



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

FROM: Kevin G. Smith *KGS*

SUBJECT: Alternative Pathways to the High School Equivalency
Diploma

DATE: January 25, 2012

AUTHORIZATION(S):

SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion:

Should the Regents consider new alternative pathways to a High School Equivalency Diploma?

Reason(s) for Consideration

The GED[®] test is the primary method to achieve a New York State High School Equivalency diploma. However with the changes in the administration and content of the GED[®] test, as well as the increased fee that has been announced by GED[®] Testing Service (GEDTS) LLC (the private for-profit company that owns the GED[®] test) the Regents may wish to consider providing alternative pathways to the High School Equivalency test.

Proposed Handling

The item will come before the Regents Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES) committee at its February 2012 meeting.

Background

Regulation 100.7 establishes the standards for the issuance of a High School Equivalency Diploma in New York State. To be eligible for this diploma, the candidate generally must be 19 years old and be a resident of New York State for at least 30 days. However, candidates who are 16, 17, or 18 years old may be eligible if they meet

certain criteria such as being enrolled in an Alternative High School Equivalency Preparation Program (AHSEP) or High School Equivalency Preparatory Program (HSEP), or are accepted into the armed services, or meet certain other conditions such as being a resident of an addiction control center, youth facility, jail, or prison, or are under the direction of a parole or probation officer. Fifty-eight percent of GED® test candidates are 21 years of age or older while 63% come from the metropolitan New York region (Long Island, NYC, Westchester and Rockland.) Of the approximately 42% of GED® test candidates who are under 21 years of age, 20% are below the age of 19.

To achieve this diploma, a candidate may take and pass the GED® test. In New York State, candidates may either take and pass the GED® test in English or take and pass the GED® test in French or Spanish and pass an English proficiency exam. (If the applicant passes the GED® test in another language but does not pass the English proficiency exam, the successful test taker may achieve a diploma bearing an inscription indicating the language in which it was taken).

Currently, New York has only one other pathway towards a High School Equivalency Diploma. Candidates can successfully complete 24 credit hours of college level courses according to requirements outlined in Regulation 100.7. The 24 semester hours are to be distributed as follows: six (6) semester hours in English/Language Arts, three (3) semester hours in mathematics, three (3) semester hours in natural sciences, three (3) semester hours in social sciences, three (3) semester hours in the humanities, and six (6) semester hours in any course within the registered degree or certificate program.

Nonetheless, taking and passing the GED® test is the primary pathway for adults and out-of-school youths to obtain the High School Equivalency diploma. Through November, 26,000 New Yorkers passed the GED® test in 2011 and were issued their High School Equivalency Diplomas (96.7% were in English, 2.8% were in Spanish and .5% were in French). An additional 2,750 applicants in 2011 received their High School Equivalency Diploma by successfully completing the 24 college credit hour requirements.

However, the GED® test will be undergoing significant changes. In the spring of 2011, the American Council on Education (ACE - the current provider of the GED® test) and Pearson, a for-profit educational services firm, announced that they were forming a new company, GEDTS which will develop a new more rigorous GED® test. This new version of the test would align with Common Core Standards, be computer-based, and replace the current test in January of 2014. In addition, GEDTS will be a “full service” provider of the test, responsible for administering the test (authorizing and monitoring test centers, training and overseeing examiners, scoring tests). Currently, SED is the sole administrator of the GED® test in New York, responsible for monitoring test centers, reviewing and approving their annual contracts, approving examiners, training examiners and scoring the tests.

Also, GEDTS has indicated that the fee for the GED® test will be increased substantially. While GEDTS has not yet set the price for the new GED® test that will be used in 2014, the price for the current computer-based full battery of tests is \$120. Even at the current rate, the cost would pose a tremendous fiscal challenge for New

York State. Since Section 317 of the education law specifically prohibits any fee for admission to the GED® test, New York State pays GEDTS for the tests as well as bears the financial burden of the administration of the tests. The Governor's proposed 2012-2013 State budget provides \$2.71 million for purchasing and administering the GED® test. While some of the administrative duties would no longer be the responsibility of SED once the new system takes effect in 2014, the increased cost of the test would still be far above our current budget. For example, each year approximately 50,000 New Yorkers take the GED® test. At a minimum of \$120 per battery of tests, the State would have to appropriate \$6 million (50,000 at \$120 per battery of tests) just to accommodate the same number of candidates to take the test, with additional funds still needed for remaining administrative costs (processing diplomas, providing duplicate diplomas and transcripts).

Consequently, we should not be as reliant on the GED® test and should look at alternative pathways to a high school equivalency diploma. SED has been discussing the changes to the GED® test and alternative pathways with professional associations. In addition, SED has been involved with other states and adult educators throughout the nation who are also expressing their concerns about the changes and increased fees of the GED® test. The Professional Development Association of the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education has established an Alternative Pathways Workgroup. Currently 11 states, including New York, are represented on the committee.

This workgroup is in the process of surveying states to assess awareness of the new GED® test and plans for alternative pathways. The survey found that all states use the GED® test as the primary pathway to a high school equivalency, and that many states are now interested in alternative pathways. A few states are considering issuing a Request for Information from likely vendors to explore possible alternatives, including the possibility of creating their own test. This may eventually lead to issuing a RFP or RFQ. Some states are also considering taking question item banks used in state end-of-course exams (similar to the Regents exams) to construct their own alternative test. The workgroup has also begun to discuss cross-state strategies for creating alternative pathways.

Potential pathways that are being discussed include:

- **NEDP** – The National External Diploma Program (NEDP) is a program designed to meet the needs of adults seeking a non-traditional method for obtaining a high school diploma. Rather than taking a traditional class culminating in a lengthy sit-down test, the program relies on self-directed learning and the individual's life experience. A NEDP candidate must demonstrate high school level proficiency by applying their abilities in simulated, real life situations. A candidate is assessed by evaluators who certify that the candidate has attained 100% mastery of the competencies needed to function effectively in the workplace.

The program was first created by SED and offered in Syracuse in 1975. Over the years, the program has been managed by different providers and operated in nine states.

Currently, over 1,000 students in 18 programs are currently enrolled in NEDP programs in New York State. However, the current program only leads to a local high school diploma and is set to expire July 1, 2012 (an extension of the program for another year is another agenda item for the February Regents meeting). Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems, Inc. (CASAS), the vendor of this program has completed a national competency revalidation project with input from a national committee and is currently performing a comprehensive overhaul of the program. The current print-based format is being replaced with a web-delivered system that will improve accessibility, efficiency, standardization and scalability. The rigor of the program is increasing through the alignment with the Common Core/College Readiness standards.

NEDP could be a prime candidate as an alternative pathway to a High School Equivalency Diploma. The program recognizes that some people do not do well on high-pressure sit-down tests, but have high level skills and knowledge that are better displayed in other formats.

- **New Alternative Tests** – an informal organization of 16 states has discussed the possibility of forming a consortium and sponsoring the creation of an alternative high school equivalency test. It is also possible that other education service companies may decide to enter the market and develop a test for a high school equivalency diploma.

Another possibility for an alternative test is the use of college placement exams. We will work with SUNY, CUNY and community colleges to determine if their college placement instrument(s) could be used to lead to a high school equivalency diploma.

Recommendation

SED should continue to work with professional associations and other States to explore and develop alternative pathways to a High School Equivalency Diploma.

SED should issue an RFI to see what products and programs are currently available or may become available that might provide alternative pathways to a High School Equivalency Diploma.