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U-46 Board of Education to Honor Finalists in National Merit Scholarship Program

Students attend Elgin, Bartlett, and South Elgin high schools

ELGIN - The School District U-46 Board of Education Monday night will recognize three high school seniors who are finalists in the 68th annual National Merit Scholarship Program.

Madeline Conter of Elgin High School, Hannah Guerra of Bartlett High School, and Andrew Strama of South Elgin High School will compete for one of 7,250 National Merit Scholarships that together are worth nearly \$28 million. The scholarships will be awarded this spring.

The U-46 students placed among the top 1 percent of juniors nationwide who entered the 2023 National Merit Scholarship Program by taking the 2021 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.

Hannah Guerra said it "didn't feel quite real" when she learned last fall that she had been named a National Merit semifinalist. Her favorite subjects are math and reading, and she plans to double major in English and physics at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Ultimately, she hopes to be a published author.

She's been a part of the Dual Credit program at Elgin Community College during her senior year - simultaneously earning college and high school credit - and said she's grateful for all the opportunities she received in U-46.

“It’s a big district, with big schools, and it therefore really has something for everyone,” said Hannah, who especially singled out for praise events at Bartlett High School that allow students to showcase their writing.

Andrew Strama plans to major in particle physics, but he is still finalizing his college choice. He said he’s proud of himself for being able to balance competing in multiple sports with an advanced academic load throughout middle and high school, but thinks he’ll look back most fondly on the connections he built at South Elgin High School.

“Some of my favorite memories in high school have come from quieter, more relaxed moments where I did nothing more than talk to my friends and slowly whittle away at work,” he said. “Those moments will stick with me the most and I’m happy I was in the position to experience them.”

Madeline Conter, a student at the Gifted & Talented Academy at Elgin High School, plans to attend Northwestern University as a mechanical engineering major, with an ultimate goal of a career in aerospace engineering.

She said she’s grateful for “being able to surround myself with welcoming and inclusive students, teachers, and administrators” ever since she started in the District as a kindergartner. Madeline was also honored by the Board earlier this spring when she was named an All-State Musician by the Illinois Music Education Association. In fact, her favorite memory from her time in U-46 is when she got to drum upside down at a high school assembly.

“A great aspect of U-46 is the teachers' devotion to giving their students space to contribute their own ideas,” she said. “Creativity is encouraged by teachers in our district like my band teacher, and I really appreciate that.”

The three National Merit finalists will receive an Accent on Achievement certificate at 7 p.m. Monday, April 10 in room 140 of the Educational Services Center. The U-46 Board of Education meeting will also be streamed live on the District’s [YouTube channel](#).



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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. More than 35,000 preschoolers through 12th 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](#).