



Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

Communications Section

P. O. Box N-3913/14

Nassau, The Bahamas

Press Release

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Re: Mr. Jayden Sands Emerges as the 2026 All Bahamas Merit Scholarship Recipient

The Government of The Bahamas is continuing its investment in the development of the nation's human capital, awarding prestigious government-funded scholarships to outstanding Bahamian students while advancing new initiatives to strengthen and expand tertiary education opportunities for Bahamians.

Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Science and Technology, the Hon. I. Chester Cooper, announced Mr. Jayden Sands, a recent graduate of St. Augustine's College, as the 2026 All Bahamas Merit Scholarship recipient. The ABM winner receives \$35K per academic year for a total of \$140K over four years.

Sands is pursuing a degree in Accounting and Finance at St. John's University in Minnesota.

Mr. Gary Neilly, a recent graduate of Queen's College, has been named the 2026 All Bahamas Merit Scholarship Runner-Up. Neilly is pursuing studies in Mathematics at University of The Bahamas. He will receive \$25K per academic year.

An additional 27 outstanding Bahamian students have been selected as 2026 National Merit Scholarship recipients, recognising their academic achievement and potential to contribute to the continued growth and development of The Bahamas.

The 2026 National Merit Scholarship recipients Kendal Brooks, Zion Carey, Christopher Carter, Ziarre Darville, Kendal Ferguson, Zante Ferguson, Alanis Gardner, Trinity Holbert, Jade Hudson, Hendrick Nairn III, Nia-Ishia Prince, Austin Roberts, Ja'A Rolle, Shiloh Rolle, Roanna Saintil, Layla Sands, Avani Sawyer, Kevin Williams will each receive \$20K per academic year for four years.

Meanwhile Kaylee Fernander, Evan Johnson, Michael Knowles, Micah Moss, Akeem Rolle, Kaitlyn Saunders, Ryan Symonette, Bernise Ulysse, and Caleb Yehuwdah will each receive \$15K per academic year for four years.

Acting Prime Minister Cooper congratulated the recipients, describing the Government's scholarship programme as an important investment not only in individual students, but in the long-term social and economic development of the country.

"Government-funded scholarships are not simply awards for academic achievement. They are strategic investments in the human capacity of our country," Acting Prime Minister Cooper said. "The continued growth and development of The Bahamas will depend heavily on the knowledge, skills, creativity, innovation and leadership capacity of our people."

The Government has budgeted approximately \$14 million for scholarships, with approximately 500 Bahamian students currently benefiting from government scholarship support.

Acting Prime Minister Cooper said the significant public investment in tertiary education underscores the need to ensure that the country ultimately benefits from the knowledge, skills and expertise developed through these opportunities.

Against this backdrop, he announced that the Government is exploring the reintroduction of a bonding requirement for government scholarship recipients, under which scholarship recipients would be required to return to The Bahamas and work for the Government for a period equivalent to the duration of their scholarship.

“We are investing substantially in developing Bahamian talent, and we want that investment to translate into stronger capacity here at home,” Acting Prime Minister Cooper said. “As we consider reintroducing the bonding process, our intention is to create a stronger connection between the opportunities we provide our scholars and the human-capital needs of the public service and the wider country.”

The initiative is intended to strengthen the pipeline of qualified Bahamians entering areas of national need while ensuring that the country receives a meaningful return on its investment in tertiary education.

The Chair of the National Scholarship Advisory Committee, Senator the Hon. Robyn Lynes noted the transformative impact that the ABM scholarships have had on their recipients throughout the years, which has significantly contributed to the country’s advancement.

“This is as result of the government’s continued commitment to education, and its continued commitment to pouring into the most valuable resource in this country – our human resource,” Senator Lynes said.

Joining the announcement virtually from St. John’s University, Sands expressed gratitude for being selected as the 2026 All Bahamas Merit Scholarship recipient and acknowledged the significance of the opportunity.

“I can assure you that I will continue to work hard, keeping education as my priority with the goal to contribute to the development of The Bahamas,” Sands exclaimed.

Acting Prime Minister Cooper encouraged all scholarship recipients to approach their studies with purpose and to recognise that the opportunities afforded them also carry an opportunity to contribute to the country’s future.

“You represent the next generation of Bahamian leaders, thinkers, innovators and professionals,” he said. “The Bahamas you will inherit will also be a Bahamas you will help to build. We look forward to your knowledge, expertise, leadership and ideas as together we build a stronger, more innovative and more prosperous nation.”

As part of The Revolution in Education, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology remains committed to ensuring that Bahamians have greater access to tertiary education and that public investment in scholarships is strategically aligned with the skills, professions and emerging sectors required for the sustained growth and development of the country.

The Ministry congratulates Mr. Jayden Sands, Mr. Gary Neilly and all 27 National Merit Scholarship recipients, as well as their parents and families, educators, school communities and others who have supported them throughout their academic journeys.

Their achievements demonstrate the promise and potential of Bahamian students and reinforce the importance of sustained national investment in education and human capacity development.

When we get education right, we get The Bahamas right.

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