

PrepTalk™

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

Hot Opportunities

Summer is the perfect time to take advantage of opportunities for college preparation. These opportunities may include visiting a college campus, taking an SAT® prep course, exploring your career interests, participating in a summer education program, or investigating financial aid packages.

PrepTalk, a joint publication of Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery College, provides you with information you can use to “beat the heat” of the college planning process.

Keeping the Door Open

Dr. Jerry Weast, superintendent of schools, and Dr. Charlene Nunley, president of Montgomery College, discuss capacity (or lack thereof) concerns which may affect record numbers of Montgomery County Public School students who wish to pursue higher education. See page 3 for more information about these concerns and what you can do to help ensure your child's future success.

SuccessTalk

Find out what college admissions people are looking for.
See page 6 for more.



MoneyTalk

Learn how to compare financial aid award packages.
See page 2 for more.



TestTalk

Get ready for changes on the PSAT® and SAT®.
See page 4 for more.



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

Make time to enhance your college resume this summer. *See page 7.*



StraightTalk

Current MC students who attended MCPS high schools share their thoughts.
See pages 5 and 8.



How Do I Compare Award Packages?

If you've received more than one financial aid award package, you will want to compare them. Here are some points you'll want to consider:

Ratio of Grant to Loan

In general, packages with higher percentages of grant aid than loan aid will be more appealing. You'll have less to pay while in college and fewer debts to repay when you graduate. Colleges tend to award higher proportions of grant aid to the most desirable students who are accepted.

Ratio of Self-Help to Grant

Take a look at the big picture beyond just grant vs. loan. How much of the total cost of attendance are you expected to cover through loans, the

Expected Family Contribution (EFC), and student employment on campus? Be realistic about whether you can meet the earnings expectations.

Loan Terms

Compare the types of loans you are expected to take on. Are the terms favorable in terms of interest and repayment? Student loans with low interest rates and no repayment until after college are preferable to private or unsubsidized loans with less attractive terms.

Gapping

Some colleges award aid that amounts to less than the difference between the EFC and the total cost of attendance. If you find you have been gapped in an award, only you can determine if you will be able to, and want to, come up with the additional money in order to attend.

Future Packages

You'll want to find out if all or part of your financial aid award is renewable, if family circumstances stay the same or change.

Outside Scholarships

If you are applying for or will otherwise qualify for outside scholarships, be sure to find out how this money will be treated in each college's financial aid award package. At some colleges, an outside scholarship directly reduces the institutional grant by the same amount. Other colleges allow a certain amount to go against any suggested loan first, then, if the outside scholarship is greater than that amount, it will reduce equally institutional grants and loans.

Source: www.marylandmentor.org

MoneyTalk

Get the Guide

The Student Guide is a comprehensive resource on student financial aid from the U.S. Department of Education. Grants, loans, and work-study are the three major forms of aid available through the department's Federal Student Aid Office. Updated each award year, *The Student Guide* tells you about the programs and how to apply for them.

The Student Guide 2004-05, for the July 1, 2004-June 30, 2005 award year, is available online. Visit http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/publications/student_guide/index.html to download a PDF version in either English or Spanish.

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

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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Let's Make a Deal

Although some colleges and universities don't like to make deals, you can, in some cases, negotiate your financial aid award. If a student is gifted in an area that is important to the school, the school might take a second look at the award. Also, students whose families experienced a drastic reduction in their income (e.g., high medical bills, job loss) may ask the financial aid office to recalculate their financial need.

Source: Montgomery College
Financial Aid Office

No Child Left Behind...Until College?

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

The partnership between Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery College helps ensure that when students graduate from high school, they will emerge well prepared for college or the workplace. Today, virtually all jobs require at least some level of college completion—if not a bachelor's or graduate degree—at least an associate's degree or certification.

Demand for a College Education Greater than Ever

Record numbers of students are graduating from our high schools. Many of these students have completed a college preparatory curriculum, and that means that a greater percentage of these graduates will be going to college. In addition, the success of the investments we are making in our schools to help improve the performance of all students also will improve college attendance rates.

As record-level school enrollment is reaching its peak and our investments in secondary education are beginning to pay off, we cannot respond by closing the door to a college education. Raise the bar. Close the gap. Slam the door? The last part of that phrase is certainly not an acceptable outcome to us. We know it is not acceptable to parents and students, either.

Working to Ensure that College Remains Accessible to All

Selective universities and colleges are already turning away more and more students. This means “open admissions” community colleges, such as Montgomery College, will see an even greater number of new, first-time college students than ever before.

It is great news that more students than ever plan and expect to go to college. However, we, as a community, must be ready to respond to this challenge of increased growth by ensuring that we have adequate capacity. The doors to higher education must remain open for all.

We want to make sure that when our young people are ready for college, affordable, accessible higher education is available for them as they take the next step in their educational journey. Please know that we are working together to ensure that we don't ever reach the point where we have “no child left behind...” until college.

Note: Dr. Charlene Nunley addressed the issue of access to higher education in her recent “State of the College Address.” For information, visit the Montgomery College Web site at www.montgomerycollege.edu or call 301-251-7900.

TestTalk

Prep for SAT® This Summer

Montgomery County Public Schools will offer four two-week SAT® prep courses this summer. The first week focuses on the math section of the SAT®; the second week focuses on the verbal section. The courses meet Monday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to noon. Session One, July 12–22, B-CC H.S. and Sherwood H.S. Registration deadline, July 2. Session Two, July 19–29, Northwest H.S. and Einstein H.S. Registration deadline, July 12.

Source: www.mcps.k12.md.us/departments/alted/sat/summer.htm

SuccessTalk

Read to Succeed

Read. Read. Read. Reading is a critical skill that can make an impact on your learning for years to come. Develop a daily reading plan. As you plan each day, be sure to include time for reading. Although you may feel that you don't have much time to spare, 15 or 30 minutes a day can make a difference. Every little bit helps! Consistent reading time can increase your reading skills, reading speed, and vocabulary. These abilities are valuable not only with academics, but also with future college entrance tests, such as the ACT and the SAT®.

Source: Adventures in Education Web site, www.adventuresineducation/middleschool/ms_read.cfm

Get Ready for Changes on the SAT®

Graduating in 2006? You will be the first class to take the new Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT®) for college admissions.

Why Is the SAT® Changing?

The SAT® assesses student reasoning based on knowledge and skills developed by the student in school coursework. The new SAT®

...the new SAT® will help colleges make better admissions and placement decisions.

will improve the alignment of the test with current curriculum and institutional practices in high school and college. By including a third measure of skills—writing—the new SAT® will help colleges make better admissions and

placement decisions. In that way, the new SAT® will reinforce the importance of writing throughout a student's education.

What Will Change?

Writing (new section): Multiple-choice questions (grammar and usage) and a student-written essay

Critical Reading (currently called Verbal): Analogies eliminated and short reading passages added to existing long reading passages

Math: Expanded to include topics from third-year college preparatory math. Quantitative comparisons eliminated.

Testing Timeline

Fall 2004 – Take the new PSAT/NMSQT®

Spring 2005 – Take the new SAT®

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

TestTalk



Dare to Prepare

The best way to prepare for the new SAT® is to participate actively in your own education.

- Sign up for the hardest classes you're ready for, including advanced math subjects, such as Algebra II.
- Read, read, and read some more. Read for fun. Ask your teachers for ideas on what to read.
- Improve your writing skills. Practice writing. Write about what you read.
- Improve your math skills. Review what you learned in Algebra I and Geometry.
- Improve your grammar and sentence structure. Practice by editing your essays carefully.
- Take the new PSAT/NMSQT® in 2004. It will give you a chance to practice for the new SAT®.

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

TickTalk

Mark Your SAT® Date

- Upcoming SAT® I and SAT® II test date: October 9, 2004
- Registration deadline: September 7, 2004

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

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



Q&A: Will the PSAT/NMSQT® Change Too?

Yes, beginning in the fall of 2004, the Preliminary SAT®/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®), which is typically taken by sophomores and juniors, will include many changes similar to those on the new SAT®. However, the PSAT/NMSQT® will not include an

essay. In addition, there will be no third-year college preparatory math questions in the math section of the PSAT/NMSQT®, but there will be additional concepts in numbers and operations, algebra and geometry.

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

Explore Your Career Interests Early

Middle school is a perfect time to explore your interests and to begin investigating your career choices.

Consider your abilities.

Think about all the things you're good at. You might be good at academic subjects like math or English. But there are probably many more areas in which you have special talents. You may be especially good at working with people— young children or older adults. You

What are you interested in?... Start a list of all the things that interest you.

may have a musical talent or an artistic flare. You may have a knack for mechanical things—a real whiz at fixing things. Consider all these areas when you assess your abilities.

Think about your interests.

What are you interested in? Do you enjoy working inside or out? Do you like to work alone or with a lot of people? Do you spend a great deal of time on the computer? Perhaps you've always enjoyed studying science. Do you often find yourself reading books on a certain topic? Start a list of all the things that interest you.

Talk to people about their careers.

Ask adults questions about their jobs. Don't be shy. They'll be happy you asked. Have them tell you what they

enjoy most about their jobs—and what they enjoy least! Ask them what skills someone must possess to be successful in that occupation. Find out what high school and/or college classes are important to their field. Ask how much education is required for their career.

Describe the lifestyle that you want.

In thinking about your future, you must consider what's important to you in your daily life. What would you think about a career that required a great deal of travel? Is the amount of money you make important to you? How would you feel about a job that required you to move on a regular basis? What hours of the day—or night—will you be working? Choose three or four aspects of your future lifestyle that are most important.

Read books about different careers.

Ask your school librarian to help you find books on careers that might match your interests and abilities. Many publications can provide you with information about careers that you may never have considered.

Talk to your school counselor.

Visit with your counselor about your interests and abilities. Find out if your school offers tests or interest inventories that can assess your skills and interests. Some schools also have computer software programs that assist with career exploration. In addition, some Internet sites can provide career information.

Source: www.adventuresineducation.org/middleschool/ms_interests.cfm

SuccessTalk

It's Time to Have that Talk



By the time a child is in sixth grade, families should start talking about going to college. Make it clear that you expect your children to go to college, and together start planning how to get there. Everyone knows that high school courses and grades count for admission to college, but many people don't realize that a college education also builds on the knowledge and skills acquired in earlier years. Your child should plan a high school course schedule early in middle school.

Source: Getting Ready for College Early Web site, www.ed.gov/pubs/GettingReadyCollegeEarly/step2.html

StraightTalk

What advice can you offer on preparing for college?



"Improve your study habits. If you don't have good study habits, it's going to be hard for you to study in college.

Nisha
Paint Branch High School Graduate

"Avoid falling behind. College professors don't do binder checks, so it's important that you motivate yourself to get organized."

Doug
Magruder High School Graduate

"Don't take easy classes all the time."

Susan
Albert Einstein High School Graduate

What Do College Admissions People Consider?

It helps to know something about how the admissions process works. Here are some of the things college admissions people consider.

Academic Record

First, the admissions people will evaluate your academic record. They will consider the difficulty and variety of the courses you took. They will note your cumulative grade point average (GPA) and your

A sloppy, ill-composed application may end your candidacy at a given college.

weighted grade point average (WPA). Your academic record is almost always the most important factor in college admissions.

Standardized Test Scores

SAT® I, SAT® II, and ACT are sometimes rather important. Most students are quite used to standardized tests and have good test-taking skills.

Counselor/Teacher Recommendations

You should let counselors and certain teachers know about your activities, accomplishments, and aspirations. You should follow the college's instructions in choosing teachers to recommend you. You

Spring/Summer College Planner A Checklist for High School Students

Freshmen and Sophomores

- Look for a great summer opportunity—job, internship, or volunteer position.
- Check with your counselor and search online for summer school programs offered to high school students at colleges.
- Go to local college fairs.
- Start a summer reading list. Ask your teachers to recommend books.
- Plan to visit college campuses to get a feel for your options. Start with colleges near you.
- Explore careers and majors that suit your strengths and preferences.
- Register online early for fall SAT®s (sophomores).

Juniors

- Go to local college fairs.
- If applicable, prepare writing samples, portfolios, audition

tapes, and other material for the fall application season.

- Make a resume of your accomplishments, activities, and work experiences.
- Start your summer reading list. Ask your teachers to recommend books.
- Try to find a job or activity that relates to your career interests.
- If you are considering military academies or ROTC scholarships, contact your counselor before summer vacation.
- Start thinking about college majors related to your interests and career goals.
- Request applications, brochures, and financial aid information from your colleges.
- Visit college campuses. Be sure to call ahead for tour and open house schedules.
- Try to narrow your list to five to eight colleges by the end of the summer.

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

should pick from among your academic subject teachers in 11th or 12th grades.

The Application Form

A sloppy, ill-composed application may end your candidacy at a given college. Your essays should be written, by you, in your best prose. Be sure that you let the colleges know about your participation in

school clubs and activities, athletics, leadership roles, community service, and jobs—both volunteer and paid. Colleges look for well-rounded, motivated, energetic individuals. Be specific and detailed about important activities.

Source: Montgomery County Public Schools, www.mcps.k12.md.us/departments/publishingservices/PDF/GetReady.pdf

Wondering What to Do this Summer?

The most important thing for high school juniors to do this summer is to relax and have fun, after all it was a long school year and it's a summer well earned. But once the novelty of the summer wears off, the Maryland Higher Education Commission urges the soon-to-be-seniors to get a jump start on college.

Explore Your Interests

Undecided about a college major? Many high school students have several careers they are considering. A great way to narrow your career options is to get involved in a shadowing program. There's no better way to experience the day-to-day realities of a job than to work with a professional for a week or two. You will probably discover things about a job that you never realized.

Visit a College Campus

Use the Internet to travel to colleges you are considering attending. Most colleges, universities, and trade or business schools offer virtual campus tours on their Web sites. The Maryland Higher Education Commission Web site, www.mhec.state.md.us has a link to all of Maryland's colleges and universities. If possible, schedule a visit to a college you find particularly interesting.

Do Some Volunteer Work

Identify a community service organization whose mission has meaning to you and contact them about volunteering your time working on a project or event. Not only will it make you feel good, but it will look great on your college applications.

Get a Job

Summer is the perfect time to get a job. Working over the summer won't interfere with schoolwork and provides an opportunity to earn some pocket money to support your fun,

...schedule a visit to a college you find particularly interesting.

add to your savings for college, and gain experience in the workforce.

For more information about higher education in Maryland or state financial aid, call 410-260-4500, 1-800-974-0203 or log onto www.mhec.state.md.us.

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

SuccessTalk

Make Your Summer Sizzle



The Summer Search catalog provides opportunities for students to broaden their educational capabilities, develop their skills, and explore career interests over the summer.

These opportunities include courses, training programs, internships, summer camps, and other experiences at local venues, throughout the United States, and abroad. Many of the Summer Search opportunities are free of charge, while others have tuition and/or travel costs attached. College credit is available for some senior-level program offerings.

To receive a copy of the Summer Search catalog, call 301-279-3100.

Source: Montgomery County Public Schools Web site, www.mcps.k12.md.us

Get on the Fast Track at MC

Students who wish to improve their placement in developmental math courses at Montgomery College may enroll in the Fast Track this summer. There are three Fast Track options offered at the Germantown and Rockville campuses.

The basic Fast Track course reviews Prealgebra and Elementary Algebra in a standard instructor/student format.

The online version of Fast Track requires you to meet with

your instructor three times and do most of the work online.

The third option is Advanced Fast Track. This course covers Elementary Algebra and Intermediate Algebra. Success in this class can place you in a college-level math class. The prerequisite for Advanced Fast Track is a score of at least 55 on the Accuplacer test.

To register, call the Rockville Campus Math/Science Center at 301-279-5200 or visit www.montgomerycollege.edu/Departments/mathscr/FastTrack/. **PT**

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

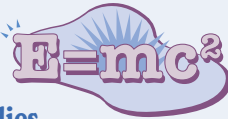
Four years required, including algebra and geometry. College-bound students also should take:

- Advanced algebra
- Trigonometry
- Calculus

Science

Three years required. Three years of lab sciences recommended:

- 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 TDD, 301-279-3323.

For additional information about 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.

Montgomery County Public Schools
Montgomery College

Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Institutions 5/04

StraightTalk

How is college different from high school?



"You really need to be responsible. In college, you're on your own. You go to class and get your money's worth, or you don't, and waste time and money."

Ani

Thomas S. Wooton 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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