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## Action

### *Professional Services Committee*

## Computer-Based Administration of the CBEST

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**Executive Summary:** This agenda item provides information about a pilot project to administer a computer-based version of the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST) and a request to amend the current CBEST administration contract to facilitate this work.

**Recommended Action:** Staff recommends that the Commission approve the amendment to the current CBEST administration contract regarding the computer-based CBEST pilot project.

**Presenter:** Yvonne Novelli, Consultant, Professional Services Division

#### Strategic Plan Goal: 3

##### Provide quality customer service

- ◆ Provide services tailored to specifically defined customer needs and groups
- ◆ Use technological innovation to improve customer access to information and services

June 2008



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# Computer-Based Administration of the CBEST

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## Introduction

This agenda item discusses a plan to conduct a two-year pilot project offering the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST) through a computer-based format to determine the interest in and use by examinees of this option, and how to implement this examination option to best serve credential candidates. The item also requests that the Commission authorize staff to amend the current test administration contract so the computer-based CBEST may be implemented.

## Background

The Commission currently offers the majority of its certification examinations in a paper-based format and none through computer-based testing. As part of the request for proposals for the 2007-2010 contract for the administration of the CBEST, the California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET), and the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA), the Commission encouraged bidders to include “enhancements, improvements, and innovations” to the scope of work. In response to this provision, the Evaluation Systems group of Pearson (Evaluation Systems) proposed that the Commission consider offering these examinations in a computer-based testing format. After discussing the potential implementation of this enhancement with Evaluation Systems, staff determined that a pilot project using a computer-based version of the CBEST examination would help determine if this is an option examinees would choose to use.

During the 2006-2007 testing year, the CBEST was administered to over 80,000 candidates, with some examinees taking the entire exam while others took only one or two subtests at a given administration.

## The Computer-Based CBEST

Under the pilot project, the computer-based CBEST will be offered during the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 testing years, with the initial administration in November 2008. *During the pilot project, the paper-based version of the CBEST will continue to be administered according to its regular administration schedule.*

Under the computer-based CBEST, Evaluation Systems will continue to be responsible for all aspects of the administration of the CBEST and will partner with its sister company, Pearson VUE, to offer this new service for the CBEST. Pearson VUE has close to 30 years of experience and administers over four million high-stakes computer-based tests each year, both nationally and internationally, covering such areas as academics and admissions, employment, health, information technology, financial and legal services and state regulated services. More information about Pearson VUE available at the Pearson VUE website (<http://www.pearsonvue.com>).

As described below, the computer-based CBEST will parallel the current paper-based format as much as possible for an equitable testing experience.

*Test Design:* The design of the test forms for both the paper-based and proposed computer-based CBEST versions will be as similar as possible so both sets of examinees will have a similar testing experience.

*Test Security:* As with the Evaluation Systems administration of the paper-based version, Pearson VUE's highest priority for a computer-based test is security. The Pearson VUE centers maintain extensive security procedures and staff are highly trained for this responsibility.

All spell-checking and calculating functions will be disabled on the computers used at the testing centers. Pearson VUE has also established procedures that prevent unauthorized individuals from viewing test items.

*Testing Availability:* Currently, the paper-based CBEST is offered throughout California at numerous sites in 30 areas one day every other month: August, October, December, February, April, and June. Under the proposed pilot, the computer-based CBEST will be available 12 times a year. Each of those times it will be offered during a one week window, Thursday through Wednesday, excluding Sunday, with up to three sessions per day. The computer-based tests will be administered at Pearson VUE testing centers across California. These include: Anaheim, Fresno, Gardena, Oakland, Ontario, Pasadena, Redding, Roseville, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, Santa Maria, and Westlake Village. As appropriate for pilot projects, this plan will be reviewed after it has been implemented for approximately six months, and, depending on the demand, the test times and number of test sites can be adjusted. The computer-based CBEST can also be offered during the same testing period at the over 200 Pearson VUE testing centers located in major metropolitan areas throughout the country.

Because of the limited number of CBEST test items currently available, individuals will not be allowed to retake the computer-based CBEST for 120 days but will be allowed to take the paper-based test during that period.

*Alternative Testing Arrangements:* All Pearson VUE testing centers are fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act in accommodating the needs of individuals who have been granted alternative testing arrangements. Because the proposed computer-based examination will be available Thursday through Wednesday, excluding Sunday, examinees who observe the Sabbath on Saturday will not need to request alternative arrangements.

*Scoring:* The official scoring of the proposed computer-based CBEST will be done in the same manner as for the paper-based. It is anticipated that the examinees will be given an unofficial indication of their reading and mathematics results immediately following the testing session. The paper-based CBEST scores are mailed approximately nineteen days after the test administration. Official results for the computer-based CBEST will be mailed to examinees ten days after the last test day (Wednesday) of the testing window so, based on the day the CBEST is taken, scores will be mailed from ten to seventeen days after the individual takes the examination.

*Testing Environment:* The computer-based testing facilities that will offer the CBEST are specifically designed with an examinee in mind. To help relax examinees prior to the test, the waiting areas are coordinated in subdued colors and use soft lighting. The test administrators use soft voices, not only to help calm the examinees but also to establish a quiet testing atmosphere. The actual testing room is well-lit, with a brighter color scheme, giving the examinees a sense of professionalism. The testing room houses approximately fifteen numbered cubicles, with easily read computer monitors and comfortable chairs. On the computer, the CBEST examinees will go through a brief tutorial to become familiar with the computer-based testing process, read the testing instructions, and then begin the actual timed test.

*Costs:* Section 80487 of the Title 5 California Code of Regulations establishes the current test fee for the CBEST as \$41 per administration. For examinees who want the convenience offered by the computer-based CBEST there will be an additional \$64 service fee, which would be retained by the contractor to cover its costs. This will result in a total examinee cost of \$105 (\$41 + \$64) to take the computer-based CBEST. For those who choose the computer-based version, this “convenience” fee will cover costs related to such benefits as the increased opportunities to take the CBEST, the more flexible administration schedule, the ease of using state of the art computers, a more conducive testing environment, and the smaller proctor to examinee ratio. The examinee cost for the paper-based CBEST administration will remain unchanged at \$41.

### **Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the Commission approve the following amendments to the current CBEST administration contract regarding the computer-based CBEST pilot project:

1. Implement the computer-based option for the CBEST administration; and
2. Authorize the \$64 computer-based CBEST service fee in addition to the \$41 test fee for those examinees who choose to exercise this option.