissal for Students**  
**February 17 - March 19 -- Celebrate Ramadan**  
February 17 - Department Meeting 3:15pm  
February 20 - Spring '26 Sports Deadline ([Registration Website](#)) See [How-To Flyer](#)

February 24 - District Meeting 3:15pm  
March 3 - Faculty Meeting 3:15pm  
March 4 - 3rd MP Progress Reports **DUE**  
March 6 - 8 -- CHS All School Musical (CHS Auditorium)  
March 9 - 3rd MP Progress Reports **PUBLISHED**  
March 10 - Department Meeting 3:15pm  
March 13 - 14 -- CHS All School Musical (CHS Auditorium)  
March 14 - SAT Offered @ CHS (See [CollegeBoard](#)) 7:45am entrance  
March 15 - CHS All School Musical (CHS Auditorium)  
March 17 - District Meeting 3:15pm  
**March 20 - NO SCHOOL for Eid al-Fitr**  
**March 30 - April 3 -- NO SCHOOL Spring Break**  
March 24 - PLC Meeting 3:15pm  
**April 1 - 9 -- Celebrate Passover**  
April 6 - Return to School  
April 7 - Faculty Meeting 3:15pm  
April 7 - Marching Band & Open House 6pm - 8pm CHS Cafeteria  
April 7 - College, Career & Service Fair Main Gym  
April 10 - Last day of the 3rd MP  
April 13 - First day of the 4th MP  
**April 14 - Half-Day DISTRICT PD with 12pm Dismissal for Students**  
April 16 - 3rd MP Grades are **DUE**  
April 21 - 3rd MP Grades are PUBLISHED  
April 21 - PLC Meeting 3:15pm  
April 28 - Department Meeting 3:15pm  
April 30 - CHS Percussion Ensemble Concert 7pm Auditorium  
May 4 - 8 -- AP Tests ([Schedule of Tests](#))  
May 5 - Faculty Meeting 3:15pm  
May 11 - The 4th MP Progress Reports **DUE**  
May 11 - 15 -- AP Testing ([Schedule of Tests](#))  
May 12 - District Meeting 3:15pm  
May 14 - The 4th MP Progress Reports PUBLISHED  
May 19 - PLC Meeting 3:15pm  
May 21 - Spring Band Concert 7pm CHS Auditorium  
**May 25 - NO SCHOOL Memorial Day**  
May 26 - Department Meeting 3:15pm  
**May 26 - Celebrate Eid al Adha**  
May 28 - Spring Choral Concert 7pm CHS Auditorium  
May 29 - Special Dance Company Assembly  
May 29 - 30 -- Special Dance Company Anjnal Performances, CHS Auditorium 8pm  
**June 2 - Election Day Half-Day with 12pm Dismissal**  
June 2 - Senior Recognition Night, 7pm, CHS Auditorium

June 6 - SAT Offered @ CHS (See [CollegeBoard](#)) 7:45am entrance

June 9 - Prom 4pm Red Carpet

June 17 - CHS Graduation 6pm

June 18 - Last Day of School with 12pm Dismissal

**June 19 - District Closed for Juneteenth**