



**LOUISIANA STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE  
COMMISSION  
OFFICE OF STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

*Student Financial Aid Bulletin*

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TOPICS:	Acts of the 2008 Regular Session of the Legislature that Affect Student Aid

During the 2008 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature, several changes were enacted that affect the student aid programs administered by the Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission through the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance. This bulletin lists those changes and summarizes their impact.

**Acts of the 2008 Regular Session of the Legislature that Affect Student Aid**

**Summary**

- Act 652 extended the hurricane alternative initial eligibility requirements and changed the name of the TOPS program.
- Act 754 added accredited cosmetology and proprietary schools to the list of eligible institutions for the TOPS Tech Award beginning with the 2009-2010 academic year.
- Act 460 enacts the Board of Regents Early Start Program (formerly the Dual Enrollment Program) into law, provides certain minimum eligibility qualifications, and allows home school and nonpublic students to participate in the program at their own expense.
- Act 715 authorizes tuition increases that are not excluded from payment by TOPS.

**Act 652 - Hurricane Initial Eligibility Requirements**

House Bill 1075 was enacted as Act 652 and was effective on July 1, 2008. This Act extends the alternative initial eligibility requirements for a TOPS award for students displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and/or Rita to displaced students who graduated from high school in 2007 or 2008 or will graduate from an out of state high school in 2009. Note that to be considered a displaced student, the student must have either:

1. Resided in certain parishes and enrolled in an eligible Louisiana high school or a BESE approved home study program at the time of the respective storm, OR
2. A parent or custodian who resided in certain parishes at the time of the respective storm.

The following is a summary of the alternate initial eligibility requirements displaced student requirements.

- **Alternate TOPS GPA Requirement.** Displaced students graduating from eligible out-of-state high schools during the 2006-07, 2007-08, and 2008-09 Academic Years must have at least a 2.50 on a 4.00 scale computed on all high school courses taken for the TOPS-Tech and Opportunity awards or at least a 3.50 on a 4.00 scale computed on all high school courses taken for the Performance and Honors awards.

NOTE: Displaced students graduating from eligible out-of-state high schools who do not meet the alternate GPA criteria may still qualify if they meet the TOPS ACT requirements for students graduating from eligible out-of-state high schools (score of at least 20 for the Tech award, 23 for the Opportunity award, 26 for the Performance award and 30 for the Honors award). Also, displaced students graduating from eligible out-of-state high schools who qualify for a higher award if they meet the TOPS ACT requirements for students graduating from eligible out-of-state high schools will be granted the higher award. In such cases, the students **do not have to meet the TOPS GPA requirement.**

- **Alternate TOPS ACT Requirement.** Displaced students who graduate from an eligible out-of-state high school during the 2006-07, 2007-08, and 2008-09 Academic Years AND meet the alternate TOPS GPA requirement above, must have an ACT score of at least 17 for the Tech award, 20 for the Opportunity award, 23 for the Performance award and 27 for the Honors award.
- **Alternate Tops Core Curriculum Requirement.** The core curriculum requirements for displaced students who graduate during the 2006-07, 2007-08, and 2008-09 Academic Years will be waived for those courses for which the high school certifies were not available to a displaced student.
- **Alternate Louisiana Residency Requirement.** Displaced students who graduate from high school during the 2006-07, 2007-08, and 2008-09 Academic Years will be deemed to have met the residency requirement if they:
  - actually lived in Louisiana for one full school year prior to the date of the natural disaster and attended an eligible Louisiana high school; OR
  - have a parent or court-ordered custodian who actually lived in Louisiana for at least the twelve months prior to the date of the natural disaster.
- **Alternate Home Study Requirement.** Displaced students who complete the 12th grade level of a BESE-approved home study program during the 2006-07, 2007-08, and 2008-09 Academic Years, are not required to complete the 11th grade level of a BESE-approved home study program.

All students displaced by Hurricane Katrina or Rita who have not been notified that they are eligible for a TOPS award who graduated or will graduate from high school in 2007, 2008 or 2009 are encouraged to contact LOSFA to determine whether they are now eligible for a TOPS award.

Displaced students who graduated from an eligible out of state high school during the 2006-2007 academic year and did not receive a Louisiana Distance Diploma were denied a TOPS Scholarship. Under Act 652, these students may now be eligible for a TOPS Award and retroactive TOPS payments. These students are encouraged to contact LOSFA.

For additional information, please visit LOSFA's website at [www.osfa.la.gov.us/ComeHome.htm](http://www.osfa.la.gov.us/ComeHome.htm).

Act 652 also changed the name of the TOPS program from the Tuition Opportunity Program for Students to the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students.

#### **Act 754 – TOPS Tech Eligible Colleges or Universities**

House Bill 1278 was enacted as Act 754 and was effective on July 6, 2008. Beginning with the 2009-2010 Award Year, students who are eligible for the TOPS Tech Award may use their awards 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 United States Department of Education, and
- Any proprietary school with a valid and current license issued by the Board of Regents and accredited by an accrediting organization recognized by the United States Department of Education.

In order to be eligible for TOPS Tech payments, these schools must also comply with all applicable laws and administrative rules concerning initial eligibility and continuing eligibility for schools participating in the TOPS Tech Award Program.

LOSFA will prepare administrative rule changes to implement this portion of the TOPS Tech Award Program. These changes will be announced in a future bulletin.

NOTE: Students who have the TOPS Opportunity, Performance and Honors Awards may NOT use their awards to attend these cosmetology and proprietary schools.

### **Act 460 - Early Start Program**

Senate Bill 482 was enacted as Act 460 and will be effective on August 15, 2008. The Board of Regents created the Early Start Program to encourage the state's colleges and universities to enroll eligible high school students to seek credit in postsecondary coursework to better prepare them for the workplace and for further postsecondary education. This program was originally known as the Board of Regents' Dual Enrollment Program but has been renamed to reduce confusion with other dual enrollment programs.

Act 460 incorporates the Early Start Program into the revised statutes and establishes the following minimum requirements to participate in the program:

1. Enrolled in a Louisiana public high school,
2. At least fifteen years of age,
3. Currently in the eleventh or twelfth grade, and
4. Any other eligibility criteria as the Board of Regents may require.

### **Participation by Nonpublic High School and Home School Students in Early Start**

Act 460 provides that students who are enrolled in Louisiana nonpublic high schools or in a home school program and meet the eligibility criteria 2 through 4 above are eligible to participate in the Early Start Program at their own expense. State funds cannot be used to pay their tuition.

NOTE: Colleges that allow these students to participate in the Early Start Program must charge the same amount as that paid by the state on behalf of a student attending a public high school. Just as with public school students, no additional amount may be charged.

### **Act 915 – Tuition Increases**

House Bill 734 was enacted as Act 915 and was effective on July 14, 2008. This act allows the management boards for public colleges and universities to raise tuition and mandatory attendance fee amounts for the 2008-2009 academic year. Increases are also authorized for the 2009-2010, 2010-2011, and 2011-2012 academic years, if approved by the Joint Legislative Committee on the Budget.

Act 915 allows TOPS to pay for the percentage increase in tuition and mandatory fees approved above the amount previously approved for TOPS payments. LOSFA in consultation with the Board of Regents is preparing a TOPS Tuition for 2008-2009 Award Year table to show the maximum amount that schools can bill for TOPS payments. As soon as the table is approved, it will be distributed.

For additional information, please contact our Public Information Representatives at **225-922-1012** or **1-800-259-5626, Extension 1012**.