



Information and Instructions for 2024 Special Scholarship Candidates

OVERVIEW

This document answers questions frequently asked by candidates in the competition for awards called “Special Scholarships,” which are offered through the National Merit® Scholarship Program by corporate and business sponsors. This document also includes requirements that candidates must meet in order to receive further consideration for a Special Scholarship.

The National Merit Scholarship Program is conducted by National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC®), a not-for-profit organization that operates without government assistance. The majority of the scholarships NMSC offers are financed by several hundred independent sponsor organizations, which include corporations, company foundations, and professional organizations.

WHAT ARE SPECIAL SCHOLARSHIPS?

Special Scholarships are provided by many of the National Merit Scholarship Program’s corporate sponsors that also offer Merit Scholarship® awards for students who meet their specified criteria—usually children of employees or residents of communities where the company is located.

Only students who qualify as Semifinalists in the National Merit Scholarship Program and then advance to Finalist standing can win Merit Scholarship awards and earn the title of Merit Scholar®. Because the number of Finalists eligible for a sponsor’s Merit Scholarship awards varies from one annual competition to another, corporate sponsors who want to offer a fixed number of awards each year make arrangements with NMSC to offer Special Scholarships as a supplement to their Merit Scholarship awards. In years when the number of eligible Finalists is smaller than the number of scholarships a sponsor wishes to offer, NMSC designates a pool of high-scoring candidates (who are not Finalists) to compete for Special Scholarships.

Special Scholarships are administered by NMSC in the same manner as a sponsor’s Merit Scholarship awards. Both types of scholarships provided by a corporate sponsor usually are named for the grantor organization. However, the words “National Merit” are not included in a Special Scholarship name; for example, a scholarship may be called “XYZ Company Scholarship” rather than “National Merit XYZ Company Scholarship.”

HOW SPECIAL SCHOLARSHIP CANDIDATES ARE DESIGNATED

Students entered the 2024 competition by taking the 2022 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®) and by filing an Entry Form through the sponsor company. NMSC used the qualifying test as an initial screen of Entry Form applicants who met National Merit Program participation requirements. NMSC designated a pool of candidates with the highest PSAT/NMSQT Selection Index scores who now have an opportunity to continue in the competition for the sponsor’s Special Scholarships.

REQUIREMENTS FOR SPECIAL SCHOLARSHIP CANDIDATES

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

- Read this document completely and make sure you understand what is required of you. If you have any questions about the information presented here, please contact NMSC’s Scholarship Administration department by phone. We are available at (847) 866-5161 Monday–Friday from 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Central Time.
- Use NMSC’s Online Scholarship Application (OSA) to submit your Special Scholarship Application. Be sure to follow all instructions to make sure your application is complete and no information is truncated.
 - ⇒ **DEADLINE:** Your completed Special Scholarship Application is due to NMSC on December 14, 2023. Your high school may indicate a different date by which they would like you to complete your part of the application.
- Check pages 2–3 to see if you need to complete any additional steps because you attend high school outside the United States and are not a U.S. citizen or if you have already left high school and are enrolled full-time in college.

WHAT REQUIREMENTS MUST CANDIDATES MEET TO CONTINUE IN THE COMPETITION?

To receive further consideration for a Special Scholarship to be awarded in 2024, you must meet all specified requirements and deadlines or you will be withdrawn from the competition. To continue in the competition for a Special Scholarship, you must:

1. Continue to meet all program entry requirements (published in the 2022 *PSAT/NMSQT Student Guide*) and the sponsor's eligibility criteria.
2. Be enrolled in the last year of high school and be planning to enroll full-time in college in the fall of 2024 **or** be enrolled in the first year of college, if grades 9 through 12 were completed in three years or less.
3. Attend high school in the United States, District of Columbia, or U.S. commonwealths and territories; or, meet the citizenship requirements (see below) for students attending high school outside the United States.
4. Be fully endorsed and recommended for a Special Scholarship by your high school principal (or school official designated by the principal). Your high school official will provide their endorsement when they complete your application, but they also reserve the right to revoke their endorsement at any point in the competition.
5. Have a record of consistently high academic performance in all of grades 9 through 12 and in any college course work taken. Your school must provide a complete record of high school courses you have taken, grades earned, and course work you are taking in grade 12. The school should also notify NMSC of any noticeable decline in your academic performance after your scholarship application has been filed. If you are now in college, high academic performance must continue and must be documented by an official transcript of your record (see instructions on page 3 of this document).
6. Electronically submit the completed application to your high school official as soon as possible using NMSC's Online Scholarship Application (OSA). The school official will then complete the school's sections of the application for final transmittal to NMSC by December 14, 2023.
7. Provide any additional documentation and information that NMSC requests.

CANDIDATES ATTENDING HIGH SCHOOL OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES

If you attend high school outside the United States, you must be a U.S. citizen, or be a U.S. lawful permanent resident (or have applied for permanent residence, the application for which has not been denied) and intend to become a U.S. citizen at the earliest opportunity allowed by law.

☐ If you attend high school outside the United States and have not yet become a U.S. citizen, you must submit with your completed Special Scholarship Application:

- A letter signed by you explaining your plans for becoming a citizen, including the date on which you expect to be eligible and will apply for U.S. citizenship.

AND

- If you are a U.S. lawful permanent resident, a copy of your Permanent Resident Card (Green Card); or a copy of your passport including the identity/biographical page and the "I-551" stamp showing that you have been granted lawful permanent resident status.

OR

- If you have applied for U.S. lawful permanent residence, a copy of Form I-797 Receipt Notice from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) that verifies you filed the "Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status" (Form I-485).

⇒ **DEADLINE:** Your letter and documentation must be received by NMSC on or before January 31, 2024.

IMPORTANT: NMSC will not share citizenship information with any other organization or agency.

CANDIDATES NOW ENROLLED FULL-TIME IN COLLEGE

Officials at the high school you last attended will be responsible for the high school's portion of the Special Scholarship Application. They will complete the school's sections of the application for final transmittal to NMSC by December 14, 2023. To be considered for an award, you must meet all requirements specified on page 2, and:

- Immediately after the end of the fall term, you must arrange to have your college send an official transcript of all college course work you have taken to NMSC. NMSC will review your transcript to make sure you continue to meet Requirement #5 on page 2.

REPORTING A COLLEGE CHOICE

You are asked to report your first-choice college on your application, but this information will not be used in the selection process. If you are undecided or choose not to report a first-choice college on your application, you will be given the opportunity to do so if you are offered a Special Scholarship. It is your responsibility to apply and be admitted to the college you plan to attend.

All Special Scholarship payments must be used exclusively for undergraduate education at a college or university in the United States that holds accredited status with a regional accrediting commission on higher education. Special Scholarship stipends are not payable, however, for attendance at service academies or certain institutions that are limited in their purposes or training.

SPECIAL SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS TO BE OFFERED

HOW ARE SPECIAL SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS CHOSEN?

Scholarship recipients will be selected by a committee of NMSC's professional staff who will evaluate the information candidates and their schools supply on the scholarship applications. This information includes:

- the academic record;
- the school's recommendation of the candidate;
- a student essay;
- extracurricular activities; and
- scores on the PSAT/NMSQT.

Scholarship winners will be the candidates judged to have the greatest potential for success in rigorous college studies based on their abilities, accomplishments, and personal attributes—without regard to gender, race, ethnic origin, religious preference, or family financial circumstances.

NMSC will notify scholarship winners and post offer letters to the students' OSA dashboards. Offer recipients will be asked to log in to the OSA, where they can view their offer letter, review the Terms of the Scholarship, accept their Special Scholarship offer, and update their college choice. Although a student may compete in more than one Special Scholarship competition, no student will receive more than one scholarship offer from NMSC.

WHAT IS THE MONETARY VALUE OF A SPECIAL SCHOLARSHIP?

Each corporate sponsor decides whether to provide nonrenewable or renewable awards and chooses the monetary limits (within a defined range) of the scholarships it finances.

TYPE OF AWARD	TYPE OF STIPEND	STIPEND RANGES
Renewable	Fixed	\$1,000–\$10,000 per year
One-time	Single-payment	\$2,500–\$5,000

WHEN WILL CANDIDATES LEARN WHETHER THEY HAVE WON A SPECIAL SCHOLARSHIP?

On March 13, 2024, NMSC will begin notifying scholarship winners by email, with confidential notification to their high schools. Offers will continue to be made throughout March and April.

In mid-May 2024, NMSC will send notification to candidates who have **not** won a Special Scholarship; if a few additional awards become available after this date, winners will be chosen and notified during the summer.

INFORMATION FOR AWARD RECIPIENTS

ARE THERE REQUIREMENTS THAT SPECIAL SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS MUST MEET?

Yes. Terms of the Scholarship will be provided on NMSC's Online Scholarship Application (OSA) after an offer has been made. These Terms govern acceptance and receipt of the award and, in the case of renewable scholarships, specify additional requirements for scholarship renewal in subsequent academic years. The Terms include the following:

- the student must be granted and accept admission to college no later than the fall following the offer of the scholarship. Scholarship recipients may request a deferment of their award if the college of attendance has approved a deferment of the student's enrollment;
- all stipend payments must be used exclusively for undergraduate education at a college or university in the United States that holds accredited status with a regional accrediting commission on higher education. NMSC scholarship stipends are not payable, however, for attendance at service academies or certain institutions that are limited in their purpose or training; and
- scholarship recipients must attend college full-time, and must pursue a course of study leading to one of the traditional baccalaureate degrees.
- all Special Scholarships are transferable from one regionally accredited U.S. institution to another.

WHEN DO WINNERS RECEIVE SCHOLARSHIP STIPEND PAYMENTS?

ONE-TIME AWARDS

In September 2024, recipients of one-time awards will be issued a single payment in the full scholarship amount. NMSC will send the recipient's single scholarship payment to their college's financial aid office.

RENEWABLE AWARDS

In September 2024, winners of renewable awards will be issued the first installment of their annual stipend; additional payments will be sent on a scheduled basis (usually twice annually) for up to four years of undergraduate study or until baccalaureate degree requirements are met, whichever occurs first. NMSC sends stipend payments for scholarship recipients to their college financial aid offices.

SCHEDULE SPECIFIC TO SPECIAL SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

DECEMBER 14, 2023

Schools transmit completed Special Scholarship Applications to NMSC using the OSA.

MARCH 13, 2024 (THROUGH APRIL 2024)

NMSC begins emailing Special Scholarship offer notifications to winners.

MID-MAY 2024

Candidates who have not been selected to receive a Special Scholarship will be notified by mail.

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