

# La. Education Dept. releases new guidance for high school seniors

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*The following information is from the Louisiana Dept. of Education.*

In response to statewide school closures to curb the spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), the Louisiana Department of Education today released guidance to school systems regarding how they can ensure high school seniors who were on track to graduate this spring can still do so on-time and without penalty.

The guidance, which is now presented in a Q&A format and now available on the Department's COVID-19 web page, addresses course credits, assessments, graduation ceremonies and diplomas, among other key topics.

It also provides information to students regarding Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) scholarships and recaps the various regulatory flexibilities granted by the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), the Board of Regents, the Governor, and the U.S. Department of Education to make graduation and promotion possible during this extraordinary time.

"This special time for seniors across the state has been disrupted by the COVID-19 event, and we are sensitive to the uncertainty this has caused to the students and their families," said Acting State Superintendent Beth Scioneaux. "We want to support and reassure them that the path forward and the ability to follow their dreams remains."

Among the key takeaways:

- **Local school systems will decide how to award course credits.** School systems will determine if students have demonstrated proficiency in the grade-level content and/or courses to award credit and provide options to students who have not. The school system, in consultation with parents and students, will also decide to award that credit by letter grade or by simple "Pass" and "Fail" grades.

- Seniors do not have to take standardized tests or achieve industry-based credentials (IBCs) to earn a diploma.**

The spring LEAP 2025 assessment window has been cancelled, and the requirement has been waived for currently enrolled seniors who will graduate by August 31, 2020. If a student needs to retest in order to earn a diploma, a summer administration will be available. If a senior has not had the opportunity to take the ACT, it is not required for graduation, but it may be needed for scholarships. The rescheduled state ACT administration is June 2, 2020. The IBC terminal graduation requirement has also been waived for Jump Start seniors who will graduate by August 31, 2020.
- Seniors currently taking dual-enrollment courses have completion options.**

The 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.
- Diplomas remain scheduled to print and arrive on time.**

Diploma printing is currently on track, and diploma and diploma seal shipments are scheduled to arrive on time.
- Local school systems will continue to plan graduation ceremonies and determine class rankings. As is the case every year, graduation ceremonies will be planned and hosted by individual schools. This year, schools may host virtual graduation ceremonies, or host in-person gatherings later in summer, once it is safe to do so, even if students will be considered graduates in May 2020. School systems will determine how to calculate grade point averages (GPAs) to determine class rankings and other honors.
- Seniors are still encouraged to complete financial aid planning.**

While the state's financial aid access policy has been waived this year, students are still encouraged to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to offset the cost of post-secondary education and training. The FAFSA remains a requirement for TOPS, and other state and federal financial aid.
- Academic eligibility requirements for TOPS are unchanged.**

Academic eligibility requirements for TOPS awards, including TOPS Core Curriculum courses and GPA, remain the same. The way the TOPS GPA is calculated also remains the same. Students opting for a Pass/Fail grade option should consult their counselor on any impact this may have on the TOPS GPA requirement.

The guidance comes after weeks of consultation with leaders from rural and urban school systems, higher education, state education boards and state government.

"We appreciate all the teamwork and effort that has taken place among all those who are working throughout the state of Louisiana to ensure students are being served and given opportunities to complete the 2019-2020 school year," said Ascension Parish Schools Superintendent David Alexander.

"We appreciate the efforts to both support the education of our high school seniors and their on-time completion as well. We look forward to welcoming this Class of 2020 into our Louisiana colleges and universities in the fall," said Louisiana Commissioner of Higher Education

Dr. Kim Hunter Reed. "We want the graduates and their parents to know we are proud of their accomplishments, aware of the challenges they have faced and stand committed to support their successful transition to college."

The Department continues to develop next steps for grades Kindergarten through 11 and will request additional regulatory waivers from BESE as needed.

[Access the full guidance for current high school seniors.](#)

[Learn more about COVID-19 and access education resources.](#)

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In response to the release of Regulatory Flexibility Guidelines for Senior Course Credit and Graduation by the LDOE, the East Carroll Parish School District will adhere to the guidelines as proposed by the LDOE. However, when appropriate, decisions made will be specific to our district.

Thanks,

East Carroll School District  
Ruthie Auston, Secondary Curriculum/Diploma/Graduation Supervisor