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ACT to be given to test high school students' post-graduation readiness

BY LYNN BONNER - lbonner@newsobserver.com

RALEIGH A new era of public school testing begins in March when high school students will take national exams to determine how well their education is preparing them for life after graduation.

The state Board of Education has been talking for more than a year about requiring high school juniors to take a college entrance exam called the ACT, and having younger students take precursor tests. The board has faced a series of questions and hurdles, and as recently as a few months ago did not know whether the state Department of Public Instruction could afford to move ahead with the plan.

DPI has scraped together $5.5 million, enough to offer the ACT to juniors, the run-up test to sophomores and a standardized test for students who have completed a sequence of career and technical education courses, state Superintendent of Public Instruction June Atkinson said Tuesday.

The state has asked the U.S. Department of Education for permission not to give the sophomore writing test, Atkinson said. Cancelling that test would let the state put $1.8 million toward the ACT.

DPI has assurances from the state budget office that it can use up to $5.5 million in reversions - money that state agencies didn't spend last year - for the new testing program, the state superintendent said.
The company that produces the ACT offers a test for eighth graders that the Board of Education wanted to use, but the department can't afford it this year, Atkinson said.

Legislators eliminated four end-of-course state tests this year - U.S. history, civics and economics, algebra II, and physical science - saying that teachers were teaching to the tests and that the results were useless in determining how North Carolina students compared to their peers in other states and around the world.

Legislators like the plan to give students the ACT, which consists of English, math, science, reading and an optional writing test.

"It's better than what we had," said Sen. Jerry Tillman, an Archdale Republican and a co-chairman of the legislative education oversight committee that heard Atkinson's report. "What we had wasn't comparing us with anybody except county to county."

The test results will be used to show whether students are ready for college, community college and work, and how well their schools are preparing them.

Legislators are coming down hard on the millions community colleges spend on basic courses to prepare new students for college-level classes.

"This system will allow us to save money that is now being spent on remediation," Atkinson said.

Lawmakers endorsed the ACT in this year's budget, but did not give DPI any money to pay for it.

"We didn't have the $6 million," Tillman said. But legislators will find money for it in future budgets, he said.

Legislators questioned whether junior year was too late to know whether students have learned enough to succeed after graduation.

The State Board of Education had envisioned offering a summer academic boot camp for rising seniors who did not perform well on the ACT, but that idea has been pushed aside because there's no money for it.

Atkinson said there is plenty schools can do for students who need help, such as setting up remedial programs that target areas of weakness, or directing students who need refresher courses to digital resources.

Bonner: 919-829-4821
RALEIGH Melissa Essary, who led Campbell University's law school as it moved from Buies Creek to downtown Raleigh, will step down as dean next summer and return to teaching.

In 2006, Essary became the first female dean of Campbell's Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law. Soon after she arrived, the school began to consider relocating to the state capital.

She will step aside as dean July 1 but will remain on the faculty as a professor of labor and employment law.

"I feel like it's sort of the end of a chapter," she said. "We've moved the school, we're very settled in. ... It feels like it's time to hand off the baton to a new leader."

During Essary's tenure, enrollment grew from 345 to 477, and applications increased to record levels. In 2009, the school moved from its Harnett County home to a renovated office building in downtown Raleigh.

"Raleigh is a very visible, dynamic city in and of itself, and simply to be associated with Raleigh has been a very positive thing," she said. "Frankly, it has put Campbell on the map."

Essary said the move led to a 400 percent increase in internships for students, who are able to gain academic credit and work experience in law firms, federal and state courts, state agencies, nonprofits and banks.

Campbell President Jerry Wallace said Essary was the right person at the right time. "Her leadership has been extraordinary in its breadth and stunning in its achievement," he said in a statement.

Essary, 51, previously was a professor at Baylor University School of Law in Texas.

She and husband Larry have two daughters - a sophomore at UNC Wilmington and a student at Leesville Road High School.

Campbell will conduct a national search for a new dean, officials said.

Stancill: 919-829-4559
Butch Davis looks over the Tar Heels during the first day of spring football practice.

Davis says firing a 'total surprise' in first on-camera comments since termination

BY KEN TYSIAC - ktysiac@charlotteobserver.com

Former North Carolina football coach Butch Davis said during an ESPNU interview Tuesday that his firing in July was "a total surprise."

Davis appeared as a guest college football analyst on "The Experts," and told host Anish Shroff he had no idea he was going to get fired by Chancellor Holden Thorp.

"We'd gone through spring practice, through recruiting, all the summer time preparations for this season, and ultimately the decision totally rested with the chancellor," Davis said. "It's within his right, and I certainly respect his authority to be able to make that decision, but obviously I totally disagree with the decision."

Davis' interviews Tuesday with Shroff and with ESPN's Jesse Palmer on Monday marked his first on-camera reaction to his firing since its announcement July 27. Although Davis taped some guest analyst segments, ESPN publicist Gracie Blackburn said there are no plans for Davis to serve as a regular on-air personality for ESPNU.

Davis told Shroff he was proud of the way his team responded last season, when 14 players missed at least one game and seven were held out the entire
season during the NCAA's investigation of impermissible benefits and academic fraud in the football program.

North Carolina went 8-5 and defeated Tennessee in the Music City Bowl.

"But you look at it and all the players that didn't get a chance to play, it certainly was a tragedy," Davis said. "It's one I didn't want to have to go through, another university didn't want to have to go through, and hopefully those are the kind of things that don't happen to any other institution in the country."

UNC officials will appear in front of the NCAA's Committee on Infractions on Oct. 28 in Indianapolis to answer charges of nine major violations. The school already has self-imposed two years of probation, vacated its wins from the 2008 and 2009 seasons and cut three football scholarships for each of the next three academic years as it waits to learn if the NCAA will impose harsher penalties after the hearing.

Davis said the violations occurred even though UNC officials took a lot of pride in educating athletes about NCAA rules.

"Some of the things that transpired in our program are things that we felt like we were doing everything we could to explain those kinds of things," Davis said. "I think maybe additional background checks on people that had access to your athletes, that's really a critical and important aspect of it."

Tysiac: 919-829-8942
In college transition, life changes for siblings left behind

By Jenna Johnson

When Josh Tarr started his freshman year at the University of Maryland a few weeks ago, his younger sister found herself without a chauffeur and back on the school bus. And, suddenly, there was no one around to tease her in the cafeteria.

“It’s been weird,” Kayla Tarr, 15, said of life at home in Louisiana since her big brother left. “A lot of times my brother would annoy me, but now I kind of miss him annoying me.”

So much energy goes into ensuring that freshmen smoothly transition to college life and that moms and dads can cope with the separation. Meanwhile, younger brothers and sisters are often forgotten.

Some colleges now offer sibling programs during student orientation, but the focus is usually on recruiting future students, not discussing how life at home is going to change. Although “parents weekend” has become “family weekend” at many schools, much of the attention is still directed at those writing tuition checks.

Even a quick family discussion can help younger siblings understand their emotional ups and downs are normal, several psychologists said. Some children genuinely miss older siblings, even if they have trouble admitting it. But many middle kids savor being on top of the sibling stack, even if only...
until Thanksgiving break. And the youngest kids rejoice at not having to compete for mirror time in the bathroom, keys to the car or total control of the television remote.

Up to this point, many of these siblings had to live in the shadows as parental energy was focused on college applications, campus visits, senior prom, graduation, shopping for dorm stuff and preparing for the big move.

“Suddenly, the big dog is gone,” said Marshall Duke, a psychology professor at Emory University. “It’s not a bad thing. It’s like pruning a flower garden. ... You trim back a bush, and the flowers behind it can now blossom.”

Rachel Israel moved from Fairfax County to McDaniel College in Maryland this year, giving her younger brother Jacob a quieter house and his parents’ undivided attention. A sophomore at West Springfield High School, he plays the clarinet in the marching band and is sometimes too busy to call his sister.

“It seems like he’s finding his own niche,” said Rachel Israel, 18, a freshman studying history. “There’s just so much going on in his life that I don’t know about.”

Israel said she will often talk to her mom before calling her brother so she can get the full scoop and not repeat questions he has already answered for his parents.

“He gets frustrated when too many people ask him the same questions,” she said.

Jacob Israel, 15, said he looks forward to talking with his sister.

“Like with any sibling, they aren’t always going to be missed 100 percent,” he said. “But it’s close.”

All of that parental attention can quickly annoy, he said: “If your parents care about your school grades, they will be all over you.”

The same is true in the Tarr household in Louisiana, where Kayla is now the only child and her mom often wants to talk and talk and talk. Meanwhile, Sherri Tarr said she worries about her daughter getting lonely without 19-year-old Josh around.

“She’s gotten so quiet,” the mother said. “Sometimes I can tell she wants me to give her some space. ... It’s hard because she’s the only one I can give my attention to.”
There are some things middle and high school students would rather discuss with an older sibling than mom or dad — like algebra shortcuts, crushes and teachers who uphold pointless rules. Under the same roof, it’s easy to ask. From a distance, it’s harder.

“It takes a lot more preparation,” said Michael Monaco, 18, a freshman at the College of William and Mary. He chats a few times a week with his sister, Mary, a seventh-grader, through online video. “It’s almost like I’m talking to a friend.”

The two discuss homework, things they have written and their favorite online game, Minecraft. Sometimes Mary worries that she’s bothering him too much, “but it’s just nice to see his face again,” she said.

As younger siblings flourish in a less crowded house, those who are at college can feel left out. Although parents don’t change much in a semester, siblings can grow several inches, change personalities and pick up new habits.

Tasha Wemhoner, a freshman at McDaniel, misses her two older siblings and two younger brothers in Colorado. She also has two step-brothers in Iowa.

“It’s always loud and crazy in my house,” said Wemhoner, 17, the first in her family to attend a four-year college. “At first it was kind of nice to be away because things were so calm.”

She keeps in touch through Skype, text message, e-mail and Facebook, but it’s not the same as sharing a bedroom with her older sister. Or walking her youngest brother home from elementary school.

“He would always tell me what he had for lunch that day,” she said. “I’m kind of sad I’m not seeing his first grade year.”

Wemhoner will fly home in mid-December for winter break. Since she arrived in Maryland in August, she knows she has changed and assumes her siblings have as well.

“It’s going to be really different when I get back,” she said. “So much has changed in two months. I can’t imagine how much will change in five months.”

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Should Top B-Schools Disclose Grades?
Posted by: Louis Lavelle on October 4, 2011

For many years, students at elite business schools have prohibited themselves from disclosing their grades to recruiters. Of the top ten full-time MBA programs in Bloomberg Businessweek’s 2010 ranking, seven have or had some form of grade nondisclosure. These aren’t the dictates of some secrecy-obsessed dean; these are self-imposed bans. At those schools and many others, the class has voted to implement a policy, and it’s up individual students to honor it. Most do, and recruiters, while they’re not big fans, generally go along.

The idea behind these policies was that by freeing students from the tyranny of grades they would encourage students to take more challenging courses and play nice with each other, fostering an environment of cooperation in what might otherwise be a cutthroat competition for grades and jobs.

Turns out that’s a load of hooey, at least according to a new study by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Daniel Gottlieb and Kent Smetters, two professors at Wharton, where grade nondisclosure has long been a point of contention between students and faculty, report that the “levels of curriculum effort” found in student surveys conducted in the wake of nondisclosure policies show the policies didn’t help, and may have even hurt.

Without grades, they wrote, students have little incentive to work hard and come to class prepared. At Wharton, for example, the amount of time spent on academics fell by 22 percent in the first four years after grade
nondisclosure was implemented, and course selection by students was unchanged.

They found the argument that grade nondisclosure fosters cooperation equally unpersuasive. Students compete for grades against a small circle of classmates, they noted, but compete for jobs against the entire class.

The authors raise some interesting questions, such as why grade nondisclosure policies exist only at business schools (but not law, medicine, and accounting), and only at top tier business schools at that. You would think that if the policies had all the benefits advocates attribute to them, they would have been more widely adopted, but they're not. Their conclusion: highly ranked business programs--where in the absence of grades everyone gets the benefit of the doubt, and where in the absence of minimum certification requirements slackers will never get caught--are probably the only place in the ivory tower where something like grade nondisclosure can flourish.

All of which raises another question: is it time for elite business schools to abandon grade nondisclosure?