



State Policy Priorities 2011-2012

The Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce (CTW) is a coalition of over 40 New York-based organizations dedicated to reconnecting young adults to education and career opportunities. Currently, over 350,000 young people in the State of New York ages 16 to 24 are neither in school nor working. Considerable research tells us that individuals who do not have productive work experience by the age of 25 have significantly decreased chances of economic success in their lifetime. We urge New York State to invest in these young people now, to ensure that they will be able to participate in and contribute to our economy in the years to come.

Workforce Development Recommendations

Develop new sources of funding to target toward programs for out-of-school youth and young adults. Despite the difficult current financial situation that New York State faces, we should continue to develop ways to support programs that reconnect young people to education and work through youth development practices. This should include how New York spends its federal allocations of WIA and TANF funds, as well as new sources of revenue.

Focus on existing education and training credentials. While CTW supports credentialing as a tool for young adults to distinguish themselves when seeking employment, CTW opposes the New York State Dept. of Labor's (NYSDOL) plan to broaden the use of the National Work Readiness Credential. This credential is not a recognized outcome in Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programming nor widely-recognized by employers. Requiring this credential would amount to a new unfunded mandate on workforce development programs. Instead, CTW encourages the State to expand access to established credentials. For instance, increased investments in GED preparation and testing and multiple pathways to graduation would lead to more opportunities for young people to secure a New York State High School Diploma or the equivalent.

GED Reform

Much of CTW's current activities at the State level focus on the systems of preparation and testing for the General Educational Development (GED) exam. CTW seeks to build consensus and support for GED system improvement in New York City. CTW has convened a broad group of GED stakeholders from New York City's multiple delivery systems (including CBOs, DOE, colleges, and libraries) to develop a shared advocacy agenda from the ground up. Our GED agenda includes:

Increase the number of people earning GEDs and expand outreach and access to GED preparation and testing. Too much of recent reform efforts have focused on the state's GED exam pass rate – this should be a secondary measure of success. NYSED's concern with the state's low pass rate has led to an emphasis on screening test-takers, and limiting access to those who are most test-ready. A more appropriate goal would be to *increase the number of test passers*. We need to balance access to the exam with greater support for test candidates in order to allow more people to earn GED diplomas.

Solidify and expand resources for literacy programs. The best way to increase the number of GED passers is to support programs that assist individuals to prepare for and pass the GED exam. Specific state-level funding streams that should be sustained or augmented include:

- *State funding for GED testing.* In 2010, NYSED funding for GED test sites was eliminated on short notice, and restored only months later after significant advocacy. Gaps in test center contracts create interruptions of testing services and undermine teachers' ability to support students in reaching their GED goals. It is critical to ensure the continuity of State funding for GED test sites in order to sustain GED testing capacity.
- *Adult Literacy Education (ALE).* ALE is state-level funding that goes to community-based organizations and community colleges for literacy programming. ALE funding has been cut in recent years by over 30%, and should be augmented to \$10 million annually.
- *Employment Preparation Education (EPE).* EPE is state funding for alternative education systems administered by localities. In New York City, the NYC Dept. of Education's Office of Adult and Continuing Education (OACE) receives one of the lowest reimbursement rates for its services of any EPE provider in the state, despite having the highest costs. New York City should receive a reimbursement rate and total EPE allocation that is in line with other localities and reflects the high numbers of students receiving EPE services.

Do not impose a fee to take the GED exam. CTW strongly opposes the proposal to transfer the cost burden of GED testing to localities and GED test-takers. Working people and the organizations that engage with them are already being hit by multiple layers of cuts to public services. As the need for GED services continues to soar, the State's economic health depends on developing a higher-skilled workforce. Overhauling the financing mechanism for GED testing at a time when there are no resources for transitional costs could devastate the system and severely curb access to the GED test.

Careful implementation of predictor exam requirements. CTW supports expanded use of an Official Practice Test (OPT) to help students and teachers identify academic skill gaps and gain familiarity with the exam. If screening for test readiness is to be effective, we need to find the optimal benchmark that allows for the largest *number* of people to pass the test. System-wide screening would need to be implemented consistently for all test-takers, not just those who attend preparation classes. Currently, two thirds of GED test-takers have no preparation or demonstration of test readiness. Therefore, it would require substantial investment and capacity building to be able to offer practice tests to all members of the public that want to take the GED exam.

Ensure that efforts to raise GED standards are met with adequate resources and supports to do so. As a new GED test is developed to be aligned with national college and career-readiness standards, City and State reforms must take into account the diversity of GED learners and service providers so as to expand opportunities for adult learners to reach their goals. Efforts to raise GED standards should be implemented through a measured phase-in process that takes into account the disparate resources that distinct providers receive, as well as the implications for lower-level learners and the intensity and length of engagement that will be required to reach a higher bar.

Explore alternate pathways to a high school equivalency diploma. The recent merger of the American Council on Education's GED Testing Service and Pearson places the development and delivery of the GED exam in the hands of a for-profit entity. This raises many questions related to cost, access, instruction, and the interplay with state education policies. Passing the GED exam is the most common but not the only way to earn a high school equivalency diploma. CTW supports efforts to explore, strengthen, and develop multiple pathways to earn a high school equivalency diploma in New York State.