



The Best & Brightest Awards honor outstanding high school seniors in Leon County for excellence in a field of study, service to their schools and the community, leadership and academic success.

WHO'S ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE

Graduating seniors enrolled in accredited high schools in Leon County are eligible for nomination for the Best & Brightest Awards.

- The principal of each public and private high school may nominate one student per category (up to 15 nominees total).
- Schools are not required to nominate a student for every category.

A student's record of community service and leadership is the most important element of the Best & Brightest application. Successful applicants demonstrate a strong, consistent history of service throughout their high school years, making a meaningful impact on their schools and communities from grades 9 through 12.

NOMINATION PROCESS

Students may be nominated at the school-level in one of two ways -

- Students wishing to be recognized by the Best & Brightest Awards must apply through the school's Best & Brightest Awards coordinator, appointed by the principal. NOTE: *Each school may set their own internal deadlines.*
- The school's Best & Brightest Coordinator is encouraged to actively identify qualified applicants with input from teachers, guidance counselors, and parents. The coordinator should also establish a school-level selection committee to review applications and recommend eligible students for nomination.

A student with a distinguished record of service may apply for consideration in more than one category; however, the school may nominate that student in only one category, if any. The student must demonstrate academic achievement related to the chosen category, but their school and community service does not need to be specific to that category.

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SUBMITTING FINALISTS

All required documents must be submitted to the school's Best & Brightest Coordinator and uploaded to the school's application folder. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

Each application must include:

- Completed Best & Brightest Application
- Unofficial Transcript
- One faculty letter of recommendation focused on community or school service
- One-page résumé summarizing awards, leadership roles, and extracurricular involvement including work experience if applicable.
- Up to 8 pages (single-sided) of supporting documents (such as award certificates, photos, news articles, etc.). Preferably these are in one PDF file. Additional uploads will not be reviewed.

Finalists must attend their scheduled interview to remain eligible for top awards. Failure to attend, without prior arrangements, will result in disqualification. Interviews will be Saturday, February 28, 2026.

INTERVIEWS AND JUDGING

Volunteer community judges, selected for their expertise in each category, serve on independent panels to review applications and conduct interviews. Judges make their decisions independently and do not consult with panels from other categories.

DEADLINE & IMPORTANT DATES

- **Application Deadline:** All application packets must be uploaded to the school's folder by January 31, 2026.
- **Interview Day:** Saturday, February 28, 2026, at Cobb Middle School
- **Awards Ceremony:** Wednesday, May 13, 2026, 6:30pm at Ruby Diamond Concert Hall

AWARDS

Recipients of the Best & Brightest Awards will receive the following:

- **Winners:** 2-year college tuition scholarship (\$5,000 value) or \$1,500 cash prize
- **Runners-Up:** 1-year college tuition scholarship (\$2,500 value) or \$750 cash prize
- **Honorable Mentions:** \$500 cash prize

Scholarships are in partnership with the Florida Prepaid Foundation and may be used at in-state, out-of-state, and private schools nationwide. May be combined with existing Florida Prepaid accounts.

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CATEGORIES

All finalists should have a track record and proficiency in their selected category. Expertise may be demonstrated by the finalists' participation and concentration in a category.

Art: Applicant may participate in the teaching, inspiration or encouragement of others through the use of visual arts. Applicant may demonstrate creative ability in drawing, painting, sculpture, fabrics, photography, graphic design or any other medium in the visual arts.

Athletics: Applicant may demonstrate physical education or leadership and participation in individual and team sports in the school and community. Applicant may demonstrate leadership and participation in sports not included in a school's athletic program (i.e. equestrian, crew, etc). Applicant may participate in managing recreation programs, coaching or assisting in athletic activity that contributes to the welfare of others.

Business & Entrepreneurship: Applicant may demonstrate expertise in areas such as accounting, finance, marketing, entrepreneurship, or business management. Applicants may also show achievement through coursework, work experience, competitions, or projects that highlight their ability to apply business knowledge and skills.

Career & Technical Education (CTE): Applicant has completed a program of study that integrates academic knowledge with technical and occupational skills. This may include programs in health sciences, skilled trades, applied technologies, or other career pathways leading to industry-recognized credentials or certifications.

Drama & Performing Arts: Applicant may participate in acting, singing, film, video or radio, dancing in theatrical production, or staging and directing such productions. Vocalists not involved in theatrical productions are better suited for the Music category.

English & Language Arts: Applicant may demonstrate leadership in activities related to a fuller understanding of the English language, including an appreciation for reading and writing.

Journalism & Media Production: Applicant may demonstrate expertise in writing, editing, reporting, or media production that informs or benefits others. This may include school newspapers, yearbooks, magazines, broadcasts, or digital media platforms. Photography used in news or journalistic contexts may be included here; photography for artistic purposes is better suited for the Art category. Applicants may include one representative sample of their published or produced work.

Leadership: Applicant may demonstrate expertise and achievement in a diverse and well-rounded range of categories, in addition to general scholastic achievement.

Mathematics: Applicant may demonstrate expertise in areas such as advanced coursework (e.g., Algebra, Calculus, Statistics), applied mathematics, or math-related research.

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Achievement may also be shown through participation in math competitions, tutoring, data analysis projects, or other problem-solving activities. Applicants may highlight how they have used mathematical reasoning and quantitative skills to explore complex ideas or address real-world challenges.

Music: Applicant may demonstrate expertise by performing vocal or instrumental music, or by fostering wider participation and appreciation for music through school, church or civic organizations. Applicant may participate in groups that share musical talents including tutoring younger students and volunteering in school music programs. An applicant does not have to participate in high school music classes or ensembles, but must document advanced study of an instrument.

Public Speaking: Applicant may demonstrate expertise by debating or publicly speaking about topics that include current events or issues that affect the community. Applicants must provide documentation noting the topic, date, audience size and any other material that provides details of events/speeches.

Science & Health: Applicant may demonstrate expertise in areas such as biology, chemistry, physics, earth and space sciences, environmental science, health sciences, or biomedical research. Achievement may be shown through coursework, science fair or research projects, competitions, or participation in health or science-related programs. Applicants may also highlight efforts in areas such as healthcare, public health, environmental sustainability, or the use of technology and innovation (including AI) to advance scientific understanding or improve community well-being.

Social Studies: Applicant may demonstrate expertise in history, government, economics, sociology, or related fields. Applicants may also highlight involvement in activities such as Student Government, debate, Model UN, or civic engagement with local, state, or federal government.

Technology: Applicant may demonstrate expertise in areas such as computer science, programming, artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, cybersecurity, digital design, social media, video production, or other emerging technologies. Applicants may showcase how they have used technology to solve problems, create projects, or make a positive impact in their school or community. Participation in technology-related clubs, competitions, or certifications may also demonstrate achievement in this category.

World Languages: Applicant may demonstrate expertise by advancing the study of foreign language (or sign language) or using a world language (or sign language) as a writer, translator or interpreter. Applicant may participate in the study of any language other than English, even if it is the study of an applicant's native language.

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