

National Merit Scholarship Program

The National Merit Scholarship Program identifies high academic achieving students through a standardized test taken in the fall of the junior year of high school. Students identified are referred to colleges that may offer information on admission and scholarships. Additional scholarships may be available from other sources.

This program is a competitive process that begins with the Preliminary SAT (PSAT) normally taken during October of the junior year in high school. Results from the PSAT are available to high school counselors who will distribute these results to students in December or January following the test.

The National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) ranks all test results and in April, notifies 50,000 high scorers that they have qualified for program recognition. These high scorers are given the opportunity to participate in a referral service to allow college officials to contact students regarding their schools. From the initial group of 50,000, approximately 34,000 students are named Commended Students in September following the test. The Commended students do not continue in the competition for National Merit Scholarships.

The remaining 16,000 students are named National Merit Semifinalists. The NMSC uses a selection index by state to identify semifinalists. The qualifying score may vary state to state. Semifinalists are given information explaining the requirements to advance to Finalist status. Requirements include an application, an essay and SAT scores that confirm their PSAT results.

In February of the senior year, 15,000 Semifinalists are named National Merit Finalists. In March 1,300 Finalists are notified that they are winners of special scholarships provided by corporate sponsors. 8,300 students will win a National Merit \$2,500 scholarship, a corporate scholarship or college-sponsored scholarship. If a student would like to be considered for a college-sponsored scholarship, he or she must be accepted at the college and have notified NMSC that the school is their first choice college. Typically college-sponsored scholarships are renewable for four years.

Concurrent with the National Merit scholarship competition is the National Achievement Scholarship Program which identifies outstanding black American high school students for further recognition and scholarships. In order to qualify, students must request consideration on the PSAT test. Eligible students may participate in both scholarship competitions.

Every student that takes the PSAT is offered College Board's My College QuickStart program. This free resource offers students career counseling, college searches and test-taking preparation. Most counselors recommend students take the PSAT/NMSQT

to practice taking standardized tests even if **the students** don't feel they will qualify for a National Merit scholarship.

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