



LOCAL STUDENTS SELECTED FOR \$14,000 GOLDEN LEAF FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIPS

ROCKY MOUNT, N.C., (June 12, 2025) - Today, the Golden LEAF Foundation announced that 215 rural North Carolina students were selected to receive up to a \$14,000 Golden LEAF Scholarship, including 10 in Wayne County.

High school seniors entering college as first year students are eligible for a \$3,500 scholarship each year for up to four years of undergraduate study at a participating four-year North Carolina college or university. Community college transfer students are eligible for \$3,500 a year for up to three years of undergraduate study.

Recipients from rural or economically distressed North Carolina counties are selected based on future career goals and an expressed intent to contribute to the state's rural communities upon graduation from college.

The Golden LEAF Foundation established the Golden LEAF Scholarship Program to broaden educational opportunities and provide support to students from rural counties with the goal that recipients will return and contribute to rural communities after graduation. The North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA) administers the program and selects students for awards.

"We are proud to award scholarships to students who have deep connections to their rural communities," said Scott T. Hamilton, Golden LEAF President, Chief Executive Officer. "These recipients were selected from nearly 1,600 applicants. We look forward to their future accomplishments as they continue their education and become North Carolina's next generation of rural leaders."

Scholarship recipients may also apply for the Golden LEAF Rural Internship Initiative. The Rural Internship Initiative provides Golden LEAF Scholars with professional work experience related to their career field in a rural North Carolina community. The Golden LEAF Foundation provides funding to pay interns \$18 per hour for up to 400 hours of work. Internships take place between May and August.

"It's a privilege to recognize Diego, Justin, Payton, Jayda, Jerrica, Avery, Nevaeh, Payton, Melody, and Brianna from Wayne County," said Representative John Bell. "Earning a Golden LEAF Scholarship is a testament to your hard work, community involvement, and bright future ahead."

"I congratulate all of the Golden LEAF Scholarship recipients from my district," said Senator Buck Newton. "These students should be proud of their great accomplishment and having their hard work and dedication recognized. I wish them the best in their bright futures ahead."

"It is such a pleasure to offer congratulations to the Golden LEAF Scholarship recipients from my district," said Representative Jimmy Dixon. "Your willingness to pursue an education and return to

your home county in the future is a strong indicator of future success for not only our rural communities but also our entire state.”

The newly selected 2025 Golden LEAF Scholarship recipients from Wayne County are as follows:

Name	College Name	High School
Diego Castaneda Avila	North Carolina State University	Spring Creek High School
Justin Cowan	University Of Mount Olive	Wayne Christian School
Payton Grimes	East Carolina University	Charles B. Aycock High School
Jayda Harrell	UNC - Chapel Hill	Southern Wayne High School
Jerrica Hinson	East Carolina University	Community College Transfer
Avery Jennette	Wayne Community College	Southern Wayne High School
Nevaeh Kenney	UNC - Charlotte	Eastern Wayne High School
Payton Lowery	UNC - Wilmington	Wayne Early/Middle College High School
Melody Riso	East Carolina University	Charles B. Aycock High School
Brianna Smith	Meredith College	Wayne Country Day School

About Golden LEAF Foundation:

The Golden LEAF Foundation is a nonprofit organization established in 1999 to receive a portion of North Carolina’s funding from the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement with cigarette manufacturers. For 25 years, Golden LEAF has worked to increase economic opportunity in North Carolina’s rural and tobacco-dependent communities through leadership in grantmaking, collaboration, innovation, and stewardship as an independent and perpetual foundation. The Foundation has provided lasting impact to tobacco-dependent, economically distressed, and rural areas of the state by helping create 68,000 jobs, more than \$780 million in new payrolls, and more than 98,000 workers trained or retrained for higher wages. For more information about Golden LEAF and our programs, please visit our website at GoldenLEAF.org.

About North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority:

North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA) administers the program on behalf of the Golden LEAF Foundation. Established in 1965, NCSEAA is the State agency that promotes access to higher education by administering financial aid and savings programs, informing students and families about paying for college, teaching educators about financial aid administration and advocating for resources to support students.

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