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Aspen School District  
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## **Press Release**

Sep 15, 2025

# **Aspen High School Students recognized in the National Merit Scholarship Program**

**Aspen, Colo.** – Aspen High School seniors Owen Cruz-Abrams and Khalil Khan-Farooqi have been named National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists based on their performance on the Pre-SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test.

They are among 16,000 Semifinalists - out of an estimated 1.3 million students who took the PSAT/NMSQT - announced by officials of National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) in the 69th annual National Merit Scholarship Program.

“We are extremely proud of both Khalil and Owen for their work earning this prestigious achievement. In addition to this exam, Semifinalists must have an outstanding academic record throughout high school,” said AHS Principal Sarah Strassburger. According to Post Secondary Counselor Karen Hawkes: “Both Khalil and Owen are excellent students, who also excel outside the classroom. Owen is the team captain of the Aspen Valley Ski and Snowboard Club (AVSC) Nordic Team, and he has qualified for and competed in the U.S. Nordic Skiing Junior National Championships the last two years, finishing in the Top 30 each year. He hopes to continue racing at the college level. Owen has also spent the last few years building an AI model to help doctors diagnose Retinoblastoma (eye cancer). Owen and his team have applied for a patent, and he has partnered with Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center to help make this diagnostic tool available worldwide. He hopes to use his computer science knowledge and ultimately a degree in medicine to bring expert care to people.

Khalil is a talented actor who has starred in many theater productions. He is also a respected leader in our community, and serves as Senior Class President, President of our Model UN Club, and President of Propel, a non profit that aims to raise literacy rates in Native American populations in the American West. With an interest in politics, Khalil has worked on several political campaigns, most recently as Lead Data Analyst for a Colorado gubernatorial race. We are excited that Khalil and Owen have an opportunity to become Finalists and become scholarship winners."

These academically talented high school seniors, representing less than one percent of U.S. High School seniors, and have an opportunity to continue in the competition for some 7,140 National Merit Scholarships worth nearly \$28 million that will be offered next spring.

Semifinalists must fulfill several requirements to advance to the Finalist level of the competition. About 95 percent of the Semifinalists are expected to attain Finalist standing, and approximately half of the Finalists will win a National Merit Scholarship, earning the Merit Scholar title.

### **About National Merit Scholarship Corporation**

NMSC, a not-for-profit organization that operates without government assistance, was established in 1955 specifically to conduct the annual National Merit Scholarship Program. Scholarships are underwritten by NMSC with its own funds and by approximately 320 business organizations and higher education institutions that share NMSC's goals of honoring the nation's scholastic champions and encouraging the pursuit of academic excellence.

### **About The Aspen School District**

Located at 8,000 feet, surrounded by unparalleled natural beauty, Aspen School District views education as an adventure created from brave innovation, a world-class teaching staff and curriculum and experiential learning. We cultivate inquisitive, resilient, and caring young people, enabling them to reach their highest academic potential through education that is rigorous, inclusive, and reflective of our mountain community values. For more information go to [Aspenk12.net](http://Aspenk12.net) Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).