SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

TO: District Superintendents
High School Principals

FROM: Derek Phillips
Public Information Director

DATE: January 13, 2026

RE: Nominations for 2026 U.S. Presidential Scholars Award

Established in 1964, the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program honors high school seniors for exceptional achievement. Since its inception, more than 8,600 students have been recognized. While early selections focused on SAT/ACT scores, the **program now includes nominations for academic excellence, Career and Technical Education (CTE), and, new this year, visual and performing arts.**

We invite each public school district and private school administrator to submit up to **four applications**:

- **One female and one male** for the Academic/General category
- **One student** (male or female) for the CTE category
- **One student** for the Arts category

Applications must be emailed to dphillips@ed.sc.gov by **5:00 p.m., Friday, January 30, 2026**. Late submissions will not be accepted. Forms for all categories are attached.

Eligible nominees are U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents graduating between January and June 2026 from public, private, or home schools. When selecting candidates, consider:

- What makes this student's scholarship exceptional?
- Has the student overcome significant challenges?

Please note: Students with publicly reported high SAT/ACT scores will be automatically considered by the U.S. Department of Education.

Reviewers will evaluate nominees on:

- Academic achievement
- Leadership and character
- Service and involvement
- Extraordinary accomplishments or obstacles overcome

For CTE nominations, see the attached criteria. Applications must include signatures and be submitted as a single PDF. Do not include transcripts or extra documents. Applications from students or parents will not be accepted.

The State Superintendent may nominate up to **20 students** for Academics/General, **5 for CTE**, and **5 for Arts**. Questions? Contact **dphillips@ed.sc.gov**.