

Due to the current COVID-19 concerns and subsequent [proclamation](#) by Gov. John Bel Edwards to close all public school facilities to students until April 13, 2020, the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), the Board of Regents, the Governor and the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) have granted regulatory flexibilities that enable students to complete the school year and graduate without penalty. The following Q&A is designed to guide school systems

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## Course Credit Guidance

### **Q: What options can schools provide to help students meet credit requirements?**

**A:** School systems should determine if students have demonstrated proficiency in the grade-level content and/or courses to award credit. If it is determined that they have not, schools can provide options that can help students meet credit requirements via distance learning options, online coursework, written work packets, project-based learning, portfolios, proficiency exams, or work-based learning (where current high school course standards align with a student's job).

### **Q: Must the school award a grade or can Pass/Fail options be utilized?**

**A:** It is the decision of the local governing authority as to how to award credit. Bulletin 741 §2302 *Uniform Grading Policy* has been modified to allow senior Carnegie units to be reported with a Pass/Fail option. If the Pass/Fail option is utilized for senior course credit, it must be awarded for the entire course Carnegie unit. Pass/Fail options are not calculated into the Grade Point Average (GPA) for the purpose of Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) . The school must consult with students and parents through the Individual Graduation Plan (IGP) process to determine if Pass/Fail shall be used and how this may impact the TOPS GPA requirements.

### **Q: What if a student is currently failing a course?**

**A:** For students that have not met minimum levels of proficiency, schools should have them participate in additional distance or alternative learning options to complete unfinished learning and demonstrate proficiency. The final grade must be input into the Student Transcript System (STS) by August 31, 2020.

### **Q: Do schools have to check attendance daily while utilizing distance or alternative learning methods during mandatory school closures?**

**A:** The provisions that require daily attendance be taken at schools at the beginning of each school day and start of each class period have been suspended for the current school year.

### **Q: How does the waiver of attendance requirements impact graduating seniors?**

**A:** Instructional minute and compulsory attendance requirements have been waived. School systems shall determine if minimum course requirements were met for awarding credit. School systems may provide students distance or alternative learning methods to complete unfinished learning. A final grade must be awarded and input into the Student Transcript System (STS) by August 31, 2020.

**Q: How does this impact senior students who are on a quarter system and have not had the opportunity to take required courses due to mandated school closures?**

**A:** Graduating seniors can be given the opportunity to engage in distance or alternative learning methods to take the minimum mandatory courses which are required for awarding a diploma by August 31, 2020. All instructional minute requirements have been waived.

**Q: What if a student is enrolled in a dual enrollment course with a college or university?**

**A:** Board of Regents is bringing a policy recommendation forward in April 2020 that will codify allowing a student to:

- continue the course via distance learning options through the higher education institution and earn credit when the course ends;
- opt for an “In Progress” designation and have until August 31, 2020, to complete the course and earn credit; or
- opt for an “Administrative Withdrawal” and exit the course with no credit and nothing posted to the official college transcript.

These options should be coordinated and determined through the students IGP planning process.

**Q: Can students in a dual enrollment course earn credit in the course and graduate without dual enrollment credit?**

**A:** If it has been determined locally that a student has demonstrated proficiency in the requisite high school course content, schools may opt to switch the course to a regular high school course code and award credit without the dual enrollment credit on the higher education institution transcript. The dual enrollment credit can be earned at a later time.

**Q: Will there be course credit waivers available to seniors who were scheduled for higher education Session B “mini-session” coursework?**

**A:** Under §345 of Bulletin 741 *Requesting Waivers of BESE Policy*, school systems may request a waiver for seniors who were scheduled to be enrolled in a Board of Regents-recognized Session B “mini-session” dual enrollment Jump Start technical course that would have been scheduled for the final eight weeks of the semester and was outlined on the student’s IGP as part of their normal course scheduling and sequencing. This may have TOPS eligibility implications.

## Assessment and Accountability Guidance

**Q: What if a senior needs a LEAP 2025 high school assessment score to be eligible to graduate?**

**A:** The spring LEAP 2025 assessment window has been cancelled, and the requirement has been waived for currently enrolled graduating seniors who will graduate by August 31, 2020.

**Q: Under Act 33, what if a graduating senior with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) needs to take a LEAP 2025 high school assessment to be eligible to graduate?**

**A:** The spring LEAP 2025 testing window has been cancelled, and the requirement has been waived for currently enrolled graduating seniors, including those eligible under Act 833, who will graduate by August 31, 2020. The Department will soon provide additional guidance on how to document the goal summary in the Special Education Reporting system.

**Q: Do the LEAP 2025 high school assessment waivers apply to students classified as juniors that have not yet been identified as seniors in data systems but who would be qualified as seniors this school year?**

**A:** If a student would be classified as a senior at any time during the current school year and eligible to graduate by August 31, 2020, then the waivers applicable to graduation requirements would apply to that student. The senior waivers are not applicable to seniors not eligible to graduate in the current school year.

**Q: Do the LEAP 2025 high school assessment waivers apply to students who are not graduating seniors?**

**A:** The Department will recommend to BESE a policy change to waive the assessment graduation requirement for a high school assessment-eligible course earned by a student in 2019-2020 if the student would have been an initial tester. The policy change would not apply to any student who needs to retake the assessment to meet graduation requirements.

**Q: How will schools serve students who need to retest in order to earn a diploma?**

**A:** The waivers apply to graduating seniors enrolled in the current school year. The current plan is to have a summer test administration for students who only need the test to be eligible to earn a diploma.

**Q: If seniors have not had the opportunity to take the ACT, will this be waived so these students can graduate?**

**A:** Seniors are not required to test as a condition of graduation. However, ACT exam options are available in June 2020 that can be used for TOPS eligibility.

**Q: Will the cancelation of the April 2020 ACT test have any implications concerning TOPS eligibility for Fall 2020?**

**A:** The state administration of ACT has been rescheduled for June 2, 2020. The national ACT test administration has been moved to June 13, 2020, and the [Board of Regents will ask the Legislature to take action](#) to allow a student to qualify for Fall 2020 TOPS with the June test date. The Board of Regents will provide updates once action is taken.

**Q: If a student is planning to graduate early this year, have all of their testing requirements been met? Will these requirements be waived for early graduates?**

**A:** If the student's IGP plan indicated they were on track for a three-year graduation and the student has the necessary credits, they have met graduation requirements.

**Q: Will testing requirements be waived for 5th and 6th year graduates?**

**A:** If the student was enrolled as a 5th or 6th year senior and counted in the latest Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) enrollment count and the student meets course credit graduation requirements, the testing requirements will be waived.

**Q: Will a student who has not completed the financial aid planning requirement be eligible to graduate?**

**A:** The financial aid requirement has been waived for graduating seniors who will graduate by August 31. Schools can maintain a list of those students and complete a [hardship waiver](#). For any student needing to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), online and phone support can be accessed by sending a request to [ldefianancialaid@la.gov](mailto:ldefianancialaid@la.gov). It should be noted that, although FAFSA has been waived as a graduation requirement, students and parents need to confirm the FAFSA requirements for TOPS as established by the Louisiana Office of Students Financial Assistance (LOSFA). The FAFSA is still a requirement for TOPS, and other state and federal financial aid.

There are benefits to still completing the FAFSA; the primary reason is to reduce post-secondary expenses.

In addition to state financial aid programs, e.g. TOPS and LA Go Grant, there are also Federal Student Aid programs that require FAFSA completion, including:

- Pell Grant

- Supplemental Education Opportunity Program/SEOG
- Federal Work Study
- Federal Direct Loans

Certain scholarships, like the Bill Gates Scholarship, require FAFSA completion. Several institutions even use the FAFSA as the scholarship application. Additionally, in order to be awarded scholarships at many highly selective institutions, you must complete the FAFSA and College Scholarship Service Profile.

**Q: Will a TOPS Tech Career Diploma student be eligible to graduate if school closures impacted their ability to earn an Industry Based Credential (IBC)?**

A: The IBC terminal graduation requirement has been waived for seniors who will graduate by August 31, 2020.

**Q: How are graduation indices affected by the waivers?**

A: School performance scores will not be released in 2020.

**Q: How is credit awarded in a course with a LEAP 2025 high school assessment?**

A: Spring LEAP 2025 assessments have been cancelled for all students in the current school year and are not a graduation requirement for current seniors. The grade/credit in those courses should be awarded without the standard end-of- course grade percentage in the calculation.

## Graduation and Diploma Information

**Q: Will diplomas and diploma seals be printed and mailed to schools in time for graduation?**

A: Diploma printing is currently on track and diploma and diploma seal shipments are scheduled to arrive on time. There is guidance for schools who opt to hold virtual graduation ceremonies.

**Q: How do school systems determine class rankings or other honors if students are given alternative modes of instruction to earn credit?**

A: The local governing authority determines how to calculate GPAs to determine local class rankings and any other type of student local honor's status. Local Pupil Progression Plan requirements in RS 17.24.4 have been suspended.

**Q: What if a senior cannot meet the 25-hour requirement to earn a Community Service Seal due to school closures?**

A: The 25-hour requirement outlined in Bulletin 741 §2317 has been waived for 2019-2020 seniors. If students have met the requirements for their freshmen, sophomore and junior years, they may be awarded the diploma seal.

## Student Transcript System (STS) Reporting Requirements

**Q: How should I submit to STS for the 2019-2020 school year?**

A: The process for submitting data to the Student Transcript System (STS) will remain the same. Data should be submitted through online update or batch upload.

**Q: When can I begin submitting to STS?**

A: STS will open on May 4, 2020, with the new Assessment Requirements for Graduation flag code "C" available for use.

**Q: How do I designate graduating seniors who are eligible for the assessment waiver?**

A: Due to the assessment waiver, a code value has been added to the *Met Assessment Requirements for Graduation (Met GEE/EOC) Flag* of the Demographic (020) record. A code value of "C" should be submitted when indicating that a

student has met the Assessment Requirements for Graduation based on the assessment waiver pertaining to graduating seniors for the 2019-2020 school year.

**Q: How do I designate graduating seniors who are unable to complete a FAFSA?**

A: The financial aid planning graduation requirement has been waived for graduating seniors for 2019-2020. The existing LEA hardship waiver (code 4) should be submitted for the graduating senior's FAFSA flag.

**Q: What should I do for Jump Start students who are not able to meet the IBC credential requirement for graduation?**

A: Jump Start graduating seniors not able to complete IBC credential requirements should use IBC code "919 - COVID 19 IBC waiver" in STS.

### Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) Information for Students

**Q: I am a student. My school is giving me the option to receive a Pass/Fail grade for one or more of the courses required to complete the TOPS Core Curriculum. How will that affect my TOPS Core GPA?**

A: For TOPS purposes, courses graded on Pass/Fail basis are not assigned a quality point value and are not included in the calculation of the TOPS Core GPA. 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, and as a result, will not impact a student's TOPS Core GPA. If a course is graded on a Pass/Fail basis, the unit earned will not be included to calculate the TOPS Core GPA. Passed courses will be used to satisfy the TOPS core curriculum requirements, but they will not increase a student's GPA. Failed courses cannot be counted in the number of units needed to satisfy the TOPS core curriculum requirement.

Example for students: If one of your TOPS Core courses is graded on a Pass basis, your TOPS Cumulative GPA will be computed by dividing your total grade points by 18 units instead of 19 units. If two of your TOPS Core courses are graded on a Pass basis, your TOPS Cumulative GPA will be computed by dividing your total grade points by 17 units instead of 19 units.

**Q: I am a high school senior and currently have a 2.49 TOPS Core GPA. I chose to receive Pass/Fail grades for my courses and passed all the TOPS Core courses, will I be eligible for TOPS?**

A: No. A course that is passed will be used in counting the number of units needed to satisfy the TOPS Core Curriculum requirement; however, no numerical value will be assigned to that Pass grade. As a result, your TOPS Core GPA would remain 2.49. TOPS requires that you earn at least a 2.50 GPA, which means you would not be eligible for a TOPS Award.

**Q: I am a student and chose to receive Pass/Fail grades. I failed one of the courses in the TOPS Core Curriculum. Does this affect my TOPS Eligibility?**

A: Yes. A failed course cannot be counted in the number of units needed to satisfy the TOPS Core Curriculum requirement. If you needed this course in order to meet the Core Curriculum requirements and you received an "F," you would not have met the Core Curriculum, and you will not be eligible for a TOPS award.

**Q: I am currently a high school senior, but I was not able to complete/pass some of the TOPS Core curriculum courses due to the COVID-19 school closures. Can I take those courses over the summer to qualify for TOPS?**

A: Yes. However, you must make sure you have completed the TOPS Core Curriculum prior to graduation from high school. These classes must be listed on your official high school transcript at the time of graduation to be considered for the TOPS Core Curriculum. You will not be allowed to complete TOPS Core Curriculum courses after high school graduation to qualify for a TOPS award.

**Q: Due to COVID-19 school closures, I must take summer school courses. How does that impact my TOPS eligibility?**

**A:** You are allowed to complete TOPS Core Curriculum courses during the summer as long as you have not yet graduated from high school; however, the determination of your eligibility for a TOPS award could be delayed depending on the date your high school submits final high school transcript data. The academic year for TOPS eligibility ends on August 31, 2020. If your graduation date falls on September 1, 2020, or beyond, you may still enroll for the Fall 2020 semester; however, your TOPS eligibility will not be determined until June 2021, as you will be considered a Class of 2021 graduate.

**Q: Can TOPS Core Curriculum classes be waived if we weren't able to complete them due to COVID-19 school closures?**

**A:** No. A TOPS Core course cannot be waived, except under limited circumstances for students with one or more learning, visual, hearing or physical disabilities, and/or exceptionalities. You are still required to complete the TOPS Core Curriculum requirements.

**Q: I am a student. My ACT score puts me in the range to qualify for either TOPS Performance or TOPS Honors. I currently have a 2.95 TOPS Core GPA and passed all the TOPS Core Curriculum courses through a Pass/Fail grading system my senior year. Can I qualify for the higher level of TOPS with just my ACT score, given the circumstances?**

**A:** No. Students must still meet TOPS eligibility requirements for each level of TOPS that includes earning a qualifying ACT score and completing the TOPS Core Curriculum with the required GPA. Your TOPS Core GPA will not be rounded up.

**Q: I am a student with over 19 units to meet the TOPS Core Curriculum requirement. I received a Pass grade for a course I hoped to use as a substitute for another course and boost my GPA. How will my TOPS Core GPA be impacted?**

**A:** If you have earned more than the required number of units of courses that are included in the TOPS Core Curriculum, your TOPS Core GPA will be calculated using the courses with the highest grades that satisfy the required core curriculum category. The program will choose the full numeric letter grade over the Pass grade.

**Q: If I did not have a TOPS Core GPA of 3.00 when I graduated high school due to COVID-19 school closures but 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. Once awarded, you must meet certain academic standards in college to continue your award.

**Q: If I did not have a TOPS Core GPA of 2.50 when I graduated high school due to COVID-19 school closures, 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: Is there an exception for the TOPS Core GPA due to COVID-19 school closures?**

**A:** No. TOPS requires a minimum TOPS Core GPA of 2.50. This requirement still applies even if a student chooses to receive Pass/Fail grades from your high school.

**Q: If a student earns a letter grade for the first semester then chooses to take a Pass/Fail grade for the second semester, how will their grade be reported to LOSFA, and how will this impact their TOPS Eligibility?**

**A:** A course with an earned grade of Pass can only be entered as Y1 – Year Long Course. A student cannot receive a grade of Pass for one part of a course and a letter grade for the other part of the course. You will be missing ½ unit of the required 19 core units. Students should speak to their counselor regarding their policy for reporting grades to LOSFA.

Updated 4/2/2020

**Q: I'm currently in the 11th grade and was taking dual enrollment courses through TOPS Tech Early Start. If I choose to receive Pass/Fail grading due to COVID-19, how will this impact my eligibility for TOPS Tech Early Start next year?**

**A:** You are required to maintain a 2.00 GPA on a 4.00 scale on all high school courses attempted in order to remain eligible for TOPS Tech Early Start. Pass/Fail grades are not assigned a quality point value and they will not be included in the calculation of your high school GPA. If you receive an "F," it will lower your GPA such that you may not meet the 2.00 requirement to continue to be eligible for TOPS Tech Early Start. If you receive a "P", the grade will not lower your GPA, but it will not increase it either.

## **Regulatory Flexibility**

**Q: What regulatory flexibilities did Louisiana secure as a result of the COVID-19 school closures?**

**A:**

### [Governor's Proclamation](#)

In an emergency proclamation titled "Additional Measures for COVID-19 Public Health Emergency," the Governor closed all public schools until April 13, 2020.

### [BESE Waivers](#)

As a result of the proclamation, BESE instituted emergency rules and flexibilities and granted policy waivers to accommodate for school closures, ensure essential services for students continue, and ensure promotion and graduation would still occur without penalties to students or school system personnel.

### [JBE 2020-27](#)

### [JBE 2020-32](#)

Additional executive orders and waivers were granted by the Governor to ensure school closures did not negatively impact children or school system employees.

### [U.S. Department of Education Waivers](#)

The state received a number of waivers from the USDOE to accommodate for school closures.

### [Board of Regents Guidance](#) p. 27-28

### [ACT Guidance](#)

The Board of Regents is asking for legislative actions for students in dual enrollment and concerning TOPS to ensure successful completion of courses and avoid penalizing students for school closures and testing cancellations.

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For additional information, contact [LDOECOVID19Support@la.gov](mailto:LDOECOVID19Support@la.gov).