

# MINNESOTA'S PLACE IN A NEW ERA OF HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY OPTIONS

**REPORT**  
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LITERACY ACTION NETWORK

700 Raymond Ave. Ste. 180  
St. Paul, MN 55114  
Website: [www.literacyactionnetwork.org](http://www.literacyactionnetwork.org)  
E-mail: [info@literacyactionnetwork.org](mailto:info@literacyactionnetwork.org)

## ON THE FRONT LINES OF CHANGE

*LAN takes the lead to assess new diploma options*

With new high school equivalency options on the horizon, Literacy Action Network (LAN) took initiative to get feedback and input from experts in the field.

For more than a year, LAN has reached out to members of the Adult Basic Education (ABE) profession through a variety of methods including special meetings, surveys and roundtable discussions.

The input secured from this outreach provides a helpful glimpse into the complexities of adult high school equivalency credentials, and it offers valuable advice for decision makers.

**LITERACY  
ACTION  
NETWORK** ADVOCATING FOR MINNESOTA  
ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

### OUTREACH TIMETABLE OF INPUT

December, 2013  
LAN meeting & discussion  
with vendors

March, 2014  
Survey to LAN members

June, 2014  
Roundtable discussions at  
Spring Regional meetings

August, 2014  
Input at LAN Summer  
Institute Conference

*Literacy Action Network (LAN) is a statewide organization of members whose goal is to strengthen, improve and expand adult literacy services and to support Minnesota's Adult Basic Education (ABE) professionals. Its membership includes ABE professionals from across the state, and it is the only organization of its kind in Minnesota.*

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*Although you commonly hear people talk about “getting a GED,” the GED test is not a diploma. It is simply a way for students to prove they have the skills and knowledge needed to earn a high school equivalency diploma.*

## HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY TESTING

*Moving lives forward one test at a time*

For decades, American educators have been giving adults a second chance in education by allowing them to achieve their high school equivalency diploma through successful completion of a standardized test.

For almost all of the past 70 years, that test has been exclusively the GED test.

The GED test has been a fixture of American education for more than 70 years. It began as a way for returning World War II veterans to acquire a high school diploma, but it quickly expanded beyond military service members.

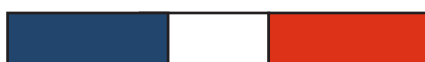
Today more than 18 million people have passed the GED test.

Historically, the test has addressed reading, science, social studies and language arts,

including writing. The American Council on Education (ACE) guided development and implementation throughout most of the GED test’s existence.

Until very recently, the GED was the only test in the country that was approved as a credential to earn a high school diploma. No other testing organization offered anything like it, and the GED

became firmly established as the standard route to a high school equivalency diploma.



THE ORIGINAL GED TEST  
BEGAN AS A WAY FOR  
RETURNING  
WORLD WAR II VETERANS TO  
EARN A HIGH SCHOOL  
DIPLOMA.

### *The next generation of GED*

In 2012, ACE formed a public-private partnership with PearsonVUE, the largest commercial testing and educational publishing company in the world, and created the current GED Testing Service. The intent of the partnership was to produce a completely revamped test that met the expectations of potential employers and higher education institutions.

The new GED test was released at the beginning of 2014 and, for the first time in history, is only available as a computer-based test. The new test also offers two passing levels: the standard pass level, valid for a credential for a high school equivalency diploma; and an honors level, which demonstrates increased academic skill and readiness for higher education.

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## ADULT BASIC EDUCATION TODAY

*Giving adults a second chance at a new life*

Adult Basic Education (ABE) serves the needs of Minnesota residents ages 17 and older who are not currently enrolled in a secondary education program. One of the main goals of ABE professionals is to help adults master skill areas such as mathematics and English as a second language (ESL).

In addition, thousands of adults enrolled in ABE programs achieve a high school equivalency diploma each year. In fact, 14 percent of all high

school level diplomas in Minnesota in 2013 were issued to students in ABE programs who took a GED test or completed a local adult diploma program.

ABE programs are administered by 44 ABE consortia at hundreds of sites throughout Minnesota, including public schools, workforce centers, community/technical colleges, prisons/jails, libraries, learning centers, tribal centers and non-profit organizations.

*The term GED® is a registered trademark that stands for General Educational Development Tests.*

## THE FUTURE OF HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY TESTING

*How can we meet the needs of adults now and in years to come?*

For seventy years, the GED test was the only test available for adults to show they had the academic skills equivalent to a high school graduate.

In fact, the GED test was so universal, that it has been written into numerous Minnesota Statutes and Rules, although state law stops short of giving it an

official designation as the Minnesota's only test-based high school credential.

Now, for the first time ever, two other test options have become available: The HiSET test and the TASC test.

## TODAY'S TEST OPTIONS

### New GED

The 2014 version of the GED is produced by the newly formed GED/Pearson VUE partnership. Pearson VUE is a longstanding producer of employment and certification tests.

### HiSET

The HiSET test is created by Educational Testing Service, known for the SAT, GRE and Praxis tests (for teacher licensing).

### TASC

The TASC test is produced by CTB/McGraw Hill, the company that produces the TABE (Tests of Adult Basic Education) assessment tests.

## WHAT SHOULD TESTING ACHIEVE?

In order to adequately evaluate the benefits of one test over another, it's helpful to understand the reasons that adults might seek to take a high school equivalency test.

According to GED statistics, candidates give several reasons for taking the test. The top two, not surprisingly, are to secure employment (or better employment), and to pursue higher education. (Source: [2013 Annual Statistical Report on the GED Test](#))

In 2013, 64 percent of test

candidates indicated they were planning further study. In fact, the GED organization reports that one-third of adults who pass the GED test go on to graduate from a post-secondary program. (Source: [Journeys Through College. Postsecondary Transitions and Outcomes of GED Test Passers](#))

Clearly, any test that is used in Minnesota must allow students to prove their employment skills as well as their readiness for post-secondary education.

**56%**  
take the test  
for employment reasons

**64%**  
take the test  
to further their education

*(test takers could give more than one reason for taking the test)*

*This spring, ABE professionals from around the state gave the highest overall ranking to the HiSET test, followed by the TASC test and the GED test.*

## HOW DO THE NEW TESTS COMPARE?

### SCORING THE THREE TEST OPTIONS ON SEVERAL KEY ISSUES

There are three high school equivalency credential tests available today. Each offers its own features and benefits.

	2014 GED	HiSET	TASC
Sub tests	Reasoning through Language Arts Mathematical Reasoning Science Social Studies	Language Arts – Reading Language Arts – Writing Math Science Social Studies	Language Arts/Reading Language Arts/Writing Mathematics Science Social Studies
Format	Computer Based Test	Paper/Pencil or Computer Based Test	Paper/Pencil or Computer Based Test
Total test time	7:35	7:05	5:50
Price (excluding state admin fee)	\$120	\$50	\$52
Standards	Aligned to Common Core State Standards	Content from Iowa Testing -- Normed in 2011	Aligned to Common Core State Standards
Credit for previous GED scores	No	State option	State option
Score from ABE rankings*	22 out of 40	33 out of 40	32 out of 40

\*This spring, ABE professionals scored the three test options on ten different criteria: Geographic access; Affordability; Content; Standards alignment; Rigor; College and career readiness; Recognition by employers and post-secondary institutions; Prep materials; Technical support and customer service; and Credentialing. The survey was conducted in March of 2014 shortly after the new GED test was launched.

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*Because the new GED test has been in place less than a year, many people believe it's too soon to make a judgment on the results of that transition.*

## SHOULD MINNESOTA MAKE A CHANGE?

### *Recommendations for policymakers from ABE professionals*

With new test options available, the question has been prevalent throughout the Adult Basic Education profession: Should we make a change?

During its outreach to ABE professionals across Minnesota, Literacy Action Network did not find any consensus on this issue. However, in discussions amongst professionals about the future of high school equivalency testing, two priorities have consistently stood out:

Minnesota's equivalency diploma must retain its value for employers and higher education.

Decisions about high school equivalency testing must be made in the best interest of students.

## OTHER ISSUES TO CONSIDER

### *Change should result in a better product*

Changing to a different test, or adding another test option would be a cumbersome process, both for test administrators and for students currently working toward test completion. This doesn't mean that a change should be avoided completely. It simply means the benefits of the new system should outweigh the negative impact of transition.

It's also important to remember that Minnesota's ABE professionals and high school equivalency test centers have already undergone a fairly substantial change in the transition between the old GED test and the 2014 GED test. Minnesota's current ABE students are weary of change and ready for stability in the system.

### *Change should be undertaken with adequate resources*

If another test were to be adopted or added in Minnesota, all 44 ABE consortia would need to update test centers, purchase test prep materials and increase professional development to get ABE instructors up to speed on the requirements of the new test.

If policymakers determine that a change is in the best interest of the state, they should pair that decision with adequate resources to allow ABE centers to make the transition without harming services to students.

### *Another promising solution may already be available*

In Minnesota, we are also on the verge of launching a new Adult Diploma option (see opposite page) that has the potential to address some of the challenges presented by a test-based high school credential.

### *Statutory mentions*

In Minnesota, state statute does not dictate one particular test for a high school graduation credential. However, since the GED was the only test available for many years, the name "GED" is specifically mentioned throughout various state statutes dealing with high school diplomas. If Minnesota were to make a change to a different test, legislative action would be required to clarify the statutes.

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*Numbers of GED test takers have dropped significantly this year. However, there likely are many causes for this other than the test itself.*

## HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY TESTING TODAY

Since the beginning of 2014, the ABE field has seen a sharp drop in the number of students pursuing the GED test.

One of the key reasons for this, of course, was a rush to get students through the GED process prior to the end of 2013, since scores from the old GED sub tests are no longer valid for credit on today's GED transcript.

Other states have also reported similar drops in testing numbers, so one potential cause could be the improving national economy and increased

job opportunities for adults without a high school diploma.

Challenges from the transition between the old GED test to the new may also be a cause for decreased student testing. It may be too soon to know the true cause of a drop in GED testing.

While this discussion continues in the months to come, Literacy Action Network and its members will continue to monitor and respond to the needs of their students, potential employers and higher education institutions.

### COMING SOON

## A NEW FLEXIBLE ADULT DIPLOMA OPTION WILL HELP STUDENTS ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS

A new adult diploma option will soon be available throughout Minnesota. In addition to the GED test and the credit-based graduation option, a third adult diploma program will be available, allowing adult students to work with an approved ABE program to earn a diploma based on their individual needs and career goals.

This flexible option, which is currently in the pilot phase, will require students to show competency in core academic areas (English language arts, mathematics, social studies and science) along with career development and employability skills (including digital literacy).

The adult diploma will be more flexible for students and allow them to show skill competency through a customized combination of testing, prior experience, course completion and applied learning.

One of the many benefits of this option is that it has the flexibility to incorporate subtest scores from the old and new GED, as well as scores from high school equivalency sub tests that are recognized in other states. Potentially, it could recognize credits earned at accredited schools in other states and countries. It will allow ABE professionals the flexibility to meet the needs of students, employers and higher education institutions in today's changing economy and environment.