





**TO:** Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES) Committee

**FROM:** Kevin G. Smith 

**SUBJECT:** First Year Implementation of the new High School Equivalency Exam

**DATE:** February 2, 2015

**AUTHORIZATION(S):** 

### **SUMMARY**

#### **Issue for Discussion**

To provide the Committee with an update on the implementation of the new national High School Equivalency (HSE) exam, the Test Assessing Secondary Completion™ (TASC), which was first administered in January 2014.

#### **Reason(s) for Consideration**

A new HSE Exam, TASC, replaced the GED® test in New York in 2014. This item provides an overview of the first year's implementation of the new test.

#### **Proposed Handling**

This item will come before the Board of Regents Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES) Committee at its February 2015 meeting.

#### **Procedural History**

In October 2011, the ACCES Committee was informed of changes to the GED® test that raised concerns regarding the State's reliance on the test as the primary pathway to a New York State HSE Diploma. In February 2012, the Committee discussed alternative pathways to a HSE Diploma. An update was provided at a joint meeting of the P-12 Education Committee and the ACCES Committee at the April 2012 meeting. At the September 2012 ACCES Committee meeting, the Board of Regents agreed to issue a Request For Proposal (RFP) for a new HSE test, provide multiple

pathways to a HSE Diploma, and transition the adult education system to Common Core and career/college readiness. Updates were provided at the November 2012, February 2013, June 2013, and September 2013 ACCES Committee meetings. In December 2013, the Regents approved an amendment to section 100.7 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education to permit acceptance of passing scores on one or more subtests of the 2002-2013 GED<sup>®</sup> examination for the corresponding subtest on the TASC.

### **Background Information**

The March 2011 decision by GED Testing Service (GEDTS) that a new GED<sup>®</sup> test beginning in 2014 would be fully aligned with Common Core State Standards, only available on computer, and double the cost of the 2002-2013 GED<sup>®</sup> test led the Board of Regents in September 2012 to request NYSED to issue an RFP for a new HSE test.

On November 28, 2012, an RFP was issued which required vendors to produce an HSE test that would gradually phase-in national college and career readiness standards and computer based testing (CBT) over a three year period. Two vendors—CTB/McGraw-Hill and ETS (Education Testing Services)—submitted bids. GEDTS decided not to bid.

An expert panel of three psychometricians and three experts in higher education and adult education scored the RFPs. On March 7, 2013, Education Commissioner John King announced that the winning bidder was CTB/McGraw-Hill with TASC.

The cost of the TASC Test was \$10.40 per subtest (\$52 for the full battery) in 2014, is \$10.80 per subtest (\$54 for the full battery) in 2015, and will be \$11.20 per subtest (\$56 for full battery) in 2016, which is significantly less expensive than the \$120 for the full battery of 2014 Series GED<sup>®</sup> test.

The TASC is similar in structure to the GED<sup>®</sup> test. Comprised of five subtests (Reading, Writing, Science, Social Studies, and Math), most items are multiple choice. There are also gridded response items in the Math test and a written essay for the Writing test. Constructed response items will be present in the 2015 and 2016 test forms.

New York was the first state in the country to issue and award an RFP for a HSE test other than the GED<sup>®</sup>. Today, 20 states across the country have chosen options either in place of or in addition to the GED<sup>®</sup> test to help students earn their state-issued high school equivalency certificate. For example: Massachusetts now only uses the test created by ETS called the *HiSET*<sup>®</sup> exam; New York State, Indiana and West Virginia only use the TASC; and California, North Carolina and New Jersey have chosen to offer all three tests — the GED<sup>®</sup> test, the *HiSET*<sup>®</sup> exam and the TASC.

### **Implementation of National College and Career Readiness Standards**

NYSED's RFP for the HSE exam called for the gradual phase-in of national college and career readiness standards. Department staff have worked closely with CTB/McGraw-Hill to guide the rigor, content, and slow and steady alignment to the

standards to ensure that our adult education examinees have sufficient time to become familiar with growing content expectations. The impact of NYSED's input should be seen in the 2015 and 2016 versions of the test. Although this is a national test and assessment decisions ultimately are made by CTB/McGraw-Hill, NYSED has worked closely with CTB/McGraw-Hill, providing guidance and recommendations. Other states, along with New York, have had the opportunity to provide comment and suggest changes to the field test questions; however, NYSED has become the lead state to review field test items, operational forms, and meet with CTB/McGraw-Hill's content experts to try to ensure:

- Alignment of and appropriate gradual phase-in to the standards;
- Proper construction and rigor of the items and forms; and
- Appropriateness for the adult education examinee.

Another challenge for NYSED is to prepare 5,500 adult education instructors to teach to national college and career readiness standards. In 2014, CUNY math and ELA content experts provided two Common Core Institutes in ELA and math for 49 Master Teachers from every region of the state. These Master Teachers then worked with Regional Adult Education Network (RAEN) center directors to turnkey national standards training in their regions. The first 2014 Institute focused on providing foundational knowledge for both ELA and math. The second 2014 Institute consisted of two concurrent sessions for ELA and math with the ELA session contextualized for teaching social studies. To date, 662 teachers have received training on instructional approaches from the Master Teachers. In 2015, in-depth and focused training will continue. In January 2015, 25 Master Teachers will be trained on teaching ELA with science concentrations and another 25 will continue receiving professional development in math, the TASC subtest that is the most challenging for New York State examinees to pass. NYSED, CUNY, and the NYC Literacy Assistance Center are also developing an adult education teacher peer review website <http://www.collectedny.org/> to identify and disseminate teacher reviewed exemplary instructional materials to meet the national standards, including teacher developed materials.

### 2013 GED Test Surge and "Grandfathering"

In 2013 there was an anticipated surge in GED<sup>®</sup> testing throughout the State. As potential test takers heard that a new and more rigorous HSE exam would replace the old GED<sup>®</sup> in 2014, many rushed to take the GED<sup>®</sup> test for the first time, or rushed to complete those subtests that they had not yet passed. For the first nine months of 2013, there was a 22.6% increase in tests administered over the previous year. The final three months saw a 108% increase from the previous year. In anticipation of the surge and with the cooperation and collaboration of other agencies such as CUNY and the New York City Department of Education, the demand to take the test was met.

To further support the transition from the GED<sup>®</sup> to the TASC, on December 17, 2013, the Board of Regents authorized an amendment to Commissioner's Regulation section 100.7 that allowed a passing score on up to four GED<sup>®</sup> subtests to be accepted as a passing score for the corresponding subtest on the TASC for two years, so that passing GED<sup>®</sup> scores could be used with passing TASC scores to obtain a NYSED HSE Diploma, also known as "Grandfathering."

## Implementation of Computer Based Testing

TASC is the first online CBT sponsored by NYSED. Building capacity for CBT and the infrastructure to support it is a challenge. While the RFP provided for up to 20% of test administrations to be computer based in 2014 and up to 40% in 2015, a survey conducted by NYSED found 86% of test centers do not have the technical expertise or infrastructure to adopt CBT. In 2014, NYSED authorized CBT in 19 locations, including the New York City Department of Education. Based on preliminary data for 2014, only 612 examinees tested on the computer, representing 2.7% of the total tester population. For 2015, 14 additional sites have been approved and more sites are being considered. Further, the new 2015 RFP for public test center reimbursement will provide incentives for CBT.

## Administration of the 2014 TASC

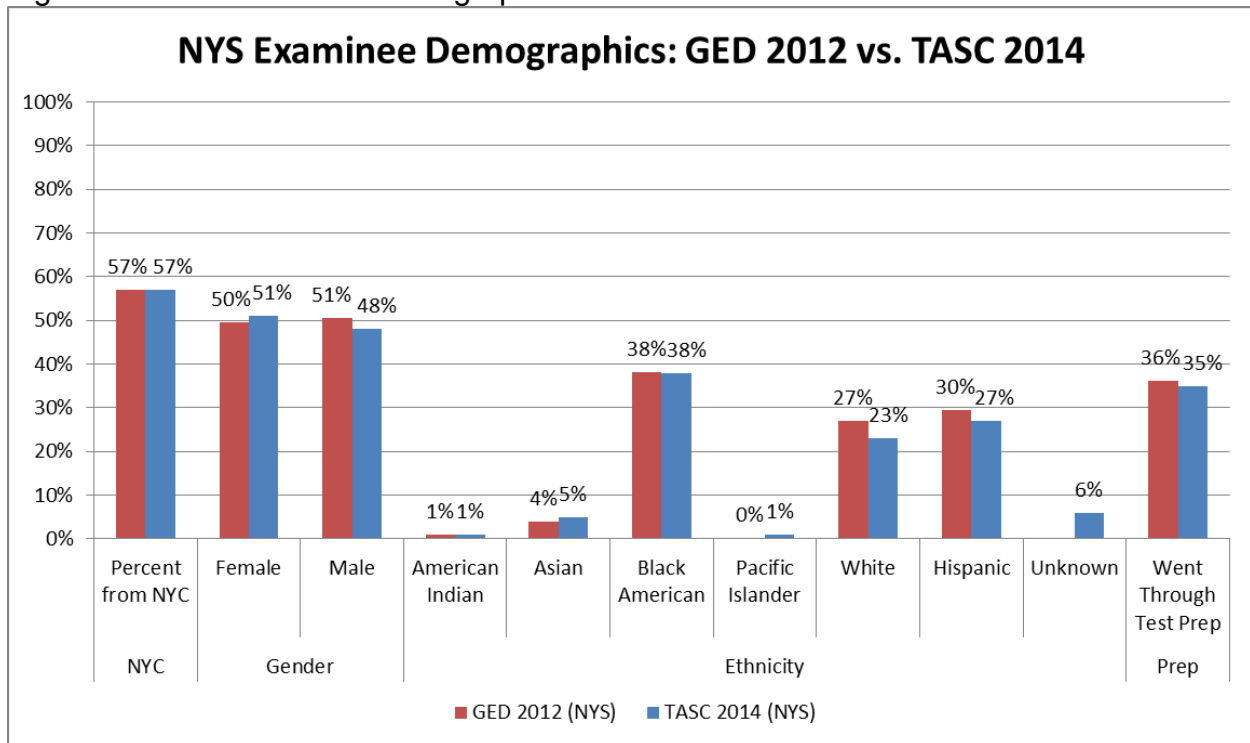
The first TASC Test was administered in New York State on January 21, 2014. In the first three months fewer than 2,000 unique individuals took the TASC. However, the rate of testing started to increase during the third quarter of 2014 and increased substantially at the end of the year. For 2014, there were 24,442 unique individuals who took one or more subtests of the TASC, compared to 44,200 unique individuals tested in 2012<sup>1</sup>. Some examinees take the test two or three times a year, therefore the number of examinees each year will be less than the total number of tests administered.

Despite the implementation of the new TASC in New York State, the characteristics of examinees who are seeking an HSE Diploma have not changed significantly (see Figure 1 below). For example, the mean age of examinees continues to be 28. Likewise, the ratio of males to females who took the GED<sup>®</sup> in 2012 versus the TASC in 2014 is still approximately 50/50. The proportion of examinees from each race/ethnicity group who took the TASC in 2014 is consistent with the proportions who took the GED<sup>®</sup> in 2012. The proportion of the testing population who are American Indian is consistent at 1%, the proportion who are Asian has increased by 1% to now encompass 5% of the TASC testing population, the proportion who are Black has remained steady at 38%, the proportion who are Pacific Islanders has increased slightly to just above 1%, the proportion who are White has decreased by approximately 4% to now encompass 23% of the TASC testing population, and the proportion who are Hispanic has decreased by 3% to now encompass 27% of the TASC 2014 testing population. The proportion of examinees from New York City remains constant at approximately 57% of the testing population. Of note, the proportion of first-time examinees who participated in a preparation program has decreased from 41% in 2012 to 35% in 2014; however, this difference is largely attributable to the fact that fewer TASC-specific preparation programs were available immediately—the TASC preparation program market had not yet scaled up to serve the TASC-taking examinee population at the beginning of 2014.

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<sup>1</sup> Because of the unusual surge of examinees in 2013, we are using 2012 data for comparison purposes

Figure 1: NYS Examinee Demographics



New York State Examinee Performance on the 2014 TASC

The TASC Test’s annual calendar will end in March 2015, at which point CTB/McGraw-Hill will release final test participation and pass rates for the TASC. Although final numbers are not yet tabulated, preliminary data indicates that of the 22,598 New Yorkers who took all five subtests in 2014, 11,281 passed all five and received their HSE Diploma for an estimated 2014 New York State passing rate of 49.92%. In addition, NYSED’s policy to allow grandfathered GED® scores has added an additional 1,876 HSE Diplomas. Adding examinees who took fewer than all five subtests increases the number of examinees to at least 24,442, resulting in a final pass rate of at least 53.8%.

The TASC 2014 pass rate is largely consistent with historic pass rates for examinees who took the GED® in New York State (see Table 1 and Figure 2). For example, the most recent year in which we have comparable GED® data was 2012 when the pass rate for New York State was 53.8%, for a difference of 3.88% between the old and new tests.

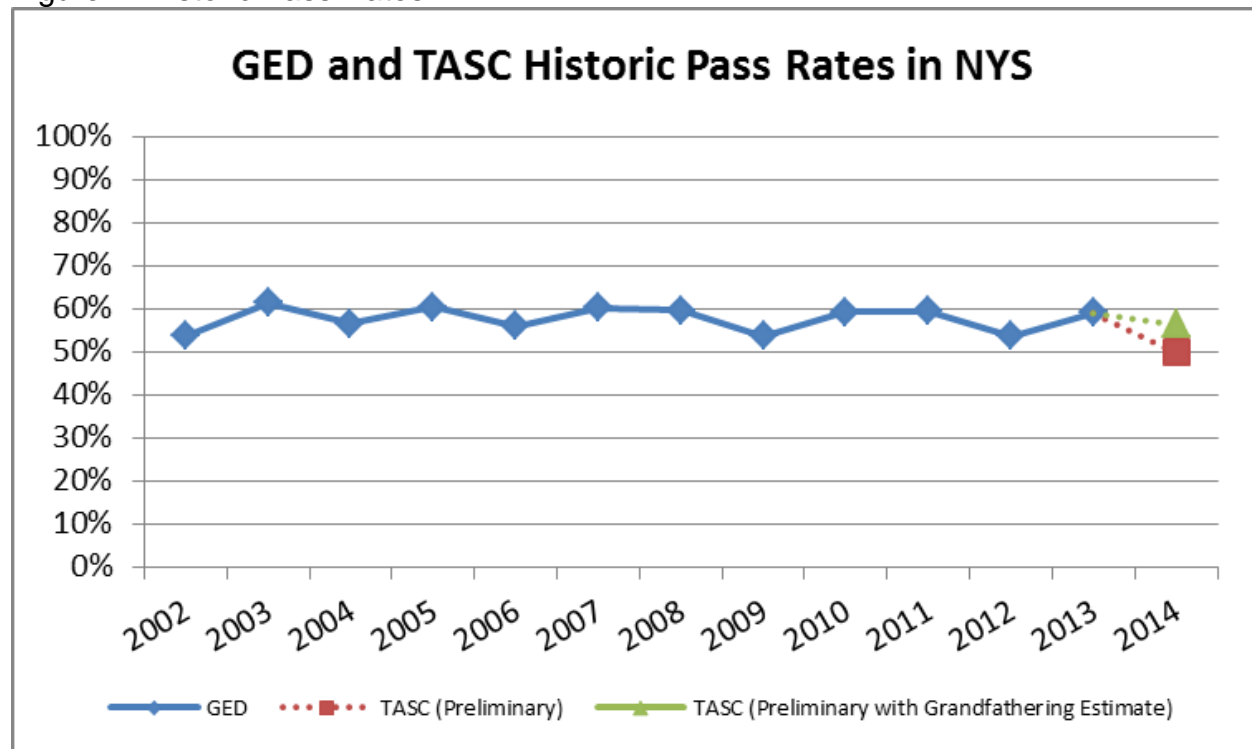
Table 1: Historic NYS HSE Pass Rates

Year	Completers	Passers	Completers Pass Rate
2002	46,724	25,084	53.7%
2003	38,420	23,618	61.5%
2004	44,333	25,140	56.7%
2005	50,831	30,733	60.5%
2006	50,564	28,345	56.1%
2007	51,620	31,097	60.2%
2008	55,776	33,309	59.7%
2009	51,724	27,815	53.8%
2010	46,408	27,564	59.4%
2011	42,738	25,436	59.5%
2012	43,168	23,223	53.8%
2013	52,934	31,282	59.1%
2014*	22,598	11,281	49.9%

Source: GEDTS 2001-2012, CTB-McGraw-Hill 2014

\*NYSED's policy to allow grandfathered GED® scores increases the number of passers to 13,157. Adding in those examinees who took fewer than all five subtests increases the number of completers to at least 24,442, resulting in a final pass rate of at least 53.8%.

Figure 2: Historic Pass Rates



To pass the TASC, examinees must pass each of the five subtests (Reading, Writing, Math, Science, and Social Studies). In 2014, the Math section was the most challenging subtest to New York State examinees; only 62.03% of examinees passed the Math subtest. The second-most-difficult subtest was Writing, with 80.79% of

examinees passing the Writing subtest. The Science, Social Studies, and Reading subtests were the least-challenging for examinees in New York State, with 87.34%, 90.24%, and 91.41% passing, respectively.

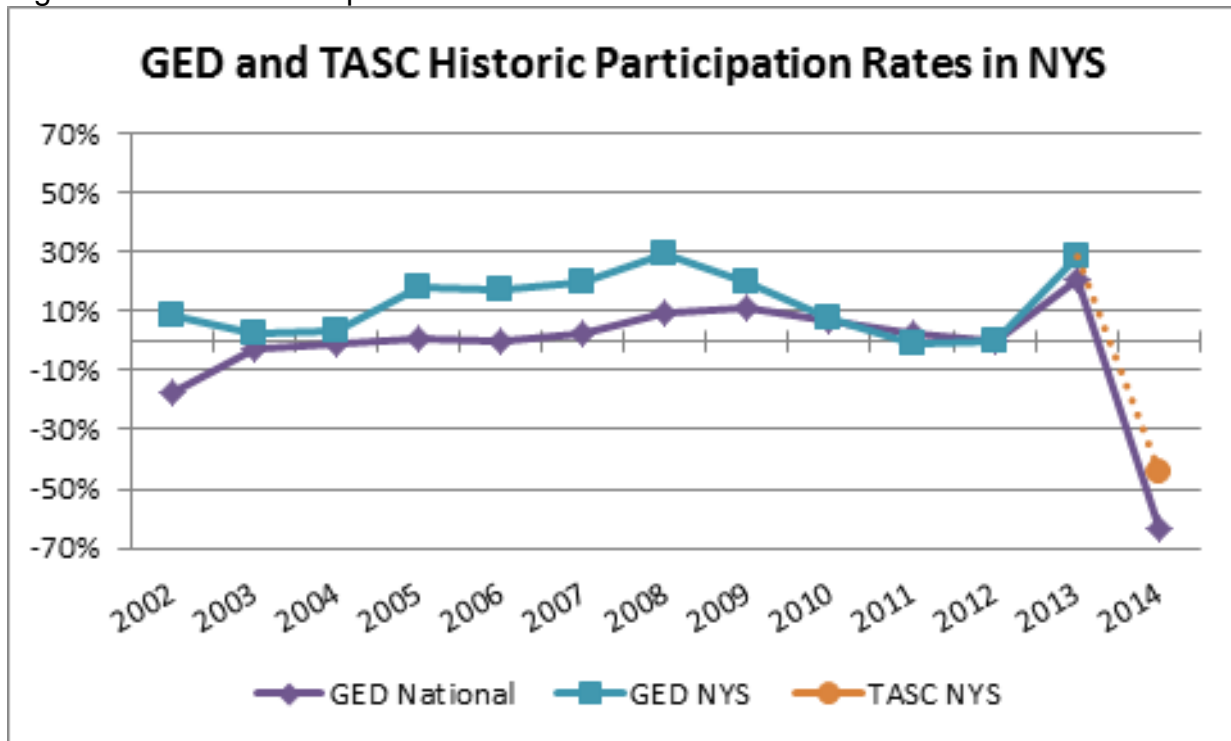
### Comparison of TASC to Other HSE Testing Programs

There are currently three major assessments that are used throughout the nation to determine if examinees have the knowledge and skill necessary to receive an HSE Diploma. These are the 2014 Series of the GED<sup>®</sup> from GEDTS (in partnership with Pearson PLC); the HiSET<sup>®</sup>, a product of Educational Testing Service; and the TASC. Although all three exams are built on national college and career readiness standards, it is the opinion of NYSED content and psychometric reviewers that each exam has a different interpretation of the knowledge and skill required of adult learners, although TASC and HiSET seem to have much more similar approaches to assessing the readiness of examinees for HSE Diplomas than the GED<sup>®</sup> 2014 Series.

The most significant way in which the GED<sup>®</sup> 2014 Series differs from TASC and HiSET is in the proportion of examinees that pass each exam and are awarded an HSE Diploma. In 2014, preliminary data reported by CTB/McGraw-Hill indicates the national TASC pass rate is approximately 59.64%. The 2014 estimated pass rate reported by ETS for the HiSET<sup>®</sup> is 62%. At this time, GEDTS has released various calculations for the pass rates for the 2014 GED Testing Service, although data indicates that the GED<sup>®</sup> 2014 pass rate is approximately 16% lower than the GED<sup>®</sup> 2013 pass rate.

Another significant difference between the new GED<sup>®</sup> 2014 Series test and the TASC is the prevalence of examinees that are choosing to take each test. Although data are still preliminary, GEDTS is reporting that approximately 248,000 examinees took the GED<sup>®</sup> in 2014, whereas 674,051 took the GED<sup>®</sup> in 2012 (the last comparable year before the 2013 “surge”); a decrease of 63.2% (see Figure 3). Many states have reported an 80-90% decrease in the number of diplomas they are issuing. Conversely, in New York State there were 44,200 total individuals who attempted the 2012 GED<sup>®</sup> and there were 24,442 total individuals who attempted the 2014 TASC, for a decrease of 44.7%. Although a decrease was expected due to the shift to the new exam, in New York State we are pleased that the shift to TASC has resulted in a substantially lower decrease than is seen nationally among states that have shifted to the new 2014 Series GED<sup>®</sup>. Much of the decrease in the number of examinees in other states is attributable to factors including the increased difficulty of the 2014 Series GED<sup>®</sup>, the smaller number of testing centers at which examinees can take the GED<sup>®</sup>, the fact that the GED 2014 is computer-based, and the substantially higher cost of the 2014 GED<sup>®</sup>. Although none of these issues are factors in the decreased rate of examinees taking the TASC in New York State, NYSED continues to work with CTB/McGraw-Hill to ensure potential New York State examinees are aware that the new TASC should be considered by those seeking to acquire an HSE Diploma.

Figure 3: Historic Participation Rates



### Next Steps

Recognizing the potential problems that the 2014 GED® test would pose to potential HSE Diploma candidates, including increased cost, sole availability in a computer based format, and substantial increase in difficulty, NYSED had the foresight to select an alternative assessment to ensure that New Yorkers have a valid, fair and accessible HSE exam at a reasonable cost to the State.

Looking forward, NYSED will continue to work with CTB/McGraw-Hill to ensure to balance the need for the TASC to continue to provide equitable access to examinees who wish to pursue further education or career development by obtaining an HSE Diploma, with the need for NYSED to have an HSE exam that conveys the high standards associated with all New York State high school-level diplomas. In 2015, NYSED will also increase the number of approved CTB sites and through the new RFP, provide incentives for CBT through public test center reimbursement and continue to support testers ability to test in this manner.

In the next few months CTB/McGraw-Hill will release the 2015 forms of the TASC, which measure college and career readiness standards with even greater fidelity. Additionally, CTB/McGraw-Hill will soon formally announce minor changes to the scores required to pass the TASC, an achievement made possible by deep data-informed collaborations among TASC states and CTB/McGraw-Hill. Finally, NYSED will continue to work with State testing centers, adult education programs, higher education institutions, and the business community to ensure the field has an accurate understanding of the important role the TASC plays in the granting of New York State HSE Diplomas.