



Q. I heard that the GED (General Equivalency Diploma) requirements will be changing next year! Is that true?

A. Yes, it is true. For millions of adults who never completed high school, the General Equivalency Diploma has been the gateway to careers, college degrees and improvement in all aspects of life including poverty. In January, the process adults undergo to earn a GED will change radically. Paper-and-pencil tests are being swapped for computerized exams, the questions will become more challenging, and the price to take the exams will rise. About 1 million Americans are racing to complete the exam before January, 2014 because those who have completed only portions of the exam will lose their money and the test after this date without any credit.

According to the www.workingpoorfamilies.org website, "While many agree that updating the

GED test is needed, there is concern among adult educators and others that the pending changes

may create obstacles for a number of individuals, particularly low-income students. Changes

that could impact individuals who take and pass the GED test include: increased test costs, a shift

to computerized tests, more difficult test content especially in math, and, in many states, a

reduction in the number of test centers. Coupled with Congress' July, 2012 elimination of

the Pell grant "ability to Benefit" regulation—which made those without a high school diploma

or equivalent ineligible for federal financial aid—progressing to postsecondary education may

become more difficult for many low-income students." The GED exams were developed in 1942 by the American Council on education as a high school completion strategy for veterans

returning from World War II who wanted to go to college. Since that time, some 18 million

GEDs have been awarded. The GED test is the most widely recognized alternative to a high

school diploma. The average age of test takers is 26. Nationally, GEDs now comprise one in

every seven high school diplomas and one in every 20 college entrants has completed their GED.

Old versus the New

The current GED battery of tests encompass five subject tests which, when passed, certify that

the taker has American (or Canadian) high school-level academic skills. The five subject tests include reading, writing, math, science and social studies. In early 2011, the American Council on Education (ACE), the not-for-profit organization that developed and has administered the test for 70 years, announced the creation of a jointly owned for-profit partnership with Pearson Vue,

the world's largest testing company. The partnership was formed as ACE officials believed that the test content did not adequately reflect college preparedness and that the testing process needed to be computerized to align with contemporary testing protocols. Further, ACE believed that Pearson's significant expertise and resources were necessary to develop, norm and implement a new GED test that incorporated strong college readiness standards, specifically the common core state standards. These standards were considered important in helping assure colleges, universities and prospective employers that adults who have passed the GED tests are prepared to compete and succeed in a global economy. The content redesign will result in a four-test format—literacy, math, science and social studies. Writing skills will be assessed within the content of two or more of the tests rather than in a separate writing test. In addition, two types of certification will be available through the GED test—general high school equivalency and an endorsement that indicates college and career readiness.

Adults do not complete high school for many reasons such as: teen pregnancy/parenting, quitting school to find jobs to help support a poor family, behavior problems, undiagnosed learning disabilities, emotional challenges, poor academic skills, frustration, ineffective teaching and taking care of a sick or drug addicted parent. It leads one to wonder how an adult with a poverty background will be able to afford the new GED costs, which is rising from about \$35 to \$120 in the New Year. Will they have access to a computer? Do they have adequate computer skills to be able to complete an exam? Do they have the exposure to the academic content, vocabulary and experiences needed to succeed with the new standards? Will these new obstacles hinder poor minorities from trying to obtain a GED?

“The goal of adult education should be to ensure that all students are equipped with the basic skills they need to access higher levels of education that will lead to good, quality jobs,” states Sabine Schoenbach from the North Carolina Justice Center, an advocacy group that pushes for the elimination of poverty, “The GED represents an important bridge to further skills training and education. Adequate funding for basic skills training is therefore necessary, and the connection of basic skills to credential attainment in ways that engage low-income working adults is key to strengthening a path to self-sufficiency.”

In many states, poor Hispanics will be impacted the most; much higher than poor African-Americans. Organizations (community adult programs, churches, organizations for the poor, education donors) that have supported GED candidates in the past will have to increase their participation and funding and provide more rigorous teaching programs to assist students in meeting the new standards. Poor minority students, who may have attended a substandard school system that failed them already, should not be denied the opportunity to pursue future educational endeavors just because they have not been exposed to enriching educational experiences and not because they don't possess the cognitive skills to do so!

For more information visit: http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/WFPF-fall-brief_2012.pdf

Lisa-Anne Ray-Byers is a licensed and certified speech-language pathologist who has worked in education for over two decades. She holds graduate degrees in speech-language pathology and multicultural education. She also holds certification in educational administration. She is the author of the books, ***They Say I Have ADHD, I Say Life Sucks! Thoughts From Nicholas, They S S Say I'm a St St Stutterer, But I S S Say Nothing! Meet Kelly*** and co-author of the books

365 Ways to Succeed With ADHD

and

365+1 Ways to Succeed With ADHD

available at www.Amazon.com. She is a member of the National Education Writers Association and the Education Editor of the

Community Journal

newspaper in Baldwin, New York. You may contact her at

speechlrb@yahoo.com

or by visiting her website at

www.AskLisaAnne.com

.