



Washington Office of Superintendent of  
**PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

# Dual Credit Exam Fees

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**Authorizing Legislation: ESSB 5950, Sec. (522)(2)(a)**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Washington’s 2023–25 Operating Budget outlined in [ESSB 5950, Sec. \(522\)\(2\)\(a\)](#) directed the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to report to relevant committees of the legislature on the options for entering into statewide agreements with companies providing dual credit exams to reduce costs to all students and eliminate them for students from low-income families. To develop this report, OSPI communicated with the organizations responsible for the administration of the exam-based dual credit programs; the College Board for Advanced Placement (AP), the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO), and Cambridge International (CI).

All three organizations have contributed data that has been included in this report and a representative from each has been directly consulted on the question of further subsidizing exam fees. While each organization was appreciative of the state’s interest in lowering costs to students and acknowledged the value of OSPI’s existing subsidy programs supporting equitable access for eligible students, none were able to meet the legislature’s interest to reduce cost to all families for dual credit exams. This report will provide an overview of the current costs of administering these exam-based dual credit options, a summary of efforts to reduce costs to students and families, and a discussion of longitudinal trends and future opportunities.

# INTRODUCTION

Dual credit courses give high school students the potential to earn both college and high school credit, either through completion of a college-level course or through performance on an exam. Studies, including the Education Research & Data Center's (ERDC) [research briefs on postsecondary outcomes and enrollment](#), have shown that students who complete dual credit courses are more likely to graduate on time, enroll in postsecondary institutions, persist at the postsecondary level, or transition into a career. Dual credit courses, including those culminating in an exam, may count towards Washington's graduation pathway requirement as indicated in [RCW 28A.230.710](#). In addition, [RCW 28B.10.054](#) requires institutions of higher education (IHE) to recognize and award college credit for qualifying scores on AP, CI, and IB exams. Multiple state and national reports have demonstrated that the cost of dual credit exam fees is a significant barrier to participation. According to the [ERDC's Dual Credit Dashboard](#), students from low-income families in the 2023 cohort participated in dual credit at a 7% lower rate than students from middle- and high-income families. As demonstrated in [ERDC's 2022 report on dual credit](#), the overall participation gap widens to 27% when CTE Dual Credit is removed from consideration, and is 24% when focused on exam-based dual credit participation specifically.

While a direct billing agreement is currently in place with the College Board to subsidize the cost of AP exams, the eligible students from families qualified as low-income account for only 17.7% of total AP test-takers, and only 15% of all AP exams are subsidized. In 2024, OSPI inquired about the College Board's willingness to discount a greater number of exams by adjusting the criteria for qualifying as low-income. The College Board indicated they could not establish state-specific criteria and required nationwide uniformity in discounting exams only for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL) eligible students. OSPI also sought estimates for covering AP exams that fulfilled English Language Arts (ELA) and Math graduation pathway requirements to explore the feasibility of subsidizing specific exams for all students. The estimates of \$1.7 million for Math and \$4.5 million for ELA were higher than anticipated and well beyond the current state funding available through proviso.

Both the IBO and Cambridge International have responded to OSPI's repeated requests to reduce fees by indicating that their rates are not negotiable. Furthermore, the IBO did note that most states subsidize costs for qualifying students at the local level, adding that North Carolina is the only state that covers all International Baccalaureate (IB) exam fees for all students.

Unlike the College Board, both of these organizations currently invoice and receive payment from the districts or schools and expressed reservations about the complexities of administering a statewide program. Cambridge International (CI), for instance, cited stringent international privacy and data sharing limitations that they believed would impede the development of a statewide direct-billing arrangement. However, both organizations benefit from [OSPI's test fee waiver program](#), which is administered through a proviso-funded grant and reimburses districts for the full cost of all CI and IB exams taken by students from low-income families. Both CI and IBO annually notify their partner schools about the subsidy grant and seldom do these schools fail to apply.

# EXAM FEE SUBSIDY PROGRAM OVERVIEW

For the 2023-24 school year, OSPI utilized a total of over \$1.48 million of its \$4.89 million dual credit proviso (approximately 30%) to subsidize AP, IB, and CI exam fees and increase access to quality dual credit programs for ready and interested students. The distribution of \$1.06 million in subsidy funds was accomplished through a direct billing agreement with the College Board for AP exams and a grant program to subsidize CI and IB exams taken by students qualifying for FRPL. An additional \$403,747 of the \$2.3 million allocated in grant funding for building equitable and sustainable dual credit programs was also disbursed to subsidize exam fees, for a total of \$148 million. As demonstrated by Superintendent Reykdal’s 2019 report to the legislature ([Covering the Costs of Dual Credit for Students and Families](#)), [2023-2025 budget priorities](#), and 2024 legislative budget request ([Increasing Equitable Access to Dual Credit and Reducing Barriers to Credential Attainment](#)), OSPI is committed to eliminating student costs and poised to make systemic changes to the dual credit system that will increase opportunities for students across our state. Included below is an overview of each program’s exam types and associated costs.

**Figure 1: 2023-2024 Exam Fee Rates**

Program	Standard Rate	Advanced (Seminar/ Capstone)	Subsidized Standard (Reduced for Low-Income)	Subsidized Advanced (Reduced for Low-Income)
Advanced Placement (AP)	\$98*	\$146*	\$53	\$101
Cambridge International (CI)	\$114.50 (AS) \$185.20 (A)	Global Perspectives AS: \$200.80 Global Perspectives A: \$252.60	NA	NA
International Baccalaureate (IB)	\$119	NA	NA	NA

**Source:** 2023-24 course fee agreements between OSPI and the College Board, International Baccalaureate Organization, and Cambridge International.

*\*Includes \$9/exam rebate retained by schools for administration costs.*

Currently, OSPI has a direct-billing agreement with the College Board to reduce exam fees for students from low-income families. The balance of each eligible student’s test fee is covered by the legislature’s dual credit proviso allocation, eliminating costs to qualified families meeting the income threshold. Exams taken by students from low-income families are reduced to \$53 for standard exams (46% discount) and \$101 for capstone exams (31% discount).

As demonstrated in Figure 2, total AP exam subsidization declined during the pandemic, but has increased nearly 70% since 2021, reaching an all-time high of \$795,112 in 2025. This is reflective of

a statewide surge in AP participation overall, which has jumped 41% since 2021 to reach high-water marks of 52,868 test-takers and 95,008 exams.

**Figure 2: Subsidized Advanced Placement Exam Costs**

Year	Standard Exams	Capstone Exams	Total Cost to State
2024	14,055	497	\$795,112
2023	12,130	323	\$675,513
2022	10,251	291	\$572,694
2021	8,259	324	\$470,451
2020	11,290	278	\$626,448

**Source:** Annual direct-billing invoice from the College Board.

Unlike the College Board, neither the IBO nor CI offer reduced rates for eligible students, nor is there a direct billing agreement in place to simplify administration. For IB and CI programs, exam fee subsidies are awarded to schools or districts through a grant-based process, which requires additional work to administer and apply for the grant, and provides less certainty about how many exams are ultimately subsidized.

Typically administered in the spring, the exam fee subsidy grant is available to all schools offering IB and CI exams. Grant applications estimate the expected number of test-takers from families who qualify as low-income, and the number of exams the students are eligible to take, to ensure that the funding awarded is sufficient to eliminate out-of-pocket costs. As demonstrated in the chart below, schools can overestimate the number of exams they will administer in the spring, so the total reimbursement amount for each district may be less than the award based on anticipated need. In 2022, for instance, 15 out of 18 recipients utilized their full award, but just three schools combined to underspend by \$102,340. The proportion of awarded funds utilized by schools and districts has improved dramatically in recent years, however, highlighted by a 98.7% expenditure rate in 2024.

**Figure 3: Subsidized International Baccalaureate and Cambridge International Exam Costs**

Year	Awarded	Expended
2024	\$273,574	\$270,016
2023	\$278,176	\$275,796
2022	\$244,953	\$142,605
2021	\$167,009	\$164,903
2020	\$302,581	\$237,034

**Source:** Total annual exam fee reimbursements sent to districts via IB/CI grant program.

# CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

OSPI and its partners are appreciative of the legislature’s investment in exam-based dual credit programs. In 2024, 286 schools received state subsidies for AP, IB, and CI fees, and 16,779 exams were administered with these funds. This represents a 33% increase over the 12,588 exams subsidized in 2022. Overall, over 30% of the dual credit proviso was utilized to cover the cost of AP/CI/IB exams, primarily for students from families who qualify as low-income.

As demonstrated in the chart below, students and families across Washington that are not eligible to receive subsidies pay between \$7–9 million total in dual credit exam fees annually. Although the amount used to cover exam fees represents 30% of the dual credit proviso, the roughly \$1.5 million distributed annually through OSPI-allocated subsidies and grants is less than 15% of the total amount paid by families for dual credit exams statewide. This figure is proportionately much lower than the statewide data in the [OSPI Report Card](#) that shows 50.1% of K–12 students were considered low-income in 2023–24.

It should be noted that students who enroll in these dual credit courses do not always take the corresponding exams, often due to the fees. The chart below demonstrates how many exams were taken and at what cost, but does not account for how many students were enrolled in courses and might have taken the exams if not for the financial barrier. As OSPI continues to support districts in increasing equitable access to dual credit via exam-based courses, we anticipate increased need for the state funds provided through the dual credit proviso to meet the growing need for low-income exam fee subsidization. As mentioned previously, AP subsidization alone is up 70% since 2021, corresponding with a 41% surge in overall participation statewide.

**Figure 4: Total Dual Credit Exam Costs for All Students, 2019–2024**

Year	Advanced Placement	Cambridge International	International Baccalaureate	All Dual Credit Exams
19–20 Exam Fees	\$7.05M	\$174,626	\$983,178	\$8.15M
19–20 Exams	78,057	1,478	8,262	87,797
20–21 Exam Fees	\$6.04M	\$149,989	\$856,086	\$6.884M
20–21 Exams	64,333	1,248	7,194	72,775
21–22 Exam Fees	\$6.56M	\$169,435	\$848,470	\$7.58M
21–22 Exams	71,925	1,355	7,130	80,410
22–23 Exam Fees	\$7.81M	\$193,580	\$788,119	\$8.79M
22–23 Exams	84,777	1,456	6,626	92,859

Year	Advanced Placement	Cambridge International	International Baccalaureate	All Dual Credit Exams
23-24 Exam Fees	\$8.80M	\$177,899	\$796,348	\$9.77M
23-24 Exams	95,008	1,341	6,692	103,041

**Source:** Data provided through annual subsidy agreement with the College Board, the International Baccalaureate Organization, and Cambridge International.

Recognizing that additional funds are necessary to meet the growing need for dual credit exam fee subsidization and to fully cover costs for all families, we appreciate the legislature’s interest in reducing costs through the exam-based providers. OSPI will continue to explore and support options to lower costs statewide, such as the College Board’s current consideration of a greater discount to exams taken by students from low-income families, allowing state funding to cover more students’ exams. In the meantime, OSPI will continue to leverage proviso funding to subsidize student costs, reevaluate the process by which exam subsidies are administered to minimize underspending, and advocate for making cost-reduction strategies available to all students.



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