



Charleston County School District
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Media Release

Five CCSD Graduates Earn College-Sponsored National Merit Scholarships in 2026

Charleston, SC (June 15, 2026) - The National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) released the names of the 2026 National Merit College-Sponsored Scholarship Winners for the 2026 National Merit Scholarship Program last week, and five are Charleston County School District (CCSD) graduates.

Academic Magnet High School

Zoe Dylan Rhyne - National Merit Furman University Scholarship
 Leah Bagg - National Merit Emory University Scholarship
 Erick Jiaao Yu - National Merit Clemson University Scholarship

Charleston County School of the Arts

Estee Yu - National Merit University of South Carolina Scholarship

West Ashley High School

Noah Todd - National Merit Clemson University Scholarship

A total of 14 graduating seniors from CCSD's Class of 2026 have now received scholarships in the 71st annual National Merit Scholarship program. School leaders across the district are celebrating these outstanding students and the impact they have made on their campuses.

"I am so proud of these three students," said Academic Magnet Principal Jacob Perlmutter. "They are such academically deserving students and wonderful people. I know they will have the same positive impact at Furman, Emory, and Clemson as they have had here at Academic Magnet!"

Officials of each sponsor college selected their scholarship recipients from among the 2025 National Merit Scholarship Program finalists who plan to attend their institution. These awards provide between \$500 and \$2,000 annually for up to four years of undergraduate study at the institution financing the scholarship.

"Estee's exceptional accomplishments as both a scholar and pianist reflect the talent, discipline, and creativity that define the very best of School of the Arts students," said SOA Principal Shannon Cook. "We congratulate her on this well-deserved recognition and look forward to hearing about her future success."



Charleston County
SCHOOL DISTRICT

Anita W. Huggins, M.Ed., Superintendent of Schools
 Sully Witte, Public Information Officer

This year, 138 higher education institutions are underwriting Merit Scholarship awards through the National Merit Scholarship Program. Sponsor colleges and universities include 69 private and 69 public institutions located in 42 states and the District of Columbia.

College-sponsored Merit Scholarship winners announced today are a part of the distinguished group of about 6,700 high school seniors who will receive National Merit Scholarships for college undergraduate study worth nearly \$24 million. Earlier this spring, NMSC announced winners of corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards and National Merit \$2500 Scholarships.

High school juniors entered the 2026 National Merit Scholarship Program when they took the 2024 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®), which served as an initial screen of program entrants. Last fall, more than 16,000 Semifinalists were named on a state-representational basis in numbers proportional to each state's percentage of the national total of graduating high school seniors. Semifinalists were the highest-scoring program entrants in each state and represented less than one percent of the nation's seniors.

To compete for Merit Scholarship awards, Semifinalists first had to advance to the Finalist level of the competition by fulfilling additional requirements. Each Semifinalist was asked to submit a detailed scholarship application, including an essay and information about extracurricular activities, awards, and leadership positions. Semifinalists also had to have an outstanding academic record, be endorsed and recommended by a high school official, and earn SAT® or ACT® scores that confirmed the qualifying test performance. From the Semifinalist group, over 15,000 met requirements for Finalist standing, and about half of the Finalists will be Merit Scholarship winners in 2026.

By the conclusion of the 2026 competition, approximately 6,700 finalists will have earned the "Merit Scholar" title and received a total of nearly \$24 million in college scholarships.

For more information, please contact the Office of Communications at (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 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 51,000 students in 90 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.