



**NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARSHIP CORPORATION**

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**SEMIFINALISTS IN THE 2026  
NATIONAL MERIT® SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM  
September 10, 2025 Announcement**

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**Note: This press release was distributed to news media on September 9 with a list of Semifinalists to encourage public recognition of these outstanding students. The release is made available here to provide information about the National Merit Scholarship Program, however the names of Semifinalists are not posted on this website.**

*Caution: Using numbers of Semifinalists to compare high schools, educational systems, or states will result in erroneous conclusions. The National Merit® Scholarship Program honors individual students who show exceptional academic ability and potential for success in rigorous college studies. The program does not measure the quality or effectiveness of education within a school, system, or state. For more information about the competition, please visit [www.nationalmerit.org](http://www.nationalmerit.org).*

**Semifinalists in the 2026 National Merit® Scholarship Program**

(Evanston, Illinois) Today officials of National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC®) announced the names of more than 16,000 Semifinalists in the 71<sup>st</sup> annual National Merit Scholarship Program. These academically talented high school seniors have an opportunity to continue in the competition for some 6,930 National Merit Scholarships worth nearly \$26 million that will be offered next spring. To be considered for a Merit Scholarship® award, Semifinalists must fulfill several requirements to advance to the Finalist level of the competition. About 95 percent of the Semifinalists are expected to attain Finalist standing, and approximately half of the Finalists will win a National Merit Scholarship, earning the Merit Scholar® title.

NMSC, a not-for-profit organization that operates without government assistance, was established in 1955 specifically to conduct the annual National Merit Scholarship Program. Scholarships are underwritten by NMSC with its own funds and by about 300 business organizations, higher education institutions, and individual donors that share NMSC's goals of honoring the nation's scholastic champions and encouraging the pursuit of academic excellence.

## **Steps in the 2026 Competition**

Over 1.3 million juniors in about 20,000 high schools entered the 2026 National Merit Scholarship Program by taking the 2024 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®), which served as an initial screen of program entrants. The nationwide pool of Semifinalists, representing less than one percent of U.S. high school seniors, includes the highest-scoring entrants in each state. The number of Semifinalists in a state is proportional to the state's percentage of the national total of graduating seniors.

To become a Finalist, the Semifinalist and a high school official must submit a detailed scholarship application, in which they provide information about the Semifinalist's academic record, participation in school and community activities, demonstrated leadership abilities, employment, and honors and awards received. A Semifinalist must have an outstanding academic record throughout high school, be endorsed and recommended by a high school official, write an essay, and earn SAT® or ACT® scores that confirm the student's earlier performance on the qualifying test.

From over 16,000 Semifinalists, more than 15,000 are expected to advance to the Finalist level, and in February they will be notified of this designation. All National Merit Scholarship winners will be selected from this group of Finalists. Merit Scholar designees are selected on the basis of their skills, accomplishments, and potential for success in rigorous college studies, without regard to gender, race, ethnic origin, or religious preference.

## **National Merit Scholarships**

Three types of National Merit Scholarships will be offered in the spring of 2026. Every Finalist will compete for one of 2,500 National Merit® \$2500 Scholarships that will be awarded on a state-representational basis. About 830 corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards will be provided by approximately 150 corporations and business organizations for Finalists who meet their specified criteria, such as children of the grantor's employees or residents of communities where sponsor plants or offices are located. In addition, about 150 colleges and universities are expected to finance some 3,600 college-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards for Finalists who will attend the sponsor institution.

National Merit Scholarship winners of 2026 will be announced in four nationwide news releases beginning in April and concluding in July. These scholarship recipients will join approximately 389,000 other distinguished young people who have earned the Merit Scholar title.

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