



**LOSFA**

# PRESS RELEASE



From the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance

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## **TOPS Progress Tracker now available to parents and students on Louisiana Connect College Access and Career Planning Portal**

BATON ROUGE – The Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA) today announced a major addition to the Louisiana Connect college access and career planning Web portal ([www.louisianaconnect.org](http://www.louisianaconnect.org)) with the launch of the new TOPS Progress Tracker tool.

“The TOPS Progress Tracker will provide students and their parents with an ongoing opportunity to review student progression toward meeting the requirements necessary to qualify for a Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) scholarship award using their actual academic information,” said LOSFA Executive Director Melanie Amrhein. “This is a tool that LOSFA has dreamed of for many years and the Louisiana Connect portal is making it a reality. It will ensure that all students have equal access to critical information regarding their future eligibility for a TOPS award and to plan accordingly. For example, if discrepancies are detected that are not explained in the footnotes on the TOPS Progress Tracker display, students and/or parents can quickly notify the appropriate officials and, if warranted, corrections can be made promptly to avoid potential delays in TOPS eligibility processing,” she added.

**The TOPS Progress Tracker will display the student’s progress toward completing the required TOPS Core Curriculum courses.** As required TOPS Core curriculum courses are successfully completed, they will be added to the TOPS Progress Tracker listing and the number of remaining core units needed for TOPS qualification will be updated.

**The TOPS Progress Tracker will display the student’s highest ACT score (or SAT equivalent score) on record.** Students may take the ACT or SAT multiple times, but must obtain a qualifying score on a national or recognized test taken prior to high school graduation. ACT score (along with TOPS Core course completion and GPA) determines what level of TOPS award the student can receive. Composite ACT scores of 16 or less will not qualify for any TOPS award. Scores of 17-19 put the student on track for a TOPS Tech award (which can only be used for a vocational/technical, non-academic program of study). Scores of 20-22 put the student on track to qualify for a TOPS Opportunity award which pays a base tuition amount at an eligible postsecondary institution. Scores of 23-26 put the student on track to earn a TOPS Performance award which pays an amount equal to the TOPS Opportunity Award plus a \$400.00 annual stipend. An ACT composite score of 27 or higher puts the student on track to earn a TOPS Honors award which pays an amount equal to the TOPS Opportunity Award plus an \$800.00 annual stipend.

**The TOPS Progress Tracker will display the student’s current TOPS Core GPA.** Many parents and students don’t realize that the cumulative high school Grade Point Average (GPA)

displayed on their transcript after graduation and their periodic “report cards” prior to graduation is NOT the GPA used to determine TOPS eligibility. TOPS eligibility is determined by the GPA earned for the required TOPS Core Curriculum courses only. In addition, the TOPS Progress Tracker will convert the TOPS Core GPA displayed to a 4.0 grading scale (all qualifying TOPS GPA’s must be converted to a 4.0 scale if any other scale is used by the school attended) in order to determine TOPS eligibility.

**The TOPS Progress Tracker will display the TOPS award that the student is currently on track to receive.** Based on the TOPS Core Curriculum courses taken to date, the highest ACT score on record, and the TOPS Core Curriculum GPA to date, the TOPS Progress Tracker will display student progress toward a TOPS Opportunity award, TOPS Performance award, TOPS Honors award, and/or TOPS Tech award and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

### **About Louisiana Connect**

The Louisiana Connect college access and career planning portal ([www.louisianaconnect.org](http://www.louisianaconnect.org)), developed in partnership with ConnectEDU, provides a plethora of tools and resources to help students plan for life after high school, find colleges where they can be successful, and launch rewarding careers. Importantly, Louisiana Connect provides professional school counselors, parents, teachers and advisors with a full suite of tracking dashboards, reporting capabilities, and communication tools to help students navigate the process.

As part of this statewide initiative, this data-driven Web portal was designed to give students, parents, counselors, and administrators a “one stop shop” for college and career planning. This centralized tool provides students with the ability to create an online portfolio (including career assessments, GPAs, course history, test scores, graduation requirements, and extracurricular activities) in addition to providing them with alerts on key milestones for college applications, scholarships, and financing deadlines.

Students can also use Louisiana Connect to compare postsecondary institutions by course offerings and cost of attendance. It further allows students to initiate direct exchanges with schools they are interested in attending and/or learning more about. Similarly, it allows participating postsecondary institutions to utilize the portal as a recruiting tool to drive information, scholarship offers and other data regarding their school to individual students.

The portal also allows students to calculate the amount of the monthly loan repayment that will be required upon graduation before they borrow, compare the repayment amount to the projected salary for their chosen profession and to determine the lifestyle they will be able to afford. This often serves as a “wake-up call” for students who would otherwise have borrowed heavily to earn a degree in a field that yields a modest income. It also tends to encourage more active searches for institutional and private scholarships and grants, and less expensive postsecondary institutions.

There is also an area of the portal that allows students to investigate employment opportunities within Louisiana, access internships, and initiate dialog with Louisiana companies.

Students and parents can access the online portal from virtually anywhere. They will have the ability to view their progress as they explore their career interests, build a resume, and create a college list. Parents can also suggest colleges and scholarships to their child, chart historical college admission outcomes, and calculate financial aid information.

LOSFA’s goal is to provide every Louisiana student with the opportunity to successfully pursue and persist in a postsecondary environment. Thus, this exciting new tool is being offered to Louisiana students and families at no cost. Parents and students are encouraged to take

advantage of this opportunity by activating their accounts today. Student registrations, under the supervision of professional school counselors at both public and non-public middle and high schools are underway and are continuing statewide. Parents may enroll by visiting: [www.louisianaconnect.org](http://www.louisianaconnect.org), clicking the first time login icon, then selecting the parent option, and entering their child's information.

"This technology represents the cutting edge of college access and career planning in the twenty-first century," Amrhein said. "In addition," she added, "we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the unprecedented level of cooperation and support LOSFA has received from the Louisiana Department of Education both in the form of data sharing and in promoting the use of the Louisiana Connect portal to the state's middle and high schools."

In summary, the Louisiana Connect college access and career planning portal allows students to:

- Connect with colleges and universities that are a match for their educational and career goals
- Learn about careers and connect with employers
- Find scholarships and other programs designed to help the student succeed
- Access an exclusive News Feed and Event Planner
- Build a profile to highlight individual skills and achievements
- Learn how a college education can be affordable
- Compare costs and academic offerings from various in and out of state schools

Other Louisiana Connect portal highlights include:

- Individual Graduation Plan: Integration of state-mandated Individual Graduation Plan (5-Year Plan), driving all 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students to the web portal
- Data Integration: Louisiana Department of Education student data loaded into the web portal, pre-populating student profiles, and driving college, scholarship and career matching
- College Searching & Matching: Guided college searching, matching and comparison tools
- Scholarship Searching & Matching: Including the ability for counselors to upload local scholarships
- Career Exploration & Planning: Interest, Skills & Values assessments mapped to occupation profiles, internships, and career planning strategies
- Dashboards & Reporting: Resources that empower counselors to help students stay on track to graduate and to earn targeted scholarships and grants

### **About LOSFA**

The Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA) is a state agency and is the

Administrative arm of the Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission and the Louisiana Tuition Trust Authority. Some of the programs administered by LOSFA include Louisiana's premier merit based scholarship program, the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS); the state's 529 college savings plan, the Student Tuition Assistance and Revenue Trust (START) program; the state's primary need based grant program, the Louisiana Go Grant; the Rockefeller State Wildlife Scholarship program; the Chafee Educational Training Voucher program, and the John R. Justice Student Loan Repayment program.

### **About ConnectEDU**

ConnectEDU is a privately held technology company, committed to preparing and transitioning 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learners on their pathways from school to college to career, helping them realize their potential, achieve a secure financial future, and ultimately connect to life's possibilities. ConnectEDU was created in 2002 by Craig Powell, an entrepreneur with a passion for ensuring that all students have access to the expertise and resources needed to realize and achieve their potential. Today, ConnectEDU serves more than 20 million registered learners, 5,000 educational institutions, and 130,000 employers throughout 40 countries; all engaging and supporting with learners across their school-to-college-to-career pathway.

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