

TO: Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and Environment

BILL: SB0283- Students With Financial Need - College Preparatory Programs - Exam Fee Prohibition

Date: January 29, 2025

Position: Information

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is providing information for consideration regarding Senate Bill (SB) 0283 which proposes prohibiting the charging of exam fees for college preparatory programs to students demonstrating financial need.

Under the current universal criteria, students qualify for free admission and fee reductions for advanced exams, including AP exams, if they demonstrate financial need through specific factors. These factors include enrollment in Free or Reduced-Price Meals (FARMS), participation in federal assistance programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or meeting federal poverty guidelines, which are defined as having a household income at or below 150% of the federal poverty level. Additionally, students who are unhoused, live in federally subsidized public housing, are in foster care or are wards of the state are also eligible. These policies ensure that many low-income students can access advanced academic tests at little or no cost, promoting equitable educational opportunities. Furthermore, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future requires that all students have access to post-College and Career Readiness (CCR) pathways without any cost to them or their families, reinforcing the principle that financial barriers should not prevent students from pursuing rigorous coursework.

Currently, Maryland public schools do not offer the Cambridge Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) diploma; however, this could change in the future. We are actively monitoring potential developments that may lead to the implementation of Cambridge programs in the state, providing students with a broader range of post-CCR pathways. As the Blueprint's implementation progresses, any introduction of the Cambridge AICE option will align with the mandate to ensure that eligible students have free or reduced exam fees, thereby maintaining equitable access.

Regarding the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma, waivers and exam fee coverage are determined locally by each local education agency (LEA) in collaboration with IB Coordinators in their region. In many instances, LEAs already work to reduce or eliminate costs for IB Diploma students who demonstrate financial need, although practices may vary by jurisdiction. Because the Blueprint for Maryland's Future calls for no-cost post-CCR pathways, LEAs will need to ensure that fee barriers for IB exams do not impede eligible students' ability to pursue IB coursework or the Diploma.



Carey M. Wright, Ed.D.

State Superintendent of Schools

Joshua L. Michael, Ph.D.

President, State Board of Education

We respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate SB 0283. For further information, please contact Dr. Akilah Alleyne (Executive Director of Government Affairs) at akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov.