

News Release

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12 students named Presidential Scholar Semifinalists

MADISON – Twelve Wisconsin students have been named semifinalists in the 2019 U.S. Presidential Scholar Program, one of the nation’s highest honors bestowed on a high school graduate.

“To Wisconsin’s semifinalists in the Presidential Scholars Program, I know your family, teachers, and all other educators in your schools and districts are delighted to see this news,” said State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor. “What you achieve now is preparing you to build a better world for everyone in the future. Congratulations on your success.”

The Presidential Scholar Program was established in 1964 to recognize and honor some of our nation’s most distinguished graduating high school seniors. The state’s 12 semifinalists are:

- Namitha Alexander, Brookfield, Brookfield East High School;
- Suhaas M. Bhat, Marshfield, Marshfield High School;
- Stephen Kearney, Whitefish Bay, Whitefish Bay High School;
- Michelle Chen Li, Brookfield, Brookfield East High School;
- Mohamed Mohamud Mohamed, Green Bay, Preble High School, Green Bay Area Public Schools;
- Katrina Eileen Pokorny, Waupun, Waupun Senior High School;
- Matthew E. Ryherd, Reedsburg, Reedsburg Area High School;
- Anusha Sahai, Verona, James Madison Memorial High School, Madison Metropolitan School District;
- Nikhita Santebennur, Brookfield, Brookfield East High School;
- Anthony Joseph Sikorski, Hartland, Arrowhead Union High School;
- Isaac Arnold Wells-Cage, Milwaukee, Ronald Reagan High School, Milwaukee Public Schools; and
- Yining Zhou, Onalaska, Onalaska High School.

The students are among 621 Presidential Scholar semifinalists nationwide. Earlier this year, the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program identified more than 5,200 candidates based on three paths of accomplishment. The majority of scholars are selected based on broad academic achievement as measured

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by the ACT and SAT college admissions exams. Another group of students, including **Pokorny and Ryherd**, are selected based on their ability and accomplishment in career and technical education fields. A final group is selected on the basis of their academic and artistic scholarship in the visual arts, performing arts, or creative writing. Students identified as candidates are invited to apply and submit essays, self-assessments, secondary school reports, and transcripts to confirm their interest and assist in the selection process.

A review committee of individuals from secondary and postsecondary education evaluates candidates on their academic achievement, personal characteristics, leadership and service activities, and the quality and content of their essay. Names and supporting materials for semifinalists are forwarded to the White House Commission on Presidential Scholars, which reviews the applications. The commission selects one male and one female scholar from each state, the District of Columbia, the commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and from families of U.S. citizens living abroad; up to 15 students chosen at large; 20 scholars in the arts; and 20 in career and technical education for a total of up to 161 U.S. Presidential Scholars.

Students chosen as Presidential Scholars will travel to Washington, D.C., in June, where they will meet with government officials, educators, authors, musicians, scientists, and other accomplished individuals. Presidential Scholars will have opportunities to visit area museums and monuments and have a chance to exchange ideas and build friendships with their peers. They also will receive a Presidential Scholars medallion at a ceremony sponsored by the White House.

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