

Student Page Program: Fostering a Passion for Government and Politics

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The Maryland General Assembly Student Page Program enables high school seniors around the state to serve as student pages for either the Maryland House of Delegates or Maryland Senate. A total of 120 student pages and 36 alternates across the state are selected to serve in Annapolis for two non-consecutive weeks over the course of the Assembly's 13-week session.

According to Dr. Joshua Fradel, our school system's Student Page Coordinator, "Each Maryland district is given one student page slot and one alternate slot. Additional positions are allotted based on a school system's student population." Every year, Worcester County selects one student page and one alternate to serve in the program.

The Department of Legislative Services which manages the program explains that the purpose of the Student Page Program is to give high school seniors an opportunity to learn about the legislative process. Established nearly 40 years ago by former House Speaker Thomas Hunter Lowe and approved by the Maryland State Board of Education, the Student Page Program continues to foster an interest in state government, while helping students to develop leadership skills.

To qualify for consideration as a student page, a student must be a high school senior and at least 16 years old. Of course, there is also a selection process! In our school system, interested candidates from each of our high schools must submit an application and essay. One candidate is selected from Pocomoke, Snow Hill, and Stephen Decatur High Schools. These three seniors, along with a candidate from Worcester Preparatory School, must participate in an interview with a selection panel comprised of students and teachers from each school. In the interview, candidates are questioned about their qualifications, as well as their knowledge of our local and state politicians.

I received the privilege of being selected to represent Worcester County in Annapolis for two separate weeks in the Maryland Senate. I served the second and ninth weeks of the

Maryland General Assembly's 2008 Session, which ran from January 14 through 18, and from March 3 through 7.

The duties of a student page can vary according to the page's assignment. According to the Department of Legislative Services, "Duties include keeping the members' bill books up to date; distributing materials on the floor to members; running errands; answering the phone and assisting visitors; and delivering messages to the members."

The duties I performed while in Annapolis included reporting to the Senate Chamber an hour early to make coffee and pass out the daily agenda for the Senators. During session, I ran errands and messages for the Senators which included venturing to their offices across the street to retrieve important documents.

I was also assigned, along with another page, to assist Senator Jim Rosapepe of District 21. Sadly, over the Christmas break, Senator Rosapepe had been hit by a car in Belgium and was in a wheelchair. My job was to pick up his tote bags and deliver them to his office or to the Senate Chamber. In addition, I met him when his van pulled up outside of the State House and I assisted him in getting to the Senate Chamber. I also waited for him after session so I could take him to his office.

I spent much of my time speaking with Senator Stoltzfus, of our District 38, whom I met for the first time as a result of my student page experience. I also spoke to Delegate Mathias who I have known and who has been a friend for some time. Both Senator Stoltzfus and Delegate Mathias helped me understand how our legislative body works at the state level.

As a student page, I was able to attend the committee meetings where legislative hearings and solid debates occur. After committee meetings, student pages were released for the day to explore the city and to get to know each other. This program and experience was perfect for me because I have a high passion for government and politics. By the way, you will see my name on the ballot one day!

For more information on the Student Page Program, you may visit <http://dls.state.md.us/> and click on "Students," followed by the "Student Page Program." You may also contact Dr. Joshua Fradel, Coordinator of Instruction and the Page Program, at 410-632-5043.