



**Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce**  
**Response to State Proposals to Establish Screening and Charge Fees for GED Test**  
February 14, 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. This statement draws on discussions with over 40 organizations involved in literacy and adult education, and their recommendations for how to improve policy and practice related to GED testing in New York.

The NYS Board of Regents has approved two proposals from the New York State Education Department (NYSED) that would change GED policy and practice across the State:

- 1) "To establish a requirement for a student's demonstration of GED test readiness via the Official Practice Test or other Department approved instruments."
- 2) "To recommend to the Governor and Legislature that Section 317 of the Education Law that bans a fee for admission to the GED test be rescinded."

### **Test Readiness Screening**

The State's primary policy goal should be to **increase the number of people earning GED diplomas**. NYSED's primary justification for test readiness screening is New York State's low GED test passage rate. While we support some efforts to increase the State's GED passage rate, the pass rate should be a secondary measure of success, and should never justify any policies that will decrease the number of likely GED recipients. We need to balance access to the exam with greater support for test candidates so that more individuals obtain GED diplomas.

We support expanded use of an Official Practice Test (OPT) to help students and teachers identify specific academic skill gaps and gain practice and familiarity with the exam through a simulated experience. 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. GED test center experience indicates that a significant number of test-takers who pass an OPT at a minimum level are able to pass the GED exam. Any proposals to require a higher OPT score should be studied closely to ensure that access will not be denied to people who could pass.

Another consideration is that for system-wide screening to be effective, it 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 who want to take the GED exam, and to ensure accommodations on the OPT for those with disabilities. Further investment would be

needed to expand preparation programs to meet the current need and demand for the GED by the eligible population. Any new strategies for online/electronic assessments should be tested through a pilot before wider implementation, and must address issues of capacity, access, and the financial resources programs would need for implementation.

The GED represents a valuable tool for New York's economic growth; individuals who attain the diploma earn higher incomes, pay more taxes, and depend less on public benefits. Efforts to raise GED standards must be met with adequate resources and supports to expand opportunities for adult learners to reach their goals. At the very least, we must ensure that our efforts do not reduce the number of GED earners in our State.

### **Charging a Fee for the GED Test**

CTW opposes the proposal to transfer the cost burden of GED testing to localities and GED test-takers. In theory, allowing test centers to charge a low fee for the GED test is something to consider, but the intent of the SED proposal is focused on eliminating the need for state funding for GED testing operations. There are many reasons why this is not a good plan. First, working people and the organizations that engage with them are feeling the harsh effects of the economic recession and are being hit by multiple layers of cuts to public services. They are already bearing more than their share of the sacrifice. Second, the need for GED services continues to soar, and our state economic recovery depends on developing a higher-skilled workforce.

Third, 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. Finally, NYSED argues that charging a fee would encourage test-takers to better prepare for the exam. However, this rationale is moot if the State also plans to implement an OPT requirement. If test-taker assessment will already be part of the system, a fee would be a meaningless addition. We urge that the Regents actively solicit feedback from GED test centers and adult education providers to learn more about the implications of a test fee, and *ensure the continuity of state funding for GED testing in the next fiscal year.*

We hope the Board of Regents will carefully consider the consequences of both of these proposals, most importantly on the 2.8 million New Yorkers who need a GED to move forward on a path of educational and career advancement.

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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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