



**SANTA MONICA-MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
NEWS RELEASE**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Oct. 20, 2023

**SMMUSD Students Recognized by
National Merit Scholarship Program**

Congratulations to the three Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD) National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists and the 18 Commended Students. Out of 1.5 million entrants, about 50,000 with the highest Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) and National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test scores qualify for recognition in the National Merit Scholarship Program as semifinalists and commended students.



Student scholars from Malibu High School and Samohi were recognized by the school board and Superintendent Dr. Shelton.

The semifinalists from Santa Monica High School (Samohi) are Milo Bernini and Justin Xu. The semifinalist from Malibu High School (MHS) is Athena Rem. Commended students from Samohi are Mason Arditi, Ryan Cao, Isaac Feinberg, Ajax Haendel, Casper Holden, Jesse Howard, Shannon Lee, Blase Londono, Matilde Martinez-Navarrete, Koosha Paridhpour, Ryan Schatzow, and Maya Williams. The commended students from MHS are Katherine Baker and Filip Kurial. All of these students are seniors.

“I feel honored to be a semifinalist and I hope this will help lessen the financial burden of college,” said Samohi student Xu. “I’d love to give a special thanks to my English teacher, Ms. Benone, for helping me gain confidence and metacognitive skills in my reading, which helped very much with my success.” Xu hopes to attend UCLA next year for either mathematics or civil engineering to become a teacher or professor.

According to the National Merit Scholarship [website](#), “semifinalists are designated on a state-representational basis and are the highest scoring entrants in each state.” The website goes on to explain that in order for semifinalists to advance to finalist standing in the competition, they must meet the high academic standards, as well as all the other requirements explained in the information provided to each semifinalist.

“I feel really proud to be a semifinalist,” said MHS student Rem, who hopes to attend

Columbia University in New York. "I remember I was worried because I was sick on the day of the PSAT, but I had my SAT score so I was still able to qualify through alternate entry. Hopefully the skills I developed in studying will help in college and beyond."

The National Merit Scholarship website states that out of the 50,000 students recognized, 3,400 are commended students. These students receive letters of commendation in recognition of their outstanding academic promise. Although commended students do not continue in the competition for National Merit Scholarships, some do become candidates for special scholarships sponsored by corporations and businesses.

"It's truly an honor to be a National Merit semifinalist. I work very hard in my classes at Samohi, and it is rewarding to see my efforts being recognized," said Bernini. "I would also like to thank my amazing teachers at Samohi for their instruction and support." Bernini hopes to get a scholarship and attend UC Berkeley to study applied mathematics.

Congratulations once again to SMMUSD's semifinalists and commended students and best of luck to the semifinalists working to advance to finalist standings!

The Board of Education recognized the students at the October 19, 2023 school board meeting for their accomplishments.

Written by Diana Bouchaaya, Communications Specialist

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