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Seniors Prepare to Say Good Bye  
Quantum Opportunities after school program comes to an end as Herndon H  
seniors prepare for graduation.

[By Brynn Grimley](#)

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Photos by Brynn  
Grimley/The Conne  
Herndon High Scho  
senior Leigh Scott s  
Thursday night at th  
Quantum Opportuni  
apartment.



Herndon High Scho  
seniors, Talesha Bur  
left, and Leigh Scott  
last Thursday. Both

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At the start of high school all students work toward one common goal — graduation. For some, the road to success is a challenging and disappointing process, making that goal unobtainable. For students in the Quantum Opportunities Program, a weekly after-school assistance program, graduation is four months away from becoming a reality — a significant accomplishment for students who once were academically in the lower two-thirds of their class.

"The fact that 100 percent of these kids want to go to college is huge," said Amy McFarland, program director, Quantum Opportunities. "Two years ago that was not the case."

The program, which started in 2000, was created through a partnership with the S. Eisenhower Foundation and Vecinos Unidos/Neighbors United, Inc. Now Neighbors United, the Herndon group partnered with the foundation to help Herndon High School freshmen struggling with academics.

Funded by a four-year grant from the Eisenhower Foundation — a continuation of presidential commissions devoted to helping youths, minorities and those in need — the program is set up to provide intervention for selected high school students for a four-year period. It helps students avoid negative peer pressure and offers tutoring and mentoring. Roughly 70 percent of the program's efforts are focused on academic skills, with the remainder of the time devoted to human development and community service, McFarland said. The hope is that students will graduate with a better sense of themselves, the community they live in and with a goal to pursue secondary education.

"WHEN I FIRST HEARD about the program I kind of thought it was a little hard to be true," said Herndon High School senior Fabian Perez. "But Amy [McFarland] has made that a reality. She genuinely cares, which is something you don't find often. I don't think I would have gotten through high school without her."

Even with balancing a schedule of school, work and an active social life, Perez is one of the remaining original students selected to participate in the program. Once he graduates, Perez plans to attend Lincoln Tech in Maryland and then take business classes at DeVry University. Currently working part-time for a tire center in Reston, Perez hopes to eventually own an auto-detailing business. "I like cars," he said, "but I don't always want to be the guy fixing them."

When the program began it operated out of an apartment behind the Neighbors Resource Center and took 40 freshman who were struggling academically. Twenty of the students were selected randomly by the Eisenhower Foundation and placed in the after school assistance program. The other 20 were left as the control group and were not brought into the after school program.

During its four years, the program has competed with after school activities, boyfriends/girlfriends and everyday stresses of high school. Due to these outside activities, a number of the original students dropped out of the program. A number

students' grades have significantly improved since joining the Quantum Opportunities Program.

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new students quickly filled the program, either at the suggestion of a high school guidance counselor, or through word of mouth by fellow students, McFarland said. "I have seen an overall attitude change in all of them," said McFarland, who has been teaching for 20 years. "Some of them have gone from being really negative and not doing their homework, to coming in and being happy and doing their homework without me making them."

Factors outside of student participation, including the support of the greater community, U.S. Rep. Frank Wolf (R-10), Neighbors United board members, High School staff and the students' parents, contributed to the program's success, McFarland said.

"To me it's just been a great success," she said. "Because of this program, 100% of the students will now go on to be very productive young adults."

THE PROGRAM IS set up so the students can stop into the apartment, now located next door to Herndon's Safe Haven — also run in conjunction with the Eisenberg Foundation — in the Parkridge Garden Apartments. Open from 2:30 to 7 p.m. five days a week, students can come and go from the apartment, but many choose to stay. "I couldn't focus at home because of the TV, the phone and all of that," said High School senior Leigh Scott. "The best thing about this program has been that I can come here because my mom wouldn't be able to sit down with me and watch me do my homework." Currently taking trigonometry with classmate and fellow Quantico participant Talesha Burke, both students' admit their parents would not have been able to help them understand the difficult subject.

To help, McFarland hired a math tutor through the program to work with the students. In the two years Burke and Scott have attended the program, both have significantly improved their grades, McFarland said.

"These kids could have gotten involved in so many other things after school, but those being the peak hours for juvenile crime," she said. "Instead they came here and they improved their grades."

Along with offering — for the most part — a quiet place to study, the program also offers a safe place for the students to hang out. Burke, Perez and Scott each attribute the relationships they formed with McFarland and each other resemble that of a family. "It hasn't hit me yet that I won't be seeing them every day," said McFarland at the upcoming graduation. "It's sad, but it's also exciting. I just want them to experience many things right now so when we're not here they can do it without us."