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## **TOPS Program Continues to Deliver on Promises**

Students who earn a TOPS scholarship are significantly more likely to stay in college and graduate sooner than their fellow students enrolled without TOPS. Moreover, data show that since the advent of TOPS, Louisiana high school students are increasingly more likely to take the more rigorous TOPS Core curriculum, which helps prepare them for career success even if they do not choose to attend college. These facts were part of a report on TOPS, Louisiana's *Tuition Opportunity Program for Students*, presented this week by the Board of Regents to the House Education Committee in Baton Rouge.

According to the report, 59% of TOPS students at four-year institutions graduate within six years, while their non-TOPS counterparts graduate at a 25% rate. Student retention, the rate at which students persist in college from year to year, is also positively impacted by TOPS. Report data showed that students who enrolled with TOPS in 2003 remained in school for the second year at a rate of 88%, while those without TOPS persisted at rate of 66%. Moreover, 77% of those TOPS students were still in college by the fourth year, as opposed to only 42% of their non-TOPS counterparts.

"Yesterday's report is further confirmation of the value and success of the TOPS program," said Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph Savoie. "Getting more students into college and increasing their likelihood of graduation once enrolled are foundational concerns as Louisiana continues its recovery and efforts to solidify its economic vitality. TOPS is playing a vital role in that process."

One of the most telling statistics revealed in yesterday's report shows that despite a decline in Louisiana high school graduates between 2003 and 2007 (from 45,226 to 41,370), the number of students graduating having successfully completed the TOPS Core curriculum *rose* from 25,546 to 27,230 during the same period.

"Even students who do not ultimately qualify for a TOPS award or who do not go on to enroll in college are taking the Core at a higher rate each year," said Theresa Hay, Regents Assistant Commissioner for Planning and Research, who participated in yesterday's report presentation. "That means that more students are graduating better prepared for employment in a knowledge-based economy. This is a collateral benefit of TOPS that is perhaps not as well known."

Yesterday's presentation marked the second TOPS report the Board of Regents has presented to the Louisiana Legislature, the previous one having been delivered in 2004. The new report echoed the findings of the first, but it reflected previously unavailable data confirming the very positive impact of TOPS on college graduation rates. The complete report is available online at <http://www.regents.state.la.us/pdfs/TOPS/TOPSPPT07.pdf>.