California Department of Education

Executive Office

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# **MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** June 14, 2019

**TO:** MEMBERS, State Board of Education

**FROM:** TONY THURMOND, State Superintendent of Public Instruction

**SUBJECT:** Update on High School Equivalency Tests

## Summary of Key Issues

The California high school equivalency (HSE) tests, which are designed for out-of-school youth and adults without a high school diploma, have eligibility requirements that test takers must meet before they can test. A complete list of California’s HSE eligibility requirements can be found at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/gd/>. The HSE certificate and transcript a test taker receives after passing one of these state-authorized tests is considered equivalent to a high school diploma and can be used in order to pursue postsecondary education or employment in California.

The HSE program receives funding through fees paid by individuals taking a test. However, state law prohibits the California Department of Education (CDE), testing contractors, and testing centers from charging an HSE testing fee to a homeless youth or foster youth. The fee set for each test is required by law to not exceed the vendor’s cost of administering the program. State regulations authorize that $20 from the HSE test fee collected for each first time test taker be deposited into a special deposit fund account to support the CDE’s administrative costs for the HSE.

Any HSE test offered in California must be approved by the State Board of Education (SBE) pursuant to Education Code Section 51420(b). The SBE may approve one or more tests to be used for the HSE program. Vendors whose tests are approved by the SBE, after negotiations with the CDE, may be invited to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the CDE to offer an HSE test in California. In January 2014, the CDE solicited information from potential vendors of existing HSE tests, offered in both computer-based and paper-based formats, through a Request for Information (RFI) process. As a result of that RFI process, the CDE recommended three tests for approval by the SBE.

In March 2014, the SBE approved the use of three separate HSE tests for use in California: the GED® Test, provided by the GED Testing Service LLC (GEDTS); the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET®), provided by Educational Testing Service (ETS); and the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC™), provided by CTB/McGraw-Hill. Later, in June 2015, the TASC™ was sold by CTB/McGraw-Hill to the Data Recognition Corporation (DRC).

This Memorandum provides the SBE with an update on the HSE program as well as plans for each respective vendor.

### Program Update

All HSE tests must be administered at CDE-approved testing centers. Altogether, the HSE contractors use more than 300 testing centers throughout California to administer the HSE tests. Each testing center may be authorized for use to administer one or more of the approved HSE tests. Each vendor must enter into an agreement with and train the staff—regarding the administration of the vendor’s test in the applicable test formats and in accordance with CDE- and vendor-approved policies and procedures—at each testing center the vendor uses. HSE testing is available year-round, and the testing dates are set by each individual testing center.

During the past five years that California has offered multiple HSE tests, a total of 171,353 test takers have completed at least one subtest, and 91,137 test takers have passed all subtests and received their HSE certificate.

### Number of Test Takers Participating per Test

| **Test** | **Subtests** | **Testing Format Offered** | **Number of Test Centers Used** | **Number of Test Takers Completing at Least One Subtest** | **Number of Test Takers Who Earned a Certificate (passed all subtests)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| GED® | * Language arts
* Mathematics
* Science
* Social studies
 | Computer-based testing | 220 | 114,874 | 50,148 |
| HiSET® | * Reading
* Writing
* Mathematics
* Science
* Social studies
 | Computer-based and paper-based testing | 340 | 56,378 | 40,957 |
| TASC™ | * Reading
* Writing
* Mathematics
* Science
* Social studies
 | Computer-based and paper-based testing | 10 | 101 | 32 |

### MOU with the GEDTS

From 1974 through 2013, the GED® test was stipulated in state regulations as the HSE test for use in California. It has been updated by the testing vendor periodically over the years—in 1978, 1988, 2002, and in 2014. On January 1, 2014, SBE-approved amendments to HSE regulations went into effect that removed language referencing the GED® test as the sole HSE test for use in California.

The 2014 version of the GED® test was provided in a computer-based format only, and its delivery continued as such through 2018. Beginning in 2019, the GED® test is provided in both computer-based and paper-based test formats.

With the SBE’s approval in March 2014, the CDE began negotiating the terms of the HSE MOU with GEDTS for the continued use of the GED® test. The MOU between the CDE and GEDTS was finalized in August 2014. The GEDTS MOU has been negotiated and renewed annually since that time.

As of March 31, 2019, 114,874 test takers have completed at least one GED subtest over the past five years, with a total of 50,148 test takers having passed all subtests and received their certificate. During that same time period, the GED® had been administered at 220 testing sites where staff had also been trained by GEDTS to provide computer-based testing.

### Number of GED Test Takers

| **Year** | **Number of Test Takers Completing at Least One Subtest** | **Number of Test Takers Who Earned a Certificate (passed all tests)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| July 1 through December 31, 2014 | 17,636 | 5,278 |
| January 1 through December 31, 2015 | 21,106 | 9,660 |
| January 1 through December 31, 2016 | 23,776 | 11,556 |
| January 1 through December 31, 2017 | 22,832 | 10,637 |
| January 1 through December 31, 2018 | 21,957 | 10,693 |
| January 1 through March 31, 2019 | 7,567 | 2,324 |

The current 2019 MOU with GEDTS ends December 31, 2019. Based on the current demand and use of the GED®, the CDE will recommend continued annual negotiations with GEDTS to renew their MOU each year until such a time that the CDE may recommend the SBE take further action.

### MOU with ETS

With the SBE’s approval in March 2014, the CDE began negotiating the terms of the HSE MOU with ETS to use the HiSET®. The MOU between the CDE and ETS was finalized in July 2014. The ETS MOU has been negotiated and renewed annually since that time.

As of March 31, 2019, 56,378 test takers have completed at least one HiSET® subtest over the past five years, with a total of 40,957 test takers having passed all subtests and received their certificate. During that same time period, the HiSET® had been administered at 340 testing sites where staff had also been trained by ETS to provide computer-based and paper-based testing.

### Number of HiSET® Test Takers

| **Year** | **Number of Test Takers Completing at Least One Subtest** | **Number of Test Takers Who Earned a Certificate (passed all tests)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| July 1 through December 31, 2014 | 3,032 | 2,121 |
| January 1 through December 31, 2015 | 10,527 | 7,328 |
| January 1 through December 31, 2016 | 13,456 | 10,568 |
| January 1 through December 31, 2017 | 12,852 | 9,371 |
| January 1 through December 31, 2018 | 13,006 | 9,494 |
| January 1 through March 31, 2019 | 3,505 | 2,075 |

The current 2019 MOU with ETS ends December 31, 2019. Based on the current demand and use of the HiSET®, the CDE will recommend continued annual negotiations with ETS to renew their MOU each year until such a time that the CDE may recommend the SBE take further action.

### MOU with DRC

With the SBE’s approval in March 2014, the CDE began negotiating the terms of the HSE MOU with CTB/McGraw-Hill to use the TASC™. The MOU between the CDE and CTB/McGraw-Hill was finalized in February 2015. Shortly after negotiations were completed for the TASC™, the test was sold by CTB/McGraw-Hill to DRC. This occurred in June 2015. Negotiations to revise the MOU then began with DRC and were finalized in October 2015. The DRC MOU has been negotiated and renewed annually since that time.

As of March 31, 2019, only 101 test takers have completed at least one TASC subtest over the past five years, with a total of 32 test takers having passed all subtests and received their certificate. During that same time period, the TASC had been administered at only 10 testing sites where staff had also been trained by DRC to provide computer-based and paper-based testing.

### Number of TASC Test Takers

| **Year** | **Number of Test Takers Completing at Least One Subtest** | **Number of Test Takers Who Earned a Certificate (passed all tests)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| July 1 through December 31, 2014 | n/a | n/a |
| January 1 through December 31, 2015 | 0 | 0 |
| January 1 through December 31, 2016 | 17 | 14 |
| January 1 through December 31, 2017 | 29 | 12 |
| January 1 through December 31, 2018 | 39 | 6 |
| January 1 through March 31, 2019 | 16 | – |

The current 2019 MOU with DRC ends on December 31, 2019. Based on the ongoing low number of test takers to whom the TASC™ is being administered annually, the CDE will recommend discontinuing the use of the TASC™ for HSE testing in California, to be effective on December 31, 2019, when the term of the current MOU expires. Taking this approach will allow any current TASC™ test takers five months to complete their TASC™ subtests before December 31, 2019. If a test taker does not complete the TASC™ testing, that test taker will be required to restart HSE testing and take all subject tests of one of the two remaining test vendors in order to earn an HSE certificate. The few test takers who require paper-based testing will have the option of using the remaining HiSET® test that is offered in both computer-based and paper-based test formats.

The change will be seamless for any new potential test taker seeking to earn an HSE certificate. The CDE will work with the TASC™ vendor, DRC, to reach out to current TASC™ test takers to assist them in completing their goal of earning an HSE certificate.

Ongoing CDE HSE administrative activities for each HSE MOU include monitoring of vendor deliverables to the CDE and providing customer service to test takers, data review, and maintenance of California’s historical test result data files, including both electronic, and hard copies. The CDE costs incurred to retain and monitor a low-volume test are not justified as effective or efficient use of funds when the program is shown to be thriving through the use of the other two vendors.

The discontinuance of the TASC™ MOU with DRC will have no revenue impact on the state, as any potential new test taker revenue will continue to be collected by one of the two remaining SBE authorized HSE vendors.

### Plans for the Program

The CDE anticipates that it will seek the SBE’s approval to solicit vendors for possible new HSE tests by 2024.

## Attachment(s)

None.