

2025 Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 77

BY REPRESENTATIVES TURNER AND SCHLEGEL

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

TOPS: Revises Taylor Opportunity Program for Students award amounts and adds an award category for students with an ACT score of 31 or above

1 AN ACT

2 To amend and reenact R.S. 17:5002, 5025(introductory paragraph), 5027(C)(introductory
3 paragraph) and (D)(2), 5029(B)(3)(b)(iii) and (D)(1)(introductory paragraph),
4 5041(introductory paragraph), (1)(c), and (4), and 5043(1) and to enact R.S.
5 17:5024(A)(1)(e) and (B)(1)(e), relative to the Taylor Opportunity Program for
6 Students; to revise program award amounts; to create a new program award level;
7 to provide a definition of tuition for program purposes; to provide for applicability;
8 and to provide for related matters.

9 Be it enacted by the Legislature of Louisiana:

10 Section 1. R.S. 17:5002, 5025(introductory paragraph), 5027(C)(introductory
11 paragraph) and (D)(2), 5029(B)(3)(b)(iii) and (D)(1)(introductory paragraph),
12 5041(introductory paragraph), (1)(c), and (4), and 5043(1) are hereby amended and
13 reenacted and R.S. 17:5024(A)(1)(e) and (B)(1)(e) are hereby enacted to read as follows:

14 §5002. Awards and amounts

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

17 (2) ~~The award amount shall be as provided in Subsection B or D of this~~
18 ~~Section unless the legislature, by law, increases the award amount.~~ For purposes of
19 this Section, applicable to award amounts for students enrolling as first-time
20 freshmen during or after the 2025-2026 academic year, "tuition" means the annual

1 resident tuition and fees charged by the institution as reported in the Board of
2 Regents annual mandatory tuition and fees survey.

3 B.(1) Any student who is eligible for an Opportunity, Performance, ~~or~~
4 Honors, or Excellence Award pursuant to this Chapter and who has enrolled as a
5 first-time freshman during or after the 2025-2026 academic year:

6 ~~(1)~~ (a) In any public college or university in this state, shall be awarded by
7 the state either an amount determined by the administering agency to equal the
8 tuition charged by the public college or university ~~during the 2016-2017 academic~~
9 ~~year.~~ or the following amount based on award level, whichever is less:

10 (i) Opportunity Award, six thousand dollars.

11 (ii) Performance Award, six thousand five hundred dollars.

12 (iii) Honors Award, nine thousand dollars.

13 (iv) Excellence Award, twelve thousand dollars.

14 ~~(2)~~ (b) At any independent college or university in the state that is a member
15 of the Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities and that is
16 accredited by an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the United States
17 Department of Education to pursue an academic undergraduate degree, shall be
18 awarded by the state either an amount ~~to be~~ determined by the administering agency
19 to equal ~~the weighted average of the tuition amounts charged to students attending~~
20 ~~public colleges and universities that offer academic undergraduate degrees at the~~
21 ~~baccalaureate level during the 2016-2017 academic year.~~ by the college or university
22 or the following amount based on award level, whichever is less:

23 (i) Opportunity Award, five thousand five hundred dollars.

24 (ii) Performance Award, six thousand five hundred dollars.

25 (iii) Honors Award, seven thousand five hundred dollars.

26 (iv) Excellence Award, eight thousand five hundred dollars.

27 ~~(3)~~ (c) In a school that has a valid and current certificate of registration
28 issued by the Louisiana State Board of Cosmetology in accordance with law and that
29 is accredited by an accrediting organization recognized by the United States

1 Department of Education or in any proprietary school that has a valid and current
2 license issued by the Board of Regents in accordance with law and that is accredited
3 by an accrediting organization recognized by the United States Department of
4 Education, shall be awarded by the state either an amount determined by the
5 administering agency to equal ~~the weighted average of the tuition amounts charged~~
6 ~~to students attending public colleges and universities during the 2016-2017 academic~~
7 ~~year and who are enrolled in the permitted skill or occupational training, as may be~~
8 ~~applicable.~~ charged by the school or the following amount based on award level,
9 whichever is less:

10 (i) Opportunity Award, three thousand five hundred dollars.

11 (ii) Performance Award, four thousand dollars.

12 (iii) Honors Award, four thousand five hundred dollars.

13 (iv) Excellence Award, five thousand dollars.

14 ~~(4)~~ (d) In an out-of-state college or university that is specifically designed
15 to accommodate deaf and hard-of-hearing students under R.S. 17:5027(C), shall be
16 awarded by the state either an amount determined by the administering agency to
17 equal ~~the weighted average of the tuition amounts charged to students attending~~
18 ~~Louisiana public colleges and universities that offer academic undergraduate degrees~~
19 ~~during the 2016-2017 academic year.~~ charged by the college or university or the
20 following amount based on award level, whichever is less:

21 (i) Opportunity Award, five thousand five hundred dollars.

22 (ii) Performance Award, six thousand five hundred dollars.

23 (iii) Honors Award, seven thousand five hundred dollars.

24 (iv) Excellence Award, eight thousand five hundred dollars.

25 (2) Any student who is eligible for an Opportunity, Performance, or Honors
26 Award pursuant to this Chapter and who has enrolled as a first-time freshman prior
27 to the 2025-2026 academic year:

1 (a) In any public college or university in this state, shall be awarded by the
2 state an amount determined by the administering agency to equal the tuition charged
3 by the public college or university during the 2016-2017 academic year.

4 (b) At any independent college or university in the state that is a member of
5 the Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities and that is
6 accredited by an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the United States
7 Department of Education to pursue an academic undergraduate degree, shall be
8 awarded by the state an amount to be determined by the administering agency to
9 equal the weighted average of the tuition amounts charged to students attending
10 public colleges and universities that offer academic undergraduate degrees at the
11 baccalaureate level during the 2016-2017 academic year.

12 (c) In a school that has a valid and current certificate of registration issued
13 by the Louisiana State Board of Cosmetology in accordance with law and that is
14 accredited by an accrediting organization recognized by the United States
15 Department of Education or in any proprietary school that has a valid and current
16 license issued by the Board of Regents in accordance with law and that is accredited
17 by an accrediting organization recognized by the United States Department of
18 Education, shall be awarded by the state an amount determined by the administering
19 agency to equal the weighted average of the tuition amounts charged to students
20 attending public colleges and universities during the 2016-2017 academic year and
21 who are enrolled in the permitted skill or occupational training, as may be applicable.

22 (d) In an out-of-state college or university that is specifically designed to
23 accommodate deaf and hard-of-hearing students under R.S. 17:5027(C), shall be
24 awarded an amount determined by the administering agency to equal the weighted
25 average of the tuition amounts charged to students attending Louisiana public
26 colleges and universities that offer academic undergraduate degrees during the 2016-
27 2017 academic year.

1 C.(1) A student who is eligible for the Performance Award shall receive the
2 sum of two hundred dollars per semester or four hundred dollars per academic year
3 in addition to the amount provided for in Subsection B of this Section.

4 (2) A student who is eligible for the Honors Award shall receive the sum of
5 four hundred dollars per semester or eight hundred dollars per academic year in
6 addition to the amount provided for in Subsection B of this Section.

7 (3) Except as provided in Subsection I of this Section, the provisions of
8 Paragraphs (1) and (2) of this Subsection shall not apply to students enrolling during
9 or after the 2025-2026 academic year.

10 D.(1) ~~Except as otherwise provided in this Subsection,~~ a A student who is
11 eligible for a TOPS-Tech Award pursuant to this Chapter and who is enrolled as a
12 first-time freshman during or after the 2025-2026 academic year:

13 (a) In an eligible public college or university that does not offer an academic
14 undergraduate degree at the baccalaureate level in those associate's degree or other
15 shorter-term training and education programs that are aligned to state workforce
16 priorities as determined by the Board of Regents and the Louisiana Workforce
17 Investment Council, shall be awarded by the state either an amount determined by
18 the administering agency to equal the tuition charged by the college or university
19 ~~during the 2016-2017 academic year.~~ or three thousand five hundred dollars,
20 whichever is less. If the Board of Regents and the Louisiana Workforce Investment
21 Council determine that a program is no longer aligned with those priorities, an
22 otherwise eligible student who had previously received an award and enrolled in that
23 program may continue to use the award.

24 (b) In an eligible college or university other than as provided for in
25 Subparagraph (a) of this Paragraph in those associate's degree or other shorter-term
26 training education programs that are aligned to state workforce priorities as
27 determined by the Board of Regents and the Louisiana Workforce Investment
28 Council, shall be awarded by the state either an amount determined by the
29 administering agency to equal ~~the weighted average of the tuition amounts charged~~

1 ~~to students attending an eligible public college or university that does not offer an~~
 2 ~~academic undergraduate degree at the baccalaureate level during the 2016-2017~~
 3 ~~academic year. charged by the college or university or three thousand dollars,~~
 4 ~~whichever is less.~~ If the Board of Regents and the Louisiana Workforce Investment
 5 Council determine that a program is no longer aligned with those priorities, an
 6 otherwise eligible student who had previously received an award and enrolled in that
 7 program may continue to use the award.

8 (2) A student who ~~graduated prior to the 2016-2017 school year, who is~~
 9 eligible for a TOPS-Tech Award pursuant to this ~~Chapter, Chapter~~ and who is
 10 enrolled as a first-time freshman prior to the 2025-2026 academic year:

11 (a) In an eligible college or university that does not offer an academic
 12 undergraduate degree at the baccalaureate level in those associate's degree or other
 13 shorter-term training and education programs that are aligned to state workforce
 14 priorities as determined by the Board of Regents and the Louisiana Workforce
 15 Investment Council, shall be awarded by the state an amount determined by the
 16 administering agency to equal the tuition charged by the college or university during
 17 the 2016-2017 academic year. If the Board of Regents and the Louisiana Workforce
 18 Investment Council determine that a program is no longer aligned with those
 19 priorities, an otherwise eligible student who had previously received an award and
 20 enrolled in that program may continue to use the award.

21 (b) In an eligible college or university other than as provided for in
 22 Subparagraph (a) of this Paragraph in those associate's degree or other shorter-term
 23 training education programs that are aligned to state workforce priorities as
 24 determined by the Board of Regents and the Louisiana Workforce Investment
 25 Council, shall be awarded by the state an amount determined by the administering
 26 agency to equal the weighted average of the tuition amounts charged to students
 27 attending an eligible public college or university that does not offer an academic
 28 undergraduate degree at the baccalaureate level during the 2016-2017 academic year.
 29 If the Board of Regents and the Louisiana Workforce Investment Council determine

1 that a program is no longer aligned with those priorities, an otherwise eligible
2 student who had previously received an award and enrolled in that program may
3 continue to use the award.

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

10 (2) No student shall be eligible for tuition payment pursuant to this Section
11 for the TOPS-Tech Award for more than two years unless an extension is granted by
12 the administering agency in accordance with its rules.

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

26 (b) In developing rules to implement this Paragraph, the administering
27 agency shall establish reasonable time lines and deadlines for receipt of any
28 information required to implement this Paragraph both for current and subsequent
29 students receiving Opportunity, Performance, ~~or~~ Honors, or Excellence awards and

1 for any student previously receiving such an award who successfully completed an
2 academic undergraduate degree in less than eight semesters. Such rules shall also
3 provide for appropriate notice to all such students of the time lines, deadlines, and
4 rules governing implementation of this Paragraph.

5 (c) The amount of the award benefits as provided for in Subparagraph (a) of
6 this Paragraph shall not exceed the amounts determined by the administering agency
7 to equal the tuition charged for the postgraduate study or for undergraduate full-time
8 enrollment charged by the highest cost public college or university in the state,
9 whichever amount is less.

10 F.(1) No student shall receive a grant pursuant to this Section in an amount
11 greater than the tuition charged by the institution attended or, if the student is the
12 recipient of a Performance or an Honors Award as provided for in Subsection C of
13 this Section, the amount stipulated therein.

14 (2) The institution shall credit any amount in excess of the cost of tuition to
15 the student's account to pay room and board or other cost of attendance.

16 G. In lieu of the payment of tuition as provided in this Section, any student
17 participating in the program provided by R.S. 29:36.1 for persons serving in the
18 Louisiana National Guard shall receive the tuition exemption as provided therein.
19 In addition to any other payments provided for by R.S. 29:36.1:

20 (1) For any student who also meets the qualifications provided in this
21 ~~Section~~ Chapter for receipt of an Opportunity Award or a TOPS-Tech Award, the
22 state shall pay on behalf of such student a sum of three hundred dollars per semester
23 or six hundred dollars per academic year to be applied toward the cost of books and
24 other instructional materials.

25 (2) For any student who also meets the qualifications provided in this
26 ~~Section~~ Chapter for receipt of a Performance Award, the state shall pay on behalf of
27 the student a sum of three hundred dollars per semester or six hundred dollars per
28 academic year to be applied toward the cost of books and other instructional
29 materials plus the sum of four hundred dollars per semester or eight hundred dollars

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 H. In lieu of the payment of tuition as provided in this Section, any student
18 participating in the program provided by R.S. 17:1688 for disabled veterans shall
19 receive the tuition exemption provided in that Section.

20 (I)(1) Notwithstanding any provision of this Section to the contrary and
21 applicable only to students enrolling at an eligible public college or university:

22 (a) The administering agency shall determine if a student would qualify for
23 a higher award amount under the provisions of Paragraph (B)(1) or (B)(2) of this
24 Section for an Opportunity, Performance, or Honors Award, including stipends
25 awarded pursuant to Subsection C of this Section, as applicable, and the state shall
26 pay the higher of the award amounts on behalf of the student.

27 (b) The administering agency shall determine if a student would qualify for
28 a higher award amount under the provisions of Paragraph (D)(1) or (D)(2) of this

1 §5027. Postsecondary institution enrollment

2 * * *

3 C. Notwithstanding any provision of Subsection B of this Section, any
4 student who meets all applicable initial and continuing program eligibility
5 requirements of this Chapter for an Opportunity, Performance, ~~or~~ Honors, or
6 Excellence Award may use the award at an out-of-state nonpublic college or
7 university when each of the following conditions is met:

8 * * *

9 D.

10 * * *

11 (2) Effective for the 2010-2011 award year and thereafter, a student who is
12 the recipient of an Opportunity, Performance, ~~or~~ Excellence award and
13 who pursues skill or occupational training as defined by the administering agency,
14 including a vocational or technical education certificate or diploma program or a
15 nonacademic undergraduate degree, may use the award at any school that has a valid
16 and current certificate of registration issued by the Louisiana State Board of
17 Cosmetology in accordance with law and that is accredited by an accrediting
18 organization recognized by the United States Department of Education and at any
19 proprietary school that has a valid and current license issued by the Board of Regents
20 in accordance with law and that is accredited by an accrediting organization
21 recognized by the United States Department of Education. Such a school shall
22 comply with all other applicable provisions of this Chapter and rules adopted by the
23 administering agency relative to a college or university being initially eligible and
24 remaining eligible for program purposes.

25 * * *

26 §5029. Alternative initial eligibility requirements

27 * * *

1 term during the academic year, fails to make steady academic progress as defined by
 2 the administering agency, such student shall become ineligible for further payments.
 3 Payments limited to those provided in R.S. 17:5002(B), regardless of whether the
 4 originally granted award was an Opportunity, Performance, ~~or Honors, or Excellence~~
 5 Award, may be reinstated upon attainment of the grade point average required by this
 6 Section for a student to maintain continued state payments once enrolled in college
 7 and the standards for steady academic progress as defined by the administering
 8 agency, provided that the student has maintained other continuation requirements
 9 and the period of ineligibility did not persist for more than two years from the date
 10 of loss of eligibility. If this two-year period is interrupted due to a student's active
 11 duty service in the United States Armed Forces, the two-year period shall be
 12 extended for a length of time equal to the student's active duty service, not to exceed
 13 four years, unless the student reenlists in the United States Armed Forces and
 14 maintains continuous active duty, in which case the period shall be extended for a
 15 length of time equal to the student's active duty service; or unless the student is
 16 granted an exception for cause by the administering agency.

* * *

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

21 (b) However, if at any time an otherwise eligible student receiving a
 22 Performance, ~~Award or an Honors, or Excellence~~ Award in accordance with the
 23 provisions of this Chapter fails to have a cumulative grade point average of at least
 24 3.00 on a 4.00 scale at the end of any academic year but has and continues to
 25 maintain a cumulative grade point average at least equal to that required by
 26 Paragraph (3) of this Subsection for continued participation by a recipient of an
 27 Opportunity Award, the student receiving a Performance, ~~Award or an Honors, or~~
 28 Excellence Award shall remain eligible for state payments but only in the amount
 29 provided for in R.S. 17:5002(B) for a recipient of an Opportunity Award. The

1 provisions of this Subparagraph shall apply to all students who receive state
2 payments pursuant to a Performance, ~~Award or an~~ Honors, or Excellence Award,
3 including all such students from the beginning of the program.

4 * * *

5 §5043. Returning students

6 Notwithstanding any provision of this Chapter to the contrary, any otherwise
7 qualified student who meets each of the following conditions and who enrolls as a
8 first-time freshman in an out-of-state college or university, or beginning with the
9 2009-2010 academic year, first enrolls as a first-time freshman in an eligible college
10 or university in Louisiana and subsequently enrolls in an out-of-state college or
11 university, may use the program award provided for by this Section at an eligible
12 college or university in Louisiana in accordance with this Section and other
13 applicable provisions of this Chapter; however, the time period of award eligibility
14 set forth in R.S. 17:5002(E) shall be reduced by an equivalent number of units as
15 may be applicable for each semester or equivalent time period that the student is
16 enrolled in an out-of-state college or university:

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

20 * * *

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

23 (B) Notwithstanding the provisions of R.S. 17:5025 as amended and reenacted by
24 this Act, the core curriculum requirements for a student qualifying for an Excellence Award
25 shall be the same as those requirements provided in R.S. 17:5025.1 et seq. that apply to
26 students qualifying for an Opportunity, Performance, or Honors Award according to the year
27 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 Original

2025 Regular Session

Turner

Abstract: Revises TOPS award amounts and adds an award level, Excellence, for students who score 31 or higher on the ACT.

TOPS generally

Present law provides for the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS), a merit scholarship program for certain students attending the following postsecondary education institutions: public institutions, institutions that are members of the La. Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (LAICU), certain out-of-state institutions for deaf students, and cosmetology/proprietary schools.

Award levels

Present law 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, beginning with students enrolling as first-time freshmen in the 2025-2026 academic year. Retains academic criteria for other award levels.

Award amounts

Present law ties the calculation of all award amounts to the amount of tuition charged during the 2016-2017 academic year. Proposed law, applicable beginning with students enrolling as first-time freshmen in the 2025-2026 academic year, removes the connection of award amounts to the tuition charged during that prior academic year and instead provides for maximum award amounts, not to exceed tuition, according to current tuition amounts. Proposed law also provides, beginning with this class of students, that "tuition" includes both tuition and mandatory fees and provides that award amounts shall be either the following amount or tuition (including fees), whichever is less:

Award level	Public	LAICU and colleges for deaf students	Cosmetology / Proprietary
Opportunity	\$6,000	\$5,500	\$3,500
Performance	\$6,500	\$6,500	\$4,000
Honors	\$9,000	\$7,500	\$4,500
Excellence	\$12,000	\$8,500	\$5,000
Tech	\$3,500	N/A	\$3,000

Proposed law provides that notwithstanding proposed law, the administering agency shall determine if a student enrolling in a public college or university would receive a higher award under present law or proposed law, and the student shall receive the higher of the two amounts for that year. Applies to students (both freshmen and returning students) enrolled

during the 2025-2026 academic year and continues through the end of their eligibility for a program award.

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 those students who qualify for an Excellence award.

(Amends R.S. 17:5002, 5025(intro. para.), 5027(C)(intro. para.) and (D)(2), 5029(B)(3)(b)(iii) and (D)(1)(intro. para.), 5041(intro. para.), (1)(c), and (4), and 5043(1); Adds R.S. 17:5024(A)(1)(e) and (B)(1)(e))