



GED/HSE Policy Priorities 2011-2012

The **Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce (CTW)** is a coalition of more than 40 organizations dedicated to advancing policy solutions to reconnect young adults to education and careers. CTW has established itself as a leading voice 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. CTW has convened a broad group of adult literacy provider organizations from New York City's multiple delivery systems (including CBOs, DOE, CUNY, SUNY, and public libraries) to develop a shared advocacy agenda from the ground up. This document outlines the Campaign's current policy and budget priorities related to improving opportunities for adult learners to earn a high school equivalency diploma (HSE).

There are 2.8 million adult New Yorkers who are out of school and lack a high school credential. The "General Educational Development" (GED) test has been an important second-chance gateway to postsecondary education and professional advancement. However, in recent years, budget cuts have decreased funding for GED testing and adult literacy programs. New barriers that would limit access to the GED test have been proposed, including mandatory readiness screening and new fees to test-takers. In addition, a complete overhaul of the GED exam is currently underway, with changes that present serious risks to New Yorkers' access to a high school equivalency diploma.

The policy response must be two-fold. First, New York State should **maintain funding and capacity for the current system** of GED testing, while **preparing the field for the new GED test in January 2014**. Second, New York State should actively **strengthen and develop multiple pathways**, beyond the GED, to earn a high school equivalency diploma. The primary goal should be to **increase the number of people earning a high school equivalency diploma** through the GED or other pathways. Specific recommendations are outlined below:

Solidify and expand resources for literacy programs. It is critical that basic funding for preparation programs and GED testing operations be maintained, especially as there will be a surge in testers looking to pass before the exam changes in 2014. Specific state-level funding streams that should be sustained or augmented include:

- *State funding for GED testing.* Maintain \$2.86 million for NYSED's GED Testing operations, including at least \$1 million for GED test centers. In 2010, NYSED funding for GED test centers was eliminated on short notice, and restored only months later after significant advocacy, causing a disruption of services. It is critical to ensure the continuity of State funding for GED test sites in order to sustain GED testing capacity and prepare for the new test.
- *Adult Literacy Education (ALE).* Maintain \$4.3 million. 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%, at a time when it should be expanding to meet the increasing demand.

- *Employment Preparation Education (EPE)*. Maintain \$96 million statewide, allocating a fair share to New York City. EPE is state funding for alternative education systems administered by localities. The NYC Department 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.

Preserve free access to the GED exam. The State focus should be on increasing the *number* of people who take and pass the GED. Policies that create more barriers should be resisted. CTW opposes proposals to begin charging a fee to GED test-takers, transferring the cost burden to those who can least afford it, especially considering that the GED Testing Service has become a for-profit operation. CTW supports expanded use of Official Practice Tests (OPT) to help students and teachers identify academic skill gaps and gain familiarity with the exam. However, we oppose mandating such readiness screening for test-takers given the limited overall capacity of the system to prepare all those who need it.

Prepare for the new 2014 GED. The GED Testing Service is developing a new GED exam to be aligned with the Common Core Standards to indicate college and career readiness. The new test will be more difficult and more expensive. It will also be for-profit for the first time in its history, as a result of the American Council on Education's recent merger with Pearson to operate the GED Testing Service. The GED will move to a computer-based test, administered only at test centers certified by Pearson. While no cost information is available for the new GED, best estimates (based on the current pricing for computer-based GED testing) predict that it will cost at least twice as much as it does now. This would mean the current state budget would pay for only *half* the number of people to take the new test, closing the door to more than 25,000 New Yorkers annually. NYSED should work closely with providers to inform Pearson's rollout, and develop transition plans, including educating the public about the GED changes and increasing testing capacity prior to 2014.

Ensure that efforts to raise GED standards are met with adequate resources and supports to do so. As the new GED test is developed to be aligned with the Common Core, it sets a higher bar for adult learners before the same standards are implemented in the K-12 system. Assuming current adult education investment and capacity, a more difficult GED test will likely reduce the number of testers who pass the test, negatively impacting the workforce system which relies on the GED as a key outcome. Instructors also need time and training to prepare their students for the new exam. Efforts to raise standards should take into account the diversity of GED learners and service providers, as well as the implications for learners with limited skills and the intensity and length of engagement that will be required to reach a higher bar.

Develop alternative pathways to a high school equivalency diploma. In New York, passing the GED exam is the most common, but not the only way to earn a high school equivalency diploma. In light of the coming changes to the GED exam, New York must pursue additional avenues for people to earn high school equivalency credentials. NYSED and practitioner-led groups have started exploring pathways that could be strengthened or implemented to lessen the State's reliance on the GED test. These efforts should be actively supported to create a more diverse set of options for adult learners.