



SOAR Virginia® Frequently Asked Questions

For School System Personnel



What is the SOAR Virginia program?

SOAR Virginia is an early commitment scholarship program created to inspire and assist high school students to reach their post-secondary education goals. It is sponsored by the Virginia529 College Savings PlanSM (Virginia529SM), an independent agency of the Commonwealth of Virginia, and brought to you by participating college access providers.

Who can join the program?

To enroll, a student must complete a SOAR Virginia enrollment form and 1) be a U.S. citizen or legal U.S. resident, 2) a Virginia resident, 3) in grades 10-12¹ in a participating Virginia high school, 4) agree to comply with the SOAR Virginia pledge, including the minimum cumulative GPA at the time of enrollment of 2.5, and 5) qualify to participate in the National School Lunch Program. For more on the current eligibility guidelines, please visit <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/notices/iegs/IEGs.htm>. SOAR Virginia will rely on school personnel to identify students who currently qualify for the National School Lunch Program.

What is the SOAR Virginia pledge?

Students pledge to...

- Maintain a minimum cumulative **GPA** of 2.5 or comparable academic achievement as determined by SOAR Virginia
- Meet with his/her early commitment **advisor** regularly
- Complete **financial literacy** training during high school
- **Behave** in a manner consistent with his/her school's Code of Student Conduct
- **Attend** school regularly without unexcused absences
- Participate in **community service** activities
- Complete a **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** during his/her senior year and
- **Apply to an eligible educational institution**, including a 2- or 4-year college or university or technical school

How does SOAR Virginia benefit our students and our school(s)?

SOAR Virginia provides financial scholarships and college access services to students who may be challenged in ways beyond their control to pursue post-secondary education. The program is designed to help select students realize the benefits of post-secondary education and assist them in reaching their education goals. The program provides a unique combination of scholarship funding and college access services, delivered in partnership with the school's personnel.

¹ Only Highland High School students may begin in the 9th grade.

In each school, the program is offered to approximately fifteen students in their 10th, 11th and 12th grade years. During this time, students can accumulate up to \$2,000 in scholarship support to apply toward post-secondary education expenses. The program not only impacts the fifteen students selected for the program, but it also raises awareness of opportunities for higher education to other students who may have never thought of it before, while also increasing community service participation.

Is there a cost to the school?

No, there is no cost for a school to participate, other than the time involved by the school administration, counseling department and other staff.

How are schools selected?

The college access providers recommend the schools based on their past experiences and understanding of where the SOAR Virginia program could provide the most benefit.

What is required of the school to participate?

The college access provider will work with school personnel to administer the program. School personnel will assist in selecting students for the program, and encouraging them to fulfill the pledge requirements.

What is required for an early commitment advisor to certify that a SOAR Virginia scholar has substantially fulfilled the requirements of the pledge?

Virginia529 relies on the college access provider to certify which students have met the pledge requirements to receive an annual award. To do so, early commitment advisors meet with the students regularly to get updates on grades, community service and other pledge components. The advisors and the college access provider also work with school personnel to verify attendance and GPAs.

Other related questions:

- *Is a 2.5 cumulative GPA required in all cases? Yes, with rare exceptions evaluated and approved by Virginia529.*
- *How often does a SOAR Virginia scholar meet with his/her early commitment advisor to be deemed "regularly?"* Virginia529 encourages SOAR Virginia scholars to meet with their advisors at least three or four times during the school year, whether one on one or in a group setting. Ultimately, the advisor determines if the SOAR Virginia scholar has met this requirement.
- *What constitutes an "unexcused absence?"* SOAR Virginia relies on your school to define which absences are unexcused.
- *What is meant by community service?* Community service can be a variety of activities that the SOAR Virginia scholar already participates in or engages in during his/her time in the program. Scholars can work independently or in groups to fulfill the requirement. The early commitment

advisor can make suggestions on activities to pursue and will determine if the scholar has met the requirement. Some popular community service activities include:

- A food or clothing drive
- Visiting homebound relatives on a regular basis
- Reading with younger students
- A bake sale
- Collecting trash after a school event
- Making valentines for homebound neighbors & friends or those in a local hospital
- Organize and conduct a safety campaign prior to prom season
- Paint a mural over graffiti

Will the students receive cash?

No, a deposit will be made into a Virginia529 college savings account for the benefit of the student to apply to post-secondary education expenses. Virginia529 has established a Virginia529 inVESTSM (inVESTSM) account for the monies awarded to SOAR Virginia scholars, and these monies are invested in the inVEST Piedmont Portfolio. Virginia529 is the owner of the account and the SOAR Virginia scholar is the beneficiary. Upon matriculation to higher education, the scholar can request funds be distributed on his/her behalf to the higher education institution he/she attends. Funds may only be used for higher education tuition and fees.

In what circumstances will a SOAR Virginia scholar be expelled from the SOAR Virginia program?

If the scholar is expelled on a temporary basis from school, the early commitment advisor should try to learn the reason(s) for the expulsion, discuss them with the college access provider leader and Virginia529. Depending on the severity of the offense, Virginia529 and the college access provider leader will decide, in their sole discretion, whether the SOAR Virginia scholar may be able to continue with the program, assuming he/she is reinstated in school.

If a SOAR Virginia scholar is expelled permanently from school, he/she is automatically expelled from the SOAR Virginia program. If the scholar is expelled from the program, he/she will also forfeit any awards accumulated to that point.

What happens if a SOAR Virginia scholar moves?

If a student moves from one participating SOAR Virginia school to another participating SOAR Virginia school, the student remains in the program and nothing is changed.

If a student moves to another school which is not able to be supported by an early commitment advisor, he/she will retain the benefit of any award(s) received up to that point but will not be eligible to receive a participation award for future years.

If a student moves from a participating SOAR Virginia school to a school out of state, he/she will retain the benefit of any award(s) received up to that point, but will not be eligible to receive a participation award for future years.