

TOPS Report:  
Analysis of the TOPS Program from 2008-2017

Louisiana Board of Regents

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## Executive Summary

The Tuition Opportunity Program for Students (subsequently renamed the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students, or TOPS) was created by ACT 1375 of 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 analyzing 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 (retention) rates of TOPS students;
- The number of and reasons for students losing award eligibility; and
- Graduation data.

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

- Demographic information of program award recipients (race, gender, parent's income);
- High school GPA and ACT scores of program award recipients grouped by mean, median, and mode; and
- Average high school GPA and average ACT scores of those who lost the award.
- Graduation rates of TOPS students by award type and year; and

The information in the report includes current and historical data on TOPS students (students receiving an *Opportunity, Performance, or Honors* award) and where appropriate non-TOPS students to allow for comparison. ACT 587 requires that this report be submitted to the Senate Committee on Education and the House Committee on Education, by December 1<sup>st</sup> each year. Therefore, in order to comply with the Act's deadline, data on 2018-2019 TOPS recipients are not included.

Overall, the findings indicated that:

- From 2008 to 2017, 88.9% of students deemed eligible for a TOPS award accepted the award and subsequently enrolled in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana.
- The average ACT score of all TOPS recipients between 2008 and 2017 was 24 and the average high school GPA (Core GPA) was 3.35.
- From 2007-2008 to 2016-2017 the majority of TOPS recipients were white (76.3%) and female (58.6%).
- Students who begin college with a TOPS award persist and graduate at a higher rate than non-TOPS students.
- The average ACT score of students who had their award cancelled between 2006 and 2017 was 23.0 and their average high school GPA (Core GPA) was 3.12.

## **Introduction and Background**

### **TOPS Legislation**

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 (Appendix A). In addition to the development of a TOPS reporting system, Act 1202 also required the BoR to prepare a report on various aspects of the TOPS program. To satisfy the reporting requirements, BoR staff developed interfaces between the major systems needed to identify and track TOPS students as they moved 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 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 (retention) rates of TOPS students, by award level;
- The number of and reasons for students losing award eligibility;
- Graduation rates by award category (within 100% and 150% of time); and
- The number of students eligible for TOPS, by award category, school, and parish.

Act 587 (Appendix B) of the 2014 Regular Legislative Session added several additional types of information to the annual TOPS report, including:

- Demographic information of program award recipients;
- High school GPA and ACT scores of program award recipients grouped by mean, median, and mode; and
- Average high school GPA and average ACT scores of those who lost the award and those who were placed on probationary status.

ACT 587 mandates that this report be submitted to the Senate Committee on Education and the House Committee on Education no later than December 1<sup>st</sup> of each year. Therefore, in order to comply with the Act's established deadline, data on 2018-2019 TOPS recipients are not included.

In addition, during the 2016, 2017 and 2018 Regular Legislative Sessions, there were several bills passed that will impact the TOPS program. Although a discussion of these statutes is noteworthy, the impact of some of these laws will not be reflected in the data until future reports.

The 2016 Acts that impact TOPS are as follows:

- **Act 18 of the 2016 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature sets a floor for the TOPS Award Amount and provides that the qualifying ACT score shall be truncated to a whole number rather than rounded to the next whole number. These changes were effective beginning with the fall semester of 2016.
- **Act 388 of the 2016 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature increases the grade point average (GPA) requirement to qualify for a TOPS Performance Award from 3.0 to 3.25 and increases the GPA requirement to qualify for a TOPS Honors Award from 3.0 to 3.50. These changes are effective for high school graduates of 2021 and later.
- **Act 503 of the 2016 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature changes the methodology for eliminating students' TOPS Awards in the event of a budget shortfall. When there is a budget shortfall, each student's TOPS award -- including Performance and Honors Award stipends -- is subject to a reduction. TOPS Awards will be distributed to all students according to a pro-rata distribution of the available funds. Under Act 503, a student is allowed to "opt out" of receiving his TOPS Award during a budget shortfall. This change was effective beginning with the AY 2016-2017 award year.

The 2017 Act that impacts TOPS is as follows:

- **Act 44 of the 2017 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature further clarified Act 18 of the 2016 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature that the level of the award shall be the amount of tuition charged to students during the AY 2016-2017, unless and until changed by the Legislature.

The 2018 Acts that impact TOPS are as follows:

- **Act 671 of the 2018 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature changes certain TOPS initial eligibility requirements and provides relative to the sharing of certain student data.
- **Act 583 of the 2018 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature establishes the TOPS Income Fund as a special treasury fund. Monies in the fund can be combined with other funds; however, all monies in the TOPS Income Fund shall be used solely to fund the TOPS Program.

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

The Tuition Opportunity Program for Students (subsequently renamed the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students or TOPS), Louisiana's merit-based student aid program, was created via Act 1375 of 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, the four generally accepted purposes of TOPS are to:

- Promote academic success by requiring completion of a rigorous high school core curriculum;
- Provide financial incentives as a reward for good academic performance;
- Keep Louisiana's best and brightest in the State to pursue postsecondary educational opportunities and become productive members of Louisiana's workforce; and
- 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. Because the TOPS Tech award has been historically underutilized, this report focuses only on those students receiving an Opportunity, Performance or Honors award. (Limited statistical analysis on the TOPS Tech award can be found in Appendix C.) Act 230 of the 2015 Regular Session made changes to the TOPS Tech program. Under Act 230, students graduating from high school during the 2016-2017 school year and thereafter are able to use the TOPS Tech Award to pursue an associate's degree or other shorter-term training and education program, including skill, occupational, vocational, technical, certificate, and academic, that the Workforce Investment Council and the Board of Regents determine are aligned to state workforce priorities. These changes are expected to increase participation, allowing for a more detailed analysis of the TOPS Tech program in future reports.

The criteria for eligibility for the *Opportunity*, *Performance* and *Honors* awards includes completion of a defined high school core curriculum, with a minimum grade point average (GPA) in core courses, and a minimum ACT composite score. Table 1 lists current eligibility criteria and award components of TOPS. Currently, the TOPS Core Curriculum consists of 19 units. (The specific course requirements of the TOPS Core Curriculum are contained in Appendix D.)

Historically, the administration of TOPS was statutorily assigned to the Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission (LASFAC). However, Act 314 of the 2016

Regular Session abolished LASFAC and transferred its duties to the Board of Regents. Therefore, the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA) has been administering the TOPS program under the direction of the BoR since that date. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or TOPS On-Line Application are the mechanisms for applying for TOPS. Program eligibility is determined by using the high school transcript from the Department of Education’s Student Transcript System (STS) and official ACT scores.

<b>Table 1: TOPS Eligibility Criteria and Award Components, 2018</b>				
<b>Award</b>	<b>Core Units</b>	<b>Core GPA</b>	<b>ACT Composite</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<b>Opportunity</b>	19	2.5	20	4 years or 8 semesters
<b>Performance</b>	19	3.0	23	4 years or 8 semesters
<b>Honors</b>	19	3.0	27	4 years or 8 semesters

Source: LOSFA website - TOPS Brochures & Flyers

To maintain eligibility, TOPS recipients must be continuously enrolled as full-time students, earn at least 24 semester hours 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. Continuing eligibility is determined by LOSFA based on data received from the postsecondary institution in which the student is enrolled.

<b>Award</b>	<b>Hrs Earned/ Academic Year</b>	<b>Cumulative GPA per AY</b>	<b>Award Reinstated (Upon recovery of req. GPA)</b>
<b>Opportunity</b>	24	2.30 end of first academic year 2.50 end of all other academic years Maintain steady academic progress at the end of all other terms (2.00 TOPS cumulative GPA)	Yes
<b>Performance</b>	24	3.00 end of each academic year. Maintain steady academic progress at the end of all other terms (2.00 TOPS cumulative GPA)	Yes, as Opportunity
<b>Honors</b>	24	3.00 end of each academic year. Maintain steady academic progress at the end of all other terms (2.00 TOPS cumulative GPA)	Yes, as Opportunity

Source: LOFSA website - TOPS Brochures & Flyers

Table 3 illustrates the distribution of TOPS awards across systems for the AY 2017-2018. In AY 2017-2018, the majority (55.8%) of TOPS awards went to students attending a UL System campus. Data also indicate that approximately one-half (49.5%) of students with TOPS awards had an *Opportunity* award. Of students with the highest level of award, the *Honors* award, 46.2% attended a UL System Campus.

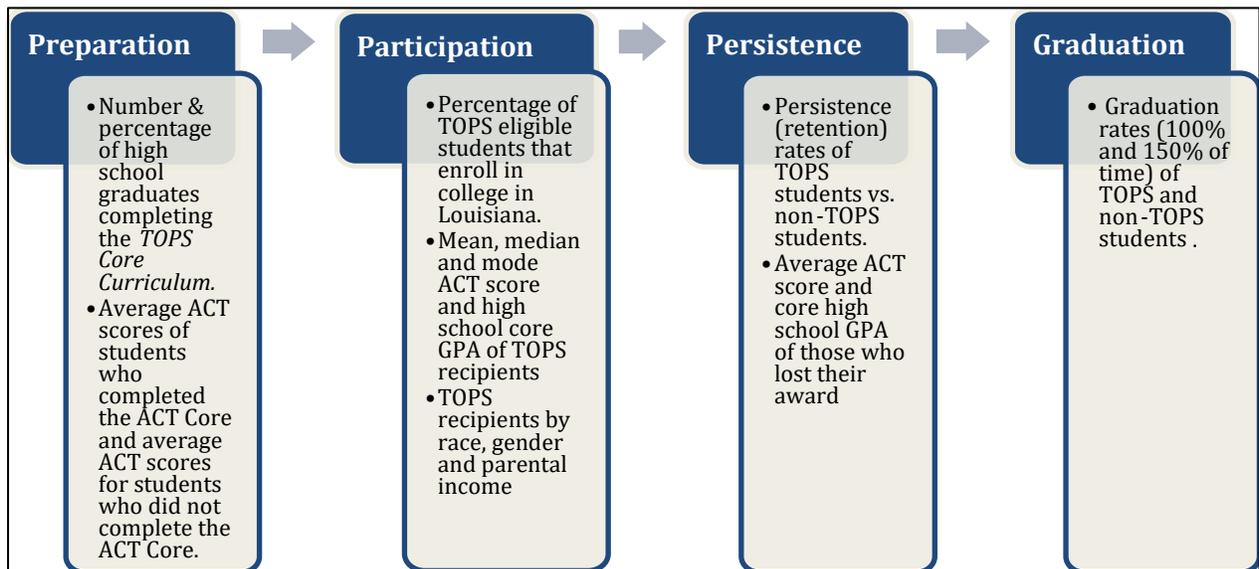
<b>Award</b>	<b>LSU System</b>	<b>Southern System</b>	<b>UL System</b>	<b>LCTC System</b>	<b>Private Institutions</b>	<b>Proprietary Schools</b>	<b>% of all awards</b>
<b><i>Opportunity</i></b>	26.5%	2.4%	58.5%	6.5%	5.7%	0.4%	49.5%
<b><i>Performance</i></b>	30.5%	0.9%	59.4%	2.9%	6.1%	0.2%	26.9%
<b><i>Honors</i></b>	42.3%	0.2%	46.2%	0.5%	10.8%	0.1%	23.6%
<b>% of all awards</b>	31.3%	1.5%	55.8%	4.1%	7.0%	0.3%	100.0%

Source: LOSFA - TOPS Payment Summary by Award Level for Academic Year 2017-2018 as of 08/15/18

## TOPS Report: Historical Analysis of the TOPS Program, 2008-2017

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



## **Preparation**

TOPS academic eligibility criteria require students to take high school courses that will prepare them for success after high school, particularly in postsecondary education. 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 admission to the state's public four-year colleges and universities. With this change, students had a double incentive to complete the college-preparatory curriculum.

A study of the 2018 Louisiana high school graduates conducted by ACT examined the correlation between the ACT Core -- which is closely aligned to the TOPS core -- and students' performance on the ACT. Findings indicated that students who reported taking the ACT Core earned higher composite ACT scores than students who did not take the ACT Core.

According to ACT, 55,711 students in the 2018 graduating class took the ACT test. Of these students, approximately 63% took the ACT Core and 19% took less than the Core. (Because some students did not indicate whether or not they completed the ACT Core, the numbers do not add up to 100%). The average ACT composite (Table 4) for those who reported completing the ACT Core in 2018 was 20.7, whereas the average ACT composite score for those who did not report completing the ACT core was 16.1.<sup>1</sup>

The TOPS eligibility core criteria is more rigorous than the ACT Core as it requires students to take a more rigorous and prescriptive high school curriculum, which in turn better prepares them for the ACT and for success in postsecondary education. Since the 2003 high school graduating cohort, data indicate that the percentage of students completing the TOPS university core has risen from 75.7% to 86.5%. Since the TOPS Core and ACT Core are closely aligned, students who complete the TOPS Core earn higher ACT composite scores than students who do not complete the TOPS Core.

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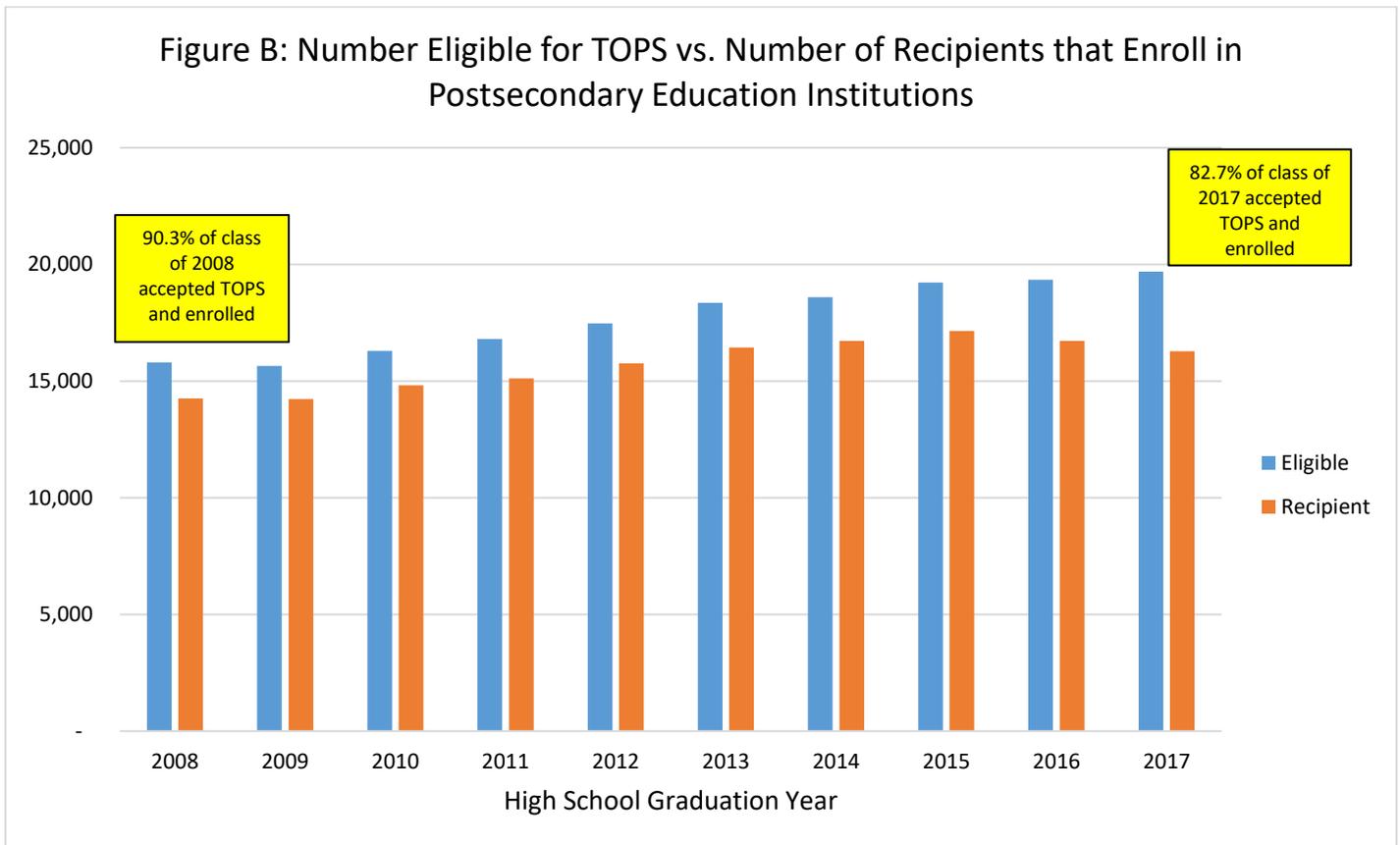
<sup>1</sup> ACT Core or more results correspond to students taking the four or more years of English and three or more years each of math, social studies, and natural science. Those who did not complete the ACT core would have most probably completed the Louisiana Jump Start curriculum.

**Table 4: Average ACT Composite, AY 2014-2018**

<b>High School Grad Year</b>	<b>Average ACT Composite for students completing ACT Core</b>	<b>Average ACT Composite for students not completing ACT Core</b>
2013	20.6	16.1
2014	20.5	15.9
2015	20.7	16.1
2016	20.7	16.2
2017	20.8	16.3
2018	20.7	16.1

## Participation

A generally accepted purpose of TOPS is to attract and retain Louisiana’s high school graduates who are more likely to persist and attain a postsecondary credential. In fact, a common slogan associated with the TOPS program has been to “retain the best and brightest” students to attend Louisiana’s colleges with the hope that they will enter the State’s workforce after graduation. To that end, of the 177,190 students deemed eligible for a TOPS *Opportunity, Performance or Honors* award between 2008 and 2017, 157,471 (or 88.9%) accepted the award and enrolled in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana. If one were to define the best and brightest as students who were deemed eligible for TOPS *Honors* Award, approximately 82.5% accepted the TOPS *Honors* Award and enrolled in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana. The lower acceptance rate (82.5%) compared to the overall TOPS acceptance rate (88.9%) can be attributed to the larger number of postsecondary options (in state and out-of-state) available to *Honors* Award eligible students.



Since 2008, the average high school core GPA of TOPS recipients has increased as illustrated in Table 5. In 2008, the average TOPS core GPA was 3.34. By 2017, the average TOPS core GPA had increased to 3.40. The 2008 and 2017 average ACT scores have remained at 24. Both the average ACT scores and TOPS core GPAs of TOPS

recipients have been consistently higher than the minimum requirements for a TOPS *Opportunity* award. See Appendix E for an analysis of 2017 high school graduates eligible for TOPS by award category, school, and parish.

<b>Table 5: Mean ACT and Core GPA of TOPS Recipients*</b>			
HS Graduating Cohort	TOPS Recipients' Average Composite ACT Score	Statewide Average ACT Composite Score**	TOPS Recipients Average Core GPA
2009	24	20.1	3.33
2010	24	20.1	3.34
2011	24	20.2	3.35
2012	24	20.3	3.36
2013	24	19.5	3.37
2014	24	19.2	3.35
2015	24	19.4	3.35
2016	24	19.5	3.38
2017	24	19.4	3.40
2018	25	19.2	3.54

\* Since 2009, the overall average composite ACT score of TOPS recipients is 24, the overall average GPA is 3.36.

\*\* The Statewide average includes all high school graduating students. Source: ACT Profile Report

As Table 6 indicates, TOPS recipients are predominantly white. In 2017, 74.2% of TOPS recipients were white while the total first-time entering freshman student population was 50.7% white. This unfortunate trend is found in other states with similarly large merit-based scholarship programs. Despite the race differences in TOPS recipients, the number of minorities receiving TOPS has increased over time. For example, in 2017, 2,845 African Americans were TOPS recipients, compared to 1,962 in 2008. This represents a 45% increase since 2008, although it is a decline from the previous two years of 2014 and 2015.

**Table 6: TOPS Recipients, by Race\***

HS Graduating Cohort	Asian	American Indian	African American	White	Hispanic	Other	Total
2007-2008	374	67	1,962	11,448	234	0	14,085
2008-2009	397	79	2,074	11,206	237	0	13,993
2009-2010	411	79	2,343	11,492	289	0	14,614
2010-2011	400	71	2,462	11,544	339	70	14,886
2011-2012	480	76	2,814	11,656	421	95	15,542
2012-2013	492	82	2,946	12,173	412	138	16,243
2013-2014	516	111	2,763	12,137	461	144	16,132
2014-2015	539	110	3,068	12,472	507	149	16,845
2015-2016	506	102	3,068	12,043	545	153	16,417
2016-2017	491	95	2,845	11,897	520	183	16,031

\* It should be noted that over the ten-year period, 2,863 individuals did not report their race. Therefore, they were not included in this analysis.  
Source: LOSFA internal data files as of August 2018.

Additionally, initial TOPS recipients are predominantly female. As noted in Table 7, in 2017, 58% of TOPS recipients were female. In comparison, 55.4% of the total 2017 first-time freshman undergraduate population was female.

**Table 7: TOPS Recipients, by Gender\***

HS Graduating Cohort	Female	Male	Total
2007-2008	8,420	5,792	14,212
2008-2009	8,316	5,847	14,163
2009-2010	8,672	6,131	14,803
2010-2011	8,760	6,357	15,117
2011-2012	9,054	6,672	15,726
2012-2013	9,596	6,848	16,444
2013-2014	9,776	6,917	16,693
2014-2015	10,112	7,009	17,121
2015-2016	9,888	6,813	16,701
2016-2017	9,564	6,681	16,245

\* It should be noted that over the ten-year period, 426 individuals did not report their gender and are not included in this analysis.

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of August 2018

As indicated in Table 8, TOPS recipients are increasingly coming from middle- and upper- income families. Since 2008, the number of TOPS recipients from households with incomes of \$150,000 increased by 57.1%; whereas, the number of recipients from lower income households has remained relatively constant over time.

<b>Table 8: Initial TOPS Opportunity, Performance, and Honors Recipients, by Parental Income*</b>									
High School Graduation Year	\$0-\$14,999	\$15,000-\$24,999	\$25,000-\$34,999	\$35,000-\$49,999	\$50,000-\$69,999	\$70,000-\$99,999	\$100,000-\$129,999	\$130,000-\$149,999	\$150,000+
2007-08	1,203	947	983	1,268	1,826	2,783	1,982	745	2,075
2008-09	930	1,012	935	1,300	1,706	2,674	2,068	822	2,128
2009-10	1,024	1,107	1,034	1,394	1,755	2,685	2,125	812	2,069
2010-11	899	1,124	1,065	1,397	1,741	2,617	2,049	858	2,226
2011-12	918	1,233	1,115	1,502	1,727	2,714	2,115	849	2,421
2012-13	1,014	1,243	1,102	1,514	1,759	2,637	2,235	1,044	2,737
2013-14	980	1,239	1,127	1,526	1,622	2,621	2,216	1,055	3,085
2014-15	1,091	1,255	1,160	1,583	1,737	2,582	2,236	1,082	3,264
2015-16	995	1,231	1,125	1,572	1,672	2,492	2,197	1,068	3,311
2016-17	991	1,201	1,125	1,374	1,519	2,465	2,119	1,156	3,260

\* It should be noted that over the past ten years, 10,070 individuals either did not report their income or reported a negative income. Therefore, those individuals were not included in this analysis

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of August 2018

## **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 9, 10 and 11, students who begin college with a TOPS award return to postsecondary education in subsequent years at higher rates than non-TOPS students. Furthermore, students who receive the Performance and Honors awards are retained at greater rates than students who receive the Opportunity award. Because TOPS students are better prepared generally for postsecondary education, it is not surprising that these students persist at greater rates than non-TOPS students.

Table 9 examines the overall retention rate (retention at any Louisiana public postsecondary institution, not necessarily the institution in which the student started) to the second, third and fourth year of students who began at a four-year institution with TOPS compared to those who began without TOPS (i.e., non-TOPS students).

<b>Fall Semester Entering Class</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Yr. Retention</b>		<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Yr. Retention</b>		<b>4<sup>th</sup> Yr. Retention</b>	
	TOPS	Non-TOPS	TOPS	Non-TOPS	TOPS	Non-TOPS
<b>2007</b>	89%	69%	83%	59%	78%	53%
<b>2008</b>	90%	70%	83%	58%	79%	53%
<b>2009</b>	89%	71%	82%	60%	77%	52%
<b>2010</b>	89%	72%	82%	61%	77%	54%
<b>2011</b>	88%	71%	81%	59%	75%	52%
<b>2012</b>	87%	71%	81%	59%	75%	52%
<b>2013</b>	87%	71%	81%	60%	76%	52%
<b>2014</b>	87%	70%	81%	59%	75%	53%
<b>2015</b>	87%	68%	80%	57%	*	*
<b>2016</b>	87%	70%	*	*	*	*

Source: BoR internal data files as of August 2018. \*Data not yet available.

Table 10 examines the overall retention rate of TOPS students who began at a four-year institution to the second, third and fourth year by award level.

<b>Table 10: Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS Students Who Began at a Four-Year Institution by TOPS Award Level</b>									
<b>Fall Semester Entering Class</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Yr. Retention</b>			<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Yr. Retention</b>			<b>4<sup>th</sup> Yr. Retention</b>		
	<b>OPP</b>	<b>PERF</b>	<b>HNRS</b>	<b>OPP</b>	<b>PERF</b>	<b>HNRS</b>	<b>OPP</b>	<b>PERF</b>	<b>HNRS</b>
<b>2007</b>	87%	93%	95%	81%	90%	92%	75%	87%	89%
<b>2008</b>	89%	88%	95%	82%	84%	91%	76%	82%	89%
<b>2009</b>	88%	88%	93%	80%	84%	92%	74%	81%	88%
<b>2010</b>	87%	88%	94%	79%	85%	93%	73%	81%	89%
<b>2011</b>	87%	87%	94%	78%	84%	91%	71%	81%	87%
<b>2012</b>	86%	88%	93%	77%	84%	91%	71%	81%	88%
<b>2013</b>	86%	86%	94%	78%	83%	91%	72%	79%	87%
<b>2014</b>	86%	87%	94%	77%	83%	92%	70%	80%	89%
<b>2015</b>	85%	87%	94%	77%	83%	92%	*	*	*
<b>2016</b>	85%	88%	93%	*	*	*	*	*	*

Source: BoR internal data files as of August 2018. \*Data not yet available.

Table 11 examines the overall retention rate to the second year of students who began at a 2-year institution with TOPS compared to those who began without TOPS.

<b>Table 11: Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS vs. Non-TOPS Students Who Began at a Two-Year Institution</b>		
<b>Fall Semester Entering Class</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Yr. Retention</b>	
	<b>TOPS</b>	<b>Non-TOPS</b>
<b>2007</b>	77%	55%
<b>2008</b>	81%	58%
<b>2009</b>	77%	53%
<b>2010</b>	77%	53%
<b>2011</b>	72%	53%
<b>2012</b>	74%	52%
<b>2013</b>	72%	52%
<b>2014</b>	73%	51%
<b>2015</b>	75%	50%
<b>2016</b>	73%	47%

Source: BoR internal data files as of August 2018

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 and earn the required 24 hours of credit per academic year, or earn the required minimum GPA. TOPS Awards are initially suspended for GPA and are permanently canceled after 2 years have passed and the student has not attained the required GPA. As shown in Table 12, the number of awards cancelled has declined over time.

Furthermore, between fall 2007 and spring 2017, 155,441 students received TOPS awards. Of these TOPS award recipients, 43,398 (28%) had their TOPS award cancelled at some point during their postsecondary academic career. Of the 43,398 awards that were cancelled, (76%) were cancelled due to students' failure to earn 24 hours of college credit during an academic year.

**Table 12: 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	
<b>2007-2008</b>	13,738	5,418	39%	3,574	26%	400	3%	1,444	11%	635	5%
<b>2008-2009</b>	14,335	5,400	38%	3,692	26%	358	2%	1,350	9%	577	4%
<b>2009-2010</b>	14,480	5,069	35%	3,450	24%	385	3%	1,234	9%	538	4%
<b>2010-2011</b>	14,805	4,689	32%	3,166	21%	493	3%	1,030	7%	606	4%
<b>2011-2012</b>	15,124	4,244	28%	3,033	20%	526	3%	685	5%	589	4%
<b>2012-2013</b>	15,815	4,117	26%	3,475	22%	546	3%	96	1%	602	4%
<b>2013-2014</b>	16,453	4,252	26%	3,631	22%	512	3%	109	1%	655	4%
<b>2014-2015</b>	16,704	3,982	24%	3,643	22%	267	2%	72	0%	659	4%
<b>2015-2016</b>	17,292	3,651	21%	3,439	20%	145	1%	67	0%	618	4%
<b>2016-2017</b>	16,695	2,576	15%	2,541	15%	N/A	0%	35	0%	461	3%
<b>2017-2018</b>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
<b>Grand Total</b>	155,441	43,398		33,644		3,632		6,122		5,940	

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of September 2018, TOPS Tech award recipients not included.

\*Due to change in methodology by LOSFA regarding recipients of awards cancelled for 2017-2018, these data are not available at this time and will be reported in the next year.

The average ACT score of all the TOPS recipients who had their award cancelled between 2005-2006 and 2016-2017 (due to failure to earn the required 24 hours of credit per academic year, earn the required minimum GPA, or maintain full-time and continuous enrollment) was 23.0. Among this same group, the average high school GPA was 3.12 (Table 13).

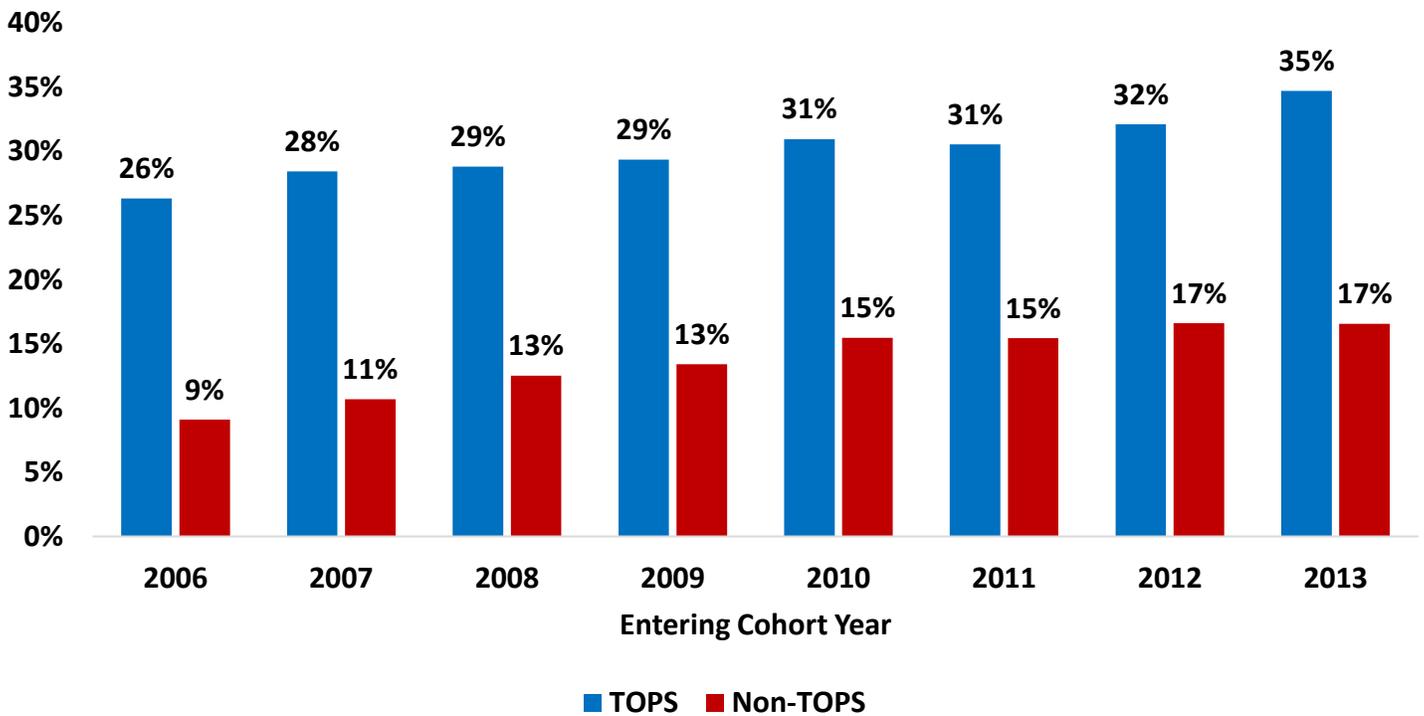
<b>Table 13: Average ACT Score and High School GPA of TOPS Recipients Who had Their Award Cancelled, 2006-2017</b>		
	Average ACT Composite	Average High School GPA
<b>24 Hour</b>	23.0	3.12
<b>GPA</b>	22.7	3.09
<b>Non-Continuous Enrollment</b>	23.0	3.13

## **Graduation**

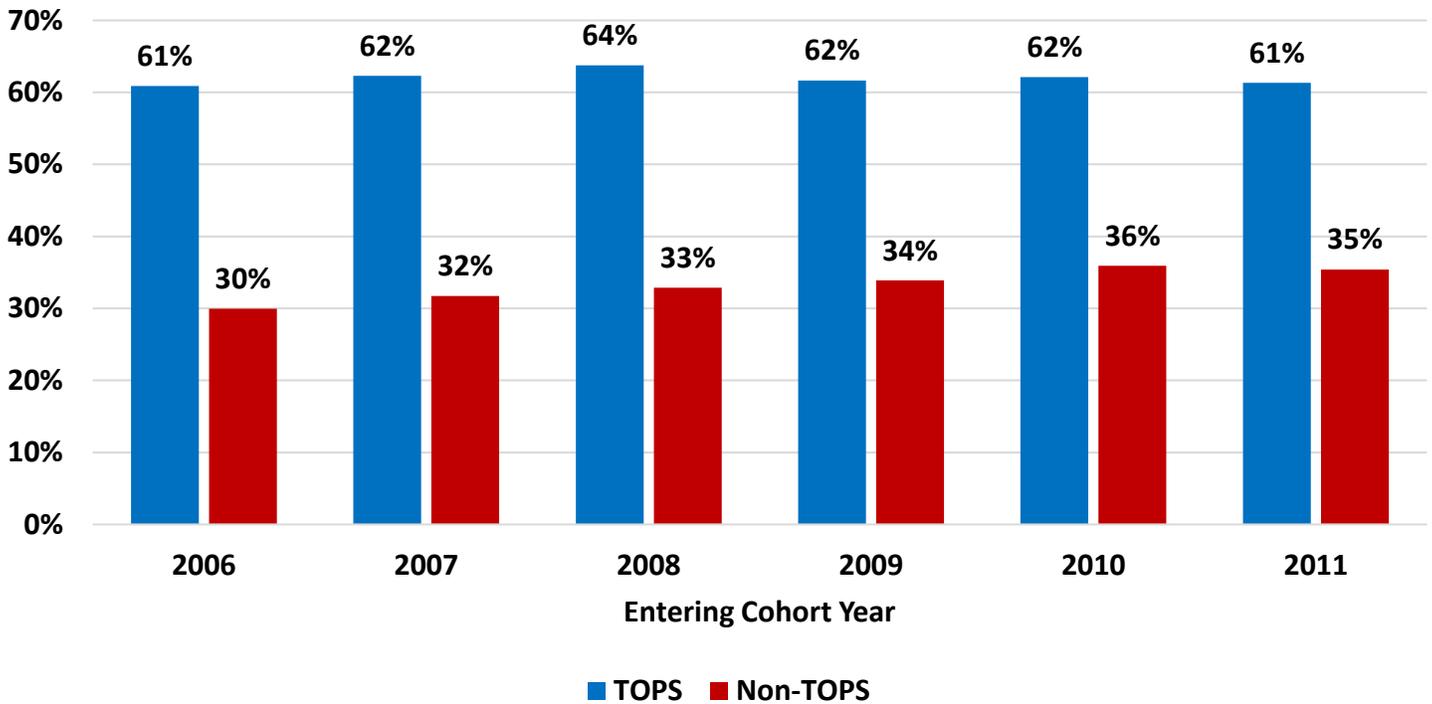
A graduation rate is typically measured by calculating the rate at which first time, full-time degree seeking students earn their academic degrees within 150% of the time required (i.e., within six years for baccalaureate degrees and within three years for associate degrees). However, because TOPS recipients are eligible for the award for up to four years (or 8 semesters), it is important to examine graduation rates at both 100% and 150% of time.

As noted in Figures C and D, students who begin a baccalaureate degree program with TOPS graduate within 100% and 150% of time at much higher rates than do students without a TOPS award. Findings indicate that 35% of first time, full-time entering cohort of TOPS recipients in 2013 completed a baccalaureate degree within 100% of time, compared with 17% of non-TOPS students who did so within the same time frame. Furthermore, 61% of first time, full-time entering cohort of TOPS recipients in 2013 completed a baccalaureate degree within 150% of time, compared with 35% of non-TOPS students within the same time frame.

**Figure C: Statewide Baccalaureate 4-Year Graduation Rate (100%) Among TOPS and Non-TOPS Students First-Time, Full-Time Entering Cohorts, Four-Year Institutions 2006-2013**

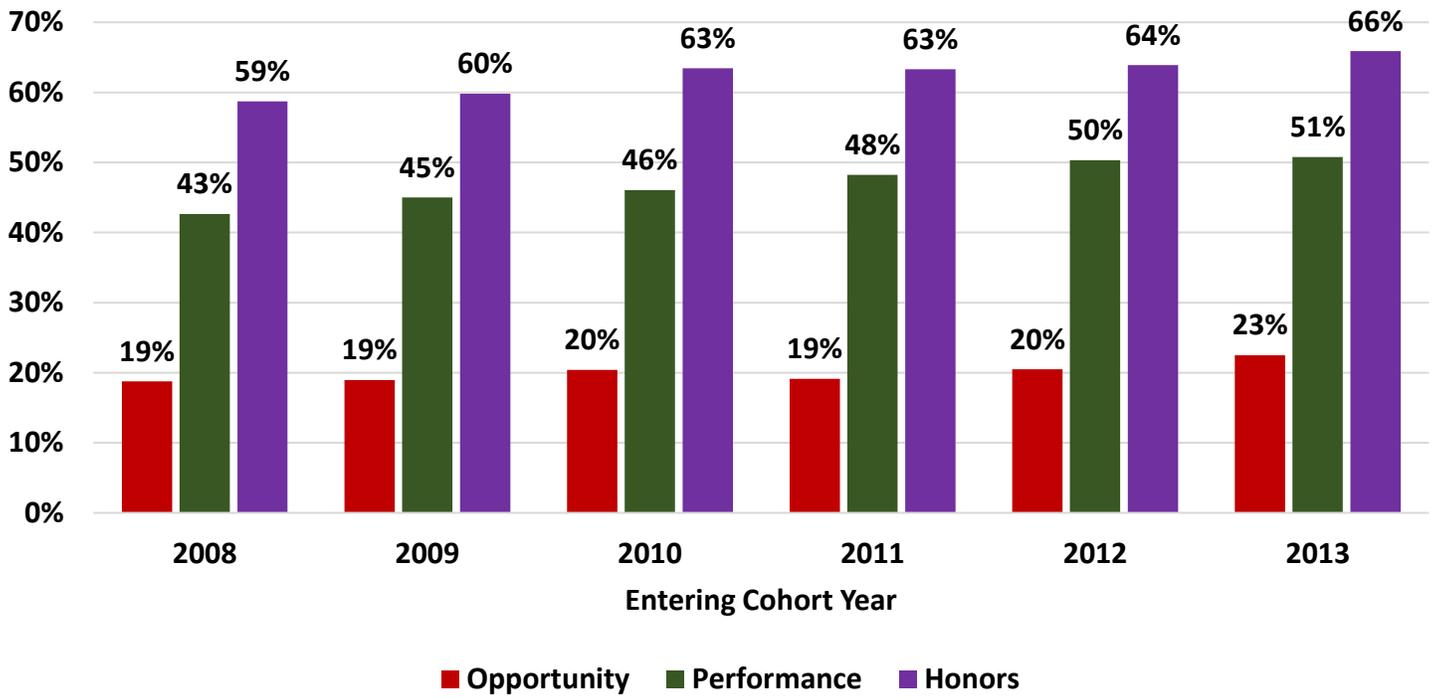


**Figure D: Statewide Baccalaureate 6-Year Graduation Rate (150%) Among TOPS and Non-TOPS Students First-Time, Full-Time Entering Cohorts, Four-Year Institutions 2006-2011**

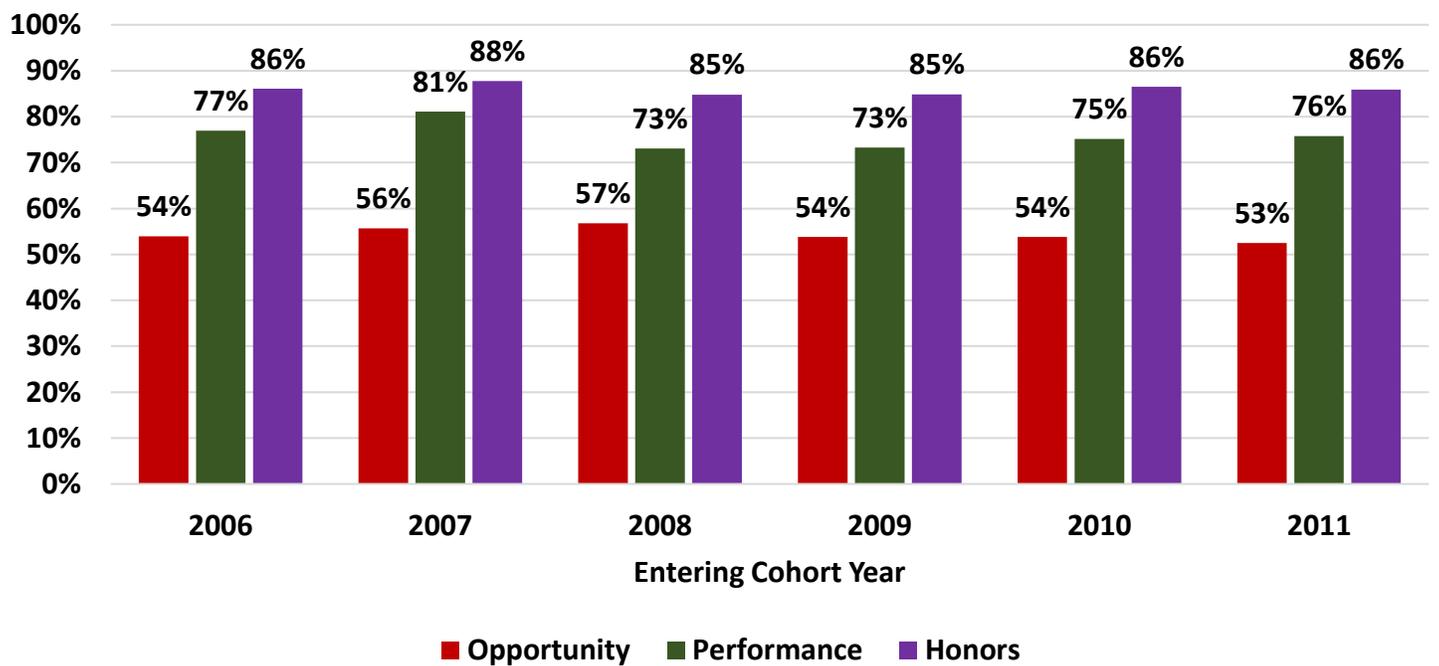


Graduation rates also differ across the type of award received. TOPS Honors award recipients graduate at much higher rates than TOPS Performance and Opportunity award recipients. As noted in Figures E and F, 66% of TOPS Honors award recipients in the 2013 entering cohort completed a baccalaureate degree within 100% of time and 86% within 150% of time, compared with 51% and 23% within 100% of time and 76% and 53% of 150% of time for the TOPS Performance and Opportunity award recipients, respectively.

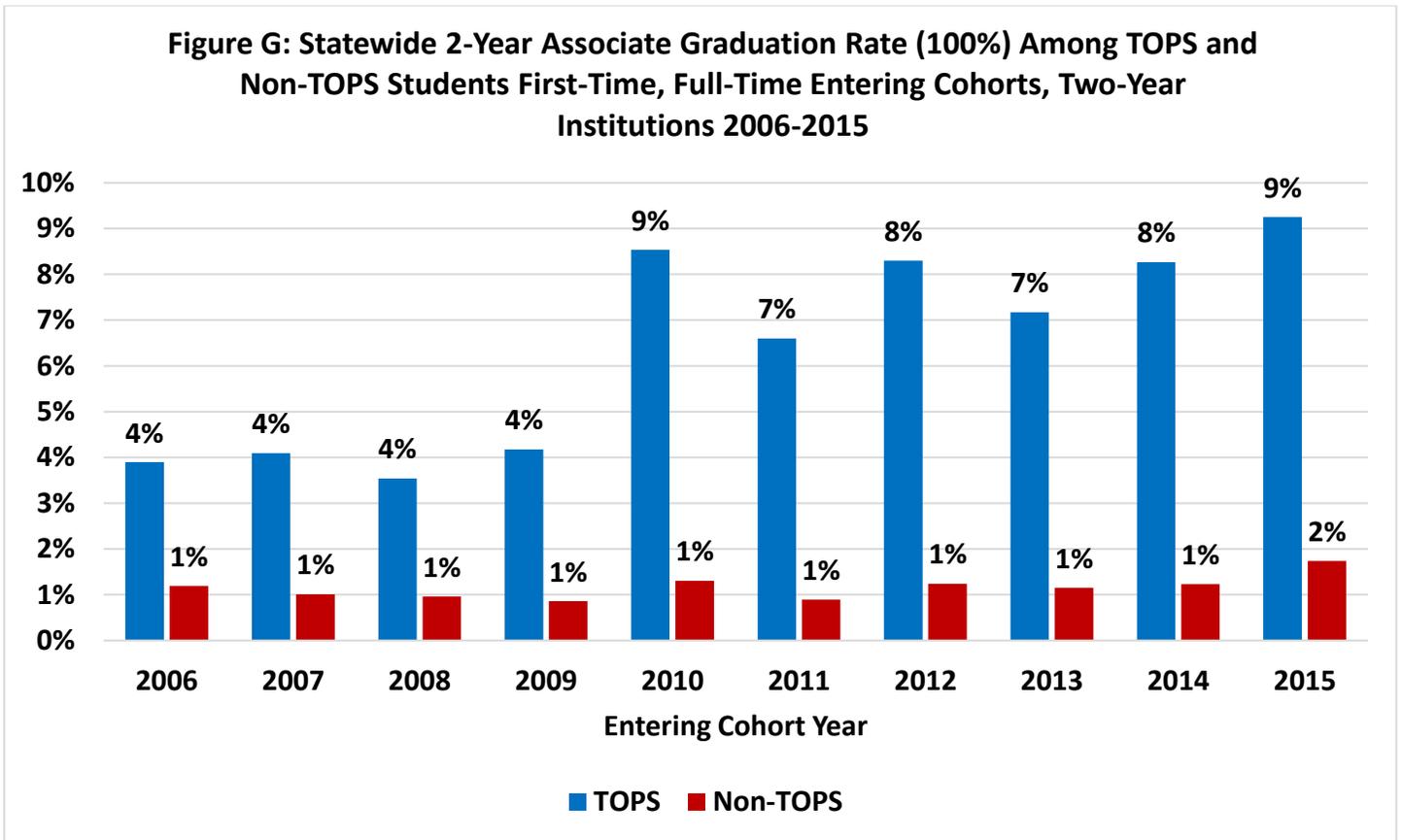
**Figure E: Statewide Baccalaureate 4-Year Graduation Rate (100%)  
By Opportunity, Performance, Honors**



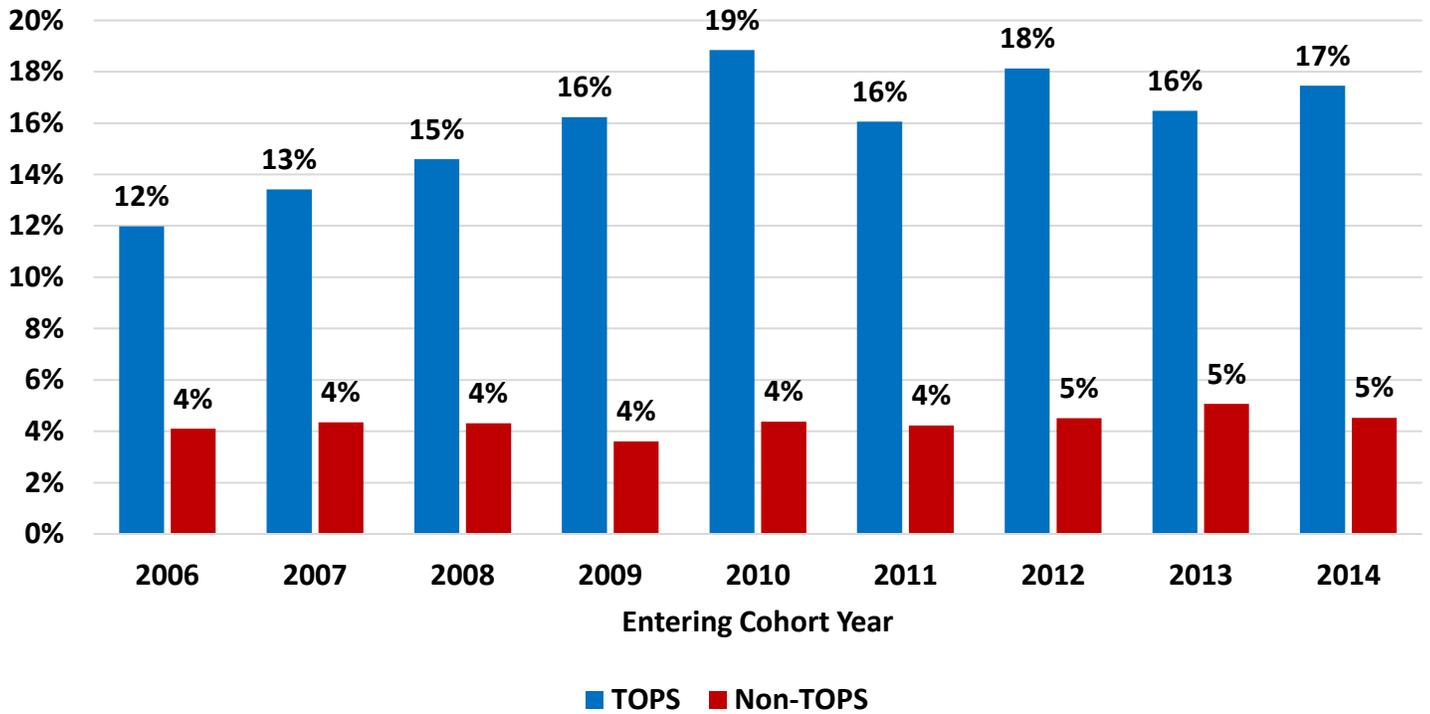
**Figure F: Statewide Baccalaureate 6-Year Graduation Rate (150%)  
By Opportunity, Performance, Honors**



Similar to the baccalaureate degree trends noted above, TOPS recipients who begin an associate degree program graduate at much higher rates than do students without a TOPS award. As shown in Figures G and H, 9% of first-time, full-time entering cohort of TOPS recipients in 2015 completed an associate degree within 100% of time, compared with 2% of non-TOPS students who did so within the same time frame and 17% of first-time, full-time entering cohort of TOPS recipients in 2014 completed an associate degree within 150% of time, compared with 5% of non-TOPS students. These rates do not include the substantial number of TOPS two-year students who transfer to four-year institutions prior to receiving an associate degree.

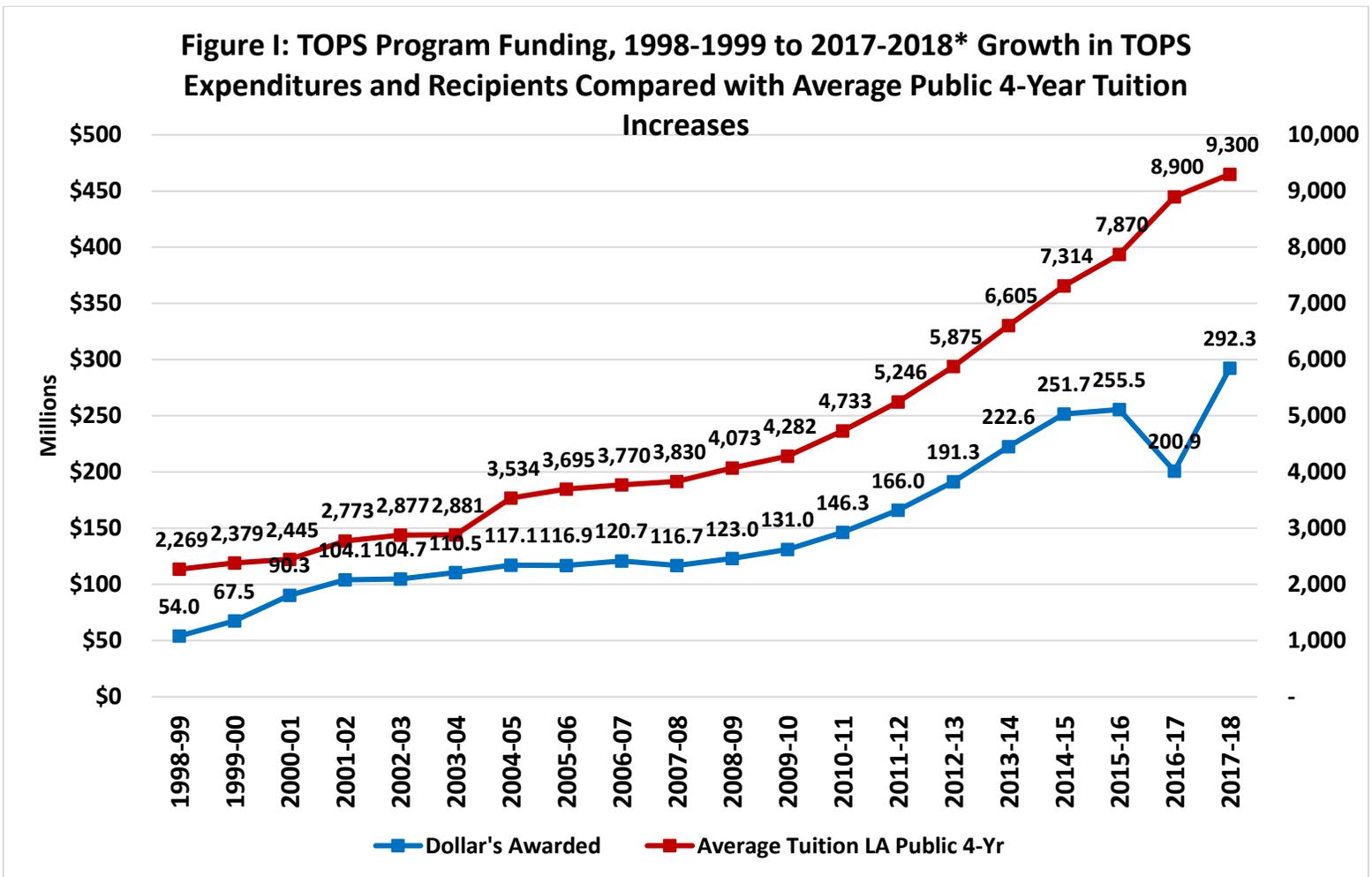


**Figure H: Statewide 4-Year Associate Graduation Rate (150%) Among TOPS and Non-TOPS Students First-Time, Full-Time Entering Cohorts, Two-Year Institutions 2006-2014**



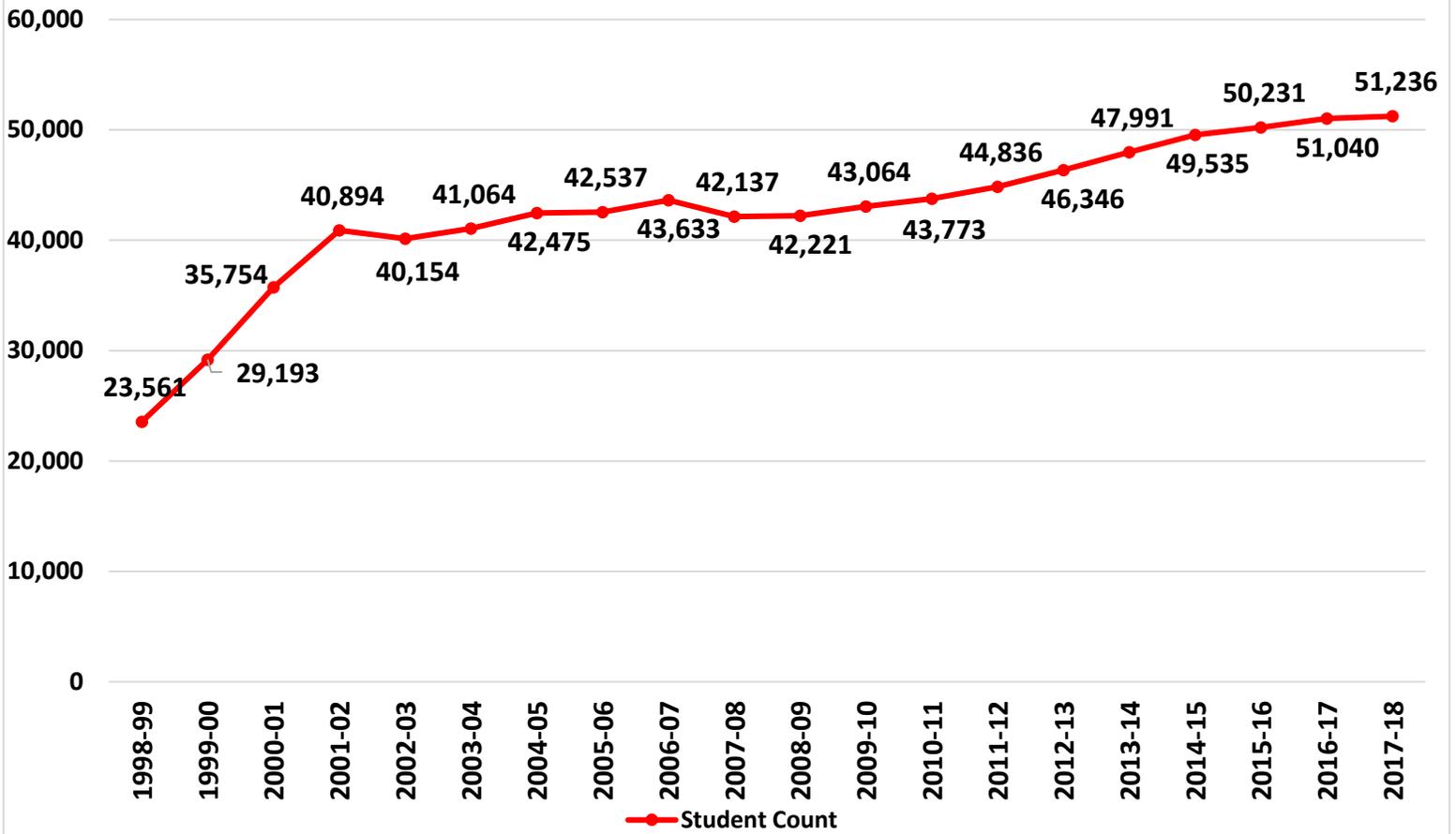
## Funding TOPS

As depicted in Figure I below, the State spent approximately \$2.9 billion funding the TOPS program from 1999 to 2018. The 2016-2017 AY was the first time that TOPS was not fully funded due to budget shortfalls. The 2017-2018 AY saw the State restore TOPS funding to previous levels. During that same time, total expenditures on the TOPS program substantially increased. The growth is largely attributable to two factors: (1) the increase in tuition amounts at the state’s public institutions of higher education (Figure I) and (2) increases in the number of students receiving the award (Figure J). From 1998 to 2017, the average tuition at Louisiana’s public 4 year institutions more than quadrupled (Figure I). As illustrated in Figure J, in 1998-1999, the number of TOPS recipients was 23,561. By 2017-18, the number of TOPS recipients more than doubled to 51,236.



Source: Average Tuition LA Public 4 Year – The College Board Annual Survey of Colleges  
 Dollars Awarded – LOSFA Award System

Figure J: TOPS Student Counts, 1998-1999 to 2017-2018



Source: Student Count - LOSFA Award System

## **Conclusions**

The TOPS eligibility criteria require students to take a more rigorous high school curriculum, which in turn better prepares them for the ACT and for success in postsecondary education. A study of the 2018 Louisiana high school graduates conducted by ACT indicated that the average ACT composite for those who completed the ACT Core -- which is closely aligned with the TOPS core -- was 20.7; whereas the average ACT composite score for those who did not complete the ACT Core was 16.1. Although there are slight variations between the ACT Core and TOPS Core, students who complete the TOPS Core also earn higher ACT composite scores than students who do not complete the TOPS Core.

Data indicate that the TOPS program has succeeded in keeping Louisiana's high school graduates in the State to pursue postsecondary education. Since the fall 2007, of the 177,190 students deemed eligible for a TOPS *Opportunity, Performance or Honors* award, 157,471 (or 88.9%) have accepted a TOPS *Opportunity, Performance or Honors* award and enrolled in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana.

TOPS recipients consistently attain ACT scores and high school core GPA's above the minimum required for TOPS eligibility. Among TOPS recipients from 2007 to 2017, the average ACT score was 24 (4 points above the required minimum for eligibility for a TOPS *Opportunity* award) and the average high school GPA (Core GPA) was 3.35 (significantly higher than the 2.5 minimum required for a TOPS *Opportunity* award). Data also indicate that the majority of initial TOPS recipients are white and female. Although there are large race differences across TOPS recipients, the number of minorities receiving TOPS has significantly increased over time. There was a 45% increase in the number of African American TOPS recipients from 2008 to 2017, although there was a decline in 2016-2017 from the previous two years. The past several years have seen a trend where TOPS students are increasingly coming from middle- and upper-income households.

With regard 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. Overall, approximately 28% of TOPS recipients between 2007-2008 and 2016-2017 had their award cancelled, with the majority 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 100% and 150% of time at much higher rates than do students without a TOPS award. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the 2013 first-time, fulltime entering cohort of TOPS recipients completed a baccalaureate degree within

100% of time, compared with 17% of non-TOPS students who did so within the same time frame.

The State's growing investment in TOPS to date is attributable to (1) the increase in the number of students receiving the award and (2) the increase in tuition at the State's public institutions of higher education. Between the 1999 and 2018 fiscal years, the State spent approximately \$2.9 billion on the TOPS program and 166,816 (34.8%) TOPS students graduated over that same time period.

## Appendices