



LOCAL & STATE

Digital standardized tests might cost \$58M

State school board hears pluses, minuses on conversion

BY MINDY B. HAGEN
The Post and Courier

Converting the paper-and-pencil standardized tests given in South Carolina schools to a computerized format could cost \$58 million, according to a report presented at a State Board of Education meeting this week.

The report conducted by the Data Recognition Corp. examined the feasibility of switching all state assessments — such

as end-of-course tests in high school and the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests in third through eighth grades — to computers.

Electronic testing has emerged as a hot topic within Palmetto State education circles, as Superintendent of Education Jim Rex, local school district leaders and parents are noticing the disadvantages associated with the current testing method.

Teachers and parents often complain

about the wait time for results, as students spend weeks taking spring exams but don't receive scores until fall.

Computerized tests would lead to more immediate results, but the study found that many South Carolina schools lack the technology infrastructure necessary to bring about a statewide change. According to the report, roughly 30 percent of school computers would need some form of upgrade to accommodate electronic testing. The state would need

to purchase 32,500 additional computers to bring about a ratio of one computer for every four students, which would be advisable before switching to computerized exams.

Rex, who wants to scrap the PACT exams in favor of interim tests to gauge student progress throughout the year, said he wasn't surprised by the \$58 million cost and called that figure a "conservative" estimate.



Rex

"I thought it would have a high price tag because we are far from where we need to be," Rex said. "Keeping up with technology requires an ongoing commitment."

Despite the costs, school district instructional leaders said an investment in computers would be a wise use of state money. Mike Turner, Berkeley's assistant superintendent for learning services, said more computers would help boost instruction in classrooms across the state.

"This should be an extremely high

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YouTube wants candidate questions

Cyber experiment set for debate at Citadel

BY SCHUYLER KROPP
The Post and Courier

If you're Internet-savvy, or even an amateur filmmaker with the political bug, you might be able to ask a question at next month's Democratic presidential debate at The Citadel.

CNN and YouTube, the Internet video-swap site, announced a political cyberspace experiment Thursday in which computer users will submit all the candidate questions online via video. Thousands of entries are expected for the first debate of its kind, to be held July 23.

When the editing is done by CNN news officials, 20 to 30 clips are expected to make the cut for the candidates on stage.

The submissions will define the two-hour debate, officials said, and no journalists other than host Anderson Cooper will intercede as the eight invited candidates give answers.

No subject is off-limits, including the war in Iraq, the minimum wage, global warming or changes in health care.

Creativity of the entries is being stressed, officials said, such as using a noisy emergency room as a background to discuss nursing shortages, a polluted river to talk about the environment, or charts or graphics that might show job losses in South Carolina's textile towns. All submissions must be 30 seconds or shorter.

"We're really looking forward to pulling this off and, I think, redefining presidential debates," David Bohman, senior vice president and Washington bureau chief for CNN, said during a conference call.

Having "live" members of the public ask questions at presidential debates, or getting them to submit questions in advance, is not new.

But YouTube officials say the format will more "democratize" the debate process because submissions will come from all over, not from voters specifically invited to the event.

Entries that are "compelling, personal and relevant" will have a leg up, said Steve Grove, YouTube editor of news and politics.

"Don't underestimate the production value of what we're going to see," Bohman said, adding that a successful submission will be more than someone "staring into a camera" and go "beyond the ordinary."

Submissions are being accepted now and will be available for viewing on the YouTube site as they come in.

None of the films will be rated for popularity so as not to tip off the candidates about what dominant issues are surfacing among party voters.

Chad Hurley, CEO and founder of YouTube, said the format will allow the

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Be part of the debate

Are you interested in submitting a video question for the Democrats' July 23 presidential debate at The Citadel? First, it will take some knowledge of the Internet and uploading video into a computer.

Start by going to www.YouTube.com/debates to see an introduction to the project and several examples of already finished videos.

For your submission, be original, be creative, but also get your question across in 30 seconds or less, organizers say.

The cutoff date for all submissions is July 22, but the earlier the better.

Scientists dig this turtle



PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL MARTIN/STAFF

Vance McCollum works to clear the dig site and define the shape of a 30 million-year-old sea turtle fossil related to the modern leatherback in a ditch behind Brandy Mill subdivision Thursday in Summerville.

30 million-year-old specimen unearthed from Summerville ditch

BY LUCIA WALINCHUS
The Post and Courier

What's more shocking than finding a sea turtle in Summerville?

Finding out it's been there for 30 million years.

Paleontologists from the South Carolina State Museum unearthed the reptile Thursday from a drainage ditch. The find is considered one of the most significant in the state's natural history.

"What's neat about this turtle is you can see how much of it is still sitting there, still associated, still together," said Jim Knight, chief curator of natural history at the museum, who led the dig. "You just never find one like that. That's just

amazing to me. This is the best one I've ever seen."

Slowly, a beige shell began to emerge from the earth as volunteers kept digging. The fossil was about 4 feet long and 3 feet wide, with an intricate scale pattern and three ridges going down the back.

The U.S. Geological Survey used uranium-thorium dating to determine the approximate age of the reptile, which swam around Charleston during the Oligocene epoch, when the shoreline was farther north.

The turtle belongs to the now-extinct Psephophorus s.p. turtle genus, related to the modern-day leatherback turtle. But

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Jim Knight (left) and Vance McCollum apply plaster to a piece of the sea turtle fossil.

On the Web

For more photographs of the fossil dig, visit www.charleston.net/webextras.



Why plane crashed still unknown

BY NOAH HAGLUND
The Post and Courier

No obvious mechanical problems caused a plane crash in Charleston Harbor near Mount Pleasant last month, killing the two people aboard, the National Transportation Safety Board said.

The finding was part of a preliminary report posted on the NTSB's Web site this week. A more complete report isn't expected for at least six months.

The 1943 Boeing Stearman PT-17 biplane smashed into Crab Bank during a sightseeing flight just before 7 p.m. May 23.

Pilot Ralph Brown, 61, and passenger Jim Powers, 76, both of James Island, died at the scene. The men were Air Force vet-



FILE/TYRONE WALKER/STAFF

Police waded while inspecting the wreckage of a World War II-era Stearman biplane May 23 that crashed into Crab Bank near the water's edge in Mount Pleasant, killing the two people aboard.

erans and friends through church.

Brown was a fixture at the Charleston Executive Airport on Johns Island and co-owner of the Air Tiger aerial tour company based there.

"He was competent, qualified and capable," said Chris Cochran, a friend and the plane's co-owner. "We worked hand in hand together for seven years."

Brown once flew the same plane to Illinois and back, Cochran said. The weekend before the crash, Brown piloted it to the Mid-Atlantic Fly-In and Sport Aviation Convention, an air show in Lumberton, N.C. At the show, the Federal Avia-

tion Administration looked it over.

Friends and family plan to gather at the Charleston Executive Airport to honor Brown on a yet-to-be-determined date, Cochran said.

What caused a crash involving a highly regarded pilot and a well-maintained plane will remain a mystery for now. NTSB preliminary reports do not usually draw conclusions about crashes. They compile basic information about the plane, the pilot and weather conditions.

It was a clear evening with winds from the east when eyewitnesses saw the vin-

tage World War II plane plummet steadily toward the water, the NTSB report says.

When it came about 20 feet from the surface, it began to climb before banking to the right and descending into the water.

The right wing hit first, followed by the nose and tail assembly.

The wreck of a Cessna 340A on the wet, stormy afternoon of Dec. 22 also remained under investigation, according to the NTSB. A New Bern, N.C., surgeon, his wife and their two daughters in their 20s died when the airplane plunged into the Stono River.