



Infinite Opportunities

August 18, 2016

**GRASP, A Virginia College Access Organization, to implement early commitment program in Northern Neck and Essex County**

GLEN ALLEN, Va. Starting this fall, high school students at Colonial Beach, Essex, Lancaster, Northumberland, Rappahannock, and Washington & Lee high schools who meet certain eligibility criteria will be able to enroll in an early commitment program beginning in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The program, SOAR Virginia®, is an early commitment scholarship program created and funded by the Virginia529 College Savings Plan<sup>SM</sup> and offered in partnership with GRASP (Great Aspirations Scholarship Program), a college access organization, whose advisors began working with area high school seniors regarding the financial aid process for postsecondary education in 2014.

To enroll in this program, students must be U.S. citizens or legal residents, live in Virginia, be eligible for the National School Lunch Program, and have a minimum 2.5 GPA. SOAR Virginia scholars will receive regular advising and assistance from their school's GRASP advisor and the chance to receive up to \$2,000 in scholarships if they continue to meet the requirements throughout high school. To receive scholarship funds for participation in the program each year, scholars must maintain a minimum 2.5 GPA, meet regularly with the GRASP advisor, and meet strict requirements for conduct, school attendance, and community service. As seniors, they must file the FAFSA and apply to at least one higher education institution. Thirty area 10<sup>th</sup> grade students per year can be enrolled in the program, and each cohort scholarship total could be \$60,000.

On average, over 90% of SOAR Virginia scholars graduate on time, and 86% pursue higher education. Students in the program receive guidance on types of schools and education options that are available after high school, how to prepare for higher education, as well as how to look for scholarships to fund higher education. Interested students can contact their school counselor for application information. Applications are due by October 31.

GRASP appreciates the area General Assembly members, specifically Delegate Keith Hodges, Senator Ryan McDougle, Delegate Margaret Ransone, and Senator Richard Stuart, for their support which brings both GRASP and SOAR Virginia® to the area.

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