



# National Council of State Directors of Adult Education

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## The Decennial Scurry

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Those of us in adult education are accustomed to the decennial scurry. To maintain the credibility, relevance and acceptance of the high school equivalency tests, the GED ® Testing Service has historically updated their test every ten to fifteen years.

The “scurry” includes both the anxious months leading up to the introduction of an updated test as we actively solicit adults to finish incomplete tests and recruit additional examinees before “the test gets more difficult” as well as the months after the test changes trying to attract new examinees having just emptied the pipeline of potential examinees.

TABLE #1	2000	2001	2002
*GED ® Test Takers taking full battery	718K	945K	467K
Number who passed the full battery	497K	658K	329K
Pass Rate	69.3%	69.6%	70.5%

\*Source: GED Annual Reports <http://www.gedtesting.com/educators/historical-testing-data>

In TABLE # 1 above, the 2000 number of test takers and pass rate represents the norm for that time. In 2001, the year before the 1988 version of the GED test expired, the number of test takers skyrocketed to almost one million. In 2002, the first year of the new GED ® test, the number of examinees dropped significantly.

We are seeing the same effects with this change of the tests in 2013-2014. However, the field is more complex because there are now three high school equivalency tests:

- **GED®** - General Educational Development test - Developed by GED Testing Service
- **HiSET®** – High School Equivalency Test - Developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS)
- **TASC®** – Test Assessing Secondary Completion™ - Developed by CTB/McGraw-Hill

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Table # 2 below captures the number of test takers and the passing rate for the current three tests. The number reflects those **who completed an entire test battery**.

TABLE # 2: Full Battery											
Year	*GED®			TASC®			HiSET®			TOTAL	
	#	# Pass	% Pass	#	# Pass	% Pass	#	# Pass	% Pass	Takers	Passers
2010	622K	451K	72.6%							622K	451K
2011	601K	434K	72.2							601K	434K
2012	581K	401K	69.1							581K	401K
2013	713K	540K	75.7%							713K	540K
2014**	223K	140K	62.8%	43K	25K	59%	50K	31K	62%	316K	196K

\*Source: GED® Testing Service Annual Reports: <http://www.gedtesting.com/educators/historical-testing-data>

\*\*To date estimates: 2014 assessments are still being calculated

Here again, the year before the 2002 GED test change (2013) we saw an upsurge in the number of test takers. The first year of the three new tests (2014) for which the final tabulations are still being made, we saw a lower participation rate with the total number of test takers at 316K with a total of 196K passers. Across the three tests in 2014 is a moderate drop in the pass rate.

### Teacher and Material Preparation:

The “scurry” also involves teacher preparation and review of new instructional materials in the year leading up to the introduction of the new test.

In 2013, the scurry was a bit more frantic in that the three tests were aligned or in the process of becoming aligned with the Adult Education College and Career Readiness Standards developed by the US Department of Education. To meet the requirements of high demand jobs and postsecondary entrance, these standards require not just recall of facts but critical thinking and critical analysis skills. Rather than producing writing samples focused on “your opinion on the Civil Rights Act”, evidence-based writing that requires using information in a passage to create a written convincing argument is expected.

In short, the tests represent the higher order skills that employers and postsecondary institutions are demanding from a 21<sup>st</sup> century high school assessment. Economists have proclaimed for a number of years that a high school diploma is no longer enough to qualify for today’s high demand jobs and for the United States to compete successfully in today’s global economy, as stated in the Lumina Foundation’s report ‘*A Stronger Nation through Higher Education*’. Nationally, the rationale for

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increasing higher education attainment has become more widely understood, and most now agree that, as a nation, we desperately need more citizens with postsecondary credentials. Much of this awareness is driven by the realization that 65 percent of U.S. jobs — almost two-thirds — will require some form of postsecondary education by 2020.

As the tests change to address the higher order skills, it takes time for the book publishers to create, field test and publish revised instructional materials. Likewise, it takes time to provide teachers the professional development needed to prepare adults at a higher level of performance. In May of 2013 the adult education state director's national organization ([www.naepdc.org](http://www.naepdc.org)) sponsored the first opportunity for states to come together in Louisville, KY to review the just-developed National Adult Education College and Career Readiness Standards and design professional development for all of their teachers (<http://clee.utk.edu/ccrtdi/>). The new test began seven months later.

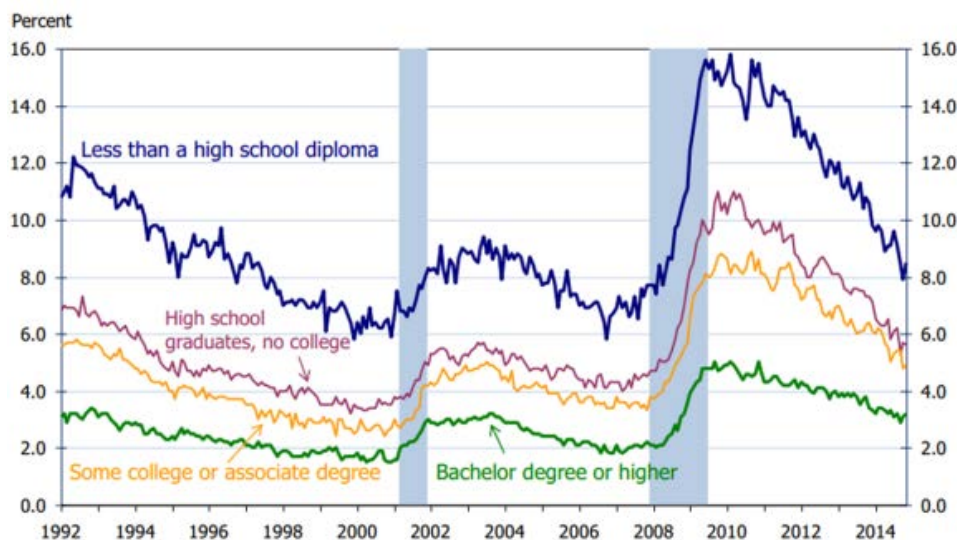
### Economic and Education Influences:

As we look back on the past four years, we see economic and education trends that have influenced both participation and pass rate for the high school equivalency testing.

#### **Economy:**

In 2010 an adult without a high school diploma found few jobs for which he or she was qualified. Those who could not find work were more likely to turn to education. In 2014 unemployment is at a low and jobs are easier to find. "I've never seen an adult who would choose education over employment," one of our adult educators remarked.

As the chart below depicts (TABLE # 3), the percent of unemployment (left axis) peaked with the recession and has decreased since then, particularly for those with less than a high school diploma!!!



Note: Shaded areas represent recessions as determined by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER). Data online at [http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14027659&series\\_id=LNS14027660&series\\_id=LNS14027689&series\\_id=LNS14027662](http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14027659&series_id=LNS14027660&series_id=LNS14027689&series_id=LNS14027662).

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, December 5, 2014.

TABLE # 3

In 2009 at the peak of the downturn, the GED® testing volumes were at their highest. As the economy showed improvement from 2010 through 2014, the GED® testing volume decreased with each year of improvement:

- 2009 – 788,000
- 2010 – 757,000
- 2011 – 723,000
- 2012 – 703,000

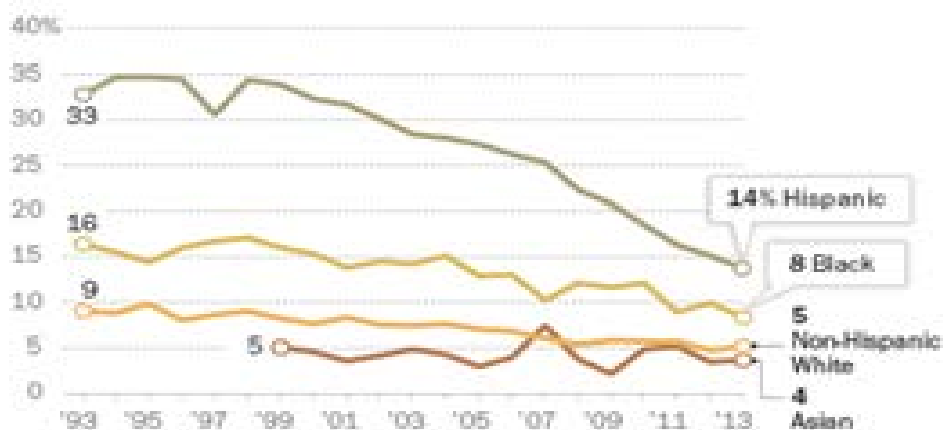
(NOTE: These numbers reflect all examinees, not just the ones who took a full battery included in Tables 1 and 2. Examinees are allowed to take fewer than the five tests in many states.)

### High School Graduation:

The second perhaps minor influence on participation and passing rates is the high school graduation rate itself that is at a high point. (TABLE # 4 below) As a result there are fewer dropouts looking to the HSE as a second option.

## Hispanic, Black High School Dropout Rates Reach Record Lows

Percent of 18-to 24-year-olds dropping out of high school



Notes: The status dropout rate shown refers to the share of 18-to 24-year-olds who were not enrolled in school and had not completed high school. Black and Asian include the Hispanic portion of those groups. White includes only non-Hispanic whites.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau October Current Population Survey

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TABLE # 4

### The Tests are Harder:

We hear similar concerns in 2014 that we heard in 2002. “This new test is hard.” “Our students are going to have difficulty passing it.”

The new tests are harder because the skills required for good jobs and entering training programs are higher. Yes, students will have difficulty passing if instructional programs provide the same level of instruction that was provided over the last ten years. Thus, program efforts to update both instructional materials and teacher preparation are a priority.

### Summary:

As we saw in 2002, in 2014 in the first few months of the change in tests, the number of participants decreases significantly; the passing rate decreases; and we all begin to worry.

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Next year this time, as the local adult education programs finish gearing up teachers and materials and the mystique of the new “harder” test fades, the participation and passing rates we predict will begin to move back toward normal levels, as it has done with every new edition since the first high school equivalency test was created after WWII.

We are proud that adult educators are leading the way to prepare men and women for the high demand jobs in this country and to successfully enter college. We did not shy away from the College and Career Ready Standards that prepare individuals for those jobs and college. The ETS, GED® Testing Service and McGraw-Hill Education paralleled that change by adapting or beginning to adapt their tests toward that higher standard.

It would be a disservice to prepare adults to a lower standard. A high school diploma or equivalent alone is simply not enough to succeed in today’s workforce and earn a family sustaining wage. Some postsecondary education and training is critical for our adults to even have a chance to compete for not just a job....but a good job, a better job and a career.

So...if it is quite evident that our adult students need to be prepared to transition to postsecondary education and training then we should equip them with the skills and credential needed to enter college prepared to succeed in credit bearing courses rather than the black hole of developmental education courses. Statistics illustrate that students taking more than one remedial course rarely graduate. Thus not preparing them at a higher level is the real disservice.

Millions of adult Americans do not have the knowledge, skills and abilities to qualify for community college or high demand jobs. Some thirty five million did not finish high school in years when a high school diploma was not needed to get a good job. Millions more graduated from high school in the 70s, 80s, and even the 90s when standards for high school graduation met the needs of the day but do not meet the needs of 2015.

Our purpose, adult education’s purpose, is to enable adult students to “prosper.” In order to prosper, they must meet the ever higher standards for community college and careers.

All adult educators are in the decennial “scurry” ramping up our instruction, support services, assessment and credentialing services to provide opportunities for those tens of millions of adults to demonstrate they have the skills demanded by today’s workplace.

If you have further questions, please contact your adult education state director ([http://www.naepdc.org/members/members\\_home.html](http://www.naepdc.org/members/members_home.html)) or their Washington DC NCSDAE office at the address below.

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