

The opening meets of the 2026 N.J. cross country season are just around the corner, meaning teams across the state will begin to shape their lineups and set their sights on county, sectional, and state championships this fall.

So which programs have the talent, depth, and experience to make a run when the stakes are highest in October and November?



Here's a closer look at the top contenders for the 2026 Group 4 girls cross-country title.

Ridgewood girls cross-country won its 37th Bergen County Group title on Saturday, Oct. 18, 2025.

FAVORITE:

Ridgewood

Ridgewood snapped a 26-year state title drought with last season's Group 4 championship, and the Maroons enter 2026 as the clear favorite to repeat. With one of the deepest returning lineups in the Garden State, Ridgewood has the talent to hold the early edge for another group title but also for a spot among the state's elite teams.

Senior Katherine Keating, an All-State selection last fall, leads the way after posting a 17:53 personal best at Holmdel. That mark is tied for the sixth-fastest among returning runners in the state and makes her one of only seven returners under 18 minutes. The Maroons' depth is what truly sets them apart. Penelope de Valence (18:55), Maeve Schooler (18:56), and Natalie Knowles (19:06) all return after breaking the 19:10 mark, while Ella Recchiuti rounds out the top five with a 19:59 personal best. Ridgewood is one of the few teams in the state with all five scoring runners under 20 minutes at Holmdel.