

Date of Hearing: March 27, 2019

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Patrick O'Donnell, Chair
AB 1233 (Smith) – As Introduced February 21, 2019

SUBJECT: Advanced placement examinations: fees

SUMMARY: Establishes a grant program to award grants to cover the costs of advanced placement (AP) examination fees for eligible low-income high school pupils, administered by the California Department of Education (CDE). Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Establishes a grant program for purposes of awarding grants to cover the costs of AP examination fees for eligible low-income high school pupils. The CDE shall administer this program.
- 2) Allows a school district to apply to the CDE for grant funding to cover the costs of AP examination fees, based on the number of low-income pupils in the school district enrolled in AP courses who will take the next offered AP examinations. A school district that applies to the CDE for this purpose is required to designate school district staff to whom pupils may submit applications for grants and must institute a plan to notify pupils of the availability of financial assistance pursuant to this program. Grant funds must be expended to pay the fees required of eligible low-income high school pupils to take an AP examination.
- 3) Allows an eligible low-income high school pupil who is enrolled in an AP course to apply to the designated school district staff for a grant pursuant to this section. A pupil who receives a grant is required to pay five dollars (\$5) of the examination fee.
- 4) Prohibits a grant provided pursuant to this section from being used to supplant a fee waiver available to a low-income pupil who takes an AP examination.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to annually update the information on advanced placement available on the CDE's website to include current information on the various means available to school districts to offer or access AP courses, including online courses. Requires the SPI to annually communicate with high schools that offer AP courses in fewer than five subjects, and inform them of the various options for making AP and other rigorous courses available to pupils who may benefit from them. (Education Code Section 52240 (b))
- 2) Authorizes a school district to help pay for all or part of the costs of one or more advanced placement examinations that are charged to economically disadvantaged pupils. (Education Code Section 52241)
- 3) Requires the office of the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges, in collaboration with the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, to:
 - a) Develop, and each community college district subsequently must adopt and implement a uniform policy to award a pupil who passes an AP examination course

credit for California Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum, California State University General Education Breadth, or local community college general education requirements, as appropriate for the pupil's needs, in a course with subject matter similar to that of the AP examination

- b) Periodically review and adjust the policy to align it with policies of other public postsecondary educational institutions (Education Code 79500)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author's office, "The AP exam not only provides students with ways to bolster their college resume, it allows them to bypass remediation and graduate earlier with smaller amounts of debt.

This is an equity issue. AP exam funding evens the playing field for all students and promotes greater access to higher education for our most vulnerable student population."

Advanced Placement Courses and Exams. AP courses are high school courses intended to replicate college-level introductory courses. The AP program began in 1955 and is administered by the College Board, a non-profit organization that also administers other tests and programs, including the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Many colleges and universities have policies in place that allow students who have earned a qualifying score on an AP exam to obtain college course credit.

The fee for each AP exam is \$94. According to the College Board, students with significant financial need may be eligible for a \$32 College Board fee reduction per AP exam. According to the author's office, in 2020 an estimated 318,000 AP exams will be taken by low-income students in California.

Advanced Placement Test Fee Reimbursement (State Funding). The CDE administered the AP Test Fee Reimbursement program from 1992-93 through 2012-13. The program included state and federal funds. Effective 2013-14, the state-funded program was subsumed into the LCFF. Federal funding from the Advanced Placement Test Fee Program (see below) continued through 2015-16 when it was amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

According to a previous program description from the CDE: "Advanced Placement (AP) programs provide incentives for public comprehensive high schools in California to provide access to rigorous, college-level courses for interested and prepared students.

The Advanced Placement (AP) Test Fee Reimbursement Program removes the financial barriers that prevent many low-income students in comprehensive high schools from taking the AP course test. Funding supports the payment of AP test fees for eligible students.

Low-income students who are enrolled in an AP class and plan to take the end-of-course AP exam are eligible to participate in the program. Upon teacher recommendation, a low-income student who has previously taken an AP class but not the exam may also be eligible to participate.

Local educational agencies (LEAs) and individual schools must document the income eligibility of students participating in the program and maintain documentation of need at the school or LEA site for five years.

Local education agencies (LEA) will be reimbursed \$48 for each exam for students whose family income does not exceed 150 percent of the poverty income level. LEAs will be reimbursed \$70 for each exam for a student whose family income exceed 150 percent, but does not exceed 200 percent of the poverty income level.”

Advanced Placement Test Fee Program (Title I, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act).

The Advanced Placement Test Fee (APTF) program awarded grants to eligible State educational agencies (SEAs) to enable them to pay all or a portion of AP test fees on behalf of eligible low-income students who (1) were enrolled in an advanced placement course and (2) planned to take an advanced placement test. The program was designed to increase the number of low-income students who take AP tests and receive scores for which college academic credit is awarded. Awards could be used only to support advanced placement test fees for low-income students. The final year of this program was 2015-16.

College Readiness Block Grant. The College Readiness Block Grant (CRBG) was established by Senate Bill 828 in June 2016 (Chapter 29, Statutes of 2016, Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review). The CRBG allocated \$200 million for LEAs, including county offices of education, school districts, and charter schools (both direct and locally funded) that reported unduplicated pupils in grades nine through twelve during the 2015–16 fiscal year. Funds could be expended anytime during the 2016–17, 2017–18, and 2018–19 fiscal years. The CRBG was intended to provide additional funding for LEAs to provide California's high school pupils additional supports to increase the number who enroll at the institutions of higher education and complete an undergraduate program degree within four years, including providing subsidies to unduplicated pupils, as defined by the LCFF, to pay fees for taking AP exams.

Current federal funding for AP exam fees. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) as amended by the ESSA, permits LEAs to dedicate a portion of the Title I, Part A and/or Title IV, Part A funding they receive to defray the cost of AP and other advanced course or industry credential exams taken by low-income students. For the 2017-18 school year, the Budget Act directed the CDE to administer Title IV, Part A funds as a competitive grant.

For the 2018-19 school year, LEAs received a formula allocation of Title IV, Part A funds, known as Student Support and Academic Achievement Grants (SSAE), which can be used to defray the cost of AP exam fees for eligible low income students. Multiple programs and services may be funded by the SSAE. Each state and LEA must use SSAE funds to: (1) provide all students with access to a well-rounded education; (2) improve school conditions for student learning; and (3) improve the use of technology in order to improve the academic achievement and digital literacy for all students.

The Committee may wish to consider that for the 2019-20 school year, state and federal funding available to LEAs to offset the AP exam fees for eligible low income students is uncertain. The third and final year of funding for the CRBG is 2018-19, and federal funds available under Title IV, Part A of the ESSA require an annual appropriation and are proposed to be eliminated or reduced every fiscal year.

Staff recommends that the bill be amended to state that the program will be funded using one-time funds, available over five years. The Committee is cautious not to establish or re-establish categorical programs due to the changes made with the creation of the LCFF. The Committee also recommends that the bill be amended to include charter schools, county offices of education. Further, amendments include adding foster youth as a student population eligible to participate in the program, and adds a definition for low-income to align with eligibility for the Free and Reduced Price Meal Program.

Prior Legislation. SB 828 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 29, Statutes of 2016 established the College Readiness Block Grant. The CRBG, among other provisions, allocates funds which may provide subsidies to unduplicated pupils, as defined by the LCFF, to pay fees for taking AP exams.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Avid Center
Corona Norco Unified School District
Fresno Unified School District
Los Angeles Unified School District
Sacramento City Unified School District

Opposition

None on file.

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