

TOPS Report:  
Analysis of the TOPS Program from 2007-2016

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 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 (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 levels of analysis to the 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.

The information in the report includes current and historical data on TOPS students (students receiving an *Opportunity, Performance, or Honors* award) and non-TOPS students, to allow for comparison. ACT 587 of the 2014 Regular Legislative Session 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 2017-18 TOPS recipients are not included.

Overall, the findings indicated that since academic year 2007-08:

- Approximately 90% of students deemed eligible for a TOPS award have accepted the award and subsequently enrolled in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana.

- The majority of TOPS recipients are white (76%) and female (59%).
- The average ACT score of all TOPS recipients between 2007 and 2016 was 24 and the average high school GPA (Core GPA) was 3.35.
- The average ACT score of students who had their award cancelled between 2007 and 2016 was 22.9 and their average high school GPA (Core GPA) was 3.11.
- Students who begin college with a TOPS award *persist* and *graduate* at a higher rate than non-TOPS students.

## **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 to analyze 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 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 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 levels of analyses 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 of the 2014 Regular Legislative Session 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 2017-18 TOPS recipients are not included.

In addition, during the 2016 and 2017 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 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 are 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. Under this law, 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 is effective beginning with the AY 2016-17 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 16-17 AY.

#### 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 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, 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. (Some 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 2016-17 school year and thereafter will be 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.

**Table 1: TOPS Eligibility Criteria and Award Components, 2017**

<b>Award</b>	<b>Core Units</b>	<b>Core GPA</b>	<b>ACT Composite</b>	<b>Award Components</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<b>Opportunity</b>	19	2.50	20	Full-time tuition contingent upon available funding	4 years, or 8 semesters
<b>Performance</b>	19	3.00	23	Full-time tuition contingent upon available funding and a \$400/year stipend per AY provided sufficient funding is available	4 years, or 8 semesters
<b>Honors</b>	19	3.00	27	Full-time tuition contingent upon available funding and an \$800/year stipend per AY provided sufficient funding is available	4 years, or 8 semesters

Source: LOSFA website- TOPS 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 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.

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.

**Table 2: Minimum Renewal Requirements, 2017**

<b>Award</b>	<b>Hrs. Earned/Academic Year</b>	<b>Cum. GPA Each Academic Yr. (2.0 each semester/term)</b>	<b>Award Reinstated (Upon recovery of req. GPA)</b>
<b>Opportunity</b>	24	2.30- first year <sup>1</sup> ; 2.50- subsequent years <sup>2</sup>	Yes
<b>Performance</b>	24	3.00	Yes, as Opportunity
<b>Honors</b>	24	3.00	Yes, as Opportunity

<sup>1</sup>Students must have earned a 2.30 cumulative GPA at the end of the first Academic Year (between 24-47 hours of earned credit).

<sup>2</sup>Students must have earned a 2.50 cumulative GPA at the end of all other Academic Years (once 48 hours have been earned).

Source: LOSFA website- TOPS Brochures and Flyers

Table 3 illustrates the distribution of TOPS awards across systems for the AY 2016-17. In AY 2016-17, the majority (54.5%) of TOPS awards went to students attending a UL System campus. Data also indicate that the majority (50.8%) of students with TOPS awards had an *Opportunity* award. Of students with the highest level of award, the *Honors* award, 45.5% attended an LSU System campus.

**Table 3: Distribution of Award Types across Systems, AY 2016-2017**

<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>Opportunity</b>	27.4%	2.4%	57.8%	6.7%	5.2%	0.4%	50.8%
<b>Performance</b>	32.9%	0.9%	57.5%	2.6%	5.9%	0.2%	26.4%
<b>Honors</b>	45.5%	0.1%	43.8%	0.5%	10.0%	0.1%	22.8%
<b>% of all awards</b>	33.0%	1.5%	54.5%	4.2%	6.5%	0.3%	

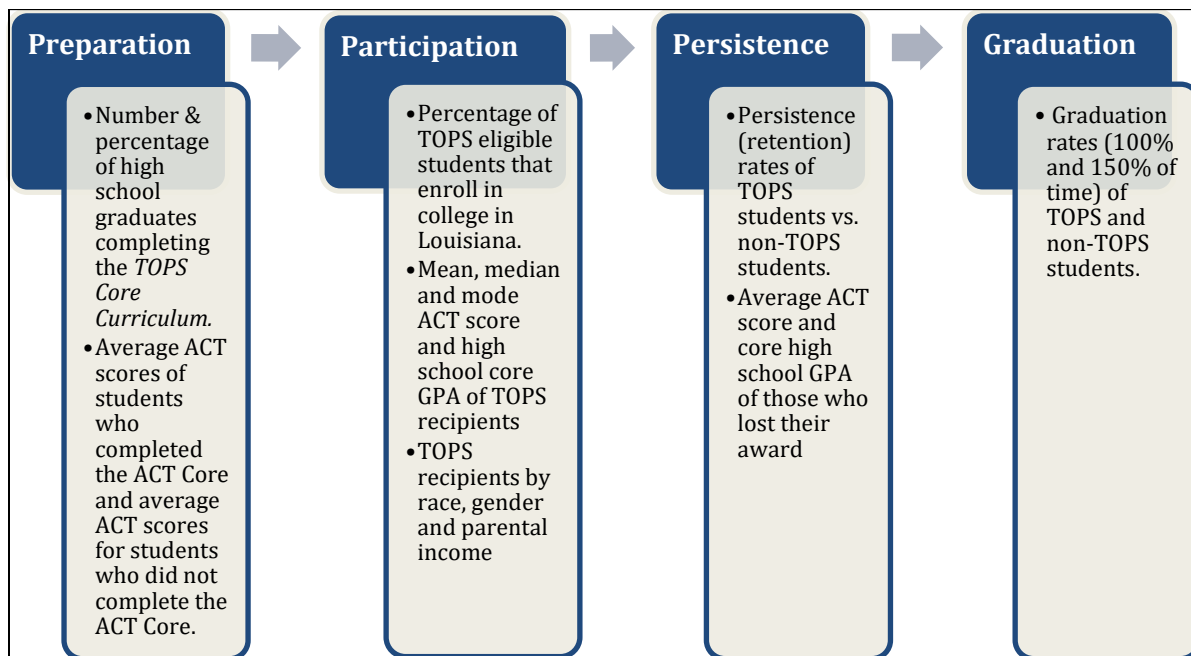
Source: LOSFA- TOPS Payment Summary by Award Level for Academic Year 2016-2017 as of 07-28-17.



## TOPS Report: Historical Analysis of the TOPS Program, 2007-2016

The information in this report includes current and historical data on TOPS students (students receiving an *Opportunity, Performance, or Honors* award) and 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.

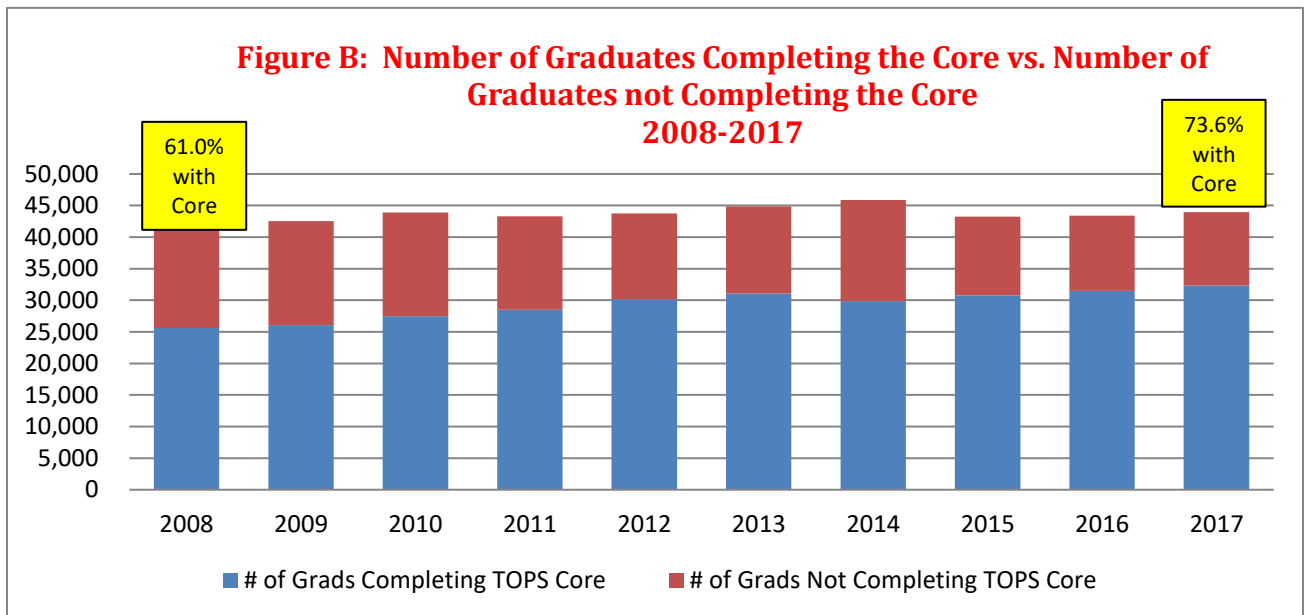
**Figure A: Graphical Overview of Report**



## 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 2017 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, 51,486 students in the 2017 graduating class took the ACT test. Of these students, approximately 68% took the ACT Core and 20% 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%. Figure B compares the number of graduates completing the TOPS core to those who did not.



Source: LOSFA internal data files as of September 2017. The *TOPS Core* was changed in 2008. An additional Math or Science requirement was added.

**Table 4: Average ACT Composite, AY 2013-2017**

<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

The average ACT composite (see Table 4) for those who completed the ACT Core in 2017 was 20.8; whereas the average ACT composite score for those who did not complete the ACT Core was 16.3<sup>1</sup>. It is reasonable to conclude that because 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.

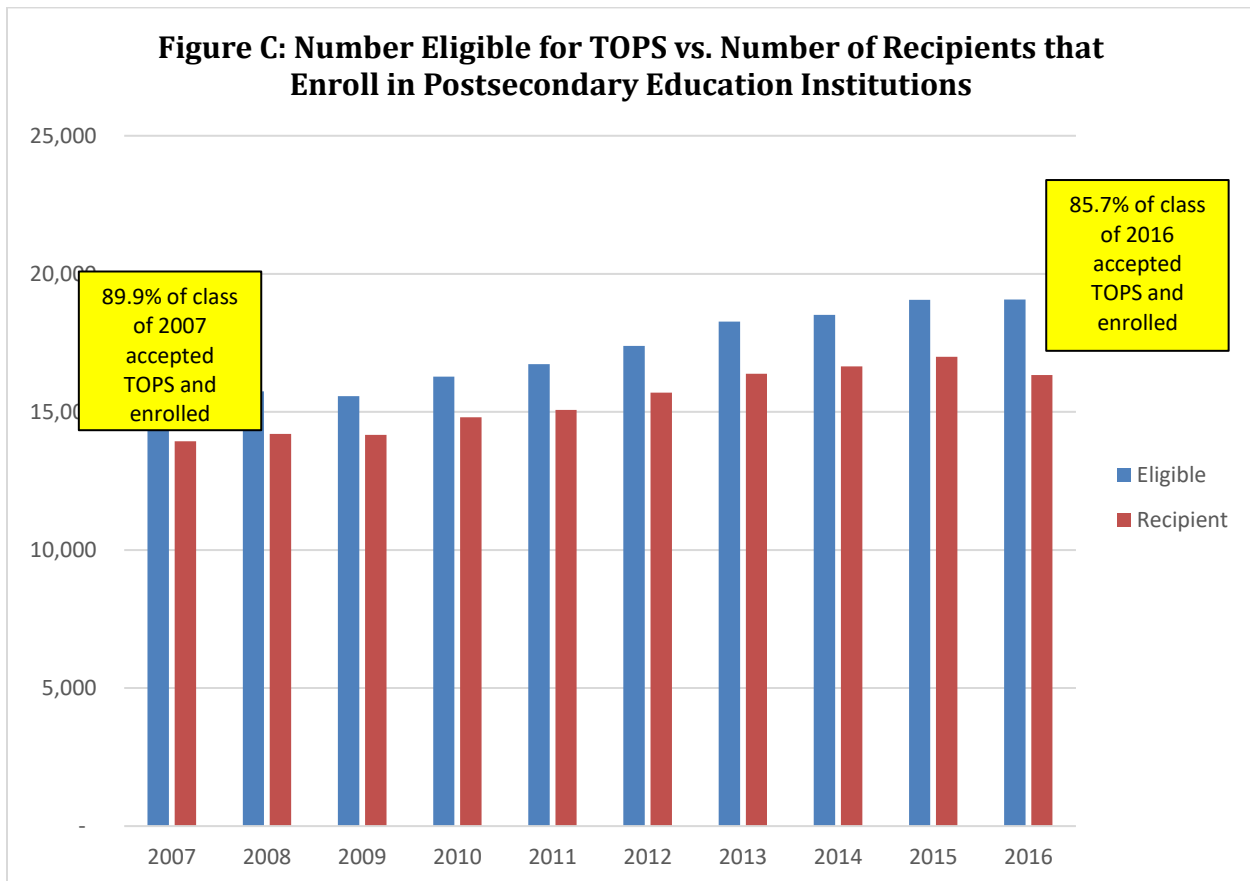
The TOPS eligibility criteria is more rigorous than the ACT Core as it requires students to take a more rigorous high school curriculum, which in turn better prepares them for the ACT and for success in postsecondary education.

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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.

## 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 172,134 students deemed eligible for a TOPS *Opportunity, Performance or Honors* award between 2007 and 2016, 154,248 (or 89.6%) accepted the award and enrolled in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana.



Source: LOSFA internal data files as of October 2017.

Since 2007, both the average ACT scores and high school core GPA of TOPS recipients have increased as illustrated in Table 5. For example, in 2007 the average ACT score of TOPS recipients was 23. By 2016, the average ACT score increased to 24 (the median score was 23 and the mode was 20). Additionally, in 2007 the average TOPS core GPA was 3.29. By 2017, the average TOPS core GPA increased to 3.37 (and the median core GPA was 3.41). 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 2016 high school graduates eligible for TOPS by award category, school, and parish.

**Table 5: Mean ACT and Core GPA of TOPS Recipients\***

HS Graduating Cohort	TOPS Recipients' Average Composite ACT Score	Statewide Average ACT Composite Score**	TOPS Recipients Average Core GPA
2007	23	20.1	3.34
2008	24	20.1	3.34
2009	24	20.1	3.33
2010	24	20.1	3.33
2011	24	20.2	3.34
2012	24	20.3	3.35
2013	24	19.5	3.36
2014	24	19.2	3.35
2015	24	19.4	3.35
2016	24	19.5	3.37

\*Since 2007, the overall average composite ACT score of TOPS recipients is 24; the overall average GPA is 3.35.

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

As Table 6 indicates, TOPS recipients are predominantly white. Data indicate there are race disparities in TOPS recipients. In 2016, 68% of TOPS recipients were white while the total first-time entering freshman white student population was 53%. This 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 2016, 2,292 African Americans were TOPS recipients, compared to 1,831 in 2007. This represents a 25% increase since 2007.

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

HS Graduating Cohort	Asian	American Indian	African American	White	Hispanic	Other	Total
2007	371	69	1,831	11,320	187	0	13,778
2008	374	67	1,962	11,448	234	0	14,085
2009	397	79	2,074	11,204	237	0	13,991
2010	411	79	2,343	11,492	289	0	14,614
2011	400	71	2,462	11,544	339	70	14,886
2012	480	76	2,814	11,655	421	95	15,541
2013	492	82	2,947	12,169	412	137	16,239
2014	512	142	2,729	12,011	582	145	16,121
2015	442	215	2,858	11,582	711	130	15,938
2016	352	210	2,292	9,045	1,266	119	13,284

\* It should be noted that 6,477 individuals did not report their race. Therefore, they were not included in this analysis.

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of October 2017.

Additionally, initial TOPS recipients are predominantly female. As noted in Table 7, in 2016, 59% of TOPS recipients were female. In comparison, 55% of the total 2016 first-time freshman undergraduate population was female.

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

HS Graduating Cohort	Female	Male	Total
2007	8,140	5,742	13,882
2008	8,420	5,792	14,212
2009	8,315	5,846	14,161
2010	8,673	6,130	14,803
2011	8,760	6,356	15,116
2012	9,054	6,671	15,725
2013	9,597	6,843	16,440
2014	9,774	6,913	16,687
2015	10,093	6,996	17,089
2016	9,698	6,679	16,377

\* 462 individuals did not report their gender and are not included in this analysis.

LOSFA internal data files as of October 2017

As indicated in Table 8, TOPS recipients are increasingly coming from middle- and upper-income families. Since 2007, the number of TOPS recipients from households with incomes of \$150,000 or more has almost doubled; whereas, the number of recipients from lower-income households has remained relatively stagnant over time. According to the 2015 American Community Survey (ACS), the median household income for Louisiana was \$45,047.

**Table 8: Initial TOPS Opportunity, Performance, and Honors Recipients, by Parental Income\***

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+
2006-07	984	984	960	1,350	1,860	2,907	1,740	622	1,694
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	1,704	2,674	2,068	822	2,128
2009-10	1,024	1,107	1,034	1,394	1,755	2,685	2,124	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	2,713	2,114	849	2,421
2012-13	1,014	1,243	1,102	1,512	1,758	2,636	2,235	1,044	2,737
2013-14	980	1,237	1,127	1,526	1,621	2,620	2,216	1,054	3,083
2014-15	1,090	1,253	1,159	1,580	1,732	2,573	2,232	1,078	3,254
2015-16	972	1,207	1,108	1,542	1,638	2,439	2,162	1,045	3,247

\* 9,814 individuals either did not report income or reported a negative income and are not included in this analysis.

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of October 2017

**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 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).

**Table 9: Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS vs. Non-TOPS Students Who Began at a Four-Year Institution**

Fall Semester Entering Class	2 <sup>nd</sup> Yr. Retention		3 <sup>rd</sup> Yr. Retention		4 <sup>th</sup> Yr. Retention	
	TOPS	Non-TOPS	TOPS	Non-TOPS	TOPS	Non-TOPS
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%	75%	52%
2012	87%	71%	81%	59%	75%	52%
2013	87%	71%	81%	60%	76%	52%
2014	87%	71%	81%	59%	0%	0%
2015	87%	68%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: BoR internal data files as of September 2017

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.

**Table 10: Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS Students Who Began at a Four-Year Institution by TOPS Award Level**

Fall Semester Entering Class	2 <sup>nd</sup> Yr. Retention			3 <sup>rd</sup> Yr. Retention			4 <sup>th</sup> Yr. Retention		
	Opportunity	Performance	Honors	Opportunity	Performance	Honors	Opportunity	Performance	Honors
	2006	87%	91%	96%	79%	87%	93%	75%	85%
2007	87%	93%	95%	81%	90%	92%	75%	87%	89%
2008	89%	88%	95%	82%	84%	91%	76%	82%	89%
2009	88%	88%	93%	80%	84%	92%	74%	81%	88%
2010	87%	88%	94%	79%	85%	93%	73%	81%	89%
2011	87%	87%	94%	78%	84%	91%	71%	81%	87%
2012	86%	88%	94%	77%	84%	91%	71%	81%	88%
2013	86%	86%	94%	78%	83%	91%	72%	79%	88%
2014	85%	88%	94%	76%	84%	92%	0%	0%	0%
2015	84%	89%	94%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: BoR internal data files as of September 2017

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.

**Table 11: Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS vs. Non-TOPS Students Who Began at a Two-Year Institution**

Fall Semester Entering Class	2 <sup>nd</sup> Yr. Retention	
	TOPS	Non-TOPS
2006	74%	57%
2007	78%	57%
2008	81%	60%
2009	78%	56%
2010	77%	53%
2011	72%	53%
2012	74%	52%
2013	72%	52%
2014	73%	51%
2015	75%	50%

Source: BoR internal data files as of September 2017



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. Awards are initially suspended for GPA and can be permanently canceled only 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 2006 and spring 2017, 169,744 students received TOPS awards. Of these TOPS award recipients, 48,093 (28%) had their TOPS award cancelled at some point during their postsecondary academic career. Of the 48,093 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
2006-2007	14,186	5,793 41%	3,737 26%	320 2%	1,736 12%	703 5%
2007-2008	13,760	5,429 39%	3,582 26%	400 3%	1,447 11%	635 5%
2008-2009	14,334	5,402 38%	3,691 26%	358 2%	1,353 9%	578 4%
2009-2010	14,504	5,074 35%	3,454 24%	385 3%	1,235 9%	541 4%
2010-2011	14,813	4,702 32%	3,172 21%	496 3%	1,034 7%	606 4%
2011-2012	15,140	4,255 28%	3,040 20%	531 4%	684 5%	588 4%
2012-2013	15,839	4,126 26%	3,479 22%	555 4%	92 1%	603 4%
2013-2014	16,466	4,145 25%	3,565 22%	506 3%	74 0%	655 4%
2014-2015	16,714	3,897 23%	3,639 22%	225 1%	33 0%	620 4%
2015-2016	17,306	3,215 19%	3,172 18%	13 0%	30 0%	533 3%
2016-2017	16,682	2,055 12%	2,049 12%	0%	6 0%	321 2%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>169,744</b>	<b>48,093</b>	<b>36,580</b>	<b>3,789</b>	<b>7,724</b>	<b>6,383</b>

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of September 2017, TOPS Tech award recipients not included.

The average ACT score of all the TOPS recipients who had their award cancelled between 2006-07 and 2016-17 (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 22.9. Among this same group the average high school GPA was 3.11 (Table 13).

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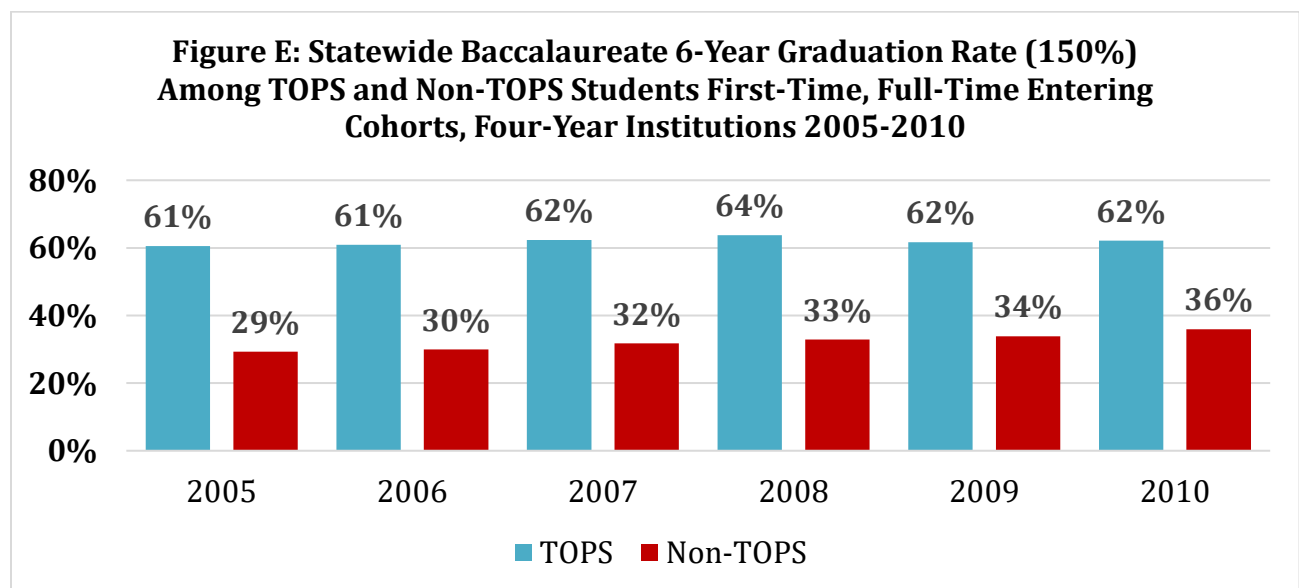
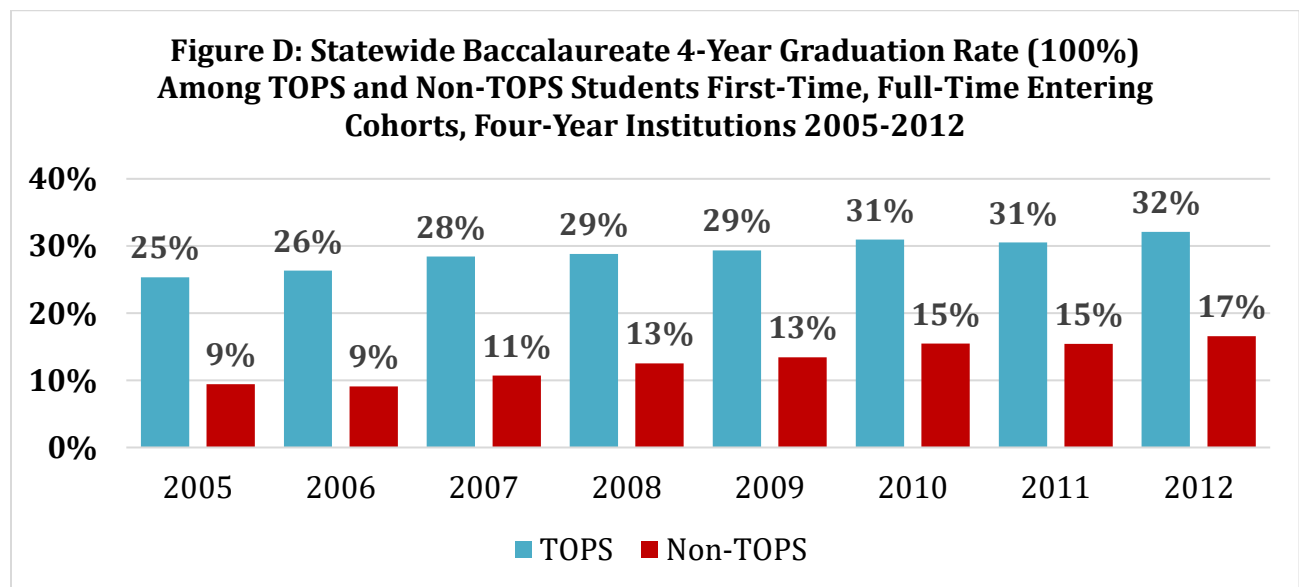
**Table 13: Average ACT Score and High School GPA of TOPS Recipients Who had Their Award Cancelled, 2005-2016**

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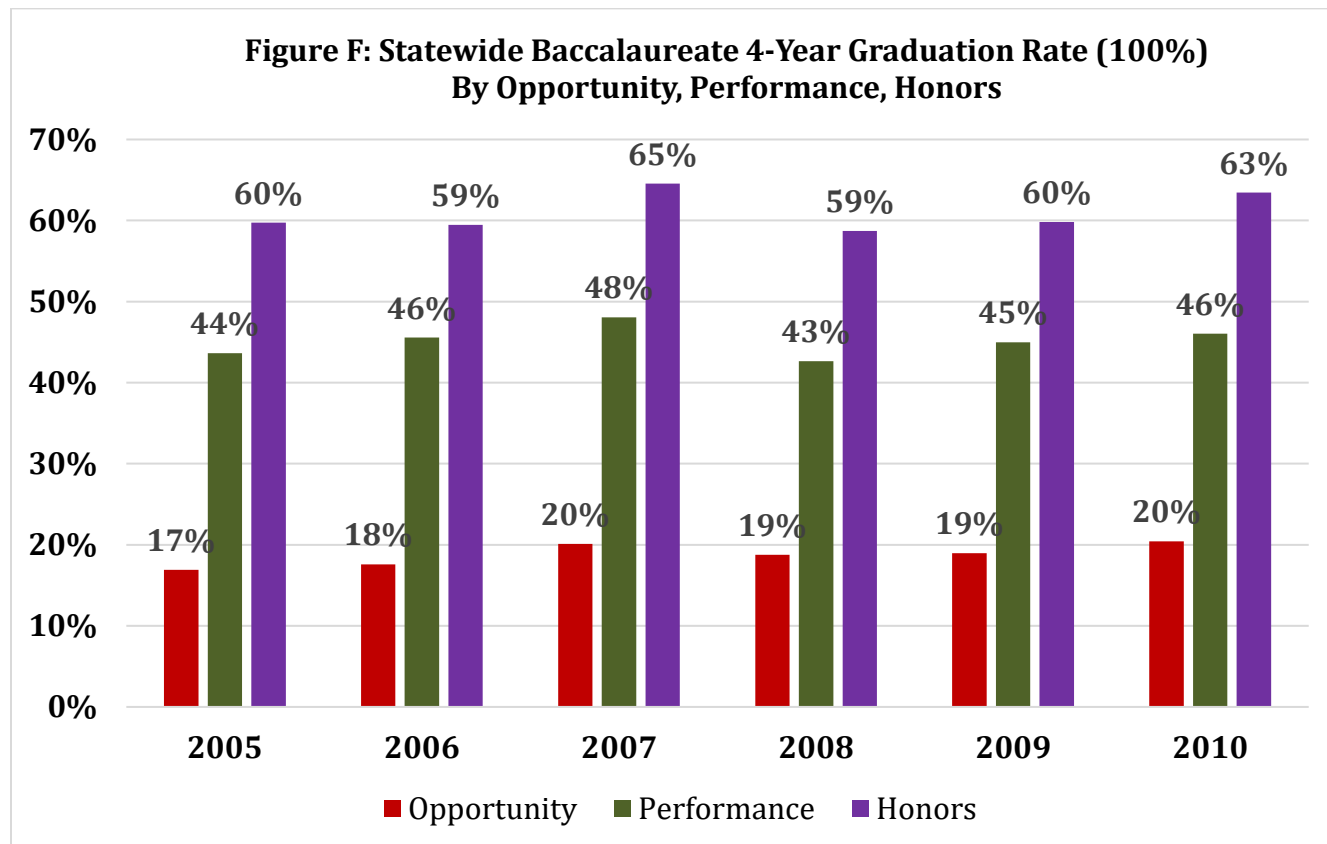
	<b>Avg. ACT</b>	<b>Avg. High School GPA</b>
<b>Cancelled: 24 Hr. Requirement</b>	23.0	3.11
<b>Cancelled: GPA Requirement</b>	22.7	3.10
<b>Cancelled: Non-Continuous Enrollment</b>	23.0	3.13

## **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 100% and 150% of time. As noted in Figures D and E, 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 32% of first-time, full-time entering cohort of TOPS recipients complete a baccalaureate degree within 100% of time, compared with 17% of non-TOPS students who did so within the same time frame.

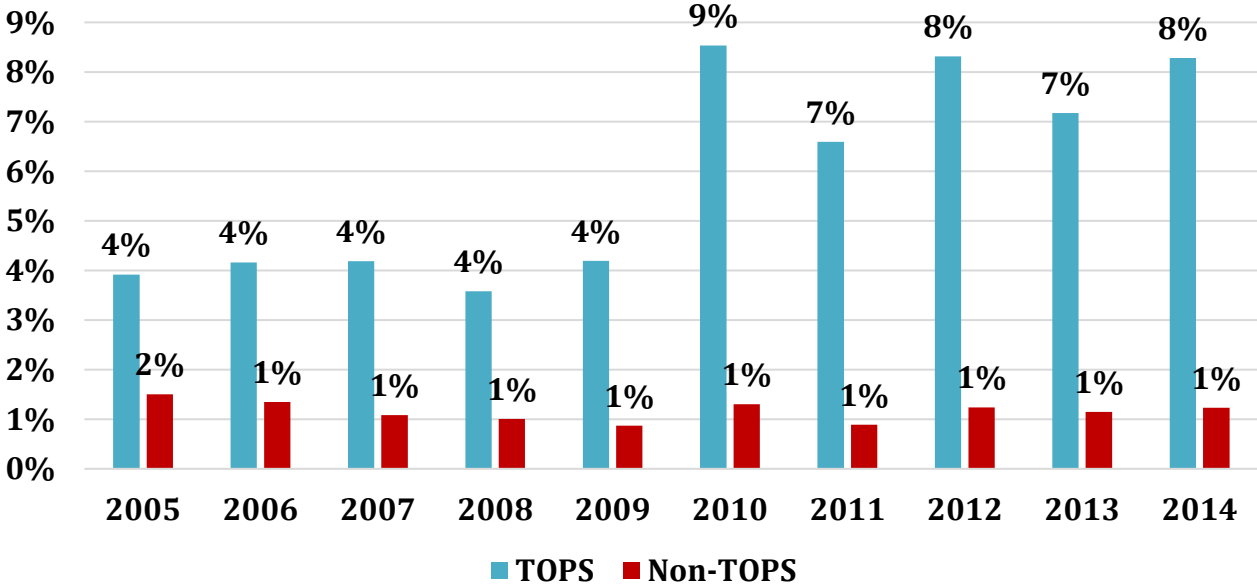


Graduation rates also differ across the type of award received. TOPS Honors award recipients graduate at much higher rates than TOPS Performance and Opportunity award recipients. As noted in Figure F, 63% of TOPS Honors award recipients complete a baccalaureate degree within 100% of time, compared with 46% and 20% of the TOPS Performance and Opportunity award recipients, respectively.

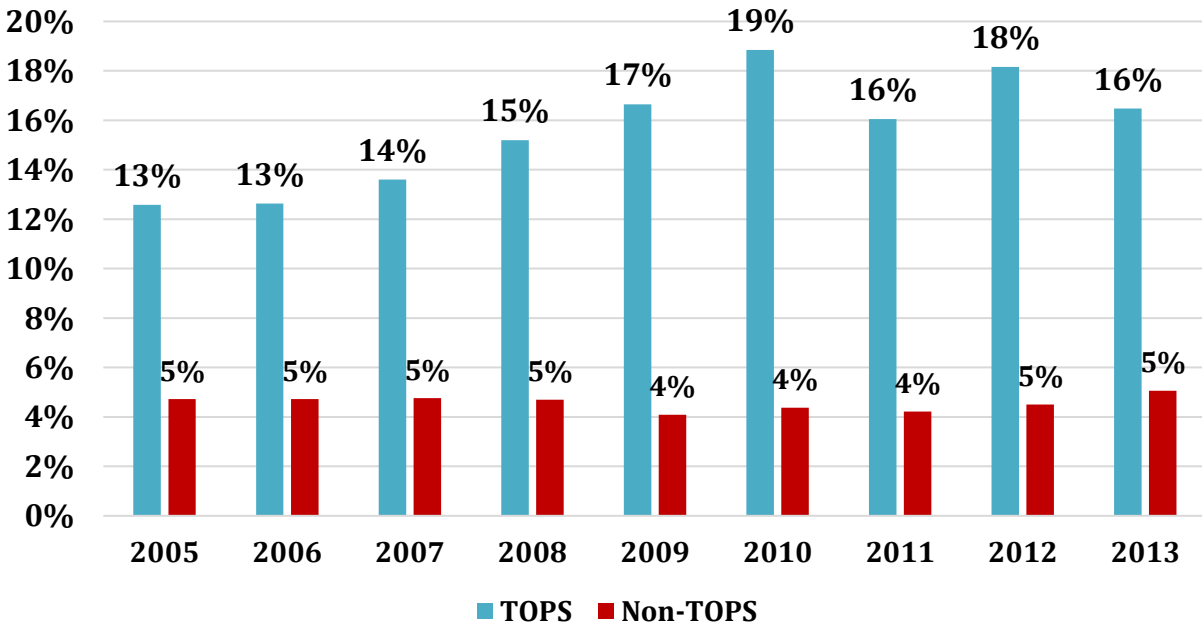


Similar to the baccalaureate degree trends noted above, TOPS recipients who begin an associate degree program graduate at much higher rates than do students without a TOPS award. As shown in Figures G and H, 8% of first-time, full-time entering cohort of TOPS recipients complete an associate degree within 100% of time, compared with 1% of non-TOPS students who did so within the same time frame and 16% of first-time, full-time entering cohort of TOPS recipients complete an associate degree within 150% of time, compared with 5% of non-TOPS students. These rates do not include the substantial number of two-year students who transfer to four-year institutions prior to receiving an associate degree.

**Figure G: Statewide 2-Year Associate Graduation Rate (100%)  
Among TOPS and Non-TOPS Students First-Time, Full-Time Entering  
Cohorts, Two-Year Institutions 2005-2014**



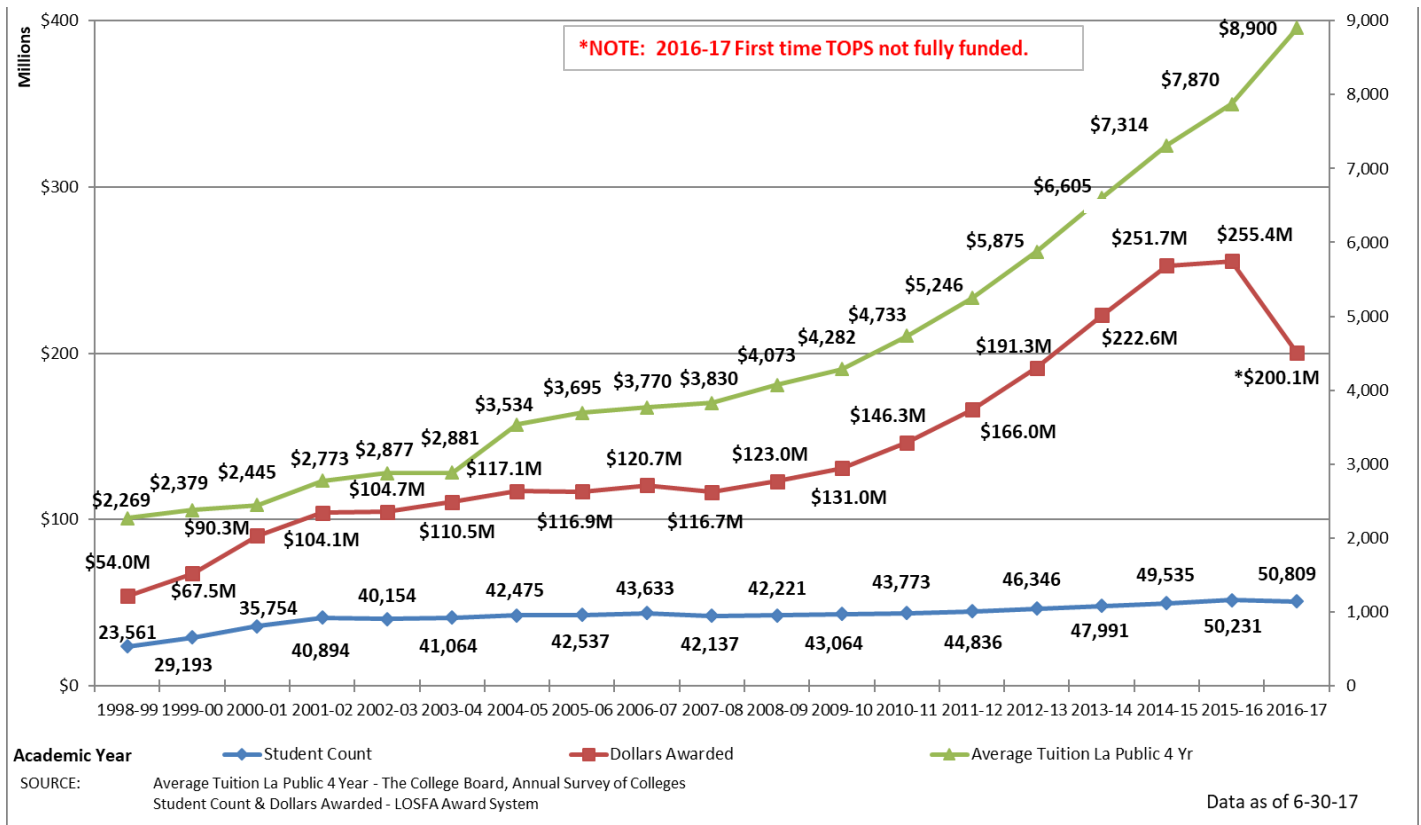
**Figure H: Statewide Associate 4-Year Graduation Rate (150%)  
Among TOPS and Non-TOPS Students First-Time, Full-Time  
Entering Cohorts, Two-Year Institutions 2005-2013**



## Funding TOPS

As depicted in Figure I below, the State spent approximately \$2.7 billion funding the TOPS program from 1999 to 2017. The 2016-2017 AY was the first time that TOPS was not fully funded due to budget shortfalls. During that same time period, total expenditures on the TOPS program have substantially increased. The growth is largely attributable to two factors: (1) increases in the number of students receiving the award and (2) the increase in tuition amounts at the state’s public institutions of higher education. As illustrated in Figure I, in 1998-1999, the number of TOPS recipients was 23,561. By 2016-17, the number of TOPS recipients more than doubled to 50,809. From 1999 to 2016 the average tuition at Louisiana’s public 4 year institutions more than tripled. The TOPS program saw a significant drop in appropriations in 2016-2017, from \$255.4 million to \$200.1 million.

**Figure I: TOPS Program Funding, 1998-1999 to 2016-2017\***  
**Growth in TOPS Expenditures and Recipients compared with Average Public 4-Year Tuition Increases**



## **Conclusions**

In accordance with Acts 1202 of the 2001 Regular Legislative Session and 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 on TOPS;
- The mean, median and mode ACT score and high school GPA of TOPS recipients;
- Demographic information on TOPS recipients;
- The persistence (retention) rates of TOPS students, by award level and award year;
- The number of and reasons for students losing award eligibility;
- The mean ACT score and high school GPA of students who lost their TOPS award;
- Graduation rates of TOPS students by award type and year; and
- The number of students eligible for TOPS, by award category;
- Historical data on the cost of the TOPS program, to date.

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 2017 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 20.8; whereas the average ACT composite score for those who did not complete the ACT Core was 16.3. Although there are slight variations between the ACT Core and TOPS Core, it is reasonable to conclude that students who complete the TOPS Core also earn higher ACT composite scores than students who did 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 172,134 students deemed eligible for a TOPS *Opportunity*, *Performance* or *Honors* award, 154,248 (or 89.6%) 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 GPA's above the minimum required for TOPS eligibility. Among TOPS recipients from 2007 to 2016, 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. It is important to note that although there

are large race differences across TOPS recipients, the number of minorities receiving TOPS has significantly increased over time. There has been a 25% increase in the number of African American TOPS recipients from 2007 to 2017 compared to a 20% decrease in the number of white recipients. 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 2007-08 and 2016-17 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 100% and 150% of time at much higher rates than do students without a TOPS award. Data also indicate that 32% of the 2011 first-time, full-time 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. In total, the State has spent approximately \$2.7 billion on the TOPS program. Between the 1999 and 2016 fiscal years, total expenditures on the TOPS program increased substantially.