

GED Powers “Second Chance”

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Emphasizing the message that the GED offers “a powerful second chance,” Sylvia E. Robinson, assistant vice president and executive director of the General Educational Development Testing Service (GEDTS), and Bob MacGillivray, deputy executive director, presented a update of its history and current profile at a recent meeting of the National Coalition for Literacy, of which NAASLN is a member.

Although the first GED tests were developed in 1942 by the American Council on Education (ACE) to help returning World War II veterans finish their studies and re-enter civilian life, GEDTS is still an ACE program whose primary mission to provide a reliable vehicle through which adults can certify that they possess the major and lasting outcomes of a traditional high school education.

Since its inception, this “powerful second chance,” has recognized 16,810,708 graduates. In 2007 alone, 728,930 persons took the test and 451,759 passed. It is now recognized throughout North America, as a bridge to education and employment. According to the 2007 College Board Annual Survey of Colleges 98 percent of colleges and universities that require a high school diploma accept the GED credential. Other studies indicate that 96 percent of companies accept applicants with a GED credential for jobs requiring a high school diploma.

GEDTS reports that about one in 20 first-year college students is a GED graduate. GED graduates are successful doctors, public servants, office workers, mechanics, technicians, college professors, military leaders, business people, writers, and artists.

The target market for potential test-takers is expanding, although the current rate of participation in GED testing has declined since 2001 peak.

According to the 2003 the National Assessments of Adult Literacy (NAAL) and 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) (2007), levels of English literacy are comparable for adults with a GED/equivalency credential and those with a high school diploma; English literacy levels of adults with a GED/equivalency credential have been consistent across time; and adults with a GED/equivalency credential show equivalent levels of English literacy across race/ethnicity, age, language spoken before starting school, English as a second language status, immigration status, and employment status.

Research conducted at GEDTS of examinee and high school senior performance on the GED tests in 2007 resulted in a major finding: Candidates who passed the GED tests met and, in many test areas, exceeded performance levels of the lower 40 percent of graduating high school seniors.

Perhaps the area of greatest interest currently lies in the development of computer-based testing (CBT). It offers significant benefits, primarily that it offers opportunity to increase access via additional testing times, promises to be a simpler and more efficient process, and mitigates or eliminates some concerns about security and human error. While seen as inevitable by most respondents to a recent survey, however, GEDTS cites the cost and availability of computers, computer proficiency, technical support as significant obstacles. For now, most jurisdictional administrators and chief examiners have expressed overall satisfaction with the current model and agree that the existing paper-based testing (PBT) model is effective.

The next step is to issue a request for proposals for a business plan to evaluate costs related to development and delivery of GED Tests by CBT only, by combination CBT and PBT, by PBT only; implications of CBT test delivery by a third-party vendor, in addition to current test delivery paradigm; and the ADA implications of CBT test delivery.

Also of great interest is the 2012 Series GED Tests. The process for transition began in 2006 with content specification meetings, item-writing workshops, streamlining of test-item banks, and item tryouts. Test specifications must be current to ensure that the tests measure high school content.

Content changes in language arts—writing include more “organization” items, fewer “conventions” items, a new essay scoring guide, and possible persuasive essay topics. Language arts—reading will feature more informational than literary excerpts, testing vocabulary in context, and evaluating items for all excerpts.

Content changes in mathematics include content distribution closely aligned to 2009 NAEP Mathematics Assessment for Grade 12 and the use of a calculator on the entire test. Social studies will increase emphasis on U.S. history and global studies. Science will see an increased number of life science items and inquiry-based questions.

GEDTS has issued preliminary results of current research on long-term benefits of GED credentials on economic and non-economic outcomes for GED recipients. Economic outcomes (after regression analyses to control demographic variables, age, ethnicity, gender, etc.) for adults without postsecondary education indicate that:

- Adults with GED credential earn higher wages than adults w/o GED credential or high school diploma.
- Adults with GED credential earn about the same wages as adults with high school diploma.
- Adults with GED credential have higher personal income than adults without GED credential or high school diploma.
- Adults with GED credential have less personal income than do adults with

high school diploma.

Among adults with postsecondary education:

- GED credential holders earn about the same wages as high school graduates.
- GED credential holders have less personal income than high school graduates.

Non-economic outcomes (after regression analyses to control demographic variables, age, ethnicity, gender, etc) indicate that:

- Adults with GED credentials show a higher level of political and social participation than adult with less than high school diploma, but lag behind adults with high school diploma.
- Adults with GED credentials have a better family literacy environment than do adults with less than a high school diploma and comparable environment with high school graduates.
- Adults with GED credentials reported “in excellent or good” health more than adults with less than high school diploma, but less than adults with a high school diploma.