

Low bidder says Calif. will overpay testing contractor

By Christopher Cadelago, Sacramento Bee

California education officials relied on three paper slips and a box to help determine who would win a nearly quarter-billion-dollar contract to overhaul the state's system of testing students.

At a state Board of Education meeting last month, board President Michael Kirst drew each of the three firms' names to decide the order in which they would present their case.

The apparent loser says it was anything but fair. Pearson School questions whether it was put through an elaborate charade designed to pick the state's current testing vendor, Educational Testing Service. Pearson representatives want the job rebid and are threatening a lawsuit.

In the world of lucrative government contracts, the effort to design and build a system for more than 3 million students a year could have far-reaching implications. The new assessments are considered a cornerstone of the state's education system, helping improve classroom instruction and marking progress in English and mathematics for kindergarten through 12th grade. Given the innovative approaches being considered, experts said the winning bidder would be in position to parlay the agreement to provide tests to other states.

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