OAK PARK and RIVER FOREST HIGH SCHOOL
DISTRICT 200

College & Post-Secondary Planning for Families of Juniors: Class of 2028

Presented by the Oak Park and River Forest Counseling Division

After Tonight You Should Know How To:

- Establish the college planning timetable and to-do list
- Find the most “bang for your buck” in a college
- Determine the right college fit for your student
- Identify requirements for admission
- Debunk myths about admission
- Prepare and register for standardized tests (if needed)
- Understand how Schoolinks can help facilitate the college search

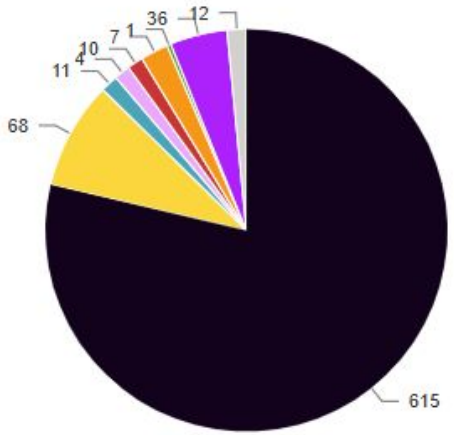
Timeline of counselors' post-secondary work with junior/senior students:

- **Junior year:**
  - **February - group meetings with juniors to review all potential post-secondary options and how to plan for them**
  - **February/March - Individual meetings with juniors to discuss post-secondary plan**

- **Senior year:**
  - **Late August - group meetings with seniors to provide details about the college application process**
  - **Early September - individual meetings with seniors to review each student's specific plan, discuss next steps and timeline for implementation**

Post-Secondary Plans - Class of 2026

Post-secondary plan



- 4-Year degree (615)
- 2-Year degree (68)
- Trade School/Technical Program (11)
- Apprenticeship (7)
- Internship (1)
- Workforce (10)
- Gap year (36)
- Volunteer
- Military (4)
- Other (12)

College Fit



- **Location**
- **Size**
- **Campus Climate / Culture**
- **Course of Study / Programs Offered**
- **Academic Fit**
- **Selectivity**
- **Net Price**

Shift your mindset from *best* to *best fit*.



College Fit - Location

- **OPRF students - 42% in state, 58% out of state**
- **Our 20 most applied-to colleges from 2026**
  - University of Illinois
  - UIC
  - University of Iowa
  - University of Wisconsin
  - MIchigan State
  - Depaul University
  - Indiana University
  - Northern Illinois University
  - Loyola University
  - Triton College
  - University of Michigan
  - Illinois State University
  - Marquette University
  - University of Colorado - Boulder
  - University of Minnesota
  - Purdue University
  - Northwestern University
  - Pennsylvania State University
  - University of Missouri
  - Ohio State University

College Fit

Size

- Small - personal, small class size
- Large - Independence, more choices
- Competition for research internship opportunities?

Course of Study

- Majors/minors of interest?
- Internships, study abroad, research?
- % of graduates employed
- With whom and where do I learn best?

Campus Climate

- Culture
- Instructional approach
- Serve my needs as an individual

Selectivity

- % acceptance rate
- Scattergrams in Schoolinks
- Reach, Target, Likely
- Time to grow outside of classroom?

College Personality Quiz

Research: Recommended Sites

- College Board Big Future
- College Results
- Mapping Your Future
- Niche
- College Data

Potential AI Prompts to Help with the Search

- **Create a college search primer for a high school student in 11th grade who is just starting to look at colleges. Include some terms they should know, steps, and timelines.**
- **Create a college preparation timeline by year in high school that starts in the 10th grade. Include categories such as academic preparation, college search, testing, activities, and financial preparation.**
- **I am interested in studying XYZ at XYZ College. Help me brainstorm a list of 8-10 additional colleges that are also located in (a city, the suburbs, etc.), that have similar sized undergraduate populations and have this major. Include whether the college is public or private and their selectivity in the results.**
    - **Bonus: Put these results in tiers based on reach, match, and safety schools.**
- **If I like XYZ major, help me brainstorm 8-10 additional undergraduate majors that might use the same skills or be similar to XYZ major. Explain why you added them to the list and the possible career outcomes for these additional majors.**

Source: Georgia Tech admissions blog

*Make sure you discuss any results from AI prompts with your counselor!

Standardized Tests for College Admission

- **Most colleges will accept EITHER the SAT or ACT test for admission**
- **Record number (2,240+) of colleges test free or test optional for 2027-28 applicants (fairtest.org)**
  - **90%of bachelor's-degree-granting colleges don't require test score submission as part of the application (per fairtest.org)**
- **All juniors take the school-day ACT digitally on April 13th, 2027.**

Test Prep Options

- **ACT**
  - **Free ACT test prep (from act.org)**
  - **OPRF Testing Specialist will send information out in December for prep courses that start in January**

- **SAT**
  - **Free SAT practice**
  - **Test prep companies such as RevolutionPrep, ExcelEdge, Kaplan, and Huntington**

Admissions Criteria

1. Cumulative Grade Point Average
2. Rigor of Coursework
3. Standardized Test Scores (if applicable)
4. GPA Trends (Upward, Downward)
5. Extra-Curricular Involvement (including Leadership, Longevity, Regional/National Recognition)
6. Community Service
7. Recommendation Letters
8. Essay
9. Demonstrated Interest

Myths about Admissions

1. Finding the right college is like finding your soulmate, and only one school is right for you
2. Colleges ranked highest are “the best” colleges
3. Getting all As is the most important thing
4. Your test scores can make or break your chances of getting in
5. The more clubs/activities you have on your resume, the better
6. You should only ask for a recommendation from a teacher who gave you an A
7. It’s a mistake to get creative with your essay
8. To make yourself memorable, you need to visit campus

College Fairs

STUDENTS REGISTER AT STRIVESCAN.COM

College Fair 2027 (Fenwick/OPRFHS/Trinity) - March 2nd, 2027 6:00 - 8pm - @OPRFHS - Register at strivescan.com

Morton College's annual College Fair - October 20th, 2026 6:00 - 8pm in the Henry J. Vais Gymnasium on Morton College campus - Register at strivescan.com

National Association of College Admission Counseling (NACAC) Fairs

Illinois Association of College Admission Counseling (IACAC) College Fairs

HBCU College and Career Fair (Chicago) - early Fall each year

National Portfolio Days

Visiting Local Campuses

Local Field Trips - Even if you do not plan to stay local, you'll be able to see which type of campus you like by visiting different local campus settings.

Chicagoland Area	
Community College:	Triton
Small, Nearby:	Concordia, Dominican
Small, Suburban:	Elmhurst College
	Lake Forest College
Midsize, Urban:	University of Chicago
	Columbia College Chicago
	Roosevelt University
Midsize, Suburban:	Northwestern
Large, Urban:	UIC, DePaul, Loyola, IL Tech

South and West of the Chicagoland Area	
Small:	Illinois Wesleyan
	Knox College
	Augustana
Midsize:	Bradley University
	Western Illinois
Large:	U of I - Urbana/Champaign
	Illinois State University

Cost of College

- **The most important conversation you would rather not have, but should not avoid!**
- **Get the most "bang for your buck" and the best ROI**
  - **ROI for 30,000 Bachelor's Degrees**
  - **Ranking 4,500 Colleges by ROI**

- **Is It Time to Talk to Your Teen about Paying for College?**



Financial Aid

- Completing the FAFSA – Free Application for Federal Student Aid – begins the financial aid process
- Required to be considered for all federal and state need-based aid (as well as for many merit-based scholarships)
- For the class of 2028, the FAFSA can be submitted anytime between Oct. 1, 2027 and June 30, 2028
- The earlier you submit, the better
- Use the Federal Student Aid Estimator to determine the amount of aid you could receive
- Use Financial Aid Estimators or Net Price Calculators available on most individual college websites.
- Attend the OPRFHS Financial Aid Night next Sept/October

Scholarships

OAK PARK AND RIVER FOREST HIGH SCHOOL
SCHOLARSHIP FOUNDATION

Recommendation: Begin applying by June 2027 and continue to apply throughout summer and fall.

- Fastweb.com
- Finaid.org
- Scholarships.com
- Scholly.com (also has an app)
- MSAN.wceruw.org (Minority Student Achievement Network)
- Cappex.com/scholarships
- Niche
- Bold.org
- ScholarshipAmerica.org

- Schoolinks - College > Scholarship Matching
- College Admissions and Financial Aid Websites/Offices
- Visit websites and contact admissions reps to find out about eligibility for merit scholarships and need-based grants

ISAC (Illinois Student Assistance Commission)

Great resource for our families to help answer questions about the FAFSA and financial aid.

OPRFHS designated ISAC representative:

Mackenzie Ramonez
Illinois Student Assistance Commission
ISACorps Triton College District
(708)738-9864
Mackenzie.Ramonez@Illinois.gov

Triton College

- Our local community college - the most “bang for your buck.”
- Tuition per credit hour (2026-27):
  - In-district: $158.00*
    - $5,340 total – in-district tuition and fees one year, full-time (15 credit hours/semester)
    - $9,000 total – in-district tuition and fees for one year, full-time (15 credit hours/semester), in select health science programs
  - Out-of-district: $397.00

* Health Career Programs tuition is $280 per credit hour in-district

Triton Scholars Program

Triton Scholars: Two-year program for academically talented in-district students who plan to earn an Associate of Arts or Sciences degree and transfer to competitive four-year colleges and universities.

Admission Requirements for program:

- **An accumulated minimum GPA of 3.5 on a 4.0 scale or equivalent**
- **Faculty and counselor recommendations**
- **Additional indicators of academic potential**

Triton Scholars Program

Some Colleges Triton Scholars have transferred to:

- Tulane University
- Auburn University
- University of California at Los Angeles
- Boston University
- University of Chicago
- Boston College
- University of Illinois at Chicago
- Cornell University
- Illinois Tech
- Arizona State University
- Ohio University
- American University
- Purdue University
- Georgetown University
- Mount Holyoke
- University of Wisconsin
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Vanderbilt
- Northwestern University
- Smith College
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- University of Southern California
- Indiana University
- University of Iowa
- The Art Institute of Chicago

Triton Scholars Program

- Carefully selected faculty
- Small classes devoted to intensive reading, discussion and research skills
- An emphasis on language, analytic and critical thinking skills in an intellectually demanding atmosphere
- Full academic scholarships for qualified students
- Careful transfer placement counseling
- Waiver of tuition
- Participation in special activities
- Special recognition on transcripts and diplomas

DR. MICHAEL FLAHERTY
TRITON SCHOLARS PROGRAM DIRECTOR
(708) 456-0300, EXT. 3250
MICHAELFLAHERTY@TRITON.EDU

Triton Trustee Honors Scholarship

- **Criteria: Unweighted GPA of 3.35 or greater**
- **If student meets the criteria, they receive free tuition**

  https://www.triton.edu/admissions-aid/scholarships/trustee-honors-scholarship/

- **For more information, please email scholarships@triton.edu or call (708) 456-0300, Ext. 3155.**

Some Other Triton Highlights

- **Paralegal Studies Certificate**
  - **(Post-Associate's Degree; 2025 median annual wage $62,890)**
- **Radiologic and MRI Technologist**
  - **(Associate’s Degree; 2025 median annual wage $81,390)**
- **Real Estate Broker Pre-License**
  - **(1 course + exam; 2025 median annual wage $57,400)**
- **Phlebotomy Technician**
  - **(1 course + certification exam; 2025 median annual wage $45,230)**
- **Veterinary Assistant**
  - **(1 course; 2025 median annual wage $38,150)**

Salary information from Bureau of Labor Statistics: www.bls.gov

Other Post-Secondary Options

- Certificate Programs
  - Offered through community colleges, 4-year schools, and industry-specific organizations
- Trade Schools
  - Typically last about 2 years and cost around $33,000 (The Simple Dollar)
  - State and federal money pouring into these programs due to dearth of skilled electricians, plumbers, welders, and other trade workers
- Proprietary Schools (for profit) – Proceed with Caution
  - Check retention, graduation, and debt rates of students
- Gap Year (local or abroad; community service)
- Work or Apprenticeships (get paid during training)
- Military

Helpful Resources – Things to Read

- Class of 2026 What's Next? Post High School Guidebook
- Fiske Guide to Colleges (Sourcebooks)
- Big Future (College Board)
- K&W Guide to Colleges for Students w/Learning Differences (Random House)
- Colleges that Change Lives by Loren Pope
- Occupational Outlook Handbook

Illinois One-Click College Admit - Opt In



- No application fees, no essays, and no letters of recommendation required.
- GPA is the only requirement. If you meet the university's GPA requirement, you're in. (GPA range 2.5 - 3.25 depending on the school)
- Please visit oneclickadmit.org for more information and to opt-in.
- Students must opt-in as juniors to be eligible to receive admission offers at the beginning of senior year.

Using Schoolinks

College Search

College Applications

Career Exploration

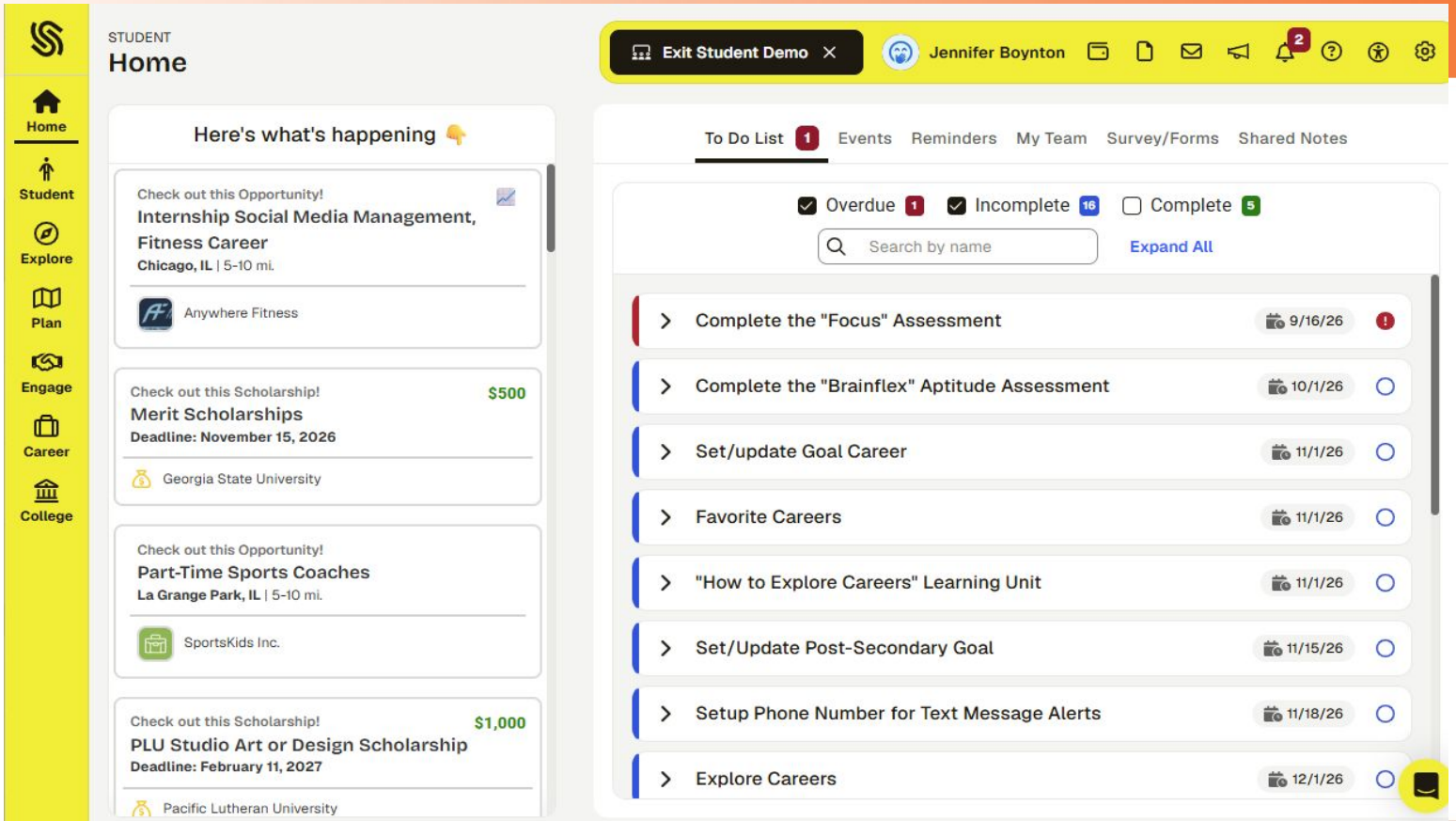
Self Exploration

Stats & Analytics

PARENTS/GUARDIANS WITH GMAIL ACCOUNTS, SIGN IN WITH GOOGLE TO ACCESS YOUR SCHOOLINKS ACCOUNT [schoolinks.com]

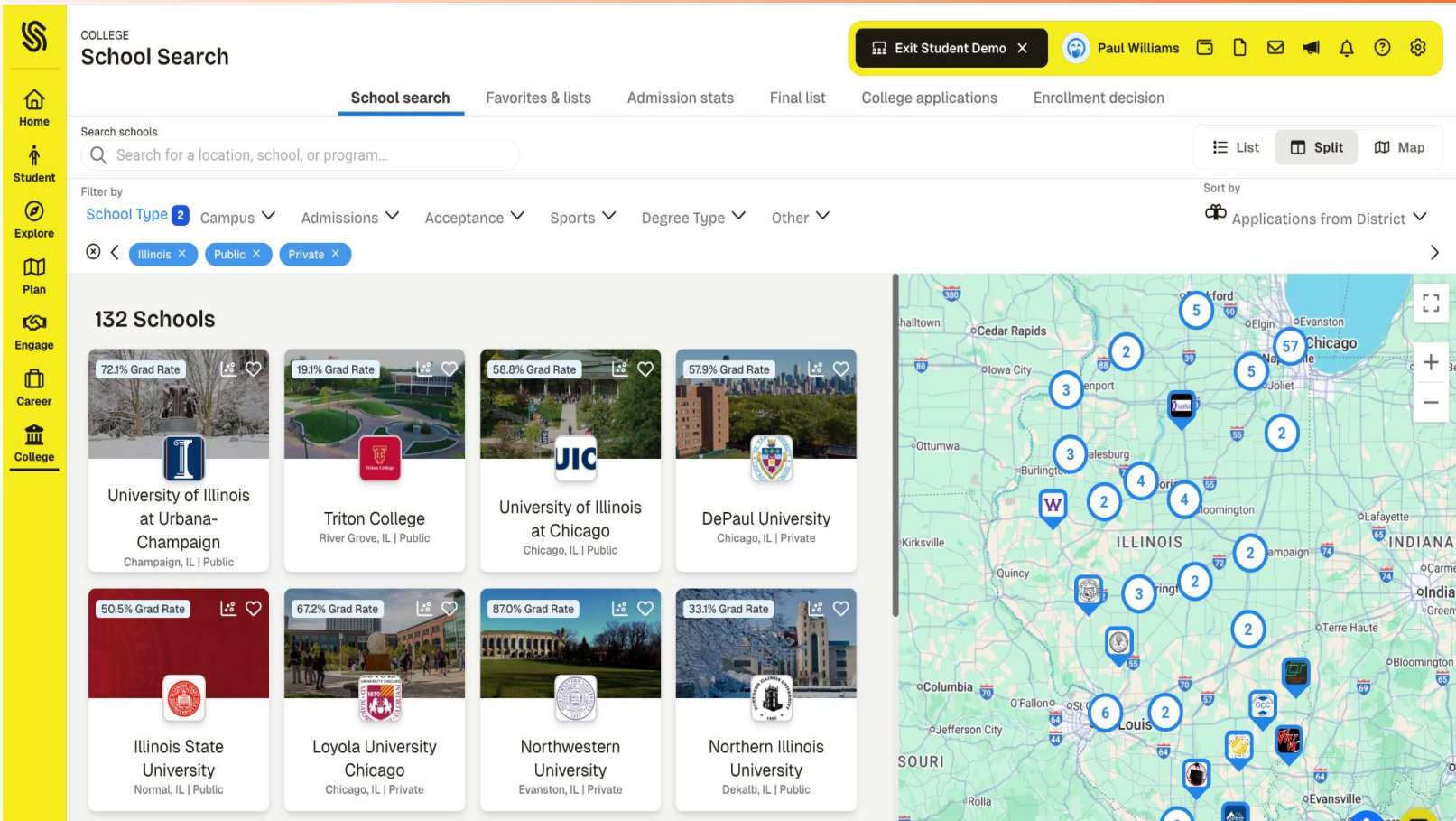
PARENTS/GUARDIANS WHO DO NOT HAVE GMAIL ACCOUNTS, CHOOSE “OPTION 2” (“FORGOT PASSWORD”)TO ACCESS YOUR ACCOUNT IN SCHOOLINKS. LINK HERE

Schoolinks - Student Dashboard

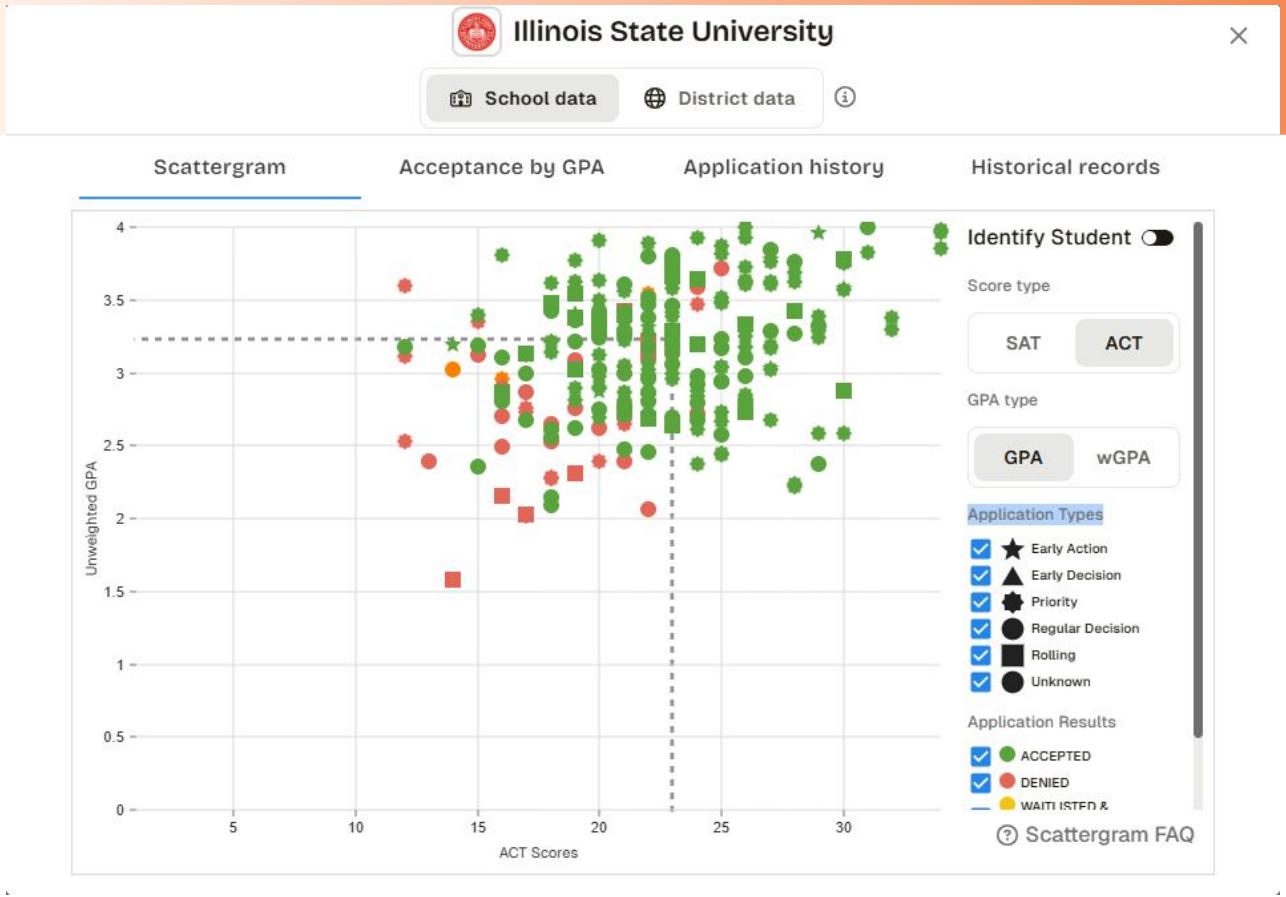


Schoolinks - College Search

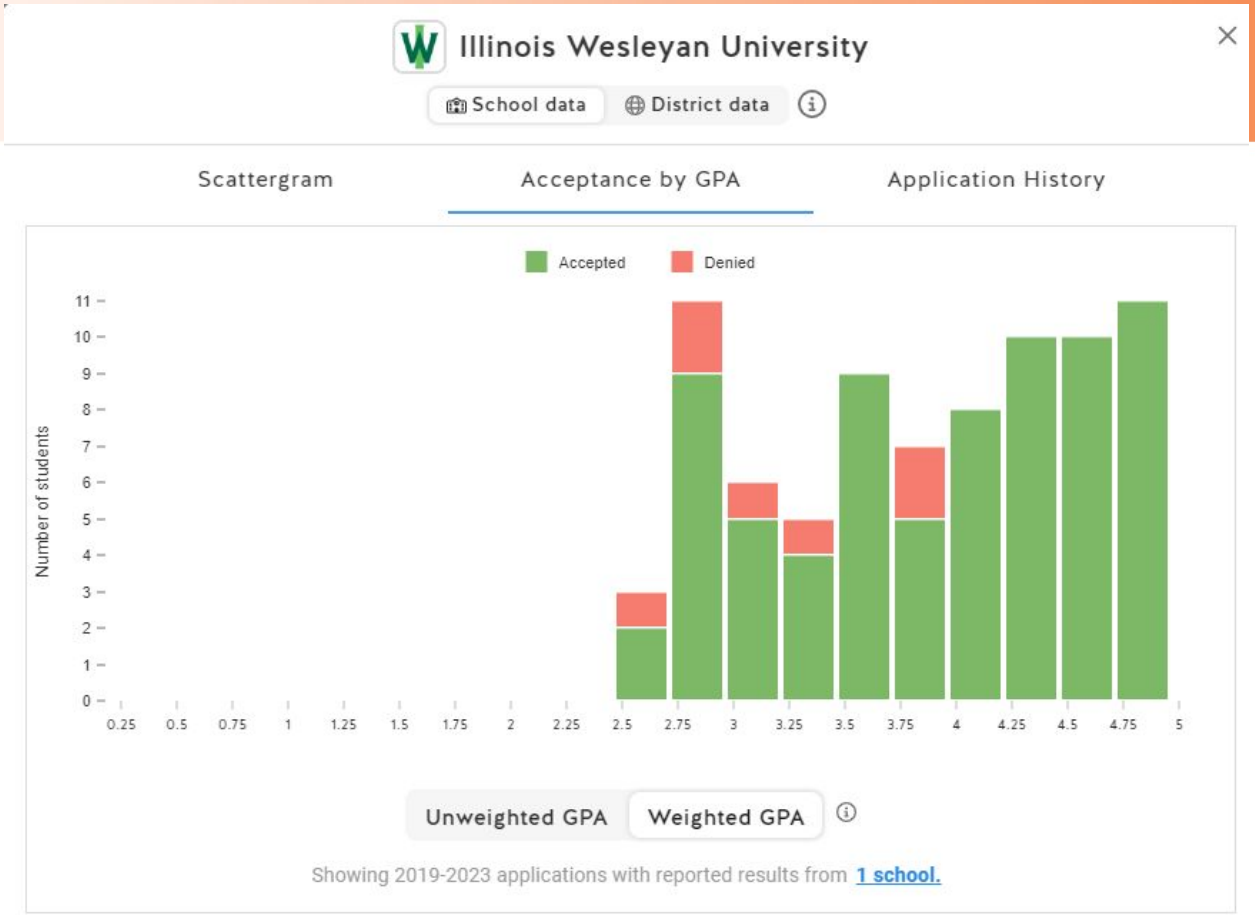
College > School Search



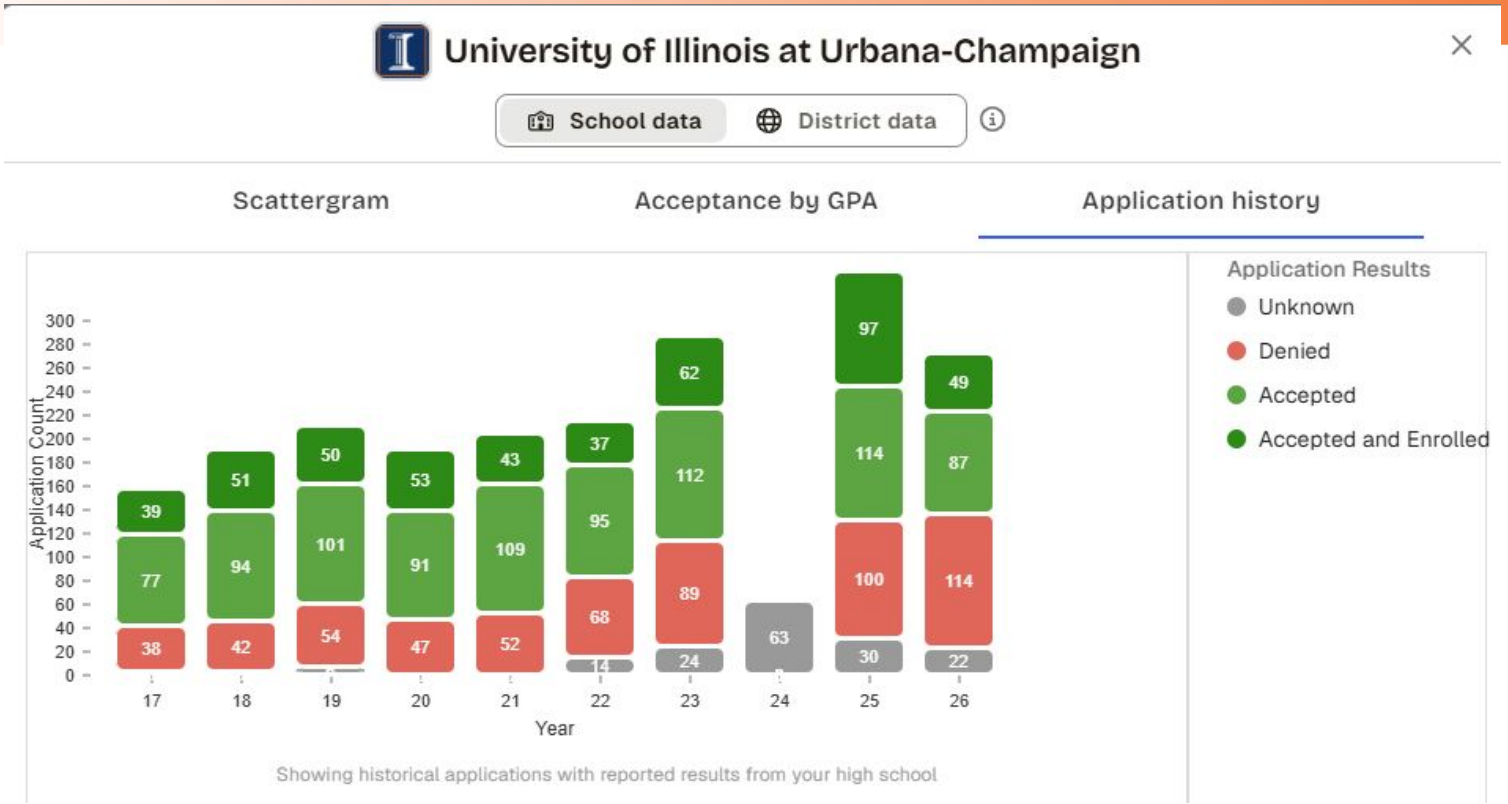
Schoolinks - College Search - Scattergrams



Schoolinks - College Search - Acceptance by GPA



Schoolinks - College Search - Application History



Athletics

ALL of our OPRFHS student-athletes and their parents/guardians have access to an Honest Game account. Click here to see Honest Game in action.

NCAA (Division I and II)

- **Review and update eligibility worksheet on the NCAA website regularly, see the OPRF Athletic Department with questions**
- **Must register with NCAA Eligibility Center**
- **Review completed registration in Fall 2026**
- **Send ACT and SAT scores directly to the Eligibility Center (Code 9999)**

NCAA (Division III)

- **No separate process beyond general application for admission the college or university**
- **However, contacting coaches is a good idea; though athletic scholarships are not granted at the DIII level, coaches can still be a strong inside advocate with admissions.**

Fine/Performing Arts

Important points for fine/performing arts admissions:

- Check each school's requirements carefully. Each may have different requirements.
- For most competitive programs, your portfolio or audition will supersede the review of all other admissions criteria
- Many colleges pre-screen potential applicants by reviewing portfolios or video auditions to determine eligibility for admission
- If you think your chances are questionable for being admitted to a competitive fine arts school, applying to comprehensive colleges that offer art/music/theatre programs may be a better plan
- Plan to have 4-6 auditioned programs (or portfolio required first) and a number of non-auditioned programs as back-ups
- Every college manages academic/artistic admissions in its own way
- Stay organized around the process by tracking what is required for admission at each school and timelines for submission/scheduling
- Start early, do your research, and know yourself!

[How to Make an Art Portfolio for College]

What should parents be doing now?

- Talk to your child about plans following graduation
- Offer support/encouragement
- Enjoy your child's high school life
- Oversee and and manage your child's digital footprint
- Encourage balance
- Share the message:
  - Most colleges admit the majority of their applicants
- Check out this information about acceptance rates

Student Objectives by June of 2027

- Maintain good grades in junior courses!
- Research whether or not standardized tests are required by your colleges and complete test prep this winter, if needed
- Register for and take at least one national SAT or ACT (if needed)
- Use Schoolinks assessments, career exploration tools, and college search
- Develop a list of favorite colleges in Schoolinks (6-10 schools - mostly Target)

Student Objectives by June of 2027

- Use Scattergrams in Schoolinks to determine Reach, Target, and Likely schools
- Review college applications and Common Application essay prompts to prepare and start considering essay topics
- Attend spring college fairs, college caller visits, and college admissions campus tours
- Use Net Price Calculators/Financial Aid Estimators on colleges' websites for colleges on your list
- Attend your individual meeting with your counselor this spring

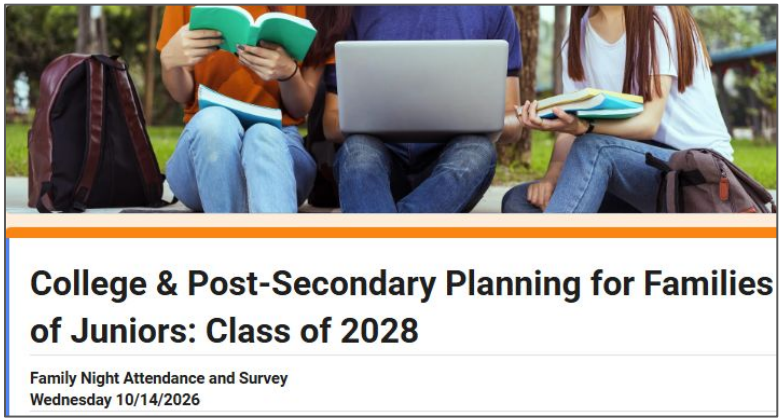
Student Objectives for Summer of 2027

- Create a Final List in Schoolinks (6-10 colleges)
- Write a rough draft of college essays to show counselor and/or trusted teacher for review
- Complete as many national scholarship applications as possible – seniors will not have much time in the fall
- Complete Counselor Questionnaire for Recommendation Letters in Schoolinks
- Decide which teachers to ask for recommendation letters (ideally ask teachers toward the end of this year)
- Fill out a financial aid estimator

Attendance and Feedback

Thank you for coming tonight!

We are so glad to have so many families with us tonight!



Scan Me

Be sure to contact your child's counselor with questions this year and throughout the post-secondary planning process.

We're here to help!



Questions?