



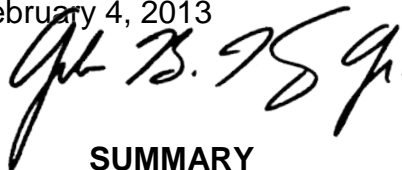
TO: Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES)
Committee

FROM: Kevin G. Smith 

SUBJECT: Update on High School Equivalency Request for Proposal
(RFP)

DATE: February 4, 2013

AUTHORIZATION(S):


SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

To provide the Committee with an update on our progress to assure that a viable pathway to the State High School Equivalency diploma remains available on January 2, 2014 when the new, computer based GED[®] test is implemented. This item will report on the status of the Request for Proposal (RFP) process, statutory and budgetary issues and efforts to create multiple alternative pathways.

Reason for Consideration

Currently, 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 beginning in January 2014, as well as the increased cost of the test that was announced by GEDTS (the company that owns and administers the GED[®] test), the Board of Regents decided at the September 2012 meeting that the State should issue a competitive RFP in order to meet state procurement standards and identify an appropriately rigorous assessment for a High School Equivalency (HSE) Diploma at the most reasonable price.

Proposed Handling

This item will come before the Board of Regents Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES) Committee at its February 2013 meeting.

Procedural History

In October 2011, the ACCES Committee was informed of changes to the GED® test which raise 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 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 an RFP for a new HSE test, provide multiple pathways to a HSE diploma, and transition the Adult Education system to Common Core, and College and Career Readiness. An update was provided at the November 2012 ACCES Committee meeting.

Background Information

The Request for Proposal (RFP):

In March 2012, SED issued a Request for Information (RFI) to identify assessments that would lead to a High School Equivalency Diploma. The assessments would be aligned to the present GED® test and evolve to raise college and career readiness over time. Potential assessments were submitted by three nationally established test vendors including GEDTS. While two of the test vendors indicated their assessments could be in either paper or computer based format, GEDTS indicated that their test would only be computer based. (Subsequent to the RFI, GEDTS announced that they would provide an exception to Computer Based Test and provide paper based tests for correctional facilities).

In order to accommodate full participation based on this information, SED issued two RFPs for the period beginning April 1, 2013 and ending December 31, 2016. One RFP requires the vendor to provide a test that is 90% Computer Based Test (CBT) and 10% paper based and would be available by January 2, 2014. The other RFP requires the vendor to provide a test that is primarily paper based and phases in CBT over the three years of the contract (20% CBT in 2014, 40% in 2015, and 60% in 2016).

In both RFPs, the vendor would be responsible for the development, printing, scoring of the test and transfer of test scores to SED. The test will need to be similar to the present GED® test in that the test should include sections on English Language Arts (ELA) reading and writing, mathematics, science and social studies. The test must include one essay and the length of the test should be comparable to the current GED® test. The vendor would also be responsible for secure shipping and downloading of test materials to the existing 269 SED approved testing centers.

The RFPs were issued on November 28, 2012. A bidders' conference was held on December 7, 2012. The deadline for submitting applications was January 11, 2013. Two vendors, CTB/McGraw Hill, LLC, and Educational Testing Services (ETS) submitted bids to both RFPs. GEDTS wrote a letter to SED stating that they would not be applying for the RFP.

An expert panel of three adult education experts and three psychometricians are reviewing and scoring the bids.

In order to determine which option the State should choose, SED is conducting a survey of all test centers and State funded High School Equivalency Preparation programs to ascertain the capability of the test centers to offer a CBT and prep programs to prepare students to take a CBT. The results of the survey are due February 4, 2013.

Transition to the Future:

As part of our overall transition plan, SED has also been active in alerting the public of the changes to the GED® test and notifying those students who have passed parts but not the entire GED® test that they have until December 31, 2013 to finish taking the test or they will have to retake the entire new test. Since January 2012, SED has been inserting notices to students who fail the GED® test informing them of the December 2013 deadline. In October 2012, SED, the NYC Council, the NYC Mayor's office, CUNY and the Literacy Assistance Center sent out a letter to over 4,800 NYC residents who passed at least three of the five GED® subtests in 2010 or 2011. In November 2012, a similar letter was mailed by SED to 2,700 "near passers" in the rest of the State. Also, SED staff is working with the Fund for Public Advocacy, New York City officials and the Literacy Assistance Center on a citywide campaign directed at getting 17-24 year old disconnected youth to finish the GED® test before 2014.

In addition, SED staff has been coordinating with P-12 staff to include team leaders and practitioners in Network Training Institutes (NTI) to learn Common Core curricula and instruction methods. The seven Regional Adult Education Network (RAEN) offices have been engaged in this process and will be tasked with rolling out technical assistance and training to the system in support of the transition. Out-of-school youth and adult education practitioners are being directed to the EngageNY.org website to learn more about Common Core skill development and instruction.

In order to create multiple pathways to the High School Equivalency Diploma, an expert panel will be created to review test instruments other than the one selected through the RFP process which will be state subsidized. Test vendors will be asked to submit their instrument for review and recommendation to the Board of Regents. The Department will ask the Board of Regents to approve, based upon the recommendation of the expert panel, the assessment instruments that meet the standards which lead successful candidates to the State High School Equivalency diploma. Revisions to Commissioner's Regulation 100.7 will be needed to effectuate this policy.

Budgetary and Statutory Issues:

The announcement by GEDTS that the new GED® test, beginning in January 2014, will cost each candidate \$120 effectively doubles the cost that New York State currently pays to administer the GED® test. SED's plan to encourage other test vendors to compete for providing this assessment allows the State potentially to secure a more reasonable cost for an appropriately rigorous High School Equivalency exam that meets our State's needs and capabilities.

The appropriation bill in the 2013-2014 Executive Budget properly refers to the “high school equivalency diploma exam” and no longer refers to the “general educational development tests”. However, while the 2013-2014 Executive Budget contains level funding to support SED's contract to administer the GED through the end of the calendar year, and while level funding should be sufficient to administer the final year of the GED test assuming that similar number of tests are administered as previous years, additional funding will be necessary to provide access to and implement a new High School Equivalency test that would take effect on January 2, 2014. Additional funds will be necessary for: expertise to work with the vendor to assure that the test is a sound measurement instrument; ensuring all test questions are reviewed and approved; executing a plan to roll out and implement the test at SED approved test centers; contract administration; and the creation of a new database.

The results of the RFP and the recommended winning bid will be available soon. Once that figure is known, SED will need to inform the executive and legislature that in order to continue to provide the usual volume of free High School Equivalency (HSE) tests to the public beyond January 2014, additional funds will need to be appropriated. If additional funds are not provided, then either the State will need to reduce the number of tests available to the public, (most likely by more than one-half) or the Legislature will have to repeal Section 317 of the Education Law which prohibits the charging of a fee for “admission to the general education development exam”, and students will be charged to take the test.

In any case, the Legislature may need to amend Section 317. The Regents plan for the High School Equivalency Diploma envisions multiple pathways and multiple assessments for the public to attain this diploma. If the Regents authorize assessments other than the state subsidized HSE as pathways to a High School Equivalency Diploma (as recommended by the expert panel mentioned above) and allow students to choose and pay for such assessments, then Section 317 may need to be repealed or amended.

Next Steps:

- Assess the full cost of the contract administration and test development to inform the 2013-2014 budget process.
- Continue to offer the current, fully state subsidized GED[®] test through January, 2014.
- Make an award to the winning applicant based upon the full knowledge of our ability to support the proposal.
- Enter in to an April 1, 2013 contract with the winning vendor and commence development of the new test to be ready for full implementation by January 2, 2014.