

PrepTalk™

Advice for Montgomery County Parents and Students on College Preparation • Spring 2003

Make Vacation Plans Now

Make the most of your vacation this summer. It's a great time to take advantage of college and career planning activities.

Cool off with a visit to your high school's career center. See the sites on a road trip to a college campus. Dive into your service learning hours by volunteering. Surf the Web for financial aid sources and tips on saving for college.

While you're at it, surf the channels for the "PrepTalk" show, airing on the MCPS Instructional TV's Cable Channel 34, Tuesdays at 7 p.m., and Wednesdays and Fridays at 8 p.m. It also airs on Montgomery College ITV's Cable Channel 10, on the second and fourth Mondays of the month at 7 p.m., and other times.

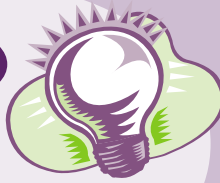
Partnering for You

Dr. Jerry Weast, superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools, and Dr. Charlene Nunley, president of Montgomery College, discuss how parent involvement promotes student success. See page 3.

SuccessTalk

College planning tips for students with special needs.

See page 8 for more.



MoneyTalk

Learn about how the expected family contribution affects financial aid. See page 6.



TestTalk

How to prepare for the college entrance tests.

See page 2 for details.



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

Find out more about how a summer job can work for you. See page 8.



StraightTalk

Current MC students who attended MCPS high schools share their thoughts. See pages 3 and 8.



PrepTalk™

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

The Long and Short of Test Prep

It's probably not what you want to hear, but preparation for admission tests should start long before you hear the letters S-A-T or A-C-T. These tests measure skills developed over a long period of time. Fortunately, there's a lot that you can do early on to have an impact on your results.

Long-Term Preparation

One of the best ways to get ready is to take solid academic courses. Enroll in the most challenging courses you can handle in English, math, science, social studies, foreign languages, and fine arts. Your classroom experiences will affect how well you do on admission tests.

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:

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You spend six hours or so each day for 180 days each year in school. So what happens the rest of the time? That's important, too. For example:

- Read regularly. Read newspapers, novels, your textbooks, poems, or even the blurbs on the back of your cereal box. Students who have

“Enroll in the most challenging courses you can handle in English, math, science, ...”

strong reading habits do well on the verbal part of the SAT® or ACT.

- Learn to attack new words. Look up unfamiliar words in the dictionary and try to get a handle on prefixes, suffixes, and root words. Studying a foreign language can also help you figure out new words.
- Get involved. Clubs, sports, games, part-time jobs, and other activities can improve your problem-solving skills.

Short-Term Preparation

During the later high school years, think about what you need to know on test day. For example, taking the PSAT/NMSQT® gives you a chance to become familiar with the SAT® I format and the types of questions, and you can use your scores to pinpoint where you need to do more work. Reviewing actual test questions and tests can also help you be more comfortable on test day.

Source: The College Board Web site, www.collegeboard.com

TickTalk

Mark Your SAT® Date

- Upcoming SAT® test date:
June 7, 2003
(SAT® I and SAT® II)
- SAT® registration deadline:
May 2, 2003
(SAT® I and SAT® II)

Applications are available at your high school career center or online at www.collegeboard.com.

Source: The College Board Web site, www.collegeboard.com

TestTalk

MCPS Offers SAT® Prep

MCPS' SAT® Prep course has helped students raise their SAT® scores, on average, by more than 100 points. The 32-hour prep course offers students practice on real SATs® to:

- refine and improve critical reading and thinking skills
- learn proven test-taking strategies
- increase test-taking confidence
- improve test-taking speed

Weekday SAT® Prep classes for the June 7 SAT® run from April 29 and 30 through June 5. Register now through April 22. For class times and locations, visit the MCPS Web site or call 301-929-2025 for information.

Source: Montgomery County Public Schools Web site, www.mcps.k12.md.us/departments/alted/sat/

Parents Can Promote Student Success

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

In its most recent publication *A Parent's Guide to Achievement Matters Most*, the Maryland State Department of Education outlined a plan to raise the achievement of every public school student in the state. One of the most eye-opening "call-outs" in the guide was: Seven in 10 middle school students said they'd like their parents to be more involved in schoolwork and school activities.

As both parents and administrators, we know that parent involvement has a significant impact on a child's success in high school, college, in his or her career—and in life.

Research supports parent involvement

Here are some key findings from research about the relationship of parent involvement to children's school success from the National Committee for Citizens in Education:

- The family provides the child's primary educational environment.
- Involving parents in their children's formal education improves student achievement.
- Parent involvement is most effective when it is comprehensive, long-lasting, and well-planned.

What you can do to ensure your child's success

- Ensure that your child takes a rigorous curriculum in English, reading, the sciences, and especially mathematics. The courses your child takes in high school will determine his or her readiness for college.
- Encourage your child to enroll in challenging classes. If your child is ready for the challenge, strongly encourage him or her to take honors or advanced placement courses. Ask your child's teachers and school personnel to help in your decisions.
- Expect your child to go to college—no matter what your child may be thinking at this point—and begin preparing for it now.

Let us help you help your child

Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery College are working in partnership to help you help your children succeed. Thank you for doing your part, as well, to ensure their success.

SuccessTalk



What's the Big Idea Here?

Your child is responsible for understanding what he reads. One of the best ways to help your child find the meaning in reading material is to have him consciously look for the main idea. As he reads, he should ask himself: "What's the main idea of this paragraph? What is this page about? What is the point of this chapter?" Just keeping these questions in mind will help him find the answer. It makes him think about the information. It helps him compare it to what he already knows. The result is better understanding.

Source: Maryland State Department of Education Web site, www.msde.org

StraightTalk



What's Your Advice to High School Students on College Preparation?

"Learn basic note-taking skills, be a good listener, apply early to different colleges, and really think about what career to pursue in life—especially if it's something that you would be doing for the rest of your life."

Carroll

Albert Einstein High School Graduate

"Improve your study habits because if you don't have good study habits [in high school], it is going to be hard for you to study in college because basically you are on your own."

Nisha

Paint Branch High School Graduate

Taking Harder Courses Helps You Prepare for College

Some students believe that innate intelligence or luck are the sole determinants of how well they do in school, and that their own efforts have little to do with their success or failure. But research shows that's not the case—hard work does count.

The courses a student takes in high school are one of the strongest influences on achievement and on the likelihood of completing college.

Research shows that taking challenging academic courses can even overcome the barrier of low socioeconomic status (SES)—the most powerful predictor of student achievement. Math and science courses are especially significant in boosting achievement.

In 1998, the Council of Great City Schools examined the effects of course-taking among urban students

“The courses a student takes in high school are one of the strongest influences on achievement...”

on the ACT college admissions test. That report found:

- Students from poorer districts who took more rigorous math courses outscored the average urban student, regardless of the poverty of the city.
- Urban students who took more difficult courses outperformed students who did not, regardless of poverty level.

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

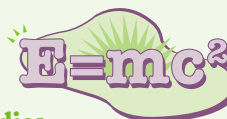
Four years required, including algebra and geometry. College-bound students also should take:

- 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

- Students taking less than three years of math courses consistently scored lower than all other students.

Statistics from the U.S. Department of Education from 1999 also underscore the importance of a solid academic curriculum:

- A high-school curriculum of “high academic intensity and quality” has a far stronger positive impact on the ability of African American and Latino students to complete a college degree than any other pre-college influence.
- A high-academic-intensity, high-quality high school curriculum has a greater positive impact on the ability of African-American

and Latino students to complete a college degree than it does for white students.

- Students from the lowest socioeconomic groups who took a rigorous academic curriculum and had high test scores and class rankings earned bachelor's degrees at a higher rate than a majority of students in the top SES group.

Another department study from 1995 found that students who complete more math and science courses show greater achievement score gains in high school, regardless of gender, race-ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

Source: American Federation of Teachers, www.aft.org (© used with permission)

What Type of Training Do You Need?

If you like many of the classes you have taken, then a program that has a strong general education or “liberal arts” component in its curriculum may appeal to you. Such an academic program allows you, and in some cases requires you, to take humanities courses as well as social science and natural science courses.

“Some professions, such as nursing, offer many different levels of training and education.”

This type of program can help you determine an academic major and possibly a career objective.

If you have identified a specific trade—for example, if you want to be an electrician, carpenter, hairdresser, or brick mason—look at vocational, trade, or technical programs. Programs that prepare you for a particular vocation or trade generally concentrate on specialized coursework and are often shorter than programs geared towards an associate’s or bachelor’s degree.

If you plan to enter a profession such as law, medicine, or business, you may need to take an undergraduate program with a major in a given subject area, and then continue your education at the graduate level. Other professions, such as engineering or teaching, may require a program combining liberal arts and specialized coursework for four or five years.

Some professions, such as nursing, offer many different levels of training

and education. You might be able to get a very satisfying job after just two or three years of study, but you might prefer the level of responsibility and specialization that requires four or five years of study, or more.

Don’t worry if you haven’t decided on a specific career goal. Goals serve as guideposts to help you explore your potential. You can always change your goals, but it’s hard to choose a school if you have not at least narrowed down your choices. Once you have a general idea of the areas you’d like to study or be trained in, identifying colleges to attend becomes more manageable.

Source: National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, www.nasfaa.org

SuccessTalk



Intern to Learn

If you’ve ever wondered what you want to be when you grow up, one of the best ways to find out is through an internship. Internships are designed for students to learn about a career field by working in it, usually during the school year part time or during the summer full time. Some are paid, and some are unpaid, especially in fields that are highly competitive. Find internships at your school’s career services office, in your school newspaper, or by visiting Web sites such as www.internshipprograms.com.

Source: Gen and Kelly Tanabe, authors of *Get Into Any College*, www.supercollege.com

MC Offers Summer Career Camp

MContgomery College is sponsoring a Career Camp June 23–27 for high school students who are interested in learning more about various careers prior to completing high school. The camps will be held on all three campuses simultaneously. Students will select a campus to attend and choose two careers to survey (one, if at Germantown).

At the Career Camps, students will see the connection between high school, college, and the workplace. They will learn about various careers and receive hands-on experiences that will help them decide if their chosen career is right for them. And, they will get valuable information

about potential salaries, various pathways, and opportunities for advancement.

The Germantown Campus will offer intensive biotechnology. The Rockville Campus will offer architecture, automotive technology, flash multimedia, interior design, photography (students must have a 35mm camera), professional restaurant management, and Web page design. The Takoma Park Campus will offer diagnostic medical sonography, nursing, radiologic (x-ray) technology, surgical technology, and Web page design.

For additional information on the Career Camp, please call 301-353-1911. **PT**

Financial Aid 101: It Really Pays You to Know the Basics

Financial aid is money that helps you pay for college. It is added to the amount that you and your family can afford to pay to cover the cost of your college. Merit-based financial aid is aid given to students who have special talents, skills, or abilities. Need-based financial aid is given to students who show they have financial need. Most financial aid is need-based.

What kinds of financial aid are available?

- Grants and scholarships are gifts that you don't have to pay back. Grants are usually given because the student has financial need, while scholarships are usually given to recognize the student's academic achievement, athletic ability, or other talent.
- Loans must be repaid, usually with interest, after you graduate or stop going to school.

- Employment, usually called work-study, lets you work and earn money to help pay for school. These jobs are usually on campus.

Most students receive a combination of these types of aid in a financial aid package put together by their college financial aid office.

Who gives financial aid?

The federal government provides most of student financial aid. The Federal Pell Grant, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, Perkins and Stafford Loans, and Federal Work Study are examples of federal programs. The State of Maryland has scholarship and grant programs based on a student's financial need, talents, and gifts, or on career choice.

Colleges and universities also have scholarships available for students. Some of the scholarships are based on need and some on talents and abilities.

A number of civic organizations, associations, clubs, foundations, churches and companies also provide financial aid.

Each year, the State of Maryland awards more than \$48 million in financial aid to more than 35,000 Maryland residents. Maryland students use this aid at community colleges, private colleges and universities, private career schools, and the 13 public four-year campuses throughout the state.

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission, www.mhec.state.md.us

MoneyTalk

Calculate Your College Aid



The Maryland Higher Education Commission offers an online College Aid Calculator (CAC) to help you see how education loans and college financial aid work. The CAC can:

- Estimate Expected Family Contribution (EFC) for both public and private colleges
- Project an inflation-adjusted EFC any number of years into the future
- Show instant answers to financial aid "What if" questions (inheritance, bonus, moving, etc.)
- Compute education loan payments for Stafford, PLUS, Perkins, and others
- Print your own EFC Report for future reference (financial aid explanations included)

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission, www.mhec.state.md.us/FinAidCalculator/cacMarystart.html

Q & A: What is the Expected Family Contribution?

The Expected Family Contribution (EFC) calculates a family's ability to pay for college. The formula for determining eligibility for federal aid programs is the same across all colleges. When you apply for financial aid, expect to answer questions about your family's income and savings. Remember that this formula does not consider the actual price of attending a given college or university—your EFC is the same

regardless of whether you attend a public or a private institution.

The EFC formula considers: family income; accumulated savings; amount of taxes paid; family size; number of children simultaneously enrolled in college; age of the older parent and how close they may be to retirement; and the student's own financial resources.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, www.ed.gov

Tips for Students with Special Needs

Montgomery County Public Schools publishes this information on college planning for students with special needs in *Getting Started Career/College Planning Guide for Ninth Grade Students*.

Prepare yourself well

Take the most challenging courses available to you. Talk with your counselor and teachers about the standardized tests you will need to take, and plan a testing time line. Consult with your counselor about whether or not you will qualify for accommodations on standardized tests, how and when to apply for those accommodations, and the testing plan that meets your needs.

Explore options

Talk with your counselor and visit the school's career center to identify a list of six to 10 schools that interest you, based on academic programs, admissions requirements, cost, financial aid opportunities, location, size, social activities, etc. Narrow the list by familiarizing yourself with the services each school can provide to special needs students. Visit the school, if possible, to get an impression of campus life, classes, residential facilities, etc. Contact the Disability Support Services Office to get your specific questions answered.

Complete the application process

Understand admissions requirements for the schools you have selected and be sure you are able to provide everything that is requested. You are not required to disclose your disability. Discuss with your counselor and your family whether or not you will

share that information. Colleges may not use the disability as a basis for denying admission. On the other hand, they are under no obligation to alter their admissions requirements or standards for special needs students. You must meet the admissions criteria established by the school. Follow your high school's application time line to be sure all requirements are completed on time. Complete, then submit your application(s). Make the most of your senior year!

Source: www.mcps.k12.md.us/departments/publishingservices/PDF/GetStart.pdf

SuccessTalk

What to Know Before You Go



The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the "special education law" does not apply to higher education. Postsecondary institutions are not required to design special programs for students with disabilities, only to provide accommodations that allow for equal access to the regular program.

Source: www.mcps.k12.md.us/departments/publishingservices/PDF/GetStart.pdf

Spring College Planner: A Checklist for High School Juniors and Seniors

Juniors

- Register for ACT, SAT® I and/or SAT® II.
- Consider career goals as you select classes and complete your plans for the next year.
- Use computer search programs to identify appropriate colleges or trade/technical schools.
- Consider an internship for your senior year.
- Attend college fairs and school-sponsored programs.
- Attend career information programs.
- Spend time in career center exploring materials.
- Assemble a file of the information you collect.
- Become familiar with college and job applications.

- Make interview appointments for early fall, if appropriate.
- Develop your resume/personal references.
- Consider completing service learning hours.
- Make an appointment with your counselor to discuss your plans after high school.

Seniors

- Maintain good grades and good attendance.
- Notify your counselor of your application status.
- Request final transcript be sent to college you will attend in the fall.

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

How Summer Jobs Can Work for You

Work experience—paid or volunteer—can teach students discipline, responsibility, reliability, teamwork, and other skills. A summer job may be a good way to gain experience and earn money for college as well. If your student works during the school year, he or she should not work so many hours that the job interferes with school work.

Some students also participate in such community service activities as tutoring elementary school children or volunteering in a local hospital. Such activities make valuable contributions to

society and also help students to identify their career interests and goals, gain workplace skills, and apply classroom learning to real-world problem solving. Community service is a valuable part of a student's college application.

MCPS high school students must earn 60 hours of Student Service Learning (SSL) to receive a high school diploma. SSL is an unpaid activity within the curriculum, school, or outside community that provides service to an individual or group to address a school or community need.

Source: Excerpts from www.ed.gov

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 TDD, 301-279-3323.

For more information on the Montgomery College–Montgomery County Public Schools Partnership or *PrepTalk*, call Charla Levine of MCPS at 301-279-3489 or Elena Saenz-Welch of MC at 301-279-5150 or e-mail partnership@mc.cc.md.us.

Montgomery County Public Schools
Montgomery College
Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Institutions 4/03

StraightTalk

How is college different from high school?



"[In college] we get more freedom, time to go outside and think. [We] make new friends from all over the world. [We] learn something useful for us in the future."

Katie

John F. Kennedy 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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