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2019-2020
TOPS
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

For

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
AND
COUNSELORS

(Revised January 17, 2020)

PRESENTED BY

LOUISIANA OFFICE OF STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE (LOSFA)
A PROGRAM OF THE LOUISIANA BOARD OF REGENTS

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Facebook - www.facebook.com/LOSFA

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The information presented in this document is correct as of the date of publication for students who will graduate from high school during the 2019-2020 school year; however, the information for graduates of other years may e different due to changes in the TOPS Statute and the rules implementing the TOPS Statute.

TOPS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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TOPS CORE CURRICULUM FOR HIGH SCHOOL 2018 GRADUATES and LATER

For the TOPS Opportunity, Performance and Honors Awards As of October 1, 2018

Units	**Courses***
ENGLISH = 4 Units	
1 Unit	English I
1 Unit	English II
1 Unit from the following:	English III, AP English Language Arts and Composition, or IB English III (Language A or Literature and Performance)
1 Unit from the following:	English IV, AP English Literature and Composition, or IB English IV (Language A or Literature and Performance)
MATH = 4 Units	
1 Unit	Algebra I
1 Unit	Geometry
1 Unit	Algebra II
1 Unit from the following:	Algebra III; Advanced Math - Functions and Statistics, Advanced Math - Pre-Calculus, Pre-Calculus, or IB Math Methods I (Mathematical Studies SL); Calculus, AP Calculus AB, or IB Math Methods II (Mathematics SL); AP Calculus BC; Probability and Statistics or AP Statistics; IB Further Mathematics HL; IB Mathematics HL
SCIENCE = 4 Units	
1 Unit	Biology I
1 Unit	Chemistry I
2 Units from the following:	Earth Science; Environmental Science; Physical Science; Agriscience I and Agriscience II (one unit combined); Chemistry II, AP Chemistry, or IB Chemistry II; AP Environmental Science or IB Environmental Systems; Physics I, AP Physics I, AP Physics B, or IB Physics I; AP Physics C: Electricity and Magnetism, AP Physics C: Mechanics, IB Physics II, or AP Physics II; Biology II, AP Biology, or IB Biology II
SOCIAL STUDIES = 4 Units	
1 Unit from the following:	U.S. History, AP U.S. History, or IB U.S. History
1 Unit from the following:	Civics, Government, AP U.S. Government and Politics: Comparative, or AP U.S. Government and Politics: United States
2 Units from the following:	Western Civilization, European History, or AP European History; World Geography, AP Human Geography, or IB Geography; World History, AP World History, or IB World History; History of Religion; IB Economics, Economics, AP Macroeconomics, or AP Microeconomics

FOREIGN LANGUAGE = 2 Units	
	Foreign Language, both units in the same language, which may also include the following AP and IB courses: AP Chinese Language and Culture, AP French Language and Culture, AP German Language and Culture, AP Italian Language and Culture, AP Japanese Language and Culture, AP Latin, AP Spanish Language and Culture, IB French IV, IB French V, IB Spanish IV, and IB Spanish V

ART = 1 Unit	
1 Unit from the following:	Performance course in Music, Dance or Theatre; Fine Arts Survey; Art I, II, III, and IV; Talented Art I, II, III, and IV; Talented Music I, II, III and IV; Talented Theater Arts I, II, III, and IV; Speech III and Speech IV (one unit combined); AP Art History; AP Studio Art: 2-D Design; AP Studio Art: 3-D Design; AP Studio Art: Drawing; AP Music Theory; IB Film Study I; IB Film Study II; IB Music I; IB Music II; IB Art Design III; IB Art Design IV; IB Theatre I or Drafting
TOTAL = 19 Units	

Core Curriculum Course(s)	**Recently Approved Equivalent (Substitute) Course(s)**
Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II	Integrated Mathematics I, II and III
Art	Media Arts I - IV; Photography I, Photography II, and Digital Photography; Digital Image and Motion Graphics; Digital Storytelling; Engineering Design and Development; Sound Design
Algebra III; Advanced Math - Functions and Statistics, Advanced Math - Pre-Calculus, PreCalculus, or Math Methods I IB (Mathematical Studies SL); Calculus, AP Calculus AB, or Math Methods II IB (Mathematics SL); AP Calculus BC; Probability and Statistics or AP Statistics; IB Further Mathematics HL; IB Mathematics HL	AP Computer Science A
Probability and Statistics	Statistical Reasoning
Biology II	Human Anatomy and Physiology
Environmental Science	Environmental Awareness
Physical Science	Principles of Engineering

Western Civilization, European History, or AP European History; World Geography, AP Human Geography, or IB Geography; World History, AP World History, or IB World History; History of Religion; IB Economics, Economics, AP Macroeconomics, or AP Microeconomics	AP Psychology
World Geography	Physical Geography
Foreign Language	Mandarin Chinese I-IV Hindi I – IV Portuguese I-IV Vietnamese I-IV Korean I-IV

*** GIFTED COURSES:** Any core curriculum course that is taken by a student who has been identified as gifted pursuant to State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) policy and that is taken in fulfillment of the student's Individualized Education Plan shall be considered a "Gifted Course" and shall fulfill the core curriculum.

Beginning with students entering the 9th grade in 2014-2015 and graduating in the 2017-2018 school year and thereafter, the calculation of the TOPS Core Curriculum grade point average (GPA) will use a five-(5.00) point scale for grades earned in certain designated Advanced Placement (AP) courses; International Baccalaureate (IB) courses; Gifted courses; Dual Enrollment courses, Honors courses and Articulated courses offered for college credit by the Louisiana School for the Math, Science and the Arts used to complete the TOPS Core Curriculum. The courses currently designated to be calculated on the 5.00 point scale can be viewed at https://www.osfa.la.gov/5scale. For the designated courses, five quality points will be assigned to a letter grade of "A", four quality points will be assigned to a letter grade of "B", three quality points will be assigned to a letter grade of "C", two quality points will be assigned to a letter grade of "D", and zero quality points will be assigned to a letter grade of "F". Note that students earning credit in courses graded on the five (5.00) point scale may earn a grade point average on the TOPS Core Curriculum that exceeds 4.00.

TOPS Tech Core Curriculum

JumpStart Curriculum (below)
Students may also qualify for the TOPS Tech Award by completing the TOPS Core Curriculum for the Opportunity, Performance and Honors Awards (above)

Units	Courses
1 Unit	English I
1 Unit	English II
2 Units	English III, English IV, AP or IB English courses, Business English, Technical Writing, or comparable Louisiana Technical College courses offered by Jump Start regional teams as approved by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.
1 Unit	Algebra I; or both Algebra I, Part 1 and Algebra I, Part 2; or an applied or hybrid algebra course
3 Units	Geometry, Algebra II, Math Essentials, Financial Literacy, Business Math, Algebra III, Advanced Math - Functions and Statistics, Advanced Math - Pre-Calculus, Pre- calculus, or comparable Louisiana Technical College courses offered by Jump Start regional teams as approved by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. Integrated Mathematics I, II, and III may be substituted for Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II, and shall equal three mathematics credits
1 Unit	Biology
1 Unit	Chemistry I, Earth Science, Environmental Science, Agriscience I and Agriscience II (both for one unit), Physical Science, Physics, or AP or IB science courses
1 Unit	U.S. History, AP U.S. History, or IB U.S. History
1 Unit	Civics, Government, AP U.S. Government and Politics: Comparative, or AP U.S. Government and Politics: United States

9 Units	In Jump Start course sequences, workplace experiences, and credentials. A student shall complete a regionally designed series of Career and Technical Education Jump Start coursework and workplace- based learning experiences leading to a statewide or regional Jump Start credential. This shall include courses and workplace experiences specific to the credential, courses related to foundational career skills requirements in Jump Start, and other courses, including career electives, that the Jump Start regional team determines are appropriate for the career major.
TOTAL: 21 units	

TOPS TOP 10 TO DO LIST: TO ENSURE TIMELY PROCESSING OF YOUR ELIGIBILITY FOR A TOPS AWARD

1. Write your name exactly the SAME on ALL documents. If your name is John Alan Smith, Jr., do not fill out one application as John A. Smith, Jr., another as J.A. Smith, Jr., or John Alan Smith. Spelling and punctuation matter. Your date of birth, home address, and email address must also be the same on all documents, applications, etc. LOSFA will use the email address that you include on your FAFSA and ACT registration to notify you of your TOPS initial eligibility determination and as identifier when matching your ACT to your FAFSA and to other data. It is imperative that you create a personal email account and stick with it. Use the same email address on all forms and applications relating to your postsecondary education. Your email address should convey maturity and professionalism.

2. Include the "La Office of Student Financ Asst" (TOPS) report code of 1595 or the SAT TOPS code of 9019 on all ACT/SAT test registrations.

3. Public School students: make certain that LOSFA has a parent-signed Parental Consent form allowing access to grade data.

4. Make sure you are taking the 19 units that comprise the TOPS Core Curriculum.

5. Be aware that TOPS awards are based on TOPS Core Curriculum GPA…not overall GPA…and GPA cannot be rounded up or down.

6. Both the parent and the student must apply for and receive an FSA ID to electronically sign the FAFSA.

7. FAFSA is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and is the primary TOPS application. The 2019-2020 FAFSA will be available beginning October 1, 2018, at www.fafsa.gov and will use 2017 Federal Income Tax information.

8. Apply for Fall 2019 admission to the postsecondary institution of your choice as soon as possible beginning in October 2018.

9. "Like" LOSFA on Facebook and/or "Follow" LOSFA on Twitter for important TOPS information throughout the year.

10. Seniors: request text message information from LOSFA by emailing "TEXT" to custserv@la.gov. Include your name, the school you currently attend and your mobile number. Text messages will provide you with critical information and deadlines as you navigate the college and financial aid application process.

Create a LOSFA Student Hub Account and Follow Your Progress Towards Earning a TOPS Award.

LOSFA has launched the new Student Hub to give you more options for tracking your award eligibility and status, and to provide you with easier account maintenance features and login recovery options.

- The "TOPS Tracker" within the LOSFA Student Hub allows you to follow your progress towards earning a TOPS award.
- View the ACT scores we have on file, if a score is missing, Email us at custserv@la.gov and we will let you know how to get it to us.
- After you have created your Student Hub account, you can grant permission within the Hub for your parents to create a Student Hub account with their own password and user name so that they may see the same information you see.
- After high school graduation, your TOPS eligibility notice, award letter and Rights and Responsibilities will be posted in your Student Hub account.
- Once in college, all information relating to your continuing eligibility for TOPS, your TOPS postsecondary GPA and all notices and announcements will be delivered via your Student Hub Account.
- To create your account, go to www.osfa.la.gov, click “Student Hub” in the menu across the top of the LOSFA homepage and follow the instructions.
- To register, click the "Register" link then click the "Student" button on the next page, where you can start the registration process with either your Louisiana Secure ID (LASECID) if you are a public school student, or your Louisiana State ID if you are a non-public student.
- When registering with your LASECID, you will also need your first and last name, your birthdate, and the high school you attended. If you do not know your Louisiana Secure ID, contact your school counselor.
- Ignore references to the LOSFA ID for now as this will be assigned to you after you have completed your FAFSA and we have matched it with your ACT records.

TOPS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

PARENTAL CONSENT

Beginning with students graduating from a public high school in 2015, high schools **may not** collect your personal academic information and provide it to LOSFA **unless** your parent or legal guardian has given written consent. Your school will provide you and your parents with a consent form, and you will be given the choice whether to consent or not to consent. Your parents must complete the form and return it to your high school. If your parents change their minds about the option they choose, they can complete another form with the other option selected and return it to your school.

Once your parents have provided consent, you will have access to the LOSFA Student Hub, an online service which will allow you to track your progress towards becoming eligible for TOPS. It will also provide you with a number of college access and career readiness services, including storing your data to populate the TOPS Tracker. The TOPS Tracker will allow you and your parents to see whether you are earning at least the minimum required grade point average required to be eligible for TOPS, whether you have earned the minimum required ACT/SAT score, and whether you are earning credit in the courses required to complete the TOPS Core Curriculum that is applicable to your graduation year.

To provide the TOPS Tracker from the beginning of high school, your parents must provide consent for LOSFA to receive your high school academic information, including your full name, date of birth, social security number, and your transcript data (grades, courses, etc. beginning with the ninth grade). If you and your parents do not want to use the TOPS Tracker, then you will not need to provide consent for LOSFA to receive your academic information until it is time for you to apply for TOPS. LOSFA cannot determine eligibility for a TOPS Award unless it has received information on all the courses you took in high school and your grades in those courses. If you and your parents do not provide consent until the end of your senior year, the determination of your eligibility for a TOPS Award will be delayed.

In addition to providing the college and career access services noted above, the Student Hub will be used to determine your eligibility for TOPS and to track your continuing eligibility for the award. The Student Hub will also provide you with important information about your TOPS Award from time to time through emails and/or text messages, so it is very important that you establish an account on https://www.osfa.la.gov/studenthub.html and keep your email address in the Hub up to date.

TRANSCRIPT DATA

To determine whether you are eligible for a TOPS Award or another award and for reporting for federal grants that support education in Louisiana, LOSFA must have access to certain data included in the Louisiana Department of Education Student Transcript System. The transcript data provided to LOSFA includes, but is not limited to, the following:

Student Transcript Data:

ACT Site Code
Beginning School Session Year
Career Option Code
Core Curriculum Waiver Flag
Core Curriculum Met Flag
Credit Attempted Count
Credit Earned Count
Units allowed
Units attempted
Units earned
Units passed
Units required
Units waived
Category Description
Category Met
Category Number
Course Beginning School Session Year
Course Code
Course Part Number
Semester Code
Course Site Code
Course Site Name
Course Sponsor Code
Course Type Code
Distance Learning Course Type Code
Grade Point Maximum Count
Relative GPA
Student's Unique Identifier Accumulated GPA
GPA 6 Decimal positions
Grade point count
Quality Points Awarded Count
TOPS award type
TOPS GPA
TOPS award type description
Graduation Date
Student's grade placement for the submission year
Beginning School Session Year when the student entered the 9th grade Last update date
Letter Grade
The 6 digit code assigned to each school by LDE. The first three digits will always match the Sponsor Code.
Transcript Course Name
Date last updated
Date file was recalculated
ALTP Units
Anticipated Grad Year
Comp GPA
Ethnic Code
Grade Code
Local ID
School District
Sex Code
TGP Count
Local Course Code

The following elements will be provided to ensure that each student's data is correct: Full name, date of birth, Social Security Number.

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS (SSNs)

LOSFA's computer application uses your social security number to match the data provided on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (the "FAFSA") or TOPS Online Application with your high school transcript data. Your ACT score is matched to these data elements using your first name, last name, and date of birth, as well as other data elements if a match cannot be made using only the first name, last name, and date of birth. Be sure that the name that you use on the ACT exactly matches your name on file with your high school and the name you use on the FAFSA. For example, if your high school records state that your name is John Q. Smith, your ACT and your FAFSA should use the name John Q. Smith, not John Smith, not John Quincy Smith, and not Quincy Smith. If your name differs in the slightest way in any of these documents, the determination of your eligibility for TOPS may be delayed.

Your social security number does not appear on LOSFA's computer screens and LOSFA's employees do not have access to it. When SSNs are received from any source, they are immediately encrypted (encoded in such a way that only the computer program can use them).

As a part of our efforts to ensure the security of your information, we ask that you **never** include a SSN in any correspondence to LOSFA or in a conversation with a LOSFA employee.

LOSFA ID NUMBER

To ensure that you can access your information and to allow LOSFA employees to provide assistance, LOSFA issues each student a unique LOSFA ID number. You should **always** include your LOSFA ID number on all correspondence to LOSFA, and you should be prepared to provide that number to LOSFA if/when calling for information. The LOSFA ID is assigned to you after you have completed your FAFSA and LOSFA has matched it with your ACT records.

If you do not know or have your LOSFA ID number, send an email to custserv@la.gov.

IRS REPORTING

TOPS provides a scholarship for students enrolled in programs leading to a diploma, certificate, or degree to be used to help pay the cost of attendance at an eligible college or university. Since the TOPS Award is a "scholarship" in accordance with Internal Revenue Code Section 117, the amount paid is NOT reportable income. LOSFA will not send a W-2, 1098 or 1099 to the recipients of a TOPS award.

"ACT" AND "SAT" TEST

Q-1. What is the minimum ACT score for 2020 high school graduates and does the score change every year?

A. The ACT qualifying scores for students graduating from eligible Louisiana high schools in 2020 are:
TOPS Tech – 17 or the silver level score on the assessments of the ACT WorkKeys system
TOPS Opportunity – 20
TOPS Performance - 23
TOPS Honors - 27

The minimum qualifying score for the **Opportunity Award** is determined annually based on the state's average composite ACT score reported for the prior year (the average for last year was 18.8), truncated to the nearest whole number. The minimum score may never be less than 20 and is currently 20.

*NOTE: The ACT scores above are TOPS requirements. The achievement of these scores does not necessarily mean that you will meet the admissions standards of the college of your choice since some schools require minimum ACT sub-scores for admission. You should contact the admissions office for the colleges to which you will apply to verify the ACT admission requirements for those schools.

Q-2. What is the minimum ACT score for students completing a BESE approved home study program for 2020?

A. The ACT qualifying scores for home study students for 2020 are:
TOPS Tech – 19

TOPS Opportunity – 22
TOPS Performance – 24*
TOPS Honors – 28*

*NOTE: The ACT scores above are TOPS requirements. The achievement of these scores does not necessarily mean that you will meet the admission standards of the college of your choice since some schools require minimum ACT sub-scores for admission. You should contact the admissions office for the colleges to which you will apply to verify the ACT admission requirements for those schools.

Q-3. What is the minimum ACT score for 2020 graduates of out-of-state and out-of-country high schools*?

A. The ACT qualifying scores for these 2020 graduates are:
TOPS Tech – 20
TOPS Opportunity – 23
TOPS Performance – 26*
TOPS Honors – 30*

*NOTE: The ACT scores above are TOPS requirements. The achievement of these scores does not necessarily mean that you will meet the admission standards of the college of your choice since some schools require minimum ACT sub-scores for admission. You should contact the admissions office for the colleges to which you will apply to verify the ACT admission requirements for those schools.

Q-4. What is the deadline for taking the ACT/SAT?

A. You must achieve a qualifying score on or before the ACT national test date in April in the academic year you graduate from high school. If you have not previously achieved a qualifying score, you may qualify after the ACT national test date in April in the academic year you graduate from high school, but prior to July 1, by using May and/or June test scores, including scores from a special ACT or SAT, but your period of eligibility for the award will be reduced by one semester or two quarters. You can only qualify for a higher award using a score achieved after the national ACT test date in April and before July 1 if you have not qualified for any TOPS award or have qualified for the TOPS Tech Award.

In very limited circumstances, the Board of Regents may grant an exception to the April deadline IF it determines that the applicant had registered for a test prior to July 1 but was prevented from taking the test prior to July 1 of the year of graduation due to circumstances beyond the immediate control of the student AND attributable to the administration of the test. If it makes this determination, a student will not be penalized one semester or two quarters.

Scores earned on an ACT/SAT taken after July 1 but before September 30 immediately following high school graduation may be accepted on a very limited basis. The Board of Regents must grant an exception to the July 1 deadline because it determines that the applicant was prevented from taking the test prior to July 1 of the year of graduation due to circumstances beyond the immediate control of the student AND attributable to the administration of the test. Illnesses, lack of transportation, death in the family, and similar circumstances are not attributable to the administration of the test and will not support an exception to the ACT deadline.

Q-5. Will a score from a special ACT or SAT taken after the official April test date but before July 1 be accepted?

A. Yes. You may use a first time qualifying score achieved on a special ACT or SAT test after the official April test date and before the July 1 deadline, but your eligibility will be reduced by one semester or two quarters.

B.

Q-6. Is any type of ACT or SAT test acceptable?

A. No. You must take an official National (includes State), International, Military, Arranged, Special, Extended Time ACT test or the SAT test.

Q-7. Should I include my social security number on my ACT or SAT application?

A. ACT no longer collects your social security number. HOWEVER, be sure that the name that you use on the ACT exactly matches your name on file with your high school and the name you use on the FAFSA. For example, if your high school records state that your name is John Q. Smith, your ACT and your FAFSA should use the name John Q. Smith, not John Smith, not John Quincy Smith, and not Quincy Smith. If your name differs in the slightest way in any of these documents, the determination of your eligibility for TOPS may be delayed.

Provision of your social security number for the SAT is optional, and it is not necessary for purposes of determining your TOPS eligibility.

Q-8. How does the ACT essay component impact TOPS eligibility?

A. The essay portion of the ACT test does not impact the ACT composite score, and therefore will not affect TOPS eligibility. However, some colleges and universities require the essay. Check with the admissions office of the school(s) to which you intend to apply.

Q-9. Is the SAT Essay test considered in the conversion of the SAT score to an ACT score for TOPS eligibility?

A. No. The essay portion of the SAT is not considered for TOPS eligibility. However, many colleges and universities require taking the essay for possible admission. You should check with the schools you hope to attend.

Q-10. How is the ACT score reported to LOSFA?

A. LOSFA has an agreement with ACT, Inc. that requires ACT, Inc. to electronically report to LOSFA all ACT test scores for students who indicate they are a resident of Louisiana and all students who included the "La Office of Student Financ Asst" (TOPS) report code of "1595" in the list of institutions to receive the test scores when registering for the ACT.

If you take the ACT outside Louisiana and do not include code "1595" on the list of institutions to receive test scores, you should contact ACT, Inc. to request that your scores be submitted to LOSFA.

NOTE: Be sure that the name that you use on the ACT exactly matches your name on file with your high school and the name you use on the FAFSA. For example, if your high school records state that your name is John Q. Smith, your ACT and your FAFSA should use the name John Q. Smith, not John Smith, not John Quincy Smith, and not Quincy Smith. If your name differs in the slightest way in any of these documents, the determination of your eligibility for TOPS will be delayed. Your date of birth, home address, and email address must also be the same.

Q-11. Will LOSFA waive ACT scores for a child with ADD or ADHD?

A. No. The minimum ACT score is established by the TOPS statute and cannot be waived. You may apply to ACT, Inc. for special testing conditions, but you must take the test no later than the deadline. See the answers to Questions 4, 5 and 6 for the deadline.

Q-12. I listed the incorrect ACT high school code or the incorrect year of graduation, or graduated from a different high school than the one I attended when I took the ACT test that resulted in the highest score. What do I do to correct this?

A. You must contact ACT and ask them to send an official ACT score report to LOSFA. You can do this by creating an account at https://services.actstudent.org/OA_HTML/actibeCAcdLogin.jsp and requesting that your ACT be sent to LOSFA using ACT code 1595.

Q-13. Can an SAT score be used in place of an ACT score, and if so, what is the minimum qualifying score?

A. Yes. To qualify for the TOPS award, and beginning with SAT tests in May 2018, the total of the subscores for the critical reading and mathematics sections of the SAT (the score for the writing section is NOT included) must be at least:

Tech Award – 920
Opportunity Award – 1030
Performance Award – 1130
Honors Award – 1260

Q-14. What are the SAT test deadlines?

A. The SAT test deadlines for TOPS are the same as the test deadlines for the ACT, which is April in the academic year you graduate from high school, or May and June with a one semester (or two quarters) reduction in eligibility for the award. See the answers to Questions 4, 5 and 6.

Q-15. How do I substitute an SAT score?

A. To substitute an SAT score, you must take the test no later than the ACT test deadline [April in the year of high school graduation or achieve a qualifying score for the first time from a May and/or June test,

which reduces your eligibility for the award by one semester or two quarters or in certain very limited circumstances on a test taken before September 30 (See the answer to Question 6 above.)], and you must direct the College Board to report the score to LOSFA, or you must personally send a copy of your SAT test report to LOSFA. LOSFA uses a conversion table to determine the ACT equivalent of the SAT score. See the answer to Question 13.

When registering for the SAT, you must indicate the "TOPS-Taylor Opportunity Program For Students" code as a recipient of the score by entering code "9019" as one of the institutions to receive a score report.

If you take the SAT outside Louisiana and do not include code "9019" on the list of institutions to receive test scores, you should send a copy of the official SAT Score Report (write your date of birth on the report) to LOSFA by mail or by fax to (225) 612-6508 or by email to custserv@la.gov.

Q-16. If I qualified for a TOPS Tech Award and take the June ACT or SAT, can I increase the level of my TOPS award?

A. Yes. You may qualify for a higher award based on the ACT or SAT score achieved on the June ACT or SAT. Because the test is taken after the April national ACT test date, your eligibility for the award will be reduced by one semester or two quarters.

Q-17. If I have an ACT score that will qualify me for a TOPS Opportunity or Performance Award and I take the ACT or the SAT after the official April ACT test date, can my award be upgraded?

A. No. If you have already qualified for a TOPS Opportunity or Performance Award, you cannot upgrade the award based on a score achieved after the national April ACT test date. Only if you have not qualified for any TOPS Award or if you have qualified for the TOPS Tech Award can you qualify for a higher award using a score achieved after the national ACT test date in April and before July 1, but your eligibility for the award will be reduced by one semester or two quarters.

Q-18. After I graduated from high school, I was awarded the TOPS Opportunity Award. My only qualifying ACT score was canceled during my second semester of college attendance. Am I still eligible for TOPS? How long will my TOPS award be paid?

A. You are no longer eligible for a TOPS award, and no further payments will be paid. You will not be required to repay any TOPS award amounts that have already been paid. The date LOSFA received notification of the ACT score being canceled will determine whether you will receive one more payment of your TOPS award. For more information, you should email LOSFA at custserv@la.gov.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Q-19. What is the application for TOPS?

A. To apply for a TOPS scholarship, you must submit one of the following:

1. You must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) unless you can demonstrate that you do not qualify for federal grant aid (Pell Grant). We recommend that all students submit the FAFSA. The most direct way to file the FAFSA is via the Internet at www.fafsa.gov. The paper FAFSA may also be used.

FAFSA on the Web:

If you have any problems with filing the FAFSA on the Web at www.fafsa.gov, including problems obtaining or using the **FSA ID** from Federal Student Aid, you should contact the FAFSA hotline at 1800-433-3243 for assistance. Both you and one of your parents must have and use an FSA ID to submit the FAFSA on the Web.

Be sure that the name that you use on the FAFSA exactly matches your name on file with your high school and the name you use on the ACT. For example, if your high school records state that your name is John Q. Smith, your ACT and your FAFSA should use the name John Q. Smith, not John Smith, not John Quincy Smith, and not Quincy Smith. If your name differs in the slightest way in any of these documents, the determination of your eligibility for TOPS will be delayed**. Your date of birth, home address, and email address must also be the same.**

Once the application has been submitted, the Web site will prompt you to print and keep a copy of the confirmation page. MAKE SURE YOU COMPLETE THE PROCESS BY SUBMITTING THE APPLICATION AND PRINTING THE CONFIRMATION PAGE. **IF THE CONFIRMATION PAGE DOES NOT APPEAR, THE APPLICATION HAS NOT BEEN SUBMITTED.** SAVE THE PRINTOUT OF THE CONFIRMATION PAGE TO PROVE THE DATE THE APPLICATION WAS SUBMITTED.

You should receive a **Student Aid Report** (SAR) confirming the receipt of the application within a few days. You should retain a copy of the SAR.

Paper FAFSA:

If you submit the FAFSA on the paper form, keep a copy of the FAFSA and send the FAFSA via certified or registered mail and keep the documentation showing the date it was mailed. You should receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) confirming the receipt of the application within a few weeks. Retain a copy of the SAR.

If you have any concerns about your FAFSA or whether it was received by the federal processor, you may call the FAFSA hotline at 1-800-433-3243 for assistance.

For a paper FAFSA, call the FAFSA hotline at 1-800-433-3243 or print it from the FAFSA on the Web site.

TOPS On-Line Application:

If you can demonstrate that you do not qualify for federal grant aid, you may submit the TOPS On-Line Application on the LOSFA Web site (**https://www.osfa.la.gov/TOPSonlineapp**). The On-Line Application requires you to certify that you do not qualify for federal grant aid, and to certify your

citizenship, residency and criminal conviction status. Once the application has been submitted, PRINT AND SAVE A COPY OF THE CONFIRMATION to prove the date you submitted the application.

The TOPS On-Line application requires that you provide a social security number. Your social security number will be encrypted immediately after you click on submit, and it will not be visible to LOSFA staff. It will only be used by programming to match your application with your student transcript data.

Be sure that the name that you use on the TOPS On-Line Application exactly matches your name on file with your high school and the name you used on the ACT and the name you used when registering for any dual enrollment classes while you were in high school. For example, if your high school records state that your name is John Q. Smith, your ACT and your TOPS On-Line Application should use the name John Q. Smith, not John Smith, not John Quincy Smith, and not Quincy Smith. If your name differs in the slightest way in any of these documents, the determination of your eligibility for TOPS will be delayed. Your date of birth, home address, and email address must also be the same.

NOTE: If you have already submitted a complete FAFSA, you will not be allowed to submit a TOPS On Line Application.

If you experience problems completing your TOPS On Line Application, send an e-mail to LOSFA at **custserv@la.gov**.

Q-20. What is the deadline for applying for TOPS?

A. The deadline for receipt of a TOPS application for the full TOPS award is July 1, or the next business day if July 1 falls on a weekend, following the one year anniversary of high school graduation. If you are a 2020 high school graduate, you must file your application so that it is received by the federal processor by July 1, 2021, to receive TOPS funding. However, no payment of a TOPS award will be made until the initial FAFSA or on-line application has been received and you have been determined eligible for a TOPS award.

If your initial FAFSA or on-line application is received after July 1 immediately following your graduation from high school, the payment of your TOPS award could be delayed depending on the date your application is received and the date you enroll for the first time as a full-time student in an eligible college or university.

If you enroll for the first time as a full-time student before you are determined eligible for a TOPS award, you must meet the TOPS Continuing Eligibility Requirements to receive payments of your TOPS award after the first semester, quarter or term of your full-time enrollment at an eligible college or university.

If you are a 2020 high school graduate and your initial application is received from July 2, 2021 through September 1, 2021, you will be eligible to receive seven semesters of TOPS funding beginning with the 2020-2021 academic year. You must also meet TOPS Continuing Eligibility Requirements if you attend college during the 2020-2021 academic year.

If you are a 2020 high school graduate and your application is received from September 2, 2021 through October 29, 2021, you will be eligible to receive six semesters of TOPS funding beginning with the 2020-2021 academic year. You must also meet TOPS Continuing Eligibility Requirements if you attend college during the 2020-2021 academic year.

If you are a 2020 high school graduate and your application is received after October 29, 2021, you are ineligible for any TOPS award. There are no exceptions, waivers or appeals.

Q-21. Is there a different deadline to file a FAFSA for a high school graduate who first enrolls as a fulltime student in an eligible Louisiana college and then enrolls in an out-of-state college?

A. No. The deadline is the same as for all other students who enroll for the first time as full-time students in eligible Louisiana colleges.

Q-22. Is there a different deadline to file a FAFSA for a high school graduate who first enrolls as a fulltime student in an eligible out-of-state college?

A. Yes. If you otherwise meet the TOPS requirements, including the academic and enrollment requirements for continuation of the award, your FAFSA must be received by July 1 immediately following the academic year you enroll in an eligible Louisiana college. Your application will be accepted if it is received no later than 60 days after the July 1st deadline, but your award will be reduced by one semester. If your application is received more than 61 but no later than 120 days after the July 1st deadline, your award will be reduced by two semesters. (See Questions 45 and148 for eligibility requirements for students who attend out-of-state colleges.)

For example, you are a 2020 high school graduate and you enroll for the first time as a full-time student at an accredited out-of-state college for the fall semester of 2020 and then you enroll as a full-time student at an eligible Louisiana college for the spring semester of 2021. Your deadline would be July 1, 2021 for the full award or no later than 120 days after the July 1 deadline for a reduced award.

Q-23. Is there a different deadline to file a FAFSA for a high school graduate who joins the U.S. Armed Forces and enters on active duty within one year of graduation?

A. Yes. If you enter on active duty with the U.S. Armed Forces within one year of graduation and before you enroll as a full-time college student, your FAFSA must be received by the federal processor no later than one year from the date you separated from active duty.

Note that you must enroll as a first-time, full-time student no later than the semester or term immediately following the one year anniversary of your separation from active duty.

The U.S. Armed Forces include the Navy, Marine Corps, Army, Air Force and Coast Guard.

Q-24. What happens if a military member fails to apply by the deadline?

A. If the federal processor receives your FAFSA or if you complete the On-Line Application after the deadline but within 120 days of the deadline, and you have met all the other TOPS eligibility requirements,

you will be eligible for a TOPS Award reduced by one or two semesters of eligibility. If the FAFSA or On-Line Application is late from one to 60 days, your award will be reduced by one semester of eligibility. If the FAFSA or On-Line Application is 61 to 120 days late, your award will be reduced by two semesters of eligibility.

If the FAFSA or On-Line Application is 121 or more days late, you are ineligible for a TOPS award.

Q-25. Is there a certain year FAFSA that I must file? If so, how do I know that I am completing the correct year FAFSA?

A. You should submit a FAFSA for the academic year immediately following your graduation from high school. This will ensure you are considered for a TOPS award even if you do not enroll in a Louisiana college the academic year after you graduate. You should submit the FAFSA even if you intend to enroll at an out-of-state college or sit out a year before enrolling in a Louisiana college. For example: If you are a 2020 graduate, you should submit the FAFSA for the 2020-2021 academic year.

Q-26. Is the FAFSA the only form I need to fill out to apply for TOPS?

A. Yes, in most cases. Some applicants may be required to submit other documentation, such as: high school and college transcripts, residency affidavits and required supporting documentation, the Application to Return from an Out-of-State College for students returning from out-of-state colleges, permanent residency or citizenship documentation, etc. If additional information is required to process your application, LOSFA will ask you for the documentation required.

All documentation and certifications necessary to establish your initial eligibility and award level, including, but not limited to, high school and/or college transcripts and certifications, copies of student aid reports, applicant confirmation forms, promissory notes, ACT and/or SAT scores, residency affidavits, proof of citizenship or permanent residency status and other documents that may be utilized in determining eligibility, must be received by LOSFA no later than January 15 immediately following the final deadline for receipt of your FAFSA or on-line application. If the required documentation is not received by that deadline, it will not be used to determine your initial eligibility or award level.

Q-27. My parents told me that they cannot complete their taxes by the state deadline for TOPS of July 1 and they are applying by completing the FAFSA. What should I do?

A. The FAFSA for 2020 high school graduates will be available as early as October 1, 2019, and students and their parents will be able to use their 2018 tax returns to complete the form. Because you will be using prior-prior year tax returns, this should not be a problem. However, if your parents are filing their tax returns more than one year late, they should use their best estimate using W-2 forms, year-end accounting reports, or other income reports. See the FAFSA instructions for guidance.

Q-28. Who is eligible to file a TOPS On-Line Application?

A. You can only file the TOPS On-Line Application if you can demonstrate that you do not qualify for federal grant aid because of your family's financial condition. You can determine if you may qualify for federal grant aid by using FinAid's Financial Aid Estimator available on the Internet at

www.finaid.org/calculators or the U.S. Department of Education's FAFSA4caster at www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov/.

NOTE: You and your parents should be aware that you will not be considered for any federal financial aid programs, including Pell and other federal grants, student loans, and the federal work study program, or for the Louisiana GO Grant if you do not complete the FAFSA.

Q-29. Must I reapply for TOPS after each semester or once a year?

A. You must file a FAFSA or a renewal FAFSA annually so that it is received by the final deadline of July 1, or the next business day if July 1 falls on a weekend, **every academic year** unless you can demonstrate that you do not qualify for federal grant aid because of your family's financial condition. If you can demonstrate that you do not qualify for federal grant aid because of your family's financial condition, you are not required to submit a renewal FAFSA. TOPS does not provide a grace period after the July 1 deadline for a continuing student to file a FAFSA or renewal FAFSA.

A correction can be made to a FAFSA at any time, and corrections do not change the original FAFSA receipt date for purposes of TOPS.

Q-30. If I submitted my paper Free Application for Federal Student Aid, sent the information by UPS overnight delivery and have the receipt that it was delivered by July 1, but the federal application receipt date is July 3, what should I do?

A. You should submit to LOSFA a copy of the proof of mailing along with a written explanation of the above circumstances. We encourage you to obtain and retain proof of mailing if the electronic application is not used. The TOPS rules limit proof of mailing to:

1. A certificate of mailing, registered, certified, certified/return receipt requested, priority or overnight mail receipt from the U S. Postal Service, or other authorized mail carriers such as UPS and Federal Express, which is dated prior to the state's final deadline.
2. The Student Aid Report (SAR) or the Institutional Student Information Report (ISIR), produced by the federal processor, shows that the original application was received by the state's final deadline.
3. The federal processor provides verbal or written verification to LOSFA that the original application was received by the state's final deadline.
4. A printed copy of the electronic receipt for a FAFSA filed on the Web shows that the original application was received by the final deadline.
5. A printed copy of the electronic receipt for an On-Line Application shows that the original application was received by the final deadline.
6. LOSFA's On-Line Application submission confirmation code corresponds to a LOSFA database transaction by the final deadline.

No other form of verification, including notarized or certified statements, will be accepted as proof of compliance with the deadline requirement.

Q-31. If I submitted a FAFSA on the Web but the federal processor does not report it to LOSFA or the federal processor has no record of the application, what documentation can I use as proof of compliance?

A. You should keep the following documentation as evidence of having filed the FAFSA electronically:

1. A printed copy of the FAFSA that was transmitted showing a date of entry prior to the state's final deadline; or
2. A printed copy of the confirmation showing the FAFSA was received, having a date of entry prior to the state's final deadline; or
3. Confirmation from the federal processor that the application was received by the state's final deadline.
4. Correspondence from the federal processor confirming that electronic problems/issues prevented processing.

Q-32. Is there a fee charged with or associated with filing the FAFSA?

A. No, federal law prohibits the charging of a fee to file the FAFSA (FREE Application for Federal Student Aid). To avoid fees and possible scams, you should file the FAFSA directly to the federal processor through the Internet at www.fafsa.gov or submit the paper form directly to the federal processor.

If a Web site charges a fee for filing the FAFSA, it is highly unlikely that you will receive any benefit for paying the fee. The Web sites that do charge fees for filing the FAFSA are not associated with the federal government and filing a FAFSA through them may result in delays processing the FAFSA and unnecessary expenses. Some sites simply take your money and your FAFSA is NOT filed.

If you need help filing your FAFSA, LOSFA will be conducting FAFSA completion workshops throughout the state starting in October and continuing throughout the academic year. You are encouraged to file as early as possible to maximize your eligibility for various sources of financial aid and to allow time for processing any corrections that may be necessary. Check our website (www.osfa.la.gov) periodically or follow us on Twitter and Facebook to find out when and where.

Check carefully to ensure that you are using the correct Web site before entering your personal and family data.

AWARD AMOUNTS

Q-33. How much does the TOPS Opportunity Award pay to pursue an academic undergraduate degree?

A. Payment of TOPS Awards is contingent upon appropriations by the Louisiana Legislature. See the chart on LOSFA's website at http://www.osfa.la.gov/MainSitePDFs/TOPS_Payment_Amounts.pdf for TOPS payment amounts at specific colleges and universities for the 2019-2020 academic year. The TOPS Award Amounts in the future will be the same as those provided in this chart unless the Legislature specifically appropriates additional funding for TOPS.

Q-34. What is the value of a TOPS award?

A. It depends on the college attended and the award made to you. See the chart on LOSFA's website at http://www.osfa.la.gov/MainSitePDFs/TOPS_Payment_Amounts.pdf for the amount paid at different colleges and universities during the 2019-2020 academic year.

Q-35. Can I use TOPS for summer school?

A. Payment of a TOPS Award is contingent upon appropriations by the Louisiana Legislature. If funding is available, LOSFA will update its website and its social media pages, and the financial aid office at your school will be notified.

The TOPS Opportunity, Performance and Honors Awards will not pay for summer school **except** when funding for summer awards is available and when:

- the summer session is required in your degree program for graduation and you enrolled for at least the minimum number of hours required for the degree program, or
- you can complete your program's graduation requirements in the summer session, or
- the course(s) taken during the summer session is required for graduation in the program in which you are enrolled and is only offered during the summer session, or
- the summer session is conducted for a technical program in which you are enrolled, or
- you have earned at least 60 hours.

NOTE: An award made for summer school expends one semester or term of eligibility.

Check with the financial aid office at your school.

If you are pursuing a technical certificate or diploma or degree, you should read the TOPS Tech Section.

Q-36. How many semesters can I receive a TOPS award?

A. You may receive TOPS Awards for up to eight (8) semesters or twelve (12) quarters unless:

- Your award is reduced by one or two semesters because your application was submitted after the deadline; or
- You qualified for TOPS based on an ACT score achieved after the ACT national test date in April but before July 1 immediately after graduation; or
- You enrolled in an out-of-state college; or
- Your award is reduced by one or two semesters because your Application to Return from an Outof-State College was submitted after the deadline.

If you have a permanent disability or enter on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, you may be allowed to attend part time, but your total TOPS award may not exceed the equivalent of eight (8) semesters or twelve (12) quarters. If TOPS has already paid for a semester or term during which you are called to active duty, the semester or term will not be charged as a semester of TOPS used by you. A Request for Exception form with instructions describing the documentation required can be found on the LOSFA Web site (**www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform**), obtained directly from LOSFA, or by emailing custserv@la.gov.

Q-37. Can I use TOPS to pursue a second undergraduate degree?

A. No. If you successfully complete an academic undergraduate degree at the baccalaureate level and have remaining TOPS eligibility, you CANNOT use the remaining eligibility to pursue a second academic undergraduate degree at the baccalaureate level; however, you may use the remainder of your award to attend graduate or professional school. You MAY use the TOPS Opportunity, Performance or Honors Award for technical programs, cosmetology school or proprietary school, and you may use your award to complete more than one such program, provided you have not exceeded your total eligibility of eight semesters or 12 quarters.

Q-38. Can I use TOPS for graduate or professional school?

A. Yes. If you completed an undergraduate degree without exhausting all 8 semesters or 12 quarters of eligibility, you may receive the period of eligibility remaining if you enroll in an eligible graduate or professional school no later than the fall semester following the one year anniversary of completion of your undergraduate degree and have met the requirements for continuation of your award.

Q-39. How does my college get the money for my TOPS award?

A. TOPS awards are paid directly to the postsecondary institution the student is attending. Institutions submit payment requests to LOSFA for students who are enrolled full-time on the 15th class day (semester schools) or the 10th class day (quarter schools), or who enroll full-time after the 14th class day (semester schools), or the 9th class day (quarter schools). Funds are sent directly to the institutions either electronically or with a paper check as soon as funds are available for distribution.

Q-40. When is my TOPS award disbursed to my school?

A. Your school will submit a payment request to LOSFA for your TOPS award after the 14th class day (semester schools) or the 9th class day (term or quarter schools). LOSFA will pay your award to your school after it receives and processes the invoice.

Q-41. How does the university get the TOPS money to me?

A. This varies from institution to institution. You should contact the bursar or the financial aid officer at your school. Normally, your school applies the award to charges you owe the school and the balance, if any, will be remitted to you.

Q-42. Can I use TOPS in conjunction with other types of scholarships?

A. Yes. You can be awarded scholarships, other financial aid, and TOPS up to the cost of attendance for your college or university. Cost of attendance is determined by each college and university based on federal guidelines and can include tuition and fees, on-campus room and board (or a housing and food allowance for off-campus students), and allowances for books, supplies, transportation, child care, costs

related to a disability, and miscellaneous expenses. Your college or university will deduct any amounts you owe for tuition, fees, and other charges, and it will remit the remainder to you.

If the total of your scholarships, state and federal aid, and TOPS Award exceed the cost of attendance, your school will reduce any loans (if applicable) first and it will continue reducing your financial assistance until your awards do not exceed the cost of attendance. If the TOPS Award is totally eliminated, the semester or term will not be counted toward the maximum semesters or terms allowed.

Q-43. Can I use the TOPS Opportunity, Performance or Honors Award to enroll in an occupational, skill or technical program?

A. Yes. See the Section entitled TOPS Tech Award for additional information.

Q-44. Can I enroll for the first time as a full-time student at an out-of-state postsecondary institution and still qualify for TOPS?

A. Yes. If you enrolled for the first time as a full-time student no later than the semester immediately following the first anniversary of your graduation from high school in an out-of-state postsecondary institution accredited by a regional accrediting organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and thereafter returned to Louisiana and enrolled as a full-time student in an eligible college or university, you may be eligible for TOPS. You must have met all the requirements for an award at the time of graduation from high school and met the requirements for continuation of the award while enrolled in an out-of-state college or university. If you did not enroll full-time, maintain continuous enrollment, or earn 24 hours during the academic year(s) you were enrolled out of state due to circumstances beyond your immediate control, you may apply for an exception to any or all of these requirements. A Request for Exception form with instructions describing the documentation required can be found on the LOSFA Web site at (www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform) or obtained directly from LOSFA or by emailing custserv@la.gov.

If you did enroll at a regionally accredited out-of-state college or university, you must apply for a TOPS award by doing all of the following:

1. Submit a FAFSA or, if you can demonstrate that you do not qualify for federal grant aid (Pell Grant) and do not want any other federal aid such as student loans, a TOPS On-Line Application no later than July 1 immediately following the academic year in which you enroll during a regular semester, quarter or term in an eligible Louisiana institution or no later than 60 days after the July 1st deadline (Your award will be reduced by one semester.), or 61 days but no later than 120 days after the July 1st deadline (Your award will be reduced by two semesters.). (You are not considered to have returned to Louisiana if you enroll only in a summer session, quarter, term, or intersession.); and

2. Submit the TOPS *Application to Return from an Out-of-State College* no later than July 1 immediately following the academic year in which you enroll during a regular semester, quarter or term in an eligible Louisiana institution for a full award. LOSFA will accept your application if it is received no later than 60 days after the July 1st deadline, but your award will be reduced by one semester; or 61 days but no later than 120 days after the July 1st deadline, but your award will be reduced by two semesters. You should submit your Application with your official out-of-state

transcript(s). You are not considered to have returned to Louisiana if you enroll only in a summer session, quarter, term, or intersession. The form is available on the LOSFA Web site at (www.osfa.la.gov/sgforms); and

3. Submit all supporting documentation, including an official **final** transcript for each out-of-state college or university attended. The transcripts must show each semester you attended an out-ofstate college or university and include all hours attempted and/or earned. Submit all of your supporting documents with the TOPS Application to Return from an Out-of-State College. If it is not possible to submit all documentation at the time you submit the application before your July 1 deadline, submit the supporting documents so that they are received no later than **January 15th** immediately following the July 1 deadline.

4. If you will require an exception to the requirements to enroll full-time, maintain continuous enrollment, or earn 24 hours during the academic year while you were enrolled out-of-state, you should submit your Request for Exception form along with all supporting documentation at the time you submit your *Application to Return from an Out-of-State College.* You can find the TOPS Request for Exception Form with instructions describing the various circumstances that qualify for an exception and the documentation required on the LOSFA Web site at www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform or you can send an email to LOSFA at custserv@la.gov.

If your Application is not received by the July 1 deadline or during the 120 days after the deadline and/or the supporting documents, including the official final transcripts, are not received by the applicable deadline, the Application will be denied and you will permanently lose your TOPS award. There are no extensions or exceptions to these deadlines.

Your TOPS period of eligibility will be reduced by one semester for each semester that you enrolled as a full-time student in the out-of-state college or university. If you enroll as a full time student while out-ofstate and subsequently enroll as a part time student, you will be ineligible for a TOPS award unless you request and are granted an exception. See below.

You must enroll in a Louisiana college or university no later than the next semester or term, excluding summer sessions and intersessions, immediately following the last semester that you were enrolled in the out-of-state college or university, unless granted an exception for cause. You can find the TOPS Request for Exception Form with instructions describing the various circumstances that qualify for an exception and the documentation required on the LOSFA Web site at www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform or you can send an email to LOSFA at custserv@la.gov.

Q-45. Can my TOPS award be reinstated if I enroll for the first time as a full-time student at an eligible Louisiana college and then enroll at an out-of-state college?

A. Yes. If you were determined eligible for a TOPS award and enrolled by the deadline in an eligible Louisiana college, and then you enrolled full-time during a regular semester, quarter or term at an out-ofstate college accredited by a regional accrediting organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, and then returned to Louisiana and enrolled in an eligible Louisiana college during a regular semester, quarter or term, you may be eligible for reinstatement of your TOPS award. You are not considered to have enrolled in an out-of-state college if you enrolled only in a summer session, quarter,

term, or intersession. You must have met all the requirements for continuation of your award while enrolled in an out-of-state college or university. If you did not enroll full-time, maintain continuous enrollment, or earn 24 hours during the academic year due to circumstances beyond your immediate control, you may apply for an exception to the requirement. You can download a Request for Exception form with instructions describing the documentation required from LOSFA's Web site at (www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform), obtain the form directly LOSFA, or email custserv@la.gov.

See the answer to Question 44 for information on what you must to do to have your award reinstated.

Q-46. If I enroll part time in an out-of-state college after I graduate from high school and then enroll in an eligible Louisiana college by the semester immediately following the one year anniversary of my high school graduation, do I have to submit an Application to Return from an Out-of-State College?

A. No. You are not required to submit the Application to Return from an Out-of-State School because you were not enrolled full-time. **However, you must provide an official final transcript from your out-ofstate college to determine your cumulative grade point average.**

WARNING: If you fail to enroll as a full-time student in either the out-of-state college or in an eligible Louisiana college by the semester immediately following the one year anniversary of your high school graduation, you will be ineligible for a TOPS award unless you were unable to enroll due to a circumstance that is not within your immediate control and you request and are granted an exception to the initial enrollment requirement. You can download a Request for Exception form with instructions describing the documentation required from LOSFA's Web site at (www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform), obtain the form directly from LOSFA, or email custserv@la.gov.

NOTICE OF ELIGIBILITY

Q-47. Is there a schedule set up for sending out notice of TOPS eligibility?

A. **You cannot be determined eligible for a TOPS award unless your parent has given consent to releasing your high school information to LOSFA.** LOSFA must evaluate and confirm your graduation date, ACT/SAT score, residency, citizenship, high school academic data transmitted by the Louisiana State Department of Education's Student Transcript System (STS), and the FAFSA or On-Line Application. **It is very important that your name appears exactly the same on all of these records so that LOSFA can match all of your records to each other. For example, if your high school records state that your name is John Q. Smith, your ACT and your FAFSA should use the name John Q. Smith, not John Smith, not John Quincy Smith, and not Quincy Smith. Your date of birth, home address, and email address must also be the same. If your name differs in the slightest way in any of these documents, the determination of your eligibility for TOPS will be delayed.**

Eligibility is currently determined twice a week. Notice of your eligibility will be sent by email to the most recent email address LOSFA has as submitted on your FAFSA or in the Student Hub, and the email will be sent after processing. For most graduates, the notice will be sent in late June or early July. LOSFA will continue to determine eligibility throughout the year, but the majority of students receive their notice by mid-July.

Notices for home study completers, non-graduates, and graduates of out-of-state and out-of-country high schools will be sent out after the information required for processing has been received and a determination of eligibility has been made. Timing of these notices will also be dependent on receipt of certification from the Louisiana Department of Education, verification from out-of-state and out-of-country high schools, and/or the education departments of other states.

Q-48. What do I have to do to receive my TOPS award?

A. You must enroll as a full-time student in an eligible Louisiana college or university no later than the first semester following the one year anniversary of graduation from high school, excluding summer sessions. For instance, if you graduate from high school in May 2020, you must enroll as a full-time student in an eligible college or university no later than the fall semester of 2021.

You will be sent an email with a link to your award letter and to a document entitled "*Your Rights and Responsibilities*" when you are notified of your TOPS eligibility. This document will be available to you every time you log in to the LOSFA Student Hub, and you should refer to it for detailed information concerning the TOPS enrollment requirements which you must meet before the award is paid and the requirements for maintaining your award once you have enrolled in school. You are personally responsible for complying with these requirements. A copy of this document is also available on LOSFA's Web site at www.osfa.la.gov/TOPS.

Q-49. Do I have to notify LOSFA to accept my TOPS award?

A. No. The school you are attending full-time as of the 15th class day of the semester (10th class day at Louisiana Tech) will bill LOSFA for your TOPS award.

Q-50. I am a student. How can I check on my TOPS award status?

A. Once you register for an account on the LOSFA Student Hub at https://www.osfa.la.gov/studenthub.html, you will receive messages from LOSFA regarding what is needed to determine your eligibility for a TOPS award.

Your eligibility for a TOPS award cannot be determined until LOSFA has your ACT or SAT score, your STS data which includes all your high school courses and grades, and your complete FAFSA or On-line Application. **LOSFA will not have your academic data unless your parent or legal guardian has given consent (See Parental Consent on page 1.).**

Be sure that the name that you use on the FAFSA exactly matches your name on file with your high school and the name you use on the ACT. For example, if your high school records state that your name is John Q. Smith, your ACT and your FAFSA should use the name John Q. Smith, not John Smith, not John Quincy Smith, and not Quincy Smith. Your date of birth, home address, and email address must also be the same. If your name differs in the slightest way in any of these documents, the determination of your eligibility for TOPS will be delayed.

AWARD PAYMENT AND RENEWAL

Q-51. Do I need to apply for TOPS every year?

A. You are strongly encouraged to reapply annually for TOPS by completing the FAFSA or renewal FAFSA by July 1. You must complete the FAFSA each year if you qualify for federal grant aid. A student who is receiving other forms of federal and state financial aid must submit the FAFSA or Renewal FAFSA each year to be considered for those types of aid.

Q-52. What is the deadline to reapply for TOPS?

A. The renewal FAFSA for the upcoming academic year should be filed no later than July 1 each year to reapply for TOPS. The FAFSA for the upcoming academic year is available in October preceding the academic year for which you will be applying for TOPS and other student financial aid. (See www.FAFSA.ed.gov.)

Q-53. What happens if I miss the July 1 renewal deadline?

A. Your TOPS award will be eligible for renewal if you met the continuation requirements.

Q-54. I just received my fee bill. Why is my TOPS Opportunity award not paying for all of my tuition?

A. Payment of TOPS Awards is contingent upon appropriations by the Louisiana Legislature. See the chart on LOSFA's website at http://www.osfa.la.gov/MainSitePDFs/TOPS_Payment_Amounts.pdf for the amounts paid at specific colleges and universities for the 2018-2019 academic year. The TOPS Award Amounts in the future will be the same as those provided in this chart unless the Legislature specifically appropriates additional funding for TOPS.

Q-55. How many hours must I earn to renew my scholarship?

A. You must **earn** (**pass with a "D" or better**) 24 hours each academic year to retain your TOPS award. Failure to earn (pass with a "D" or better) 24 hours will result in permanent cancellation of your award unless you are granted an exception for cause. The academic year for the purpose of earning at least 24 hours begins with the fall semester and ends immediately before the next fall semester. It includes the summer sessions, terms, quarters and intersessions.

Q-56. Do my Advanced Placement or Dual Enrollment hours earned in high school count toward the 24 hours required for the academic year for TOPS renewal?

A. **No.** Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment hours were earned in high school so they do not count toward the 24 hours required for TOPS renewal. **HOWEVER, grades earned in dual enrollment will be included in the calculation of your TOPS cumulative grade point average after your first semester in college.**

Q-57. Do hours earned in a summer session or intersession count toward the 24 hours required for the academic year for TOPS renewal?

A. Yes. The college "academic year" for the TOPS requirement to earn at least 24 hours each academic year **begins with the fall semester**, quarter or term of the award year and concludes immediately before the next fall term commences. Hours earned at any time beginning with the fall semester, quarter or term and until the next fall semester, quarter or term commences, including summer session and intersession hours, will count toward the 24 hour requirement. Hours earned in summer school before you enroll for the first time as a full time student **DO NOT** count towards the 24 hour requirement for your first year of college.

If you have been awarded the TOPS Opportunity, Performance or Honors Award and you are enrolled in a technical program, you should read the Section on TOPS Tech beginning with Question 201.

Q-58. My college does not give credit for remedial hours. Do remedial hours count toward the 24 hours required for the academic year for TOPS renewal?

A. Yes. Remedial hours taken and passed during the academic year do count toward the 24 hours required even if your school reports a "P" for the remedial class. If you do not pass a remedial class, it will be treated as an "F" and will affect your TOPS Cumulative GPA.

Q-59. What GPA do I need to renew my TOPS Opportunity, Performance, or Honors Award?

A. To renew your award:

- You must maintain Steady Academic Progress (cumulative 2.00 GPA on a 4.00 scale) at the end of every semester, quarter, term, session or intersession for which grades are reported. If you do not maintain a 2.00, your award will be suspended for failure to maintain Steady Academic Progress (SAP).
- Your TOPS Cumulative Grade Point Average (Cum GPA) will be calculated on all coursework you have attempted, including grades earned for dual enrollment courses taken while in high school, summer session grades, remedial course grades and repeated course grades. LOSFA will determine whether you have met the requirements to continue to receive your TOPS Award at the end of each academic year. Your TOPS Cum GPA is calculated by LOSFA based on academic reports received from all schools that you have attended, and it could differ from the Cum GPA calculated by the school you currently attend.

  Note: Grades earned in dual enrollment courses will be included in the calculation of your TOPS Cum GPA after your first semester of college. If you resign from a dual enrollment course, the course will not be included in the Cum GPA calculation.

- **For the TOPS OPPORTUNITY AWARD:**
  1. If you have NOT earned at least 24 hours at the end of the academic year, you are required to have at least a 2.00 Cum GPA to meet SAP.
  2. If you have earned at least 24 hours at the end of the academic year, you must have at least the following Cum GPA at the end of the academic year:

     2.30 with 24 to 47 earned hours
     2.50 with 48 or more earned hours

- **For the TOPS PERFORMANCE/HONORS AWARD**
    1. If you have NOT earned at least 24 hours at the end of the academic year, you are required to have at least a 2.00 TOPS Cum GPA to meet SAP.
    2. If you have earned at least 24 hours by the end of the academic year, you must have at least a 3.00 TOPS Cum GPA.
    3. If you have been awarded the TOPS Performance or Honors award and you have less than a 3.00 TOPS Cum GPA at the end of the academic year, your award will be changed to Opportunity Award for the remaining period of eligibility and you will not receive the stipend that goes with your former award. Once you lose your Performance or Honors Award, you cannot regain it.

- You must achieve the TOPS Cum GPA required for the Opportunity Award at the end of the academic year or your TOPS Award will be suspended until you have regained academic standing and have achieved the required TOPS Cum GPA.
- If you do not achieve the required TOPS Cum GPA within two years from the end of the semester or quarter your award is suspended, your award will be permanently canceled. **There are no exceptions or waivers to this cancelation.**
- Note that if you request an exception to the requirement to earn 24 hours each year, to enroll full time, or to remain continuously enrolled and it is granted, the period of suspension for grades is not interrupted unless an exception is granted for military service. **Note that there are no exceptions to the TOPS Cum GPA requirements.**
- If you are enrolled in a technical program, you must have a 2.50 TOPS Cum GPA at the end of the academic year or your award will be suspended, regardless of the number of hours you have earned. If you do not achieve the required TOPS Cum GPA within one year from the end of the semester your award is suspended, your award will be permanently canceled.

See the answer to Question 57 for the definition of "academic year."

Q-60. I had a 1.95 GPA at the end of the fall semester. Why was my award suspended for the spring semester if the GPA is only checked at the end of the spring semester?

A. You must maintain Steady Academic Progress, which means that you must have a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.00, at the end of each semester/quarter/term/intersession/session. If you do not maintain Steady Academic Progress, your award will be suspended.

Q-61. My college transcript says that my cumulative GPA is 2.65, but LOSFA has my GPA for TOPS as 2.48. Why is this different?

A. There are many reasons why your GPA at your college is different than the GPA LOSFA has for your TOPS Award. Your TOPS cumulative GPA is based on ALL college courses you have ever enrolled in, including dual enrollment courses that you might have taken in high school and summer school courses (even if you took the courses at a different school). Your TOPS cumulative GPA also includes your grades in any courses that your college might have removed from your transcript because you took the course again and earned a higher grade (repeat/delete). There is also the possibility that LOSFA does not have grades that your college has for you. You should check the Student Hub to ensure that LOSFA has all grades that you have earned. For example, if you enrolled in and earned grades during a summer session

that are not on the Student Hub, your TOPS GPA will be affected. If you notice this problem or other discrepancies between your transcript(s) and records on the Student Hub, send an official copy of all of your college transcripts to LOSFA for review.

Q-62. What does it mean when my award is suspended?

A. It means your TOPS award will not be paid until you bring your grades up, but it does not mean that you have permanently lost your award. Even if your award is suspended, you must meet the continuation requirements to qualify for reinstatement, i.e.: you must enroll full-time, remain continuously enrolled and earn at least 24 hours each academic year, unless you are granted an exception to these requirements.

Your award will be reinstated if you achieve the required Cumulative Grade Point Average within the time allowed. (See the answer to Question 59.) Upon reinstatement, you will be eligible for payment of the remaining semesters of your TOPS eligibility.

Q-63. I had 24 hours with a 2.29 cumulative GPA at the end of the spring semester/quarter. Do I need to go to summer school?

A. You must have a TOPS cumulative GPA of **at least** 2.30 to renew your Opportunity award at the end of the academic year. Because you have earned 24 hours, you do not have to go to summer school to earn the required number of hours. HOWEVER, your TOPS cumulative GPA of 2.29 is less than the required GPA, so if you do not go to intersession and/or summer school and raise your TOPS cumulative GPA to at least a 2.30, your TOPS Award will be suspended. **There is no rounding up of a cumulative GPA for TOPS.**

Q-64. What is the cumulative GPA required for continuation of my Performance or Honors Award?

A. You must have a TOPS cumulative GPA of at least 3.00 at the end of each academic year if you have earned at least 24 hours at that time.

Q-65. What happens if I do not have at least a 3.00 TOPS cumulative GPA for continuation of my Performance or Honors Award?

A. If you do not maintain the minimum 3.00 cumulative GPA required for renewal of a Performance or Honors Award but you do have the cumulative GPA that is required to renew an Opportunity Award, your award will be reduced to an Opportunity Award. Once your award has been reduced to the Opportunity award, your Performance or Honors award will **not** be reinstated and you are no longer eligible to receive stipends. If your cumulative GPA is below the minimum required to renew an Opportunity Award, your award will be suspended. If your award is reinstated, you will receive the Opportunity award for your remaining semesters of eligibility. See Questions 60-62 regarding suspension of awards.

Q-66. My award was suspended for GPA, but my friend's award was canceled for failing to earn 24 hours. What is the difference between suspension and cancelation?

A. If your TOPS award is suspended for failure to earn the required TOPS cumulative GPA or for failure to maintain Steady Academic Progress, you will have an opportunity to have your award reinstated once you

have attained the minimum required TOPS cumulative GPA if the period of ineligibility does not exceed two years from the end of the semester the award is suspended (one year from the end of the semester or quarter the award is suspended for the TOPS Tech Award).

If your award is canceled due to failure to earn at least 24 hours during the academic year, you are not eligible for reinstatement of your award unless you are granted an exception. If your award is canceled and you can provide documentation that circumstances beyond your control prevented you from earning at least 24 hours, you can apply for an exception. Your Request for Exception form must be received no later than six months from the date of the email notifying you of the cancelation of your TOPS award. Even if the exception is approved, your award may still be suspended for failure to earn the required GPA or for failure to maintain Steady Academic Progress. A Request for Exception form with instructions describing the documentation required can be found on the LOSFA Web site at (www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform), obtained directly from LOSFA, or by emailing custserv@la.gov.

Q-67. How will I know if my TOPS award has been renewed?

A. You can check your renewal status by creating an account on the Student Hub at **https://www.osfa.la.gov/studenthub.html.** LOSFA does not send TOPS award renewal letters.

Q-68. I have the TOPS Opportunity, Performance or Honors Award. Will TOPS pay for me to attend summer school?

A. Payment of a TOPS Award is contingent upon appropriations by the Louisiana Legislature. If funding is available, LOSFA will update its website and its social media pages, and the financial aid office at your school will be notified.
TOPS will **ONLY** pay for summer school if you are enrolled in a **Qualified Summer Session** and there are sufficient funds available for that purpose. A Qualified Summer Session is one which your institution certifies that:

- The summer session is required in your degree program for graduation and you enrolled for at least the minimum number of hours required for the degree program, or
- You will graduate in the summer session, or
- The courses taken during the summer session are required by your degree program and are only offered during the summer session, or
- You are enrolled in a technical program, or • You have earned at least 60 hours.

TOPS will not pay for the summer session immediately following high school graduation. For TOPS to pay for a summer session, you must have been enrolled as a full-time student in a semester, quarter or term prior to the summer session.

TOPS payment for a Qualified Summer Session will expend one full semester of TOPS eligibility. Performance and Honors award recipients will receive their stipends during a Qualified Summer Session.

See the Section entitled TOPS Tech Award if you are enrolled in a non-academic program of study.

Q-69. I enrolled for the first time as a full-time student at an out-of-state school. Can I come back to Louisiana and receive a TOPS award?

A. Yes.

SEE THE ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS 45 AND 46 FOR INFORMATION REGARDING REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES.

Q-70. If I enroll in an eligible out-of-state college AFTER my first year of receiving TOPS at an eligible Louisiana institution, can I return to Louisiana and still receive my TOPS award in the future?

A. Yes.

SEE THE ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS 44 AND 45 FOR INFORMATION REGARDING REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES.

Q-71. I just completed my 4 year enlistment in the Army. Can I receive a TOPS award?

A. Yes, if you:

1. Joined the Armed Forces and were on active duty within one year of high school graduation. You must enroll in an eligible institution by the first semester, quarter, term following the one year anniversary of your separation from active duty. To be eligible, you must have received an honorable discharge or a general discharge under honorable conditions and must submit the FAFSA or the TOPS Online Application so that it is received by the federal processor no later than one year after separation from active duty. You must provide LOSFA with your DD-214 demonstrating the dates you were on active duty and the character of your discharge (if any) in order for LOSFA to determine whether you are eligible for a TOPS award.

OR

2. Are a 2003 or later graduate who first enrolls as a full-time student in an eligible Louisiana institution and then voluntarily enlists and enters on active duty as a member of the regular U.S. Armed Forces. You must request an exception no later than six months from the date of the letter notifying you of the cancelation of your TOPS award. You may also request an exception prior to entering on active duty, and provide to LOSFA the documentation required to receive an exception.

Q-72. After I completed my first 4 year enlistment in the Army, I reenlisted. Can I receive a TOPS award?

A. Yes, if you reenlisted and maintained continuous active duty status and then enrolled as a full time student at an eligible college no later than the semester, quarter, term following the one year anniversary of your separation from active duty.

Q-73. I was just notified that I am being called to active duty during the current semester. What happens to my TOPS award?

A. You must request an exception as soon as possible, but no later than six months from the date of the notification that your TOPS award has been canceled. If TOPS has already paid for the semester, quarter or term during which you are called to active duty, the semester, quarter or term will not be charged as a

semester, quarter or term of TOPS used by you. A Request for Exception form with instructions describing the required documentation can be found on the LOSFA Web site at (www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform) or obtained directly from LOSFA.

If your TOPS award is suspended for failure to earn the required grade point average at the time you are called to active duty, the period of suspension will be extended by the length of time you are on active duty, including any periods of reenlistment.

Q-74. I have been offered a CO-OP/Internship for the upcoming academic year. What happens to my TOPS award if I accept it?

A. A CO-OP/Internship may be considered an exceptional educational opportunity, if your academic dean certifies in writing that the CO-OP/Internship is considered an exceptional educational opportunity. An exception for an exceptional educational opportunity may be granted for up to two consecutive semesters or the required program length.

Q-75. I am a nursing student. I will be in clinicals next semester. Do I still have to take 12 hours for the semester to be full-time?

A. If your college considers you to be enrolled full-time (although less than 12 hours), you may enroll in the number of hours required by your program of study. You are considered program full-time and will not be required to earn 24 hours for the academic year. To be considered program full-time, your school must certify that you are considered to be enrolled full-time in your program of study when it bills LOSFA for your TOPS award. Ask the Dean of your current program of study to send an email or note to the financial aid office to let them know that you are considered enrolled full time in your program of study.

Q-76. How many semesters will my TOPS award pay?

A. The Opportunity, Performance and Honors awards are paid for up to 8 semesters or 12 quarters unless:

- Your TOPS award is reduced by one or two semesters because your application was submitted after the deadline; or
- You qualified for TOPS based on an ACT score achieved after the deadline but before July 1 immediately after graduation or in some very limited circumstances, before September 30 immediately after graduation; or
- Your award is reduced for semester(s) enrolled in an eligible out-of-state college; or
- Your award is reduced by one or two semesters because your Application to Return from an Outof-State College was submitted after the deadline.

TOPS Tech awards are paid up to two years. See the TOPS Tech Award Section starting with Question 201 for additional information.

Once a semester, quarter, or term of the TOPS award is paid, it counts toward your total award, even if you are not able to complete the semester, quarter or term. (Students who are called to active duty during a semester do NOT lose a semester, quarter or term of eligibility, even if the award has been paid for the

semester, quarter or term.) However, if you receive an exception for the semester, quarter or term **AND** your college reimburses LOSFA for some or all the amount paid by TOPS for that semester, the amount reimbursed will be available to you for a subsequent semester, quarter or term provided you have enrolled full-time and met the cumulative GPA requirement.

Q-77. Are there any exceptions to the maximum number of semesters allowed for TOPS?

A. Yes. If you are granted an exception based on a permanent disability or if you are on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, you may enroll on a part time basis. The total TOPS payments may not exceed the equivalent of eight semesters of payments of the full TOPS award. See the Permanent Disability Section starting with Question 167.

In addition, if you cannot complete a semester **AND** you resign from all courses **AND** you receive an exception for that semester **AND** the college reimburses LOSFA for some or all the amount paid by TOPS for that semester, the amount reimbursed will be available to you for a subsequent semester, provided you have enrolled full-time and met the cumulative GPA requirement.

Q-78. I completed my bachelor's degree in less than 8 semesters. Do I lose the remaining semesters of my TOPS award?

A. No, you do not lose the remaining semesters. You may receive your award for any remaining semesters or quarters of eligibility for graduate or professional study. To be eligible for payments for graduate or professional school, you must enroll no later than the fall semester immediately following the first anniversary of your completion of an undergraduate degree and you must have met the requirements for continued eligibility. You may not use your remaining eligibility to work on a second bachelor's degree.

Q-79. How much will my TOPS award pay for graduate school?

A. Payment of TOPS Awards is contingent upon appropriations by the Louisiana Legislature. See the chart on LOSFA's website at http://www.osfa.la.gov/MainSitePDFs/TOPS_Payment_Amounts.pdf for the amounts paid during the 2018-2019 academic year.

CITIZENSHIP REQUIREMENT

Q-80. I am not a U.S. citizen. Am I eligible for TOPS?

A. At the time you graduate from high school, you must either be a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident as defined by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services to receive TOPS. See Question 81 for additional information.

Q-81. What documentation can I provide to LOSFA to verify my permanent residency status or citizenship?

A. If you are a permanent resident, you may provide a copy of one of the following:

1. Permanent Resident Card - Form I-551, or
2. Application for Naturalization and/or Certificate of Naturalization, or
3. A foreign passport page indicating initial admission as a permanent resident, or
4. A re-entry permit indicating permanent residency.

If you are a citizen, you must provide a copy of one of the following:

1. A U. S. birth certificate;
2. A Certificate of Citizenship; or
3. A Certificate of Naturalization; or
4. A U.S. passport; or
5. A Consular Report of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the United States of America.

If you believe that you are a permanent resident or a citizen and you do not have one of the listed documents, you should send an email to LOSFA at custserv@la.gov.

An "Employment Authorization Document" issued by the USCIS CANNOT be used to establish citizenship.

Q-82. Are there any exceptions or circumstances that would allow a waiver of the citizenship or permanent resident status requirement?

A. No. However, the Commission recognizes that the process for applying for permanent resident status is often delayed and can be very time consuming. For these reasons, it has authorized LOSFA to consider the circumstances of a student who applied for permanent residency before graduating from high school.

If you applied for permanent resident status before high school graduation, you should contact LOSFA by email at custserv@la.gov. Your TOPS award will not be paid until you have been granted permanent residency status and LOSFA determines that you have met the initial and continuing eligibility requirements.

Q-83. Will a student who has an H-4 visa be eligible for a TOPS award?

A. No. This is a visa for a spouse or child of a nonimmigrant temporary worker who has an H-1, H-2 or H3 visa. This student is not a permanent resident.

Q-84. Will a student with an F-1 visa be eligible for a TOPS award?

A. No. This is a visa for a student who seeks to study in the United States. To qualify for this visa, a student must maintain a permanent residence abroad which the student has no intention of giving up.

CORE CURRICULUM

The TOPS Core Curriculum Reference Tables used in the Student Transcript System are available on the Department of Education's LEADS Portal, https://leads.doe.louisiana.gov/ptl/ on the STSQ12 report and on LOSFA's Web site, osfa.la.gov. Also available on these sites are the Course Code Tables.

Q-85. Do I need to take the TOPS Core Curriculum or the CORE 4 Curriculum?

A. You have the option to follow the Career Diploma path or the Basic Core. Students who entered the 9th grade in the 2015-2016 academic year have the option of the TOPS University Diploma or the Career Diploma. You should periodically discuss course requirements with your high school guidance counselor to ensure that you're on track to graduate AND to be eligible to receive TOPS.

You should create an account on the Louisiana Student Hub (https://www.osfa.la.gov/studenthub.html) and keep up with your progress toward meeting the requirements for a TOPS Award. Note that LOSFA will not be able to provide you with this information unless your parents provide consent for LOSFA to receive your academic data. See Parental Consent on Page 1.

Q-86. If my high school does not offer a TOPS core course, can it be waived?

A. No, a TOPS core course cannot be waived, except under limited circumstances for students with disabilities and/or exceptionalities. See the Answers to Questions 197-200.

You are required to complete the TOPS core curriculum requirements. If your school does not offer a course, other arrangements such as correspondence, distance learning, or dual enrollment for college credit must be made to acquire the course before graduation if you want to qualify for a TOPS award. These classes must be listed on your official high school transcript at the time of graduation to be considered for the TOPS core curriculum. **NOTE:** grades earned in dual enrollment courses will be included in the calculation of your TOPS cumulative GPA after your first semester in college. Any grades you've earned for college courses prior to your first semester as a full time student will be included in this calculation. High grades in these dual enrollment or summer courses will help to increase your GPA, while lower grades will decrease your GPA. If you have not maintained Steady Academic Progress, your TOPS award will be suspended (the award will not be paid the next semester) until Steady Academic Progress has been achieved.

Q-87. I graduated from an out-of-state/out-of-country high school. Do I have to meet the TOPS core curriculum requirements to be eligible for a TOPS Award?

A. No. You are NOT required to meet the TOPS core curriculum requirements to qualify for a TOPS Award. HOWEVER, you must have an ACT (SAT) score of at least 20 for TOPS Tech and at least a 23 for Opportunity, 26 for Performance and 30 for Honors.

Q-88. I did not take French I, but took French II and French III. Can these two classes be used to meet the Foreign Language requirement?

A. Yes. The TOPS statute only requires two (2) units in the same language.

Q-89. I am taking American Sign Language. Can these courses be counted as TOPS core curriculum foreign language courses?

A. Yes. Note that LDE does not consider courses currently designated as "Signing" or "Sign Language" to include all the necessary components of American Sign Language, so these courses are not acceptable as substitutes.

Q-90. Can I be eligible for TOPS if I graduated early and could only take Business English instead of English IV?

A. No. You would not be eligible for TOPS Opportunity, Performance or Honors because the TOPS statute requires English IV. However, you may be eligible for the TOPS Tech Award.

Q-91. In the past, some of the TOPS core curriculum courses could be substituted for Art. What courses does this include for 2019 graduates?

A. The following courses satisfy the Art requirement in the TOPS Core Curriculum: 1 unit of performance courses in music, dance, or theater; or 1 unit of studio art or 1 unit of visual art; drafting: or Speech III and Speech IV (both for 1 unit). Other TOPS Core Curriculum courses may not be used to substitute for Art.

The TOPS Core Curriculum Reference Tables used in the Student Transcript System are available on the Department of Education's LEADS Portal, https://leads.doe.louisiana.gov/ptl/ on the STSQ12 report and on LOSFA's Web site, www.osfa.la.gov/tops.

Q-92. If I passed a proficiency test for a foreign language, can the unit be used for completion of the TOPS core curriculum foreign language requirement?

A. Yes. If your high school credits the foreign language unit obtained through proficiency testing in the Student Transcript System, it may be used for the TOPS core curriculum. You must receive credit for two units in the same foreign language.

Q-93. Can an extra foreign language be used to substitute for the required unit of Art?

A. No. Extra foreign language courses may not be substituted for Art.

Q-94. Can Speech Debate be used as a substitute for the required unit of Art?

A. No. Speech Debate may not be used. However, you may substitute Speech III and Speech IV (both units) for Art.

Q-95. If I complete one unit of Civics and ½ unit of Free Enterprise in high school, can I use the extra ½ unit of Civics as a substitute for ½ unit of Art?

A. No. The only courses that can be substituted for Art are: 1 unit of performance courses in music, dance, or theater; or 1 unit of studio art or 1 unit of visual art; 1 unit of drafting; or Speech III and Speech IV (both for 1 unit). Other TOPS Core Curriculum courses may not be used to substitute for Art.

Q-96. I earned ½ unit of Art and ½ unit of Environmental Science that is not needed to meet my other TOPS core curriculum requirements. Can I use the ½ credit of Environmental Science to complete my Art requirement?

A. No. The only courses that can be substituted for Art are: 1 unit of performance courses in music, dance, or theater; or 1 unit of studio art or 1 unit of visual art; drafting; or Speech III and Speech IV (both for 1 unit). Other TOPS Core Curriculum courses may not be used to substitute for Art.

Q-97. I have taken college courses for credit. May these be considered as part of the TOPS core curriculum for TOPS purposes?

A. Yes. College level courses taken independently during the summer or in a dual enrollment program such as TOPS Tech Early Start, whether in the classroom, on-line, or by correspondence, may be used to qualify for TOPS if your high school determines the courses are TOPS core equivalent courses, approves the course for high school credit, and the courses are credited on your official high school transcript using the correct Department of Education course code and transmitted to LOSFA by the Student Transcript System.

College level courses taken in an early admissions program must be reported on the forms required by the Louisiana Department of Education. See the section on "Early College Admission Programs" for additional information.

Q-98. I grew up in China and speak fluent Chinese, but I am just now learning English. Can the English courses count as the foreign language, and if not, can the fact that I speak Chinese count?

A. No. English is not considered a foreign language. The English courses are part of the core curriculum. You must take and pass the foreign language courses during high school. By itself, the fact that you speak Chinese does not count towards the TOPS core curriculum foreign language requirement; however, if you pass a proficiency test in Chinese and it is credited on your official transcript and is entered in STS, it may be used to satisfy the foreign language requirement.

Q-99. Who should be contacted to get approval for courses taught at a high school that may be equivalent to courses in the TOPS core curriculum?

A. Requests for equivalent courses from public schools must be submitted by the school board to both BESE and LOSFA. Requests for equivalent courses from non-public schools must be submitted by the school's governing body to both BESE and LOSFA. A copy of the course syllabus must be included with the request. Note that a course not listed in Bulletin 741 will not be considered.

Q-100. Can Integrated Mathematics I, II and III substitute for TOPS core curriculum courses?

A. Yes. Integrated Mathematics I, II and III substitute for Algebra I, Algebra II and Geometry. Separately, the courses substitute as Integrated Mathematics I for Algebra I, Integrated Mathematics II for Algebra II and Integrated Mathematics III for Geometry.

Q-101. What are the BESE approved statewide computer related courses for TOPS?

A. **A computer related course will not be required for and may not be used by students who graduate in 2014 and later to complete the core curriculum for the TOPS Opportunity, Performance and Honors Awards.**

Q-102. I earned ½ unit in two different performance courses in music, dance or theater. Can these courses be used to complete the 1 full unit of performance courses required as a substitute for Art?

A. Yes. You may use two ½ unit performance, or two ½ unit visual arts, or two ½ unit studio arts courses, or two ½ unit drafting courses, or two ½ unit photography courses to substitute for Art.

Contact LOSFA by email at custserv@la.gov or by mail to request a determination through an audit if there is a computation problem.

Note: The ½ units must be in the same program type (performance, studio or visual arts). For example, one ½ unit performance art courses may not be combined with one ½ unit studio arts courses to satisfy the Art core curriculum requirement.

Q-103. How many core units do I have to earn to complete the core curriculum for the TOPS Opportunity, Performance or Honors awards?

A. If you graduate in 2014 or later, you must earn 19 core units.

Q-104. Can I substitute Agriscience I & II for the 3rd science course requirement and the additional math/science requirement?

A. If you graduate from high school in 2014 or later, you must earn 4 math units and 4 science units. Agriscience I & II (both for one unit) may be used to satisfy one unit of the science requirement.

Q-105. Can I use Anatomy and Physiology as one of the advanced science courses?

A. Beginning with 2018 graduates, Human Anatomy and Physiology may be used to substitute for Biology II.

CUMULATIVE HIGH SCHOOL GRADE POINT AVERAGE FOR TOPS

General

Q-106. Who is responsible for calculating the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average (TOPS Core GPA)?

A. The final TOPS Core GPA is calculated by the Louisiana Department of Education using data from your final transcript transmitted through the Student Transcript System (STS) by each Local Education Authority (LEA) (for public high schools) or by the high school (for non-public high schools).

Q-107. How is the TOPS Core GPA calculated?

A. Beginning with students who will graduate in the 2017-2018 school year and thereafter, the calculation of the TOPS Core Curriculum grade point average (GPA) will be calculated on a 4.00 scale using the grades for the courses that were used to satisfy one of the TOPS Core Curriculum, except for certain courses that will use a five (5.00) point scale for grades earned in designated Advanced Placement (AP) courses; International Baccalaureate (IB) courses; Gifted courses; Dual Enrollment courses, Honors courses, and Articulated courses offered for college credit by the Louisiana School for Math, Science and the Arts used to complete the TOPS Core Curriculum.

The courses currently designated to be calculated on the 5.00 point scale can be viewed at https://www.osfa.la.gov/5scale. [2]

[2] *Courses approved for the five (5.00) point scale will be noted in updates to this document.*

For the designated courses, five quality points will be assigned to a letter grade of "A", four quality points will be assigned to a letter grade of "B", three quality points will be assigned to a letter grade of "C", two quality points will be assigned to a letter grade of "D", and zero quality points will be assigned to a letter grade of "F". Note that students earning credit in courses graded on the five (5.00) point scale may earn a grade point average on the TOPS Core Curriculum that exceeds 4.00.

Q-108. What happens if I have taken more than the required number of units of core courses?

A. If you have earned more than the required number of units of courses that are included in the TOPS core curriculum, your TOPS Core GPA will be calculated using the courses with the highest grades that satisfy the required core curriculum category.

For example, if you have taken more than one higher level math course, any of which would satisfy the TOPS core curriculum requirement, the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average will be calculated using the high level math courses in which you received the highest grades.

Q-109. What happens if I have taken the same course more than once?

A. In the event you take the same core course more than one time, your TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average will be calculated using the highest grade earned in the course. Example: if you earned an "F" in Algebra I and a "B" by repeating the course, the "B" would be used in calculating your TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average.

Q-110. I earned credit for TOPS core courses on a Pass/Fail basis. How are these courses treated in the grade point average calculation?

A. For TOPS purposes, the Pass/Fail is not assigned a quality point value and is not included in the calculation of the TOPS Core GPA. A TOPS core course that is completed as a "pass" is not included in the grade point calculation in any way. Failed courses cannot be used to complete the core curriculum.

A Pass/Fail core course that is passed is used in counting the number of units needed to satisfy the TOPS core curriculum requirement. A Pass/Fail core course that is failed is not counted in the number of units needed to satisfy the TOPS core curriculum requirement.

If your school gave you a letter grade, it will be used in the calculation.

Q-111. I earned credit for TOPS core courses by taking proficiency tests. How will these courses be included in the grade point average calculation?

A. A TOPS core course that is earned through proficiency testing will not be included in the GPA calculation. The course may be used in counting the number of units needed to satisfy the TOPS core curriculum requirement.

Q-112. Why doesn't my TOPS Core GPA agree with the GPA shown on my official transcript?

A. Your TOPS Core GPA is calculated using only the grades earned for courses that are used to satisfy the 19 TOPS Core Curriculum units. Your high school transcript's cumulative GPA is based on all courses attempted. In addition, your high school may include failed courses that you have repeated for a passing grade on the official transcript. These differences will generally result in a grade point average that is different than the grade point average computed for TOPS. In addition, some high schools use a different grading scale than the 4.0/5.0 for certain courses used for TOPS so the conversion of the grades causes differences.

Q-113. My <u>TOPS Core GPA</u> is 2.499. Can this be rounded up to a 2.50?

A. No. The TOPS statute requires that you earn at least a 2.50 grade point average. A 2.499 average is less than 2.50 and may not be rounded up.

Q-114. I failed a TOPS core course, took the class over, then made an A, and our parish policy states that the F is not transferred to the transcript. How will LOSFA calculate my TOPS Cumulative High School GPA?

A. The TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average will be computed using the grades on courses that are used to satisfy the TOPS Core Curriculum units. Courses that are failed cannot be used. The highest grade achieved for a course, regardless of the number of times the course is taken, will be used for the calculation. In this case, the student's "A" would be used. Previous questions and answers in this series provide complete information about calculating the grade point average.

Q-115. If I make a higher ACT score than 20, do I still need a 2.50 TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average?

A. Yes. The TOPS statute requires a minimum TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average of 2.50 for student's graduating from Louisiana public and non-public high schools to be eligible for the TOPS Opportunity Award. This minimum TOPS core GPA cannot be waived.

Q-116. Is there any circumstance under which I could qualify for a TOPS Award without meeting the requirement to earn at least a TOPS Core GPA of 2.50 on the courses used to satisfy the TOPS core curriculum?

A. Yes. If you graduate from an out-of-state high school, an out-of-country high school, or complete a BESE approved home study program or if you meet certain intelligence testing requirements (See the answer to Question 169.), you do not have to meet the TOPS Core GPA requirement nor the core curriculum requirement. However, if you graduate from an out-of-state or out-of-country high school, you must earn an ACT score that is at least 3 points higher than that required for students who graduate from Louisiana high schools. If you complete an approved home study program, you must earn an ACT score that is 2 points higher than students who graduate from Louisiana high schools for the Opportunity Award and 1 point higher for the Performance and Honors Awards.

In addition, if you do not graduate from high school and are determined eligible for a TOPS award by meeting certain intelligence testing criteria, you are not required to complete the TOPS core curriculum or achieve a minimum TOPS Core GPA. See the answer to Question 169. However, if you graduate from a BESE approved high school, you must have at least a 2.50 on the TOPS Core Curriculum units.

Q-117. If I make a 3.00 cumulative GPA in college, can I move up to a higher award level?

A. No. You are awarded TOPS based on your academic performance in high school. You must meet the TOPS requirements at the time of graduation from high school and once awarded, must meet certain academic standards in college to continue your award.

Q-118. If I did not have a TOPS Core GPA of 2.50 when I graduated high school, can I get a higher GPA in college and receive TOPS then?

A. No. You are awarded TOPS based on your academic performance in high school. You must meet the TOPS requirements at the time of graduation from high school.

Q-119. Is there an exception for the TOPS Core GPA if I have a disability or exceptionality and am on a 504 plan or have an IEP on file?

A. No. The statute requires a minimum TOPS Core GPA of 2.50. This requirement cannot be waived.

Q-120. My high school computes its grades on a semester basis. How will the Louisiana Department of Education calculate my TOPS Core GPA ?

A. The TOPS Core GPA for your school will be computed using the two semester grades for each course. Your school may report either a single annual grade for a course or two semester grades using course part numbers, depending on the school's procedure.

Q-121. My high school computes its grades on an annual basis. How will the Louisiana Department of Education calculate the TOPS Core GPA?

A. The TOPS Core GPA for your school will be computed using the annual grade. Your high school may report either a single annual grade for a course or two semester grades, depending on the school's procedure.

Q-122. If through the use of substitutions, I have more than 19 units to meet the TOPS core curriculum requirement, will the TOPS Core GPA calculation be based on 19.0 units or the actual number of units used to satisfy the TOPS core curriculum?

A. The number of units used in the TOPS Core GPA cannot exceed 19 units.

Q-123. If I have one unit of Civics and ½ unit of Free Enterprise, how is the TOPS Core GPA calculated?

Note: If you graduate from a public school, you may NOT use ½ unit of Civics and ½ unit of Free Enterprise to meet graduation requirements. These students must complete one unit of Civics.

A. Public schools will use 220501 Civics 1st semester course code for the full year course, and this course will include a free enterprise component.

Private schools will use either the 220501 Civics first semester course code for the full year course, or if you take ½ unit of civics and ½ unit of free enterprise, the ½ unit of civics will be reported with 220504 Civics 2nd semester course code along with the grade for the ½ semester of Free Enterprise reported with the 220200 Free Enterprise course code.

For example, at a school that grades on a semester basis, you receive an "A" for the first semester and a "B" for the second semester of Civics. The "A" and "B" will be averaged (4+3)/2=3.50 and the GPA will be computed using 3.50 for the Civics grade.

Q-124. I took French I and failed it. I decided not to pursue French as my foreign language choice. Instead, I completed Spanish I and II to meet my foreign language requirement for TOPS. Will the French grade have any bearing on my GPA for calculating TOPS Core GPA?

A. No. A course that is failed cannot be used to complete the TOPS core curriculum requirement and only the courses used to satisfy the TOPS Core Curriculum units will be used in the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average calculation.

Q-125. If I complete French I, II, III and IV, will the Department of Education take the two highest grades or would the grades have to be from consecutive courses?

A. The TOPS core requirement is to complete two courses in the same foreign language. The courses do not have to be consecutive. The rules require the two highest grades in a category to be used. In this case, the two French courses with the highest grades would be used.

If your school grades on an annual basis and you receive:
"A" for French I
"C" for French II
"B" for French III
"D" for French IV
The grades for French I and French III would be used to calculate your TOPS High School Cumulative GPA.

If your school grades on a semester basis and you receive:
"A" for the first semester and "B" for the second semester of French I (4+3=7/2=3.5),
"C" for the first semester and "A" for the second semester of French II (2+4=6/2=3.0),
"B" for the first semester and "B" for the second semester of French III (3+3=6/2=3.0),
"A" for the first semester and "A" for the second semester of French IV (4+4=8/2=4.0),
The grades for French I and French IV would be used to calculate your TOPS High School Cumulative GPA.

Q-126. My school requires a minimum grade of a "C" in a foreign language to enroll in the next course level. How will the TOPS Core GPA be calculated if I have a "D" in Spanish I, a "B" in Spanish 1 and a "B" in Spanish 2?

A. The highest two grades will be used. In this case, the "B" in Spanish I and the "B" in Spanish II will be used.

Q-127. At my school, credits earned in the 8th grade, such as Algebra I, are recorded as "P" on my high school record. How will this be treated in the TOPS Core GPA calculation? Will a grade point value be assigned to the P grade and the total grade points divided by 19? Or, will the total grade points be divided by 18?

A. The grade points will be divided by 18. If a course is graded on a pass/fail basis, the ½ unit or unit earned will not be included to calculate the TOPS Core GPA, but passed courses will be used to satisfy the TOPS core curriculum requirements

Q-128. My school offers semester electives in English IV. Can I use the course names for the specific electives, or must they be recorded as English IV?

A. You must complete English IV. The TOPS Matrix will note acceptable substitutions for English IV.

Q-129. I took Spanish I in semester 1 and earned ½ unit. I was proficient, so my school advanced me to Spanish II for the second semester and I earned ½ unit in Spanish II, excelling again. In semesters three and four, I earned one full credit in Spanish III. Will this fulfill the foreign language requirement?

A. Yes.

Q-130. If I take ½ unit of Probability and Statistics and ½ unit of Advanced Math – Functions and Statistics, will this be accepted for one of the required advanced math units?

A. No. Beginning with high school graduates of 2018, a half unit of Probability and Statistics combined with a half unit Advanced Math – Functions and Statistics will not be acceptable.

Art

Q-131. If I received a "D" in Art and I have a higher grade in an extra TOPS core curriculum elective such as World Geography, will the grade for the elective substitute for Art in the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average?

A. No. The only courses that satisfy the Art requirement are: 1 unit of performance courses in music, dance, or theater; or 1 unit of studio art or 1 unit of visual art; 1 unit of drafting; or Speech III and Speech IV (both for 1 unit). Other TOPS Core Curriculum courses may not be used to substitute for Art.

Q-132. If I received a D in Art and I also have 1 unit of Studio Art with an A, which do you use to calculate the TOPS Core GPA?

A. Since the Studio Arts course has the higher grade, it will be used to calculate the TOPS Core GPA.

Q-133. If I fail Art and do not repeat the course, but I have an eligible elective to substitute, how is the GPA calculated?

A. The Art course will not be considered because a failed course cannot be used to complete the TOPS core curriculum. See Question 131 for acceptable Art courses.

Q-134. If I take two band courses to substitute for one Art course, do you average the two band course grades?

A. No. Since only one unit of band is required to satisfy the Art requirement, the band course with the highest grade will be used. See the answer to Question 122.

Q-135. I took one year of Beginning Chorus and earned an "A" the first semester and a "B" the second semester. Can I take the first semester "A" of Beginning Chorus and the second semester "A" of Advanced Vocal Ensemble to equal one whole unit of the required unit of a performing art for purposes of meeting the Art Requirement?

A. Yes. ½ unit of a one unit course may be separated and matched with ½ unit of another course of the same program type (performance, studio or visual arts) to satisfy the Art requirement. See also questions 91 and 95. Contact LOSFA by email at custserv@la.gov or by mail for recalculation.

EARLY COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

Q-136. If I enter college under the Department of Education's Early College Admissions Policy, when do I become eligible for TOPS?

A. If you enter college under the Early College Admissions Policy, you are not eligible for TOPS until the first semester following the date you graduate from high school. To be eligible for TOPS, you must follow the same application procedures as any other graduate of the same academic year. You must enroll as a full-time student in an eligible college no later than the semester or term, excluding summer semesters or sessions, immediately following the first anniversary of the date that you graduated from high school.

Q-137. Are there any special TOPS requirements for students who enter college under the Early College Admissions Policy?

A. You must enter college early under this Policy and meet the following requirements:

1. You must meet the requirements of the Louisiana Department of Education as set forth in the Early College Admissions Policy in the latest edition of Bulletin 741.
2. You must satisfy all core curriculum requirements not completed in high school by making passing scores on equivalent college courses.
3. The college courses taken to satisfy TOPS core curriculum requirements and the grades reported on those courses must be reflected in your official high school records as reported by the Louisiana Department of Education through the Student Transcript System.
4. You must complete the core curriculum requirements no later than the conclusion of the first two semesters or three quarters of college attendance following entrance into college under the Early College Admissions Policy.
5. The high school must award you a high school diploma and transmit your academic transcript to the Louisiana Department of Education in the same manner as that of other high school graduates.

Q-138. I am a home study student. Can I qualify for the early admissions program?

A. No. To be eligible for the early admissions program, Bulletin 741 requires you to have earned at least a "B" average during the previous three years of high school and to be recommended for the program by your high school principal. Since you have no high school principal to recommend your participation in the program, you are not eligible for participation.

EARLY GRADUATION

Q-139. If I graduate from high school in less than four years, when will I be eligible for TOPS?

A. If you graduate early (whether in September or at mid-year), you cannot be determined eligible for a TOPS award until your high school submits grades at the end of the school year. If you enroll in the spring semester immediately following graduation and are determined eligible for a TOPS award, you will receive a retroactive payment for that spring semester. Payment is contingent upon appropriations by the Louisiana Legislature.

If you graduate early in the spring (graduate in three years) and meet TOPS eligibility requirements, you may be awarded for the fall semester following graduation.

You must make sure you have completed the TOPS Core Curriculum prior to graduation. You will not be allowed to complete TOPS Core Curriculum courses after high school graduation to qualify for a TOPS award.

If you graduate early, you must comply with the application and ACT deadlines applicable to the class that graduates in the spring of that high school academic year. If you graduate early in December 2019 or graduate early in May 2020, you must follow the same application procedures and meet the same deadlines as students who graduate on time in May or June 2020. (See the answers to Questions 4 and 21).

If you complete the twelfth grade level of a home study program before the start of the next spring semester or early in the spring, you have the same options as a student who graduates early from high school.

ELIGIBLE INSTITUTIONS

Q-140. Can I use TOPS at any postsecondary school?

A. No. TOPS can only be used at an "eligible institution" (Louisiana public postsecondary schools and regionally accredited independent colleges or universities in the state that are members of the Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (LAICU), accredited out-of-state private colleges that are specifically designed to accommodate deaf and hard-of-hearing students at which the majority of the students are deaf and hard of hearing, and certain Louisiana cosmetology and proprietary schools.)

Eligible LAICU schools are: Centenary College, Dillard University, Louisiana College, Loyola University, New Orleans Theological Seminary, Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University (formerly Our Lady of the Lake College), The University of Holy Cross (formerly Our Lady of Holy Cross College), St. Joseph Seminary College, Tulane Medical Center, Tulane University and Xavier University.

If you qualify for any TOPS Award, you may also use the award at the following schools:

- Any school with a valid and current certificate of registration issued by the Louisiana State Board of Cosmetology that is accredited by an accrediting organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, or
- Any proprietary school with a valid and current license issued by the Louisiana Board of Regents that is accredited by an accrediting organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

Q-141. If I want to pursue a program of study that is not offered in Louisiana, can I use TOPS in another state?

A. No. TOPS is not portable to other states, except when used at accredited out-of-state private colleges that are specifically designed to accommodate deaf and hard-of-hearing students at which the majority of the students are deaf and hard of hearing.

The TOPS award cannot be used to enroll in an out-of-state college through the **Academic Common Market.** The Academic Common Market, which is administered in Louisiana by the Board of Regents,

allows a student whose major is not offered in Louisiana to pay in-state tuition at a school in the next adjoining southern state which offers the major. Contact the Louisiana Board of Regents for additional information or visit the Board of Regent's Web site at www.regents.la.gov.

Q-142. If I want to study at an out-of-state college or university, can I return to Louisiana and use my TOPS award?

A. Yes.

SEE THE ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS 44 and 46 FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES.

Q-143. What is an eligible out-of-state college or university?

A. The out-of-state college or university must be accredited by a regional accrediting organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. The organizations currently recognized are:

1. Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools
2. New England Association of Schools and Colleges
3. North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
4. Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
5. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
6. Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Q-144. Can TOPS ever be used at an out-of-state college?

A. Yes. Students can use the TOPS Opportunity, Performance and Honors awards at accredited out-of-state private colleges that are specifically designed to accommodate deaf and hard-of-hearing students at which the majority of the students are deaf and hard of hearing.

FIRST-TIME, FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT REQUIREMENT

Q-145. Is there a deadline to enroll in college?

A. Yes. You must enroll for the first time as a full-time student in an eligible postsecondary institution no later than the first college semester following the first anniversary of the date you graduated from high school. If you graduate in May 2020, you have until the fall semester of 2021 to enroll as a first-time, full-time student. However, your deadline for receipt of your FAFSA without any reduction in your award is July 1, 2021.

Once you enroll as a full-time student, you must continue to enroll full time in each semester (fall and spring); quarter (fall, winter and spring); term (in proprietary and cosmetology schools); or summer session or term, if applicable, thereafter, unless granted an exception for cause.

Q-146. I had an accident or have an illness that started after I graduated from high school, and I am unable to enroll as a full-time student by the deadline due to my injuries/illness. Is there any way I can retain my TOPS Award?

A. Yes. There are certain circumstances for which an exception may be granted for failure to initially enroll full-time within the allotted time period (the first semester following the first anniversary of the date of high school graduation). These include such temporary disabilities as those caused by accidents/illnesses. A Request for Exception form with instructions describing the documentation required can be found on the LOSFA Web site at (**www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform**), or by emailing custserv@la.gov.

Q-147. I entered on active duty within a year after high school graduation and before I enrolled full time in college. Is there an exception to the initial enrollment deadline in these circumstances?

A. Yes. You can delay your full-time enrollment to the semester (not including summer sessions) following the one year anniversary of separation from active duty. In order for LOSFA to determine whether you are eligible for a TOPS award, you must provide LOSFA with a DD-214 which shows your dates of active duty and that you were discharged honorably or without characterization (i.e., not dishonorably discharged).

Q-148. If I enroll in an out-of-state college the first year as a full-time student, can I return to Louisiana and be awarded TOPS?

A. Yes.

SEE THE ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS 44 and 46 FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES.

Q-149. Do I lose eligibility for a TOPS Award by attending college during high school or during summer sessions before enrolling as a full-time college student?

A. No. You are allowed to enroll in college full or part-time while still attending high school and between graduation and first-time, full-time enrollment; **however, your college grades earned while you were in high school will be used to calculate your TOPS college cumulative grade point average for renewal of your TOPS award beginning at the end of your first semester of full time enrollment in college.**

(See the answer to Question 59 for renewal requirements.)

Q-150. If I attend college during high school, including through a dual enrollment program, or during summer sessions before enrolling as a full-time college student, will my grades or hours disqualify me from a TOPS award?

A. No. If you earn college hours under these circumstances, and you otherwise qualify for a TOPS Award, you will receive the award for the first semester of full-time enrollment. **However, your cumulative grade point average will be checked after the first semester of full-time enrollment for Steady Academic Progress (at least a 2.00 cumulative GPA). Any grades you've earned for college courses prior to your first semester as a full time student will be included in this calculation. High grades**

in these dual enrollment or summer courses will help to increase your GPA, while lower grades will decrease your GPA. If you have not maintained Steady Academic Progress, your award will be suspended (the award will not be paid the next semester) until Steady Academic Progress has been achieved.

See the answer to Question 59 for more information regarding the required cumulative GPA and Steady Academic Progress.

GRADUATION RECOGNITION

Q-151. As a high school guidance counselor, what terminology should I use to recognize a potential TOPS recipient at graduation?

A. **It is inappropriate for the high school to state that a student is eligible for or has been awarded TOPS.** The high school electronically forwards the student's academic transcript through the Local Education Agency via the Student Transcript System (STS) to the Louisiana Department of Education, which will determine each student's compliance with the TOPS core curriculum requirements and compute the student's highest TOPS Core GPA. LOSFA will determine the student's eligibility after graduation. Eligibility is also based on official ACT/SAT scores, timely receipt of application, compliance with the requirement to apply for federal grant aid and information relating to the student's citizenship, residency and criminal record.

If the high school elects to notify students of their tentative TOPS eligibility based upon data available to the school, the high school must make the following disclaimer:
"Although it appears that you have satisfied the academic requirements for a Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) Award based on this school's review of the TOPS core curriculum courses you have completed and calculation of your TOPS Core GPA, you must meet all of the following conditions to redeem a scholarship under this program:

1. The Louisiana Board of Regents (the Board) must determine that you have in fact completed the TOPS core curriculum courses;
2. The Board must determine that your TOPS Core GPA based on the TOPS core curriculum meets the statutory requirements;
3. You must be a Louisiana resident as defined by the Board;
5. You must be accepted for enrollment by an eligible Louisiana postsecondary institution and be registered as a full-time undergraduate student no later than the next semester following the first anniversary of your graduation from high school;
6. You must apply for federal grant aid, if you are eligible for such aid, by the deadline required for consideration for state aid; and
7. You must have met all academic and nonacademic requirements and be officially notified of your award by the Board."

Q-152. I was notified at graduation that I have TOPS. Now, my college has no record of that award. What is going on?

A. While some high schools honor their graduates by naming those who are expected to qualify for a TOPS award, the only official notice that you have qualified for a TOPS scholarship is the notice of your TOPS

eligibility from the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA), a Program of the Board of Regents.

HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY DIPLOMA (GED)

Q-153. If I have not graduated from an eligible high school and have not completed a BESE approved home study program, can I obtain a Louisiana High School Equivalency Diploma (GED) to qualify for TOPS?

A. No. There are currently no provisions in law to permit students who earn a GED to qualify for TOPS.

HIGH SCHOOL REPORTING

See Parental Consent on page 1.
See the Student Transcript System Section.

Q-154. What are the certification responsibilities of the high schools?

A. Public high schools must electronically submit academic data for their students using the Department of Education's Student Transcript System. Submission of the data constitutes a certification by the high school that:

1. All data reported are true and correct, to the best of the school's knowledge or belief, and that they reflect the official records of the school for the students listed; and
2. Records pertaining to the listed students will be maintained and available upon request to LOSFA and the legislative auditor for a minimum of three years or until audited, whichever occurs first.

LOSFA will only receive data for those students for whom parents have provided consent. See Page 1 for more information.

If a student is determined eligible for a TOPS Award based on data certified by the high school that is incorrect, and the student was, in fact, ineligible for a TOPS Award or the level awarded, the high school must reimburse the Louisiana Board of Regents for the amount paid in excess of what the student was eligible to receive.

Q-155. What data will high schools report?

A. High schools will be required to report the same data that is included on the student's official transcript.

Q-156. How will high schools report the data?

A. Public high schools submit their data through their Local Education Authority (LEA). LEAs and nonpublic high schools will report their data to the Louisiana Department of Education using the Student Transcript System (STS).

HOME STUDY PROGRAMS

Q-157. I am a home study student. Can I receive TOPS and, if so, are there any special requirements?

A. Yes. The Louisiana Department of Education must certify to LOSFA that you are a student who successfully completed the eleventh, if applicable, and twelfth grade levels of a home study program approved by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).

If you ever enrolled in a Louisiana public high school or nonpublic high school or an approved non-Louisiana high school that was or has been approved by BESE, you must have successfully completed both the eleventh and twelfth grades of a home study program approved by BESE and the previously attended high school must provide LOSFA with certification that you were in good standing at the time you last attended that school.

In addition, you must have an ACT score of at least 19 for TOPS Tech, 22 for Opportunity, 24 for Performance, or 28 for Honors, or an SAT score of at least 990 for TOPS Tech, 1100 for Opportunity, 1160 for Performance or 1300 for Honors.

Q.-158. I am a home study student. How does LOSFA know that I am interested in applying for TOPS?

A. Home study students are identified by the high school code they entered on their ACT or SAT Registration. You should use the high school code 969999 on the ACT and 970000 on the SAT. These codes will cause your name to be placed on a list of students to be verified by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) as having being registered in an approved home study program.

If you complete the FAFSA, you will be asked, "When you begin college in the 2019-2020 school year, what will be your high school completion status?" If you mark "home schooled" after this question, LOSFA will include your name on the list sent to LDE if you have an ACT or SAT score of at least 19.

If you complete the TOPS On-Line Application, you will be asked to name the high school you attended or that you were in a home study program. If you answer "home study", LOSFA will include your name on the list sent to LDE if you have an ACT score of at least 19 or an SAT score of at least 990.

Be sure that the name that you use on the ACT and the FAFSA exactly matches your name on file with LDE. For example, if LDE records your name as John Q. Smith, your ACT and your FAFSA should use the name John Q. Smith, not John Smith, not John Quincy Smith, and not Quincy Smith. If your name differs in the slightest way in any of these documents, the determination of your eligibility for TOPS may be delayed. Your date of birth, home address, and email address must also be the same.

Q-159. Is a home study student eligible for TOPS in an early admissions program?

A. No. Only students enrolled in public or BESE approved non-public high schools are eligible for early college admissions under the Department of Education's Early College Admissions Policy. For additional information, see the section above entitled "Early College Admissions."

NATIONAL GUARD

Q-160. Can I receive a TOPS award if I join the National Guard?

A. Yes. You are entitled to a tuition waiver from the school, and TOPS will provide $300 per semester ($600 per year maximum) for assistance with additional costs. In addition, students with Performance Award will receive a stipend of $400 per semester ($800 per year maximum) and students with the Honors Award will receive a stipend of $800 per semester ($1,600 per year maximum). Payment of stipends is contingent upon appropriations by the Legislature.

OUT-OF-COUNTRY HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES AND HOME STUDY PROGRAMS

Q-161. I graduated from high school or completed a home study program outside of the United States and its territories. Can I qualify for a TOPS Award?

A. Yes. You may qualify for a TOPS Award if you meet the standard residency requirements. See the "Residency Requirement" section starting with Question 172.

Q-162. What are the alternate requirements for a student who graduates from an out-of-country high school or completes a home study program out-of-country?

A. The "alternate requirements" are as follows:

If you will graduate or have graduated from out of country high school, you:

1. Must graduate from an out-of-country high school that has been approved by an accrediting organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and meets the standards adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education for nonpublic high schools in Louisiana; and
2. Must have a composite score on the ACT (SAT) of at least 20 for TOPS Tech and at least 23 for TOPS Opportunity;

OR

If you will complete or have completed a home study program, you:

3. Must be certified to have successfully completed the eleventh grade and the twelfth grade levels of a home study program (if you were previously enrolled in a Louisiana public or BESE approved private high school) which has been approved by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education; and
4. Must have a composite score on the ACT (SAT) of at least 20 for TOPS Tech and at least 23 for the TOPS Opportunity Award;

AND You:

5. Must enroll in a Louisiana public postsecondary institution as a first-time freshman not later than the semester, excluding summer semesters or sessions, immediately following the first anniversary of the date that you graduated from high school or completed a home study program;* or
6. If you enter on active duty with the U.S. Armed Forces within one year after graduating from high school, you must enroll in a Louisiana public postsecondary institution as a first-time freshman not later than the semester, quarter, or term, excluding summer semesters or sessions, immediately following the one year anniversary of separation from active duty; and
7. Must be a U.S. citizen or designated as a Permanent Resident by the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services; and
8. Must meet Louisiana residency requirements; and
9. Must not have any criminal convictions, except for misdemeanor traffic violations; and

10. If you have been in the U.S. Armed Forces and have been separated from such service, have received an honorable or general discharge.

*For students returning to Louisiana after attending an accredited out-of-state postsecondary institution, refer to the answers to Questions 44, 46, 69, 70, and 148.

Q-163. What do I have to do to prove Louisiana residency?

A. See the discussion in the Section entitled "Residency Requirement."

OUT-OF-STATE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

Q-164. I graduated from a high school outside of Louisiana. Can I qualify for a TOPS Award?

A. Yes. If one of your parents or your court ordered custodian meets Louisiana residency requirements and you meet the alternate eligibility requirements, you may qualify. See the answers to Questions 166 through 172 for the residency requirements.

Q-165. What is the purpose of the alternate eligibility requirements?

A. These requirements permit students who qualify as Louisiana residents and who graduated from eligible out-of-state high schools to apply for a TOPS Award. Since course names and grading scales for these students may not be consistent with Louisiana's standards, a higher ACT or SAT test score was selected as the criteria for qualification.

Q-166. I graduated from an out-of-state high school. What are the alternate requirements for eligibility?

A. The "alternate requirements" for graduates of out-of-state high schools are that you:

1. Must graduate from:
   - an out-of-state high school that has been approved by the appropriate state educational agency in the state in which the school is located that is the equivalent of Louisiana's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education; or
   - Must graduate from an out-of-state high school that is accredited by a regional accrediting organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education* and can demonstrate that it meets the standards adopted by BESE for approval of nonpublic schools in Louisiana; or
   - Must graduate from a high school that has been approved by the U.S. Department of Defense; and
2. Must have a composite score on the ACT of at least 20 for TOPS Tech, 23 for Opportunity, 26 for Performance, and 30 for Honors (or an equivalent value on the SAT); and
3. Must enroll in a Louisiana public postsecondary institution as a first-time freshman not later than the semester, excluding summer semesters or sessions, immediately following the first anniversary of the date that you graduated from high school or, if you are returning from an eligible out-of-state college, be enrolled in an eligible college or university not later than the next semester or term, excluding summer sessions or intersessions, immediately following the last semester that you were enrolled in the out-of-state college or university (your period of eligibility shall be reduced by one

semester or term for each semester or term that you were enrolled in an out-of-state college or university); OR

- If you enter on active duty with the U.S. Armed Forces within one year after graduating from high school, you must enroll in a TOPS eligible college or university as a first-time freshman not later than the semester, excluding summer semesters or intersessions, immediately following the one year anniversary of separation from active duty; and

4. Must be a U.S. citizen or be designated as a Permanent Resident by the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services; and
5. Must meet Louisiana residency requirements (you will be required to complete an Affidavit of Residency – See www.osfa.la.gov/forms); and
6. Must not have any criminal convictions, except for misdemeanor traffic violations; and
7. If you have been in the U.S. Armed Forces and have been separated from such service, have received an honorable or general discharge.

*NOTE: The organizations currently recognized are:

a. Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools
b. New England Association of Schools and Colleges
c. North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
d. Northwest Association of Accredited Schools
e. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
f. Western Association of Schools and Colleges

PERMANENT DISABILITY

Q-167. What if I qualify for a TOPS Award, but cannot attend college on a full-time basis because of a permanent disability?

A. You may be eligible for an exception to the full-time enrollment requirement. You must submit a Request for Exception form to LOSFA requesting permanent disability status. The form must include a written statement from a qualified professional that states:

1. the diagnosis of disability and prognosis,
2. that the disability is permanent,
3. an opinion as to why the disability restricts the student from attending classes full-time, and
4. an opinion as to whether the student could attend full time with medications and/or accommodations.

Note that having a permanent disability is not enough to warrant the exception since many permanent disabilities do not prevent the student from enrolling full-time and progressing in college because the disability can be treated with therapy or medications, and/or overcome with appropriate accommodations. To warrant an exception based on permanent disability, the student must be unable to attend school full time, even with medication and appropriate accommodations.

A Request for Exception form with instructions describing the documentation required can be found on the LOSFA Web site at (www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform), obtained directly from LOSFA, or by emailing custserv@la.gov.

If permanent disability status is approved, your TOPS Award and stipend, if applicable, will be paid up to the equivalent of eight full-time semesters or twelve terms of postsecondary education for part time attendance.

Q-168. I have ADD or ADHD, or a physical disability such as blindness or deafness. Will I automatically be designated as having a permanent disability?

A. No. The fact that you have a disability that cannot be cured is not enough. Since most students with these disabilities can function normally with medication and/or with accommodations, a qualified professional must have determined that you cannot enroll on a full-time basis, even with medication and accommodations, due to the disability.

QUALIFYING AS A NON-GRADUATE

Q-169. If I enroll in college without graduating from high school, can I qualify for a TOPS Award?

A. Yes, if you meet certain conditions.
You must:

- Meet the TOPS citizenship and ACT requirements prior to college enrollment.
- Actually reside in Louisiana for a period of 24 months prior to full-time enrollment in an eligible college.
- Be certified by a psychologist or psychiatrist licensed to practice in Louisiana to have a score in the superior range on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (Third Edition).
- Be certified by a psychologist or psychiatrist licensed to practice in Louisiana to have a composite score that is in the ninetieth percentile at the twelfth grade level in reading, mathematics and written language portions of the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (Second Edition).
- Successfully complete 12 credit hours at an eligible college or university.
- After completion of 12 college credit hours and no later than your 19th birthday, begin full-time college enrollment.
- Submit a FAFSA or TOPS On-Line Application by the deadline. See the answers to Questions 20, 21, 22, and 23.

For qualifying non-graduates awarded TOPS, the award provides up to eight semesters of eligibility.

Q.-170. Is there a deadline for taking the Wechsler Tests to be considered for TOPS eligibility?

A. Yes. You must have taken the tests prior to enrolling for the first time in an eligible college or university.

REMEDIAL COLLEGE COURSES

Q-171. Will remedial courses be counted towards the 24 credit hours required annually in college?

A. Remedial (developmental) courses will be counted toward the 24 hour requirement. The college you attended must report them as earned (passed) hours for purposes of TOPS, even if it does not include those hours as earned hours for purposes of attaining your postsecondary credential. If you receive a grade other

than ”pass” for a remedial class, that grade will be used in the computation of your TOPS cumulative grade point average.

RESIDENCY REQUIREMENT

Q-172. What is the Louisiana residency requirement?

A. Any independent or dependent student who actually resides in Louisiana while attending his last two full years at an eligible Louisiana high school, graduates from such a school and FASFA application or TOPS on-line application list Louisiana as state of residency. Your high school transcript must reflect that you earned credit for the last four semesters of high school and graduated from an approved Louisiana high school. This information is reported by the high school using the Department of Education’s Student Transcript System.

You may qualify based on the residency of a parent or court ordered custodian (“legal guardian”) who was a legal resident of Louisiana for at least the 24 months prior to the month of your high school graduation. If you are an independent student, you may also qualify based on you having been a legal resident of Louisiana for at least the 24 months prior to the month of your high school graduation.

If you are a dependent student and your parent is a member of the U.S. Armed Forces living in Louisiana under permanent change of station orders, but who does not claim Louisiana as his official state of legal residence, and you actually reside in Louisiana while attending your last two full years at an eligible Louisiana high school and you graduate from such a school, and your transcript reflects that you earned credit for the last four semesters of high school and graduated from an approved Louisiana high school, you will meet the Louisiana residency requirement.

Q-173. How will LOSFA determine my residency?

A. If you graduated from a Louisiana public or a Louisiana approved non-public high school, your residency will be determined from the Course Site Codes reported to the Department of Education’s Student Transcript System (STS). STS must show that all courses completed during the final two years of high school were earned in an eligible Louisiana high school and that you graduated from an eligible Louisiana high school, and the FAFSA TOPS on-line application must show Louisiana as state of residence for at least two years prior to high school graduation.

If you completed a BESE approved home study program or you are an eligible non-graduate, your residency will be determined from the information provided on your FAFSA or On-Line Application. If you are an out-of-state or out-of-country graduate, you must complete a residency affidavit in addition to the FAFSA or On-Line Application. If you are a home study student, an eligible non-graduate, a dependent of active duty military personnel, or a student for whom the STS does not confirm Louisiana residency, residency will be determined from the information provided on your FAFSA or On-Line Application or from a completed residency affidavit.

Q-174. I received a letter/observed on the LOSFA Web site that I have been determined ineligible for TOPS due to residency. I have lived in Louisiana all my life. Why has this happened and what must I do to correct the mistake?

A. LOSFA's programming looks first at the information supplied by STS. A high school site code not recognized by STS will result in a determination that you do not meet the TOPS residency requirement.

If you do not meet the STS check, LOSFA's programming will check the information supplied on the FAFSA or On-Line Application. If the data indicates that your parent was a Louisiana resident for at least the 24 months preceding the month of your high school graduation and you are a dependent student, you will pass the residency requirement.

If residency information received from your FAFSA or On-Line Application is incorrect, you may complete a TOPS Affidavit of Residency (available from LOSFA's Web site at http://www.osfa.la.gov/resaffidavit**)** and provide the required supporting documentation. You may also submit a Student Aid Report (SAR) correction to the data you provided in your FAFSA. See the instructions on the SAR (The FAFSA processor will send you this report shortly after your FAFSA is received).

If you are a dependent student who is qualifying based on the residency of a parent or court ordered custodian and your parent's or custodian's state or date of residency is incorrect on the FAFSA or OnLine Application, you should have your parent or custodian complete a TOPS residency affidavit and provide the required supporting documentation.

If you graduated from a high school outside of Louisiana and if your parent's or custodian's state or date of residency is incorrect on the FAFSA or On-Line Application, you must have your parent or custodian complete a TOPS residency affidavit and provide the required supporting documentation.

Q-175. What is a legal resident?

A. A "legal resident" is a person who:

- Resides (actually lives) in Louisiana, and
- If registered to vote, has registered to vote in Louisiana as evidenced by a voter's registration card; and
- If licensed to drive a motor vehicle, has a Louisiana driver's license; and
- If owning a motor vehicle located in Louisiana, has registered that vehicle in Louisiana; and - If earning a reportable income, has filed a Louisiana tax return.

If you are completing a TOPS Affidavit of Residency on behalf of your child, you will be required to submit a copy of all documents that were marked "YES". If you filed a Louisiana tax return, you must submit page one of the return, not the electronic declaration page.

If none of the documents show an issue date of at least 24 months before the month of your child's high school graduation, additional documentation will be required. (See the answer to Question 185.)

Note: A parent or court ordered custodian who is incarcerated in a Louisiana prison or jail is considered a Louisiana resident during the period of incarceration.

Q-176. What is a "court ordered custodian"?

A. A "court ordered custodian" is an adult appointed by a court of competent jurisdiction to have custody and care of a minor and who demonstrates the requirement to provide the primary support for such minor (sometimes referred to as a "court appointed custodian" or a "legal guardian"). Documents such as powers of attorney and Provisional Custody by Mandate are not acceptable since they are not issued by a court. The custodianship (court appointment) must be in effect before the date you graduate from high school to be considered.

Q-177. How do I know whether I am a dependent or independent student?

A. All students are classified as dependent unless LOSFA determines the student is "independent" for purposes of TOPS. The determination may be based on information provided by you on the FAFSA or in documents provided to LOSFA. LOSFA will automatically classify you as independent if you are reported as an independent student by the federal processor on the FAFSA.

Q-178. What are the requirements to be an "independent student?

A. In order to be an independent student, you:

1. must have reached 24 years of age prior to January of the year preceding the academic year for which you are applying for aid; or
2. be a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces; or
3. be an orphan or a ward of the court or was a ward of the court until age 18; or
4. have legal dependents other than a spouse; or
5. be a graduate or professional student; or
6. be married; or
7. be determined an independent student by a financial aid officer exercising professional judgment in accordance with applicable provisions of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (**may include certain emancipated and homeless/self-supporting students**); or
8. must currently be serving in the U.S. Armed Forces on active duty for purposes other than training.

Q-179. What are the requirements to be classified as an "orphan"?

A. An orphan is a person who does not live with either parent because:

1. both parents are deceased; or
2. both parents have abandoned him; or
3. a court proceeding has severed the parental rights of both the parents; or
4. one parent is deceased and the other parent abandoned him; or
5. one parent is deceased and a court proceeding has severed the parental rights of the other parent; or 6. one parent abandoned him and a court proceeding has severed the parental rights of the other parent.

Q-180. How do you calculate the 24 month period for residency of a parent, court ordered custodian, or independent student?

A. The TOPS statute requires residency for a period of the 24 months preceding the month of your high school graduation. Months are calendar months and are counted backward starting with the month preceding the month of high school graduation.

For example, if you will be graduating in May 2020, you would start counting with April 2020 and count backward 24 months. You would have to demonstrate legal residency from May 2018 through April 2020.

Q-181. I am a 2020 high school graduate and I have lived in Louisiana for most or all of my life. Why does the Web site show my date of residency as "2015"?

A. The 2020-2021 FAFSA asks if your parent has been a legal resident since January 1, 2015 (five years). If the answer is "yes" to the residency question, the computer automatically enters "2015" as the date of residency. The date is simply a default date. There is no need to correct this because TOPS only requires the 24 consecutive months of residency preceding the month of your date of high school graduation.

If you answer "no" to the question has your parent been a legal resident since January 1, 2015 programming will populate the month and year that was entered on the FAFSA to when your parent became a resident of Louisiana.

Q-182. My grandparent is raising me because my parents have completely abandoned me, but my grandparent has never become my "court ordered custodian." How will that affect my residency? What can I do to remedy this problem?

A. If you are not independent (See the answer to Question 178.), and you did not complete all of your last two years at a Louisiana high school and graduate from such a school, then you must have one parent or a "court ordered custodian" who has been a resident of Louisiana for the 24 months preceding your graduation from high school. If your grandparent is not a "court ordered custodian," if there is no parent who meets the Louisiana residency requirements, and you did not complete your last two years at a Louisiana high school and graduate from such a school, then you are ineligible for a TOPS Award.

Q-183. Can I qualify for TOPS if one or both of my parents are in the military and stationed outside of Louisiana? What documentation is needed for that?

A. Yes. If your parent who is a member of the Armed Forces is on active duty and the official military personnel or pay records (DD Form 2058) show that he claims Louisiana as his legal residence, you will be eligible if the military parent has filed a Louisiana tax return for the two most recent tax years. You must submit a completed TOPS Affidavit of Residency, a copy of your parent's DD Form 2058, a copy of both tax returns, and all other required documents listed on the affidavit.

Q-184. Can I qualify for TOPS if my parents were transferred by the military into Louisiana? What documentation is needed for that?

A. Yes. If your parent was classified as a Louisiana resident when transferred to Louisiana, you can meet the residency requirements. (See the previous question and answer.)

If your parent who is a member of the Armed Forces was not a Louisiana resident, you can meet the residency requirements if:

1. The military parent who is transferred to Louisiana under permanent change of station orders changes his DD Form 2058 to establish Louisiana as his legal residence not later than 180 days after reporting to such station and thereafter complies with all Louisiana income tax laws and regulations while stationed in Louisiana. You must submit to LOSFA a completed TOPS Affidavit of Residency and a copy of a DD Form 2058 validated by your parent's military personnel officer and showing Louisiana as the member's state of legal residence at the time you apply for TOPS. The DD Form 2058 must reflect that it was filed within 180 days after the member reported to a duty station in Louisiana.

OR

2. You actually resided in Louisiana while attending your last two full years at an eligible Louisiana high school and graduated from such a school.

OR

3. After the 180 day period, your parent who is a member of the Armed Forces may still become a Louisiana resident by changing the DD Form 2058 to declare Louisiana as his or her legal residence and paying Louisiana income taxes; however, your parent must reside in Louisiana for 24 months preceding the month you graduate from high school. See the answer to Question 172.

OR

4. Your parent who is not a member of Armed Forces (the spouse of the military member) may establish Louisiana as his or her legal residence and reside in Louisiana for 24 months preceding the month you graduate from high school. See the answer to Question 185.

Q-185. My parents are residents of Louisiana, but do not file tax returns, are not registered to vote, and do not drive. Can I be considered for TOPS?

A. Yes. If you graduate from an eligible Louisiana high school or complete a home study program approved by BESE and submit a FAFSA or TOPS On-Line Application certifying that your parents are and have been residents of Louisiana for at least the 24 months preceding the month of your high school graduation, a TOPS Affidavit of Residency will not be required. If you graduate from an out-of-state or out-of-country high school, you are required to submit a TOPS Affidavit of Residency.

Otherwise, you must submit an affidavit of residency with documents that support one or both parents' residency in Louisiana for the required 24 months. The documents must show that one of your parents actually resided in Louisiana for the 24 month period. The documents can include, but are not limited to, utility bills, rent payments, rental agreements, pay stubs, and sworn statements from others attesting to the residency. This list is illustrative only. Many other documents may suffice. Each student in this situation is reviewed individually based on the information submitted, so you should contact LOSFA if you have questions or other documentation that is not included in this list.

Q-186. I attended boarding school in Louisiana for my final two years of high school. Can I meet the residency requirement for TOPS?

A. Yes. Your transcript must reflect that you earned credit for the last four semesters of high school immediately prior to graduation and graduated from an approved Louisiana high school. The FAFSA application or TOPS on-line application must show a parent resided in Louisiana 24 months prior to graduation.

Q-187. My Louisiana college/university has granted me Louisiana resident status and has approved me for in-state tuition. Can I meet the residency requirement for TOPS?

A. Not necessarily. The fact that a college or university has approved you for in-state tuition does not mean that you meet the TOPS residency requirement.

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS

Q-188. If I discover that I used an incorrect social security number on either the ACT or SAT test, what can I do to correct this?

A. You are not required to provide a social security number on either the ACT or the SAT. Be sure that the name that you use on the ACT or SAT and the FAFSA exactly matches your name on file with your high school or the Louisiana Department of Education. For example, if your school records indicate your name is John Q. Smith, your ACT and your FAFSA should use the name John Q. Smith, not John Smith, not John Quincy Smith, and not Quincy Smith. If your name differs in the slightest way in any of these documents, the determination of your eligibility for TOPS will be delayed because matching your records will require manual intervention by LOSFA staff.

Q-189. If I discover that I used an incorrect social security number on the FAFSA, what can I do to correct this?

A. If you filed the paper FAFSA form, you must file a new FAFSA with the correct social security number. For assistance, you can contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center at (800) 433-3243.

Note: The application receipt date of the FAFSA with the wrong social security number will be used to determine whether the FAFSA was filed before the deadline.

If you filed the FAFSA on the Web, you must correct your social security number with FAFSA on the web. For assistance, you can contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center at (800) 433-3243.

Although LOSFA will receive your social security number along with your FAFSA, it will be encrypted upon receipt and no member of LOSFA's staff will be able to view it. Your social security number, along with your name and date of birth, will be used to match all of your records.

Q-190. If I discover that I used an incorrect social security number on the TOPS On-Line Application, what can I do to correct this?

A. You should send an email to LOSFA at custserv@la.gov to have the application with the incorrect SSN deleted, and then you should file a new On-Line Application using the correct SSN. Although LOSFA requires that you input your social security number when completing the TOPS On-Line Application, it will be encrypted as soon as you press "Enter" and no member of LOSFA's staff will be able to view it. Your social security number, along with your name and date of birth, will be used to match all of your records. Never send your social security number to LOSFA via email, U.S. mail, or any other route.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN HIGH SCHOOL

Q-191. Does a student with a disability have to take all of the TOPS core curriculum units? If not, what documentation must they provide?

A. TOPS core curriculum requirements may be waived for a student who has one or more learning, visual, hearing or physical disabilities. To obtain a waiver, the high school must certify to LOSFA that it has on file in the school records the following documents:

1. A written diagnosis from a person licensed or certified to diagnose the disability of the student that specifies the need for special accommodation by the student's high school, and
2. A written statement from the principal of the high school that a plan of accommodation under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ("504 Plan") has been established, and the high school was unable to provide the special accommodation, or, if the special accommodation was provided by the high school, the failure to complete the specified TOPS core curriculum course was due solely to the student's diagnosed disability.

Note: All documentation must be maintained at the high school for audit purposes. The certification is through STS. See the answer to Question 197.

Q-192. If the recommended accommodation is for the student not to take the course, and the 504 Plan reflects the school's acceptance of the accommodation, is it acceptable for the principal to certify that the reason that the student did not complete the course was due solely to the student's disability?

A. Yes. If a student does not take a course under this circumstance, this is acceptable. If the student ignores the recommendation and attempts the course, and then drops the course due to the disability, the result would be the same.

Q-193. Is the high school required to report a course if a student is diagnosed with a disability, the high school provides special accommodations and the student earns a "D" or "C" in the course?

A. Yes. A student with a disability cannot be granted a waiver for a course which was attempted and passed with a "C" or "D" in the course.

Q-194. We have a deaf student who is taking signing courses. Will these courses fulfill the foreign language requirement?

A. Yes, but only if the course is the BESE approved American Sign Language. See the answer to Question 89.

Q-195. Will LOSFA waive ACT/SAT scores for a child with ADD or ADHD or another disability?

A. No. The minimum ACT score is established by the TOPS statute and cannot be waived. However, the student may apply to ACT, Inc./SAT for special testing accommodations.

Q-196. Will LOSFA waive the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average for a child with ADD?

No. The minimum TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average of 2.50 is established in the TOPS statute and there is no provision for waiver.

Q-197. I have a student who qualifies for a disability waiver of a TOPS core curriculum course(s). How do I enter the disability information into STS to obtain the waiver for the student?

The data element letter grade code must be "E", the core curriculum waiver flag must be "Y", and the course part number must be blank. Records with "E" must be submitted as whole records.

STUDENTS WITH EXCEPTIONALITIES

Q-198. Does a student with an exceptionality have to take all of the TOPS core curriculum units? If not, what documentation must they provide?

A. TOPS core curriculum requirements may be waived for a student defined as an exceptional child in accordance with R.S. 17:1943(4), excluding gifted and talented. To obtain a waiver, the high school must certify to LOSFA that it has on file in the school records the following documents:

1. A written Individual Education Program (IEP) in accordance with R.S. 17:1941 et seq. and Louisiana Department of Education Bulletin 1706, and
2. A written statement from the principal of the high school that the failure to complete the specified core curriculum course was due solely to the student's exceptionality.

Q-199. If the IEP is for the student not to take the course, is it acceptable for the principal to certify that the reason that the student did not complete the course was due solely to the student's exceptionality?

A. Yes. If a student does not take a course under this circumstance, this is acceptable. If the student ignores the recommendation and attempts the course, and then drops the course due to the exceptionality, the result would be the same.

Q-200. Is the high school required to report a course if an exceptional student's IEP provides special accommodations and the student earns a "D" or "C" in the course?

A. Yes. A student with an exceptionality cannot be granted a waiver for a course which was attempted and passed with a "C" or "D" in the course.

TOPS TECH AWARD

Q-201. How is the TOPS Tech Award different from the TOPS Award?

A. Besides the ACT score, most of the requirements are the same as, or similar to, the TOPS Award, except that there are different core curriculums that may be used to qualify. The differences are noted in the answers to the following questions.

Q-202. What are the core curricula choices?

A. There is one TOPS Tech curriculum, also known as the Career Diploma curriculum or the JumpStart curriculum. This curriculum requires completion of 21 core courses, including 9 courses in Jump Start course sequences, workplace experiences, and credentials.

In addition, you may complete the TOPS core curriculum for the TOPS Opportunity Award (19.0 units).

Q-203.Where can I use a TOPS Tech Award?

A. The TOPS Tech Award may be used for up to two years of skill or occupational training at any campus of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, accredited two-or-four-year public colleges or universities, or private colleges or universities (members of the Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, LAICU) to pursue a vocational or technical education certificate, diploma or non-academic degree program. Students who are eligible for the TOPS Tech Award may also use their awards at any school with a valid and current certificate of registration issued by the Louisiana State Board of Cosmetology and that is accredited by an accrediting organization recognized by the United States Department of Education, and any proprietary school, with a valid and current license issued by the Board of Regents and accredited by an accrediting organization recognized by the United States Department of Education.

TOPS Tech awardees who graduated high school in 2017 or later may also use their awards to enroll in an eligible college or university on a full time basis in an associate's degree or other shorter-term training or education program that is aligned to state workforce priorities as determined by the Board of Regents and the Workforce Investment Council. (For eligible programs of study, go to http://www.osfa.la.gov/MainSitePDFs/T2017-3.pdf

If the Board of Regents and the Louisiana Workforce Commission determine that a program is no longer aligned with those priorities, an otherwise eligible student who had previously received an award and enrolled in that program may continue to use the award.

Q-204. What is a technical program?

A. A program of courses designed to teach a skill or occupation or provide technical training resulting in a vocational or technical education certificate, diploma, or a technical undergraduate degree. The purpose of TOPS Tech is to provide an incentive for qualified Louisiana residents to prepare for and pursue technical positions in Louisiana and to encourage students to enter into programs of study that meet state workforce needs.

Q-205. What is the academic year for technical programs?

A. The academic year for technical programs is referred to as the "program year" because it is different than the academic year for academic programs. A program year is the schedule of semesters or terms during a year beginning with the fall semester or term, including the winter term, if applicable, and concluding with the spring semester or term or the equivalent schedule at an institution which operates on units other than semesters or terms. Enrollment in a summer term, semester, or session is not required to maintain eligibility for an award, but the award will be paid for summer for students who enroll on a full-time basis provided that funding is available for this purpose.

Q-206. Which schools offer technical programs?

A. The eligible colleges and universities that currently offer technical programs are:

- All campuses of the Louisiana Technical Colleges
- Baton Rouge Community College
- Bossier Parish Community College
- Central Louisiana Technical Community College
- Delgado Community College
- Louisiana Delta Community College
- Louisiana State University at Eunice
- Northshore Technical Community College
- Nunez Community College
- River Parishes Community College
- South Louisiana Community College
- Southern University at Shreveport
- Fletcher Technical Community College
- SOWELA Technical Community College
- Cosmetology and Proprietary schools

Q-207. Can I use the TOPS Tech Award or the Opportunity, Performance, or Honors Award to enroll in a technical program at a nonpublic college or university?

A. Yes, if the college or university is a member of the Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (LAICU). You may also use the TOPS Tech award at certain cosmetology and proprietary schools. (See the answer to Question 203.)

Q-208. Can I use a TOPS Opportunity, Performance or Honors Award to pursue a technical program?

A. Yes. You may also use your TOPS Opportunity, Performance or Honors Award at an eligible cosmetology or a proprietary school.

Q-209. How much does the TOPS Tech Award pay toward enrollment in a technical program or in an academic program that is aligned to state workforce priorities?

A. Payment of TOPS Awards is contingent upon appropriations by the Louisiana Legislature. See the chart on LOSFA's website at http://www.osfa.la.gov/MainSitePDFs/TOPS_Payment_Amounts.pdf which indicates the TOPS Award amounts for the 2019-2020 academic year.

NOTE: TOPS Tech awardees who enroll in an approved academic program of study that results in an associate's degree at a four year university that also has a baccalaureate degree in that program will receive the weighted average of award amounts paid to students enrolled in TOPS Tech eligible programs at two year colleges and universities. For example, Northwestern State University (NSU) provides an associate's degree in Nursing as well as a baccalaureate degree. A TOPS Tech awardee enrolled in the associate's degree program at NSU will receive the weighted average award amount. Louisiana Tech University offers an associate degree in Nursing, but it does not offer a baccalaureate degree in Nursing. A TOPS Tech Awardee enrolled in this program at Louisiana Tech will receive the TOPS Award Amount that all TOPS eligible students receive at that school. You should carefully review the TOPS Payment Amount Charts referenced above before selecting your school.

Q-210. How much do the TOPS Opportunity, Performance and Honors Awards pay toward enrollment in a technical program?

A. Payment of TOPS Awards is contingent upon appropriations by the Louisiana Legislature. See the chart on LOSFA's website at http://www.osfa.la.gov/MainSitePDFs/TOPS_Payment_Amounts.pdf which indicates the TOPS Award amounts for the 2018-2019 academic year.

Q-211. Will TOPS pay my award for a summer session in a technical program?

A. Yes, provided that funding is available for this purpose. Payment of a TOPS Award is contingent upon appropriations by the Louisiana Legislature. If funding is available, LOSFA will update its website and its social media pages, and the financial aid office at your school will be notified.

If funds are available, TOPS will pay for enrollment in a summer session in technical programs EXCEPT for the summer session immediately after high school graduation. For example, if you graduate in May 2020, you may enroll in a technical program for the 2020 summer session, but your TOPS Tech Award will not be paid; however, if you enroll as a full time student in a technical program for the fall semester of 2020 and/or spring semester of 2021, your award will be paid for enrolling in a technical program for the 2021summer session.

Q-212. Will a TOPS Tech Award pay for two technical diplomas?

A. Yes. You may use two full years of eligibility for technical programs.

Q-213. Will a TOPS Opportunity, Performance and Honors Award pay for two technical diplomas (four years)?

A. Yes. You may use all 8 semesters of eligibility for technical programs.

Q-214. Will a TOPS Opportunity, Performance or Honors Award pay for a technical diploma (two years) and then two years of a four-year academic program?

A. Yes. If you have the TOPS Opportunity, Performance or Honors Award and enroll in an academic program in the semester or term, excluding summer sessions, that starts no later than the fall semester following the one year anniversary of the semester you completed the technical diploma, you may be eligible for continued TOPS payments if you have met continuing eligibility requirements and have not exhausted your TOPS eligibility.

Q-215. What cumulative GPA do I have to maintain with the TOPS Tech Award?

A. You must maintain a 2.00 cumulative GPA at the end of each semester or term, and you are required to have a cumulative 2.50 GPA at the end of each academic year if you are enrolled in a technical program. This GPA is applicable to recipients of TOPS Tech and Opportunity Awards. If you are a Performance or Honors recipient and you are enrolled in a technical program, you must have a cumulative GPA of at least 3.00 at the end of each academic year to maintain your award as a Performance or Honors Award. If you do not earn at least a 3.0, your award will be converted to Opportunity for the remainder of your eligibility and you will no longer be eligible to receive the stipend portion of your award.

If you are **enrolled at a proprietary or cosmetology school**, you must meet the federal grant aid steady academic progress requirement at the school you are attending instead of the grades stated in the preceding paragraph.

Q-216. How many hours does a TOPS Tech student have to earn to maintain his award?

A. You must earn (pass with a "D" or better) at least 24 hours each program year, regardless of whether you are a TOPS Tech recipient or a TOPS Opportunity, Performance or Honors recipient.

Q-217. If I am enrolled in a technical program, can I use hours earned during a summer session to meet the 24 hour requirement?

A. Yes.

Q-218. If I enrolled in a technical program and have not earned at least 24 hours after the spring semester, will TOPS pay for the summer session?

A. Yes, provided that funding is available for this purpose.

Q-219. If I have an Opportunity, Performance or Honors Award and have attended both an academic program and a technical program, how is my GPA for TOPS continuing eligibility calculated?

A. All of your college grades will be averaged together, regardless of whether your program of study is academic or technical.

Q-220. What is the deadline for taking the ACT WorkKeys assessment?

A. You must achieve a qualifying WorkKeys score on or before the end of April in the academic year you graduate from high school. If you have not previously achieved a qualifying score for the TOPS Tech Award, you may qualify after April in the academic year you graduate from high school, but prior to July 1, by using May and/or June test scores. (In certain very limited circumstances, you may qualify for a TOPS Tech award based on a WorkKeys assessment score achieved on a test taken before September 30 (See the answer to Question 4 above.). If your qualifying WorkKeys score is earned after the April deadline, but before September 30 your award will be reduced by one semester.

Q-221. Where can I obtain information on WorkKeys Assessment dates and locations?

A. A WorkKeys Assessment is not scheduled like ACT testing. Assessment dates depend on the entity administering the assessment.

You should first check with your high school counselor or school district office. When a school district administers an assessment, it typically administers the assessment in a group/class setting, but dates and times vary by district.

For individual testing, you can contact one of the Louisiana Workforce Commission's (LWC) Business Career Solution Centers. These Centers administer the assessment frequently and at some centers, multiple times during the week. A list of the Centers can be downloaded from LWC's website at: www.laworks.net/Downloads/WFD/B&CSC_Contacts.pdf.

You can also contact your local Louisiana Technical College (LTC) campus. The LTC Adult Education program administers WorkKeys assessments. Generally, a student must be enrolled in a LTC program to take the assessment at the LTC campus.

You are responsible for sending these scores to LOSFA. You should send a copy of the official ACT Score Report (write your date of birth on the report) to LOSFA by mail or by fax to (225) 612-6508 or by email to custserv@la.gov. Send an email to LOSFA at custserv@la.gov if you have questions. Be sure that the name that you use on the WorkKeys assessments and the FAFSA exactly matches your name on file with your high school or the Louisiana Department of Education. For example, if your school records indicate your name is John Q. Smith, your ACT and your FAFSA should use the name John Q. Smith, not John Smith, not John Quincy Smith, and not Quincy Smith. If your name differs in the slightest way in any of these documents, the determination of your eligibility for TOPS may be delayed because matching your records will require manual intervention by LOSFA staff.

Q-222. Can I receive a TOPS Tech award if I join the National Guard?

A. Yes. You are entitled to a tuition waiver from the school, and TOPS will provide $300 per semester ($600 per year maximum) for assistance with additional costs.