

# 28.4 Million Grant for Low Income Students' Exam Fees

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On Aug. 12, the U.S. Department of Education announced it would grant a combined \$28.4 million to 40 different states, the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands to assist with the cost of Advanced Placement Exam (AP) fees for low-income public high school students.

The Advanced Placement Test Fee (APTF) program helps outline and describe the criteria, cost and contribution for AP Exam fees and is administered by the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. The purpose of this grant is to boost college and career readiness for students who may not be financially stable. The grant is designed to increase the number of low-income students who plan to take the AP test to obtain college credit for high school courses, and reduce the time and cost needed to complete a postsecondary degree.

"The Grant only encourages low income students to participate more in AP testing. The price for other students without financial aid is going up. Even for those who can afford it, no one wants to pay \$91 for a test. In a way, it discourages the people on the other side of the spectrum from testing." Junior Agatha Handojo said.

Approximately 769,000 AP tests were

taken nationally in 2014, a 6% increase from 2013. According to the College Board, 28% of the people who took the AP test in the year of 2013 were low-income students.

The funding for each state will be determined by an estimation of the number of students who are expected to take the test. California received about one-third of the entire grant, receiving \$10.7 million for the spring of 2014 and 2015 exams as stated by the U.S. Department of Education.

"High school instruction needs to become more rigorous to foster college and career-readiness and provide multiple pathways to success to prepare students for the 21st century global economy," U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said, according to the U.S. Department of Education. "Advanced Placement courses are helping schools meet this challenge by developing the study skills, critical reasoning and habits of mind that prepare students for college."

According to the College Board, an AP exam costs \$91 without any financial aid or a

fee waiver while schools retain a \$9 rebate per exam taken. The grant will cover all the fees but \$18. The states are then to determine whether students pay this amount themselves or to cover it in the state's budget. Individual schools may also be

subject to raise the price of the test in order to cover proctoring and administration costs.

"I think that because of this grant, people will be more willing to take AP tests due to the reduced price and its availability. It'll be easier on them

and their families who may have had problems before with paying for AP tests," sophomore Vicky Lam said.

According to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in Washington, students will be eligible for the APTF program if they qualify for one of the following programs:

free lunch program, the reduced lunch program, the social security program and the Medicaid program. One may still be eligible for the APTF program if a parent or guardian certifies that the student's family taxable income does

not exceed the 2013 Annual Low-Income Levels. If this method is used, the Low-Income Student Verification Form 1616 should be signed to offset the cost of AP testing. The student will need to be enrolled in an AP class and plan to take the AP test.

There have been similar grants like this one according to the U.S. Department of Education. In the year of 2013, a grant of more than \$28.8 million have been awarded to 42 states. While in the year of 2012, a grant of more than \$21.5 million had been awarded to 43 states. Both of the grant were also for the purpose of lowering AP test fees.

The fees will only cover approved AP tests administered by the College Board (AP), the International Baccalaureate Organization (IB) and Cambridge International Examinations (CI). The Secretary of Education may also approve other advanced placement tests.

"We know that students who succeed in Advanced Placement courses in high school are also more likely to succeed in college," Vice President of Communications for the College Board John McGrath said in a press release by the Wall Street Journal. "Fee waivers play an essential role in making these courses accessible for low-income students, and help pave the way for increased opportunities as they transition to college and career."

**MOOR** graphic by SAMMIE CHEN



## New Non-Punitive Policy Adopted by LAUSD

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In an attempt to reduce student arrest rates, suspensions and expulsions, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) formalized and issued a new disciplinary policy on Aug. 19. The policy that will be placed into effect during the 2014-15 school year states that minor violations of district and school rules will no longer lead to a "school-to-prison pipeline."

"There are enough studies that show bringing them into the justice system is really more of a slippery slope that leads to negative outcomes and poor futures," Los Angeles Juvenile Courts Judge Michael Nash said, according to the Los Angeles Times (LA Times).

As stated by the LAUSD website, students who are involved in affairs that do not pose a great risk to the community, including campus fights, thefts, vandalism of school property, trespassing and possession of tobacco or a small quantity of marijuana, will no longer be arrested or given citations by the Los Angeles School Police Department. Instead of being disciplined in the juvenile court system, most offenders will receive interventions by guidance counselors or school administrators.

"Effective discipline is, and always will be, a necessity," Attorney General Eric Holder said, as stated by The United States Department of Justice. "But a routine school discipline infraction should land a student in a

principal's office — not in a police precinct."

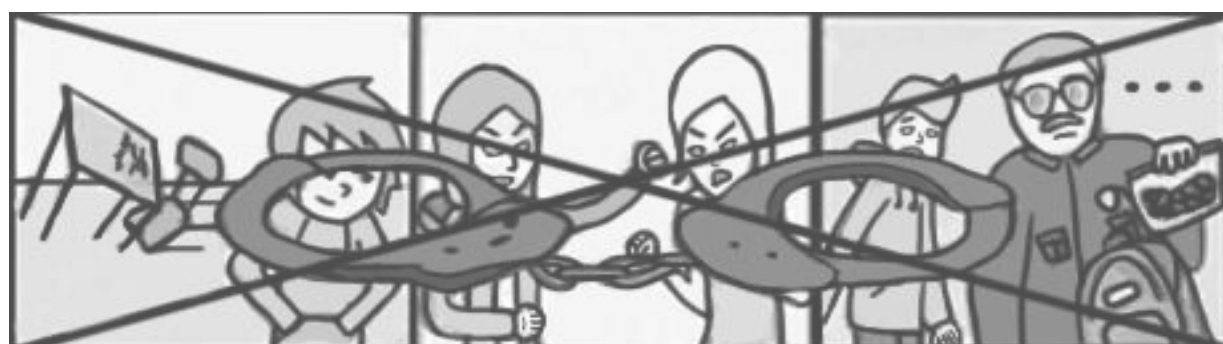
As mentioned by the LA Times, although the zero-tolerance policies ensured that students would take responsibility for their actions, its long-term negative impact for them became the main reason for the policy reform. The consequences included a decrease of the young adults' likelihood of entering the higher education system, along with an increase of their contact with the juvenile and criminal justice system. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics shows that schools with high student arrest rates tended to have below average graduation rates.

"I think the new policy will still have flaws, [but it] will effectively deal with students' problems, instead of 'shoving it under the rug,'" senior Derek Duong said.

Another possible reason for the implementation of the new policy is the progress achieved by previous reform. As stated by the New York Times, since 2012, LAUSD has successfully decreased its dropout rates and even raised the attendance rates by stopping the citation of students who are tardy for class.

"It is hard to [predict] how effective the new policy may be and difficult to say whether it can also apply to Alhambra Unified School District, since we already have policies in place. But there is one thing for sure, kids need to be in school to learn. There are lots of possible interventions [that can be performed] other than expulsions or suspensions," Principal Duane Russell said.

**MOOR** graphic by SAMMIE CHEN



## LAUSD's Exemption for Parent Trigger Law

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In 2010, former state senator Gloria Romero drafted the "Parent Trigger" law, formally known as the Parent Empowerment Act of 2010. This law states that if 50 percent of students' parents of a constantly subpar school sign a petition for reformation, the change will go into effect. Recently, along with eight other California school districts, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), announced that it would not be subject to the "parent trigger" law.

Last year at 24th Street Elementary in Los Angeles, parents used the "parent trigger" law to turn their students' underperforming school into a charter-hybrid. Without this policy, parents now are no longer able to conduct several different reforms, which include transforming their school into a charter school, replacing the school's principal and staff, closing the failing school or sending students to better performing schools.

LAUSD officials said that a special Department of Education waiver from the federal No Child Left Behind law specifically exempts the district from the "parent trigger" law. According to the Los Angeles Times (LA Times), Ingrid Villeda from the United Teachers of Los Angeles led the opposition for the "parent trigger" law saying that it has divided communities by allowing half the parents to change the fate of an entire school, which may be an essential reason for the exemption.

"The law is flawed," Villeda said, according to LA Times. "[All school and community members should have a voice to ]create change that is effective and long-lasting."

LAUSD's action has also raised controversy with people questioning its fairness.

"I believe that suspending this law is a way of revoking a parent's rights in being able to support their children," sophomore Maya Gomez said.

As stated by the LA Times, LAUSD will be working toward making their own reforms and establishing new systems to show progress.