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## **Board of Education to Honor Finalists in National Merit Scholarship Program**

*Teachers who have received National Board Certification  
also to be recognized*

**ELGIN** - The School District U-46 Board of Education Monday night will recognize three high school seniors who are finalists in the 64th annual National Merit Scholarship Program. The BOE will also honor a teacher who recently earned National Board Certification, the highest credential in the teaching profession, as well as another teacher who has maintained and recently renewed this credential.

The three seniors who are National Merit finalists — Alexa Mogan and Rachel A. Montesano of Bartlett High School and Riya Kumar of Elgin High School — will compete for one of 7,500 National Merit Scholarships that together are worth more than \$31 million. They will be awarded this spring.

The three U-46 finalists placed among the top 1 percent of more than 1.6 million juniors nationwide who entered the 2019 National Merit Scholarship Program by taking the 2017 PSAT, which served as the initial screening. They advanced to the finals based on their academic record, participation in school and community activities, demonstrated leadership abilities, employment, and honors and awards received.

Riya credited her teachers at Elgin High School's Gifted & Talented Academy for keeping her motivated. She plans to attend Northwestern University this fall to study neuroscience on the pre-med track.

"They encourage and support me in everything I do, not only inside the classroom, but outside as well," Riya said. "With this kind of environment, I genuinely enjoy learning, and I never feel like I'm doing work just to get a

grade or a diploma. My teachers have inspired me to work hard and convince me every day that I can do great things.”

Rachel has appeared in Bartlett High School theater productions and was part of a BHS team that took first place in the 2018 Illinois High School Association’s Sectional Tournament for Group Interpretation. Rachel plans to study math or computer science with a minor in music.

“I think I am most motivated by my inner desire to be the best that I can possibly be,” Rachel said.

Alexa, who plans to double major in mathematics and cognitive science in college, said she is grateful she participated in speech and mock trial activities at BHS because they improved her public speaking and communication skills.

“I am motivated in school and in life by the encouragement and support of my single mother, Lisa,” Alexa said. “I always try my best to make her proud — nothing makes me happier than making her happy.”

Also to be honored Monday night are Gisselle Moreira, a 4th grade Dual Language teacher at Garfield Elementary School in Elgin who achieved National Board Certification in 2018, and Julie Tina Denz, a Spanish teacher at Streamwood High School, who maintained and renewed her certification.

National Board Certification requires teachers pass a rigorous performance-based assessment that only 33 percent of candidates pass on the first attempt. Moreira joins nearly 70 of her peers in the District who have earned the credential; her chosen certificate area is “Literacy: Reading-Language Arts for Early and Middle Childhood.”

“Even though I am a lifelong learner, now I am a stronger and more sensitive teacher than when I began my practice,” Moreira said. “This experience changed the way I look at teaching and helped me reflect and improve on what I do to support students’ achievement.”

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards oversees the process for National Board Certification, which can take a teacher one to three years to complete. It is a self-reflective form of professional learning that defines and recognizes accomplished teaching. Candidates must demonstrate their understanding of content knowledge in their chosen certificate area; design

and implement instruction to advance student learning and achievement; describe, analyze and reflect on their teaching and interactions with students; and highlight their abilities as an effective and reflective practitioner in developing and applying their knowledge of their students.

“It’s such a powerful process,” said Maryellyn Friel, who is a Cross Cat Resource Teacher at Heritage Elementary School in Streamwood and serves as the District’s cohort facilitator for candidates who want to complete or renew national certification. Friel herself is Nationally Board Certified in Exceptional Needs.

“It really gets you to slow down and examine your practice — how to be reflective, how to align what you know about your students, what you know about the content, and to bring it all together,” Friel said. “And the centerpiece is student impact — how did you impact your students?”

Denz, whose renewal certification is in “World Languages Other than English,” said she decided to renew “so I could continue to look for ways to improve my teaching through reflection and so I could continue to grow in my profession.”

Denz, Moreira, and the National Merit finalists will receive an Accent on Achievement certificate at 7 p.m. Monday, March 18 in room 140 of the Educational Services Center. The U-46 Board of Education Meetings are always open to the public and they stream live on YouTube.

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*School District U-46 serves families in 11 communities: Bartlett, Elgin, Hanover Park, South Elgin, Streamwood and Wayne, as well as portions of Carol Stream, Hoffman Estates, St. Charles, Schaumburg, and West Chicago. In total, the District encompasses 90 square miles within the Fox River Valley, approximately 45 minutes west of downtown Chicago, and includes communities within Cook, DuPage and Kane counties. Nearly 39,000 pre-K through twelfth graders attend the 57 District schools and programs. To learn more, Visit the U-46 [website](#), or like us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#).*



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