
DIGEST

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HB 77 Engrossed

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	\$11,300	\$8,500	\$5,000
Tech	\$3,500	N/A	\$3,000

Present law provides for stipends of \$200 per semester / \$400 per year for the Performance Award and \$400 per semester / \$800 per year for the Honors Award. Proposed law eliminates these stipends and instead provides for a stipend of \$350 per semester / \$700 per year for Opportunity, Performance, Honors, and Excellence for students enrolled at LSU-Baton Rouge or LSU Health Sciences Center-New Orleans.

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 (including stipends), and the student shall receive the higher of the two amounts for that year. Applies to students (both freshmen and continuing 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))

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.