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Media Release

30 CCSD Students Named Semifinalists in the 2027 National Merit Scholarship Program

CHARLESTON, S.C. (September 11, 2026) - Charleston County School District (CCSD) is proud to announce that 30 students from the Class of 2027 have been named semifinalists in the 72nd annual National Merit Scholarship Program.

The National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) announced the names of more than 16,000 semifinalists nationwide on September 9. These academically talented students now have the opportunity to continue competing for 6,930 National Merit Scholarships to be awarded in 2027.

The following CCSD students have been named semifinalists:

Academic Magnet High School
Matthew Baer
William Barganier
Sameen Basunia
Tennyson Broadhurst
Conrad De Arellano
Andrew Flynn
Lane Hawk
Suzette Head
Jeffrey Kotz
Jamison Kubu
Benjamin LeQuire
Boaz Makowsky
Jonathan Mei
Cullen Reid
Brooks Traugott
Yidong Ye
Aaron Zhu

Charleston County School of the Arts
James Fauerbach

Lucy Garrett Beckham High School
John Oliver Adams
John Boone

Caroline Kennedy
Caroline Koysza

Wando High School
Tyler Alfas
Jacob Brokes
Sophia A. Maltezos
Benjamin Snyder
Melina Su
Zachary Teachman
Sylvia Wright

West Ashley High School
Elon Erbe

“Being named a National Merit Semifinalist is an incredible accomplishment that reflects the dedication, curiosity, and academic excellence these students demonstrate every day,” said Academic Magnet High School Principal Barrett Reese. “We are incredibly proud of our students and grateful for the teachers, families, and school community members who have supported them throughout their academic journeys. Their achievement represents the very best of what is possible when students are challenged to reach their full potential.”

High school juniors entered the 2027 National Merit Scholarship Program by taking the 2025 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT), which served as an initial screen of program entrants. Approximately 1.3 million students entered the 2027 competition. About 16,000 of the highest-scoring students nationwide were named semifinalists, representing the highest-scoring entrants in each state.

Charleston County School of the Arts Principal Dr. Shannon Cook said Fauerbach's recognition is a testament to his academic commitment and accomplishments.

“James has demonstrated an exceptional commitment to his academics, and we are thrilled to see that hard work recognized at the national level,” said Cook. “This honor reflects not only his academic ability, but also his perseverance, curiosity, and drive to continue learning. We are proud to have this scholar and artist represent Charleston County School of the Arts as a National Merit Semifinalist.”

To become a finalist, each 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. Semifinalists must also be endorsed and recommended by a school official, complete an essay and earn SAT or ACT scores that confirm their earlier performance on the qualifying test.

Lucy Garrett Beckham High School Principal Dassing said the recognition highlights the commitment of Beckham students to academic excellence.

“We are incredibly proud of our students for earning this prestigious recognition,” said Dassing. “Their success is a reflection of their hard work, determination and willingness to challenge themselves academically. They have set an outstanding example for their classmates, and we look forward to seeing all that they accomplish in the future.”

Wando High School Principal Chas Coker said the school's seven semifinalists represent a strong tradition of academic achievement.

“Wando High School has a long tradition of students who pursue excellence in the classroom, and this group continues that legacy,” said Coker. “We are proud of each of our National Merit Semifinalists and the commitment they have shown to their academics. This achievement is a tremendous reflection of their hard work and the support of their teachers and families.”

West Ashley High School Principal Andy Brandt said Erbe's recognition reflects his dedication to academic achievement.

“Elon has consistently demonstrated the drive, determination, and intellectual curiosity that define academic excellence,” said Brandt. “We are proud to see his hard work recognized through this national honor, and we look forward to celebrating all that he will accomplish as he continues his educational journey.”

National Merit Scholarship winners will be announced through four nationwide news releases beginning in April and continuing through July 2027. The scholarship recipients will join the more than 375,000 distinguished young people who have earned the title of Merit Scholar since the National Merit Scholarship Program was established in 1955.

Scholarships are underwritten by NMSC with its own funds and by business organizations, higher education institutions, and individual donors that share NMSC's goals of honoring the nation's scholastic champions and encouraging the pursuit of academic excellence.

For more information, contact CCSD's 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 dedicated to ensuring every student has access to a high-quality education and the support needed to thrive. As South Carolina’s second-largest school system, CCSD serves more than 50,000 students across 91 schools and specialized programs throughout 1,300 square miles of coastal communities, representing a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools.

Under the leadership of Superintendent Anita Huggins, CCSD is focused on accelerating student achievement, expanding opportunities, and preparing every student for success in college, career, and life. Recent district accomplishments include record-high academic performance on state assessments, increasing graduation rates, and significant gains in college and career readiness, reflecting the district’s commitment to continuous improvement and educational excellence. Through the Peninsula Promise, CCSD is also expanding access to early learning, college and career pathways, arts, and family support services to create seamless opportunities for students living on the historic Charleston Peninsula.

CCSD offers a diverse and expanding portfolio of educational choices, including neighborhood, magnet, charter, Montessori, and International Baccalaureate (IB) schools and programs. Students have access to rich learning experiences in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); visual and performing arts; world languages; military and leadership programs; career and technical education; dual enrollment and early college opportunities; and other innovative pathways designed to meet a wide range of interests and aspirations.

Working in partnership with families, community organizations, higher education institutions, and industry leaders, CCSD remains committed to creating equitable opportunities, fostering student success, and ensuring that every graduate is prepared to contribute and compete in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.