



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Charlene M. Russell Tucker, Commissioner of Education

DATE: January 15, 2026

SUBJECT: Nominations for the 2026 U.S. Presidential Scholars Program

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) recently received a request from the U.S. Department of Education (USED) seeking nominations from states for the [U.S. Presidential Scholars Program](#). The USED is expecting to receive nominations from states by early February. Annually, the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program committee selects students in each state for recognition in each of the following three components:

1. the General Component (selection based on high academic achievement);
2. the Arts Component (selected based on excellence in the arts); and **(NEW)**
3. the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Component (selection based on the merits of CTE scholarship).

As per the guidance received from USED, we are seeking your recommendations to identify statewide candidates. Considering the quick turnaround sought by USED, the CSDE is asking you to submit up to four nominations for your district by **Thursday, January 29, 2026**:

1. one male student and one female student for the General Component;
2. one student (male or female) for the Arts Component; and
3. one student (male or female) for the CTE Component.

You may recommend any student in your district (public, non-public, homeschooled) who will graduate in the spring of 2026 and who intends to engage in post-secondary education.

From the recommendations received from all districts, the Commissioner will nominate up to 20 students (10 males and 10 females) for the General Component, and five (5) students each for the Arts Component and the CTE Component. The criteria for district consideration are below.

General Component: Recommend one (1) male and one (1) female

Candidates for the General Component are selected for nomination in one of two ways:

1. Automatic qualifiers are those among the students obtaining the highest SAT or ACT scores in their state. The top 30 students qualify as do all other students who obtain the score equal to the lowest of the qualifying scores of the top 30 students.
2. In addition to the high scorers, each state's Commissioner may nominate up to 20 additional candidates (10 males and 10 females) who, though high achieving, were not among the top SAT/ACT scorers in the state but have additionally overcome hardships, made a remarkable turnaround, accomplished something unique, or are otherwise distinguished by their personal characteristics and scholastic efforts.

Arts Component: Recommend one (1) student

Candidates for the Arts Component are selected by meeting one or more of the following criteria:

1. Candidates should demonstrate exceptional skill, creativity, and mastery in their chosen artistic discipline (visual arts, fine arts, performing arts or creative writing).

2. Candidates should demonstrate long-term engagement with their art form, demonstrating progressive growth and sophistication in their work over multiple courses and years.
3. Candidates should demonstrate meaningful contributions to arts communities through leadership, mentoring peers, organizing arts events, advocating for arts programs, or using their artistic talents to benefit their school or broader community.
4. Candidates should show how their artistic pursuits complement or inform their broader educational experience, intellectual development and academic achievement in the arts.
5. Candidates should demonstrate creative risk-taking, original thinking, innovation or distinctive artistic perspectives that set their work apart.

Nominating representative from the district may want to consider reviewing supporting materials provided by the candidate including examples of art form, recordings, recommendation letters from arts professionals, and documentation of achievements to substantiate nomination.

CTE Component: Recommend one (1) student

Candidates for the CTE Component are selected by the following criteria:

1. Candidates must have successfully completed two courses in one of the pathways in Connecticut's CTE Career Clusters.
2. Concentrators must also have demonstrated active membership and participation in one of the following nationally recognized and CSDE approved Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO): DECA, FBLA, FCCLA, FFA, HOSA, SkillsUSA, or TSA.
3. In addition to concentrator status and CTSO involvement, candidates may have overcome a hardship, made a remarkable turnaround, accomplished something unique, or are otherwise distinguished by their personal characteristics and scholastic efforts.

Request for Recommendation Letters

For the General Component, write about one male and one female student. For the Arts Component, write about one student. For the Career and Technical Education Component, write about one student. For these four students from your district, include details about the compelling stories that provide a powerful backdrop to their achievements. Please make your selection from the students in all of the high schools in your district. Prior to submitting a letter of recommendation, ensure that you have secured evidence of parental/guardian consent for the nomination. Following are the submission procedures and specifications for nomination letters and the necessary related information.

Submission Requirements and Procedures

Your letter of recommendation should not exceed 1,500 words and should include the student's name and your rationale for selecting this student (e.g., what makes him/her stand out and what challenges or hurdles this student has overcome). Your letters of recommendation will be reviewed by a selection committee. Additional documents are not necessary and will not be reviewed. By virtue of your nomination, the students will be assumed to possess high-academic achievements. No further evidence or attestation to that effect is needed. Along with your nominee's compelling back story, you may wish to include some details addressing the student's character, leadership qualities, and involvement in community service – these are among the same criteria that the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program reviewers will be using.

On a separate sheet of paper, accompany your letters with the following information:

- Student's Name;
- SASID;
- Component (General, Art, CTE);
- For CTE only, include name of CTSO;

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- Home mailing address;
- High school name and mailing address;
- High School CEEB (College Entrance Examination Board) code; and
- Male or Female.

Do not include the students' SASID or home mailing address on the recommendation letter.

Your letters **must be received** in our office by **Thursday, January 29, 2026**.

Mailing Address:

Ada Kovaci-Kume Connecticut State Department of Education, Performance Office P.O. Box 2219 Hartford, CT 06145-2219 ATTN: SY 2025-2026 U.S. Presidential Scholarship Nomination
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Selection of Commissioner's Nominees

A selection committee for the General Component will evaluate the first male and first female nominations for each district that was received by the deadline date and select up to 20 students for me to nominate to the USED. Two other selection committees tasked with reviewing the letters for Arts Component and the CTE Component will select five students for each from among the letters submitted for these components.

Reviewers will be asked to rate your nominees on:

- the details of their personal contexts;
- evidence of respectable character;
- the description of their leadership qualities; and
- their involvement in community service.

Invitations to Apply for the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program

All students nominated by me through this process will be invited by the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program to complete an application. While a student's nomination may be noted publicly, the student's completion of an application for the Scholars Program is voluntary. Please note that during the selection process, only the application materials developed by the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program will be made available to their selection committees. SAT/ACT scores, for instance, will not be included.

Reviewers for the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program will be considering the following elements from their application materials when evaluating the nominees:

- Involvement and Service (in school and community);
- Leadership and Character;
- Writing samples;
- Academic achievements; and
- Discretionary points for extraordinary achievement, heavy workload, family responsibilities, or obstacles overcome.

I sincerely look forward to hearing about our extraordinary students. If you have any questions about this process, please contact Ada Kovaci-Kume by phone at 860-713-6855 or via e-mail at Ada.Kovaci-Kume@ct.gov. For specific questions pertaining to the Arts Component, please contact Irene Parisi by phone at 860-713-6852 or via e-mail at Irene.Parisi@ct.gov. For specific questions pertaining to the Career and Technical Education Component, please contact Sean McKeown by phone at 860-713-6884 or via e-mail at Sean.McKeown@ct.gov.