



Pinellas Education Foundation

Walker's Rising Stars 2025-2026

Scholarship Competition Guidelines

Thank you for participating in the Walker's Rising Stars Scholarship Competition! This year-long initiative will help you hone your audition, portfolio, and performance skills.

Walker's Rising Stars students will compete for college scholarships in six categories: Culinary Arts, Dance, Instrumental, Theater, Visual Arts, and Vocal Performance.

Calendar of Events

August 11, 2025

Application Opens

<https://pinellaseducation.org/students/#wrs-section>



October 12, 2025

Application Deadline

<https://pinellaseducation.org/students/#wrs-section>

January 11, 2026

Performing Arts Semi-Finalist Video Submission Deadline

Visual Artist Portfolio Submission Deadline

March 2026

Culinary Competition

Location: TBD

Tuesday, April 21, 2026, 6:30 pm

Walker's Rising Stars 2026 Final Event

Location: The Mahaffey Theater

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to accelerate educational achievement for ALL students through the effective mobilization of innovation, relationships and resources.

12090 Starkey Road Largo, Florida 33773 | pinellaseducation.org | 727-588-4816

Applications

Students in all fields (other than culinary arts) will apply online at <https://pinellaseducation.org/students/#wrs-section>. All applications must be submitted in their entirety by **October 12, 2025, at midnight.**

The application process will be available to all Pinellas County Public Schools' juniors and seniors. Participants must be in good standing with Pinellas County Schools and in compliance with the Student Code of Conduct.

Students enrolled in Home Education may participate in Walker's Rising Stars as long as they are co-enrolled with Pinellas County Schools.

Any senior who competed as a junior and was awarded the first-place scholarship in a specific discipline is no longer eligible to apply for that discipline. However, they may submit an application in a different discipline. For example, if a student won 1st place in the Vocal category as a junior, that student can no longer apply in the Vocal category as a senior. However, they are eligible to apply in Dance, Instrumental, Theatre, Visual, or Culinary.

Seniors who competed as juniors and either received any other scholarship award (2nd – 4th place) or were not awarded a scholarship are still eligible to compete in the same discipline for their senior year.

The culinary aspect of the program is directed by the [Ryan Wells Foundation](#) and all inquiries about the culinary competition should be directed to Ashley Giasone, Executive Director of the Ryan Well Foundation, ashley@ryanwellsfoundation.com.

Scholarships

All performing and visual arts finalists will receive scholarships based on the scoring of their final work. Four scholarships will be awarded in each category.

Scholarships for the winners of the culinary competition will be determined by the Ryan Wells Foundation.

Judges

Judges for all phases of the competition in performing and visual arts will be selected based on their ability to fairly and professionally represent and judge all genres in each category. Every effort will be made to secure judges for the semi-final and final rounds who do not have a current affiliation with the students being judged. Judges cannot be a current private instructor of a contestant.

Each round of the competition will have a minimum of three judges per performance category. Competitors' final scores will be the sum of all judges' scores. In the event of a tie, judges will deliberate to determine placements.

Visual Arts

Portfolios and Judging

Visual arts students will be invited to submit their portfolios to DropBox for adjudication by a panel of expert judges.

- Students will be judged in one round. Instructions for the submission of your portfolios will be sent to visual arts competitors following the application deadline.
- **Students must submit a total of 5 unique pieces to be adjudicated (no more and no fewer). Failure to submit a complete portfolio of 5 unique works will result in disqualification.**
- Students will submit their artwork no later than **January 11, 2026**.
- Judging will take place in February of 2026.
- A minimum of 3 judges with one alternate will be needed to complete judging.
- No Pinellas County public high school may be represented by more than 2 students in each category.
 - If the scores of more than 2 students from a single school would place them among the finalists, the lowest-scoring students will be eliminated from the competition and the next highest-scoring student from the remaining schools will advance into the final position in each category.

- Visual Arts awards will be revealed on stage at Walker's Rising Stars, which has been scheduled for **Tuesday, April 21, 2026, at the Mahaffey Theater in St. Petersburg.**

Performing Arts (Dance, Instrumental Music, Theater, Vocal)

Preliminary Performing Arts Auditions

Preliminary auditions will be held for the performing arts categories (instrumental, theatre, vocal, and dance) via a student-submitted YouTube video, a link to which must be included in the student's initial application. Judges' scores will determine which students advance to the semi-final round of the competition.

- All performing arts competitors are asked to perform 2 contrasting pieces.
- **Each piece should be no more than three minutes in length, the total being no more than 6 minutes in length for the two contrasting pieces. Failure to submit 2 contrasting pieces will result in disqualification.**
- Students applying in the fields of vocal, instrumental, dance, and theatre must submit their YouTube video audition link with the online application.
 - If using a cell phone to record, please record horizontally.
 - If possible, record your audition in front of a plain, solid background.
 - Make sure you have good lighting to record your video.
 - Video framing should be appropriate to your performance (close up for stationary monologue, wide shot for dance, etc.)
 - At the beginning of your video introduce yourself, give the name of your school and the name of your performance piece or pieces.
 - **Please submit only one video containing both pieces along with introductions. Do not submit separate videos for each piece.**
 - Upload your YouTube video as UNLISTED before cutting and pasting the link into your Walker's Rising Stars application in the box provided.

- The link to your YouTube audition video must remain active until after the Walker's Rising Stars final competition and the end of the 2025-2026 school year.
- Competitors will be judged on their overall skill, creativity, and artistic expression.
- Auditions are open to **SOLOISTS ONLY**.

Semifinal Performing Arts Auditions

Following the judging of the preliminary audition videos, semi-finalists will be notified and judges' critiques provided to the advancing semi-finalists.

Based on the scoring of the preliminary auditions, a maximum of **20 students from each performance category** will move on to the semifinal round.

- Based on preliminary audition scores, the top student from each Pinellas County public high school that is represented among the preliminary competitors in each category, will automatically be included for judging in the semi-final round (total of up to 18).
- The remaining slots in each category (up to a maximum of 20) will be filled with the remaining top competitors in each category based on individual scores, regardless of school.
- If competitors are not available from each high school, the top student from each competing school will advance to the semifinals and the remaining available semi-finals audition slots will be filled with the top-scoring competitors from the remaining pool.
- The same rules from the preliminary auditions will apply to the competitors for each discipline.
- Following notification of the semi-finalists in each category, the semi-finalists will receive instructions on the submission of their semi-final audition videos and the deadline for submission.

Final Performing Arts Judging

The final judging for Walker's Rising Stars has been scheduled for **Tuesday, April 21, 2026, at the Mahaffey Theater in St. Petersburg.**

- Based on the semifinal audition scores, the top students in each category will advance to the final live performance round of competition.
- There will be no fewer than 3 and no more than 5 finalists in each category for the final round of competition.
- No Pinellas County public high school may be represented by more than 2 students in each category in the final round.
- If the scores of more than 2 students from a single school would place them among the finalists, the lowest-scoring students will be eliminated from the competition and the next highest-scoring student from the remaining schools will advance into the final position in each category.

For questions, please contact Kiersten Keely at 727-588-4816, ext. 2111 or kkeely@pinellaseducation.org.