



SNAPSHOT

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Back to School: TOPS Participation and Demographics

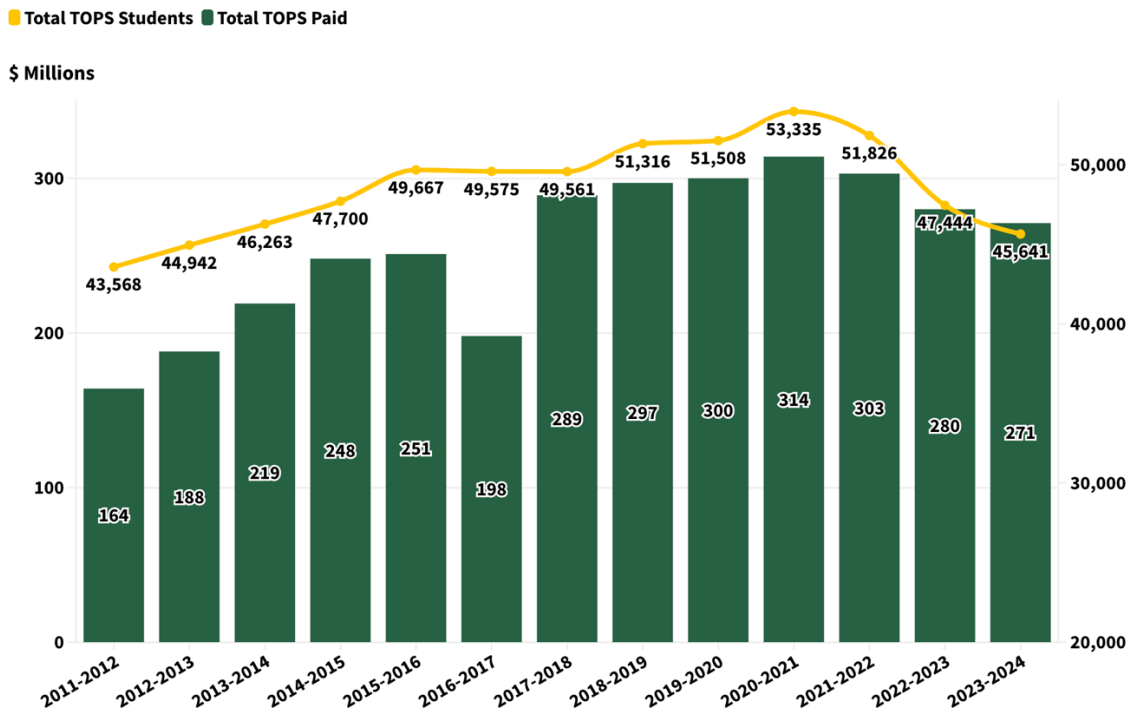
The number of students receiving free college tuition through Louisiana’s TOPS program has dropped for the third consecutive year, most likely an effect of [declining college enrollment](#).

The state-financed Taylor Opportunity Program for Students offers scholarships to Louisiana residents attending college in the state. After years of steadily increasing enrollment, the number of students receiving TOPS awards has continued to decline annually since the 2021-22 school year.

Nearly 46,000 students received TOPS scholarships in the last school year, totaling more than \$270 million, according to [data from the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance](#), known as LOSFA.

Compared with levels four years ago, that is a 14% decrease in participation and a \$43 million drop in state spending on the program.

TOPS Participation by Academic Year



Source: Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance

Beyond an overall dip in college enrollment, TOPS participation also is impacted by the declining number of high school graduates eligible for the scholarship.

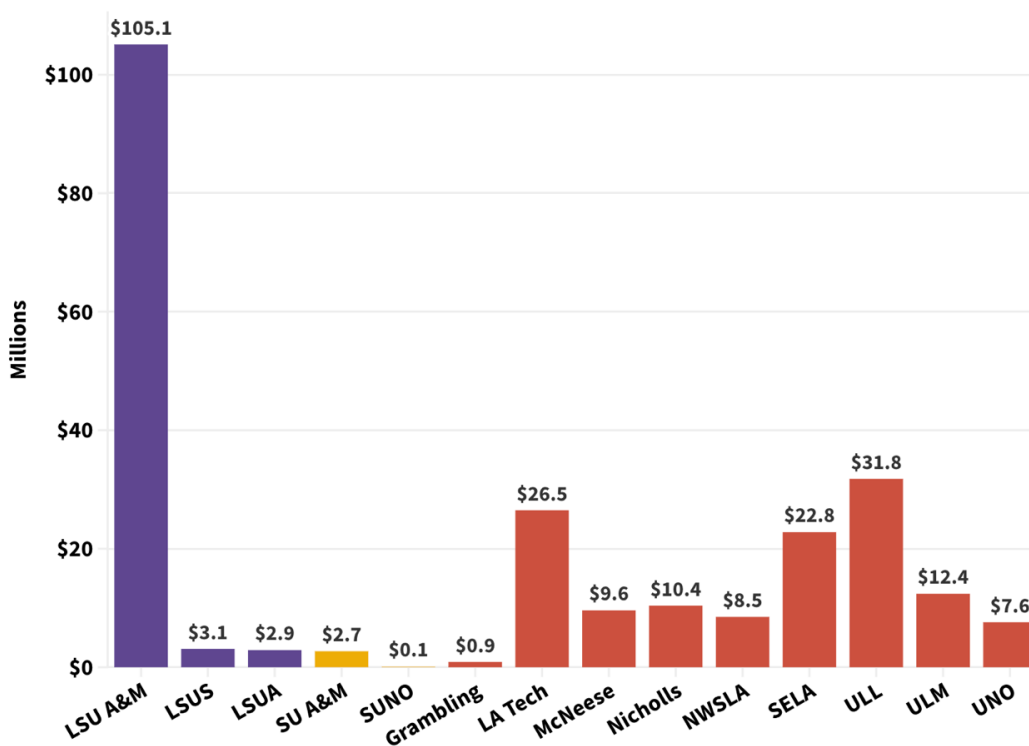
Since 2017, the number of high school graduates eligible for TOPS has fallen by more than 3,600 students, a decrease of 17%, according to LOSFA data compiled by the House Fiscal Division.

Not only is the population of students eligible for TOPS shrinking, but not all students who qualify for the award use it.

Of 37,382 high school graduates in the 2022-23 school year, 17,597 reached the grade point average, coursework and testing benchmarks required for TOPS eligibility, and only 14,054 took the scholarship.

That is a gap of about 3,500 students who were eligible but did not participate in TOPS.

TOPS Distribution by Four-Year Institution, 2023-24



Source: [Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance](#)

Louisiana State University's flagship campus in Baton Rouge received the most in TOPS funding for the past academic year, with \$105 million in scholarships distributed among 14,000 students. The school has the heftiest tuition cost and largest student body, and its students tend to have higher ACT scores.

Out of Louisiana's remaining four-year public institutions, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and Louisiana Tech University received the second- and third-highest levels of TOPS funding.

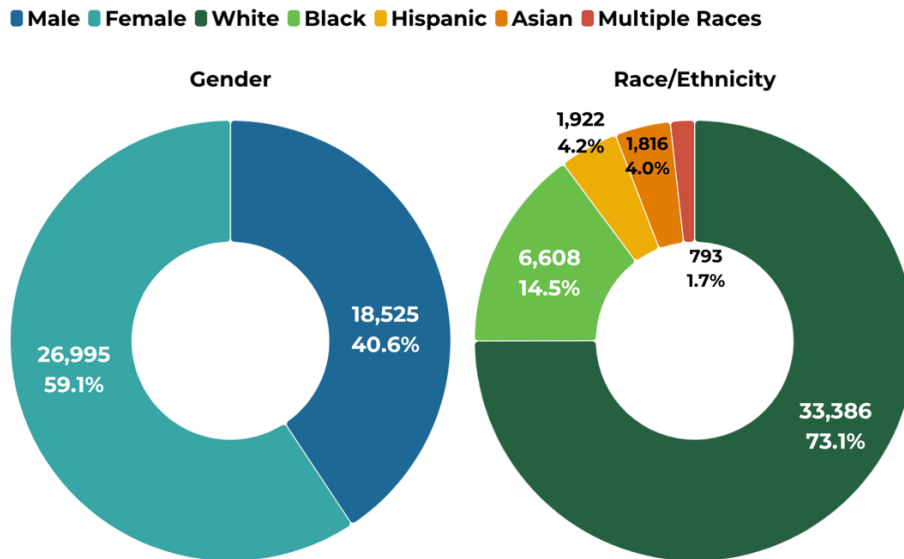
ULL received \$31.8 million for its nearly 6,000 TOPS students, while LA Tech collected \$26.5 million from the state-financed program for roughly 5,000 students.

Most students who received TOPS in the previous school year went to one of the nine colleges composing the University of Louisiana System.

The LSU System ranked second in TOPS participation, enrolling 34% of the student population receiving the state scholarship.

The Southern University System, Louisiana Community and Technical College System and private colleges account for the remaining 15% of the students who received TOPS awards.

TOPS Population by Gender and Ethnicity, 2023-24



Source: Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance

Of the nearly 46,000 TOPS recipients in the last school year, a majority were White women.

Female students outnumbered male students by about 19 percentage points, while White students accounted for more than two-thirds of the TOPS student enrollment.

Black students made up 14.5% of the population, and other minority students accounted for the remaining 10% of students who received awards.

Hispanic students were the only ethnic or racial group to grow in the TOPS program over the last four years, with a 5% increase.

TOPS distributes a tiered system of awards depending on a student's GPA and score on the ACT college entrance exam. Students with higher scores receive a stipend beyond the tuition coverage.

Most students receive the TOPS Opportunity award, which requires high school graduates to have a minimum GPA of 2.5 and a minimum ACT score of 20. About 24,000 students received scholarships at the opportunity award level last year, costing more than \$128 million, according to data from LOSFA.

Students with higher grade point averages and test scores receive the TOPS Performance or TOPS Honors scholarships. Students with the performance award made up 25.2% of the TOPS population, while 23.2% of students in the program were at the honors level.

While TOPS can cover a student's full tuition cost, the scholarship does not pay for other college expenses such as fees, housing and meal plans.

Part 3 of a three-part series looking at public K-12 education and higher education in Louisiana.