

PRINCETON HIGH SCHOOL

Class of 2027 Senior College Application Night

September 17, 2026



PHS Counseling Team



Welcome & Introductions

John McMichael, Supervisor of Counseling K-12

School Counselors:

- Tom Filippone
- Daniel DeStefano
- Paul Song
- Rebecca McEvoy
- Adam Rothschild
- Reyhan Garcia
- Stephanie Niera (leave replacement for Meghan Brennan)

Nipurna Shah, College & Career Counselor

Diana Lygas, School Counselor

Dr. Andrea Dinan-Director of Service Learning

Michelle Simborski-Student Assistance Counselor

Bethzayda Matos-Mental Health Counselor

Ryan Stingel-Mental Health Counselor



Agenda

- Year in Review
- PHS Class of 2026 By the Numbers
- Key Insights from the Class of 2026
- Implications for the Class of 2027
- Senior Year Nuts, Bolts, Logistics
- College Athletics
- Financial Aid
- Resources



Class of 2025 By The Numbers



371: graduates in the Class of 2026



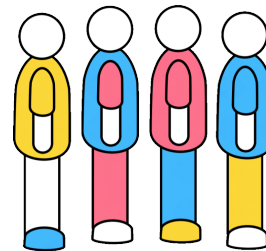
354: colleges/universities where PHS graduates were accepted



149: colleges/universities where a PHS graduate will attend



43, 7: states, countries where a PHS graduate will attend college/university



93: percent of PHS graduates attending a 2-year or 4-year institution

Class of 2025	
College Name	#of Apps Submitted
Rutgers University (New Brunswick)	186
Princeton University	82
Northeastern University	75
University of Michigan	70
Penn State University (University Park)	68
Boston University	64
Cornell University	64
University of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh)	62
New York University	61
University of Pennsylvania	57
University of Virginia (Main Campus)	51
Columbia University	46
University of Maryland (College Park)	45

Class of 2026	
College Name	# of Apps Submitted
Rutgers University	210
Penn State University	104
Northeastern University	90
University of Pittsburgh	83
Princeton University	80
University of Michigan	75
New York University	69
Cornell University	67
University of Pennsylvania	67
University of Maryland	61
University of Virginia	58
Columbia University	56
Boston University	50

PHS APPLICATIONS
BY COLLEGE
2025 VS. 2026

Key Insights

- As always, Rutgers remains the most popular college among applicants for both years.
- The top ten schools our students applied to have shown minimal changes from year to year.

KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE CLASS OF 2026

1

Application Inflation

Students are submitting more applications, with a faster increase in application volume than in the number of applicants. The Common App reported higher total applications and more colleges applied to by each student.

2

Testing is Evolving Towards Increased Nuance

The testing landscape has evolved from "test-optional vs. test-required." While many institutions still offer test-optional admissions, many selective colleges have reintroduced testing requirements and emphasized strong scores, as recent Common App data indicates an increase in score reporting after previous declines.

3

Authenticity is a Key Differentiator in the AI Era

The rise of AI has transformed admissions, with leaders prioritizing genuine student voice, meaningful engagement, and authentic personal growth over polished yet generic applications.

4

The Definition of Merit Is Becoming More Contextual

Admissions offices are increasingly considering student context, opportunity, and educational environment after years of test-optional policies and holistic reviews. Colleges are evaluating achievement in relation to available opportunities rather than just numerical indicators.

5

Prioritizing Value Over Prestige

Public universities saw greater application growth than private ones, indicating increased interest in affordability, return on investment, career outcomes, and overall value.

IMPLICATIONS/UPDATES FOR THE CLASS OF 2027

1

Rising application volume = more unpredictability

The Common Application reported increases in both the number of applicants and total applications submitted. Students are also applying to more colleges on average than in previous years

2

Every Student Needs a Testing Strategy

Although most colleges remain test-optional, testing still matters in many admission processes. Recent Common App data show an increase in score-reporting among applicants, while some highly selective institutions have restored testing requirements.

3

Authenticity Matters More in an AI-Influenced Landscape

Colleges are increasingly focused on authentic student voice, meaningful reflection, and genuine engagement as AI tools become more common in the application process

4

Affordability and Return on Investment Are Driving College Choice

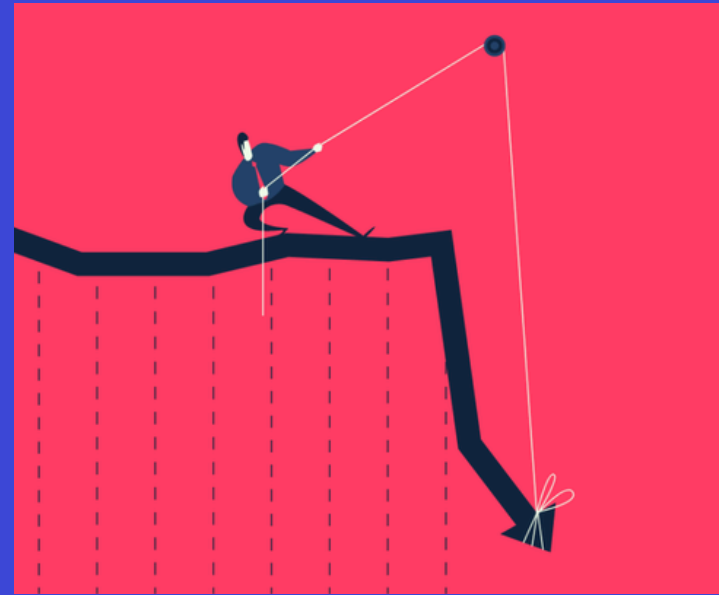
Families are assessing colleges based on cost, outcomes, career preparation, and value, leading to strong interest in public institutions due to their cost-effectiveness.

OTHER NEWS ON THE ADMISSIONS FRONT



Direct Admissions Programs

The CA direct admissions pilot program proactively offers qualified students admissions to select institutions in their home state. The program is geared for under resourced students.



The Demographic/ Enrollment Cliff

The declining birth rates are one of the factors that directly impact the number of potential college-bound students in the U.S. applying for college starting with the Class of 2026.



Changes in Enrollment Strategies

Look for changes in the way colleges recruit and try to retain the students on campus.



Tips for Applicants In the Class of 2027

Create a balanced, best-fit list

Have realistic consideration for ED or EA colleges along with a balanced list of foundational, target and reach schools that fit your needs and interests.

Thoughtful expressions on the qualitative parts of the application

Message each written part of your application with intention. Use the 150 characters in the activities section to show your engagement, impact and contribution to the community.

Explore Your Interests Before Choosing Your Major

Explore your interests, not just your major. You don't need to know exactly what you want to study, but you should begin identifying the subjects, activities, and experiences that genuinely excite you and help tell your story.

Guidance from PHS CCC

What do you have control over?

Keeping Organized

As you prepare for college, there's a lot to juggle and manage in senior year. Keeping organized is the best way to keep stress levels down and keep your applications on track.

Be on Time, or Even Early

Deadlines for applications, scholarships and requests for letters of recommendations come up quickly. Be sure to know the deadlines and submit your applications on or even before the deadlines to avoid technical glitches or any unforeseen snafus.

Communicate Professionally

To communicate effectively, regularly check your email and respond promptly to, counselors, teachers and colleges. Using professional and respectful language in all interactions is also essential for maintaining productive relationships.

Build a Balanced List of Colleges



Likely/Safety

A safety school is a college or university where a student is very likely to be admitted based on their academic credentials. ***In other words, it's a school where the student's qualifications, such as GPA and standardized test scores, exceed the institution's average*** admitted student. Safety schools are considered "safe bets" because the chance of acceptance is high..

Target

A target school is a college or university that is a realistic and competitive option for a student. ***Their academic qualifications align well with the institution's typical admitted student profile.*** While admission is not guaranteed at target schools, the student has a reasonably good chance of being admitted based on their academic and extracurricular achievements.

Reach

A reach school is a college/university where a student's academic credentials, such as GPA and standardized test scores, fall below the institution's typical admitted student profile. It's a more competitive option, and the chances of acceptance are lower compared to safety and target schools.

ADMISSIONS PLANS

Regular Decision

Regular Decision is an application with a deadline in January or February. Students who apply through RD receive their admission decisions in the spring. RD is non-binding, so students can apply to multiple colleges and have until May 1st to decide which college to attend.

Early Decision

Early Decision is an application option that is binding, meaning if a student is admitted through Early Decision, they are committed to attending that specific college and must withdraw their applications from other institutions. ED deadlines are typically in November, and students often receive decisions by December.

Early Action

In Early Action, students apply to the school usually by November 1. They receive an early admission decision, typically in December, but they are not obligated to enroll if admitted. Early Action is non-binding, allowing students to apply to multiple colleges and compare offers before making a final decision.

ADMISSIONS PLANS

Rolling Admissions

Rolling Admission is a process where colleges accept and evaluate applications continuously throughout the admission cycle. There is no set deadline for applications; instead, the school reviews applications as they are received. Students can often receive admission decisions relatively quickly after applying. Rolling Admission typically continues until a certain enrollment capacity is reached or until a final deadline.

Restrictive Early Action/ Single Choice Early Action

Restrictive Early Action is a variation of Early Action. Under REA, students apply early to a college but are restricted from applying to other private colleges under Early Action or Early Decision programs during the same admission cycle. However, they can still apply to public institutions and institutions with non-binding programs. REA allows students to apply early to their top-choice school without committing to attending if admitted.

THE APPLICATION PLATFORMS



Common
Application



+



SCOIR in collaboration with the
Coalition Application



College Website

Resources for Senior Year

Who can I speak to about college applications?

- Mrs. Shah, College & Career Counselor
 - Use this booking link to schedule a meeting:
<https://calendar.app.google/cCW14K3iMBpkkgwKA>
- Your School Counselor
 - school counselors are very well versed on the college application process, don't hesitate to reach out to them

Common App Need to Know Info

PHS CEEB Code: 311255

Graduating Class Size: 389

Class Rank Reporting: None

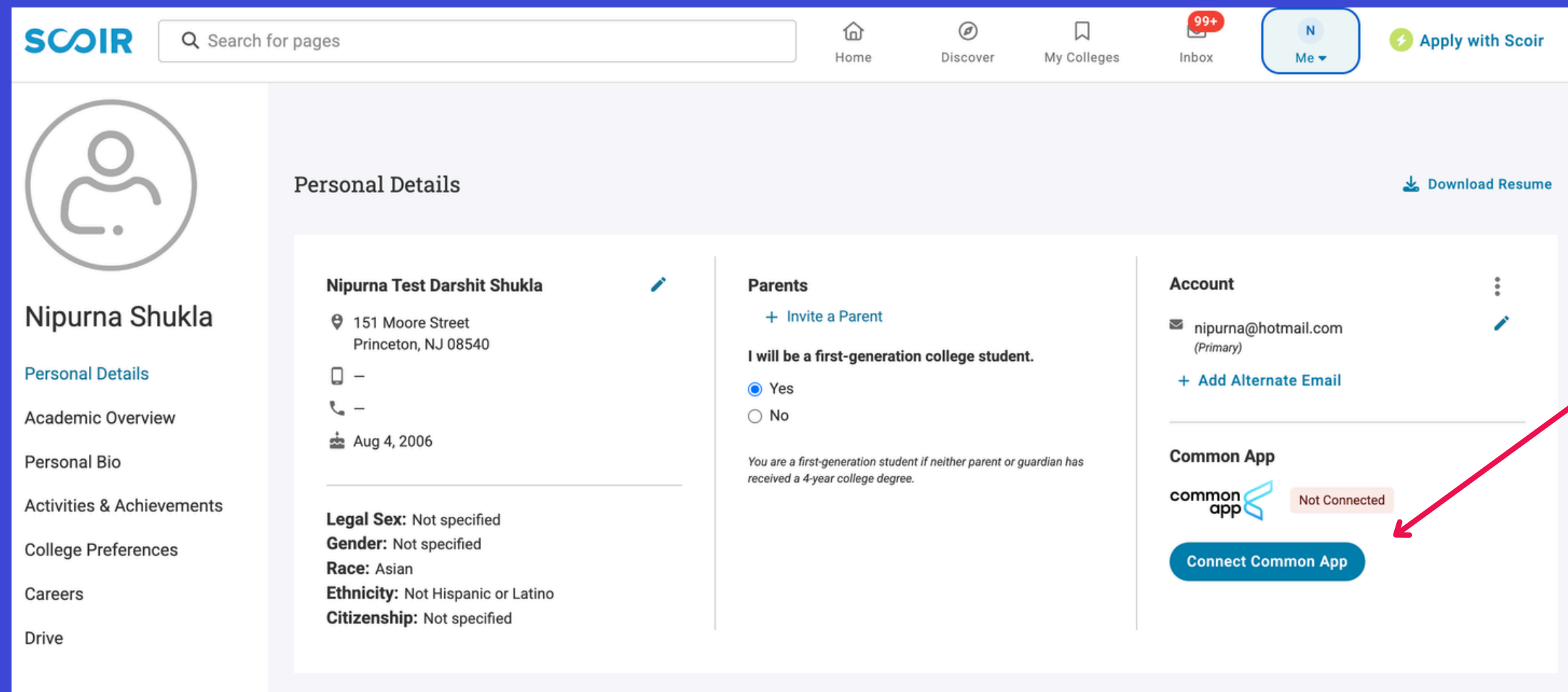
GPA Scale: 4.0

Cumulative GPA: please report your *weighted* GPA

GPA Weighting: Weighted

SCOIR + Common App Integration

Please be sure you have connected your SCOIR Account with the Common App



On the homepage of
SCOIR, click on the
drop down arrow next
to "Me"--> select *View
Profile*--> Click on
Connect Common App

View [this presentation](#) for detailed instructions

Add and Rank your Recommenders

Rank your teacher recommendations

Recs & Docs

There is a declined recommendation in your rankings. Remove it and re-rank so your recs are assigned to your colleges in the right order.

Recommendations Rank + New Request

Recommender	Type	College	Status	
Rick Miller #1	Teacher	General	Requested Aug 26, 2026	Manage Cancel
Cecilia Birge #2	Teacher	General	Declined by Teacher Sep 8, 2026	

Rows per page: 10 1-2 of 2

From my colleges-->
Recs. & Docs--> New
request. Add your
teacher recommenders

Rank Recommendations

There is a declined recommendation in your rankings. Remove it and re-rank so your recs are assigned to your colleges in the right order.

Ranked

Rick Miller Requested Aug 26, 2026	#1	↑ ↓
Cecilia Birge Declined by Teacher Sep 8, 2026	Declined #2	×

Available

No other recs available

Cancel Save

Once you've added
your recommenders,
please rank them

View [this presentation](#) for detailed instructions

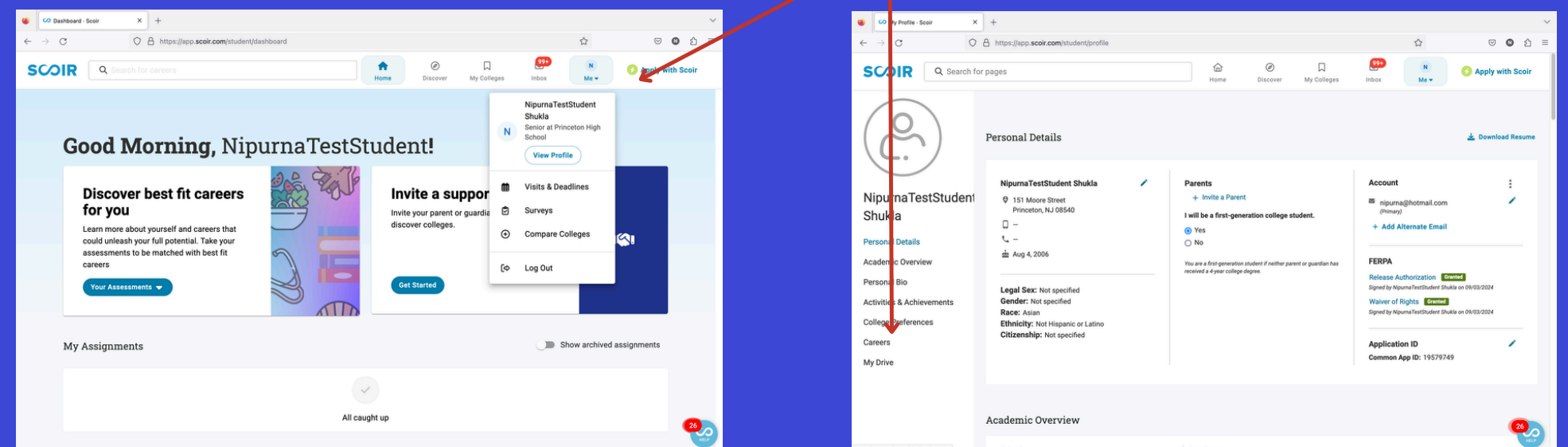
Things to know about SCOIR

- *Parents, please register for SCOIR*
- *Students, all college visits are posted on SCOIR. Be sure to register 3-days in advance of the visit.*
- *Students, check 'My Drive' on SCOIR for scholarship information*
 - *To access 'My Drive'*

College Visits



Scholarships



Student Responsibilities:

- Submit student/parent brag sheet to counselor
- Submit teacher brag sheets to teacher recommenders
- Submit college applications by their deadlines
- Update the Common App with your college list. Since the Common App + SCOIR have integrated, the colleges will automatically appear in SCOIR.
- Send official SAT/ACT tests from respective testing agencies to college if required
- Remember to fill in the STARS(Rutgers, Penn State, UPitt)
- Self-report AP Scores on CA (only 4's or 5's)
- Fill in the FAFSA and/or CSS Profile





School Counseling Office Roles & Responsibilities

- Submit transcripts to colleges
- Submit letters of recommendations (counselor & teacher) to colleges
- Submit school profile to colleges

Teachers Roles & Responsibilities

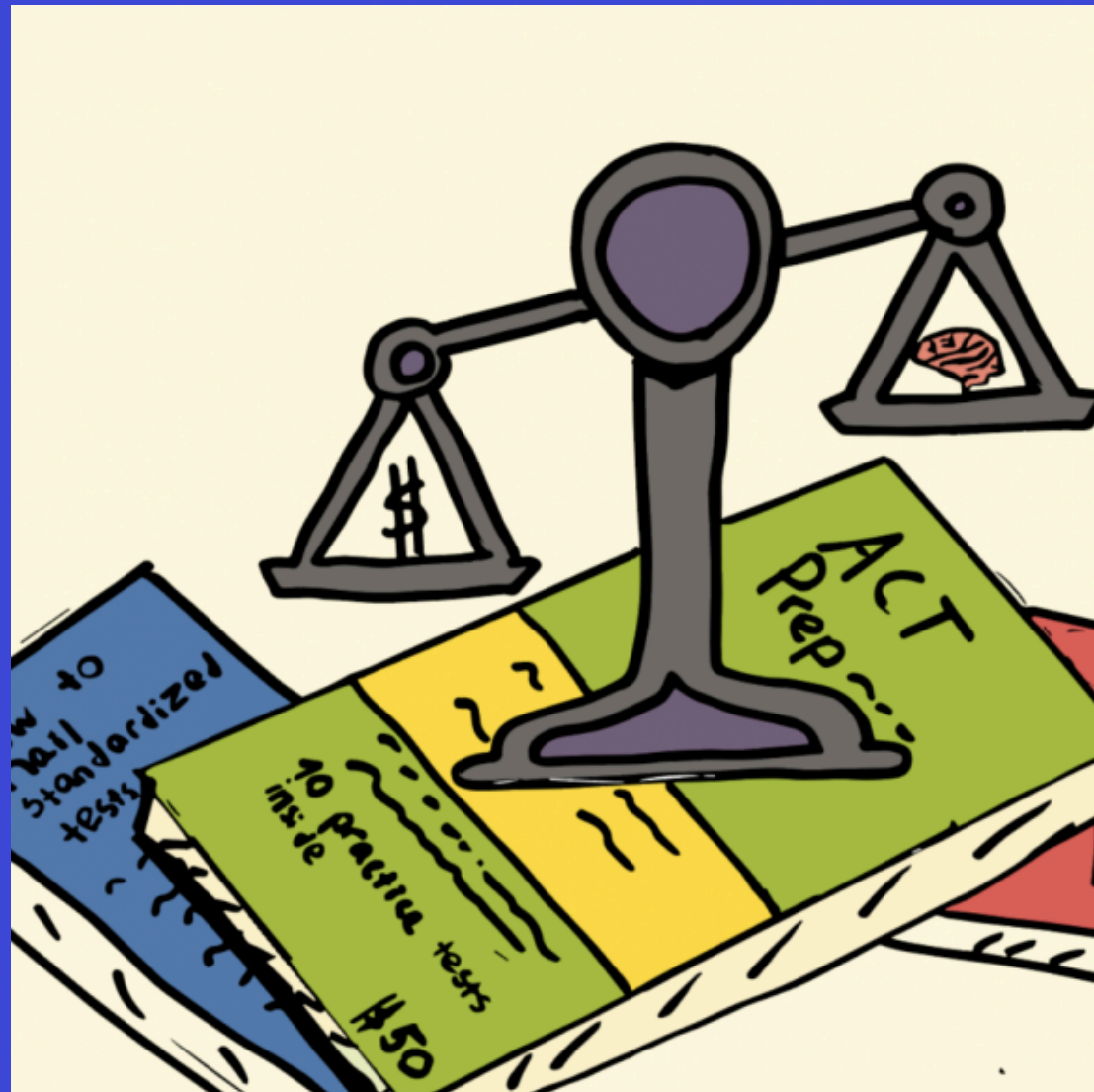
- Upload letter of recommendation into SCOIR



Important Reminders

- *Schedule Changes*
 - *Email colleges about course changes*
 - *Keep counselors/teachers aware of your application timelines*

STANDARDIZED TESTING



- *Be sure to check the respective colleges' websites for their testing policies on how to report your testing. Some colleges accept self-reported testing from the Common App. Other require students to send official test scores directly from the testing agency.*
- *Testing is nuanced. Check the respective colleges' requirements and think about how standardized testing will/will not support your application*

UCAS TIPS--Hot Off the Press

- List all qualifications--> AP Scores
 - different universities have different requirements and if they're not listed, it may be a missed opportunities
- List all modules (ie., courses taken in HS)
 - Start with the most recent courses from 12th grade first
 - Math is typically required for most STEM majors, list math
- Referees/References aka Letter of Recommendation
 - The letter of rec. should come from a teacher that most closely aligns with your program of study (major)
 - If a university only accepts a single letter, you can include multiple teachers feedback within one letter
- Personal Statement
 - Subject first: why I want to study that subject, why I'm a good fit, how I'm a good interest
 - one statement for ALL universities
- Interviews
 - not all programmes require interview
- Be intentional about checking requirements for all universities

Postsecondary education options = **COLLEGE** ➡

4 yr. College/
University
*Bachelor's
Degree*

2 yr. Community
College
*Associate Degree
or Certificate*

Career or
Technical School
*Certificate or
License*

Apprenticeship
*Certificate or
License*



COLLEGE ATHLETICS

- *Division I or II athletes must register with the NCAA Eligibility Center*
 - *Final transcripts and proof of graduation will be sent to the NCAA at the end of Junior/Senior Year*
- *Division III athletes do not need to register with NCAA. Please contact respective colleges for their eligibility requirements*
- ***Prospective collegiate athletes will still need to participate in the application process***



FINANCIAL AID

- *Apply for Financial Aid*
 - *FAFSA opens on October 1, 2026*
 - *Both students AND parents need to create an FSA ID*
 - *<https://studentaid.gov/fsa-id/create-account/launch>*
 - *2027-2028 school year (this is the year the student will start attending college)*
 - *FAFSA is a graduation requirement*
 - *Waiver in PowerSchool*
- *Jeff Selingo's Buyers & Sellers List*
- *Financial Aid Seminar*
 - *Wednesday, 10/14/25 @ 7pm, Virtual*
- *Early Financial Aid Reads*



SCHOLARSHIPS



- *PHS Local Scholarship Program—February 2026*
- *Check the respective college's Financial Aid page for college-specific scholarships*
- *Scholarship search sites*
 - *fastweb*
 - *College Board Big Future*
 - *Coca Cola Scholars Foundation* (scroll to the bottom of the page)

Career News

- Fastest Growing Occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics)

Other News

- [Some Colleges That Dropped Supplemental Essays](#) (Inside Higher Ed)
- SUNY Free Application Week: October 19-November 2 (students can apply to up to 5 SUNY campuses)
- [6-Figure Sticker Price Colleges](#) (CNBC)
- [Turning the Tide in 2026: Preparing Students for Lives of Caring and Purpose](#) (Harvard Graduate School of Education)
- [The 10 Strongest College Alumni Networks in the US According to LinkedIn](#)
- [Entry Level Job Skills](#) (Chronicles of Higher Education)

What Can You Do This Year To Be College Ready?

Build the Skills Colleges & Employers Want

- *Life Skills*
 - *Get a job, tutor, babysit — build reliability*
 - *Join a club or sport and lead something*
 - *Use a real time-management system*
- *AI & Tech Fluency*
 - *Learn AI prompting*
 - *Try intro Python or data-science courses*
 - *Build one small project (website, chatbot, data viz)*
- *Entrepreneurial Leadership*
 - *Start a club, project, or micro-business*
 - *Practice pitching ideas*
 - *Learn basic budgeting*
- *Hands-On Skills*
 - *Volunteer outdoors or in community service*
 - *Take CTE electives*
 - *Get a certification (CPR, lifeguarding, food safety, GIS)*

UPCOMING EVENTS

- *Saturday, 9/19-Mock PSAT with Revolution Prep*
- *Friday, 10/2-Parent Coffee Chat @8am in the PHS Cafe*
- *Wednesday, 10/14-Financial Aid Night @7pm (virtual)*



How to get in touch



Email

nipurnashah@princetonk12.org
or contact your school counselor



Telephone

609 806 4282



website:

[PHS College Counselors Corner](#)



*Look out for all college related
communication in your PPS
email via SCOIR.*

