Date: June 10, 2013

To: Ronny J. Coleman, Chairman  
Statewide Training and Education Advisory Committee  
c/o State Fire Training

From: Ken Wagner, Fire Service Training Specialist III

Subject/Agenda Action Item: Voluntary vs. Mandatory Capstone Testing and IFSAC/Pro Board Certification

Recommended Actions: Discussion

Background Information:

Capstone Testing
Capstone testing as a component of certification has been discussed on a regular basis since the inception of our certification system. Prior to July 1, 2012 State Fire Training (SFT) developed and distributed certification exams for each individual course delivered as a component of CFSTES. Since July 1, 2012, SFT no longer develops and distributes certification exams.

Furthermore, on July 22, 2011 STEAC approved the implementation of the performance based task book process to assess each certification candidate’s qualifications. SFT has been phasing in task books as certification tracks and associated courses are updated.

As a component of the Mission Alignment Process SFT has been pursuing national recognition in the form of accreditation by both the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) and the National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications (Pro Board). Both IFSAC and Pro Board require written and/or skills capstone testing to satisfy their respective certification requirements. In fact, beyond processing procedures the singular focus of their requirements is how a prospective accredited agency (SFT) develops, validates, proctors and scores capstone examinations. Although both organizations set forth criteria for demonstration of requisite knowledge and skills using a portfolio process, neither have approved an accredited agency in this regard. Discussions with those in leadership positions at IFSAC and Pro Board have confirmed that the portfolio process may be more appropriate at executive levels of certification, similar to the way we have implemented Fire Chief Certification in California.
Voluntary or Mandatory Capstone Testing

As we have discussed implementation of national recognition at the Fire Fighter 1 level, we have anticipated requiring candidates at Accredited Regional Training Programs (ARTP) and Accredited Local Academies (ALA) to mandatorily complete capstone written and skills testing as a component of their academies. We chose this option as it is apparent that:

1. Fire Fighter 1 candidates usually lack an in-depth understanding of the certification system which can lead to uninformed choices when having to decide which certifications they should apply for.

   And

2. Capstone testing for Fire Fighter 1 candidates can best be accomplished before they leave the academy setting. Therefore, in addition to California certification they are positioned to apply for IFSAC and/or Pro Board should they desire.

While discussing appropriate components and implementation of the proposed SFT records management system, staff has been contemplating the point at which IFSAC/Pro Board capstone testing should be available to participants beyond Fire Fighter 1. During this discussion staff recognized that participants for other levels of certification should be allowed to sit for capstone testing as soon as possible after they complete required course work; this would mirror Fire Fighter 1 capstone testing.

This led to the next logical discussion point, should capstone testing be voluntary or mandatory? After significant deliberation, staff concluded that capstone testing should be mandatory. This position is an extension of the previous discussion wherein we decided that task books would serve as our capstone testing method in California. However, it is appropriate to revisit this decision armed with contemporary knowledge about IFSAC and Pro Board certification.

Voluntary vs. Mandatory IFSAC/Pro Board Certification

Our California certification system has its foundations in a voluntary system. Therefore, from the incipient discussions on SFT’s participation in national certification the emphasis has been on allowing a participant to voluntarily select to obtain IFSAC and/or Pro Board certification in addition to California certification. Other states differ from California in that they rely solely on IFSAC and/or Pro Board as their certifying authority; they do not administer state certification as we do in California.

Along with discussion on voluntary or mandatory capstone testing, staff also deliberated on whether IFSAC and Pro Board certification should be mandatory. Consistency and uniform application should be among the hallmarks of any certification system. Often, too many options can lead to confusion among participants and selections that do not serve their best interests into the future. The California Fire Service has determined that participation in IFSAC and Pro Board is in the best interests of our profession. Therefore, staff concluded that we should include IFSAC and Pro Board certification jointly when California certification is conferred. Issuing IFSAC and Pro Board certification jointly with California Certification would certainly reduce confusion among participants and significantly derail complaints and problems from those who initially choose California certification only and subsequently seek national certification. Additionally, internal SFT processing time and resource utilization can be maximized. Further, maintaining and transmitting records to IFSAC and Pro Board will be streamlined. If we do not issue IFSAC and Pro Board certification jointly with California certification from the onset, the potential for participant confusion is increased.

As an accredited agency, SFT will be required to pay annual agency fees and individual participant certification fees to IFSAC and Pro Board. Annual agency fees are approximately $2,000 each and are adjusted depending on the number of certifications issued. Therefore, implementing
mandatory IFSAC and Pro Board certification will also result in minimal certification cost increases paid by participants. However, spreading the cost over a broader population will result in a smaller cost increase per participant. SFT anticipates that the current Fire Fighter I certification fee of $40.00 would increase to between $60.00 and $70.00 with mandatory inclusion of IFSAC and Pro Board certification. Should IFSAC and Pro Board certification be voluntary, certification fees for those choosing to participate would likely increase to between $70.00 and $80.00. This would be the result of amortizing administrative and operating costs across a smaller population of participants.

Analysis/Summary of Issue:

In summarizing the background information provided, staff has identified the following pros and cons associated with these two proposals.

**Capstone Testing**

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<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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<tr>
<td>Consistency with other state certification systems</td>
<td>Adds another requirement for those not interested in IFSAC/Pro Board certification</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aligns with testing process used by other professions</td>
<td>Added SFT workload to develop, validate &amp; proctor exams</td>
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<td>Satisfies IFSAC/Pro Board testing requirements</td>
<td>Will result in higher cost for participants</td>
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<td>SFT already focusing on mandatory testing for F/F 1</td>
<td>Participants do not like change</td>
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**Voluntary vs. Mandatory IFSAC/Pro Board Certification**

<table>
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<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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<tr>
<td>Consistency with other state certification systems</td>
<td>Some participants will not be interested in IFSAC/Pro Board certification</td>
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<td>Supports interstate professional interoperability</td>
<td>Workload increase for SFT</td>
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<td>Eliminates two-tier system</td>
<td>Higher costs for participants</td>
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<td>Reduces confusion among participants</td>
<td>Participants do not like change</td>
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<td>Maximizes SFT staff time &amp; resources</td>
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<td>Simplifies record keeping and reporting to IFSAC/Pro Board</td>
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After fully considering this issue, staff recommends that STEAC:

1. In addition to task books, approve capstone testing for all levels of certification to be implemented as the level of certification is incorporated into State Fire Training’s IFSAC and Pro Board accreditation.

   AND

2. Approve a program change which will require IFSAC and Pro Board certification jointly when California certification is conferred upon a participant for each level of certification incorporated into State Fire Training’s IFSAC and Pro Board accreditation.
June 20, 2013

Tonya Hoover, State Fire Marshal  
Cal Fire/Office of the State Fire Marshal  
P.O. Box 944246  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460

Dear Tonya,

It has come to my attention that a current staff report on Capstore Testing and IFSAC/Pro Board Certification will be on the agenda for the upcoming STEAC meeting on July 19, 2013. I'm aware that State Fire Training has been working on national recognition for some time, and it has always been my understanding that national certification would be voluntary for California firefighters preparing for state certification.

I'm concerned to read that the current report now recommends that national certification become mandatory for anyone working toward certification in California. The result of this change will be increased requirements and fees, which are unnecessary and provide no benefit for most of our membership. I'm writing to let you know that I am adamantly opposed to this recommendation, and it is my opinion that those who choose to pursue national certification do so on an individual basis and bear any additional costs that may ensue.

I know through STEAC and SBFS meetings we will have an opportunity to discuss these issues; however, I wanted to give you a "heads up" on our position. As always, if you have questions or wish to discuss further, I would be happy to meet with you.

Sincerely,

Lou Paulson  
President

c: Dan Terry, Chair, CFFJAC  
   Yvonne de la Peña, Program Director, CFFJAC  
   Bob Brier, Member, STEAC  
   Mary Jennings, Member, STEAC