



Middle school teacher Michael Williams helps Marcos prepare for the [Terp Young Scholars](#) summer enrichment program.

Middle school teacher encourages student to strive for success

Marcos first caught the attention of his Georgetown Middle School teacher Michael Williams as a sixth grader.

“He was continuously in trouble. He was a student with a lot of problems,” said Williams, who began mentoring him through Connecting Generations when he was a seventh grader. “I saw him grow up in the next year.”

Marcos’ teachers knew he had potential but saw he wasn’t applying himself. He earned Cs and Bs and had disciplinary problems. A seventh grade teacher called Williams one day asking for help, saying Marcos didn’t want to do his work.

Williams entered the classroom and asked Marcos to come out and talk to him. Marcos resisted, so Williams scribbled a note in his composition book: “Don’t give up on yourself. Keep going. I believe in you.”

From that day on, his behavior changed, Williams said.

That spring Marcos applied for Williams’ Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, which aims to close the achievement gap by helping prepare students, especially those traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education, for college. He was the only one of the three students interviewed who was selected for the program.

Williams kept in touch with him throughout the summer, and when Marcos entered his classroom as an eighth grader, he saw a difference.

“I told him he has so much to prove to other people. People are expecting him to fail,” Williams said.

Marcos earned straight As his first marking period.

Williams began asking him about his high school plans, telling him, “Given your history, a lot is not going to be given to you. You are going to have to work for it.”

Marcos was willing to do just that.

He got approval to transfer to an honors math class, skipping pre-Algebra to go straight into Algebra. He earned a low B his second marking period. Using Khan Academy, he intensified his studying.

He applied for a national AVID summer institute and was selected as a semifinalist through an essay contest.

“He started to believe in himself,” Williams said. “He started to feel the difference of you can be the bad kid who has the great potential or you can be the great kid who continues to soar.”

When he ultimately didn’t get accepted into the summer institute, he didn’t give up. Williams had recommended the [Terp Young Scholars](#) summer enrichment program at the University of Maryland to all 110 of his students, promising if they got accepted he would help them find a way to pay for it. Marcos was the only student who took up his suggestion to apply.

“It’s rigorous and selective – for him to get in, that’s a big deal for him,” Williams said.

They celebrated his success but soon realized the hurdle ahead: They had missed the scholarship application deadline.

For Marcos, a first-generation American and the son of a mechanic and stay-at-home mom with four siblings, funding the \$4,000 tuition would be a challenge.

Williams told him, “I had so much faith that because of your story and who you are, we are going to get you that money if you really want to go.”

Twelve days before the tuition deadline, Williams set up a Go Fund Me account to ask for help.

Marcos wrote his request to potential donors:

“I am very determined to be a successful engineer in the future after attending college. I have many goals to pursue in life, but my most important is to make my parents proud. With that being said, I have not always had this motivation in my life. When I was growing up I did not have any intention to learn from my teachers. However, as I started to get older I would get into trouble with my so-called friends. I was usually getting searched by the school’s resource officer at least two times a month for illegal

substances and negative behavior. Then I started noticing that I was really hurting my parents and knew immediately that I had to stop after a conversation with my mom. So, now here I am in the 8th grade and a soon-to-be freshman in high school. And, due to the major changes I have made in the last year, I am currently a straight A student and enrolled in a college prep strategy class known as AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination). AVID has challenged me to take harder classes, such as a math honors course, and encouraged me to apply to the summer academic program at The University of Maryland- College Park. With my hard work and determination, I was accepted! I am extremely excited for the opportunity to attend The University of Maryland- College Park academic program and start my college career by taking my first course titled: Introduction to Engineering Design from July 9th- 28th. This course introduces me to engineering and the engineering design process. While working in teams to design, build, test, and analyze a number of challenging robotics-oriented projects, I'll learn fundamental engineering analysis methods and how to apply them using software packages. This course (is) important to my future since I desire to create and lead my own mechanic shop business in the next 10 years. Thus, this brings me to my BIG ask. I am asking for your help in contributing to my participation and future goals in life. I need to raise \$4000.00 by June 20th in order to participate in the program (includes housing, food, course cost, and any special programming). If enough funds and contributions are raised it would be an opportunity of a lifetime. Your contribution would be a generous gift and blessing to me and my family. As a potential first generation college student, with my eyes set on making it to Columbia University any contribution is welcomed and will be a HUGE help for me in accomplishing my goals. Can I count on you?

Again, any contribution is welcomed and I thank you wholeheartedly for allowing me to express my story and my 'pursuit of happiness' towards a better future."

"Once people heard about it, they wanted to help," Williams said.

Within a day, the account had raised \$800. Within two days, it had raised \$2,000. Three days before the deadline, someone donated \$500 to take them over the goal.

"He was overfilled with joy in reaching \$2,000 within a couple of days. He saw the comments and the people who were donating. They don't even know him and they are supporting him," Williams said.

Marcos embarked for the three-week program July 9. It was the longest he had been away from home.

"Every day was a new experience," Marcos said. "The work that we received was very intense. I also loved that the students attending came from all over the place. This really helped me understand what the real world and diversity look like and that no one will have all the same opinions as you or see things just like you."

For Marcos, the experience of living life as a college student was invaluable.

"I did not expect for the experience to expose me to as much of college life as it did," Marcos said. "One thing that I will not forget is a sign in the elevator that stated, 'Don't forget to sleep.' At first, my friends and I just laughed at it until a week went by and – boom – getting about 5 hours of sleep every night was like a brick hitting me right in my face."

This fall, Marcos is a freshman at Sussex Academy charter school. Williams has moved, too, teaching mathematics at EastSide Charter School in Wilmington and working on his principal certification through [Lead for Delaware](#), an alternative route to certification program.

The two will keep in touch.

"I'm super proud of him, and I tell him that whenever I can," Williams said.