

Virginia Board of Education Agenda Item



Agenda Item: A

Date: September 18, 2014

Title	Final Review of Request for Approval of the 2014 General Educational Development (GED®) Testing Program		
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Purpose of Presentation:

Action required by state or federal law or regulation.

Previous Review or Action:

Previous review and action. Specify date and action taken below:

July 24, 2014: First Review

Action Requested:

Final review: Action requested at this meeting.

Alignment with Board of Education Goals: Please indicate (X) all that apply:

	Goal 1: Accountability for Student Learning
X	Goal 2: Rigorous Standards to Promote College and Career Readiness
X	Goal 3: Expanded Opportunities to Learn
	Goal 4: Nurturing Young Learners
	Goal 5: Highly Qualified and Effective Educators
	Goal 6: Sound Policies for Student Success
	Goal 7: Safe and Secure Schools
	Other Priority or Initiative. Specify:

Background Information and Statutory Authority:

Goal 2: The GED® test is the only high school equivalency exam currently on the market that will fully measure college and career readiness in Virginia. The 2014 GED® test meets higher standards for high school completion as set by the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education (CCRS/AE), and standards used by Texas, Virginia, and other states. The GED® test provides an opportunity for adults to demonstrate college and career readiness through a new passing score designed to facilitate transitioning into a job or postsecondary education. The GED® test passing score is a minimum of 150 for each of the four subject areas. The GED® with Honors score is a minimum of 170 for each of the four subject areas. This score is reflective of performance consistent with readiness to

complete credit-bearing, first-year, postsecondary courses with a grade of “C” or better, and is currently being validated through an ongoing program of longitudinal research.

Goal 3: The 2014 GED® Testing Program can expand opportunities for adults to learn the skills and knowledge they need to further their education, gain employment, and care for their families. The 2014 GED® test provides a means for adults and out-of-school youth to demonstrate that they have the skills employers need to fill entry level and middle skill jobs. Earning a GED® credential, can open the doors to college courses, apprenticeships, and job training for Virginians.

In March 2013, the former Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dr. Patricia I. Wright, approved the state’s adoption of the 2014 GED® test as the state approved alternative high school credential. The GED® test was selected at that time because it was widely accepted and recognized by postsecondary education and employers. State and local resources for the implementation of the GED® test were put in place as a result of that acceptance.

On July 1, 2014, HB 1007 (Byron) changed all references in the *Code of Virginia* from “General Educational Development (GED®)” to “high school equivalency examinations approved by the Board of Education.”

Summary of Important Issues:

On January 2, 2014, GED Testing Service® unveiled a new assessment in all jurisdictions (except Canada and International) that ensures the GED® testing program is no longer an endpoint for adults, but a springboard for more education, training, and better-paying jobs.

The new assessment continues to provide adults the opportunity to earn a high school credential, but it goes further by measuring career and college readiness skills that are the focus of today’s curriculum and tomorrow’s success.

Four content areas: Reasoning Through Language Arts, Mathematical Reasoning, Science, and Social Studies measure a foundational core of knowledge and skills that are essential for career and college readiness.

A GED® test graduate must remain competitive with students who complete their high school credentials in a traditional manner. Evidence suggests that test takers who demonstrate fluency with the skills measured in the new assessment will be better prepared for what they plan to do with their lives. A GED® graduate no longer holds just a high school equivalency credential, but a roadmap for life’s success. It is a stepping-stone toward a college classroom or a better career and a family-sustaining wage.

Alternative High School Equivalency Exams

Two high school equivalency assessment options are currently available in addition to the GED® test - the *High School Equivalency Test (HiSET®)*, from the Educational Testing Service, and *CTB/McGraw Hill’s Test Assessing Secondary Completion™ (TASC)*.

In response to the Board of Education's first review of the request for approval of the GED® Testing Program, the staff members at the Office of Adult Education and Literacy (OAEL) have taken the following action:

Compared the GED® Assessment Targets and Indicators to Virginia College and Career Readiness Expectations

The OAEL requested that the GED Testing Service® provide an alignment of the GED® Assessment Targets and Indicators to Virginia College and Career Ready Performance Expectations. Staff members of the OAEL have reviewed the assessment targets for alignment to the Virginia College and Career Readiness Expectations.

The Needs of Virginians Without a High School Diploma

The staff members at the OAEL believe that the 2014 GED® test is currently the most beneficial test for Virginians without a high school diploma for the following reasons:

- Alternative tests such as the HiSET® and the TASC test are still making adjustments to cut scores and full alignment to the CCRSAE. The states that have adopted alternative tests are in the early stages of implementing these new assessments and determining the acceptance of these tests by employers and institutions of postsecondary education.
- Virginians would benefit from a well-known credential respected by employers and public and private colleges. Over 97 percent of colleges and employers accept the GED® credential.
- Virginians would benefit from a testing program that is reflective of current high school standards. The GED® test was normed on graduating high school seniors and is reflective of the academic skills required for high school graduation.
- Virginians would benefit from a testing program that is fully aligned with the CCRSAE and challenges individuals to acquire the higher level critical-thinking and problem-solving skills needed for postsecondary education, for middle skill job opportunities, and for meeting Governor McAuliffe's executive order 23, "The New Virginia Economy Workforce Initiative." Executive order 23, announced on August 13, 2014, includes several ambitious goals, including the "Pathway to 50K" initiative, which sets a target of 50,000 credentials, licensures, apprenticeships, and sub-baccalaureate degrees earned that meet the immediate needs of Virginia's work force.
- Virginians would benefit from access to the features and benefits that the 2014 GED Testing® Program provides, such as online support tools including: My GED™; GED Ready™, The Official Practice Test; and GED Credentialing™.
- Virginia test takers would benefit from financial support in the form of vouchers to offset the cost of the practice test and the operational test. Adult education programs can provide vouchers through state Race to GED® funds.
- Virginians in the rural areas of the state, who often face the challenge of traveling to testing centers, would benefit from access to a mobile testing solution.

Virginia's Investment in the 2014 GED® Test

State Race to GED® funds, which total \$1,945,613 per year, are used for (1) outreach to adult learners, (2) instruction to prepare for the GED® test, (3) GED® testing, and (4) computers to establish authorized Pearson VUE Testing Centers. Extensive planning and preparation for these centers have been in development since GED Testing Service® announced the new computer-based test.

The Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) grant provides annual funding totaling \$2,247,581 to approved ISAEP programs across the state. This amount has not changed since the program's inception in 1999. The cost to take the complete battery of the 2014 test is \$120; however, for ISAEP students, the costs to take the GED® and the GED Ready™ practice test are paid for with school division and local ISAEP program funding.

The annual General Adult Education (GAE) grant funds of \$1,051,800 support Virginia adult education programs. These funds are used to support adult secondary school classes for credit, GED® instructional preparation classes, English literacy/civics education classes, and English as a second language (ESL) classes. For students in these classes, the cost of the 2014 GED® test and GED Ready™ test will be borne by either the individual tester, the local school division, or the GAE supported adult education program.

Virginia has also spent considerable time and resources in preparing teachers for the implementation of the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education. Intensive professional development for teachers was conducted on July 16-18 at the Virginia Institute for Lifelong Learning (VAILL) summer conference at Radford University. The Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC) also provides professional development on college and career readiness standards for adult educators and GED® instructional preparation. The VALRC is funded by the Office of Adult Education and Literacy. OAEL also held a one day ISAEP conference for teachers and program coordinators. Participants at this conference attended several sessions on the 2014 GED® program.

Postsecondary Education Admissions and Candidates Holding the GED® Credential

Today, more than ever before, GED® credential holders seek to enroll in postsecondary education programs. This is borne out by the results of research studies conducted by GED Testing Service® in 2013:

- Approximately two-thirds of GED® test passers report that they took the GED® test to further their education and 43 percent of these individuals enrolled in postsecondary education.
- Two-thirds of GED® passers who enroll in postsecondary education do so within three years of obtaining their GED® credential.
- Almost half (48 percent) of adults working towards obtaining their GED® credential report going to college as their main motivation, specifically to obtain a two-year or four-year degree (90 percent) or an advanced degree (10 percent).

Computer-based Testing Options

Adult learners must be computer literate and have adequate technology skills to search and apply for jobs online. We believe that Pearson VUE testing centers can provide test takers with the most advanced, highly reliable technology to consistently meet local programs' registration and delivery needs. Further, Virginia test takers need access to secure and proctored computer-based testing to ensure the integrity of the test. Computer-based testing is the standard for many other test delivery

programs. Technology continues to advance, it is also becoming the standard format for most of the key K-12 assessment programs, including the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) tests.

Additionally, the GED Testing Service® has a mobile laptop option to deliver the test. Some regions in Virginia, especially rural areas, will benefit greatly from a mobile laptop testing solution because transportation to testing centers is often an issue for many adults in these areas. State and regional adult correctional facilities also have a mobile laptop testing option. Neither of the other current alternative tests have this mobile option.

Features and Benefits of the 2014 GED® Program

The 2014 GED® testing program includes tools to help all adult students get the study support they need before the test and follow-up support for after the test. The GED® program also includes support tools for adult educators to better assist their students in preparing for the 2014 GED® test.

Features and Benefits of the 2014 GED® program	Specific Features
Inclusive and innovative test preparation materials designed to support test taker success	MyGED™, a test taker portal that is the central location for all GED® test-related information and includes personalized study tools, an interactive user dashboard, a test center finder, on-demand score report access, and more
	Online tutorials to help students break down each step and successfully sign up and prepare for the GED® test
	GED Ready™ practice test
	Scheduling 24 hours a day, seven days a week in just minutes
A proven high school equivalency exam backed by more than 70 years of experience	Virginia has used the GED® for 70 years
	A consistent testing experience administered year-round at 124 Virginia test centers
	Students test when and where they want
	A credential respected by employers and colleges – over 97 percent of colleges and employers accept it
	A faster track to college, jobs, and better wages
	Through MyGED™, students can find links to information about jobs and training that they may qualify for after passing the test, the college application process and how to apply for financial aid, and career pathways that lead to the salaries and types of jobs they want.
	Through MyGED™, students can take skills assessments to learn more about what careers might be right for them.
Smart Transcript provides links to detailed information about the content tested and test taker scores. GED® test takers who	

Features and Benefits of the 2014 GED® program	Specific Features
	take the 2014 test will receive a secure digital copy of their transcript. Digital copies of transcripts can be e-mailed directly to employers.

The 2014 GED® Test Benefits Virginia Test Takers

The new GED® testing program is designed to save Virginia test takers time and offers the ability to spread test taking costs over time. The specific savings for the test taker include the following:

Benefit to test takers	Feature
Time to test	With online registration and scheduling, a student can move forward any day, any time, and not wait for the center to be open the next morning.
Time to jobs and college	With same-day scores, students know how they did and can apply for their desired jobs or training programs on the same day that they test.
Money	The ability to register for one test at a time means that students can budget the cost of the test and preparation in pieces and build a realistic plan of success, rather than worrying about paying for everything up front.
Accommodations:	Administration services provided by GEDTS

GED Ready™, The Official Practice Test

Adults in Virginia without a high school diploma would benefit from a practice test that identifies areas of study in which they need to strengthen their skills. In the fall of 2013, GED Testing Service® launched GED Ready™: The Official Practice Test. This assessment is a computer-based practice test approximately one half the length of the operational 2014 GED® test. Like the operational test, GED Ready™ is aligned to the CCRSAE and is standardized and placed on the same scale as the operational test. These attributes allow GED Ready™ to provide information to test takers on the likelihood of their passing the 2014 GED® test as well as descriptive information about their skills, as demonstrated on the assessment, and what they will need to master in order to move to the next level of performance on the test.

In 2014, GED Testing Service® has delivered over 9,000 GED Ready™ tests and the correlation between performing well on the GED Ready™ and passing the operational GED® test is strong. Ninety-five percent of students who perform in the green “Ready to Test” zone on the GED Ready™ go on to pass the corresponding module of the GED® test. GED Ready™ gives students who pass confidence that they are ready to commit to the operational GED® test. And for those who do not score in the green zone, it provides a detailed, actionable, prescriptive study plan for remediation.

The GED Ready™ is administered over the Internet via a secure connection and provides immediate, individualized score reports to test takers, along with information that will allow adult educators to score the constructed response items and provide feedback to test takers. In correctional settings, the GED

Ready™ is available as an offline version, delivered in the same way the operational GED® test is delivered.

The GED Ready™ is available for purchase by test takers through the MyGED™ portal, and Virginia adult education and literacy programs may purchase the GED Ready™ for distribution to their students. The GED Testing Service® is working with over 15 publishers that are reselling the GED Ready™ to their customers. Allowing these publishers to distribute the GED Ready™ test provides greater flexibility for Virginia adult education programs to purchase GED Ready™ through existing publishers from which they may already be buying other test preparation materials. Adult education centers, work force development centers, libraries, and other community organizations can buy the GED Ready™ from one of the many publishers.

Educator Training

Well in advance of the release of the 2014 GED® test, Virginia had made a commitment to making certain that adult education teachers had access to training and training materials in a variety of formats. The Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC) at Virginia Commonwealth University, OAEL's professional development arm, has spent considerable time and resources in providing professional development activities for teachers in preparation for the 2014 GED® test. The 2013 and 2014 Virginia Institute for Lifelong Learning (VAILL) summer conferences held at Radford University offered GED® content specific training in algebraic problem solving, quantitative problem solving, geometry, science and social studies through project-based learning, and reasoning through language arts. In addition, professional development opportunities for teachers to learn how to teach the new technology-enhanced items on the GED® test is also provided through regional adult education training.

Transition from the OAEL Services Unit Credentialing to GED Credentialing™

As part of the 2014 GED® Program, the GED Testing Service® offered states the option of providing a Web-based credentialing service called GED Credentialing™. The OAEL transitioned to the GED Credentialing™ service on January 2, 2014. GED® test takers who need a copy of their GED® transcript or GED® certificate can create an account and order either an electronic or paper copy of their credentials. This service can be especially helpful for testers who have a scheduled job interview or need immediate access to transcripts or certificates as proof they have been credentialed. To date in Virginia, 24,765 transactions, 4,397 e-transcripts, 1,797 e-certificates, 1,314 paper transcripts, and 959 official paper copies of the Virginia GED® certificate have been processed by the GED Credentialing™ service.

Virginia GED® Testers to Date

Between January 1 and August 26, 2014, 2,462 Virginia testers have taken one or more of the 2014 GED® subject area tests. Of these individuals, 1,433 have completed the entire battery of tests and 806 have passed the complete battery of the GED® test. The Virginia pass average is 56 percent while the national pass average is 53 percent. Test taking declined in July and August 2014 most probably because adult education and literacy centers are typically not open in the summer.

Between January 1 and August 26, 2013 (the last year of the 2002 test series), 14,176 individuals in Virginia took the complete GED® test battery. Of those test takers, 10,515 passed the complete battery, reflecting a pass rate of 74 percent. Comparison of this year's data to last year's data shows that 2014 GED® test completers are 10 percent of the number completed during the same period last year and that 2014 GED® passers are 8 percent of the number passing last year.

The impact of these reduced numbers and expanded cost is being closely examined by the OAEL in this first year of the 2014 GED® test.

Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:

The cost for the GED Ready™ practice test is \$24 for all four subject area tests, or between \$4-\$6 per individual subject area test. The cost to take the complete battery of the GED® test is \$120, or \$30 per subject. This cost also includes scoring, reporting, and mailing or e-mailing of original transcripts and certificates. Test takers can take the entire battery of tests, or, they may elect to take one subject area at a time on a pay-as-you-go basis. Of this \$120, testing centers receive compensation of \$5 per test hour, or \$40 per test, for each student they test. Many OAEL funded adult education and literacy programs will be using 2014-2015 Race to GED® funds to purchase vouchers to help offset the cost to adults who take the practice test and/or the official GED® test. Some regional adult education programs are using vouchers paid from state Race to GED® funds to pay for the full or partial cost of the test if test takers meet certain program incentive requirements.

As previously stated, the cost of the 2014 GED® test has increased from \$58 (2002 series) to \$120 for the full battery. Although the increased cost of the new test has and continues to be a concern, data from January 1, 2014 to September 2, 2014, suggest upward trends in the number of tests taken by content area and month, as well as the number of those who pass all four subject area tests.

Month GED Analytics™	Number of Test Takers Who Passed All Four Subject Area Tests of the 2014 GED® Test
January 2014	16
February 2014	28
March 2014	78
April 2014	102
May 2014	151
June 2014	203
July 2014	126
August 2014	142

Timetable for Further Review/Action:

Upon approval by the Board, this information will be disseminated via a Superintendent’s Memorandum to school divisions and the Virginia Community College System.

Superintendent's Recommendation:

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board approve the 2014 GED® Testing Program.

Rationale for Action:

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board approve the 2014 GED® Testing Program because it is currently the only high school equivalency test on the market that is fully aligned with the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education, and is widely accepted and recognized by postsecondary education and employers.