

## **TOPS Funding Update for the 2016-2017 Academic Year**

*As of April 14, 2016*

### ***What is the situation with TOPS right now?***

- TOPS is a nearly \$300 million a year program, fully funded.
- Right now, approximately \$110 million in funding is proposed for TOPS next year. That is made up of \$60.2 million in tobacco settlement funding and an additional \$50 million in funding the governor is proposing.
- That leaves TOPS roughly \$187 million short of its full funding next year. It is uncertain at this point whether the remaining \$187 million shortage of TOPS funding will be restored. Until then, it is important that all students seeking TOPS awards do everything they can to be ready to accept TOPS funds.

### ***How many students will be funded for the 2016-17 academic year?***

- The number of students who will receive TOPS Awards next year will not be determined until eligibility is determined and elimination provisions are implemented, based on the dollars appropriated. Funding is contingent upon appropriation.
- Currently, when there is a budget shortage, TOPS awards are eliminated beginning with students who earn lower ACT scores (and inside each ACT score band, beginning with the students who have the highest expected family contribution in \$1000 increments through those with the lowest expected family contribution) and moving up through each ACT score band until the funding level has been reached.
- The numbers we are reporting that show 17,297 students with ACT scores of 25 and the lowest Expected Family Contribution (EFC) levels and those with ACT scores of 26 and above receiving TOPS is only an ESTIMATE based upon current recipients at this time. The actual number of total students eligible for TOPS next year remains a moving target as more 2016 high school graduates with higher ACT scores become eligible and other existing higher ACT-scoring TOPS recipients leave the system, etc. So, funding for awards remains contingent on how much the legislature appropriates to TOPS at the time that the state budget is passed and actually funded.
- Also, Governor Edwards is supporting legislation currently being considered that would spread TOPS dollars so that, when cuts are made, all qualified recipients would receive *some* TOPS tuition support. The current law requires cuts to be made in an “all or nothing” fashion, eliminating awards completely for students with lower ACT scores.

### ***What do students/parents need to do in the meantime?***

- File the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) immediately. You may access the FAFSA at [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov)
- The deadline to file a FAFSA or Renewal FAFSA to be considered for funding in the 2016-2017 academic year is July 1, 2016. This includes first-time and continuing students.
- Call 800-259-5626 or Email [custserv@la.gov](mailto:custserv@la.gov) for assistance.

- Approximately 10 days after you have filed your FAFSA, create a Louisiana Award System Account at [https://www.osfa.la.gov/AwardSystem/faces/jsf/student/new\\_student.jspx](https://www.osfa.la.gov/AwardSystem/faces/jsf/student/new_student.jspx). You must enter a phone number and an email address in order to receive important notifications.
- Get latest LOSFA updates via Twitter, Facebook and <http://www.osfa.la.gov/>
- Study hard to raise your GPA.
- Legislators are working hard to secure additional funding.

*Are there any other scholarships, grants or loans available?*

- By completing and filing the FAFSA, you will be considered for the following:
  - Federal Pell Grants
  - Federal Work Study opportunities
  - Low-interest federal student loans
  - TOPS, the Louisiana Go Grant
  - Institution-based scholarships and grants
- Go to <http://www.osfa.la.gov/index.jsp?SRC=/scholseach.htm> , click on “Scholarship Searches” near the bottom of the menu on the left side of the homepage. Click on any of the links listed and follow the instructions to search hundreds of private scholarships.
- Check to see if your parents’ employers, various churches, civic and/or social organizations offer academic scholarships.