

TOPS Report:
Analysis of the TOPS Program from 2003-2012

Louisiana Board of Regents

December, 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary 4

Brief History of the TOPS Program 7

Eligibility, Levels of Award, Renewal, and Distribution 7

ACT 1202 of 20019

Overview of Report10

Academic Preparation of TOPS Recipients10

Participation of TOPS Recipients in Postsecondary Education12

Persistence and Retention of TOPS Recipients 13

Graduation Rates of TOPS Recipients15

Funding TOPS 16

Conclusions17

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: *TOPS Eligibility Criteria and Award Specifics, 2012*7

Table 2: *Renewal Requirements, 2012*8

Table 3: *Distribution of Award Types across System, Fall 2012*9

Table 4: *Percentage of Entering Class with a TOPS Award across System, Fall 2011*.....9

Table 5: *Retention Rates of TOPS vs. Non-TOPS Students Who Began at a Four-Year Institution* ...14

Table 6: *Retention Rates of TOPS vs. Non-TOPS Students Who Began at a Two-Year Institution*14

Table 7: *Percentage of TOPS Awards Cancelled by Cohort*15

Figure A: *Graphical Overview of Report*10

Figure B: *Number and Percentage of High School Graduates Completing TOPS Core, 2003-2012* ...11

Figure C: *Number Eligible for TOPS vs. Number That Enroll By Graduating High School Class*13

Figure D: *150% Statewide Baccalaureate Graduation Rate Among TOPS and Non-TOPS Students* .16

Figure E: *150% Statewide Associate Degree Graduate Rate Among TOPS and Non-TOPS Students* .16
Figure F: *TOPS Tuition Program Funding, 1999-2013* 17

APPENDICES

A. Analysis of TOPS Tech Program19
B. The TOPS Core Curriculum20
C. ACT 120221

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 students, including numbers of and reasons for students losing award eligibility; and
- Graduation data, including rates.

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.

All indications are that the TOPS eligibility requirements do 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. As the key component for eligibility for a TOPS award, the *TOPS Core Curriculum* encourages students to take high school courses that will prepare them for success after high school, particularly in postsecondary education. Of the 2002-03 graduating high school class, 57.6% had completed the *TOPS Core Curriculum*. Ten years later, 69.7% of the 2011-12 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 2009-2010 high school graduating class, 21,244 students (approximately 50%) 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 16.8. In addition, data indicate that taking a rigorous high school curriculum decreases the likelihood of having to take developmental coursework in college. Of the 2009-2010 entering freshmen cohort, 42% 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, 90% were required to take developmental coursework.

One of the generally accepted purposes of TOPS is to keep Louisiana high school graduates in the state to pursue postsecondary educational opportunities. In 1997, a year before the TOPS program began, 43% of the 1996-97 high school graduating class enrolled full-time in a Louisiana postsecondary education institution the fall semester following graduation (fall 1997). Fourteen years later, 48% of the 2010-11 high school graduating class enrolled full-time in Louisiana postsecondary education. The TOPS program specifically seeks to entice Louisiana's best and brightest high school graduates (as determined 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 program's inception in fall 1998, 238,181 students have met the eligibility requirements for an *Opportunity, Performance or Honors* TOPS award. Of those, 212,056, or 89%, have accepted a TOPS award and enrolled in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana.

In regards to persistence, aggregate data indicate that students who begin college with a TOPS award return to postsecondary education in subsequent years at a higher rate than non-TOPS students. TOPS awards are 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. Between 2003 and 2012, approximately 34% of TOPS recipients had their TOPS award cancelled at some point during their postsecondary academic career. Based upon preliminary data from the 2011-12 entering freshmen cohort of TOPS recipients, approximately 12% had their awards cancelled during or immediately following their first year of postsecondary education. Data indicate that of those awards which are cancelled, the majority are cancelled due to students' failure to earn 24 hours of college credit during an academic year.

In regards to graduation rates, data indicate that students who begin a baccalaureate degree or an associate degree with TOPS graduate within 150% of time at much higher rates than do students without a TOPS award. Approximately 3 out of 5 TOPS recipients complete a baccalaureate degree within 150% of time, compared with 1 out of 4 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 the program. In total, the State has spent approximately \$1.5 billion on the TOPS program. Between the 1999 and 2012 fiscal years, total expenditures on the TOPS program increased 212%. In 1999 the average TOPS award amount was \$2,592. In 2012, the average TOPS award amount had increased 54% to \$3,981. In addition, there has been a

growing disparity between HB1 appropriations and total expenditures since fiscal year 2010. As a result, supplemental funding has been required to fully fund the TOPS program since 2011.

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 levels of TOPS awards for 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, 2012

| Award | Core | Core GPA | ACT Composite | Award Specifics | Duration |
|---------------------------|---------------|----------|---------------|--|----------------------------|
| <i>Opportunity</i> | 17.5 Units | 2.50 | 20 | Full-Time Tuition & Certain fees | 4 years, or 8 semesters |
| <i>Performance</i> | 17.5 Units | 3.00 | 23 | Full-Time Tuition & Certain fees + \$400/year | 4 years, or 8 semesters |
| <i>Honors</i> | 17.5 Units | 3.00 | 27 | Full-Time Tuition & Certain fees + \$800/year | 4 years, or 8 semesters |

Source: LOSFA website- TOPS Informational Brochures and Flyers

Currently, the *TOPS Core Curriculum* consists of 17.5 units (the specific course requirements of the *TOPS Core Curriculum* are contained in Appendix B). Beginning with graduates of the 2013-2014 academic year the *TOPS Core Curriculum* will increase to 19 units, with the addition of a fourth math course.

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, 2012

| Award | Hrs. Earned/Academic Year | Cum. GPA Each Academic Yr. (2.0 each semester/term) | Award Reinstated (Upon recovery of req.GPA) |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--|
| <i>Opportunity</i> | 24 | 2.30- first year; 2.50- subsequent years | 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 fall 2012, the majority (56.8%) of all TOPS awards went to students attending a UL System campus. The majority (52.2%) of students with TOPS awards had an *Opportunity* award. The majority (53.1%) of students with the highest level of award, the *Honor* award, attended an LSU System campus. Table 3 illustrates the distribution of TOPS awards received for the fall 2012 semester.

Table 3: Distribution of Award Types across System, Fall 2012

| Award | LSU System | Southern System | UL System | LCTC System | Private Institutions | Proprietary Schools | % of all awards |
|------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Opportunity | 31.7% | 0.2% | 62.4% | 0.2% | 5.4% | 0.1% | 52.2% |
| Performance | 36.7% | 0.1% | 57.7% | 0.1% | 5.4% | 0.1% | 26.8% |
| Honors | 53.1% | 0.0% | 41.8% | 0.0% | 5.0% | 0.0% | 21.0% |
| % of all awards | 37.5% | 0.1% | 56.8% | 0.1% | 5.3% | 0.1% | |

Source: LOSFA- TOPS Payment Summary by Award Level for Academic Year 2012-2013

Table 4 illustrates the percentage of the entering class with a TOPS award within each system for the fall 2011 first-time, full-time, degree-seeking cohort. In fall 2011, the LSU System had the largest percentage (81.7%) of its freshmen cohort with a TOPS award.

Table 4: Percentage of Entering Freshmen Class with a TOPS Award across System, Fall 2011

| Award | % of Entering Class with TOPS Award |
|------------------------|--|
| LSU System | 81.7% |
| Southern System | 1.4% |
| UL System | 63.2% |
| LCTC System | 4.7% |

Source: Internal BoR data files

ACT 1202 of 2001

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.

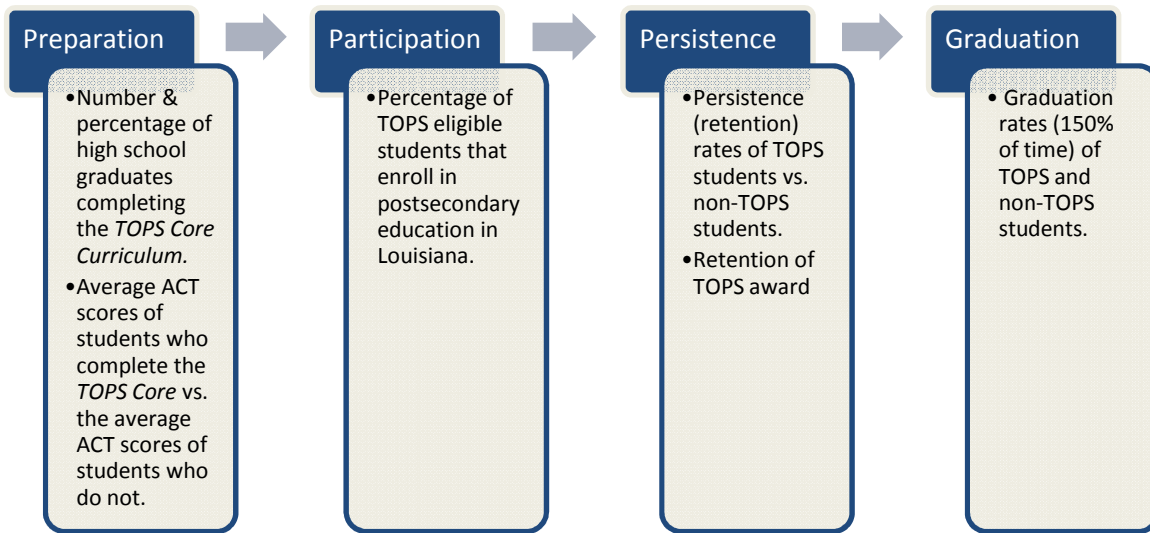
This report includes analyses of the five reporting specifications listed above.

TOPS Report: Historical Analysis of the TOPS Program, 2003-2012

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 they do not currently participate in Regents’ reporting systems.

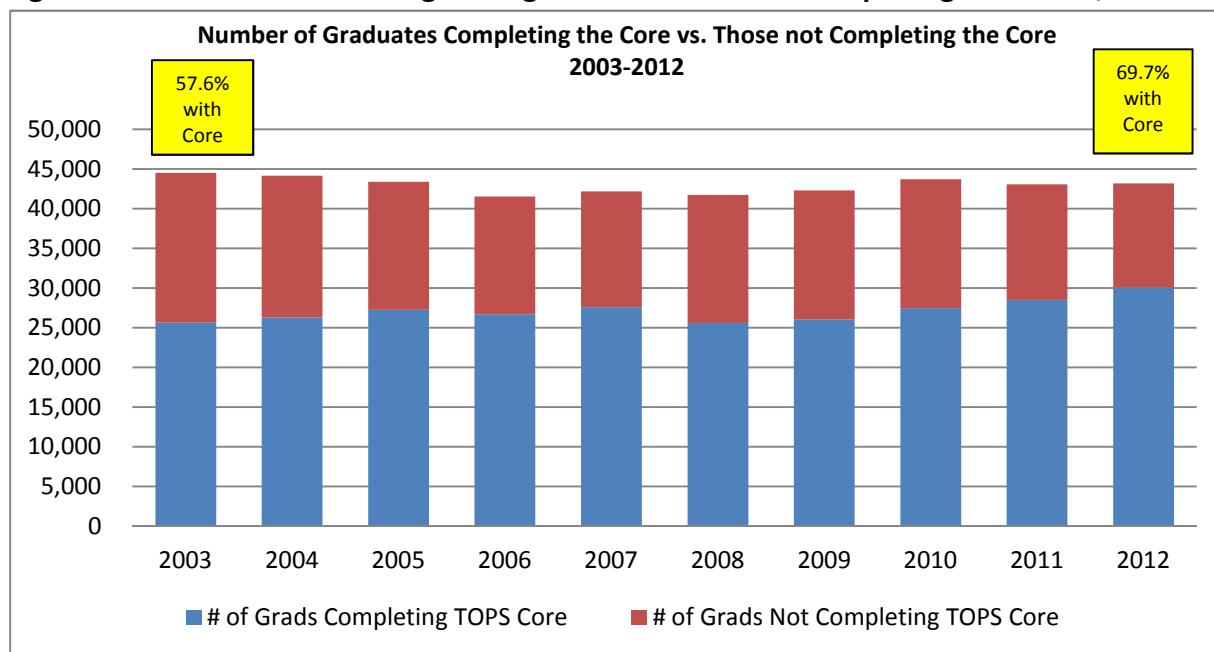
Preparation

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*.

As shown in Figure B, the number and percentage of high school graduates completing the *TOPS Core Curriculum* has increased from 57.6% in 2003 to 69.7% in 2012, despite a decrease in the total number of high school graduates (a result of demographic changes in the early 1990’s which led to a decrease in the number of school-age children in Louisiana).

Figure B: Number and Percentage of High School Graduates Completing *TOPS Core*, 2003-2012



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 average ACT composite score for the Louisiana high school graduating class of 1998 (the first class eligible for TOPS) was 19.5¹. The average ACT composite score for the class of 2012 was 20.3². In addition, 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.”³ According to ACT, of the 2009-2010 high school graduating class, 21,244 students

¹ “Louisiana ACT Scores for the Graduating Class of 1999 at the School and District Levels” Page 1- 1998 and 1999 ACT Results. American College Test (ACT) 1999 data file. Louisiana Department of Education.

² “Louisiana ACT Scores for the Graduating Class of 2012 for Districts and Schools” Page 2- 2008 through 2012 ACT Results. American College Test (ACT) data file. Louisiana Department of Education.

³ “The ACT High School-to-College Success Report: 2009-2010 Freshmen”

(approximately 50%) 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 16.8.

In addition, data indicate that taking a rigorous high school curriculum decreases the likelihood of having to take developmental coursework in college. Of the 2009-2010 entering freshmen cohort, 42% 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, 90% were required to take developmental coursework.⁴

All indications are that the TOPS eligibility requirements do 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.

Participation

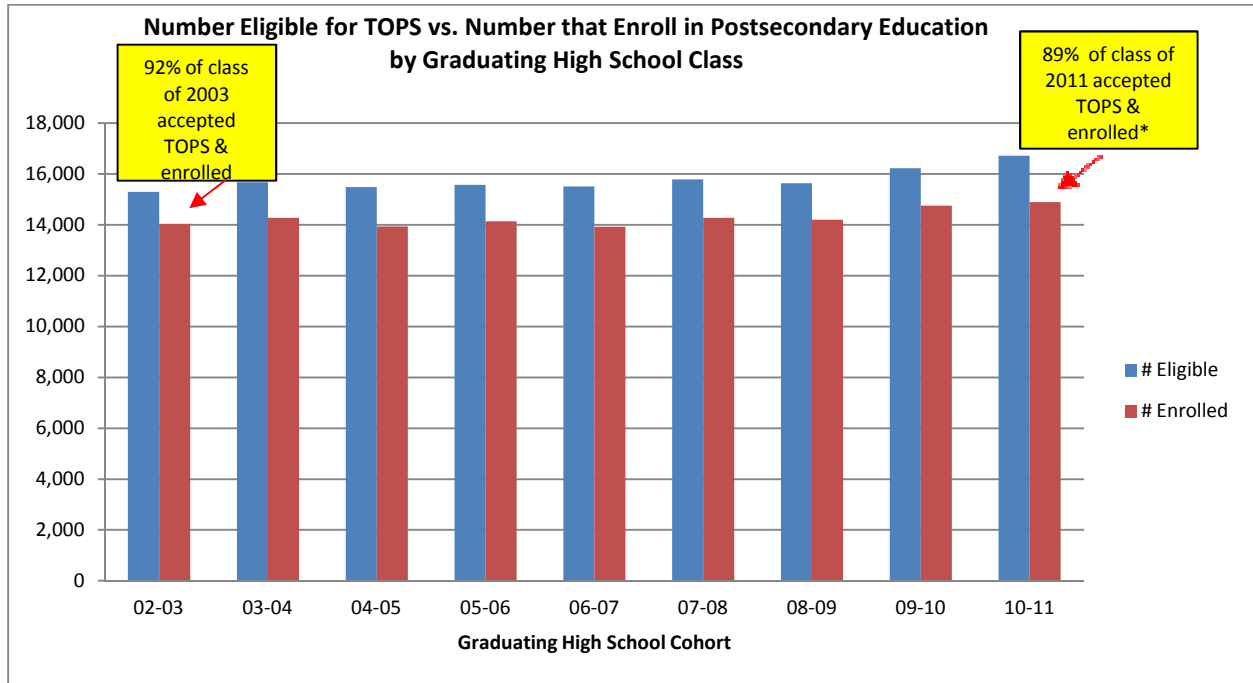
One of the generally accepted purposes of TOPS is to keep Louisiana high school graduates in the state to pursue postsecondary educational opportunities. In 1997, a year before the TOPS program began, 43% of the 1996-97 high school graduating class enrolled full-time in a Louisiana postsecondary education institution the fall semester following graduation (fall 1997)⁵. Fourteen years later, 48% of the 2010-11 high school graduating class enrolled full-time in Louisiana postsecondary education.⁶ The TOPS program specifically seeks to entice Louisiana's best and brightest high school graduates (as determined 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 program's inception in fall 1998, 238,181 students have been deemed eligible for an *Opportunity, Performance or Honors* TOPS award. Of those, 212,056, or 89%, have accepted a TOPS award and enrolled in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana. However, as illustrated in Figure C, the percentage of TOPS eligible students that enroll in postsecondary education in Louisiana has declined since 2002, from 92% to 89%.

⁴ "The ACT High School-to-College Success Report: 2009-2010 Freshmen"

⁵ "Louisiana First-Time College Freshmen State Report: Fall 1997." Louisiana Department of Education.

⁶ "Louisiana College & Career Readiness Data." Louisiana Department of Education website.

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 89% reported in Figure C above represent only those students in the 10-11 high school graduating cohort who accepted a TOPS award by the fall 2012 semester. The remaining cohort of eligible students has until the fall 2013 semester to accept a TOPS award.

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 5 and 6, students who begin college with a TOPS award return to postsecondary education in subsequent years at a higher rate than non-TOPS students.

Table 5 compares the overall retention rate (retention at any public postsecondary institution, not necessarily at the institution in which the student started) to the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth 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 5: 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 | | 5 th Yr. Retention | | 6 th Yr. Retention | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------|----------|
| | TOPS | Non-TOPS | TOPS | Non-TOPS | TOPS | Non-TOPS | TOPS | Non-TOPS | TOPS | Non-TOPS |
| | 2003 | 90% | 70% | 78% | 51% | 78% | 48% | 58% | 37% | 34% |
| 2004 | 85% | 62% | 82% | 54% | 77% | 47% | 57% | 36% | 34% | 24% |
| 2005 | 88% | 67% | 81% | 55% | 76% | 49% | 57% | 38% | 33% | 24% |
| 2006 | 88% | 68% | 82% | 58% | 78% | 52% | 56% | 41% | 33% | 26% |
| 2007 | 89% | 69% | 83% | 59% | 78% | 53% | 55% | 40% | N/A | N/A |
| 2008 | 90% | 70% | 83% | 58% | 79% | 53% | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| 2009 | 89% | 71% | 82% | 60% | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |

Source: BoR internal data files. *TOPS Tech* award recipients are considered non-TOPS for purposes of this analysis.

Table 6 compares the overall retention rate to the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth 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 6: 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 | | 4 th Yr. Retention | | 5 th Yr. Retention | | 6 th Yr. Retention | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------|----------|
| | TOPS | Non-TOPS | TOPS | Non-TOPS | TOPS | Non-TOPS | TOPS | Non-TOPS | TOPS | Non-TOPS |
| | 2003 | 79% | 55% | 60% | 26% | 57% | 26% | 44% | 21% | 32% |
| 2004 | 69% | 36% | 66% | 36% | 54% | 27% | 42% | 22% | 28% | 18% |
| 2005 | 76% | 54% | 65% | 38% | 52% | 30% | 41% | 25% | 28% | 20% |
| 2006 | 74% | 57% | 63% | 39% | 53% | 33% | 46% | 26% | 30% | 19% |
| 2007 | 78% | 57% | 66% | 44% | 56% | 33% | 40% | 25% | N/A | N/A |
| 2008 | 81% | 60% | 70% | 43% | 57% | 32% | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| 2009 | 78% | 56% | 66% | 39% | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |

Source: BoR internal data files. *TOPS Tech* award recipients are considered non-TOPS for purposes of this analysis.

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 preliminary data from the 2011-12 entering

freshmen cohort of TOPS recipients, approximately 12% had their awards cancelled during or immediately following their first year of postsecondary education.

As Table 7 illustrates, between 2003 and 2012 128,476 students received TOPS awards. Of these TOPS award recipients, 43,991 (34%) had their TOPS award cancelled at some point during their postsecondary academic career. Of the 43,991 awards which were cancelled, 28,777 (65.4%) were cancelled due to students' failure to earn 24 hours of college credit during an academic year.

Table 7: 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 |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2003-04 | 14,024 | 5,483 (39%) | 3,278 (23%) | 343 (2%) | 1,862 (13%) | 593 (4%) |
| 2004-05 | 14,274 | 5,819 (41%) | 3,381 (24%) | 327 (2%) | 2,111 (15%) | 716 (5%) |
| 2005-06 | 13,955 | 5,787 (42%) | 3,085 (22%) | 344 (3%) | 2,358 (17%) | 681 (5%) |
| 2006-07 | 14,154 | 5,810 (41%) | 3,745 (27%) | 338 (2%) | 1,727 (12%) | 703 (5%) |
| 2007-08 | 13,728 | 5,486 (40%) | 3,591 (26%) | 450 (3%) | 1,445 (11%) | 631 (5%) |
| 2008-09 | 14,332 | 5,445 (38%) | 3,706 (26%) | 468 (3%) | 1,271 (9%) | 574 (4%) |
| 2009-10 | 14,390 | 4,806 (33%) | 3,418 (24%) | 302 (2%) | 1,086 (8%) | 518 (4%) |
| 2010-11 | 14,753 | 3,600 (24%) | 2,837 (19%) | 40 (0.3%) | 723 (5%) | 471 (3%) |
| 2011-12 | 14,866 | 1,755 (12%) | 1,736 (12%) | 0 (0.0%) | 19 (0.1%) | 313 (2%) |
| TOTAL | 128,476 | 43,991 | 28,777 | 2,612 | 12,602 | 5,200 |

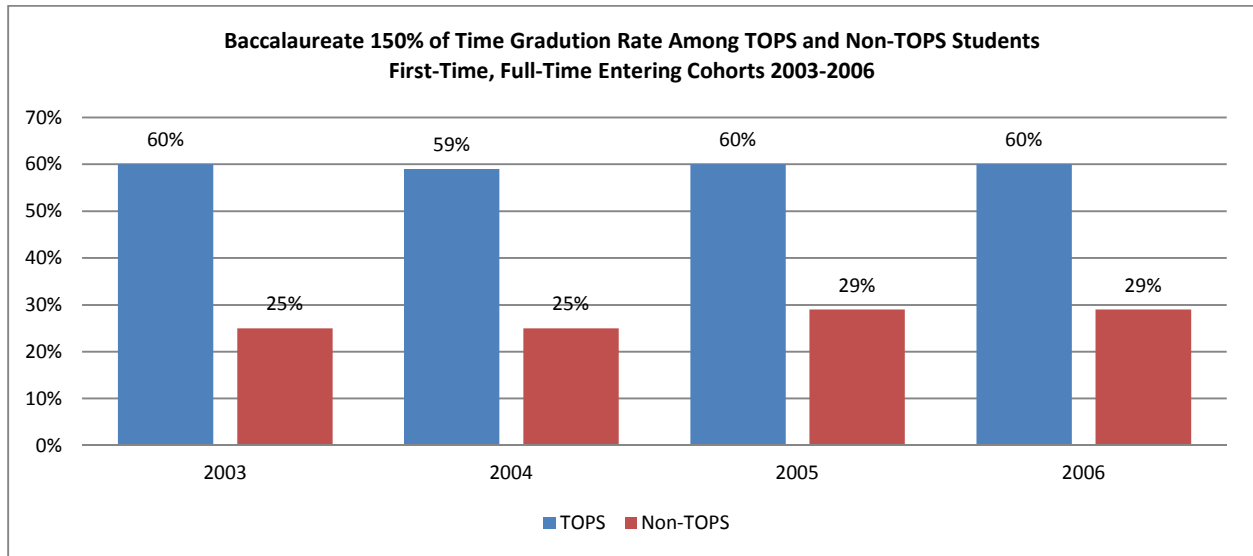
*Does not include those cancelled due to resignation.

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

Graduation

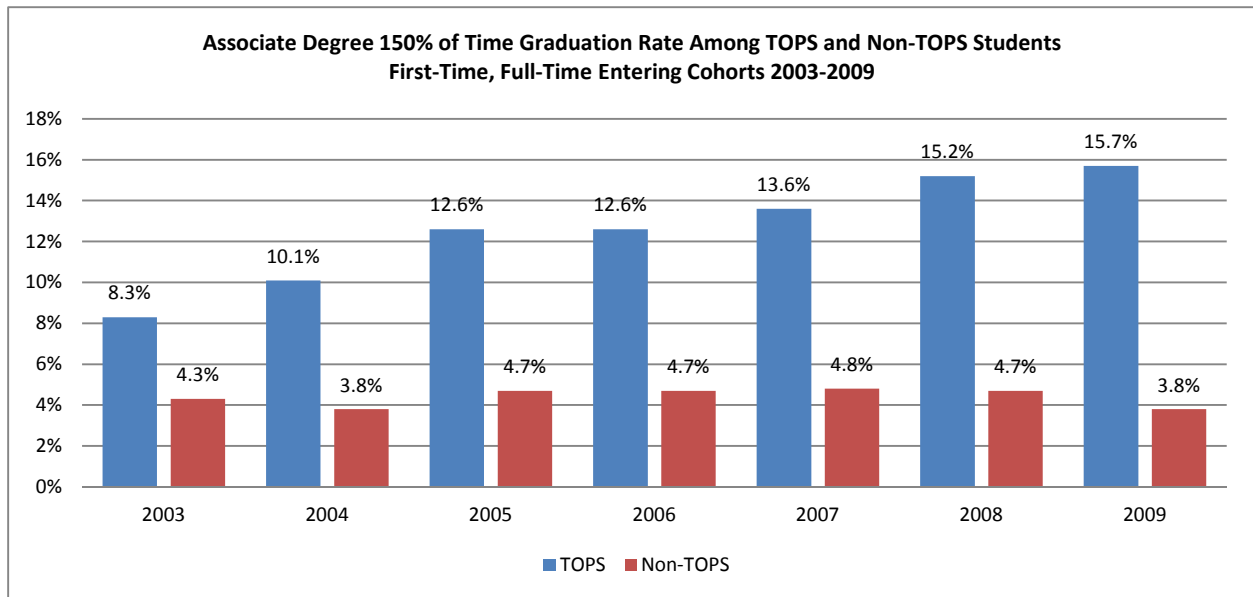
Graduation is typically measured by calculating the rate at which first-time, full-time degree seeking students earn their academic degrees within 150% of the time required (i.e., within six years for baccalaureate degrees and within three years for associate degrees). This 150% protocol was adopted 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 or an associate degree with TOPS graduate within 150% of time at much higher rates than do students without a TOPS award. As Figure D illustrates, approximately 3 out of 5 TOPS recipients complete a baccalaureate degree within 150% of time, compared with 1 out of 4 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. *TOPS Tech* award recipients are considered non-TOPS for purposes of this analysis.

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



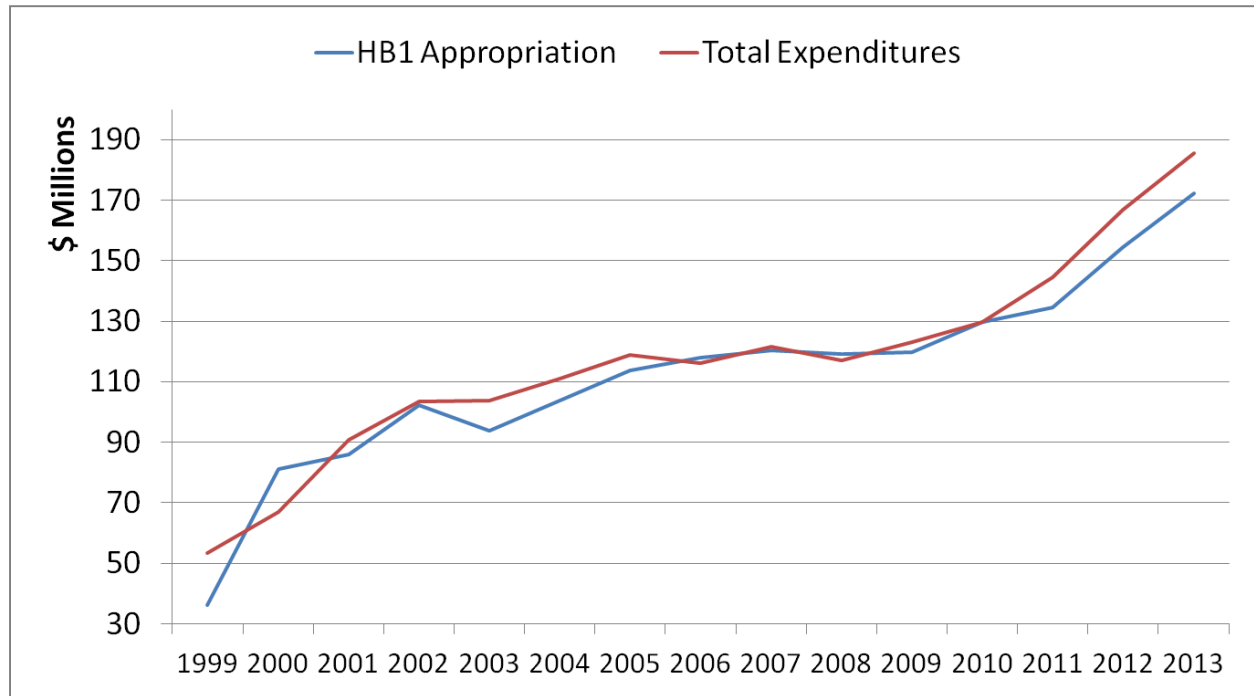
Source: BoR internal data files. *TOPS Tech* award recipients are considered non-TOPS for purposes of this analysis.

Funding TOPS

From 1999 to 2012, the State has spent approximately \$1.5 billion funding the TOPS program. During that same time period, total expenditures on the TOPS program have increased 212%. In 1999 the average TOPS award amount was \$2,592. In 2012, the average TOPS award amount had increased 54% to \$3,981. As Figure F illustrates, there has been a growing disparity

between HB1 appropriations and total expenditures since fiscal year 2010. As a result, supplemental funding has been required to fully fund the TOPS program since 2011.

Figure F: TOPS Tuition Program Funding, 1999-2013



Source: LOSFA internal data files. Note: State Fiscal Year 2013 expenditures are estimated.

Conclusions

In accordance with ACT 1202 of the 2001 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 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, of TOPS students.

In regards to the relationship between the high school courses taken and students' score on the ACT, indications are that completion of the *TOPS Core* improves students' score on the ACT.

In regards to keeping Louisiana's "best and brightest" high school graduates in the state to pursue postsecondary educational opportunities, data indicate that since the programs

inception, 89% of students deemed eligible for a TOPS award have accepted the award and subsequently enrolled in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana. The percentage of TOPS eligible students that enroll in postsecondary education in Louisiana has however declined since 2002, from 92% to 89%.

In regards to persistence, data indicate that students who begin college with a TOPS award return to postsecondary education in subsequent years at a higher rate than non-TOPS students.

In regards to retention of TOPS awards, between 2003 and 2012, about 34% of students with TOPS awards had their award cancelled at some point during their postsecondary academic career. Preliminary data from the 2011-12 entering freshmen cohort of TOPS recipients indicate that approximately 12% of TOPS recipients have their award cancelled during or immediately following their first year of postsecondary education. Data also reveal that the majority (65.4%) of awards that are cancelled, whether cancelled during the first year of college or at any point thereafter, are cancelled due to students' failure to earn 24 hours of college credit during an academic year.

In regards to graduation rates, students who begin a baccalaureate degree or an associate degree with TOPS graduate within 150% of time at much higher rates than do students without a TOPS award. More specifically, approximately 3 out of 5 TOPS recipients complete a baccalaureate degree within 150% of time, compared with 1 out of 4 non-TOPS students who do so within the same time frame.

Appendix A
Analysis of TOPS Tech Program

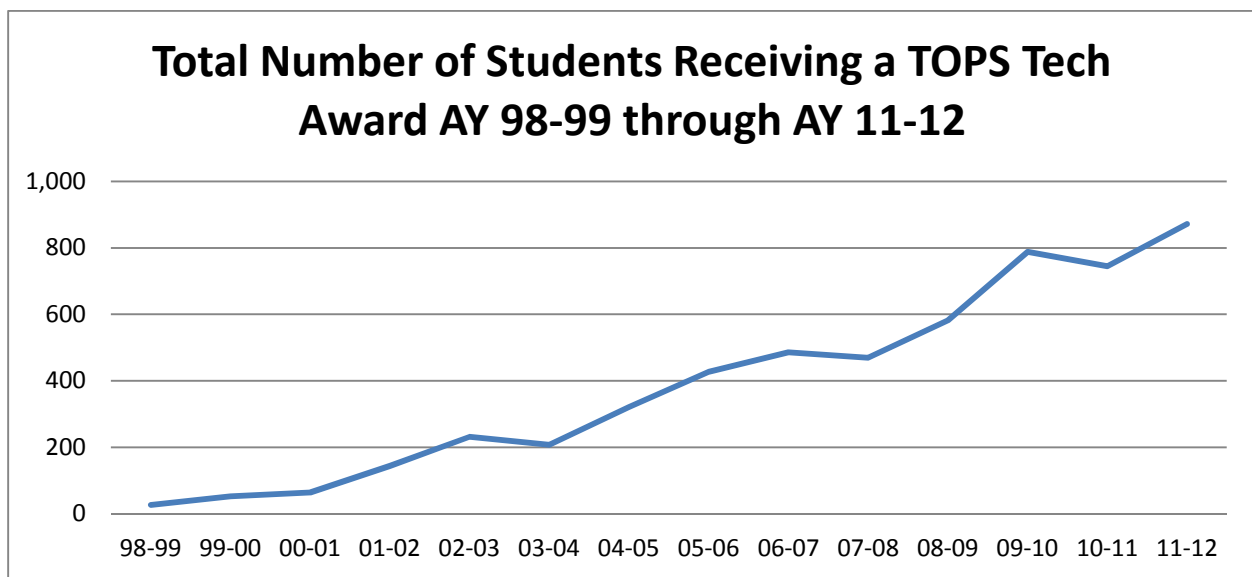
The *TOPS Tech* award may be utilized at any Louisiana Technical College and other public postsecondary school or at any member school of the Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (LAICU) that provides skill or occupational training, and certain cosmetology and proprietary schools. 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.

TOPS Tech Eligibility Criteria and Award Specifics, 2012

| | 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 |

Source: LOSFA website- TOPS Informational Brochures and Flyers

The *TOPS Tech* award has historically been underutilized. Since the program's inception in fall 1998 through fall 2012, approximately 42,928 students have been deemed eligible for a *TOPS Tech* award. Of those, approximately 5,515, or 13%, have utilized the award and enrolled full-time in a TOPS-approved Louisiana postsecondary education institution.





TOPS Core Curriculum

Attachment B

For the Opportunity, Performance, and Honors Awards
For High School graduates of 2013

| Units | Courses |
|--------------------------|--|
| 4 | English I, II, III, & IV |
| 1 | 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) |
| 1 | Algebra II or Integrated Mathematics II |
| 1 | Geometry, Applied Geometry, Pre-Calculus, Advanced Math-Pre-Calculus, Calculus, AP Calculus AB, Advanced Math-Functions and Statistics, Probability and Statistics, Discrete Mathematics, Applied Mathematics III, Integrated Mathematics III, or Algebra III |
| 1 | Biology I or II |
| 1 | Chemistry I or II, or Chemistry Com |
| 1 | Earth Science, Physical Science, Environmental Science, Integrated Science, Biology II, Chemistry II, Physics, Physics II, Physics for Technology I or II, AP Physics C: Electricity & Magnetism, AP Physics C: Mechanics or both Agriscience I & II (two units) |
| 1 | Additional Math or Science : Geometry, Applied Geometry, Pre-Calculus, Advanced Math-Pre-calculus, Calculus, AP Calculus AB, Advanced Math-Functions and Statistics, Probability and Statistics, Discrete Mathematics, Applied Mathematics III, Integrated Mathematics III, Algebra III, Biology II, Chemistry II, Physics, Physics II, AP Physics C: Electricity & Magnetism, AP Physics C: Mechanics or Anatomy and Physiology |
| 1 | American History |
| 1 | Civics and Free Enterprise (1 unit combined), Civics (1 year) or AP Government and Politics: United States |
| 1 | World History, Western Civilization, World Geography, or European History |
| 2 | Foreign Language (2 units in the same language) or American Sign Language I & II |
| 1 | Fine Arts Survey (1 unit) or 2 units performance courses in music, dance or theater or 2 units studio art or 2 units visual art or both Speech III & IV or both Agriscience I & II or substitute 1 unit of an elective from among the other subjects listed in this core curriculum |
| 1/2 | Computer Science I or II, Computer Technology Literacy, Business Computer Applications, Introduction to Business Computer Applications, or Computer Science Elective or substitute (<i>the following courses can only be used to substitute for the Computer Science requirement</i>) Advanced Technical Drafting, Computer Applications, Computer/Technology Applications, Computer Architecture, Computer Electronics I or II, Computer Systems and Networking I or II, Desktop Publishing, Digital Graphics & Animation, Multimedia Productions, Computer Multimedia Presentations, Technology Education Computer Applications, Telecommunications, Web Mastering, Web Design, Word Processing, Independent Study in Technology Applications, AP Computer Science A, AP Computer Science AB, Database Design & Programming, Database Programming with PL/SQL Training, Java Programming or substitute 1/2 unit of an elective from among the other subjects listed in the core curriculum |
| TOTAL: 17.5 units | |



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.
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Updated 08/08/2012

Regular Session, 2001

ACT No. 1202

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: _____