



**Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce**  
**Priorities for GED System Reform: *GED Testing***  
*February 2011*

The **Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce (CTW)\*** is an advocacy coalition seeking to bring more public attention to the GED, and build consensus and support for GED system improvement in New York City. CTW has convened a broad group of GED stakeholders from the City's multiple delivery systems (including CBOs, DOE, CUNY, SUNY, and libraries) to begin developing a shared advocacy agenda from the ground up. The CTW has led discussions with over 40 organizations that provide or advocate for adult education, literacy instruction, and GED preparation and testing to generate recommendations about ways to improve our GED systems. The policies and practices related to *GED testing* represent one key area in need of attention. ***This document presents recommendations specifically focused on improving GED testing,*** which are part of a broader set of changes needed to improve opportunities and for adult learners.

**1) Expand outreach and access to GED preparation and testing.**

By the most conservative estimates, there are 1.3 million individuals in New York City who are age 18 or over, out of school, and without a high school or equivalent diploma. To reach and meet the needs of these large numbers of New Yorkers, we must hold GED and literacy programs harmless from budget cuts and seek ways to increase investments in these programs. Currently, approximately 70,000 New Yorkers receive preparation or testing services. This constitutes just over five percent of the eligible population, far too small a figure. New York City should aim to ***serve at least 10 percent*** of the GED-eligible population by 2013.

**2) Focus on increasing the number of people earning GEDs.**

Too much of recent reform efforts have focused on the 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 get more people earning GED diplomas. If screening for test readiness is to be effective, it needs to be implemented consistently for all test-takers, not just those who attend preparation classes.

**a) Develop and implement a better GED test registration system.** Currently, test seats go empty while preparation programs cannot get test dates for their students. There should be a simple, ***online website*** for booking test seats and the option for preparation programs to make long-term reservations for their students. The GED COMPASS should be further developed and supported to serve this need.

**b) Improve support for test-takers.** Test-takers would benefit from academic screenings to determine academic skills needed for the exam, more opportunities for self-assessment, and experiences that simulate the GED exam. New York should invest in and implement

standardized usage of the *Official Practice Test (OPT)*. New York should also improve communication of OPT results and system for reporting OPT scores; explore how to communicate the OPT experience, preparation or other screening; and also ensure that test results are reported in a timely manner. There is also a need for improved access to reasonable accommodations in test taking for individuals with disabilities as required by law.

- c) **Improve support for examiners.** Test administration would be improved if examiners had more support services available to them. These should include a phone hotline; a responsive person to provide support; and more frequent and conveniently located training in NYC with an in-person trainer.
- 3) **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, the City's reforms must take into account the diversity of GED learners and service providers so as to expand opportunities for adult learners to reach their varied 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. Planning for these efforts should include prominent roles for community-based providers in partnership with city agencies.
- 4) **Increase and improve funding for GED testing in New York City.**
- a) **Ensure continuity of state funding for GED testing.** In 2010, funding to the organizations that serve as GED test sites was eliminated on short notice, and restored only months later after significant advocacy activities. Gaps in test center contracts, like what occurred in 2010, create interruptions of testing services and undermine the ability to support students to reach their GED goals. Testing during the period between the cut and its restoration was a fraction of the previous year's level. Even after the funding was mostly restored, GED testing has been slow to return to previous levels as it takes time for test centers to ramp up services again. It is critical to sustain GED testing capacity and protect GED testing contracts throughout the state budget process.
  - b) **Fully spend current-year funding for GED testing.** It is imperative that we invest into programs all of the funds budgeted for testing this year. This may mean increasing the reimbursement level in the short-term (from \$20 to \$40 per exam) while organizations rebuild their capacity from the disastrous impacts of the mid-year budgets cuts.
  - c) **Increase funds to adequately cover the costs** of staff, supplies and facilities for test administration and support operations, as well as expanded access to the OPT. The \$20-per-test reimbursement covers only a fraction of the true costs of GED test site administration.
  - d) **Consider changing the structure of GED testing contracts from the current reimbursement system to a grant system.** The current method of payment encourages test sites to accept as many individuals as possible, including those who may be unprepared for the exam. Funding incentives should promote best practices and outcomes. A system of granting would remove the incentive for organizations to test individuals who are not ready, and it would help stabilize and improve test center operations.

- 5) Improve state policies to support implementation, and incorporate more input from the field.** The New York State Education Department (NYSED) defines the policies affecting GED testing and preparation across the state. Currently, state policies do not reflect a full understanding of GED testing issues at the implementation level. There is little coordination between GED preparation and testing policy, and the new state policies aimed at increasing the state's GED pass rate raise concerns about access and effective implementation. NYSED holds preparation programs accountable for low pass rates, despite the fact that preparation programs cannot control the testing. More input is needed from the field. **A new advisory council** would create a mechanism to help inform NYSED's policy decisions relating to the GED and adult education and better incorporate best practices. This body should be made up of stakeholders and field experts, including adult education teachers, GED alumni, test site administrators, program managers, etc.)
- a) Improve GED testing data operations and reporting.** NYSED data reports should be responsive, transparent, and received in a timely and regular manner. Improvements should include electronic data reporting, a cleaner prep code system, reports sent to programs and test centers that can be analyzed locally.
- 6) Create a mechanism for city-level coordination.** Current testing and preparation programs are far too disconnected. There should be a New York City coordinating body that involves multiple levels of the GED testing system, identifies concerns and priorities, and analyzes field experience. This body could undertake ongoing system review that would research and analyze issues relevant to GED practice and policy, such as the population needing or seeking the exam and the population being tested, the correlation between OPT and GED scores, etc.
- a) Establish systematic links between GED preparation programs and testing sites, across all funding streams.** GED preparation programs that are not also testing sites report problems getting test dates and seats for their students. Getting test seats is often dependent on an informal personal relationship with someone at the testing site, rather than an institutional linkage. A city coordinating body could orchestrate more systematic communication among preparation programs and test centers, including periodic networking opportunities.

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\*The **Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce** (CTW) is a coalition of over 40 NYC providers and intermediaries dedicated to advancing policy solutions to reconnect young adults to education, training, and career opportunities. The CTW has established itself as a leading voice primarily for "disconnected youth", and in 2010 launched an advocacy campaign focused on GED reform, as a key part of a larger agenda for expanding coordinated resources and opportunities for youth and adults. The CTW is guided by three coordinating organizations - Neighborhood Family Services Coalition (NFSC), United Neighborhood Houses (UNH), and Community Service Society (CSS).

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