

TOPS Report:
Analysis of the TOPS Program from 2003-2014

Louisiana Board of Regents

December, 2014



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Executive Summary

The Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS), Louisiana's merit-based student aid program, was created via Act 1375 during the 1997 Regular Legislative Session. The first college freshman class to receive TOPS awards entered postsecondary education in the fall of 1998.

Act 1202 of the 2001 Regular Legislative Session requires the Louisiana Board of Regents (BoR) to prepare a report to analyze various aspects of the TOPS program. In accordance with Act 1202, this report includes:

- An analysis of the relationship between the high school courses taken and the student's score on the American College Test (ACT)
- The number of high school graduates who are eligible for TOPS and subsequently enroll in college
- Persistence rates of TOPS students
- Retention rates of TOPS awards, including numbers of and reasons for students losing award eligibility
- Graduation data, including rates

Act 587 of the 2014 Regular Legislative Session added several additional levels of analysis to the annual TOPS report, including:

- Demographic information of program award recipients, including but not limited to race, gender, and parents' household income
- High school GPA and ACT or concordant SAT scores of program award recipients grouped by mean, median, and mode
- Average high school GPA and average ACT or concordant SAT scores of those who lost the award and those who were placed on probationary status

The data in this report include current and historical data on TOPS students (students receiving an *Opportunity, Performance, or Honors* award) and non-TOPS students, to allow for comparison.

The findings indicated that:

- 65.1% of the 2014 high school graduating class completed the *TOPS Core*, 2.6 percentage points higher than the 2005 high school graduating class (62.5%).
- Completion of the *TOPS Core* improves students' score on the ACT.
- Since academic year 2003-2004, approximately 90% of students deemed eligible for a TOPS award have accepted the award and subsequently enrolled in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana.

- Between 2003 and 2014, approximately 79% of TOPS recipients were White and 59% were female.
- The mean and median household income of TOPS recipients between 2003 and 2014 ranged from \$70,000 to \$99,000.
- The average ACT score of all TOPS recipients between 2003 and 2014 was 23.2 and the average high school GPA (Core GPA) was 3.3.
- Students who begin college with a TOPS award persist in postsecondary education in subsequent years at a higher rate than non-TOPS students.
- The average ACT score of students who had their award cancelled between 2003 and 2014 was 22.9. The average high school GPA (Core GPA) of students who had their award cancelled was 3.13.
- Students who begin a baccalaureate degree or an associate degree with TOPS graduate within 150% and 200% of time at higher rates than do students without a TOPS award.

Brief History of the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS)

The Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS), Louisiana’s merit-based student aid program, was created via Act 1375 during the 1997 Regular Legislative Session. The first freshman class to receive TOPS awards entered postsecondary education in the fall of 1998. Although the founding legislation does not directly document the goals of the program, four generally accepted purposes of TOPS are:

- To promote academic success by requiring completion of a rigorous high school core curriculum;
- To provide financial incentives as a reward for good academic performance;
- To keep Louisiana’s best and brightest in the state to pursue postsecondary educational opportunities; and
- To promote access to and success in postsecondary education.

Eligibility Criteria, Levels of Award, Renewal Requirements, Distribution of Awards

There are four TOPS awards available to students enrolling at Louisiana’s colleges and universities: *TOPS Tech*, *Opportunity*, *Performance*, and *Honors*. Due to historical underutilization of the *TOPS Tech* award, this report will focus only on those students receiving an *Opportunity*, *Performance* or *Honors* award (some limited statistical analysis on the *TOPS Tech* award can be found in Appendix A).

The criteria for eligibility for the *Opportunity*, *Performance* and *Honors* awards include completion of a defined high school core curriculum, with a minimum grade point average in core courses, and a minimum ACT composite score. Table 1 lists current criteria and awards.

Table 1: TOPS Eligibility Criteria and Award Specifics, 2014

Award	Core	Core GPA	ACT Composite	Award Specifics	Duration
<i>Opportunity</i>	19 Units	2.50	20	Full-Time Tuition	4 years, or 8 semesters
<i>Performance</i>	19 Units	3.00	23	Full-Time Tuition + \$400/year	4 years, or 8 semesters
<i>Honors</i>	19 Units	3.00	27	Full-Time Tuition + \$800/year	4 years, or 8 semesters

Source: LOSFA website- TOPS Informational Brochures and Flyers

Currently, the *TOPS Core Curriculum* consists of 19 units (the specific course requirements of the *TOPS Core Curriculum* are contained in Appendix B).

Administration of TOPS is statutorily assigned to the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA). Initial student eligibility is determined using a combination of: the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or TOPS On-Line Application; the high school transcript from the Department of Education’s Student Transcript System (STS); and official ACT scores.

To maintain eligibility, TOPS recipients must be continuously enrolled as full-time students, earn at least 24 semester hours equivalent of credit each academic year (fall, spring and summer), and maintain academic progress as demonstrated by the cumulative grade point average. Table 2 lists the minimum renewal requirements for each award.

Table 2: Renewal Requirements, 2014

Award	Hrs. Earned/Academic Year	Cum. GPA Each Academic Yr. (2.0 each semester/term)	Award Reinstated (Upon recovery of req.GPA)
		2.30- first year; 2.50- subsequent years	
<i>Opportunity</i>	24		Yes
<i>Performance</i>	24	3.00	Yes, as <i>Opportunity</i>
<i>Honors</i>	24	3.00	Yes, as <i>Opportunity</i>

Source: LOSFA website- TOPS Informational Brochures and Flyers

Continuing eligibility is determined by LOSFA based on data received from the postsecondary institution in which the student is enrolled.

In AY 2013-14, the majority (52.9%) of all TOPS awards went to students attending a UL System campus. The majority (53.4%) of students with TOPS awards had an *Opportunity* award. Of students with the highest level of award, the *Honors* award, 47.2% attended an LSU System campus. Table 3 illustrates the distribution of TOPS awards received for the AY 2013-14.

Table 3: Distribution of Award Types across System, AY 2013-2014

Award	LSU System	Southern System	UL System	LCTC System	Private Institutions	Proprietary Schools	% of all awards
<i>Opportunity</i>	27.0%	2.1%	56.7%	7.4%	6.4%	0.4%	53.4%
<i>Performance</i>	35.0%	0.8%	55.5%	2.5%	6.1%	0.2%	25.9%
<i>Honors</i>	47.2%	0.2%	40.0%	0.4%	12.1%	0.0%	20.7%
% of all awards	33.2%	1.4%	52.9%	4.7%	7.5%	0.3%	

Source: LOSFA- *TOPS Payment Summary by Award Level for Academic Year 2013-2014 as of 07-28-14.*

Act 1202 of 2001 and Act 587 of 2014

Act 1202 of the 2001 Regular Legislative Session charged the Board of Regents (BoR) with developing a uniform TOPS reporting system for the purposes of policy analysis and program evaluation, and to provide accurate data and statistics relative to the program's impact on the State and on students. In addition to the development of a TOPS reporting system, Act 1202 also required the BoR to prepare a report to analyze various aspects of the TOPS program (Act 1202 is included in Appendix C). To satisfy the reporting requirements, Regents' staff developed interfaces between the major systems needed to identify and track TOPS students as they move through the postsecondary education enrollment cycle. According to Act 1202, the "TOPS report" should include:

- An analysis of the relationship between the high school courses taken and the student's score on the American College Test (ACT);
- The number of high school graduates who are eligible for TOPS and subsequently enroll in college;
- Persistence rates of TOPS students;
- Retention rates of TOPS students, including numbers of and reasons for students losing award eligibility; and
- Graduation data, including rates.

Act 587 (Appendix D) of the 2014 Regular Legislative Session added several additional levels of analysis to the annual TOPS report, including:

- Demographic information of program award recipients, including but not limited to race, gender, and parents' household income;
- High school GPA and ACT or concordant SAT scores of program award recipients grouped by mean, median, and mode; and
- Average high school GPA and average ACT or concordant SAT scores of those who lost the award and those who were placed on probationary status.

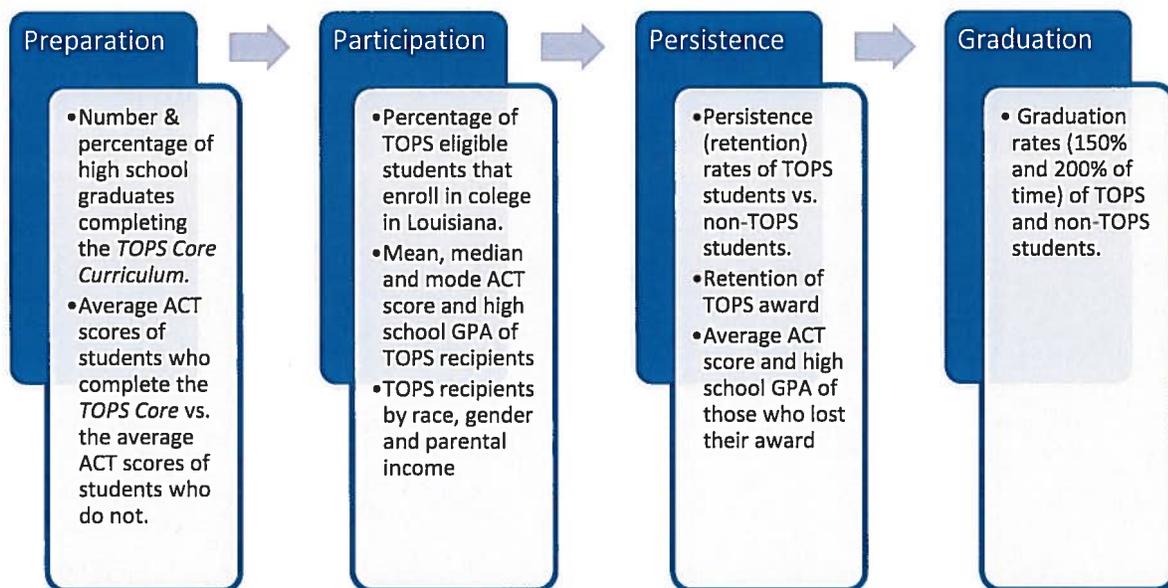
This report includes analyses of the reporting specifications listed above.

TOPS Report: Historical Analysis of the TOPS Program, 2003-2014

Overview of Report

The data in this report include current and historical data on TOPS students (students receiving an *Opportunity, Performance, or Honors* award) and non-TOPS students, to allow for comparison. As illustrated in Figure A, the report is presented in an order that follows the students' progression through the postsecondary enrollment process; from preparation, to participation in postsecondary education, to persistence, to graduation.

Figure A: Graphical Overview of Report

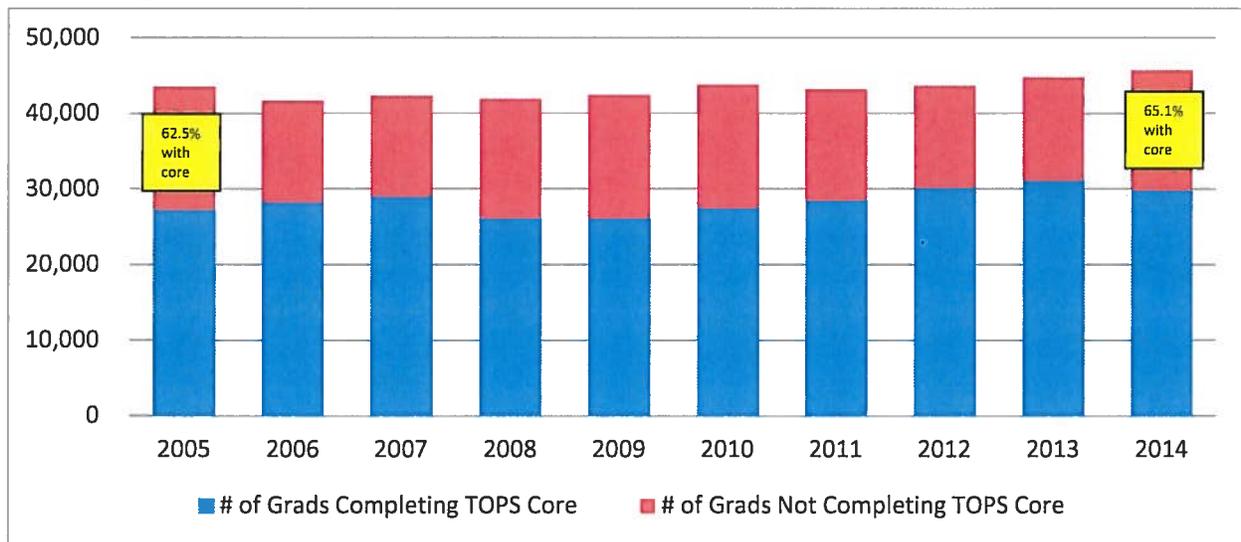


It should be noted that some of the data provided in the “Preparation” section, and all of the data provided in the “Participation,” “Persistence” and “Graduation” sections of this report do not include private postsecondary institutions since those institutions do not currently participate in Regents’ reporting systems.

Preparation

TOPS eligibility requirements encourage students to take high school courses that will prepare them for success after high school, particularly in postsecondary education. The *TOPS Core Curriculum* is the key component for eligibility for a TOPS award. With the 2001 Master Plan, the BoR adopted the *TOPS Core* as the *Regents’ Core*, the most important element of the minimum standards established for admissions to the state’s public four-year colleges and universities. With this change, students had a double incentive to complete the college-preparatory curriculum. In 2008 the *Regents’ Core* became the *Core 4*, an even more demanding college-preparatory curriculum. The *TOPS Core* is now a subset of the *Core 4*.

Figure B: Number & Percentage of High School Graduates Completing/Not Completing TOPS Core, 2005-2014



Source: LOSFA internal data files.

The TOPS Core was changed in 2008. An additional Math or Science requirement was added.

Indications are that completion of the TOPS Core improves students' scores on the ACT. The latest data available from ACT indicate that, "On average, students who complete the Louisiana Board of Regents recommended college preparatory coursework [*closely aligned with the TOPS Core*] in high school earn higher ACT composite scores." According to ACT, of the 2011-2012 high school graduating class, 22,033 students (approximately 49%) took the ACT and attended a public postsecondary education institution in Louisiana the following fall. Of these students, the average ACT composite for those who completed the TOPS Core was 21.4. The average ACT composite for those who did not complete the TOPS Core was 16.7.¹

In addition, data indicate that taking a rigorous high school curriculum decreases the likelihood of having to take developmental coursework in college. Of the 2011-2012 entering freshman cohort, 43% of those that had completed the Louisiana Board of Regents recommended college preparatory coursework [*closely aligned with the TOPS Core*] in high school were required to take developmental coursework upon entry into college. Of those that did not complete the same rigorous curriculum while in high school, 89% were required to take developmental coursework.²

All indications are that the TOPS eligibility requirements induce students to take a more rigorous high school curriculum, which in turn better prepares them for the ACT and for success in postsecondary education.

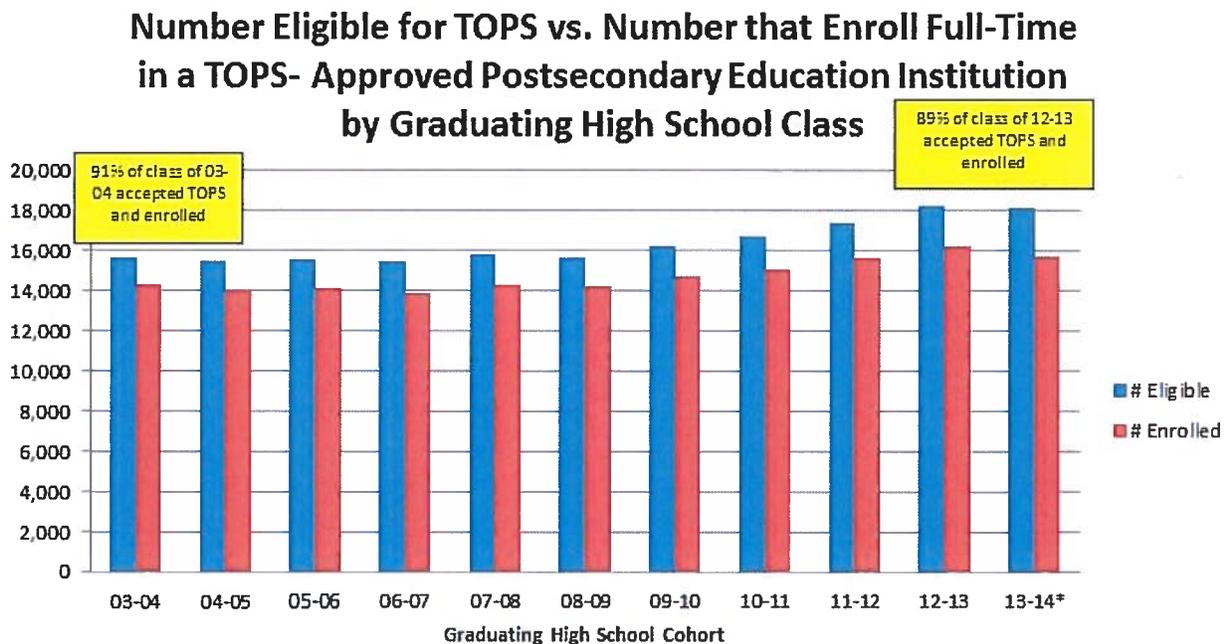
¹ "The ACT High School-to-College Success Report: 2011-2012 Freshmen"

² "The ACT High School-to-College Success Report: 2011-2012 Freshmen"

Participation

One of the generally accepted purposes of TOPS is to keep Louisiana high school graduates in the State to pursue postsecondary educational opportunities. The TOPS program specifically seeks to entice Louisiana's best and brightest high school graduates (as defined by completion of the *TOPS Core Curriculum*, a minimum high school GPA and a minimum score on the ACT) to remain in the state for postsecondary education. To that end, since the fall 2003, 195,447 students have been deemed eligible for an *Opportunity, Performance or Honors* TOPS award. Of those, 176,098, or 90%, have accepted an *Opportunity, Performance or Honors* TOPS award and enrolled in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana.

Figure C: Number Eligible for TOPS vs. Number that Enroll by Graduating High School Class



Source: LOSFA internal data files.

*Students have until the first college semester following the first anniversary of the date they graduate from high school to accept a TOPS award. Therefore, the data reported in Figure C above for the class of 13-14 represent only those students in the 13-14 high school graduating cohort who accepted a TOPS award by the fall 2014 semester. The remaining cohort of eligible students has until the fall 2015 semester to accept a TOPS award.

As indicated in Table 4, among those who accepted an *Opportunity, Performance or Honors* award (TOPS recipients) from 2003 to 2014, the mean, median and mode ACT score and high school GPA remained fairly consistent throughout the years. From 2003 to 2014, the mean ACT score ranged from 23 to 24 (3.2-4.0 points above the required minimum for eligibility for a TOPS *Opportunity* award). The median score was 22 and the mode ranged from 20 to 21.

The mean high school GPA (Core GPA) ranged from 3.29 to 3.35, significantly higher than the 2.5 minimum required for a TOPS *Opportunity* award. The median score ranged from 3.25 to 3.31; the mode ranged from 3.5 to 4.0.

Table 4: Mean ACT and GPA of TOPS Recipients

HS Graduating Cohort	Average ACT*	Average GPA**
2003	23	3.29
2004	23	3.29
2005	23	3.29
2006	23	3.28
2007	23	3.29
2008	23	3.29
2009	23	3.28
2010	23	3.30
2011	23	3.34
2012	24	3.35
2013	24	3.36
2014	24	3.35

*The overall average composite ACT score is 23.2
 **The overall average GPA is 3.3

Demographically speaking, as Tables 5 and 6 demonstrate, TOPS recipients are predominantly white (79%) and female (59%).

Table 5: TOPS Recipients, by Race*

HS Graduating Cohort	Asian	American Indian	African American	White	Hispanic	Other	Total
2003	338	51	1,797	11,556	171	--	13,913
2004	345	64	1,856	11,795	203	--	14,263
2005	338	73	1,892	11,466	186	--	13,955
2006	371	59	1,914	11,502	196	--	14,042
2007	372	71	1,877	11,514	192	--	14,026
2008	385	69	2,043	11,717	245	--	14,459
2009	397	79	2,092	11,278	237	--	14,083
2010	416	80	2,346	11,503	289	1	14,635
2011	396	71	2,472	11,557	341	69	14,906
2012	512	83	2,995	12,259	450	103	16,402
2013	552	92	3,314	13,423	464	162	18,007
2014	574	127	3,093	13,236	555	178	17,763
Grand Total	4,996	919	27,691	142,806	3,529	513	180,454

*It should be noted that 2,702 individuals did not report their race. Therefore, they were not included in this analysis.

Table 6: TOPS Recipients, by Gender*

HS Graduating Cohort	Female	Male	Total
2003	8,317	5,680	13,997
2004	8,536	5,808	14,344
2005	8,247	5,795	14,042
2006	8,397	5,771	14,168
2007	8,270	5,861	14,131
2008	8,619	5,969	14,588
2009	8,365	5,887	14,252
2010	8,686	6,140	14,826
2011	8,774	6,361	15,135
2012	9,567	7,037	16,604
2013	10,610	7,626	18,236
2014	10,521	7,535	18,056
Total	106,909	75,470	182,379

*It should be noted that 777 individuals did not report their gender. Therefore, they were not included in this analysis.

Data also indicate that TOPS recipients come from households with incomes that are significantly higher than the State median. The mean and median household income of TOPS recipients ranges from \$70,000 to \$99,999, while Louisiana’s median household income is \$44,164.

Persistence

Persistence in postsecondary education is usually measured by the rate at which first time, full-time, degree-seeking students are retained to (or return for) their second year. As illustrated in Tables 4 and 5, students who begin college with a TOPS award return to postsecondary education in subsequent years at a higher rate than non-TOPS students.

Table 4 compares the overall retention rate (retention at any public postsecondary institution, not necessarily the institution in which the student started) to the second, third and fourth year (if available) of students who began at a four-year institution with TOPS verses those who began without TOPS (i.e., non-TOPS students).

Table 7: Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS vs. Non-TOPS Students Who Began at a Four-Year Institution

Fall Semester Entering Class	2 nd Yr. Retention		3 rd Yr. Retention		4 th Yr. Retention	
	Non-TOPS		Non-TOPS		Non-TOPS	
	TOPS	TOPs	TOPS	TOPs	TOPS	TOPs
2004	85%	62%	82%	54%	77%	47%
2005	88%	68%	81%	56%	76%	49%
2006	88%	68%	82%	58%	78%	52%
2007	89%	69%	83%	59%	78%	53%
2008	90%	70%	83%	58%	79%	53%
2009	89%	71%	82%	60%	77%	52%
2010	89%	72%	82%	61%	77%	54%
2011	88%	71%	81%	59%	N/A	N/A
2012	87%	71%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: BoR internal data files.

Table 5 compares the overall retention rate to the second and third year (if available) of students who began at a two-year institution with TOPS versus those who began without TOPS (i.e., non-TOPS students).

Table 8: Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS vs. Non-TOPS Students Who Began at a Two-Year Institution

Fall Semester Entering Class	2 nd Yr. Retention		3 rd Yr. Retention	
	Non-TOPS		Non-TOPS	
	TOPS	TOPs	TOPS	TOPs
2004	69%	36%	66%	36%
2005	76%	54%	65%	38%
2006	74%	57%	63%	39%
2007	78%	57%	66%	44%
2008	81%	59%	69%	41%
2009	78%	53%	64%	35%
2010	77%	54%	60%	34%
2011	72%	53%	55%	33%
2012	74%	52%	N/A	N/A

Source: BoR internal data files.

Students who receive a TOPS award must maintain minimum academic criteria to retain their award (see Table 2). The award is cancelled when students fail to maintain full-time and

continuous enrollment, earn the required 24 hours of credit per academic year, or raise their GPA to the required minimum. Based upon data from the 2013-14 entering freshmen cohort of TOPS recipients, approximately 11% had their awards cancelled during or immediately following their first year of postsecondary education.

As Table 6 illustrates, between fall 2003 and spring 2014, 168,560 students received TOPS awards. Of these TOPS award recipients, 55,197 (33%) had their TOPS award cancelled at some point during their postsecondary academic career. Of the 55,197 awards which were cancelled, 35,656 (65%) were cancelled due to students' failure to earn 24 hours of college credit during an academic year.

Table 9: Percentage of TOPS Awards Cancelled by Cohort

Entering Cohort	Total # of Awards	Total # of Awards Cancelled*	Cancelled: 24 Hr. Requirement	Cancelled: GPA Requirement	Cancelled: Non-Continuous Enrollment	Cancelled: Student Resignation
2003-2004	14,267	5,612 (39%)	3,319 (23%)	351 (2%)	1,942 (14%)	606 (4%)
2004-2005	14,620	6,047 (41%)	3,422 (23%)	353 (2%)	2,272 (16%)	730 (5%)
2005-2006	14,443	6,108 (42%)	3,143 (22%)	357 (2%)	2,608 (18%)	699 (5%)
2006-2007	14,667	6,083 (41%)	3,812 (26%)	358 (2%)	1,913 (13%)	728 (5%)
2007-2008	14,227	5,769 (41%)	3,657 (26%)	496 (3%)	1,616 (11%)	656 (5%)
2008-2009	14,921	5,937 (40%)	3,788 (25%)	584 (4%)	1,565 (10%)	602 (4%)
2009-2010	15,299	5,670 (37%)	3,594 (23%)	608 (4%)	1,468 (10%)	568 (4%)
2010-2011	15,582	4,970 (32%)	3,143 (20%)	605 (4%)	1,222 (8%)	639 (4%)
2011-2012	16,044	4,092 (26%)	3,003 (19%)	317 (2%)	772 (5%)	593 (4%)
2012-2013	16,843	2,970 (18%)	2,846 (17%)	70 (0%)	54 (0.3%)	532 (3%)
2013-2014	17,647	1,939 (11%)	1,929 (11%)	0	10 (0%)	409 (2%)
Total	168,560	55,197	35,656	4,099	15,442	6,762

*Does not include those cancelled due to resignation.

Source: LOSFA internal data files. TOPS Tech award recipients not included.

The average ACT score of all the TOPS recipients who had their award cancelled between 2003 and 2014 (due to a failure earn the required 24 hours of credit per academic year, raise their GPA to the required minimum, or maintain full-time and continuous enrollment) was 22.9. Among this same group the average high school GPA was 3.13.

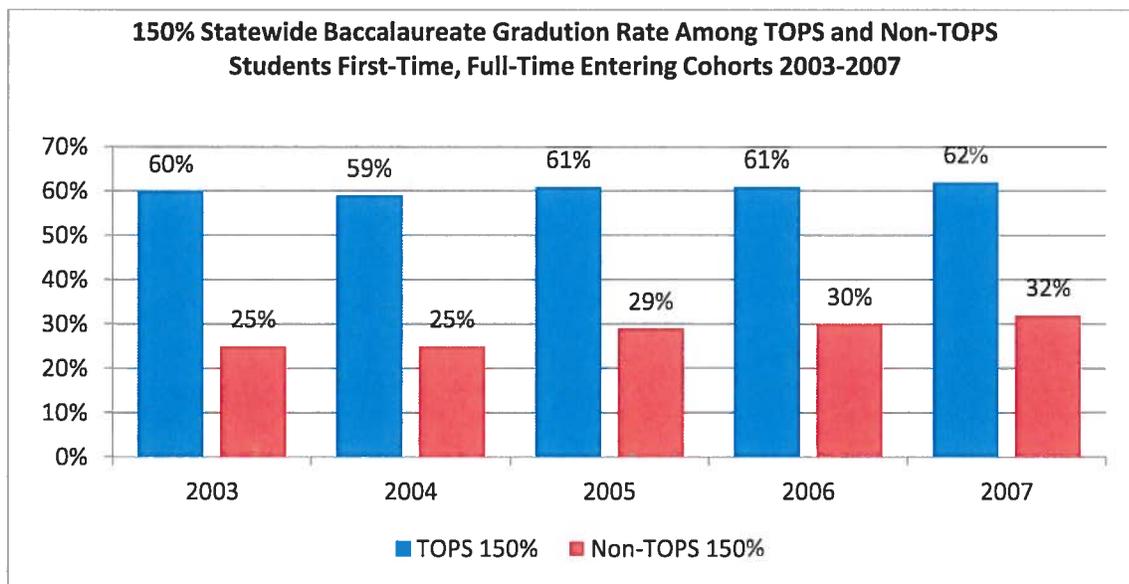
Table 10: Average ACT Score and High School GPA of TOPS Recipients Who had Their Award Cancelled

	Avg. ACT	Avg. High School GPA
Cancelled: 24 Hr. Requirement	22.8	3.12
Cancelled: GPA Requirement	22.6	3.08
Cancelled: Non-Continuous Enrollment	22.9	3.18

Graduation

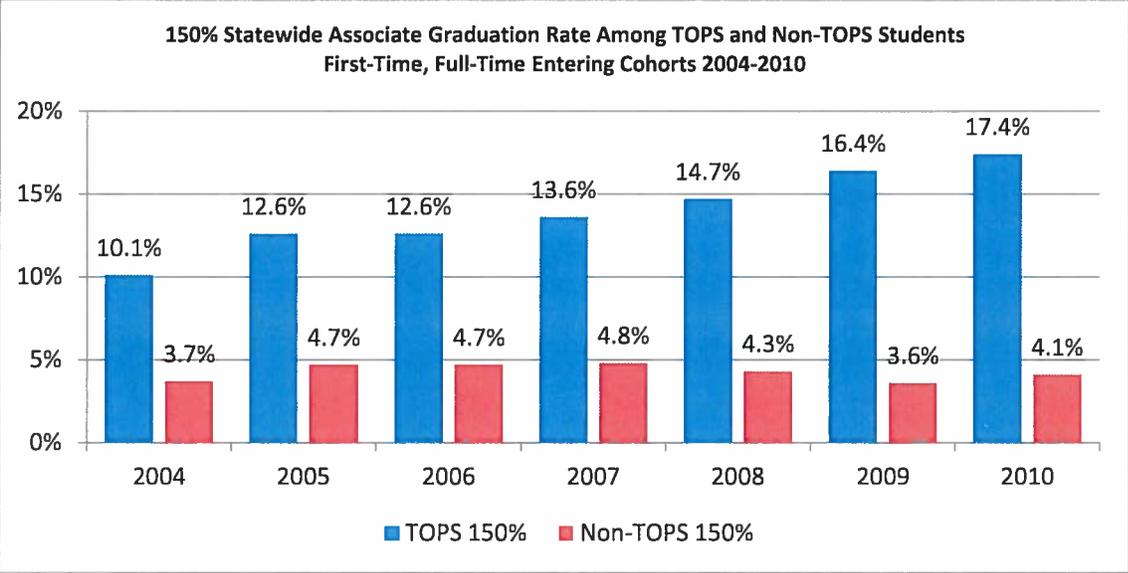
Graduation is typically measured by calculating the rate at which first-time, full-time degree seeking students earn their academic degrees within 150% of the time required (i.e., within six years for baccalaureate degrees and within three years for associate degrees). This 150% protocol was adopted by the federal government and has become the standard followed by the states. As Figures D and E both illustrate, students who begin a baccalaureate degree program or an associate degree program with TOPS graduate within 150% of time at much higher rates than do students without a TOPS award. As Figure D illustrates, approximately 62% TOPS recipients complete a baccalaureate degree within 150% of time, compared with 32% non-TOPS students who do so within the same time frame.

Figure D: 150% Statewide Baccalaureate Graduation Rate among TOPS and Non-TOPS Students



Source: BoR internal data files.

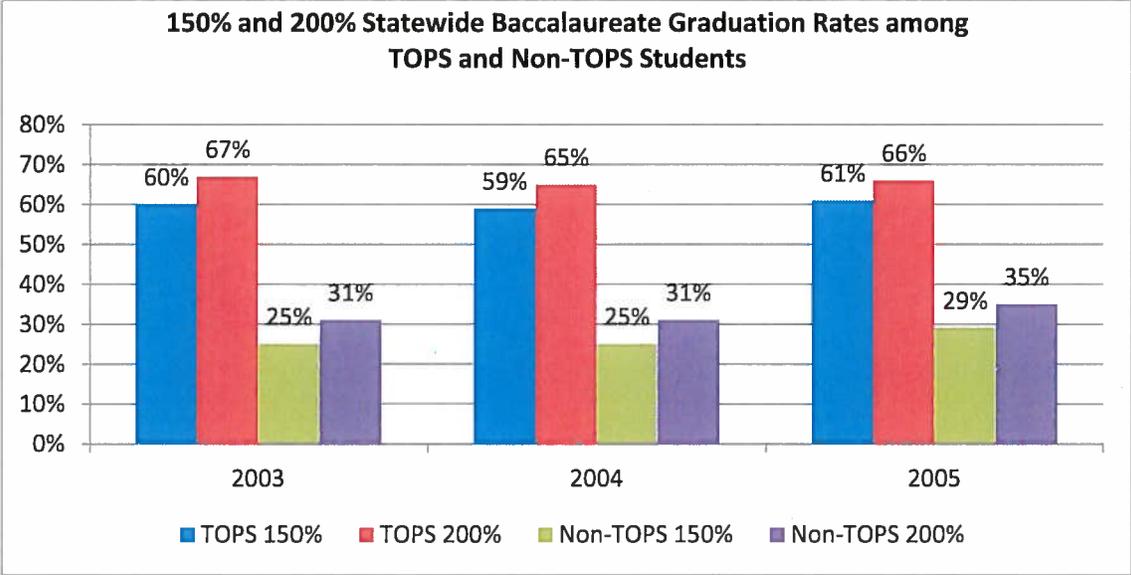
Figure E: 150% Statewide Associate Graduation Rate among TOPS and Non-TOPS Students



Source: BoR internal data files.

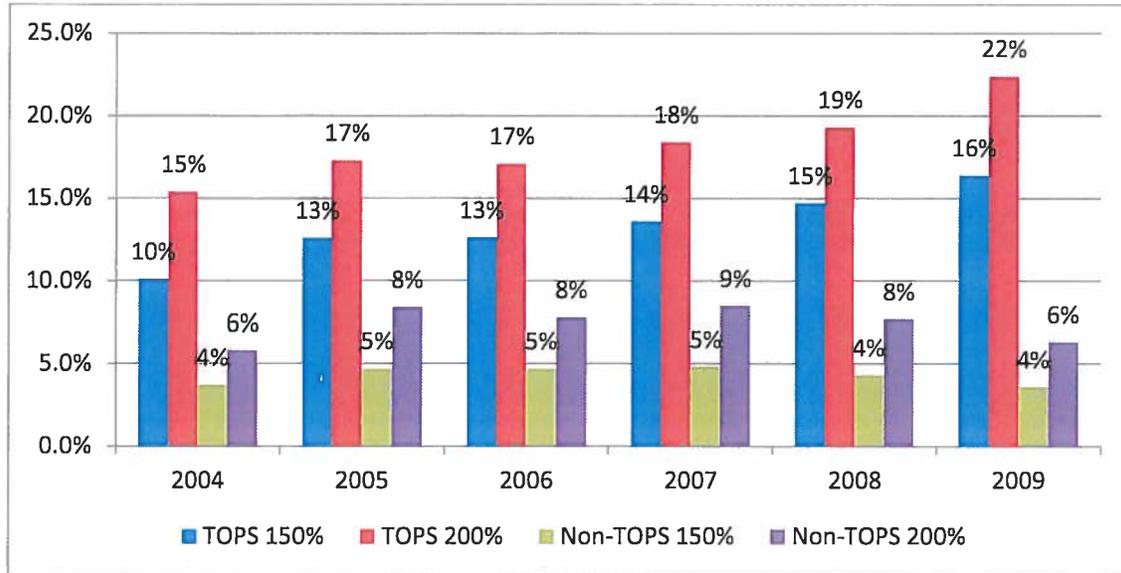
Figures F & G display the comparisons between the standard federally-accepted 150% graduation rates versus a 200% graduation rate. Again, TOPS recipients graduate at a higher rate than non-TOPS students.

Figure F: 150% and 200% Statewide Baccalaureate Graduation Rates among TOPS and Non-TOPS Students



Source: BoR internal data files.

Figure G: 150% and 200% Statewide Associate Graduation Rates among TOPS and Non-TOPS Students

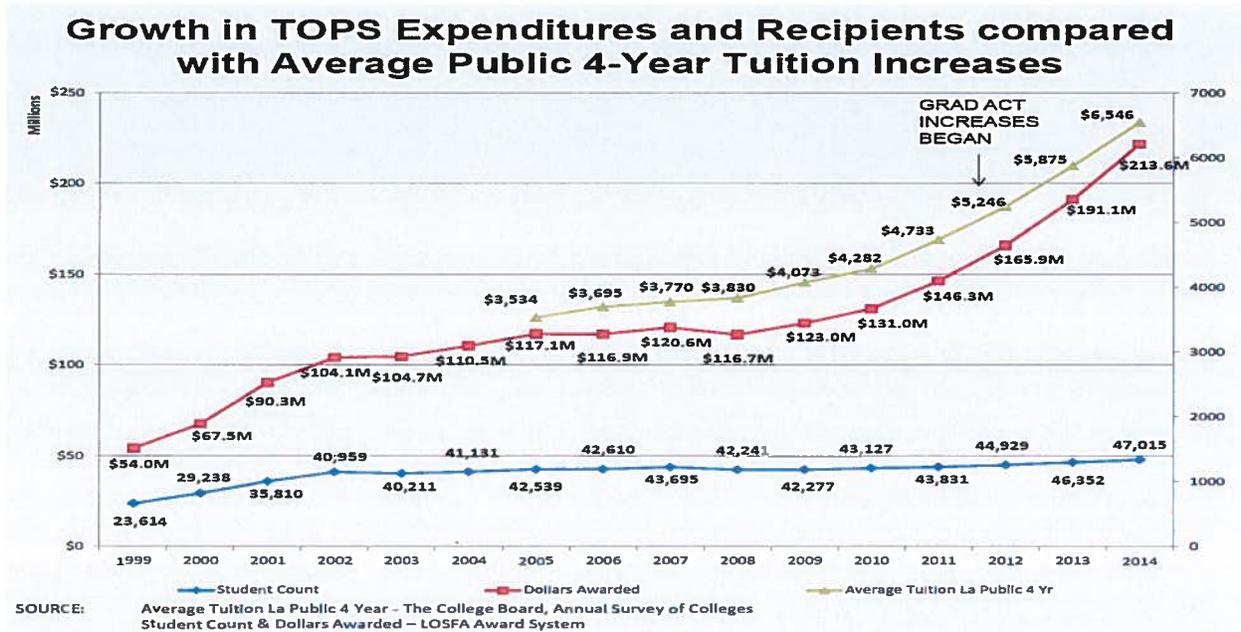


Source: BoR internal data files.

Funding TOPS

As depicted in Figure H below, the State spent approximately \$1.9 billion funding the TOPS program from 1999 to 2014. During that same time period, total expenditures on the TOPS program increased 296%. In 1998- 1999 the average TOPS award amount was \$2,286. In 2013- 2014, the average amount was \$4,530, a 98% increase. These dramatic increases are due to increases in both enrollment and tuition, but primarily in tuition.

Figure H: TOPS Program Funding, 1999-2014



Source: LOSFA internal data files.

Conclusions

In accordance with Act 1202 of the 2001 Regular Legislative Session and Act 587 of the 2014 Regular Legislative Session, this report has analyzed:

- The relationship between the high school courses taken and the student's score on the American College Test (ACT)
- The number of high school graduates who are eligible for TOPS and subsequently enroll in college
- The mean, median and mode ACT score and high school GPA of TOPS recipients
- Demographic information of TOPS recipients, including race, gender, and parents' household income
- The persistence rates of TOPS students
- Retention rates of TOPS awards, including numbers of and reasons for students losing award eligibility
- The mean ACT score and high school GPA of students who lost their TOPS award
- Graduation data, including rates, of TOPS students.

In addition, this report has included historical data on the cost of the TOPS program, to date.

All indications are that the TOPS eligibility requirements induce students to take a more rigorous high school curriculum, which in turn better prepares them for the ACT and for success

in postsecondary education. Of the 2004-05 graduating high school class, 62.5% had completed the *TOPS Core Curriculum*. Ten years later, 65.1% of the 2013-14 high school graduating class had done so. Indications are that completion of the *TOPS Core* improves students' scores on the ACT. According to ACT, of the 2011-2012 high school graduating class, 22,033 students (approximately 49%) took the ACT and attended a public postsecondary education institution in Louisiana the following fall. Of these students, the average ACT composite for those who completed the *TOPS Core* was 21.4. The average ACT composite for those who did not complete the *TOPS Core* was 16.7.

It is reasonable to conclude that the TOPS program has succeeded in keeping Louisiana's high school graduates in the State to pursue postsecondary education. Since fall 2003, 195,447 students have been deemed eligible for an *Opportunity, Performance* or *Honors* TOPS award. Of those, 176,098, or 90%, have accepted an *Opportunity, Performance* or *Honors* TOPS award and enrolled in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana.

Data indicate that TOPS recipients consistently attain ACT scores and high school GPA's above the minimum required for TOPS eligibility. Among TOPS recipients from 2003 to 2014, the average ACT score was 23.2 (3.2 points above the required minimum for eligibility for a TOPS *Opportunity* award) and the average high school GPA (Core GPA) was 3.3 (significantly higher than the 2.5 minimum required for a TOPS *Opportunity* award). Demographically speaking, TOPS recipients are predominantly white (79%) and female (59%). They also come from households with incomes that are significantly higher than the State median. The mean and median household income of TOPS recipients ranges from \$70,000 to \$99,999, while Louisiana's median household income is \$44,164.

With regards to persistence, students who begin college with a TOPS award return to postsecondary education in subsequent years at a higher rate than non-TOPS students. With regards to retention of TOPS awards, 11% of the 2013-14 entering freshmen cohort had their awards cancelled during or immediately following their first year of postsecondary education. Overall, approximately 33% of TOPS recipients between 2003 and 2014 had their award cancelled, with the majority being cancelled due to students' failure to earn 24 hours of college credit during an academic year.

Data indicate that students who begin a baccalaureate or an associate degree program with a TOPS award graduate within 150% and 200% of time at much higher rates than do students without a TOPS award. Approximately 62% TOPS recipients complete a baccalaureate degree within 150% of time, compared with 32% non-TOPS students who do so within the same time frame.

Finally, it should be noted that since the program's inception, the State has made a significant and growing investment in TOPS. In total, the State has spent approximately \$1.9 billion on the TOPS program. Between the 1999 and 2014 fiscal years, total expenditures on the TOPS program increased 296%. In 1998-1999 the average TOPS award amount was \$2,286 (including *TOPS Tech*). In 2013-2014, the average TOPS award amount had increased 98% to \$4,530 (including *TOPS Tech*). These dramatic increases are due to increases in both enrollment and tuition, but primarily in tuition.

Appendix A Analysis of TOPS Tech Program

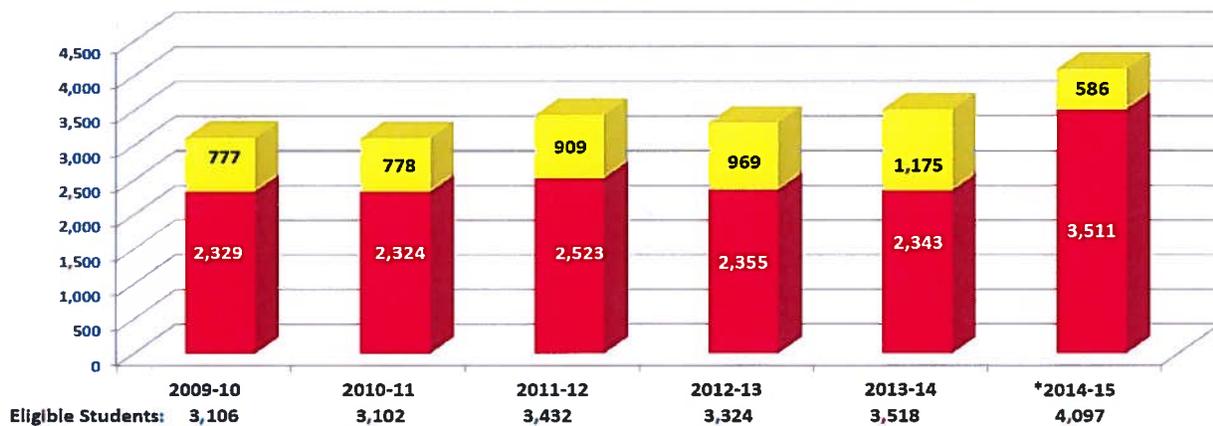
The *TOPS Tech* award may be utilized at any Louisiana Technical College and other public postsecondary school or at any member school of the Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (LAICU) that provides skill or occupational training, and certain cosmetology and proprietary schools. The criteria for eligibility for the *TOPS Tech* award includes completion of a defined high school core curriculum, with a minimum grade point average in core courses, and a minimum ACT composite score or minimum level score on the assessments of the ACT WorkKeys system.

Table 1: TOPS Tech Eligibility Criteria, by Award Level, 2014

	TOPS Tech Option 1	TOPS Tech Option 2
Core	17 Units	19 Units
Core GPA	2.50	2.50
ACT Composite or ACT WorkKeys	17 or Silver Level	17 or Silver Level
Max Award at Public Schools that do not offer a baccalaureate degree	Tuition	Tuition
Max Award at Public Schools that offer baccalaureate degrees and at LAICU institutions and certain cosmetology and proprietary schools	The average TOPS Tech payments paid to students attending public schools that do not offer a baccalaureate degree	The average TOPS Tech payments paid to students attending public schools that do not offer a baccalaureate degree
Duration	2 years	2 years

The *TOPS Tech* award has historically been underutilized. From 2009 to 2014, only 25% of eligible TOPS TECH Tech students accept the award (Figure 1). It is important to note that students who graduated in 2014 have until the fall semester of 2015 to accept their awards. Therefore, the TOPS Tech acceptance rate will likely increase.

Figure 1: ACCEPTANCE RATE OF TOPS TECH AWARDS





TOPS Core Curriculum

For the Opportunity, Performance, and Honors Awards

For High School graduates of 2014 through 2017.

For High School graduates of 2018 and thereafter [click here](#)

Units	Courses ¹
ENGLISH = 4 Units	
4 units	English I, II, III, & IV
MATH = 4 Units	
1 unit	Algebra I, or Integrated Mathematics I, or Applied Algebra I or Algebra I - Parts 1 & 2 (two units) or Applied Mathematics I & II (two units) or Applied Algebra 1A and 1B (two units)
1 unit	Algebra II or Integrated Mathematics II
2 units	Geometry, Pre-Calculus, Advanced Math-Pre-Calculus, Calculus, Advanced Math-Functions and Statistics, Probability and Statistics, Discrete Mathematics, Applied Mathematics III, Integrated Mathematics III, or Algebra III
SCIENCE = 4 Units	
1 unit	Biology I or II
1 unit	Chemistry I or II, or Chemistry Com
2 units	Earth Science, Physical Science, Environmental Science, Integrated Science, Biology II, Chemistry II, Physics, Physics II, Physics for Technology I or II, or Anatomy and Physiology or both Agriscience I & II (both for 1 unit)
SOCIAL STUDIES = 4 Units	
1 unit	United States History
1 unit	Civics and Free Enterprise (1 unit, combined), ² Civics (1 year), or AP Government and Politics: United States
2 units	World History, Western Civilization, World Geography, European History, History of Religion or AP Human Geography
FOREIGN LANGUAGE = 2 Units	
2 units	Foreign Language (2 units in the same language)
FINE ARTS = 1 Unit	
1 unit	Fine Arts Survey or 1 unit of a performance course in music, or dance, or theater or 1 unit of studio art or 1 unit of visual art or both Speech III & IV (both for 1 unit)
TOTAL = 19 Units	

¹ Advanced Placement (AP) courses and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses with the same name as a course listed in the TOPS Core Curriculum may be substituted.

² Can be used only by students who entered the 9th grade before July 1, 2011. (See R.S.17:274.1)



This core curriculum is accurate as of the date of publication and includes courses listed in TOPS statute and those determined to be equivalent by the La. Board of Regents and BESE.

(800) 259-5626

custserv@la.gov

www.osfa.la.gov

P.O. Box 91202. Baton Rouge. LA 70821-9202

Updated : 08/15/2013

ACT No. 1202

Regular Session, 2001

HOUSE BILL NO. 2012

BY REPRESENTATIVE DANIEL

AN ACT

To enact R.S. 17:3048.3 and 3048.4, relative to the Tuition Opportunity Program for Students; to provide for the establishment and implementation of a uniform information reporting system; to provide for applicability; to provide relative to compliance with reporting system requirements by colleges and universities, including requiring compliance as a condition of eligibility to receive certain payments by the state; to require that the reporting system include certain components; to provide for certain notifications to parents and others about program availability; and to provide for related matters.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of Louisiana:

Section 1. R.S. 17:3048.3 and 3048.4 are hereby enacted to read as follows:

§3048.3. Program information reporting system; implementation; requirements; applicability; participation by eligible institutions and others

A.(1) The Board of Regents shall formulate, develop, establish, and implement a uniform Tuition Opportunity Program for Students information reporting system for the purposes of policy analysis and program evaluation and for providing accurate data and statistics to the legislature, the governor and appropriate executive branch agencies.

and the public relative to the program's impact on the state and on students.

(2) In formulating and developing the information reporting system, the Board of Regents shall consult with and seek written recommendations from the Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission, each college or university eligible for participation in the Tuition Opportunity Program for Students, each of the public postsecondary education management boards, the Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, legislators, and knowledgeable others as determined appropriate by the Board of Regents.

(3) It is the intention of the legislature that the reporting system provided by this Section and the requirements thereof shall be applicable to all Tuition Opportunity Program for Students applicants, all award recipients regardless of eligible college or university attended, and all such eligible colleges and universities. Effective for the 2002-2003 award year and thereafter, compliance with the requirements of the Tuition Opportunity Program for Students information reporting system shall be a condition for an eligible college or university to remain eligible to receive payments from the state on behalf of an award recipient. Compliance determinations shall be made annually by the Board of Regents.

B. The Tuition Opportunity Program for Students information reporting system shall include but not be limited to the following:

(1) A report prepared as of the end of the Fall semester and again as of the end of the Spring semester or equivalent periods of time during each academic year relative to the rate of retention of program

awards by students as they progress from semester to semester or other equivalent periods of time as may be applicable once enrolled at an eligible college or university. The data shall be reported by institution attended, by the two digit classification of instructional program, and by program award category and shall include the percent of students losing program eligibility due to not earning the minimum number of credit hours, the percent of students losing program eligibility due to not having the required cumulative grade point average, and the percent of students losing program eligibility for failing to make steady academic progress.

(2) The persistence rates at colleges and universities of freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior students receiving a program award reported by award category and by award year.

(3) The graduation rates or rates of completion of the chosen postsecondary education program if otherwise applicable for students receiving a program award, reported by award category and award year, including for those graduating with an academic degree at the baccalaureate level the rate for persons graduating within four years, within five years, and within six years, respectively.

(4) The mean length of time required for a student receiving a program award to graduate with an academic degree at the baccalaureate level or to complete the chosen postsecondary education program if otherwise applicable with such information being reported by award category and by award year.

(5) An annual report on the number of applicants as well as the percent of high school graduates by high school and by parish who

apply for a program award, by award category, and the percent of those students who subsequently enroll in a college or university.

(6) Statistical studies on the relationship between the courses taken and grades earned by a high school student and the student's score on the American College Test or the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Relative to public high schools, such statistical studies shall use student course and grade data that is otherwise available from the schools and such studies shall be conducted at no additional cost to the governing authority of any public high school.

C. When necessary due to limitations in existing secondary data sources and systems, the Board of Regents, consistent with the general provisions of this Section, may modify any specific requirement of this Section. However, prior to making any such modifications the board shall report in writing to the House Committee on Education and the Senate Committee on Education on the proposed action and the board shall have received approval from each committee relative to the proposed action.

§3048.4. Notice to students and parents

The State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education shall require that the governing authority of every public secondary school include as a component of a student's Five Year Educational Plan as required by R.S. 17:183.2 comprehensive information relative to the Tuition Opportunity Program for Students and program eligibility requirements for each of the awards. Additionally, the parent or other person responsible for the student's school attendance at the ninth grade level shall be required to return to the school at the start of the student's ninth grade year a signed notice that the program information and

eligibility requirements have been reviewed by the parent or other responsible person and by the student and that, for informational and data collection purposes only, expresses the intent of the parent or other responsible person as to whether or not the student will be pursuing the necessary program of studies to be eligible for a Tuition Opportunity Program for Students award.

Section 2. This Act shall become effective upon signature by the governor or, if not signed by the governor, upon expiration of the time for bills to become law without signature by the governor, as provided in Article III, Section 18 of the Constitution of Louisiana. If vetoed by the governor and subsequently approved by the legislature, this Act shall become effective on the day following such approval.

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF LOUISIANA

APPROVED: _____

SENATE BILL NO. 599

BY SENATOR ERDEY

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AN ACT

To enact R.S. 17:3048.3(B)(7), (8) and (9), (D), and (E), relative to the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students; to provide relative to the program's information reporting system; and to provide for related matters.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of Louisiana:

Section 1. R.S. 17:3048.3(B)(7), (8) and (9), (D), and (E) are hereby enacted to read as follows:

§3048.3. Program information reporting system; implementation; requirements; applicability; participation by eligible institutions and others

* * *

B. The Taylor Opportunity Program for Students information reporting system shall include but not be limited to the following:

* * *

(7) Demographic information of program award recipients, including but not limited to race, gender, and parents' household income.

(8) High school grade point average and ACT or concordant SAT scores of program award recipients grouped by mean, median, and mode.

(9) High school grade point average and ACT or concordant SAT score cross-referenced with those students who lost the award and those who were placed on probationary status and the reasons therefor.

* * *

D. The Board of Regents shall submit a written report including all of the information required by this Section for the preceding academic year to the Senate Committee on Education and the House Committee on Education, not later than December first of each year.

1 **E. All information reported pursuant to this Section shall be reported**
 2 **in the aggregate only and shall contain no personally identifiable information**
 3 **for any recipient of a program award.**

4 Section 2. This Act shall become effective upon signature by the governor or, if not
 5 signed by the governor, upon expiration of the time for bills to become law without signature
 6 by the governor, as provided by Article III, Section 18 of the Constitution of Louisiana. If
 7 vetoed by the governor and subsequently approved by the legislature, this Act shall become
 8 effective on the day following such approval.

 PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

 SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

 GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF LOUISIANA

APPROVED: _____