



## **A SECOND CHANCE FOR OREGON, HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS, AND THE GED**

*Oregon has neglected pathways of success for dropouts, but the launch of a new high school equivalency exam offers the possibility of a better future.*



*City Club of Portland Bulletin, Vol. 96, No. 11, January 17, 2014*

*City Club members will vote on this report between Friday, January 24, 2014 and Wednesday, January 29, 2014. Until the membership votes, City Club of Portland does not have an official position on this report. The outcome of the vote will be reported in the City Club of Portland Bulletin Vol. 96, No. 12, dated January 31, 2014, and online at [pdxcityclub.org](http://pdxcityclub.org).*

## Table of Contents

<b>Executive summary</b> .....	3
Conclusions .....	5
Recommendations .....	5
<b>About this study</b> .....	7
Study charge .....	7
Study methodology.....	7
Composition of the committee.....	9
Acknowledgements.....	9
<b>Background</b> .....	10
Introduction .....	10
Why earn a GED? .....	11
History of the GED .....	12
2014 Revision and the Common Core Standards .....	14
40-40-20 and the challenge of high school dropouts.....	17
<b>Discussion</b> .....	20
The illusion of high school equivalency .....	20
A new era for the GED .....	23
Who takes the GED test? .....	25
Wraparound support services for adults preparing to take the GED.....	27
Paying for the GED .....	31
Alternatives to the GED .....	33
Oregon’s preparation for the new GED .....	35
GED Analytics .....	39
State coordination and funding for the GED .....	40
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	44
<b>Endnotes</b> .....	51

<b>Witnesses</b> .....	56
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	59
<b>Appendix A: Why 19 to 25 year olds?</b> .....	64
<b>Appendix B: The Common Core State Standards</b> .....	66
<b>Appendix C: Demographics of GED test takers (2012)</b> .....	69
<b>About the City Club</b> .....	70

## Executive summary

Oregon has a high school dropout crisis, but the state does not adequately support the primary tool to help young adults get back on track for college and career: The General Educational Development (GED) credential.

It cannot be said that Oregon dropped the GED ball because the state never truly picked it up. Providing services for young adult dropouts who wish to earn a GED certificate has been barely an afterthought in statewide planning. A mix of under-funded, under-coordinated public and private providers have done their best to fill the gap, but they face a steep challenge.

Oregon has a second chance with the launch of a revised GED exam in 2014.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 336,000 adult Oregonians (11 percent) lack a high school diploma or alternative credential. One-quarter of Oregon students fail to complete high school within five years, though some eventually do earn a diploma or alternate certificate.

School districts are working hard to keep kids in the classroom and shepherd them to graduation. But even the most optimistic predictions do not include a day any time soon when every student will earn a diploma. Rather, if only due to unforeseen life circumstances, too many students will continue to enter adulthood having dropped out before graduation. Oregon must do more to help those future dropouts and those who already have dropped out.

The day after a student leaves school for the last time without a diploma, his future prospects are grim, but not hopeless. The GED offers adults a second chance. Though it is not a genuine high school equivalent, it is a way for them to advance into college and career.

High school alternative credentials are particularly important within the context of Oregon's ambitious 40-40-20 plan. The governor and lawmakers set a goal that by 2025, 40 percent of Oregonians will earn at least a bachelor's degree, 40 percent will earn an associate's degree or post-secondary credential, and the remaining 20 percent will earn at least a high school diploma or alternative. To reach 40-40-20, then, nearly every Oregonian will need a high school diploma or an alternative like the GED.

In recent years, the GED has suffered from a poor reputation among employers, educators and the public. That reputation was well-deserved. Research showed that GED recipients fared little or no better than other high school dropouts.

Things changed on Jan. 2, 2014, when GED Testing Service launched a revised GED exam that aligns with the Common Core State Standards for K-12 education. The new GED has a second chance to dispel past criticisms and serve as a useful educational stepping stone for adults who did not complete high school. Whether it does so remains to be seen.

To maximize the opportunity for success, Oregon must change how it approaches the GED and new alternatives to it. The state lacks coordinated, comprehensive support and oversight for GED-related services, and it cannot even provide a full accounting of public spending on the GED.

The fact that Oregon neither coordinates support for the GED across departments nor tracks expenditures on them creates an environment in which accountability is virtually impossible and success remains elusive.

Such shortcomings became particularly acute in the months leading up to the launch of the 2014 revision. State outreach to help students and GED preparation providers was lacking, necessary administrative and technical changes were hurried or did not occur, and the state provided little help to providers preparing for the transition.

Yet it is not too late to capitalize on the opportunity the revised GED offers.

With the new exam, Oregon will have access to a wealth of data about GED test preparation centers and student performance that can help the state target support toward successful programs and replicate their techniques in different communities. It also will be able to support educational opportunities for communities of color and immigrant communities in a culturally responsive manner.

New hires and appointments to several key positions in state government within the last year make this a particularly good time to enact needed changes.

The new GED offers a second chance for many people and institutions:

- Adults who dropped out of high school and hope to advance to college or career;
- The state of Oregon as a whole, which can finally make the institutional and programmatic changes that would support those adults;
- And the GED itself. If students who earn the new GED credential succeed in college and career, they will rehabilitate the credential's image.

Your committee concludes and recommends the following in order to give young adult dropouts, Oregon and the GED the best opportunity to capitalize on that second chance.

## Conclusions

*This report's conclusions reflect five overarching themes:*

1. The GED is not the same as a high school diploma, but the 2014 GED revision has a chance to demonstrate that it accurately measures college and career readiness. (Conclusions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5)
2. If the new GED leads to college and career readiness, Oregon would benefit from helping more 19 to 25 year olds who lack a high school diploma prepare for and earn the GED credential. (Conclusions 6, 7, and 8)
3. Oregon should monitor the success of GED alternatives in other states, consider adopting them here and prepare for people who earn them to move here. (Conclusions 9, 10 and 11)
4. Oregon has not prepared sufficiently for the 2014 GED revision. (Conclusions 12 and 13)
5. State funding and coordination of GED services are inadequate. (Conclusions 14 and 15)

## Recommendations

*For additional explanation, please refer to the Recommendations section of the report.*

1. The Oregon Department of Education and the Oregon Education Investment Board (OEIB) should launch a public outreach program that targets diverse communities and stakeholders across the state and helps them develop a clear understanding of the 2014 GED program.
2. Oregon's chief education officer should develop and implement a coordinated funding and strategic framework across departments for GED preparation, testing, soft-skill development programs and related wraparound services.
3. The Legislature should allocate dedicated funding to subsidize GED testing for qualified students with demonstrable need.
4. Oregon's public universities should update their admissions criteria to allow admissions for qualified recipients of the 2014 revision of the GED.
5. Officials should collect information about the GED as well as the college and career performance of people after they earn it, and report back to Oregonians regularly. (This recommendation has several parts that are detailed in the full report.)
6. The governor should direct the Department of Administrative Services to prepare an annual report that contains a clear accounting of state funds that are allocated for GED test preparation, testing and related support services.

7. Officials should take a fresh look at alternatives to the GED in a few years. (This recommendation has several parts that are detailed in the full report.)
8. The Oregon Speaker of the House and Senate President should direct the Office of Legislative Counsel to conduct a review of applicable laws and administrative rules that refer to the GED. Counsel should suggest revisions to treat the HiSET, TASC and any other approved GED alternative in other states as equivalent to the GED for purposes of law, post-secondary education, public services and benefits.

## About this study

### Study charge

City Club of Portland charged your research committee with studying how state and local government systems and community-based efforts might better support Oregonians aged 19 to 25 who have dropped out of high school in obtaining a General Educational Development (GED) credential that will lead to a post-secondary education or advanced skills training.\*

The study charge asked your committee to pay particular attention to impacts and opportunities of the 2014 GED revision for Oregon's broader educational goals, how the state can successfully manage transition to the new GED, changes important for communities of color and those with lower socioeconomic status, and how better to evaluate the impact of changes.

In February 2013, an Oregon Secretary of State Audit Report found that "Current strategies aimed at implementing Oregon's 40-40-20 education goal do not sufficiently address the education needs of adults that have already dropped out of school, nor do they address the needs of those that may drop out in the future."<sup>1</sup>

The study charge also tasked your committee with researching options to ensure that the GED is not simply an end in itself but that it serve as a credential that leads to a post-secondary education, advanced-skills training certification or successful career. This is consistent with the state's 40-40-20 education goals serving as an economic driver for Oregon.

Your committee also was asked to assess the impacts and opportunities of the 2014 revision of the GED program.

### Study methodology

Your research committee, composed of members with diverse backgrounds, expertise and skills, met for the first time on July 15, 2013. At weekly meetings, committee members interviewed witnesses and discussed the value of the GED as well as its role in the context of Oregon's 40-40-20 educational goals. It focused on systemic challenges with the GED, how state and community partners can better re-engage disconnected young Oregonians without a high school diploma and help them move on to career or college, and how Oregon can best take advantage of the 2014 GED program.

---

\* See Appendix A for an explanation of why the scope is limited to adults 19 to 25 years old.

More than two dozen witnesses spoke with your committee. They represented a wide array of stakeholders, including representatives from the national GED Testing Service, Oregon community colleges, local school districts, the business community, nonprofit groups, workforce development groups, state offices responsible for monitoring and certifying the GED in Oregon, and GED students themselves. A [complete list of witnesses](#) is at the end of this report.

Committee members also reviewed relevant reports and research, and assembled data from multiple sources to better understand the scope of the challenge and potential solutions.

After assessing the evidence and witness testimony, your committee deliberated and reached the conclusions and [recommendations](#) contained in this report.

Throughout the research, your committee was aware that a new version of the GED test would launch on Jan. 2, 2014. This report makes a conscious effort to look forward to the new exam rather than dwell at great length on the inadequacies of the old test.

*In order to achieve the goal of all Oregon adults having at least a high school diploma or equivalent by 2025 and 80 percent having a post-secondary education, the educational needs of those without a high school diploma will need to be met.*

*This will require a coordinated statewide effort that is unlikely to occur without a strategic plan targeted at reengaging high school dropouts, helping them earn GEDs, and then facilitating their transition to post-secondary education or employment.*

**Oregon Secretary of State Audit Report**

# Composition of the committee

**Chair**  
Zeke Smith

**Lead Writer**  
Christian Trejbal

## **Committee Members**

Marty Berger	Jeffrey Chicoine	Aimee Craig
Chris Mascal	Melvin Oden-Orr	Bimal RajBhandary
Judith Ramaley	Andrew Riley	Alexis Romanos
Eliz Roser		Pat Wagner

# Acknowledgements

*The committee wishes to express their appreciation to the following City Club members for their help and support:*

**Research Advisor**  
Carmel Bentley

**Research Advisor**  
Cory Streisinger

**Advocacy & Awareness Advisor**  
Kristie Perry

**Research & Policy Director**  
Greg Wallinger

## Background

### Introduction

No young children dream of dropping out of high school. They plan to become doctors, nurses, astronauts or firefighters. Then life happens, and the unfortunate reality is that more than one-quarter of young Oregonians will not complete high school within five years of starting.

Young Oregonians like Yolanda G. After she became pregnant in high school, her educational trajectory soon turned downward. She tried an alternative high school, but remained a few credits short of graduation when she turned 21 and had to leave without a diploma.<sup>2</sup>

Yolanda and the 336,000 other adult Oregonians who do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent have a second chance. The General Educational Development (GED) program offers them an opportunity to earn a credential recognized by post-secondary schools and some employers as a mark of achievement.

How much achievement the GED truly represents, though, is a matter of some debate. Academic literature and data show that GED earners on average do not perform as well as high school graduates in college or career. The credential itself therefore has a generally poor reputation among many employers, educators and the public.

On Jan. 2, 2014, the national GED Testing Service launched a new GED program that aims to address past criticisms ([described in detail below](#)) and to align the exam with the Common Core State Standards. Those standards set educational targets for language arts and mathematics, integrating critical thinking and problem-solving skills at each grade level. Forty-five states, including Oregon, have adopted them.<sup>3</sup>

The 2014 revision could prove to be a substantial improvement over its predecessor and better assess students' ability to succeed in college and career. It also could inherit the failings of its predecessor. It remains unclear whether the GED credential ever will be a genuine high school equivalent, and this must be assessed in the coming years in Oregon and across the nation.

Indeed, perhaps the error is assuming that the GED is or should be conceived of as *high school equivalency*. The question for the new GED program should not be whether it shows that

someone who passes has the same skills and knowledge as a high school student but whether it is an accurate measure of college and career readiness.\*

The GED also must be considered in the larger context of re-engaging disconnected youth. It is not the only option for these students, but rather is one tool in a complex toolkit.

If the new GED successfully corrects the old one's shortcomings and if state and local education officials implement measures to maximize the potential for success, then the new GED offers Oregon an important and much-needed opportunity to re-engage more effectively the many disconnected young adults who have not completed high school.

### **Why earn a GED?**

The GED credential is not an end in itself. Rather, its value lies in what follows and the doors that it opens.

In their report "Achieving Education for All," Daniel Princiotta and Ryan Reyna call the GED "an important last resort."<sup>4</sup>

They write, "General Educational Development (GED) certificate programs are an important last resort for individuals who have exhausted options for earning a traditional high school diploma. GEDs can help adults without high school diplomas enhance their educational and economic opportunities."<sup>5</sup>

Community colleges test students upfront to assess their level of mastery of core subjects and direct them into remedial classes as needed. Earners of the GED should be able to avoid some

---

\* The concept of "college and career readiness" defies precise definition. For purposes of this report, your committee takes it to mean a certain web of skills and knowledge that will allow a first year college student or entry-level employee to succeed without remedial training. Those skills certainly include but are not limited to competency at basic arithmetic, literacy, reading comprehension and problem-solving. They also include a level of maturity and interpersonal skills that, for example, will have someone show up on time for work or class and interact respectfully with colleagues.

GED Testing Service notes:

One of the major goals of the GED Testing Service is to develop a new GED assessment that indicates readiness for careers and college (CCR) and continues to provide for issuance of a high-school equivalency credential. The philosophy underlying the new GED assessment states that there is a foundational core, or domain, of academic skills and content knowledge that must be acquired in order for an adult to be prepared to enter a job, a training program, or an entry-level, credit bearing postsecondary course. While the emphasis on particular skills may differ from job to job and course to course, mastery of a core set of essential skills is required for any post-secondary pursuit.

*(Wine, Marjorie, et al.)*

or all of that remedial work, enrolling in more advanced classes immediately. This is not always the case, of course, but it also is not always the case for high school graduates. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education reports that 60 percent of first-year college students require remedial coursework.<sup>6</sup>

Technically, community colleges do not require a high school diploma or GED credential for enrollment. However, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) that most universities also use to determine financial aid eligibility requires the applicant to possess a diploma or equivalent or to have completed a high school education in a home-school setting approved by state law.<sup>7</sup> For many people, financial aid is an absolute need in order to attend postsecondary education, thus making the GED credential or high school diploma a *de facto* requirement for enrollment.

Universities typically do require a high school diploma or equivalent to enroll, and some require a minimum score for GED applicants. University of Oregon,<sup>8</sup> Portland State University<sup>9</sup> and Oregon State University,<sup>10</sup> for example, set minimum scores on the GED test for admission.

A high school diploma or GED credential is also a minimum requirement for many technical and trade schools and is sometimes accepted for military enlistment.

For young people who do not wish to pursue further education or training, a GED credential can be the gateway to work. Employers today commonly require that new hires possess a high school diploma or equivalent, even for entry-level jobs.

Yet for all those opportunities, a GED credential does not guarantee success. In the past, many people who earned it were unprepared for college and career. Some lacked academic skills; others lacked personal skills needed to excel. We return to this point below.

## **History of the GED**

The GED test was born out of war. Many young veterans returning from World War II found that they did not possess the credentials needed to pursue higher education or career. They might have been gone for years and had disengaged from the educational system.

GED was created to provide them with a means to earn a high school equivalency that would open doors. This was particularly important in light of the G.I. Bill, which originated around the same time and provided funding for veterans to attend college.<sup>11</sup>

The first people took the test in 1942. The practical application of the exam soon spread beyond veterans to serve other adults who did not finish high school. More than 18 million

## Profile: Yolanda G.

*GED Student  
Portland Community College  
Age: 25*



When Yolanda G. became pregnant in high school, she enrolled in an alternative program. She was still three or four credits short of what she needed to graduate when she turned 21 and became disqualified for school.

She attempted her first GED test preparation in 2007, but she couldn't continue because of a second pregnancy. In the fall of 2013, she returned to her studies.

"The sooner I get my GED, ... the sooner I can get my career started," she confided.

Yolanda's children motivate her to study for the GED exam. With three small kids and one stepson, time management is a big challenge for the 25-year-old while she prepares.

She does all her work during the GED class period because she is too busy with the kids' daily demands outside the class.

Her two biggest hurdles to studying are childcare and transportation. For the former, she relies on her aunt. For the latter, she receives some help from the Workforce Training Center and Department of Human Services in the form of gas vouchers.

In the past, she and folks like her had to figure out what options were available to them for GED preparation and support on their own. The public schools provided no direction.

This time around she feels she is receiving the help she needs from Portland Community College.

She especially credits her current GED instructor's encouragement for her sticking with the program.

After completing her GED, she wants to go to college and ultimately become a nurse.

people have passed the GED test. It remains the only nationally recognized high school equivalency exam at this time.

Historically, the nonprofit American Council on Education ran the test. ACE represents the presidents of accredited public, private, and for-profit colleges and universities. It owns the GED trademark and oversees content.

In 2011, ACE joined with Pearson VUE to form GED Testing Service. Pearson VUE is part of Pearson PLC, a global, for-profit firm that publishes education materials and provides

commercial testing. The company is one of the largest providers of textbooks used by public schools in the United States.

GED Testing Service now oversees the GED test and directly related services.

## **2014 Revision and the Common Core Standards**

Over the years, ACE revised the GED to reflect new educational standards and expectations. Such updates are needed occasionally as expectations for high school graduates change. The knowledge and skills they are expected to master are not static, and the GED gradually falls behind until realignment. Past revisions occurred in 1978, 1988 and 2002.

On Jan. 2, 2014, the GED Testing Service launched its newest version of the GED. This time, not only had expectations of high school graduates changed, but the Common Core State Standards had been adopted by nearly every state, including Oregon. The new test therefore aims both to address concerns about the old one and bring the GED into alignment with the [Common Core](#).\*

According to the official website of the Common Core, “The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers.”<sup>12</sup>

The format of the GED test also changed. The previous test consisted of five subtests. The 2014 version has only four, merging reading and writing subtests into a single “Language Arts.” The other three subtests cover mathematical reasoning, science and social studies. GED Testing Service estimates students will need more than 7 hours to complete all four.<sup>13</sup>

In the past, students have primarily taken the GED on paper. No longer. The new test will be conducted exclusively on computers.<sup>†</sup> That will allow more-sophisticated questioning that adapts to test-takers and provides a more thorough assessment.

Test-takers therefore will need some keyboarding skill, which could present new challenges for education and test preparation programs. People without regular access to computers might not be comfortable using them.

---

\* See Appendix B for more information about the Common Core State Standards.

† There are limited exceptions for students with disabilities.

That said, younger people tend to have stronger computer skills than their elders. Portland Community College GED instructor Bowen Adajian believes the change to computer-based testing could be a positive.

“Our students are pretty good with computers. They’re more comfortable with computers than they are with reading and writing conventional text,” he said.<sup>14</sup>

## Profile: Blue Mountain Community College

*GED and Adult Basic Education*



Blue Mountain Community College excels at integrating resources and services for adult students in different situations.

The college serves four counties in northeastern Oregon — Baker, Grant, Morrow and Umatilla — through its locations in Pendleton, Hermiston, Baker City, Milton-Freewater, Boardman and John Day. It also provides selected onsite services to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Blue Mountain provides GED preparation services in a classroom setting not only at its various community locations but also in adult corrections institutions and local juvenile detention facilities. Many of its students require improvement in basic literacy skills and must enroll in English as a Second Language (ESL) or Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes before starting GED preparation classes.

During the 2008-09 academic year, more than 1,100 of the college’s 11,000 students plus 1,340 prison inmates enrolled in GED preparation, ESL or ABE classes. Blue Mountain has the largest contract to offer GED services in Oregon prisons.

The funding formula for community colleges does not directly fund basic skills and GED programs. Blue Mountain, like other community colleges, uses its general funds to support those classes and to underwrite some or all of the testing costs.

Colleges generally cannot charge tuition because basic skills and GED preparation students do not have the means to pay it.

Blue Mountain provides low-cost ESL, ABE and GED preparation instruction with financial support for basic literacy programs from Title II of the Federal Workforce Investment Act. In addition, basic literacy and GED programs receive varying amount of community support from nonprofits, local fundraising and philanthropy.

Students can receive tuition support and job training funded through the state’s allocation of the Federal Welfare to Work program, which primarily serves women with children, through the Jobs Opportunity Basic Skills (JOBS) program. Some students also have access to Workforce Investment Act funds that can provide funding for students in GED preparation programs.

In Eastern Oregon, Blue Mountain Community College President Camille Preus had the same view. “I think it will be well embraced by younger individuals,” she said.<sup>15</sup>

The cost to take the 2014 GED will increase. Practice subtests, which previously were free, now will cost \$4 to \$6, depending on where they are taken. The base price GED Testing Service charges for the full test has more than doubled from \$50 to \$120. Some of that fee is returned to the testing center.

Actual costs to students vary by state. In Oregon, the cost to take the test last year ranged from \$35 to \$150 among the 44 active official testing centers.<sup>16</sup> With the 2014 test, there will be a uniform statewide fee of \$155. The Oregon Department of Education charges a \$35 administrative fee on top of GED Testing Services’ \$120.<sup>17</sup>

With the alignment to the Common Core State Standards, the new test is also expected to be more difficult than the previous version.

“As we see the new GED test roll out with more rigorous educational expectations, there could be more protracted time in preparation than we’ve had with the old test,” State Director of Adult Basic Skills David Moore said.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, in the final months of 2013, some states saw a rush of students taking the GED in hopes of passing before the more expensive and more difficult 2014 version went into effect. Other students rushed to complete because they had passed some but not all of the old tests’ subtests. If they did not complete them by Jan. 2, 2014, they had to start over with the new test.<sup>19</sup>

Scores required to pass the GED are normed to graduating seniors around the country by testing a diverse sample of recent graduates and seniors who are on track to graduate. Their performance helps set the bar for passing. Stakeholder panels also play a role. Those panels include K-12 teachers, higher education faculty and employers.

However, unlike the previous exam, people who take the new GED can earn one of two certificates depending on how well they perform. A “GED Score” indicates high school equivalence. A higher “GED Score with Honors” serves as a college and career readiness indicator.

The 2014 revision also includes an overhaul of how students interact with the GED and the sorts of information available to students, states and test preparation providers. GED Testing Service chose to offer a more service-oriented experience in order to engage better with students and to offer information and feedback that would not only help them pass the exam but also provide planning tools to assist students as they prepare to pursue further education or career.

A new MyGED Portal is the online point of interaction for students. There, people seeking a GED will be able to learn about the test, to register for and schedule practice tests, to find preparation resources and, after they have passed, to access score reports, and to order transcripts and diplomas.

A core part of that interactive, online experience is GED Ready, which will provide sample questions and the same scoring scheme as the real test. When students choose to take the sample test, they will immediately receive detailed score reports and customized learning plans to improve their weak spots before taking the full test. If working with a test preparation program, students can share that information with their provider.\*

For educators and public officials, GED Analytics will provide new depth of information to states that want it. The detailed reports will allow officials to analyze student success down to the local program level in order to see which are working as well as where additional resources might be most fruitfully directed.

#### **40-40-20 and the challenge of high school dropouts**

On July 20, 2011, Gov. John Kitzhaber signed SB 253,<sup>20</sup> which the Oregon Legislature had passed with overwhelming bipartisan support a month earlier.<sup>†</sup> SB 253 set ambitious goals for education in the state. Colloquially referred to as the 40-40-20 law, the bill enacted statutory goals that Oregon would strive to achieve by 2025:

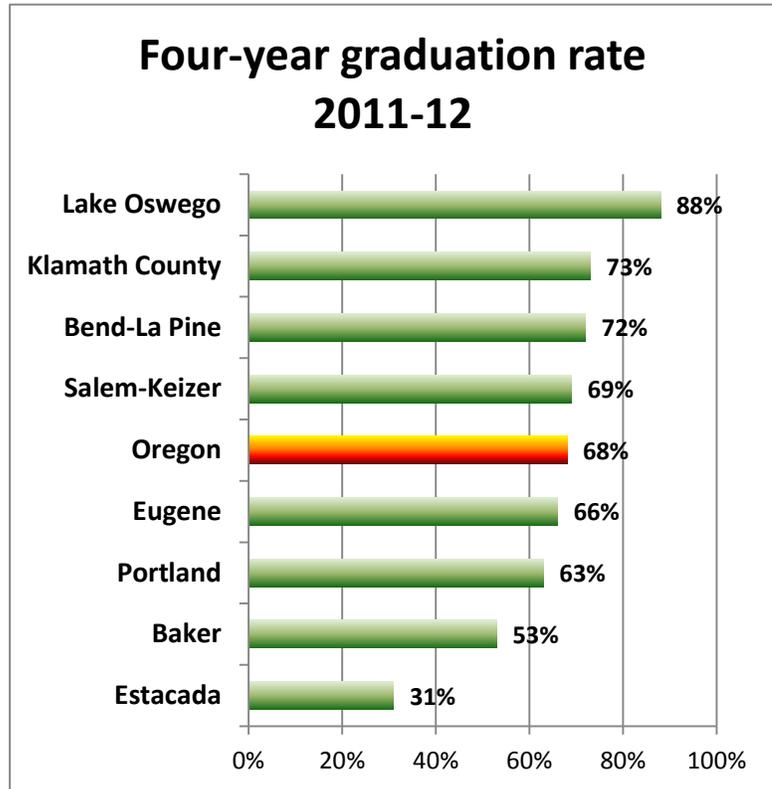
- At least 40 percent of adult Oregonians earn a bachelor’s degree or higher.
- At least 40 percent of adult Oregonians earn an associate’s degree or post-secondary credential as their highest level of educational attainment.
- The remaining 20 percent or less of adult Oregonians earn a high school diploma, extended or modified diploma or the equivalent as their highest level of educational attainment.

---

\* Sample questions are online at [gedtestingservice.com/educators/freepracticetest](http://gedtestingservice.com/educators/freepracticetest).

<sup>†</sup> The Oregon Senate passed SB 253 on Feb. 10, 2011 with a 28-2 vote. The Oregon State House of Representatives passed it on June 21, 2011 with a 46-14 vote.

The implications of the third goal are striking. In order to achieve any of the goals, nearly 100 percent of adult Oregonians must achieve high school graduation or an equivalent certification.\* The U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey found that about 336,000 Oregonians 18 and older (11 percent) lacked a high school diploma or its equivalent.<sup>21</sup> To put that in perspective, it is more than the combined populations of Salem and Eugene.



Oregon graduates about two-thirds of its high school students in four years, according to data compiled by the Oregon

Department of Education. In the 2011-12 cohort, 68.4 percent received a regular high school diploma in four years. Given an extra year, the five-year cohort graduation rate increased to 72.4 percent. Those rates have been trending upward slightly in recent years, but they remain too low for a state with lofty education goals.<sup>22</sup>

Local graduation rates vary across Oregon. In Portland Public School District, the four-year graduation rate for the 2011-12 cohort was 63 percent.<sup>†</sup>

Graduation rates also vary among racial/ethnic groups. Asian and white students tend to graduate at higher rates than other groups.

Oregon’s K-12 educators strive to increase the portion of students who graduate each year with a regular high school diploma, but it is unrealistic to expect that a 100 percent completion rate is obtainable by 2025, if ever.

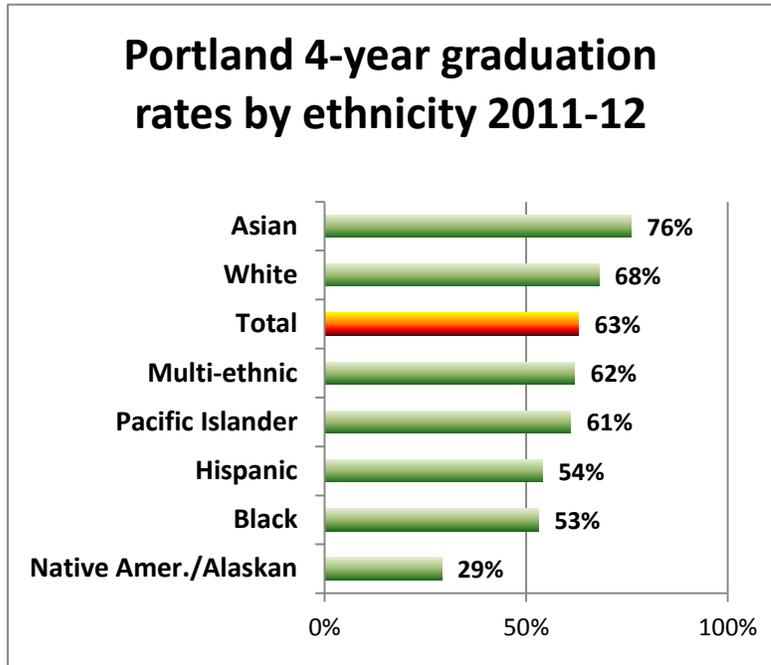
The large number of dropouts has serious personal and public consequences.

\* “Nearly” because exceptional students without a high school diploma or GED credential still can enroll in community college and earn a two-year degree. They would then fall into the middle 40.

† Portland Public Schools’ 2011-12 four-year “completion” rate – which includes adult high school diploma, modified diploma and GED recipients – was 73 percent. The state completion rate was 75 percent.

The poverty rate is particularly acute among Oregonians without a high school diploma or equivalent, standing at 29 percent. Among students with a diploma it is only 16 percent, and the rate drops even further for college-educated Oregonians.

The benefits of education do not accrue to the individual alone. Oregon as a whole benefits from an educated populace that appeals to employers. Those workers also contribute to state coffers through income taxes.



Conversely, Oregon experiences steep costs associated with people who drop out of high school. They are more likely to rely on public programs such as unemployment assistance and the Oregon Health Plan. They also are more likely to be incarcerated.

By one estimate, when lost revenue and additional public support costs are totaled, dropouts cost Oregon more than \$400 million per year.<sup>23</sup>

The state should focus considerable effort on high school retention and completion, but the GED is an important part of a robust safety net and essential to achieving the 40-40-20 goals. As long as some students do not receive a high school diploma, they will need to earn a credential that demonstrates college and career readiness before the state can declare success.

## Discussion

### The illusion of high school equivalency

Oregon's 40-40-20 goal does not differentiate between high school graduates and earners of an equivalent certificate (GED). It consolidates them into a single group (the 20 percent), and that could create the impression that they are equivalent. They are not.

The earning power of GED recipients and their general career prospects fall short of high school graduates. College and career prospects for someone with the pre-2014 GED are little better than for someone who has dropped out and never earned a credential. Time will tell whether the 2014 revision helps create better opportunities.

The state will repeatedly assess its progress toward 40-40-20 in the run-up to the 2025 target date. As it does so, differentiating between high school graduates and GED recipients would increase transparency and promote a better understanding among Oregonians that they are not the same and historically have had, on average, very different outcomes. Oregon should not seek to increase GED attainment at the cost of high school graduation rates simply because both count the same in 40-40-20.

#### **Conclusion 1:**

*The 40-40-20 goal could create a false equivalency between the GED and a high school diploma.*

Multiple witnesses testified that GED completers often do not possess the knowledge and skills that are needed to continue either in employment or post-secondary education. For all the doors that officially open, most people who earn the GED fail to take advantage of their new opportunities such as post-secondary education.

Researchers with the National Bureau of Economic Research conducted a review of the academic literature about the GED and reported in 2010 that it provides minimal value in terms of labor market outcomes and post-secondary success:

GEDs are equivalent to uncredentialed dropouts in terms of their labor market outcomes and their general performance in society. On average, obtaining a GED does not increase the wages of dropouts. While GEDs go to college at higher rates than dropouts, few finish more than one semester. The same traits that lead them to drop

out of school also lead them to leave from jobs early, to divorce more frequently, and to fail in the military.<sup>24</sup>

People who earn a high school diploma have demonstrated not just subject matter mastery but also other skills and traits that are valued in the workplace and are beneficial in both secondary and post-secondary education. For example, completing four years of high school requires perseverance and in most cases at least some social competencies that enable one to interact well with others.

The GED does not measure those soft traits. Indeed, it is structured as a test of knowledge and academic skills, not as an explicit test of soft skills. One can pass the GED in considerably less time than completing high school and without socially interacting with peers, though most students do interact with instructors and peers as they prepare.

Bowen Adajian, a GED instructor at Portland Community College's Portland Metropolitan Workforce Training Center, described the deficit among many of his students. "My students tend to lack these kinds of soft skills, emotional skills or habits of mind – things like patience, perseverance and the ability to tolerate frustration," he said.

Portland Public Schools Superintendent Carole Smith noted that well-designed class time spent preparing for the GED can help some students develop college and career readiness skills.<sup>25</sup>

That is not to say that all students who pursue a GED lack the traits that businesses seek. Indeed, examples abound of students who earn a GED and go on to tremendous success. Famous examples include comedian Bill Cosby, actor Christian Slater, former Delaware Gov. Ruth Ann Minner, former U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona and former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman, Jr.

Leaders from Portland's Hispanic business community remained skeptical of the GED's value. When asked who is best served by access to the GED, Gale Castillo, president of the Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber, answered that no one is well served by it. "The GED is not a solution to the dropout problem. It will not prepare students to be college-ready or prepare for a career," she said.<sup>26</sup>

Gerardo Ochoa, a member of the chamber's board and director of financial assistance at Linfield College, echoed a common theme among witnesses. "Finishing the GED is not enough," he said.<sup>27</sup>

Rather, it is a point on an educational and career continuum that should continue past earning a GED certificate. The need for further learning and for more sophisticated soft skills will increase as the economy in Oregon continues to change.

Witnesses from community colleges also indicated that GED recipients are often perceived as underprepared for college.

“In its current form, the GED is viewed by some as an incomplete measure and is not seen as a viable articulation of a level of skill and talent,” Camille Preus, president of Blue Mountain Community College, said.<sup>28</sup>

Randy Trask, president of GED Testing Service, acknowledged the challenges in an interview with PBS NewsHour:

If you think about what we've been testing historically, we've been testing knowledge. And what employers are telling us and what colleges are telling us is it's less about the knowledge and more about being able to use what you know to demonstrate critical thinking skills and solve real-world problems. ... It's the application of the knowledge that becomes much more important than the original knowledge we tested.<sup>29</sup>

Where the evidence of GED success is lacking, the evidence of high school graduates' success is clear. A student who completes high school and earns a diploma on average will earn more over a lifetime and has far greater opportunity to pursue post-secondary education.

**Conclusion 2:**

*A high school diploma better serves and prepares students who can achieve it than the pre-2014 GED certificate did.*

Some business representatives suggested to your committee that the National Career Readiness Certificate is a better measure for whether an individual possesses the skills to succeed in the workplace. The NCRC provides an assessment of an individual's skills in applied mathematics, locating information and reading comprehension. It also seeks to measure soft skills and work-related behaviors that indicate the potential for employment success.

David Conley, professor of educational policy and leadership in the University of Oregon College of Education, testified that no single test or credential – not the high school diploma nor the GED nor the NCRC – can provide a clear line to show who is ready and sufficiently prepared and who is not.<sup>30</sup>

The GED fundamentally differs from high school, though. Preparation does not normally occur in the sort of institutional school environment that consumes a young person's days and is compelled by the state. Rather, it is something that adults who have disengaged from the educational system personally choose to pursue because of the perceived benefits it will bring.

The GED, then, has never truly been a high school equivalent. The 2014 revision is tied to high school standards through the Common Core State Standards and the passing score is normed to high school graduates. It is not, however, a comparable experience, and demanding that it identify people who are indistinguishable from high school graduates in their skills and knowledge is an unreasonable expectation.

The better way for the potential test-takers, educators, employers and the public to think of the GED program is as a measure of college and career readiness for adults 19 years old and older. If students for whom high school is no longer a practical option can succeed in post-secondary education, in trade schools or in a career after preparing for the GED exam and earning the credential, then the GED would serve as a valuable educational benchmark and waypoint.

**Conclusion 3:**

*Rather than ask whether GED recipients are equivalent to high school graduates, Oregon should assess the credential based on whether the people who earn it succeed in college or career.*

**A new era for the GED**

The 2014 GED revision is a second chance for outreach both to students and to the broader public who have preconceptions based on the old GED.

The negative popular perception that your committee found arose during the era of the 2002-13 GED test, which had become outdated over more than a decade. The arrival of a new GED examination could be a turning point. It's a brand new day, and the revised GED deserves an opportunity to overturn past preconceptions. How well earners of the new credential perform in college and career will to a large extent determine whether it becomes a more meaningful credential.

“The proof will be in the pudding,” BMCC President Preus said, “when we actually start enrolling students at collegiate level coursework who have the new GED and see how well they do.”<sup>31</sup>

**Conclusion 4:**

*It will take time to ascertain whether the 2014 GED revision successfully measures college and career readiness.*

Andrew Dyke, senior economist and managing director at ECONorthwest, suggested that the higher standards of the new GED could screen out some less-skilled students who might have passed the old test. That, in turn, could improve the perception of the GED.<sup>32</sup>

Dyke's suggestion contains an important insight. The new GED is not something meant to be handed out to anyone who simply jumps through hoops. If it is to have genuine value, employers and post-secondary educators must believe that it accurately assesses the knowledge and skills of test-takers. Only people who genuinely meet the standards should pass the exam. If it is more difficult than the past exam, then those who passed it will have demonstrated a higher level of knowledge and skills than their predecessors.

He also emphasized that higher standards will not help if the standards reflect skills that employers don't care about.

Operating under the old assumptions would be a disservice both to students and to the people who could benefit from access to a pool of educated people who have earned a GED, but overturning those preconceptions could prove difficult if the state does not actively get the message out.

Compared to some other states, Oregon conducts very little outreach and marketing. The secretary of state's GED audit notes that Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts and Virginia had statewide marketing plans and programs in place to raise awareness of Adult Basic Education and the GED in particular. Kentucky in particular has an aggressive program of television and radio advertising as well as partnerships with local McDonald's restaurants to produce tray liners that direct potential students to GED services.<sup>33</sup>

Oregon's business community could become a valuable partner in such efforts. The state's business leaders were among the strongest proponents of the 40-40-20 plan when it was proposed. Moreover, employers have a vested interest in advancing the plan's goals, including helping adults attain the knowledge and skills that allow them to earn a GED credential and move on to college or career.

**Conclusion 5:**

*Students, employers, educators, and the public need to understand that the 2014 GED revision sets new achievement standards and is not the old GED.*

**Who takes the GED test?**

Adults who have not earned a high school diploma are as varied as other Oregonians. They come from all racial and ethnic groups as well as from different economic groups. There is no single description that encompasses them all.

There are some people who take the test because they want to, not because they dropped out of school. Home-schooled students might want it as a credential. Particularly bright students might see it as a way to complete high school early and move on to more challenging education. Incarcerated youth pursue the GED. Some immigrants choose to take the GED because credentials from their home country are not recognized in the United States.

Those people do exist, but they are the exceptions. Most GED test-takers are people who have otherwise become disengaged from the educational system. They often are less affluent, come from troubled families, face difficulty finding employment or have had children early in life.

The GED Testing Service releases an annual statistical report about GED test-takers nationwide and by state. In 2012, more than 12,000 Oregonians took some or all of the subtests. Overall, they tended to perform well. Seventy-four percent of test-takers completed the entire test, and 84 percent of them passed.<sup>34</sup> That passage rate ranked Oregon 11<sup>th</sup> among states.<sup>35</sup>

Demographically, some patterns emerge among GED test-takers.

The majority (59 percent) are male, though females slightly outnumber men in Oregon overall.

In terms of race and ethnicity, whites are underrepresented. Sixty-six percent of test-takers are white, though 88 percent of Oregonians are. Oregonians of Asian descent also are underrepresented.

Correspondingly, African American, Hispanic and Native American Oregonians are overrepresented.\*

---

\* See Appendix C for more demographic details.

One should not attribute those disparities to different degrees of motivation to take the test. Rather, they arise because dropout rates are higher among males and non-Asian communities of color. Those demographic groups therefore have a larger proportional pool of people who would consider pursuing the GED and for whom the high school system is not currently working.

Midge Purcell, director of advocacy and public policy for the Urban League of Portland, noted that in order to ensure that the GED is a successful option for African Americans, the delivery system and support system must accommodate the particular needs of the community and African American students. It is important to offer culturally competent and culturally specific\* programs that are integrated within an existing and trustworthy environment and support system.<sup>36</sup>

Representatives of the Portland Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber testified that in the Latino community, education tends to be a family effort. The chamber seeks to build on this work ethic and commitment to educational attainment by directly engaging with students and their families before they become disengaged. Members coach students in the skills they need to succeed in college as well as in more practical matters such as seeking financial aid and navigating academic bureaucracy.<sup>37</sup>

Gerardo Ochoa, a member of the chamber's board and director of financial assistance at Linfield College, said such encouragement is necessary because "the system is disenfranchising too many of our kids" and tells them that "they are not college material."<sup>38</sup>

The GED test is offered in Spanish.<sup>†</sup> In 2012, 1,053 Oregonians chose the Spanish version, representing about 8 percent of the 12,691 test-takers that year. Nationally, about 4 percent of people took the test in Spanish.<sup>39</sup>

If Oregon is to strive to achieve its goal of universal high school completion or its equivalent under the 40-40-20 plan, it must reach out to members of diverse demographic groups that have disproportionately taken the GED and do so in a way that addresses their unique characteristics and needs. The educational needs of these communities should be addressed in a comprehensive manner that goes beyond the GED test itself. Partnerships with groups like

---

\* The notions of "culturally competent and culturally specific," as used in this report, refer to recognizing and being sensitive to differences that exist between people of varied cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. One must be able to tailor a message, training, etc. to the cultural norms, practices and communication styles of a particular audience. Given the disproportionate outcomes that affect communities of color and the lack of systemic success to date, understanding these cultural attributes and approaches is critical to making progress on rectifying those inequities.

<sup>†</sup> GED Testing Service also offers a French version of the test. Only 527 people nationwide (less than 0.1 percent) chose it in 2012, mostly in New York.

the Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber, the Urban League, faith-based organizations, and other civic and nonprofit groups would facilitate such efforts.

**Conclusion 6:**

*The lack of targeted outreach across the state to communities of color and immigrant communities in a culturally appropriate manner for each has hindered Oregon from maximizing the number of young adults who re-engage in education, including through GED programs. One blanket outreach policy will not successfully engage all groups.*

**Wraparound support services for adults preparing to take the GED**

Many young adults face significant barriers to preparing for and earning a GED credential.

When your committee interviewed GED students, a common thread emerged for why they want to earn the credential. Yes, they see it as a means to advance to postsecondary education, technical training and career, but that is not what motivates them to return to the classroom week after week.

“The reason I’m pursuing my GED is so I can get better job opportunities and to further my life for my son,” Victor T. said.<sup>40</sup>

“My kids are my motivation. ... The sooner I get my GED, the better that I can get my career started and pursue what I want to do with my life. That way I could provide for my kids, and I wouldn’t have to depend on a man,” Yolanda G. said.<sup>41</sup>

“My motivation are my kids because I can’t tell my daughter I want her to go to college if her mother doesn’t have a high school diploma,” Michelle L. said.<sup>42</sup>

Those personal reasons are an essential element of each student’s narrative. Yet even as family motivates students, it also is one of many potential barriers to a student’s devoting time, energy and financial resources toward education. But family is not the only obstacle.

Bowen Adajian, a GED instructor for Portland Community College’s Portland Metropolitan Workforce Training Center, described some of the challenges students face.

“Most of them receive [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families] or some other form of public assistance,” he said. “In addition to the stressors of poverty, most of my students face

## Profile: Bowen Adajian

*GED and Adult Basic Education Instructor  
Portland Community College  
Portland Metropolitan Workforce Training  
Center*



When Bowen Adajian started teaching remedial reading, writing and mathematics almost two decades ago, he found that he enjoyed working with students who traditionally struggled academically. He has taught GED preparation for 15 years in Portland and previously taught similar classes in Wisconsin. He holds a master's degree in English literature and composition.

He sees the challenges students face on a daily basis. Academically, many of his students enter the class at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level and a 5<sup>th</sup> grade math level.

"The general demographic is mostly women. Most of them receive TANF or some other form of public assistance," he said. "In addition to the stressors of poverty, most of my students face additional barriers such as domestic violence, drugs and alcohol, mental health and homelessness. Many of my students are affected by at least one of those barriers."

In the past, there were four instructors for the program, two part-time and two full-time paid for by the Steps to Success program at his campus.

Over the last several years, however, grants dried up, and now Bowen is the only

instructor. He is a part-time instructor, and his GED classes usually have 15-20 students on the roster. "The huge challenge is attendance and retention," he said. On an average day, eight to ten might show up for class. His class meets four days a week for two or three hours per day.

Bowen feels well informed about the 2014 GED revision, but he believes that many of his students will struggle to overcome the higher bar it sets.

He believes that because of their weaknesses in basic reading, writing and math, the increased emphasis on reasoning, critical thinking and content knowledge in the Common Core-aligned test will be a big challenge for them.

Bowen believes the GED is a very important stepping stone for students to transition into additional education and training and especially into employment.

It is essential that students are supported on to that next step. Without built-in supports similar to those of the Workforce Training Center or the Department of Human Services, Bowen says GED recipients will have difficulty transitioning successfully into the next stage of their lives.

additional barriers such as domestic violence, drugs and alcohol, mental health and homelessness. Many of my students are affected by at least one of those barriers.”<sup>43</sup>

They therefore typically have limited resources to pay for test prep and often find themselves working long hours just to keep a roof over their heads and to feed their families. Time for studying grows scarce.

For GED students with children, babysitting and other childcare services can present hurdles. Even when they have access to such services, using them can be time consuming.

For example, GED student Yolanda G. lives in North Portland but must deliver her children to Gresham where her aunt watches them. She then returns to Portland for her GED classes and must make the roundtrip again afterward.

Michelle L., another student your committee interviewed, described similar challenges, “My daughter doesn’t have to be to school until 8:50, so when my babysitter, my mom, comes late ... I’m a little late waiting for the bus, and I get here late, which is not OK. Transportation and childcare are my biggest things.”<sup>44</sup>

Many GED completion programs would be ineffective if they did not provide wraparound social and economic support for students. The problems that contribute to dropping out of school initially also affect a person’s willingness and ability to pursue options for advancing their education, like the GED. Challenges such as finances, childcare and transportation are often cited.

A 2006 study funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation suggested that, while there are many reasons students drop out of school, some of the main ones are that they find school boring, they are uninspired or personal, real-life challenges arise.<sup>45</sup> To succeed at engaging such students, a GED preparation program must address the underlying issues that caused the initial disengagement.<sup>46</sup>

Generally speaking, however, community colleges find that the wraparound services many GED seekers need to be successful are beyond the scope of what they are able to offer, particularly given their funding constraints.<sup>47</sup> Students must look to other public assistance.

“Usually a nonprofit workforce or community college partner will provide the wraparound services. It could be transportation, vouchers, health care or child care to provide support for students while they are getting instruction,” Blue Mountain Community College President Camille Preus explained.<sup>48</sup>

Northwest Health Foundation President Nichole Maher\* also identified mental health issues and the need for community support as significant challenges.<sup>49</sup>

Wraparound services are essential because students' basic needs must be met in order for them to be able to focus on the GED. Portland YouthBuilders is a prime example of the sort of organization that provides wraparound services and assistance to help students address the myriad issues that inhibit their success and ability to prepare for the GED.

“We have three people on staff who are very proactively working with students to address the barriers that got them off track in the first place: unstable housing, unstable food, drug-affected families, juvenile justice circumstances. The barriers this population faces are endless,” Elise Huggins, education manager at Portland YouthBuilders, said.<sup>50</sup>

Her organization also provides direct support to students in the form of a stipend based on attendance.

## The faces of GED

*Tracie Memmott, Portland Community College – Cascades instructor for the YES! Program, arranged for some GED students to share their stories with your committee.*

### Raja M.

Raja (18 years old) found GED preparations to be easy. He didn't see any major challenges ahead in his GED testing. Once he receives his GED, he wants to take video production classes. After that, he wants to pursue higher education and get a job.



### Skylar H.

Skylar (20 years old) moved from Arizona to Oregon. He wasn't able to complete his high school diploma because of illness. He had a pleasant experience completing his GED. He credits his PCC instructors and the YES! program for his successful completion. The only major challenge he faced was scheduling classes. He currently is working on a transfer degree.

### Hannah R.

Hannah (17 years old) had problems with attendance at her high school. Her parents have been instrumental in pushing her to follow the GED track instead. Although she is worried about “how long the [GED] process takes,” she is grateful for the current YES! teachers and their help. She plans to transfer to a 4-year college and ultimately become a registered nurse.



“We recognize that many of our youth can’t afford the time to go back to school. They have families that they must financially contribute to, or they have families of their own,” she said. “The stipend is far from a livable wage, but it helps our students stay in school.”

Huggins is optimistic about their ability to overcome challenges, “They are incredibly resilient youth. That they even come to our door and want to try again is very impressive.”

New Avenues for Youth, another Portland provider, also emphasizes support services.

“We keep our students engaged by providing a lot of wraparound support,” said Kari Brenk, New Avenues’ program director. Every student is tied to a team of support staff and case managers.<sup>51</sup>

Programs like Portland YouthBuilders, New Avenues for Youth and Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center, provide culturally competent avenues for ethnic minority students who are overrepresented among GED seekers.<sup>52</sup> Despite this, Oregon lacks GED programs that cater to Latino and Southeast Asian GED seekers.<sup>53</sup>

Many of these programs receive funding from a variety of sources based on the particular social needs they address, such as homelessness. Some of those funding sources include Portland Public Schools, the City of Portland, Multnomah County and the U.S. Department of Labor.

**Conclusion 7:**

*Because many adults who lack a high school diploma face significant barriers to success in their lives, well funded, coordinated, culturally competent wraparound support services are essential to helping students succeed in pursuing a GED credential.*

**Paying for the GED**

In general, GED participants in Oregon personally bear the brunt of costs for testing and preparation unless they qualify for a specific need-based program (e.g., unemployment or teen parenting) or a third party (e.g., community college, school district or private nonprofit) underwrites the costs through some other funding sources. For many students, this means that access to financial assistance for testing costs can feel arbitrary and capricious. It might appear that help is more dependent on where one lives and one’s personal persistence in finding resources than on the actual need.

The increased cost of the 2014 GED revision could create a financial hurdle for some test takers. The cost to individual test takers under the new revision is \$155 for the full suite of tests. The GED Testing Service assesses \$120 and the Oregon Department of Education charges a \$35 administrative fee. That is a significant increase over the previous cost to take the paper-based test.\* It also does not include secondary costs for practice tests and other preparation material.

Thirty-three percent of the costs assessed by the GED Testing Service will come back to test centers, through the Department of Education,<sup>54</sup> but it remains unclear how these resources will be allocated in relation to existing resources.

These increasing costs occur in an environment of reduced federal spending. Students will find less funding available to support them while they pursue a GED.

For example, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (or TANF, which is commonly referred to as welfare) now identifies GED preparation as a non-core activity that only some TANF recipients may count toward their federal participation requirements. Specifically, single adults with children under the age of six may not count non-core activities like GED preparation. Single adults with children 6 and older as well as two-parent families may count it to varying degrees.<sup>55</sup>

Due to budget reductions experienced in Oregon's 2011-13 biennium, TANF limited GED test payments to teen parents. Effective July 1, 2013, that policy was expanded to provide some flexibility for case managers to pay for GED tests on behalf of other TANF adults under some circumstances, but the example remains relevant.<sup>56</sup>

Teen mothers certainly can benefit from such assistance, but so would other at-risk parents who might have as great or greater need and motivation to pursue a GED credential.

A second example of reduced support occurred in the Portland metro area where managers of Workforce Investment Act funds have shifted the focus away from education costs, including GED services, and toward actual job development, workforce training and creating pipelines to work. Assessing the merits of that shift in an environment of limited resources is beyond the scope of this report.

Some states subsidize the testing fees. For example, both Maryland and Ohio subsidize the cost to test-takers, and Maryland's governor has ensured that testing fees will stay nearly the same price under the 2014 revision (\$45 for the whole test suite, less than one-third of the cost to students in Oregon).<sup>57</sup> New York, which has abandoned the GED in favor of the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC), will continue to pay all testing fees for students.<sup>58</sup>

---

\* Test costs varied in Oregon prior to the 2014 GED revision. Typically the test cost \$100 to \$125. At Portland Community College, for example, the fee was \$120.

In the case of New York, however, it is important to note that fully subsidizing testing fees does not ensure positive outcomes. The 2012 GED passing rate there was worst in the nation at only 54 percent compared to Oregon's 84 percent.<sup>59</sup> One cause might be that there is no personal cost to take and retake the test, even if one is unprepared.

In 2012, some 12,691 Oregonians took at least one of the GED subtests. If one optimistically assumes that number will double in coming years as the state pushes toward its 40-40-20 goal and that each test-taker completes all of the subtests, then the total cost to cover their fees would be nearly \$4 million.

Given the pass rate in New York, however, it might make better sense to pay only part of the fee. For example, Oregon might decide to pay half the cost. It also could restrict who is eligible with need-based criteria as well as requirements that test-takers have completed a recognized preparation course or scored at a pass level on official practice tests.

For \$2 million or less annually and \$4 million in a budget biennium, Oregon could offer a substantial discount on testing fees for many GED test takers.\* That would be 0.03 percent of the \$6.55 billion K-12 biennial budget that the legislature adopted in 2013.

**Conclusion 8:**

*The cost of a need-based subsidy for GED test takers who meet minimum qualifications is not out of reach in the Oregon budget and would reduce the disincentive for many low-income high school dropouts to prepare for and take the test.*

**Alternatives to the GED**

The 2014 GED revision has not received universal acceptance. Some of the changes that came with the exam worried education officials in other states and led them to pursue alternatives. Two new exams have sprung up to fill that demand.

- For-profit CTB/McGraw-Hill will offer the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC).<sup>60</sup>
- Nonprofit Education Testing Service will offer the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET).<sup>61</sup>

---

\* If 25,000 people take the GED in some near-future year, it would cost \$2 million to give each an \$80 subsidy or to pay the entire testing fee for half of them.

Both tests cover five core areas: reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies. Both also claim that they will align with the Common Core State Standards.

They differ from the 2014 revision of the GED in at least two significant ways.

- Students can choose between computer or pencil-and-paper exams. The GED test is available only on computer.
- The base cost for the two alternatives is \$52 for TASC and \$50 for HiSET, compared to \$120 for GED. Total costs to the test-taker will vary from state to state.

Several states find those differences appealing and have either dropped the GED in favor of one of the alternatives or will offer multiple options. Maine, Iowa, Missouri, New Hampshire and Louisiana have chosen the HiSET. New York and Indiana have chosen the TASC.<sup>62</sup> Tennessee now offers both HiSET and GED as equal certificates.<sup>63</sup> Nevada will offer all three.<sup>64</sup>

Oregon is sticking with the GED alone. State GED Administrator Marque Haeg, whose office falls under the Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (CCWD), testified that changing to an alternative test would be a complex decision requiring coordination with Oregon Department of Human Services, Department of Education, the Adult Basic Skills community and Oregon Youth Authority.

Haeg noted several points in the GED's favor over the new alternatives:

- **Portability** – CCWD wants to assure that a high school alternative certificate completed in Oregon will be accepted by all other states and Canadian provinces. Currently, the GED is the only one that has that level of portability.
- **Sustainability** – GED Testing Service, by way of American Council on Education, has a 70-year history of developing high school equivalency tests. The alternatives are new.
- **Alignment with Common Core State Standards** – The 2014 GED revision aligns with the Common Core State Standards. The alternative tests claim they will align with at least some of the Common Core, though full implementation will take time. Those promises could wind up being more marketing than reality.
- **History** – The GED has an established track record and experience in testing. It has been around for 70 years. The alternative tests might not prove sustainable.

The alternative tests might be more attractive once they have had time to iron out any issues in the states that are using them. Those states also might find that these other tests provide a more effective platform for assessing the skills of specific types of learners, for example, recent immigrants who are non native English speakers. Problems also could arise with the GED. Haeg therefore suggested reassessing the HiSET and TASC objectively in a few years.

**Conclusion 9:**

*Continuing to use the GED has pros and cons, but new alternatives lack any performance data.*

**Conclusion 10:**

*As data become available about the performance of the 2014 GED test and new alternatives, Oregon will be able to better assess which of them would best serve the state's educational needs.*

In the meantime, adults in other states will earn these alternative credentials, and some of them will move to Oregon. Even if Oregon does not use these tests, it must decide whether it will recognize them for purposes of postsecondary education, employment and social services. If the HiSET or TASC will be accepted credentials, administrative rules and policies must be updated to reflect that.

**Conclusion 11:**

*Regardless of whether Oregon uses alternatives to the GED, adults who have earned those credentials will move to Oregon.*

**Oregon's preparation for the new GED**

The 2014 GED test was in the works for more than two years. It contains several significant changes from its predecessor that Oregon might have addressed prior to launch but, for reasons indiscernible to your committee, did not.

Several witnesses testified that with only a few months until the new GED launches, they had not yet received detailed information about the format and content of the new exam.

## Profile: Charlotte Fraser

*Vocational and Recreational Coordinator  
Clackamas County Drug Court,  
Clackamas County Juvenile Department*



Charlotte Fraser shared the perspective of decades of working with GED students. She has worked with troubled youth for almost 45 years, as a counselor, case manager and program coordinator. She said that high school simply doesn't work for some students.

"Getting a GED certificate can be the best option for them, so they can get on with their lives," she said. "It may not be perfect, but it has enabled many, many young people over the years the chance to find success and feel much personal satisfaction over completing the activity.

"Just today I referred a student (a former meth user) who got his GED a few weeks ago, to Clackamas Community College's vocational staff to pursue his dream of being a welder. The GED was a huge first step in his following his dream and has made a real difference in his life. Not only did he succeed in achieving his GED, but he attended prep classes with other students and was involved in a classroom environment that provided academic as well as social opportunities."

She said classes at CCC focus on attendance, taking initiative, social skills and appropriate behavior.

"The thing about a GED is that it not only gives students a sense of accomplishment, but it shows them what it feels like to start and finish something, what it feels like to show up and do the work and complete a project. This gives them confidence in their abilities and

their potential. And they learn how to learn," she said.

In her years of coordinating employment and training programs, she has never encountered an employer who refused to hire a young person with a GED because it was not a high school diploma.

Fraser has personal experience with the GED, too. "Our granddaughter had a very rough childhood and when she came to live with us she was seriously deficient in high school credits," she shared. "It just made sense for her to get her GED. She completed her GED at CCC and went on to have a career as a beautician. She worked as a hair stylist for a while and then she decided she wanted something more challenging. She studied to be a medical assistant, graduated with honors, and is now a medical assistant in a clinic. The road to her success started with her GED and continued through other accomplishments."

Fraser acknowledged the value of updating the test periodically, but she worried that it might be too much change this time.

"I hope that supports are in place to assist young people through the challenges and requirements that the new GED test brings," she said.

That concern aside, she remains upbeat about the GED. "The GED, old or new, can be a huge stepping stone in a young person's life," she said.

For example, Heather Ficht, director of youth workforce services at Worksystems, Inc., said in August, “I feel like the new GED is a black box that I haven’t gotten to see inside.” She said in November that more information had become available in the intervening months.<sup>65</sup>

Elise Huggins, education manager at Portland YouthBuilders, said in September, “GED has released a lot of guidance on the new GED, but we have not seen a version of the test that is going to roll out in January. We just have the learning targets and the assessment targets. We’ve been working proactively to align our program with these learning and assessment targets, but since we haven’t seen the new test, we are prepared to do additional work when it is released.”<sup>66</sup>

Yet when your committee interviewed CT Turner, GED Testing Service’s senior director, public affairs and government relations, he identified resources that have been available for up to two years to assist teachers and test preparation programs in preparing for the 2014 revision. An assessment guide for educators runs to more than 100 pages covering each of the content areas and what the standards will be. The site also includes a sample exam and archived webinars for training.<sup>67</sup>

“We have provided more information earlier about this test to educators than any test that we’ve ever released in our history,” he said.<sup>68</sup>

Your committee was not able to ascertain why this information disconnect exists.

GED Testing Service must accept some of the responsibility. It is the primary source of information about the 2014 revision and the resources available to help states and educators prepare. It failed to ensure that information was widely disseminated, at least in Oregon.

It is not solely responsible, though. Oregon State GED Administrator Marque Haeg testified that he had updated GED test center coordinators and Adult Basic Skills Directors about available information.

“The information ... has been distributed to the GED preparation sites. The publishers’ list of materials is distributed to the preparation staff, and we have recently conducted a survey of the needs of instructors to teach the new content of the tests,” he wrote in an email to your committee.

Yet most representatives from GED test centers, higher education and other preparation sites in Oregon testified that they did not have the information necessary to prepare adults to take the new GED exam.

Teachers and GED test centers are not the only ones who needed to prepare for the new test. Technical changes needed to be made to Oregon Administrative Rules, which spell out several

details about oversight and administration of the GED in the state. \* As of December 2013, with little time remaining before the launch of the new exam, they had not all been updated.

By December, Oregon also had not adopted a regulation regarding the sharing of disaggregated information between the GED Testing Service and GED test centers. This shortfall will be addressed in detail in the next section.

Oregon's public universities accept the GED for admission under some circumstances, but they require that minimum scores be met. Those scores are tied to particular GED revisions. For example, the University of Oregon uses the following standard that reflects changes made in the 2002-13 test:<sup>69</sup>

- If you received your GED *after* January 2002, your standard score on each of the five examinations must be at least 410, with an overall average of 580 or higher.
- If you received your GED *before* January 2002, your standard score on each of the five examinations must be at least 40, with an overall average of 58 or higher.

Similar standards exist at other public universities. In the final months of 2013, they had not been updated to address the 2014 revision. Indeed, one admissions official contacted by your committee was unaware of the 2014 revision and the need to set a new admissions threshold.

Joseph Holliday, Oregon University System assistant vice chancellor for student success initiatives, initiated discussions among admissions officials in December. If things advance well, schools could have new standards in place relatively quickly.

The new admissions requirements could again reflect specific numerical scores or instead adopt the GED Testing Service's "GED Score with honors" level that the service says will indicate college and career readiness.

The fact that universities were unaware of the need for new GED admissions standards and were working to adopt them quickly so close to the launch of the new exam is another indication of a lack of state preparation.

**Conclusion 12:**

*Oregon agencies and officials that oversee or interact with the GED inadequately prepared for the 2014 revision.*

---

\* Specifically OAR 589-007-0400: General Educational Development Program and Certificates of High School Equivalency and OAR 589-007-0500: State GED Fees.

## GED Analytics

The 2014 GED program includes a new tool called GED Analytics that can provide real-time data about student performance to state officials, policymakers and testing centers. The data will contain aggregate information that can inform policy and encourage sharing of best practices for student preparation. It will provide program metrics that answer questions such as:<sup>70</sup>

- How are test-takers performing?
- What are the characteristics of test-takers?
- How many students take the test how frequently throughout the state and at individual test centers?

The new system can provide unprecedented data to officials and testing centers that will empower them to make smart choices based on real-time information. They will be able to analyze subject-specific test performance based on many demographic and geographic characteristics, as well as performance by students coming out of particular test-preparation programs. They can spot trends, both good and bad, and identify best practices to share.

Access to that data is contingent on Oregon engaging with GED Testing Services. Each state will decide how much of the data is accessible and to whom. In Oregon, that decision had not been made in the final months of 2013. The state had not adopted formal guidelines or regulation that would allow Oregon to capitalize on the data-rich package to effectively support student development while ensuring individual student privacy.

Without privacy protections, personal information about individual students could be shared widely. Students should be able to decide what is shared about them individually, and the default should be for the state to protect individual privacy.

### **Conclusion 13:**

*Approaching the end of 2013, Oregon had not prepared to take advantage of all of the analytical data available as part of the 2014 GED test. GED Analytics provides a tool to Oregon and its partners in GED preparation and testing to track and measure the outcomes of the 2014 GED test. The sooner it takes advantage of it, the sooner it will have reliable data on which to act.*

## **State coordination and funding for the GED**

Despite the ambitious 40-40-20 goal, your committee found that Oregon has neither a plan in place for providing GED-related services to students who drop out nor a clear understanding of what it would take to implement such a plan. In fact, the current approach to supporting GED attainment as the primary alternative to a high school diploma is fractured, uncoordinated and insufficient for many.

“Oregon is one of the few states in the United States that provides no categorical funding to its citizens to prepare for the test or to take the GED,” State Director of Adult Basic Skills David Moore said. “The [40-40-20] goal is ambitious, but I’m not sure the resources have been aligned at the state to adequately give Oregonians access to that educational opportunity.”<sup>71</sup>

The lack of designated, coordinated funding and preparation manifests differently in different environments, but the overall result is the same – a disconnected system where GED students often pay a disproportionate share of the costs relative to other states.

Part of the problem is that no single office or individual oversees the GED and related services in Oregon. The state has a GED administrator, but the number of programs and support services extend far beyond the scope of his responsibilities. Your committee considered recommending the creation of an overarching position, a “GED czar,” but it chose not to do so primarily out of concern that it would not successfully streamline and consolidate the oversight.

Implementing a coordinated plan for disconnected youth will require Oregon to address both regulatory and funding issues.

The Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development regulates who can provide the actual testing services by designating and monitoring local GED testing centers, but regulation does not extend to GED preparation and education programs.

While the state regulates community colleges that are significant providers of GED preparation and testing, those are not the only providers. Community-based and faith-based organizations also provide GED instruction. So do private, for-profit organizations. Because Oregon does not certify or oversee any of them, there is considerable variation in the quality of instruction. As noted above, however, the wide variety of providers also allows GED students to choose a program that best serves their particular needs and circumstances.

Community colleges tend to offer these programs as a public service and direct some of their institutional funds to underwrite the costs. GED programs are not revenue generators for colleges.

Colleges continue to provide the service because the GED opens up an educational opportunity and enhanced access to postsecondary options for people who have not completed a high school education.

Although your committee discussed formal state regulation of GED test preparation providers, we make no recommendation on this point. Some committee members view state certification as a means to protect education consumers. Other members shared concerns that a regulatory framework could become a burden on local, community-based providers, especially those that meet the culturally specific needs of communities of color.

State funding is available for students aged 19 to 21 through their local school districts. Oregon law permits, but does not require, school districts to provide alternative education services to students in that age group, using existing education dollars.<sup>72</sup> Students in that age range are counted like any other student in a district's attendance tally under the state's school funding formula.<sup>73</sup>

Some school districts aggressively seek out those students and provide them with alternative education paths to help complete their high school diploma or prepare for the GED test. Such services may be provided directly by the district or by contract with outside providers, such as community colleges.

Portland Public Schools actively takes advantage of this option. Superintendent Carole Smith explained:

It's our responsibility to give students an opportunity to live a productive and fulfilling life, even if they have not obtained a diploma by the time they're 18. That's one reason we provide students with an opportunity to complete school until they are 21. Those funds support community college or community-based organizations where students can continue to work on their diploma or GED. We pay for that instruction because we want students prepared to become responsible adults. That aligns with Oregon's 40-40-20 goal.<sup>74</sup>

If more school districts served 19- to 21-year-olds, greater resources might be available to local GED services for that age group. However, because circumstances differ among districts, the decision whether to serve older students must be made locally. Your committee therefore makes no specific recommendation on this point.

The experience of community colleges and K-12 schools are pieces of a broader public funding problem. There is no categorical, dedicated, line-item funding for GED preparation, testing and wraparound support services in Oregon, and what resources are expended are not tracked in any clear way.

Many federal agencies and programs support GED attainment, including federal workforce development, the Department of Education, special education and programs that support families in need, to name a few.

Several state agencies also currently support GED-related costs through resources under their purview, including the Department of Education, Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, Oregon Youth Authority, Department of Corrections and Department of Human Services.

Yet no one actually knows how much the state spends on GED services. When asked about funds spent on GED services out of the Department of Human Services, a department analyst acknowledged that preparation, testing and support services such as childcare or transportation costs are allowable, but also wrote, “We don’t track or collect the cost specifically related to GED attainment.” She suggested, however, that they might be gleaned through manual analysis.<sup>75</sup>

A policy and budget analyst in the Department of Administrative Services said the department has never studied how GED services are funded, and he was unaware of anyone who has.<sup>76</sup>

A representative of the Legislative Fiscal Office also confirmed that the office does not track specific state dollars spent on programs related to the GED.<sup>77</sup>

**Conclusion 14:**

*Because Oregon does not track its spending on GED preparation and related services, Oregonians cannot gauge how effectively state-supported programs are performing.*

While every state is dealing differently with the costs of the new GED system, several states are better positioned than Oregon to strategically meet the change.

According to the National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium, Oklahoma, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania are among the states that coordinate funding for GED services across state agencies and incorporate federal funding streams.<sup>78</sup>

Most states provide some level of categorical or line-item funding for GED services, including Washington, Montana, Georgia, Kansas and Kentucky. Many of these states provide funds for core programming and award performance-based funds related to the number of students who pass the GED.

Your committee concludes that Oregon is unprepared for the 2014 GED revision not only because it failed to take action but also because the state has never developed the institutional infrastructure, budgeting and oversight to manage the GED in a coherent manner. That was true under the old GED, but the new GED provides a second chance. It is not too late to pursue an effective approach to building an integrated system that ensures all adults have the credentialing and skills necessary to contribute to the economic, workforce and educational goals our state has set.

**Conclusion 15:**

*A funding and oversight framework for the GED and related services that coordinates across state agencies and aligns resources within a coherent plan would stabilize the system and best ensure a successful pathway to bridging the gap between Oregonians without a high school diploma or equivalent and the aspirations of 40-40-20.*

## Recommendations

Oregon, the GED test itself and young adults without a high school diploma all have a second chance with the 2014 GED revision. Historically, the state has not treated the GED as part of a comprehensive education system. Now is the time to change that.

The 2014 GED revision comes at a fortuitous time for Oregon as the state strives to meet the ambitious goals of its 40-40-20 plan and has new education leadership in place. The state's still relatively new Oregon Education Investment Board last year hired a new chief education officer. The governor's office has appointed a new education adviser. And the Department of Community College and Workforce Development has an interim director. These education leaders can implement a better approach to the GED and adult basic education without being tied directly to past shortcomings.

Yet just as the GED does not guarantee success but only a second chance for adults, so too the 2014 revision offers Oregon only an as-yet-unproven opportunity to help 19- to 25-year-old adults without high school diplomas to become active participants in the state's economy.

Many people's views of the GED credential have been shaped by its past shortcomings. Such negative opinions could discourage some adults from pursuing the credential and affect how recipients are perceived in the workplace. The launch of the 2014 revision could reshape public perceptions, but only if the public is aware of the changes and the performance of the new GED program.

Historically, Oregon has not engaged in much marketing or outreach for the GED. That should change.

### **Recommendation 1:**

*The Oregon Department of Education and the Oregon Education Investment Board (OEIB) should launch a public outreach program that targets diverse communities and stakeholders across the state and helps them develop a clear understanding of the 2014 GED program.*

Your committee concluded that the absence of a coordinated funding framework for the GED, related wraparound services and programs to help adult students develop soft skills does not

serve Oregonians well. Adults who lack a high school diploma often face steep barriers to success, and assistance programs help provide the freedom to pursue a GED. Coordination between training and preparation programs will allow students to maximize their time studying and learning career skills.

**Recommendation 2:**

*Oregon's chief education officer should develop and implement a coordinated funding and strategic framework across departments for GED preparation, testing, soft-skill development programs and related wraparound services.*

Your committee concluded that a need-based subsidy for GED testing fees would not be cost-prohibitive within the Oregon state budget and would reduce a barrier for low-income high school dropouts to prepare for and take the test. Demonstrable need varies among government programs. In this case, lawmakers should develop eligibility criteria after a robust public discussion and consideration of similar programs in other states.

**Recommendation 3:**

*The Legislature should allocate dedicated funding to subsidize GED testing for qualified students with demonstrable need.*

Oregon's public universities did not update their admissions criteria in advance of the 2014 GED's launch. Individuals who pass the new GED test will be ineligible for admission to universities until those criteria are changed.

**Recommendation 4:**

*Oregon's public universities should update their admissions criteria to allow admissions for qualified recipients of the 2014 revision of the GED.*

Your committee concluded that Oregon inadequately prepared for the launch of the new exam and to take advantage of the data offerings of the new GED program.

The foundation of action must be better information. GED Analytics can provide detailed information about test takers and preparation programs that would allow officials to better gauge success and share best practices. The state should actively engage with GED Testing Services to acquire that information and use it in ways that protect the privacy of individual test takers.

The fifth recommendation has six parts that can be summed up as follows: ***Officials should collect information about the GED as well as the college and career performance of people after they earn it, and report back to Oregonians regularly.***

**Recommendation 5.1:**

*Oregon's chief education officer, State Board of Education and Oregon Education Investment Board should adopt administrative rules to allow collection of disaggregated information about GED participants while protecting students' personal privacy.*

**Recommendation 5.2:**

*Oregon's chief education officer, Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development director, deputy superintendent of public instruction and the State GED administrator should coordinate with GED Testing Services to take full advantage of the GED Analytics tool and to begin collecting disaggregated data about GED takers and completers.*

As the state gathers and processes the information, analysts should ensure that they present fine-grained detail. Rural areas, urban areas, communities of color, non-native English speakers and other groups each have particular characteristics and needs that should be considered so that Oregon officials can determine which preparation programs serve which groups well.

**Recommendation 5.3:**

*Oregon's chief education officer, deputy superintendent of public instruction and OEIB should collect data about the success of GED instruction programs in diverse geographic, cultural and institutional locations.*

While gathering the above information, officials must not lose sight of the fact that a high school diploma is preferable and different from a GED certificate. State education officials, the public, the business community and other stakeholders would benefit from disaggregating the two groups in the context of 40-40-20.

**Recommendation 5.4:**

*Oregon's chief education officer, deputy superintendent of public instruction, OEIB, the State GED administrator and any other individual or entity that assesses state performance toward meeting 40-40-20 goals should track and report GED recipients separately from high school graduates.*

In order to evaluate the new GED test as well as test preparation programs, the state needs accurate performance data about people who receive the GED certificate. Their aggregate ability to succeed entering college and career should be the core indicators of the value of the 2014 GED revision.

**Recommendation 5.5:**

*Oregon's chief education officer, Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development director, deputy superintendent of public instruction and the State GED administrator should collect data on how well GED recipients perform in college and career.*

Once the above information has been collected, state education officials will be in a position to provide an assessment of the GED. A detailed analysis of how well students perform under the 2014 revision and how well preparation programs succeed would allow the state to engage in a frank discussion about where to direct resources and other support.

The GED must be part of an ongoing discussion, and Oregon must react to performance changes. An annual report would facilitate that discussion and provide current data.

**Recommendation 5.6:**

*Oregon's chief education officer, deputy superintendent of public instruction, State GED administrator and OEIB should use the data collected on the performance of GED recipients to produce a report no later than 2017 that assesses the performance of the 2014 GED test for students and in the context of the 40-40-20 plan. Thereafter, an annual public report should be delivered to the governor and the Legislature.*

Oregon government also must turn its eyes inward and assess how well it supports the GED. Because such data now are lacking, the state cannot determine whether it is investing the right amount in the right programs to maximize the opportunity for adult learners to succeed in college and career. The fact that spending on services related to the GED remains a mystery creates a significant barrier to serious strategic planning and allocation of resources.

**Recommendation 6:**

*The governor should direct the Department of Administrative Services to prepare an annual report that contains a clear accounting of state funds that are allocated for GED test preparation, testing and related support services.*

The HiSET and TASC both aspire to provide viable alternatives to the GED, and some other states have adopted them. Oregon should consider whether to use these alternatives in the future based on the college and career success of adults in other states who earn these credentials. State officials should not predicate their analysis on the notion that any single test is appropriate or needed. A fair, open analysis will entertain the options that some or all of the high school alternative programs are suitable to serve Oregonians' diverse needs.

The seventh recommendation has three parts that can be summed up as follows: ***Officials should take a fresh look at alternatives to the GED in a few years.***

**Recommendation 7.1:**

*Oregon's chief education officer, deputy superintendent of public instruction, State GED administrator and Oregon Education Investment Board should use Recommendation 5.6's annual report to assess the suitability of the 2014 GED revision for specific populations, including non-native English speakers, who might be better served by alternative tests.*

**Recommendation 7.2:**

*Oregon's chief education officer, deputy superintendent of public instruction, State GED administrator and OEIB should collect information about the performance of the HiSET, TASC and any other approved GED alternative in other states, focusing in particular on how well recipients of those credentials perform in college and career.*

**Recommendation 7.3:**

*Oregon's chief education officer, deputy superintendent of public instruction, State GED administrator and OEIB should consider, as soon as possible but no later than 2018, whether alternatives to the GED would better serve Oregonians from diverse backgrounds and make recommendations to the governor and Legislature.*

Although Oregon has not adopted one of the alternatives to the GED, adults will begin earning those credentials in other states. Inevitably, some of those people will move to Oregon. If the review conducted for Recommendation 7.2 above finds that HiSET and TASC recipients have similar outcomes to GED recipients, regardless of whether Oregon uses those exams, it should treat those credentials as equivalent to the GED.

**Recommendation 8:**

*The Oregon Speaker of the House and Senate President should direct the Office of Legislative Counsel to conduct a review of applicable laws and administrative rules that refer to the GED. Counsel should suggest revisions to treat the HiSET, TASC and any other approved GED alternative in other states as equivalent to the GED for purposes of law, post-secondary education, public services and benefits.*

Finally, two topics came up repeatedly throughout your committee’s research that were beyond the scope of this report but warrant further investigation by City Club of Portland, state agencies or other interested researchers.

**Avenues for future research 1:**

*Your committee focused on adults 19 to 25 years old who dropped out of school. Additional challenges arise with older adults, and further research is needed to develop ways to re-engage them in pursuit of an educational credential such as the GED.*

**Avenues for future research 2:**

*The need for the GED and other alternatives arises only because students drop out of school. More research should be done to address the question of how to keep more young people in school through graduation.*

## Endnotes

1. Oregon Secretary of State Audit, "Opportunities to Increase Adult GEDs in Support of 40-40-20 Education Plan," Report No. 2013-02, Feb. 2013, <http://sos.oregon.gov/Documents/audits/full/2013/2013-02.pdf> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013), p. 1.
2. Yolanda G., Witness Testimony, Oct. 14, 2013.
3. Common Core State Standards Initiative website, "In the States," <http://www.corestandards.org/in-the-states> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
4. Daniel Princiotta and Ryan Reyna, "Achieving Graduation for All," 2009, <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/0910ACHIEVINGGRADUATION.PDF> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013), p. 29.
5. *Ibid.*
6. National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and Southern Regional Education Board, "Beyond the Rhetoric: Improving College Readiness Through Coherent State Policy," June 2010 [http://www.highereducation.org/reports/college\\_readiness/CollegeReadiness.pdf](http://www.highereducation.org/reports/college_readiness/CollegeReadiness.pdf) (accessed Dec. 7, 2013).
7. U.S. Department of Education. Am I Eligible to Receive Financial Aid? <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/help/fftoc03a.htm> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
8. University of Oregon, Requirements for Applicants with GEDs. <http://admissions.uoregon.edu/otherapplicants/ged> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
9. Portland State University, "Minimum Admission Requirements: Freshman," <http://www.pdx.edu/admissions/minimum-admission-requirements-freshman> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013)
10. Oregon State University, Graduates of Non-standard or Unaccredited High Schools or Home-Schooled Students. <http://oregonstate.edu/admissions/main/graduates-non-standard-or-unaccredited-high-schools-or-home-schooled-students> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
11. GED Testing Service, "About the GED Test," GED Testing Service, <http://www.gedtestingservice.com/testers/history> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
12. Common Core State Standards Initiative website. <http://www.corestandards.org/> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013)
13. GED Testing Service, "Programs and Services: FAQs." <http://www.gedtestingservice.com/educators/2014-faqs> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
14. Bowen Adajian, Witness Testimony, Oct. 14, 2013.
15. Camille Preus, Witness Testimony, Sep. 3, 2013.

16. GED Testing Service, "2012 Annual Statistical Report on the GED Test," p. 17.
17. Marque Haeg, Witness Testimony, Sep. 10, 2013
18. David Moore, Witness Testimony, Sep. 10, 2013.
19. Kimberly Hefling, "GED test takers rush to beat deadline," Associated Press, Nov. 7, 2013.  
[http://www.philly.com/philly/news/nation\\_world/20131107\\_GED\\_test\\_takers\\_rush\\_to\\_beat\\_deadline.html](http://www.philly.com/philly/news/nation_world/20131107_GED_test_takers_rush_to_beat_deadline.html) (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
20. SB253, Oregon State Legislature, 2011 Regular Session.  
<https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2011R1/Measures/Overview/SB253> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013)
21. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010-12, 3-year estimates.
22. Oregon Department of Education, 2011-12 Cohort Graduation Rates.  
<http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=2644> (accessed Aug. 24, 2013).
23. Emily House, "Oregon's High School Dropouts: Examining the economic and social costs," The Foundation for Educational Choice, 2010. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED509327.pdf> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
24. James Heckman, John Eric Humphries, and Nicholas Mader, "The GED," 2010, National Bureau of Economic Research, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w16064.pdf> (accessed Oct. 7, 2013), p.4.
25. Carole Smith, Witness Testimony, Nov. 13, 2013.
26. Gale Castillo, Witness Testimony, Aug. 29, 2013.
27. Gerardo Ochoa, Witness Testimony, Aug. 29, 2013.
28. Camille Preus, Witness Testimony, Sep. 3, 2013.
29. PBS NewsHour, "The GED gets a makeover: Will it make for better workers?," Nov. 17, 2013.  
[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/education/july-dec13/ged\\_11-17.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/education/july-dec13/ged_11-17.html) (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
30. David Conley, Witness Testimony, Sep. 9, 2013.
31. Camille Preus, Witness Testimony, Sep. 3, 2013.
32. Andrew Dyke, Witness Testimony, Oct. 10, 2013.
33. Oregon Secretary of State Audit, "Opportunities to Increase Adult GEDs in Support of 40-40-20 Education Plan," Report No. 2013-02, Feb. 2013, p. 11-12, 18.
34. GED Testing Service, "2012 Annual Statistical Report on the GED Test," p. 9.
35. GED Testing Service, "2012 Annual Statistical Report on the GED Test," p. 81.
36. Midge Purcell, Witness Testimony, Sep. 16, 2013.

37. Gale Castillo, MaryAnn Porter and Gerardo Ochoa, Witness Testimony, Aug. 29, 2013.
38. Gerardo Ochoa, Witness Testimony, Aug. 29, 2013.
39. GED Testing Service, "2012 Annual Statistical Report on the GED Test," p. 39.
40. Victor T., Witness Testimony, Oct. 14, 2013.
41. Yolanda G., Witness Testimony, Oct. 14, 2013.
42. Michelle L., Witness Testimony, Oct. 14, 2013.
43. Bowen Adajian, Witness Testimony, Oct. 14, 2013.
44. Michelle L., Witness Testimony, Oct. 14, 2013.
45. John Bridgeland, Karen Burke Morison, and John Dilulio, The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts, March 2006, p. iii.  
<https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/Documents/TheSilentEpidemic3-06FINAL.pdf> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013)
46. Carla Gay, Pamela Blumenthal and Marc Goldberg, Witness Testimony, Aug. 13, 2013.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Camille Preus, Witness Testimony, Sep. 3, 2013.
49. Nichole Maher, Witness Testimony, Sep. 19, 2013.
50. Elise Huggins, Witness Testimony, Sep. 17, 2013.
51. Kari Brenk, Witness Testimony, Sep. 17, 2013.
52. This point was expressed by multiple witnesses including Elise Huggins, Kari Brenk, Allison DeFresse, and Midge Purcel.
53. Nichole Maher, Witness Testimony, Sep. 19, 2013.
54. CT Turner, Witness Testimony, Oct. 22, 2013.
55. Oregon Department of Human Services, TANF Federal Participation Requirements,  
<http://www.dhs.state.or.us/caf/ss/tanf/employment.html>. (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
56. Lily Sehon, Witness communication by e-mail, Oct. 25, 2013.
57. CT Turner, Witness communication by email, Oct. 25, 2013.
58. New York State Education Department, "TASC: New York State's 2014 High School Equivalency Test," [http://lacnyc.org/sites/default/files/TASC%20\\_NYACCE\\_Final\\_5.pdf](http://lacnyc.org/sites/default/files/TASC%20_NYACCE_Final_5.pdf) (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).

59. GED Testing Service, "2012 Annual Statistical Report on the GED Test," p. 9.
60. CTB/McGraw Hill, Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC) – A National Test for High School Equivalency,  
<http://www.ctb.com/ctb.com/control/ctbLandingPageViewAction?landngPageId=52783> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
61. Educational Testing Services, The ETS High School Equivalency Test, <http://hiset.ets.org/> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
62. Caroline Winter, "GED Faces New Rivals for High School Dropouts," Bloomberg BusinessWeek, Oct. 10, 2013. <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-10-10/ged-faces-new-rivals-for-high-school-dropouts> (Accessed Oct. 10, 2013).
63. Education Division of the Tennessee Department of Labor & Workforce Development, "Tennessee adopts second high school equivalency test," Sep. 12, 2013. <https://news.tn.gov/node/11340> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
64. Paul Takahashi, "Adult students in Nevada to have equivalency-exam options beyond GED," Las Vegas Sun, Oct. 5, 2013. <http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2013/oct/05/adult-students-nevada-have-equivalency-exam-option/> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
65. Heather Ficht, Witness Testimony, Aug. 6, 2013, and e-mail correspondence Nov. 27, 2013.
66. Elise Huggins, Witness Testimony, Sep. 17, 2013.
67. GED Testing Service website. <http://www.gedtestingservice.com/educators/home> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013)
68. CT Turner, Witness Testimony, Oct. 22, 2013.
69. University of Oregon, Requirements for Applicants with GEDs.
70. Sarita Parikh and Mark Christianson, "GED Analytics," GED Testing Service.  
<http://www.gedtestingservice.com/uploads/files/d67621896563fc655b68d6c11217d4cf.pdf> (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
71. David Moore, Witness Testimony, Sep. 10, 2013.
72. ORS 339.115(1) and (2)(b).
73. OAR 581-022-1350(8)(a).
74. Carole Smith, Witness Testimony, Nov. 13, 2013.
75. Lily Sehon, Witness communication by e-mail, Oct. 25, 2013.
76. Bill McGee, Witness Testimony, Oct. 1, 2013.
77. Doug Wilson, Witness Testimony, Oct. 1, 2013.

78. The National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium, Examples of state funding formulas,  
[http://www.naepdc.org/resource\\_library/professional\\_development/Examples%20of%20State%20Funding%20Formulas.pdf](http://www.naepdc.org/resource_library/professional_development/Examples%20of%20State%20Funding%20Formulas.pdf) (accessed Dec. 10, 2013).

## Witnesses

Bowen Adajian, GED Instructor, Portland Community College's Portland Metropolitan Workforce Training Center

Iris Bell, Executive Director, Youth Development Council

Sheronne Blasi, Audit Manager, Oregon Secretary of State's Office

Pamela Blumenthal, Director of Alternative Programs, Portland Community College

Kari Brenk, Program Director, New Avenues for Youth

Kate Brown, Oregon Secretary of State

Sandy Bumpus, Executive Director, Oregon Family Support Network

Pat Burk, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy, College of Education, Portland State University

Krissa Caldwell, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development

Gale Castillo, President, Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber

Tom Chamberlain, President, AFL-CIO

Jay Clemens, President and CEO, Association of Oregon Industries

David Conley, Professor of Educational Policy and Leadership, College of Education, University of Oregon; Founder and Director, Educational Policy Improvement Center

Allison DeFresse, GED Coordinator, Rosemary Anderson High School, Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center (POIC)

Andrew Dyke, Senior Economist and Managing Director, ECONorthwest

Betsy Earls, Association of Oregon Industries

Xochitl Esparza, TANF Manager, Oregon Department of Human Services

Heather Ficht, Director of Youth Workforce Services, Worksystems, Inc.

Charlotte Fraser, Recreational Coordinator, Clackamas County Drug Court, Clackamas County Juvenile Department

Yolanda G., GED Student, Portland Community College

Carla Gay, Program Director, Contracted Alternative Schools, Portland Public Schools

Marc Goldberg, Dean of Economic and Workforce Development/Community Learning Programs, Mt. Hood Community College

Whitney Grubbs, Chief of Staff, Oregon Education Investment Board

Skylar H., GED Student, Portland Community College - Cascade Campus

Marque Haeg, State GED Administrator, Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development

Betsy Hammond, Education Reporter, The Oregonian

Kira Higgs, Director, Continuous Improvement, All Hands Raised

Joseph Holliday, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success Initiatives, Oregon University System.

Elise Huggins, Education Manager, Portland YouthBuilders

Dan Koopman, Associate Vice President of Instruction, Blue Mountain Community College

Michelle L., GED Student, Portland Community College

Terry Lenchitsky, President, Oregon School Board Association

Raja M., GED Student, Portland Community College - Cascade Campus

Nichole Maher, President, Northwest Health Foundation

Frank Martin, Education Administrator, Oregon Youth Authority

Nick Mathern, Associate Vice President, Policy and Partnership Development, Gateway to College National Network

Bill McGee, Policy and Budget Analyst, Department of Administrative Services, Chief Financial Office, State of Oregon

Andrew McGough, Executive Director, Worksystems, Inc.

Mark McKechnie, Executive Director, Youth Rights Justice

Tracie Memmott, Instructor, YES! Program, Portland Community College - Cascade Campus

David Moore, State Director of Adult Basic Services, Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development

Gerardo Ochoa, Board of Directors, Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber, Associate Director of Financial Aid, Linfield College

Tammi Paul, Lane County Regional Director, Oregon Family Support Network

Rose Payan, Specialist, Education Testing Service

Nicole Pexton, Staff Auditor, Oregon Secretary of State's Office

Maryann Porter, Finance Manager and Scholarship Program Manager, Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber

Camille Preus, President, Blue Mountain Community College

Midge Purcell, Director of Advocacy and Public Policy, Portland Urban League of Portland

Hannah R., GED Student, Portland Community College - Cascade Campus

Gail Rasmussen, Past President, Oregon Education Association

Mickey Reynolds, Associate Director of Operations, Oregon State University

Hilda Rosseli, Deputy Commissioner, Oregon Education Investment Board

Lily Sehon, Policy Analyst, Department of Human Services, State of Oregon

Stephen Simms, Administrator, Oregon State Apprenticeship and Training Division

Carole Smith, Superintendent, Portland Public Schools

Victor T., GED Student, Portland Community College

Matt Tschabold, Operations and Policy Advisor, Youth Development Council, Oregon Department of Education

CT Turner, Senior Director, Public Affairs and Government Relations, GED Testing Service

Doug Wilson, Principal Legislative Analyst, Legislative Fiscal Office, State of Oregon

Duncan Wyse, President and CEO, Oregon Business Council

## Bibliography

- Bridgeland, John, Karen Burke Morison, and John Dilulio. "The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts." 2006.  
<https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/Documents/TheSilentEpidemic3-06FINAL.pdf>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- Cardoza, Kavitha. "The GED Test Is About to Get Much Harder, and Much More Expensive." *The Atlantic*, 2013. <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/10/the-ged-test-is-about-to-get-much-harder-and-much-more-expensive/280281/>. (Accessed Dec. 7, 2013).
- City Club of Portland. *Creating Better Second Chances for a Basic Education*. Draft Comprehensive Study Charge, 2013.
- Common Core State Standards Initiative Website. "In the States." n.d.  
<http://www.corestandards.org/in-the-states>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- . "Frequently Asked Questions." n.d.  
<http://www.corestandards.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions>. (Accessed Dec. 11, 2013).
- . "Mathematics." n.d. <http://www.corestandards.org/Math>. (Accessed Dec. 11, 2013).
- CTB/McGraw Hill. *Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC) - A National Test for High School Equivalency*. n.d.  
<http://www.ctb.com/ctb.com/control/ctbLandingPageViewAction?landngPageId=52783>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- Curry-Stevens, A. A Cross-Hemmer, and Coalition of Communities of Color. *Communities of Color in Multnomah County: An Unsettling Profile*. Portland. 2010.  
<http://www.coalitioncommunitiescolor.org/docs/AN%20UNSETTLING%20PROFILE.pdf>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- Education Division of the Tennessee Department of Labor & Workforce Development. "Tennessee Adopts Second High School Equivalency Test." 2013.  
<https://news.tn.gov/node/11340>. (Accessed Nov. 11, 2013).
- Education Northwest. "Spotlight on the Common Core Standards." March 2011  
[http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm\\_send/1106](http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/1106). (Accessed Dec. 11, 2013).
- Educational Testing Services. *The ETS High School Equivalency Test*. n.d. <http://hiset.ets.org/>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).

- GED Testing Service. *2012 Annual Statistical Report on the GED Test*. 2013.  
<http://www.gedtestingservice.com/uploads/files/8d4558324628dfcf1011dc738acca6eb.pdf>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013)
- . *About the GED Test*. n.d. <http://gedtestingservice.com/testers/history>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- . *Programs and Services FAQs: About the Test*, n.d.  
<http://www.gedtestingservice.com/educators/2014-faqs#about>. (Accessed Oct.10, 2013).
- Heckman, James, John Eric Humphries and Nicholas Mader. *The GED*, 2010.  
<http://www.nber.org/papers/w16064.pdf>. (Accessed Oct.7, 2013).
- Hefling, Kimberley. “GED Test-Takers Rushing to Meet Dec. 31 Deadline.” *Time*. November 2013.  
[http://www.philly.com/philly/news/nation\\_world/20131107\\_GED\\_test\\_takers\\_rush\\_to\\_beat\\_deadline.html](http://www.philly.com/philly/news/nation_world/20131107_GED_test_takers_rush_to_beat_deadline.html). (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- House, Emily. “Oregon’s High School Dropouts: Examining the Economic and Social Costs.” The Foundation for Educational Choice. 2010. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED509327.pdf>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- Long, Angela, and Chris Mullin. *Rebirth of a Dropout Nation: Examining Education’s Forgotten GED Population*. Stylus Publishing. 2013.
- Mageehon, Ali. “Minding the Gap: Helping GED Students Transition to Career and Technical Education.” *Techniques* May (2013): 34–37.
- Martin, Vanessa, and Joseph Broadus. *Enhancing GED Instruction to Prepare Students for College and Careers: Early Success in Laguardia Community College’s Bridge to Health and Business Program*. 2013.
- National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium. “Examples of State Funding Formulas.” n.d.  
[http://www.naepdc.org/resource\\_library/professional\\_development/Examples\\_of\\_State\\_Funding\\_Formulas.pdf](http://www.naepdc.org/resource_library/professional_development/Examples_of_State_Funding_Formulas.pdf). (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and Southern Regional Education Board. “Beyond the Rhetoric: Improving College Readiness Through Coherent State Policy.” June 2010. [http://www.highereducation.org/reports/college\\_readiness/CollegeReadiness.pdf](http://www.highereducation.org/reports/college_readiness/CollegeReadiness.pdf). (Accessed Dec. 7, 2013).

- National Governors Association. "Forty-Nine States and Territories Join Common Core Standards Initiative." n.d. [http://www.nga.org/cms/home/news-room/news-releases/page\\_2009/col2-content/main-content-list/title\\_forty-nine-states-and-territories-join-common-core-standards-initiative.html](http://www.nga.org/cms/home/news-room/news-releases/page_2009/col2-content/main-content-list/title_forty-nine-states-and-territories-join-common-core-standards-initiative.html). (Accessed Dec. 11, 2013).
- New York State Education Department. "TASC: New York State's 2014 High School Equivalency Test." n.d. [http://lacnyc.org/sites/default/files/TASC\\_NYACCE\\_Final\\_5.pdf](http://lacnyc.org/sites/default/files/TASC_NYACCE_Final_5.pdf). (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- Oregon Department of Education. "2011-12 Cohort Graduation Rates." n.d. <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=2644>. (Accessed August. 24, 2013).
- . *Correctional Education Programs: Juvenile Education Program*. n.d.
- Oregon Department of Human Services. "TANF Federal Participation Requirements." n.d. <http://www.dhs.state.or.us/caf/ss/tanf/employment.html>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- Oregon Education Investment Board. *Progress on OEIB Objectives: 2013 Legislative Session*. 2013.
- Oregon Secretary of State Audit. "Opportunities to Increase Adult GEDs in Support of 40-40-20 Education Plan." 2013. <http://sos.oregon.gov/Documents/audits/full/2013/2013-02.pdf>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013)
- Oregon State Legislature. *Oregon Revised Statute §339.010*, n.d. ([https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills\\_laws/lawsstatutes/2011ors339.html](https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills_laws/lawsstatutes/2011ors339.html)). (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- . *SB253*. 2011 Regular Session. 2011. <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2011R1/Measures/Overview/SB253>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- Oregon State University. "Graduates of Non-Standard or Unaccredited High Schools or Home-Schooled Students." n.d. <http://oregonstate.edu/admissions/main/graduates-non-standard-or-unaccredited-high-schools-or-home-schooled-students>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- Oregon University System. "'From Goal to Reality: 40-40-20,' A Report on Strategies to Meet Oregon's 40-40-20 Education Goals Based on the 2011 Leadership Symposium Sponsored by the Oregon University System." 2011. <http://www.oregon.gov/gov/oeib/docs/nnousreport.pdf>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- Oregon Youth Authority. *Education Services for Youth in OYA Close Custody (Issue Brief)*. 2013.

- Parikh, Sarita, and Mark Christianson. *GED Analytics*. n.d. GED Testing Service.  
<http://www.gedtestingservice.com/uploads/files/d67621896563fc655b68d6c11217d4cf.pdf>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- PBS NewsHour. "The GED gets a makeover: Will it make for better workers?" Nov. 17, 2013.  
[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/education/july-dec13/ged\\_11-17.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/education/july-dec13/ged_11-17.html). (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- Perez-Pena, Richard. "Oregon Looks at Way to Attend College Now and Repay State Later." *The New York Times*, July 3, 2013. [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/04/education/in-oregon-a-plan-to-eliminate-tuition-and-loans-at-state-colleges.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/04/education/in-oregon-a-plan-to-eliminate-tuition-and-loans-at-state-colleges.html?_r=0). (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- Portland Public Schools. *Improving Graduation Rates at Portland Public Schools: A Report by the District Performance Auditor*. Portland. 2013.  
[http://www.pps.k12.or.us/files/board/Audit\\_Graduation-Rates.pdf](http://www.pps.k12.or.us/files/board/Audit_Graduation-Rates.pdf). (Accessed December 10, 2013).
- Portland State University. "Minimum Admission Requirements: Freshman." n.d.  
<http://www.pdx.edu/admissions/minimum-admission-requirements-freshman>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- Portland YouthBuilders. "Are You Ready to Plan Your Future?" Portland, n.d.
- Princiotta, Daniel, and Ryan Reyna. *Achieving Graduation for All*. 2009.  
<http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/0910ACHIEVINGGRADUATION.PDF>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- Rich, Motoko. "Raising the G.E.D. Bar Stirs Concern for Students." *The New York Times*, Oct. 11, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/12/education/raising-the-ged-bar-stirs-concern-for-students.html>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- Takahashi, Paul. "Adult Students in Nevada to Have Equivalency-Exam Options Beyond GED." *Las Vegas Sun*, October 11, 2013. <http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2013/oct/05/adult-students-nevada-have-equivalency-exam-option/>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- Tuck, Eve. "Repatriating the GED: Urban Youth and the Alternative to a High School Diploma." *High School Journal* 95.4, no. April-May (2012): p. 4.
- U.S. Census Bureau. "2011 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates," n.d.
- U.S. Department of Education. "Am I Eligible to Receive Financial Aid?" n.d.  
<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/help/fftoc03a.htm>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).

University of Oregon. "Requirements for Applicants with GEDS." n.d.  
<http://admissions.uoregon.edu/otherapplicants/ged>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).

Urban League of Portland. *The State of Black Oregon*, 2013. <http://ulpdx.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/UrbanLeague-StateofBlackOregon.pdf>. (Accessed Dec. 10, 2013).

———. "Who We Are," n.d. <http://ulpdx.org/who-we-are/> (Accessed Nov. 8, 2013).

Wine, Marjorie, Erika Hall, Linda Zimmerman and Tracy Gardner. "Development of the Career- and College-Readiness Assessment Targets for the New GED Assessment." GED Testing Service. n.d.  
<http://www.gedtestingservice.com/uploads/files/2287ea9548aa8839c330e610556f97b6.pdf>. (Accessed Dec. 11, 2013).

Winter, Caroline. "GED Faces New Rivals for High School Dropouts." *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, 2013. <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-10-10/ged-faces-new-rivals-for-high-school-dropouts>. (Accessed Oct.10, 2013).

## **Appendix A: Why 19 to 25 year olds?**

Admittedly, when considering the effectiveness of the GED, any age range is somewhat arbitrary.

The study charge for this report originally requested that your committee make recommendations for disconnected young people aged 16 to 25. As your committee conducted its research, however, it concluded that the GED is a more appropriate path for adults 19 years old and older than for younger students. Youths in the 16 to 18 range are better served within the established public education system working toward a high school diploma. Portland Public Schools, for example, offers many alternative and dropout-prevention programs designed specifically to work with students in this age range. Moreover, Oregon law makes school attendance compulsory for students between the ages of 7 and 18 who have not yet completed 12<sup>th</sup> grade.\*

A report by the National Governor’s Association supported this split. It cautioned, “Governors seeking to support GED programs should also consider how to do so without undermining dropout recovery programs that lead to a traditional high school diploma.”†

In 1955, when more states began offering the GED to non-veterans, test-takers had to be at least 20 years old. That minimum age requirement was put in place to prevent the GED from becoming a replacement for high school. It wasn’t until the 1980s that many states lowered the minimum age to 16. Some states other than Oregon still maintain a higher minimum age under state law.‡

In its State of Black Oregon report, the Urban League of Portland called on parents and educators to work together to keep young African Americans in school. It noted, “Dropping out of school leads to a future of unemployment and underemployment. Differential treatment in

---

\* Oregon Revised Statute §339.010 ([https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills\\_laws/lawsstatutes/2011ors339.html](https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills_laws/lawsstatutes/2011ors339.html))

† Princiotta, Daniel and Ryan Reyna. “Achieving Graduation for All,” 2009, p. 29. (<http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/0910ACHIEVINGGRADUATION.PDF>)

‡ Heckman, James, John Eric Humphries and Nicholas Mader. “The GED,” 2010, National Bureau of Economic Research. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w16064.pdf> (accessed Oct. 7, 2013), p.59.

the criminal justice system, decreased access to health care and limited access to college all combine to limit the prospect of a prosperous, successful future.”\*

At 19, students pass beyond the traditional age for high school. Although Oregon allows for enrollment to continue until age 21 for some special circumstances, students who reach 19 without graduating typically pass beyond the reach of the public K-12 system. Portland Public Schools is an exception to this and contracts with nonprofits and other providers to serve students until they are 21.

The upper end of the study’s age range is more flexible. Twenty-five serves as a convenient demarcation because it is commonly used for demographic purposes. The U.S. Census Bureau, for example, frames many datasets around that age point.

Some barriers to education tend to become more acute as one ages. By the time they reach the age of 25, many people have children, jobs, health problems or other challenges that inhibit their ability to prepare for the GED exam.

Moreover, the longer one has been removed from formal education, the more difficult it can be to reengage.

Bowen Adajian, a GED instructor at Portland Community College’s Portland Metropolitan Workforce Training Center, described his experience with adult learners to your committee.

“As a general rule, the longer people are out of school, the harder time they have. I’ve had students who are 20, 21 years old. They usually have a much easier time of it than a student who is 30 years old and hasn’t been in school for 10 or 15 years,” he said.

Twenty-five, then, is a convenient point for discussion while acknowledging that individual circumstances differ.

That said, many of the findings, conclusions and recommendations in this report are age-independent. They would improve the second chance of success for all adult students.

---

\* Urban League of Portland, “The State of Black Oregon,” p. 31. <http://ulpdx.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/UrbanLeague-StateofBlackOregon.pdf>.

## **Appendix B: The Common Core State Standards**

Each state sets its own standards and processes for developing, adopting and implementing student education and achievement standards. What schools teach and what students might learn can vary from state to state.

At the same time, students compete on a national and international stage, often with students whose state or countries have more rigorous educational requirements. Oregon and other states recognize the importance of having an education system that equips its students to compete both nationally and internationally and therefore supported and adopted the Common Core State Standards.\*

A multistate initiative organized by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officials developed the Common Core. The initiative formally commenced its efforts in 2009 with the support and involvement of 49 states.<sup>†</sup> It released standards for mathematics and English language arts (ELA) in June 2010.<sup>‡</sup> Since then, 45 states, the District of Columbia, and four territories have adopted the standards.<sup>§</sup>

The Oregon State Board of Education adopted the standards in 2010, and schools have been implementing them since then. New, tougher tests to assess how well students perform under the Common Core roll out in 2015.

The standards set learning expectations for all K-12 grade levels.

The standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are ready for college or to enter the workforce without any further remedial preparation. Standards were designed with the intent that high school graduates would be prepared for credit-bearing courses in two or four year college programs. The standards' developers further explain, "The standards are clear and concise to ensure that parents, teachers, and students have a clear

---

\* Oregon Dept. of Education, "Common Core Standards – Historical / Background Information" <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?=3253>

† National Governors Association. "Forty-Nine States and Territories Join Common Core Standards Initiative," [http://www.nga.org/cms/home/news-room/news-releases/page\\_2009/col2-content/main-content-list/title\\_forty-nine-states-and-territories-join-common-core-standards-initiative.html](http://www.nga.org/cms/home/news-room/news-releases/page_2009/col2-content/main-content-list/title_forty-nine-states-and-territories-join-common-core-standards-initiative.html)

‡ Education Northwest, "Spotlight on the Common Core Standards," p. 1, [http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm\\_send/1106](http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/1106)

§ Common Core State Standards Initiative, "In the States," <http://www.corestandards.org/in-the-states>

understanding of the expectations in reading, writing, speaking and listening, language and mathematics in school.”\*

The standards are intended to ensure that no matter where students live they are “well prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to collaborate and compete with their peers in the United States and abroad.” Shared standards should foster collaboration among states in developing textbooks and teaching material, common testing and assessment systems and changes needed to help support educators and schools in teaching to the new standards.<sup>†</sup>

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (ELA) set standards broadly across those subjects and specify that students be able to read, write, speak, listen and communicate effectively in those various content areas. The literacy standards in history, social studies, science and technical subjects, however, do not replace content standards in these areas but supplement them.<sup>‡</sup>

Other features of the ELA standards include:

- Reading standards focus on text complexity and growth of comprehension, placing equal emphasis on the sophistication of what students read and the skill with which they read.
- Writing standards acknowledge the fact that while some writing skills, including the abilities to plan, revise, edit and publish, apply to many types of writing, other skills relate to specific types of writing, such as arguments, informative/explanatory texts and narratives.
- Speaking and listening standards focus on flexible communication and collaboration, requiring students to develop a range of broadly useful oral communication and interpersonal skills, not just skills needed for formal presentations.
- The language standards cover conventions (grammar), effective use and vocabulary. They not only include the essential rules of standard written and spoken English, but also look at language as a matter of craft and making choices.<sup>§</sup>

---

\* Common Core State Standards Initiative, “Frequently Asked Questions: What is the Common Core Standards Initiative?” <http://www.corestandards.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions>

<sup>†</sup> *Ibid.* “Frequently Asked Questions: Why is the Common Core State Standards Initiative important?”

<sup>‡</sup> Common Core State Standards Initiative, “English Language Arts Standards,” <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>

<sup>§</sup> Education Northwest, p. 2.

The mathematics standards “define what students should understand and be able to do in their study of mathematics.” They focus on both procedural skill in undertaking computations and mathematical understanding, deeming those “equally important” and “assessable” according to the developers of the standards. \* Therefore, two types of standards are used, “one for mathematical practice (how students are able to apply and extend math principles) and one for mathematical content (what students know about math). The two are linked together while students are learning.”†

---

\* Common Core State Standards Initiative, “Mathematics,” <http://www.corestandards.org/Math>

† Education Northwest, p.3.

**Appendix C:  
Demographics of GED test takers (2012)**

	<b>Oregon</b>		<b>United States</b>	
	<b>GED test takers</b>	<b>All Oregonians</b>	<b>GED test takers</b>	<b>All U.S. residents</b>
<b>Male</b>	59%	50%	55%	49%
<b>Female</b>	41%	50%	45%	51%
<b>Hispanic</b>	22%	12%	17%	17%
<b>American Indian/Alaska Native</b>	4%	1%	5%	1%
<b>Asian</b>	2%	4%	2%	5%
<b>African American</b>	6%	2%	23%	13%
<b>White</b>	66%	85%	52%	74%

Sources: GED Testing Service and U.S. Census Bureau.

## **About the City Club**

The mission of City Club is to inform its members and the community in public matters and to arouse in them a realization of the obligations of citizenship.

Additional copies of this report are available online at [www.pdxcityclub.org](http://www.pdxcityclub.org).

All photos, tables, graphs and figures used with permission

### **City Club of Portland**

901 SW Washington St.

Portland, OR 97205

503-228-7231 • 503-765-5528 fax

[info@pdxcityclub.org](mailto:info@pdxcityclub.org) • [www.pdxcityclub.org](http://www.pdxcityclub.org) • [twitter.com/pdxcityclub](https://twitter.com/pdxcityclub) • [facebook.com/pdxcityclub](https://facebook.com/pdxcityclub)