

# **2012-2013 TOPS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

**For**

**HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS  
AND  
COUNSELORS**  
(Revised 8-24-2012)

**PRESENTED BY**

**LOUISIANA OFFICE OF STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE (LOSFA)**

**Contact us at:**

**Public Information Representatives: 1-800-259-5626**

**E-Mail: [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov)**

**Web site: [www.osfa.la.gov](http://www.osfa.la.gov)**

**Also visit LOSFA on:**

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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 2012-2013 school year; however, the information for graduates of other years may be different due to changes in the TOPS Statute and the rules implementing the TOPS Statute.**

# **IMPORTANT**

## **CHANGES TO TOPS CORE CURRICULUM**

**FOR THE TOPS OPPORTUNITY, PERFORMANCE AND HONORS AWARDS  
FOR  
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES OF 2014 AND THEREAFTER**

**Students who entered the ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) grade in the 2010-2011 academic year and later should pay close attention to this new core curriculum requirement.**

Beginning with students graduating in 2014, the TOPS core curriculum has been changed. Students will be required to complete 19 units from the TOPS Core Curriculum that must include the following:

- 4 – English
- 4 – Math
- 4 – Science
- 4 – Social Studies
- 1 – Fine Arts Survey
- 2 – Foreign Language

**19 TOTAL UNITS**

The ½ unit in computer will no longer be required.

See the Chart on the next page for the courses allowed in the TOPS Core for 2014 and thereafter.

**TOPS CORE CURRICULUM  
FOR THE TOPS OPPORTUNITY, PERFORMANCE AND HONORS AWARDS  
FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES OF 2014 AND THEREAFTER**

As of August 24, 2012

Units	Course <sup>1 2</sup>
<b>ENGLISH = 4 Units</b>	
(1 Unit)	English I
(1 Unit)	English II
(1 Unit)	English III
(1 Unit)	English IV
<b>MATH = 4 Units</b>	
(1 Unit)	Algebra I (1 unit) or Integrated Mathematics I or Applied Algebra I or Applied Algebra 1A and 1B (both for 1 unit) or Algebra I – Part I and Algebra I – Part 2 (both for 1 unit) or Applied Mathematics I and Applied Mathematics II (both for 1 unit)
(1 Unit)	Algebra II or Integrated Mathematics II
(2 Units)	Geometry or Calculus or Applied Geometry or Integrated Mathematics III or Applied Mathematics III or Advanced Math–Pre-Calculus or Advanced Math–Functions and Statistics or Pre-Calculus or Probability and Statistics or Discrete Mathematics or Algebra III
<b>SCIENCE = 4 Units</b>	
(1 Unit)	Biology I or Biology II
(1 Unit)	Chemistry I or Chemistry Com or Chemistry II
(2 Units)	Earth Science or Environmental Science or Integrated Science or Physical Science or Biology II or Chemistry II or Anatomy and Physiology or Physics or Physics II or Physics for Technology I or Physics for Technology II or Agriscience I and II (both for 1 unit)
<b>SOCIAL STUDIES = 4 Units</b>	
(1 Unit)	U.S. History (formerly American History)
(2 Units)	World History, Western Civilization or World Geography or European History or History of Religion
(1 Unit)	Civics and Free Enterprise (one unit combined) or Civics (one unit) or AP American Government (one unit)
<b>FINE ARTS = 1 Unit</b>	
(1 Unit)	Fine Arts Survey; (or substitute 1 unit performance courses in music, dance, or theater; or 1 unit of studio art or 1 unit of visual art; or Speech III and Speech IV (both for 1 unit)
<b>FOREIGN LANGUAGE = 2 Units</b>	
(2 Units)	Foreign Language, both units in the same language
<b>TOTAL = 19 Units</b>	

1 Advanced Placement (AP) courses with the same name as a course listed in the TOPS Core Curriculum may be substituted.

2 Includes courses designated as equivalents.



# TOPS Core Curriculum

**For the  
Opportunity, Performance, and Honors Awards  
For High School graduates of 2013**

Units	Courses <sup>1</sup>
4	English I, II, III, & IV
1	Algebra I, or Integrated Mathematics I, or Applied Algebra I or Applied Algebra 1A and 1B (2 units) or Algebra I - Parts 1 & 2 (two units) or Applied Mathematics I & II (two units)
1	Algebra II or Integrated Mathematics II
1	Geometry, Pre-Calculus, Advanced Math-Pre-Calculus, Calculus, AP Calculus, Advanced Math-Functions and Statistics, Probability and Statistics, Discrete Mathematics, Applied Mathematics III, Integrated Mathematics III, or Algebra III
1	Biology I or II
1	Chemistry I or II, or Chemistry Com
1	Anatomy and Physiology, Earth Science, Physical Science, Environmental Science, Integrated Science, Biology II, Chemistry II, Physics, Physics II, Physics for Technology I or II, AP Physics C: Electricity & Magnetism, AP Physics C: Mechanics or both Agriscience I & II (for one unit)
1	Additional Math or Science : Geometry, Applied Geometry, Pre-Calculus, Advanced Math-Pre-calculus, Calculus, AP Calculus AB, Advanced Math-Functions and Statistics, Probability and Statistics, Discrete Mathematics, Applied Mathematics III, Integrated Mathematics III, Algebra III, Biology II, Chemistry II, Physics, Physics II, AP Physics C: Electricity & Magnetism, AP Physics C: Mechanics or Anatomy and Physiology
1	American History
1	Civics and Free Enterprise (1 unit combined), Civics (1 year) or AP Government and Politics: United States
1	World History, Western Civilization, World Geography, or European History
2	Foreign Language (2 units in the same language) or American Sign Language I & II
1	Fine Arts Survey (1 unit) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>or 2 units performance courses in music, dance or theater</li> <li>or 2 units studio art</li> <li>or 2 units visual art</li> <li>or both Speech III &amp; IV</li> <li>or both Agriscience I &amp; II</li> </ul> or substitute 1 unit of an elective from among the other subjects listed in this core curriculum
½	Computer Science I or II, Computer Technology Literacy, Business Computer Applications, Introduction to Business Computer Applications, or Computer Science Elective or substitute ( <i>the following courses can only be used to substitute for the Computer Science requirement</i> ): Advanced Technical Drafting, Computer Applications, Computer/Technology Applications, Computer Architecture, Computer Electronics I or II, Computer Systems and Networking I or II, Desktop Publishing, Digital Graphics & Animation, Multimedia Productions, Computer Multimedia Presentations, Digital Media I or II, Technology Education Computer Applications, Telecommunications, Web Mastering, Web Design, Word Processing, Independent Study in Technology Applications, AP Computer Science A, AP Computer Science AB, Database Design & Programming, Database Programming with PL/SQL Training, Java Programming or substitute 1/2 unit of an elective from among the other subjects listed in the core curriculum
<b>TOTAL: 17.5 units</b>	

1. Advanced Placement (AP) courses with the same name as a course listed in the TOPS Core Curriculum may be substituted.



*This core curriculum is accurate as of the date of publication and includes courses listed in TOPS statute and those determined to be equivalent by the La. Board of Regents and BESE.*

(800) 259-5626

custserv@osfa.la.gov

www.osfa.la.gov

P.O. Box 91202, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-9202

# TOPS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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## TOPS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### “ACT” AND “SAT” TEST

#### **Q-1. What is the minimum ACT for 2013 high school graduates and does the score change every year?**

- A. The ACT qualifying scores for students graduating from eligible Louisiana high schools in 2013 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 20.2). The TOPS statute provides that the required score is calculated by rounding the state's average composite ACT score reported for the prior year to the nearest whole number. The minimum score may never be less than 20 and is currently 20.

#### **Q-2. What is the minimum ACT for students completing a BESE approved home study program for 2013?**

- A. The ACT qualifying scores for home study students for 2013 are:  
TOPS Tech – 19  
TOPS Opportunity – 22  
TOPS Performance – 24\*  
TOPS Honors – 28\*

\* Students who complete a BESE approved home study program are not eligible for the Performance and Honors awards if the Louisiana residency requirement is met based on a parent who is a Louisiana resident living outside the United States who actively engaged in work or another activity on behalf of a Louisiana sponsor or employer after having lived in Louisiana at least 24 months prior to starting work out of the country.

#### **Q-3. What is the minimum ACT for 2013 graduates of out-of state and out-of-country high schools\*?**

- A. The ACT qualifying scores for these 2013 graduates, who must qualify under alternate eligibility criteria for 2013, are:  
TOPS Tech – 20  
TOPS Opportunity – 23  
TOPS Performance – 26\*  
TOPS Honors – 30\*

\* Students who graduate from out-of-country high schools are not eligible for TOPS Performance and TOPS Honors awards if the Louisiana residency requirement is met based on a parent who is a Louisiana resident living outside the United States who actively engaged in work or another activity on behalf of a Louisiana sponsor or employer after having lived in Louisiana at least 24 months prior to starting work out of the country.

#### **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.

**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.

**Q-6. Will a score from an ACT or SAT taken after July 1 be accepted?**

A. These scores will be accepted under very limited circumstances. Beginning with awards made to applicants graduating from high school in academic year 2011, a first time qualifying score on the ACT/SAT earned before September 30 immediately following high school graduation may be accepted if the Commission grants 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.

The use of any ACT or SAT score earned after April 30 to be eligible for a TOPS award will result in the reduction of your period of eligibility for the award by one semester or two quarters.

**Q-7. Is any type of ACT or SAT test acceptable?**

A. No. You must take an official National, International, Military, Arranged, or Special ACT test or the SAT test.

**Q-8. Should I include my social security number on my ACT or SAT application?**

A. **Yes. You should still provide your social security number.** ACT will include your social security number on its report to LOSFA. Your social security number is the only means that LOSFA has to match your ACT or SAT scores with your high school grades and your TOPS application. Without the social security number matching on all three, your TOPS eligibility cannot be determined. If you do not include your social security number, processing you for TOPS eligibility will be greatly delayed or possibly prevented.

If you did not provide your social security number when you applied for the test, you may have it added to future reports if you so request by writing ACT Records, 301 ACT Drive, Post Office Box 451, Iowa City, IA 52243-0451. If you have it added, be sure to have the future report sent to LOSFA.

When you register for a national or international ACT test date, ACT will automatically assigned an ACT ID number to you. This number will not substitute for your social security number.

**Q-9. How does the new 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-10. 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.

**Q-11. 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 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 either mail LOSFA a copy of the score report (must include your name and social security number), or call LOSFA at 1-800-259-5626 and provide the information. LOSFA will verify the score and test date through ACT.

We do not recommend that you pay to send a MAILGRAM. We can verify your ACT score and test date without a fee or delay to you.

**Q-12. 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-13. 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. High school codes for in-state high school graduates will be provided through the State Department of Education’s Student Transcript System (STS), and therefore, you do not have to correct your ACT report. If you graduated from an out-of-state/country high school or completed an approved home study program or were in the military and you have applied for TOPS, contact a LOSFA Public Information Representative at 1-800-259-5626 or e-mail [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov).

If you graduate from an out-of-state high school or complete an approved home study program, this answer does not apply to you. See the Questions for out-of state graduates and home study completers.

**Q-14. 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, the total of the sub-scores 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 – 820  
Opportunity Award – 940  
Performance Award – 1050  
Honors Award – 1210



**Q-15. 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-16. 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), and you must direct the College Board to electronically report the score to LOSFA within 45 days of the date you take the test, 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 14 above.

When registering for the SAT, you must indicate the Louisiana 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 either mail LOSFA a copy of the score report (must include the student’s name and social security number), or call a LOSFA Public Information Representative at 1-800-259-5626 or e-mail [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov).

**Q-17. 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 or in certain very limited circumstances on a test taken before September 30 (See the answer to Question 6 above.). 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-18. 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 (and under very limited circumstances on a test taken before September 30. See the answer to Question 6.), but your eligibility for the award will be reduced by one semester or two quarters.

**APPLICATION PROCESS**

**Q-19. What is the application for TOPS?**

- A. Beginning with 2004 high school graduates, 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.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.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.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov), including problems obtaining or using the **Personal Identification Number** (PIN) from Federal Student Aid, you should contact the FAFSA hotline at 1-800-433-3243 for assistance. Both you and one of your parents must have and use a PIN to submit the FAFSA on the Web.

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:**

2. 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.

**If you only file the TOPS On Line Application, you will be the first to lose your award in the event of a budget shortfall.**

If you experience problems completing your TOPS On Line Application, contact a LOSFA Public Information Representative at 1-800-259-5626 or e-mail [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.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 2013 high school graduate, you must file your application so that it is received by the federal processor by July 1, 2014, 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 your FAFSA or on-line application is received, 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 2013 high school graduate and your initial application is received from July 2, 2014 through August 30, 2014, you will be eligible to receive seven semesters of TOPS funding beginning with the 2013-2014 academic year. You must also meet TOPS Continuing Eligibility Requirements if you attend college during the 2013-2014 academic year.

If you are a 2013 high school graduate and your application is received from August 31, 2014 through October 29, 2014, you will be eligible to receive six semesters of TOPS funding beginning with the 2013-2014 academic year. You must also meet TOPS Continuing Eligibility Requirements if you attend college during the 2013-2014 academic year.

If you are a 2013 high school graduate and your application is received after October 29, 2014, 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 full-time 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 full-time 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> deadline, your award will be reduced by two semesters. (See Questions 45, 150, 151 and 156 for eligibility requirements for students who attend out-of-state colleges.)

For example, you are a 2013 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 2013 and then you enroll as a full-time student at an eligible Louisiana college for the spring semester of 2014. Your deadline would be July 1, 2014 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.**

**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 2013 graduate, you should submit the FAFSA for the 2013-2014 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 may 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. There is a question on the FAFSA that permits you to report whether your parents have filed or will file a federal tax return. If your parents indicate that they will file a return, they should complete the income questions based on 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](http://www.finaid.org/calculators) or the U.S. Department of Education's FAFSA4caster at [www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov/](http://www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov/).

**Beware:** You and your parents should be aware that students who file the TOPS On-Line Application will be the first eliminated from the TOPS program in the event the legislature does not appropriate sufficient funds to pay a TOPS award to all eligible students. You and your parents should also 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.

**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; however, in the event of a budgetary shortfall, your award will be the first eliminated from the TOPS program. 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 anytime, and corrections do not change the original FAFSA receipt date.

**Q-30. How is LOSFA able to determine which high school I attended if the FAFSA does not have a section for this information to be conveyed?**

- A. If you graduated from a BESE approved public or non-public high school, the Louisiana Department of Education through its Student Transcript System (STS) will report to LOSFA what high school you attended.

If you graduated from an out-of-state or out-of-country high school or completed a BESE approved home study program, you include this information on your ACT or SAT registration form. You will also include your high school name and address on your FAFSA. You should receive a letter from LOSFA requesting additional information regarding the high school you attended, Louisiana residency, citizenship, etc. to begin the TOPS eligibility process. If you do not, contact a LOSFA Public Information Representative at 1-800-259-5926 or e-mail [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov).

**Q-31. 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-32. 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-33. 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.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.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.

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

**AWARD AMOUNTS**

**Q-34. How much does the TOPS Opportunity Award pay to pursue an academic undergraduate degree?**

- A. If you enroll in a Louisiana public postsecondary institution, TOPS pays an amount equal to tuition that semester **OR** to the tuition and the mandatory fees in effect on January 1, 1998, plus any additional tuition and fees after that date authorized by the legislature to be paid by TOPS, whichever is greater. Fees that are not paid by TOPS include: the Technology Fee authorized by Act 1450 of the 1997 legislative session, the Academic Excellence Fees, various Facilities and Use Fees and the Operational Fees added by Act 788 of the 2004 legislative session, and any other fees added by the institution that are not authorized by the legislature to be paid by TOPS.

If you enroll in a regionally accredited independent college or university (non-public) in Louisiana that is a member of the Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, TOPS pays the weighted average of the amount paid at public institutions and is calculated by dividing the total dollar value of awards (excluding award stipends) made under TOPS in the prior academic year to students attending public colleges and universities that offer baccalaureate degrees by the total number of students that received the awards.

**Q-35. What is the value of a TOPS award?**

- A. It depends on the college attended and the award made to you. The total value of a TOPS Honors Award for attendance at LSU in Baton Rouge for one year, based on the tuition for the 2012-2013 academic year, will be \$5,983 including the \$800 stipend. Current year tuition amounts are listed by institution at [www.osfa.la.gov/TOPSAwardamounts](http://www.osfa.la.gov/TOPSAwardamounts).



**Q-36. Will TOPS pay for summer school?**

- A. The TOPS Opportunity, Performance and Honors Awards will not pay for college summer school except 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 nonacademic 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 officer at your school.

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

**Q-37. How many semesters does a TOPS award cover?**

- 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 deadline but before July 1 immediately after graduation; or
  - You qualified for TOPS based on an ACT score achieved after July 1 immediately after graduation but before September 30 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 Out-of-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 granted authority 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 the 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](http://www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform)), obtained directly from LOSFA or by emailing [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov).**

**Q-38. Will TOPS pay for me 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. You MAY use the TOPS Opportunity, Performance or Honors Award for nonacademic, technical programs, and you may use your award to complete more than one such program, provided you have not exceeded your total eligibility of eight semesters.

**Q-39. Will TOPS pay 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.

If you have enrolled in an eligible Louisiana public professional school (veterinary, pharmacy, law, medical, etc.), the TOPS award amount is equal to the tuition charged by the school or an amount equal to the tuition charged by the highest cost public school for pursuit of a baccalaureate degree, whichever is less.

If you have enrolled in an eligible Louisiana private professional school, the TOPS award amount is calculated by dividing the total dollar value of awards (excluding award stipends) made under TOPS at public postsecondary institutions in the prior academic year to students attending public colleges and universities, by the total number of students that received the awards (weighted average).

If you enroll in a graduate degree program at an eligible Louisiana college or university, the TOPS award amount is equal to the tuition at the school or the tuition charged for a student while pursuing a baccalaureate degree at the highest cost public school in the state, whichever is less.

**Q-40. How does my college get the money for my TOPS award?**

A. By statute, TOPS awards are paid directly to the college or university. Institutions submit payment requests to LOSFA for students who are enrolled full-time on the 15<sup>th</sup> class day (semester schools), or the 10<sup>th</sup> class day (quarter schools) or who enroll full-time after the 14<sup>th</sup> class day (semester schools), or the 9<sup>th</sup> class day (quarter schools). Funds are sent directly to the institutions either electronically or with a paper check.

**Q-41. When is my TOPS award disbursed to my school?**

A. Your school will invoice LOSFA for your TOPS award after the 14<sup>th</sup> class day (semester schools) or the 9<sup>th</sup> class day (term or quarter schools). LOSFA will pay your award to your school after it receives and processes the invoice, normally within 10 days.

**Q-42. How does the university get the TOPS money to me (both tuition and stipend)?**

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-43. 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-44. Can I use the TOPS Opportunity, Performance or Honors Award to enroll in an occupational, skill or technical (nonacademic) program?**

A. Yes. See the Section entitled TOPS Tech Award for additional information. Note that the Opportunity, Performance and Honors awards can now be used to pay for enrollment at eligible proprietary and cosmetology schools.



**Q-45. 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 while enrolled in an out-of-state college or university, met the requirements for continuation of the award. 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. 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](http://www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform)) or obtained directly from LOSFA or by emailing [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.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 1<sup>st</sup> deadline (your award will be reduced by one semester), or 61 days but no later than 120 days after the July 1<sup>st</sup> 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* (for use by students returning from out-of-state institutions) 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 1<sup>st</sup> deadline but your award will be reduced by one semester; or 61 days but no later than 120 days after the July 1<sup>st</sup> 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/exceptionform](http://www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform)); 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-of-state 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 15<sup>th</sup>** immediately following the July 1 deadline.

**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-of-state 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](http://www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform)) or you can contact a LOSFA Public Information Representative at (800) 259-5626 or by emailing [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov).

**Q-46. 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-of-state 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 during the 2009-2010 academic year or later, 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. 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](http://www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform)), obtained directly from LOSFA or by emailing [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov).

See the answer to Question 45 for information on what you must do have your award reinstated.

**Q-47. 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 transcript from your out-of state 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. A Request for Exception form with instructions describing the documentation required can be found on the LOSFA Web site ([www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform](http://www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform)), obtained directly from LOSFA or by emailing [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov).

**NOTICE OF ELIGIBILITY LETTERS**

**Q-48. Is there a schedule set up for mailing award letters?**

- A. You cannot be determined eligible for a TOPS award until LOSFA has evaluated and confirmed 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.

Eligibility is currently determined a number of times each week and may be determined each work day in the future. A letter notifying a student of his eligibility is sent out after the Thursday night processing. For most graduates, the letters will be mailed in late May or early June. LOSFA will continue to determine eligibility throughout the year, but the majority of students receive their letter by mid-July.

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

**Q-49. 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 2013, you must enroll as a full-time student in an eligible college or university no later than the fall semester of 2014.

Enclosed with the letter notifying you of your TOPS eligibility is a document entitled “*Your Rights and Responsibilities.*” **KEEP THIS DOCUMENT DURING YOUR ENTIRE AWARD.** The statement explains that you have been determined eligible for a TOPS award and provides detailed instructions regarding the TOPS enrollment requirements which you must meet before the award is paid. 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](http://www.osfa.la.gov/TOPS) (Click on “Rights and Responsibilities” on the right hand side).

**Q-50 Do I have to notify LOSFA to accept my TOPS award?**

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

**Q-51 How can I check on my TOPS award status?**

- A. You can:
1. Create an account on the Louisiana Connect Portal: [www.louisianaconnect.org](http://www.louisianaconnect.org). Once you have an account on the Louisiana Connect portal you can provide a mobile telephone number in order to receive a text message once your TOPS status has been determined.
  2. You (the student) can register at the student logon on the Louisiana Awards System at [www.osfa.la.gov/AwardSystem/](http://www.osfa.la.gov/AwardSystem/) at any time to check your ACT/SAT information and award status. Note that you may register on the Award System at any time, but your ACT/SAT information will not be available until ACT or SAT reports a score. Once you register, you may receive messages from LOSFA regarding what is needed to determine your eligibility for a TOPS award.
  3. You can call a LOSFA Public Information Representative at (800) 259-5626.
  4. Wait to receive notification via United States mail.

Your eligibility for a TOPS award cannot be determined until LOSFA has your ACT or SAT score, your STS data through high school graduation and your complete FAFSA or On-line Application. The information from these three sources is matched using your social security number, name and date of birth. Without the social security number, name and date of birth matching on all three, your TOPS eligibility cannot be determined. Failure to include your correctly spelled name as it appears on your social security number card, a correct date of birth and a correct social security number will greatly delay and could totally prevent processing for TOPS eligibility.

## **AWARD PAYMENT AND RENEWAL**

### **Q-52. 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. You must complete the FAFSA each year if you qualify for federal grant aid. In the event of a budget shortfall, a student who does not reapply by submitting a FAFSA or Renewal FAFSA will be the first to be eliminated from receiving his TOPS award. A student who is receiving other forms of federal and state financial aid must submit the FAFSA or Renewal FAFSA each year to continue receiving aid.

### **Q-53. What is the deadline to reapply for TOPS?**

- A. TOPS renewal for the upcoming academic year should be filed no later than July 1 each year. The FAFSA for the upcoming academic year is available in January preceding the academic year for which you will be applying for TOPS and other student financial aid. (See [www.FAFSA.ed.gov](http://www.FAFSA.ed.gov).)

### **Q-54. 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. However, if there is a budget shortfall, your award will not be funded.

### **Q-55. I just received my fee bill. Why is my TOPS Opportunity award not paying for all of my tuition?**

- A. At a Louisiana public institution, a TOPS Opportunity award provides an amount equal to tuition that semester OR to the tuition and the mandatory fees in effect on January 1, 1998, plus any additional tuition and fees after that date authorized by the legislature to be paid by TOPS, whichever is greater. The amount does not include technology fees, academic excellence fees, energy surcharges, parking fees, room and board, or any other fee imposed by the school after January 1998 that has not been approved by the legislature. Some schools include these fees in the tuition amount on their fee bill.

If you are attending a private institution which is a member of the Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (LACIU), you will receive an amount equal to the weighted average of public school tuition paid for the previous academic year.

### **Q-56. How many hours must I earn to renew my scholarship?**

- A. You must earn (pass) 24 hours each academic year to retain your TOPS award. Failure to earn (pass) 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-57. Do my Advanced Placement hours count toward the 24 hours required for the academic year for TOPS renewal?**

- A. No. Advanced Placement hours were earned in high school so they do not count toward the 24 hours required for TOPS renewal.

### **Q-58. 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.

If you have been awarded the TOPS Opportunity, Performance and Honors Awards and you are enrolled in a nonacademic program, you should read the answers to Questions 215, 219, and 228.

**Q-59. 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.

**Q-60. 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.
- In addition, your 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, at the end of each academic year (spring semester or quarter). Your 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.

• For the TOPS OPPORTUNITY AWARD:

If you have earned at least 24 hours at the end of the spring semester, quarter or term, you must have at least the following Cum GPA at the end of the spring semester, quarter or term:

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

If you have NOT earned at least 24 hours at the end of the spring semester, quarter or term, you must have earned at least 24 hours and at least the following Cum GPA by the end of the next spring semester, quarter or term:

- .....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 earned at least 24 hours by the end of the spring semester, quarter or term, you must have at least 3.00 Cum GPA:
2. If you have NOT earned at least 24 hours during the academic year at the end of the spring semester, quarter or term, you must have earned at least 24 hours and at least a 3.00 Cum GPA by the end of the next spring semester, quarter or term:
3. If you have been awarded the TOPS Performance or Honors award and you have less than a 3.00 Cum GPA when required, 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 Cum GPA required for the Opportunity Award at the end of the spring semester, quarter or term or your TOPS Award will be suspended until you have regained academic standing and have achieved the required Cum GPA.
- If you do not achieve the required Cum GPA within two years from the end of the semester, quarter or term your award is suspended, your award will be permanently canceled. There are no exceptions or waivers to this cancellation.
- Note that if you request an exception and it is granted, the period of suspension for grades is not interrupted unless an exception is granted for military service.
- If you are enrolled in a technical program, you must have a 2.50 Cum GPA at the end of the spring semester, quarter or term or your award will be suspended, regardless of the number of hours you have earned. If you do not achieve the required Cum GPA within one year from the end of the

semester your award is suspended, your award will be permanently canceled.

- Note that if you have earned hours in both an academic program and a technical program, your grades from each program remain separate for purposes of calculating your Cum GPA. For example, if you have a 3.20 on 12 hours in a technical program and a 2.80 on 12 hours an academic program, your Cum GPA will not be 3.00. It will be 3.20 in the technical program and 2.80 in the academic program.

**See the answer to Question 58 for the definition of “academic year.”**

**Q-61. 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-62. What does it mean when my award is suspended?**

- A. It means your TOPS award will be paid until you bring your grades up, but you have not lost your award. If your award is suspended, your TOPS award will not be paid; however, 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 60.) 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. Why is my Opportunity award suspended?**

- A. You must have a cumulative GPA of **at least** 2.30 to renew your Opportunity award if you have 24 or more earned credit hours and less than 48 credit hours at the end of the spring semester, quarter, or term. Your cumulative GPA of 2.29 is less than the required GPA. **There is no rounding up of a cumulative GPA for TOPS.**

If you had not earned 24 or more credit hours at the end of the spring semester, quarter, or term, you must have a cumulative GPA of **at least** 2.30 to renew your Opportunity award after the next spring semester, quarter or term.

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

- A. You must have a cumulative GPA of at least 3.00 at the end of each spring semester, quarter or term if you had earned at least 24 hours at that time.

**Q-65. What happens if I do not have at least a 3.00 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 a cumulative GPA of 2.50 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 61-63 regarding suspension of awards.

**Q-66. My award was suspended for GPA, but my friend's award was cancelled 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 cumulative GPA or for failure to maintain Steady Academic Progress, you will have an opportunity to have your award reinstated once you have re-attained the minimum required 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, quarter or term the award is suspended for the TOPS Tech Award or for a student using an Opportunity, Performance, or Honors Award to pursue a technical program).

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 letter notifying you of the cancelation of your TOPS award. Even if the exception is approved, your award still may 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](http://www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform)), obtained directly from LOSFA or by emailing [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.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 Louisiana Award System at [www.osfa.la.gov/AwardSystem](http://www.osfa.la.gov/AwardSystem). 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. TOPS will **ONLY** pay for summer school if you are enrolled in a **Qualified Summer Session**. 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 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 for additional information.

**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 ANSWER TO QUESTION 45 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, provided you return to Louisiana in the 2009-2010 academic year or later.

**SEE THE ANSWER TO QUESTION 45 FOR ADDITIONAL 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.

**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 letter notifying you of the cancelation of your TOPS award. 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](http://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 the TOPS award.

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

A. The Opportunity, Performance and Honors awards are paid 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 Out-of-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 208 for addition 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?**

B. 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 below.

In addition, if you cannot complete a semester **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. TOPS will pay the amount of tuition charged for the graduate study OR the amount charged for undergraduate full-time enrollment at the highest cost public institution (currently LSU-BR), whichever is less. Performance and Honors award recipients will receive their stipends while in graduate school.

### **CITIZENSHIP REQUIREMENT**

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

A. 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.

**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.

If you believe that you are a permanent resident or a citizen and you do not have one of the listed documents, you should contact LOSFA at (800) 259-5626 or by e-mail at [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov).

**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. 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 a H-1, H-2 or H-3 visa. This student is not a permanent resident.

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

- B. 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](http://osfa.la.gov). Also available on these sites are the Course Code Tables.

**Q-85. If I entered the 9th grade during the 2008-2009 school year or later, do I need to take the TOPS Core Curriculum or the CORE 4 Curriculum?**

- A. Anyone entering the 9th grade during the 2008-2009 school year or afterwards is required to take the CORE 4 curriculum to graduate from high school. Graduation is also required to be eligible for TOPS. So, you should take the TOPS Core Curriculum as part of the required CORE 4 courses. **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 Louisiana Connect and keep up with your progress toward meeting the requirements for a TOPS Award. Go to <https://www.louisianaconnect.org/>.**

**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 Sections that answer questions for these students.

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 concurrent 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.

**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. **NOTE:** If you graduated/will graduate from an out-of-country high school, you are not eligible for the TOPS Performance or Honors Award if the Louisiana residency requirement is met based on a parent who is a Louisiana resident living outside the United States who actively engaged in work or another activity on behalf of a Louisiana sponsor or employer after having lived in Louisiana at least 24 months prior to starting work out of the country.

**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. The LDE added course listings for American Sign Language I (123456) and American Sign Language II (123457) to the Secondary Programs of Study in the Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators (Louisiana Department of Education Bulletin 741). The only approved course is American Sign Language.

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. Some of the TOPS core curriculum courses permit me to substitute for the other subjects listed in the core curriculum. What courses does this include for 2013 graduates?**

A. See TOPS Core Curriculum Tables for a complete list of courses that may be substituted for Fine Arts Survey or the ½ unit of Computer Science, Computer Literacy, or Business Computer Applications. 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/pt/> on the STSQ12 report and on LOSFA’s Web site, [www.osfa.la.gov/tops](http://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.

**Q-93. Can an extra foreign language be used to substitute for either the required unit of Fine Arts Survey or ½ unit of Computer Science?**

A. Yes. An extra foreign language (third in the same language or in a second foreign language) may substitute for either the required unit of Fine Arts Survey or the ½ unit of Computer Science.

**Q-94. Can Speech Debate be used as a substitute for the required unit of Fine Arts Survey?**

A. No. Students graduating in 2009 and later may substitute Speech III and Speech IV (both units) for Fine Arts Survey, but Speech Debate may no longer be used.

**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 the ½ unit of computer literacy?**

A. In effect, yes. Actually, the civics unit will be substituted for the 1 unit of Civics/Free Enterprise and the Free Enterprise will be substituted for the ½ unit of computer literacy. The resulting cumulative grade point average will be the same as if the ½ unit of Civics was substituted for computer literacy.

**Q-96. I earned ½ unit of Fine Arts Survey 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 Fine Arts Survey requirement?**

A. No. You must earn a whole unit of Environmental Science to substitute for the Fine Arts Survey requirement. For 2013 graduates only, the ½ credit of Environmental Science can be used to substitute for the ½ unit of computer.

**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 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 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 toward 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. Your school’s local governing school board (or equivalent authority for private schools) must submit a request to LOSFA. The course must be listed in the Secondary Programs of Study in the Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators (LDE Bulletin 741). The request should include the course syllabus and sufficient information to support the request. BESE and the Board of Regents will determine if the course is equivalent. If BESE and the Board of Regents concur that the course is equivalent to a course in the core curriculum, a proposed rule will be submitted to the Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission for initiation of rulemaking to authorize the course as an equivalent.

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

A. All three courses, 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. The BESE approved statewide computer related courses for students graduating in 2008 through 2013, are as follows:

- Advanced Technical Drafting (½ or 1 credit)
- Business Computer Applications (½ or 1 credit)
- Computer Applications or Computer/Technology Applications (½ or 1 credit)
- Computer Architecture (½ or 1 credit)
- Computer Electronics I (½ or 1 credit)
- Computer Electronics II (½ or 1 credit)
- Computer/Technology Literacy (½ or 1 credit)
- Computer Science I (½ or 1 credit)
- Computer Science II (½ or 1 credit)
- Computer Systems and Networking I (½ or 1 credit)
- Computer Systems and Networking II (½ or 1 credit)
- Database Design and Programming (½ or 1 credit)
- Database Programming with PL/SQL (½ credit)
- Desktop Publishing (½ or 1 credit)
- Digital Graphics & Animation (½ credit)
- Digital Media I (1/2 or 1 credit)
- Digital Media II (1/2 or 1 credit)
- Introduction to Business Computer Applications (½ or 1 credit)
- Java Programming (1/2 or 1 credit)
- Multimedia Productions or Multimedia Presentations (½ or 1 credit)
- Technology Education Computer Applications (½ or 1 credit)
- Telecommunications (½ credit)
- Web Mastering or Web Design (½ credit)
- Word Processing (½ or 1 credit)
- Independent Study in Technology Applications (½ or 1 credit)

**Note: A computer related course will not be required for and may not be used by students graduating in 2014 and later.**

**Q-102. I earned ½ unit in four different performance courses in music, dance or theater. Can these courses be used to complete the 2 full units of performance courses required as a substitute for Fine Arts Survey?**

A. Yes. You may use four ½ unit performance or four ½ unit visual arts, or four ½ unit studio arts courses to substitute for Fine Arts Survey. Since the Student Transcript System cannot recognize this combination of courses as a substitute for Fine Arts Survey requirement, you or your high school guidance counselor must contact LOSFA by email at [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov) or by mail to request a determination through an audit.

Note: The ½ units must be in the same program type (performance, studio or visual arts). For example, two ½ unit performance art courses may not be combined with two ½ unit studio arts courses to satisfy the Fine Arts Survey 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 2013, you must earn 17.5 core units.  
If you graduate in 2014 or later, you must earn 19 core units.

**Q-104. Can I substitute a TOPS core curriculum elective for the Computer Science requirement?**

- A. Yes, if you graduate in 2013, you will be allowed to substitute a TOPS core curriculum elective for the computer requirement.  
**A computer related course will not be required for students graduating in 2014 and later.**

**Q-105. Can I substitute Agriscience I & II for the 3<sup>rd</sup> science course requirement and the additional math/science requirement?**

- A. If you graduate from high school in 2013:
- Agriscience I & II (both for one unit) may be used to satisfy the core requirement for a **third science**. In other words, Agriscience I & II (both for one unit) may be used instead of one unit of Earth Science, Environmental Science, Physical Science, Biology II, Chemistry II, Physics, Physics II, or Physics for Technology.
  - You must earn either a fourth unit of advanced math or a fourth unit of science to complete the TOPS Core Curriculum for the Opportunity, Performance and Honors awards. Agriscience I & II (both for one unit) may not be used to satisfy this requirement.

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-106. If I substitute a core course for the computer science category, can I use ½ unit of the core course or must it be a full unit?**

- A. Yes. A ½ unit of an unused core course may be substituted for the ½ unit of computer science.

**Q-107. Is Keyboarding approved as a computer science course for TOPS?**

- A. Keyboarding must be approved by BESE for use as a TOPS computer substitute on a district wide basis. Submission for approval to BESE must be made by the district office for public high schools and by the governing board for non-public high schools.

For schools that have requested and received approval of Keyboarding for previous academic years, the course must have been resubmitted and approved for use in the 2003-2004 academic year and beyond or the course is no longer a valid substitution. Check with your high school guidance counselor to see if you can use this course to satisfy the TOPS core curriculum requirement for computer science.

**Q-108. Can I use Anatomy and Physiology as one of advanced sciences?**

- A. Yes. One unit of Anatomy and Physiology may be substituted for one unit of the following advanced sciences: Earth Science, Environmental Science, Physical Science, Biology II, Chemistry II, Integrated Science, Physics, Physics II, or Physics for Technology or Agriscience I and II (both for 1 unit).

**CUMULATIVE HIGH SCHOOL GRADE POINT AVERAGE FOR TOPS**

**General**

**Q-109. Who is responsible for calculating the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average?**

- A. The final TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average is calculated by the Louisiana Department of Education using data from your official 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-110. How is the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average calculated?**

- A. Your TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average is calculated on a 4.00 scale using the grades for the courses that were used to satisfy one of the TOPS Core Curricula. For those high schools that utilize other than a 4.00 scale, all grade values will be converted to a 4.00 scale utilizing the following formula:

For schools awarding a maximum of 5 points for honors courses, the formula would be used to convert the honors course grade of “C” (which assumes that a “C” would be equal to 3.00 points in the 5.00 grading system) as shown in the following example.

$$\frac{3.00}{5.00} = \frac{X}{4.00}$$

By cross multiplying,  $5X = 12$ ;  $X = 2.40$

**Q-111. 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 Cumulative High School Grade Point Average will be calculated using the courses with the highest grades that satisfy the required core curriculum.

For example, if you have taken more than one Advanced Mathematics course, either of which would satisfy the TOPS core curriculum requirement, the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average will be calculated using only the math course in which you received the highest grade.

**Q-112. 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-113. 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 Cumulative High School Grade Point Average. 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-114. 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-115. Why doesn't my TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average agree with the GPA shown on my official transcript?**

- A. Your TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average must be calculated using only the grades earned for courses that are used to satisfy the TOPS Core Curriculum units. The official transcript overall 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 grade point scale higher than a 4.0 for honors and advanced placement courses. This difference can result in grade point averages higher than a 4.0. For purposes of determining TOPS eligibility, all grades are converted to a 4.0 grade point scale.

**Q-116. My TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average 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-117. 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-118. 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. This minimum cannot be waived.

**Q-119. Is there any circumstance that I could qualify for a TOPS Award without meeting the requirement to earn at least a TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average 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 178), you do not have to meet the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average 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 Cumulative High School Grade Point Average. See the answer to Question 178.

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-120. 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-121. If I did not have a TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average 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-122. Is there an exception for the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average 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 Cumulative High School Grade Point Average of 2.50. This requirement cannot be waived.

**Q-123. My high school computes its grades on a semester basis. How will the Louisiana Department of Education calculate my TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average (GPA)?**

- A. The TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average 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, depending on the school's procedure.

**Q-124. My high school computes its grades on an annual basis. How will the Louisiana Department of Education calculate the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average?**

- A. The TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average 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-125. If through the use of substitutions, such as two units of music for Fine Arts Survey or Algebra I Parts 1 and 2, I have more than 17.5 units to meet the TOPS core curriculum requirement, will the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average calculation be based on 17.5 units or the actual number of units used to satisfy the TOPS core curriculum?**

- A. The number of units used in the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average cannot exceed 17.5 units or 19 units if you graduate in 2014 or later.

In those cases where one unit is used to substitute for a ½ unit, the grade on the substitute unit will be used in the calculation. If more than one unit is used to substitute for a one unit requirement, the grades must be added together and divided by the number of grades. For example, if Algebra I, Parts 1 and 2, are used to substitute for Fine Arts Survey and the units are graded on an annual basis, the grades for each year for each unit will be added together and divided by two. If the units were graded on a semester basis, the grades for each semester for each unit will be added together and divided by four. The resulting grade (Relative Grade Points) based on one unit of credit will be used to determine the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average.

For example, for schools that grade on an annual basis, a student receives an "A" for the year in Algebra I, Part 1, and receives a "C" for the year in Algebra I, Part 2. The grades for each year will be added (4+2=6) and the sum is divided by two (2) resulting in a grade of 3.00, or "B."

For schools that grade on a semester basis, a student receives an “A” for the first semester and a “B” for the second semester of Algebra I, Part 1, and receives a “C” for the first semester and an “A” for the second semester of Algebra I, Part 2. The grades for each semester will be added ( $4+3+2+4=13$ ) and the sum is divided by four (4) resulting in a grade of 3.25.

**Q-126. If I have one unit of Civics and  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit of Free Enterprise, how is the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average calculated?**

- A. If your school grades on an annual basis, one  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit of the Civics annual grade will be used with the grade for the one semester of Free Enterprise.

If your school grades on a semester basis, the two semester grades in Civics will be averaged and  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the average will be used with the semester grade for Free Enterprise.

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-127. I did not earn the required  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit in the computer category, but I have an extra  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit of Civics. Can I use the extra  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit of Civics to meet the requirement?**

- A. In effect, yes. Actually, the civics unit will be substituted for the 1 unit of Civics/Free Enterprise and the Free Enterprise will be substituted for the  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit of computer literacy. The resulting cumulative grade point average will be the same as if the  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit of Civics was substituted for computer literacy.

**Q-128. 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 Cumulative High School Grade Point Average based on TOPS core curriculum courses?**

- 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-129. 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-130. My school requires a minimum grade of a “C” in a foreign language to enroll in the next course level. How will the 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-131. At my school, credits earned in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, such as Algebra I, are recorded as “P” on my high school record. How will this be treated in the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average calculation? Will a grade point value be assigned to the P grade and the total grade points divided by 17.5? Or, will the total grade points be divided by 16.5?**

A. The grade points will be divided by 16.5. If a course is graded on a pass/fail basis, the ½ unit or unit earned will not be included to calculate the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average, but passed courses will be used to satisfy the TOPS core curriculum requirements.

If you will graduate in 2014 or later, you will be required to earn 19 TOPS Core Curriculum units, but the same procedure will be used for courses that are graded as a “P”.

**Q-132. 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. There are no substitutes for English IV. Your school must report that you passed English IV on the Student Transcript System.

**Q-133. 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. In fact, if your school reports all three courses on the Student Transcript System, the extra Spanish can be used to substitute for computer or Fine Arts Survey through 2013 graduates.

**Q-134. If I take ½ unit of Probability and Statistics and ½ unit of Advanced Math –Functions and Statistics, will this be accepted for the 1 unit of advanced math requirement?**

A. Yes. However, you will need to contact a LOSFA Public Information Representative at 1-800-259-5626 or e-mail [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov) for a manual evaluation of your transcript to have this combination considered as meeting the advanced math requirement.

### Fine Arts Survey

**Q-135. If I received a “D” in Fine Arts Survey 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 Fine Arts Survey in the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average?**

A. Yes. The rules require use of the highest grade in a category. If you have completed performance arts, visual arts, studio arts or an extra core elective that has a higher grade than Fine Arts Survey, the grade for the substitute will be used to calculate the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average. If you do not take Fine Arts Survey, then the highest grade you earned on eligible performance arts, visual arts or studio arts or an extra core elective will be used.

**Q-136. If I received a D in Fine Arts Survey and I also have 2 units of Studio Art with an A in one unit and a B in one unit, which do you use to calculate the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average?**

A. Since the Studio Arts courses have the higher grades, they will be used to calculate the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average.

**Q-137. If I fail Fine Arts Survey and do not repeat the course, but I have an eligible elective to substitute, how is the GPA calculated?**

A. The Fine Arts Survey course will not be considered because a failed course cannot be used to complete the TOPS core curriculum. See the first question and answer in this section. The eligible elective will be used in the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average.

**Q-138. If I take two band courses to substitute for one Fine Arts Survey course, do you average the two band course grades?**

A. Yes. See the answer to Question 125.

**Q-139. I took one year of Beginning Chorus and earned an "A" the first semester and a "B" the second semester and then I took Advanced Vocal Ensemble and earned an "A" the first semester and an "A" 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 two units of a performing art for purposes of meeting the Fine Arts Survey Requirement? I would go on to take another year of a performing art by completing Advanced Vocal Ensemble II, thus giving me a total of two units of a performing art.**

A. Yes.  $\frac{1}{2}$  units of a one unit course may be separated and matched with  $\frac{1}{2}$  units of other courses of the same program type (performance, studio or visual arts) to substitute for Fine Arts Survey. STS cannot make this calculation. Contact LOSFA by email at [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov) or by mail for recalculation.

**Q-140. What are the changes in Fine Arts Survey for students graduating in 2014 and later?**

A. There are two changes. First, only one unit (instead of two units) will be needed to satisfy the Fine Arts Survey requirement. Second, an extra core elective cannot be used to substitute for Fine Arts Survey.

### Computer Science

#### **COMPUTER SCIENCE IS NOT IN THE TOPS CORE CURRICULUM FOR STUDENTS GRADUATING IN 2014 AND LATER.**

#### **THE FOLLOWING APPLIES TO STUDENTS WHO WILL GRADUATE IN 2013.**

**Q-141. If I DO NOT take a computer related course for the  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit but I have one whole unit of, say, Environmental Science, is the Louisiana Department of Education going to calculate a full unit of that elective OR as a  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit?**

A. It will count as  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit. If your school grades on an annual basis, the grade for the year will be used. If your school grades on a semester basis, the two grades will be averaged for the GPA calculation.

**Q-142. If I earn a “C” in Business Computer Applications, do I have to use that specific course or can I substitute an extra academic course (math, science, social studies or foreign language) not currently being used? For example: Advanced Math – Pre Calculus with a “B.”**

- A. Yes. The rules require use of the highest grade in a category. If you have completed a substitute course or an extra TOPS core curriculum elective that has a higher grade than Business Computer Applications, the grade for the substitute will be used to calculate the TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average. If you have not taken Computer Science, Computer Literacy or Business Computer Applications, then the highest grade earned in an eligible substitute course or an extra core elective will be used.

### **EARLY COLLEGE ADMISSIONS**

**Q-143. 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-144. 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-145. 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.

### **EARLY GRADUATION**

**Q-146. 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.

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 2012 or graduate early in May 2013, you must follow the same application procedures and meet the same deadlines as students who graduate on time in May or June 2013. (See the answer to Question 20).

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-147. 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, Our Lady of the Lake College, Our Lady of Holy Cross College, St. Joseph Seminary College, Tulane Medical Center, Tulane University and Xavier University.

Effective with the graduating class of 2009, if you qualify for the TOPS Tech Award and effective with the graduating class of 2010, if you qualify for the TOPS Opportunity, Performance or Honors 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 and that is accredited by an accrediting organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, and
- Any proprietary school with a valid and current license issued by the Louisiana Board of Regents and accredited by an accrediting organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

### **Q-148. 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 an 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](http://www.regents.la.gov).

**Q-149. 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 45 and 46 FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES.**

**Q-150. 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-151. Can TOPS ever be used at an out-of-state college?**

A. Yes. Students graduating during and after the 2004-2005 Academic Year 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-152. 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 2013, you have until the fall semester of 2014 to enroll as a first-time, full-time student.

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), or term (in proprietary and cosmetology schools) thereafter, unless granted an exception for cause.

**Q-153. 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](http://www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform)), obtained directly from LOSFA or by emailing [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov)



**Q-154. 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.

**Q-155. 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 ANSWER TO QUESTION 45 FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES.**

**Q-156. 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 will be used to calculate your TOPS college cumulative grade point average for renewal of your TOPS award.**

(See the answer to Question 60 for renewal requirements.)

**Q-157. 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 (including courses taken while in high school and during summers) will be checked after the first semester of full-time enrollment for Steady Academic Progress (at least a 2.00 cumulative 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 60 for more information regarding the required cumulative GPA and Steady Academic Progress.

## **GRADUATION RECOGNITION**

**Q-158. 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 Cumulative High School Grade Point Average. 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 Cumulative High School Grade Point Average, you must meet all of the following conditions to redeem a scholarship under this program:

1. The Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission (LASFAC) must determine that you have in fact completed the TOPS core curriculum courses;
2. LASFAC must determine that your TOPS Cumulative High School Grade Point Average based on the TOPS core curriculum meets the statutory requirements;
3. You must be a Louisiana resident as defined by LASFAC;
4. 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;
5. You must apply for federal student aid, if you are eligible for such aid, by the deadline required for consideration for state aid; and
6. You must have met all academic and nonacademic requirements and be officially notified of your award by LASFAC.”

**Q-159. 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 notification that you have qualified for a TOPS scholarship is the letter notifying you of your TOPS eligibility from the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA).

### **HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY DIPLOMA (GED)**

**Q-160. 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**

**Also see the Student Transcript System Section.**

**Q-161. What are the certification responsibilities of the high schools?**

- A. Starting with the graduating class of 2003, 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 LASFAC and the legislative auditor for a minimum of three years or until audited, whichever occurs first.

If a student is determined to be 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 LASFAC for the amount paid in excess of what the student was eligible to receive.

**Q-162. 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-163. 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-164. 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 900 for TOPS Tech, 1020 for Opportunity, 1090 for Performance or 1250 for Honors.

**Q-165 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 2013-2014 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 or SAT score of at least 19.

**Q-166. Is a home study student eligible for TOPS in an early admissions program?**

- A. No. Only students enrolled in public or BESE approved private 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-167 Can I receive a TOPS award if I join the National Guard?**

- A. Yes. If you are eligible for a TOPS award and are in the Louisiana National Guard, you are exempt from tuition for an amount equal to a TOPS award, so the TOPS award is not paid. However, you will receive \$1,200 per year for assistance with additional costs. Students with Performance Awards will receive a stipend of \$800 per semester. Students with Honors Awards will receive a stipend of \$1,600 per semester.

If you are eligible for the National Guard Tuition Exemption, you must accept that award, and the TOPS National Guard Stipend. You may not accept TOPS instead of the National Guard Tuition Exemption.

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

### **Q-168.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 below.

If you meet the alternate eligibility requirements (See the answer to Question 169) to qualify, you can only qualify for the TOPS Tech or TOPS Opportunity Award.

### **Q-169.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 ( if you previously were enrolled in a Louisiana public or BESE approved private high school), and the twelfth grade levels of a home study program 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 19 for TOPS Tech and at least 22 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 45, 46, 69, 70, 150, and 155.

**Q-170. What do I have to do to prove Louisiana residency?**

- A. See the discussion in the Section entitled “Residency Requirement.” If your parents or court ordered custodian work out-of-country, they must submit a sworn Affidavit of Residency before Louisiana residency can be confirmed. You should contact LOSFA for this affidavit or download a copy at [www.osfa.la.gov/forms](http://www.osfa.la.gov/forms).

**Q-171. I graduated from a high school outside the United States and its territories. My parents are missionaries and are not paid enough to require that they file an income tax return. They do not have Louisiana driver’s licenses or own a car registered in Louisiana and are not registered to vote in Louisiana. Can I qualify for a TOPS Award?**

- A. Possibly. The TOPS statute provides an alternate residency test that may be used instead of the standard residency test:

When you graduate from an out-of-country high school, your parent(s) (if living out-of-the country/working out-of-the country) must complete an out-of-country residency affidavit and submit documentary support declaring:

1. I actually resided in Louisiana at least 24 months before I started living outside the United States and its territories and have not resided in any other state since leaving Louisiana; and
2. I was assigned duties outside the United States and its territories by a Louisiana employer or Louisiana sponsor and continued to be employed by that employer or perform duties for that sponsor through the date of your graduation from high school; and
3. I have remained a resident of Louisiana through the date of your graduation from high school.

When you complete a BESE approved home study program outside the United States and its territories and your parent(s) resides outside the United States, your parent(s) must complete an affidavit and submit documentary evidence declaring:

1. I actually resided in Louisiana at least 24 months before I started living outside the United States and its territories and have not resided in any other state since leaving Louisiana; and
2. I was assigned duties outside the United States and its territories by a Louisiana employer or Louisiana sponsor and continued to be employed by that employer or perform duties for that sponsor through the date you completed the home study program; and
3. I have remained a resident of Louisiana through the date of your completion of the home study program.

**OUT-OF-STATE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES**

**Q-172. 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 180 through 194 for the residency requirements.

**Q-173. 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-174. 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
  2. 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
  3. Must graduate from a high school that has been approved by the U.S. Department of Defense; and
  4. Must have a composite score on the ACT (SAT) of at least 20 for TOPS Tech, 23 for Opportunity, 26 for Performance, and 30 for Honors; and
  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, 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
  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 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
  7. Must be a U.S. citizen or be designated as a Permanent Resident by the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services; and
  8. Must meet Louisiana residency requirements (you will be required to complete a Affidavit of Residency – See [www.osfa.la.gov/forms](http://www.osfa.la.gov/forms)); 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; and
  11. Must complete and submit an Application to Return from an Out-of-State College so that it is received by LOSFA no later than the July 1 immediately after the academic year you first return to Louisiana and enroll as a full-time student in an eligible Louisiana college. See the answers to Questions 45 and 46.

- \*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-175. 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. The student 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, and
  3. an opinion as to why the disability restricts the student from attending classes full-time.

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.

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](http://www.osfa.la.gov/exceptionform)), obtained directly from LOSFA or by emailing [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov).

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

### **Q-176. 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, there must be evidence that you cannot enroll on a full-time basis, even with medication and accommodations, due to the disability.

## **QUALIFYING AS A NON-GRADUATE**

### **Q-177. 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 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, begin full-time college enrollment.
  - Submit a FAFSA or TOPS On-Line Application by the deadline. See the answers to Questions 20, 22, and 23.

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

**Q-178 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-179. Are remedial courses part of the 24 credit hours required annually in college?**

- A. Remedial (developmental) courses may be counted toward the 24 hour requirement, if the college attended reports them as earned (passed) hours. 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-180. 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 and graduates from such a school will meet the Louisiana residency requirement. 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.

If you are a dependent student, 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 must have 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-181. 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.

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 and 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-182. 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. If the STS data indicates you attended Louisiana schools for all of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades and you graduated from an eligible Louisiana high school, you will pass the residency requirement. 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> or from a LOSFA Public Information Representative by calling 1-800 259-5626 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.

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 On-Line 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-183. 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 none of the documents show an issue date of at least the 24 months before the month of your child’s high school graduation, additional documentation will be required. (See the answer to Question 193.)

**Q-184. 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-185. 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 determined to be an “independent student” by a financial aid officer at a postsecondary institution or reported as an independent student by the federal processor on the FAFSA.

**Q-186. 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-187. 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-188. 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 2013, you would start counting with April 2013 and count backward 24 months. You would have to demonstrate legal residency from May 2011 through April 2013.

**Q-189. I am a 2013 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 “2007”?**

- A. The 2013-2014 FAFSA asks if your parent has been a legal resident since January 1, 2008 (five years). If the answer is “yes” to the residency question, the computer automatically enters “2008” 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 the computer picks up a “no” to the residency question, then it picks up the answer for the month and year that you enter on the FAFSA for residency.

**Q-190. 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 186.) 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-191. 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?**

- B. 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 and a copy of both tax returns, and all other required documents listed on the affidavit.

**Q-192. 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. Your high school 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.

**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 180.

**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 180.

**Q-193. 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, receipts or credit card invoices showing purchases in Louisiana, 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-194. I attended boarding school in Louisiana for my final two years of high school. Can I meet the residency requirement for TOPS?**

- A. Yes. If you graduated in 2003 or later, 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.

**Q-195. 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. No. The criteria for a college or university's approval for in-state tuition does not meet the TOPS residency requirement.

**SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS**

**Q-196. 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 should contact a LOSFA Public Information Representative at 1-800-259-5626 or e-mail [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov). You may be required to submit a copy of your social security card.

**Q-197. 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.

**Q-198. 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 contact a LOSFA Public Information Representative at 1-800-259-5626 or e-mail [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.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.

### **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN HIGH SCHOOL**

**Q-199. 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.

**Q-200. 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-201. 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-202. 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-203. 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-204. 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-205. 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-206. 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-207. 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-208. 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-209. 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 three different core curriculums that may be used to qualify. The differences are noted in the answers to the following questions.

**Q-210. What are the core curricula choices?**

- A. There are two TOPS Tech curricula: Option 1 has a speech/language component (17.0 units). Option 2 has a career option component (19.0 units). In addition, you may complete the TOPS core curriculum for the TOPS Opportunity Award (17.5 units for 2013 graduates and 19.0 units beginning with 2014 graduates). **NOTE:** To have a student considered for TOPS with the TOPS Tech Option 2 Core Curriculum, the student’s **career major code** must be included in the Career Option field in STS.

**Q-211. Can courses be mixed/matched for those courses listed under TOPS Tech Option 1, where foreign language is listed?**

- A. Yes. The intent of the change in this requirement is to allow mixing/matching. For example, a student may meet the requirement by successfully completing Spanish I and French I, or Spanish I and Speech I, or another combination.

**Q-212. In TOPS Tech Core Option 2, can keyboarding count to meet the requirements of “in a related field” for a student enrolled in a Welding Program?**

- A. Only if it is a course included in the courses listed under the student’s major.

**Q-213. Where can I use a TOPS Tech Award?**

- A. You can use the TOPS Tech Award to enroll in a nonacademic program for a vocational or technical education certificate or diploma at any eligible postsecondary institution that offers such courses. This includes the Louisiana Technical College campuses, some public colleges and universities and some of those colleges and universities that are members of the Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

Effective with the graduating class of 2009, you may also use your award at the following schools:

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

**Q-214. What is a nonacademic program?**

- A. A program of courses, as defined by the Board of Regents, designed to teach a skill or occupation or provide technical training resulting in a vocational or technical education certificate, diploma or a nonacademic 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.

**Q-215. What is the academic year for nonacademic programs?**

- A. The academic year for nonacademic 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 students who enroll on a full-time basis.

**Q-216. Which schools offer nonacademic programs?**

- A. The eligible colleges and universities that currently offer nonacademic courses 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

- Our Lady of the Lake College (non-public)
- River Parishes Community College
- South Louisiana Community College
- Southern University at Shreveport
- Fletcher Technical Community College
- SOWELA Technical Community College
- Cosmetology and Proprietary schools identified in the answer to Question 212.

**Q-217. Can I use the TOPS Tech Award or the Opportunity, Performance, or Honors Award to enroll in a nonacademic 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). Currently, Our Lady of the Lake College is the only LAICU institution offering a nonacademic program. You may also use the TOPS Tech award at certain cosmetology and proprietary schools. (See the answer to Question 213.)

**Q-218. Can I use a TOPS Opportunity, Performance or Honors Award to pursue a nonacademic program (attend a technical school)?**

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

**Q-219. How much does the TOPS Tech Award pay toward enrollment in a nonacademic program?**

- A. It depends on whether the college is public or private and whether it offers an academic degree at the baccalaureate level or higher:
- If it is a public college that DOES NOT offer a baccalaureate degree, the award pays the actual cost of tuition.
  - If it is a public or nonpublic college that DOES offer a baccalaureate degree, the award is an average of what is paid to students enrolled in the same types of programs in the prior program year at eligible public colleges and universities that do not offer academic degrees at the baccalaureate level and is determined by dividing the total dollar value of awards made by the total number of students that received the awards.
  - If you are attending a cosmetology school or proprietary school as described in the answers to Question 213, the award will pay \$1,520 per year, or \$380.00 per term for the 2012-2013 award year.

**Q-220. How much do the TOPS Opportunity, Performance and Honors Awards pay toward enrollment in a nonacademic program?**

- A. The TOPS award amount for these students:
- If you are enrolled in a public college that DOES NOT offer a baccalaureate degree, the award pays an amount equal to tuition.
  - If you are enrolled in a public or nonpublic college that DOES offer a baccalaureate degree, the award is an average of what is paid to students enrolled in the same types of programs in the prior program year at eligible public colleges and universities that do not offer academic degrees at the baccalaureate level and is determined by dividing the total dollar value of awards made by the total number of students that received the awards.
  - Students with TOPS Performance and Honors also receive their stipends.



**Q-221. Will TOPS pay my award for a summer session in a nonacademic program?**

- A. Yes. TOPS will pay for enrollment in summer session in nonacademic programs EXCEPT for the summer session immediately after high school graduation. For example, if you graduated in May 2013, you may enroll in a nonacademic program for the 2013 summer session, but your TOPS Tech Award will not be paid; however, your award will be paid for enrolling in a nonacademic program for the 2014 summer session.

**Q-222. Will a TOPS Tech Award pay for two nonacademic diplomas?**

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

**Q-223. Will a TOPS Opportunity, Performance and Honors Award pay for two nonacademic diplomas (four years)?**

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

**Q-224. Will a TOPS Opportunity, Performance and Honors Award pay for a nonacademic 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 immediately after the end of the nonacademic term, you may be eligible for continued TOPS payments if you have met continuing eligibility requirements and have not exhausted your TOPS eligibility.

**Q-225. 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 spring semester if you are enrolled in a nonacademic 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 nonacademic program, you must have a cumulative GPA of at least 3.00 at the end of each spring semester, quarter or term 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.

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

**Q-226. How many hours does a TOPS Tech student have to earn to maintain his award?**

- A. You must earn at least 24 hours each program year. If you have the TOPS Opportunity, Performance and Honors awards and are enrolled in a nonacademic program, you must earn at least 24 hours each program year.

**Q-227. If I am enrolled in a nonacademic program, can I use hours earned during a summer session to meet the 24 hour requirement?**

- A. Yes. A student who has not earned at least 24 hours after the spring semester may use hours earned during the next summer session to meet the 24 hour requirement.

**Q-228. If I enrolled in a nonacademic program and have not earned at least 24 hours after the spring semester, will TOPS pay for the summer session?**

A. Yes. See the answer to Question 227 for more information.

**Q-229. If I have an Opportunity, Performance or Honors Award and have attended both an academic program and a nonacademic program, how is my GPA for TOPS continuing eligibility calculated?**

A. If you have attended both an academic program and a nonacademic program, you will have a GPA calculation for each type of program. Grades from an academic program **will not be mixed** with grades from a nonacademic program. The GPA for the program last attended will be used; however, if you change from one type of program to another while your award is suspended for failure to earn the required GPA, your award will continue to be suspended until you earn at least the minimum GPA required for the program you most recently attended.

For example, you are an Opportunity Award recipient who attended an academic program during the spring semester of 2013. At the end of the spring semester of 2013, your cumulative GPA is 2.25 on 25 earned hours. Your TOPS award will be suspended because you have earned more than 24 hours and your grade point average is below 2.30. If you enroll in a nonacademic program in the fall semester of 2013, your TOPS award will not pay for that semester because your award is suspended. If you earn at least a 2.5 at the end of the fall semester of 2013, your award will be reinstated for the spring semester of 2014, regardless of whether you enroll in an academic program of study or in a nonacademic program.

**Q-230. What is the deadline for taking the ACT WorkKeys assessment?**

A. You must achieve a qualifying 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, 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. If your qualifying WorkKeys score is earned after the April deadline, but before July 1 your award will be reduced by one semester.

**Q-231. 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](http://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. Contact a LOSFA Public Information Representative at 1-800-259-5626 or e-mail [custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:custserv@osfa.la.gov) for submission details.