

Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D.

State Superintendent of Schools

BILL: SB 267 **DATE:** February 4, 2020

SUBJECT: AP Opportunities Act of 2020 **COMMITTEE:** Education, Health, and

Environmental Affairs

POSITION: Support

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EXPLANATION:

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) supports Senate Bill (SB) 267, AP Opportunities Act of 2020, which provides Advanced Placement examination fee assistance for students with financial need.

The Maryland State Board of Education recently adopted new regulations that establish educational equity as a matter of policy and priority in the State. We guarantee that each Maryland public school will provide every student equitable access to educational rigor such as Advanced Placement courses.

Maryland has a long history of increasing AP participation and performance, consistently ranking among the top in the nation. However, program expansion has not rectified the gaps in participation by socioeconomic status. Across the state, middle- and high-income students are more likely to enroll in an AP course than low-income students. Of the 110,957 exams taken in 2018, 14% of them were taken by a low-income student. As a rough comparison, 36% of high school students in Maryland in 2018 were eligible for free or reduced price meals.

Even in our highest performing schools and school systems, there are "missing students" – those who are excluded from advanced academic programs due to longstanding systemic barriers. Through the Lead Higher initiative, MSDE has been working with school systems to close the opportunity gap by identifying underserved Maryland students who are prepared to succeed in AP courses but are not enrolled in these classes. In this school year (2019-20), 51 schools from 10 school systems are participating in the program, and over 1,700 additional underrepresented students were enrolled in Advanced Placement and/or International Baccalaureate programs. Additionally, we saw a 28% increase from the 20017-18 school year in the number of students of color and low-income students passing at least one AP/IB course. MSDE and our local school systems are building a culture of rigor, belonging and success for these students. However, one of the barriers that remains is the cost of the AP exam. Taking an AP exam, or possibly the class, should not be a financial choice.

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Maryland's local school systems have struggled to find funding sources to assist these students since 2016, when the federal grant program that reimbursed them for AP fees for low-income students ended. SB 267 would remove the financial barrier for low-income students and enable them to make coursework decisions in high school that will impact college admission, financial aid, college academic performance, and graduation.

We respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate **SB 267**. For further information, please contact Tiffany Clark, at 410-260-6028, or <u>tiffany.clark1@maryland.gov</u>.