

My name is Riley Day, and I am a senior at Leonardtown High School. I am a Directed Study student in the Teacher Academy of Maryland, and I am dual-enrolled at the College of Southern Maryland through the Early College AAT program. I am writing this letter to share my experiences in these programs and explain how they have impacted my personal, professional, and academic dedication to becoming an educator in the state of Maryland.

As a Directed Study student through TAM, I have been given access to early experience in education courses and internships. Through coursework, classroom observations, conferences, and teaching placements, I have gained insight into what it truly means to teach students. I have been able to see the rewards of supporting students, but also the responsibility, preparation, and dedication the profession requires. TAM has given me the opportunity to spend 700+ hours interning in elementary school classrooms during the past two years. These experiences continue to affirm my desire to pursue a career in education and serve my community as a future teacher.

As I entered my third year of TAM, the Early College program at the College of Southern Maryland was piloted. This Early College pathway has given me the opportunity to begin my associate's degree as a senior in high school. Currently, I take four classes per semester, followed by an internship five days a week at Benjamin Banneker Elementary School in a third-grade classroom. Taking college-level courses while still in high school challenges me academically and teaches me invaluable skills that I will take with me into my future career as an educator. I have learned the importance of time management, self-advocacy, and critical thinking. Earning college credit early has also reduced the financial burden of higher education for my family and made college feel both accessible and achievable.

The combination of the Teacher Academy of Maryland and Early College has provided me with a clear, structured pathway as I intend to transfer to the University of Maryland or Towson University next year to pursue a degree in Elementary Education. This program has not only prepared me for college, but it has also prepared me as a future educator who is already invested in Maryland's schools and communities. I have been given the wonderful opportunity to take college courses at a discounted price, some of which are paid for by SMCPS, while maintaining access to school-sponsored clubs, competitions, and events. Although I am a student at CSM, I am able to participate in SkillsUSA regional and state competitions for Early Childhood Education alongside other high school students. I am able to make connections within my community, especially within my internship placement schools, while maintaining relationships with peers and teachers at Leonardtown High School.

I respectfully urge you to continue supporting and investing in programs like the Teacher Academy of Maryland and other partnerships with institutions such as the College of Southern Maryland. My experience with these programs in action is proof that these initiatives work. These initiatives support students early, enabling Maryland schools to grow and support future educators who understand the needs and values of our local classrooms. Initiatives like the Early College program reduce barriers to higher education, which could lead to a stronger future for Maryland school systems and educators.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my experiences and for your continued commitment to Maryland's students and educators.

Sincerely,

*Riley Day*