



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

**FROM:** Kevin G. Smith

**SUBJECT:** Institutional Challenges to Preparing Adults for the new High School Equivalency (HSE) Exam

**DATE:** October 11, 2013

**AUTHORIZATION(S):**

*John B. Smith*  
**SUMMARY**

### **Issue for Discussion**

How can New York State's adult and alternative education systems prepare for higher Common Core State Standards (CCSS) rigor and new science and social studies content when many HSE teachers are part-time, primarily generalists (teaching all 5 subject matter areas), have students for a limited time each week and have HSE programs that are filled to capacity?

### **Panel Discussion**

To provide the Regents ACCES Committee with information on the challenges and opportunities facing adult education programs as they prepare their students for the new High School Equivalency exam which begins in January 2014.

### **Panel Members**

- Suri Duitch, PhD, University Dean for Continuing Education and Deputy to the Senior University Dean for Academic Affairs, CUNY
- Dan White, District Superintendent, Monroe 1 BOCES
- Timothy F. Lisante, PhD, Superintendent, Program for Young Adults, NYC Department of Education
- Bernard P. Pierorazio, Superintendent, Yonkers Public Schools
- Echo Shumaker-Pruitt, Interim Co-Executive Director/Director of Adult Education, Highbridge Community Life Center

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

Should the Board of Regents support increased resources for more services including High School Equivalency Preparation programs and practitioner technical assistance and staff development?

## **Proposed Handling**

This item will come before the Board of Regents ACCES Committee at its October 2013 meeting.

## **Procedural History**

In October 2011, the ACCES Committee was informed of developments to the GED® test which raised concerns regarding the State's reliance on the test as the primary pathway to a New York State High School Equivalency (HSE) Diploma. In February 2012, the Committee discussed alternative pathways to a HSE Diploma. An update was provided at a joint meeting of P-12 Education and ACCES Committees at the April 2012 meeting. At the September 2012 ACCES Committee meeting, the Board of Regents agreed to issue an RFP for a new HSE test, provide multiple assessments leading to a HSE diploma, and transition the Adult Education system to Common Core State Standards for Career and College readiness. Updates were provided at the November 2012, February 2013, June 2013 and September 2013 ACCES Committee meetings.

## **Background Information**

A new High School Equivalency exam called TASC (Test Assessing Secondary Completion) will replace the 2002 GED® test in New York State in 2014. This new test will phase in CCSS rigor for math and ELA and introduce social studies and science content each year over the three years of the contract. The implementation plan is to phase in an online computer based test, moving from exclusively a written test in 2013 to around 60% using an online computer based test in 2016.

TASC implementation challenges New York's adult and alternative education system in many ways:

1. At the September 2012 ACCES committee meeting, the Regents called for all adult and alternative education instruction to be aligned with CCSS for math and ELA by 2017. Consistent with this direction, the new TASC will require alternative and adult education teachers to be trained in the new Common Core content for math and ELA over three years. The adoption of Common Core Learning Standards represents a significant challenge to both teachers and learners. While a range of public resources has been leveraged to support the K-12 transition to Common Core, no such parallel effort has been made in the field of adult education. The gradual move to online computer based testing will require alternative and adult education providers to prepare teachers and students for online computer based testing, including digital literacy. By 2016, up to 60 percent of all test administrations

could be online computer based. The January 2013 technology survey of 196 funded adult education programs found that 71 percent (138) did not have the online connections or computer capacity to prepare students for the online TASC.

2. Programs will need to purchase instructional materials, calculators required for TASC math and science, computers and broadband access for online testing, and new paper and online readiness assessments. Programs with limited funding will struggle to make these critical purchases, especially as federal funds decline because of sequestration. Combined federal and state funding for adult education programs in New York State totals \$144.7 million, for example. On a per capita basis, New York spends \$1,252 per adult education student.
3. Achieving alignment with the Common Core will require on-going professional development. While there are positive examples of good work being accomplished, current funding cannot support the effort that is necessary. For example, a grant from the Booth Ferris Foundation and a commitment of CUNY resources has allowed the CUNY Common Core Initiative (CCI) to take a leading role in piloting comprehensive Common Core professional development for adult education teachers. This includes the development of new math and ELA curricula, intensive professional development seminars, reading mentors, website providing ongoing expert support for trained teachers, creation of teaching videos, and a demonstration class in HSE teaching at CUNY's new Community College. Implementing this or other initiatives to statewide results will require additional resources.
4. The number and diversity of teachers who will need training further complicates effective preparation. Funded adult education programs support 3,435 teachers and 1,563 unpaid volunteers in diverse settings: schools and BOCES (2,384); postsecondary institutions (292); libraries (112); community based organizations (571) and volunteer agencies (74 teachers in addition to unpaid volunteers). 966 are part-time teachers, 2,469 are full-time. An estimated 1,200 instructors teach HSE preparation programs and need immediate professional development around more rigorous content. Alternative education programs support an estimated 1,000 teachers, mostly full-time.
5. The diverse student population challenges the ease of introducing more complex content based upon knowledge expected of U.S. high school students. 70 percent of New York's adult education students are foreign-born, with the most diverse languages-spoken and cultural background of any system in the country. An estimated 68 percent are parents whose children will be preparing for Common Core instruction. (Data is not available for alternative education programs.) Of the 51,949 students who are enrolled in funded adult basic literacy programs, 26,094 students are at instructional levels equivalent to sixth grade or above; 7,011 are at the ninth grade level or above who will require specific TASC test preparation.

In 2012, 32 percent of all GED® test takers (15,800 students) were under the age of 21; 13 percent (6,494 students) were under 19 years old.<sup>1</sup> 1,571 students were referred to the GED® test from alternative education programs in Rikers Island and county jails. In 2012, only one of every three GED® test takers was referred by a preparation program; close to 70 percent were walk-ins. About half (49%) of the 15,800 16-20 year olds who tested were referred from preparation programs (7,764). In 2012-13, only 5,039 of the 49,518 test takers were formally referred to GED® testing from funded adult education programs.

6. Current HSE preparation programs serve only a fraction of need. Readiness instruction and opportunity to learn is limited as many HSE preparation programs are at capacity. There are approximately 2.8 million New Yorkers, age 16 and older who are out-of-school and without a high school diploma or the equivalent. Yet the number of these New Yorkers who are enrolled in NYSED-funded adult education programs was just 115,699 in FY12. An additional 18,500 students are projected to be served by alternative high school equivalency preparation programs. An October 2013 capacity survey of adult education programs found that a third of the 65 adult education programs that responded had added classes to support greater HSE instructional demands. All 65 had some form of waiting lists, with 19 having waiting lists of 10 students. Seven had waiting lists of more than 50 students with 12 reporting that it would take over 2 months for adults with higher level literacy skills to enroll in a HSE preparation program.

### **Recommendation**

The Board of Regents should support a request for additional state and federal resources needed to assure that greater numbers of students in alternative and adult education programs receive the instruction they need and have the opportunity to learn required to demonstrate college and career readiness by passing the Test Assessment of Secondary Completion (TASC) and earning the Regents' High School Equivalency diploma.

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<sup>1</sup> Anyone who has lived in New York State for at least one month prior to their scheduled exam date and is at least 19 years old will be able to take the exam. Applicants may be between 16 and 18 years old and take the exam under certain circumstances: participate in an alternative high school program; member of a high school class that has graduated; enlisted in the armed services; or, resident in a correctional or other institutional program.