



**Pinellas Education
Foundation**



Rising Stars 2026-2027
Scholarship Competition Guidelines

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

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, 2026

Application Opens

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



October 11, 2026

Application Deadline at Midnight

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

January 10, 2027

Visual Arts Portfolio Submission Deadline

March 2027

Culinary Competition

Location: TBD

Tuesday, April 20, 2027, 6:30 pm

Rising Stars 2027 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

Disciplines

- Vocal Performance – For students who showcase their talent through singing songs of any genre, including musical theater selections; if you are singing, this is the correct category.
- Theater – For students who demonstrate acting skills through a spoken dramatic or comedic monologue; if you are performing a monologue rather than singing, this is the correct category.
- Dance – For students who perform a choreographed dance piece in any style, demonstrating technique, artistry, and stage presence.
- Instrumental Music – For students who perform on a musical instrument, showcasing technical skill, musicianship, and interpretation.
- Visual Arts – For students who create original artwork, including drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, digital art, or other visual media.
- Culinary Arts – For students who demonstrate culinary skills, creativity, and knowledge through food preparation and presentation.

Applications

Students in all fields (except for culinary arts) will apply online at <https://pinellaseducation.org/students/#wrs-section>. All applications must be submitted in their entirety by **October 11, 2026, 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 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, Theater, 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 Wells Foundation, ashley@ryanwellsfoundation.com. Finalists for the culinary competition will be selected by the Ryan Wells Foundation.

All performances and accompanying music must be school-appropriate. Entries containing profanity, explicit language, violent, or otherwise inappropriate content for a K–12 audience will not be permitted.

Scholarships

All performing and visual arts finalists will receive scholarships based on the scoring of their final work/performance. Four (4) scholarships will be awarded in each category, except for Culinary (which has 3). Culinary scholarship placements and amounts for the 3 winners will be determined by the Ryan Wells Foundation.

Judges

Judges for all phases (2 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 preliminary 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 10, 2027**.
- Judging will take place in February of 2027.
- 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 Rising Stars on **Tuesday, April 20, 2027, at the Mahaffey Theater in St. Petersburg.**

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

Preliminary Performing Arts Auditions

There will be two rounds of the competition – preliminary and final show.

Preliminary auditions will be held for the performing arts categories (instrumental, theater, 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 final round of the competition.

- All performing arts competitors are asked to perform 2 contrasting pieces.
- Each piece should be no more than 3 minutes in length, the total being no more than 6 minutes in length for the two contrasting pieces. **Failure to submit 2 contrasting pieces and/or adhere to 6 minutes time limit will result in disqualification.**
- Students applying in the fields of vocal, instrumental, dance, and theater 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 to 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.
 - **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 Rising Stars application in the box provided.

- The link to your YouTube audition video must remain active until after the Rising Stars final competition and the end of the 2026-2027 school year.
- Competitors will be judged on their overall skill, creativity, and artistic expression.
- Auditions are open to **SOLOISTS ONLY**.
- Judges' critiques will be provided for the advancing finalists.

Final Performing Arts Judging

The final judging for Rising Stars is on **Tuesday, April 20, 2027, at the Mahaffey Theater in St. Petersburg.**

- Based on the preliminary 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 4 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 Rising Stars Student Liaison, Emma Ruffin, at eruffin@pinellaseducation.org.