
DIGEST

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HB 390 Original

2017 Regular Session

Gary Carter

Abstract: Sets future TOPS award amounts at the level of 2017-2018 academic year award amounts but provides that this limit does not apply to students meeting certain financial or academic criteria; in the event of a funding shortfall, provides procedures for reducing or eliminating awards based on such criteria.

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 certain academic and other qualifications. Provides for Opportunity, Performance and Honors Awards (eight semesters) and TOPS-Tech Awards (two years).

Establishment of Baseline Award Amounts

Present law provides award amounts for Opportunity, Performance, and Honors awards:

Opportunity, Performance, or Honors Award	
Institution Type	Award Amount
La. public college or university	Tuition charged by institution
La. nonpublic college or university	Weighted average of amounts paid for students attending La. public colleges and universities that offer academic baccalaureate degrees
Out-of-state college or university designed to accommodate deaf and hard-of-hearing students	Weighted average of amounts paid for students attending La. public colleges and universities that offer academic undergraduate degrees
Licensed cosmetology and proprietary schools	Weighted average of amounts paid for students attending public colleges and universities for skill or occupational training

Present law provides for award amounts for a TOPS-Tech award:

TOPS-Tech Award	
Institution Type	Award Amount
Public college or university that does not offer an academic undergraduate degree at the baccalaureate level	Tuition charged by institution
Other eligible college or university	Weighted average of amounts paid for students attending an eligible public college or university that does not offer an academic baccalaureate degree

Present law "decouples" TOPS award amounts from future tuition increases by fixing the award amount for a given institution at the award amount *paid* for a student at that institution during the 2016-2017 academic year. (A pro rata cut reduced the awards for all students for the 2016-2017 academic year pursuant to present law; thus, the award amount *paid* during such academic year was a reduced amount.)

Proposed law does the following:

- (1) "Recouples" TOPS awards to future tuition amounts for students whose expected family contribution (EFC) is no greater than twice the amount necessary to qualify for a Pell Grant or whose ACT score is 30 or higher.
- (2) TOPS awards and tuition increases remain decoupled for all other students, but proposed law changes the academic year to which a student's award amount is tied from 2016-2017 to 2017-2018.
- (3) Provides that the fixed amount is the actual award amount as defined by present law (see the tables above) and not the amount paid and provides that weighted averages are those of award amounts and not amounts paid.

Funding

Present law requires the legislature annually to appropriate funds sufficient to cover the costs of TOPS awards. Proposed law retains present law.

Present law requires the administering agency, if the legislature appropriates insufficient money to fully fund all awards, to equitably reduce the amount of award for each qualifying student by an equal percentage on a pro rata basis (a "pro rata cut"), so that every student receives the award for which he qualifies and the total amount of all awards in any award year does not exceed the funds available.

Proposed law requires identification of each student whose EFC is no greater than twice the amount necessary to qualify for a Pell Grant or whose ACT score is 30 or higher; such students are referred

to as identified students. Provides for application of pro rata cuts to award amounts, as required by present law, as follows:

- (1) If funds are sufficient to fully fund awards for such identified students, other students are subject to pro rata cuts.
- (2) If funds are not sufficient to fully fund awards for such identified students, the identified students are subject to pro rata cuts and awards are eliminated for other students.

(Amends R.S. 17:5002(A), (B), and (D) and 5065(D); Adds R.S. 17:5065(E))