

RÉSUMÉ DIGEST

ACT 346 (HB 870)

2020 Regular Session

Garofalo

Existing law provides for the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS), a merit-based postsecondary education scholarship program. Provides eligibility criteria for the initial awarding of a scholarship to a student and for retaining the scholarship from one semester to the next. Provides that the program is administered by the Bd. of Regents (the administering agency).

TOPS eligibility for students impacted by the COVID-19 public health emergency

New law modifies initial eligibility requirements for a TOPS award as follows:

- (1) Existing administrative rule provides that the deadline for taking the ACT or SAT is April. New law provides that the deadline for an award in the 2020-2021 academic year is Sept. 30, 2020.

Existing law provides that a student loses a semester of eligibility if he is late qualifying. New law prohibits the administering agency from reducing the period of eligibility for a student who qualifies under this extended deadline.

- (2) Existing administrative rule of the State Bd. of Elementary and Secondary Education provides for a high school career and technical education program known as Jump Start. Existing law provides for consideration of Jump Start education credits in determining the initial eligibility of a student for a TOPS-Tech Award. New law provides that if any Jump Start requirement was waived by a high school for graduation purposes, it shall also be waived for TOPS-Tech eligibility purposes.
- (3) Existing law provides specific initial eligibility requirements for students who complete a home study program. New law authorizes the administering agency to waive such home study requirements if it determines that a student's failure to meet them was, more likely than not, due solely to measures taken to limit the spread of COVID-19.

New law, applicable to the 2019-2020 academic year, modifies continuing eligibility requirements for a TOPS award as follows:

- (1) Waives requirements for steady academic progress and for the achievement of a certain cumulative grade point average (GPA).
- (2) Existing law provides for the possibility of reinstatement of an award that was suspended because of the student's GPA or his failure to make steady academic progress. Generally provides that a student has two years to recover a TOPS award and one year to recover a TOPS-Tech Award. New law extends the time a student has to recover a suspended award by one semester for each semester he is unable to enroll or complete due to measures taken to limit the spread of COVID-19.
- (3) Authorizes the administering agency to waive other existing law provisions if it determines that a student's failure to comply is, more likely than not, due solely to measures taken to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Performance and Honors Awards, eligibility

Existing law provides for an increase in the minimum cumulative GPA for initial eligibility for both a Performance and an Honors Award (these awards include a cash stipend on top of the baseline tuition award). Increases the 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.

Prior law provided that the higher GPA requirements were first applicable to students graduating from high school in the 2020-2021 school year. New law delays the initial applicability of the higher GPA requirements for one year; they are first applicable to students graduating in the 2021-2022 school year.

Effective Aug. 1, 2020.

(Amends R.S. 17:5024(A)(2)(c); Adds R.S. 17:5103)