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DIGEST

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HB 438 Original

2016 Regular Session

Ivey

**Abstract:** Creates a new Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) award, the TOPS-Tech Transfer Award, available for two years in pursuit of skill or occupational training and for two years in pursuit of a baccalaureate degree.

**Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS), generally**

Present law provides for the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) as a program of merit scholarships for students attending certain postsecondary education institutions who meet specific grade point average, ACT score, and core curriculum requirements and certain other qualifications. Provides for Opportunity, Performance and Honors Awards (eight semesters) and TOPS-Tech Awards (two years).

**Establishment of a new TOPS Award**

Proposed law creates a new TOPS award, the TOPS-Tech Transfer Award. Provides that a student who receives this award shall receive the equivalent of a TOPS-Tech Award for his first two years of postsecondary education and, if he meets certain criteria, the equivalent of an Opportunity Award for his remaining four semesters. Provides that the first cohort of students eligible for such an award shall be those graduating from high school in the 2019-20 school year (in other words, students entering high school in the fall of 2016).

**Baseline award amounts and maximum award duration**

Present law provides relative to the amount awarded for recipients of a TOPS-Tech Award, which is only awarded if a student is enrolled in programs aligned to state workforce priorities as determined by the Bd. of Regents and La. Workforce Investment Council:

<b>TOPS-Tech Award</b>	
<b>Institution Type</b>	<b>Award Amount</b>
Public college or university that does not offer an academic undergraduate degree at the baccalaureate level	Tuition charged by the institution

Other eligible college or university	Equal to the weighted average of amounts paid to students attending an eligible public college or university that does not offer an academic undergraduate degree at the baccalaureate level
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Proposed law retains present law and provides that a student qualifying for a TOPS-Tech Transfer Award who enrolls at an institution at which a student may use a TOPS-Tech award shall receive an award amount at the TOPS-Tech Award level.

Present law provides as follows relative to the amount awarded to recipients of Opportunity, Performance, or Honors awards:

<b>Opportunity, Performance, or Honors Award</b>	
<b>Institution Type</b>	<b>Award Amount</b>
La. public college or university	Tuition charged by the institution
La. nonpublic college or university	Weighted average of amounts paid for students attending La. public colleges and universities that offer academic undergraduate degrees at the baccalaureate level

Proposed law retains present law and adds that upon transferring to an institution at which a student may use an Opportunity Award, the recipient of a TOPS-Tech Transfer Award shall receive an award amount at the Opportunity Award level.

Present law allows a student receiving an Opportunity, Performance, or Honors Award who graduates in less than eight semesters to continue to receive award benefits to pursue a postgraduate academic degree, subject to certain limitations and requirements. Proposed law grants this same opportunity to recipients of a TOPS-Tech Transfer Award.

Present law provides for a tuition exemption for persons serving in the La. National Guard and provides that in lieu of payment of tuition through a TOPS Award, they shall receive this tuition exemption; also grants them a stipend based on whether they qualify for an Opportunity or TOPS-Tech Award (\$300 per semester/\$600 per academic year) or a Performance or Honors Award (\$700 per semester/\$1400 per academic year).

Proposed law grants such persons who qualify for the TOPS-Tech Transfer Award the same stipend granted to those who qualify for an Opportunity or TOPS-Tech Award.

### **Initial eligibility requirements**

All proposed law revisions to initial eligibility requirements are applicable to students graduating

from high school during or after the 2019-2020 school year.

ACT:

Present law requires that for an Opportunity Award, a student must attain an ACT score that is at least equal to the state's average score but never less than 20. Proposed law instead applies this ACT score requirement to the TOPS-Tech Transfer Award; provides that the minimum score for an Opportunity Award is 21.

Present law requires at least a 23 for the Performance Award, at least a 27 for the Honors Award, and at least a 17 for the TOPS-Tech Award. Proposed law retains present law.

Grade point average (GPA):

Present law requires a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.50 for a TOPS-Tech or Opportunity Award and a 3.00 for a Performance or Honors Award. Proposed law raises the minimum GPA for the Opportunity Award from 2.50 to 3.00 and otherwise retains present law.

Core curriculum:

Present law provides one set of core curriculum requirements for Opportunity, Performance, and Honors Awards and another for the TOPS-Tech Award. Proposed law requires TOPS-Tech Transfer Award recipients to meet the core curriculum requirements applicable to Opportunity, Performance, and Honors Award recipients.

## **Postsecondary education institution enrollment**

Present law provides that to be eligible for any TOPS Award, a student shall enroll in an eligible college or university as a first-time freshman not later than the semester, excluding summer semesters or sessions, immediately following the first anniversary of his high school graduation.

Proposed law applies this deadline to those qualifying for a TOPS-Tech Transfer Award and further provides that in order for such award to continue upon his completion of skill or occupational training, he shall transfer to and enroll in an eligible college or university not later than the semester, excluding summer semesters or sessions, immediately following the first anniversary of the date that he graduated from his initial institution.

## **Maintaining eligibility**

Present law provides general requirements for maintaining eligibility for all TOPS Awards. Requires maintaining a minimum GPA. For students qualifying for an Opportunity Award, present law requires a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.30 after 24 credit hours and 2.50 after 48 credit hours. Proposed law, applicable to students graduating from high school during or after the 2019-2020 school year, increases these minimum GPA requirements from 2.30 to 2.50 and from 2.50 to 2.75, respectively; also applies them to continuing eligibility for a TOPS-Tech Transfer Award, specifying that a student must have at least a 2.75 upon graduation from his initial institution in order for his award to continue upon transfer to his subsequent institution.

(Amends R.S. 17:5002(A), (D), (E), and (G)(1), 5024(A)(1)(intro. para.) and(a) and (B)(1)(intro para.) and (a), 5025(intro. para.), 5027(A)(1) and (C)(intro. para.), 5029(C)(intro. para.), and 5041(intro. para.), (3), (4), and (5); Adds R.S. 17:5024(A)(1)(e) and (B)(1)(e), 5024.1, 5041(6) and 5041.1; Repeals R.S. 17:5024(A)(2) and (3)(b), (B)(2), and (C))