

California Department of Education

Executive Office

SBE-003 (REV. 11/2017)

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# California State Board of EducationJuly 2019 AgendaItem #05

## Subject

High School Equivalency Tests: Reconsideration of Authorized Test Vendors.

## Type of Action

Action, Information

## Summary of the Issues

In March 2014, the California State Board of Education (SBE) authorized the use of three separate high school equivalency (HSE) tests in California: the General Educational Development (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 as authorized by *Education Code* section 51420. After five years of administering three separate HSE tests, the California Department of Education (CDE) recommends removing one of the tests due to lack of demand.

## Recommendation

The CDE recommends that the SBE direct the CDE to: (1) continue annual negotiations with GEDTS and ETS to renew their memoranda of understanding (MOUs) each year until such a time that the CDE recommends the SBE take further action; and (2) discontinue the use of the TASC™ for HSE testing in California, to be effective beginning December 31, 2019, when the term of the current MOU expires.

## Brief History of Key Issues

California’s HSE program provides a path to earn a certificate that is equivalent to a high school diploma in California. To be eligible to test, a test taker must be a resident of California and at least eighteen years of age at the time of taking the test or at least seventeen years of age and have accumulated fewer than 100 units of high school credit, and either: (1) is confined to a state or county hospital or to an institution maintained by a state or county correctional agency; or (2) has successfully completed an academic program offered by a dropout recovery high school. An HSE test includes subject-area subtests, one each in language arts (or reading and writing,) mathematics, history, and science. A test taker must pass all subject-area subtests in order to earn an HSE certificate.

In March 2014, the SBE authorized the use of three separate HSE tests for use in California, with an understanding that the selection and use of multiple HSE tests be revisited in three years. Also in March 2014, the CDE began negotiating the terms of the MOUs with each of the three testing vendors. The MOU with GEDTS, previously the sole HSE vendor, was finalized in August 2014; the MOU with ETS was finalized in July 2014; and the MOU with CTB/McGraw-Hill was finalized in February 2015. Shortly after negotiations were completed for the TASC™, the company was sold by CTB/McGraw-Hill to the Data Recognition Corporation (DRC)—in June 2015. Negotiations to revise the affected MOU then began with DRC and were finalized in October 2015.

In June 2019, an Information Memorandum provided the SBE with data on the number of testing centers used for HSE testing, the number of first-time test takers, the number of test takers who have completed at least one subtest, and the number of test takers who have received an HSE certificate (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/pn/im/documents/memo-pptb-adad-jun19item01.docx>). During the past five years that California has offered test takers three separate HSE test options, 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. However, very few test takers have opted to use the TASC™ to earn their HSE certificate.

Over the past five years, up to March 31, 2019, only 101 test takers have completed at least one TASC™ subtest, with a total of 32 test takers having passed all subtests and received their certificate, confirming a low demand for use of this HSE option.

**Number of Test Takers per Test Over the Past Five Years**

| **Test** | **Number of Test Takers Completing at Least One Subtest** | **Number of Test Takers that Earned a Certificate (passed all tests)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| GED® | 114,874 | 50,148 |
| HiSET® | \*72,080 | 40,957 |
| TASC™ | 101 | 32 |

\* Number correct after the posting of the June Information Memorandum.

Prior to 2019, the GED® was provided in a computer-based test format only. The HiSET® and TASC™ have been provided in both computer- and paper-based formats. All HSE tests must be administered at testing centers approved by the CDE. Combined together, the HSE contractors use more than 300 testing centers throughout California to administer the HSE tests. Each testing center can be authorized to administer one or more of the approved HSE tests. Each vendor must enter into agreements with and train the staff at each testing center the vendor uses on the administration of the vendor’s test in accordance with CDE and vendor-approved policies and procedures. HSE testing is available year-round, and the testing dates and times are set by each individual testing center.

As noted in the table below, in the past five years, only 10 individual testing sites received training from DRC, and during that time, administered the TASC™. In contrast, during that same time period, the GED® was administered at 220 testing sites trained by GEDTS and the HiSET® was administered at 340 testing sites trained by ETS.

**Testing Centers Used per Test Over the Past Five Years**

| **Test** | **Type of Testing Offered** | **Number of Test Centers** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| GED® | Computer-based testing | 220 |
| HiSET® | Computer-based and paper-based testing | 340 |
| TASC™ | Computer-based and paper-based testing | 10 |

The CDE recommends the state not renew the MOU with DRC to utilize the TASC™ for HSE testing in California. While the TASC™ remains a valid and reliable test for HSE purposes, the state resources used across multiple offices and divisions to annually develop, negotiate, process, and monitor an MOU for such a relatively low-volume test is not good use of public resources, and can be redirected to capture and report demographic information (e.g., homeless youth and foster youth designations, etc.) for the adult population taking the HSE tests and the California High School Proficiency Examination (CHSPE).

Most HSE test takers are outside of the K–12 educational system and longitudinal data structure. The K–12 data structure includes only those adults who attend an Adult Education Program funded with Adult Education Program funding, adult-age students attending charter schools that include partnerships with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, JobCorps, California Conservation Corps, or YouthBuild, or adult-age students with disabilities enrolled in K–12 schools and programs. The CDE has struggled to collect and report in-depth demographic information for the HSE and CHSPE test populations to the Legislature and other state agencies to help inform decision-making. The CDE has taken steps to strengthen the data collection related to the homeless youth and foster youth waiver fees as a requirement for reimbursement. However, to date, the CHSPE and HSE contractors do not have a uniform process to collect and report to the CDE the demographic data necessary to adequately track the total number of fee waivers requested by homeless and foster youth.

The CDE’s recommendation to discontinue the use of the TASC™, effective December 31, 2019, will allow any current TASC™ test takers five months to complete their TASC™ testing before December 31, 2019. If a TASC™ test taker does not complete testing, that test taker will be required to start again and retake all subject-area subtests provided by of one of the two remaining test vendors in order to earn an HSE certificate. The two remaining vendors will be able to cover all the regions of California, thus there will be no impact to those who would take a HSE across the state. Upon SBE approval of CDE’s recommendation, 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.

## Summary of Previous California State Board of Education Discussion and Action

In June 2019, an Information Memorandum provided the SBE with an update on HSE testing, including data collected over the past five years regarding the number of testing centers used for HSE testing, the number of first-time test takers, the number of test takers who have completed at least one subtest, and the number of test takers that have received an HSE (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/pn/im/documents/memo-pptb-adad-jun19item01.docx>).

In March 2014, the SBE approved the implementation of one or more alternative HSE tests (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr14/documents/mar14item12.doc>) (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr14/documents/mar14item12-addendum.doc>).

In July 2013, the SBE approved amendments to the HSE certificate regulations and directed the CDE to conduct the rulemaking process. The proposed amendments removed language referencing the GED® Test as the sole HSE test for use in California. The amendments were filed in September 2013 and went into effect on January 1, 2014 (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr13/documents/jul13item06.doc>) (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr13/documents/jul13item06a4.pdf>) (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr13/jul13item06a4aav.asp>).

In March 2013, the SBE approved the commencement of the rulemaking process for amendments to the *California Code of Regulations*, Title 5, sections 11530–11532 pertaining to the HSE certificate to provide the CDE with the necessary flexibility to explore new options that may lead to alternative assessments (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr13/documents/mar13item07.doc>) (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr13/documents/mar13item07a04.pdf>) (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr13/mar13item07a04aav.asp>).

In February 2013, an Information Memorandum provided a summary of changes related to the GED® Test, the impact of those changes on test takers and testing centers, and the CDE’s interest in exploring other options for the purpose of recommending a new assessment (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/pn/im/documents/memo-dsib-adad-feb13item02.doc>).

## Fiscal Analysis

The California HSE program receives funding to support the vendor activities through fees paid by individuals taking the respective HSE test. The fee set for each test is required by law not to exceed the cost of implementing the program. State law authorizes a portion of each HSE test fee collected to be deposited into a special deposit fund account to support the CDE’s administrative costs for the HSE. State regulations currently set the CDE portion of the testing fee at $20 per first-time test taker. The ongoing CDE HSE administrative activities include contract monitoring, data review, and the maintenance of California’s historical test results data files, including both electronic and paper copies.

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

## Attachment(s)

None.