



Contact: Kelley Hope
Tel: 804-616-8157 (mobile) 804-225-2452 (office)
Email: khope@virginia529.com

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Virginia Community College System Joins with Virginia529 in SOAR Virginia Early Commitment Scholarship Program

The Virginia529 College Savings Plan (Virginia529) launched **SOAR Virginia**, an early commitment scholarship program, in Fall 2010 to help eligible high school students reach their postsecondary education goals. Virginia529 is expanding the program across the Commonwealth in a new partnership with High School Career Coaches from Virginia's Community Colleges (VCCS).

Through SOAR Virginia, Virginia529 and college access providers offer a range of assistance including advising on academic preparation and financial literacy, assistance in the admissions process and with financial aid applications, and SOAR Virginia scholarship support of up to \$2,000, accumulated during high school, to apply toward postsecondary education expenses. In exchange, participating students pledge to meet program requirements including maintaining a 2.5 grade point average, working with a college access provider, performing community service and complying with their school's Code of Student Conduct. The program assists low and moderate income families meet their higher education goals and provides a broader message about the importance of postsecondary education and the need to plan, prepare and save for it.

VCCS High School Career Coaches are community college employees based in high schools around the Commonwealth to help students define their career aspirations. They guide students to identify community college and other postsecondary programs, including apprenticeships and workforce training, that can help them achieve their educational and financial goals.

"With the addition of the VCCS, SOAR Virginia now will serve almost 1,200 students throughout the Commonwealth as they progress through high school," said Mary G. Morris, Chief Executive Officer of Virginia529. "The combination of advising and financial support, over a number of years, is designed to encourage not only on-time high school completion, but also advancement to postsecondary education by motivated and prepared students."

The reach of SOAR Virginia now extends to Harrisonburg City, Accomack County, Northampton County, Lee County, Franklin City, Suffolk City and Roanoke City, enabling SOAR Virginia to serve more of the seventeen districts that the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia has classified as high need.

“Nearly every parent I talk to worries about the costs their children will face to attend college,” said Glenn DuBois, Chancellor of the Virginia Community College System. “One out of every five American households is living with college loan debt and when you add it all together it comes out to more than \$1 trillion. SOAR Virginia has the potential to be a difference-maker for many of the students and families our Career Coaches work with every day. Earning a postsecondary credential is essential to succeeding in the 21st century. We are delighted to work together with Virginia529 to help more people realize their college dreams.”

About the Virginia529 College Savings Plan:

Virginia529 is a 529 college savings plan that offers flexible, affordable, tax-advantaged savings programs for qualified higher education expenses through its four programs – Virginia529 prePAIDSM (prePAIDSM), Virginia529 inVESTSM (inVESTSM), CollegeAmerica[®] and CollegeWealth[®]. With over 2.2 million accounts and \$39 billion in assets under management as of December 31, 2012, Virginia529 is the largest 529 plan in the country. For more information on Virginia529’s college savings options, visit Virginia529.com.

About Virginia’s Community Colleges:

Created more than 40 years ago, the VCCS is comprised of 23 community colleges located on 40 campuses across the Commonwealth. Together, Virginia’s Community Colleges serve more than 400,000 students a year. For more information please visit myfuture.vccs.edu.

