

PrepTalk

Advice for Montgomery County Parents and Students on College Preparation • Spring 2005

Surfin' Safari

Go surfing this summer—rain or shine, day or night, at your house or on the beach. You and your child can hang 10 (fingers, that is) on your board (keyboard, not surfboard) for a rush of college and career planning opportunities.

The bridges.com Web site provides online career exploration and college prep resources for both middle and high school audiences. Visit your school's career center, counselor, or library for a Bridges password. Other outstanding college prep Web sites include: the Maryland Higher Education Commission, mhec.state.md.us; the College Board, collegeboard.com; and the College Savings Plans of Maryland, collegesavingsmd.org.



A Note from...

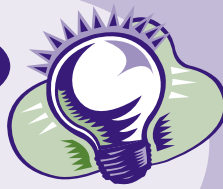
**MCPS Superintendent
Dr. Jerry D. Weast
and Montgomery College President
Dr. Charlene R. Nunley**

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of *PrepTalk*. We are working together with parents to help our middle and high school students prepare for and succeed in college and the workforce.

SuccessTalk

Learn more about Maryland's High School Assessments.

See page 4 for more.



MoneyTalk

Find out the myths and realities about getting financial aid.

See page 6 for more.



TestTalk

Try these tips for writing the essay on the new SAT®.

See page 2 for more.



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

Stay on track as you make plans for college.

See page 7 for more.



StraightTalk

Hear some thoughts from MC students who attended MCPS high schools.

See pages 3 and 7.



PrepTalk™

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

PrepTalk

Approaches to the Essay on the New SAT®

The essay portion of the writing section of the new SAT® gives you an opportunity to show how effectively you can develop and express ideas. Here are some approaches to try:

Read the prompt carefully.

Make sure you write on the topic given. Essays not on topic will receive a zero.

Decide your viewpoint on the topic.

If you have trouble focusing on the main point, try completing this sentence: "When people finish reading my essay, I want them to understand that..." The words you use to fill in that blank might well become part of your thesis statement.

Spend five minutes on planning.

Use your test booklet to create a quick sentence outline. Begin with the thesis from the approach above. You have only 25 minutes to write your essay, so don't spend too much time outlining. A little planning time, however, may be essential to make

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sure that your essay does not wander off topic or stray from your focused thesis statement.

Vary the sentence structure in your writing.

Good writing uses a variety of sentence types to make the writing more interesting while showing the relationships between ideas. Vary the sentence structure that communicates how your ideas are related.

Use clear, precise, and appropriate vocabulary.

Appropriate words are accurate and specific, not necessarily long and obscure.

Leave time to review what you've written.

Although you won't have time for full-scale revision, do leave a few minutes for rereading your essay and making minor changes in the wording or even in the structure of what you have written.

Source: www.collegeboard.com

TestTalk

Summer Prep for New SAT®

MCPS will offer four two-week SAT® prep courses this summer. The course will cover the math and critical reading and writing sections of the new SAT®. Courses meet Monday through Thursday, from 8 a.m. to noon.

Session One, July 11–21,
B-CC H.S and Sherwood H.S.
Registration deadline, July 1

Session Two, July 18–28,
Northwest H.S. and Blair H.S.
Registration deadline, July 11

The course fee is \$250. If your total family income is \$34,724 or less, with document verification, you may take this course for just \$60. Course registration forms are available online.

Source: www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/adulted/satprep/

TickTalk

Mark Your SAT® Date

- Upcoming Fall SAT® test date:
October 8, 2005
(New SAT® and Subject Tests)
- SAT® registration deadline:
September 7, 2005
(New SAT® and Subject Tests)

Other test dates and applications are available at your high school career center or online at the College Board Web site, www.collegeboard.com.

Source: www.collegeboard.com

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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Get Your Child a Great Summer Job

Summer break is a great opportunity for your child to pursue her interests and gain greater experience in paid or volunteer jobs, internships, and other activities. In addition to giving her life experience and a sense of fulfillment, meaningful summer activities are also seen by college admission officers as a demonstration of her ability to act responsibly and make a commitment.

Your child's high school years are also a great time to test her

The Internet can yield great results for a persistent student.

expectations of careers against the practical reality of a work situation. College classes will not necessarily give her an understanding of what to expect on the everyday level—this is something she can only learn through experience.

How to Start

There are many ways to search for opportunities. The Internet can yield great results for a persistent student. One of the best ways to find a great opportunity locally, however, is simply by asking family and friends. Special resources may also be offered

through your child's high school. His high school counselor may have helpful information about opportunities in the community. Some high schools even have job and internship boards with special postings for their students.

Create a Job

During her job search, your child may come across a potential employer that just can't afford to hire her. If she's really interested in working there, she should consider offering her services for free, possibly part time. In return she will get great skills, a glowing recommendation, and possibly even an offer of a paid position down the road.

Young Entrepreneur

Your child can also gain great experience by establishing his own small business locally. He should be cautioned beforehand that running one's own business can be challenging and requires a great deal of responsibility.

Deepening a Commitment

If your child has a job during the year that really interests her, she should consider getting more involved over the summer. She should ask not just for more hours, but also for more responsibility. Sticking with one organization or job gives your child depth and breadth—and shows a real commitment.

Source: www.collegeboard.com

StraightTalk

How is College Different from High School?

"You are responsible for doing a lot more research papers."

Choupa
Seneca Valley High School Graduate



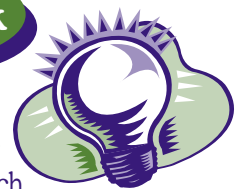
SuccessTalk

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.

The Summer Search catalog is available online at MCPS' Web site.

Source: Montgomery County Public Schools Web site, www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org



MoneyTalk

Maryland, My Maryland

Always list at least one Maryland college on your FAFSA so you can be awarded state aid.

Source: Montgomery College Financial Aid



Get Ready for High School Assessments

Beginning with the class of 2009, all Maryland students must pass the High School Assessments to graduate.

What are the Maryland High School Assessments?

The High School Assessments, or HSA, are four tests: one each in English 10, algebra/data analysis, biology, and government. Your child will take each test as he or she completes the course. The tests contain both multiple-choice and written-response questions. Although the content and skills measured by the HSA are important, they do not represent all that a student will learn in a course, only the minimum.

Does my child have to pass the HSA in order to graduate?

Students graduating from high school in or after 2009 have to pass the HSA to graduate. There are a few ways to do this:

- Pass all four assessments. The passing scores are: 412 for algebra/data

analysis, 394 for government, and 400 for biology. The English passing score will be set in fall 2005;

- Earn passing scores on state-approved substitute tests and substitute one or more of those scores for passing scores on the

Students graduating from high school in or after 2009 have to pass the HSA to graduate.

HSA. The state has yet to select acceptable substitute tests, but possibilities include the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate tests;

- Earn a minimum score on each test and earn a combined score that's equal to the total of the four HSA passing scores.

Source: Maryland High School Assessments & Your Child, www.marylandpublicschools.org

Q&A: Can Middle School Students Take the HSA?

My child is in middle school, but taking algebra now. Does she have to pass the algebra HSA to graduate from high school?

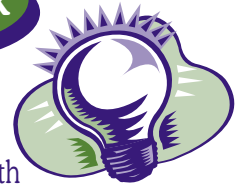
Yes. Students take each High School Assessment after they complete the course. If your child is in middle school but taking a high-school-

level course (this happens most frequently with algebra), she will have to pass the appropriate HSA to graduate. Of course, the earlier a student takes an assessment, the more opportunities she has to pass it.

Source: Maryland High School Assessments & Your Child, www.marylandpublicschools.org

SuccessTalk

Parents Have Homework



Talk frequently with your child about classes, homework, and projects. Help him or her keep a calendar of assignment due dates. Make it clear that you expect your child to complete assignments in a timely, thorough manner.

Monitor academic performance closely. If your child is achieving less or becoming frustrated with schoolwork, talk to the teacher about ways to help your child.

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

TestTalk

Prepare Today for the HSA



Following are some ways to prepare for the Maryland High School Assessments:

- **Pay attention to organizational and study skills.**

The assessments cover content from an entire course, so students should organize all their notes for the year and review the material covered in each unit.

- **Brush up on writing skills.**

Portions of the assessments require a written answer. Plus, no matter what students' plans are after graduation, they'll need to know how to write well.

Source: Maryland High School Assessments & Your Child, www.marylandpublicschools.org

Preparing For Your Future: Get Involved and Stay Involved

No matter what you decide to do with your life, your participation in school and community activities arms you with skills that will be valuable in your future. Stay involved. Give yourself the chance to expand on your talents, develop socially, and acquire some valuable leadership skills.

Leadership Activities

Run for an office in Student Government. Volunteer to organize a food drive. You'll gain valuable leadership experience. And who knows? Maybe you'll discover you've got a future in politics. If you're already a member of an

academic club, consider running for president. With a new role comes new responsibility, and you'll learn what it takes to manage a team.

Get Involved in Junior Achievement (JA)

More than 4 million students take part in this nationwide program that teaches and inspires them to value business while working to improve the quality of their lives.

School Activities

Do you run track? Play football? Act in your school plays? Consider going out for school teams and clubs. You'll have the chance to interact with people outside your classes.

Participate in Community and Volunteer Activities

How are you involved in your community? Have you achieved honors as a Girl or Boy Scout? Are you an active member of your church? Do you donate your time at a homeless shelter? What have you learned from these experiences?

Special Interests and Talents

You probably have interests or talents outside your school. Maybe you love mountain biking or hiking. Or painting. These "fun" activities could set you apart from others when it comes time for admissions.

Source: www.maryland.collegeanswer.com

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

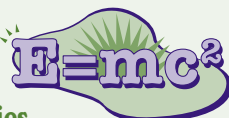
Four years required, including algebra and geometry. College-bound students also should take:

- 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

SuccessTalk

Grades Rule in Middle School



If you maintain a list of your grades, you can average them to get an idea of where you stand. When you receive a grade on your report card, it won't be a surprise to you—or to your parents. You may believe that your middle school grades aren't particularly important. But in reality, they are. When you sign up for your high school courses, your grades are one indicator of how well prepared you are to start high school. Make the most of your time in middle school to ensure that you have options when you schedule your high school courses.

Source: www.adventuresineducation.org

Getting Financial Aid: Myths vs. Realities

Here are some commonly encountered myths—and realities—about financial aid, as reported by the U.S. Department of Education.

“I’m not going to bother filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) because...”

“...my parents make too much money, so I won’t qualify for aid.”

Reality: There is no income cut-off to qualify for federal student aid. Many factors besides income—from the size of your family to the age of your older parent—are taken into account. Your eligibility is determined by a complicated mathematical formula, not by your parents’ income alone. And remember: when you fill out the FAFSA, you’re also automatically applying for funds from your state, and possibly from your school as well. Don’t make assump-

tions about what you’ll get—fill out the application and find out.

“...only students with good grades get financial aid.”

Reality: While a high grade point average will help a student get into a good school and may help with academic scholarships, most of the federal student aid programs do not

Don’t make assumptions about what you’ll get—fill out the application and find out.

take a student’s grades into consideration. Provided a student maintains satisfactory academic progress in his or her program of study, federal student aid will help a student with an average academic record complete his or her education.

“...you have to be a minority to get financial aid.”

Reality: Funds from federal student aid programs are awarded on the basis of financial need, not on the basis of race. The FAFSA doesn’t even collect this kind of information about an applicant.

“...the form is too hard to fill out.”

Reality: The FAFSA is easier than ever, especially if you fill it out online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. There are detailed instructions for every question, and the form walks you through step by step, asking only the questions that apply to you. If you need help, you can access real-time, private, online chat with a customer service representative. If you’re filling out the paper FAFSA, you can get help from a high school counselor, from the financial aid office at the school you plan to attend, or from the toll-free number: 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) TTY: 1-800-730-8913. And remember, the FAFSA and all these sources of advice are FREE.

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

Q&A: Which School Offers the Best Financial Deal?

There is a Web site for students and parents, www.studentaid.org, that contains two very useful worksheets to help families make an informed decision about which school is offering the best deal financially.

Cost of Attendance Comparison

When considering the award package from a particular school, families can use this worksheet to help compare their cost expecta-

tions to each school’s estimated total cost of attendance.

Award Package Comparison

This worksheet helps families compare the amounts and types of financial aid different schools offer. It also prompts families to ask important questions, such as how will private scholarships affect the school’s award offer, or can a scholarship be renewed annually.

Source: Montgomery College Office of Student Financial Aid

TickTalk

FAFSAs Due

FAFSA on the Web, Renewal FAFSA on the Web, and applications for the 2004–2005 school year (July 1, 2004–June 30, 2005) must be submitted by midnight, June 30, 2005.

If you plan to use FAFSA on the Web, a 2004–2005 pre-application worksheet is available at www.fafsa.ed.gov/preappwk45.pdf.

Source: www.fafsa.ed.gov



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

Juniors

- Register for ACT, new SAT® and/or SAT® Subject Tests (formerly 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 the 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 student 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 that a final transcript be sent to the college you will attend in the fall.

Source: www.montgomerycollege.edu/Departments/studevgt/Connection.htm

Develop Your Personal Mission Statement

Have you ever thought about what you want to do with your life? Thinking about and planning for your future and making sure all your decisions fit in with your mission will

What is important to you—family, religion, work?

likely result in a much more successful life. So how do you decide your mission? Here are some steps:

Decide on your values.

Do you have a core set of beliefs? What is important to you—family, religion, work?

Analyze your values.

Do you spot any common themes? Can you divide those values into different categories?

Set some goals.

Based on the values you listed, can you set some goals for yourself? For instance, if one of your values is to do something in life to help others, you might want to enter a career field where you can help others less fortunate. In that case, there are several career goals you can establish to align with your values.

Do some research.

Learn what rewards come with the goals you have set and make sure those are the rewards you want. Do research to understand all the consequences of a career or personal decision.

Begin living your mission.

Based on all the work you have done, determine your mission in life and begin living it with every decision you make!

Source: mapping-your-future.org

MoneyTalk



Summer Pay Goes a Long Way

Don't forget about student employment [during the summer or school year] as an alternative for borrowing. Although working can seem like an extra burden, so is struggling with high loan repayments after college.

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

StraightTalk



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

"Try to take honors and AP classes. These classes cover the [material] you need to succeed in college."

Sergio
B-CC High School Graduate

Get on the Fast Track at MC

Students who wish to improve their placement in developmental math courses at Montgomery College may enroll in Fast Track, Fast Track Online, or Advanced Fast Track this summer.

Fast Track

The basic Fast Track course is a fast-paced, intensive review course that covers 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. Success in Fast Track qualifies you for Intermediate Algebra.

Rockville Campus

June 13–24, 9–11 a.m.
June 13–24, 6:30–8:30 p.m.

Germantown Campus

August 1–12, 9–11 a.m.
August 1–12, 6:30–8:30 p.m.

Fast Track Online
July 28–August 18

Advanced Fast Track

The Advanced Fast Track course is a similar course that covers Elementary Algebra and Intermediate Algebra. Success in this class can place you in a college-level math class.

Rockville Campus

August 1–12, 9–11 a.m.
August 1–12, 6:30–8:30 p.m.

Germantown Campus

August 1–12, 6:30–8:30 p.m.

There are no prerequisites for Fast Track, but Advanced Fast Track does have some prerequisites. See your counselor to determine which course you qualify for.

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

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 301-649-8010 or Lisa Carvallo of MC at 301-610-4141.

Montgomery County Public Schools
Montgomery College
Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Institutions 4/05

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Visit the MCPS Web address: www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/publishing/services/PDF/preptalk/ for back issues of *PrepTalk*.

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