

Date of Hearing: May 6, 2020

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Patrick O'Donnell, Chair
AB 2022 (McCarty) – As Introduced January 29, 2020

SUBJECT: Advanced Placement Test Fee Reimbursement Program

SUMMARY: Establishes a reimbursement program for school districts, county offices of education and charter schools, administered by the California Department of Education (CDE), for the costs of Advanced Placement (AP) examination fees for eligible low-income students. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the CDE to administer the Advanced Placement Test Fee Reimbursement program for the purposes of covering the costs of AP examination fees for eligible low-income high school students or foster youth high school students.
- 2) Authorizes a school district, county office of education, or charter school to apply to the CDE for reimbursement based on the number of low-income students and foster youth in the school district, county office of education, or charter school enrolled in AP courses who will take the next offered AP examinations. A school district, county office of education, or charter school that applies to the CDE must designate staff persons that students may submit applications for financial assistance with and must institute a plan to notify students of the availability of financial assistance related to this program.
- 3) Authorizes an eligible low-income high school student or foster youth high school student who is enrolled in an AP course may apply to the designated staff for financial assistance.
- 4) Specifies that financial assistance provided under the Advanced Placement Test Fee Reimbursement program may not be used to supplant a fee waiver available to a low income high school student or foster youth student who takes an AP examination.
- 5) Specifies that the Advanced Placement Test Fee Reimbursement program only be implemented if funds are appropriated for these purposes in the annual Budget Act or other statute commencing in the 2021-22 fiscal year.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to annually update the information on AP 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 students who may benefit from them. (Education Code (EC) 52240)
- 2) Authorizes a school district to help pay for all or part of the costs of one or more AP examinations that are charged to economically disadvantaged students. (EC 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 adopt and implement, a uniform policy to award a student 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 student'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. (EC 79500)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author's office, "In the wake of COVID-19, AB 2022 is necessary to expand access to AP exams for low-income high school students to allow more students to take the test and pursue their higher education goals with less debt. This bill is essential to ensuring students can still take the exams without putting cost burdens on the backs of families struggling from the impact of the pandemic.

AP exams help students reduce their time-to-degree and ultimately defray the cost of college, which is becoming increasingly economically prohibitive, particularly for low-income students. Providing direct AP test funds by reimbursing school districts for the projected 318,000 AP exams to be taken by low-income Californian students this year eliminates a critical barrier to college and helps to address opportunity and equity gaps.

School districts across the state have spent large amounts of money to address equity issues within technology and distance learning as a result of COVID-19, and do not have the funds to help their high-achieving low-income students cover the costs of AP exams. This pandemic has exacerbated and highlighted serious inequities in education. Now more than ever, it is crucial to support these low-income students so that they do not have to forgo taking the exam because they cannot afford it."

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 Exam changes due to COVID-19. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the College Board developed online free-response exams for each AP course. The exams will only include topics and skills that most AP teachers and students have already covered in class by early March. This year's AP Exams will be open book/open note and students will be able to

take exams on any device they have access to—computer, tablet, or smartphone. They will be able to either type and upload their responses or write responses by hand and submit a photo via their cell phone.

State Advanced Placement Test Fee Reimbursement (program eliminated). 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 eliminated by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The eliminated program removed financial barriers that prevented many low-income students in high schools from taking AP course tests. Local education agencies (LEA) were reimbursed \$48 for each exam for students whose family income did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty income level. LEAs were reimbursed \$70 for each exam for a student whose family income exceeded 150%, but did not exceed 200% of the poverty income level.

Federal Advanced Placement Test Fee Program (program eliminated). 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 AP 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 SB 828 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 29, Statutes of 2016. 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 students 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 students 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 students, 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 2020-21 school year, 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 was 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 by the President and Congress every fiscal year.

Recommended Committee Amendment. *Staff recommends that the bill be amended* to apply only for the 2020-21 school year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and be contingent upon apportionment.

Related Legislation. AB 1233 (Smith) of this Session would have established a grant program to award grants to cover the costs of AP examination fees for eligible low-income high school students, administered by the CDE. This bill was vetoed by the Governor, with the following message:

While I understand the Legislature's intent to promote AP testing opportunities for eligible low-income high school students or foster youth high school students, local educational agencies already have the ability to subsidize AP examination fees using their local control funding formula funds.

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 students, as defined by the LCFF, to pay fees for taking AP exams.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Alhambra Unified School District
 Alliance College-ready Public Schools
 Avid Center
 California Alliance of Child and Family Services
 California Association for The Gifted
 Calipatria Unified School District
 Carlmont High School
 Chaffey Joint Union High School District
 Conejo Valley Unified School District
 Corona Norco Unified School District
 Culver City Unified School District
 Dublin Unified School District
 El Dorado Union High School District
 El Monte Union High School District
 Elk Grove Unified School District
 Hanford Joint Union High School District
 Hayward High School

Ica Cristo Rey Academy
Mariposa County Unified School District
Murrieta Valley Unified School District
Oakland Charter High School
Oceanside Unified School District
Oxnard Union High School District
Patterson Joint Unified School District
Poway Unified School District
San Dieguito Union High School District
Shasta Union High School District
Torrance Unified School District
Tracy Unified School District
Tulare Joint Union High School District
Tustin Unified School District
Yolo County Office of Education
Yuba City Unified School District
1 individual

Opposition

None on file

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