MONTGOMERY
COUNTY PUBLIC
SCHOOLS

Senior Exit Survey: Class of 2004

Department of Shared Accountability

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Executive Summary

This report provides information on high school seniors' postsecondary plans and their high school experience. Counselors, principals, the Board of Education, and other school administrators can use this information to improve students' school experience and help students and their parents to make informed decisions about their postsecondary education and training plans. To learn about students' high school experience and postsecondary education and work plans, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) seniors were asked to complete the High School Exit Survey. The survey asks students about their academic experiences, educational support, and factors that influenced their postsecondary planning and decisions.

MCPS seniors generally report a favorable high school experience. Students are pleased with their academic experience and classroom instruction as 53.6% of students rate their English instruction as excellent or good. Similarly, nearly half of seniors give an excellent or good rating to math, science, and social science instruction.

Fewer students indicated they were pleased with MCPS educational support services. While more than one third rate school counseling services and college and career resources as excellent or good, fewer students rate the development of the four-year plan and academic advising in this manner. This finding suggests that schools may need to focus efforts to improve educational support to reach all students.

MCPS seniors overwhelmingly expect to earn undergraduate or advanced degrees—bachelor's (22.0 percent), master's (41.4 percent), and doctorate or professional degree (27.6 percent). The expectation to earn a college degree is similar across racial/ethnic and gender groups.

More than 90% of MCPS students plan to continue their education in two- or four-year colleges and universities. Just as students expect to earn degrees, many plan to take steps toward this goal by beginning postsecondary studies in the fall following high school graduation. However, MCPS students are taking different routes as they anticipate beginning postsecondary education. More than half (52.2%) of MCPS seniors plan to enter a four-year college; an additional 14.4% plan to work or join the military while attending a four-year college.

While nearly three-quarters of Asian American and White students plan to enter a four-year college, fewer African American and Hispanic students plan to begin their postsecondary education in a four-year college. African American and Hispanic students most frequently chose Montgomery College (a local two-year college) as their first choice school, while Asian American and White students selected the University of Maryland College Park.

Further research is necessary to examine MCPS students' postsecondary planning, course-taking paths, and college readiness.

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Background

Obtaining a college education is generally accepted as both a goal and value among students today. By eighth grade, over 80% of students indicate that they will earn at least a college degree and nearly half also expect to earn a graduate or professional degree (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000; Noeth & Wimberly, 2002; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Students indicate that they want to attend college and pursue careers in professional fields such as business, computer science, teaching, and medicine (Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). Their desire to go to college is strengthened as they progress through high school and learn about educational and career options. These educational and career expectations are consistent across race, social class, gender, and student achievement level (Freeman, 1999; Kao & Tienda, 1998; MacLeod, 1995).
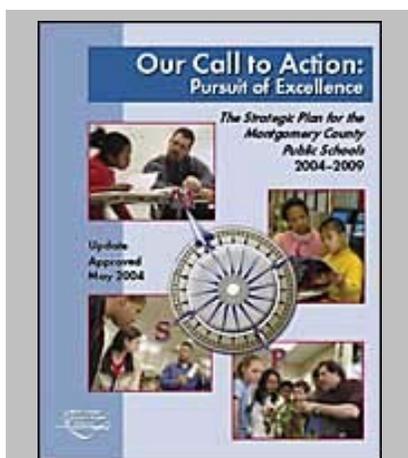
Learning Milestone from Goal 1: All students will graduate prepared for postsecondary education or employment (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2004).

Many factors contribute to the expectation to attend college. Over the past three decades, changes in education and social policy have expanded access to postsecondary education, causing enrollment in colleges and universities to increase. Beginning in the 1970s, the federal government began funding grants to provide tuition assistance for low-income students to attend college and expanded student loan programs to help families meet college costs. Civil rights legislation led to affirmative action initiatives designed to increase postsecondary participation among women and minorities (Bowen & Bok, 1998). These policy changes occurred as high school graduation became nearly universal, increasing the pool of potential college students (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Two major changes are occurring in the U.S. economy. First, the shift from an industrial economy to one based on service, information, and technology has dramatically increased the importance of advanced skills and credentials. Many jobs now demand that workers have some postsecondary training (Moss & Tilly, 2001; Wilson, 1996). These changes in the U.S. economy, growing competition across the global market, and increasing demand for a skilled labor force have made postsecondary training essential. Second, the makeup of the U.S. workforce is changing due to the upsurge in Hispanic immigration, with Hispanics fast becoming

the largest minority group in America. It is projected that in the next 30 years minority workers will make up more than one third of the American labor force.

The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) recognizes the importance of developing students who are prepared for postsecondary education and a technological and information-based workforce. Minority students constitute more than half of MCPS students, with no racial group constituting a clear majority. These students will need the skills and postsecondary credentials to compete in the ever-changing labor market. A goal of the MCPS Strategic Plan (2004) is to ensure success for every student. All MCPS students will graduate prepared for postsecondary education or employment (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2004). To reach this goal MCPS has instituted a rigorous academic curriculum as well as educational support and planning activities centered around college readiness.

Part of the preparation for postsecondary education or employment involves students engaging in educational planning steps that can include the following:

- Considering postsecondary education

- Deciding to attend college

- Selecting high school courses to prepare for postsecondary training

- Maintaining good grades in high school courses

- Obtaining information about colleges and academic programs

- Exploring college majors and career interests

- Obtaining information about financial aid opportunities

- Preparing for and taking college admissions tests

- Selecting a college to attend

Many factors influence students as they consider, develop, and pursue postsecondary plans. Influences often include individuals, institutions, programs, activities, and experiences that either directly or indirectly facilitate postsecondary planning. Schools play a pivotal role in providing a school climate and experience that supports academic achievement, parent involvement, and educational planning.

MCPS seeks to provide students and their parents with the information, resources, and skills to make the transition from high school to postsecondary education. This report provides information on high school seniors' postsecondary plans and their high school experience. Counselors, principals, the Board of Education, and other school administrators can use this information to improve students' school experience and help students and their parents make informed decisions about their postsecondary education and training plans.

Methodology

To learn about students' high school experiences and postsecondary education and work plans, MCPS seniors were asked to complete the High School Exit Survey. The survey asks students about their academic experiences, educational support, and factors that influenced their postsecondary planning and decisions. High school seniors eligible for graduation reported their postsecondary education and work plans, colleges and universities they have applied to, and how their high school experiences helped them decide about the future. This survey was administered in May 2004, prior to graduation, when most postsecondary decisions are finalized.

Key Research Questions

1. What academic and educational factors supported students' high school experience?

2. What factors interfered with students' high school experience?

3. How far in school do students expect to go?

4. What are students' educational and work plans for the fall following graduation?

5. To which colleges and universities do MCPS students apply?

Instrument and Administration

Nearly all seniors eligible for graduation completed the survey (N=8,453). The survey findings were linked to students' grade point averages (GPA), courses taken, and SAT results. The findings presented in this report reflect the racial, economic, and achievement level diversity of MCPS students. The high response rate (87.2%) enables us to accurately report and generalize the survey findings to MCPS graduating seniors.

Results

This section addresses the key research questions about MCPS students' high school experiences and their postsecondary plans. Results from the High School Exit Survey are analyzed and presented using descriptive statistics. For selected items, findings are reported for all students and by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) subgroups, these include students' gender, race/ethnicity, and students receiving special services—Free and Reduced-price Meals System (FARMS), special education, and Limited English Proficient (LEP) status.

Factors Supporting High School

MCPS seniors generally report a favorable high school experience. Students are pleased with their academic experience and classroom instruction, as 53.6% of students rate their English instruction as excellent or good (Table 1). Similarly, nearly half of seniors give an excellent or good rating to math, science, and social science instruction. African American and Hispanic students are less likely to rate these instructional areas as excellent or good, but these findings are inconclusive given the different levels of course participation across racial groups. Students also rate the variety of courses offered and the flexibility to select courses as excellent or good. Overall, these findings are consistent across racial groups, gender, and students receiving special services. This consistency may suggest that MCPS is effectively reaching students from traditionally underrepresented groups or groups that may need additional or special assistance to achieve school success.

Table 1

High School Experiences Rated Excellent

or Good (*N*=8,453)

Academic Experiences	%
Math Instruction	48.6
Science Instruction	44.8
Social Science Instruction	43.9
English Instruction	53.6
Foreign Language Instruction	26.1
Educational Support Services	
Four-year Plan	24.7
School Counseling Services	37.1
Variety of Courses	47.7
Academic Advising	18.4

Fewer students indicated they were pleased with MCPS educational support services. While more than one third rate school counseling services and college and career resources as excellent or good, fewer students rate the development of the four-year plan and academic advising in this manner. This finding suggests that schools may need to focus efforts to improve educational support to reach all students.

Factors Interfering with High School Education

Students were asked about issues or experiences that interfered with their high school education. The interference students reported most was poor study habits, with more than one third of the class identifying this as a problem (Table 2). Other interferences seniors reported suggest competing demands for their time during the school year. Students reported that activities outside of school (33.1%), a job outside of school (31.0%), and family obligations (28.2%) were interferences. Seniors also reported that poor class instruction (25.5%) interfered with their high school education.

Table 2

Factors Interfering With MCPS Students'

High School Education (*N*=8,453)

Interference	%
Poor study habits	34.6
Activities outside of school	33.1
Job outside of school	31.0
Family obligations	28.2
Poor class instruction	25.5

Expected Educational Attainment

MCPS seniors overwhelmingly expect to earn undergraduate or advanced degrees—bachelor's (22.0 percent), master's (41.4 percent), and doctorate or professional degree (27.6 percent) (Table 3). As students were preparing for their upcoming high school graduation, most perceived a high school diploma as one step on their educational journey. This suggests that students anticipate that they will need to pursue postsecondary education and earn degrees to meet their educational and career goals. These findings are consistent with national data and other studies in which more than 80% of middle and high school students expect to earn a college degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Table 3

MCPS Students' Expectations of Educational Attainment (*N*=8,453)

Expected Degree	All %	Race/Ethnicity				Special Services		
		African American %	Asian American %	Hispanic %	White %	FARMS %	Special Education %	LEP %
HS diploma	3.4	4.7	2.9	6.5	2.2	7.5	15.2	15.5
Associate or trade/ business/tech degree	5.6	6.8	4.1	10.9	4.4	8.8	14.2	7.2
Bachelor's degree	22.0	21.3	15.1	20.9	24.5	20.7	27.2	14.7
Master's degree	41.4	39.4	35.7	39.3	44.4	37.8	30.2	37.1
Doctorate or professional degree	27.6	27.8	42.2	22.3	24.5	25.1	13.2	25.5

The expectation to earn a college degree is similar across racial/ethnic groups. Table 3 shows that most students expect to earn at least a bachelor's degree across these groups. Expectations were highest among Asian American students, with nearly half (42.2%) expecting to earn a doctorate or other professional degree, and more than one third (35.7%) expecting to earn a master's degree.

Students receiving special services also have high educational expectations. Most of these students expect to earn a college degree. They show little variation from other students in their educational expectations. The majority of FARMS students expect to earn a bachelor's degree or higher, while two thirds of special education students have similar expectations. Although still a low percentage, about 15% of LEP and special education students report they expect to earn only a high school diploma.

These nearly universal educational expectations suggest that students express the clear desire to not only complete education beyond high school, but to earn college and advanced degrees that might better enable them to successfully compete in the information-based labor market. MCPS students have high educational goals that are consistent with students nationwide.   These expectations are consistent across racial groups, social class, and students receiving special services.   In MCPS and across the nation, schools and parents have successfully instilled in students the value and desire to pursue higher education. Students generally value education and see college in their educational futures. However, the challenge for most students lies in having the information, knowledge, resources, and opportunities to make their educational goals a reality (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999).

Education and Work Plans for the Fall

Although students have numerous options after graduating from high school, more than 90% of MCPS students plan to continue their education in two– or four–year colleges and universities. Just as students expect to earn degrees, many plan to take steps toward this goal by beginning postsecondary studies in the fall following high school graduation. Assuming that most of these students begin their studies in the fall, MCPS is well above the national average in which only 61.7% of graduates attend college in the fall following graduation (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

However, MCPS students are taking different routes as they anticipate beginning postsecondary education.   More than half (52.2%) of MCPS seniors plan to enter a four-year college; an additional 14.4% plan to work or join the military while attending a four-year college (Table 4). Fewer students plan to attend a two-year college (12.7%) or work while attending a two-year college or special training program (11.2%).

Table 4

Postsecondary Plans for Fall 2004 (*N*=8453)

What will you do after high school graduation?	All (%)	African American (%)	Asian American (%)	Hispanic (%)	White (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	FARMS (%)	Special Ed (%)	LEP (%)
Four-year college only	52.2	43.8	59.4	27.1	59.7	54.7	49.6	30.1	26.0	25.5
Four-year college plus work or military	14.4	14.3	16.2	13.0	14.3	15.9	12.8	15.4	11.0	10.0
Two-year college or trade, technical, business school only	12.7	17.5	11.8	21.6	8.8	10.4	15.0	21.4	27.7	22.3
Two-year college or trade, technical, business school plus work or military	11.2	13.3	7.4	20.8	9.1	11.5	11.0	18.5	18.0	18.3
Work only	3.0	3.2	1.2	6.6	2.5	2.6	3.4	5.5	7.0	10.7
Military (no school, may also work)	1.6	1.9	0.8	3.1	1.4	0.8	2.6	2.6	0.7	3.3
Undecided or other plans	3.3	3.4	2.2	5.8	3.0	2.9	3.8	3.7	6.3	7.2
No plans reported/missing data	1.5	2.6	0.8	2.0	1.1	1.2	1.8	2.8	3.3	2.7

Unlike the similarity with educational expectations, MCPS seniors' fall plans vary across racial groups. While nearly three quarters of Asian American and White students plan to enter a four-year college, fewer African American and Hispanic students plan to begin their postsecondary education in a four-year college. Furthermore, Table 4 shows that 30.9% of African American and 42.4% of Hispanic students plan to enter a two-year college or special training program in the fall following high school graduation. Findings reveal that African American and Hispanic students more frequently report planning to work or are undecided about their fall plans than are Asian American and White students.

Fall plans vary slightly among students receiving special services. Most FARMS and LEP students plan to attend college, yet almost one quarter of special education students do not have college plans for the fall. Nearly one third of students receiving special services plan to hold a job while they are attending college. Students receiving special services are almost evenly divided among those planning to attend a two- or four-year college.

Colleges and Universities

MCPS students most frequently applied to 25 colleges and universities, representing just under half of the total applications submitted (Table 5). Nearly 20% of the applications reported in the survey went to two schools: The University of Maryland College Park and Montgomery College. For over ten years, the list of colleges and universities to which seniors applied most frequently has changed only slightly. The 10 colleges and universities that the Class of 2004 applied to were the same schools as the Class of 2003 (Bernstein, Wade, & Loeb 2004).

Table 5

Colleges and Universities to which MCPS Students Applied

and Were Accepted Fall 2004

Rank Order	College/ University	# Applied	% Applicants Accepted	
			MCPS	Nationally
1	Univ. of Maryland—College Park	1,994	77	43
2	Montgomery College—all campuses	1,494	Open admissions	
3	Towson University	709	72	52
4	Univ. of Maryland—Baltimore Co.	701	83	58
5	Pennsylvania State University	467	93	78
6	Salisbury University	331	79	61
7	Frostburg State University	322	82	79
8	University of Delaware	302	57	42
9	Virginia Polytechnic Institute	278	88	69
10	St. Mary's College of Maryland	245	76	55
11	George Washington University	209	65	39
12	New York University	200	53	32
13	University of Pennsylvania	194	27	20
14	James Madison University	191	78	62
15	University of Michigan at Ann Arbor	189	82	53
16	Cornell University	188	51	31
17	American University	187	66	59
18–tie	Johns Hopkins University	186	38	30
18–tie	University of Virginia	186	40	39
20	Boston University	185	75	52
21–tie	Georgetown University	172	33	23
21–tie	Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	164	31	37
23	Duke University	161	35	23
24	West Virginia University	157	90	92
25	Washington University in St. Louis	145	55	20

The colleges and universities students' applied to varied somewhat by racial group (see Appendix). Asian American and White students most frequently applied to four-year colleges and universities. Asian American students regularly applied to a larger number of private colleges and universities, including Johns Hopkins University, New York University, Cornell, and Georgetown. These elite schools tend to draw from a national applicant pool, accept a low percentage of students, and have highly competitive admissions standards. Many of the top 10 schools that African American students indicated they submitted applications to were Historically Black Colleges and Universities, including Morgan State University, Bowie State University, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and Howard University. MCPS applicants' acceptance rates were higher in many cases than the national rates of freshmen applying to these and most other universities (Peterson's, 2004).

African American and Hispanic students most frequently chose Montgomery College (a local two-year college) as their first choice school, while Asian American and White students selected the University of Maryland College Park. The prevalence of planning to enter a two-year program and the number of applications to Montgomery College among African Americans and Hispanics may be related to student preparation. Only 65.3% of African American and 49% of Hispanic students in MCPS took the SAT; compared with more than 85% of Asian American and White students. Students in the Class of 2004 had the highest-ever SAT average score of 1102, yet African American and Hispanic students scored an average 928 and 950 respectively (VonSecker, 2004). Two-year colleges generally do not require that students take the SAT or other college admissions exams, yet these SAT scores are an essential part of the four-year college admissions criteria. African American and Hispanic students are also less likely than their Asian American and White classmates to take Honors or Advanced Placement courses—academically rigorous courses designed to prepare students for college-level work. Taking college admissions tests and completing a strong curriculum are essential aspects of the postsecondary planning process. Students who do not take the SAT or complete rigorous courses may be closing the door to attendance at a potential four-year college or university (Breland, Maxey, Gernand, Cumming, & Trapani, 2002).

For those students receiving special services, there is a difference in the colleges and universities to which the Class of 2004 indicated they had applied. The number of LEP students is too small in several cases to report results. As might be expected, special education students also applied to a different set of schools than their classmates, with the University of Hartford, Hofstra University, Elon College, and Shepherd College among the top 10 schools where they submitted applications.

Discussion and Recommendations

This report clearly shows that MCPS graduating seniors had a positive high school experience. They indicated that their academic experience was favorable and they received educational support services that helped them plan for the future. Although there are always areas for growth, MCPS is effectively working to ensure that all students are prepared for postsecondary education or work. MCPS students have high educational expectations, with nearly all expecting to earn at least a bachelor's degree and most expecting to earn graduate or professional degrees.

However, among African American and Hispanic students, the findings reveal a discrepancy between their educational expectations and their plans for the fall following high school graduation. Like other MCPS students, they desire to earn advanced degrees, yet African American and Hispanic students are more likely to plan to enter two-year colleges and special training programs than their Asian American and White peers. Among college students nationwide, research has shown that many students who enter two-year colleges do not move on to complete bachelor's degrees (Hoachlander, Sikora, & Horn, 2003).

Two-year colleges often become a necessary option for students whose initial postsecondary plans change. While only 17.6% of MCPS seniors reported they applied to Montgomery College for fall 2004, Montgomery College reports that 25.4% of MCPS graduates actually enrolled in classes.

It is possible that students will begin their education in a two-year program and later transfer to a four-year college or university; however, many students do not earn degrees from two-year colleges. For example, at Montgomery College only 6.6% of students completed their programs, and 28.7% of students transferred to other higher education institutions (Montgomery College, 2005). Students often spend many years in two-year colleges taking remedial courses, and many experience a floundering or "cooling out" phase in which they reconsider their education and work plans (Cohen & Brawer, 2002; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). But we are uncertain of MCPS students' actual college attendance and degrees earned.

MCPS can work to monitor and evaluate whether all students (particularly African American and Hispanic students) are engaging in the postsecondary planning process and taking steps to ensure that they are poised to fulfill their academic and career goals in colleges and universities. Further research is necessary to examine MCPS students' postsecondary planning, course-taking paths, and college readiness. A first step may be to strengthen the High School Exit Survey to better address factors influencing students' postsecondary planning and to capture issues facing today's high school students.

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Appendix

College and University Applications by Demographic Characteristics

	African American MCPS Graduates		Asian American MCPS Graduates
Rank	University/College	Rank	University/College
1	Montgomery College	1	Univ. of Maryland, College Park
2	Univ. of Maryland, College Park	2	Univ. of Maryland, Baltimore County
3	Morgan State University	3	Montgomery College
4	Bowie State College	4	Towson University
5	Towson University	5	Pennsylvania State University
6	Howard University	6	Johns Hopkins University
7	Univ. of Maryland at Baltimore	7	New York University
8	Univ. of Maryland Eastern Shore	8	Cornell University
9	Frostburg State University	9	George Washington University
10-tie	Pennsylvania State University	10-tie	University of Pennsylvania
10-tie	Temple University	10-tie	Georgetown University

	Hispanic MCPS Graduates		White MCPS Graduates
1	Montgomery College	1	Univ. of Maryland, College Park
2	Univ. of Maryland at College Park	2	Montgomery College
3	Towson University	3	Towson University
4	Univ. of Maryland at Baltimore	4	Pennsylvania State University
5	Frostburg State University	5	Univ. of Maryland at Baltimore
6	Salisbury State University	6	University of Delaware
7-tie	Pennsylvania State University	7	Salisbury State University
7-tie	American University	8	Frostburg State University
7-tie	University of Delaware	9	Virginia Polytech. Inst. & State Univ.
10-tie	George Washington University	10	Saint Mary's College
10-tie	Saint Mary's College		

MCPS Graduates Receiving the Following Special Services

FARMS		Special Education	
Rank	University/College	Rank	University/College
1	Montgomery College	1	Montgomery College
2	Univ. of Maryland, College Park	2	Univ. of Maryland, College Park
3	Univ. of Maryland at Baltimore	3	Frostburg State University
4	Towson University	4	Towson University
5	Morgan State University	5	Salisbury State University
6	Bowie State College	6	West Virginia University
7	Univ. of Maryland Eastern Shore	7	University of Delaware
8	Frostburg State University	8	University of Hartford
9	Pennsylvania State University	9	Univ. of Maryland at Baltimore
10	Howard University	10-tie	Hofstra University
		10-tie	American University
		10-tie	Elon College
		10-tie	Shepherd College

LEP

Rank	University/College
1	Montgomery College
2	Univ. of Maryland at College Park
3	Towson University
4	Univ. of Maryland at Baltimore
5	Frostburg State University
6	Morgan State University
7	Univ. of Maryland Eastern Shore
8	Pennsylvania State University
9	American University
10	Catholic University