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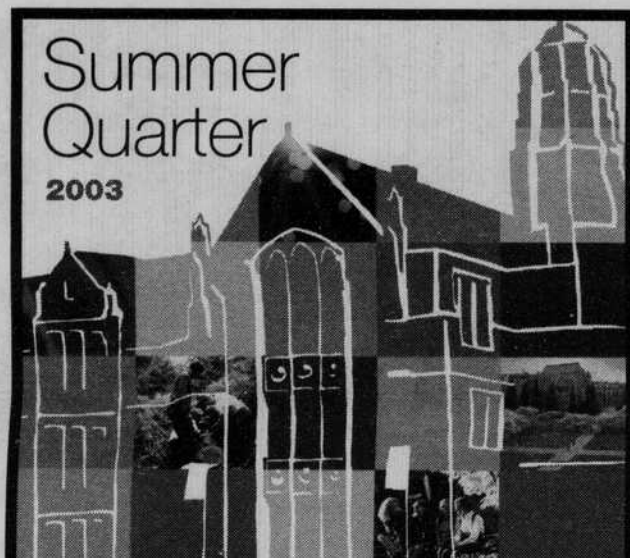
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Benchmark tests face new program changes

Two proposed bills in the Legislature would either alter or eliminate parts of required state benchmark tests

Jan Montry
City/State Politics Reporter

State benchmark testing is facing potential transformations in the Oregon Legislature as lawmakers move to either decrease the scope of or completely eliminate the Certificate of Initial Mastery and Certificate of Advanced Mastery program.

House Bill 2744, a bi-partisan effort by members of the House Education Committee, would modify the CIM implementation so it only applies to math, science and English. Public schools would have the option to expand the program if they chose.

House Bill 2415, on the other hand, would abolish the CIM/CAM program completely and replace it with a testing system graded independently from the Oregon Education Department.

Rep. Pat Farr, R-Eugene, said he wanted to limit the scope of CIM to simplify the benchmark and make it easier for schools to maintain the program. The narrower scope would also comply with the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which singles out English, math and science as priorities for education.

"It's not to, in any way, degrade

the quality of education in the state," he said.

Rep. Vic Backlund, R-Keizer, said the bill is a compromise between abolishing the program and keeping it intact.

"My goal was to keep Oregon's high standards and also reduce burden on schools," he said.

But the Salem lawmakers who are making a push beyond the compromise to annihilate the program say it is expensive, ineffective and a waste of time.

Rep. Randy Miller, R-West Linn, who introduced the bill to abolish the test, said many teachers and students express frustration that CIM/CAM can't be used for admission purposes after high school.

"We need to invest the money we have for education in a way that will do students some good," he said. "I don't think there is any evidence of the effectiveness of CIM/CAM."

"What (higher education schools) care about is what they've always cared about — SAT, ACT and GPA."

In an Oregon Department of Education study released last week, officials concluded that abolishing CIM/CAM would not save the state a significant amount of money because much of the cost lies in small increments of teacher time during school days.

Furthermore, the study concluded CIM/CAM only costs the state \$21.6

million — \$17 million that is devoted to activities required under the federal No Child Left Behind Act — and the CAM would cost \$4.9 million.

CIM and CAM use multiple choice tests, class work samples and career experience to benchmark the proficiency of high school students; however, the Oregon University System does not require the benchmarks for admission.

The CIM will be completely implemented for the 2004-2005 sophomore class with benchmarks in English, math, science, social sciences, art, second languages and physical education. Currently, benchmarks exist for English, math and science.

University Admissions Director Martha Pitts said the University only looks at CIM/CAM assessments as part of an applicant's comprehensive review. Potential students who fail to meet the requirements for automatic admission undergo the review, which consists of an analysis of grade trends, SAT scores and other factors.

"There are not a lot of circumstances where we use (CIM/CAM)," she said. "It's not a requirement for admission."

Members of the public will testify before the House Education Committee this week about both bills.

Contact the senior news reporter at janmontry@dailyemerald.com.

Iraq

continued from page 1

infantry keeps a wary 24-hour watch on the well-armed Kurdish militia stationed in the village.

The standoff has left everyone frightened and nervous. Hair-triggered Iraqi sentries shoot at anyone who ventures too close to their bunkers or trenches, and the broad sloping pastures below their positions are heavily mined. Kalak villagers still jump when they hear that odd and sickening sound — a short, muffled explosion — that tells them another wayward sheep has stepped on a land mine.

Sometimes, heavy rains unearth a patch of Iraqi mines, which tumble downhill into the village. The latest victim was a boy who kicked at a loose mine that ended up on a soccer field.

So many Kalak men have fled the frontier or been killed in battles that women now outnumber men by 8 to 1. Everybody in Kalak, of course, blames Hussein.

Aisha Malood was washing some turnips the other day, and the water in her bowl had turned a dark crimson.

"I wish this was Hussein's blood on my hands, Insha'allah," she said, appealing to Allah to make it so. "I'd love to have his blood up to my elbows. I'd slay him myself, and then I'd bury him directly under my outhouse. Only then would the Iraqi people finally be free of him."

Just down the lane, under a pomegranate tree in her backyard, Amina Ahmed was stoking an outdoor oven and turning out thin, crisp wheels of nan, the flat Kurdish bread. She had heard, yes, that Iraqi troopers are now begging local shepherds to bring them bread.

"But those soldiers will get no bread from me," said the 65-year-old widow. "They terrorize us every day, just by being up there on our hills."

"If Hussein came to Kalak, I wouldn't give him bread. I'd give him rat poison. I'd slaughter him."

She squinted, smiled, and then slowly drew a finger across her throat.

The Kurds of Kalak have been battling Baghdad for nearly 35 years. After the 1991 Gulf War and a failed Kurdish uprising, the terrified villagers fled to Iran. When they returned, their Arab neighbors had looted their homes.

"They even took my baby's cradle," said Aisha Malood.

"In the last war, I fled," said the widow Ahmed. "This time, I'm staying put."

The Kurds have driven all the Arabs out of Kalak, which sits just above the 36th parallel, a few miles inside the United Nations no-fly zone. As a village, it's not much to look at — stray dogs, the bleating sheep, some vegetable patches, a few shops and schools, a scattering of low-slung houses.

Look closer, though, and nearly every one of Kalak's houses is pockmarked with a bullet hole, or five, or 20. Look at the arms or the chests of the Kalak men, and there's sure to be a purpled scar or two from an Iraqi bullet or bayonet. The hard history of Kalak is right there, shot right into their bodies.

Their children know the history, too. They learn it in Patriotism class.

"The main theme of the Patriotism class is an independent Kurdistan,"

said Ali Zorab Ali, headmaster at the Avesta Primary School for Girls. "We teach them about homeland, nationality, democracy and dictators."

"Our children also know about fear and tension. They learn this at an early age. They're used to soldiers in the streets, the low-flying American planes and regular evacuations of the town. Sadly, these things have become normal for them."

Kalak's crumbling police station serves as the headquarters of the protective Kurdish forces, an odd mix of regular soldiers and security brigades from the Kurdistan Democratic Party, furtive intelligence men driving battered Peugeot sedans, and squads of volunteer peshmerga, the Kurdish guerrilla fighters.

Most days, the KDP security commander prowls the roof of the station-house, fingering his string of worry beads, smoking ferociously and peering through his field glasses at the Iraqis up on the ridge. He also looks downstream to a new bridge spanning the Zab, a bridge that's capable, he said, of handling tank columns.

One side of the half-mile bridge is controlled by his men, the other side by Hussein's. If a war breaks out, the first order of battle is to seize and hold that bridge. After that, the important oil center of Mosul is just a day's march.

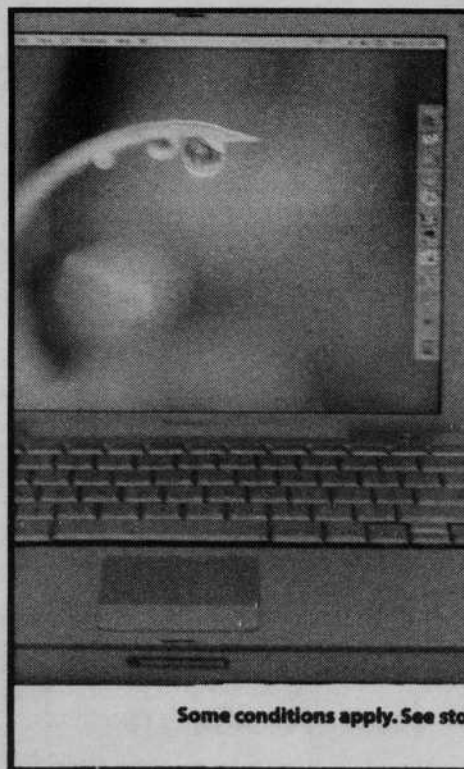
"We can't wait. We want a war as soon as possible so we can be rid of Hussein and his damned soldiers," said Capt. Hajar Mullah Omar, the Kurdish commander. "Whenever the people in the village hear the news that the war has been delayed again, they feel sick."

"That's our land up there," he said, pointing to the Iraqi positions, "and very soon we're going to reclaim it."

He smiled and nodded confidently, then told about an Iraqi trooper who recently crept down near the village. The soldier told a local man to spread the word among the townspeople.

"Please don't shoot us if a war breaks out at night," the Iraqi said. "I promise you we'll be gone by morning."

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