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## Changes to the GED & More High School Equivalency Exam Options

In 2014 the GED exam was overhauled for the first time since 2002. Since the change, the National GED Testing Service saw a significant decrease in graduates. As a reaction to the decrease in grads, many states began researching and implementing alternative equivalency exams. The numbers were nothing to sneer at. Whereas in 2012 401,388 people passed the GED test, only 58,524 passed it in 2014. Some reports said that even high school graduates couldn't pass the new GED.

Changes included computer only administration, and more writing and critical thinking components. Designed to mirror high school curriculum changes and to mimic the skills required in a changing workforce, the GED was due for an update. Since the government created the GED in 1942 for the young men and women returning from World War II, the test has been updated five times. The upgrades usually result in drops in participation the following year, as test takers elect to wait until they have a better handle on what the new test will look like before signing up.

Some see this latest update as an unnecessary barrier for people who are already at a disadvantage. By increasing the test's difficulty, increasing the cost, and requiring computers, they say people who are already struggling are being put at a disadvantage. Proponents for the changes to the test argue that the changes were needed in order to keep it relevant for employers who rely on the GED to measure skills comparable to those a high school graduate would have. In today's technological world, it's rare to find a workplace that isn't mostly digitized.

Alternative high school equivalency exams include the HiSET (High School Equivalency Test) or the TASC. Those opposed to the difficulty level of the GED say that the HiSET and TASC are fairer to students and less expensive. The alternative tests were actually created in the face of concerns that the GED was becoming more profit driven. Some say that it's good to have alternatives but others argue that the increase in options may confuse test takers and may defeat the purpose of standardization inherent in the GED.

In many states, the response to the more difficult GED was to lower the score needed to pass the test. In Michigan and 32 other states, the passing score for the GED was lowered from 150 to 145. The change was recommended by the GED Testing Service after the changes were implemented and fewer people started passing (and taking) their exam. In 2015, the exam had

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a 73% pass rate. Aside from the lower passing score requirement, in some states, test takers with scores between 165 and 174 are categorized as ready to enter credit-bearing college courses and those who receive a score between 175 and 200 qualify for up to ten hours of college credit.

These changes demonstrate an effort by the GED Testing Centre and local governments to improve the GED program while also attempting to stay relevant in a world where high school dropouts are finding they have increasing options.

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