

New law, relative to the Tuition Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) requires the Board of Regents to formulate, develop, establish, and implement a uniform information system for the purposes of policy analysis and program evaluation and for providing accurate data and statistics to the legislature, the governor and appropriate executive branch agencies, and the public relative to the program's impact on the state and on students. Requires that the board consult with and seek written recommendations from the La. Student Financial Assistance Commission, each college or university eligible for participation in TOPS, each public postsecondary education management board, the La. Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, legislators, and knowledgeable others as determined by the board.

States legislative intent that the reporting system and its requirements shall be applicable to all TOPS applicants, all award recipients regardless of eligible college or university attended, and all such eligible colleges and universities. Specifies that effective for the 2002-2003 award year and thereafter, compliance with the information reporting system shall be a condition for an eligible college or university to remain eligible to receive payments from the state on behalf of an award recipient. Requires the Board of Regents to make compliance determinations annually.

Requires that the information reporting system include but not be limited to the following:

- (1) A report prepared as of the end of the Fall semester and again as of the end of the Spring semester (or equivalent periods of time) during each academic year relative to the rate of retention of program awards by students as they progress from semester to semester or other equivalent periods of time as may be applicable once enrolled at an eligible college or university. Provides that the data shall be reported by institution attended, by the two-digit classification of instructional program, and by program award category and include the percent of students losing program eligibility due to: not earning the minimum number of credit hours; not having the required cumulative grade point average; and failing to make steady academic progress.
- (2) The persistence rates at colleges and universities of freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior students receiving a program award reported by award category and by award year.
- (3) The graduation rates (or rates of completion of the chosen postsecondary education program if otherwise applicable) for students receiving a program award, reported by award category and award year, including for those graduating with a baccalaureate academic degree the rate for persons graduating within four years, within five years, and within six years, respectively.
- (4) The mean length of time required for a student receiving a program award to graduate with a baccalaureate academic degree or to complete the chosen postsecondary education program (if otherwise applicable) with such information being reported by award category and by award year.
- (5) An annual report on the number of applicants as well as the percent of high school graduates by high school and by parish who apply for a program award, by award category, and the percent of those students who subsequently enroll in a college or university.

- (6) Statistical studies on the relationship between the courses taken and grades earned by a high school student and the student's score on the ACT or SAT. Relative to public high schools, specifies that the statistical studies shall use student course and grade data that is otherwise available from the schools and that such studies shall be at no additional cost to the governing authority of any public high school.

Permits the Board of Regents, consistent with the general provisions of new law and when necessary due to certain data limitations, to modify any specific requirement of new law relative to the information reporting system. Provides that prior to making any such modifications the board shall report in writing to the House and Senate education committees on the proposed action and shall have received approval from each committee relative to the proposed action.

New law additionally requires that the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) mandate that the governing authority of every public school include comprehensive information relative to TOPS and program eligibility requirements as a component of a student's five-year educational plan that is required by R.S. 17:183.2. New law provides that the parent or other person responsible for the student's school attendance at the ninth grade level return to the school at the start of the student's ninth grade year a signed notice that the program information and eligibility requirements have been reviewed by the parent or other responsible person and by the student and that (for informational and data collection purposes only) expresses the intent of the parent or other responsible person as to whether or not the student will be pursuing the necessary program of studies to be eligible for a TOPS award.

Effective upon signature of governor (June 29, 2001).

(Adds R.S. 17:3048.3 and 3048.4)