
DIGEST

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HB 77 Re-Reengrossed

2025 Regular Session

Turner

Abstract: Adds the Excellence award level for students who score 31 or higher on the ACT, allows application of unused award amounts to medical or dental school, allows award qualification based on the Classic Learning Test, and revises eligibility requirements for TOPS-Tech.

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.

Medical or dental school

Present law allows award recipients who graduate from college early to apply unused award amounts to postgraduate study. Proposed law retains present law and allows students to apply unused award amounts if they are enrolled in a doctor of medicine, doctor of osteopathic medicine, or doctor of dentistry program in La. during or after the 2024-2025 academic year and have earned an academic baccalaureate degree from an in-state or out-of-state college. Applicable to students who qualify for TOPS upon high school graduation regardless of whether they left the state for the entirety of college or used part of their award at a TOPS-eligible college and then transferred out of state. Requires students to pay a sum equaling award amounts and interest thereon unless they are enrolled in a residency program or they practice medicine or dentistry full-time for three consecutive years in La. after residency. Requires the administering agency (the Bd. of Regents) to provide by rule for collecting unpaid amounts and other excepted circumstances relative to payment.

Award qualification

Present law sets a minimum ACT score for each award level and allows qualification upon attainment of an equivalent concordant score on the SAT. Proposed law, applicable to graduates of approved nonpublic schools and approved home study programs, also allows this upon the attainment of an equivalent concordant score on the Classic Learning Test.

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)(ii) and (iii) and (D)(1)(intro. para.), 5041(intro. para.), (1)(c), and (4), and 5043(1); Adds R.S. 17:5002(I), 5002.1, and 5024(A)(1)(e), (B)(1)(e) and (3), 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.

The House Floor Amendments to the reengrossed bill:

1. Allow award qualification based on a minimum score on the Classic Learning Test for graduates of approved nonpublic schools and approved home study programs.
2. Authorize certain students to apply unused award amounts to medical or dental school and require repayment unless certain conditions are met.