WISCONSIN STUDENT NEWSMEDIA ASSOCIATION

2026 HIGH SCHOOL
Better NewsMedia Contest

Contest Opens: November 4, 2026

Deadline: Monday, December 7, 2026

All entries must be uploaded by 10:59 p.m. CST

Entries must have been published between Jan. 1, 2026 and Dec. 7, 2026.

CONTEST DIVISIONS

Division A: Publications from schools with more than 500 students
Division B: Publications from schools with less than 500 students

Entries will be merged into the next highest division if a category receives three or fewer entries.

ELIGIBILITY & ENTRY LIMITS

Any student enrolled in a Wisconsin public, parochial or private high school is eligible.
Unless otherwise specified, each entrant may submit as many entries in each contest as desired.

CONTEST WEBSITE

All entries must be submitted online through **betternewspapercontest.com/WNA_HS.**

Detailed instructions can be viewed on the contest website. Full page PDFs or URLs must be submitted with each entry. Photography entries also require JPGs of the submitted photo(s).

CONTEST MANAGERS

Each publication will be assigned a contest manager, who will receive a username and password. The contest manager can add authorized entrants, who may also submit entries. The contest manager can also opt to share his or her login information with staffers so that they may upload their entries. If you've forgotten your username or password, please contact Laura Niemi at laura@mna.org.

PAYMENT

There is a $10.00 entry fee for each entry. Please complete credit card payment **on or before the contest deadline**. The PayPal link is on the contest site.

AWARDS

Experienced publication professionals from the North Carolina Press Association will serve as judges. Winning publications will be notified after judging has been completed. Awards will be presented in Madison at the Branen Family Student Luncheon at the WNA Annual Convention on Friday, March 12, 2027.

The Branen Family proudly sponsors the Branen Family Student Luncheon, honoring the legacy of William E. Branen, former publisher and president of the Burlington Standard Press. Branen became Wisconsin's youngest editor in 1953 and later served as president of what was then the Wisconsin Press Association.

The Branen Family's continued support celebrates student achievement and helps strengthen the future of Wisconsin journalism.

2026 CONTEST CATEGORIES

1. General Excellence
2. General Reporting
3. Public Affairs Reporting
4. In-Depth Story
5. Feature Story
6. Sports Story
7. Editorial Writing
8. Column Writing
9. News/Feature Photography
10. Sports Photography
11. Infographic/Illustration
12. Best Use of Multimedia

CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS

1. General Excellence

This award seeks to recognize balanced excellence of the publication as a whole. Entries will be judged on overall evaluation of the publication, with maximum point value assigned as follows:

- Quality of writing: 25 points
- Depth, breadth and quality of news coverage: 25 points
- Quality of editorial page with particular attention to relevance to community: 25 points
- Overall appearance of the publication with focus on effective layout and design: 25 points

Entries are limited to one per publication.

Instructions: Two (2) complete issues of the publication must be submitted as PDFs or e-editions. Enter the two dates of the issues in the headline box of your online entry.

2. General Reporting

This award seeks to recognize excellence in general news reporting. Criteria include significance of subject, writing quality and thoroughness. A publication may submit unlimited entries, but a staff member's name may not appear on more than two entries.

Instructions: Upload full-page PDFs or submit URLs for each story.

3. Public Affairs Reporting

This award recognizes excellence in public affairs reporting, including coverage of student, local, state or federal government and how it affects the publication's community. Criteria include enterprise, clarity and relevancy. Editorials or columns may be submitted as supporting materials, but cannot be the main focus of the entry. A publication may submit unlimited entries, but a staff member's name may not appear on more than two entries.

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) for story or story and sidebar(s).

4. In-Depth Story

This award recognizes the best single story or series on a single topic that goes beyond the surface and requires more time, work and skill than general news reporting. Criteria include enterprise, relevancy, resourcefulness, originality, organization, clarity, use of sources and impact. Each entry shall consist of either a single story or a series on a particular topic. A publication may submit unlimited entries, but a staff member's name may not appear on more than two entries.

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) for story or stories.

5. Feature Story

Each entry shall consist of a single feature article or feature article and sidebar(s). Criteria include effectiveness of writing style, originality of approach and human interest. A publication may submit an unlimited number of entries, but a staff member's name may not appear on more than two entries.

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) for story or story and sidebar(s).

6. Sports Story

Each entry shall consist of a single sports story, series or story and sidebar(s) on the same topic. Criteria include significance of subject, writing quality and thoroughness. A publication may submit an unlimited number of entries, but a staff member's name may not appear on more than two entries.

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) for each story.

7. Editorial Writing

Each entry shall consist of a single editorial. Criteria include quality of writing, significance to the school, importance of the issue, success of the argument on the reader and general impact. A publication may submit an unlimited number of entries, but a staff member's name may not appear on more than two entries.

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF or submit URL for the editorial.

8. Column Writing

Each entry shall consist of a single column, and may be a news, feature or humor column. Criteria include reader appeal, depth of material or research and clarity of writing. Publications may submit an unlimited number of entries, but no more than two for the same columnist.

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF or submit URL for the column.

9. News/Feature Photography

Each entry shall consist of a single photo (or up to three photos on the same subject) that is the direct result of a news event. Criteria include news value, enterprise, impact, composition, technical ability and originality. Photographers may submit unlimited entries.

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) **and** the individual JPG(s) for each photo.

10. Sports Photography

Each entry shall consist of a single photo (or up to three photos on the same subject) focusing on any aspect of athletics. Criteria include creativity, impact, interest, composition, technical ability and originality. Photographers may submit unlimited entries.

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) **and** the individual JPG(s) for each photo.

11. Infographic/Illustration

Each entry shall consist of a single graphic or illustration that helps to deepen the reader's understanding of a topic via visual elements. Entries may include graphs, charts, maps or other graphics used to convey information in a succinct manner. Criteria include creativity, effectiveness, clarity, accuracy and originality. Designers may submit unlimited entries.

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) for the graphic and accompanying story.

12. Best Use of Multimedia

This award recognizes excellence in storytelling using multimedia elements. Entries may include, but are not limited to videos, podcasts, photo slideshows and interactive graphics. Entries may be part of a project that also includes a print or online story or standalone pieces. Criteria include innovation, technical quality, impact and effectiveness of storytelling. Publications may submit unlimited entries.

Instructions: Submit URL(s) for multimedia elements. If part of a larger project, submit PDF or URL for accompanying story. Third party platforms, such as Storify, may be used to showcase digital projects.