

2025 Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 77

BY REPRESENTATIVES TURNER, ADAMS, BAGLEY, BERAULT, BUTLER, CARRIER, FREIBERG, HORTON, ILLG, KERNER, MACK, SCHLEGEL, AND THOMPSON

Prefiled pursuant to Article III, Section 2(A)(4)(b)(i) of the Constitution of Louisiana.

TOPS: Adds the Excellence award level for students who score 31 or higher on the ACT, allows award qualification based on the Classic Learning Test, revises eligibility requirements for TOPS-Tech, and allows application of unused award amounts to medical or dental school

1 AN ACT

2 To amend and reenact R.S. 17:5002(A), (E)(1) and (3), and (G), 5025(introductory

3 paragraph), 5029(B)(3)(b)(ii) and (iii) and (D)(1)(introductory paragraph),

4 5041(introductory paragraph), (1)(c), and (4), and 5043(1) and to enact R.S.

5 17:5002(I), 5002.1, and 5024(A)(1)(e), (B)(1)(e) and (3), and (D), relative to the

6 Taylor Opportunity Program for Students; to create a new program award level; to

7 provide a definition of tuition for certain program purposes; to revise academic

8 initial eligibility criteria for a TOPS-Tech award; to provide for qualification for a

9 TOPS-Tech award based on the attainment of certain early college credits; to provide

10 for an additional test for purposes of determining initial award eligibility for certain

11 students; to allow certain students who qualify for a program award to apply unused

12 award amounts to medical and dental school under certain circumstances; to require

13 repayment of award amounts under certain circumstances; to require the Board of

14 Regents to provide by rule for collection and exceptions; to provide for applicability;

15 and to provide for related matters.

16 Be it enacted by the Legislature of Louisiana:

17 Section 1. R.S. 17:5002(A), (E)(1) and (3), and (G), 5025(introductory paragraph),

18 5029(B)(3)(b)(ii) and (iii) and (D)(1)(introductory paragraph), 5041(introductory paragraph),

1 (1)(c), and (4), and 5043(1) are hereby amended and reenacted and R.S. 17:5002(I), 5002.1,  
2 and 5024(A)(1)(e), (B)(1)(e) and (3), and (D) are hereby enacted to read as follows:

3 §5002. Awards and amounts

4 A.~~(1)~~ A student shall be eligible for an Opportunity, Performance, Honors,  
5 Excellence, or TOPS-Tech Award based on his academic achievement.

6 ~~(2) The award amount shall be as provided in Subsection B or D of this~~  
7 ~~Section unless the legislature, by law, increases the award amount.~~

8 \* \* \*

9 E.(1) No student shall be eligible for tuition payment pursuant to this Section  
10 for the Opportunity Award, the Performance Award, ~~or~~ the Honors Award, or the  
11 Excellence Award for more than eight semesters or an equivalent number of units  
12 in an eligible institution which operates on a schedule based on units other than  
13 semesters, unless an extension is granted by the administering agency in accordance  
14 with its rules.

15 \* \* \*

16 (3)(a) Any student receiving an Opportunity, Performance, ~~or~~ Honors, or  
17 Excellence Award who successfully completes an academic undergraduate degree  
18 in less than the eight semesters or its equivalent of award benefits provided by this  
19 Subsection shall be eligible to continue to receive all applicable award benefits, in  
20 accordance with the limitations as specified in Subparagraph (b) of this Paragraph,  
21 for any remaining semester or semesters or the equivalent thereof of eligibility not  
22 used to obtain the undergraduate degree if the student pursues a postgraduate  
23 academic degree at an eligible institution and the student continues to meet all  
24 academic and other requirements provided by this Section and by rule of the  
25 administering agency for continued receipt of the award as an undergraduate except  
26 as such requirements, including requirements provided by this Section for  
27 undergraduate students, may be modified by the administering agency as necessary  
28 to apply such requirements to postgraduate study.



1 per academic year for other educational expenses as defined by the administering  
2 agency.

3 (3) For any student who also meets the qualifications provided in this  
4 ~~Section~~ Chapter for receipt of an Honors Award, the state shall pay on behalf of the  
5 student a sum of three hundred dollars per semester or six hundred dollars per  
6 academic year to be applied toward the cost of books and other instructional  
7 materials plus the sum of eight hundred dollars per semester or one thousand six  
8 hundred dollars per academic year for other educational expenses as defined by the  
9 administering agency.

10 (4) For any student who also meets the qualifications provided in this  
11 Chapter for receipt of an Excellence Award, the state shall pay on behalf of the  
12 student a sum of three hundred dollars per semester or six hundred dollars per  
13 academic year to be applied toward the cost of books and other instructional  
14 materials plus the sum of one thousand dollars per semester or two thousand dollars  
15 per academic year for other educational expenses as defined by the administering  
16 agency.

17 \* \* \*

18 I.(1) Any student who is eligible for an Excellence Award pursuant to this  
19 Chapter and who has enrolled in any public college or university in this state, shall  
20 be awarded by the state either an amount determined by the administering agency to  
21 equal the tuition charged by the public college or university or twelve thousand  
22 dollars, whichever is less.

23 (2) For purposes of this Subsection, "tuition" means the annual resident  
24 tuition and fees charged by the institution as reported in the Board of Regents annual  
25 mandatory tuition and fees survey.

26 §5002.1. Medical school; dentistry school

27 A. A student who is determined by the administering agency to be eligible  
28 for an Opportunity, Performance, or Honors Award upon high school graduation in

1 accordance with the requirements of this Chapter may apply unused award amounts  
2 if enrolled in certain postsecondary education institutions as provided in this Section.

3 B. A student may apply unused award amounts pursuant to this Section if he  
4 meets all of the following criteria:

5 (1) He has successfully completed an academic undergraduate degree at the  
6 baccalaureate level at a postsecondary education institution either in Louisiana or  
7 outside the state other than an institution provided for in R.S. 17:5027(C). This  
8 criterion applies both to students who used part of their award while enrolled at an  
9 eligible college or university before transferring to an out-of-state institution and  
10 students who never enrolled in an eligible college or university before enrolling in  
11 an out-of-state institution.

12 (2) He enrolls in a doctor of medicine, doctor of osteopathic medicine, or  
13 doctor of dentistry degree program at a public postsecondary education institution  
14 in the state, a regionally accredited independent college or university that is a  
15 member of the Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, or  
16 a campus of the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine in the state during or  
17 after the 2024-2025 academic year.

18 (3) He signs a promissory note agreeing to pay the administering agency a  
19 sum equal to the amount awarded pursuant to this Section, plus interest, upon  
20 graduation or otherwise exiting the program; however, a student shall be exempt  
21 from the payment requirement under the following circumstances:

22 (a) The student shall not be required to make the payment for the duration  
23 of a residency program.

24 (b) The student shall not be required to make the payment if he practices  
25 medicine or dentistry full-time in Louisiana for three consecutive years upon  
26 successful completion of the residency program.

27 (c) The student shall not be required to make the payment in accordance with  
28 rules promulgated by the administering agency pursuant to Paragraph (F)(2) of this  
29 Section.



1 using only the grades obtained by the student in completing the core curriculum  
2 requirements established by this Chapter, for the respective awards:

3 \* \* \*

4 (e) For an Excellence Award, a minimum cumulative grade point average  
5 of 3.50.

6 \* \* \*

7 B.(1) Except as otherwise provided by this Subsection, a student shall earn  
8 the following minimum test scores for the respective awards:

9 \* \* \*

10 (e) For an Excellence Award, a score of thirty-one or higher on the 1990  
11 version of the ACT or an equivalent concordant value on any enhanced or revised  
12 version of such test or on the SAT.

13 \* \* \*

14 (3) A student who graduates from a nonpublic school as provided in R.S.  
15 17:5021 and is otherwise eligible for an award pursuant to this Chapter shall qualify  
16 if he earns the minimum score on the 1990 version of the ACT provided for the  
17 applicable award level in Paragraph (1) of this Subsection or an equivalent  
18 concordant value on any enhanced or revised version of such test, the SAT, or the  
19 Classic Learning Test.

20 \* \* \*

21 D.(1) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Section, a student who is  
22 otherwise eligible for a TOPS-Tech award pursuant to this Chapter shall qualify for  
23 the award if he meets at least two of the following requirements as determined by the  
24 administering agency:

25 (a) Attainment of a minimum grade point average on the core curriculum as  
26 provided in Subsection A of this Section.

27 (b) Attainment of a minimum ACT score as provided in Subsection B of this  
28 Section or R.S. 17:5029(B)(3), as applicable.



1 (iii) For a student qualifying for an initial Performance, ~~or~~ Honors, or  
 2 Excellence Award for the 2008-2009 award year or thereafter pursuant to this  
 3 Subsection, the student shall have a composite score on the 1990 version of the ACT  
 4 which is at least one point higher than that required by R.S. 17:5024(B) for the  
 5 particular award or an equivalent concordant value on an enhanced or revised version  
 6 of such test, ~~or on the SAT,~~ or the Classic Learning Test.

7 \* \* \*

8 D.(1) Beginning with the 2004-2005 award year, a student who does not  
 9 graduate from high school or complete a home study program shall be eligible to  
 10 receive an Opportunity, Performance, or Honors Award pursuant to this Chapter and  
 11 a student who does not graduate from high school or complete a home study program  
 12 shall be eligible to receive an Excellence Award pursuant to this Chapter if each of  
 13 the following conditions is met:

14 \* \* \*

15 §5041. Maintaining eligibility; Excellence, Honors, Performance, Opportunity

16 To maintain continued state payment of any amount pursuant to an  
 17 Opportunity, Performance, ~~or~~ Honors, or Excellence Award once enrolled in college  
 18 a student shall meet all of the following:

19 (1)

20 \* \* \*

21 (c) If at any time a student fails to maintain the cumulative grade point  
 22 average required for continuation in the program or, as of the end of any semester or  
 23 term during the academic year, fails to make steady academic progress as defined by  
 24 the administering agency, such student shall become ineligible for further payments.  
 25 Payments limited to those provided in R.S. 17:5002(B), regardless of whether the  
 26 originally granted award was an Opportunity, Performance, ~~or~~ Honors, or Excellence  
 27 Award, may be reinstated upon attainment of the grade point average required by this  
 28 Section for a student to maintain continued state payments once enrolled in college  
 29 and the standards for steady academic progress as defined by the administering

1 agency, provided that the student has maintained other continuation requirements  
 2 and the period of ineligibility did not persist for more than two years from the date  
 3 of loss of eligibility. If this two-year period is interrupted due to a student's active  
 4 duty service in the United States Armed Forces, the two-year period shall be  
 5 extended for a length of time equal to the student's active duty service, not to exceed  
 6 four years, unless the student reenlists in the United States Armed Forces and  
 7 maintains continuous active duty, in which case the period shall be extended for a  
 8 length of time equal to the student's active duty service; or unless the student is  
 9 granted an exception for cause by the administering agency.

10 \* \* \*

11 (4)(a) For students qualifying to receive a Performance, ~~or an Honors, or~~  
 12 Excellence Award, have a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.00 on a 4.00  
 13 scale at the end of each academic year.

14 (b) However, if at any time an otherwise eligible student receiving a  
 15 Performance, ~~Award or an Honors, or~~ Excellence Award in accordance with the  
 16 provisions of this Chapter fails to have a cumulative grade point average of at least  
 17 3.00 on a 4.00 scale at the end of any academic year but has and continues to  
 18 maintain a cumulative grade point average at least equal to that required by  
 19 Paragraph (3) of this Subsection for continued participation by a recipient of an  
 20 Opportunity Award, the student receiving a Performance, ~~Award or an Honors, or~~  
 21 Excellence Award shall remain eligible for state payments but only in the amount  
 22 provided for in R.S. 17:5002(B) for a recipient of an Opportunity Award. The  
 23 provisions of this Subparagraph shall apply to all students who receive state  
 24 payments pursuant to a Performance, ~~Award or an Honors, or~~ Excellence Award,  
 25 including all such students from the beginning of the program.

26 \* \* \*

27 §5043. Returning students

28 Notwithstanding any provision of this Chapter to the contrary, any otherwise  
 29 qualified student who meets each of the following conditions and who enrolls as a

1 first-time freshman in an out-of-state college or university, or beginning with the  
 2 2009-2010 academic year, first enrolls as a first-time freshman in an eligible college  
 3 or university in Louisiana and subsequently enrolls in an out-of-state college or  
 4 university, may use the program award provided for by this Section at an eligible  
 5 college or university in Louisiana in accordance with this Section and other  
 6 applicable provisions of this Chapter; however, the time period of award eligibility  
 7 set forth in R.S. 17:5002(E) shall be reduced by an equivalent number of units as  
 8 may be applicable for each semester or equivalent time period that the student is  
 9 enrolled in an out-of-state college or university:

10 (1) The student has been determined by the administering agency to meet the  
 11 initial eligibility requirements established by this Section for an Opportunity,  
 12 Performance, ~~or~~ Honors, or Excellence Award.

13 \* \* \*

14 Section 2.(A) Qualification for an Excellence Award shall begin with students  
 15 enrolling as first-time freshmen during the 2025-2026 academic year.

16 (B) Notwithstanding the provisions of R.S. 17:5025 as amended and reenacted by  
 17 this Act, the core curriculum requirements for a student qualifying for an Excellence Award  
 18 shall be the same as those requirements provided in R.S. 17:5025.1 et seq. that apply to  
 19 students qualifying for an Opportunity, Performance, or Honors Award according to the year  
 20 such student graduates from high school.

---

DIGEST

The digest printed below was prepared by House Legislative Services. It constitutes no part of the legislative instrument. The keyword, one-liner, abstract, and digest do not constitute part of the law or proof or indicia of legislative intent. [R.S. 1:13(B) and 24:177(E)]

---

HB 77 Re-Reengrossed

2025 Regular Session

Turner

**Abstract:** Adds the Excellence award level for students who score 31 or higher on the ACT, allows application of unused award amounts to medical or dental school, allows award qualification based on the Classic Learning Test, and revises eligibility requirements for TOPS-Tech.

**TOPS award levels**

Present law provides for the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS), a merit scholarship program. Provides for four award levels based on high school academic criteria,

including completion of a specific core curriculum, a minimum GPA on that core curriculum, and a minimum ACT score: TOPS-Tech, Opportunity, Performance, and Honors, which is the highest award level for students who score a 27 or higher on the ACT. Proposed law creates Excellence, a new award level, for students who score 31 or higher on the ACT and enroll in a public college or university.

#### **Award amounts**

Present law ties the calculation of award amounts to the amount of tuition charged at a given institution during the 2016-2017 academic year. Proposed law retains present law except provides that for the Excellence award; the award amount is \$12,000 or the amount of tuition and mandatory fees, whichever is less.

#### **Medical or dental school**

Present law allows award recipients who graduate from college early to apply unused award amounts to postgraduate study. Proposed law retains present law and allows students to apply unused award amounts if they are enrolled in a doctor of medicine, doctor of osteopathic medicine, or doctor of dentistry program in La. during or after the 2024-2025 academic year and have earned an academic baccalaureate degree from an in-state or out-of-state college. Applicable to students who qualify for TOPS upon high school graduation regardless of whether they left the state for the entirety of college or used part of their award at a TOPS-eligible college and then transferred out of state. Requires students to pay a sum equaling award amounts and interest thereon unless they are enrolled in a residency program or they practice medicine or dentistry full-time for three consecutive years in La. after residency. Requires the administering agency (the Bd. of Regents) to provide by rule for collecting unpaid amounts and other excepted circumstances relative to payment.

#### **Award qualification**

Present law sets a minimum ACT score for each award level and allows qualification upon attainment of an equivalent concordant score on the SAT. Proposed law, applicable to graduates of approved nonpublic schools and approved home study programs, also allows this upon the attainment of an equivalent concordant score on the Classic Learning Test.

#### **TOPS-Tech**

Present law provides that to be initially eligible for a TOPS-Tech award, a student shall attain both of the following academic eligibility criteria:

- (1) GPA of at least 2.5 on a specified high school core curriculum.
- (2) ACT score of at least 17 or silver on WorkKeys.

Proposed law adds at least nine credit hours of early college credit attained through dual enrollment courses or equivalent validated skills and learning measures as approved by the Statewide Articulation and Transfer Council as a third academic criterion. Provides that a student qualifies if he meets at least two of these three requirements. Applicable to students enrolling in college as first-time freshmen beginning with the 2025-2026 academic year.

#### **National Guard stipends**

Present law provides that students who qualify for both TOPS and a National Guard tuition exemption as provided in present law receive the latter tuition exemption but also receive a stipend based on the TOPS award level for which they qualify. Proposed law adds a higher stipend for these students who qualify for an Excellence award.

(Amends R.S. 17:5002(A), (E)(1) and (3), and (G), 5025(intro. para.), 5029(B)(3)(b)(ii) and (iii) and (D)(1)(intro. para.), 5041(intro. para.), (1)(c), and (4), and 5043(1); Adds R.S. 17:5002(I), 5002.1, and 5024(A)(1)(e), (B)(1)(e) and (3), and (D))

Summary of Amendments Adopted by House

The Committee Amendments Proposed by House Committee on Education to the original bill:

1. Lower amount of Excellence award at public institutions from \$12,000 to \$11,300.
2. Provide a stipend of \$350 per semester / \$700 per academic year for students who qualify for an Opportunity, Performance, Honors, or Excellence Award and are enrolled at LSU-Baton Rouge or LSU Health Sciences Center-New Orleans.

The Committee Amendments Proposed by House Committee on Appropriations to the engrossed bill:

1. Reinstate present law award amounts and present law stipends for Performance and Honors awards.
2. Increase maximum Excellence award amount from \$11,300 to \$12,000 and limit use of this award to public institutions.
3. Remove proposed law stipends for students at certain LSU institutions.
4. For a TOPS-Tech award, add the attainment of certain dual enrollment credits as an eligibility criterion in lieu of either the core curriculum or the minimum ACT score.

The House Floor Amendments to the reengrossed bill:

1. Allow award qualification based on a minimum score on the Classic Learning Test for graduates of approved nonpublic schools and approved home study programs.
2. Authorize certain students to apply unused award amounts to medical or dental school and require repayment unless certain conditions are met.