

**For Immediate Release**

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# Media Release

## **Forty CCSD students recognized as 2023 National Merit Scholarship semifinalists**

Communications Office

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**Charleston, SC** — Charleston County School District (CCSD) is proud to announce that 40 students from the Class of 2023 are semifinalists in the 68<sup>th</sup> annual National Merit Scholarship Program. The National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) released the names of more than 16,000 semifinalists last week.

The following CCSD students are 2023 semifinalists:

### **Academic Magnet**

Joseph J. Benich  
Nora W. Cheng  
Lily K. Coulter  
Spence D. Cox  
Maria E. Cymbalyuk  
Summer D. Desouza  
Elena S. Graham  
Dennis C. Griffin  
John Habakus  
Ransome W. Hudson  
Henry A. Hughes  
Sampson P. Kennedy  
Leo Li  
Irene Y. Liu  
Angela Mei  
Elizabeth A. Murray  
Daniel T. Orvin  
Finlay G. Palmer  
Lilly Skinner  
Cooper A. Smith  
Jeffrey Song  
James H. Unger  
Andrew M. Wallace  
Willa R. Wiley

Moyu C. Yamaguchi  
Elliott P. Yarborough  
Alan Zhang

### **Charleston County School of the Arts**

Ryan R. Dickerson  
Aurora L. Drye  
Anna Garziera

### **Lucy Beckham**

Thomas W. Collins  
Mila K. Ganaway  
Peyton C. Matheson

### **Wando**

Brody Bundis  
Alexander Fister  
Samuel Henshaw  
Rowan Johnson  
Sydney Lewis  
Inna Voloshchuk  
Carson K. Walker

Lucy Beckham High School is making its debut for this honor; this will be the school's first-ever graduating class.

"As part of our first graduating class, these semifinalists represent not only the highest academic achievement but the strength and determination that the Class of 2023 embodies," said Anna Dassing, Lucy Beckham's principal. "They have worked tirelessly to overcome and persevere through a global pandemic to be top in their class and we could not be more proud of this incredible accomplishment."

Academic Magnet High School leads the state with 27 semifinalists.

"These are students who have not only demonstrated academic excellence, but demonstrated excellence in challenging times given how disjointed these last few school years have been," said Academic Magnet Principal Jake Perlmutter. "Staying focused, staying committed, and excelling through adversity is a remarkable accomplishment and these scholars and their families should be very proud of this recognition."

These CCSD high school seniors are now competing for some 7,250 National Merit Scholarships worth close to combined \$28 million that will be awarded in the spring.

"We are so proud of our gifted semifinalists and their academic accomplishments," explained Dr. Shannon Cook, principal of Charleston County School of the Arts. "This level of success results from their hard work, the rigorous instruction provided by their teachers and the support they receive from their families. We applaud our young artists and look forward to their future contributions and success."

High school juniors entered the 2023 National Merit Scholarship Program by taking the 2021 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.

"Nelson Mandela famously said 'education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world,'" added Wando Interim Principal Kim Wilson. "The seven Wando students who qualified for 2023 National Merit semifinalist status personify what Mr. Mandela was talking about in this quote. Through hard work and determination, they have obtained the goal of being one of the top academically talented high school seniors in the nation. The Wando family is proud of these students and look forward to seeing how they will change the world."

To become a finalist, the semifinalist and a high school official must submit a detailed scholarship application that includes the student'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.

2023 National Merit Scholarship finalists will be contacted by NMSC in February and winners will be announced in four nationwide news releases beginning in April and concluding in July. These scholarship recipients will join more than 368,000 other distinguished young people who have the title of Merit Scholar.

For more information, contact the Communications Office (843) 937-6303.

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#### **About the Charleston County School District**

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all of its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves approximately 49,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools. Options include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military.