

2025 Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 77

BY REPRESENTATIVES TURNER, ADAMS, BAGLEY, BERAULT, BUTLER,
CARRIER, FREIBERG, HORTON, ILLG, KERNER, MACK, SCHLEGEL, AND
THOMPSON

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

TOPS: Adds a TOPS award level, Excellence, for students who score 31 or higher on the ACT and revises initial academic eligibility requirements for a TOPS-Tech award

1 AN ACT
2 To amend and reenact R.S. 17:5002(A), (E)(1) and (3), and (G), 5025(introductory
3 paragraph), 5029(B)(3)(b)(iii) and (D)(1)(introductory paragraph), 5041(introductory
4 paragraph), (1)(c), and (4), and 5043(1) and to enact R.S. 17:5002(I) and
5 5024(A)(1)(e), (B)(1)(e), and (D), relative to the Taylor Opportunity Program for
6 Students; to create a new program award level; to provide a definition of tuition for
7 certain program purposes; to revise academic initial eligibility criteria for a TOPS-
8 Tech award; to provide for qualification for a TOPS-Tech award based on the
9 attainment of certain early college credits; to provide for applicability; and to provide
10 for related matters.

11 Be it enacted by the Legislature of Louisiana:

12 Section 1. R.S. 17:5002(A), (E)(1) and (3), and (G), 5025(introductory paragraph),
13 5029(B)(3)(b)(iii) and (D)(1)(introductory paragraph), 5041(introductory paragraph), (1)(c),
14 and (4), and 5043(1) are hereby amended and reenacted and R.S. 17:5002(I) and
15 5024(A)(1)(e), (B)(1)(e), and (D) are hereby enacted to read as follows:

16 §5002. Awards and amounts

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

~~(2) The award amount shall be as provided in Subsection B or D of this Section unless the legislature, by law, increases the award amount.~~

* * *

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

* * *

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

(b) In developing rules to implement this Paragraph, the administering agency shall establish reasonable time lines and deadlines for receipt of any information required to implement this Paragraph both for current and subsequent students receiving Opportunity, Performance, ~~or~~ Honors, or Excellence awards and for any student previously receiving such an award who successfully completed an academic undergraduate degree in less than eight semesters. Such rules shall also

1 provide for appropriate notice to all such students of the time lines, deadlines, and
2 rules governing implementation of this Paragraph.

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

8 * * *

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

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

18 (2) For any student who also meets the qualifications provided in this
19 ~~Section~~ Chapter for receipt of a Performance Award, the state shall pay on behalf of
20 the student a sum of three hundred dollars per semester or six hundred dollars per
21 academic year to be applied toward the cost of books and other instructional
22 materials plus the sum of four hundred dollars per semester or eight hundred dollars
23 per academic year for other educational expenses as defined by the administering
24 agency.

25 (3) For any student who also meets the qualifications provided in this
26 ~~Section~~ Chapter for receipt of an Honors Award, the state shall pay on behalf of the
27 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 eight hundred dollars per semester or one thousand six

1 hundred dollars per academic year for other educational expenses as defined by the
2 administering agency.

3 (4) For any student who also meets the qualifications provided in this
4 Chapter for receipt of an Excellence 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 one thousand dollars per semester or two thousand dollars
8 per academic year for other educational expenses as defined by the administering
9 agency.

10 * * *

11 I.(1) Any student who is eligible for an Excellence Award pursuant to this
12 Chapter and who has enrolled in any public college or university in this state, shall
13 be awarded by the state either an amount determined by the administering agency to
14 equal the tuition charged by the public college or university or twelve thousand
15 dollars, whichever is less.

16 (2) For purposes of this Subsection, "tuition" means the annual resident
17 tuition and fees charged by the institution as reported in the Board of Regents annual
18 mandatory tuition and fees survey.

19 * * *

20 §5024. Academic requirements

21 A.(1) Except as otherwise provided by this Subsection, students shall meet
22 the following minimum grade point average requirements, calculated on a 4.00 scale
23 using only the grades obtained by the student in completing the core curriculum
24 requirements established by this Chapter, for the respective awards:

25 * * *

26 (e) For an Excellence Award, a minimum cumulative grade point average
27 of 3.50.

28 * * *

B.(1) Except as otherwise provided by this Subsection, a student shall earn the following minimum test scores for the respective awards:

* * *

(e) For an Excellence Award, a score of thirty-one or higher on the 1990 version of the ACT or an equivalent concordant value on any enhanced or revised version of such test or on the SAT.

* * *

D.(1) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Section, a student who is otherwise eligible for a TOPS-Tech award pursuant to this Chapter shall qualify for the award if he meets at least two of the following requirements as determined by the administering agency:

(a) Attainment of a minimum grade point average on the core curriculum as
provided in Subsection A of this Section.

(b) Attainment of a minimum ACT score as provided in Subsection B of this
Section or R.S. 17:5029(B)(3), as applicable.

(c) Successful completion of either at least nine credit hours of early college credit, which may be attained through academic or technical dual enrollment courses, or equivalent validated skills and learning measures as approved by the Statewide Articulation and Transfer Council.

(2) The provisions of this Subsection are applicable to students enrolling in an eligible college or university as first-time freshmen during or after the 2025-2026 academic year.

§5025. High school core curriculum requirements; Opportunity, Performance, Honors, Excellence Awards

To be eligible for an Opportunity, Performance, ~~or~~ Honors, or Excellence Award pursuant to this Chapter, a student shall have successfully completed a core curriculum which consists of twenty units of high school course work as follows:

* * *

§5029. Alternative initial eligibility requirements

* * *

B. A student who completes a home study program shall be eligible to receive an award pursuant to this Chapter if each of the following conditions is met:

* * *

(3)

* * *

(b)

* * *

(iii) For a student qualifying for an initial Performance, ~~or Honors, or~~ Excellence Award for the 2008-2009 award year or thereafter pursuant to this Subsection, the student shall have a composite score on the 1990 version of the ACT which is at least one point higher than that required by R.S. 17:5024(B) for the particular award or an equivalent concordant value on an enhanced or revised version of such test or on the SAT.

* * *

D.(1) Beginning with the 2004-2005 award year, a student who does not graduate from high school or complete a home study program shall be eligible to receive an Opportunity, Performance, or Honors Award pursuant to this Chapter and a student who does not graduate from high school or complete a home study program shall be eligible to receive an Excellence Award pursuant to this Chapter if each of the following conditions is met:

* * *

§5041. Maintaining eligibility; Excellence, Honors, Performance, Opportunity

To maintain continued state payment of any amount pursuant to an Opportunity, Performance, ~~or Honors, or~~ Excellence Award once enrolled in college a student shall meet all of the following:

(1)

* * *

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

19 * * *

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

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

1 Excellence Award shall remain eligible for state payments but only in the amount
2 provided for in R.S. 17:5002(B) for a recipient of an Opportunity Award. The
3 provisions of this Subparagraph shall apply to all students who receive state
4 payments pursuant to a Performance, ~~Award or an Honors,~~ or Excellence Award,
5 including all such students from the beginning of the program.

6 * * *

7 §5043. Returning students

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

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

22 * * *

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

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

2025 Regular Session

Turner

Abstract: Adds a TOPS award level, Excellence, for students who score 31 or higher on the ACT and revises initial academic eligibility requirements for a TOPS-Tech award.

TOPS award levels

Present law provides for the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS), a merit scholarship program. 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 and enroll in a public college or university.

Award amounts

Present law ties the calculation of award amounts to the amount of tuition charged at a given institution during the 2016-2017 academic year. Proposed law retains present law except provides that for the Excellence award; the award amount is \$12,000 or the amount of tuition and mandatory fees, whichever is less.

TOPS-Tech

Present law provides that to be initially eligible for a TOPS-Tech award, a student shall attain both of the following academic eligibility criteria:

- (1) GPA of at least 2.5 on a specified high school core curriculum.
- (2) ACT score of at least 17 or silver on WorkKeys.

Proposed law adds at least nine credit hours of early college credit attained through dual enrollment courses or equivalent validated skills and learning measures as approved by the Statewide Articulation and Transfer Council as a third academic criterion. Provides that a student qualifies if he meets at least two of these three requirements. Applicable to students enrolling in college as first-time freshmen beginning with the 2025-2026 academic year.

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 these students who qualify for an Excellence award.

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

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.

The Committee Amendments Proposed by House Committee on Appropriations to the engrossed bill:

1. Reinstate present law award amounts and present law stipends for Performance and Honors awards.
2. Increase maximum Excellence award amount from \$11,300 to \$12,000 and limit use of this award to public institutions.
3. Remove proposed law stipends for students at certain LSU institutions.
4. For a TOPS-Tech award, add the attainment of certain dual enrollment credits as an eligibility criterion in lieu of either the core curriculum or the minimum ACT score.