



Junior College Planning Night

February 11, 2026

Let's Start with Gratitude

- Research shows that gratitude can:
- Help you make friends
- Improve your physical health
- Improve your psychological health
- Enhance empathy and reduces aggression
- Improve your sleep
- Increase in mental strength



Welcome & Introductions

PHS Counseling Department

John McMichael, Supervisor of School Counseling



School Counselors:

- Tom Filippone
- Daniel DeStefano
- Paul Song
- Rebecca McEvoy
- Adam Rothschild
- Reyhan Garcia
- Meghan Brennan

Other Counseling Staff

- Nipurna Shah, College & Career Counselor
- Diana Lygas, Dean of Students
- Dr. Andrea Dinan, Director of Service Learning
- Michelle Simborski, Student Assistance Counselor
- Ryan Stingel, Mental Health Counselor
- Bethzayda Matos, Mental Health Counselor

Agenda

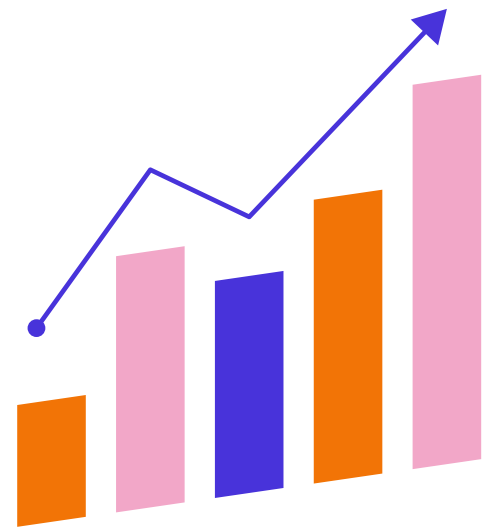
- Year in Review
- College Admission Trends
 - Postsecondary Options
 - College Planning Tools
- Exploring Majors & Careers
- Where Do I Begin My Research?
 - Factors in Admissions
- Developing a Well-balanced List
 - Admission Plan
 - Standardized Testing
 - Visits
- Letters of Recommendation
 - College Essays
- Extracurricular Activities
 - Athletics
- Senior Schedule
- Paying for College



Year In Review 2025-2026



**College
Matriculations**



**College
Trends**



**Looking
Ahead to the
Class of 2027**

2025 vs. 2026 PHS Application Numbers

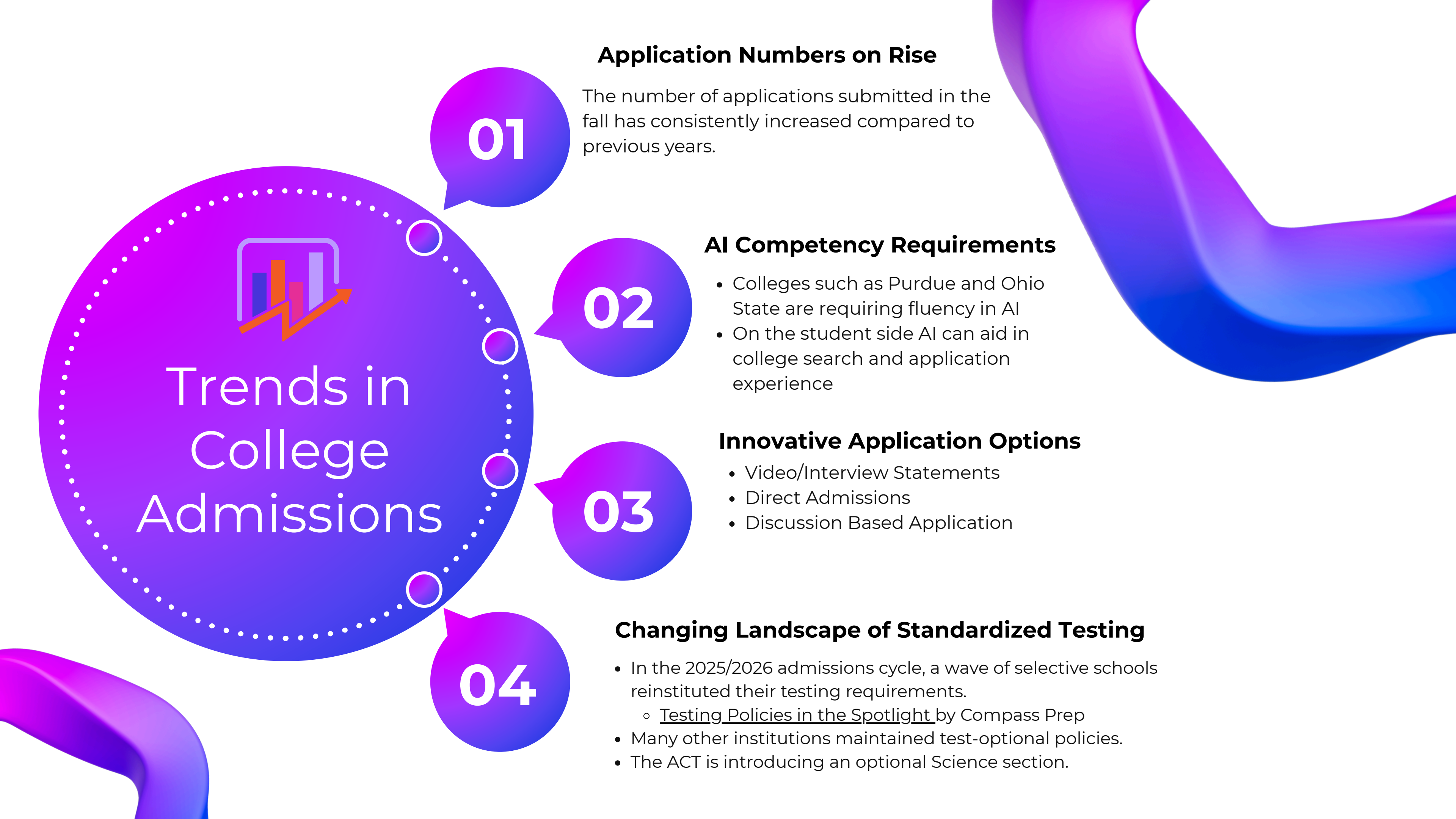


Class of 2025

Rutgers University New Brunswick	187
Northeastern University	77
Princeton University	72
Penn State-University Park	62
New York University	60
Boston University	59
University of Pittsburgh	57
University of Michigan	57
Cornell University	54
University of Virginia	48

Class of 2026

Rutgers University (New Brunswick)	220
Penn State University (University Park)	106
Northeastern University	96
University of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh)	88
Princeton University	82
New York University	75
Cornell University	73
University of Michigan	73
University of Pennsylvania	68
University of Maryland (College Park)	64



Trends in College Admissions

The infographic features a central purple circle with a dotted border and a bar chart icon. Four purple speech bubbles with numbers 01 through 04 are arranged around the circle, each pointing to a corresponding text block on the right. The background is white with abstract purple and blue wavy shapes on the left and right sides.

01

Application Numbers on Rise

The number of applications submitted in the fall has consistently increased compared to previous years.

02

AI Competency Requirements

- Colleges such as Purdue and Ohio State are requiring fluency in AI
- On the student side AI can aid in college search and application experience

03

Innovative Application Options

- Video/Interview Statements
- Direct Admissions
- Discussion Based Application

04

Changing Landscape of Standardized Testing

- In the 2025/2026 admissions cycle, a wave of selective schools reinstituted their testing requirements.
 - Testing Policies in the Spotlight by Compass Prep
- Many other institutions maintained test-optional policies.
- The ACT is introducing an optional Science section.



What's impacting the Class of 2027?

05

Application Numbers & Competition Will Remain High

- The Common Application continues to show increased application numbers per student.
- Students should consider options like spring admission or satellite campuses

06

Standardized Testing Will Continue it's Comback

- According to the Common Application the number of student who submitted test scores with their applications as of December 1, 2025, rose by 11% compared to the same time in 2024

07

Some Colleges Will use AI to Read Essays & Evaluation Applications

- Colleges like Caltech, Georgia Tech and University of Virginia are using AI for application review.
- Even with these advancements, human admissions officers still make the final decisions--for now

08

The Demographic Cliff

- Starting in 2026, the U.S. will experience an "enrollment cliff," with a projected 15% decline in 18-year-olds by 2029.
- Colleges in the Midwest and Northeast are closing campuses.
- To counter declining enrollments, some colleges are using strategies like direct admission offers and increased financial aid and merit scholarships to attract students.

College Rankings: What Do They Really Mean?

Perspective From NACAC
National Association for College
Admissions Counseling

***Check out Malcolm
Gladwell's podcast
"Lord of the Rankings"***

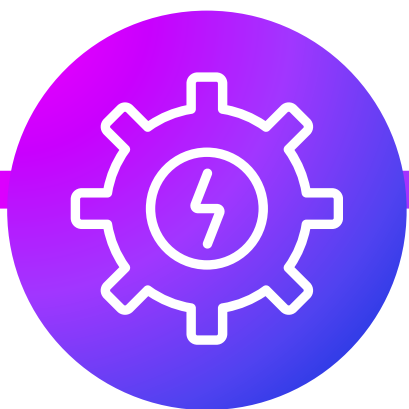
*Various magazines publish their
college rankings issues every year,
generating a lot of attention from the
media, colleges, and college-bound
students and their families.*

But what are they really telling you?

*Should these rankings have any
influence on what college you choose?*

The short answer: No.

College Planning Tools



Organization

As you start your college journey there will be lots of information coming at you. Organization is key.



Self-Reflection

The college journey begins with the question: WHO AM I?



Communication

Students and parents please communicate your thoughts and hopes for college to each other



Growth Mindset

Keep a positive and realistic mindset. Be open to colleges whose names you may not have heard of!



Who am I?



01

PrinciplesYou (SCOIR)

PrinciplesYou is a scientifically-validated character assessment that brings student assessments into the 21st century because its framework is designed to tap into character traits and measure them across 3 orientations: Cognitive. Interpersonal. Motivational.

02

Career Interest Assessment (SCOIR)

Students can explore and discover careers and college majors from their profile and in Discover.

03

Occupational Outlook

The Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH) is a career resource offering information on the hundreds of occupations that provide most of jobs in the United States.

04

Shadow/Intern/Volunteer

Experiential opportunities in fields students are interested in provide tangible information about likes and dislikes about an industry of job

WHERE DO I BEGIN MY RESEARCH?

1

SCOIR

College & Career Readiness Program. Don't have an account? Email Daniel North: danielnorth@princetonk12.org

2

College Websites

Check our respective colleges' websites for information on applying, campus life, and academics

3

Publications

Fiske Guide, Peterson's, Colleges ,That Change Lives (CTCL)

4

College Vocabulary.

Get familiar with college terms and vocabulary

5

AI Tools

ChatGPT and Copilot are great AI tools for the college search, organization and idea generation. Remember to be clear and precise in what you're asking

6

College Scorecard

College search site from the US Department of Education

Factors Considered in Admissions



TRANSCRIPT/COURSES/
GRADES

STANDARDIZED TESTING

COMMON APP ESSAY/
SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAYS

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

EXTRA CURRICULAR
ACTIVITIES

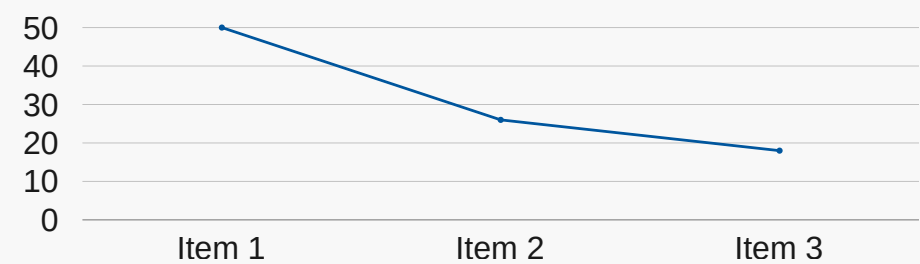
INTERVIEW/VIDEOS

DEMONSTRATED INTEREST



DEVELOPING A WELL-BALANCED LIST: CATEGORIES TO CONSIDER

SAFETY

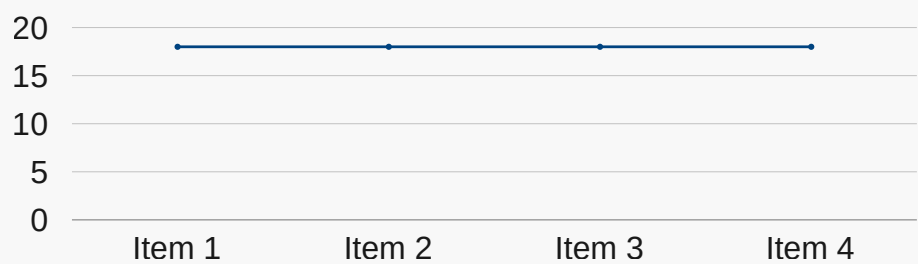


approximately 70% or greater chance of being accepted

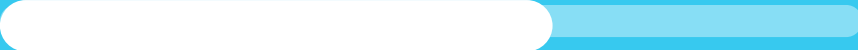


A safety school is one where your academic credentials exceed the school's range for the average first-year student.

TARGET

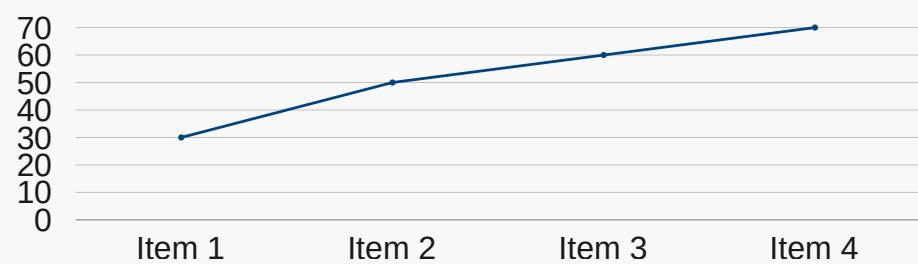


approximately 30-65% chance of admission



A target school is one where your academic credentials (grades, SAT or ACT scores) fall well within the school's average range for the most recently accepted class.

REACH



approximately 15% or less chance of admission



A reach school is a college where your academic credentials fall in the lower end, or even below, the school's average range for the cohort of students accepted the previous year.

Developing a Well-Balanced List

“You need to engage in this process, both the challenging and rewarding aspects of it, and it's a time commitment that you need to invest yourself in,” she says. “Look to others for help and ask for it when you need it; you are not expected to automatically know what to do.”

Dr. Tani Castañeda, VP of Enrollment Mgmt. & Dean of Admission @ Carnegie Mellon University



ACADEMIC

Can the applicant do the work, will they thrive in a classroom environment?



SOCIAL

How does the student engage with their community? How might this transfer to our community?

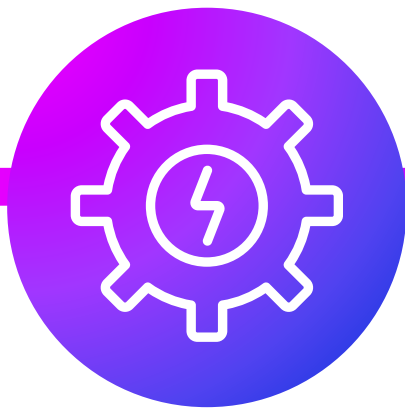


FINANCIAL

How can we make college as affordable as possible?

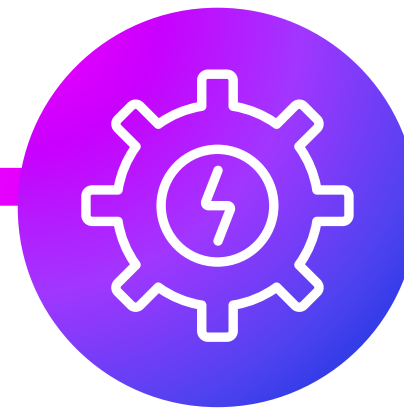
A New Way to Think About Your College List: *The Buyers and Sellers*

a concept developed by Jeff Selingo, college admissions expert
make sure you have enough buyers vs. sellers on your college list



The Buyers

The buyers are the “have-nots” in terms of admissions—although they might provide a superior undergraduate education. Rather than “select” a class, their admissions officers must work hard to recruit students and they must discount tuition through merit aid to fill classroom seats and beds in dorm rooms.



The Sellers

The sellers are the “haves” of admissions. They are overwhelmed with applications, many from top students. They don’t need to buy students with tuition discounts to fill their classrooms. Most sellers offer financial assistance only to students who really need it or are truly exceptional.

Jeff Selingo’s website for Buy and Seller Colleges

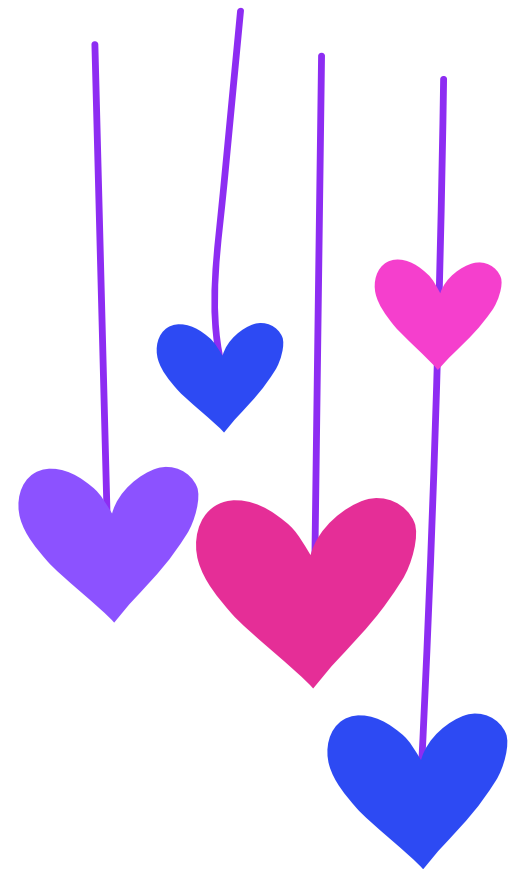
Making Care Common

Harvard Graduate School of Education

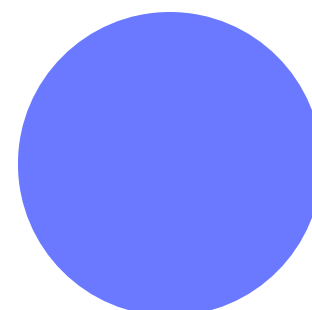
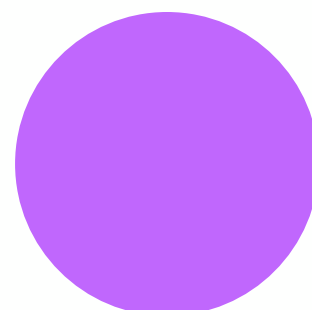
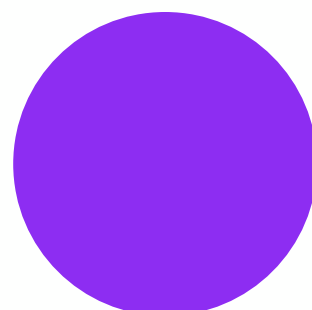
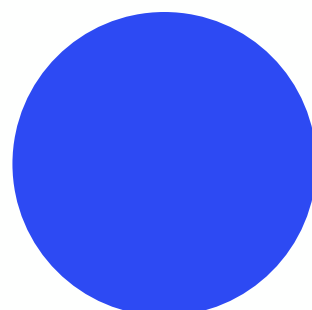
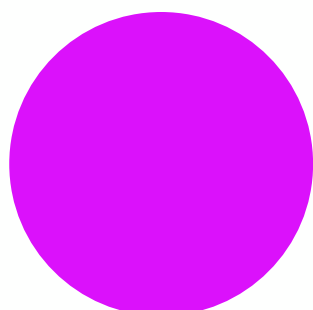
“The college admissions process is a rite of passage that plays a powerful role in shaping student attitudes and behaviors. High school students often perceive colleges as simply valuing their achievements, not their responsibility for others and their communities.”

Character Counts!

MCC-HGSE

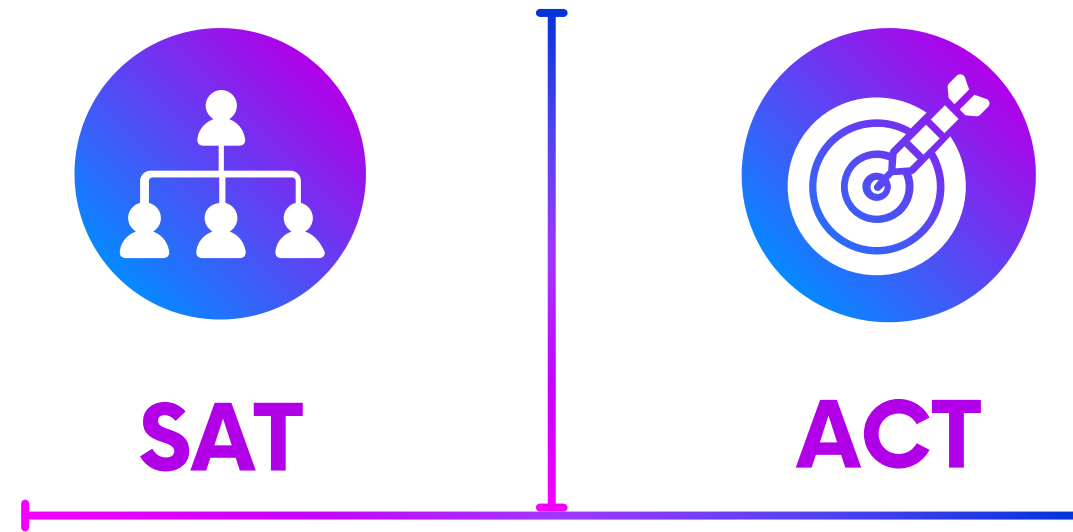


ADMISSION PLANS



RESTRICTIVE EARLY ACTION	EARLY DECISION	REGULAR DECISION	EARLY ACTION	ROLLING ADMISSIONS
Non Binding	Binding agreement	Applications submitted late fall/early winter	Non-binding	No specific deadline
November 1 deadline (usually)	November 1 or November 15 deadline (usually)	January 1 deadline (usually)	November 1 or November 15 deadline (usually)	Decisions released 4-6 weeks after submission if complete application
May not apply to another private school under ED, but can apply to public schools via EA	Decisions released by end of December	Decisions released in late March early April	Decisions released by end of December/early January	
Review the colleges' specific requirements under this plan.	Only 1 ED application allowed			

Standardized Testing



- Either test is widely accepted for college admissions
- Many colleges/universities have gone test optional
- Many highly selective colleges are now requiring testing
- fairtest.org is a great resource for tracking TO colleges
- The ACT is changing
 - Digital ACT released Spring 2025
 - Science section will be optional
 - Join us on Wednesday, March 5 @ 7pm for a program with Compass Test Prep on “Navigating College Admissions Testing”



College Visits



**New
Jersey**



Virtual



**Social
Media**



**Beyond
the
Script**

How to Spot Good Teaching on a College Campus

Letters of Recommendation



Counselor Recommendation

Student Brag Sheet
Parent Brag Sheet



Teacher Recommendations

Teacher Brag Sheet
Other required Information

Writing The College Essay

- Common Application Essay
 - Prompts for Class of 2027 released typically in late February/Early March 2027-Stay Tuned
- Timeline:
 - First draft in spring/summer
 - Proof read & review
 - Show a trusted adult
 - Final draft in late August/Early September
- Many colleges have supplemental essays
 - # of essays/college varies
 - start early
 - reflect, review, revise
- The College Essay Guy



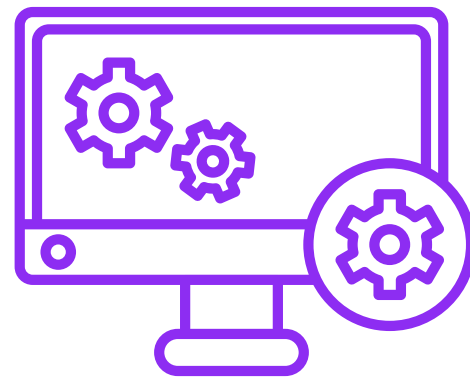
Extracurricular Activities



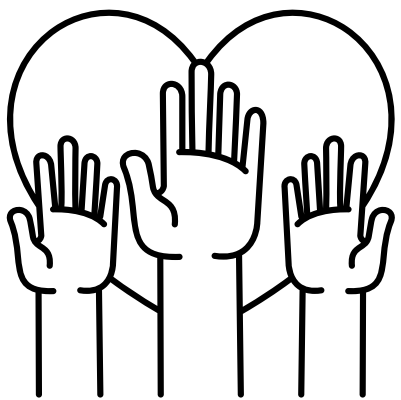
Athletics



Clubs



Summer Programs



Volunteering

Athletics

- Register with the NCAA @ <https://web3.ncaa.org/ecwr3/>
- Review eligible courses list on NCAA
- Fill out the prospective student athlete questionnaire on college websites



Senior Year Scheduling

Q1

Continue
With
Academic
Rigor

Q2

Check
Graduation
Requirements

Q3

Review
Application
Requirements on
Respective
college websites

Paying For College



FAFSA

- Free Application for Federal Student Aid
- <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>



Early Estimates

- Federal Student Aid Estimator
- <https://studentaid.gov/aid-estimator/>
- Net Price Calculator
- MyinTuition (private colleges)



CSS Profile

- College Scholarship Service
- <https://cssprofile.collegeboard.org/>



Scholarships

- Fastweb.com
- Goingmerry.com
- Unigo.com

JUNIOR YEAR COLLEGE PLANNING TIMELINE

The 11th Grade College Planning Timeline
is available on the College Counselor's
Corner web-page



THERE IS A PLACE FOR EVERYONE

- over 4000 degree granting college & universities in the US
- Keep an open mind
- Look for hidden gems
- Find the right fit
- Colleges That Change Lives



Homework For Students & Parents

STUDENTS

use SCOIR to discover colleges



Be sure to check email messages on SCOIR from the College Counselor



PARENTS

Do you have a SCOIR Account?



Be sure to check email messages on SCOIR from the College Counselor



Be sure to watch this [video](#) with Jeff Selingo



Career News



LEARN TO NETWORK

DURABLE SKILLS

BECOME COMFORTABLE WITH
THE PROPER USE OF AI

WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING TO
JOBS FOR NEW GRADS



Career News--Foundational Skills

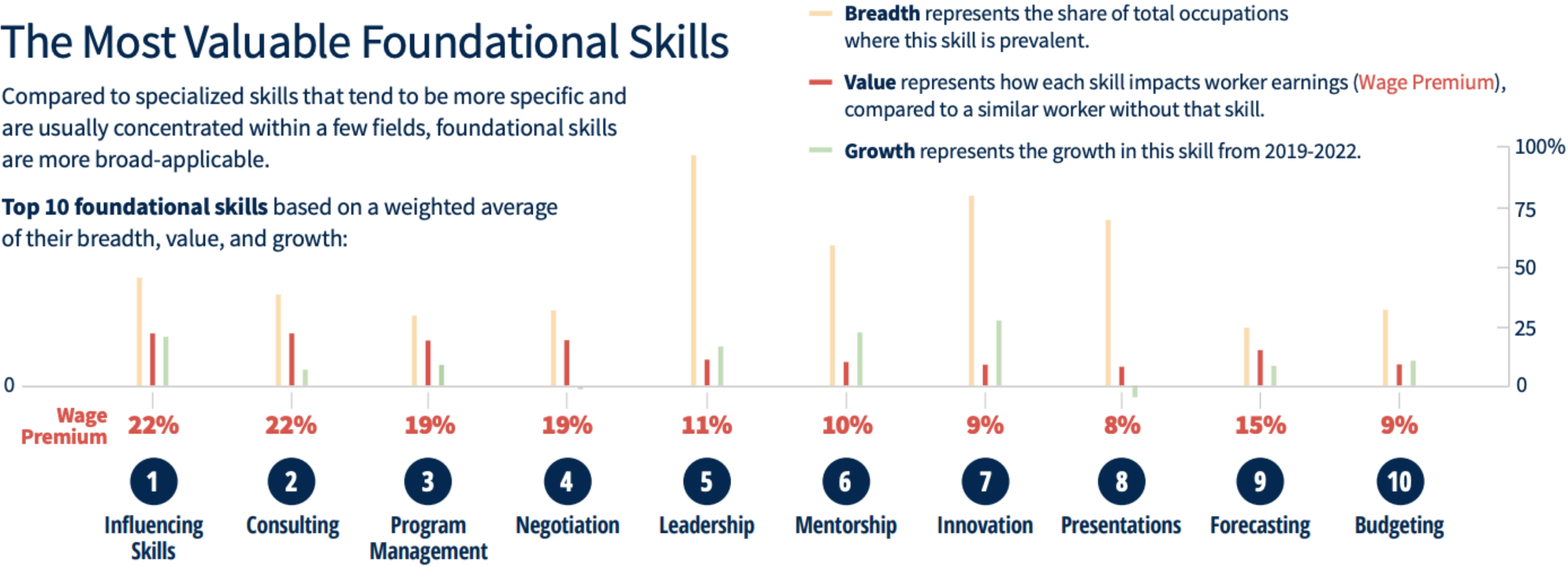


FIGURE 3

The Most Valuable Foundational Skills

Compared to specialized skills that tend to be more specific and are usually concentrated within a few fields, foundational skills are more broad-applicable.

Top 10 foundational skills based on a weighted average of their breadth, value, and growth:



Resource page



[The Right Way to Choose a College](#)



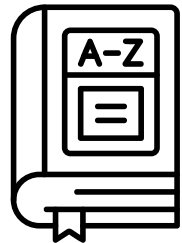
[Who Gets in and Dream School by Jeff Selingo--
A Book by Jeff Selingo](#)



[How College is Different From HS](#)



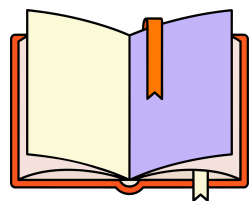
[How to Make 2025 A Successful College Admissions Year For Your Kids](#)



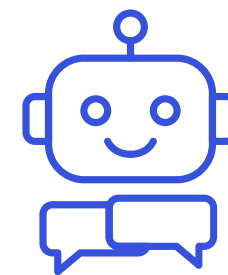
[College Vocabulary.](#)



[How to Spot Good Teaching.](#)



[Connections Are Everything.](#)



[AI Tools Transform College Admissions Process](#)

Thank you

Nipurna Shah

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-  [College Counselor Corner](#)