



1516 Sycamore Street
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania 18017
PRESS RELEASE

BASD Celebrates Three Commended National Merit Scholars, One National Merit Scholar Finalist, and Excellence in Education Award Winners for the 2025-2026 School Year

Combined Recognition Event to Honor Outstanding BASD Students and Innovative Programming

BETHLEHEM, PA, May 5, 2026 — The Bethlehem Area School District, in partnership with Colonial Intermediate Unit 20, is proud to announce three Commended National Merit Scholar Students, one National Merit Finalist (all from Freedom High School), along with recognition of an Excellence in Education Award-winning program. These honors will be formally celebrated at an upcoming regional ceremony recognizing exceptional academic achievement and innovative educational practices.

National Merit Scholar Students

Freedom High School is proud to recognize three students as **2025–2026 National Merit Scholar Scholars**:

A Commended National Merit Scholar is a high-achieving student who places among the top 50,000 scorers (approximately the top 3-4%) of over 1.3 million participants in the National Merit Scholarship Program.

- **Gwen Adriguez** - attending Drexel University's College of Computing & Informatics
- **Sean Blackton** - attending Le Moyne College
- **Cody Smith** - attending Arizona State University

Freedom High School is also proud to recognize a fourth student as a **National Merit Scholar FINALIST**:

A National Merit Finalist is a high-achieving U.S. high school senior who scored in the top 1% on the PSAT/NMSQT, advanced from semifinalist status and submitted a competitive application including SAT/ACT scores and a school recommendation. Awarded to only 15,000 students nationally every year.

- **Ethan Fredericks** - attending University of Texas at Dallas on a full scholarship

“Earning National Merit recognition is an outstanding achievement, and we are incredibly proud of these students for their hard work and determination,” commented Laurie Sage, Freedom



High School Principal. “They exemplify the high standards of excellence here at Freedom, and we look forward to all they will achieve in the next chapter of their journey.”

Excellence in Education Award Winner

BASD is also proud to recognize the following program selected as an **Excellence in Education (EIE) Award winner**:

Program Name: *Launch Your Career: Pre-Apprenticeship Program*

Nominated by: Rick Amato, BASD Supervisor of Business, Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics

This award highlights the district’s commitment to innovative programming that connects students to meaningful career exploration, hands-on learning, and real-world workforce pathways.

“Having three National Merit Scholars in a single cohort is an extraordinary accomplishment and speaks to the talent, perseverance, and academic excellence of our students,” said Dr. Jack Silva, Superintendent of Bethlehem Area School District. “We are incredibly proud of Gwen, Sean, Cody, and Ethan, and we also celebrate the educators behind the Launch Your Career Pre-Apprenticeship Program for creating transformative learning experiences that prepare students for the future.”

“Recognitions like these showcase both the academic excellence and innovative programming thriving in our schools,” said Dr. Maureen Leeson, Assistant Superintendent of Bethlehem Area School District. “We are honored to celebrate students and educators whose work exemplifies commitment, creativity, and success.”

The annual CIU 20 Excellence in Education Awards and National Merit Scholars Ceremony will be held on Thursday, May 7, 2026, at the Bethlehem Area Vocational-Technical School (BAVTS), 3300 Chester Avenue, Bethlehem, PA 18020.

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Media inquiries:

Jennifer LoConte-Kugler, Communications Manager
jlocontekugler@basdschools.org

About the Bethlehem Area School District

The Bethlehem Area School District is the 6th largest school district in Pennsylvania serving over 12,240 culturally and economically diverse students in 22 community-based schools. The district serves five municipalities: City of Bethlehem, Bethlehem Township, Hanover Township, Freemansburg, and Fountain Hill. The district enjoys numerous community partnerships with universities, businesses, and arts providers that extend the schools’ rich curricular and co-curricular offerings.