

GED, HiSET, and High School Equivalency Diplomas

prepared for Education and Local Government Interim Committee by Pad McCracken, Research Analyst
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Background

The GED (General Educational Development) Test was developed in 1942 by the American Council on Education (ACE) at the request of the military as a way of providing educational credentials to veterans who had not graduated high school prior to their service in World War II in order to aid them in finding employment and continuing their education. The test has evolved over the decades to reflect changes in secondary education expectations and standards. In 2011 ACE joined with Pearson to develop and administer a new iteration of the test to be released in January 2014.

Montana Law

In Montana, under statute and administrative rule¹, the Board of Public Education establishes minimum scores that qualified residents must achieve on a “state-approved high school equivalency test”. Upon achieving the required scores, individuals are awarded a high school equivalency diploma issued by the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Switching from GED to HiSET

Primarily due to significant cost increases charged by the GED Testing Service, the Board of Public Education, following the recommendation of the Office of Public Instruction, decided to switch “providers” of the high school equivalency test utilized in Montana from GED to HiSET (High School Equivalency Test). The HiSET is developed and administered by Educational Testing Service and Iowa Testing Programs. It will launch in January 2014 and will be administered as the GED was in Montana under administrative rules.

HiSET Option Program

The Superintendent of Public Instruction has also initiated a Montana HiSET Option Program (MHOP) in which school districts may apply to participate. Participating districts create a program in which a student who has fallen significantly behind the student’s 9th grade cohort in attaining credits toward graduation can apply to pursue a diploma via an alternative pathway that includes successfully completing the HiSET.

Possible Consequences & Options

At the June 24, 2013 ELG meeting, Rep. Woods asked Superintendent Juneau whether a student who passed the HiSET would be allowed to mark GED completion on job applications. Superintendent Juneau replied that it was hoped that job applications would no longer ask about GED, a trademark, but instead ask about high school equivalency. Currently, the State of Montana Employment Application (and many other job applications) asks applicants to indicate their high school name and address and to indicate whether they received a diploma or GED. Considering the consequences an applicant might face for falsifying a job application and some of the general misperceptions about the GED, the ELG may wish to consider if or how to effect changes to employment applications and generally educate employers and the public about the change in high school equivalency tests.

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¹ 20-2-114 , 20-2-121, and 20-7-131, MCA, and 10.66.110 through 10.66.118, ARM.