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HURRICANE LAURA and NATURAL DISASTER QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
FOR
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AND POSTSECONDARY STUDENTS

Updated as of 2/8/212021 at 11:30 p.m.

On September 18, 2020, Governor John Bel Edwards signed Proclamation 124 JBE 2020. This Proclamation suspended certain provisions of law related to TOPS for students who were living in a parish or attending an institution in a parish in which an emergency declaration was issued due to Hurricane Laura.

After the 2020 Second Extraordinary Legislative Session, Governor Edwards signed Act 17, which includes the provisions in Act 17 in the law governing TOPS. Act 17 also allows the administering agency to provide the same type of waivers for other natural disasters occurring during the 2020-2021 academic year, including Hurricanes Delta and Zeta.

As of February 08, 2021, the list of parishes affected by natural disasters includes:

- **Acadia**
- **Allen**
- **Beauregard**
- **Caddo**
- **Calcasieu**
- **Cameron**
- **Grant**
- **Iberia**
- **Jackson**
- **Jefferson**
- **Jefferson Davis**
- **Lafayette**
- **Lafourche**
- **Lasalle**
- **Lincoln**
- **Morehouse**
- **Natchitoches**
- **Orleans**
- **Ouachita**

- **Plaquemines**
- **Rapides**
- **Sabine**
- **St. Bernard**
- **St. Landry**
- **St. Martin**
- **Terrebone**
- **Union**
- **Vermilion**
- **Vernon**
- **Winn**

High School Graduates of 2020

The deadline for achievement of a qualifying score on the ACT or SAT when the ACT or SAT testing site has closed due to the effects of Hurricane Laura, natural disasters, or actions taken to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 has been extended to December 31, 2020.

1. I was scheduled to take the ACT on September 12, but my test site was closed because it was damaged in Hurricane Laura. I am unable to schedule a test by September 30. Does this mean I won't qualify for TOPS?

No, students graduating from high school in 2020 have until December 31, 2020 to take the ACT/SAT.

2. I was scheduled to take the ACT in September, but the test site was closed because of COVID-19, and I am unable to schedule another test this month. Will I have an opportunity to qualify for TOPS on a later test?

Students graduating from high school in 2020 have until December 31, 2020 to take the ACT/SAT. An exception to the deadline may be granted if student provides documentation that he/she was registered for a test that was canceled due to COVID-19, Hurricane Laura, or a declared natural disaster, and he/she was unable to schedule a test before the deadline due to circumstances beyond his/her control.

3. I already have a qualifying ACT score. If I take the ACT again before December 31, will I be evaluated for a higher award level than what I've already been awarded?

Yes. Once LOSFA receives a new ACT score, your award eligibility will be re-evaluated, and if you are eligible for a higher award level, your award will be upgraded.

4. I was scheduled to take the ACT before December 31, 2020, but I was exposed to COVID-19 and was not able to take the test. I was unable to schedule another ACT before December 31, 2020. Is there anything I can do to qualify for TOPS?

Yes. You may request an exception to the ACT deadline of December 31, 2020. You must complete the Request for Exception form found here on LOSFA's website and return it to LOSFA at TOPS.Exceptions@la.gov along with documentation that you were registered for an ACT before December 31, 2020, documentation that you were exposed to COVID-19, and documentation that you were unable to schedule a test within a reasonable distance from your home or the location where you were living prior to December 31, 2020.

Note that if you attended school in the fall semester of 2020, your TOPS Award (or an upgraded TOPS Award) will be paid for the first time during the semester in which you first qualified for the Award, and it will not be paid retroactively for any semesters you attended prior to achievement of the qualifying ACT score.

****NOTE: The above deadline applies to 2020 high school graduates ONLY. Graduates of 2021 have until April 30, 2021, to achieve a qualifying score on the ACT without penalty.**

Current High School Students

- **The requirement that students must live in Louisiana and complete their last four (4) semesters at a Louisiana high school or that their parents must reside in Louisiana for the 24 months preceding high school graduation.**
- **The requirement that a student score a minimum of 23 on the ACT to receive the Opportunity Award if they graduate from an out of state high school.**
- **The requirement that a student begin a home study program no later than the end of their 10th grade year.**

1. I am a high school senior, and we went to Texas to evacuate from Cameron Parish, and now I'm going to school in Texas. Does this mean I will not be able qualify for TOPS?

The requirement that you live in Louisiana and complete your last 4 semesters of high school in Louisiana has been waived. A student meets the residency requirement if he/she actually resided in Louisiana the entire eleventh grade year and was enrolled in a Louisiana high school, or if a parent/court ordered custodian resided in an affected parish for at least twelve months preceding August 26, 2020.

The requirement that you complete the TOPS core curriculum has also been waived upon documentation by your principal that failure to complete the core curriculum is due solely to the fact that required courses were not available at the school you attended. The requirement that you must have a higher ACT score if you have to stay in Texas for your entire senior year and graduate from a Texas high school has also been waived.

2. I was a senior in high school in a parish that was severely impacted by Hurricane Laura. My parents have decided to home school me now. Will I still be able to qualify for TOPS?

Yes. The requirement that you begin a home study program no later than the end of your tenth-grade year has been waived.

College Students

- **The annual hours requirements**
- **The steady academic progress requirements**
- **The minimum grade point average requirements**
- **The deadlines requiring that a student whose award is suspended for failure to meet the grade point average requirements must bring his grade point average up to that required in the applicable statute within a specified time period**
- **The requirement that one semester of TOPS eligibility be reduced for each semester attended full time at an out of state institution.**

1. Is there anything I need to do to guarantee my TOPS award is not cancelled?

If your FAFSA indicates that you lived in a parish for which a disaster was declared by FEMA, or if you were attending an institution in an affected parish, you will receive an automatic exception to this requirement for the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters.

2. Do I need to file a request for exception if I withdraw this semester or if I don't earn 24 hours?

If your FAFSA indicates that you lived in a parish for which a disaster was declared by FEMA, or if you were attending an institution in an affected parish, you will receive an automatic exception to these requirements for the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters.

3. Do I lose a semester of TOPS because I had to withdraw?

It depends on whether the 14th school day has passed, and if so, whether your school issues a TOPS refund. Your school will determine whether it will issue a TOPS refund or any other type of refund. If you withdraw on or before the 14th class day, your TOPS Award will not be paid and you will not lose a semester of TOPS.

4. What happens if my school issues a full TOPS refund?

If your school issues a full refund, you will receive credit for a full semester of TOPS funding as if you had never utilized the affected semester.

5. What happens if my school only issues a partial refund?

If your school provides a partial refund, you will receive credit for the portion of the TOPS award amount that is refunded. Credit for this portion will be available after you've exhausted your 8th semester or equivalent terms on TOPS.

6. How do I find out if my school issued a TOPS refund?

You will receive an email from LOSFA at the most recent email address in LOSFA's records. To verify that we have the correct email address for you, register for a Student Hub account at https://mylosfa.la.gov/applications/student-hub/. You will also be able to check your Student Hub account to see if your school provided a partial or full refund of your TOPS Award.

7. My school will not issue a refund. What does this mean for me?

If your school does not issue a refund, your TOPS eligibility will be reduced by one semester or term as it would have if you had remained enrolled throughout the semester.

8. I am at the end of my two-year TOPS award suspension and I will not be remaining enrolled this fall because my home was destroyed in Hurricane Laura. Does this mean I have lost my TOPS Award permanently?

The requirement that you bring your grades up by the deadline has been suspended. If the fall semester of 2020 is your last semester to bring your grades up, you will have until the end of the fall semester of 2021 to achieve the required GPA in order to have your award reinstated.

9. I requested and was granted an exception for the fall semester of 2020 to participate in an internship, but I will no longer be participating. What do I need to do to make sure my TOPS is available for fall?

You must enroll full time in the fall semester of 2020 if you will not be participating in the internship, unless your home of record or institution is in one of the parishes listed above. Your school will bill LOSFA for your TOPS Award as it usually does.

10. I am a TOPS Opportunity recipient whose GPA was below 2.3 at the end of the spring semester of 2020. Will my TOPS Award be paid for this fall semester of 2020?

Acts 346 and 245 of the 2020 Regular Legislative Session were passed to assist students with maintaining their TOPS Awards during the COVID-19 epidemic. The law suspended the requirement that a student have a 2.30 grade point average at the end of the 2019-2020 academic year. Your TOPS award will be paid for the fall semester of 2020 if you enroll full time. If you enroll part-time, your TOPS award may be paid, but you must specifically request such a payment by speaking with the

financial aid office at your school. Note that use of TOPS for part-time enrollment will reduce your total remaining TOPS eligibility by one semester.

11. My GPA was below a 2.30 at the end of the spring semester of 2020, and I am not enrolling this fall semester because of Hurricane Laura. Will my TOPS Award be paid for the spring semester of 2021 if I enroll?

Yes. The GPA requirement for the 2019-2020 academic year was suspended by Acts 346 and 245 of the 2020 Regular Legislative Session. The GPA requirement was extended through the 2020-2021 Academic Year for students living in affected parishes. You have until the end of the Fall 2021 semester to bring your GPA up to that required by the TOPS statutes

12. I am at the end of my two-year TOPS award suspension and my home was destroyed during Hurricane Laura, so I am not enrolling in/withdrawing from school this fall. What happens to my award?

The deadline to bring your grades up to that required by the TOPS statutes has been waived. You will have until the end of the Fall 2021 semester to bring your grades up.

13. I am a TOPS Honors award recipient whose GPA was below a 3.00 at the end of Spring 2020 semester. I know that the GPA requirement does not apply for last year because of COVID-19, but I thought I had to bring up my grades by Fall 2020. My home is in a hurricane affected parish, and I am needed to help with clean up and repairs. Am I going to lose my Honors award if I don't bring my grades up?

The GPA requirement was waived for the 2020 academic year because of COVID. This waiver was extended for the 2020-2021 Academic Year for students living in affected parishes. Therefore, you have until the end of Fall 2021 to bring your grades back up to a 3.00

THIS DOCUMENT WILL BE UPDATED AS MORE INFORMATION BECOMES AVAILABLE.