



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

ROCKY MOUNT, N.C., (June 8, 2026) - 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 two in Cumberland 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.

The Golden LEAF Scholarship program prioritizes students who demonstrate clear career goals and a commitment to returning to rural North Carolina communities after graduation. In alignment with the Foundation's mission, the scholarship also honors the state's agricultural heritage by supporting students with personal or family ties to North Carolina's tobacco industry. This focus recognizes the historical and economic significance of tobacco growing, production, and processing to the families and rural communities that Golden LEAF serves.

Scholarship recipients may also participate in the Golden LEAF Rural Internship Initiative, which 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 up to \$18 per hour for up to 400 hours of work. Internships take place between May and August.

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. Since establishing the scholarship program in 2000, Golden LEAF has provided more than 6,300 scholarships to help North Carolinians attend participating public or private colleges and universities in North Carolina. Currently, there are 645 Golden LEAF Scholars attending a North Carolina four-year college or university. The North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA) administers the program and selects students for awards.

"We are proud to award scholarships to hardworking students with deep roots in their communities," said Scott T. Hamilton, Golden LEAF President, Chief Executive Officer. "Chosen from more than 1,400 applicants, these students represent the future of rural North Carolina. We look forward to their accomplishments as they continue their education and become North Carolina's next generation of leaders."

"Congratulations to the students from Cumberland County who have earned the Golden LEAF Scholarship," said Representative Diane Wheatley. "Your determination and hard work have brought you to this moment, and I am confident you will use this opportunity to achieve your goals and strengthen our rural communities."

"These scholarship recipients represent the promise and potential of rural North Carolina," said Representative Charles Smith. "I am confident they will use this opportunity to create positive change in their communities."

"I am grateful for the dedication these students have shown in earning the Golden LEAF Scholarship," said Representative Frances Jackson. "Your commitment to your education and your community gives me great confidence in the future of rural North Carolina."

"Congratulations to the students from Cumberland County on earning the Golden LEAF Scholarship," said Senator Val Applewhite. "Brendan and Joseph have already shown strong leadership and commitment, and I am excited to see the positive difference they will make in the future."

"Congratulations to the students in my district who have earned the Golden LEAF Scholarship," said Senator Tom McInnis. "This honor recognizes your commitment to making a difference, and I am proud to see what you will accomplish in the years ahead."

The newly selected 2026 Golden LEAF Scholarship recipients from Cumberland County are as follows:

<b>Name</b>	<b>College/University</b>	<b>High School</b>
Brendan Jones	Winston-Salem State University	South View High School
Joseph Walls	University Of Mount Olive	Riverside Christian Academy

**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. 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. For more than 25 years, the Foundation has provided lasting impact to tobacco-dependent, economically distressed, and rural areas of the state. In fiscal year 2025, Golden LEAF helped create 1,665 jobs, more than \$116 million in new payrolls, and more than 4,722 workers trained or retrained for higher wages. For more information about Golden LEAF and our programs, please visit our website at [GoldenLEAF.org](https://GoldenLEAF.org).

**About North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority:**

The North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA) administers the Golden LEAF Colleges and Universities Scholarship 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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