

News release



Everett Public Schools

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Three seniors in Everett high schools earn National Merit semifinalist status
Students' junior year PSAT scores increase scholarship chances. Everett Public Schools among handful of districts that pay for all juniors to take PSAT.

Deborah Peterson from Everett High School and Eunice Chu and Christopher Steckler from H.M. Jackson High School are among an elite number of high school seniors in the state and nation to be named as *semifinalists* in the National Merit® Scholarship program for 2013.

The three Everett Public Schools students were among 1,270 in the district who took the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) in October 2011 – the first junior class in the district for whom all of the PSAT costs were covered by the district. The year before, when students and families were responsible for PSAT costs (\$25), only 628 juniors took the test.

Because of their PSAT scores, Peterson, Chu and Steckler are now eligible to compete for 8,300 National Merit® scholarships worth more than \$32 million that will be offered next spring.

The three must now fulfill several requirements to advance to the next level – *finalist level* – of the scholarship competition. Requirements include submitting a detailed scholarship application that documents their academic record, involvement in school and community activities, leadership abilities and honors and awards. Each *semifinalist* must have an outstanding academic record all the way through high school, and each must have the endorsement of a high school principal. Each must write an essay and once again score well on the SAT to confirm the qualifying score earned as a junior.

When the junior year PSAT was free, the number of students taking the test doubled from 638 in 2010 to 1,270 in 2011.

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In February 2013, the National Merit organization will announce which of the nation's 16,000, *semifinalists*, including Peterson, Chu, and Steckler, have made it to the next level, *National Merit designee*. Historically, approximately nine out of 10 *semifinalists* do become *designees*, and more than half of those will earn the title of Merit Scholar®. Merit Scholars, announced April through July of 2013, are chosen because of their skills, accomplishments and potential for success in rigorous college studies, without regard to gender, race, ethnic origin or religious preference.

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“There are distinct advantages to taking the PSAT,” notes Dr. Catherine Matthews, the district’s curriculum and assessment director. “For those reasons, the district is eliminating the cost barrier that, in the past, got in the way of some high school juniors and prevented their having those advantages.

“Being eligible for National Merit awards is one advantage,” she explains. “We also know that when students take the PSAT as juniors, they are likely to do better on the SAT as seniors. And we know that when a student actually experiences the PSAT, that student has opened a college-bound doorway that might have remained closed without that testing experience. For some students, getting positive results on the PSAT is an ‘ah ha’ affirmation that inspires them to go to college.”

As Matthews explains, “The PSAT results come back to students personalized with feedback about individual academic skills, strengths and challenges each needs to work on. Students can use the score information and the rich resources on the [College Board](#) website to study for the SAT and to plan for work and education after high school. The district’s investment in this test for each high school junior is an investment with high returns for these students and their futures.”

Matthews re-emphasizes that the number of PSAT takers in 2010 was doubled in 2011 when the test was free – from 638 in 2010 to 1,270 in 2011. “Our September 2012 11th-grade enrollment number was 1,298. On Oct. 17 each of them will take the PSAT. At this time next year, we might be announcing even more National Merit *semifinalists*. Whether or not that is the case, we will have given more students a college-bound advantage and taken another step toward achieving our strategic plan goal of having 100 percent of our students graduate from high school with college-ready skills.”

BACKGROUND

Why is it important for juniors to take the PSAT/NMSQT - even if they might have taken it as sophomores?

- Eligible juniors will be automatically entered into scholarship and recognition competitions, including the [National Merit Scholarship Program](#).
- Scholarships not only help students and families pay for college and training, but they also can help students stand apart from other students in the post-high school education admission process.
- Students who say "yes" to Student Search Service on the test day, will be eligible to receive FREE information from colleges and scholarship organizations.
- Those who take the PSAT/NMSQT test get FREE access to [My College QuickStart](#), an online college, training center and career planning tool that is customized for each student.
- On average, students who take the junior year PSAT/NMSQT score higher on the senior year SAT than those who don't.
- Those who take the PSAT/NMSQT as sophomores and juniors score even higher on the SAT.

Try your hand at an SAT question

- The College Board provides a daily SAT question along with lots of resource materials for students to study and build skills. You can check your [SAT savvy online](#) with the daily SAT question.

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