At a Glance:
A Study of College Access Services and Resources in Virginia

A Project of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia Funded by the College Access Challenge Grant Program

Why is College Important?

Research has long demonstrated the significant positive benefits that a college education provides for both public and private stakeholders:

- College graduates earn an average of 62% more in annual wages, and over a lifetime, earn nearly a million dollars more than those with a high school education only.
- Individuals with a college degree report better health, volunteer more frequently, vote in greater numbers, and are more engaged in their children's education.
- College graduates are more aware of and involved in political and philanthropic issues.

Such quality-of-life improvements affect not only those individuals who earn a postsecondary degree, but also the Commonwealth of Virginia, which benefits from graduates' greater economic contributions, better health, and stronger political and philanthropic involvement. Therefore the Common-wealth stands to gain many advantages if young Virginia students are:

- Inspired to attend college
- Educationally prepared to enter college
- Assisted and supported in navigating an often complex college-going process that includes applying for, enrolling in, and paying for education after high school
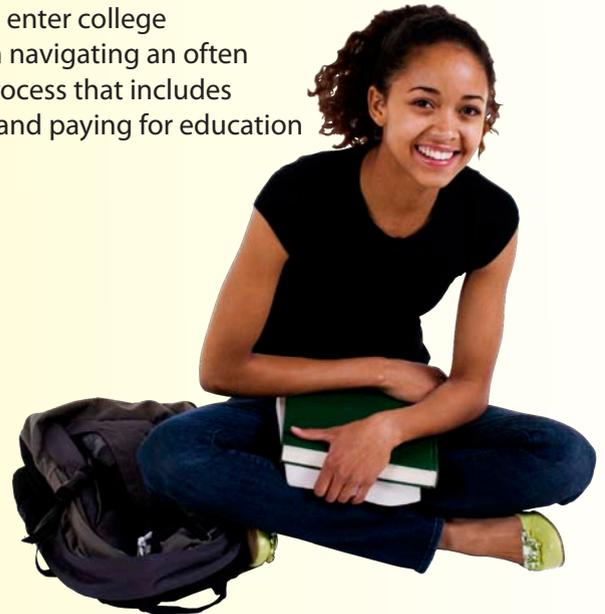
A Study of College Access Providers

In August 2008, the Commonwealth of Virginia was awarded a $1.1 million grant through the U.S. Department of Education's College Access Challenge Grant Program (CACGP), which is administered by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). In accordance with the grant's objective, SCHEV plans to utilize the CACGP funds to help increase access to postsecondary education with emphasis on assisting students from low-income families.

This study of access providers and services is one of the initiatives funded by Virginia's CACGP grant. This multi-faceted research project was designed to identify the patchwork of college access providers across the Commonwealth. The results of the study are published as a full report entitled, "A Statewide Examination of College Access Services and Resources in Virginia" that is available on the SCHEV website at www.schev.edu.

A study identifies a diverse number of services and programs that are offered by college access providers across Virginia and compares these resources to the access and academic achievement needs of the Commonwealth.

What is an Access Provider?

The study defines an access provider as any organization through which an individual gains the knowledge, skills, or support necessary for college aspiration, qualification, application, and enrollment. Researchers further identify at least five sub-categories of provider types:

1. Community-based providers that are typically independent organizations dedicated to meeting local or regional access needs.
2. State or higher education-directed providers, which are similar to community-based providers, but centrally directed and funded.
3. School-based providers, including school counselors, teachers, and other resource persons based in a secondary school.
4. Micro-providers, which include a wide range of clubs, religious organizations, civic organizations, and other small-scale groups for whom access work is not a primary organizational purpose.
5. Relationship-based providers, including peers, parents, family, and friends who encourage or in some way contribute to college-going behaviors.
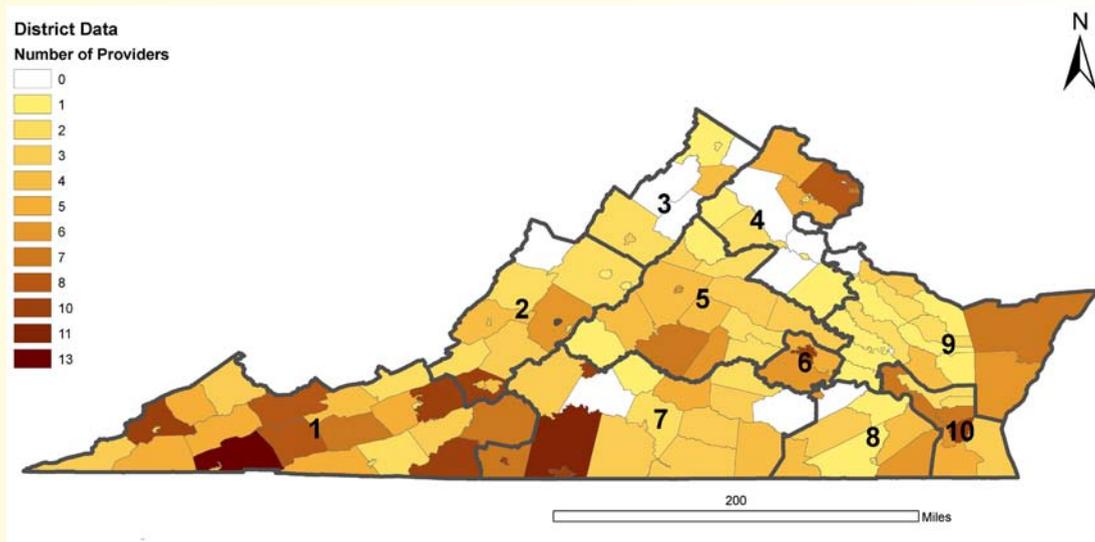
Distribution of Access Providers in Virginia

The researchers' investigation identified nearly 450 access providers of various types across Virginia. Distribution results showed an average of 3.7 access providers per school district, with a per-district high of 13 in one district (Washington County) and a low of zero providers in 15 districts:

Campbell County	Page County
Clarke County	Prince George County
Colonial Heights City	Shenandoah County
Dinwiddie County	Spotsylvania County
Falls Church City	Stafford County
Fauquier County	Town of Colonial Beach
Highland County	Town of West Point
King George County	

Virginia School Districts Number of Access Providers

Map Created by Stuart Hampilton
Maps are based on 2008 data and were compiled on behalf of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia

Comparing State Needs and Access Provider Distribution

Through a compilation of high school student achievement data, student demographic data, and provider distribution data, the study highlights two categories of school districts struggling to prepare at-risk populations for college: those deemed to be *high need* [1] districts and those deemed to be *recognized need* [2] districts.

Of 130 consolidated school districts, 17 met the criteria for *high need* districts and 18 met the criteria for *recognized need* districts.

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[1] A high need district is defined as a district that is significantly underperforming in graduation rate and dropout rate and is above the state average in at least one of the following two categories: percentage of students qualifying for the Free and Reduced School Lunch (FRSL) program or percentage of student from low-income families. Significantly underperforming is defined as eight percentage points below the 2008 Virginia average graduation rate of 82%, and five percentage points above the state average dropout rate of 9.3%.

[2] A recognized need district is one in which multiple indicators of low performance and high risk population are present in the same area. The criteria for this category are intentionally vague, since many combinations of performance and demographic indicators contribute to an environment of significant need.

High Need School Districts	Provider Count
Accomack County	7
Brunswick County	4
Buckingham County	7
Covington City	3
Franklin City	4
Harrisonburg City	3
Hopewell City	2
King and Queen County	3
Lee County	3
Lunenburg County	3
Northampton County	6
Petersburg City	6
Portsmouth City	6
Richmond City	10
Roanoke City	4
Suffolk City	6
Sussex County	3

Recognized Need School Districts	Provider Count
Alexandria City	7
Bristol City	5
Charlottesville City	6
Colonial Heights City	0
Cumberland County	6
Danville City	10
Dinwiddie County	0
Fredericksburg City	1
Giles County	2
Henry County	7
Lynchburg City	10
Newport News City	7
Norfolk City	10
Nottoway County	3
Pittsylvania County	11
Southampton County	1
Tazewell County	8
Winchester City	1

***Virginia Tech Upward Bound**
staff worked with a student from
a very large family in western
Virginia. Though the student
mentioned that none of her
siblings had gone to college, she
went on nearly every campus
visit that Upward Bound orga-
nized. With the support and
guidance of the Virginia Tech
Upward Bound staff, the student
completed her bachelor's degree
and came back in 2008 to work in
a residence hall and teach classes
for the Upward Bound program.
The student is currently enrolled
in a Ph.D. program at Indiana
University.*

Study Recommendations

The study offers six recommendations to improve access programs and services in the Commonwealth. The recommendations are built on two broad themes: accurate information and timely responsiveness in providing services, and improved data and coordination at the state level. Specifically, the authors recommend that:

1. Access providers who do not currently target first-generation students and their families develop services and activities to identify and address the unique challenges and issues of this population.
2. Access providers offer information sessions, workshops, and programs on financial literacy and debt management to address college affordability issues.
3. Stakeholders involved in access issues on all levels improve cooperative efforts, from communication to collaboration.
4. State agencies and access providers prioritize evaluation, with specific attention to improved statewide and student-specific longitudinal data collection initiatives that rely on and support, rather than impose, access provider self-assessment processes.
5. This research initiative be replicated on a biennial basis for a set number of years to establish longitudinal points of comparison, from which improved targeting of access services to state needs can occur.
6. In conjunction with broader access provider coordination initiatives, specific efforts are made to link providers throughout the Commonwealth who are working with similar underserved populations.

Many of Virginia's access providers have an established track record of excellent, innovative work that can serve as model programming, and organizational leaders can serve as mentors for individuals seeking to create and expand access initiatives. However, if Virginia is to address the gaps in college access programs and efforts, it is incumbent upon all stakeholders to work together toward a more comprehensive, statewide solution to ensure that Virginia's students can pursue and successfully complete post-high school education.

Access provider organizations in Virginia have done an excellent job shaping their services to meet the needs of local constituents. However, findings in "A Statewide Examination of College Access Services and Resources in Virginia" indicate there is a need for increased provider activity in the following areas:

❖ Programs for younger students
❖ Computer skills training for students
❖ Financial literacy training for students and their parents/guardians
❖ Programs for parents explaining the value of education after high school
❖ Direct support for students during their transition to college

*Access providers at the **Virginia Tidewater Consortium for Higher Education's Educational Opportunity Center** found out that a high school student was living in a car with her child. The student revealed that her parents were not supportive of her having a child and she had been kicked out of their house. Tidewater Consortium counselors helped her get the resources she needed to not only graduate from high school, but to eventually attend a Virginia community college. She went on to earn both a bachelor's and a master's degree, and she is now teaching college.*

College Guide Program personnel worked with a local high school football player who was injured during his junior year. Unable to play, the student felt lost, with no real sense of what he would do with his life. A guide noticed and spent one-on-one time with the student, encouraging him to explore his options. With the guide's assistance and support, the student ended up with a full scholarship to a public institution in Virginia. More than a year later, the student's mother still gives the College Guide staff updates on her son's progress, telling them how appreciative she is of their encouragement.

Community outreach staff members at the **New College Institute** partnered with a 4-H program to deliver a 45-minute college awareness program to all fifth graders in a nearby school district. A parent of one of the students participating in the program stopped by to inquire about a summer camp for her seventh grader and ended up scheduling an individual counseling session for herself. During that session, access providers helped the parent identify a potential career path, register for courses at a local community college, and apply for financial aid. For a single family, the community outreach program provided enrichment and motivation for both elementary- and middle-school children, as well as support for the educational aspirations of their parent.

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State Council of
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Visit www.schev.edu/k12/CACGP for the complete study