

Six National Merit Scholars reach semifinals

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Staff Reporter

West Linn boasts many intelligent and highly motivated students. The National Merit Scholars are the best of the best out of these.

Six seniors made the cut this year: Elise Biancardi, Christine Chen, Chase Gray, Marisa Peralta, Christine Rutan and Dylan Stark join a small group chosen from schools all over the nation to be National Merit Scholar Semifinalists.

"We find out in February if we're finalists or not. Then I'll make my first choice college selection and hopefully get some scholarship money from some school, corporation or National Merit," Gray, said.

These students scored in the top 1% of all students taking the PSAT last fall and, on top of getting substantial financial funding for their future education, are now eligible to become finalists who will receive even greater gifts from their schools of choice as well as corporations.

Each of these students is involved in many and very diverse activities, but they are all brought together by their love of learning and academic excellence. Whether in drama, art, music, Model UN, Mock Trial or other clubs, each has extra curricular activities they enjoy.

Multiple advanced placement and honors classes are also part of their schedule. They are involved in a wide variety of subjects and considering multiple career options, from writing to math, and from business to the sciences.

This honor assures these students are sufficiently prepared, if not more than many of their peers, for college and offers them various financial aid opportunities.

The PSAT is formulated primarily as a practice test for the actual SAT, but also serves as an opportunity to recognize and honor those who exceed beyond most expectations.



Christine Chen

How do you feel about this achievement? What impact has it made on your life?

"I feel amazing. Significant impact? If I end up getting a scholarship, I will have paid for 2% of my college tuition."

What has been your favorite class?

"I know it's only been about two months of school, but I would say Mr. West's AP English class."

What are your plans for after graduation?

"I'm pretty sure I'll go straight to college. I can't wait to get out of here and actually be on my own."

Who has had the biggest impact on who you are right now?

"I don't know, I can't really name one specific person. I would just have to say all my friends. Maybe my parents because they're always nagging."



Christine Rutan

How do you feel about this achievement? What impact has it made on your life?

"I feel more confident

about my chances of getting into a good school."

What has been a "defining moment" for you so far?

"My Honors Humanities project last year. The presentation night was one of the only times I can remember where I was in front of a group and didn't feel like a freak. That was huge because that was also the most open I'd been with strangers — there were some really personal, even embarrassing, stories that I shared that night."

What do you do to have fun and relax outside of school?

"I try to go someplace by myself every once in a while. I notice more when I'm by myself, and it's refreshing to come out of a sort of "study tunnel" and catch up on the world."

Who has made the biggest impact on who you are right now?

"My parents have had a big impact on me, but I'm trying to fix that."



Dylan Stark

How do you feel about this achievement? What impact has it made on your life?

"This is and will always be my greatest achievement. This has opened immeasurable opportunities in my future."

What extra-curricular activities are you involved in?

"Well I am a Thespian and I play co-ed soccer with my BFF's for life. Also, in my free time I like to watercolor paint and write screenplays."

What has been a "defining moment" for you so far?

"The moment I decided I wanted to cook food for the rest of my life was very defining. I was like, "Scha! No way! I figured it out!" I was standing on a mountaintop beside a glacial lake and it just hit me."

Who has made the biggest impact on who you are right now?

"Jim Halpert (John Krasinski) from The Office has always served as a role model. Occasionally Dwight Schrute inspires me as well."



Elise Biancardi

How do you feel about this achievement? What impact has it made on your life?

"I'm of course really excited about the scholarship opportunities that can come from this. Just going through this process and making decisions about college makes me really excited to graduate!"

What extra-curricular activities are you involved in?

"Jazz Choir, Symphonic Choir, Girls Sextet, church events, Mock Trial, the musical "Once Upon A Mattress" which everyone should come see!"

What do you do to have fun and relax outside of school?

"Sleeping is always a good thing...once in a while."

Who has made the biggest impact on who you are today?

"I'm going with the cliché answer but it's so true: my parents. I would be a completely different person without them."



Marisa Peralta

How do you feel about this

achievement? What impact has it made on your life?

"I mean, happy to have it, but it's weird how long ago the test was in relation to the importance it has NOW, you know what I mean?"

What are your plans for after graduation?

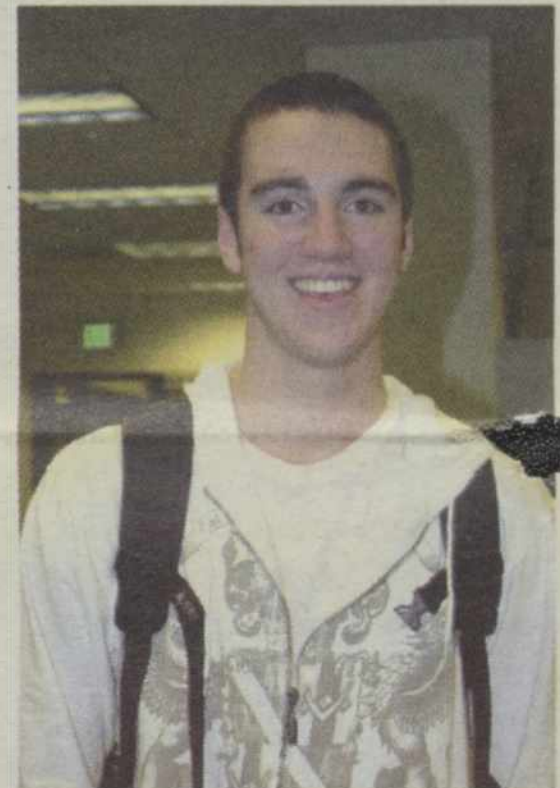
"I will most likely go to college next fall, but depending on the school and whether it allows students to defer for a year, I would love to take a year off and focus on dance, and then start college in 09."

What has been a "defining moment" for you so far?

"I got in a car crash in May. It really affected me—made me realize life is short. Things CAN happen to me as the cliché goes. I have lived differently since then."

Who has been your most influential teacher?

"Ms. Murray. Her sophomore English class made me think in a whole new way. It was one of the best classes I've ever taken."



Chase Gray

How do you feel about this achievement? What impact has it made on your life?

"It was cool having my picture in the *Tidings*. And it's nice to put on college applications. Other than that, it's really pointless."

What extra-curricular activities are you involved in?

"Right now I'm the Wizard in the musical. I'm also in Mock Trial. Outside of school I volunteer at the West Linn Library on Sundays."

What are your plans for this year and after you graduate?

"Well, I want to finish all of my college applications. Hopefully, after that I can just enjoy the rest of my senior year. I'm going backpacking in Europe next summer, then heading off for college (hopefully at Stanford) after that."

Who has been your most influential teacher?

"Mr. Rose. Even though I hated calculus and it was really hard for me, he made it as interesting as he could and helped me out a lot through a subject that I struggled with."

All Photos by Malia Chong

ISEF opens new opportunities for students

ISEF

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It also gives students a chance to earn scholarships, and three projects and three observers are sent to the international ISEF. Thirty percent of students who compete move on to the State competition.

"I like the way ISEF brings together kids who are interested in all kinds of things—science is not always their

favorite or best subject—who have in common the fact that they have accepted this challenge and met it," Schauer said.

Schauer advised, "Stick with it, do a little work on it each day or week. Don't put it off or you won't have as much fun as you could have doing this. And don't lose heart."

Some of the students this year are looking to their future. "I heard that by taking a course

through ISEF, you could obtain four college credits," Billy Gillham, junior. Gillham and his partner will be conducting a social science test for ISEF.

"I like the idea of taking what we learn in our science classes, and applying it to real life in our own way," Gillham said. "By obtaining possible college credits I will structure my later learning career and potentially get a scholarship."