



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

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

FROM: Kevin G. Smith *KG Smith*

SUBJECT: Update on Pathways to a High School Equivalency Diploma

DATE: September 26, 2019

AUTHORIZATION(S): *Elizabeth P Berlin*

SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

To provide the Committee with updates on the four pathways to a New York State High School Equivalency (HSE) Diploma.

Reason(s) for Consideration

For information.

Proposed Handling

This item will come before the Board of Regents ACCES Committee at its September 2019 meeting.

Procedural History

Four Pathways to a High School Equivalency (HSE) Diploma

I. High School Equivalency (HSE) Exam

The primary pathway to acquiring an HSE Diploma is by taking and passing a comprehensive exam created for that purpose. Prior to 2014, the General Educational Development (GED®) test served as the State's HSE exam since its' development in the 1940's. However, in October 2011, the ACCES Committee was informed of significant changes to the GED® exam which raised concerns about the State's continued reliance

on this assessment. Updates on the GED® test were provided to the Board of Regents in April 2012, at a joint meeting of the P-12 and ACCES Committees, and at their ACCES Committee meeting in September 2012. A Request for Proposals (RFP) was subsequently issued for the development of a new exam which would maintain a viable pathway to an HSE diploma and transition the adult education system to career and college readiness standards. Additional updates were provided to the ACCES Committee at the following meetings: November 2012; February 2013; June 2013; and September 2013. In December 2013, the Board of Regents approved an amendment to Section 100.7 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education which permitted accepting passing scores for GED® subtests from 2002-2013 to substitute for corresponding subtests on the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC™) which was adopted as the new HSE exam in 2014.

II. 24 College Credits

The HSE diploma pathway - obtained via college credit earned - has been available in accordance with Commissioner's Regulation (CR) Section 100.7 since the 1960's. The last regulatory change to this program became effective in September 2004, when language was added to CR 100.7 to ensure that college credits were from an approved institution and followed the prescribed course and credit distribution.

III. National External Diploma Program

The authorization of the National External Diploma Program (NEDP) as a local HSE diploma was first adopted at the November 1984 Regents meeting when CR 100.8 was added to a new Part 100 enabling local Boards of Education, beginning September 1, 1985, to award a local HSE diploma based on an experimental program approved by the Commissioner. The regulations were amended in 2005, 2008, and annually from 2011-2015, to continue allowing school districts to issue these local diplomas. In May 2016, the Board of Regents approved an amendment to CR 100.7 adding NEDP as a third pathway to a State HSE diploma and effective September 1, 2016, discontinuing it as a local diploma and lowering the age of eligibility from 21 to 18 years.

IV. The Regents - HSE Exam Pathway

At their March 2018 meeting the Board of Regents approved regulatory changes to support a fourth pathway to an HSE diploma and effective on April 25, 2018, the Regents-HSE Exam Pathway was formally adopted. The fourth pathway provides the option to substitute passing scores from prior Regents exams, or any other exams approved by the Commissioner pursuant to CR Section 100.2(f) or (mm), for corresponding TASC™ subtests in accordance with CR 100.7. The subtests include: Mathematics; Science; Social Studies; Reading; and Writing. The Regents English Language Arts exam may be singularly substituted for the Reading and Writing TASC™ subtests. Applicants pursuing an HSE diploma using the fourth pathway must always take at least one TASC™ subtest, even if all content areas have otherwise been addressed and requirements met.

Background Information

Four Pathways to HSE Diplomas Granted in New York State

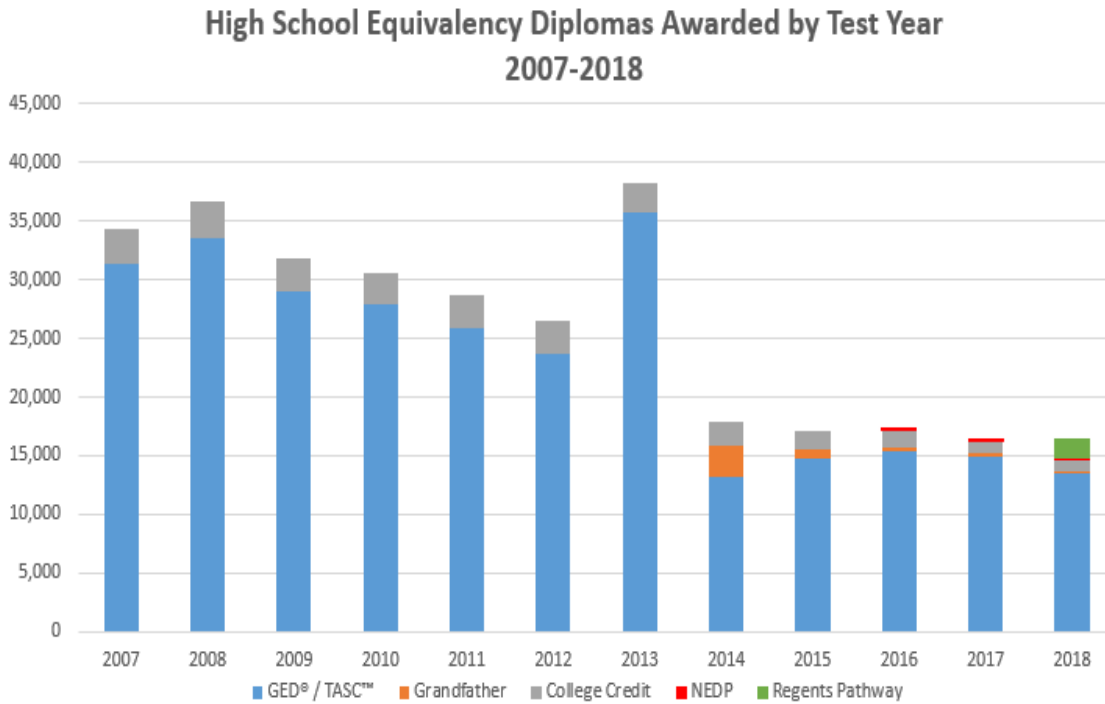
Taking and passing the TASC™ is the primary pathway for adults and out-of-school youth to obtain an HSE diploma. During 2018, over 17,000 full batteries of the TASC™ (all five subtests) were administered leading to approximately 12,500 HSE diplomas being awarded. This total includes the grandfathering of prior passing GED® subtest scores, which can be used in conjunction with TASC™ subtest scores. In addition, over 1,000 individuals earned their HSE diploma by successfully completing 24 college credits in the required content areas from accredited higher education institutions in the United States. Another 181 individuals received HSE diplomas by demonstrating mastery of the ten competency areas required for successful completion of the NEDP. The newest pathway was adopted by the Board of Regents in April 2018 and permits combining the scores from Regents exams, where a passing score was obtained, with a minimum of one passing TASC™ or GED® subtest. This newest pathway has already resulted in over 4,800 HSE diplomas being awarded.

The TASC™ is a secure, reliable and valid instrument that is used to verify that examinees have knowledge in core content areas equivalent to that of graduating high school seniors in the State. As noted, there are five subtests in the full TASC™ battery: Reading; Writing; Social Studies; Science; and Mathematics. To ensure that the content and skills measured by the subtests remain closely matched to high school curricula, they undergo regular review by Data Recognition Corporation (DRC). The full battery of subtests takes approximately nine hours to complete, including a direct writing assessment. The TASC™ is offered as a paper test or in a computer-based format and is available in English, Spanish, braille, large print and in audio formats. The TASC™ includes selected responses, gridded responses, constructed responses and an essay. Computer-based testing includes drag and drop, multiple selected responses, and other technology-enhanced items.

To further support the transition to the TASC™, in December 2013 the Board of Regents authorized a regulatory amendment allowing up to four valid GED® subtests to be used in conjunction with passing TASC™ scores to obtain an HSE diploma. This practice is referred to as “grandfathering.”

Figure 1 shows the number of diplomas awarded by year for each of the four pathways. The surge in the number of HSE exams administered in 2013 reflects the widespread public awareness of the upcoming discontinuation of the GED®. Further, while the number of TASC™ diplomas awarded has been consistent, the number of individuals receiving diplomas via the new Regents-HSE Exam Pathway has been steadily increasing since adoption by the Board of Regents in April 2018. With program changes underway, it is also anticipated that NEDP will grow in the coming years.

Figure 1. NYS HSE Diplomas Awarded from 2007-2018



Data as of 7/30/2019

The TASC™ is administered throughout the state at 244 public and private Test Centers, including addendum sites. The HSE website includes a TASC™ Test Center location finder for examinees to locate a testing site and apply to take the exam. A 2018 multi-year RFP reimburses 59 public Test Centers for TASC™ administration. Public sites which receive funding to administer the TASC™ must serve any and all examinees. Some of the funded sites incorporate NYC Department of Education sites. There are also approved Test Centers and addendum sites which are not reimbursed for test administration and are therefore not required to serve as public sites, although many do. Finally, there are private testing sites which only serve their own examinees, including incarcerated and residential settings. Table 1 provides a breakdown of TASC™ Test Centers by type and number of examinees served in 2018.

Table 1. Number of TASC™ Examinees in 2018 by Test Center Type

Test Center Type	Number of Centers	Examinees
BOCES	42	3,894
Community College	24	10,424
County Jail	52	814
Educational Opportunity Center - EOC	8	5,891
Job Corps	4	216
Library System	7	2,482
NYC Department of Education	7	8,132
NYCDOE East River Academy - Riker's Island	7	140
NYS Office of Mental Health	3	14
NYSDOCCS	50	3,775
NYSOCFS	4	24
Others	14	3,022
Residential / Rehabilitation Facility	6	223
School District	16	2,264
TOTAL	244	41,315

Data as of 7/30/2019

The duties and responsibilities for TASC™ administration are shared by Test Centers, DRC, and NYSED. A Three-Way Agreement of understanding and compliance must be signed by each partner. Individual testing information is directly transmitted from the Test Centers to DRC for scoring. Upon completion of scoring, DRC electronically delivers testing results to NYSED where records verification is conducted to ensure candidates for HSE diplomas have met all criteria. When confirmed, a diploma (or alternatively a failing transcript) is mailed to the examinee. Test results are also made available via DRC's online portal. Thus, while examinees can check the NYSED HSE status verification online report for pass/fail outcomes, TASC™ examinees who set up a DRC account through the self-registration system can check their actual scores through the DRC portal using the Universal Unique ID (UUID) that they are assigned.

The cost to the State for the complete battery of five subtests is \$52; or \$10.40 per subtest. The TASC™ is free to examinees as per Section 317 of Education Law which prohibits a fee for admission. Testing policies and protocols allow examinees to re-test up to three times each calendar year, but they must wait a minimum of 60 days between exams. While DRC distributes paper and computer-based readiness tests to preparation programs for a fee, examinees are neither required to participate in adult education preparation nor do they have to demonstrate test readiness prior to taking the TASC™. This open-ended access to the HSE exam contributes to low pass rates.

The NYSED HSE office offers a variety of services to examinees, Test Centers, and the public. The HSE website provides a comprehensive source for information on the four pathways in addition to needed forms and applications. In 2018, the HSE Office had

about 40,000 contacts, including: daily call center, approximately 30,000 calls; the HSE email box, 7,900 inquiries; and the customer service window, about 700 in-person clients.

TASC™ Computer-Based Testing

The TASC™ was the first online computer-based test (CBT) sponsored by NYSED. While the RFP to replace the GED® test had set a goal for steadily increasing CBT, a NYSED survey found that 86 percent of Test Centers lacked the technical expertise or needed infrastructure. Cost was also presented as a significant barrier. Further, while approximately half of all testing sites administer the TASC™ to incarcerated examinees, correctional facilities are only able to administer paper-based tests due to issues and policies related to computer access.

However, both NYSED and DRC have continued to promote the implementation of CBT through helpful tutorials, a toolkit, user testimonials on its advantages, and full technical support. The percentage of CBT administrations has risen from three percent in 2014 to 20 percent in 2018. There are currently 50 active CBT sites with additional Test Centers approved for CBT but not yet implementing this testing mode. Table 2 represents the number of CBT TASC™ examinees in 2018 by Region and shows that most CBT examinees are in New York City, with the Central/Southern Region conducting the next largest number of CBTs, followed by the Western Region and the North Country.

Table 2. Number of Computer-Based TASC™ Examinees in 2018 by Region

Region	Number of Examinees
Capital/North Country	533
Central/Southern Tier	801
Finger Lakes	235
Hudson Valley	364
Long Island	520
New York City	5,333
West	628
Total CBT Examinees:	8,414

Data as of 7/30/2019

DRC conducted a qualitative research study to better understand the slow implementation of CBT testing for the TASC™ in New York State. While cost and lack of infrastructure were cited as the most prevalent challenges to implementation, there was also a widely held perception that the paper test was preferable because it is easier to administer, no additional informational technology staff were needed and most examinees were uncomfortable taking a CBT. To the contrary, Test Centers which administer CBT have been pleased with the several advantages of this mode, including system reliability, administrative ease, fewer errors and faster score reporting.

In September 2016, DRC migrated to an online delivery system which enhanced the ease of test administration and improved the CBT experience. As part of the effort,

DRC developed a free Online Training Tool (OTT) to support the use of the CBT mode. The OTT includes brief practice tests in each of the five TASC™ subtest areas to assist examinees in understanding and using tools for different item types encountered in the online testing environment. Increased practice with these types of tools, as well as increased exposure to computers and digital literacy skills, are also critical components to being prepared for college and careers in the 21st Century.

TASC™ Examinees

The percentage of HSE examinees is nearly evenly distributed between genders. From 2014 to 2018, on average, 49.6 percent of TASC™ examinees were male and 50.4 percent were female. The average age of a male examinee is 27 years, while the average age of a female examinee is 29 years. Table 3 conveys race and ethnicity distributions (which are self-reported).

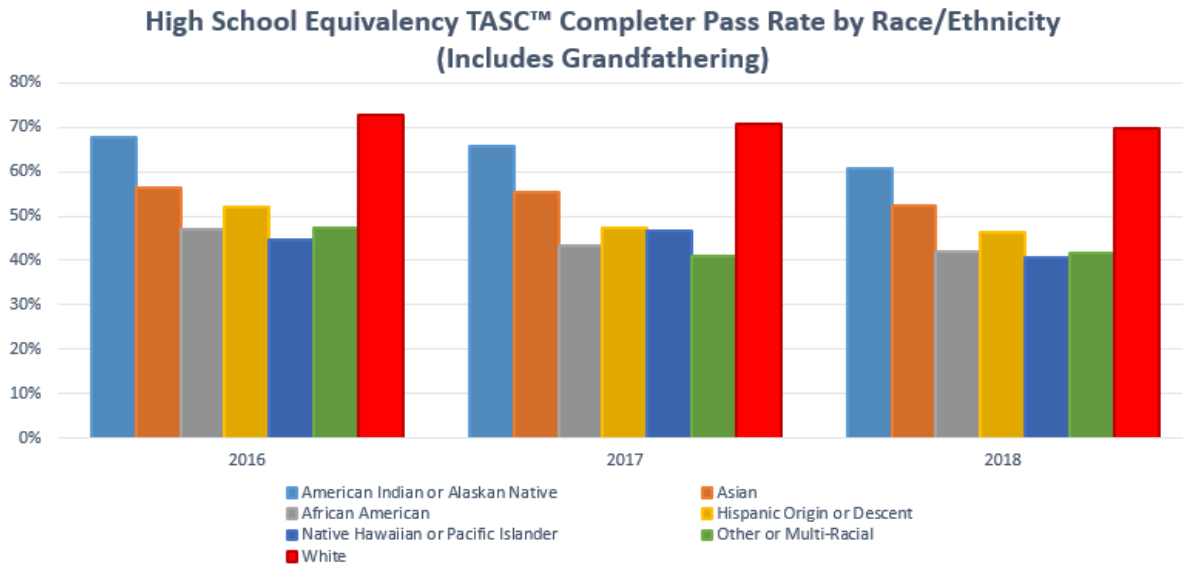
Table 3: Number of GED® / TASC™ Examinees by Race/Ethnicity 2011-2018

Year	American Indian or Alaskan Native	Asian	African American	Hispanic Origin or Descent	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Other or Multi-Racial	White
2011	0.9%	3.5%	34.4%	26.4%	0.4%	8.3%	26.1%
2012	0.9%	3.5%	34.9%	26.5%	0.5%	8.5%	25.1%
2013	0.9%	3.5%	36.6%	28.0%	0.5%	8.8%	21.7%
2014	1.1%	4.6%	35.1%	32.0%	1.2%	5.9%	20.1%
2015	1.1%	2.9%	22.3%	19.5%	0.8%	39.1%	14.3%
2016	1.7%	3.8%	29.3%	27.3%	0.8%	19.4%	17.8%
2017	2.1%	4.9%	31.3%	29.0%	0.8%	12.6%	19.3%
2018	2.3%	5.6%	33.8%	29.7%	0.7%	11.0%	16.8%

Data as of 7/30/2019

Additionally, analyses conducted in early 2018 indicated that there are large variances among the pass rates for different racial and ethnic groupings. These variances are displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2. HSE TASC™ Completer Pass Rate by Race/Ethnicity (Includes Grandfathering)

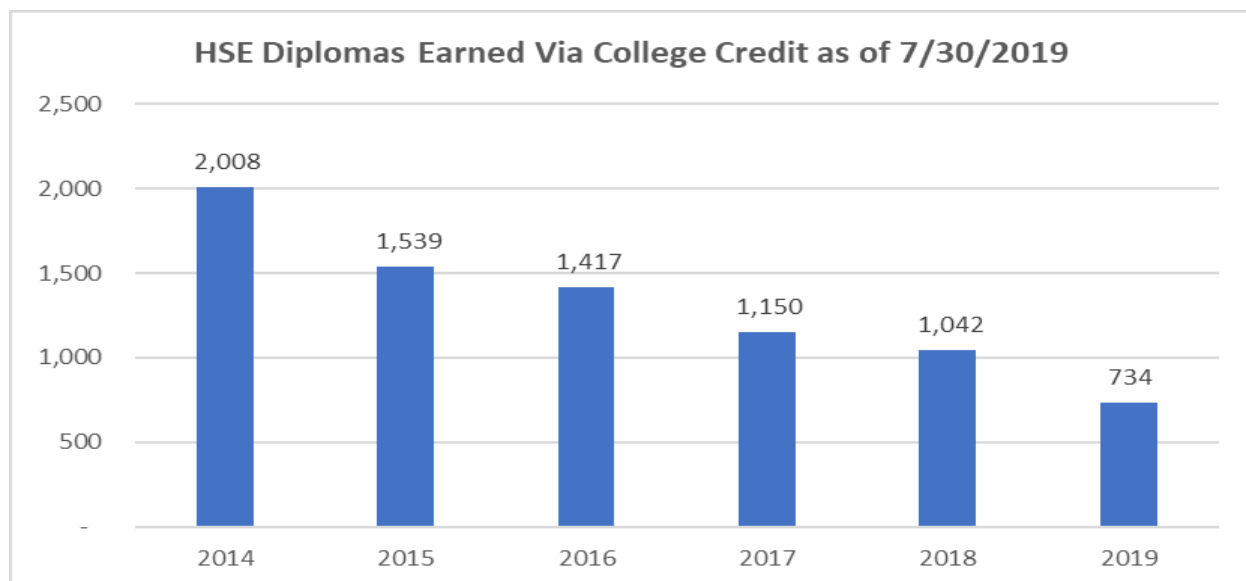


Data as of 7/30/2019

II. College Credit

The HSE diploma based on college credits, in accordance with CR 100.7, may be awarded to an individual who has completed 24 credits (or the equivalent) as a recognized candidate for a degree or a certificate at an approved institution within the United States. The college credits must be distributed among the following subject areas: English; Mathematics; Social Science; Natural Science; and Humanities. Credits in the applicant’s designated degree program are also required. The HSE Office evaluates each application individually using a clearly defined rubric which is available to the public. Applicants are typically non-traditional ability-to-benefit students, home schooled students, and/or students who have earned a high school diploma outside of the United States and many non-traditional students are assisted through this pathway. Figure 3 conveys the number of diplomas awarded from 2104 through July 2019.

Figure 3. HSE Diplomas Awarded Based on 24 College Credits Earned



Data as of 7/30/2019

III. National External Diploma Program

The third pathway to an HSE diploma was established as a statewide option in 2016 through the National External Diploma Program (NEDP), as described previously under the heading of Procedural History. Since becoming a State sponsored pathway to an HSE diploma, NEDP diplomas have been awarded, as follows: 34 in 2016; 174 in 2017; and 181 in 2018. The number of diplomas awarded represents a small but increasing number of candidates completing their HSE diploma via this pathway.

The NEDP was originally launched in Syracuse in the 1970's as a non-traditional approach to enabling participants to demonstrate proficiency in a competency-based program by completing a series of assignments and tasks that parallel job and life situations. As a non-traditional pathway, NEDP employs highly structured, criterion-referenced assessments whereby participants must demonstrate that they have achieved 100 percent mastery across all ten competency areas. NEDP is a flexible online program which allows a self-paced approach for participants to work with knowledgeable and helpful professional educators while completing assignments at home. Through a series of take-home projects and proctored In-Office checks, NEDP measures academic and life skills, including reading; writing; mathematics; oral communication; and critical thinking. As participants advance in the program, they are required to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in financial literacy, civic literacy, geography, health literacy, history, science, and workplace issues using problem solving techniques, gathering, analyzing, applying and presenting data. The Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) - the national organization administering NEDP - reports that while some

participants may complete the program in six months, the average completion time is about one year.

The 1199 Service Employees International Union (SIEU) enables their members to participate in NEDP and reports that this approach to assessing knowledge and competencies serves populations typically underserved in other high school diploma programs. English Language Learners also benefit from NEDP as they may be proficient in their native language but unable to master the highly specific content knowledge (such as U.S. History) needed to succeed on a Regents exam or the TASC™. Students with special needs may also benefit from NEDP as they can set their own pace and work toward demonstrating incremental progress over time rather than taking a high-stakes test.

In order to facilitate the expansion of NEDP across the State, NYSEDs contract with CASAS provides partial financial support for organizations wishing to expand current NEDP programs or organizations interested in launching a program. In addition to recruiting agencies across the state, NYSED has been working closely with CASAS to produce comprehensive resources to provide programs with guidance to facilitate program planning, sustainability, and management. The CASAS contract with NYSED is valid through 2020.

NYSED has also expanded support for adult education programs funded under the Employment Preparation Education (EPE) state aid program for schools and BOCES that provide NEDP, by generating aid in eight NEDP content areas and doubling the number of EPE contact hours that can be generated to tutor NEDP students.

IV. Regents - HSE Exam Pathway

As of April 25, 2018, NYSED provided an additional pathway to earn an HSE diploma by allowing eligible TASC™ examinees to substitute passing scores from prior Regents exams in Math, Science, or Social Studies for corresponding TASC™ subtests in accordance with CR 100.7. While the full battery of TASC™ subtests includes Reading, Writing, Math, Science, and Social Studies, the Regents English Language Arts Exam may be substituted for the Reading and Writing subtests.

An HSE diploma will be awarded to a candidate after all five subtests have been credited using any combination of accepted Regents exams, passing scores from TASC™ subtests, and/or passing scores from the GED® 2002 series subtests. The GED® 2002 series includes English Language GED® subtests taken from 2002-2013. Passing GED scores prior to the GED® 2002 series cannot be used in place of TASC™ subtests. GED® subtests taken in Spanish or French are accepted from 2004-2013. If an applicant is credited with all five subtests using a combination of the GED® 2002 series and Regents exam substitutions, the applicant still is required to take and pass at least one TASC™ subtest (of the applicants choosing) to earn an HSE diploma.

Additionally, candidates for the HSE diploma must continue to meet all eligibility requirements for age and provide proof of their identity and residency, as set forth by NYSED. The application to combine Regents passing scores with a GED® or TASC™ subtest is referred to as Attachment R, i.e. R for Regents. Tables 4 and 5 provide data on the Regents-HSE Exam Pathway since its adoption in April 2018.

Table 4. Total Number of Attachment R Applications Received and Number of Diplomas Awarded

Total R Applications	Total R Processed	Diplomas Awarded
11,560	9,754	4,855

Data as of 7/30/2019

Table 5. Number of Attachment R Applications Received and Processed Using 0-4 Regents Exam Credit, TASC™ Subtests and Diplomas Awarded

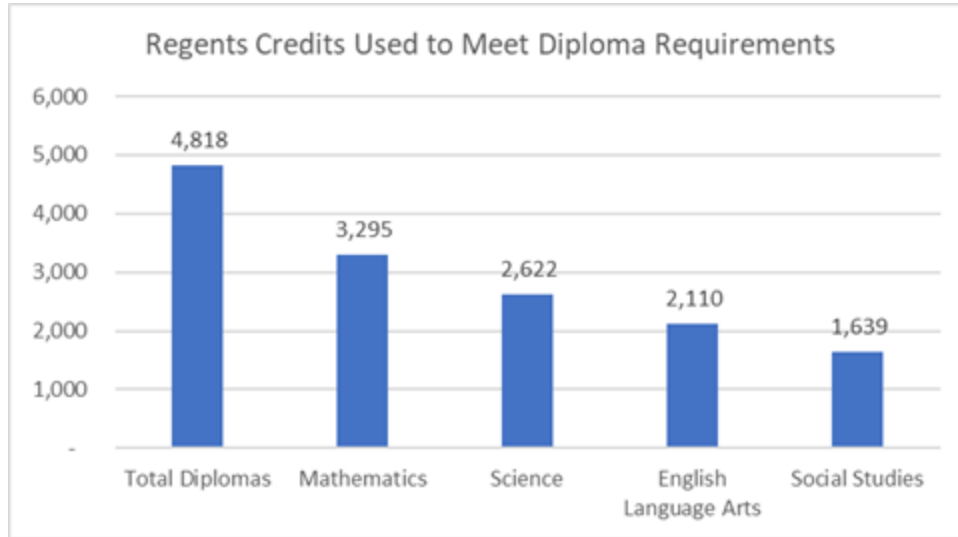
Total Regents Credits Received	Distinct Candidates Processed*	Candidates taking TASC Subtests	% Candidate TASC Tested	Diplomas Received	% Diplomas
0	160	89	56%	38	44%
1	2,508	1,312	52%	852	65%
2	2,294	1,361	59%	1,053	77%
3	2,402	1,547	64%	1,368	88%
4	2,231	1,569	70%	1,544	98%
TOTAL	9,595	5,878	61%	4,855	83%

*Candidates - who have submitted more than one Attachment R - are only counted once.

Data as of 7/30/2019

When one or more Regents exam credits were applied to examinees' records, 4,818 applicants were awarded diplomas through the fourth pathway. Figure 4 conveys the number of Regents exams applied toward a diploma, by subject area, and number of candidates earning an HSE diploma through the combination of Regents credit and TASC™ subtests.

Figure 4: Number of Diplomas Awarded Using At Least One Regents Credit



Finally, there are circumstances where examinees did not pass the subject area TASC™ subtest but were able to use prior passing Regents credit to obtain their HSE diploma. Figure 5 conveys the percentage of candidates awarded HSE diplomas by using Regents credit where they were not successful on TASC™ subtests.

Figure 5: Diplomas Awarded Using Regents Credit When Failing Corresponding TASC™ Subtest

