



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

FROM: Kevin G. Smith *Kevin G. Smith*

SUBJECT: Update on the new High School Equivalency Test

DATE: June 10, 2013

AUTHORIZATION(S):

J. B. G. G.
SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

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 a new High School Equivalency (HSE) test is implemented. This item will report on the status of the development of the new test, statutory and budgetary issues related to the test, activities in other states, actions to close out GED® testing, transition to Common Core State Standards, and efforts to create multiple pathways.

Reason(s) 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 June 2013 meeting.

Procedural History

In October 2011, the ACCES Committee was informed of developments to the GED® test which raise concerns regarding the State's reliance on that 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 Career/College readiness. Updates were provided at the November 2012 and February 2013 ACCES Committee meetings.

Background Information

The New HSE Test (TASC)

At the September 2012 ACCES Committee meeting, the Board of Regents charged the Department with issuing a RFP for a new HSE test. The RFP required that the test be aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) over the next three years (2014-2016). On November 29, 2012, SED issued two RFP's. RFP#13-019 allowed for a test that is 90% computer based and 10% paper based. RFP #13-010 allowed for a phased-in implementation of a computer based test over the three year period.

An expert panel of three psychometricians and three experts in higher education and adult education scored the RFPs. On March 7, 2013, Commissioner King announced that the winning bidder was CTB/McGraw Hill with a new test called Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC). The cost of the test will be \$52 per test administered in 2014, \$54 in 2015, and \$56 in 2016.

A survey conducted by SED in January and February of 2013 of the State's GED® test centers and State funded High School Equivalency Preparation programs demonstrated that there is insufficient capacity to deliver the test primarily on computer by January 2014. Consequently, SED opted for RFP #13-010 which provides a phased-in use of computer based tests. In the first year (2014), the vendor will provide up to 20% of the tests on computer. In the second year (2015) the vendor will provide up to 40% of tests on computer, and in the third year (2016), the vendor will provide up to 60% of the tests on computer. The actual number of tests available on computer will be solely determined by NYSED based upon surveys, a comprehensive readiness assessment, and the capability of the test centers to provide Computer Based test administrations. Test centers may offer only paper based tests, only computer based tests, or offer both but any candidate will be offered the test in the format they require.

CTB/McGraw Hill is responsible for the development, printing, scoring and transfer of TASC test scores to SED. They will also be responsible for secure shipping and downloading of test materials to the existing 269 SED approved testing centers.

TASC is similar to the present GED® test. The test will be composed of five subtest sections: English Language Arts Reading, English Language Arts Writing, Mathematics,

Science and Social Studies. In 2014, the test will use multiple choice items in Reading, Science, and Social Studies, complemented by gridded response items in Math, and an essay in Writing. Constructed-response and technology enhanced items will be added in 2015 and 2016. TASC will be available in English and Spanish. Braille, large print and audio versions for the visually impaired will also be available.

SED staff are meeting regularly with CTB/McGraw Hill on the development of the test. Meetings have focused on accommodations, business practices, error corrections, communications, etc. Field testing of TASC began in May and will continue until July.

Budgetary /Statutory Issues

The 2013-2014 State Budget provided SED with an additional \$1.5 million for services and expenses related to the new High School Equivalency exam. The funding will be needed to provide staff to implement the new test, develop a new data system for the new test, and train the adult education community to Common Core State Standards.

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 test”. However, Section 317 of the Education Law still refers to the “General Education Development exam”. That law prohibits any fee for admission to the test. Yet 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 plan to authorize assessments other than the state subsidized HSE as pathways to a High School Equivalency Diploma and allow students to choose and pay for such assessments, then Section 317 may need to be repealed or amended.

Other States’ Activities

According to a May 10 survey of states conducted by the HSE Options workgroup which New York and Massachusetts co-chair, four states (New York, New Hampshire, Tennessee, and Montana) have completed a competitive procurement and have selected tests other than the GED® test as their state's 2014 assessment leading to a high school equivalency credential. The last three selected ETS, which has lowered their price to match CTB McGraw-Hill's test administration cost.

Twelve states are in the process of issuing a competitive procurement. This includes California which has removed the reference to GED® in state administrative code and will be seeking a written and computer-based assessment, and Massachusetts which is in the process of identifying whether to issue a Request for Information or a Request for Qualifications.

Eight states are exploring the possible need to competitively identify an alternative assessment but will be initially going with GED® in 2014.

Seventeen states are committed to GED® for 2014.

Membership in the national HSE Options workgroup has grown to 42 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Department of Labor representatives from Job Corps.

Close-out of GED® test

As part of our overall transition plan, SED has also been active in alerting the public to 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, a letter was sent out 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 Department of Education 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. As of June 1, the campaign has taken over 1,200 calls and placed over 200 individuals in prep programs.

As we expected, there has been a surge in the number of people taking the GED® test. The past eight months has seen a **12.1% increase** in GED® test administrations from the previous year.

Transition to Common Core

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 website to learn more about Common Core skill development and instruction. A NYS Common Core Workgroup has been formed to develop a multi year action plan to roll out Common Core standards to the Adult Education community. A training workshop on the Tri-State Rubric was conducted by Regents fellows to the Workgroup on May 31, 2013.

Creating Multiple Pathways

In order to create multiple pathways to the High School Equivalency Diploma, an expert panel would be created to review test instruments other than TASC which will be state subsidized. Test vendors will be asked to submit their instrument for review and recommendation to the Board of Regents. The Board of Regents will approve, based upon the recommendation of the expert panel, the assessment instrument that meets 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. We hope to start this process in the fall. Also, as stated earlier, Section 317 of the Education Law may need to be amended or repealed.