Agenda Item: 5.A

Board of Education

Regular Meeting – November 9, 2026

AGENDA SECTION: Recognitions

ITEM: National Merit Scholarship Semi-Finalists and Esteemed Teachers

COMMENTS BY: Robb Virgin, Superintendent

WHS Seniors Honored in 2026-2027 National Merit Scholarship Program

Wayzata is proud to recognize 21 Wayzata High School students who have been named Semifinalists in the National Merit Scholarship Program. Congratulations to these amazing students for being named among only 16,000 semifinalists from across the country and among 270 from MN.

High school juniors entered the National Merit Scholarship Program by taking the 2025 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test, which served as an initial screen of program entrants. The nationwide pool of Semifinalists, representing less than one percent of U.S. high school seniors, includes the highest-scoring entrants in each state.

These academically-talented high school seniors have an opportunity to continue in the competition for 7,500 National Merit Scholarships worth nearly $30 million that will be offered next spring.

Amy Swenson, Gifted and Talented Coordinator at Wayzata High School, will introduce each of the National Merit Semifinalists and share the names of the teachers being recognized by these students.

2026-2027 Wayzata High School National Merit Semifinalists

Arabella Asrani

Logan Cassie

Louis Dang

William Feng

Rohan Gajendhar

Henry Horton

Ishan Iska

Pavan Kartik

Owen Kaus

Gabrielle Lewis

Karan Narang

Eshaan Parnerkar

Luke Schirack

Yashvi Singh

Colin Sullivan

Raymond Sun

Thomas Williams

Sydney Willoughby

Tianqi Yu

Allison Zhang

Joy Zhou

WHS National Merit Semifinalists Recognize Staff Who Made a Difference

It is a long-standing tradition at Wayzata High School that our National Merit Semifinalists identify a significant K-8 staff member and a significant 9-12 staff member who have played an important role in their learning. This year's semifinalists selected the following individuals as their esteemed staff nominees. Each staff member identified was presented with a lapel pin in recognition.

K-8 Esteemed Staff

Chad Bartels

Chip Brofford

Miriam Dennis

Michele Hull

Nicole Misuraco

Jane Panning

Katie Pilla

Nicole Ringate

Matthew Rohweder

Alexa Simon

Carolyn Sund

9-12 Esteemed Staff

Lee Barnett

Seth Finck

Abigail Genise

Mark Gitch

Jodi Grack

Jorun Hamre

Emily Haugh

Clarice Jorenby

Shannon Kelly

Paul Kimbler

Amanda Laden

Tim Masters

Eliza Lewis O'Connor

Jeff Prondzinski

Colleen Regnier

Janna Stanton

Wayzata is filled with amazing staff as evidenced by a summary of the words and thoughts of our National Merit Semifinalists who had these things to say about why this group of staff members was important to them.

Several students described teachers who fundamentally changed how they viewed a subject. One student remembered a science teacher who: "Truly made learning fun and not just a responsibility." Others described discovering a passion for biology, mathematics, music, literature and business because a teacher made those subjects come alive. One student credited a teacher with inspiring a passion for classical music that continues today and another described how an elementary teacher's encouragement helped establish the curiosity and creativity that still guide her learning.

These students repeatedly recognized educators who pushed them beyond their comfort zones, maintained high expectations and encouraged them to pursue opportunities they might not have thought possible. They told stories about how these educators helped them navigate setbacks, take intellectual risks and develop the confidence to succeed independently. In the words of one student, "I truly cannot imagine where I would be without her support, insight and unwavering belief in me."

Students also remembered creative classroom projects, special traditions, meaningful conversations and moments of shared laughter. They remembered the teacher who participated in the classroom carnival, the science teacher who waded into the pond alongside students, the teacher who made hot chocolate Fridays special and the educator who made early morning rehearsals something to look forward to. These details might seem small, but they are anything but insignificant. They are the moments that create a personal connection and make school meaningful.

To every teacher nominated: Thank you for seeing potential, for creating opportunities, for making learning meaningful, and for showing up every day with enthusiasm, patience, and care. You may not always see the full impact of a conversation, a word of encouragement, or a simple expression of belief in a student. But these nominations remind us

that those moments matter. They stay with students. They influence their choices, their passions, their confidence, and ultimately, the people they become. Your influence reaches far beyond the walls of your classrooms!

Congratulations to this year's National Merit Semifinalists and Esteemed Staff Members! You make a difference and your efforts are deeply appreciated!