

PrepTalk

Advice for Montgomery County Parents and Students on College Preparation • Spring 2007

Record Setting

Forty-five percent of graduating seniors in the Class of 2006 in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) scored a 3 or higher on the Advanced Placement exam during their high school careers—triple the national average of 15 percent and double the Maryland average of 22 percent, according to the Advanced Placement Report released in February 2007.

Another noteworthy accomplishment is that the Class of 2006 had the highest percentage of students to earn a 3, 4, or 5. In fact, nearly one out of five graduates scored at least one 5, the highest possible score.

The performance of MCPS' Class of 2006 capped a five-year trend of consistently higher performance on the exams.



A Note from...

**MCPS Superintendent
Dr. Jerry D. Weast
and Montgomery College President
Dr. Brian K. Johnson**

Parents and students, we hope you enjoy reading this issue of *PrepTalk*. We are working together to help students prepare for and succeed in college and the workforce.

SuccessTalk

Discover why it's important for you to gain volunteer experience.

See page 4 for more.



MoneyTalk

Find out how you can forecast your financial aid future.

See page 7 for more.



TestTalk

Learn how the SAT® and ACT tests are different.

See page 3 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

Make a plan to beat boredom this summer.

See page 2 for more.



StraightTalk

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

See page 8.



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

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

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

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

For more information, log onto www.mhec.state.md.us.

Source: www.mhec.state.md.us

SuccessTalk

Land a Great Summer Job



Here are 10 tips for getting a summer job:

- Never ask if the employer is hiring—assume that they need you and tell them why you want to work for their company.
- Look the part—clean, neat, clothes pressed.
- Don't leave without talking to the person who does the hiring—this will add a face to your application.
- Always take a resume—this makes you stand out.
- Apply when they aren't advertising—your chances of getting hired are greater when fewer people are applying.
- Come with a referral—providing references gives you an edge.
- Always ask questions during the interview and check out the company's Web site before the interview.
- Follow up—don't wait more than a few days. Inquire about the status of your application. Write a thank you note after the interview and express interest in working for the company.
- Never go to pick up or fill out an application in everyday clothing—you may be interviewed on the spot and you want to make a good first impression.
- Don't give up—persistence pays off. Apply to other places where you would like to work.

Source: www.mcps.k12.md.us/schools/wheatonhs

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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Q&A: How Are the SAT® and the ACT Tests Different?

When is it offered?

SAT®

Seven times a year

ACT

Six times a year

How do questions appear?

By order of difficulty

With no order of difficulty

What does the test cover?



Math—basic geometry/Algebra II

Science—only in reading passages

Reading—vocabulary, reading comprehension, sentence completions

Writing—grammar, usage, word choice, and essay

Math—basic geometry/Algebra II/trigonometry

Science—charts, experiments

Reading—prose fiction, social science, humanities, and science

English—grammar; writing optional

Is there a penalty for wrong answers?

Yes. A fraction of a point is subtracted for guessing incorrectly.

No. The test is scored based on questions answered correctly.

What is the structure of the test?

Ten sections—three critical reading, three math, three writing, one experimental

Four sections—English, reading, math, science reasoning

How is the test scored?

200–800 per section, for a combined score of 2,400

1–36 for each subject, averaged together for a composite score

Are scores sent to colleges?

Yes. Score reports sent to specific colleges include the scores the student received on *every* SAT® taken.

No. Students can choose which colleges receive scores *and* which scores colleges will see.

Sources: www.gearupchicago.org;
www.princetonreview.com

TickTalk

Mark Your SAT® Date

- Upcoming SAT® and Subject Tests dates:
October 6, 2007
November 3, 2007
- SAT® and Subject Tests registration deadlines:
September 10, 2007
October 2, 2007



Test dates and applications are available at your career center or online.

Source: www.collegeboard.com

TestTalk

Free Online Prep for SAT®

MCPS students can take a free SAT® Prep course from CollegeBoard.com. The course provides 18 interactive lessons, personalized score reports, six practice tests, hundreds of practice questions, and explanations of answers. Get a registration card from your school's career center coordinator and go to the SAT® Prep course site on CollegeBoard.com and follow the prompts.



Source: www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org

SuccessTalk

Accommodations for PSAT Test

The College Board offers a Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) process. Parents and students should use this process at www.collegeboard.com/ssd/student/ to gain approval for testing accommodations on such tests as the PSAT. MCPS students entering 9th grade this fall need to work with their high school this summer to complete the SSD process for the PSAT in October.



Source: www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org

Volunteer Opportunities: How Helping Others Can Help You

Volunteering has a meaningful, positive impact on your community. But did you know that it can have many benefits for you, too?

You may have heard that volunteering helps you get into college, but keep in mind they're not just looking for a list of organizations and dates. Colleges want to see a complete picture of you, and real examples of your commitment, dedication, and interests.

Reasons to Volunteer

Send a signal to colleges

Colleges pay attention to your life inside and outside the classroom. Your extracurricular activities reveal a great deal about you, such as what your interests are, whether you can manage your priorities and maintain a long-

term commitment, what diversity you'd bring to the student body, and how you've made a meaningful contribution to something.

Keep in mind, colleges are not interested in seeing you do it all. It's more meaningful to colleges to

Colleges pay attention to your life inside and outside the classroom.

see your dedication to one or two causes or activities than to see that you've spread yourself thin.

Get academic credit

Some schools offer academic credit for volunteer work through service-learning. This is a teaching method that integrates hands-on learning

(through service to the community) into the school curriculum. It's available in high schools and colleges, as well as in earlier grades.

Gain valuable life experiences and skills

Whether you build houses for the homeless or mail flyers for a local politician, you'll experience the real world through hands-on work. You can use this experience to explore your major or career interests.

Meet interesting people

Volunteering brings together a variety of people. Both the recipients of your volunteer efforts and your co-workers can be rich sources of insight. For example, maybe you'll learn about the legal profession from a former lawyer you visit at a convalescent center.

Source: www.collegeboard.com

Service Learning Hours to Increase

Beginning with the Class of 2011 (this year's eighth graders), Montgomery County Public Schools students will be required to complete 75 student service-learning (SSL) hours in order to graduate. Students in the Class of 2007 through the Class of 2010 will have to meet the current requirement of 60 hours.

The number is being increased to match the majority of Maryland counties, which require 75 hours for graduation. All other aspects of

the SSL program remain the same.

Students can begin accruing SSL hours the summer after completing fifth grade. Hours can be accumulated by volunteering with a nonprofit, tax-exempt community group; taking specific middle or high school courses; or participating in school-sponsored clubs and organizations.

Contact the school-based SSL coordinator or school counselor with questions.

Source: www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org

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Make Your Summer Sizzle



The Summer Search catalog offers 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.

Call 301-279-3100 for a catalog.

Source: www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org

Preparing Your Child for Middle School

Helping your child transition from elementary school, where he or she was familiar with the school environment, can be challenging.

Middle school routines, homework, campus, teachers, friends, and fellow students are new. With peer pressure and academic demands, this new world can be overwhelming.

Middle school students need more space and independence to discover new interests and build skills and knowledge, but they also need continued support and guidance from parents. Here are some ways to help your child through this move:

Attend an open house at the middle school

This will help your child become familiar with his or her new building, classrooms and lockers.

Meet with your child's new school counselor

Ask the counselor's advice on how to help your child transition into his or her new school.

Expose your child to different experiences and programs

This will allow your child to identify new interests in academic subjects, community involvement, and sports. Encouraging your child to participate in new programs can help him or her explore new interests and start to consider future plans.

Set ground rules for your child

Make sure your child knows what time to get up, be ready for school, and when to do homework. Continually tell your child that he or she is expected to do his or her best in school.

Help your child get organized

The amount of homework, school work, and after-school activities increases in middle school. Help your child learn good study habits. Habits

...homework, school work, and after-school activities increases in middle school.

such as doing homework at a certain time, talking about assignments, writing assignments in a calendar, going to the library, and cleaning out his or her backpack will help your child be more organized and focused at school.

Source: www.acrnetwork.org

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Explore a Career This Summer

Summer offers a lot of time to do research, so you can get ahead on your future career. Pick a profession, and use the summer to learn as much as possible. Collect research on the Web. Read books on the subject. Find someone in your community who has a career in which you are interested, and ask to spend a day with them, or volunteer to work part-time for them. Use the Occupational Outlook Handbook on the Web at www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm to find out what type of education and training is required to get a job in that field.

Source: AIEmail@tgsllc.org

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:

- Critical reading, listening, viewing
- Purposeful writing and discussion
- Appreciation of literature
- Effective use of language
- 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

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.
- 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. Visit colleges while they're in session.

- Finalize your summer plans.
- Start a calendar with important dates and deadlines.

Juniors

- Get ready for the SAT®.
- Start visiting local colleges. Get a feel for what works for you. Develop a list of 15–20 colleges that interest you.
- Plan ahead for the summer and senior year. Enrich yourself by volunteering or getting an interesting job or internship.
- Keep your momentum up this summer. Visit colleges. Take

campus tours; set up interviews with admissions counselors.

- Request applications from colleges to which you'll apply. Check important deadlines.

Seniors

- Compare financial aid awards from different colleges.
- Visit your final college before accepting. Make your final choice and send a deposit to the college you choose.
- Ask your high school to send a final transcript to your college.

Source: www.collegeboard.com

Make College Decision Making Stress-Free



College decision making is serious business, but it is not life's ultimate moment. It is one of a long series of decisions that will help to define you as you move toward adulthood. A calm,

and dreams. Understand and accept your grades and test scores.

Research your options

Investigate the range of postsecondary possibilities that may interest you. This part of decision making is worth the investment of your time and effort.

Consult the people who can help you evaluate the situation

These people may include parents, counselors, teachers, relatives, friends, college representatives, financial aid experts, etc. Useful information sometimes comes from unexpected sources.

Choose where you will apply and attend college

Every school choice involves both plus and minus factors. In the end you will choose the available alternatives that (all things considered) seem to suit you best.

Source: www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org

Know your strengths and weaknesses, your likes and dislikes,...

businesslike approach with a dash of humor will serve you better than a frenzied, frantic, doomsday outlook. Actually, this should be fun.

Now for a few hints about how to make this important decision:

Know yourself well

Know your strengths and weaknesses, your likes and dislikes, your hopes

SuccessTalk



Visit Your Career Center

Each Montgomery County public high school has a career center. The career center is a resource room for gathering career information. The center is managed by a college/career information coordinator (CCIC) who is available to all students, staff, parents, and area residents. The center usually is open year-round from 7 a.m.–3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Summer hours may vary; call ahead to set up an appointment at your high school career center. One resource in the career center is a computer search database of information on careers, two- and four-year colleges, and trade and technical schools.

Source: www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org

Forecast Your Future Financial Aid

If you want to begin exploring your financial aid options and get an early start on the financial aid process, FAFSA4caster is for you! By using FAFSA4caster, you and your family will receive an early estimate of eligibility for federal student aid, which could include a Pell grant of

By using FAFSA4caster, you and your family will receive an early estimate of eligibility...

up to \$4,310. This Web site provides you with an opportunity to increase your knowledge of the financial aid process; become familiar with the various types of federal student aid that are available; and investigate other sources of aid, such as grants and scholarships.

The FAFSA4caster will:

- Instantly calculate a student's eligibility for federal student aid, including grants,
- Reduce the time it will take to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and
- Simplify the financial aid process.

When you're ready to apply for aid, you can easily transition from FAFSA4caster to FAFSA on the Web. Much of the information that you enter in the FAFSA4caster will appear on your FAFSA on the Web application, making applying for federal student aid a lot easier.

The FAFSA4caster is available online at www.federalstudentaid.ed.gov in English and Spanish. In September, the Department of Education will release the next version of the FAFSA4caster, which will estimate a student's federal aid package, including eligibility for federal student loans.

Source: www.ed.gov

MoneyTalk

Get the Guide

The U.S. Department of Education publishes a comprehensive resource on student financial aid each year. Get the current guide online at studentaid.ed.gov/students/publications/student_guide/.

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



TickTalk

All About Scholarships

Don't miss the 2007 Scholarship Conference on Saturday, October 20, 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at Montgomery College's Germantown Campus. More than 20 programs/universities will provide information. Call 240-567-5000.

Source: www.montgomerycollege.edu



Q & A: Why Make a Post High School Plan?

Statistics about education and careers in the U.S. reveal why it's important to have a plan for life after high school:

- 48 of the 50 fastest growing jobs in the U.S. require some type of education beyond high school.
- People who don't have post-high school training are three times more likely to be unemployed than those who do.
- People who have some training after high school make more money and have better opportunities for career advancement than those who have only a high school diploma.
- Freshmen who don't have a career goal or academic major when they enter college are more likely to drop out.
- If your child has a solid plan before graduating, his or her chances for success in postsecondary education increase.

Source: www.acrnetwork.org

MoneyTalk

Maryland 529s Top the Class

Morningstar®, a leading investment research company, recently named the Maryland College Investment Plan, managed by T. Rowe Price, among the Best 529 College Savings Plans in the country. Ratings were based on important criteria, including low fees, well-run underlying funds, and flexible investment options.

Source: www.collegesavingsmd.org



PrepTalk

College Degree Pays Off in Job Market

Getting a college degree takes years of study. Will that effort pay off in the job market? It probably will, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Bright prospects are expected to continue for college graduates, especially for those who prepare for careers with lots of job openings.

Between 2004 and 2014, almost 14 million job openings are projected

As a whole, college-educated workers earn more money than workers who have less education.

to be filled by workers who have a bachelor's or higher degree. Some occupations will offer more openings and bigger paychecks than others will.

Higher earnings, lower unemployment rates

As a whole, college-educated workers earn more money than workers who have less education. In 2005, workers who had a bachelor's degree had

median weekly earnings of \$937, compared with \$583 a week for high school graduates—that's a difference of \$354 per week, or a 61 percent jump in median earnings. For workers who had a master's, doctoral, or professional degree, median earnings were even higher.

Occupations with many openings

Between 2004 and 2014, BLS projects 55 million job openings for workers who are entering an occupation for the first time. Of these, at least 13.9 million are expected to be filled by college-educated workers.

Source: www.bls.gov

StraightTalk

What advice would you give about college?

"Since the professors have office hours for the students, take advantage of that opportunity if you need extra help."

Jonathan

Seneca Valley High School Graduate

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 Charla Levine of MCPS at 301-294-0261 or Lisa Carvallo of MC at 240-567-4141.

Montgomery County Public Schools
Montgomery College
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Miss an issue?

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

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