

SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE

ESTABLISHED 1994



32ND ANNUAL SCHOLAR LEADER BANQUET

MARCH 30, 2026

ANTHONY OCEAN'S VIEW – NEW HAVEN

MEMBER SCHOOLS: Amity Regional, Branford, Hill Regional Career Magnet, Cheshire, Daniel Hand, East Haven, Fairfield Prep, Joseph A. Foran, Guilford, Hamden, Hillhouse, Jonathan Law, The Academy of Our Lady of Mercy - Lauralton Hall, Lyman Hall, Mercy, North Haven, Notre Dame, Sacred Heart Academy, Mark T. Sheehan, Shelton, West Haven, Wilbur Cross, Xavier

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WELCOME

Welcome to the 2026 Southern Connecticut Conference Scholar Leader recognition banquet – the 32nd hosted by the league, presented by AVANGRID (UI, SCG and CNG).

This evening, we recognize forty-six impressive young people who have demonstrated outstanding scholarship and leadership in their respective school and external communities.

On behalf of the SCC, congratulations to the recipients and their families and best of luck in their future endeavors.

2025-26 SCC SCHOLAR LEADERS

Amity Regional – Sophie Cohen, Burke Lindsay

Branford – Tate Jones, Nate Durante

Hill Regional Career – Akawsi Okyere, Chyna Lopes

Cheshire – Tema Caplan, Braeden Turski

Daniel Hand – Colton Bartholomew, Lillian Gerrard

East Haven – Steve Condo, Ava DiNola

Fairfield Prep – Josh Salazar, Ryan Ventrelle

Joseph A. Foran – Thao Pham, Andrew Bishop

Guilford – Ethan Parker, Emma Vittorio

Hamden – Alexander Medina, Lyla Patel

James Hillhouse – Samantha Mera Toro, Antonio Ponton

Jonathan Law – Layla Alogna, Marcus Townes

Academy of Our Lady of Mercy, Luralton Hall – Eve Mena, Lydia-Grace Sessler

Lyman Hall – Vincent D'Amico, Ella Cranmer

Mercy – Irene Milite, Beatrice Perrault

North Haven – Valerie Adams, Gavin Knauft

Notre Dame – William Bader, Jovan Lakaj

Sacred Heart Academy – Divya Sankar, Mia Thomas

Mark T. Sheehan – Nicholas Kent, Yi Zeng

Shelton – Matthew Quevedo, Sienna Giampaolo

West Haven – Ehsanullah Hadi, Jennifer Ngo

Wilbur Cross – Julian Theodore, Charlotte Herzog

Xavier – Daniel Cruz, Nicholas Salamone

*** RECIPIENT BIO INFORMATION WAS COMPILED BY EACH SCHOOL'S PRINCIPAL.**

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Amity Regional

Sophie Cohen

Sophie is a standout student at Amity Regional High School, recognized for her resilience and intellectual curiosity. Academically, she excelled in rigorous courses like AP U.S. History, earning a top score of 5 on the national exam and an A+ on her research regarding American cults. A leader within her school community, Sophie served as an editor for the yearbook and actively participates in theater. Her passion for the humanities is further reflected in her memberships in the English, Theater, and Music National Honor Societies. Following her interest in European history and storytelling, Sophie is attending the University of St. Andrews in Scotland to study History. She aims to channel her expertise into a career as a teacher, in publishing, or within the history field.

Burke Lindsay

Burke Lindsay is a standout student at Amity Regional High School, maintaining 1st Honors throughout his high school career while achieving a noteworthy GPA. His academic prowess is further reflected in his membership in both the Spanish and Math National Honor Societies. A dedicated leader, Burke serves as a Link Crew member, helping freshmen acclimate to high school, and represented his school at Connecticut Boys State and the Class Act Council. On the lacrosse field, his tireless work ethic earned him the "Offensive Hustle" award, and he is poised to serve as team captain this year.

Branford

Tate Jones

Tate was co-captain of the State Champion Varsity Field Hockey Team and a three-year varsity tennis athlete, demonstrating leadership and dedication in competitive sports. She serves as President of "Mental Health Matters," promoting awareness and advocacy within the school community, and she's an active member of the National Honor Society, recognized for academic excellence and service. Tate was a recipient of the prestigious "Rensselaer Medal" Award for outstanding achievement in mathematics and science. Finally, she was selected as a Yale "Discover to Cure" Intern, gaining research experience and contributing to meaningful scientific initiatives.

Nate Durante

Nate is a member of the Varsity Boys Tennis Team and President of the Class of 2026, demonstrating leadership both on and off the court. He serves as Vice President of the Economics Club and is an active member of the National Honor Society, reflecting strong academic achievement and engagement. Nate was named as a recipient of the Trinity College Book Award for academic excellence, and he's an accomplished pianist and entrepreneur - he founded Nate Durante Music, LLC, combining musical talent with business initiative.

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Hill Regional Career

Akawsí Okyere

Akawsí is a powerhouse of discipline, clinical readiness, and community-level leadership. His athletic record is defined by immediate impact and sustained excellence: from playing Varsity Basketball as a freshman to serving as a four-year Cross Country captain, they have proven they can both lead a team and endure individual grit. This competitive drive culminated in a remarkable first year of wrestling, ranking third in the SCC, and earning multiple awards in Jiu-jitsu. Academically, he possessed the technical foundation of a future healthcare professional through EMT certification and active membership in the Bio Science and Math clubs. His leadership extends beyond sports into the executive sphere as a Senior Class Officer and a National Honor Society member. Furthermore, his role as a Yale Pathway Student Coordinator and Ahead Program mentor highlights a sophisticated commitment to lifting others up—transforming their personal success into a roadmap for their peers.

Chyna Lopes

Chyna represents the rare intersection of elite physical discipline and a high-level civic leader. As a four-year athlete and two-year captain of both indoor and outdoor track, she has cultivated the “grit” and team-oriented mindset essential for the long hours on and off the track. Her leadership extends beyond the track into the halls of governance as Student Class Vice President and into academic excellence as a member of the National Honor Society. Chyna’s commitment to patient care is already evidenced by her CNA certification and current pursuit of EMT certification, proving a readiness to handle frontline medical responsibilities. Combined with her role as a Yale Pathways Coordinator, where she guides the next generation of scholars, Chyna has demonstrated a sophisticated ability to balance rigorous academics with meaningful community service and professional clinical development.

Cheshire

Tema Caplan

Tema is a dedicated student-athlete who brings enthusiasm, leadership, and integrity to every part of her high school experience. A three-sport captain in field hockey, basketball, and lacrosse, Tema has balanced the demands of athletics while maintaining a strong commitment to her academics and school community. She is an active member of Student Senate, Science National Honor Society, and the Cheshire Board of Education Health and Wellness Committee. Tema also enjoys mentoring younger athletes, serving as a youth coach in field hockey, basketball, and lacrosse. A member of the CHS Wind Ensemble, she plays the French horn. Through her participation in the JCC Maccabi Games, Tema has earned multiple bronze medals and the Midot Medal for exemplifying respect, joy, and contributing positively to the world.

Braeden Turski

Braeden is a standout student-athlete at Cheshire High School who has distinguished himself through leadership, resilience, and academic excellence. A four-year member of both the varsity hockey and lacrosse teams, Braeden has contributed to multiple SCC and state championship teams and serves as captain of the hockey team this year. How Braeden handled not one, but two season-ending injuries in his career is a testament to his resilience, positive attitude, and finding the best in difficult situations. In the classroom, he is a six-time SCC All-Academic honoree and has earned High Honor Roll every quarter of high school. Braeden is also an active member of Student Senate and Link Crew, helping support school events and welcoming new students to CHS. Outside of school, he coaches youth lacrosse, tutors younger students in math, and volunteers at several community events.

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Daniel Hand

Colton Bartholomew

Colton is a standout leader at Daniel Hand High School, recognized for his maturity, altruism, and unparalleled academic drive. Maintaining a perfect 5.33 weighted GPA, Colton has mastered the most rigorous curriculum, earning 15 departmental awards and the prestigious Harvard Book Award. His leadership extends beyond the classroom into elite performance groups such as nationally ranked VIBE Show Choir, where he balances complex choreography and vocal performance with his leadership responsibilities as co-president. A dedicated mentor, Colton transitioned from a volunteer to a paid tutor at Study Hall, where he works with students of all ages on essential academic skills. In every role he occupies, Colton demonstrates a rare ability to lead with humility and excellence, making him a dynamic asset to any leadership community.

Lilliana Gerrard

Lilliana is an exceptionally driven student-leader at Daniel Hand High School, balancing rigorous academics with meaningful service. She demonstrated early scientific maturity through sophisticated research on the neuroscience of love, linking complex inquiry to human emotion. A multifaceted leader, Lilliana anchors her lacrosse team's defense as a strategic goalie and mentors peers as captain of VIBE, fostering collaboration and excellence. Her commitment to philanthropy is equally profound, from raising vital funds for brain cancer research through A Shot for Life to providing compassionate support at the Connecticut Hospice. Driven by curiosity and empathy, Lilliana is uniquely prepared for a pre-med biochemistry track. She aspires to bridge high-level scientific expertise with patient care, embodying the heart of a future medical professional destined to make immeasurable, positive contributions.

East Haven

Steve Condo

Steve has consistently demonstrated outstanding academic excellence, extracurricular involvement, and leadership within our school community. A dedicated scholar, he has been recognized with numerous awards for excellence and received College Board recognition through the National Hispanic and National First-Generation Recognition Programs. Steve is an active member of Math Club, Science Club, and Future Business Leaders of America, and serves as Secretary of the National Honor Society. He has represented his peers as a Vision of the Graduate student liaison to the Board of Education and is a varsity tennis captain and varsity soccer player. Outside of school, Steve also volunteers with the East Haven Youth Services at the East Haven Teen Center. Steve leads by example while mentoring younger students in academics and athletics, reflecting his strong commitment to scholarship and service.

Ava DiNola

Ava is an accomplished and driven student, who consistently demonstrates academic excellence and leadership at EHHS. She earned Magna Cum Laude honors on the National Latin Exam and was recognized with the Saint Michael's College Book Award for Social Conscience and Academic Achievement in 2025. A dedicated leader, Ava currently serves as Class of 2026 Vice President after previously holding the role of Student Council Historian. She is Secretary and Treasurer of the National Technical Honor Society and Treasurer of Future Business Leaders of America. As a Peer Mentor and Writing Center Tutor, she supports fellow students academically by providing them with support in a variety of academic areas. Beyond the classroom, Ava spent 12 years as a competitive gymnast, earning regional and state titles before reaching Level 9. After an injury, she continued her involvement in athletics by joining the EHHS Dance Team, contributing to the school's first hip hop competition performance.

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Fairfield Prep

Josh Salazar

Josh is an exceptional student whose intellect, creativity, faith, and Ignatian leadership distinguish him across every dimension of school life. A gifted performer, he has appeared in every Prep Players production since freshman year, earning leading roles and recognition such as the Halo Robe Award. As a vocalist, he is the first Prep student in over a decade to qualify for the Western Region Festival and sings as an optional seventh class purely for love of music. A devoted member of Campus Ministry, he serves at school wide and weekly Masses and is a Kairos leader. Josh is also a published novelist, an award winning poet, and an insightful scholar whose curiosity drives him to explore literature, languages, and the human condition. Humble, kind, and deeply committed to service, Josh exemplifies the Jesuit ideal of being “open to growth.”

Ryan Ventrelle

Ryan is an exceptional scholar athlete whose discipline, maturity, and Ignatian leadership shine in every arena. A top-performing student, he excels in rigorous AP coursework, consistently demonstrating strong analytical skills, thoughtful class engagement, and meticulous preparation. Ryan is equally distinguished on the baseball field, where he became a rare freshman varsity starter and Prep’s first-ever two year captain in over two decades. His work ethic – one part natural talent and two parts determination – defines both his academic and athletic success. Beyond the classroom and field, Ryan embodies being “a man for others” through service in Campus Ministry, Cardinal Key, and especially the Fairfield Red Storm Challenger Baseball Program, where his empathy and inclusiveness make a profound impact. Respected for his character, teamwork, and integrity, Ryan models the Jesuit High School Graduate at Graduation.

Joseph A. Foran

Thao Pham

Thao is an accomplished and well-rounded student leader who has made a meaningful impact through her academic excellence, service, and dedicated leadership. Serving as Class President, she leads with humility and integrity, consistently setting a positive example for her peers. Thao is actively involved in numerous organizations, including Natural Helpers, Key Club, Interact Club (officer), Drama Club, Unified Sports, and the district SEL Equity Coalition. A dedicated and accomplished musician, she is President of the Foran Band and a member of Jazz Band, and also is the Captain of the Tennis Team. Her commitment to helping others is evident in her volunteer work with Milford Adaptive Programs and her support of school events through Natural Helpers. Thao has pursued a rigorous academic program including numerous AP courses and has earned various honors, including the Yale Book Award and membership in National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta Math Honor Society, Rho Kappa Social Studies Honor Society, and the Tri-M Music Honor Society.

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Andrew Bishop

Andrew is a highly engaged and respected member of the Foran High School community whose leadership, service, and dedication have made a significant impact. He has an enthusiasm for learning and has excelled academically while taking a rigorous course load. Andrew is a leader within the Foran journalism program and the award-winning Mane Street Mirror student newspaper, where he oversees the online magazine, editing articles, helping with layout, and contributing to important decisions. Serving as Class Vice President for three consecutive years, he has organized fundraisers, coordinated major events, and managed the class' social media to promote school spirit. He is a member of National Honor Society, Quill & Scroll (journalism) Honor Society, French Honor Society, and is an officer in the Rho Kappa Social Studies Honor Society and Natural Helpers, where he has organized and supported freshmen orientation and numerous other school events. Andrew is also a member of the Foran mentoring program, where he works with elementary students and serves as a positive role model for younger students. He has volunteered over 260 hours across organizations including Milford Little League and at a local elementary school. An accomplished varsity golfer for four years, he has earned SCC All-Academic honors and Most Improved recognition.

Guilford

Ethan Parker

Ethan is a standout scholar at Guilford High School who excels in a rigorous curriculum of AP and IB coursework. A 2025 Yale Club Book Award recipient and National Honor Society member, Ethan's intellectual promise is matched by his dedication to the arts and athletics. He is a seasoned violinist in the GHS Symphony Orchestra and Shoreline Youth Symphony, as well as a multi-year varsity soccer player recognized repeatedly for his sportsmanship. Beyond the classroom, Ethan is a captain of the varsity math team and a decorated Science Olympiad competitor. Whether repairing homes with Pilgrim Fellowship, teaching Sunday School, or working with the Youth Soccer Club, Ethan consistently demonstrates a profound commitment to service and a tireless work ethic.

Emma Vittorio

Emma is a multifaceted leader at Guilford High School who seamlessly integrates academic excellence with creative and technical mastery. As Vice President of the Science Olympiad team, she has achieved state-level success, including a first-place finish in the prestigious "Build" event. Emma's leadership extends to the theater, where she serves as Painting Crew Chief, managing the intricate execution of set designs for major GHS productions. A true global citizen, Emma is fluent in Italian and has lived in five different countries, bringing a rare cultural depth to her school community. Whether she is conducting independent chemistry research, competing on the varsity volleyball court, or mentoring youth at local sports camps, Emma's 200+ hours of community service reflect her tireless dedication to excellence and outreach.

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Hamden

Alexander Medina

Alexander is a standout student-athlete whose Hamden High legacy is defined by grit and leadership. A dominant force in track and cross country, Alex is a New England Champion and multi-time State and SCC titleholder. Notably, he led his team to their first Outdoor SCC Championship in 25 years while shattering school records in the 1000m and 5000m. Academically, Alex has excelled in a dual-enrollment engineering program since middle school, earning college credits and All-State Academic Class LL honors. Beyond the stats, he is recognized for his character, receiving a Certificate of Achievement for his embodiment of the HHS PBIS PRIDE Matrix. A selfless leader and Game Time CT First Team selection, Alex leaves an indelible mark of excellence and community commitment on Hamden High.

Lyla Patel

Lyla is an exceptional scholar ranking in the top 10% of her class, recently earning the WPI Innovation Award for STEM excellence. She balances a rigorous AP curriculum with leadership as a member of the National World Language Honor Society. As founder of the Be Kind 2 Your Mind Club and co-founder of the Aquatics Club, she champions both mental health and environmental stewardship. A four-year varsity field hockey starter and captain, Lyla's resilience is unmatched; she returned to play just five weeks after major foot surgery. Her leadership extends to managing the ice hockey team, mentoring peers through Unified Friends, and maintaining part-time employment. Whether in the lab or on the field, Lyla embodies rare discipline, empathy, and grit, making her a standout leader and a true asset to any community.

James Hillhouse

Samantha Mera Toro

Samantha is an extraordinary scholar whose resilience, creativity, and leadership shine through every aspect of her high school journey. After immigrating from Ecuador, she quickly distinguished herself through unwavering determination and a commitment to excellence. Samantha balances a rigorous academic schedule—including Honors, AP, and dual-enrollment coursework—with meaningful extracurricular engagement. She serves as Yearbook Editor, contributes artistically through the Art Club and a school mural, and completed an internship at NXTH-VN, all while maintaining a part-time job. As a Newcomer Ambassador, she supports and guides newly arrived students, modeling compassion and leadership. Her achievements include National Honor Society and Spanish Honor Society membership, the Seal of Biliteracy, High Honors, and CNA certification.

Antonio Ponton

Antonio is an exemplary scholar whose drive, character, and commitment define his success. After immigrating from Ecuador, he quickly distinguished himself as a motivated and engaged student, excelling academically while learning a new language. Ricardo has embraced rigorous coursework—including Honors, AP, UConn, CT State dual-enrollment classes, and CNA certification—earning consistent Honor Roll recognition. He is active in DECA, Chess Team, and the school band, and he has already exceeded 80 hours of meaningful community service. His leadership as a role model to new arrivals and his acceptance into the UConn School of Business, along with the prestigious Global Distinction Scholarship, highlight his exceptional promise and dedication.

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Jonathan Law

Layla Alogna

Layla embodies the qualities of a true leader: intelligence, empathy, and an unwavering commitment to making a difference. As the President of the senior class student council for three years, she has successfully orchestrated events and fundraisers that promote inclusivity and school spirit. Her leadership in the Model United Nations club has brought international perspectives to our school, and her co-founding of Raffles for Wishes demonstrates her entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to community service. As captain of the varsity soccer team for the past two years, she has fostered a positive and collaborative team culture, earning accolades such as MVP and All-SCC First Team. Layla's academic journey is marked by excellence and intellectual curiosity. Her commitment to academics is reflected in her outstanding GPA of 4.5893, tackling a rigorous curriculum that includes multiple Advanced Placement courses such as United States History, US Government and Politics, and Macroeconomics.

Marcus Townes

Marcus epitomizes the exceptional student succeeding scholastically, achieving academically and contributing to the community. Throughout his high school career, Marcus elected the most challenging course work. By graduation, he will complete seven AP classes and four Early College Awareness classes. His ranking is in the top four percent of a talented class. Marcus enhances the learning environment in classes and holds the respect of faculty. Beyond the classroom, Marcus manages to blend his travel to Aquaculture with a return to our community for his many contributions. In the athletic arena, Marcus is a three season four year athlete. On the football, baseball and basketball teams. Marcus is a role model of discipline, determination and dedication earning him election to captain. With his demanding schedule he also carves time to volunteer in addition to a variety of clubs. He will graduate with Distinction for Community Service.

Academy of Our Lady of Mercy, Luralton Hall

Eve Mena

Eve exemplifies outstanding character and leadership at Luralton Hall. She excels in rigorous AP and honors courses, is a member of the National Honor Society, and received the Columbia Book Award. Eve is a Peer Mentor and is Co-President of the LH Engineering Team. She served as the Varsity Cross Country captain and a member of indoor and outdoor track and field teams. Eve is also a member of our Advanced Vocal Ensemble and represents our school at many community events. Dedicated to service, she volunteers at Yale New Haven Hospital and the Saint John Bosco Parish Youth Ensemble.

Lydia-Grace Sessler

Lydia-Grace is a natural leader whose impact on our community has been remarkable. She has embraced a rigorous academic path, excelling in AP and honors courses, and is a member of both the National Honor Society and the Spanish National Honor Society. She was awarded the Dartmouth Book Award and the Frances Warde Award for service. Lydia is a Class Representative on the Student Council. Lydia is a member of our Advanced Vocal Ensemble, dedicating hours each week to rehearsal and representing Luralton Hall at many community events. We are incredibly grateful for her enthusiasm, dedication, and the lasting impact she has made on our community.

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Lyman Hall

Vincent D'Amico

Vincent ranks third in the Class of 2026 with a 4.29 GPA while pursuing one of Lyman Hall's most demanding academic programs. He is the recipient of the Rensselaer Medal, the Harvard Book Award, and AP Scholar with Distinction recognition, and has earned High Honors throughout high school. Vincent serves as Vice President of the National Honor Society and coordinates the Trojan Tutors program, fostering academic support and mentorship. A three-year varsity football player and two-time All-Conference Academic honoree, he leads with integrity on and off the field. As a Trojan Ambassador and active member of Best Buddies, Vincent promotes inclusion and community engagement. He balances scholarship, athletics, leadership, and employment with humility, compassion, and purpose.

Ella Cranmer

Ella ranks seventh in the Class of 2026 with a 4.15 GPA while completing one of Lyman Hall's most rigorous academic schedules. Her coursework includes AP Chemistry, AP Physics, AP Calculus I and II, AP Language, and AP Spanish. She earned the Seal of Bilitery and received recognition through the Rochester Institute of Technology Women in STEM Scholarship. Ella is Co-founder and Ambassador of Morgan's Message, promoting mental health awareness for student-athletes, and serves as Class Treasurer and Student Council Representative. A dedicated dancer for ten years, she exemplifies discipline and balance. Ella is a member of the National Honor Society, the SCC All Academic Team, and has achieved High Honors throughout high school.

Mercy

Irene Milite

Irene is a student that stands out for myriad reasons. She is bright, intuitive, dedicated to her academics and genuinely works to make our school better. Irene has been a pivotal leader in our school community throughout her time at Mercy High School. She has been a 4-year member of the Mercy Tennis team, has served on her class executive board, and this year, holds the position of Student Council Vice President. She is also the Stage Manager for the Mercy/Xavier Drama and Musical productions and is a member of multiple academic honor societies and clubs, proving that she is truly a well-rounded leader.

Beatrice Perrault

Bea is an exceptional academic and athletic leader at Mercy High School. She is an outstanding student, articulate, and curious. Bea is also a 3-season athlete serving as Captain of our State Champion Cross Country and Indoor Track teams, as well as our Outdoor Track team. She is involved within our school community, participating in multiple academic honor societies and clubs. Bea radiates kindness, maturity, humility and her quiet dedication to not only her teammates but also her schoolwork are unmatched. There never seems to be a challenge that Bea can't face head on.

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North Haven

Valerie Adams

The NHHS Salutatorian, Valerie is the recipient of the Yale Book Award and RIT Women in STEM award, an AP Scholar, and a HOBY Leadership participant. She is captain of Math Team and president of Model UN and First Priority, a faith-based club. She has helped to serve her community through this club by serving food to a homeless shelter in New Haven and organizing an annual veterans benefit concert. She also volunteers through Aceing Autism, a tennis program for children with autism. She is an officer of Thespian Honor Society, and a member of National Honor Society, Tri-M Honor Society, Science Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, and French Honor Society. She is a four year tennis doubles player and plays flute in the Wind Ensemble.

Gavin Knauff

Gavin is the recipient of the Salve Regina Book Award for Excellence in English and currently serves as North Haven's Youth Poet Laureate. He is the founder and chief editor of The Raven, the school's literary magazine, and has been elected class president for all four years of high school. Academically, he ranks fourth in his class and is a member of National Honor Society, Science Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, and Spanish National Honor Society. Gavin is also a four-year varsity hockey player for North Haven High School and is the recipient of the 2026 SCC winter scholar award.

Notre Dame

William Bader

William is a highly engaged member of our school community who has demonstrated leadership, initiative, and a strong commitment to service throughout his four years at Notre Dame. He has served as a Student Ambassador for four years and has been an active member of the Student Government Association during that time. William has also been involved in the Finance Club and Theater Club, while gaining valuable professional experience through internships with Dow Jones and the New York Stock Exchange, as well as serving as an Admissions Summer Intern at Notre Dame for three years. Dedicated to serving others, William volunteered with Habitat for Humanity for two years and organized and facilitated three American Red Cross blood drives at Notre Dame. In recognition of his academic and leadership accomplishments, he received the University of Rochester's George Eastman Young Leaders Award and is a member of the National, Math, English, and Latin Honor Societies. A consistent First Honors student, William has earned a place on the First Honor Roll every quarter during his time at Notre Dame.

Jovan Lakaj

Throughout his four years at Notre Dame, Jovan has defined himself through a balance of academic rigor and competitive athletics. As a consistent First Honors student, he maintains membership in the National, Math, Italian, and English Honor Societies. On the court, Jovan leads as the senior captain of the basketball team and competes for the outdoor track and field team. His engagement extends to the Finance Club, SGA, and the Pep Rally Committee, among many others. Deeply committed to giving back, Jovan spends his time volunteering with youth arts programs, assisting at his church, and supporting local food banks. Whether leading a team or participating in a neighborhood clean-up, Jovan exemplifies the spirit of service and excellence.

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Sacred Heart Academy

Divya Sankar

Divya is a young woman who has found the ability to manage a rigorous academic schedule alongside demanding extracurricular and leadership commitments. Divya is a curious and self-motivated learner who has steadily challenged herself through the most advanced courses offered at SHA – AP Biology, Human Gene Discovery Lab and Honors Biotechnology Research Project. Her intellectual curiosity extends beyond the classroom; she regularly seeks out connections between what she learns and how it applies to the world around her. She has learned to think outside of the box and problem solve in new ways and her resilience and growth mindset serve her well across all subjects. Divya is co-president of the Technology Student Association and an officer for Mu Alpha Theta and Student Council. She leads with empathy, collaboration and a calm confidence that inspires others to contribute their best. Her leadership is grounded in a genuine desire to serve rather than to seek recognition.

Mia Thomas

Mia is truly the embodiment of all that is good in teenagers today – she is driven, compassionate, humble and strong in both mind and heart. As a student at Sacred Heart Academy, Mia has enrolled in and will complete at the end of this year eight Advanced Placement courses. Her academic journey has been marked by consistent growth and a willingness to push beyond comfort zones. She has a natural aptitude for understanding how things work and an impressive ability to translate theoretical concepts into practical application – skills that will serve her well in whatever path she chooses. Mia is a natural leader and communicator serving as President of the Senior Class and Captain of the Varsity Soccer Team. She leads with a quiet confidence, empathy and grace. Her ability to connect with others is one of her greatest strengths. She listens fully, engages genuinely and makes everyone around her feel valued.

Mark T. Sheehan

Nicholas Kent

Nicholas is a young man of character. As valedictorian of the class of 2026, Nick has enrolled in the highest course offered in each discipline. He has been named an AP Scholar with Distinction based on top tier AP scores, and he is a member of the National Honor Society and the recipient of the Harvard Book Award. Nick demonstrates leadership as Co-President of Student Council in both his junior and senior years. He also represents Sheehan at monthly Board of Education meetings in addition to improving the spirit and involvement at Sheehan through events he has helped to organize and plan. As President of Sheehan's Esports Team, Nick is a three time CIAC Rocket League Champion.

Yi Zeng

Yi exemplifies excellence in scholarship and leadership. As class Salutatorian, she has earned recognition as an AP Scholar with Distinction, a Varsity Scholar, and a member of the National Honor Society. As Captain of the Mock Trial Team, Yi helped to lead her peers to a State Championship, demonstrating poise, strategy, and collaboration under pressure. As lead presenter, she earned the highest score at the Sikorsky STEM Team States twice, reflecting exceptional analytical ability and innovation. A DECA State Finalist, academic mentor for elementary students, and active member of several service and arts organizations, Yi serves her school community with purpose. She is widely respected for her integrity, intellectual humility, and determination — qualities that define both her achievements and her positive impact on others.

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Shelton

Matthew Quevedo

Matthew is an outstanding student athlete who represents the top 1% of his senior class. Matthew has been named as an AP Scholar multiple years in a row, is a member of our World Language Honors Society, earned 1st place in the AMC 12 Math competition, and has earned SCC All-Academic in his sport. This fall, Matt was recognized as a National Merit Scholarship semifinalist. Furthermore, Matt is a dedicated athlete, participating on both our Varsity Cross Country and Outdoor Track teams. In addition to his academic and athletic accomplishments, Matt is treasurer for his senior class and president of the French Club, as well as a peer mentor for middle school students.

Sienna Giampaolo

Sienna is extremely accomplished here at Shelton High School. Her strong academics and dedication to learning have brought her great success. Sienna has a wonderful passion for writing. She was published in the American Library of Poetry in 2023 and is a winner of the Young Writers USA's "Unsolved" and "Integers" writing contests. She is very involved in our school and community. Sienna is a member of the National Honor Society. In developing her passions for theater and the entertainment industry, Sienna is our Drama Club dance captain, Secretary of the Fashion and Styling club, and a staff writer for our school's Gael Magazine and Yearbook staff. She also volunteers at our local theater company as an usher and greeter.

West Haven

Ehsanullah Hadi

Ehsanullah Hadi is ranked top 5 in his graduating class at West Haven High School. He currently serves as Student Representative to the West Haven Board of Education and serves on the CAS-CIAS Student Empowerment Board. Ehsan attended the HOBY Leadership Program during his sophomore year, which allowed him to advance to the international World Leadership Congress in Chicago to represent his school that same year. Collaborating with the Yale School of Medicine, Ehsan supports genomic research by co-authoring a manuscript, building AI nuclei-detection, and presenting findings to Yale genetics faculty. He leads outreach through "A Shot for Life" that mentors students through the Medical Access Pathway (MAP) whose mission is to empower high school students that are historically underrepresented within medicine to choose medical career paths.

Jennifer Ngo

Chosen for the Connecticut Interscholastic Scholar Athlete Conference in May... Smith College Book Award recipient... President of HOSA (Health Occupations Students of America), organization has donated over \$8,000 worth of goods to charities and the New Haven/West Haven community... Student Board of Education Representative for West Haven relays concerns and accomplishments for ~6,000 students to the Superintendent and Board of Education... Captain of WHHS Girls Volleyball team, voted Second Team SCC and SCC Great Blue Fall Scholar Athlete... Vice President of Science National Honor Society and is a member of SADD.

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Wilbur Cross

Julian Theodore

Julian is a remarkable leader who ranks second in his class with a 4.99 weighted GPA. While excelling in college-level courses at Yale, Julian's true impact is felt through his initiative within our school community. He founded the Wilbur Cross Math Team, incredibly leading them to qualify for the New England Association of Math Leagues in their first year. A gifted problem-solver, Julian wrote custom code to help our administration automate the daily process of assigning substitute teachers. Beyond STEM, he is an accomplished writer, earning third place at the 2024 CT History Day. Julian is a published researcher, a three-sport athlete, and a dedicated leader who consistently uses his talents to serve others.

Charlotte Herzog

Charlotte is a distinguished leader at Wilbur Cross, excelling in both creative governance and community service. As a College Board AP Scholar and recipient of the Seal of Biliteracy in German, she maintains consistent High Honors with Distinction. Charlotte serves as the Editor-in-Chief for both the school newspaper, Proclamation, and the literary magazine, Cross Currents, while also serving the student body as Vice President of the Student Council. Outside of school, she is a Senior Apprentice at the Eli Whitney Museum, facilitating experiential learning for thousands of children. Her commitment to others is further evidenced by her daily volunteer work with IRIS, where she mentors refugee and immigrant youth. Charlotte is a multi-sport athlete and a vital, empathetic leader in our community.

Xavier

Daniel Cruz

Peer Minister at Xavier. Member of soccer and tennis teams. Member of Random Acts of Kindness Club. Attended Guatemala service trip. Member of the National Honor Society. Has been on the Principal/President's list for the past 3 years at Xavier. Daniel is a Big Falcon at Xavier, which is a senior assigned to a freshman to mentor. Received a silver and bronze medal on the National Spanish exam.

Nicholas Salamone

Nick is a student leader committed to service, scholarship, and initiative across his school and broader community. As Founding President of Xavier's DECA chapter and Red Cross Blood Drive Program Leader, he has established and grown programs that engage students in applied learning and service. He serves as Treasurer of the National Honor Society and Vice President of the Math, Spanish, and Science Honor Societies. He is a Peer and Music Minister, Faith Formation Teacher at St. Peter's Church, and Regional Director of his family's business. A Bowdoin College Book Award recipient, AP Scholar with Distinction, College Board National Recognition Program Awardee, and National Spanish Exam medalist, Nick complements academic excellence with over 200 hours of community service and participation in Cross Country and Track.

BILL O'BRIEN COMMUNITY SERVICE SCHOLARSHIP

Bill O'Brien served as Commissioner of the SCC for 10 years (1994-2004) and remains active with the conference. A retired banking executive, Bill is well-known for his passionate and unselfish community service efforts throughout the greater New Haven area.

At the conclusion of tonight's awards banquet, two \$500 scholarships will be awarded in Bill's honor.

Worthy recipients have a healthy balance of school and community activities that are value-added and embody the "spirit and passion" of Bill O'Brien. To "fairly" identify the recipients, the league requested for those interested scholar-leaders to contribute a writing piece in addition to their resume of activities/achievements.

This is the 15th year the SCC has presented this scholarship.

WHAT IS THE SCC?

Founded in 1994, the Southern Connecticut Conference is in its 32nd year in 2025–26 with 23 member schools and nearly 23,000 students. Recognized as one of the premier athletic leagues in the state of Connecticut, SCC member schools have captured more than 600 state championships since the league's inception. More importantly, the SCC is recognized for its outstanding non-athletic programs and events in student leadership and the arts, which attempt to breakdown barriers and build bridges of understanding to its students.

For more information, visit www.SouthernConnecticutConference.org

SCC Leadership 2025-26

President: Bryan Darcy, Principal – Jonathan Law HS

Vice-President: Lino Izzo, Principal – Notre Dame HS

Recording Secretary: Anthony Verderame, Director of Athletics - East Haven HS

Treasurer: Jennie Casceillo

Chair of Athletic Directors: Ernie Goodwin, Director of Athletics – Amity Regional HS

Commissioner: Al Carbone

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