

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.*

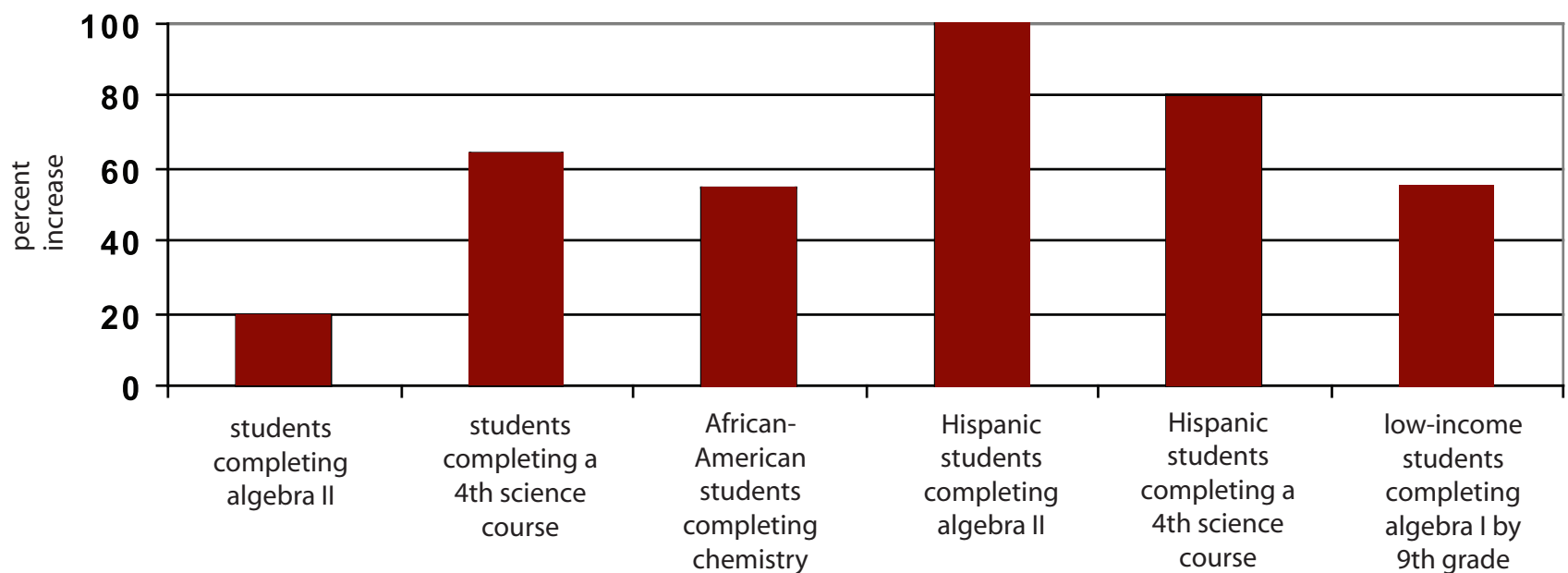


**“One of the best predictors of college success is taking rigorous high school classes. Getting good grades in lower level classes will not prepare students for college-level work.”**

**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

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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