

A Publication from the Maryland State Department of Education

# Maryland Classroom

# Maryland Scholars

By Kathy Seay

**M**ore than ever, if we want our children to succeed and our country and communities to prosper, students must graduate from high school with high-level knowledge and skills in math, science, and language. Whether a student wants to go to college or get a good job, laying the strongest foundation in high school is essential. Even if students don't know what they want to do after high school, taking the right courses right now will allow them to follow any path they choose later on.

With Maryland's new higher standards, an army of talented, dedicated teachers, and parents who want the best for their children, what's keeping some of our students from achieving? For many, it's a lack of motivation and a clear understanding of how the skills and content they're learning in school will affect their ability to earn a decent wage and live the life they want.

## The Motivating Factor

In a recent national survey of high school dropouts, nearly 7 in 10 cited "lack of motivation" as the primary reason for not completing high school. Nearly the same number said they could have graduated if they'd tried. Two-thirds said they would have worked harder in school if more had been demanded of them.

More than 8 in 10 dropouts surveyed said there should be more opportunities for real-world learning and that students need to see the connection between school and getting a good job. Nearly all regretted their decision.

However, lack of motivation affects more than dropouts alone. Last year, more than 70 percent of high school graduates surveyed said they wish they had worked harder and taken more rigorous courses in high school.

For these young people, it's an uphill climb. For today's students, the future could be brighter.

## Maryland Scholars

The Maryland Scholars program offers students what they need and, apparently, what they want—credible reasons, good information, and a vision of what is possible for them. With MSDE and the Governor's Office, the Maryland Business Roundtable for Education is promoting Maryland Scholars, which encourages students to complete a rigorous and specific course of study—with an emphasis on math, science, and foreign language (see [Maryland Scholars: Course of Study](#)).

But Maryland Scholars isn't just a set of courses. The program mobilizes parents, teachers, school counselors, community leaders, employers, and business volunteers to inspire, motivate, and help students to achieve academic—and, ultimately, professional and personal—success.

## Strong Messages, Credible Messengers

We are reaching students—in classrooms, online, and in print—with strong messages and believable messengers about the critical connection between achievement in school and success in life.

- **In classrooms:** Two-thousand volunteers from varied backgrounds and careers talk with 8th and 9th graders about where they want to go in life and how rigorous courses and hard work in high school will help them get there.



## Maryland Scholars: Course of Study

Courses in **red** are not currently required for a Maryland High School Diploma.

- English: 4 credits
- Math: 3 credits—algebra I; geometry; **algebra II**
- Science: 3 lab science credits—biology; **chemistry**; **physics** [preferred]
- Social Studies: 3 credits—U.S. history; world history; government
- **Foreign Language:** 2 credits—both in the same language

Students must have a 2.5 GPA to qualify for the program.

Students graduating with a GPA of 3.5 or higher receive extra recognition.

- **Online:** BeWhatIWantToBe.com engages students in a teen-focused, interactive exploration of careers and the academic preparation required for them. The site—designed for and by teens—includes profiles of people in interesting careers; tips for getting into and financing college, preparing for a career, saving money, and making the most of the high school years; and a variety of activities and links that motivate students to take real, next-step actions.
- **In print:** Students receive *Be What I Want To Be* magazine from the speakers who visit their classrooms. The magazine reinforces the speakers' messages, highlights material from the Be What I Want to Be Web site, and encourages students to visit the site and start planning their future.

## Tuition Incentives

Students and educators alike have told us that incentives are important motivators. And money may be the most effective incentive of all. Pell-eligible students who complete the Maryland Scholars course of study could qualify for a federal Academic Competitiveness Grant, worth up to \$750 for

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[www.MarylandPublicSchools.org](http://www.MarylandPublicSchools.org)

try on a future.  
see what fits.

Look inside for details on [BeWhatIWantToBe.com](http://BeWhatIWantToBe.com)

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college freshmen and up to \$1,300 for college sophomores. Plus, college juniors and seniors who major in math, science, engineering, technology, or specific foreign languages—and who carry at least a 3.0 GPA—could qualify for up to \$4,000 in federal grant money.

## It's Working

By encouraging rigor, demonstrating relevance, building relationships, and providing incentives, Maryland Scholars is creating an environment where students understand and appreciate the value of a good education and are willing to make an investment in their own future.

Data collected in Frederick and Harford counties—districts that began piloting Maryland Scholars in 2003—show a substantial increase in the number of students completing rigorous math and science courses, particularly among minority and low-income students. For example, in Frederick County, 429 more students completed algebra II in 2005 than did in 2003 (a 20-percent increase), and 531 more students completed a 4th science course (a 64-percent increase). The number of African-American students completing chemistry increased by 55 percent and the number of Hispanic students completing algebra II doubled.

And in June 2006, 1,974 Frederick County seniors—more than two-thirds of the graduating class—received Maryland Scholars certificates along with their diplomas.

All of which goes to show that, working together, it is possible to get all students to achieve at higher levels. ■

*Maryland Scholars is offered in all 24 school systems.*

*For more information about the program, contact Kathy Seay at [kathy@mbrt.org](mailto:kathy@mbrt.org). Kathy is deputy director of the Maryland Business Roundtable for Education.*

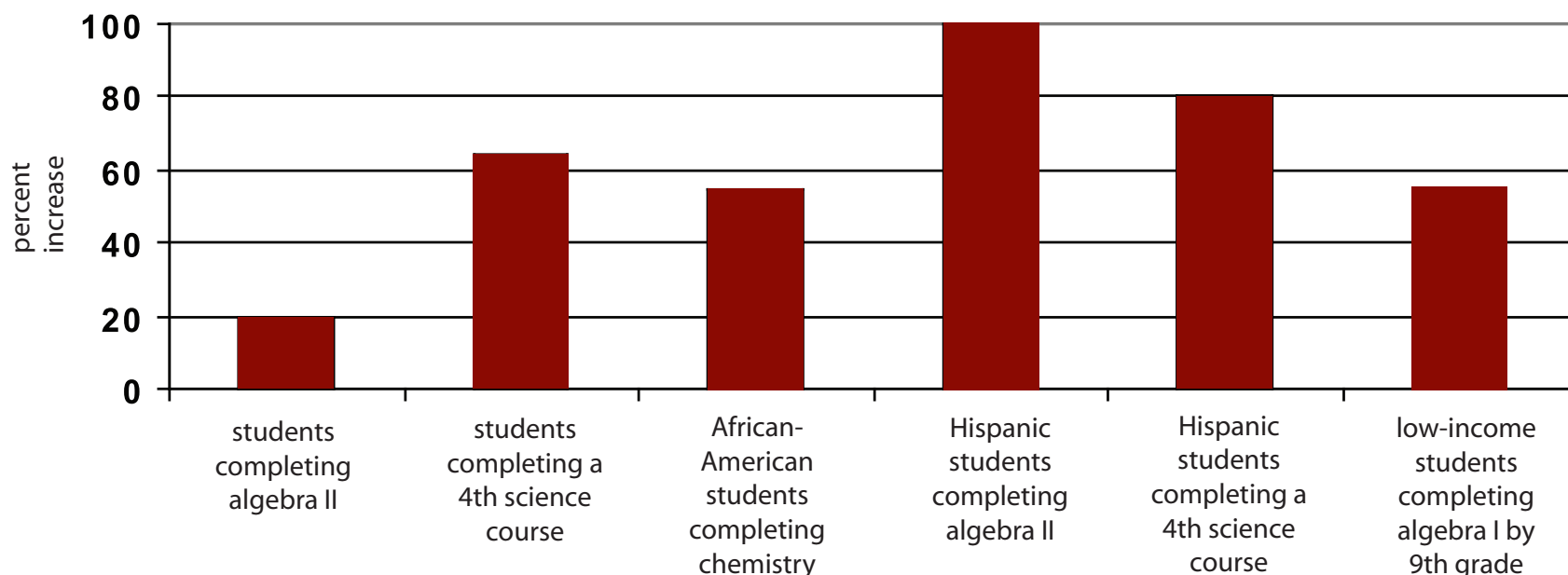


**“One of the best predictors of college success is taking rigorous high school classes. Getting good grades in lower level classes will not prepare students for college-level work.”**

**Among African-American and Latino students, the quality and intensity of the high school curriculum is the strongest pre-college predictor of degree completion.”**

— *Betraying the College Dream*  
Stanford University's Bridge Project

## Percent Increase in Rigorous Course Completion Frederick County, 2003 to 2005



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### Office of Academic Policy

Ronald Peiffer, Deputy State Superintendent

Nan Mulqueen, Editor-in-Chief

Edward L. Root, President, State Board of Education

Nancy S. Grasmick, Secretary-Treasurer of the Board

State Superintendent of Schools

Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., Governor

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If you have any questions or comments about this publication, please contact Nan Mulqueen, editor, at 410.767.0475.

**“Eighty-eight percent of all U.S. 8th graders expect to go to college. But, once in high school, just 47% of them take a college-prep courseload.”**

**Seventy-two percent of all U.S. high school graduates go to college within two years of graduating. But 40% of four-year college students and 63% of community college students have to take at least one remedial course once they get there.”**

— *Betraying the College Dream*  
Stanford University's Bridge Project



# Be What I Want To Be .com

The Maryland Business Roundtable for Education launched Be What I Want to Be in 2004 as part of Maryland Scholars, a program designed to show students the connection between achievement in school and success in the workplace. Be What I Want to Be is an interactive Web site and a supporting annual magazine. It sustains the Maryland Scholars conversation with teens, reaches students of many ages, and moves students from mere interest in careers to actively preparing for them. Be What I Want to Be boosts students' motivation by highlighting exciting careers and explaining what has to be accomplished in school to qualify for them.

During the 2005-06 school year alone, more than 40,000 visitors explored BeWhatIWantToBe.com, and more than 1,000 students created personal accounts on the site.

## BE WHAT I WANT TO BE

- Read about people all over Maryland in great jobs and what they had to do to get them. (It doesn't always mean going to college.)
- Learn how to write a professional résumé that will get you noticed.
  - Search colleges by the program of study you're interested in.
  - Find out what different jobs really pay and what you can expect to earn over your lifetime.
  - Get tips on applying for college scholarships and financial aid.
  - Take a career self-assessment and see what fits for you.
  - Find out what local college admissions officers look for in their applicants. (What do you think they said matters most: SAT or GPA? See Answer #8 in "What do you say?")
- Explore the true "cost of living" and build your own budget online.
- Find out what courses you'll have to take, year by year, to get into the job or college you want.
- Test your college and career knowledge with quizzes.
- Tell us about yourself by answering our online polls.

## WHAT DO YOU SAY?

1. In terms of college admissions, is it better to be deeply involved with a few school groups or spread the wealth among more?
2. What percentage of jobs today can be filled by workers with a high school diploma or less?
3. On average, how much does it cost each year to attend a private four-year college? Public four-year college? Public two-year college?
4. True or False: Your high school grades can be a sign of how much money you'll earn later.
5. Three-quarters of company officials in Maryland said everyone they hire must have ... what skill?
6. What proportion of employers said they check job applicants' high school transcripts?
7. Most high school students say they've picked their chosen career because:
  - a) it involves doing something they like; or
  - b) they'll make good money doing it.

## ERIKA - SOFTWARE ENGINEER



**What obstacles did you face growing up, and how did you overcome them?** My parents were not together while I was in school, so that made school a constant in my life.

**What or who inspired you growing up?** My mother was an inspiration through my entire life. She showed extreme resolve no matter what.

**What choices have you made that helped you get where you are today?** I decided to focus on my education and do positive things. That made the things that were not so good seem smaller. I also decided to take chances in my life and career as long as they are in line with my goals.

**What do you do?** I manage software projects to ensure they are correctly finished on time and on budget.

## PETE - SPORTS SALES



**What obstacles did you face growing up, and how did you overcome them?** I think I had it pretty good, but I grew up in a competitive town, so there was a lot of pressure to be successful. Juggling school while playing varsity basketball and participating in a lot of other activities was also a challenge at times.

**What do you do?** My main duties are to find new clients that we can work with, while servicing our current accounts to maintain

strong relationships. I bring in money for the company by selling season tickets and group tickets.

**How did you get your job?** Choosing the job was easy for me once I received an offer. I played basketball in high school and college, and I love sports. Combine that with the opportunity to be independent and use my sales/marketing experience, and I was very excited to land this job.

## GUY - COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE LAWYER



**What obstacles did you face growing up, and how did you overcome them?** Negative peer pressure and petty jealousy. In response, I remained sharply focused on my goals, chose friends wisely, took every setback as a learning opportunity, and tried to set a positive example for others in my daily activities.

**What do you do?** I structure, negotiate, and document complex real estate transactions

for clients around the country and around the world.

**How did you get your job?** I applied for the job during my first year of law school and was hired as a first-year summer associate. I then was offered a job upon finishing law school and joined the firm's commercial real estate department and have remained here ever since.

## LALEH - EDUCATOR



**What obstacles did you face growing up, and how did you overcome them?** As a young child I lived overseas, so English was my second language. When we returned to the United States, I had to work hard to be able to get the concepts down so I could do well in school. After much patience and time, I was able to excel in my classes.

**What or who inspired you growing up?** My parents were my inspiration growing up. The one thing they did was to provide me with direction so I would make the right decisions later in life.

**What do you do?** I teach, organize events for my students, meet with business leaders to create relationships that will benefit my students, and advise students and a student organization.



# WIN PRIZES!

When you create a free personal account, you're automatically entered to win prizes—prizes like games, gift cards, even iPods. Maryland students with Be What I Want to Be accounts earn points for completing activities, polls, and contests. Sign up now and you earn 100 points right away. Get a friend to sign up and earn another 50. Fill out your career goal when you sign up and earn 50 more.

Contests and prizes are announced throughout the year, so make sure you're completing "challenges" throughout the site and building up your points ... because random prizes may be announced for point leaders at any time.

**BeWhatIWantToBe.com**

**What do you say: Answers**  
 1. College admissions officials say it's better to be deeply involved with 1-3 groups you're passionate about than a bunch you're not.  
 2. 15 percent.  
 3. \$21,235; \$5,492; \$2,191.  
 4. True. One study showed that one letter-grade improvement (for example, from C to B) meant almost 13 percent more in earnings later in life. Coincidentally, that's also how much more a 27-year-old who took harder courses in high school earns over a 27-year-old who took easier courses.  
 5. Basic computer skills.  
 6. Half of them ... so there's a 50-50 chance they'll check yours.  
 7. A. Answer B came in second! Tell us what YOU think at [www.bewhatiwanttobe.com](http://www.bewhatiwanttobe.com).  
 8. From the Be What I Want to Be checklist! Most admissions officers interviewed said they place much more emphasis on a student's GPA and high school transcript (to see how many difficult courses were taken) than on this/her SAT score.