

# TOPS Report

Analysis of the TOPS Program

2014–2024

October 2024



BOARD of REGENTS  
STATE OF LOUISIANA

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# Executive Summary

The Tuition Opportunity Program for Students subsequently renamed the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (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 to be reported 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 score of students who lost the award.

Act 227 requires that this report be submitted annually by December 1 to the Senate and House Committees 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 2013–2014 to 2022–2023, 84.8% 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 awards differ by award level. The proportion of students eligible for an *Opportunity*, *Performance*, or *Honors* award and choosing to accept it continues to decline.

- The average ACT score of all TOPS recipients between 2013–2014 and 2022–2023 increased to 24.5, and their average core GPA increased to 3.73.
- The average ACT composite for TOPS *Tech* recipients for 2023–2024 (included this year for the first time) was 17.3, and their average core GPA was 3.05. This as a slight decline from the 2012-13 ACT score of 18.3, but a slight increase in GPA from 2.86.
- From 2013–2014 to 2022–2023, the majority of TOPS recipients were white (70.5%) and female (57.2%).
- The number of minority students receiving TOPS has generally increased over time, but not at the rate needed to erase disparities in racial representation. This year, the number of African American and Hispanic students eligible for TOPS modestly increased. However, overall, the pool of eligible students has been declining.
- 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 *Tech* recipients pursuing an associate's degree at the same institution in which they first enrolled is 3.7 years, compared with 5.7 years for non-TOPS.
- The average time-to-degree for TOPS *Opportunity*, *Performance*, and *Honors* recipients pursuing a baccalaureate degree at the same institution in which they first enrolled is 4.4 years, compared to 6 years for non-TOPS.
- From 1998–1999 through the 2022–2023 fiscal years, the state spent approximately \$4.9 billion on the TOPS Program supporting 435,578\* students.

\* Source: LOSFA Microsoft BI as of 10/14/2024.

# Introduction and Background

## TOPS Legislation

**Act 1202** of the 2001 Regular Legislative Session charged the Board of Regents (BOR) to develop a uniform TOPS reporting system for policy analysis and program evaluation that would 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 established 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 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 in probationary status.

Act 587 mandates that this report be submitted to the Senate and House Committees on Education no later than December 1 each year. Therefore, to comply with the Act's established deadline, data on 2023–2024 TOPS recipients are not included in this report.

**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.

**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 case 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.

**Act 44 of the 2017 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature impacts TOPS as follows:

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

**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.

**Senate Resolution 10 of the 2019 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature impacts TOPS 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.

**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.

**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 option 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.

**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 alternatives to the foreign language requirement in TOPS *Opportunity*, *Performance*, and *Honors* core curricula beginning with 2027 high school graduates.
- **Act 681** provides exceptions to the initial and continuing TOPS eligibility requirements for students impacted by Hurricane Ida.

**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 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 from two courses to one course and adds Financial Literacy as the third required math. This is effective beginning with 2028 graduates.
- **Act 224** provides a tuition and fee waiver for certain disabled veterans who will not receive a TOPS award but will receive an exemption in an amount equal to the remaining tuition and fees owed to the public postsecondary institution after the application of federal benefits. Defines “disabled veteran” as an individual with a service-connected disability as determined by the US Department of Veterans Affairs and who is a resident of Louisiana.
- **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 remained 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.

**Act 211 of the 2024 Regular Session** of the Louisiana Legislature impacts TOPS as follows:

- **Act 211** requires students to earn one Carnegie unit of credit in Computer Science as part of the TOPS *Tech*, *Opportunity*, *Performance*, and *Honors* core curricula. The Act provides that this credit will be obtained for any core as a math or science elective. Students pursuing the TOPS *Tech* core may also earn this credit as one of the nine credits in Jump Start course sequences. Students pursuing the TOPS *Opportunity*,

*Performance*, or *Honors* core can earn this credit as an alternative to a foreign language. This is effective beginning with 2028–2029 graduates.

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

The Tuition Opportunity Program for Students, subsequently renamed the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (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 Awards, Renewal Requirements, Distribution of Awards

Four TOPS awards are available to Louisiana college students: TOPS *Tech*, *Opportunity*, *Performance*, and *Honors*. Act 230 of the 2015 Regular Session changed the TOPS *Tech* program to allow students graduating from high school during the 2016-2017 school year and thereafter to 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 *Opportunity*, *Performance*, *Honors*, and *Tech* eligibility criteria include completing 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 current eligibility criteria and award components for all TOPS awards. Currently, the TOPS Core Curriculum consists of 19 units. The specific course requirements of the TOPS Core Curriculum can be found in Appendix D. The list of 2023 high school graduates eligible by school and parish 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, subsequently, the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA) has administered



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 the TOPS Online Application are the mechanisms by which to apply for TOPS.

**Table 1. TOPS Eligibility Criteria and Award Components**

TOPS Eligibility Criteria and Award Components				
Award	Core Units	Core GPA	ACT Composite	Duration
<i>Opportunity</i>	19.0	2.50	Prior-year state average, currently 20	4 years or 8 semesters
<i>Performance</i>	19.0	3.25	23.0	4 years or 8 semesters
<i>Honors</i>	19.0	3.50	27.0	4 years or 8 semesters
TOPS <i>Tech</i>	21 Jumpstart Career Path Core Units	2.50	17 or higher or a silver-level score on the assessments of the ACT WorkKeys system	2 years

Source: LOSFA website - TOPS Brochures & Flyers

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. LOSFA determines continuing eligibility 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**

Minimum Renewal Requirements			
Award	Hrs. Earned /AY	Cumulative GPA for Continuation	Award Reinstated* (Upon recovery of req. GPA)
<i>Opportunity</i>	24.00	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>	24.00	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>	24.00	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 <i>Tech</i>	24.00	2.5 after 24 credit hours earned Maintain satisfactory academic progress at the end of all other terms (2.00 TOPS cumulative GPA)	2 years

Source: LOFSA website - TOPS Brochures & Flyers

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

Table 3 illustrates the distribution of TOPS awards across systems for AY 2023–2024. This year, 47.2% of TOPS awards went to students attending a UL System campus. Of students with the highest level of award, *Honors*, 51.2% attended an LSU System campus, followed by a UL System campus at 39.4%. Data also indicate that most students (41.7%) with TOPS awards had an *Opportunity* Award.

**Table 3. Distribution of Award Types Across Systems, AY 2023-2024**

Distribution of Award Types Across Systems, AY 2023-2024							
Award	LSU System	Southern System	UL System	LCTCS System	Private Institutions	Proprietary Schools	% of all awards
Opportunity	37.3%	1.9%	51.8%	3.2%	5.5%	0.3%	<b>41.7%</b>
Performance	40.4%	0.8%	51.4%	1.5%	5.9%	0.1%	<b>28.5%</b>
Honors	51.2%	0.2%	39.4%	0.3%	8.9%	0.0%	<b>27.6%</b>
TOPS Tech	8.7%	0.9%	4.7%	75.5%	0.1%	10.1%	<b>2.2%</b>
<b>% of all awards</b>	<b>41.4%</b>	<b>1.1%</b>	<b>47.2%</b>	<b>3.5%</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: LOSFA - TOPS Payment Summary by Academic Year 2023–2024 as of 09/20/2024

## TOPS Report: Historical Analysis of the TOPS Program, from 2013–2014 to 2023–2024

### METHODOLOGY

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.

### 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 19-hour core curriculum to prepare them for success after high school, particularly in postsecondary education (Table 4). With this change, students gained an incentive to complete the college-preparatory curriculum. Table 4 illustrates the average ACT composite of students who completed the Regents' Core compared to those who did not complete the Core. This year represents the first time since the pandemic that there has been a modest increase in the number of students completing the Core compared to those who did not.

Table 4. Average ACT Composite

Average ACT Composite								
High School Grad Year	HS Graduates Completing Regents' Core Yes		HS Graduates Completing Regents' Core No		HS Graduates Completing Regents' Core Unknown		Total High School Graduates with an ACT Composite from LOSFA	
	Avg ACT	Count	Avg ACT	Count	Avg ACT	Count	Avg ACT	Count
2019	21.3	33,934	15.0	6,059	20.0	2,086	20.3	42,079
2020	21.2	32,653	14.7	4,925	21.1	1,332	20.4	38,910
2021	20.8	31,636	14.4	5,301	21.5	981	19.9	37,918
2022	20.7	30,922	14.4	5,650	21.3	1,004	19.8	37,576
2023	20.9	31,090	14.7	5,662	20.5	1,152	19.9	37,904

Source: Louisiana Department of Education and LOSFA data

## 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.

To that end, of the 190,006 students deemed eligible for a TOPS *Opportunity, Performance, or Honors* between 2014 and 2023, 161,060 (84.8%) accepted the award and enrolled in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana (see Figure A1). For TOPS *Tech*, 66,336 students were eligible and 15,087 (22.7%) accepted the award. The percentage of students who accept TOPS *Opportunity, Performance, or Honors* awards and enroll in college has been steadily declining since 2018. The most recent rate of 80.6% is the lowest in ten years.

**Figure A1. Number Eligible for TOPS vs. Percent of Eligible who Accepted and Enrolled in Postsecondary Education Institutions by High School Graduation Year (TH, TP, TO)**

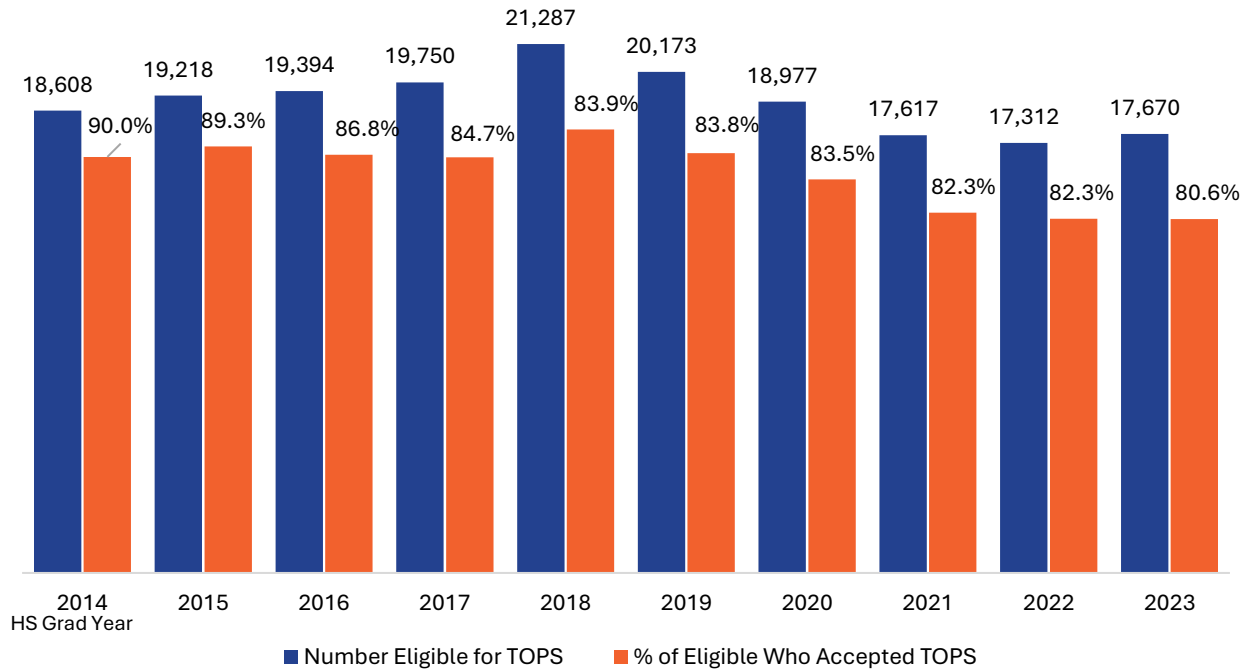
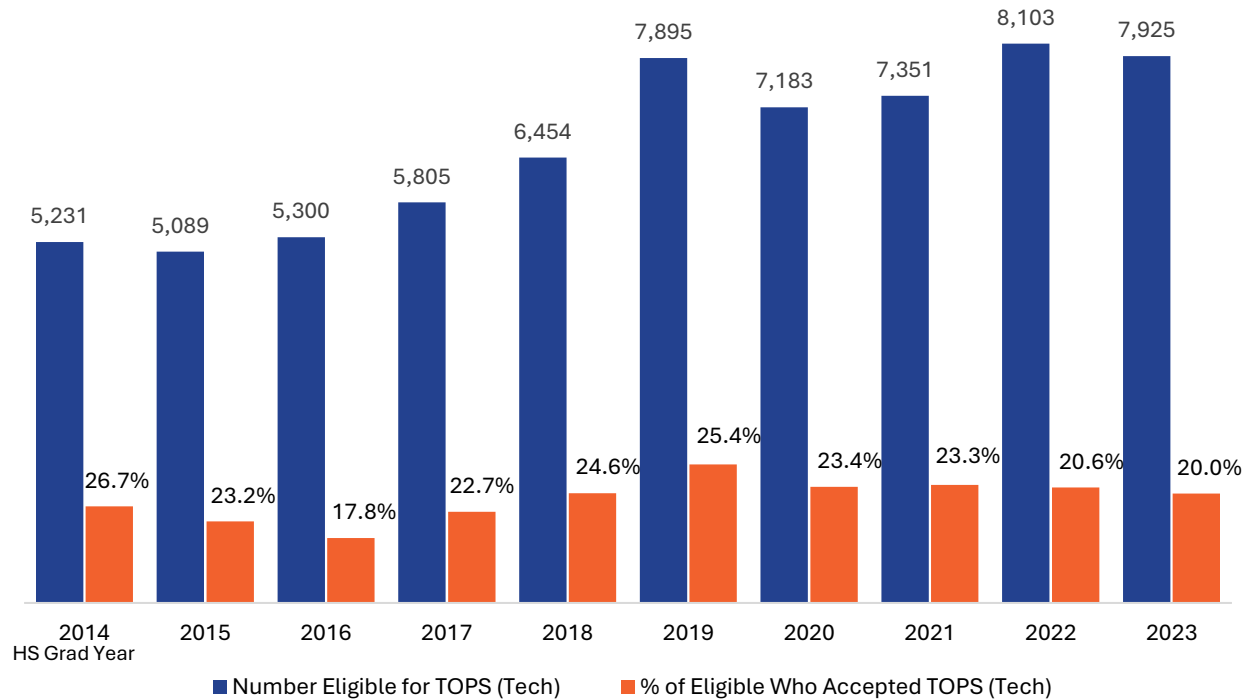


Figure A2 displays similar data for students who were eligible for a TOPS *Tech* award. Acceptance rates for TOPS *Tech* awards have always been much lower than those for *Opportunity, Honors* and *Performance*. There has been a decline in acceptance rates for TOPS *Tech* in recent years that mirrors that of the other awards.

**Figure A2. Number Eligible for TOPS vs. Percent of Eligible who Accepted and Enrolled in Postsecondary Education Institutions by High School Graduation Year (TOPS Tech)**



While data support the claims that participation in the TOPS Program keeps Louisiana students in the state to attain their postsecondary education, the declining numbers over the past several years of total high school graduates and college-going high school graduates continue to be of concern. The declines currently seen in Louisiana are following trends that are evident throughout the southern states. Southern Regional Board of Education data (SREB) indicate that total college enrollment is decreasing nationwide and in 13 of the 16 SREB states (of which Louisiana is a member) [Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, PAR Snapshot, February 2024].

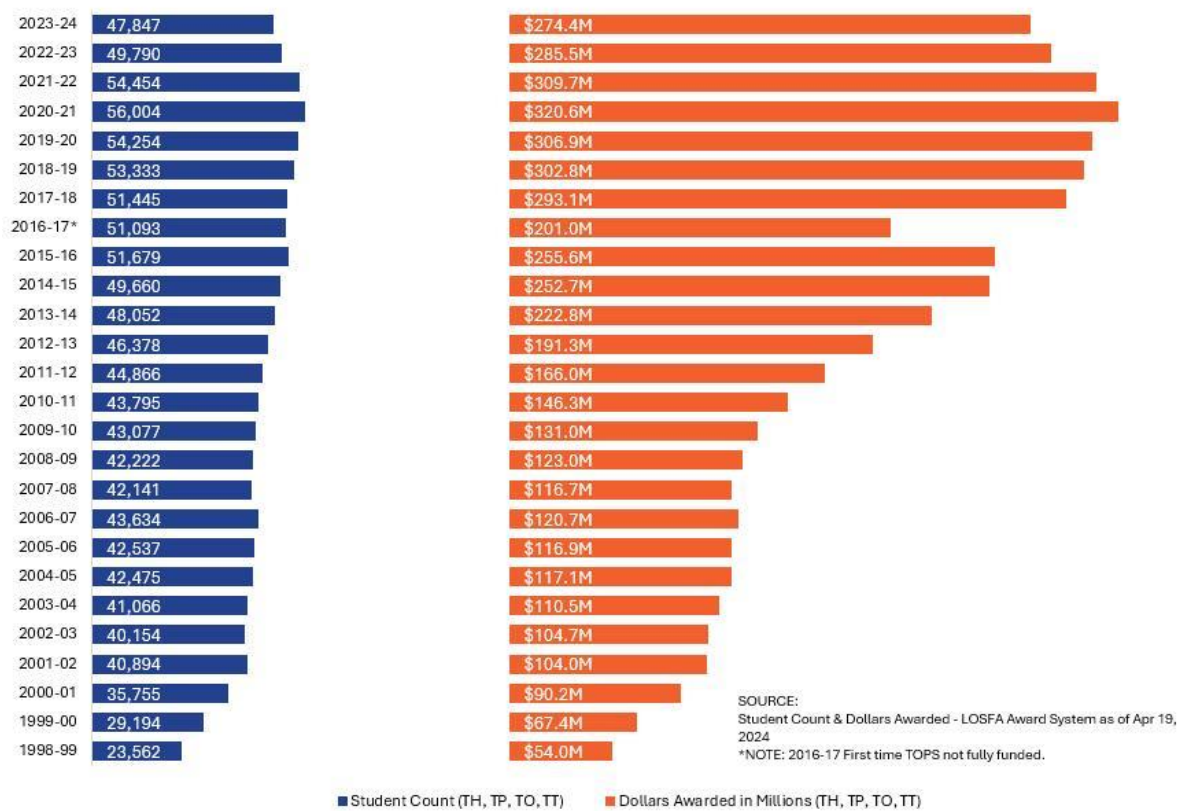
According to data from the National College Attainment Network (NCAN) (2024), students who need college financial aid the most apply at a lower rate than those who have less need. Nationally, an estimated 63% of seniors in the class of 2024 at high-income high schools completed a FAFSA application, while only 55% of seniors at low-income high schools did the same (NCAN, 2024).

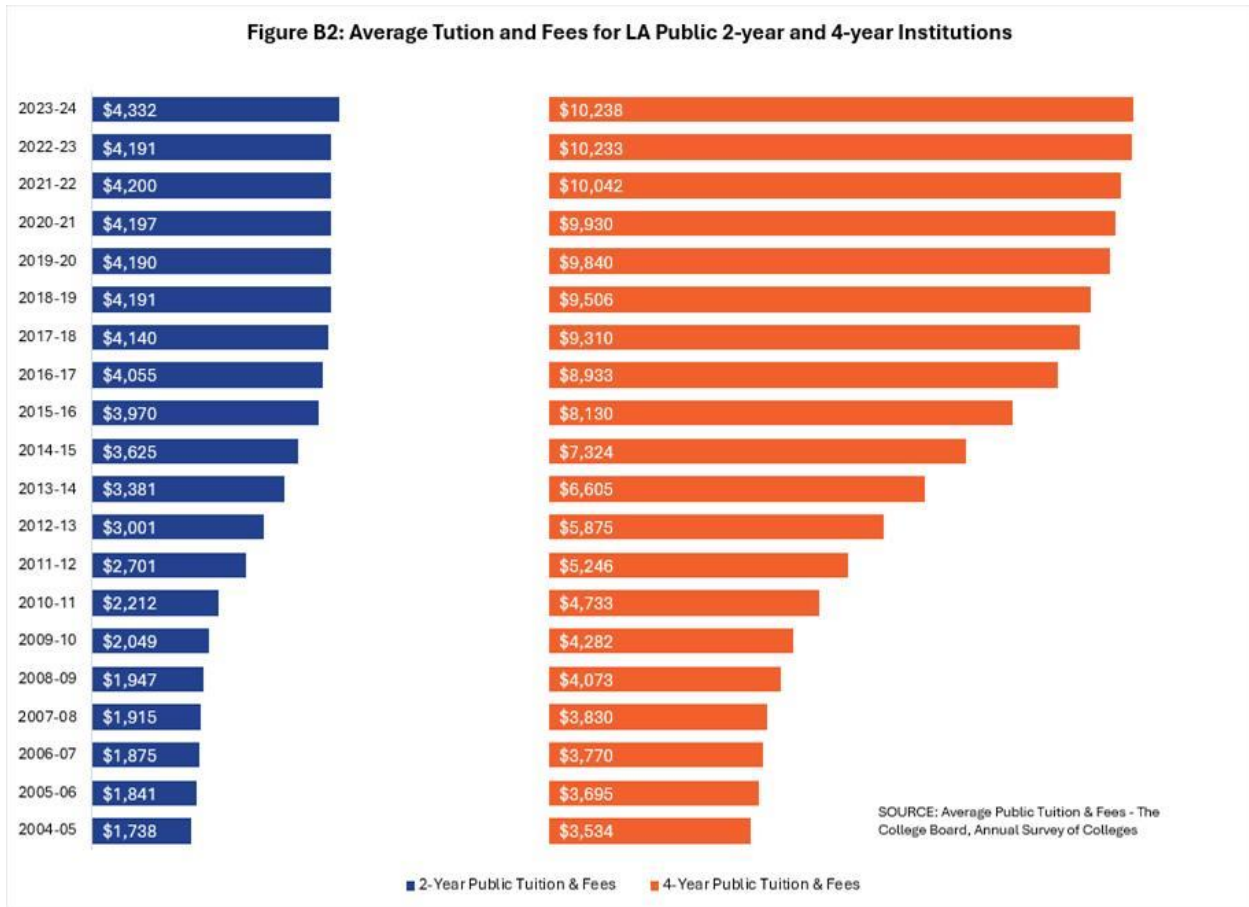
In 2023, Louisiana led the nation in FAFSA completion, with more than 71% of students submitting due to a Louisiana Department of Education policy requiring FAFSA submission to graduate. Compounded by the delay of the new federal application process, 2023 saw a further decrease in the number of students (60%) completing the FAFSA application, which is one of two ways students apply for TOPS. These challenges with the 2023–2024 FAFSA submission cycle have been particularly difficult for high schools serving students of color and

students from limited-income backgrounds. In March 2024, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) removed, effective in January 2025, the policy requiring FAFSA completion and submission to graduate high school. How this will impact FAFSA submission rates and TOPS participation will be analyzed going forward.

The factors listed above, several years of declining numbers of high school graduates as well as of TOPS-eligible students, combined with lower proportions of students receiving/accepting their awards, have resulted in a continued slide in the number of overall TOPS recipients and, for the third year in a row, an increase in TOPS funding was not requested (Figure B1). Figure B2 provides a comparison of tuition and fee rates at two and four-year institutions.

Figure B1: TOPS Recipients (including students maintaining their awards) and Total Dollars Awarded





While Figure A1 presents the overall acceptance rate, this average masks significant differences in acceptance rates across 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 2018–2019 to 73.2% in 2022–2023. This year saw declines in the acceptance rates across all TOPS award categories.



**Table 5. TOPS Acceptance Rates**

TOPS Acceptance Rates				
HS Grad Year	<i>Tech</i>	<i>Opportunity</i>	<i>Performance</i>	<i>Honors</i>
2011–12	22.3%	91.4%	92.8%	84.2%
2012–13	26.7%	90.6%	92.7%	84.0%
2013–14	26.7%	90.6%	93.3%	84.3%
2014–15	23.2%	89.6%	92.9%	84.2%
2015–16	17.8%	86.6%	91.1%	81.9%
2016–17	22.7%	84.8%	89.4%	79.1%
2017–18	24.6%	83.6%	88.2%	79.4%
2018–19	25.4%	83.2%	88.1%	79.9%
2019–20	23.4%	83.1%	88.4%	78.7%
2020–21	23.3%	83.2%	86.6%	76.0%
2021–22	20.6%	83.2%	86.3%	75.3%
2022–23	20.0%	81.9%	84.5%	73.2%

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of July 2024

Table 6a illustrates the mean ACT and Core GPA of TOPS *Opportunity*, *Performance*, and *Honors* recipients. This year, the composite ACT and Core GPA increased from the previous year, indicating that academic quality is rising even as the number of students accepting TOPS is decreasing.

**Table 6a. Mean ACT and Core GPA of TOPS Recipients (TH, TP, TO)**

Mean ACT and Core GPA of TOPS Recipients (TH, TP, TO)		
HS Cohort	TOPS Recipients' Average Composite ACT Score	TOPS Recipients' Average Core GPA
2011–12	23.9	3.35
2012–13	24.0	3.37
2013–14	24.1	3.35
2014–15	24.1	3.35
2015–16	24.3	3.38
2016–17	24.4	3.40
2017–18	24.4	3.54
2018–19	24.4	3.58
2019–20	24.5	3.64
2020–21	24.2	3.68
2021–22	24.1	3.71
2022–23	24.2	3.70
2023–24*	24.5	3.73

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of July 2024

\* of those eligible

Table 6b illustrates the mean ACT and Core GPA of TOPS *Tech* recipients.**Table 6b. Mean ACT and Core GPA of TOPS Recipients (TOPS Tech)**

Mean ACT and Core GPA of TOPS Recipients (TOPS Tech)		
HS Cohort	TOPS Recipients' Average Composite ACT Score	TOPS Recipients' Average Core GPA
2011–12	18.4	2.86
2012–13	18.3	2.89
2013–14	18.5	2.80
2014–15	18.6	2.81
2015–16	18.4	2.83
2016–17	18.4	2.89
2017–18	18.0	3.00
2018–19	17.5	2.94
2019–20	17.6	3.02
2020–21	17.4	3.06
2021–22	17.3	3.07
2022–23	17.3	3.03
2023–24*	17.3	3.05

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of July 2024.

\* of those eligible

As illustrated below in Tables 7a and 7b, TOPS recipients' average ACT scores vary by race. Composite ACT scores for African American students over the past ten years have increased to an average of 22.6 in 2022-2023, compared to 24.5 for white and 23.8 for Hispanic students.

This year, ACT reports that 66% of Louisiana graduating seniors (public and private) took the ACT more than once, an increase from 63.4% last year, and improved their composite score by an average of 1.3 points from their first test to their most recent test.

This trend is encouraging, as research by ACT has found that students who retest do better in the subsequent test administrations.

**Table 7a. TOPS Recipients by Race and Average ACT Composite Score (TH, TP, TO)**

TOPS Recipients by Race and Average ACT Composite Score (TH, TP, TO)							
HS Cohort	Asian	African American	White	Hispanic	Other	Race Not Reported	Total
2012–13	25.0	22.4	24.4	23.9	24.1	26.6	24.0
2013–14	25.0	22.4	24.5	24.3	24.1	24.9	24.1
2014–15	25.4	22.5	24.5	24.1	24.0	25.5	24.1
2015–16	25.8	22.7	24.7	24.3	24.3	25.4	24.3
2016–17	25.6	22.6	24.8	24.2	24.6	26.3	24.4
2017–18	25.5	22.6	24.8	24.4	24.0	26.1	24.4
2018–19	26.0	22.6	24.8	24.2	24.1	26.0	24.4
2019–20	25.8	22.8	24.8	24.2	24.6	27.9	24.5
2020–21	25.8	22.6	24.5	24.1	24.0	25.8	24.2
2021–22	25.6	22.7	24.4	23.8	24.0	26.5	24.1
2022–23	25.9	22.6	24.5	23.8	24.1	23.4	24.2

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of July 2024

**Table 7b. TOPS Recipients by Race and Average ACT Composite Score (TOPS Tech)**

TOPS Recipients by Race and Average ACT Composite Score (TOPS Tech)							
HS Cohort	Asian	African American	White	Hispanic	Other	Race Not Reported	Total
2012–13	18.6	18.0	18.5	18.2	18.1	19.4	18.3
2013–14	18.2	18.2	18.7	18.3	18.5	19.8	18.5
2014–15	18.8	18.2	18.7	18.5	18.7	20.0	18.6
2015–16	18.4	18.1	18.6	18.0	18.3	20.5	18.4
2016–17	18.2	18.0	18.5	18.6	18.6	20.3	18.4
2017–18	18.1	17.7	18.2	17.9	18.6	22.0	18.0
2018–19	17.7	17.2	17.7	17.6	17.4	21.0	17.5
2019–20	17.7	17.2	17.8	17.4	17.5	19.7	17.6
2020–21	17.4	17.1	17.5	17.4	17.2	19.8	17.4
2021–22	18.3	16.9	17.5	17.1	16.9	20.0	17.3
2022–23	18.1	16.8	17.5	17.6	17.4	19.5	17.3

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of July 2024

As Table 8 indicates, overall, TOPS recipients are predominantly white. In 2022-2023, white students comprised 70.5% of TOPS recipients in the first-time entering freshman student population (Table 9).

The number of minority students accepting TOPS has generally increased over time; this year, for the second year in a row, the numbers of African American (from 17.4% in 2022 to 18.1% in 2023 and Hispanic (from 4.4% in 2022 to 5% in 2023) TOPS recipients increased (Tables 8 and 9).

**Table 8. TOPS Recipients by Race (TH, TP, TO, TT)**

TOPS Recipients by Race (TH, TP, TO, TT)							
HS Cohort	Asian	African American	White	Hispanic	Other	Not Reported	Total
2012–13	509	3,377	13,114	464	269	24	17,757
2013–14	553	3,307	13,373	529	300	82	18,144
2014–15	550	3,444	13,471	546	302	34	18,347
2015–16	521	3,422	12,945	570	279	41	17,778
2016–17	530	3,377	13,190	589	332	33	18,051
2017–18	582	3,877	13,889	650	414	33	19,445
2018–19	553	3,643	13,593	666	414	36	18,905
2019–20	537	3,126	12,769	674	397	21	17,524
2020–21	536	2,594	12,013	639	391	35	16,208
2021–22	562	2,769	11,441	705	417	30	15,924
2022–23	539	2,862	11,149	784	453	34	15,821

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of July 2024

**Table 9. % TOPS Recipients by Race (TH, TP, TO, TT)**

% TOPS Recipients by Race (TH, TP, TO, TT)							
HS Cohort	Asian	African American	White	Hispanic	Other	Not Reported	Total
2012–13	2.9%	19.0%	73.9%	2.6%	1.5%	0.1%	100%
2013–14	3.0%	18.2%	73.7%	2.9%	1.7%	0.5%	100%
2014–15	3.0%	18.8%	73.4%	3.0%	1.6%	0.2%	100%
2015–16	2.9%	19.2%	72.8%	3.2%	1.6%	0.2%	100%
2016–17	2.9%	18.7%	73.1%	3.3%	1.8%	0.2%	100%
2017–18	3.0%	19.9%	71.4%	3.3%	2.1%	0.2%	100%
2018–19	2.9%	19.3%	71.9%	3.5%	2.2%	0.2%	100%
2019–20	3.1%	17.8%	72.9%	3.8%	2.3%	0.1%	100%
2020–21	3.3%	16.0%	74.1%	3.9%	2.4%	0.2%	100%
2021–22	3.5%	17.4%	71.8%	4.4%	2.6%	0.2%	100%
2022–23	3.4%	18.1%	70.5%	5.0%	2.9%	0.2%	100%

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of July 2024

TOPS recipients have been predominantly female for more than a decade. Male students receiving TOPS have had slightly higher average ACT scores than female students (Table 10). Table 11 shows that in 2022-2023, 57.2% of TOPS recipients were female, and 42.8% were male.

**Table 10. TOPS Recipients' ACT Composite Score by Gender**

TOPS Recipients ACT Composite Score by Gender				
HS Cohort	Female	Male	Unknown	Total*
2012–13	23.3	24.1	N/A	23.6
2013–14	23.4	24.1	20.0	23.7
2014–15	23.5	24.2	N/A	23.8
2015–16	23.7	24.4	N/A	24.0
2016–17	23.6	24.4	26.3	23.9
2017–18	23.5	24.4	22.5	23.9
2018–19	23.4	24.1	27.8	23.7
2019–20	23.4	24.3	28.7	23.8
2020–21	23.2	23.9	19.0	23.5
2021–22	23.1	23.8	27.0	23.4
2022–23	23.1	24.0	20.8	23.5

\* This analysis includes 21 individuals who did not report their gender.

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of July 2024

**Table 11. TOPS Recipients by Gender**

TOPS Recipients by Gender					
HS Cohort	Female		Male		Total*
2012–13	10,447	58.8%	7,310	41.2%	17,757
2013–14	10,677	58.8%	7,466	41.1%	18,144
2014–15	10,833	59.0%	7,514	41.0%	18,347
2015–16	10,488	59.0%	7,290	41.0%	17,778
2016–17	10,597	58.7%	7,451	41.3%	18,051
2017–18	11,361	58.4%	8,082	41.6%	19,445
2018–19	10,976	58.1%	7,923	41.9%	18,905
2019–20	10,277	58.6%	7,244	41.3%	17,524
2020–21	9,277	57.2%	6,930	42.8%	16,208
2021–22	9,147	57.4%	6,776	42.6%	15,924
2022–23	9,049	57.2%	6,768	42.8%	15,821

\* This analysis includes 21 individuals who did not report their gender.

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of July 2024

## 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 12a, 12b, 13a, and 13b, 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 *Performance* and *Honors* awards, generally better prepared for

postsecondary education, are retained at higher rates than those receiving the *Opportunity Award*.

Tables 12a and 12b examine the overall retention rates (retention at any Louisiana public postsecondary institution, but not necessarily at the institution where the student started) of students with TOPS who began at a four-year institution through the second, third, and fourth years (Table 12a) and a two-year institution (Table 12b) compared to those who started without TOPS. This year, the retention rates for students with a TOPS *Opportunity, Performance, or Honors* award beginning at a four-year institution increased across the board for second-, third-, and fourth-year fall retention, with an all-time high of 90.2% rate of TOPS awardees returning for the second year. Additionally, 84.1% of TOPS *Opportunity, Performance, or Honors* who began at a two-year institution (Table 12b) were retained in the second-year fall semester, a new benchmark for that population.

**Table 12a. Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS vs Non-TOPS Students Who Began at a 4-year Institution**

Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS vs. Non-TOPS Students Who Began at a Four-year Institution (TH, TP, TO)						
Fall Semester Entering Class	2nd Fall Retention		3rd Fall Retention		4th Fall Retention	
	TOPS	Non-TOPS	TOPS	Non-TOPS	TOPS	Non-TOPS
2012	87.3%	68.9%	80.6%	57.0%	75.1%	50.5%
2013	87.4%	68.0%	81.0%	57.4%	75.5%	49.1%
2014	87.2%	67.7%	80.6%	56.4%	75.1%	50.4%
2015	86.9%	64.5%	80.4%	54.3%	74.5%	47.9%
2016	87.5%	67.3%	81.4%	56.9%	75.6%	49.3%
2017	87.7%	67.7%	81.3%	56.5%	75.6%	48.8%
2018	87.5%	66.7%	81.5%	54.8%	74.8%	46.1%
2019	88.9%	69.0%	80.6%	55.2%	73.2%	47.1%
2020	86.8%	63.6%	79.1%	51.3%	73.8%	45.0%
2021	88.1%	64.4%	82.2%	54.0%	NA	NA
2022	90.2%	70.4%	NA	NA	NA	NA

**Table 12b. Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS vs Non-TOPS Students Who Began at a Two-year Institution**

Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS vs. Non-TOPS Students Who Began at a Two-year Institution (TH, TP, TO)						
Fall Semester Entering Class	2nd Fall Retention		3rd Fall Retention		4th Fall Retention	
	TOPS	Non-TOPS	TOPS	Non-TOPS	TOPS	Non-TOPS
2012	76.3%	52.1%	65.4%	35.9%	55.1%	26.9%
2013	76.9%	54.5%	63.4%	37.8%	55.5%	29.3%
2014	74.9%	54.8%	62.5%	36.8%	53.8%	28.1%
2015	79.4%	53.2%	62.5%	37.6%	54.7%	27.5%
2016	78.0%	51.0%	66.2%	34.4%	54.2%	27.4%
2017	80.7%	51.3%	67.7%	35.0%	60.7%	25.8%
2018	77.9%	51.9%	60.0%	33.1%	47.5%	25.4%
2019	74.8%	50.1%	60.1%	34.6%	48.1%	26.7%
2020	75.3%	51.5%	59.4%	36.4%	46.5%	26.6%
2021	77.1%	56.7%	60.6%	37.5%	NA	NA
2022	84.1%	52.1%	NA	NA	NA	NA

Tables 13a and 13b examine overall retention rates by award level of TOPS students who began at a four-year institution (13a) or a two-year institution (13b) through the second, third, and fourth years. TOPS *Honors* recipients at four-year institutions were retained from the first to the second year at an all-time-high rate of 95%, with *Performance* retained at 92.4% and *Opportunity* at 85.9%, also all-time highs.



**Table 13a. Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS Students Who Began at a Four-year Institution by TOPS Award Level**

Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS Students Who Began at a Four-year Institution by TOPS Award Level									
Fall Semester Entering Class	2nd Fall Retention			3rd Fall Retention			4th Fall Retention		
	TO	TP	TH	TO	TP	TH	TO	TP	TH
2012	82.0%	90.7%	94.2%	73.4%	84.8%	90.1%	67.2%	79.9%	85.7%
2013	81.4%	90.5%	94.7%	73.5%	84.9%	90.5%	67.6%	79.5%	85.8%
2014	81.1%	90.6%	94.3%	72.4%	84.7%	90.5%	66.1%	79.9%	85.8%
2015	80.9%	89.9%	94.4%	72.7%	84.3%	90.3%	65.7%	78.8%	86.0%
2016	81.8%	90.5%	93.3%	74.3%	84.6%	89.1%	67.6%	79.3%	84.2%
2017	81.8%	90.8%	93.5%	74.1%	84.4%	89.1%	68.3%	78.6%	83.8%
2018	82.3%	89.7%	92.7%	74.2%	84.0%	89.3%	67.5%	77.6%	82.3%
2019	83.4%	90.5%	94.9%	72.2%	83.5%	89.0%	64.3%	76.2%	82.4%
2020	80.6%	88.7%	93.1%	70.5%	81.6%	87.9%	65.1%	76.7%	82.3%
2021	83.1%	90.0%	93.3%	75.7%	84.4%	89.3%	NA	NA	NA
2022	85.9%	92.4%	95.4%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

TOPS *Tech* recipients also showed positive increases in their retention rates across all award levels.

**Table 13b. Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS Students Who Began at a Two-year Institution by TOPS Award Level**

Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS Who Began at a Two-year Institution by TOPS Award Level									
Fall Semester Entering Class	2nd Fall Retention			3rd Fall Retention			4th Fall Retention		
	TO	TP	TH	TO	TP	TH	TO	TP	TH
2012	74.2%	84.0%	79.2%	63.3%	75.5%	58.3%	52.4%	66.0%	54.2%
2013	75.8%	79.0%	88.0%	62.5%	64.8%	76.0%	54.9%	57.1%	60.0%
2014	73.9%	77.3%	88.9%	61.7%	64.5%	72.2%	52.7%	58.2%	61.1%
2015	77.8%	84.7%	78.6%	61.0%	68.5%	57.1%	52.4%	61.3%	64.3%
2016	75.4%	85.5%	81.5%	63.9%	72.6%	70.4%	50.9%	61.3%	70.4%
2017	78.9%	85.3%	87.0%	64.5%	76.7%	69.6%	57.4%	70.5%	60.9%
2018	74.2%	88.0%	83.3%	57.7%	66.2%	62.5%	44.8%	54.9%	50.0%
2019	72.1%	84.3%	80.0%	57.2%	67.6%	80.0%	45.8%	52.0%	75.0%
2020	74.2%	77.3%	86.7%	57.5%	65.9%	60.0%	42.5%	59.1%	53.3%
2021	77.2%	79.0%	66.7%	60.1%	61.0%	66.7%	NA	NA	NA
2022	83.5%	83.3%	95.2%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Table 14 examines the overall retention rate in the second year for students who began with TOPS at a two-year institution compared to those who started without TOPS (Non-TOPS students include only Louisiana residents who did not receive the award and were in eligible programs for comparison purposes). These retention figures only include students who are retained to TOPS Tech eligible programs.

**Table 14. Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS vs. Non-TOPS Students Who Began at a Two-year Institution and Enrolled in TOPS Tech-Eligible Programs**

Statewide Retention Rates of TOPS vs. Non-TOPS Students Who Began at a Two-year Institution and Enrolled in TOPS <i>Tech</i> -Eligible Programs		
Fall Semester Entering Class	2nd Fall Retention	
	TOPS <i>Tech</i>	Non-TOPS <i>Tech</i>
2012	69.4%	53.2%
2013	70.2%	50.0%
2014	65.8%	50.4%
2015	67.8%	50.4%
2016	67.9%	48.2%
2017	67.2%	48.6%
2018	66.1%	50.5%
2019	64.7%	42.9%
2020	66.4%	50.5%
2021	68.9%	49.7%
2022	68.2%	49.4%

## RETAINING THE TOPS AWARD

As previously noted, students who receive a TOPS award must meet minimum academic criteria to retain the award (See Table 2). The award is canceled 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 failure to maintain the minimum GPA and are permanently canceled after two years. TOPS *Tech* awards are permanently canceled after one year has passed during which the student has not attained the required GPA. As shown in Tables 15a and 15b, numbers of award cancellations have declined over time for all TOPS scholarships.

Table 15a. Percentage of TOPS Award Cancelled\*\* by Cohort (TH, TP, TO)

Percentage of TOPS Award Cancelled ** by Cohort (TH, TP, TO)									
Entering Cohort	Total # of TOPS Awards	Total # of Awards Cancelled *		Cancelled: 24 Hrs Requirement		Cancelled: GPA Requirement		Cancelled: Non-Continuous Enrollment	
2013–2014	16,455	4,273	26.0%	3,648	22.2%	514	3.1%	111	0.7%
2014–2015	16,703	4,141	24.8%	3,683	22.0%	360	2.2%	98	0.6%
2015–2016	17,292	4,177	24.2%	3,738	21.6%	332	1.9%	107	0.6%
2016–2017	16,705	3,775	22.6%	3,378	20.2%	278	1.7%	119	0.7%
2017–2018	16,692	2,665	16.0%	2,344	14.0%	193	1.2%	128	0.8%
2018–2019	17,770	2,445	13.8%	2,164	12.2%	132	0.7%	149	0.8%
2019–2020	16,954	1,439	8.5%	1,265	7.5%	47	0.3%	127	0.7%
2020–2021	15,825	1,783	11.3%	1,622	10.2%	41	0.3%	120	0.8%
2021–2022	14,558	1,596	11.0%	1,473	10.1%	23	0.2%	100	0.7%
2022–2023	14,321	956	6.7%	875	6.1%	0	0.0%	81	0.6%
2023–2024	14,650	67	0.5%	46	0.3%	0	0.0%	21	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>177,925</b>	<b>27,317</b>	<b>15.4%</b>	<b>24,236</b>	<b>13.6%</b>	<b>1,920</b>	<b>1.1%</b>	<b>1,161</b>	<b>0.7%</b>

Source: BOR data files as of August 2024

\*Due to a change in methodology by LOSFA in 2018 regarding a timeframe change from 90 days to 9 months for data collection, these data are not available for awards canceled for 2023-2024 at this time and will be reported in the next year.

\*\* Students whose awards are canceled for non-GPA reasons may request an exception and be approved under existing law.

Table 15b. Percentage of TOPS Award Cancelled\*\* by Cohort (TT)

Percentage of TOPS Award Cancelled ** by Cohort (TT)									
Entering Cohort	Total # of TOPS Awards	Total # of Awards Cancelled *		Cancelled: 24 Hrs Requirement		Cancelled: GPA Requirement		Cancelled: Non-Continuous Enrollment	
2013–2014	1,278	304	23.8%	253	19.8%	42	3.3%	9	0.7%
2014–2015	1,358	347	25.6%	316	23.3%	22	1.6%	9	0.7%
2015–2016	1,337	375	28.0%	348	26.0%	23	1.7%	4	0.3%
2016–2017	956	267	27.9%	222	23.2%	34	3.6%	11	1.2%
2017–2018	1,305	307	23.5%	290	22.2%	10	0.8%	7	0.5%
2018–2019	1,502	294	19.6%	275	18.3%	9	0.6%	10	0.7%
2019–2020	2,098	136	6.5%	104	5.0%	7	0.3%	25	1.2%
2020–2021	1,693	163	9.6%	143	8.4%	2	0.1%	18	1.1%
2021–2022	1,664	330	19.8%	304	18.3%	2	0.1%	24	1.4%
2022–2023	1,684	315	18.7%	280	16.6%	0	0.0%	35	2.1%
2023–2024	1,750	161	9.2%	134	7.7%	0	0.0%	27	1.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>16,625</b>	<b>2,999</b>	<b>18.0%</b>	<b>2,669</b>	<b>16.1%</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>1.1%</b>

Source: BOR data files as of August 2024

\*Due to a change in methodology by LOSFA in 2018 regarding a timeframe change from 90 days to 9 months for data collection, these data are not available for awards canceled for 2023-2024 at this time and will be reported in the next year.

\*\* Students whose awards are canceled for non-GPA reasons may request an exception and be approved under existing law.

Furthermore, between the 2013–2014 cohort and the 2023–2024 cohort, 177,925 students received *Opportunity*, *Performance*, or *Honors* awards, and 16,625 received *Tech*. Of these *Opportunity*, *Performance*, or *Honors* award recipients, 15.4% had their awards canceled, while 18% of *Tech* recipients had their awards canceled during their postsecondary academic career.

From 2013–2014 to 2023–2024, the cumulative total of canceled awards was 30,316, a decrease from cancellations noted in last year's report (31,901). Of these 30,316 canceled awards, 26,905 were canceled due to students' failure to earn 24 hours of college credit during an academic year, 2,071 due to the GPA requirement, and 1,340 due to non-continuous enrollment. Most awards are canceled due to the students not meeting the 24-hour requirement. However, regardless, there has been a decreasing trend of award cancellations in recent years for TOPS *Opportunity*, *Performance*, and *Honors* recipients.

The average ACT score of TOPS *Opportunity, Performance, and Honors* recipients who had their awards canceled between 2013–2014 and 2022–2023 (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 23.2. This group's average high school GPA was 3.19 (Table 16a).

**Table 16a. Average ACT Score and High School Core GPA of TOPS Recipients Who had Their Award Canceled\*, (2013–14 to 2022–23 (TH, TP, TO))**

Average ACT Score and High School Core GPA of TOPS Recipients Who had Their Award Canceled*, 2013-14 to 2022-23 (TH, TP, TO)		
Reason Canceled	Average ACT Composite	Average High School Core GPA
24 Hour	23.2	3.19
GPA	23.0	3.07
Non-Continuous Enrollment	23.7	3.31

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of July 2024

\* Students whose awards are canceled for non-GPA reasons may request and be approved for an exception under existing law.

The average ACT score of TOPS *Tech* recipients who had their awards canceled between 2013–2014 and 2022–2023 (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 17.8. This group's average high school GPA was 2.8. (Table 16b).

**Table 16b. Average ACT Score and High School Core GPA of TOPS Recipients Who had Their Award Canceled\*, (2013–14 to 2022–23 (TT))**

Average ACT Score and High School Core GPA of TOPS Recipients Who had Their Award Canceled*, 2013–14 to 2022–23 (TT)		
Reason Canceled	Average ACT Composite	Average High School Core GPA
24 Hour	17.8	2.79
GPA	18.4	2.79
Non-Continuous Enrollment	17.3	2.87

Source: LOSFA internal data files as of July 2024

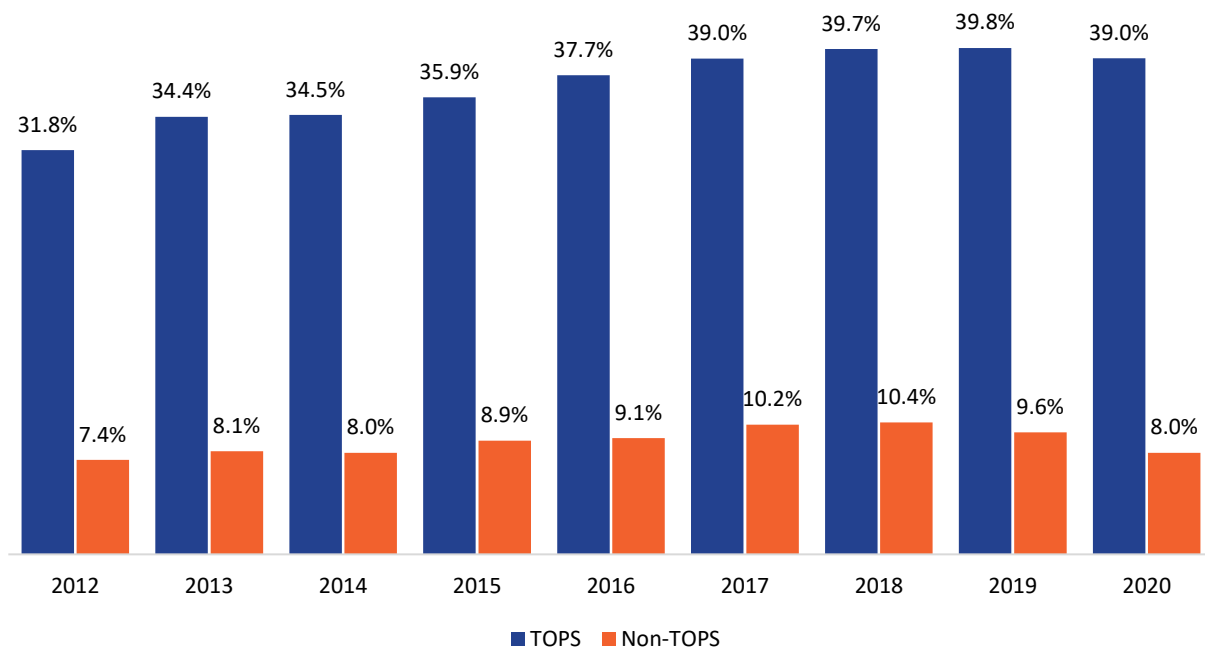
\* Students whose awards are canceled for everything but GPA may request and be approved for an exception under existing law.

## GRADUATION

A graduation rate is typically determined 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 three years for associate's degrees). However, because TOPS recipients are eligible for the award for a maximum of four years (or eight semesters), examining graduation rates at both 100% and 150% of time is essential.

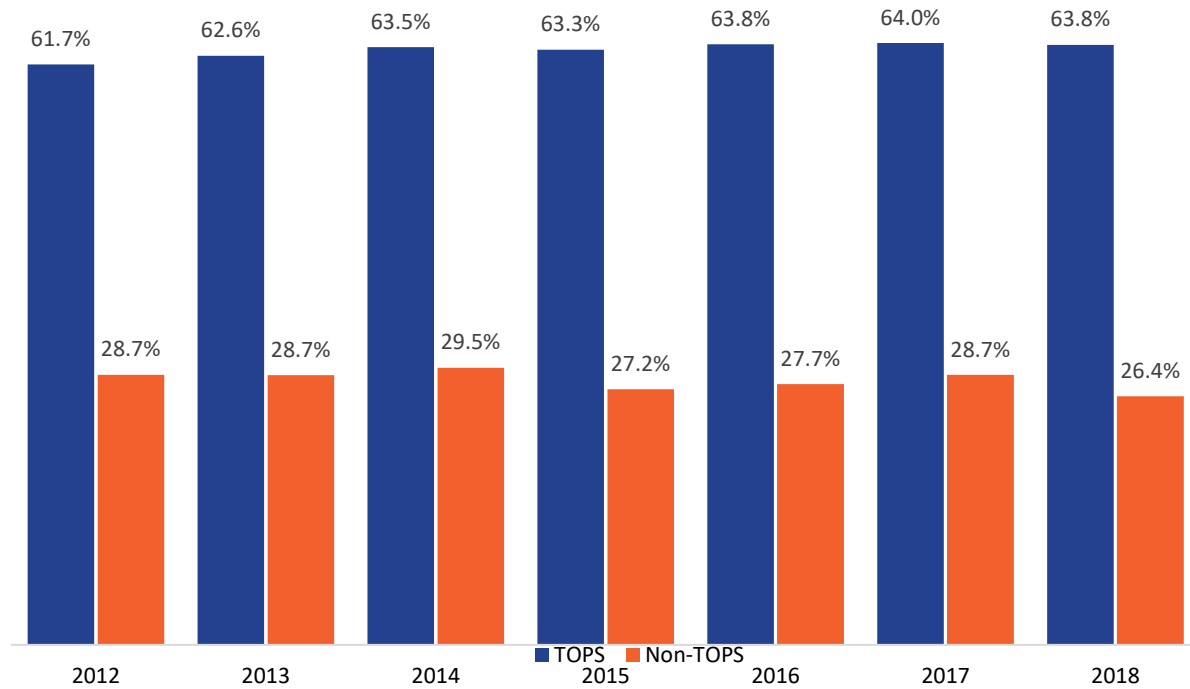
As noted in Figures C and D, students who begin a baccalaureate degree program with TOPS graduate within 100% and 150% of time at much higher rates than students without a TOPS award. The 2018 class is used to compare cohorts as both 100% and 150% data are available. Findings indicate that 39.7% of the 2018 first-time, full-time entering cohort of TOPS recipients completed a baccalaureate degree within 100% of time, compared with 10.4% of non-TOPS students.

**Figure C. Statewide Baccalaureate Four-year Graduation Rate (100%) among TOPS and Non-TOPS Students First-time, Full-time Entering Cohorts**



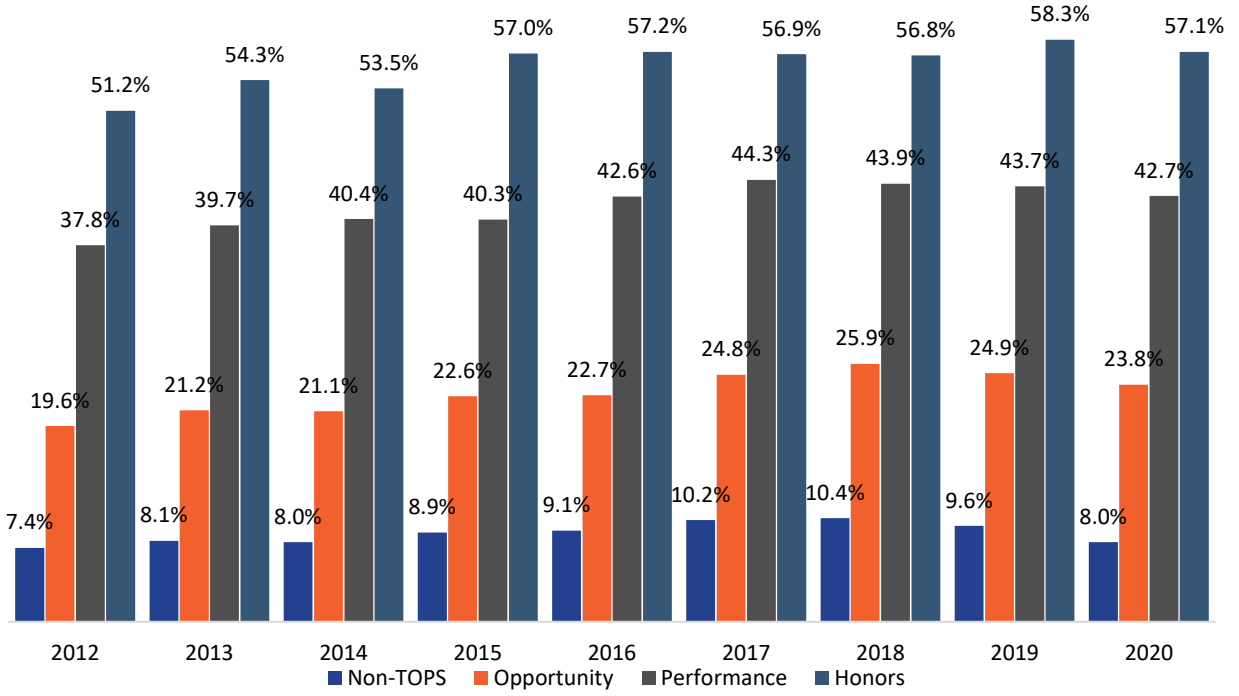
Furthermore, 63.8% of the 2018 first-time, full-time entering cohort of TOPS recipients completed a baccalaureate degree within 150% of time, compared with 26.4% of non-TOPS students.

**Figure D. Statewide Baccalaureate Six-year Graduation Rate (150%) among TOPS and Non-TOPS Students First-time, Full-time Entering Cohorts**



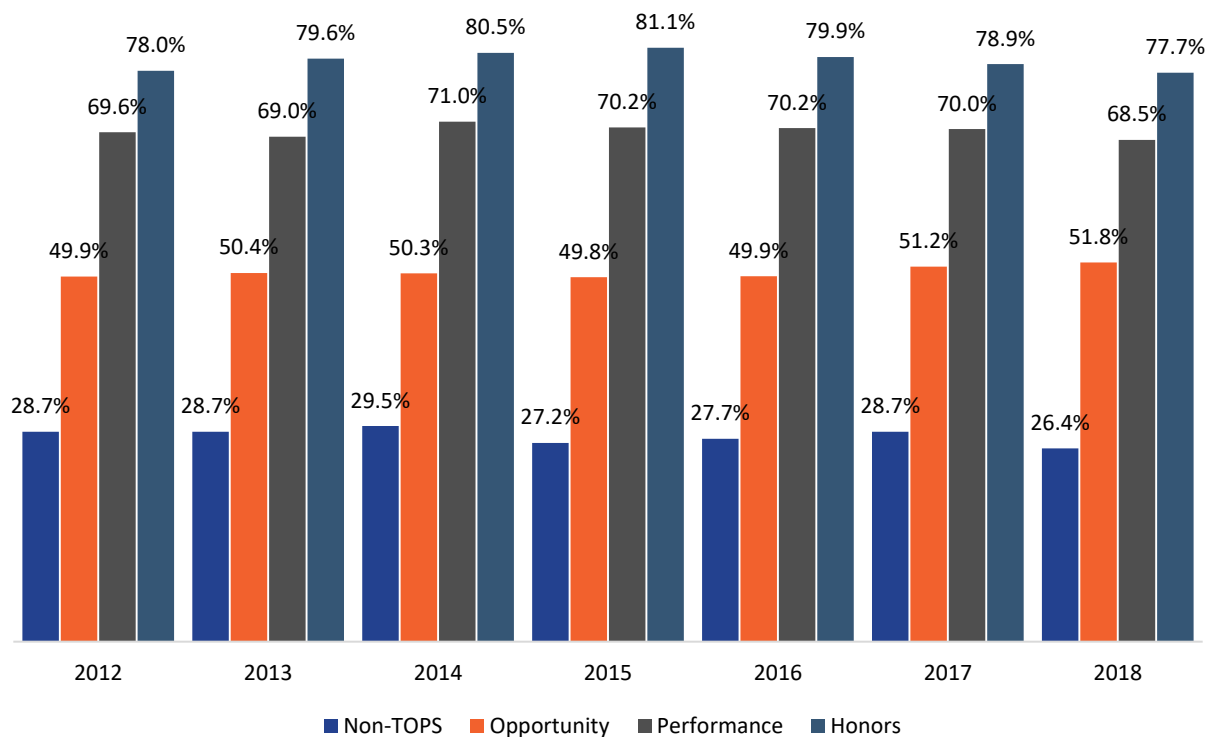
Graduation rates also differ across the type of award received. TOPS *Honors* recipients graduate at much higher rates than TOPS *Performance* and *Opportunity* recipients. The 2018 class is used to compare cohorts as both 100% and 150% data are available. As noted in Figures E and F, 56.8% of TOPS *Honors* recipients in the 2018 entering cohort completed a baccalaureate degree within 100% of time and 77.7% within 150% of time, compared with 43.9% and 25.9% within 100% of time and 68.5% and 51.8% within 150% of time for TOPS *Performance* and *Opportunity* recipients, respectively.

**Figure E. Statewide Baccalaureate Four-year Graduation Rate (100%)  
by Non-TOPS, Opportunity, Performance, Honors**



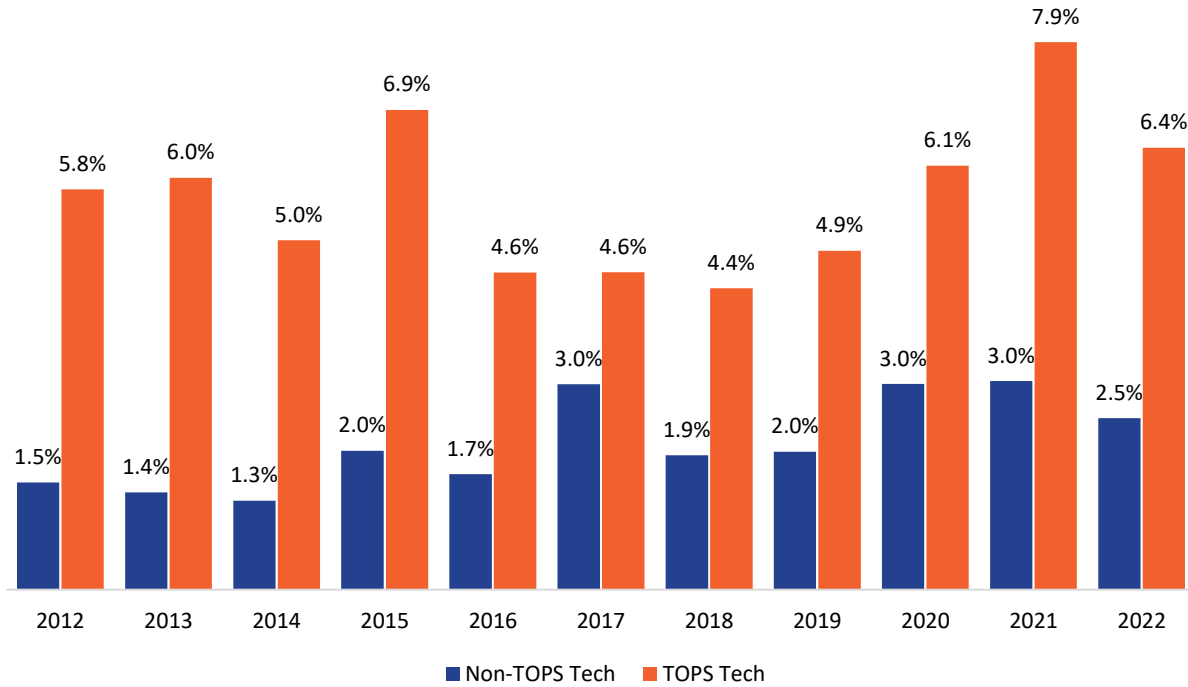


**Figure F. Statewide Baccalaureate Six-year Graduation Rate (150%) by Non-TOPS, Opportunity, Performance, Honors**

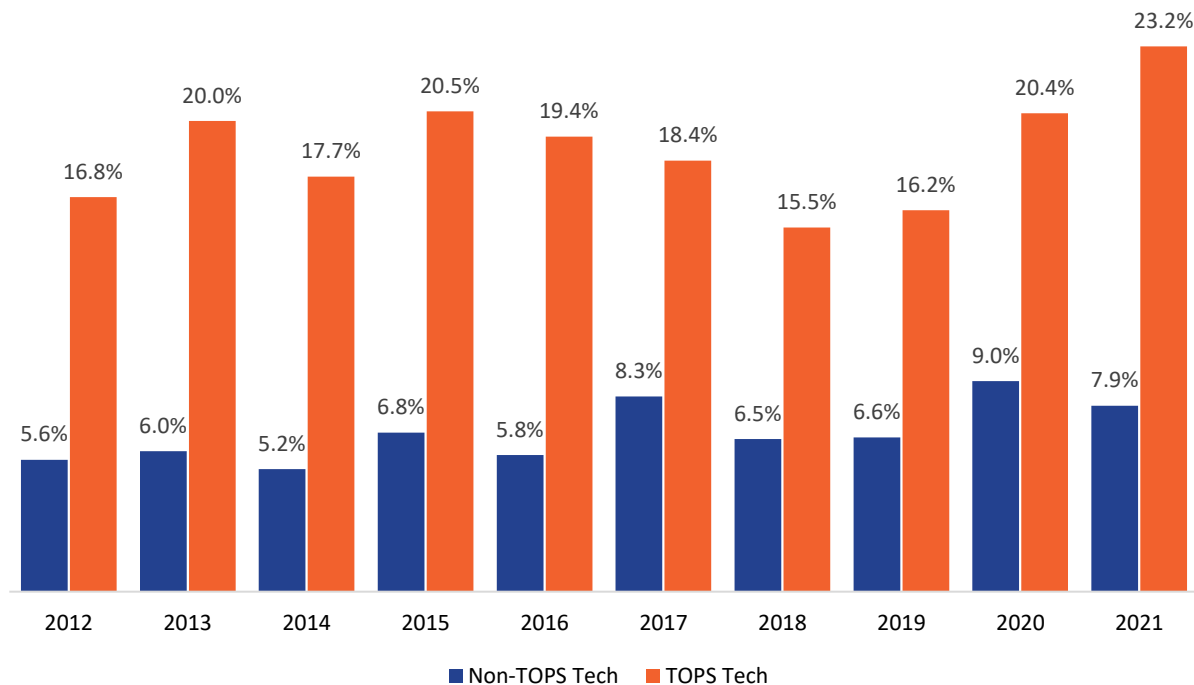


Like TOPS baccalaureate degree seekers, TOPS recipients who begin an associate's degree program graduate at higher rates than students without a TOPS award (Figures G and H); the 2020 class is used to illustrate both 100% and 150% graduation rates as data are available. Figure G shows that 6.1% of the 2020 first-time, full-time entering cohort of all TOPS recipients completed an associate's degree within 100% of time, compared with 3% of non-TOPS students. Figure H shows that within 150% of time, 20.4% of the 2020 first-time, full-time entering cohort of TOPS recipients completed an associate's degree, compared to 9% of non-TOPS students. Performance measures for out-of-state and international students were negligible and did not affect the data.

**Figure G. Statewide Associate's Two-year Graduation Rate (100%) Among TOPS and Non-TOPS Students First-time, Full-time Entering Cohorts (Two-year Tech Programs only)**



**Figure H. Statewide Associate's Three-year Graduation Rate (150%)  
Among TOPS and Non-TOPS Students First-time, Full-time Entering  
Cohorts  
(Two-year Tech Programs only)**



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." Tables 17a, 17b, and 17c examine this metric for TOPS recipients compared with non-TOPS students for the 2023–2024 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.

In light of recent transfer legislation and Board of Regents transfer policies, TOPS and non-TOPS time-to-degree data were examined in two ways. Tables 17a and 17b compare time-to-degree by award level for students who remained at the institution of initial entry versus those who transferred elsewhere in any associate's (TOPS *OPH*) [17a] or technical (TOPS *TECH*) eligible programs (17b). Table 17c looks at time-to-degree for completers of baccalaureate programs.

Tables 17a and 17b examine time-to-degree for *Opportunity*, *Performance*, and *Honors* awardees in associate's degree programs and TOPS *Tech* awardees in technical associate's degree programs. With the expansion of transfer initiatives such as the Universal Transfer Pathways and the Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) policy, associate's degree programs have become more attractive to students as a bridge to a four-year degree, even if the student

transfers from one institution to another. While still relatively new, these programs and policies show promise as a vehicle for students to attain and subsequently transfer credentials. The data indicate that transfer students take a bit longer to graduate; however, as previously stated, the impact of BOR policies and legislative mandates enacted over the past couple of years may mitigate that trend in the future as standardized and more nimble transfer policies result in efficient transfer credit evaluation and application from one institution to another. Tables 17a and 17b provide an idea of present levels of time-to-degree for students with TOPS compared to those without TOPS.

**Table 17a. 2023–24 Associate Average Time to Degree of TOPS & Non-TOPS Recipients**

2023-24 Associate Average Time to Degree of TOPS & Non-TOPS Recipients			
Graduation Type	Award Types	Time to degree (in years)	Completer Count
Same Institution	Honors	2.4	52
	Performance	3.4	124
	Opportunity	4.2	257
	TOPS	3.7	433
	Non-TOPS	5.7	459
	Overall	4.7	892
Any Institution	Honors	2.8	113
	Performance	4.1	222
	Opportunity	5.6	443
	TOPS	4.7	778
	Non-TOPS	7.6	726
	Overall	6.1	1,504

Note: The numbers reflected here are those students whose program start dates were available.

**Table 17b. 2023–24 Associate (Tech) Average Time to Degree of TOPS & Non-TOPS Recipients**

2023-24 Associate (Tech) Average Time to Degree of TOPS & Non-TOPS Recipients			
Graduation Type	Award Types	Time to degree (in years)	Completer Count
Same Institution	TOPS Tech	3.4	266
	Non-TOPS Tech	6.1	543
	Overall	5.2	809
Any Institution	TOPS Tech	4.0	302
	Non-TOPS Tech	8.1	899
	Overall	7.1	1,201

Note: The numbers reflected here are those students whose program start dates were available.

Time-to-degree for *Opportunity*, *Performance*, and *Honors* students who graduate from the same institution (4.4 years) versus those who transfer (4.7 years) is significantly less than for

associate’s or technical programs. The benefit of BOR policies may be a factor in this metric as institutions refine the transfer process into a more consistent and supportive model.

**Table 17c. 2023–24 Baccalaureate Average Time to Degree of TOPS & Non-TOPS Recipients**

2023-24 Baccalaureate Average Time to Degree of TOPS & Non-TOPS Recipients			
Graduation Type	Award Types	Time to degree (in years)	Completer Count
Same Institution	Honors	4.0	2,824
	Performance	4.3	2,979
	Opportunity	4.9	2,796
	TOPS	4.4	8,599
	Non-TOPS	6.0	1,501
	Overall	4.6	10,100
Any Institution	Honors	4.1	3,037
	Performance	4.5	3,336
	Opportunity	5.4	3,307
	TOPS	4.7	9,680
	Non-TOPS	6.6	1,807
	Overall	5.0	11,487

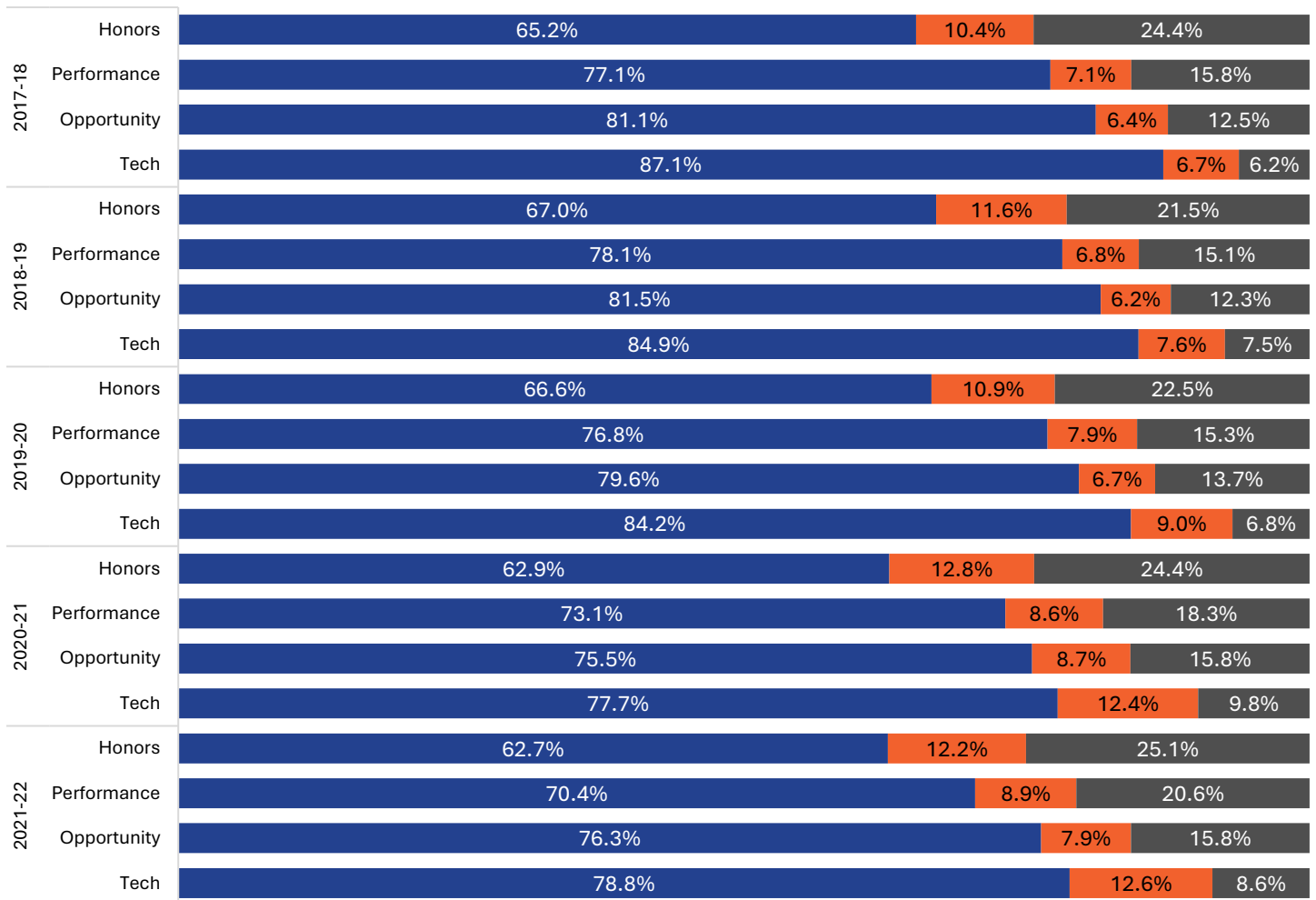
Note: The numbers reflected here are those students whose program start dates were available.

## EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

Study Resolution (S.R.) 10 of the 2019 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature requested the BOR study to determine the need for and feasibility of updating TOPS reporting requirements to include data on scholarship recipients' employment outcomes and other relevant data points. This year, the BOR obtained requested data on completers by award level from the Louisiana Workforce Commission to illustrate the post-TOPS status of recipients. Figure I shows the 2<sup>nd</sup>- and 6<sup>th</sup>-quarter post-completion status of TOPS completers.

TOPS *Opportunity* and *Tech* completers indicated the highest levels of established employment post-graduation. TOPS *Honors* completers are found in the workforce data in lower numbers but showed higher enrollment levels within two years of graduating. This finding correlates with the lower rate of time-to-degree for *Honors* completers (Figure 17c) and the potential for students to use their remaining TOPS funds to attend graduate school. It will be interesting to track how this number is impacted as BOR transfer and PLA policies increase opportunities for students to efficiently move from one institution to another and obtain the maximum benefit from their coursework.

**Figure I. TOPS Recipients Completing An Award Employment Outcomes by TOPS Award Types**



■ Found Employed w/n 18 Mos Post Completion    ■ Found Enrolled w/n 2 Yrs Post Completion    ■ Unknown

Source: Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC) data.

## 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 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.

This year, data showed an increase in the median ACT and GPA of TOPS recipients.

Since 2013–2014, of the 190,006 students deemed eligible for a TOPS *Opportunity*, *Performance*, *Honors*, or *Tech* award, 161,060 (or 84.8%) have accepted their award and enrolled in a postsecondary education institution in Louisiana.

The proportion of students who are eligible for *Opportunity*, *Performance*, and *Honors* awards and accept their awards is steadily declining. Also of concern is that a steadily increasing proportion of TOPS-eligible students choose not to continue with postsecondary education. This trend is not limited to Louisiana, but is reflected in national trends that require further analysis.

TOPS recipients consistently attain ACT scores and high school core GPAs above the minimum for TOPS eligibility. Among TOPS recipients from 2011–2012 to 2023–2024, the average ACT score was 24.5 (four points above the minimum needed for eligibility for a TOPS *Opportunity* Award), and the average high school GPA (Core GPA) was 3.73 (significantly higher than the 2.5 minimum required for a TOPS *Opportunity* Award). This year, both those metrics had modest increases. The average ACT for TOPS *Tech* recipients was 17.3, with a high school GPA of 3.05. Data indicate that most initial TOPS recipients are white and female.

Despite the racial gaps among TOPS recipients, the number of minority students receiving TOPS has generally increased since the pandemic. In a positive trend, for the second year in a row, the number of TOPS recipients who were African American and Hispanic increased.

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. This year, the retention rates for students beginning with a TOPS award at four-year institutions increased for second-, third-, and fourth-fall retention, with an all-time high of a 90.2% rate of TOPS awardees returning for the second year. Approximately 36% of TOPS recipients had their awards canceled between 2013–2014 and 2023–2024, 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 time at much higher rates than students without a TOPS award. 56.8% of TOPS *Honors* recipients in the 2018 entering cohort completed a baccalaureate degree within 100% of time and 77.7% within 150% of time, compared with 42.7% and 23.8% within 100% of time and 68.5% and 51.8% within 150% of time for TOPS *Performance* and *Opportunity* recipients, respectively. Of the 2021 first-time, full-time entering cohort of all TOPS recipients, 7.9% completed an associate's degree within 100% of time, compared with 3% of non-TOPS students. Within 150% of time, 23.2% of the 2021 first-time, full-time entering cohort of TOPS recipients completed an associate's degree, compared to 7.9% of non-TOPS students.

Data indicates 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.

TOPS *Opportunity* and *Tech* completers indicated the highest levels of established employment post-graduation. TOPS *Honors* completers are found in the workforce data in lower numbers but

showed higher enrollment levels within two years of graduating, leading to the conclusion that these students entered graduate programs.

From the 1998–1999 through 2023–2024 fiscal years, the state provided approximately \$4.9 billion in funding for the TOPS Program. Despite this significant investment, several years of declines in the number of high school graduates and TOPS-eligible students, combined with lower proportions of students accepting their awards, have resulted in a third year of decreases in the number of overall TOPS recipients. As a result, in these years an increase in TOPS funding was not requested.

Senate Resolution 138 of the 2024 Regular Session calls on the Board of Regents to conduct a study of all the state’s higher education financial aid programs. The resolution asks the report to explain any barriers which prohibit the use of these programs and strategies that might enable these programs to work more effectively together, as well recommended modifications to improve the functioning and utilization of the state’s financial assistance. Ways in which TOPS might be productively modified, in light of the trends identified in this document, to better support progress toward the state’s education attainment goal of 60% of working-age adults holding a postsecondary credential by 2030 will be discussed within that broader context as part of that report.



## **Appendix A:**

[Act 1202 from 2001 Regular Legislative Session](#)

## **Appendix B:**

[Act 587 of 2014 Regular Legislative Session](#)

## **Appendix C:**

[Act 227 of 2015 Regular Legislative Session](#)

## **Appendix D:**

[TOPS Core Curriculum](#)

## **Appendix E:**

[2023 High School Graduates TOPS-Eligible by School and Parish](#)