

GED Facts & Figures

60,045

Number of Mainers without a high school diploma/GED¹

\$25,367/\$18,557

Median annual wage of a Maine worker with and without a diploma/GED²

\$200,000

Difference in income over a work life between a worker with and without a diploma/GED³

54%

Maine families without a high school diploma/GED that live in poverty⁴

2,258

Number of Maine GED test takers per year⁵

86.9%

Pass rate of Maine GED test takers⁶

91.5%

Success rate for first-time GED test takers in Maine⁷

25.2

Avg age of Maine GED test taker⁸

7.3

Avg number of years a Maine test taker has been out of school before taking the GED⁹

5

Number of tests to obtain a GED: math, science, social studies, reading, and writing¹⁰

7

Number of hours required to complete the five GED tests¹¹

The GED Matters

Making Sure Maine Gets the Best Equivalency Test to Meet the Needs of Low-Income Adult Learners

Mainers without a high school diploma do not fare well in the economy. They are stuck in low-paying jobs with little opportunity for advancement. Recent changes to the General Educational Development (GED®) test make it harder for adult learners who want to earn their diploma. If Maine is to remain committed to making high school equivalency accessible to those who need it most, it will require a testing process that does not impose barriers for low-income working adults.

Obstacles Posed by GED Privatization and Computerization

Starting January 1, 2014, the nonprofit American Council on Education, which has owned the GED for 70 years, will privatize it. The private company will increase costs and administer the tests only on-line and only at sites that meet the company's technology requirements.

Table 1: The New GED Poses Obstacles for Low-Income Mainers

Stranded GED Candidates	Current GED candidates must pass all five GED tests prior to December 31, 2013 or start all over
Higher Test Cost	The current cost will increase from \$40 to \$120 for to take all five required GED tests.
Extra Program Costs	Adult education centers will need computer equipment, updated curriculum materials, and training and certification that comply with the company's protocol.
Fewer Test Sites	It is unclear whether all adult education sites will be upgraded in time, posing hardships for those who lack transportation or must miss work to travel to a distant test site.
Inflexibility	Accommodations for adult learners with learning disabilities or who lack computer proficiency are more restricted.

Background

The state of Maine pays the cost for adult students to prepare for and take the GED. Adult educators work one-on-one with students to complete the GED exams successfully. Maine's individualized approach puts it eighth in the nation for GED pass rates.

The GED consists of five tests: math, science, social studies, reading, and writing. Students take the tests at one of 78 adult education centers across the state. Currently, it takes seven hours to complete all five of the paper-and-pencil tests. When a student passes all the GED tests, Maine's Department of Education confers a diploma, which is the legal equivalent of a Maine high school diploma.

The current version of the GED is outdated and leaves GED recipients insufficiently prepared for careers or higher education.

The new owner of the GED—Pearson VUE—is an established provider of online testing services. They have updated test content to include modern skill sets such as problem-solving and computer literacy, and they will provide feedback to students on additional work needed to become career or college ready. However, with their high cost and inflexibility, Pearson VUE may not be the best option for Maine.

What Maine Needs to Address in Selecting an Equivalency Test

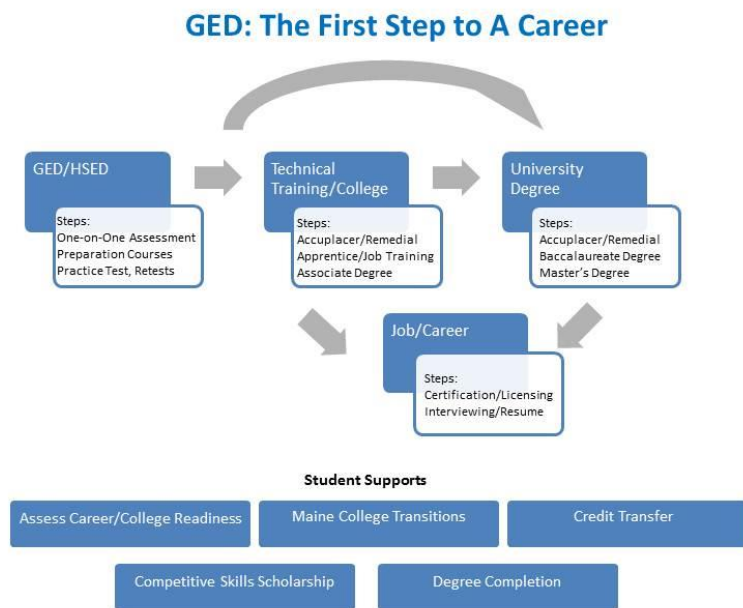
While the GED is the most widely accepted, there are other exams and testing services for granting a high school equivalency. New York State has adopted the TASC™ test developed by McGraw Hill. New Hampshire will use the nonprofit HiSET™ test. Both are more affordable and flexible.

Maine’s Department of Education will soon solicit proposals to provide the high school equivalency test in Maine that it can evaluate against Pearson VUE. This competitive bidding process is Maine’s first, best chance to obtain a test and testing service that serves the state’s needs. To provide the greatest chance of success and therefore improve the job opportunities for Maine’s low-income, adult test-takers, the department must ensure that its equivalency test is accessible, compatible with Maine’s individualized adult education system, and remains at no cost to the test-taker.

Table 2: Maine Bid Specifications Needed to Serve Low-Income Adult GED Candidates

1. Grandfathering of GED candidates who have passed parts of the GED prior to January 1, 2014
2. Test costs the state can continue to pay
3. Widely accessible test sites that align with Maine’s decentralized adult education program
4. Workable accommodation of Maine’s successful individualized approach to adult education
5. Flexibility with physical characteristics of small rural adult education sites with limited staff and resources
6. Deference to localized decision-making with regard to students with learning disabilities or who lack computer proficiency (for example, paper-and pencil options)
7. Support each student’s transition to career or college

The First Step to a Career



A GED is not the end point of adult education. Moving on to training and postsecondary education via a career pathway helps adult learners obtain credentials needed for family-sustaining employment and career advancement.¹²

An equivalency test that focuses on college and career readiness is important to support career pathways. Regardless of which equivalency test Maine chooses, its new content must reinforce Maine’s career pathways structure for adult education.

For many working adults, the first step to a higher paying job is to obtain an equivalency diploma. The equivalency diploma, if crafted well, will also help adult learners as they aspire to further education and technical skills. Both are necessary to offer low-income working adults better employment opportunities that will help toward greater personal and family prosperity and strengthen Maine’s economy.

This report is funded by the Working Poor Families Project: www.workingpoorfamilies.org

Endnotes:

¹ Working Poor Families Project. Population Reference Bureau, analysis of 2011 American Community Survey.
² *Measures of Growth in Focus 2013*. “Benchmark #9: 2011 Maine Median Earnings for Population Age 25 and Over by Educational Attainment,” March 2013; and 2011 HHS Poverty Guidelines, <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/11poverty.shtml>.
⁴ Working Poor Families Project, “Percent of working families <100% of poverty in which no parent has some post-secondary education.” Population Reference Bureau analysis of 2011 American Community Survey.
⁵⁻⁹ GED Testing Service. *2011 Annual Statistical Report on the GED® Test*, 2012.
¹⁰⁻¹¹ GED Testing Service. *Website*. <http://www.gedtestingservice.com/testers/faqs-test-taker>. Accessed on June 11, 2013.
¹² National Center on Education and the Economy. *Guide to Adult Education for Work Transforming Adult Education to Grow a Skilled Workforce*, 2009.