



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

SUBJECT: Update on the GED® Test

DATE: October 5, 2011

AUTHORIZATION(S):

SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

To update the Board on recent developments in the GED® test, identify concerns with regard to those changes, and discuss both short-term and long-term steps to address these matters.

Reasons for Consideration

Information and discussion so that the Board is aware of the significant changes to the test and can consider policies and strategies that will ensure the continued viability of administering the test in the short term and provide alternative pathways to the High School Equivalency diploma in the long term.

Proposed Handling

This item will come before the Regents Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES) committee at its October 2011 meeting.

Background

Passing the GED® test is the primary method to achieve the New York State High School Equivalency Diploma. For many adults who dropped out of school, or came to this country with an inadequate education, the GED® test has been an important pathway leading to a credential which leads to college and career opportunities. On average, 60% of test candidates are over 21 years old while 63% come from the metropolitan New York region (Long Island, NYC, Westchester and Rockland).

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, GED Testing Service (GEDTS) LLC, which will develop a new more rigorous GED® test. This new version of the GED® test would align with Common Core Standards and be computer based. The new test is scheduled to replace the current test in January of 2014.

This development is a radical departure from the present testing system. Currently, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) is the sole administrator of the GED® test in New York State. GED® testing is administered, managed and overseen by the Adult Education Programs and Policy Office within ACCES. We monitor all test centers, review and approve their annual contracts, facilitate the establishment and closure of all test centers, approve the appointments of all examiners, provide annual training for all GED® test Chief Examiners, investigate any testing or scoring irregularities, score the exams, and provide high school equivalency diplomas to those who pass the test. Under the new system, GED Testing Service (GEDTS) will be responsible for most of these administrative duties; the states or jurisdictions will continue to be responsible for the issuance of their own diplomas or certificates.

These changes raise the following challenges and concerns:

1. **Computer based testing** – Currently, the GED® test is a written test, completed with paper and pencil. Moving to a computer based test will be a challenge for some students who are not comfortable and familiar with the computer.
2. **Elimination of tests in French** - GEDTS has announced that the new version of the GED® test that will be in 2014 will no longer be provided in French. New York has a large population of Haitians as well as other French speakers from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana. Last year, 373 of test takers took the test in French.
3. **Test preparation** - Preparation for the new test will also be a challenge. Presently GED® preparatory (prep) programs are based on the content of the current test. GEDTS has set a target of Fall 2013 for the release of a readiness test which could be used by prep programs. This leaves little time for prep programs to prepare students for the new test that begins in 2014.
4. **Testing sites** – Currently, there are 268 test centers in New York State. That number includes non-public centers in state prisons, residential facilities and county jails, and 75 public sites. Yet there are only 19 Pearson test centers located in New York State at the present time (*see Attachments A & B*). According to GEDTS, testing centers that currently offer GED® tests will need to become authorized Pearson testing centers if they still want to provide the GED® test. GEDTS has indicated that the testing centers requirements are fairly minimal. They do not charge a licensing fee or annual fee— but require a one-time fee for security equipment (two cameras and electronic signature pad).

Centers would also need to provide an adequate number of computers for testing.

5. **Testing surge** – GEDTS plans on ending the current GED® test on December 31, 2013. Test scores for students who have passed some of the battery of tests (Language Arts-Reading, Language Arts-Writing, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies) will not carry over to 2014. Those students will have to pass the entire new test beginning in 2014. Consequently, we expect a substantial increase in test takers prior to 2014 as some applicants will want to pass the current test before the more rigorous test takes effect, and others who have passed some of the subtests will need to retest to complete the remainder and earn satisfactory scores to qualify for a New York State High School Equivalency diploma.

Data from the NYSED GED® Testing Office indicates that approximately 159,000 candidates have taken the GED® test since January 1, 2002 and still need to earn satisfactory scores to qualify for an equivalency diploma. Although this number includes candidates who may no longer need to test in New York State, (e.g. they have moved, they are deceased, they have gone back to high school, they have earned a college credit diploma or have finished their testing in other jurisdictions and have earned diplomas or certificates), there still remains a sizeable number of potential candidates who may need to retest between now and December 31, 2013.

It is expected that there will be a spike in demand for GED® testing seats similar to the one New York State experienced in 2001, before the current GED® test debuted in 2002. The numbers of test candidates in New York State increased by 11% between 2000 and 2001 (65,860 in 2000 to 72,970 in 2001).

New York State's 11% increase in testing does not accurately reflect the huge testing *demand* that existed in 2001; there were long waiting lists for test seats particularly in New York City. The *New York Daily News* reported in September 2001 that 6,000 people had applied in New York City when typically at that time of year the number of applications would have been around 2,500. Many testing centers in New York City reported that students on waiting lists waited between six and nine months before they were given admission notices to take the GED® Test.

Due to the huge number of New York City complaints, New York State requested and received assistance. ACE sent a cadre of GED® test examiners to conduct test sessions at York College in Queens. These weekend sessions, in which 250-300 candidates took the GED® test, helped but did little overall to reduce the huge demand for testing services in New York City.

6. **Cost** – Finally, a major concern is the cost of the test. New York is one of only four states that do not charge a fee to take the GED® test. Since Section 317 of the Education Law specifically prohibits any fee for admission to the GED® test, New York State bears the financial burden for GED® test administration. While they have not yet set the price for the new GED® test that will be instituted in

2014, GEDTS has priced the computer based test for the present GED® test at \$24/subtest or \$120 for the full battery of five GED® subtests (Language Arts-Reading, Language Arts-Writing, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies). This represents more than five times what NYSED currently pays ACE for the test and scoring materials. While it is true that under the new system, GEDTS will be scoring and administering the test (currently a function of NYSED), our expenses are far below the increased cost. To put this in perspective, each year approximately 50,000 New Yorkers take the GED® test. At \$120 per battery of tests, the State would have to appropriate \$6 million (50,000 at \$120 per battery of sub-tests) just to accommodate our candidates to take the test. Yet the budget for all of GED® test administration services for FY 11-12 is \$2.86 million.

To address these problems, we need to provide actions both short term and long term.

For the short term, we need to ensure that we are prepared to continue to administer the current GED® test and handle an expected increase in testers before the new test is instituted in 2014. To do this, we will conduct surveys to identify overall system capacity and identify best practices. NYSED has designed two surveys, one which will be sent to the public GED® testing centers (via Chief Examiners) and the other to program officials from Alternative High School Equivalency Preparation Programs (AHSEPP), High School Equivalency Preparation Programs (HSEPP) and Adult GED® Preparation programs. Survey results will inform us of current test and prep program capacity, programs' and centers' ability to expand and identify those areas of need and extensive waiting lists.

We will also identify strategies to inform New Yorkers about the new GED® test so we do not have a last minute surge in testers as 2014 approaches. If we can alert enough potential testers now, we can mitigate the spike and better manage the increase.

We are also continuing our strategies to enhance test preparation and increase students' test readiness so more students pass the GED® test.

As discussed in ACCES committee meetings in November 2010 and January 2011, New York State has the next to lowest GED® passing rate in the country. Overall, the State passing rate for 2010 was 58%. The rate for New York City was even lower at 48.1%. (See *Attachment C*)

The most significant factor in determining student success on the GED® Test is preparation. 59% of our GED® test takers sit for the test with no reported preparation or demonstrated test readiness. Their overall pass rate for 2010 was 49%. Students with reported test prep programs or test readiness determinations (such as proficient Official Practice Test [OPT] scores) comprise only 41% of the test takers, but have a pass rate of 71%. (See *Attachment D*) The share of test takers who are taking prep courses has increased from 33% in 2008 to 41% in 2010.

Recently, NYSED has instructed our state funded prep programs to only refer candidates to GED® test centers who have attained a score of 2,500 or better on their

OPT. Consequently, we have seen an increase in the pass rate but this has also resulted in a decrease in the number of test takers outside New York City. Also, since the State instituted a contract system with test sites in 2008, test sites now allocate a finite number of seats for exams, resulting in fewer seats available for walk-ins.

As a means to enhance GED® preparation capacity the Department is preparing a Request for Information (RFI) to solicit data from vendors of educational online learning tools that could be used to screen for readiness as well as provide online support for preparation. We are looking to supplement GED® prep classes with online programs that could be a more convenient and practical approach for many of our GED® applicants.

For the long term, we need to ensure that there are alternative pathways for those who may not see the GED® test as their best option for a high school equivalency diploma. Multiple pathways will not only liberate us from a dependency on the GED® test, but will better match our students' needs. With a diverse population that includes the over-age and under-credit in-school youth, those with limited English proficiency, the learning disabled, working adults, and the incarcerated, the GED® test may not be the best method for some of our residents to obtain a high school equivalency diploma.

A few months ago we asked the National Adult Education Professional Development Consortia (NAEPDC) to conduct an informal survey of state directors of adult education on alternative pathways. The results of that survey found that the current pathways beyond the GED test fall into four categories:

1. **Adult High School program** - Connecticut and Ohio offer an adult high school credit diploma program that is aligned with the state's high school graduation standards. Credits toward a local diploma must be obtained through a prescribed plan that requires a minimum of 20 credits in academic and elective areas. This results in a local high school diploma, not a state equivalency. We are requesting further information and details about the Connecticut program.
2. **College credit hour program** - Under this program, students who successfully complete and pass college courses can obtain their high school equivalency diploma. Pennsylvania and New Jersey require 30 semester hour credits while Wisconsin uses 24 credits, similar to New York.
3. **The National External Diploma Program (NEDP)** - NEDP is a national program utilized by a number of states which awards a local high school diploma to adults (21 or older) who can demonstrate high school skills and knowledge through their work and other experience. The program is a competency based, applied performance assessment system where participants must master 65 competencies. The program will be aligned with the Common Core standards in 2012.
4. **Open approval process** - Wisconsin has the option for programs to propose and evaluate a pathway for high school graduation that is approved by the state superintendent. The programs need to provide a description of courses, training, and counseling, professional staff qualifications, etc. The programs are approved as a one year pilot and then subject to annual review and renewal.

New York already uses two of these approaches - college credit program and NEDP. However, the NEDP program is currently based on a local diploma and will end on June 30, 2012.

Recommendations

Short term:

In anticipation of the expected spike in testing demand, SED should begin to disseminate information to the field in the following way(s):

- Put all pertinent information regarding the 2014 GED® test on the ACCES GED® website, perhaps in the “*What’s New*” section or highlighted in color.
- Send official memos/notification statewide to the District Superintendents notifying them of the new test in 2014 and the sunset policy regarding previously earned test scores.
- Disseminate information via the Regional Adult Education Network (RAEN) directors.
- Send official notification to all GED® testing centers and GED® preparation programs.
- Beginning in January 2012 (or whatever date that is decided), provide a notice to all who do not pass the current GED® test that they have until December 31, 2013 to retake and pass any portion of the GED® test that they failed. This notice will be inserted into the envelope with the candidate’s failing transcript and will incur minimal additional cost to NYSED.

Since the number of test candidates is expected to climb before the imposition of the new test and since New York State may not be able to meet the needs of all who wish to test before December 31, 2013, it is recommended that for those state funded centers that have a backlog, seating priority be given to:

- Those candidates who are officially referred (with Test Authorization Forms) from GED® preparation programs;
- Those candidates who have proof that they have taken and passed the Official Practice Test (OPT); and
- Those who have already passed some of the subtests.

Those test ready candidates should have preferred seating and be given the opportunity to take and pass the GED® test before the unprepared “walk-in” students. In addition to reducing the number of unprepared candidates, this will increase the overall pass rate in New York State.

Long term:

In order to ensure that the GED® test is accessible and available for New Yorkers beyond 2013, NYSED staff will work with GEDTS to address our issues and concerns, and make every effort to provide for as smooth a transition as possible.

Does the Board of Regents want us to identify and present multiple pathway options to the High School Equivalency Diploma so that we are not too reliant on one tool (the GED® test)? To inform this purpose, we continue our interaction with other

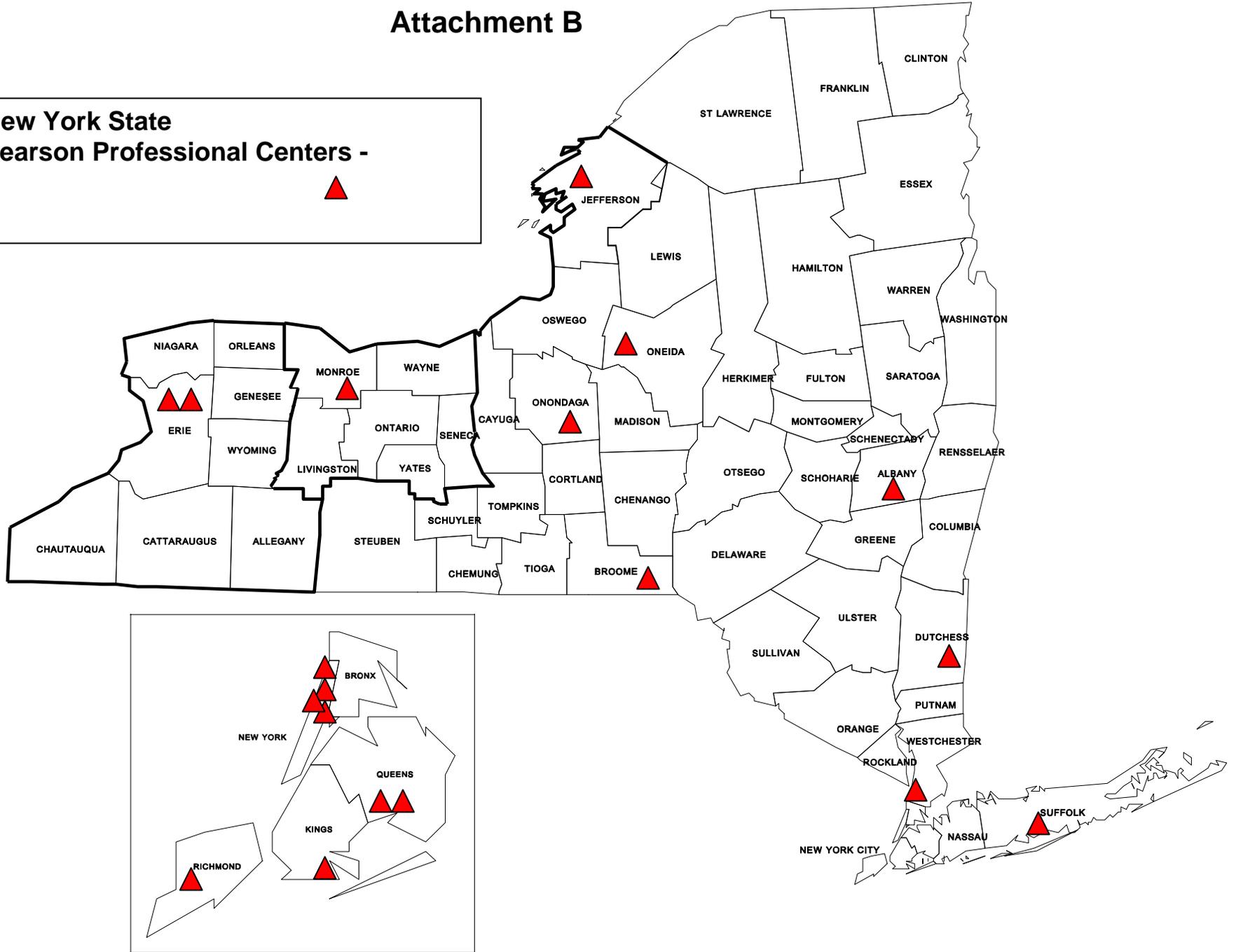
states and organizations like the NAEPDC to explore and share information about other options and programs.

More specifically, does the Board of Regents wish to consider expanding the National External Diploma Program (NEDP)? Currently, there are 18 NEDP programs in the state. A detailed chart is attached indicating four years (2006-10) of NEDP graduation rates. (*See Attachment E*) It should be noted that throughout these years of programming, agencies have been cautious in developing or expanding this non-traditional program due to the eventual end of the local diploma (currently extended to June 30, 2012). The developers of this national program are at present retooling their standards to align with the Common Core Standards. Successful completion of the NEDP program would become the third (along with the GED® exam and 24 hours of college credit) pathway for the Board of Regents to award a High School Equivalency diploma if authorized.

Attachments

Attachment B

New York State
Pearson Professional Centers -



Attachment C

GED Testing Volume and Pass Rates New York State, New York City and Rest of State 2002-2010

YEAR	NYS TESTERS	NYS PASS RATE	NYC TESTERS	NYC PASS RATE	ROS TESTERS	ROS PASS RATE
2002	43,427	53%	17,058	42%	26,369	60%
2003	50,289	56%	21,150	45%	29,139	64%
2004	54,190	56%	22,559	44%	31,161	66%
2005	53,272	58%	21,811	47%	31,461	66%
2006	52,299	55%	24,139	44%	27,980	64%
2007	54,019	59%	26,776	49%	27,243	68%
2008	58,330	58%	24,842	50%	33,488	65%
2009	55,786	53%	28,592	43%	27,914	64%
2010	48,645	58%	26,773	48%	21,872	71%

Attachment D

GED Testing Volume New York State Preparation Program Data 2002-2010

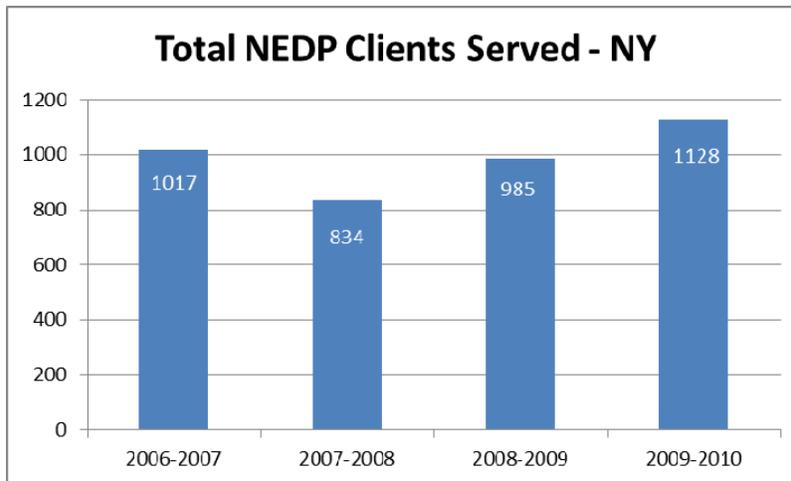
YEAR	PREP PROGRAM STUDENTS	PREP PASS RATE	NON-PREP STUDENTS	NON-PREP PASS RATE
2002	16,841	62%	26,586	46%
2003	20,202	66%	30,087	47%
2004	22,373	68%	31,817	46%
2005	22,019	70%	31,253	49%
2006	21,114	64%	31,185	46%
2007	20,242	67%	33,777	51%
2008	19,341	70%	38,989	51%
2009	19,503	66%	37,489	44%
2010	17,962	71%	30,953	49%

Attachment E

New York NEDP Statistical Data (2006 – 2010)

Over the past four years, New York has served approximately 3963 NEDP clients. (CASAS acquired the NEDP program in 2006. Therefore, only four years of data is available.)

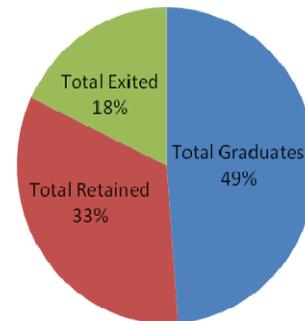
New York NEDP Data	Total	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Total Served	3963	1017	834	985	1128



NEDP has a very high overall retention rate. For 2009-2010, 82% of NEDP clients either graduated or were retained in the program, continuing work to earn a diploma.

2009-2010 New York Data	No of Clients
Total Graduates	550
Total Retained	376
Total Exited	202
Total Served	1128

2009 - 2010 New York NEDP Clients



Current NEDP Sites

New York currently has twenty active NEDP sites:

- 1199SEIU Training and Upgrading Fund
- Ebbets Field Community Dev. Center Adult Literacy Program
- GST - BOCES
- Herkimer County BOCES
- Ken-Ton Schools Continuing Education
- Literacy West
- Long Beach Public Schools Adult Learning Center
- Madison-Oneida BOCES Rome Access Site
- Madison-Oneida BOCES Utica Access Site
- Niagara Falls Community Education Center
- OCM BOCES Center for New Careers
- OCM BOCES Career Training Center
- Pathways to Success (Yonkers Public Schools)
- Questar III Access Center
- QUESTAR III - RCG BOCES
- St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES
- Syracuse City School District - Adult & Continuing Ed
- W.E.B. DuBois High School – ATTAIN
- Western Suffolk BOCES
- Wayne-Finger Lakes BOCES