



Richard Montgomery High School Rocket Corps puts Rockville, Maryland, kids on the map.

Q&A with The Hoenny Center and Julie Good, founder and coordinator,
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High school students in Julie Good's **Rocket Corps** don't have it easy. To get in, they need a 3.0 average, a good attendance record, and they need to have achieved goals and objectives in entry-level liberal arts courses (English, mathematics, science, and social studies). Once approved, they learn about educational issues and pedagogical strategies, assist high school teachers through peer teaching and mentoring, keep journals, and write reflective response papers. Some even take college-credit courses in education. Here are some questions we asked the program's founder and Coordinator, Julie Good:

Is the Rocket Corps a credit course? Rocket Corps is a semester class. At the end of each semester, students must re-enroll and reapply. They may take it up to four semesters, two junior year and two senior year. They receive 1/2 credit and a grade each time they enroll. The program is seven years old and has been very successful in both recruiting future teachers and assisting underachieving students. Peers are very powerful as teachers for their fellow students. It is a concept long overlooked, whose time has come, in order to help those kids who need that personal, peer-to-peer, involvement.

What is the school schedule like? Our semesters are approximately 18 weeks, give or take. We have a seven period day and all students eat lunch at the same time, which is how I can conduct my instruction at

lunch. Lunch also allows time for interns to tutor kids, which builds relationships with their students.

How many students do you usually have in the course? Over the course of last year I had 110 students, up from sixteen when I started the program. Many of them take it for more than one period of the day which accounts for the larger number of classes covered than students enrolled. They must be a Junior or Senior with a GPA of 3.0 (with a few exceptions on a case-by-case basis). That limits my pool of available students but I have more than enough applications! Over the past couple of years, students have also interned at our local middle school and elementary school. One is still working at the elementary school for one-half day this year.

Do students get released from other classes to do internships, or is this a for-credit class? This is a for-credit class. The students work in a class, everyday, during the class period they are assigned. They receive one-half credit per semester, and if they take it more than one period, they receive 1/2 credit each period they take it just like any other academic class. They also receive community service credit, which is required for graduation in the state of Maryland. When a student goes off campus to intern, his or her schedule is specially designed by our guidance department to make it possible. Last year, six students took the first two college level Education classes at the local community college (four of them were Juniors) and did their field experience here at the high school. They received four college credits that are transferable. That option will be available again this year.

What do repeaters do when others are learning the week 1-10 topics? "First timers" meet once a week during lunch and have weekly homework and a project on the NCLB Act. They keep a logbook and attend three guest speaker presentations per semester. "Second timers" meet every other week and also have homework and a project. "Third

timers" meet periodically; they have written homework and a project. "Fourth timers" rarely meet and have a project. All students attend the guest speaker presentations unless it would be a repeat for them. I consider the first timers training as the most significant. All students have my phone numbers, e-mail address, IM screen name, and Facebook information. I am ALWAYS available to them, which might explain why I was selected as the "most inspirational" teacher at the school for the yearbook. Also, I am only a halftime employee and thus, some things must be cut back due to my time limitations.

You must have a busy schedule, yourself. It is true that I rarely am bored! I also sponsor the Future Educators Club, which recognizes teachers and holds a "teach-in" where I arrange visits at the local feeder schools so the kids can experience a range of grade level observations. I am currently involved in trying to establish partnerships with our local universities and try to keep up with written materials in the field of education. I e-mail most relevant and current articles from local newspapers and education journals and maintain a lending library of education books and DVDs in my office. Lastly, I spend quite a bit of time each year writing college recommendations for seniors.

Your program is widely recognized. Tell us a bit about that. The program received a School of Distinction Award from the National Society of High School Scholars and I have received their Outstanding Achievement and Excellence in Education award several times, including this year (2006-7). I was featured in their on-line newsletter, and the program was written up by them last year in May 2006. The \$500 they awarded me has been used to establish a scholarship fund for low-income students who want to go into education. . The program was also featured in the December 2005 FEA Communiqué, from Phi Delta Kappa International's Future Educators Association. Jay Mathews' weekly column

in the *Washington Post* (March 15, 2007) featured an exchange between me and a reader about how peers help underachieving students, and we were featured in a big spread in the *Rockville Gazette*. We also got a nice mention in Marc Fisher's column in the *Washington Post* on November 25, 2005. I have also taught workshops for the University of Maryland System's "E=MC" grant, the Maryland State Teachers Association and at the Blue Ribbon Schools' convention in Charleston last year. The Rocket Corps program receives the support of the staff and the Administration and is an important part of the culture of our school society.