

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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Seven Comal ISD students earn National Merit Semifinalist status



Of more than 1.5 million high school juniors that took the Pre-SAT test in 2009, only 16,000 were named National Merit Semifinalists.

Seven of those National Merit Semifinalists were from Comal ISD high schools. Never before in the district's 54-year history has Comal ISD had so many elite students in the National Merit program.

In addition, six Comal ISD students earned National Merit Commended status.

Five of the semifinalists, Lloyd Cunningham, Lauren Haney, Michael Nipper, Ben Whitehead and Kayla Oliver, were from Smithson Valley High. Semifinalist Robert Croteau is a Canyon High senior, and semifinalist Stuart Olsen is a senior at Canyon Lake High.

Smithson Valley's Cody Carroll, Alyssa Pappas and Brian West; Canyon High's Sarah Crockett and Clifton Fey; and Canyon Lake High's Brandon Clark were named National Merit Commended students.

About 34,000 commended students throughout the nation were recognized. Although they will not continue in the 2011 competition for National Merit Scholarships, the commended students placed among the top five percent nationwide.

"I couldn't be more proud of these students," superintendent Dr. Marc Walker said. "They have set a great example for others to follow."

The seven Comal ISD students have a chance to follow in the footsteps of the likes of Bill Gates, a National Merit Scholarship winner in 1973.

Of the 16,000 semifinalists nationwide, 15,000 students will be named National Merit Finalists in February. Half of those students will be selected as Merit Scholarship winners earning the Merit Scholar title.

"A student recognized by the National Merit Program has earned a distinctive mark of academic excellence," said National Merit spokesperson Katie Williamson. "This is an honor that will stay with them the rest of their lives."

Oliver said she was pleased to hear so many Comal ISD students were National Merit Semifinalists.

"This senior class has always been one that's stressed academics," Oliver said. "I think it's great that so many students all around Comal ISD were honored."

Oliver plans on attending the University of Texas-Austin and double majoring in English and sociology. Her parents are P.J. and Kyle Oliver.

Haney will choose between the University of Texas-Austin and Texas A&M University. She will major in pre-med. Her parents are Bill and Louise Haney.

Nipper will attend Texas A&M University and major in chemistry. His parents are Hunter and Denise Nipper.

Whitehead plans on attending the University of Chicago and is undecided on a major. His parents are Paul and Lisa Whitehead.

Cunningham will attend the University of Texas-Austin and major in computer science. His parents are Bill and Leta Cunningham.

Croteau is choosing between Cornell University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Texas-Austin. He plans on majoring in aerospace engineering. His parents are Roger and Susan Croteau.

Olsen is deciding between the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the California Institute of Technology. He plans to major in mathematics or physics. His parents are John Olsen and Lee Ann Steeves.

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IN PHOTOS: Smithson Valley High had a total of eight students earn National Merit recognition, including five National Merit Semifinalists. Pictured (l-r) are Michael Nipper, Lloyd Cunningham, Alyssa Pappas, Cody Carroll, Kayla Oliver, Ben Whitehead, Lauren Haney and Brian West.

Canyon High senior Robert Croteau (middle) was named a National Merit Semifinalist. In addition, fellow CHS students Clifton Fey and Sarah Crockett were named National Merit Commended students.

Canyon Lake High senior Stuart Olsen (left) was named a National Merit Semifinalist and Brandon Clark was named a National Merit Commended student.

