

Board of Education Agenda Item

Item: _____ O. _____

Date: June 23, 2011

Topic: Report on the Advisory Committee on Adult Education and Literacy Discussion Regarding GED Testing Changes

Presenter: Mr. Randall Stamper, Director, Adult Education and Literacy
Dr. Thomas Brewster, Deputy Superintendent, Pulaski County Public Schools, and Chair of the Advisory Committee on Adult Education and Literacy

Telephone Number: (804) 786-3347 **E-Mail Address:** Randall.Stamper@doe.virginia.gov

Origin:

Topic presented for information only (no board action required)

Board review required by

State or federal law or regulation

Board of Education regulation

Other: _____

Action requested at this meeting Action requested at future meeting: _____ (date)

Previous Review/Action:

No previous board review/action

Previous review/action

date _____

action _____

Background Information: The GED is a nationally standardized test that measures the academic skills and knowledge of a four-year high school curriculum in five core content areas--language arts/writing, mathematics, language arts/reading, social studies and science. The GED Testing Service (GEDTS) is an arm of the American Council on Education (ACE). It develops, owns and administers the tests through contracted test centers in each state. Each state is allowed to select its own requirements or limitations for GED candidates as long as the rules adhere to minimum requirements set by GEDTS. Each state sets the fee it wishes to charge to participants for taking the GED tests.

There are currently 82 GED testing centers and more than 200 addendum sites in Virginia. Approximately 30,000 GED tests are taken in Virginia each year.

Section 22.1-254.2 of the *Code of Virginia* requires the Board of Education to “establish a program of testing for general educational development (GED) through which persons may earn a high school equivalency certificate or a diplomas provided in subsection F of § 22.1-253.13:4.”

Section 22.1-253.13:4:F of the *Code of Virginia* states:

F. The Board shall establish, by regulation, requirements for the award of a general achievement diploma for those persons who have (i) achieved a passing score on the GED examination; (ii) successfully completed an education and training program designated by the Board of Education; and (iii) satisfied other requirements as may be established by the Board for the award of such diploma.

The Board of Education has promulgated the *Regulations Governing General Educational Development Certificates* [8 VAC 20 - 360], effective in March 2005. The regulations contain provisions that govern eligibility and retesting of participants.

VDOE provides grants to testing centers to offset costs of GED preparation and test taking, and establishing fee structures has always been considered part of grants and program administration. As neither the Board of Education nor the Superintendent of Public Instruction have specified authority for setting fees in the *Code of Virginia* or in regulation, without guidance, testing centers could set their own fee structures. The Superintendent of Public Instruction has been providing guidance to GED testing centers about GED fees to try to ensure that the fees don't exceed the cost of the tests.

Summary of Major Elements: ACE, which owns the GED test, recently announced that changes are being made in the GED test program and that fees charged for each test will increase. ACE has informed the states that changes in the cost, content, and delivery of the GED Tests are going to be made over the next three years. The changes are significant and will have an impact on the programs, participating agencies and testing centers, GED teachers and staff, and fees paid by test-takers.

In its advisory capacity, the Board's Advisory Committee on Adult Education and Literacy was asked to review and discuss the upcoming changes. The advisory committee met on June 9, 2011, and the chair of the committee will report on the discussion. The report (attached) will include an overview of the changes being made by ACE and the implications of these changes.

Superintendent's Recommendation: The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education receive the report of the Advisory committee on Adult Education and Literacy.

Impact on Resources: This responsibility can be absorbed by the agency's existing resources at this time. If the agency is required to absorb additional responsibilities related to this activity, other services may be impacted.

Timetable for Further Review/Action: Following the Board's receipt and review, information about the GED test-taker-fee increase will be communicated to school division superintendents and GED testing centers through a Superintendent's Memorandum.

Adult Education and Literacy Advisory Committee

**Changes to the Tests of General Educational
Development (GED)**

June 23, 2011

James Monroe Building

Richmond, VA

Committee Background

- Established in 2001
- “...for the sole purpose of advising and making recommendations to the Board on ways and means of improving the Adult Education and Literacy Program...”
- Membership: elected officials, adult education professionals, university and school division administrators, business owners, former GED students

GED Changes: Delivery

- American Council on Education and Pearson VUE
 - Formed LLC, for-profit company – General Educational Development Testing Service
 - Begin in 2014 Computer-based delivery **only**
- Currently: 82 GED testing centers and over 200 addendum sites in Virginia
- 21 public/22 private Pearson VUE sites in Virginia

- Implications
 - Access
 - Computer skills for test takers

GED Changes: Content

- Aligned with Common Core State Standards
 - More rigorous than the current GED Tests
 - Two levels of completion – high school equivalency and college readiness
 - Assessment system instead of single, terminal exam
- Implications
 - Professional development for teachers
 - Getting near- and non-passers back into testing centers before the change in the tests, when all previous scores become invalid
 - Outreach and recruitment

GED Changes: Costs

- Current test-taker fees
 - \$45 for first-time test taker
 - \$7 per test for re-tests
 - Testing vouchers via Race to GED and local funds
 - Federal and local/state matching funds cannot be used for GED testing activities
- Future test-taker fees
 - NRSpro test scoring – from \$4.85 to \$14.95 (July 1, 2011)
 - GED Testing Service
 - Test booklet rental – from \$80 to \$92 (January 1, 2012)
 - First-time test taker fee – from \$10 to \$12 (January 1, 2012)

GED Changes: Costs (continued)

- Future test-taker fees
 - \$55.10 on July 1, 2011
 - \$57.90 on January 1, 2012
 - When the test changes in 2014 – \$140-\$200
- Implications
 - Passing along 2011-2012 cost increases
 - Testing center costs increasing – approximately \$150-\$200 per test taker to actually administer the GED tests
 - In 2014 – burden on test takers; subsidizing options

GED Changes: Discussion

- Committee members discussed the pros and cons of implementing the two upcoming cost increases twice (as they occur) or once after both have occurred.
- Committee members discussed the best way to balance increasing testing center costs, increasing vendor costs, and increases in test-taker fees. There was some debate as to whether VDOE should increase the test-taker fee over the amount of the raw vendor cost increases in order to offset the rising testing center costs or to pass along only the actual cost increases from the vendors so as to keep the test-taker fee as low as possible.

GED Changes: Action

- Superintendent of Public Instruction's decision on fee increase needed before beginning of the new fiscal year
- Feedback and advice sought from committee and Board
- Final decision to be communicated via Superintendent's Memorandum
- More increases ahead – will be under consideration by the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the advisory committee in the coming months