

Technology

By Zach Miners

A New Test for the 21st Century, Literally

ALL THE EFFORTS TO PROVIDE more emphasis on technology skills in schools may be paying off, as steps have been taken to nationally test, for the first time, students' technology literacy.

WestEd, a nonprofit educational research agency, was recently awarded a \$1.86 million contract to develop the technology literacy component framework for the 2012 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation's Report Card.

Those involved with the project say it will ultimately lead to ways to measure students' knowledge on an array of technology-related subjects, which include 21st-century computer and researching skills but also technology applications in fields such as agriculture, engineering, energy usage and medicine.

"This isn't just about computers," says Mary Crovo, executive director of the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB). "It's much broader than that. It's about how technology touches all aspects



of our lives, regardless of whether it's in the end product."

The announcement was made in October by the NAGB, which was created by Congress in 1988 to set policy for NAEP.

WestEd is currently convening steering and planning committees—which include technology experts, teachers, scientists and policymakers from across the country—to develop the content and framework for the

new assessment.

Given the fast-changing nature of new technologies, project members say the content design phase will include some "hypothesizing" on what the landscape may be 10 years out, but an attempt to "outguess" any impending technological advancements is not an objective.

"We're going to focus more on core technologies and how students should think, not the hardware itself," says Steve Schneider, director of WestEd's Math, Science and Technology Program. "It should be about process—what is thoughtful design, what is careful analysis, what is critical thinking," he adds.

The board is slated to review and approve the framework in late 2009, which will then open up a competitive bidding process for a contractor to construct the actual test.

The work comes at a time when there are no nationwide requirements or a common definition for technological literacy, experts say.

Be Careful What You Post

HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS WHO ARE FRETTING OVER APPLICATIONS, interviews and grades for college have another thing to worry about: Will their Facebook or MySpace pages count against them in the admissions process?

A new survey of 500 top colleges by education company Kaplan found that 10 percent of admissions officers acknowledged looking at social-networking sites to

evaluate applicants, and of those, 38 percent said their views of the applicant were "negatively affected" by what they saw.

Princeton University's dean of admission, Janet Lavin Rapelye, says the school doesn't have time to look at all applicants' online information and has not rejected anyone based on information posted on the Internet. However, if an offensive Facebook post came to the college's attention, the school would examine it, she says.



E-rate Funding Made Easy

THE NATION'S LEADING E-RATE funding services firm, Funds for Learning, has recently made moves to greatly simplify the E-rate funding process.

In an effort to streamline the application process, the firm has introduced the *Form 470 Wizard*, enabling schools and libraries to complete the entire E-rate application process online. The addition comes on the heels of Congress's passage of the Children's Internet Protection Act, which requires schools participating in the E-rate program to educate students about appropriate behavior on social networking sites and in chat rooms, and about cyberbullying.

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