

PrepTalk™

Advice for Montgomery County Parents and Students on College Preparation • Fall 2004

A Record High

The graduating class of 2004 produced the highest systemwide average SAT® score (1102) ever achieved by the Montgomery County Public Schools.

The eight-point gain to an average score of 1102 is the largest single-year improvement in 16 years, surpassing by 76 points this year both the Maryland and national average of 1026.

The higher SAT® scores mark the achievements of the first graduating class of students taking the SAT® who were exposed to a full range of educational reforms in MCPS, which included the opportunities for more rigorous coursework in preparation for college.

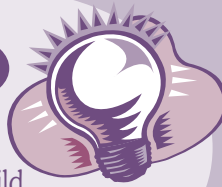
...and Aiming Higher

Dr. Charlene Nunley, president of Montgomery College, and Dr. Jerry Weast, superintendent of schools, discuss the importance of having a college degree to gain a competitive edge in the job market of the near future.

See page 3 for details.

SuccessTalk

Take challenging classes early to build a strong academic record.
See page 7 for more.



MoneyTalk

Find out how you can score big on College Goal Sunday.
See page 5 for more.



TestTalk

Try these test-taking tips to raise your SAT® score.
See page 4 for details.



PrepTalk™

A service of the Montgomery College–Montgomery County Public Schools Partnership

The Inside Scoop...

Look for these segments throughout this newsletter to find helpful information for getting ready for college. From taking tests, planning academic schedules, and improving study skills, to paying for college and planning for key deadlines—you'll find it all here.

TickTalk

Learn why this Groundhog Day should start with a shadow. *See page 7.*



StraightTalk

Hear some thoughts from MC students who attended MCPS high schools.
See pages 2 and 8.



PrepTalk

Parental Involvement Equals Success

Why is parental involvement important? Here are some reasons why it is important for parents to be involved in their child's education:

- When parents are involved in their children's education at home, their children do better in school. And when parents are involved in school, children go farther in school—and the schools they go to are better.
- The family makes critical contributions to student achievement through high school. A home environment that encourages learning is more important to student achievement than income, education level, or cultural background.

- The College Board found that reading achievement is more dependent on learning activities in the home than is math or science.
- When children and parents talk regularly about school, children perform better academically.
- Three kinds of parental involvement at home are consistently associated with higher student achievement: actively organizing

When parents are involved in their children's education...their children do better in school.

and monitoring a child's time, helping with homework, and discussing school matters.

- Parents who read to their children before they enter school give their children a boost toward reading success. Talking to children about books and stories read to them also supports reading achievement.
- The earlier that parent involvement begins in a child's educational process, the more powerful the effects.
- Positive results of parental involvement in their children's schooling include improved achievement, reduced absenteeism, improved behavior, and restored confidence among parents in their children's schooling.

Source: Excerpts from www.nea.org/parents

TickTalk

Homework Hotline: Live!

Montgomery County Public Schools Instructional TV offers one-on-one homework help to students who call the hotline number at 301-279-3234 (Voice/TTY). The program, which can be viewed on channel 33, is scheduled from 4:30–6 p.m. on most Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from October through April. Students and families can use this service even if they do not subscribe to cable television. By calling 301-279-3234, a student will be connected to a teacher who can provide assistance in most academic subjects from kindergarten through 12th grade. During each program, three teachers are on camera, while several more answer telephone calls.

Source: www.mcps.k12.md.us/departments/itv/ITV_Programs_HHL.shtm

StraightTalk

How is college different from high school?

"What you learn in one year in high school, you learn in a semester in college. Classes move a lot faster here."

Biruh

Montgomery Blair High School Graduate

"You have a lot more homework. If you don't do it, you'll fall behind. You're on your own here."

Mitchell

Sherwood High School Graduate

PrepTalk™

A newsletter for Montgomery County parents and high school students on preparing for college. Produced in partnership by Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery College. Please direct queries to:

Lisa Carvallo at 301-610-4141;
Lisa.Carvallo@montgomerycollege.edu;
TTY, 301-294-9672; Montgomery College,
51 Mannakee St., Rockville, MD 20850, or
Hope Dieckhans at 301-279-3370;
Hope_Dieckhans@mcpsmd.org;
TTY, 301-517-8155; Montgomery County
Public Schools, 850 Hungerford Dr.,
Rockville, MD 20850

Research, writing, editing, design, production, and printing by the Montgomery College and Montgomery County Public Schools communications staffs:

Steve Simon, Director of Communications—MC
Kate Harrison, Assistant Director of
Communications—MCPS
Donna D'Ascenzo, Designer—MC
Jill Fitzgerald, Senior Editor—MC
Tina Kramer, Writer—MC
John Marshall, Supervisor, Electronic
Graphics and Publishing Services—MCPS

Putting a College Education to Work

A Note from Montgomery College President Dr. Charlene R. Nunley and MCPS Superintendent Dr. Jerry D. Weast

In the Bureau of Labor Statistics' *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*, economists Arlene Dohm and Ian Wyatt say, "When it comes to work, having a college degree is one of the best ways to gain and maintain a competitive edge. On average, college graduates enjoy advantages—ranging from more job opportunities to better salaries—over their non-college-educated counterparts." The article, "College at Work: Outlook and Earnings for College Graduates," presents an overview of the job market through the year 2010.

These noted economists made the following observations:

Benefits of a college degree

Students working toward a degree are likely to set their sights on the long-term payoffs—which include more career options, better promotion opportunities, higher earnings, and lower unemployment—that a college degree provides.

Earnings: higher by degree

The more experience workers have, the higher their earnings usually are. Having experience plus a degree enhances a worker's ability to qualify for promotions and positions of responsibility, leading to higher salaries.

Projected job openings for college graduates

The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that overall employment will grow 15 percent through 2010, resulting in 22 million new jobs. Much of this growth is projected to be in occupations in which large numbers of college graduates are employed. Occupations employing primarily college graduates are projected to be among the fastest growing in the nation. Millions of older workers, including a high proportion of baby boomers with college degrees, are expected to retire by 2010, leaving a large number of job vacancies to be filled by college graduates.

Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery College are working together to ensure that your children are well-prepared for success after high school graduation. Ultimately, we want them to put their college education to work.

SuccessTalk



High School, Then What?

What your child accomplishes in high school will unlock the door to his or her future—careers and dreams. College can help your child have more career choices, make more money, and have a better chance at a fulfilling career. College opens doors to the world by offering opportunities that can help your child grow personally and intellectually.

Source: *Preparing Your Child for College*, www.mhec.state.md.us/preparing/

TickTalk



Financing the Future

Montgomery County Public Schools offers free financial aid workshops at county high schools.

December 2004 dates:

Magruder	Dec. 1	7 p.m.
Wheaton	Dec. 1	7 p.m.
John F. Kennedy	Dec. 2	7 p.m.
Seneca Valley	Dec. 2	7 p.m.
Paint Branch	Dec. 2	7 p.m.
Walter Johnson	Dec. 6	7 p.m.
Watkins Mill	Dec. 8	7 p.m.
Sherwood	Dec. 8	7 p.m.
Rockville	Dec. 9	7 p.m.
Poolesville	Dec. 14	7 p.m.
B-CC	Dec. 15	7 p.m.

January 2005 dates:

Gaithersburg	Jan. 6	7 p.m.
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Source: www.mcps.k12.md.us/curriculum/careercenter/financialworkshops.htm

PrepTalk

Fall/Winter College Planner: A Checklist for Juniors and Seniors

Juniors

- Register for SAT® and/or ACT.
- Attend college programs sponsored by the guidance department and career center.
- Get information on programs and schools that interest you.
- Meet with college admissions representatives who visit your school.
- Attend college fairs and school-sponsored programs.
- Become familiar with college and job applications.

- Acquire part-time volunteer or job experiences related to career plans.
- Monitor student service learning hours.
- Meet with counselor about your progress.

Seniors

- Visit schools, if appropriate.
- Review scholarship information and apply, if appropriate.
- Honor school and college deadlines for admissions,

recommendations, transcripts, and financial aid.

- Seek letters of recommendation, if needed.
- Look for the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) to arrive at your school's career center in late November; if appropriate, have your parents complete and file the form after January 1, 2005.

Source: Montgomery College Web site, www.montgomerycollege.edu/Departments/studevgt/Connection.htm

TestTalk

Keys to SATs®

Answer easy questions first.

You earn just as many points for easy questions as you do for hard questions. The easier questions are at the beginning of the section and the harder questions at the end—except for Critical Reading questions, which are ordered according to the logic and organization of each passage.

Don't panic if you cannot answer every question.

You do not have to answer every question correctly to get a good score. You can get an average score by answering about half of the questions correctly and omitting the remaining questions.

Guess smart.

If you can rule out one or more answer choices for a multiple-choice



question as definitely wrong, your chances of guessing the right answer improve. For math questions without answer choices, fill in your best guess; no points are subtracted for wrong answers as they are in all other question types.

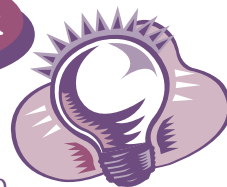
Source: www.collegeboard.com

SuccessTalk

Don't Cram for the Big Exam

The best way to do well on the SAT® is not to try to cram for it, but to be a good student over the long term—by reading and writing as much as possible, learning to use language effectively, taking hard courses, thinking critically, and solving problems in and out of school.

Source: The Chronicle of Higher Education Web site article, <http://chronicle.com/free/v48/i44/44b01101.htm>



TickTalk

Mark Your SAT® Date

- Upcoming SAT® test dates:
 - January 22, 2005 (SAT® and Subject Tests)
 - March 12, 2005 (New SAT®)
 - May 7, 2005 (New SAT® and Subject Tests)
- SAT® registration deadlines:
 - December 20, 2004 (SAT® and Subject Tests)
 - February 7, 2005 (New SAT®)
 - March 25, 2005 (New SAT® and Subject Tests)

Applications are available at your high school career center or online at the College Board Web site, www.collegeboard.com.

Source: www.collegeboard.com



TickTalk

FAFSA Arrives in November

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is available in your high school's career center usually by Thanksgiving.

Source: Springbrook High School Guidance Department and Career Center Web site



MoneyTalk

What's FAFSA?

All colleges use the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to determine your eligibility for federal financial aid. The FAFSA can not be transmitted or submitted until January 1, 2005, for the 2005–2006 academic year.

Source: Montgomery College Financial Aid



Score Big on College Goal Sunday

Hundreds of counselors and financial aid professionals—and thousands of Montgomery County Public Schools students—will take part in College Goal Sunday, a program designed to make higher education a reality and alleviate the financial burden for many. The program will be held at Wheaton High School on Sunday, January 30, 2005, at 2 p.m.

College Goal Sunday is a charitable collaboration sponsored by the Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, Inc. (ASFAA) in cooperation with the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

College Goal Sunday is designed to help college-bound students receive free professional assistance in completing the Free Application

for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), the financial aid form required by colleges and universities.

Financial aid professionals, primarily from colleges and universities, will help students and their families complete the FAFSA form and learn more about applying for college financial aid.

Spanish-speaking professionals will assist families who need assistance; if possible, professionals conversant in other languages may be available.

The College Goal Sunday program is sponsored through grants from The Lumina Foundation for Education and USA Funds. For more information about College Goal Sunday at Wheaton High School, call the Montgomery College Office of Student Financial Aid at 301-279-5100. **PT**

Q&A: Can We Still Apply for Financial Aid?

If we enroll in the Section 529 College Savings Plans of Maryland, can we still apply for financial aid?

Yes. Participation in the College Savings Plans of Maryland does not limit your ability to apply for financial aid. It also should not affect a student's receipt of merit-based financial aid, including academic or athletic scholarships. It may, however, affect your ability to

receive need-based financial aid. The most significant amount of the need-based financial aid offered to students today is in the form of loans, not grants or scholarships. Typically, loans have to be repaid with interest. Families that plan ahead and save for college using the College Savings Plans of Maryland may be able to greatly reduce their need for financial aid.

Source: www.collegesavingsmd.com

TickTalk

Deadlines for 529s

Enroll now in Maryland's Section 529 plans (tax-deferred college savings programs). The Maryland Prepaid College Trust's enrollment period is November through mid-March; however, enrollment is year round for new-borns. The Maryland College Investment Plan has year-round enrollment. Enroll online at the College Savings Plans of Maryland Web site.

Source: www.collegesavingsmd.org



PrepTalk

So You Want to Be a Better Writer?

Here are 10 ways you can improve your writing to raise your score for the essay question on the new SAT®.

1. Write Often

Give yourself a boost with regular writing practices like journal writing, taking notes on your reading, and freewriting (writing quickly for 10 minutes, without stopping to think about grammar or spelling).

2. Experiment

Experiment to expand your range and abilities. Try writing for many

...it's good experience to get feedback from friends, family, and writers you respect.

different purposes and audiences—try stories, memoirs, letters to the editor, and more.

3. Have Fun with Writing

Play with words, use your imagination, and tune your ear for language that tickles you. Look for pleasing words and phrases that jump out when you read them, and use them in your writing.

4. Get Feedback

Don't be shy about passing your writing around—it's good experience to get feedback from friends, family, and writers you respect.

5. Read!

Read like a writer! Try to imagine why and how the author did something in a certain way, and think about the

techniques you use in your own writing. Use your favorite writers as models for writing practice.

6. Write Outside of English Class

Use writing to find out what you know, not just in English class, but also in other subjects and in ordinary life. The funny thing about writing is that it actually helps you think! Whether it's a math problem or a magazine article, writing about it can help you think it through and make connections.

7. Learn the Tricks of the Trade

If writer's block is making it hard to get started, try brainstorming, clustering, looking for ideas in your journal or writer's notebook, or imitating the first lines of your favorite novels.

8. Write What You Know

There's no need to make each piece your life's history, but do find your topics, descriptions, dialogue, and ideas in your own life's experiences.

9. Revise and Edit

Work first on developing and drafting your ideas. Revise, revise, revise! Then edit for correct grammar and spelling. Your close attention to revising and editing will make your writing clearer to your audience.

10. Start a Writing Folder

Save your writings in a writing folder or notebook and occasionally take time to review and reflect. Ask yourself what you like about a piece, what you don't like, and what you would like to change.

Source: National Council of Teachers of English, www.ncte.org/library/files/Parents_Students/tips-students.pdf

TestTalk

New SAT® Tests Writing Skills

The new SAT® essay question measures your ability to:

- organize and express ideas clearly
- develop and support the main idea
- use appropriate word choice and sentence structure

Source: www.collegeboard.com

SuccessTalk

Choo Choo-sing Your College

Amtrak offers special deals to high school students and their parents or guardians for college visits. The 2004–2005 Amtrak “buy one ticket, get one free” discount coupon program requires a seven-day advance purchase (other restrictions may apply). Coupons are available online at www.onebigcampus.com/html/amtrak_discount.htm.

Source: Blair High School Career Center Web site, <http://career.mbhs.edu/>

TickTalk

2004 National College Fair

Washington, D.C.
Washington Convention Center
Tuesday, November 30
9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and
6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Source: National Association for College Admission Counseling Web site, www.nacac.com

Building a Strong Academic Record

To build a strong high school academic record, you need to take challenging courses in math, English, science, history, and study a foreign language. If you want to go to college, it's better to get B's in tough courses like these than straight A's in easy courses.

Take algebra, geometry early

Try to take algebra and geometry as soon as possible—preferably by the end of the eighth and ninth grades. It's a fact: Students who take algebra and geometry early on are much more likely to go to college than students who don't. One reason is that you generally must take algebra and geometry before you can take advanced math and science courses such as trigonometry, calculus, chemistry, and physics. These advanced courses are exactly the kinds of courses colleges want you to take.

Study foreign language early

Consider learning a foreign language as soon as possible—preferably before you start high school. The longer you study a

foreign language, the more interested colleges will be in you. Many colleges require students to study at least two years of the same foreign language, and just about all of them prefer as many years as possible. Studying a foreign language has other benefits, too. It will increase your verbal skills, which could mean a higher SAT® or ACT score. It will show your future employers that you're ready to compete in the "global economy," increasing your chances of landing an exciting job that involves travel to faraway places.

Take challenging courses

Students who take challenging courses ... and work hard at them do better in high school, score higher on standardized tests, and get into better colleges. Ask a teacher, guidance counselor, or other trusted adult to help you choose the most challenging courses offered at your school. If possible, do this even before you start high school.

Source: www.aft.org/pubs-reports/parents/HardWorkPays.pdf

themselves, associations, and banks. Your chances of getting financial aid may be as good as anyone else's. All you have to do is plan ahead and apply for it. More than half the students attending college get some financial aid. Most families pay for college with savings, current income, and loans.

Source: Think College Early, www.ed.gov

SuccessTalk



Join the Club

Becoming a member of a school club and/or team is a smart move. Being a member of a club not only gives you the opportunity to do something you enjoy, it enables you to meet others who have the same interest as you, and it can be an opportunity to discover new interests.

Source: www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/publishingservices/PDF/GetSet.pdf

TickTalk



Groundhog Day Brings a Shadow

Kicking off on February 2, 2005, and continuing throughout the school year, Job Shadowing gives more than one million students across America the opportunity to "shadow" a workplace mentor as he or she goes through a normal day on the job.

For students and educators, job shadowing:

- Provides an answer to the question, "Why do I have to learn this?"
- Demonstrates the importance of academics in reaching college and career goals
- Motivates students to learn by demonstrating the tangible applications of classroom lessons

If you are interested in participating in the Job Shadowing program, please contact Regina Breiterman, MCPS, at 301-279-3438.

Source: www.jobshadow.org

TickTalk

Can I Afford to Go to College?

There is money, called financial aid, to help you pay for college. Financial aid can come from different places: the federal government, the state, colleges



PrepTalk

Recommended Program of Study for College

As students plan their high school classes, their focus should be on meeting graduation requirements, as well as college admission requirements. The following courses are highly recommended for college-bound students.

English

Four years required for a Maryland high school diploma. Focus on:

- Rules of grammar
- Communication and problem-solving skills
- Writing techniques
- Library research skills

Mathematics

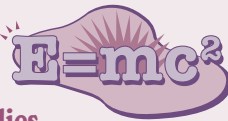
Four years required, including algebra and geometry. College-bound students also should take:

- Advanced algebra
- Trigonometry
- Calculus

Science

Three years required. Recommend three years of lab sciences:

- Biology
- Chemistry
- Physics



Social Studies

Three years required.

- American history
- World history
- National, state, local government

Foreign Language

Minimum three years recommended.

Additional Requirements

Minimum one year required in each of the following course areas:

- Arts and Music
- Technology Education
- Physical Education

Minimum one semester required in:

- Health Education

PrepTalk™

This publication provides information on what students should know to ensure their success beyond high school. We hope you'll find it useful and that you'll share your feedback.

Available in alternative format by contacting the MCPS Department of Communications, 301-279-3391 or TTY, 301-279-3125.

For additional information about the Montgomery College–Montgomery County Public Schools Partnership or *PrepTalk*, call Hope Dieckhans of MCPS at 301-279-3370 or Lisa Carvallo of MC at 301-610-4141.

Montgomery County Public Schools
Montgomery College

Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Institutions 11/04

StraightTalk

How did high school prepare you for college?



"I was well prepared for college. The teachers in high school were great. They were always available if you needed extra help. The AP courses I took were very challenging."

Sylvia

Northwest High School Graduate

Miss an issue?

Visit the MCPS Web address: www.mcps.k12.md.us/departments/publishingservices/PDF/preptalk/ for back issues of *PrepTalk*.

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Rockville, MD 20850