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Information/Action

Educator Preparation Committee

Update on Examinations: CSET, RICA, and CBEST

Executive Summary: This agenda item provides an update on several Commission-owned examinations including new online proctoring opportunities for the California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET): Multiple Subjects Subtests I and III, and English Subtests I-IV, the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST), and the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA). In addition, information about a new subtest structure for the RICA and a proposal to retire the paper-based form of the CBEST are addressed.

Recommended Action: That the Commission direct staff to revise regulations to retire the paper-based form of the CBEST and the forty-one-dollar (\$41.00) fee.

Presenters: Cara Mendoza, Administrator, and Mike Taylor, Consultant, Professional Services Division

Strategic Plan Goal

II. Program Quality and Accountability

- a) Develop and maintain rigorous, meaningful, and relevant standards that drive program quality and effectiveness for the preparation of the education workforce and are responsive to the needs of California's diverse student population.

Update on Examinations: CSET, RICA, and CBEST

Introduction

This agenda item provides an update on several Commission-owned examinations including new online proctoring opportunities for the California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET): Multiple Subjects Subtests I and III, and English Subtests I-IV, the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST), and the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA). Information about a new subtest structure for the RICA, and a proposal to retire the paper-based version of the CBEST are addressed.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging for candidates in educator preparation programs and especially for those who need to access required examinations for earning one's credential. In April 2020, as authorized in statute and in an effort to alleviate some of the challenges with accessing examinations, the Commission voted to:

- Defer for up to one year the CBEST for applicants who were unable to complete the examination between March 19, 2020 and August 31, 2021 because of health and safety restrictions related to COVID-19; and
- Temporarily waive the precondition requirement for a candidate to meet the subject matter requirement prior to beginning student teaching through August 31, 2021.

Additionally, in May 2020 the Governor issued Executive Order N-66-20 to suspend the RICA requirement as a condition for individuals to be recommended for a preliminary credential and instead required that the RICA be passed prior to being recommended for the clear credential. In September 2020, the Governor signed Senate Bill 820, which extended the Executive Order examination flexibilities for an additional year through August 31, 2021. These flexibilities supported candidates as they navigated next steps for satisfying examination requirements to earn their preliminary teaching credentials.

Throughout the last year, staff has worked closely with the Commission's contractor the Evaluation Systems group of Pearson (ES) to monitor examination administration, test site availability, and the rates of examination administrations. ES has and will continue to post communications on the [California Educator Credentialing Assessments](#) website relative to test center openings and closings due to COVID-19. In addition, strategies for locating and scheduling a test session are posted. Where state and local regulations and guidance have permitted, the California-based Pearson VUE-owned test centers have been open and operating at the maximum capacity allowable.

The sole remaining paper-based examination, the CBEST, has previously been offered at venues that can accommodate large numbers of people, such as high schools and community colleges. These venues are the same school sites that have been closed due to state and county

restrictions—being in the Purple Tier, for example—as outlined in the *Blueprint for a Safer Economy*. ES test sites have not been open for paper-based examinations since April 2020 due to COVID safety regulations.

Staff has heard the concerns of candidates and educator preparation programs about the inability to access required examinations and has shared these concerns with Commission leadership and ES staff. This agenda item outlines updates for CBEST, CSET, and RICA that offer additional options for examinees to take exams, open availability in test centers, update ways in which RICA examinees can provide videos of teaching practice, and offer more cost-effective measures in the event that an individual must retake a required exam.

California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET)

Pursuant to California Education Code [§44259](#) and [§44280](#), teaching credential candidates in California are required to demonstrate competency in the subject matter for which they will be authorized by their credential to teach. The California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET) is one of three current options candidates can use to meet the subject matter competency requirement. The other two options for demonstrating subject matter competence include completing a Commission-approved subject matter preparation program or completing a course of study deemed equivalent by a subject matter program. Current legislation, [Assembly Bill 437 \(Kalra\)](#), and budget trailer bill language would expand upon these options.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions on testing centers, examinees have had limited available appointments at testing sites. In an effort to provide additional opportunities for examinees to take the CSET, ES will offer online proctoring as a new mode of testing for examinees who need to take CSET: Multiple Subjects I and III, and CSET: English Subtests I, II, III and IV beginning at the end of May 2021. These specific examinations are high volume CSETs. ES and Commission staff will determine, based on next highest volume, which additional CSETs to offer via online proctoring. Some CSET titles, including CSET: Multiple Subjects II, and CSET: Mathematics, will not be available for online proctoring because these exams require specific scannable answer sheets for responding to constructed-response questions. The ES online proctoring modality does not support this administration feature.

Online proctoring allows examinees to take the required examination from their own homes, during monthly windows when online proctoring is offered. Online Proctored CSET examinations will be delivered using Pearson’s OnVUE test delivery platform and provide a streamlined examinee experience. Examinees are encouraged to conduct a system test before registering to verify that they have the necessary hardware and internet bandwidth to take an online proctored examination. Through pictures provided by the examinees, Pearson’s OnVUE proctor ensures that the examinee’s environment is appropriate, and that the exam will be administered in a private space in the home. Examinees provide their photo identification, and proctors confirm that the face of the examinee they see on screen matches the face on the identification. As the examinee takes the exam, the proctor monitors the examinee’s eye gaze movement for suspicious activity, observes the examinee’s surroundings for prohibited items,

and checks to make sure that the examinee does not move out of view of the camera. Pearson OnVUE certifies examination security in the online platform.

The cost of online proctored administration for CSET will be the same as the cost of the computer-based examinations administered at test centers.

Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA)

In response to Education Code [§44283](#) and [§44283.2](#), the Commission developed the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA). Since October 1998, California-prepared teaching credential candidates applying for an initial Multiple Subject Teaching Credential or initial Education Specialist Teaching Credential (after January 2000) have been required to verify that they have the knowledge and skills to provide effective reading instruction to students. Currently, candidates have the option of taking and passing either the RICA Written Examination or the RICA Video Performance Assessment.

The basic structure of these two forms of the RICA has not been altered since they were first developed more than 20 years ago. Where other teacher licensure tests have been organized around a sub-test structure, the written form of the RICA is organized as a single assessment that candidates take and pass as a whole. The video performance assessment relies on collection and submission of video on mini digital videocassette, DVD, or USB flash drive and is not currently supported on an online platform.

As outlined in present statute, the Commission is expected to periodically analyze the validity and reliability of the content of the RICA. Commission staff has been working with ES to determine needed updates to the RICA test specifications and to reconfigure both the written and video performance versions of RICA to better support candidates. Evaluation Systems is in the process of implementing structural updates to RICA that will 1) subdivide the RICA Written Examination into three subtests for which examinees can individually register and pass, and 2) move the current RICA Video Performance Assessment to online candidate registration and submission platforms.

At this time, the RICA Written Examination is a four-hour assessment with 70 multiple choice questions, four constructed response items, and a case study covering the five identified domains of reading instruction. When this form of the RICA is reconfigured into three subtests, each subtest will cover specified domains of content knowledge defined in the RICA test specifications. The written form of this assessment will continue to include multiple choice questions, constructed response questions, and the case study response. Subdividing the RICA Written into three individual subtests may reduce the amount of time it takes to complete the exam, as well as potentially lower overall costs to candidates who do not pass on the first try.

At present, the cost for taking the RICA Written is one hundred and seventy-one dollars (\$171.00). If an examinee does not pass the RICA on the first try, the examinee must retake the entire assessment for the total cost. When the RICA Written is subdivided into three subtests, the cost will be fifty-seven dollars (\$57.00) per subtest, resulting in the current cost of one

hundred and seventy-one dollars (\$171.00); however, with the three-subtest model if an examinee does not pass one or two of the subtests, the examinee will only need to retake the subtest(s) not passed for the cost of fifty-seven dollars (\$57.00) each.

Registration for, and administration of, the revised three written RICA subtests is set for late July 2021. Online proctoring will be available beginning mid-August 2021 at no additional cost to candidates.

For the RICA Video Performance Assessment, examinees are currently required to prepare and submit three packets, each of which contains candidate documentation related to their instruction, a ten-minute videotaped recording on mini digital cassette, DVD, or USB flash drive of the examinee providing reading instruction to students, and a reflection form. One video packet must demonstrate whole-group instruction, one small-group, and one individual instruction. ES is migrating the RICA Video Performance to the same online platform used for the Commission's model Teaching Performance Assessment (CalTPA). When updated, examinees will be able to upload videos onto an online platform versus sending "hard copy" to ES for scoring. Migration to the online platform for registration and submission of examinee materials for RICA Video Performance Assessment will be completed in late July 2021.

The Governor's proposed budget for 2021-22 includes \$2 million in the Commission's operational budget for one-time funding to support updates to educator testing. This proposed funding will be used to undertake a more significant update to the RICA, ensuring its alignment with current research that supports the science of reading and the current English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework, as required in statute. Most of the proposed \$2 million will be used to significantly update the current RICA Video Performance Assessment, allowing the Commission to align this older form of performance assessment with current best practice in the design of performance assessments.

Legislation introduced in the 2021 Legislative Session – [Senate Bill 488 \(Rubio\)](#) – would actually require that the Commission ensure that by July 2025, all approved teaching performance assessments assess candidates for competence in literacy instruction, including but not limited to evidence-based methods of teaching foundational reading skills. If this bill is signed into law, then in the future the RICA requirement would be met in the context of completing an approved teaching performance assessment. Whether or not SB 844 (Rubio) is enacted, the proposed funding in the Governor's Budget will allow for the redesign of the current RICA Video Performance Assessment. This development work will support the Commission's current statutory obligation to provide an authentic, performance-based route to meet the RICA requirement and can be adapted to meet the expectation of this proposed legislation as needed.

California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST)

Pursuant to Education Code [§44252](#) candidates must verify basic skills proficiency in reading, mathematics, and writing. This is a requirement for many Commission credentials, certificates, and permits. Currently individuals can demonstrate basic skills proficiency by:

- Passing the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST); or
- Passing a basic skills examination from another state; or
- Passing the California Subject Examination for Teachers (CSET): Multiple Subjects plus the Writing Skills Examination; or
- Achieving qualifying scores on the College Board Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or American College Testing (ACT) in English and mathematics; or
- Achieving a qualifying score on the College Board Advanced Placement (AP) Examinations in English, and Calculus, or Statistics; or
- Passing both the math and the English sections of the California State University (CSU) Early Assessment Program (EAP) for English and Mathematics; or
- Passing both of the California State University (CSU) placement examinations: English Placement Test (EPT) and Entry Level Mathematics (ELM). Though these examinations are no longer administered by the CSU, candidates who previously passed the examinations may still use those scores to meet the basic skills requirement.

Current legislation, [Assembly Bill 312 \(Sevarto\)](#), and budget trailer bill language propose a new option for teacher candidates to demonstrate the basic skills requirement (BSR) by permitting the Commission to accept letter grades of B or higher in credit-bearing higher education coursework in basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills.

At this time, taking the CBEST exam is the option that is most used by prospective teachers. CBEST for reading, writing, and mathematics is currently offered in four-hour blocks of time in both paper-based and computer-based formats. Current regulations require that CBEST costs forty-one dollars (\$41.00) which is the cost of the paper-based administration of CBEST. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the last paper-based test was administered in February 2020 because examination testing sites that accommodate paper-based testing had been closed. Currently, the computer-based CBEST costs one hundred and two dollars (\$102.00) and examinees have found it challenging to schedule the four-hour block of time to take the computer-based CBEST at a testing center. If an examinee fails any portion of the CBEST, the examinee may retake the section(s) they wish to retake at the cost of forty-one dollars (\$41.00) for paper-based or one hundred and two dollars (\$102.00) for computer-based and they are given the full four hours of time to retake one or more of the content-area tests.

Commission staff has been working with ES to update options and availability of the CBEST for examinees. To increase access and provide flexibility for candidates, ES will make the CBEST available via online proctoring beginning in late June 2021. As with CSET, examinees will be able to access CBEST from their homes during monthly windows when online proctoring is offered, with policies and procedures in place designed to maintain examination security. When examinees register for the online proctoring option for CBEST, more seats will become available at test centers for other examinees who need to access the test center to take the exam.

Another plan to support examinees is to reduce the price of the computer-based and online proctored administrations from one-hundred and two (\$102.00) to ninety dollars (\$90.00)—thirty dollars (\$30.00) for each subtest—reading, mathematics, and writing—beginning in June 2021. One of the benefits to examinees with this new fee structure is that if an examinee does not successfully pass one or more CBEST subtests, the examinee will only need to pay for and take the subtest(s) they still need to pass rather than paying the entire one hundred and two dollars (\$102.00) currently required for retaking one or more sections of the CBEST. An additional benefit is that currently the CBEST is administered in four-hour test appointments; however, with this change, candidates will now be able to schedule testing appointments based on the time needed to take the individual subtest(s), for example one and a half hours for reading and writing, and two hours for mathematics. With this change in the number of hours needed for each subtest, test appointment availability in testing centers may increase.

Current California Code of Regulations §80487 state that the “*fee for the state basic skills proficiency test shall be forty-one dollars*” and this is the current cost of the paper-based CBEST. Staff is seeking direction from the Commission to revise regulations to retire the paper-based form of the CBEST and the forty-one-dollar (\$41.00) fee. A paper-based testing option will continue to be available for examinees who qualify for an accommodation.

Staff Recommendation

That the Commission direct staff to revise regulations to retire the paper-based form of the CBEST and the forty-one-dollar (\$41.00) fee.

Next Steps

Commission staff will continue to work with ES on updates outlined above, prepare and disseminate communications to the field, monitor examination administrations and number of candidates served, and report back to the Commission as appropriate and as may be directed by the Commission.