

# Louisiana Believes

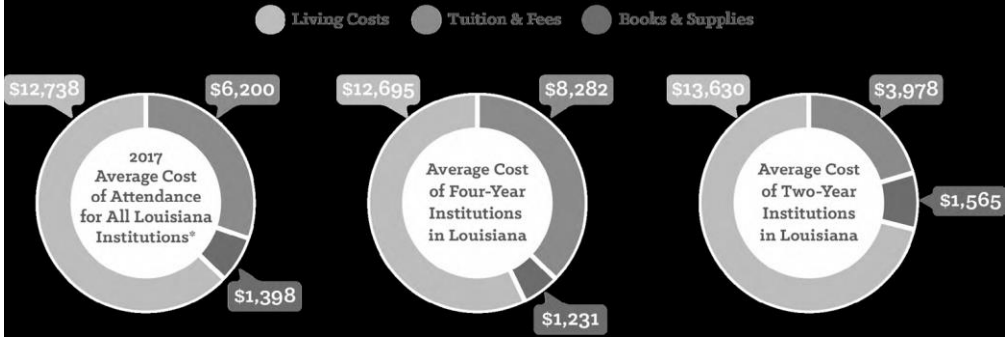
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## The State of Financial Aid in Louisiana

# POSTSECONDARY ACCESS IN LOUISIANA

By 2018, 51 percent of Louisiana’s jobs will require postsecondary education, and 65 percent of the nation’s jobs will require postsecondary education by 2020. In order to meet this imminent workforce demand, Louisiana must equip its students with the postsecondary education and training necessary to meet the requirements of a global economy.

One of the most prominent barriers to postsecondary education or training in Louisiana is cost. Too few students and families have the money to fund a four year degree or industry training program without assistance.



# POSTSECONDARY FUNDING SOURCES

Louisiana students are afforded many state and federal financial aid options such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students to help combat the costs of postsecondary education and training.

## ***Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)***

The FAFSA is a form prepared annually by current and prospective postsecondary students to determine their eligibility for student financial aid such as Pell grants, work study programs, and federal student loans. Students complete the FAFSA during their senior year of high school and again each year they are in a postsecondary institution to continue qualifying for aid. Early completion is encouraged since students may qualify for additional state or institutional aid.

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

TOPS is a scholarship program for Louisiana residents who attend any of the following institutions:

- Louisiana public college or university;
- school in the Louisiana Community and Technical College System;
- approved proprietary and cosmetology schools;
- institutions in the Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

*TOPS awards Opportunity, Performance, Honors, and Tech awards are based on a student's GPA and ACT score.*

# LOUISIANA'S PLAN FOR INCREASING POSTSECONDARY ACCESS

Too few students were taking advantage of state and federal financial aid, especially those who have the greatest need. The FAFSA completion rate of Louisiana's high school seniors has been consistently ranked in the bottom half of the nation. By not completing the FAFSA, Louisiana students forego roughly \$54 million each year in federal grants, state opportunities, and other postsecondary funding. Additionally, students who are awarded TOPS or other state scholarships still seek additional assistance with living expenses, textbooks, and academic fees.

## **Solutions:**

- Improving state policy
- Improving statewide financial aid planning

# IMPROVING STATE POLICY

In December of 2015 the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) approved a policy regarding postsecondary planning for graduating public high school seniors. The policy sought to increase student access to state and federal financial aid by requiring graduating seniors to either

- complete the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) application or the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA);
- declare a hardship; or
- submit a waiver to the local school system.

*These policies were made effective with the start of the 2017-2018 school year and will apply to the Class of 2018.*

# IMPROVING STATEWIDE FINANCIAL AID PLANNING

In order to provide even greater access to financial aid for Louisiana's students, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) formed the Financial Aid Working Group to evaluate the state's financial aid application completion rates, identify deficiencies and solutions for communities with low completion rates, and provide a comprehensive list of recommendations to the LDOE on how to improve financial aid completion rates statewide.

## Tasks of the Working Group

1. Develop a state action plan to track school-level financial aid form completion and make recommendations to the Department regarding changes in policy or funding opportunities deemed necessary to ensure that the new policy is implemented with fidelity;
2. Support the Department in the ongoing identification of services and programs available for schools and families; and
3. Assist in the development of partnerships and alliances with financial aid-related support programs, services, and stakeholders.

# WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION 1

Improve financial aid application completion rates in Louisiana, which are currently below the national average.

The Department trained counselors and Teacher Leaders across the state on financial aid awareness. As a result:

- FAFSA submission rates during the 2016-2017 school year increased by seven percent statewide
- Louisiana's completion rate of 65% surpassed the national average of 61% as of June 30, 2017

# WORKING GROUP RECOMMENATION 2

Provide families and schools with comprehensive information and tools to highlight the importance of financial aid in pursuing postsecondary education and training.

The Department created a [Financial Aid webpage](#) with resources for families and schools



# WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION 3

Foster regional partnerships among families, schools, postsecondary institutions, and providers of financial aid support services; maintain a catalog of regional financial aid application completion events and support services.

- The Department facilitates regular communication and coordination of financial aid services
- The Department provides resources for families and schools via its [Financial Aid website](#) including a [Financial Aid Calendar of Events](#) with statewide financial aid activities

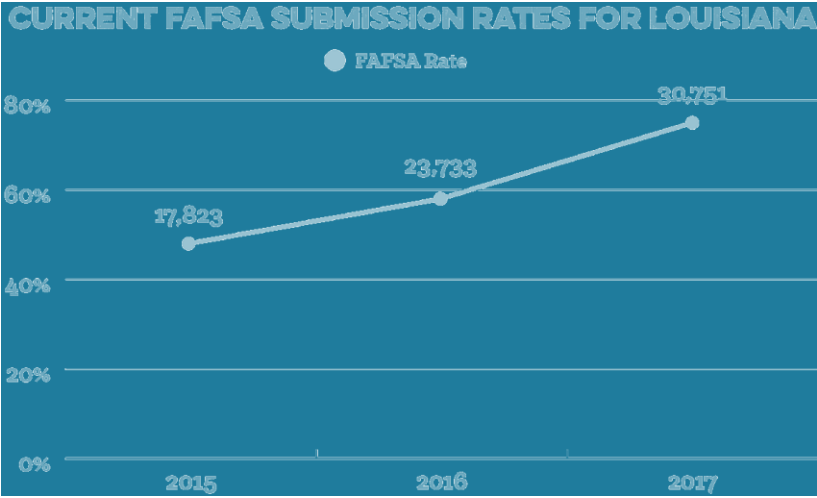
# WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION 4

Create a financial aid unit that can be delivered within a career readiness or other applicable course, one that is dedicated to providing students a basic understanding of the financial aid process and the types of funding available.

The Department created a course unit on financial aid awareness and steps for completing the FAFSA which is published on the [Financial Aid website](#)

# IMPROVING STATEWIDE FAFSA APPLICATION SUBMISSION RATES

In 2017, the national average for FAFSA submission was 61 percent. In Louisiana 65% of public high school seniors submitted the FAFSA by the July 1 priority deadline, surpassing the state's all-time high and the national average. As of September 2017, that submission rate had jumped to 75 percent. Louisiana is ranked nationally among the top 15 states for growth.



# FINANCIAL AID PLANNING RESOURCES

## **Financial Aid Resources**

Students, parents, and schools can visit the [financial aid homepage](#) (Louisiana Believes/Graduation Pathways/Financial Aid) for more information or email [ldfinancialaid@la.gov](mailto:ldfinancialaid@la.gov) with questions or for assistance with FAFSA completion

## Financial Aid Planning Calendar of Events

- FRANK <https://frankfafsa.com/>
- LOSFA <http://www.osfa.la.gov/>
- Career Compass <http://www.careercompassla.org/>
- LELA <http://www.lela.org/>
- [ldfinancialaid@la.gov](mailto:ldfinancialaid@la.gov)

# Louisiana Believes

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Supplemental Course Allocation/Course Choice

# Supplemental Course Allocation/Course Choice

SCA currently gives school systems and schools an allocation of \$59 per student in grades 7-12 to be spent on approved providers of currently unavailable academic courses. Courses include core subjects required for the TOPS University Diploma, career and technical education courses required for the Jump Start diploma, test preparation courses, and dual enrollment opportunities for students. Courses are delivered in online, face-to-face and hybrid formats.

Funding has increased to \$59 per student in grades 7-12 per school system

To view your school system's allocation amount:

- <http://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/minimum-foundation-program>
- Download 2017-2018 Circular No. 1161 - MFP Budget Letter (excel)\_web
- Select Page 4\_Level 4

Questions or issues email [SCA@la.gov](mailto:SCA@la.gov)

# Payments

- Allocations are given to school systems at 1/12 per month as a separate line item in the MFP allocation (called Course Choice)
- School systems pay providers directly
- Private providers are paid ½ payment for full tuition amount once registration ends
- Final ½ payment occurs once time for course elapses and student completes the course (students that legitimately withdraw with an extenuating circumstance do not pay this payment)
- Dual enrollment courses pay one full payment for the tuition total once registration ends

# Registration Deadlines

- The final date for fall block and full year registration was September 11, 2017
- Registration will reopen for spring block courses November 27, 2017 – January 10, 2018
- School systems register for actual courses directly with providers and report either in [www.lacourses.net](http://www.lacourses.net) for private providers and via spreadsheet for dual enrollment courses
  - [Private provider registration instructions](#)
  - Dual enrollment registers directly with the college or university



# Reporting System

- [www.lacourses.net](http://www.lacourses.net)
- All private provider enrollments must be documented in the system by the registration deadlines in order to be funded by SCA
- Usernames/passwords [SCA@la.gov](mailto:SCA@la.gov)
  
- Dual enrollment registrations are self reported by school systems by set deadlines to [Tiffany.Thomas@la.gov](mailto:Tiffany.Thomas@la.gov)
  
- The reporting system and self reported dual enrollment information are used to officially calculate for reallocation purposes
- A school system must intend to use 90% of funds to avoid reallocation

# Information and Assistance

- Visit the [SCA webpage](#)

<http://www.louisianabelieves.com/courses/supplemental-course-academy>

- For assistance email [SCA@la.gov](mailto:SCA@la.gov)