

National Merit Scholarship Program

The National Merit Scholarship Program is an academic competition for recognition and scholarships that began in 1955. High school students enter the National Merit Program by taking the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT). Over 1.5 million college-bound high school students from more than 21,000 high schools entered the 2009 National Merit Scholarship Program .

Commended Students: Letters of Commendation were sent to 34,000 of the highest scorers nationwide in recognition of their outstanding academic promise. Commended Students are named on the basis of a nationally applied Selection Index score. Although they will not continue in the competition for National Merit Scholarships, some of these students may be candidates for Special Scholarships provided by corporate sponsors.

Semifinalists: Of the 1.5 million who took the qualifying test, the list of 16,000 National Merit Semifinalists represent less than one percent of each state's high school seniors. Only semifinalists qualify to continue the competition for National Merit Scholarships to be awarded in the spring of 2009. To be considered for a National Merit Scholarship, Semifinalists must advance to Finalist standing in the competition by meeting high academic standards and all other requirements explained in the materials provided to each Semifinalist. 15,000 students will advance to Finalist standing.

National Achievement Scholarship Program

The National Achievement Scholarship Program is conducted by National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC), a not-for-profit organization that operates without government assistance. The National Achievement Program was created in 1964 specifically to honor academically talented Black American high school students and to provide National Achievement Scholarships for college undergraduate study to a substantial number of the most outstanding participants in each annual competition. To date, about 194,200 participants have received program recognition and 28,700 of them have won Achievement Scholarship awards worth over \$91 million.

NMSC also conducts the annual National Merit Scholarship Program, which is open to all U.S. high school students who meet published requirements for participation. The Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) is the route of entry to both programs, which are conducted simultaneously but administered and funded separately. The PSAT/NMSQT performance required for students to receive recognition is determined independently in each competition, and therefore, differs between the National Achievement Program and the National Merit Program.

Black students can qualify for recognition and be honored in both competitions, but no student can receive more than one monetary award from NMSC.

More than 150,000 college-bound black high school students took the 2007 PSAT/NMSQT and requested consideration in the 2009 National Achievement Program; about 1,600 were named Semifinalists on the basis of their Selection Index scores (the sum of critical reading, mathematics, and writing skills scores). To ensure that scholastically able black students throughout the nation are represented, Semifinalists are designated on a regional representation basis. The 50 states and the District of Columbia are grouped into several geographic regions; an allocation of Semifinalists is assigned to each based on the region's proportion of the total number of Black Americans. Semifinalists are the highest scorers in the states within reach region. Additional Semifinalists are named in high schools in U.S. commonwealths and territories, in schools outside the nation that are attended by U.S. citizens, and in U.S. boarding schools that enroll a sizable number of their students from outside the state in which the school is located.