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December 1, 2023

The Honorable Cleo Fields
Chairman, Senate Education Committee
2147 Government Street
Baton Rouge, LA 70806

Dear Senator Fields:

Act 1202 of the 2001 Regular Legislative Session requires the Louisiana Board of Regents to prepare an annual report analyzing various aspects of the TOPS program. Act 587 of the 2014 Regular Legislative Session identified several additional levels of analysis to be included in the TOPS Report, while Act 227 of the 2015 Regular Legislative Session amended Act 1202 for statutory clarity. Finally, Act 665 of the 2022 Regular Legislative Session eliminated the requirement to include parental income data in the report.

The Board of Regents will approve the 2023 TOPS Report at its regularly scheduled meeting on December 13, 2023, and staff is authorized to transmit it to the appropriate committees of the Legislature on the Board's behalf. The report is attached.

Thank you for your leadership. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me concerning this report or any other matters relating to higher education. I look forward to working with you in the upcoming 2024 Regular Legislative Session.

Sincerely,

Kim Hunter Reed, Ph.D.
Commissioner of Higher Education

Attachment

c: Yolanda Dixon, Secretary of the Senate, dixon@legis.la.gov
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AGENDA ITEM V.B.

2023 TOPS Report (as Required by R.S. 17:5067)

Background Information

Act 1375 of the 1997 Regular Legislative Session	Created TOPS awards
First class to receive TOPS awards	Entering freshman class of 1998
Act 1202 of the 2001 Regular Legislative Session	Prescribed BOR to prepare a yearly report analyzing the program
Act 227 of the 2015 Regular Legislative Session	Modified and clarified specific data points without making substantive changes to the report
Act 665 of the 2022 Regular Legislative Session	Eliminated the inclusion of parental income data in the report
Act 447 of the 2022 Regular Legislative Session	Added Geometry as a core curriculum requirement for TOPS <i>Tech</i>
Act 502 of the 2022 Regular Legislative Session	Added specific computer science courses as an alternative to the foreign language requirement for TOPS <i>Opportunity</i> , <i>Performance</i> , and <i>Honors</i>
Act 267 of the 2023 Regular Legislative Session	Added Financial Literacy as a required, one-unit core curriculum course for both the TOPS OPH and TOPS <i>Tech</i> core curricula. For TOPS <i>OPH</i> , it adds one core curriculum course, bringing the total courses required to 20. For TOPS <i>Tech</i> , it reduces the math electives to one course instead of two and adds Financial Literacy as the third required math.

STAFF SUMMARY

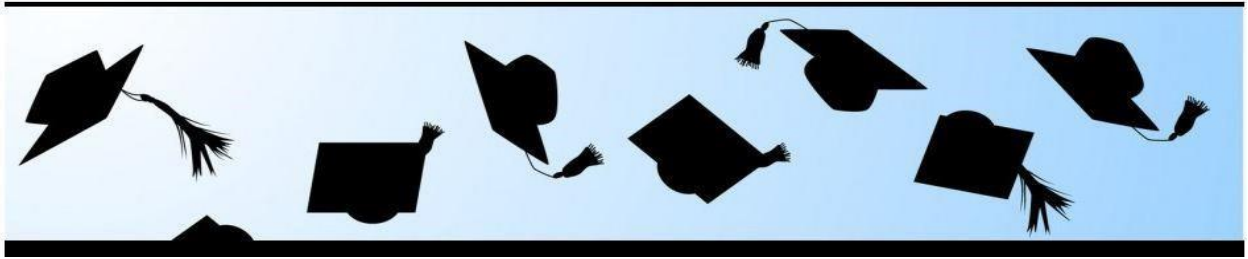
- From 2012-2013 to 2021-2022, 85.4% of students deemed eligible for a TOPS award accepted the award by enrolling in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana.
- The proportions of eligible students who accept their award differ by award level. The proportion of eligible students for Opportunity, Performance, and Honors awards who choose to accept their award is declining.
- The average ACT score of all TOPS recipients between 2013-2014 and 2022-2023 was 24, and their average core GPA was 3.50.
- The average ACT composite for TOPS recipients for 2022-2023 was 24, and their average core GPA was 3.71.
- From 2012-2013 to 2021-2022, the majority of TOPS recipients were disproportionately white (71.0%) and disproportionately female (57.2%).
- Despite the racial gaps among TOPS recipients, the number of minority students receiving TOPS has generally increased over time, but not at the rate needed to erase the equity gap. This year, all minorities

saw modest increases in eligible students receiving TOPS. However, overall, the pool of eligible students has been declining, a trend reflected in ACT scores at the national level.

- Students who begin college with a TOPS award persist and graduate at higher rates than non-TOPS students.
- The average time-to-degree for TOPS recipients pursuing an associate's degree is 3.7 years, compared with 6.1 years for non-TOPS.
- The average time-to-degree for TOPS recipients pursuing a baccalaureate degree is 4.4 years, compared with 6.2 years for non-TOPS.
- From 1998-1999 through the 2022-2023 fiscal years, the state provided approximately \$5.10 billion in funding for the TOPS Program.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Senior Staff recommends approval of the "TOPS Report: Analysis of the TOPS Program from 2013-2022" and authorizes the Commissioner of Higher Education to submit the report to the appropriate legislative committees on behalf of the Board of Regents.



TOPS Report:
Analysis of the TOPS Program, 2013-2023

Louisiana Board of Regents

December 2023



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Executive Summary

The Tuition Opportunity Program for Students (subsequently renamed the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students, also known as TOPS) was created by Act 1375 of the 1997 Regular Legislative Session. The first college freshman class to receive TOPS awards entered postsecondary education in the fall of 1998.

Act 1202 of the 2001 Regular Legislative Session requires the Louisiana Board of Regents (BOR) to provide a report analyzing various aspects of the TOPS Program. Act 227 of the 2015 Regular Legislative Session modified prior law to clarify and specify data points without making any substantive changes to the program.

In accordance with Act 227, this report includes:

- An analysis of the relationship between high school courses taken and the student's American College Test (ACT) score;
- The number of high school graduates who are eligible for TOPS and subsequently enroll in college;
- Persistence (retention) rates of TOPS recipients;
- The number of and reasons for students losing award eligibility;
- Graduation data; and
- TOPS time-to-degree and degree attainment information.

Act 587 of the 2014 Regular Legislative Session added new reporting requirements to the TOPS report, including:

- Demographic information of program award recipients (race, gender, parents' income);
- High school GPA and ACT scores of program award recipients grouped by mean; and
- Average high school GPA and average ACT scores of students who lost the award.

Act 227 requires that this report be submitted annually by December 1 to the Senate Committee on Education and the House Committee on Education. The report includes current and historical data on TOPS students (students receiving an *Opportunity*, *Performance*, or *Honors* award) and, where appropriate, non-TOPS students to allow for comparison.

Overall, the findings indicated that:

- From 2012-2013 to 2021-2022, 85.4% of students deemed eligible for a TOPS award accepted the award by enrolling in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana.
- The proportions of eligible students who accept their award differ by award level. The proportion of eligible students for Opportunity, Performance, and Honors awards who choose to accept their award is declining.
- The average ACT score of all TOPS recipients between 2013-2014 and 2022-2023 was 24, and their average core GPA was 3.50.

- The average ACT composite for TOPS recipients for 2022-2023 was 24, and their average core GPA was 3.71.
- From 2012-2013 to 2021-2022, the majority of TOPS recipients were disproportionately white (71.0%) and disproportionately female (57.2%).
- Despite the racial gaps among TOPS recipients, the number of minority students receiving TOPS has generally increased over time but not at the rate needed to erase the equity gap. This year, all minorities saw modest increases in eligible students receiving TOPS. However, overall, the pool of eligible students has been declining, a trend reflected in ACT scores at the national level.
- Students who begin college with a TOPS award persist and graduate at a higher rate than non-TOPS students.
- The average time-to-degree for TOPS recipients pursuing an associate degree is 3.7 years, compared with 6.1 years for non-TOPS.
- The average time-to-degree for TOPS recipients pursuing a baccalaureate degree is 4.4 years, compared with 6.2 years for non-TOPS.
- From 1998-1999 through the 2022-2023 fiscal years, the state spent approximately \$5.10 billion on the TOPS Program.

Introduction and Background

TOPS Legislation

Act 1202 of the 2001 Regular Legislative Session charged the Board of Regents (BOR) with developing a uniform TOPS reporting system for policy analysis and program evaluation to provide accurate data and statistics relative to the program's impact on the state and students (Appendix A). To satisfy the reporting requirements, BOR staff developed interfaces between the major systems needed to identify and track TOPS students through the postsecondary education enrollment cycle. In addition to mandating the development of a TOPS reporting system, Act 1202 also required the BOR to prepare a report on various aspects of the TOPS Program. According to Act 1202, the "TOPS report" should include:

- An analysis of the relationship between high school courses taken and students' scores on the ACT;
- The number of high school graduates who are eligible for TOPS and subsequently enroll in college;
- Persistence (retention) rates of TOPS students by award level;
- The number of and reasons for students losing award eligibility;
- Graduation rates by award category (within 100% [4-year] and 150% [6-year] of time); and
- The number of students eligible for TOPS by award category, school, and parish.

Act 587 (Appendix B) of the 2014 Regular Legislative Session added reporting requirements to the annual TOPS report, including:

- Demographic information of program award recipients;
- High school GPA and ACT scores of program award recipients grouped by mean, median, and mode; and
- The average high school GPA and ACT scores of those who lost the award and those placed on probationary status.

Act 587 mandates that this report be submitted to the Senate Committee on Education and the House Committee on Education no later than December 1 each year. Therefore, data on 2022-2023 TOPS recipients are not included to comply with the Act's established deadline.

Act 227 of the 2015 Regular Legislative Session amended Act 1202 (Appendix C) for statutory clarity. The new law reorganizes, renumbers, and recodifies existing law without making substantive changes to the program beyond requiring additional data points to assess TOPS recipients' time to degree.

The **Acts of the 2016 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature that impact TOPS are as follows:

- **Act 18** sets a floor for the TOPS award amount and provides that the qualifying ACT score shall be truncated to a whole number rather than rounded to the next whole number. These changes were effective beginning with the fall semester of 2016.

- **Act 388** increases the *core* grade point average (GPA) requirement to qualify for a TOPS *Performance* award from 3.0 to 3.25 and the GPA requirement for a TOPS *Honors* award from 3.0 to 3.50. These changes are effective for high school graduates of 2022 (per Acts 245 and 346 of the 2020 Regular Legislative Session).
- **Act 503** changes the methodology for eliminating students' TOPS awards in the event of a budget shortfall. When there is a budget shortfall, each student's TOPS award -- including *Performance* and *Honors* award stipends -- is subject to a reduction; National Guard stipends and TOPS *Tech* Early Start are not reduced. TOPS Awards will be distributed to all students according to a pro-rata distribution of the available funds. Under Act 503, students can "opt out" of receiving their TOPS Award during a budget shortfall. This change was effective beginning with the AY 2016-2017 award year.

The **Act of the 2017 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature that impacts TOPS is as follows:

- **Act 44** clarifies Act 18 of the 2016 Regular Session that the award level shall be the TOPS award amount charged to students during the AY 2016-2017.

The **Acts of the 2018 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature that impact TOPS are as follows:

- **Act 671** changes certain TOPS initial eligibility requirements and provides relative to sharing specific student data.
- **Act 583** establishes the TOPS Income Fund as a special treasury fund. Monies in the fund can be combined with other funds; however, all monies in the TOPS Income Fund shall be used solely to fund the TOPS Program.

The **Act of the 2019 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature that impacts TOPS is as follows:

- **S.R. 10** requires the BOR to study the feasibility of updating TOPS reporting requirements to include data on scholarship recipients' employment outcomes and other relevant information.

The **Acts of the 2020 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature that impact TOPS are as follows:

- **Act 346** modified qualifications for the TOPS scholarships and continuing eligibility requirements for the 2019-2020 academic year.
- **Act 245** charges the administering agency to adopt rules to provide waivers and exceptions to initial eligibility requirements and continuing eligibility requirements for students impacted by the public health emergency declared by the governor in response to the novel coronavirus, COVID-19.

- **Act 17** declared exceptions for Hurricane Laura-affected students and applied to students who had a home of record in an affected parish or enrolled in an eligible college or university in an affected parish.

The **Acts of the 2021 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature that impact TOPS are as follows:

- **Act 334** adds African-American History as a core curriculum social studies requirement for TOPS.
- **Act 407** adds race and ethnicity data that may be collected and shared with BOR and LOFSA for assessment, evaluation, and policy development.

The **Acts of the 2022 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature that impact TOPS are as follows:

- **Act 665** eliminates the requirement that parental income data be included in the report.
- **Act 447** adds Geometry as a core curriculum requirement for TOPS *Tech* beginning with 2027 high school graduates.
- **Act 502** adds specific computer science courses as an alternative to the foreign language requirement for TOPS *Opportunity*, *Performance*, and *Honors* core curriculum beginning with 2027 high school graduates.
- **Act 681** provides exceptions to the initial and continuing eligibility requirements for students impacted by Hurricane Ida.

The **Acts of the 2023 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature that impact TOPS are as follows:

- **Act 267** adds Financial Literacy as a required, one-unit core curriculum course for both the TOPS *OPH* and TOPS *Tech* core curricula. For TOPS *OPH*, it adds one core curriculum course, bringing the total courses required to 20. For TOPS *Tech*, it reduces the math electives to one course instead of two and adds Financial Literacy as the third required math.
- **Act 224** provides that any student who receives a tuition waiver due to being a 100% disabled veteran will not receive a TOPS Award. Note that the House Floor eliminated the stipend of \$600 per academic year and the enhanced book stipend for TOPS *Performance* and *Honors* recipients.
- **Act 405** amends the definition of Louisiana Resident to allow graduates of 2023 and later to meet the residency requirement if their parent or court-ordered custodian was a Louisiana resident for at least the 24 months preceding the date they moved out of the country, provided that they remain a Louisiana resident as demonstrated by ownership of property, maintenance of a home, payment of Louisiana taxes, etc. during the entire time the parent or custodian was living out of the country.

Brief History of the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS)

The Tuition Opportunity Program for Students (subsequently renamed the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students, also known as TOPS), Louisiana's merit-based student aid program, was created via Act 1375 of the 1997 Regular Legislative Session. The first freshman class to receive TOPS awards entered postsecondary education in the fall of 1998. Although the founding legislation does not directly document the goals of the program, the four generally accepted purposes of TOPS are to:

- Promote academic success by requiring completion of a rigorous high school core curriculum;
- Provide financial incentives as a reward for good academic performance;
- Keep Louisiana's best and brightest in the state to pursue postsecondary education with the hope that they will remain in the state and become productive members of Louisiana's workforce and
- Promote access to and success in postsecondary education.

Eligibility Criteria, Levels of Award, Renewal Requirements, Distribution of Awards

Four TOPS awards are available to students enrolling at Louisiana's colleges and universities: TOPS *Tech*, *Opportunity*, *Performance*, and *Honors*. Trend data for the TOPS *Tech* Award can be found in Appendix D. Act 230 of the 2015 Regular Session changed the TOPS *Tech* program. Under Act 230, students graduating from high school during the 2016-2017 school year and thereafter can use the TOPS *Tech* Award to pursue an associate's degree or other shorter-term training and education credential, including skill, occupational, vocational, technical, certificate, and academic, that the Workforce Investment Council and the Board of Regents have determined is aligned to state workforce priorities.

The eligibility criteria for the *Opportunity*, *Performance*, *Honors*, and *Tech* Awards include completion of a defined high school core curriculum, with a minimum grade point average (GPA) in core courses and a minimum ACT composite score. Table 1 lists all TOPS awards' current eligibility criteria and award components. Currently, the TOPS Core Curriculum consists of 19 units. The specific course requirements of the TOPS Core Curriculum can be found in Appendix E.

Historically, the administration of TOPS was statutorily assigned to the Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission (LASFAC). However, Act 314 of the 2016 Regular Session abolished LASFAC and transferred its duties to the Board of Regents. Therefore, the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA) has been administering the TOPS Program under the BOR, as directed by the acts of the Louisiana Legislature since that date. Program eligibility is determined using the high school transcript from the Louisiana Department of Education's Student Transcript System (STS) and official composite ACT scores. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or TOPS Online Application are the mechanisms for applying for TOPS.

Table 1

TOPS Eligibility Criteria and Award Components				
Award	Core Units	Core GPA	ACT Composite	Duration
<i>Opportunity</i>	19	2.50	Prior-year state average, currently 20	4 years or 8 semesters
<i>Performance</i>	19	3.25	23	4 years or 8 semesters
<i>Honors</i>	19	3.50	27	4 years or 8 semesters
<i>TOPS Tech</i>	21 Jumpstart Career Path Core Units	2.5	17 or higher or a silver-level score on the assessments of the ACT WorkKeys system	2 years

Source: LOSFA website - TOPS Brochures & Flyers

Achievement of the required GPA must occur within one year for TOPS *Tech*.

To maintain eligibility, TOPS and TOPS *Tech* recipients must be continuously enrolled as full-time students, earn at least 24 semester hours each academic year (fall, spring, and summer), and maintain satisfactory academic progress as demonstrated by the cumulative grade point average. Continuing eligibility is determined by LOSFA based on data from the postsecondary institution in which the student is enrolled. Table 2 lists the minimum renewal requirements for each award.

Table 2

Minimum Renewal Requirements			
Award	Hrs. Earned /AY	Cumulative GPA for Continuation	Award Reinstated* (Upon recovery of req. GPA)
<i>Opportunity</i>	24	2.30 after 24 credit hours earned 2.50 after 48 credit hours earned Maintain steady academic progress at the end of all other terms (2.00 TOPS cumulative GPA)	Yes
<i>Performance</i>	24	3.00 after 24 credit hours earned Maintain satisfactory academic progress at the end of all other terms (2.00 TOPS cumulative GPA)	Yes, <i>Opportunity</i>
<i>Honors</i>	24	3.00 after 24 credit hours earned Maintain satisfactory academic progress at the end of all other terms (2.00 TOPS cumulative GPA)	Yes, <i>Opportunity</i>
TOPS Tech	24	2.5 after 24 credit hours earned Maintain satisfactory academic progress at the end of all other terms (2.00 TOPS cumulative GPA)	Yes

Source: LOFSA website - TOPS Brochures & Flyers

*Achievement of the required GPA must occur within two years for *Opportunity*, *Performance*, and *Honors* and one year for *Tech*.

Table 3 illustrates the distribution of TOPS awards across systems for AY 2022-2023. This year, one-half (50.0%) of TOPS awards went to students attending a UL System campus. Of students with the highest level of award, the *Honors* Award, 44.9% attended an LSU System campus, followed closely by UL System campuses at 44.5%. Data also indicate that most students (42.3%) with TOPS awards had an *Opportunity* Award.

Table 3

Distribution of Award Types Across Systems, AY 2022-2023							
Award	LSU System	Southern System	UL System	LCTC System	Private Institutions	Proprietary Schools	% of all Awards
<i>Opportunity</i>	29.5%	2.5%	54.6%	7.1%	5.6%	0.8%	42.3%
<i>Performance</i>	33.9%	0.8%	55.7%	3.2%	6.1%	0.3%	28.1%
<i>Honors</i>	44.9%	0.2%	44.5%	0.7%	9.5%	0.1%	24.7%
<i>TOPS Tech</i>	9.2%	0.8%	4.8%	73.4%	0.0%	11.9%	4.8%
% of all awards	33.6%	1.4%	50.0%	7.6%	6.4%	1.0%	100.0%

Source: LOSFA - TOPS Payment Summary by Award Level for Academic Year 2022-2023 as of 08/14/2023

TOPS Report: Historical Analysis of the TOPS Program, from 2011-2012 to 2021-2022

This report includes current and historical data on TOPS students (receiving an *Opportunity*, *Performance*, *Honors*, or *Tech* Award) and, where appropriate, non-TOPS students to allow for comparison. Some of the data provided in the "Preparation" section and all the data provided in the "Participation," "Persistence/Retention," and "Graduation" sections of this report do not include private postsecondary institutions since those institutions do not currently participate in Regents' reporting systems.

Methodology

This report contains data from public and private institutions, except for graduation rates, retention rates, and time-to-degree. Private institutions are currently not required to report this information to the Board of Regents.

In this year's report, we have made several improvements to the granularity of the underlying data. These improved data have allowed us to refine the calculations of retention, graduation, and time-to-degree. These subtle changes in methodology should be taken into account when comparing this report to previous reports.

Preparation

With the 2001 Master Plan, the BOR adopted the TOPS Core as the Regents' Core, the most critical element of the minimum standards for admission to the state's public four-year colleges and universities. The TOPS/BOR Core currently consists of four units of coursework in English, Math, Natural Science, and Social Science, two units of foreign language, and one unit of study in fine arts. TOPS academic eligibility criteria require students to take this nineteen-hour core curriculum to prepare them for success after high school, particularly in postsecondary education. With this change, students had a double incentive to complete the college-preparatory curriculum. Table 4 illustrates the average ACT composite between students who completed the BOR core and those who did not complete the BOR core.

Table 4

Average ACT Composite, AY 2019-2022					
High School Grad Year	Average ACT Composite for students completing BOR Core		Average ACT Composite for students not completing BOR Core		Total High School Graduates with an ACT Composite from LOSFA
	AVG ACT	Count	AVG ACT	Count	
2019	21.3	33,739	15.0	6,049	39,788
2020	21.2	32,310	14.7	4,802	37,112
2021	20.8	31,405	14.4	5,245	36,650
2022	20.7	30,816	14.4	5,618	36,434

Source: Louisiana Department of Education and LOSFA Files.

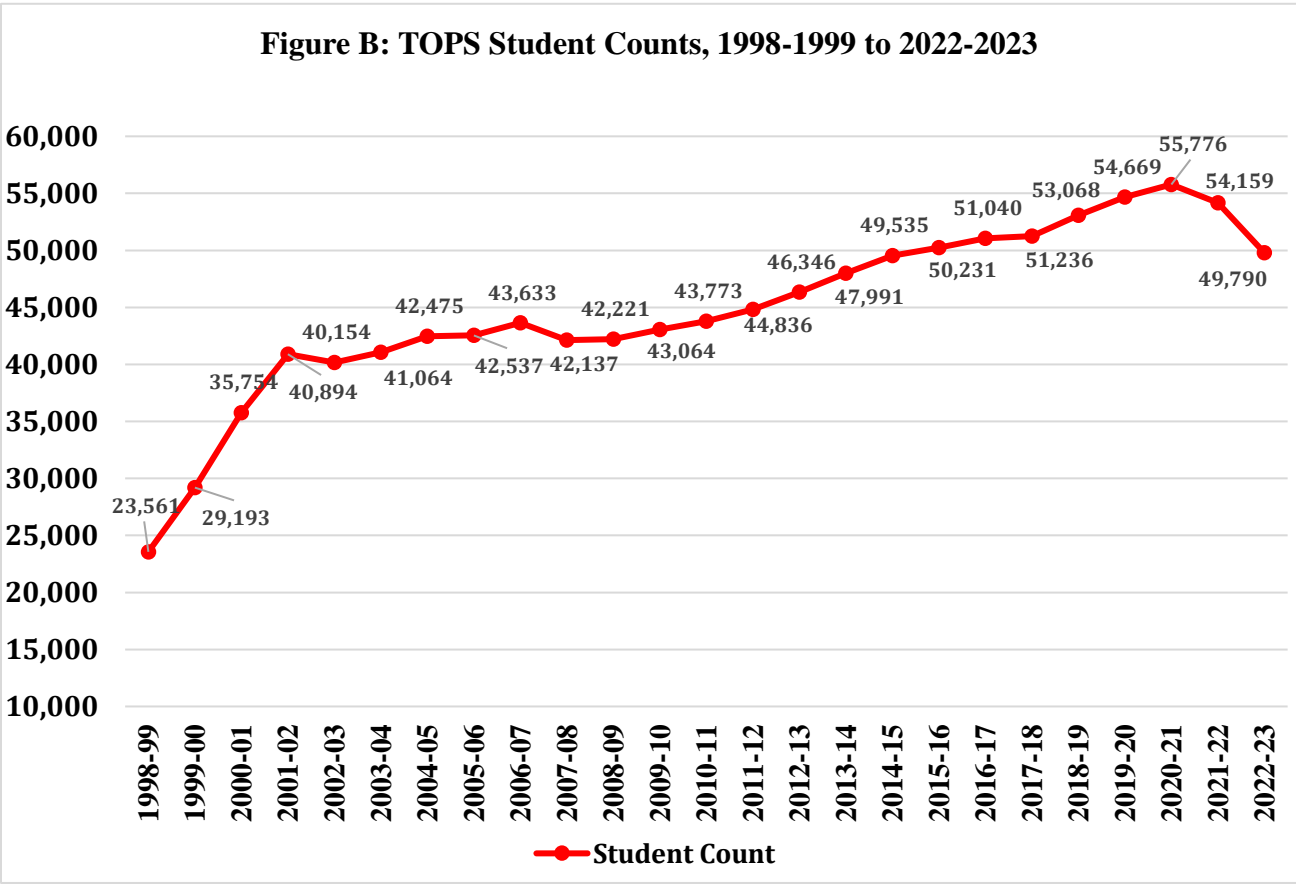
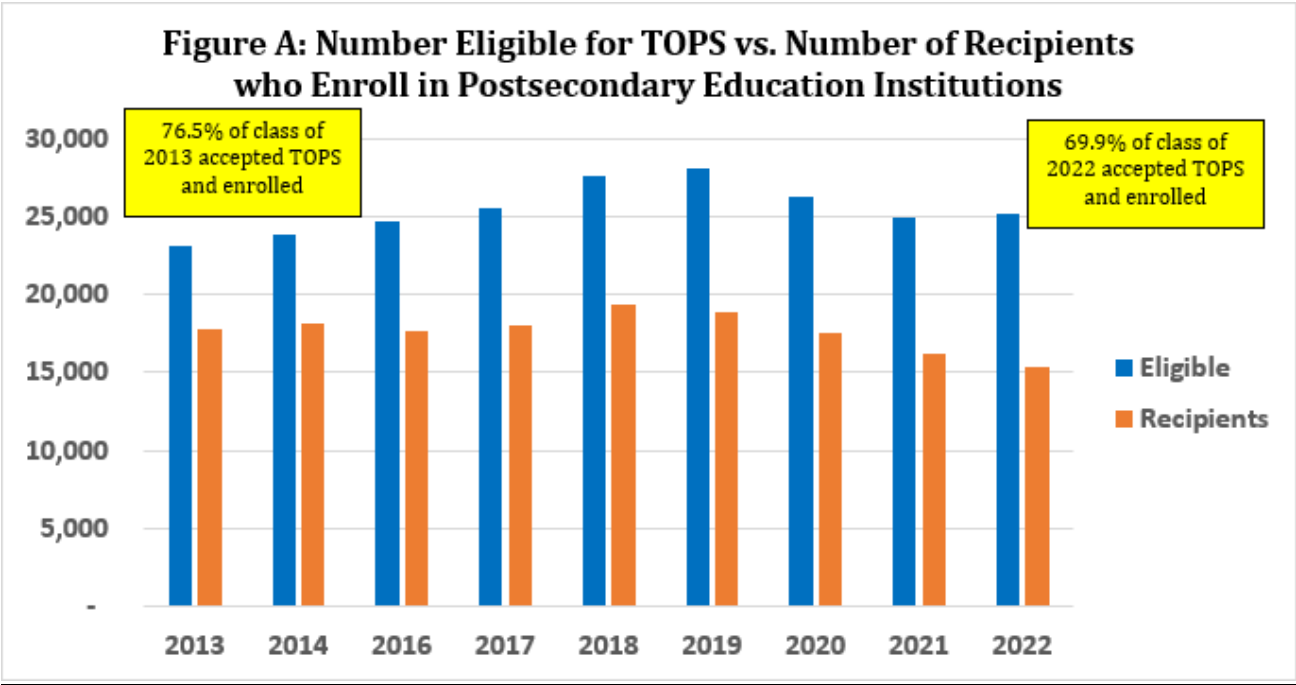
Participation

A generally accepted purpose of TOPS is to attract and retain Louisiana's high school graduates who are more likely to persist and attain a postsecondary credential. A common slogan associated with the TOPS Program has been to "retain the best and brightest" students to attend Louisiana's colleges, with the hope that they will enter the state's workforce after graduation. A recent Washington Post (September 2022) analysis reported, "Louisiana ranks 17th in keeping graduates in the state."

To that end, of the 253,734 students deemed eligible for a TOPS *Opportunity, Performance, Honors*, or TOPS *Tech Award* between 2013 and 2022, 177,295 (or 69.9%) accepted the award and enrolled in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana (see Figure A).

While data supports the claims that participation in the TOPS Program keeps Louisiana students in the state to attain their postsecondary education, declining numbers of high school graduates and college-going high school graduates over the past several years are of concern. The percentage of students accepting TOPS and enrolling in college (Figure A) is the lowest it has been in ten years.

Several years of declining high school graduate numbers and declines in the number of TOPS-eligible students, combined with lower proportions of students receiving their awards, have resulted in a second decline in the number of overall TOPS recipients and, for the second year, an increase in TOPS funding was not requested (Figure B).



While Figure A presents the overall acceptance rate, this average masks significant differences in acceptance rates for the four different TOPS awards.

While the acceptance rates for *Opportunity* and *Performance* awards have remained in the mid-80s in recent years (Table 5), a steadily declining proportion of *Honors* awardees have been accepting their award. That proportion has dropped from 80% in 2018-19 to 75% in 2020-21.

Table 5

TOPS ACCEPTANCE RATES				
YEAR	<i>Opportunity</i>	<i>Performance</i>	<i>Honors</i>	<i>Tech</i>
2014-2015	89%	92%	82%	23%
2015-2016	86%	91%	81%	18%
2016-2017	85%	89%	78%	23%
2017-2018	83%	88%	79%	25%
2018-2019	83%	88%	80%	25%
2019-2020	83%	88%	78%	23%
2020-2021	83%	86%	75%	24%

Also striking is that only about one in four of those eligible for a TOPS *Tech* award choose to accept their scholarship and enroll in an eligible program (refer to Appendix D). Table 6 illustrates the mean ACT and Core GPA of TOPS recipients.

Table 6

Mean ACT and Core GPA of TOPS Recipients*		
H.S. Cohort	TOPS Recipients' Average Composite ACT Score	TOPS Recipients' Average Core GPA
2013-2014	24	3.35
2014-2015	24	3.35
2015-2016	24	3.37
2016-2017	24	3.40
2017-2018	24	3.53
2018-2019	24	3.57
2019-2020	24	3.63
2020-2021	24	3.68
2021-2022	24	3.71
2022-2023**	24	3.71

* Since 2013, the average overall composite ACT score of TOPS recipients is 24, and the overall average GPA is 3.50

**Of those eligible

As illustrated below in Table 7, TOPS recipients' average ACT scores vary by race. Composite ACT scores for African American students throughout the past ten years have increased to an average of 22.7 for 2021-2022, compared to 24.4 for white and 23.9 for Hispanic students.

ACT reported that the number of Louisiana students taking the ACT more than once declined last

year; this decrease in retesting is of concern as it has been found that students who retest do better in the subsequent test administrations. If a student took only one administration of the ACT, then there is a possibility that lower scores might not meet TOPS eligibility criteria, although a student could achieve that mark with an additional attempt.

Table 7

TOPS Recipients, by Race and ACT Composite Score*							
HS Cohort	Asian	American Indian	African American	White	Hispanic	Other	Total
2012-2013	25.0	23.4	22.4	24.4	23.9	24.4	24.0
2013-2014	25.1	23.6	22.3	24.5	24.3	24.4	24.1
2014-2015	25.4	23.3	22.4	24.5	24.0	24.5	24.1
2015-2016	25.8	23.8	22.7	24.7	24.3	24.5	24.3
2016-2017	25.5	24.3	22.6	24.7	24.2	24.7	24.3
2017-2018	25.5	23.8	22.6	24.8	24.4	24.0	24.4
2018-2019	26.0	23.3	22.6	24.8	24.1	24.3	24.4
2019-2020	25.8	25.0	22.8	24.8	24.1	24.5	24.4
2020-2021	25.8	23.6	22.6	24.5	24.1	24.1	24.2
2021-2022	25.6	24.1	22.7	24.4	23.9	24.1	24.1

* It should be noted that 2,985 individuals did not report their race. Therefore they were not included in this analysis.

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of August 2023.

As Table 8 indicates, overall TOPS recipients are predominantly white. In 2021-2022, the first-time entering freshman student population was 50.5% white; this reflects all enrolled first-time freshmen (including in-state, out-of-state, TOPS recipients, and non-TOPS students).

Despite the racial gaps among TOPS recipients, the number of minority students accepting TOPS has generally increased over time; this year, the numbers of African American, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic TOPS recipients all saw a slight increase (Tables 8 and 9).

Table 8

TOPS Recipients, by Race*							
HS Cohort	American		African	White	Hispanic	Other	Total
	Asian	Indian	American				
2012-2013	492	82	2,947	12,176	413	138	16,248
2013-2014	518	111	2,770	12,144	461	144	16,148
2014-2015	539	110	3,081	12,492	507	150	16,879
2015-2016	509	102	3,092	12,087	545	154	16,489
2016-2017	506	97	2,942	12,183	537	195	16,460
2017-2018	563	117	3,312	12,758	586	258	17,594
2018-2019	525	73	2,954	12,214	592	269	16,627
2019-2020	531	71	2,658	11,472	599	268	15,599
2020-2021	519	74	2,151	10,662	549	255	14,210
2021-2022	531	76	2,276	9,856	632	254	13,625

* It should be noted that 2,985 individuals did not report their race. Therefore they were not included in this analysis.
Source: LOSFA internal data files as of August 2023.

Table 9

TOPS Recipients, by Race								
HS Cohort	American		African	White	Hispanic	Other	Not Reported	Total
	Asian	Indian	American					
2012-2013	3%	0%	18%	74%	3%	1%	1%	100%
2013-2014	3%	1%	17%	73%	3%	1%	3%	100%
2014-2015	3%	1%	18%	73%	3%	1%	2%	100%
2015-2016	3%	1%	18%	72%	3%	1%	2%	100%
2016-2017	3%	1%	18%	73%	3%	1%	2%	100%
2017-2018	3%	1%	19%	72%	3%	1%	1%	100%
2018-2019	3%	0%	17%	72%	4%	2%	2%	100%
2019-2020	3%	0%	17%	72%	4%	2%	2%	100%
2020-2021	4%	1%	15%	74%	4%	2%	2%	100%
2021-2022	4%	1%	16%	71%	5%	2%	2%	100%

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of August 2023.

TOPS recipients have been predominantly female for more than a decade. As Tables 10 and 11 noted, in 2021-2022, 57.2% of TOPS recipients were female. Male students receiving TOPS have had slightly higher average ACT scores; however, the number of male participants is 42.5%. In comparison, 56.2% of the total Academic Year 2021-2022 first-time freshman undergraduate population was female; this percentage reflects all enrolled first-time freshmen (including in-state, out-of-state, TOPS recipients, and non-TOPS students).

Table 10

TOPS Recipients ACT Composite Score* by Gender			
H.S. Cohort	Female	Male	Total
2012-2013	23.7	24.5	24.0
2013-2014	23.8	24.6	24.1
2014-2015	23.8	24.6	24.1
2015-2016	24.0	24.8	24.3
2016-2017	24.0	24.9	24.4
2017-2018	24.0	24.9	24.4
2018-2019	24.1	24.9	24.4
2019-2020	24.1	25.0	24.5
2020-2021	23.9	24.6	24.2
2021-2022	23.9	24.5	24.2

Source: BOR data files as of August 2023

* The average includes only those students whose data points were fully reported. It should be noted that over the ten-year period, 420 individuals did not report their gender and are not included in this analysis.

Table 11

TOPS Recipients, by Gender*			
H.S. Cohort	Female	Male	Total
2012-2013	9,597	6,852	16,449
2013-2014	9,784	6,925	16,709
2014-2015	10,130	7,026	17,156
2015-2016	9,925	6,849	16,774
2016-2017	9,775	6,913	16,688
2017-2018	10,334	7,441	17,775
2018-2019	9,729	7,095	16,824
2019-2020	9,236	6,566	15,802
2020-2021	8,216	6,212	14,428
2021-2022	7,943	5,896	13,839

Source: BOR data files as of August 2023

* The average includes only those students whose data points were fully reported. It should be noted that over the ten-year period, 420 individuals did not report their gender and are not included in this analysis.

Persistence (Retention)

Persistence in postsecondary education is measured by the rate at which first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students are retained in (or return for) their second year. As illustrated in Tables 12, 13, and 14, students who begin college with a TOPS award return to postsecondary education in subsequent years at higher rates than non-TOPS students.

Furthermore, students receiving the *Performance* and *Honors* Awards, generally better prepared for postsecondary education, are retained at higher rates than those receiving the *Opportunity* Award.

Table 13 examines the overall retention rate (retention at any Louisiana public postsecondary

institution, not necessarily the institution where the student started) through the second, third, and fourth years of students with TOPS who began at a four-year institution compared to those who started without TOPS.

Table 12

Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS vs. Non-TOPS Students Who Began at a Four-Year Institution						
Fall Semester Entering Class	2nd Yr. Retention		3rd Yr. Retention		4th Yr. Retention	
	TOPS	Non-TOPS	TOPS	Non-TOPS	TOPS	Non-TOPS
2012	87%	66%	81%	52%	75%	46%
2013	87%	63%	81%	53%	76%	44%
2014	87%	65%	81%	53%	75%	46%
2015	87%	61%	80%	51%	75%	43%
2016	88%	64%	81%	53%	76%	45%
2017	88%	65%	81%	52%	76%	44%
2018	88%	63%	81%	49%	75%	40%
2019	89%	65%	81%	50%	73%	42%
2020	87%	60%	79%	45%	0%	0%
2021	88%	60%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: BoR internal data files as of September 2023

Table 13 examines the overall retention rate by award level of TOPS students who began at a four-year institution through the second, third, and fourth years.

Table 13

Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS Students Who Began at a Four-Year Institution by TOPS Award Level									
Fall Semester Entering Class	2nd Yr. Retention			3rd Yr. Retention			4th Yr. Retention		
	Opportunity	Performance	Honors	Opportunity	Performance	Honors	Opportunity	Performance	Honors
2012	82%	91%	94%	73%	85%	90%	67%	80%	86%
2013	81%	91%	95%	74%	85%	90%	68%	79%	86%
2014	81%	91%	94%	72%	85%	90%	66%	80%	86%
2015	81%	90%	94%	73%	84%	90%	66%	79%	86%
2016	82%	90%	93%	74%	85%	89%	68%	79%	84%
2017	82%	91%	94%	74%	84%	89%	68%	79%	84%
2018	82%	90%	93%	74%	84%	89%	67%	78%	82%
2019	83%	90%	95%	72%	84%	89%	64%	76%	82%
2020	81%	89%	93%	71%	82%	88%	0%	0%	0%
2021	83%	90%	93%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: BoR internal data files as of September 2023

Table 14 examines the overall retention rate in the second year of students who began with TOPS at a two-year institution compared to those who started without TOPS (Non-TOPS students include only Louisiana residents for comparative purposes).

Table 14

Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS vs. Non-TOPS Students Who Began at a Two-Year Institution		
Fall Semester Entering Class	2 nd Year Retention	
	TOPS	Non-TOPs
2012	76%	51%
2013	74%	51%
2014	75%	52%
2015	76%	51%
2016	76%	48%
2017	76%	49%
2018	77%	51%
2019	75%	46%
2020	73%	51%
2021	76%	53%

Source: BOR internal data files as of September 2023

Retaining the TOPS award

As previously noted, students who receive a TOPS award must meet minimum academic criteria to retain their award (See Table 2). The award is cancelled when students fail to maintain full-time and continuous enrollment, earn 24 hours of credit per academic year, or maintain the minimum GPA. Students may request and be granted exceptions for failure to meet these criteria for circumstances beyond their control, including illness, death in the family, military service, natural disasters, etc. TOPS Awards are initially suspended for GPA and are permanently cancelled after two years. TOPS *Tech* awards are permanently cancelled after one year has passed during which the student has not attained the required GPA. As shown in Table 15, the number of awards cancelled has declined over time.

Furthermore, between the 2012-2013 cohort and the 2022-2023 cohort, 187,430 students received TOPS awards. Of these TOPS award recipients, 31,901 (17%) had their TOPS award cancelled during their postsecondary academic career. From 2012-2013 to 2022-2023, the cumulative total of cancelled awards was 31,901. Of these 31,901 cancelled awards, 28,148 were cancelled due to students' failure to earn 24 hours of college credit during an academic year, 2,555 due to the GPA requirement, and 1,198 due to non-continuous enrollment. The vast majority of awards are cancelled due to the 24-hour requirement. However, there has been a decreasing trend of award cancellations in recent years.

Table 15

Percentage of TOPS Award Cancelled** by Cohort									
Entering Cohort	Total # of TOPS Awards	Total # of Awards Cancelled*		Cancelled: 24 Hr. Requirement		Cancelled: GPA Requirement		Cancelled: Non-Continuous Enrollment	
2012-2013	16,171	4,314	27%	3,652	23%	557	3%	105	1%
2013-2014	16,994	4,578	27%	3,901	23%	556	3%	121	1%
2014-2015	17,306	4,488	26%	3,999	23%	382	2%	107	1%
2015-2016	17,883	4,553	25%	4,086	23%	355	2%	112	1%
2016-2017	16,974	4,045	24%	3,602	21%	311	2%	132	1%
2017-2018	17,262	2,968	17%	2,631	15%	202	1%	135	1%
2018-2019	18,511	2,705	15%	2,412	13%	138	1%	155	1%
2019-2020	18,198	1,394	8%	1,212	7%	43	0%	139	1%
2020-2021	16,958	1,364	8%	1,256	7%	10	0%	98	1%
2021-2022	15,704	1,174	7%	1,101	7%	1	0%	72	0%
2022-2023	15,469	318	2%	296	2%		0%	22	0%
Grand Total	187,430	31,901	17%	28,148	15%	2,555	1%	1,198	1%

Source: BOR data files as of August 2023

* Due to change in methodology by LOSFA in 2018 regarding a timeframe change from 90 days to 9 months for data collection. For awards cancelled for 2021-2022, these data are not available at this time and will be reported in the next year.

**Students whose awards are cancelled for everything but GPA, may request and be approved for an exception under existing law.

The average ACT score of all TOPS recipients who had their awards cancelled between 2010-2011 and 2021-2022 (due to failure to earn the required 24 hours of credit per academic year, achieve the required minimum GPA, or maintain full-time and continuous enrollment) was 23.1. This group's average high school GPA was 3.17 (Table 16).

Table 16

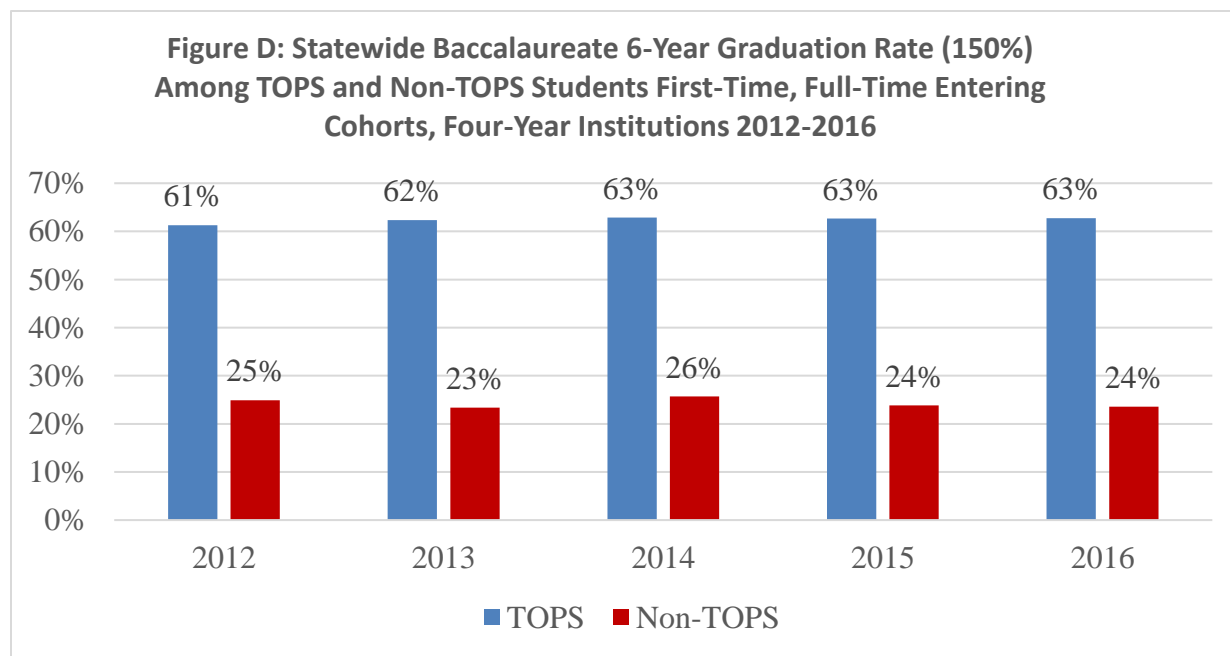
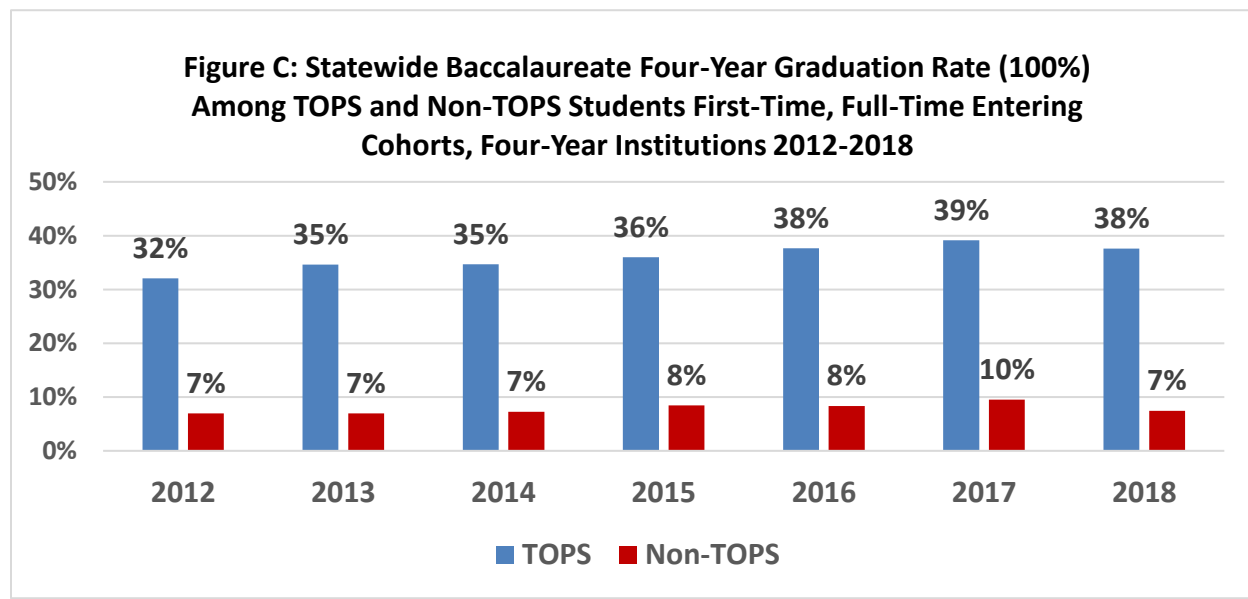
Average ACT Score and High School GPA of TOPS Recipients Who had Their Award Cancelled*, 2010-2011 to 2021-2022		
Reason Cancelled	Average ACT Composite	Average High School GPA
24 Hour	23.1	3.17
GPA	22.8	3.10
Non-Continuous Enrollment	23.6	3.19

*Students whose awards are cancelled for everything but GPA may request and be approved for an exception under existing law.

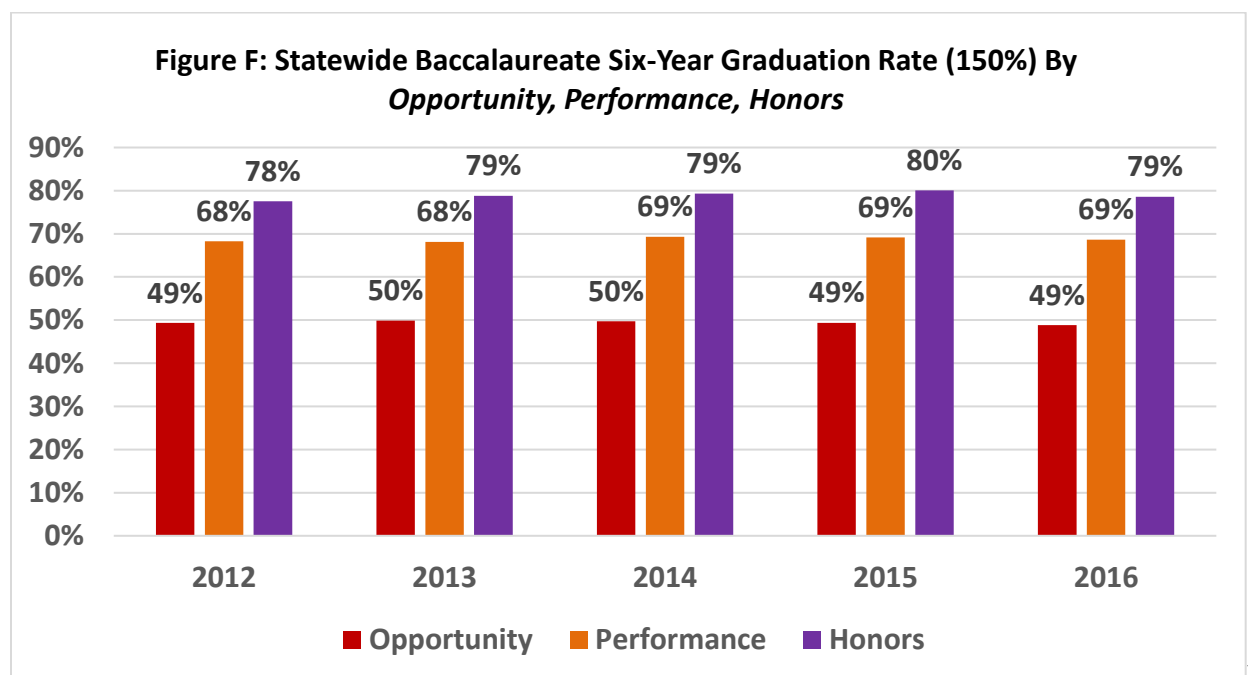
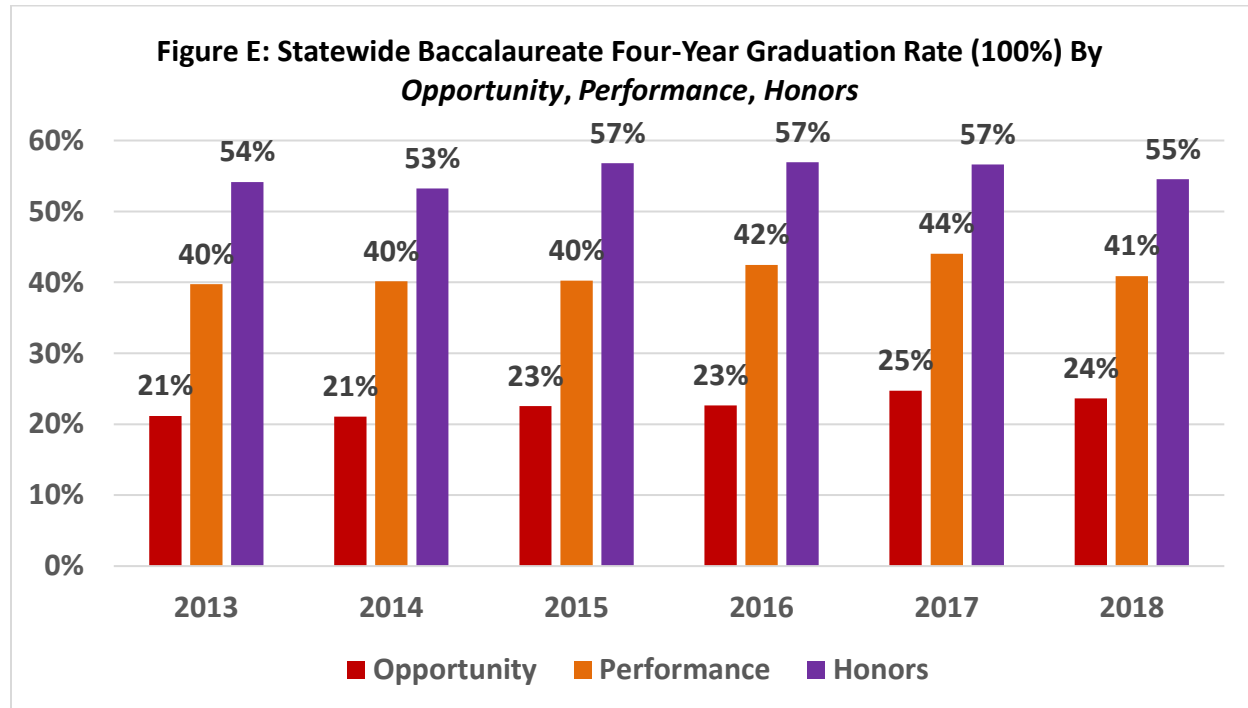
Graduation

A graduation rate is typically measured by calculating the rate at which first-time, full-time degree-seeking students earn their academic degrees within 150% of the time anticipated (i.e., within six years for baccalaureate degrees and within three years for associate's degrees). However, because TOPS recipients are only eligible for the award for up to four years (or eight semesters), examining graduation rates at both 100% and 150% of time is essential.

As noted in Figures C and D, students who begin a baccalaureate degree program with TOPS graduate within 100% and 150% of time at much higher rates than students without a TOPS award. The 2016 class is used to compare cohorts as both 100% and 150% data are available. Findings indicate that 38% of the 2016 first-time, full-time entering cohort of TOPS recipients completed a baccalaureate degree within 100% of time, compared with 8% of non-TOPS students. Furthermore, 63% of the 2016 first-time, full-time entering cohort of TOPS recipients completed a baccalaureate degree within 150% of time, compared with 24% of non-TOPS students.

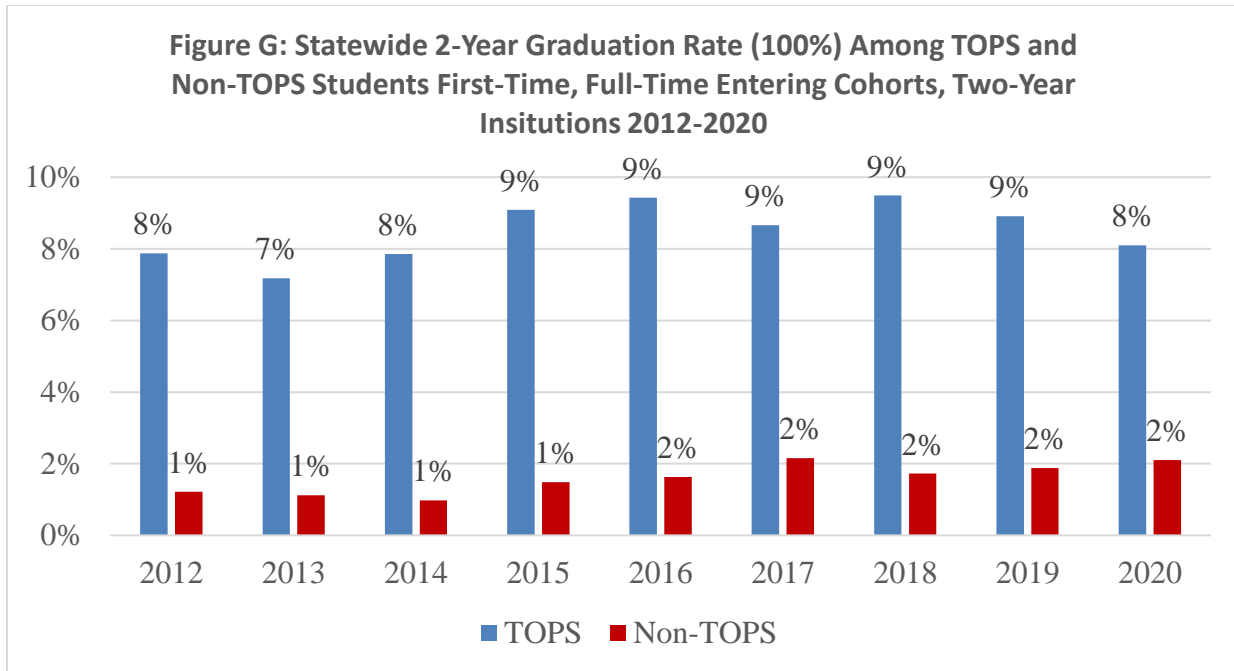


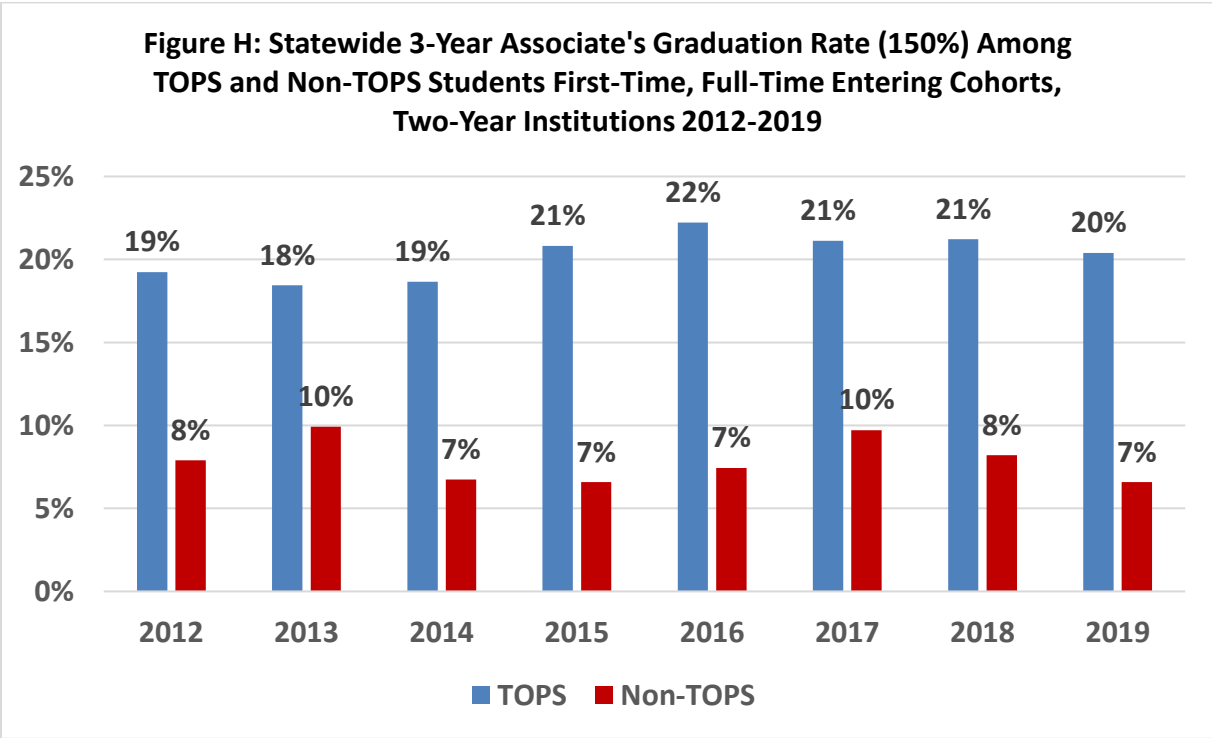
Graduation rates also differ across the types of award received. TOPS *Honors* recipients graduate at much higher rates than TOPS *Performance* and *Opportunity* recipients. As noted in Figures E and F, 57% of TOPS *Honors* recipients in the 2016 entering cohort completed a baccalaureate degree within 100% of time and 79% within 150% of time, compared with 42% and 23% within 100% of time and 69% and 49% within 150% of time for TOPS *Performance* and *Opportunity* recipients, respectively. As mentioned previously, the 2016 class will be used to compare cohorts as both 100% and 150% data are available.



Like

TOPS recipients who begin an associate's degree program graduate at much higher rates than students without a TOPS award; as previously mentioned, the 2019 class is used to illustrate both 100% and 150% graduation rates as data are available. As shown in Figures G and H, 9% of the 2019 first-time, full-time entering cohort of all TOPS recipients completed an associate's degree within 100% of time, compared with 2% of non-TOPS students. Within 150% of time, 20% of the 2019 first-time, full-time entering cohort of TOPS recipients completed an associate's degree, compared with 7% of non-TOPS students. Performance measures for out-of-state and international students were negligible and did not affect the data.





The National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) [2016] defines time-to-degree as "the time between initial enrollment in a postsecondary institution and graduation with a college degree." Table 17 examines this metric for TOPS recipients compared with non-TOPS students for the 2021-2022 Academic Year. Consistent with trends discussed in this report, TOPS students took less time to complete the degree than their non-TOPS counterparts. Within the three tiers of TOPS (*Opportunity, Performance, and Honors*), the higher the scholarship level, the fewer semesters taken to graduate.

Table 17

2022-2023 Average Time-to-Degree of TOPS & Non-TOPS Recipients*	
Average Time-To-Degree (Calendar Years)	
Associate's Degree Recipients	
TOPS	3.7
Non-TOPS	6.1
Total	5.2
Baccalaureate Degree Recipients	
TOPS <i>Opportunity</i>	4.9
TOPS <i>Performance</i>	4.2
TOPS <i>Honors</i>	4.0
TOPS Total	4.4
Non-TOPS	6.2
Baccalaureate Total	4.7
* Does not include out-of-state or international students	

Conclusion

The TOPS eligibility criteria require students to take a more rigorous high school curriculum, which better prepares them for success in postsecondary education. Students who complete the TOPS Core also earn higher ACT composite scores than students who do not complete the TOPS Core.

Data indicate that the TOPS Program has succeeded in keeping more of Louisiana's high school graduates in the state to pursue postsecondary education. In a recently published positive trend for the state, a Washington Post (September 2022) analysis reported that "Louisiana ranks 17th in keeping graduates in the state".

From 2012-2013, of the 253,734 students deemed eligible for a TOPS *Opportunity, Performance, Honors, or Tech Award*, 177,295 (or 69.9%) have accepted a TOPS *Opportunity, Performance, Honors, or Tech Award* and enrolled in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana.

TOPS recipients consistently attain ACT scores and high school core GPAs above the minimum required for TOPS eligibility. Among TOPS recipients from 2013-2014 to 2022-2023, the average ACT score was 24 (four points above the minimum needed for eligibility for a TOPS *Opportunity Award*), and the average high school GPA (Core GPA) was 3.71 (significantly higher than the 2.5 minimum required for a TOPS *Opportunity Award*). Data also indicate that the majority of initial TOPS recipients are disproportionately white and disproportionately female.

Despite the racial gaps among TOPS recipients, the number of minority students receiving TOPS has generally increased over time; however, minority participation rates are too low to erase the existing opportunity gaps. In a positive trend for the state this year, all minority races saw an increase in number of TOPS recipients. BOR has been working with the Lumina Foundation to look more deeply into these findings and potential solutions to further increase minority participation.

In terms of persistence, students who begin college with a TOPS award return to postsecondary education in subsequent years at a higher rate than non-TOPS students. Approximately 16.8% of TOPS recipients had their awards cancelled between 2012-2013 and 2021-2022, with most cancellations due to students' failure to earn 24 hours of college credit during an academic year. Students may receive an exception to this requirement by filing an appeal due to extenuating circumstances.

Data indicate that students who began a baccalaureate or an associate's degree program with a TOPS award graduated within 100% and 150% of the time at much higher rates than students without a TOPS award. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the 2016 first-time, full-time entering cohort of TOPS recipients completed a baccalaureate degree within 100% of time, compared with 8% of non-TOPS students.

Data indicate that TOPS awards may correlate with time-to-degree, as TOPS recipients graduated in fewer semesters than non-TOPS students. Students who begin with a TOPS Award complete at a higher rate, regardless of whether they retain the award for the entirety of their eligibility.

From 1998-1999 through the 2022-2023 fiscal years, the state provided approximately \$5.10 billion in funding for the TOPS Program. However, several years of declines in the number of high school graduates and TOPS eligible students combined with lower proportions of students accepting their awards has resulted in a second decrease in the number of overall TOPS recipients and a second year where an increase in TOPS funding was not requested.

Further research will be conducted concerning TOPS eligibility and acceptance, as it is critical that more students successfully enroll and complete their credentials and access the financial aid resources that will assist them in reaching their educational goals.

Appendix A:
Act 1202 from 2001
Regular Legislative Session

<https://www.legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=817880>

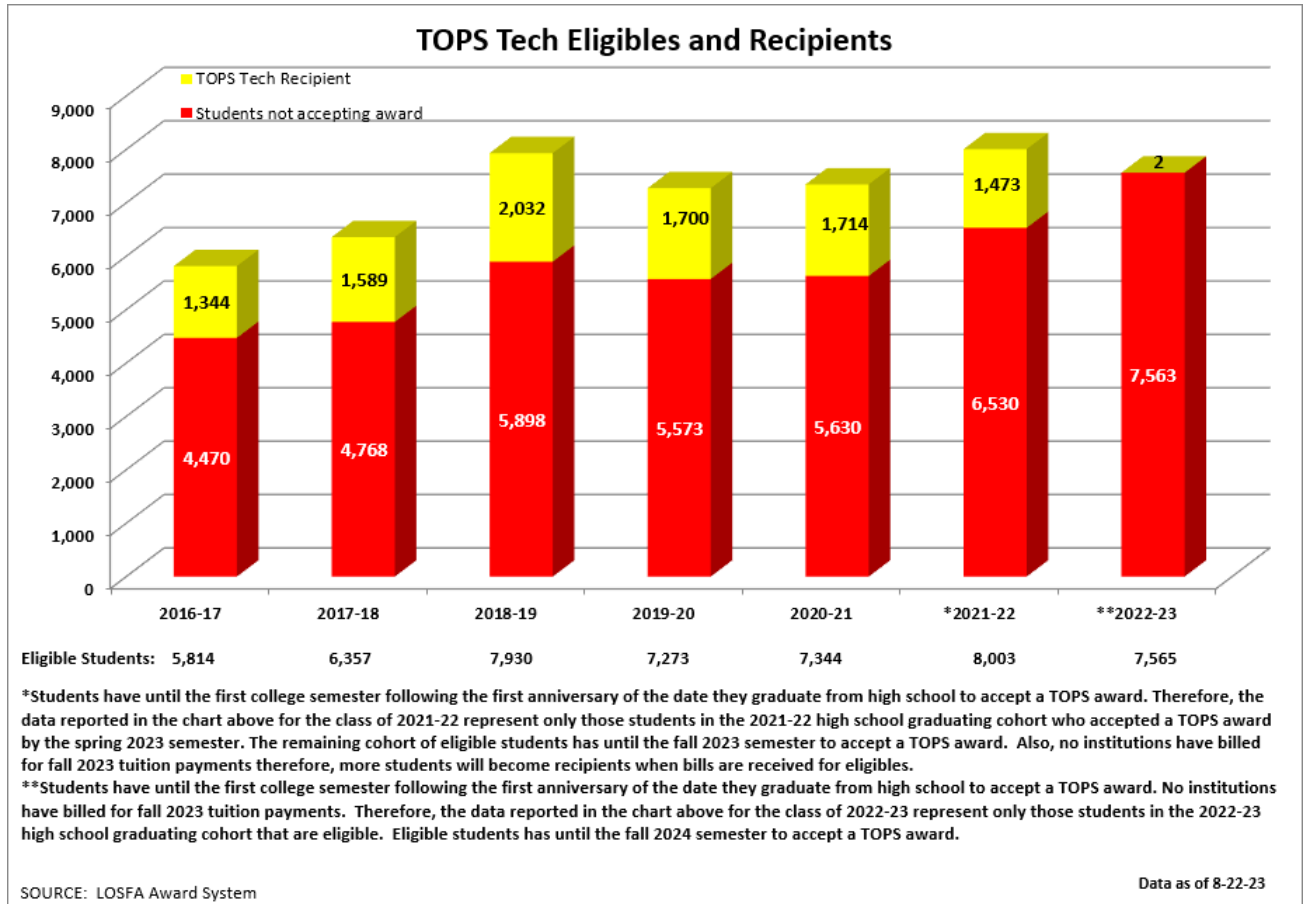
Appendix B:
Act 587 from 2014
Regular Legislative Session

<http://legis.la.gov/Legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=911152>

Appendix C:
Act 227 from 2015
Regular Legislative Session

<https://legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=954697>

Appendix D: TOPS Tech Analysis



Appendix E:
TOPS Core Curriculum

<https://mylosfa.la.gov/wp-content/uploads/TOPSCoreCurriculum.pdf>

Appendix F:
2023 High School Grads TOPS Eligible
by School and Parish

<https://mylosfa.la.gov/wp-content/uploads/TOPS-Eligibles-by-School-and-Parish-2023.pdf>