

TOPS: Alternate Eligibility

Home-Study students:

Question: I graduated from a BESE-approved home-study program. Am I eligible for TOPS?

Answer: Yes. Students who have completed the 11th (if applicable) and 12th grade levels of a BESE-approved home-study course are eligible to apply for TOPS. You must submit your FAFSA or TOPS online application by the required deadline, you must meet all residency and citizenship requirements and you must have a qualifying ACT or SAT score for home-study students. Home study students must have an ACT score of at least a 19 for the TOPS Tech award, a 22 for the TOPS Opportunity award, a 24 for the TOPS Performance award or a 28 for the TOPS Honors award.

Your application will be processed once we have verified your BESE home-study status and it has been determined that all of the academic and non-academic requirements have been met.

For additional information, please consult the TOPS Q&A on the web at https://osfantweb.osfa.state.la.us/TOPS_Q_and_A.pdf.

Question: What is the deadline for applying for TOPS as a Home-study student?

Answer: The deadlines for applying for TOPS as a home-study student are the same as those for students graduating from a Louisiana high school.

For additional information, please consult the TOPS Q&A on the web at https://osfantweb.osfa.state.la.us/TOPS_Q_and_A.pdf.

Question: How does LOSFA know that a Home Study student is interested in applying for TOPS?

Answer: Home study students are identified by the high school code they included on their ACT or SAT Registration. Students should use the high school code 969999 on the ACT and 970000 on the SAT. These codes cause a student's 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.

Also, students completing the TOPS Online Application have the opportunity to identify themselves as a Home-Study student.

For additional information, please consult the TOPS Q&A on the web at https://osfantweb.osfa.state.la.us/TOPS_Q_and_A.pdf.

Out-of-State High School Graduates:

Question: I graduated from an out-of-state high school. Am I eligible to apply for TOPS?

Answer: Yes. Students who graduate from an out-of-state high school can be eligible for a TOPS award if they can meet residency requirements. Out-of-state high school graduates must have an ACT score of at least a 20 for the TOPS Tech award, a 23 for the TOPS Opportunity award, a 26 for the TOPS Performance award or a 30 for the TOPS Honors award.

The deadlines for applying for TOPS as an out-of-state grad are the same as those for students graduating from a Louisiana high school.

For additional information, please consult the TOPS Q&A on the web at https://osfantweb.osfa.state.la.us/TOPS_Q_and_A.pdf.

Question: How do I know if I meet the TOPS residency requirements for an out-of-state graduate?

Answer: A dependent student 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 24 months prior to the month of the student’s high school graduation. The parent or legal guardian will be required to submit an affidavit of residency along with all supporting documentation to show that they meet residency requirements. The Residency affidavit can be found on our website in the TOPS Forms section under FORM-ID TOPS0009:
http://www.osfa.state.la.us/MainSitePDFs/Residency_Affidavit_8_20_08.pdf

Independent students must have been a legal resident of Louisiana for at least 24 months prior to the month of their high school graduation.

For additional information, please consult the TOPS Q&A on the web at https://osfantweb.osfa.state.la.us/TOPS_Q_and_A.pdf.

Question: How do I know if my out-of-state high school qualifies as a TOPS-eligible school?

Answer: An out-of-state high school must meet the following guidelines in order for their students to be considered for TOPS awards:

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 the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' Commission on Secondary and Middle Schools and meets the standards adopted by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education for approval of nonpublic schools in Louisiana, or for 2003 graduates and thereafter, the out-of-state high school must be approved by a regional accrediting organization recognized by the United States 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 United States Department of Defense.

For additional information, please consult the TOPS Q&A on the web at https://osfantweb.osfa.state.la.us/TOPS_Q_and_A.pdf.

Out-of-Country High School Graduates and OOC Home-Study students:

Question: I graduated from an out-of-country high school. Am I eligible for TOPS?

Answer: Yes. These students may qualify for either a TOPS-Tech or TOPS Opportunity Award. They must meet the alternate eligibility requirements below to qualify:

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;
2. Must have a composite score on the ACT (SAT) of at least 20 for TOPS Tech and at least 23 for TOPS Opportunity;
3. Must enroll in a Louisiana public postsecondary institution as a first-time freshman not later than the semester, excluding summer semesters or sessions, immediately following the first anniversary of the date that the student graduated from high school;
4. If the student enters on active duty with the United States Armed Forces within one year after graduating from high school, 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 fifth anniversary of the date that the student graduated from high school or within one year of separation from active duty, whichever is earlier; and
5. Must be a U.S. citizen or designated as a Permanent Resident by the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services;
6. Must meet Louisiana residency requirements;
7. Must not have any criminal convictions, except for misdemeanor traffic violations;
8. If the student has been in the U.S. Armed Forces and has been separated from such service, has received an honorable or general discharge.

For additional information, please consult the TOPS Q&A on the web at https://osfantweb.osfa.state.la.us/TOPS_Q_and_A.pdf.

Question: I completed a BESE-approved home-study course while out-of-country. Am I eligible for TOPS?

Answer: Yes. These students may qualify for either a TOPS-Tech or TOPS Opportunity Award. They must meet the alternate eligibility requirements below to qualify:

1. Must be certified to have successfully completed the twelfth grade level of a home study program, which has been approved by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education;
2. Must have a composite score on the ACT (SAT) of at least 19 for TOPS Tech and at least 22 for TOPS Opportunity;
3. Must enroll in a Louisiana public postsecondary institution as a first-time freshman not later than the semester, excluding summer semesters or sessions, immediately following the first anniversary of the date that the student graduated from high school;
4. If the student enters on active duty with the United States Armed Forces within one year after graduating from high school, 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 fifth anniversary of the date that the student graduated from high school or within one year of separation from active duty, whichever is earlier; and
5. Must be a U.S. citizen or designated as a Permanent Resident by the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services;
6. Must meet Louisiana residency requirements;
7. Must not have any criminal convictions, except for misdemeanor traffic violations;
8. If the student has been in the U.S. Armed Forces and has been separated from such service, has received an honorable or general discharge.

For additional information, please consult the TOPS Q&A on the web at https://osfantweb.osfa.state.la.us/TOPS_Q_and_A.pdf.

Question: 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?

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

When the student graduates from an out-of-country high school, the parent (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.
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 the student's graduation from high school.
3. I have remained a resident of Louisiana through the date of the student's graduation from high school.

The deadlines for applying for TOPS as an out-of-state grad are the same as those for students graduating from a Louisiana high school.

For additional information, please consult the TOPS Q&A on the web at https://osfantweb.osfa.state.la.us/TOPS_Q_and_A.pdf.

Eligible Non-Graduates:

Question: Can a student who enrolls in college without graduating from high school qualify for a TOPS Award?

Answer: Yes, if the student meets certain conditions.

The student must:

- Meet the TOPS citizenship and ACT requirements prior to his 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 his 19th birthday, begin full-time college enrollment.
- Submit a FAFSA or TOPS On-Line Application.

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

For additional information, please consult the TOPS Q&A on the web at https://osfantweb.osfa.state.la.us/TOPS_Q_and_A.pdf.

Question: What are the deadlines for non-graduates?

Answer: The student must have taken both of the Wechsler tests prior to enrolling for the first time in an eligible college or university.

The student must begin full-time college enrollment the semester immediately following completion of the 12 hours of college credit and prior to the student's 19th birthday.

The student must have an ACT score from a test dated prior to his initial full-time college enrollment.

The FAFSA deadlines for non-graduates are the same as those for Louisiana high school graduates.

For additional information, please consult the TOPS Q&A on the web at https://osfantweb.osfa.state.la.us/TOPS_Q_and_A.pdf.

Residency:

Question: What is the Louisiana residency requirement?

Answer: Beginning with Academic Year (High School) 2002-2003, 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. The student's high school transcript must reflect that the student 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 Student Transcript System,

A dependent student 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 24 months prior to the month of the student's high school graduation. Independent students must have been a legal resident of Louisiana for at least 24 months prior to the month of their high school graduation.

Effective for 2001 graduates and thereafter, any 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 and whose parent is a member of the United States 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 the student's transcript reflects that the student earned credit for the last four semesters of high school and graduated from an approved Louisiana high school will meet the Louisiana residency requirement.

For additional information, please consult the TOPS Q&A on the web at https://osfantweb.osfa.state.la.us/TOPS_Q_and_A.pdf.

Question: How will LOSFA determine a student's residency?

Answer: For a student who graduates from a Louisiana public or a Louisiana approved non-public high school, the student's residency will be determined from the Course Site Codes reported to the Student Transcript System (STS), which must show that all courses completed during the final two years of high school were in a Louisiana high school.

For a student who graduated from an out-of-state or out-of-country high school, completed a BESE approved home study program, is an eligible non-graduate or is a dependent of an active duty military member, the student's residency will be determined from the information provided on their FAFSA or On- Line Application.

Out-of-state and out-of-country graduates **must** complete a residency affidavit in addition to the FAFSA or On-Line Application. Home study students, eligible non-graduates and dependents of active duty military personnel and students for whom the STS does not confirm Louisiana residency **must** complete the residency affidavit.

For additional information, please consult the TOPS Q&A on the web at https://osfantweb.osfa.state.la.us/TOPS_Q_and_A.pdf.
