
DIGEST

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HB 708 Original

2015 Regular Session

Hunter

Abstract: Authorizes use of Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) awards for postgraduate study in certain circumstances; requires recipients of TOPS awards to (1) pursue a field of study that will qualify the recipient for employment in certain categories of jobs, (2) repay awards unless the recipient completes a bachelor's or postgraduate degree and resides in La. for at least one year for each year of award received; establishes amounts paid for TOPS scholarships in the 2015-2016 award year as baseline amounts for future awards; authorizes the legislature to increase base-award amounts in the future; prohibits future award amounts from decreasing below the base-award amount; eliminates waivers of academic excellence fees at La. State University.

Minimum ACT Score

With respect to TOPS, present law provides that a student, among other eligibility criteria, must have a composite ACT score equal to or higher than the state average composite score, rounded to the nearest whole number, reported for the previous year, but never less than 20 or an equivalent value on the SAT in order to receive a TOPS Opportunity award.

Proposed law retains the requirement that a student have a minimum ACT score equal to or greater than the state average, but never less than 20, but specifies that the state average be expressed in whole number increments.

Establishment of Baseline Award Amounts

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

- (1) For a recipient who attends a La. public college or university to pursue an academic undergraduate degree or skill or occupational training, the award amount is an amount determined by the La. Student Financial Assistance Commission (LASFAC) to equal the tuition charged by the college or university attended.
- (2) For a recipient who attends an eligible state nonpublic college or university, the award amount is an amount determined by LASFAC to equal the weighted average amount of amounts paid for students attending public colleges and universities that offer academic undergraduate degrees at the baccalaureate level or an amount determined by LASFAC to equal the weighted average of amounts paid for students attending public colleges and

universities who are enrolled in permitted skill or occupational training.

- (3) For a recipient who is eligible to use the award at an out-of-state nonpublic college or university to pursue an academic undergraduate degree, the award amount is an amount determined by LASFAC to equal the weighted average of amounts paid for students attending La. public colleges and universities that offer academic undergraduate degrees.
- (4) For a student who is the recipient of an Opportunity, Performance, or Honors award who enrolls in a cosmetology school registered by the La. State Board of Cosmetology or a proprietary school licensed by the Board of Regents, the award amount is equal to the amount determined by the LASFAC to equal the weighted average of amounts for students attending public colleges and universities who are enrolled in the permitted skill or occupational training.
- (5) Provides an additional \$200 per semester, or \$400 per academic year, to a recipient of a Performance Award, and provides an additional \$400 per semester, or \$800 per academic year, to a recipient of an Honors Award.

Relative to the amount of a TOPS-Tech Award, present law provides as follows:

- (1) For a recipient who attends an eligible La. public college or university that does not offer an academic undergraduate degree at the baccalaureate level or higher to pursue permitted skill or occupational training, the award amount equals the actual cost of tuition.
- (2) For a recipient who attends any other eligible postsecondary education institution, the award amount equals the amount determined by LASFAC to equal the weighted average of amounts paid for students attending public institutions who are enrolled in the permitted skill or occupational training.

Proposed law provides that, beginning with the 2016-2017 award year:

- (1) The amount awarded by the state to a student who is the recipient of any TOPS award shall be equal to the award amount established for each respective award for the 2015-2016 award year.
- (2) The legislature may, by law, increase the amount awarded in any given award year to a student who is the recipient of any TOPS award.
- (3) Any increase in award amounts granted by the legislature shall be established as the minimum amount to be awarded to a student who is the recipient of any TOPS award.
- (4) The amount awarded to a student who is the recipient of any TOPS award shall not be less than the amount paid for the previous award year.
- (5) Retains payment of the supplemental amounts established in present law for a recipient of

a Performance or Honors award.

Continuing Eligibility for Award

Present law requires that a recipient of a Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) award meet certain criteria in order to maintain continued receipt of such award. Such criteria include, but are not limited to:

- (1) Earning enough credits to maintain full-time status as a student.
- (2) Maintain a minimum required grade point average, depending on the type of award received.
- (3) Have no criminal conviction, except for misdemeanor traffic violations.

Proposed law adds a requirement that the student pursue a degree or skill or occupational training that would qualify him for employment in a four or five star job, on a statewide basis, as defined by the Louisiana Workforce Commission. Further provides that a student shall remain eligible for an award if all other conditions of present law are met and if after the student enrolls in but before he completes the program of study such job is no longer defined as a four or five star job.

Awards for Postgraduate Study

Proposed law provides that an otherwise qualified student who meets each of the following conditions may use the TOPS award to pursue a postgraduate academic degree at an eligible La. institution:

- (1) The student meets the initial eligibility requirements for an Opportunity, Performance, or Honors award.
- (2) The student first enrolled as a postsecondary student in and graduated from an out-of-state college or university accredited by a regional accrediting organization recognized by the U.S. Dept. of Education.
- (3) While enrolled in such a college or university, the student met all requirements for continuation of the initial award that would have been applicable had he been enrolled in a La. college or university.
- (4) The student graduated from high school during the 2010-2011 school year or thereafter.

Provides that the amount of the tuition award shall not exceed the amounts determined by the administering agency to equal the tuition charged for the postgraduate study or for undergraduate full-time enrollment charged by the highest cost public college or university in the state, whichever is less.

Provides that the student may continue to receive the award if he continues to meet all academic and

other requirements for continued receipt of the award as applicable to an undergraduate, including any modifications of such requirements made by the administering agency as needed to apply such requirements to postgraduate study.

Permits student to receive the award for not more than three academic years or the equivalent number of semesters or quarters; prohibits receipt of the award for a term that begins more than seven years after high school graduation.

Repayment of Award Amounts

Proposed law provides that for an award recipient first enrolling in an eligible institution for or during the 2015-2016 academic year or thereafter, upon completion of a bachelor's or postgraduate degree, such former recipient of an award shall either reside in La for at least one year for each year of award he received or repay one year of award for each year he fails to meet this residency requirement. Requires any such recipient who loses eligibility to receive awards to repay amounts received.

Proposed law requires that the former recipient repay amounts in the reverse order from that in which they were received and repay one year of awards within each calendar year until all awards have been repaid. Authorizes deferral of repayment for full-time students and those engaged in military service. Waives the repayment requirement for a recipient who completes a degree and works for at least four years in any of the following: government service including military service; for a La.-based company; or for a nonprofit organization.

Proposed law authorizes the administering agency to promulgate rules necessary to implement proposed law, including provision for collecting amounts owed and interest on unpaid amounts.

Academic Excellence Fees; LSU

Present law (R.S. 17:3351.3) authorizes the board of supervisors of LSU to assess an "academic excellence" fee in addition to any other tuition or attendance fees and charges established by the board. Proposed law retains present law.

Present law authorizes the board to waive the academic excellence fee in cases of financial hardship. Proposed law repeals present law.

(Amends R.S. 17:3048.1(A)(1)(b)(i) and 3351.3(C)(4) and adds R.S. 17:3048.1(A)(4)(f), (Z), (AA), and (BB))