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### **NCHS is going high ech**

**By Penny Riordan Staff Writer**

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North County is the first high school in Maryland to be a site for a national program that matches disabled students with employers in the fields of technology and science.

Starting this school year, roughly 30 NCHS sophomores will get a chance to visit and intern at offices of employers in math, technology and science fields.

The program, called High School / High Tech, will help students with disabilities gain valuable work experience through mentoring and career training, school officials said.

Although students in high school often get a chance to work in some capacity before they graduate, whether it is flipping burgers or shadowing a lawyer, teens with disabilities often have fewer options available.

"These kids have been overlooked their entire lives," said Michele Folderauer, Anne Arundel County Public Schools' High School / High Tech program manager.

"Most either fail out or drop out. This program is seeking to give them a map they are going to run on for the rest of their lives."

For students with disabilities in Maryland, only 50 percent graduate, according to Mrs. Folderauer. Out of those who graduate, only 50 percent find regular employment.

"This program will help students say, 'I'm not going to work at McDonald's, I'm going to work at Northrop Grumman,'" she said.

High School / High Tech is a national program funded in part by the U.S. Department of Labor. Through partnerships among local disabilities groups, state and local education agencies and local businesses, students are

matched with high-tech employers to learn what careers are available to them after high school.

North County is the fifth site in the state, and the first to be run out of a high school. Elsewhere, students in counties like Montgomery and Prince George's work in places such as the University of Maryland College Park or the National Institutes of Health.

Out of about 2,200 students in the high school, 420 are considered learning disabled, Mrs. Folderauer said.

Program administrators said they are still working on securing commitments from business partners in the region, but business leaders at a kickoff dinner held last week at the high school expressed their support of the program.

"There are a lot of employers who are interested in high school kids in general," said Andy Moser, president and CEO of the Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corporation. The group will be working closely with county schools to match students with employers.

Any opportunity businesses get to work with teens who have been taught the basic skills needed to hold down a job is a win-win situation, he said. Because the program provides students with step-by-step guidance from career counseling to basic employment skills, the students will be ready for the demanding jobs when they start their internships, Mr. Moser said.

"With this program, we are tapping into undiscovered human capital," he said.

By the spring, students are expected to be matched with employers, Mrs. Folderauer said.

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