

For Immediate Release

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Media Release

Two CCSD students earn the distinction of U.S. Presidential Scholar in 2024

Office of Communications

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Michael Lee of Academic Magnet and Jessie Leitzel of Charleston County School of the Arts are district's first U.S. Presidential Scholars in three years

Charleston, SC – For the first time in three years, Charleston County School District (CCSD) has a United States Presidential Scholar. In fact, this year, CCSD has two: Academic Magnet High School (AMHS) senior **Michael Lee** and Charleston County School of the Arts (SOA) senior **Jessie Leitzel**. The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) made the announcement earlier this month. Lee and Leitzel are the district's first U.S. Presidential Scholars since [Academic Magnet's Lilly Lassiter earned the honor in 2021](#).

Lee and Leitzel are two of 161 students from the Class of 2024 to earn the honor. Leitzel also has the distinction of being one of 20 U.S. Presidential Scholars in Arts.

"It is an honor and a blessing to represent the SOA Creative Writing Department and the district as both an academic and an artist," said Leitzel. "Being named a Scholar in the Arts affirms for me that the passion we pursue here at SOA not only matters but is vital."

Leitzel will attend Harvard College (undergraduate college of Harvard University) in the fall to major in Biomedical Engineering, with a focus in nonfiction journalism.

Lee and Leitzel are two of three U.S. Presidential Scholars from South Carolina, and two of 11 semifinalists from the state in the 2024 U.S. Presidential Scholars Competition.

"Even though I am honored to receive this prestigious award, I wish to commend my fellow classmates on their equally impressive accomplishments," Lee said. "I feel privileged to represent them and their drive to succeed in life."

Lee plans on studying in the field of science at the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill) in the fall.

According to the USDOE, more than 5,700 of the nearly 3.7 million high school students expected to graduate this year qualified for the 2024 awards through outstanding performance on the College Board SAT or ACT exams or by

nominations made by chief state school officers, other partner recognition organizations and [YoungArts](#), the National Foundation for the Advancement of Artists.

“Michael is one of an elite handful of students from across the world to receive this Presidential Scholar award and our entire school is proud of him and his family” added AMHS Principal Jacob Perlmutter. “In addition to his academic prowess, Michael is humble and honorable. If you've met him, even briefly, you'd suspect, as I do, that he is only getting ‘warmed up.’”

The Presidential Scholars Class of 2024 will be recognized for their outstanding achievement this summer with an online recognition program.

“We are thrilled to celebrate this accolade with Jessie,” SOA’s principal, Dr. Shannon Cook, stated. “We are so proud of the accomplishments of this outstanding student artist.”

The United States Presidential Scholars Program was established in 1964, by [Executive Order of the President](#), to recognize and honor some of the nation’s most distinguished graduating high school seniors. In 1979, the program was extended to recognize students who demonstrate exceptional talent in the visual, creative and performing arts. In 2015, the program was again extended to recognize students who demonstrate ability and accomplishment in career and technical education fields.

Each year, up to 161 students are named U.S. Presidential Scholars, one of the Nation’s highest honors for high school students. The Scholars represent excellence in education and the promise of greatness in young people. In honoring the U.S. Presidential Scholars, the President of the United States symbolically honors all graduating high school seniors of high potential. Application is by invitation only; therefore, students may not apply individually to the program, nor may their schools nominate them.

“The 161 high school seniors selected for the 60th anniversary of the U.S. Presidential Scholars represent the best of our nation’s schools and inspire hope in the bright future of this country,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. “On behalf of President Biden, I am delighted to celebrate their accomplishments, and encourage these scholars to continue to aim high, lift up others, and embrace opportunities to lead.”

For more information about Lee and Leitzel, please contact the Office of Communications at (843) 937-6303. To learn more about the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program, contact the U.S. Department of Education’s Press Office at (202) 401-1576.

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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 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 50,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse portfolio of educational options and specialized programs delivered to the students of CCSD through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools and programs. Rich educational opportunities for students include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; military; dual credit; and many more.