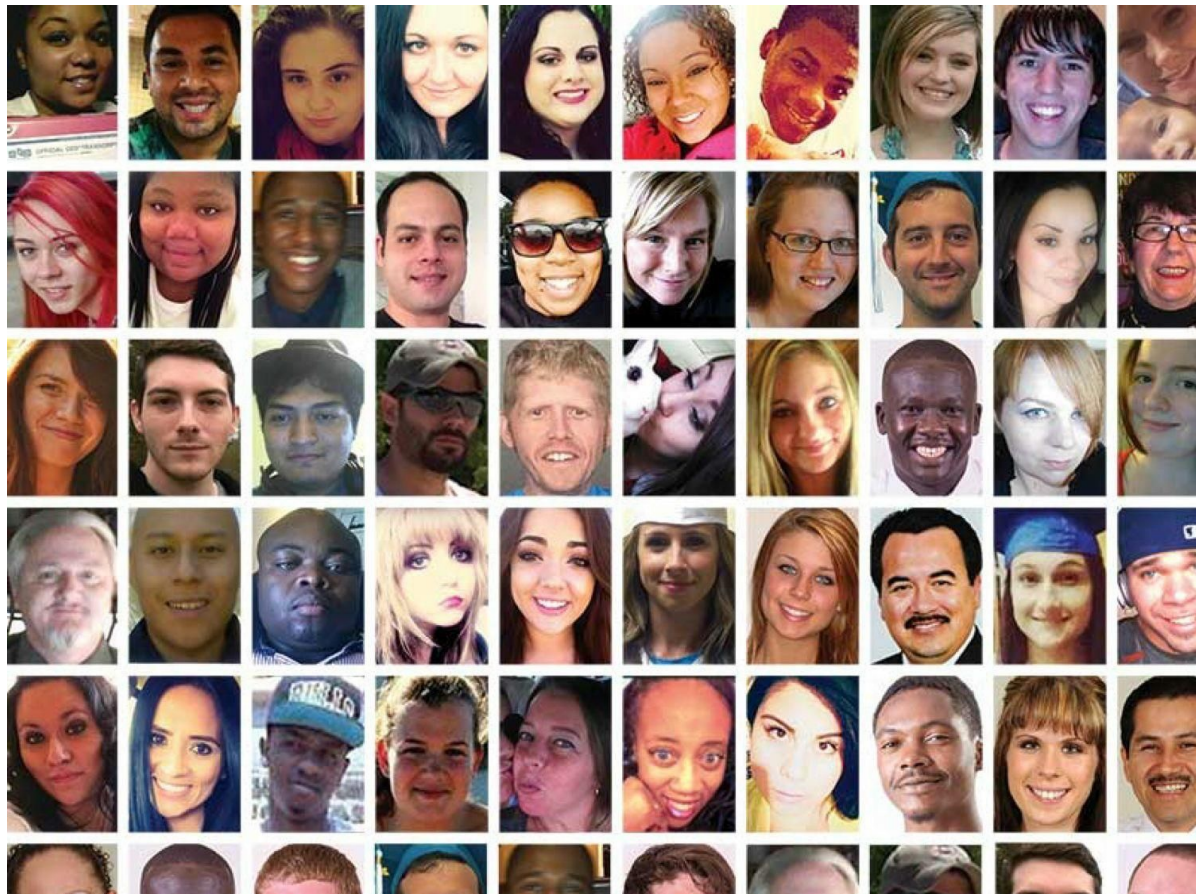

Efficacy Research Report

GED Testing Service

March 2017



Product Summary

The GED Program launched in January 2014 as part of the continuing effort of GED Testing Service to help adult learners obtain the credentials needed to access a variety of postsecondary education pathways and to progress in the workplace and in job training programs. The program operates primarily in the US, although there is also an international presence, discussed in later sections of this report.

The GED Program is founded on two key assessments with related but differing purposes: the flagship GED test, the nationally recognized high school equivalency test developed by experts with a 70 year history in high school equivalency; and the GED Ready Official Practice Test, which provides a score predictive of performance on the operational GED test.

Both tests were developed concurrently, with similar specifications, yet are utilized differently. GED Ready was built to the same content specifications as the GED test and therefore allows individuals to evaluate their likelihood of success on the GED test. GED Ready also provides an opportunity to gain additional testing experience as well as exposure to the content and format of the GED test.

The GED test itself is intended for jurisdictions to award a high school-level credential. The GED test is also an indication of readiness for some jobs, job training programs, and/or credit-bearing postsecondary education coursework. The GED test is:

- Aligned with current high school standards (including US grade 12 standards) and career and college-readiness expectations.
- Delivered exclusively on computer which provides a consistent testing experience nationwide.
- Has same-day scoring on all four parts including the new score report for reporting and remediation.
- Offers three score levels:
 - GED Passing Score: at or higher than the minimum needed to demonstrate high school equivalency-level skills and abilities in the US.
 - GED College Ready: at or higher than the minimum needed to demonstrate readiness for credit bearing college courses in US.
 - GED College Ready+Credit: at or higher than the minimum needed to qualify for granting of up to 10 semester hours of college credit.
- Provides an opt-in feature enabling learners to receive text messages sent from the program to help support them and keep them on track with their progress towards attaining their GED credential.

In addition, The GEDWorks initiative, in which GED Testing Service is partnering with major employers to provide instruction, coaching, and other support to their employees who are seeking to attain their GED credential.

GED Testing Service has made a public commitment to ensuring that the test content and performance levels will be monitored over time and kept current with corresponding content and performance requirements leading to awarding of regular high school diplomas.

Intended Outcomes

The following are learner outcomes that have been agreed for GED Testing Service. Our efficacy impact evaluation work (outlined in “Product Research” below) aims to evidence GED Testing Service’s impact on these outcomes.

Intended Outcome 1: Learners will experience increased satisfaction with the testing experience and with access to the GED Program.

Historically, adult learners have not had much information about the GED test nor much control in how they access and take the test. One of the goals in providing additional information and resources to learners is to enable them to increase their success with the program and to experience increased satisfaction with the results. GED Testing Service is implementing a long term research program which will measure learner satisfaction with the program over time.

Intended Outcome 2: Learners will complete the full GED test at increasing rates over time.

In order to have an opportunity to pass the GED test, students must first complete the test. Effective preparation will improve the likelihood of completion. GED Ready provides an opportunity for students to gain additional testing experience as well as exposure to the content and format of the GED test. This provides exposure to and practice in a realistic way that helps students be better prepared for the GED test.

Intended Outcome 3: Learners will pass the GED test at increasing rates over time

Passing the GED test at the high school equivalency level is an important first step in helping learners progress toward their long term goals. The new GED Program has been designed with an extensive amount of learner resources, including the MyGED Portal through which learners access instructional materials, information about their progress towards passing the GED test, the detailed score report showing areas of strength and weakness, and information about careers and college pathways. These resources are designed to help more students be successful in passing the test than in the past.

Intended Outcome 4: Learners will meet their personal goals after earning their GED credential.

The US is facing a national crisis. Millions of adults, without high school diplomas, lack the skills and knowledge to succeed in the 21st century marketplace (OECD, 2013). This impacts every community in the US. That is why GED Testing Service has built not just a new test, but a new comprehensive program. The new GED Program ensures that an adult's high school equivalency credential signifies he or she has the skills and knowledge necessary to take the next critical steps in his or her life.

Intended Outcome 5: After earning their GED credential, learners will progress to postsecondary education.

In response to an increasingly competitive labor market and a growing skills gap in the workforce, the GED test underwent another significant revision in 2014. The revised version of

the test allows learners who score at the highest level to earn college credits, which could further encourage them to pursue postsecondary education.

Intended Outcome 6: Learners will increasingly pass the GED test at the two college and career-readiness performance standards: GED College Ready and GED College Ready+Credit.

Although passing the GED test at the high school equivalency level is the first step in the learner journey, the majority of jobs in the future that provide family sustaining income will require postsecondary credentials, above and beyond high school equivalency. The support provided by the GED Program is designed to help learners demonstrate their skills at career-and-college-readiness levels at increasing rates over time.

Intermediate Outcomes

Intermediate Outcome 1: More learners actively use the preparation tools and resources available to them through the MyGED Portal.

MyGED is the start-to-finish online portal for test takers and those who work with them. Launched at the end of November 2013, MyGED is the hub for all GED test activities providing a personalized online program that guides test takers through the entire testing process. It also provides resources to assist in transitions to postsecondary education and careers.

Intermediate Outcome 2: More learners will use the GED Ready Official Practice Test, which predicts their score on the operational test, as part of their test preparation strategy.

The GED Ready went through the same norming and standardization study as the official test. That means the questions are designed to mimic the official test and that the test results are predictive of how a student will perform on the official test. Test feedback includes an indicator of how likely a learner is to pass the GED test given their performance on the GED Ready. The GED Ready enhanced score report also provides learners with targeted study plans highlighting both their academic strengths to build upon and areas to address in further preparation activities.

As a result, the GED Ready is the closest thing to taking the GED test without actually taking the test, and the best way for students to prepare.

Intermediate Outcome 3: An increasing number of learners without a high school diploma will have access to the tools and resources provided by GEDTS to help them make progress toward their learning goals.

In the past, tools and resources for the GED test were often difficult to obtain, as most programs were operated at the local level. The online MyGED portal now makes information, tools, and resources widely available to anyone with an Internet connection. These more accessible tools are intended to help improve the outreach to learners in need of a high school equivalency credential to take advantage of the GED Program in increasing numbers over time.

Foundational Research

The overall design and framework of the GED Program is centered around providing measurements and tools documenting and promoting student achievement. Therefore, the program design is built around increasing efficacy. More information about the test itself and the underlying documentation and validity framework may be found in the 2014 GED Test Technical Manual on the [GED Testing Service website](#).

The philosophy underlying the GED test is that there is a foundational core of academic skills and content knowledge that an adult must demonstrate to be certified as prepared to enter a job, a training program, or an entry-level, credit-bearing postsecondary course. This foundational core of knowledge and skills is defined by career and college-readiness standards (Pimentel, 2013), now adopted in some form by the majority of states.

The GED test has three purposes:

1. To provide a high school–level credential.
2. To provide information about a candidate’s academic strengths and weaknesses.
3. To provide evidence of readiness to enter workforce training programs, careers, or postsecondary education.

The GED test is future-focused: that is, it is designed to provide information about candidate readiness that is directly tied to the next steps in a candidate’s preparation and training. Many factors impact actual workplace or postsecondary success (such as engagement, teamwork, or creativity). However, the GED test focuses on those foundational career and college academic skills and knowledge that are critical for candidates to be prepared for the next step in their future, whether they seek to enter the workforce or some form of postsecondary education for further education and training.

Intended Product Implementation

The GED test has been in existence since 1942, but the new GED Program was implemented starting in November 2013 with the launch of the GED Ready and the MyGED portal, which included the Enhanced Score Report. The operational GED test followed with implementation in January 2014. In the time since the initial launches occurred, the GED Program has continued to be enhanced and new resources added.

The GED test has evolved notably since its days as a pencil-and-paper test designed to help veterans to obtain a high school diploma. Seven decades later, the GED test is accompanied by services such as an online portal and a suite of preparation materials designed to prime learners to perform at their best on test day. In addition, an increasingly competitive economy has forced the test to shift even more significantly. College credits are now attainable for the highest scoring takers of the GED test, and enrollment in post-secondary education remains one of the highest priorities for the makers of the test. Many learners know that without a proper credential, long term economic success could remain out of reach.

Some of the key components of the GED Program and their intended use include the following:

- MyGED: The portal through which learners access all of the resources and processes that facilitate their test-taking journey, including accessing tutorials, connecting with preparation programs and materials, viewing test results and score reports, taking practice tests, and career exploration.
- GED Ready: The Official Practice Test that gives learners a prediction of their score on the operational GED test.
- Enhanced Score Report: Provides learners their score, performance level, and descriptions of the skills they demonstrated on the test and those they need to develop further to obtain a higher score.
- New GED test: the new assessment is aligned with current college and career readiness standards.
- Pathsource: A free tool for learners to use to explore a variety of career pathways.
- GEDWorks: An employer -sponsored program supporting employees in the achievement of their GED credential, described in more detail below.
- GED College Ready and GED College Ready+Credit: Updated test performance levels enabling high performing students to bypass remedial courses, avoid placement testings and even earn college credits depending on their level of GED test performance.

Additional enhancements will continue to be implemented on an ongoing basis, all of which are designed to improve student outcomes and increase efficacy.

In response to an increasingly competitive labor market and a growing skills gap in the workforce, the GED test underwent another significant revision in 2014. The revised version of the test allows learners who score at the highest level to achieve college credits, which could further encourage them to pursue post-secondary education. Another significant component of this revision to the GED test was the transition to a digital platform. The official GED test, as well as practice tests and other features, are administered by computer. In addition to the flagship GED

test, the program also offers the GED Ready Official Practice Test, which provides a score predictive of performance on the actual GED test.

While users tout the ease and convenience of the MyGED portal, and more than 770,000 learners have online accounts, GED Testing Service is currently conducting further research with the goal of continuing to improve overall engagement on and effectiveness of the platform. The number of MyGED users who take the GED Ready (available to students through the MyGED portal) and complete the full battery of tests shows initial evidence of active user engagement on the platform.

In addition, an analysis of 2014 - 2016 results demonstrate that 51 percent of candidates prepared with the GED Ready Official Practice Test, surpassing the company's target of 33 percent. This target is based on historical percentages of test takers who completed the Official Practice Test as part of the previous GED test edition. Surpassing this benchmark shows strong improvement over time in the number of test-takers who prepare for the GED test. As the GED test evolves and students use the practice test and other tools as part of their preparation strategy, the program aims to have more learners complete and pass the full GED test at increasing rates over time.

Product Research

<i>National Student Clearinghouse Data Match</i>	
Study Citation	Title: 2014 GED Graduates Data Match Study Researchers: Carl Setzer, Ph.D. Hung-chen Hsu, Ph.D.
Research Study Contributors	GED Testing Service Assessment Services
Type of Study	Data match study
Sample Size	10,000 GED graduates who received their credential in 2014
Description of Sample	GED Testing Service conducted a simple random sample of 10,000 GED test completers who passed the test in 2014. The sample size was ample to make meaningful generalizations (given a successful matching process)
Outcomes Measured	Progress to postsecondary education after receiving the GED credential

Introduction

GED Testing Service recognizes the importance of a high school degree not only on one's future but also on the economy. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports that over 30 million adults between the ages of 16 and 65 did not have at least a high school diploma or GED credential in 2012, the most recent year for which data is available. High school dropouts cost the US \$1.8 billion annually. In addition, studies indicate that if the number of dropouts among Americans aged 20 was cut in half, the US would gain \$45 billion in higher tax revenues and lower costs for health, prisons, and welfare (Purdue Extension Learning Network of Clinton County, 2014). Finally, if the US had in recent years closed the gap between its educational achievement levels and those of better performing nations, GDP in 2008 could have been \$1.3 trillion to \$2.3 trillion higher. This represents 9 to 16% of GDP (McKinsey & Company, 2009).

There is an extensive body of research documenting the value of completing and passing the

GED test on the life outcomes of test takers. Published research to date refers to previous editions of the GED test. Because of differences in the GED test editions over time, future research may have different findings. Key findings from previous research include:

- Adults who earn a GED credential can earn as much in weekly wages as a high school graduate. Compared to non-GED credential holders, GED credential holders can increase their earning potential by about \$115 per week (Song & Hsu, 2008).
- An analysis of 12 years of data showed that, as of 2008, GED test credential recipients earned higher hourly compensation, worked more hours, had higher family incomes, enjoyed higher job satisfaction, and tended to receive better fringe benefits from their employers than uncredentialed high school dropouts. From a longitudinal perspective, for each year after earning a GED test credential, the hourly wages of credential recipients would increase by 2.0% beyond increases in wages of uncredentialed high school dropouts that come with the accumulation of work experiences (Song, 2011).
- Historically, about 43% of GED test passers enroll in postsecondary education, 26% of the enrollees persist through postsecondary education, and about 12% of postsecondary enrollees with GED credentials graduate (GED Testing Service, 2011).

The revisions to the GED Program aim to give adults without a high school diploma another chance to go to college or get a good job with higher wages and to produce better long term future outcomes than were historically the case.

The consequences of passing (or not passing) the GED test are a primary component of the GEDTS research agenda. A key research study is a data matching process between GED test taker data and extant, national postsecondary enrollment records.

National Student Clearinghouse

National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) is a non-profit organization that warehouses, manages, and verifies enrollment data for over 3,600 postsecondary education (PSE) institutions. According to its website, NSC participants cover 98 percent of all students in public or private US institutions. NSC maintains a database—StudentTracker—which is primarily used by high schools (or local districts) to measure and track PSE enrollment. Similarly, StudentTracker is capable of providing GED Testing Service with similar estimates on a national scale. StudentTracker provides data on a number of variables. A successful match will return information (at the student level) regarding the college name and state, type of institution (2- or 4-year; public or private), enrollment dates, enrollment status (part- or full-time), class level, major field of study, and graduation status with date and degree attained.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the current study was to obtain enrollment data on a representative sample of GED test passers and examine the rate with which GED test passers enrolled in

post-secondary education (PSE). By using a probability-based sampling approach, the resulting match rate with StudentTracker should theoretically provide an estimated percentage of recent GED test passers enrolled in a PSE institution. Additional StudentTracker data provided further context and descriptions of those students enrolled in PSE, including the type of institutions enrolled by GED passers, average GED test scores, and overall demographic composition of the enrolled population.

Method

GED Testing Service selected a simple random sample of 10,000 individuals who passed the GED test in 2014. The sample represented approximately 17% of the total population of 58,542 GED test passers in 2014, and therefore the size was ample to make meaningful generalizations (given a successful matching process). Test takers were eligible for the sample based on completion data (2014) and passing status, which was originally derived using scaled scores for all content areas (i.e., passed if scaled score was greater than or equal to 150 in all four content areas). However, an internal post hoc match with GED Testing Service's portal data suggested that 24 of the sampled persons did not, in fact, obtain a credential due to some additional jurisdictional policy requirement (e.g. combining English and Spanish test scores may not be allowed in some jurisdictions). These 24 records were excluded from any denominators, making the final usable sample size 9,976.

The random sample file was formatted to meet NSC guidelines and subsequently forwarded to NSC in mid-July, 2015. NSC performed the matching process using only first name, middle initial, and last name. (Name suffix was also included but was blank for all sampled persons.) NSC emailed an initial match rate estimate and asked for comment about its reasonableness and for permission to return the matched file results. The matched dataset was received in late October, 2015. GED Testing Service subsequently linked the NSC data with internal records for further demographic and performance analysis. A follow-up match on the original sample was conducted in October 2016 to examine whether additional progress in postsecondary education had occurred on the part of sampled GED graduates.

A total of 14,503 records were returned in the matched file. Nine records were exact duplicates which reduced the record number to 14,494. The number of returned records was greater than the original sample of ten thousand due to the one-to-many structure of the returned file—a matched name would likely have more than one record due to multiple enrollments. For example, if a person was enrolled at a PSE institution and had attended two semesters, there were two records for that person—one for each semester.

Results

Of the ten thousand original sampled persons, 3,391¹ (34%) were successfully matched by NSC^[1]

¹ The actual number of matches was 3,394. However, three of these matches were ineligible because they did not receive their GED credential.

Note that 143 additional students requested their data not be used or the school blocked their data altogether. Adding these two numbers provides an estimate of 35.4 percent of recent GED test passers enrolled in a PSE institution. To put these results in context, the 2004 cohort of GED graduates who received their credentials under the previous GED test edition (the most recent cohort for which data is available), progressed to postsecondary education at the rate of 24% within one year of receiving their credential.

A 2016 follow-up study with this sample showed that the enrollment percentage had increased to 41% within two years of graduating. Again for context, it took the 2004 cohort six years after receiving their credential to reach a postsecondary progression rate of 43%.

These results demonstrate the increased speed of progression to postsecondary education under the new GED Program currently in effect. An additional random sample of nearly 27,000 2015 GED graduates showed that 32% had enrolled in postsecondary education within a year of credentialing, similar to the results for the 2014 GED graduates.

Discussion

The post-secondary enrollment rates for graduates of the current GED test represent more than a 30 percent increase from the 12-month enrollment rate GED test-takers had 10 years prior. It will be important to continue to closely monitor the final number of GED graduates who enroll in postsecondary institutions to determine the overall effectiveness of the service and to set future goals for enrollment. In 2016, more GED graduates went on to pursue higher education than in any other year.

Results from a further internal analysis into completion and pass rates for 2014-2016 show that of those that took the GED test, 60% completed the full test. In addition, results for pass rates show that 63 percent of test completers passed GED test on their first attempt. When multiple testing attempts are included, the overall test pass rate is 83 percent.

To ensure learners will increasingly pass GED test at the college and career-readiness performance standard, GED Testing Service conducted pilot studies in 2015 designed to help hone specific research questions that will guide the series of longitudinal studies that are beginning in 2017. These studies will also examine the progress learners are making toward the higher performance level. This is important for learners because higher skill levels are increasingly needed in order to enter and complete postsecondary education programs.

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