

# FairTest

National Center for Fair & Open Testing

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## **H.S. CLASS OF 2016 NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARSHIP CUT-OFF SCORES VARY BY STATE BUT ASSURE MOST AWARDS GO TO AFFLUENT FAMILIES; TEST SCORES DO NOT MEASURE “MERIT,” AS 850 SAT/ACT-OPTIONAL SCHOOLS DEMONSTRATE**

Students from affluent families are greatly over-represented in the lists of high school seniors eligible for National Merit Scholarships released last week, a result of the competition’s reliance on standardized test results, according to data made public today. The National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest) posted National Merit’s previously secret cut-off scores, which vary greatly among states, and a table showing SAT scores by family income.

“The National Merit competition relies solely on the Preliminary SAT to select Semifinalists,” explained FairTest Public Education Director Bob Schaeffer. “SAT results strongly correlate with family income. On average, the more your parents earn, the higher your test scores. As a result, the National Merit selection process guarantees that the lion’s share of scholarships goes to students from families that least need financial aid. Among other factors, wealthy parents often buy their children test-prep ‘steroids’ to boost their scores.”

Schaeffer continued, “National Merit says it uses different state eligibility scores to assure geographic fairness. However, it has made no effort to fix other biases in its process. The minimum PSAT requirement eliminates nearly 99% of scholarship seekers, no matter how strong their other credentials.” Depending on the state, the PSAT cut-off score for members of the class of 2016 to become Semifinalists ranges from 202 to 225.

“This unfair use of the PSAT should stop,” Schaeffer concluded. “Standardized exam scores do not measure academic ‘merit.’ Research shows that high school grades are a better predictor of undergraduate success than any test. That is why more than 850 colleges and universities across the U.S. now have SAT/ACT-optional admissions policies.”

FairTest is leading a campaign to overhaul the competition’s eligibility rules. Many civil rights, education and feminist groups also support National Merit Scholarship reforms. A FairTest gender bias complaint forced revisions in the qualifying exam that increased the percentage of female winners. National Merit has not addressed the groups’ other concerns.

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attached:

- State-by-state National Merit Scholarship qualifying scores for the high school class of 2016
- Average SAT scores by family income for students in the high school class of 2015.

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## NMSQT/PSAT Qualifying Scores for High School Class of 2016 National Merit Semifinalists

Alabama	209	Nevada	211
Alaska	206	New Hampshire	213
Arizona	215	New Jersey	225
Arkansas	204	New Mexico	208
California	223	New York	219
Colorado	215	North Carolina	215
Connecticut	220	North Dakota	202
Delaware	216	Ohio	215
Dist. of Columbia	225	Oklahoma	208
Florida	214	Oregon	215
Georgia	218	Pennsylvania	217
Hawaii	214	Rhode Island	212
Idaho	208	South Carolina	211
Illinois	215	South Dakota	202
Indiana	213	Tennessee	212
Iowa	208	Texas	220
Kansas	213	Utah	206
Kentucky	210	Vermont	214
Louisiana	211	Virginia	222
Maine	211	Washington	219
Maryland	222	West Virginia	202
Massachusetts	223	Wisconsin	208
Michigan	210	Wyoming	202
Minnesota	214		
Mississippi	209	U.S. Territories	202
Missouri	209	Outside U.S.	225
Montana	204		
Nebraska	209		

**Score for National Merit “Commended Status” = 202 in all jurisdictions**

## 2015 COLLEGE-BOUND SENIORS SAT SCORES BY FAMILY INCOME

	READING	MATH	WRITING	TOTAL
\$ 0 - \$20,000	433	455	426	1314
\$20,000 - \$40,000	466	479	454	1399
\$40,000 - \$60,000	488	497	473	1458
\$60,000 - \$80,000	503	510	487	1500
\$80,000 - \$100,000	517	526	501	1544
\$100,000 - \$120,000	528	539	514	1581
\$120,000 - \$140,000	531	542	518	1591
\$140,000 - \$160,000	539	551	526	1616
\$160,000 - \$200,000	545	557	534	1636
More than \$200,000	570	587	563	1720

Calculated by FairTest from: College Board, College-Bound Seniors 2015: Total Group Profile Report and College-Bound Seniors 2006: Total Group Profile Report