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# Two CCSD Students Named to Final List of National Merit College-Sponsored Winners for 2026

**Charleston, SC (July 16, 2026)** - The National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) recently announced over 750 additional winners of National Merit Scholarships financed by colleges and universities. These Merit Scholar designees join more than 2,500 other college-sponsored award recipients who were announced in June.

Two Charleston County School District graduates received college-sponsored National Merit Scholarships:

- Riley Shelley - National Merit Clemson University (Academic Magnet High School)
- Sophia Milner - National Merit College of Charleston Scholarship (Charleston County School of the Arts)

"We are incredibly proud of Sophia and this outstanding achievement," said Charleston County School of the Arts Principal Dr. Shannon Cook. "Being named a National Merit college-sponsored scholarship recipient reflects her academic excellence, dedication, and commitment to learning. We look forward to seeing all that she accomplishes at the College of Charleston."

Academic Magnet Principal Barrett Reese shared those sentiments.

"Riley has demonstrated exceptional academic achievement and a passion for learning throughout his time at Academic Magnet High School," said Principal Barrett Reese. "This recognition is a testament to his hard work, perseverance, and the support of his teachers and family. We congratulate him on this well-deserved honor and wish him continued success at Clemson University."

A total of 16 graduating seniors from CCSD's Class of 2026 received scholarships in the 71st annual National Merit Scholarship program.

Officials of each sponsor college selected their scholarship winners from among the Finalists in the National Merit Scholarship Program who will attend their institution. College-sponsored awards provide between $500 and $2,000 annually for up to four years of undergraduate study at the institution financing the scholarship. This year, 138 colleges and universities are sponsoring more than 3,250 Merit Scholarship awards. Sponsor colleges include 69 private and 69 public institutions located in 42 states and the District of Columbia.

This year's competition for National Merit Scholarships began when high school juniors took the 2024 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®), which served as an initial screen of program entrants. In September 2025, 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 become a Finalist, each Semifinalist had to complete a detailed scholarship application, which included writing an essay, describing leadership positions and contributions in school and community activities, showing an outstanding academic record, and being endorsed and recommended by a high school official. Semifinalists also had to take the SAT® or ACT® and earn scores that confirmed their performance on the initial qualifying test. From the Semifinalist group, over 15,000 attained Finalist standing, and about half of the Finalists were chosen to receive National Merit Scholarships.

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