GUIDE

to the

National Merit® Scholarship Program

September 2026

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GUIDE
to the
NATIONAL MERIT® SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

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Introduction

The National Merit® Scholarship Program, conducted by National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC®), is an annual academic competition for recognition and college undergraduate scholarships. Established in 1955, NMSC is a privately financed not-for-profit organization that operates without government assistance.

The competition is open to all U.S. high school students who meet published participation requirements. Scholarship winners are chosen on the basis of their abilities, skills, and accomplishments—without regard to gender, race, ethnic origin, or religious preference.

The goals of the National Merit Scholarship Program are to:

- *identify and honor academically talented U.S. high school students and encourage them to pursue rigorous college studies;*
- *provide professional services for corporations, company foundations, colleges and universities, and other individuals and organizations that wish to sponsor scholarships for outstanding participants in the competition;*
- *promote a broader and deeper respect for learning in general and for exceptionally talented individuals in particular;*
- *stimulate increased support for the education of scholastically able students; and*
- *encourage the pursuit of academic excellence at all levels of education.*

Although a sizable number of National Merit Scholarships are underwritten by NMSC with its own funds, the majority of scholarships awarded in the National Merit Program are sponsored by about 260 corporate organizations and higher education institutions. Since

the first scholarships were awarded in 1956, the educational opportunities of hundreds of thousands of academically talented young people have been enhanced by the support of scholarship sponsors, such as those listed on pages 32–40.

Each year, educators in about 19,000 high schools provide the opportunity for their students to participate in the National Merit Scholarship Program. The cooperation and assistance of these principals and counselors are essential to the successful operation of the competition, and NMSC is sincerely grateful to them.

This *Guide* is updated and distributed annually as a reference for school administrators. NMSC welcomes suggestions for improving this distribution and all other program materials provided for schools and students.

Student participation and recognition

Currently, over 1.2 million students in about 19,000 high schools enter the National Merit® Scholarship Program each year. Some 50,000 entrants qualify for program recognition, and approximately 7,320 outstanding students receive scholarships for college undergraduate study. The awards, valued at over $29 million, are underwritten by NMSC® with its own funds, by several hundred corporate organizations and higher education institutions, and by individual donors.

Program entry

Students enter the National Merit Program by taking the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®) and meeting other program entry requirements (listed on pages 6–8). The test, administered annually in the fall, is cosponsored by NMSC and College Board. (Information about test registration and procedures is on pages 41–46.) Questions regarding the test should be directed to College Board. All inquiries about the National Merit Program should be directed to NMSC, which independently conducts the competition.

NMSC uses the PSAT/NMSQT as an initial screen of the large number of entrants to the program. A particular year's test is the entry vehicle for a specific year's competition. For example, the 2025 PSAT/NMSQT was used for entry to the 2027 National Merit Program. Most 2027 program participants will enter college in the fall of 2027. The announcement of Semifinalists in September 2026 marks the midpoint of the 2027 competition; it will conclude in the spring of 2027 when winners of National Merit Scholarships are notified and their names are released to news media. The 2028 program begins with the PSAT/NMSQT administration in the fall of 2026 and ends in the spring of 2028. Each competition spans about one and a half years.

To ensure that the competition is conducted in a timely manner and that all participants are treated consistently, NMSC adheres to specified program requirements and deadlines. A schedule of key dates for both the 2027 and 2028 competitions is on pages 47–49.

Each year, approximately 1.2 million high school students enter the National Merit Scholarship Program by taking the PSAT/NMSQT. Approximately 7,320 of them will receive scholarships for college study. Over seven decades of the National Merit Program, more than 3.5 million high school students have been recognized for their exceptional scholastic potential and over 462,000 have received college scholarships.

Information for students who wish to enter the competition is provided in the *PSAT/NMSQT Student Guide*, which is available on College Board's website and at www.nationalmerit.org, each fall before the test administration.

Requirements for entry

To participate in the 2027 competition, a student must:

1. be enrolled as a high school student (traditional or home-schooled), progressing normally toward graduation or completion of high school, and planning to enroll full-time in college no later than the fall following completion of high school;
2. take the PSAT/NMSQT in the specified year of the high school program and **no later than** the third year in grades 9 through 12, regardless of grade classification or educational pattern; and
3. attend high school in the United States, District of Columbia, or U.S. commonwealths and territories; or meet the citizenship requirements for students attending high school outside the United States (see box below).

To be eligible for the 2027 National Merit Scholarship Program, a student attending high school outside the United States must be a citizen of the United States; or be a U.S. lawful permanent resident (or have applied for permanent residence, the application for which has not been denied) and intend to become a U.S. citizen at the earliest opportunity allowed by law.

When to take the qualifying test

Because a student can participate (and be considered for a scholarship) in only one specific program year, the year in which the student takes the PSAT/NMSQT to enter the competition is very important. The test must be taken in the specified year of the student's high school program, as described below.

1. **Students who plan to spend the usual four years in high school (grades 9 through 12) before entering college full-time** must

take the PSAT/NMSQT in their third year (usually grade 11, junior year). They will be entering the competition that ends when awards are offered in the spring of their fourth high school year (usually grade 12, senior year), the same year they will leave high school and enter college.

Some schools encourage their **sophomore** students to take the PSAT/NMSQT for guidance purposes; however, if these students are spending four years in grades 9 through 12, they must take the test again when they are juniors to enter the National Merit Scholarship Program.

2. **Students who plan to leave high school early to enroll in college full-time after spending three years or less in grades 9 through 12** usually can participate in the National Merit Program if they take the PSAT/NMSQT before they enroll in college. Such students must take the PSAT/NMSQT in either the next-to-last year or the last year they are enrolled in high school.

   a) Those who take the PSAT/NMSQT in the *next-to-last year* of high school will be entering the competition for awards to be offered as they are finishing their final high school year.

   b) Those who take the PSAT/NMSQT in their *last year* of high school will be entering the competition for awards to be offered the year after they have completed high school.

3. **Students who are dual enrolled in both high school and college** must take the PSAT/NMSQT in the fall of their third year of high school (grade 11, junior year) to enter the National Merit Program. The high school determines whether a student is dual enrolled and confirms the student's status as a high school student.

4. **Students who plan to spend five years in grades 9 through 12** usually can participate in the National Merit Program if they take the PSAT/NMSQT in both the third and fourth years of high school. A five-year student will not be eligible for the program until a written request for entry to the competition is approved by NMSC. The request should identify the student's name, high

school, and specific educational pattern (including the academic years spent in grades 9 through 12).

The student's highest possible level of recognition is determined by the qualifying score earned during the third year, the year in which all other competitors are considered. The student must qualify at or above that same level in the fourth year in order to compete in the fifth year, the year the student will leave high school and enter college.

Note: If there is a question about whether a student can participate in the National Merit Program because educational plans do not fit one of the previous descriptions, or for any other reason, contact NMSC immediately.

The student's responses to National Merit Scholarship Program eligibility questions provided during exam set-up for the PSAT/NMSQT are used to determine whether the student meets requirements to participate in a particular year's program. (More information about these questions can be found on page 35 in the NMSC section of the 2026 *PSAT/NMSQT Student Guide*.) Score reports provided to test takers and their schools indicate only whether or not the student is a program participant, not whether the student qualifies for recognition. Encourage your students to review this section of the score report carefully. A school official or the student should immediately contact NMSC regarding any error or change that may affect the student's participation in the program.

If a student misses the PSAT/NMSQT administration

A student who does not take the PSAT/NMSQT because of illness, an emergency, or other extenuating circumstance (but meets all other requirements for program participation) may still be able to enter the competition. If the PSAT/NMSQT testing window has not yet closed, the student may be able to take the PSAT/NMSQT on another date or at another school. If the PSAT/NMSQT testing window has closed, the student or a school official must **write** to NMSC to request alternate entry procedures. The alternate entry request should include the student's name and home address, the contact information of the person making the request, the name and address of the

student's high school, and a brief explanation of why the student missed the test. To be considered, a request should be sent as soon as possible but **must be postmarked no later than April 1** following the missed PSAT/NMSQT administration. NMSC will provide the alternate entry form that requires the signature of the high school principal, guidance counselor, or other school official designated by the principal.

Program recognition

The PSAT/NMSQT is administered in a digital format in October. Students will receive a Reading and Writing section score and a Math section score. NMSC will compute the 2026 NMSC Selection Index scores by doubling the Reading and Writing section score, adding the Math section score, and dividing the total by 10. Score levels sufficient for recognition vary from year to year and from state to state; those for the 2027 competition are given on pages 13–14.

High scorers

In the spring following the PSAT/NMSQT administration, NMSC identifies about 50,000 program participants with the highest NMSC Selection Index scores and contacts their high school principals, asking them to identify any errors or changes in the reported eligibility of their high scorers. It is not until the beginning of the next school year that NMSC notifies high scorers that they have qualified as either Semifinalists or Commended Students.

Semifinalists

More than 16,000 of the high scorers, representing less than 1 percent of the nation's high school graduating seniors, qualify as Semifinalists in each annual National Merit Program. They are the only participants who have an opportunity to advance in the competition for some 6,700 Merit Scholarship® awards.

To ensure that academically talented students from all parts of the U.S. are included in this talent pool, Semifinalists are named on a state-representational basis. A participant can be considered

for Semifinalist standing in only one state or other selection unit (explained below), based on the high school in which the student is regularly enrolled when the PSAT/NMSQT is taken to enter the competition.

Using the most recent data available, NMSC determines an allocation of Semifinalists for each of the 50 states, based on the state's percentage of the national total of graduating high school seniors. For example, the Semifinalist allocation for a state that enrolls approximately 2 percent of the nation's high school graduates would be about 320 (2 percent of the 16,000 Semifinalists).

To begin the process of establishing each state's Semifinalist qualifying score, the Selection Index scores of all students in the state who meet program entry requirements are arranged in descending order. The score at which the state's allocation is most closely filled becomes the Semifinalist qualifying score for that state. Entrants with a Selection Index score at or above the qualifying score are named Semifinalists. The scores of all Semifinalists are extremely high. Although this process results in qualifying scores that vary from one state to another and from year to year, it produces an equitable, representative distribution of recognized students nationwide.

In addition to Semifinalists designated in each of the 50 states, and without affecting the allocation to any state, Semifinalists are named in several other selection units that NMSC has established for the competition. These additional units are for participants attending schools in the District of Columbia, schools in U.S. commonwealths and territories, schools in other countries that enroll U.S. citizens, and U.S. boarding schools that enroll a sizable proportion of their students from outside the state in which the school is located. Boarding schools are grouped into geographic regions, each consisting of several states; the Semifinalist qualifying score for students in each region is the same as the highest qualifying score among the states within that region.

In September, NMSC sends principals of participating high schools a booklet listing the names of the 16,000 Semifinalists by state and high school. Principals of schools enrolling Semifinalists are also sent scholarship application information and instructions for the students and school. NMSC sends the names of Semifinalists to news media for announcement and to regionally accredited four-

From the beginning of the corporation in 1955, an Advisory Council of experienced high school administrators from all areas of the nation has met regularly with National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) senior staff. When conducting the National Merit Scholarship Program, NMSC recognizes the pivotal role of high school officials and the essential part they play in the development of academic talent.

year U.S. colleges and universities in an effort to enhance the educational opportunities of these scholastically talented young people.

Commended Students

About 34,000 of the 50,000 high scorers in each annual National Merit Scholarship Program are named Commended Students based on a national Selection Index qualifying score, applicable to all participants without regard to state-by-state distribution. The qualifying score for this level of recognition varies from year to year. All National Merit Program participants who score at or above the Commended level but below their selection unit's Semifinalist qualifying score are designated Commended Students.

In mid-September, NMSC sends principals a list of their school's Commended Students with *Letters of Commendation* for presentation to the students. Although Commended Students are honored for their academic promise, they do not continue in the competition for National Merit Scholarship awards. Some, however, may be candidates for Special Scholarships offered by corporate sponsors (explained on pages 22–23).

National Merit Program qualifying data for 2027

The National Merit Scholarship Program honors individual students for their exceptional scholastic potential. The program does not measure the quality or effectiveness of education within a school, district, or state. The table on pages 13–14 relates only to the 2027 National Merit Program, which began with the administration of the 2025 PSAT/NMSQT. **This information is provided as a reference for principals and counselors who understand the design and purpose of the National Merit Scholarship Program and the limited usefulness of the data.**

A number of factors should be kept in mind when interpreting data in the table. First, since Semifinalists are named on a state-representational basis, qualifying scores required for Semifinalist standing vary from one state to another. This ensures that students from all parts of the nation are included in the Semifinalist talent pool. The soundness of this method has been confirmed by

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2027 National Merit Scholarship Program

Semifinalists and Commended Students—2025 PSAT/NMSQT*

	SEMIFINALISTS			COMMENDED STUDENTS**	
	Selection Index Qualifying Score	*Number*	*Number of Schools*	*Number*	*Number of Schools*
Alabama	210	238	65	56	38
Alaska	208	36	15	0	0
Arizona	215	383	84	466	113
Arkansas	210	156	49	34	23
California	220	2,245	374	6,298	647
Colorado	217	251	86	571	136
Connecticut	220	179	64	745	115
Delaware	219	41	13	97	28
Florida	216	999	256	1,694	387
Georgia	217	553	117	1,074	195
Hawaii	218	62	14	126	21
Idaho	211	86	36	56	31
Illinois	218	649	129	1,539	216
Indiana	215	288	76	471	133
Iowa	210	140	48	34	24
Kansas	212	144	48	83	41
Kentucky	211	216	59	95	46
Louisiana	211	229	55	98	49
Maine	214	51	28	48	27
Maryland	221	315	68	1,282	162
Massachusetts	221	335	90	1,574	217
Michigan	216	527	117	768	199
Minnesota	214	271	81	297	95
Mississippi	211	144	44	70	36
Missouri	214	261	76	257	89
Montana	208	48	21	0	0
Nebraska	212	94	30	50	27
Nevada	211	178	42	71	31
New Hampshire	215	54	23	83	33
New Jersey	223	380	115	3,341	299
New Mexico	209	88	31	15	10

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2027 National Merit Scholarship Program ***(continued)***

Semifinalists and Commended Students—2025 PSAT/NMSQT*

	SEMIFINALISTS			COMMENDED STUDENTS**	
	Selection Index Qualifying Score	*Number*	*Number of Schools*	*Number*	*Number of Schools*
New York	220	955	206	3,137	405
North Carolina	217	487	97	1,031	184
North Dakota	208	19	8	0	0
Ohio	216	516	146	810	206
Oklahoma	210	194	54	38	28
Oregon	216	191	50	252	63
Pennsylvania	219	521	126	1,555	265
Rhode Island	213	53	19	50	20
South Carolina	212	229	75	150	68
South Dakota	210	32	14	8	6
Tennessee	214	338	83	349	105
Texas	219	1,462	274	4,636	577
Utah	209	203	55	23	15
Vermont	212	24	12	12	10
Virginia	221	361	92	1,912	198
Washington	221	340	65	1,391	170
West Virginia	208	77	33	0	0
Wisconsin	212	250	97	164	83
Wyoming	208	16	11	0	0
District of Columbia	223	45	12	222	20
U.S. boarding schools	***	154	46	711	87
U.S. territories & commonwealths	208	49	26	0	0
Outside the U.S.	223	73	50	644	259
	Totals	*16,230*	*4,005*	*38,488*	*6,237*

*A total of 1,254,659 students from 18,403 schools entered the 2027 National Merit Program by taking the 2025 qualifying test and meeting participation requirements.

**The national qualifying score for Commended Students in the 2027 program is 208.

***U.S. boarding schools that enroll a substantial portion of students from outside the state in which the school is located are grouped into geographic regions; regional qualifying scores for Semifinalist standing vary from 217 to 223.

the thousands of students representing every state who have earned the Merit Scholar® title and have gone on to excel in undergraduate studies and beyond.

Second, the decision to offer the qualifying test, and to whom, belongs to officials of the individual schools. Some schools administer the PSAT/NMSQT to all juniors, while others test only a few. Therefore, although the 19,000 high schools that administer the PSAT/NMSQT enroll the vast majority of the nation's eleventh graders, the proportion of students tested in a particular year may differ markedly from school to school and state to state.

Third, while demographic changes that affect school enrollments are appreciably greater in some states and communities than in others, schools must design programs that are effective for all of their students. States and communities also differ in per capita income of residents, educational achievement of the adult population, per pupil expenditure for education, and qualifications prescribed for teachers. In addition, schools vary widely in educational objectives and standards, in numbers of seniors who plan to attend college, in curricular offerings, and in the extent to which students take advantage of the highest-level courses offered. Many factors influence student performance, and no single factor accounts for differences among educational units.

For these and other reasons, National Merit Program data provided to schools should not be used to measure the educational quality of a school, district, or state. **Qualifying scores and numbers of recognized students are relevant only within the context of a particular year's competition, and use of such data for any other purpose is neither valid nor appropriate.** NMSC regularly cautions news media, high schools, and all others interested in the competition against attempts to make comparisons on the basis of numbers of students honored in the National Merit Program. When this caution is ignored, conclusions drawn are usually erroneous and can be detrimental to the groups being compared as well as to the National Merit Program and the participating students.

Responsibilities of Semifinalists and their high schools

To compete for National Merit® Scholarships, Semifinalists must advance to the Finalist level of the competition by fulfilling several additional requirements. A Semifinalist can become a Finalist and compete for a Merit Scholarship® award in only one program year.

Requirements for Finalist standing

To qualify as a Finalist, a Semifinalist must:

1. continue to meet all requirements for participation in the competition (see pages 6–8);
2. be enrolled in the last year of high school and plan to enroll full-time in college the following fall, or be enrolled in the first year of college if grades 9 through 12 were completed in three years or less;
3. be fully endorsed for Finalist standing and recommended for a National Merit Scholarship by the high school principal (or school official designated by the principal);
4. have a record of consistently very high academic performance in all of grades 9 through 12 and in any college courses taken;
5. complete the NMSC® Online Scholarship Application (OSA) with all information requested;
6. take an authorized administration of the SAT® or ACT®, earn scores that confirm performance on the PSAT/NMSQT® taken for program entry, and arrange for the National Merit Program to receive an official score report of the SAT or ACT taken; and
7. provide any additional documentation and information that NMSC requests.

In late August, NMSC sends high school principals a list of their Semifinalists, along with instructions for using the OSA. Important

information about requirements and deadlines is available both through the OSA and on NMSC's website. Both the Semifinalist and the school official must supply a substantial amount of information on the application, which NMSC uses to determine whether the student qualifies to advance to Finalist standing and to select scholarship recipients.

What Semifinalists must do

One requirement on the OSA is the submission of a personal *essay* authored solely by the Semifinalist. Semifinalists must respond to an essay prompt provided on the OSA, which helps scholarship selection committees get to know the applicants better and discern the most outstanding students. Each Semifinalist also completes a section of the application listing *activities/volunteer service, leadership positions, honors or awards,* and *employment.*

The OSA requires the Semifinalist to supply *biographical information* that includes home address, parental employment, college choice, college major, and career plans. This information is used to identify candidates for corporate-sponsored and college-sponsored awards provided for Finalists who meet a grantor's specified criteria. It is important for the Semifinalist to report to NMSC all changes in this biographical information that occur after the scholarship application is submitted.

In addition, each Semifinalist in the 2027 competition must make all arrangements to *take either the SAT or ACT* on one of the national administration dates specified in the scholarship application materials and to *have an official score report sent* to NMSC. To become a Finalist, the Semifinalist must *earn SAT or ACT scores that confirm the PSAT/NMSQT performance.* The scores a Semifinalist submits will only be used to determine whether Finalist requirements are met and will not be used in the selection of award recipients.

A Semifinalist who attends high school outside the United States and has not yet become a U.S. citizen must submit citizenship documentation to NMSC with the Scholarship Application. The *Requirements and Instructions* document available through the OSA and on NMSC's website provides information about the documentation needed.

What high schools must provide

For a Semifinalist to advance to Finalist standing and compete for National Merit Scholarships, the student's high school principal (or a school official designated by the principal) must *endorse* the Semifinalist for further consideration. A school official must also complete several sections of the OSA, including the Semifinalist's academic record (course work and grades), information about the school, and a school recommendation of the Semifinalist. Further, the principal is asked to notify NMSC **at once** if at any time during the competition the academic performance of a student at either the Semifinalist or Finalist level declines noticeably, or if the school can no longer recommend the student for Merit Scholarship consideration.

High schools must provide a report of the student's *academic record*, which includes grades earned and course work completed in grades 9 through 11 and a list of courses to be taken in grade 12. The academic record is crucial, both in determining whether the Semifinalist qualifies as a Finalist and in choosing Merit Scholar® awardees. To help evaluators place a student's record in perspective, the scholarship application includes questions about the school's curricular offerings and grading system. This information is important because the thousands of schools that Semifinalists attend vary widely in grading standards and practices; in the number and difficulty level of courses offered (including accelerated and honors sections of college preparatory subjects); and in the way grade point average and class rank, if any, are calculated. In selecting Merit Scholarship recipients, each candidate's academic record is scrutinized in the context of the particular school as well as compared to the records of students in other schools. Selection committees evaluate grades earned in relation to course load, difficulty level, and depth and breadth of subjects studied.

In the school's *letter of recommendation*, the school official is asked to describe qualities and attributes that distinguish the student from others. Because every Semifinalist who qualifies as a Finalist has an excellent academic record and outstanding test scores, the recommendation can be a valuable source of information about the student's demonstrated leadership and accomplishments, both in and out of school. The recommendation is most helpful when it complements

other information in the application, revealing personal characteristics that cannot be gleaned from test scores or grades. Citing the student's personal qualities with supporting examples is valuable because selection committees look for evidence of a student's motivation and ability to intelligently direct energy toward goals. For instance, if the candidate is considered to be a "leader" or is said to be "concerned for others," describe how this has been demonstrated and in what types of school or community activities. If the student is termed "creative" or "intellectually inquisitive," how has this specifically been shown? An effective characterization of the Semifinalist also points out how the student copes with challenges and describes situations that have resulted in personal or academic growth. Since the records of all students who attain Finalist standing are superior, no record "speaks for itself." Therefore, it is important to avoid generalizations. A thoughtfully and thoroughly prepared school recommendation is a vital and influential part of the student's scholarship application.

Notifying schools of the status of their Semifinalists

Currently, about 95 percent (over 15,000) of the Semifinalists in each competition qualify as Finalists. In February, NMSC notifies principals of their Semifinalists who have advanced to the Finalist level. A *Certificate of Merit*, attesting to distinguished performance in the competition, is provided for presentation to each Finalist. NMSC also directly informs Finalists (by mail and OSA) of the recognition and that they are being considered for a National Merit Scholarship. NMSC does not release the names of Finalists to the media, but schools may announce their Finalists if they choose.

Semifinalists who do not meet all Finalist requirements and standards are withdrawn from the competition. They are notified directly by NMSC at their home addresses.

National Merit® Program scholarships

Some 7,320 awards with a total value of over $30 million are offered each year to outstanding participants in the National Merit Scholarship Program. In addition to 6,700 National Merit Scholarships that are awarded to Finalists, about 620 Special Scholarships are sponsored by business organizations for other high performers in the competition. All winners are chosen on the basis of their scholastic and extracurricular accomplishments, abilities, and potential for future academic success.

Types of awards

Three types of scholarships for undergraduate study are offered each year. National Merit® $2500 Scholarships and college-sponsored scholarships are offered **only** to Finalists. Corporate-sponsored awards may be Merit Scholarship® awards reserved for Finalists or Special Scholarships offered to other outstanding students.

National Merit $2500 Scholarships. The 2,500 National Merit $2500 Scholarships offered annually are an integral part of the competition because every Finalist is considered for one and winners are chosen in every state and other selection unit. These single-payment scholarships are awarded on a state-representational basis, as in the designation of Semifinalists. This method ensures that distinguished students nationwide will be among each year's Merit Scholarship recipients.

NMSC® convenes a committee of college admission officers and high school counselors to choose the winners. Working in teams, committee members use their professional skills in evaluating the scholarship applications of all Finalists within a state or other selection unit.

Most of the one-time National Merit $2500 Scholarships are financed by NMSC with its own funds. However, companies and business organizations that provide corporate-sponsored scholarships help underwrite National Merit $2500 Scholarships with grants they provide to NMSC in lieu of paying administrative fees. Donations

Committees of college admission officers and high school counselors evaluate the applications of all 15,000 Finalists to select the 2,500 winners of National Merit $2500 Scholarships. Semifinalists come from over 4,000 high schools that vary widely. The school official's recommendation and the student's personal essay are often very influential in the selection of award winners.

made to NMSC's President's Fund also provide funding for National Merit $2500 Scholarship awards.

Corporate-sponsored Scholarships. Each year about 120 corporations, company foundations, and professional associations finance approximately 1,320 scholarships for National Merit Program participants who meet both the competition standards set by NMSC and criteria specified by the sponsor. A corporate organization may provide awards for children of its employees or members, for residents of areas where the company is located, or for students planning to pursue college majors or careers the sponsor wishes to encourage. These scholarships are not subject to state-by-state distribution because only program participants who meet a sponsor's criteria can be considered for these awards. Almost all winners are chosen by NMSC's professional staff.

Of the 1,320 corporate-sponsored awards, about 700 are **National Merit Scholarships** offered to Finalists who meet sponsors' criteria. NMSC identifies Finalists who may be eligible for each sponsor's awards from information students provide on the OSA. (Some sponsor organizations also require candidates to file Entry Forms.) A corporate sponsor may offer a specific number of awards or elect to sponsor a scholarship for every eligible Finalist.

More than two-thirds of the corporate sponsors choose to complement their National Merit Scholarships with **Special Scholarships** for high-scoring program participants who meet the sponsor's criteria *but are not Finalists.* This enables a sponsor to offer a predetermined number of scholarships in each annual competition, even though the number of Finalists eligible for its awards varies from year to year.

To be considered for a Special Scholarship, students who meet a sponsor's criteria must file Entry Forms made available through the sponsor. NMSC contacts a pool of high-scoring candidates through their high schools and provides Special Scholarship Applications patterned after the National Merit Scholarship Applications completed by Semifinalists. (See pages 16–19.) About 620 outstanding students are recipients of Special Scholarships each year.

Corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards and Special Scholarships are usually named for the sponsoring orga-

nization. However, the "National Merit" title is not included in the name of a Special Scholarship. Examples of a sponsor's scholarship names are "National Merit Corning Incorporated Scholarship" and "Corning Incorporated Scholarship."

The sponsor organization decides whether to provide **renewable** or **one-time** awards and also determines the dollar amount for its scholarships. One-time awards provide a single payment that can range from $2,500 to $10,000. Renewable awards, which cover up to four years of undergraduate study, provide a fixed stipend that can range from $1,000 to $10,000 per year and is the same for every recipient of the sponsor's scholarships.

College-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards. About 140 four-year regionally accredited U.S. colleges and universities annually support about 3,500 National Merit Scholarships that can be used only at the respective sponsor institution. Finalists who have notified NMSC that a sponsor college is their first choice (and have not been offered another Merit Scholarship award) are referred to the sponsor college or university for consideration. College sponsor officials then select winners of awards the institution will underwrite.

A sponsor college may decide to offer a Merit Scholarship award to every eligible Finalist who is admitted to the institution or choose to limit the number of awards it provides. A college-sponsored Merit Scholarship award is renewable for up to four years of undergraduate study at the sponsor institution. It is not transferable and is offered with the condition that it must be used at the institution financing it. For that reason, an offer is canceled if the winner decides not to attend the sponsor college or university.

Each college sponsor chooses the annual stipend their institution offers to award recipients, within a range of $500 to $2,000 per year. All college-sponsored scholarship recipients at the institution will receive the same stipend amount, as determined by the college.

Winner selection

Although all students who attain Finalist standing in the National Merit Scholarship Program are distinguished, unfortunately

Steps in the 2027 National M

1,300,000 Entrants. U.S. high school students who took th participation requirements entered the 2027 competition for all program entrants were juniors who planned to enroll in co uses NMSC Selection Index scores (calculated by doubling the score, and diving the total by 10) to determine 50,000 high-sco

50,000 High Scorers. In April 2026, NMSC sent a list of high scoring errors or changes in the reported eligibility of students whose scores

Participants who qualify for Nat

34,000 Commended Students. In late September 2026, more than two-thirds of the 50,000 high scorers will be notified through their high school principals that they have qualified as Commended Students. NMSC will provide *Letters of Commendation* for schools to present to these students in recognition of their outstanding academic promise. Commended Students (see page 12) are named based on a nationally applied Selection Index score. Although they will not continue in the competition for National Merit Scholarships, some of these students may be candidates for Special Scholarships provided by corporate sponsors.

Scholarshi

620 Special Scholarship recipients. Beginning in March 2027, NMSC will notify winners of Special Scholarships provided by corporate sponsors (described on pages 22–23). Recipients, who will be chosen from candidates sent scholarship applications in late November 2026, will be outstanding students (although not Finalists) who meet their sponsors' eligibility criteria. Sponsors will handle public announcement of their Special Scholarship winners.

Merit® Scholarship Program

e PSAT/NMSQT® in October 2025 and met other program National Merit Program recognition and scholarships. Nearly llege in 2027. (See pages 6–8 for entry requirements.) NMSC® e Reading and Writing section score, adding the Math section oring participants who qualify for program recognition.

participants to high school principals and asked them to identify any qualify them for recognition in the fall of 2026.

ional Merit Program recognition

16,000 Semifinalists. In early September 2026, about a third of the 50,000 high scorers will be notified that they have qualified as Semifinalists (see pages 9–12). Named on a state-representational basis, Semifinalists are the highest-scoring program participants in each state. NMSC will provide scholarship application materials explaining requirements (see pages 16–17) to advance in the competition for National Merit Scholarships to be offered in 2027.

15,000 Finalists. In February 2027, Semifinalists who meet academic and other requirements will be notified that they have advanced to Finalist standing. In March, schools will receive *Certificates of Merit* to distribute to students. All Merit Scholarship® winners (Merit Scholar® awardees) will be chosen from this group of Finalists based on their abilities, skills, and accomplishments. (See pages 23–26.)

ip winners

6,700 Merit Scholarship winners. Beginning in March 2027, NMSC will notify winners of the three types of National Merit Scholarships:

- National Merit® $2500 Scholarships
- Corporate-sponsored scholarships
- College-sponsored scholarships

During April through July, NMSC will release the names of Merit Scholar designees to news media for publication. (See pages 20–23 and 26–27.)

not all Finalists receive a National Merit Scholarship. The National Merit Program is very competitive, and, in recent years, only about half of the 15,000 Finalists have been selected to be Merit Scholar® awardees. A student may be considered for more than one scholarship, but no student can receive more than one monetary award from NMSC.

To select winners of two types of awards, National Merit $2500 Scholarships and corporate-sponsored awards, committees of experienced professionals evaluate a variety of information submitted about each candidate in conjunction with the scholarship application. They carefully weigh each student's academic record (including course load, difficulty level, depth and breadth of subjects studied, and grades earned) in the context of the high school's report of class size, percentage of seniors going to college, curricular offerings, and grading system. Students' essays and the recommendations of school officials may provide information about students' personal qualities, demonstrated leadership abilities, and service to their schools and communities. Winners are candidates judged to have the strongest combination of academic and extracurricular attainments and the greatest potential for success in rigorous college studies. Winners of these two types of awards are notified in March.

Recipients of college-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards are chosen by officials of the sponsor institution. College officials base their decisions on information Finalists file with the college as part of the admission process. NMSC begins sending college-sponsored Merit Scholarship offers to winners in early May.

Scholar announcements and award administration

Beginning in March, NMSC will notify scholarship winners and post formal scholarship offers to their OSA dashboards. Notification of each award will also be sent to the winner's high school. NMSC releases the names of Merit Scholarship recipients to news media nationwide in scheduled announcements (one for each type of Merit Scholarship award) on three dates in April, May, and June, followed by a second release of college-sponsored award

winners in July. (See page 48.) The announcements identify Scholars' high schools and Merit Scholarship sponsors. Special Scholarship winner announcements are handled independently by the corporate sponsors.

Every scholarship recipient is responsible for fulfilling admission requirements of the college or university to be attended. In addition, each recipient must comply with all terms specified in the NMSC scholarship offer, which cover conditions of eligibility, standards of student performance, and other requirements.

NMSC scholarship payments, which are sent to Scholars through their colleges, must be used exclusively for undergraduate education at a college or university in the United States that holds accredited status with a regional accrediting commission on higher education. NMSC scholarship stipends are not payable for students' attendance at service academies or institutions that are limited in purpose or training. Winners of one-time awards receive a single payment in the fall following their selection; four-year scholarship winners receive payments in installments, generally twice a year. To receive a scholarship payment, the winner must be enrolled full-time, be in good standing, and be pursuing a course of study leading to a traditional baccalaureate degree.

Sponsors and their support for scholarships

About 260 independent sponsor organizations and individual donors currently underwrite scholarships through the National Merit® Scholarship Program. Since the first competition in 1956, corporations and businesses have underwritten both National Merit Scholarships and Special Scholarships in every annual competition. Colleges and universities began sponsoring Merit Scholarship® awards in 1963. Individual donors also have opportunities to directly fund National Merit $2500 Scholarship awards. The generosity of sponsors and donors is key to the success of the National Merit Program, in which scholarships worth more than $1.9 billion have been awarded.

Sponsor support

Corporate organizations and colleges and universities have underwritten 79 percent of the 462,000 scholarships offered to date, committing a total of nearly $1.7 billion. NMSC® has used over $230 million of its own funds to support 97,500 Merit Scholarship awards.

Corporate sponsors. Over the National Merit Program's 71 competitions, business organizations have significantly increased their commitment for scholarships. In the first competition, 24 companies provided about $800,000 to finance 195 Merit Scholarship awards and 10 Special Scholarships. In 2026, about 120 corporate sponsors committed over $11 million to underwrite some 700 Merit Scholarship awards and 620 Special Scholarships. To date, corporate and business organizations have provided about 168,075 awards worth a total of more than $934 million for program participants with qualifications of interest to the sponsor. Corporate sponsors also make a modest supplemental grant to NMSC, in lieu of paying an administrative fee, which is used to underwrite National Merit® $2500 Scholarships that all Finalists have an opportunity to win.

College sponsors. College-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards were introduced in the eighth annual competition, when nine institutions

National Merit Scholarship Corporation's mission—to recognize and honor the academically talented students of the United States—is furthered through partnerships with business organizations, higher education institutions, and individual donors who contribute to the success of the National Merit Scholarship Program by underwriting approximately 6,700 awards each year worth over $24 million.

underwrote 175 scholarships valued at approximately $400,000. In 2026, about 140 U.S. colleges and universities committed over $13 million to underwrite approximately 3,500 Merit Scholarship awards for students to attend sponsoring institutions. Over 64 competitions, colleges have expended and committed more than $736 million for 196,500 Merit Scholarship awards. Funds from college and university sponsors are used exclusively for scholarship payments to their Merit Scholarship recipients.

Individual donors. Individuals provide support for Merit Scholarship awards through establishing endowments with NMSC or donating to NSMC's President's Fund. In 2026, some individuals made arrangements with NMSC to underwrite National Merit $2500 Scholarship awards, and 25 scholarships were offered this year.

NMSC services for sponsors

The National Merit Program provides educationally sound and cost-effective professional services for corporations, higher education institutions, and individual donors that wish to sponsor scholarships for scholastically talented young people in whom they have particular interest.

For corporate sponsors and individual donors, NMSC:

- identifies scholarship candidates who meet a sponsor's criteria (i.e., children of company employees, residents of plant communities and areas specified by the sponsor, or students planning to pursue particular college majors and careers);
- collects information about the most outstanding candidates eligible for a sponsor's awards;
- selects scholarship recipients and determines their annual stipends;
- sends scholarship offers to award winners;
- announces Merit Scholarship winners through news media nationwide;

- provides scholarship certificates for corporate sponsors to present to their award recipients or provides certificates directly to individual donors' award recipients;
- sends scholarship payments to recipients through their colleges; and
- administers the awards and monitors winners' progress toward their undergraduate degrees.

For college sponsors, NMSC:

- identifies Finalists who wish to attend the sponsor institution and refers them to college officials for scholarship consideration;
- sends scholarship offers to award winners;
- distributes news media announcements about winners;
- provides certificates for presentation to winners;
- sends scholarship payments to winners; and
- administers the awards throughout the recipients' undergraduate years at the sponsor college or university.

Sponsor identity. The sponsor is identified with the awards it supports in several ways, including the name of the scholarship: for example, "National Merit Corning Incorporated Scholarship," "National Merit Case Western Reserve University Scholarship," and "National Merit – The Child Family Scholarship." Information about the sponsor is included in NMSC media announcements about Merit Scholarship winners. Scholarship certificates identify the sponsor and are often presented at events held by sponsors to honor their award recipients.

Names of corporate scholarship sponsors and endowment scholarship sponsors with descriptions and numbers of awards offered are listed in the *PSAT/NMSQT® Student Guide.* This publication is available online to high school students before the annual competition begins in October.

National Merit Program scholarship sponsors
Each sponsor organization underwrites from 1 to nearly 200 scholarships annually. Following is a list of 323 corporate organizations, individuals, and higher education institutions that have financed scholarships awarded by NMSC during the past four academic years. Sponsors that will offer scholarships for the first time in 2027 have been added.

Abilene Christian University
Acushnet Company
Adient Foundation Inc.
ADP Foundation
Aerojet Rocketdyne Foundation
Albany International
Ameren Corporation Charitable Trust
American Air Liquide Holdings, Inc
American City Business Journals, Inc.
American Electric Power
American University
The AMETEK Foundation
Aon Foundation
Apache Corporation
Arizona State University
Arkema Inc. Foundation
Ascension
Aspen Technology, Inc.
Astellas US LLC
AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals LP
Auburn University
BASF Corporation
Battelle
Belmont University
Bentley Systems, Incorporated
Trust Under The Will of Mary E. Beyerle
BNSF Railway Foundation
The Boeing Company
Boston College
Boston University
Bowdoin College
Bradley University
Brady Corporation

Brandeis University
Bridgestone Americas Trust Fund
Brigham Young University
Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation
Broadridge Financial Solutions, Inc.
Brown & Brown, Inc.
Bucknell University
Bunge
Bunzl USA, LLC
CACI International Inc
Calvin University
Carleton College
Carlisle Companies Incorporated
Carpenter Technology Corporation
Case Western Reserve University
CDK Global, LLC
Cencora, Inc.
Centre College
Chevron U.S.A. Inc.
The Child Family
Claremont McKenna College
Clemson University
Coalfire Systems, Inc.
Colby College (Maine)
Colgate-Palmolive Company
College of Charleston
College of Wooster
Colorado College
Colorado State University
Commvault Systems, Inc.
Computer Aid, Inc.
Corning Incorporated
Creighton University
Crum & Forster
CSX Corporation
Davidson College
DePauw University
Dollar Tree, Inc.
Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation
Drake University
Eastman
Eaton Charitable Fund
ECMS
Ellucian Company L.P.
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
Emerson Charitable Trust
Emory University

The Estée Lauder Companies Inc.
Eversource Energy Foundation, Inc.
Family Dollar Management, LLC
Federal Express Corporation
FedEx Custom Critical, Inc.
FedEx Freight, Inc.
Ferro Corporation
Fifth Third Foundation
Florida Atlantic University
Florida International University
Florida State University
Fluor Foundation
FMC Corporation
Fordham University
Formosa Plastics Corporation, U.S.A.
Fox News Network, LLC
FTS International, LLC
Furman University
GAF
Gannett
Gates Industrial Corporation Foundation
GEICO Philanthropic Foundation
General Dynamics Corporation
General Dynamics Ordnance and Tactical Systems
Gleason Family Foundation
Global Tungsten & Powders LLC
W.W. Grainger, Inc.
Greyhound Lines, Inc.
Grinnell College
Gustavus Adolphus College
Harding University
Harvey Mudd College
Hendrix College
Hill-Rom Holdings, Inc.
Hillsdale College
Hope College
Hormel Foods Corporation Charitable Trust
The Hubbell Foundation
Hunter Industries Incorporated
Illinois Tool Works Inc.

Illinois Wesleyan University
Indiana University Bloomington
Ingalls Shipbuilding Division of Huntington Ingalls Industries
Insperity Services, L.P.
Iowa State University
J. Walter Thompson Company Fund, Inc.
JBT Marel Corporation
Johnson & Johnson Services Inc.
Kalamazoo College
Kaman Corporation
Kansas State University
The Kennametal Foundation
Kenyon College
L3Harris Technologies
LANXESS Corporation
Lawrence University (Wisconsin)
Lehigh University
Leidos, Inc.
Lewis & Clark College (Oregon)
Liberty Mutual Scholarship Foundation
Liberty University
Loews Corporation
Louisiana State University
Louisiana Tech University
Loyola University Chicago
LPL Financial LLC
The Lubrizol Foundation
Luther College
Macalester College
Mannington Mills, Inc.
Marquette University
Marsh
McGraw Hill LLC
Mead Witter Foundation, Inc.
MH Mediate
Michigan State University
Michigan Technological University
Mississippi State University
Missouri University of Science and Technology
The MITRE Corporation
Molex LLC

Montana State University-Bozeman
Moody's Foundation
Motorola Solutions Foundation
National Distillers Distributors Foundation
Nationwide Foundation
New College of Florida
New Jersey Manufacturers Insurance Company
New York Life Foundation
The NewMarket Foundation
NextEra Energy Foundation, Inc.
NiSource Charitable Foundation
Norfolk Southern Foundation
North Dakota State University
Northeastern University (Massachusetts)
Northrop Grumman Corporation
NOV Inc.
Novartis US Foundation
Novo Nordisk Inc.
NVIDIA Corporation
Oberlin College
Occidental College
Occidental Petroleum Corporation
Ohio University-Athens
Oklahoma Christian University
Oklahoma State University
Old National Bancorp
Franklin W. Olin College of Engineering
Omron Foundation, Inc.
Ouachita Baptist University
Owens Corning Foundation
Paramount Global
Parker Hannifin Foundation
Frank E. Payne and Seba B. Payne Foundation
The Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company
Pennsylvania State University
The PepsiCo Foundation, Inc.

Pfizer Inc.
Pilkington North America, Inc.
Pomona College
PPG Foundation
PricewaterhouseCoopers Charitable Foundation, Inc.
Principal Life Insurance Company
Public Service Enterprise Group
Purdue University
Putnam Investments, LLC
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Research Triangle Institute
Reynolds American Foundation
Rheem Manufacturing Company
Rhodes College
Robert Half Inc.
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rockwell Automation Charitable Corporation
Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology
RSM US Foundation
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
S&P Global
Saint Louis University
St. Olaf College
Samford University
Schindler Elevator Corporation
Schneider Electric North America Foundation
Sensient Technologies Foundation
Sentry Insurance Foundation, Inc.
Siemens Foundation
Snap-on Incorporated
Sogeti USA
Sony Electronics Inc.
South Carolina Sports Medicine and Orthopaedic Center
Southern Company Services, Inc.
Southern Methodist University
C. D. Spangler Foundation, Inc.
Specialty Materials Inc
Spirit AeroSystems, Inc.
State Farm Companies Foundation

Stony Brook University
Stronger Minds Foundation
Suburban Propane, L.P.
Synthomer Foundation
Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America
TEGNA Foundation, Inc.
Tennessee Technological University
Texas A&M University
Texas Christian University
Texas Instruments Foundation
Texas Tech University
Textron Charitable Trust
3M Company
The Travelers Employees' Club
Tredegar Corporation
Trinity University (Texas)
Truist Financial Corporation
Truman State University
TTEC Foundation
Tufts University
Tulane University
United Services Automobile Association
University of Alabama at Birmingham
University of Alabama in Huntsville
University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa
University of Arizona
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville
University of Central Florida
University of Dallas
University of Dayton
University of Evansville
University of Florida
University of Georgia Foundation
University of Houston-Main Campus
University of Idaho
University of Iowa
University of Kansas
University of Kentucky
University of Louisville
University of Maine
University of Maryland

University of Miami
University of Minnesota
University of Mississippi
University of Missouri-Columbia
University of Montana-Missoula
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
University of Nevada, Reno
University of New Mexico
University of North Dakota
University of North Texas
University of Oklahoma
University of Oregon
University of Pittsburgh
University of Puget Sound
University of St. Thomas (Minnesota)
University of South Carolina
University of South Florida
University of Southern California
University of Southern Mississippi
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
University of Texas at Dallas
University of Tulsa
University of Utah
University of Wisconsin-Madison
University of Wyoming
The UPS Foundation
USG Foundation, Inc.
Vanderbilt University
ViaSat, Inc.
Villanova University
Virginia Commonwealth University
Vulcan Materials Company Foundation
Walgreen Co.
Washington and Lee University
Washington State University
Waste Management National Services Inc.
Wayne State University (Michigan)
West Virginia University Foundation, Inc.
Westlake
Wheaton College (Illinois)
Whitman College

Wichita State University
Willamette University
Wofford College
Zoetis Inc.

PSAT/NMSQT® procedures and reports

The Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT), which is cosponsored by NMSC® and College Board, is the official route of entry to the National Merit® Scholarship Program. The PSAT/NMSQT is delivered digitally through Bluebook™, College Board's custom-built application for the test. High school officials should refer to the College Board website at https://satsuite.collegeboard.org/k12-educators/ about for a full description of the PSAT/NMSQT and an explanation of what is included on the test. The *PSAT/NMSQT Student Guide* will be available online to all administrators and test takers in advance of the test administration. The *Student Guide* provides information on how to take a full-length Practice Test through Bluebook. It also contains valuable information about the National Merit Scholarship Program. For the latest updates to testing policy, please see https://satsuite.collegeboard.org/k12-educators/educator-experience.

Note: The PSAT™ 10 and PSAT™ 8/9 will not be considered for entry to the National Merit Scholarship Program. Please contact NMSC directly with questions about entering the program.

Registration, test dates, and fees

Questions about testing arrangements should be directed to the PSAT/NMSQT office. Educators may contact the PSAT/NMSQT office toll free at (866) 630-9305, from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday; educators in schools outside the U.S. may call +1(212) 713-8000. The email address is psathelp@info.collegeboard.org. A wide array of information is also provided on College Board's website at www.collegeboard.org.

School registration. Registration for the PSAT/NMSQT is by high school, not by individual student. College Board's SAT Suite Ordering and Registration system (SSOR) opens for orders for the next school year around the end of April each year. To allow sufficient time to complete all test-related readiness tasks, schools should

place their order by the on-time ordering deadline, and no later than 3 weeks before their intended test administration date.

Test dates. The PSAT/NMSQT testing date window is October 1 through October 30, 2026. The official who places the order must indicate the day the school intends to administer the test within the testing window. If a school decides to change their test date from the one designated when placing their order, they can do so at their discretion as long as it is within the testing window. A designated school official will upload a registration file containing information about the students who will be testing.

Test fees. The fee for the 2026 PSAT/NMSQT is $18.00 per student tested. Schools may charge students an additional amount to cover local administrative costs, but the total fee must be the same for all students. Some schools cover all or part of the cost for their students.

Test preparation and administration

Test center staff use Test Day Toolkit, an intuitive web-based application for educators, to administer the PSAT/NMSQT. Each staff member will need a College Board Professional Account to use Test Day Toolkit. Before the test, the test coordinator will be able to see the roster of registered students in the application. Proctors will use Test Day Toolkit to check students in, read the script, start the test, monitor student progress, and report irregularities. Test Day Toolkit also includes helpful guides and resources.

Schools are emailed information about required training modules of the procedures for administering the digital test. Training topics for coordinators and staff include test center planning, Test Day Toolkit, technology requirements, and test day procedures.

Schools can also find resources on College Board's website that supplement Test Day Toolkit. The manuals and other materials cover everything needed for administering the test, including planning, technical readiness and troubleshooting, Test Day Toolkit setup, test coordinator test day procedures, instructions for proctors and hall monitors, and flyers for students and parents.

Only the scores of students who are tested according to published policies and procedures will be considered in the National Merit Scholarship Program. NMSC reviews all Irregularity Reports and reserves the right to make decisions regarding students' participation in the National Merit Program.

Schools should complete a student readiness check with their students one to two weeks prior to when they expect to begin testing. Allow at least 30 minutes for students to complete the student readiness check, which includes answering some preliminary questions. More time should be allotted if students will be taking the practice test at that time. Students will need Bluebook installed on an acceptable device and a sign-in ticket with login credentials to access the full-length in-app practice test.

Schools should reserve at least 20 minutes on test day for students to get set up and started. This time is needed for students to view a tutorial video. Students who have not completed their student readiness check will need additional time to complete exam setup before they begin testing. Actual testing time is 2 hours and 14 minutes, plus a 10-minute break between sections. (Some students testing with accommodations may require more time.)

Answers are submitted automatically when a student's test time is up and the student's testing status in Test Day Toolkit will change to "Submitted." Proctors should make sure students get to the Congratulations page to ensure student answers have been successfully submitted. Also, any irregularities will need to be reported in Test Day Toolkit within 5 days of testing.

Special testing arrangements for individual students

For the following situations, special arrangements must be made. Arrangements for all but the last situation must be made **well before** the test administration date.

U.S. students temporarily outside the country. For students who will be studying outside the U.S. when their U.S. high schools administer the PSAT/NMSQT, testing arrangements must be made in advance. If a student wants to take the PSAT/NMSQT internationally, they should contact a local school as early as possible,

but no later than 6 weeks prior to the test. Students should visit https://ordering.collegeboard.org/testordering/publicsearch to look for schools in their area, and contact the school to request arrangements for testing.

Students with documented disabilities. Students with disabilities must be approved for accommodations by College Board Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) well in advance of test day. Students who have not already been approved for accommodations must submit a request for accommodations. Your school's SSD Coordinator can submit requests for accommodations online. Requests must be submitted at least seven weeks prior to the week that testing will begin. Information about the process for requesting testing accommodations is provided on the College Board website at www.collegeboard.org/ssd. Contact the SSD office by calling (866) 630-9305.

Most accommodated students test digitally, and many accommodations are provided through Bluebook. Occasionally a student will be approved to test with a paper version of the PSAT/NMSQT. Guides for testing students with approved accommodations are available in the Test Coordinator Manual and Proctor Manual posted on the College Board website.

Students who cannot test on their school's date. If it is known in advance that one or more students cannot take the test on the day their high school will administer it, the high school may choose to offer the test on an additional test date within the testing window. If the high school has no other test dates available, the student or a school official may make arrangements for the student to test at a nearby school that has chosen another test date. For example, a school administering the PSAT/NMSQT on Saturday may arrange for a student whose religious observance prevents Saturday testing to be tested at a school giving the PSAT/NMSQT on another test date. These arrangements are possible only if another school agrees and has space available. The administering school will be responsible for uploading the student's registration data.

Homeschooled students may request to test at a local high school since the PSAT/NMSQT cannot be administered at home. NMSC en-

courages high schools to honor such requests. These students are instructed to contact the local high school as early as possible regarding registration for the test. The administering school will be responsible for registering the student, but homeschooled students' scores will not be included in testing schools' reports.

Students who miss the PSAT/NMSQT administration. A student who meets all other requirements for participation in the National Merit Program but does not take the PSAT/NMSQT because of illness, an emergency, or other extenuating circumstance may still be able to enter the competition. To request information from NMSC about alternate testing arrangements, refer to pages 8–9 for procedures and the postmark deadline date.

Online score reports

PSAT/NMSQT scores are released online to educators a few weeks after the test administration. High schools also receive a printable PDF of each student's score report. College Board will provide guidance for distributing score reports to students and connecting assessment results to instruction. Schools should go to https://psat.org/scores in the fall for more information about score availability for schools and their students. Schools receive summaries that provide data about their students' answers compared with other students nationwide. Resources are also available to support counselors and other educators during score release. Educators may visit the College Board website at https://counselors.collegeboard.org/assessments/psat-nmsqt/scores for further information. Additionally, educators can find benchmarks and further context for scores in the guide PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 8/9: Understanding Scores for Educators at https://psat.org/downloads.

Students can access their PSAT/NMSQT scores online two days after their scores are released to their high school. Each student's online score report provides the student's total score, Reading and Writing section score, and Math section score; percentiles; knowledge and skills insights; examples of future career possibilities; NMSC Selection Index score and responses to eligibility questions used to determine whether the student meets

requirements for entry* to the National Merit Scholarship Program; and a link to free, tailored SAT® practice recommendations at Khan Academy. Students will also be able to access their scores through College Board's BigFuture School free mobile app.

*An asterisk printed next to a student's NMSC Selection Index score indicates that the Selection Index score will not be considered in the National Merit Scholarship Program because the student does not meet all entry requirements (outlined on pages 6–8). If the student made an error when completing the entry requirement questions on the PSAT/NMSQT or a change has occurred that may affect participation, a school official or the student may submit a request to update their answers with NMSC at www.nationalmerit.org/studentupdate. An asterisk can also indicate that a student's Selection Index score is reported for guidance-purposes only. In such a case, your school will have information from College Board about why the Selection Index score cannot be considered.

Key dates
2027 National Merit® Scholarship Program

2025

October 1 through October 31, 2025: Students entered the 2027 program by taking the 2025 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®).

2026

August 18: National Merit Scholarship Application instructions for Semifinalists mailed to high school principals.

September 8: Booklet listing all 16,000 Semifinalists and this *Guide* mailed to high school principals and admission officials of four-year regionally accredited U.S. colleges and universities.

September 9: Date for news media nationwide to release NMSC's announcement of Semifinalists.

September 10: *Letters of Commendation* for Commended Students mailed to high school principals.

September 12: Authorized SAT® administration for Semifinalists.

October 3: Authorized SAT administration for Semifinalists.

By October 7: Schools submit completed National Merit Scholarship Applications to NMSC®.

October 17: Authorized ACT® administration for Semifinalists.

November 7: Authorized SAT administration for Semifinalists.

Late November: Application instructions for Special Scholarship candidates mailed to high school principals.

December 5: Last authorized SAT administration for Semifinalists to be considered for Finalist standing.

December 12: Last authorized ACT administration for Semifinalists to be considered for Finalist standing.

2027

February 8: Notification of advancement to Finalist standing mailed to Semifinalists' home addresses. A copy of the letter will also be posted to both the high school's and Finalist's Online Scholarship Application dashboard.

March 2: *Certificates of Merit* for Finalists mailed to principals.

March 10: NMSC begins notifying winners of corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarship® awards and Special Scholarships. Each winner's high school is also notified.

March 25: NMSC begins notifying winners of National Merit® $2500 Scholarships. Each winner's high school is also notified.

May 3: NMSC begins notifying winners of college-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards. Each winner's high school is also notified.

Mid-May: Finalists not chosen to receive a National Merit Scholarship are notified at their home addresses. Candidates not chosen as Special Scholarship winners are also notified.

National Merit Scholar press releases

April 21: Corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarship winners

May 12: National Merit $2500 Scholarship winners

June 2: College-sponsored Merit Scholarship winners

July 12: Additional college-sponsored Merit Scholarship winners

A few additional National Merit $2500 Scholarship winners and corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarship recipients will be announced individually during the summer.

Key dates
2028 National Merit® Scholarship Program

2026

Late April: 2026 PSAT/NMSQT® ordering information emailed to high school PSAT/NMSQT Coordinators.

August: 2026 *PSAT/NMSQT Student Guide* is available online.

By early September: Participating schools register their students for the 2026 PSAT/NMSQT.

October 1 through October 30: Testing window for the administration of the PSAT/NMSQT.

Late October through November: 2026 PSAT/NMSQT online scores are available to educators.

2027

April 1: Postmark deadline for students who missed taking the 2026 PSAT/NMSQT to request consideration for alternate entry to the 2028 National Merit Program (see pages 8–9).

Mid-April: High school principals are notified if any of their students are among the 50,000 entrants with the highest PSAT/NMSQT Selection Index scores and asked to report any errors or changes in the reported eligibility of their high scorers.

Early September: Principals are notified of their Semifinalists in the 2028 National Merit Scholarship competition.

Note: Dates for completion of the 2028 National Merit Program will be published in the September 2027 *Guide*.

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NMSC Mission Statement

The mission of National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC®) is to recognize and honor the academically talented students of the United States. NMSC accomplishes its mission by conducting nationwide academic scholarship programs. The enduring goals of NMSC's scholarship programs are:

- To promote a wider and deeper respect for learning in general and for exceptionally talented individuals in particular
- To shine a spotlight on brilliant students and encourage the pursuit of academic excellence at all levels of education
- To stimulate increased support from individuals and organizations that wish to sponsor scholarships for outstanding scholastic talent

NMSC Lamp of Learning Logo

NMSC's "Lamp of Learning" logo is modeled after an oil-burning lamp—a classic symbol of knowledge and wisdom. Education fuels the flame that burns from the lamp, which is shown resting on a base that represents the Book of Knowledge. The logo is symbolic of the enduring goals of NMSC's scholarship programs.

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