

ACCELERATED LEARNING ACT OF 2015

Senator Al Franken

Summary

Senator Franken's legislation, **the Accelerated Learning Act of 2015**, will authorize federal funding for states to expand accelerated learning models, including Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, dual and concurrent enrollment programs, and early college high schools. These programs have a demonstrated record of success in improving educational opportunities for students.

Why Accelerated Learning?

Access to accelerated learning models, such as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), early college high schools, and dual enrollment programs, is increasingly critical for our nation's students. These accelerated learning models can help make high schools engaging for students, better prepare them for success in postsecondary education, and help them save on college costs.

Federal Support for Accelerated Learning

For over a decade, the federal government has helped states and local districts provide access to accelerated learning models for students. The federal Advanced Placement Test Fee and Incentive Program provides funding to help cover the cost of AP and IB Exam fees for low-income students around the nation. This program also provides competitive grants to states and districts to expand the number of AP and IB courses in high-need schools. Since the federal program began in 1999, the number of AP Exams taken by low-income students has grown nearly 800% from 82,000 exams in 1999 to 732,000 exams in 2014. Similar growth has occurred in the IB program, with an increase of 630 percent in the number of low-income students participating in the program from 2005 to 2014.

Despite the increase in the number of low-income students taking AP and IB Exams, our nation continues to face significant gaps in the ability of low-income students to access these courses and exams. According to the College Board and the International Baccalaureate, of the total number of students that took an AP Exam in 2014, 21% were from low-income backgrounds and for those taking an IB Exam, 22% were from low-income backgrounds. Yet data from the National Center for Education Statistics shows that over 50% of high school students in the 2014-2015 school year were eligible for the free and reduced price lunch program, indicating a serious equity gap in the ability of low-income students to access AP and IB courses and exams.

The Legislation

The Accelerated Learning Act of 2015 would reauthorize the existing federal funding stream to provide competitive grants to help states cover the costs of AP and IB exam fees for low income students and improve access to AP, IB, dual enrollment, and early college high school programs for low-income students.

Accelerated Learning Act of 2015

Improving access to AP coursework and exams can help to boost college graduation rates. Low-income students who successfully complete AP coursework and score a 3 or higher on AP exams have a college graduation rate that is 26% higher than that of low-income students who did not participate in AP.

At a time when the average debt of a graduating senior who borrows to pay for college is \$27,300 as of 2013, access to accelerated learning models can also help students save a tremendous amount of money in college costs. The College Board and the International Baccalaureate estimate that the \$28.5 million in annual federal funding for the AP Test Fee and Incentive Program produces a potential of \$285 million in college cost savings for low-income students.