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ALYSSA SCHUKAR / THE WORLD-HERALD

Elkhorn South senior Vaishnavi Ganesan examines a plaque she received during today's ceremony at Omaha Central High School. Ganesan received a top score on the ACT.

## College ACT Tests

By *Joe Dejka*  
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

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In a hall at Central High School devoted to honoring athletic greatness, a crowd of notables gathered Wednesday to honor academic prowess.

Standing beneath the retired purple jerseys of football greats Gayle Sayers and Ahman Green, Gov. Dave Heineman paid tribute to nine Omaha-area graduating seniors who earned perfect scores on the ACT or SAT college entrance exams.

The students were among 15 statewide to achieve such perfection, a rare feat.

Rarer still was what Central High senior Marika Svolos accomplished: acing both the ACT and SAT.

Central High Principal Keith Bigsby, who will retire after this year, hugged Svolos as she accepted her award.

Bigsby told all the students, "You represent a great sense of hope to me."

Svolos said she was "thrilled" to learn of her perfect composite score of 36 on the ACT.

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A couple of months later, she got up early one morning and logged onto the SAT website to check that score.

She said she stared at the numbers and thought, "Is this really happening?"

"I was so excited I just could not believe it," she said.

Her mother, Carol Svolos, was in the kitchen and heard a shriek from downstairs. Her mother bounded down to check on Marika, and Marika shared the good news.

Carol Svolos said she and Marika's dad, Thomas Svolos, are thankful for the great teachers who helped Marika through the years — she specifically mentioned Linda Coates, Susan Altman and Greg Sand.

Marika, who plays varsity tennis for Central, said she will study math at the University of Chicago next year.

Heineman praised the students but also their parents.

"You're the first, best and most important teacher of these kids," he said.

Nebraska Education Commissioner Roger Breed encouraged the students to build on their talents and seek ways to apply them to benefit society.

Breed said that although some are heading to college more than a thousand miles away, they should return someday to Nebraska.

"See the world, but build your career and your life back here," he said.

Interim OPS Superintendent Virginia Moon and the district's next superintendent, Mark Evans, both attended the ceremony.

Thirteen other students were perfect on the ACT:

- Preston Fegley, Grand Island High School, Grand Island;
- Patrick Fisher, Creighton Prep High School, Omaha;
- Maranda Frey, Lincoln Southwest High School, Lincoln;
- Thomas Fryklind, Archbishop Bergan High School, Fremont;
- Vaishnavi Ganesan, Elkhorn South High School, Omaha;
- Alexander Gangwish, Bellevue West High School, Bellevue;
- Paul Kujawa, Mount Michael Benedictine High School, Omaha;
- Mackenzie Mikkelsen, Westside High School, Omaha;
- Nick Nagengast, Bloomfield High School, Bloomfield;
- Andrew Peterson, Lincoln Southeast High School, Lincoln;
- Thomas Rasmussen, Lincoln East High School, Lincoln;
- Bonnie Smith, Omaha Northwest High School, Omaha;
- Peter Xu, Millard North High School, Omaha.

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Earning a perfect SAT score was Nathaniel Wei, Lincoln East High School, Lincoln.

The ACT tests students' knowledge of English, mathematics, reading and science. The composite score reflects the average of the four test scores.

About 1.6 million students in the nation take the ACT each year. Fewer than one student in 1,000 earns a perfect score.

The SAT exam measures reading, math and writing skills.

Perfect SAT scores are rare as well, with only 360 of 1,664,479 test takers getting the top score of 2400 in 2012.

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