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DIGEST

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HB 413 Original

2018 Regular Session

Ivey

**Abstract:** Creates a new Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) award, the TOPS Transfer Award, available for two years in pursuit of skill or occupational training and two years in pursuit of a baccalaureate degree, and raises grade point average and ACT score required for initial eligibility for a TOPS Opportunity Award.

**Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS), Generally**

Present law provides for the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) as a program of merit scholarships for students attending certain postsecondary education institutions who meet specific grade point average, ACT score, and core curriculum requirements and certain other qualifications. Provides for Opportunity, Performance, and Honors Awards (eight semesters) and TOPS-Tech Awards (two years).

**Establishment of a New TOPS Award**

Proposed law creates a new TOPS award, the TOPS Transfer Award. Provides that a student who receives this award shall receive the equivalent of a TOPS-Tech Award for his first two years of postsecondary education and, if he meets certain criteria, the equivalent of an Opportunity Award for his remaining four semesters. Provides that the first cohort of students eligible for such an award shall be those graduating from high school in the 2021-22 school year (in other words, students entering high school in the fall of 2018).

**Baseline Award Amounts and Maximum Award Duration**

Present law provides relative to the amount awarded for recipients of a TOPS-Tech Award:

TOPS-Tech Award	
Institution Type	Award Amount

Eligible public college or university that does not offer an academic undergraduate degree at the baccalaureate level in associate's degree or other shorter-term training and education programs aligned to state workforce priorities as determined by the Bd. of Regents and the La. Workforce Investment Council	Tuition charged by the institution during the 2016-17 academic year
Other eligible college or university	Weighted average of tuition amounts charged to students attending an eligible public college or university that does not offer an academic undergraduate degree at the baccalaureate level during the 2016-17 academic year

Proposed law retains present law and provides that a student qualifying for a TOPS Transfer Award who enrolls in a program for which a student may use a TOPS-Tech Award shall receive an award amount at the TOPS-Tech Award level.

Present law provides as follows relative to the amount awarded to recipients of Opportunity, Performance, or Honors awards:

<b>Opportunity, Performance, or Honors Award</b>	
<b>Institution Type</b>	<b>Award Amount</b>
La. public college or university	Tuition charged by the institution during the 2016-17 academic year
La. nonpublic college or university	Weighted average of tuition amounts charged to students attending La. public colleges and universities that offer academic undergraduate degrees at the baccalaureate level during the 2016-17 academic year

Proposed law retains present law and adds that upon enrolling in a program for which a student may use an Opportunity Award, the recipient of a TOPS Transfer Award shall receive an award amount at the Opportunity Award level.

Present law allows a student receiving an Opportunity, Performance, or Honors Award who graduates in less than eight semesters to continue to receive award benefits to pursue a postgraduate academic degree, subject to certain limitations and requirements. Proposed law grants this same opportunity to recipients of a TOPS Transfer Award.

Present law provides for a tuition exemption for persons serving in the La. National Guard and provides that in lieu of payment of tuition through a TOPS Award, they shall receive this tuition

exemption; also grants them a stipend based on whether they qualify for an Opportunity or TOPS-Tech Award (\$300 per semester/\$600 per academic year) or a Performance or Honors Award (\$700 per semester/\$1400 per academic year). Proposed law grants such persons who qualify for the TOPS Transfer Award the same stipend granted to those who qualify for an Opportunity or TOPS-Tech Award.

### **Initial Eligibility Requirements**

All proposed law revisions to initial eligibility requirements are applicable to students graduating from high school during or after the 2021-22 school year (those entering high school in the fall of 2018).

ACT:

Present law requires that for an Opportunity Award, a student must attain an ACT score that is at least equal to the state's average score but never less than 20. Proposed law instead applies this ACT score requirement to the TOPS Transfer Award and raises the minimum score for an Opportunity Award to 21.

Present law requires at least a 23 for the Performance Award, at least a 27 for the Honors Award, and at least a 17 for the TOPS-Tech Award. Proposed law retains present law.

Grade point average (GPA):

Present law requires a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.50 for a TOPS-Tech or Opportunity Award and a 3.00 for a Performance or Honors Award. Increases, effective with students graduating from high school in the 2020-21 school year, the minimum GPA for initial eligibility for a Performance Award from 3.00 to 3.25 and for an Honors Award from 3.00 to 3.50. Proposed law raises the minimum GPA for the Opportunity Award from 2.50 to 2.75 and otherwise retains present law.

Core curriculum:

Present law provides one set of core curriculum requirements for Opportunity, Performance, and Honors Awards and another for the TOPS-Tech Award. Proposed law requires TOPS Transfer Award recipients to meet the core curriculum requirements applicable to Opportunity, Performance, and Honors Award recipients.

### **Postsecondary Education Institution Enrollment**

Present law provides that to be eligible for any TOPS Award, a student shall enroll in an eligible college or university as a first-time freshman not later than the semester, excluding summer semesters or sessions, immediately following the first anniversary of his high school graduation.

Proposed law applies this deadline to those qualifying for a TOPS Transfer Award and further provides that in order for such award to continue upon his completion of skill or occupational training, he shall enroll in a program at an eligible college or university not later than the semester,

excluding summer semesters or sessions, immediately following the first anniversary of the date that he graduated from his initial institution.

### **Maintaining Eligibility**

Present law provides general requirements for maintaining eligibility for all TOPS Awards. Requires maintaining a minimum GPA. For students qualifying for an Opportunity Award, present law requires a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.30 after 24 credit hours and 2.50 after 48 credit hours. Proposed law, applicable to students graduating from high school during or after the 2021-22 school year, increases these minimum GPA requirements from 2.30 to 2.50 and from 2.50 to 2.75, respectively; also specifies that for a TOPS Transfer Award, a student must have at least a 2.75 after two years in order for his award to continue upon subsequent enrollment.

(Amends R.S. 17:5002(A)(1), (D)(1)(intro. para.) and (2), (E), and (G)(1), 5024(A) and (B), 5025(intro. para.), 5027(A)(1) and (C)(intro. para.), 5029(C)(intro. para.), and 5041(intro. para.), (3), (4), and (5); Adds R.S. 17:5002.1, 5024.1, 5041(6) and 5041.1; Repeals R.S. 17:5024(C))