

LETTER

Changes in GED Should Force Government Policy Decisions

To the Editor:

The article "**GED Revision Opens Path to Higher Ed.**" (Nov. 16, 2011) describes the current efforts to redesign the test of General Educational Development. The GED is an important gateway to higher education and many jobs, and although its average impact has been debated, it has shown that it helps individuals for whom exam preparation requires improving their literacy and math skills. Improving and modernizing the exam's content is a valuable goal. The article illustrates some of the important proposed revisions to the exam, but does not mention the even-greater shifts in GED policy that are on the horizon.

For years, the exam had been developed and provided to states (for a fee) by the GED Testing Service, a unit within the American Council on Education, a national nonprofit organization. But this year, the GED Testing Service was acquired by Pearson, a for-profit organization. Pearson's changes to the exam will roughly double the price for the exam.

New York state, which fully funds the price of the exam, using its current budget, would be able to test roughly half of those who now take the test each year. As public budgets continue to be weak, many states, including New York, are looking for ways to shift the costs of the exam to GED consumers. Given the value that the GED entails to individuals and the resulting economic benefits to the public, this represents an unwise barrier to the exam.

The changes in the exam will also require increased support to the many organizations that help people prepare for the GED in classes that range from literacy to test-prep, in settings that include community groups, libraries, and schools. These programs already faced limited public support despite increasing demand for their services; states and localities will need to consider how they can support these organizations in this important work.

As a large corporate entity, Pearson has strong lobbying abilities and relationships with public education officials. Pearson has the power to influence public policy and budgeting in both the testing and preparation aspects of the GED. As such, we should be sure to turn our attention not only to the proposed changes in the content of the exam, but also to the shifts in how our governments support people looking to use the GED test or an alternative pathway as a second chance to succeed in education and careers.

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