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State will pay students' PSAT costs

High schoolers who take the exam do better on the SAT, education department says

*By Deanna Martin
Associated Press*

The state wants more high school sophomores and juniors to take a preparatory version of the SAT, so it will cover the cost of the test.

The Indiana Department of Education said Thursday it will pay the fee for students to take the Preliminary SAT, or PSAT. Previously, many parents or students had to shell out \$13 for the exam, which helps students prepare for the important SAT college admissions test.

"By removing preparatory exam fees from the equation, Indiana has eliminated another obstacle to preparing Hoosier students for college success," said Suellen Reed, the state's superintendent of public instruction.

The state has offered free tests to some 11th-graders in the past, but did not have enough money to cover all of them or any 10th-graders.

The Department of Education said the state's newly negotiated contract with the College Board, which owns the test, gives Indiana a discounted rate of \$10.40 per test, as well as professional development opportunities for educators.

The lower rate allows the department to offer free tests to all sophomores and juniors without spending more than \$1.8 million -- paid for with savings from Indiana's revamped statewide testing system.

Reed has encouraged students to take rigorous high school classes and take the PSAT -- steps she hopes can boost scores.

"Now it's up to our students to take full advantage of these opportunities," Reed said.

Indiana's overall scores on the SAT declined slightly for the graduating class of 2008. Indiana's combined score of 1,485 in reading, math and writing lagged the national average of 1,511 on a 2,400-point scale.

More than 60 percent of Indiana's class of 2008 took the SAT. But less than half of Indiana sophomores and juniors took the PSAT last year.

Graduating seniors in 2008 who previously had taken the PSAT scored an average of 250 points higher on the SAT than those who didn't take the PSAT, the state education department said.

PSAT results give students personalized feedback about their strong and weak points so they know what to work on before taking the SAT, said Elizabeth Crouch, with Learn More Indiana, a partnership of state agencies working to get more kids in college.

"The sooner they start preparing for college, the better," Crouch said.

This year the PSAT will be given in locations across Indiana on Oct. 15. The registration deadline for ordering student testing materials is Sept. 24, and students can talk to their guidance counselors for more information.
