Information about the 2027 National Merit® Scholarship Competition

OVERVIEW

Initiated in 1955, the National Merit Scholarship Program is conducted by National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC®), a not-for-profit organization that operates without government assistance. A sizable number of National Merit Scholarships to be offered in 2027 will be underwritten by NMSC with its own funds, but most will be supported by some 260 independent corporate organizations, higher education institutions, and individual donors.

In each annual National Merit Scholarship Program, about 50,000 academically talented high school students are honored, but only some 16,000 of them are named Semifinalists. Students who qualify as Semifinalists based on their performance on the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®) are the only program participants who have an opportunity to advance to the Finalist level and compete for National Merit Scholarships. About 6,700 of the outstanding Finalists will be chosen as Merit Scholarship® winners in the 2027 competition.

A description of the current National Merit Program—including entry requirements, groups of honored students, and scholarships to be offered—was in the *2025 PSAT/NMSQT Student Guide* distributed to students before they entered the competition. This document gives additional information for Semifinalists and includes a chart of steps in the 2027 scholarship competition.

SEMIFINALISTS

HOW WERE SEMIFINALISTS DESIGNATED?

The 2025 PSAT/NMSQT served as an initial screen of over 1.3 million entrants to the 2027 National Merit Scholarship Program. The Selection Index scores of students who met program participation requirements were used to designate a pool of more than 16,000 Semifinalists on a state allocation basis. Semifinalists are the highest scorers in each of the 50 states and represent less than one percent of each state's high school seniors. Although Semifinalist qualifying scores vary from one state to another, the scores of all Semifinalists are extremely high.

In addition to those designated in each of the 50 states, and without affecting the allocation to any state, Semifinalists were named in other selection units established by NMSC for the competition. These units are for participants who attend schools in the District of Columbia, schools in U.S. territories and commonwealths, schools in other countries, and U.S. boarding schools that enroll a sizable proportion of their students from outside the state in which the school is located.

HOW WILL NMSC HONOR SEMIFINALISTS?

Semifinalists in the 2027 National Merit Program will be recognized:

- in an announcement sent to news media nationwide for release on September 9, 2026. By spotlighting Semifinalists, NMSC hopes to increase general interest in academic excellence and encourage broader support for the education of talented young people; and
- in notification to colleges and universities. To help enhance their educational opportunities, a list of Semifinalists (by high school) will be sent to four-year U.S. colleges and universities.

WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP FOR SEMIFINALISTS?

Before they can be considered for Merit Scholarship awards, Semifinalists must qualify as Finalists by completing the National Merit Scholarship Application using NMSC's Online Scholarship Application (OSA) and fulfilling several other requirements. (See *Requirements and Instructions for Semifinalists*, which is posted online in the "Competition Instructions" section of the OSA or at www.nationalmerit.org/resources.) Semifinalists who do not meet all specified requirements and deadlines cannot become Finalists; they will be notified by NMSC or an official of their high school that they have been withdrawn from the competition. A Semifinalist can advance to Finalist standing and be considered for a National Merit Scholarship in only one specific annual competition.

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HOW WILL SEMIFINALISTS KNOW IF THEY BECOME FINALISTS?

On February 4, 2027, NMSC notifies high school principles about the status of their Semifinalists. This notification will be posted to each high school's OSA dashboard.

On February 8, 2027, NMSC will mail a letter to each Finalist at their home address. A copy of the letter will also be posted to the Finalist's OSA dashboard.

On March 1, 2027, NMSC will mail a *Certificate of Merit* for each Finalist to the Finalist's high school principal.

Semifinalists who do not advance to Finalist standing will be notified in writing. Notification will be mailed to high school officials and the students' homes.

NOTE: NMSC does not make a news media announcement about Finalists because Semifinalists are publicly honored and more than 15,000 of the 16,000 Semifinalists are expected to reach the Finalist level.

MERIT SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

About **6,700 National Merit Scholarships** of three types will be offered in 2027:

- 2,500 single-payment **National Merit® $2500 Scholarships** for which all Finalists will be considered;
- about 700 **corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarship** awards for which Finalists who meet a company or business grantor's specified criteria will be considered; and
- some 3,500 **college-sponsored Merit Scholarship** awards for which only Finalists who will attend their respective sponsor institutions are considered.

All Merit Scholar® designees are chosen based on their abilities, accomplishments, and potential for success in rigorous college studies—without regard to gender, race, ethnic origin, religious preference, or family financial circumstances.

Although all students who become Finalists are outstanding, not all Finalists receive a Merit Scholarship award. Of the 15,000 Finalists in the 2027 program, about half will win an award, and no student will receive more than one scholarship offer from NMSC.

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, and accept their Merit Scholarship offer.

HOW ARE NATIONAL MERIT $2500 SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS SELECTED?

Every Finalist who completes requirements by December 31, 2025, is considered for one of 2,500 National Merit $2500 Scholarships. Most of these one-time scholarships are supported by NMSC's own funds. Business organizations that provide corporate-sponsored awards help underwrite a portion of these scholarships with grants they provide to NMSC in lieu of paying administrative fees. Donations made to NMSC's President's Fund also provide funding for National Merit $2500 Scholarships.

As in the designation of Semifinalists, these awards are allocated on a state-representational basis according to the state's percentage of the national total of high school graduates; winners are also named in the other selection units established for the competition. Each Finalist competes against other Finalists who attend high school in the same state or selection unit at the time winners are chosen.

In late January 2027, a committee of experienced college admission officers and high school counselors will meet to choose the winners of National Merit $2500 Scholarships. Committee teams analyze and evaluate all Finalists' scholarship applications based on information supplied by students and their schools, which includes:

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

Because every Semifinalist who qualifies as a Finalist has an excellent academic record and outstanding test scores, the school official's recommendation of the student and the student's essay play an important part in the process of choosing Merit Scholar designees. Activities, awards, and employment are also considered. Winners in each state (or other selection unit) will be the Finalists judged by committee members to have the most distinguished credentials and potential for academic success, without consideration of financial need, college choice, or major and career plans.

WHEN WILL FINALISTS LEARN WHETHER THEY HAVE WON A NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARSHIP?

In March 2027, NMSC will begin notifying scholarship winners, with confidential notification to their high schools. (See the schedule in the *Requirements and Instructions for Semifinalists* document.)

In mid-May 2027, NMSC will notify Finalists who have not won a National Merit Scholarship. However, a few additional scholarships may become available after this date; recipients of those awards will be notified and their names released to news media during the summer.

WHICH FINALISTS CAN BE CONSIDERED FOR CORPORATE-SPONSORED MERIT SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS?

About 700 corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards will be offered in 2027 to Finalists who meet specified criteria. Most of the 120 corporate sponsors that underwrite these scholarships designate them for children of their employees; however, some sponsors specify their awards for residents of communities in which the company has plants or offices, or for Finalists pursuing college majors and careers the grantor organization wishes to encourage. (See the *Sponsors of National Merit® Scholarships* document, which is posted online in the "Competition Instructions" section of the OSA or at www.nationalmerit.org/resources.)

Information Finalists supply on their National Merit Scholarship Applications will be used to identify a pool of eligible candidates for corporate-sponsored awards. NMSC's professional staff will choose almost all scholarship recipients. Officials of a few sponsor organizations will make their own selections from eligible Finalists.

Each corporate sponsor specifies the amount of the award and whether the awards provide one-time payments or payments that can be renewed for up to four years of undergraduate study, per the chart below:

Type of award	Scholarship amount ranges
Renewable	$1,000–$10,000 per year
One-time	$2,500–$10,000

WHICH FINALISTS CAN BE CONSIDERED FOR COLLEGE-SPONSORED MERIT SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS?

About 140 colleges and universities have made arrangements with NMSC to sponsor National Merit Scholarships in the 2027 competition, and it is expected that some 3,500 of these awards will be offered to Finalists next spring. (See the *Sponsors of National Merit® Scholarships* document, which is posted online in the "Competition Instructions" section of the OSA.) To be considered for college-sponsored awards, Finalists must meet **all three** of the following conditions. Finalists:

- must have notified NMSC that the sponsor college is their first choice;
- must have applied for admission to that institution; and
- must not have been offered any other National Merit Scholarship.

Every college-sponsored award is offered with the condition that the Finalist has been admitted for the fall term and will attend the sponsor college. Because every college-sponsored award can be used only at the institution financing it, the scholarship is canceled if the winner changes college choice. (See page 4 of the *Requirements and Instructions for Semifinalists* document for more information about naming a first-choice college.)

Also, if a Finalist informs NMSC of a change in college choice after a college-sponsored Merit Scholarship offer has already been posted to the students' OSA dashboard, the change will not be processed and the student cannot be offered another college-sponsored award. (See page 4 of the *Requirements and Instructions for Semifinalists* document, which is posted online in the "Competition Instructions" section of the OSA or at www.nationalmerit.org/resources.)

Early in March, NMSC will begin notifying each sponsor college about Finalists who have reported that institution as their first choice. College officials will choose all winners of their Merit Scholarship awards from among these Finalists. A sponsor college may decide to offer a Merit Scholarship award to every Finalist who is admitted or choose to limit the number of awards it provides. Students should contact the sponsor college directly if they have questions about the college's selection process.

A college-sponsored scholarship is renewable for up to four years of undergraduate study at the sponsor institution. Each college sponsor chooses the annual scholarship amount their institution offers to award recipients, within a range of $500 to $2,000 per year. All college-sponsored scholarship recipients at the institution will receive the same scholarship amount as determined by the college.

AWARD RECIPIENTS

ARE THERE REQUIREMENTS THAT NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS MUST MEET?

Yes. Terms of the Scholarship will be provided on NMSC's Online Scholarship Application 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 Scholar 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 Scholar's enrollment;
- all Merit 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. NMSC scholarship stipends are not payable, however, for attendance at service academies or certain institutions that are limited in their purpose or training;
- Merit Scholarship recipients must attend college full-time, and must pursue a course of study leading to one of the traditional baccalaureate degrees; and
- all National Merit $2500 Scholarships and all corporate-sponsored awards are transferable from one regionally accredited U.S. institution to another; however, college-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards will be canceled if the winner transfers to a different college.

WHEN DO WINNERS RECEIVE SCHOLARSHIP PAYMENTS?

ONE-TIME AWARDS

Next September, 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

Next September, winners of renewable awards will be issued the first installment of their scholarship; 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 scholarship payments for scholarship recipients to their college financial aid offices.

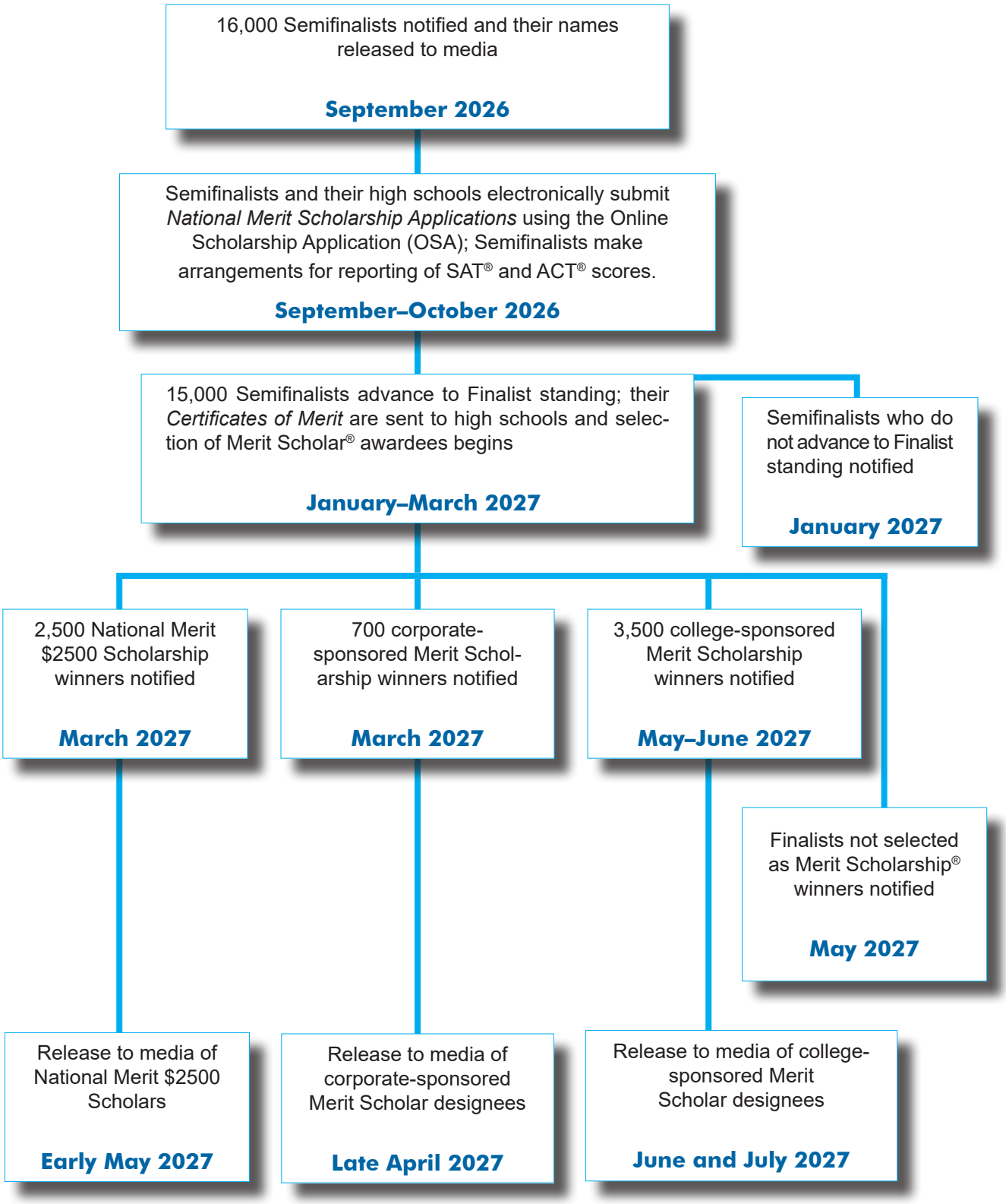
SCHOLAR ANNOUNCEMENTS

After NMSC receives award acceptances, the names of Merit Scholar® designees will be released to news media nationwide in four announcements:

April 21	Corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarship winners
May 12	National Merit $2500 Scholarship winners
June 2 and July 12	College-sponsored Merit Scholarship winners

If you have any questions about the information presented in this document, 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

2027 NATIONAL MERIT® SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM



For a complete explanation of steps, requirements, and dates for the competition, see pages 1–3 of this document and the *Requirements and Instructions for Semifinalists* document. Both documents can be found at www.nationalmerit.org/resources and in the "Competition Instructions" section of the OSA.