



LITERACY UPDATE

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Literacy Assistance Center

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Pushing for Change

>Jon Steinberg

Roughly 1.6 million residents of New York City are over 15 years old, out of school, and lacking a high school diploma. Without a high school diploma, their best chance of landing a job that pays a living wage or provides benefits, let alone opportunities for advancement, is to get a General Educational Development diploma, commonly known as the GED or high school equivalency diploma.

To ensure that the maximum number of people can obtain their diploma, the GED test must be accompanied by a system that assists, encourages, and prepares candidates. Believing that the city's system could be improved, the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) wanted to find out how. With grant support from New York Community Trust, it commissioned Jacqueline Cook to conduct a comprehensive study. Her report, "Our Chance for Change: A Four-Year Reform Initiative for GED Testing in New York City," described the barriers potential GED candi-

dates face and laid out a clear, feasible path to increasing the number of people who take the test and significantly improving the pass rate from the current 43 percent. The report predicts that enacting the reforms it recommends would quadruple the number of people who pass the test: 40,000 more New Yorkers would obtain a diploma each year.

Already, signs abound that the report could be the catalyst to substantial reform. The Youth Services and Education Committees of the NYC City Council held a hearing on the issue in January 2009 (the articles in this issue by Linda Aitavale, Jill Poklempa, and Francisco Gonzalez originated as testimony at the hearing). Both City Council members and the New York Community Trust have expressed interest in supporting changes. The Community Service Society has initiated a study that will complement the Cook report.

The reforms the Cook report calls for cover all aspects of the system to be implemented in the next

four years ending in 2012, the first year of the new GED test developed by the nonprofit American Council on Education. Here is a summary of the recommendations:

I. To ensure that test-takers are academically prepared and have sufficient information and practice with the GED exam, introduce a combination of screening policies and training resources.

1. Require that all students in GED preparation programs supported by city or state funds show evidence of having passed the Official Practice Test (OPT).

2. Give priority for testing appointments to applicants who have passed the OPT.

3. Develop a print and on-line curriculum module for test-takers with information such as test-site procedures and practice forms for the bubble answer sheet and basic information that candidates must provide; and

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Buzz Words

> Elyse Barbell *Executive Director*

Here at the LAC, we believe that trying out new approaches is an essential aspect of our work to support and promote the most effective literacy services for adults and youth. Some of our experiments with new ideas, researched-based practices, and strategies for strengthening the field are extraordinarily successful. Other projects have more modest results, but still give us a better sense of what works and what doesn't.

Several times in recent years, we've put substantial effort into a project that we've fervently believed in without having a clear idea of how far it would go. Then, suddenly, it's become clear that all the stars are aligned for substantive change that exceeds our expectations. At that point, we've rushed to keep pace and realize the full potential for improvement that has opened up.

This happened with health literacy. We began with a conviction that it would be a valuable addition to the adult literacy curriculum. After some research, we selected a new approach developed at the Harvard School of Public Health and became the first organization to test it in the field. We also fostered partnerships between adult literacy programs and health care institutions. Within a year or so, not only did this project generate a strong response in the adult literacy community, it became clear that federal, state, and local government agencies; private foundations; health care institutions; and, most importantly, our learners, all shared our belief that health literacy is not just important, but vital to our country's health.

I am beginning to feel that the GED testing system here in the city is ripe for the same kind of broad, enthusiastic engagement. A little over a year ago we launched the GED Testing Network, which provided a venue where participants who worked at testing centers described a host of difficulties that impeded students who were prepared and ready from taking and passing the test. A few months later, DYCD issued an RFP for a data collection and management program that could become the foundation for a rigorous assessment of the situation. DYCD followed this up with an invitation to Jacque Cook, a long-time specialist in the field of adult education, to prepare a report on current practices and recommendations for improvement. This was a wonderful opportunity to take a closer look at how we could work together to make things better. The LAC was happy to help where it could. Jacque's report is now out. "Our Chance for Change: A Four Year Reform Initiative for GED testing in New York City" is a cogent analysis of what's wrong with the current system coupled with a comprehensive and persuasive blueprint for change. A summary of her report begins on page 1 of this issue.

Jacque's work was funded by the New York Community Trust, which has shown great leadership in this area and indicated it will continue to ensure funding for reform, even in these tough economic times. City officials are also committed to changes in the GED system. At a January City Council hearing devoted to GED testing, council members expressed keen interest in change.

"Our Chance for Change" predicts that following its recommendations could triple the number of GED diplomas awarded in New York City. How wonderful it would be if an additional 30,000 New Yorkers obtained a GED diploma every year! The LAC welcomes the opportunity to join with so many other stakeholders to make this possible. This issue, dedicated entirely to the GED, is one of our contributions to this effort.



LITERACY UPDATE

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Putting the GED to Work

>Jill Poklemba Senior Policy Analyst for Income Security and Workforce Development, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies
(Testimony at the City Council Youth Services and Education committees hearing)

“Our Chance for Change: A Four-Year Reform Initiative for GED Testing in New York City” (http://www.nyc.gov/html/dycd/downloads/pdf/GED_testing_report_our_chanceforchange.pdf), the recent report prepared for the Department of Youth and Community Development, is excellent in conveying the extent of the problem we are facing in terms of the sheer numbers of individuals who are out of school and lacking a high school diploma or GED, along with the barriers to GED preparation classes and the struggles faced by many to passing the GED exam. However, these problems should be examined in the broader context of our workforce development system. This was described in “Demands of the Time: Turning the Workforce Development Model of the Last Century into a Skills Education Model for Today” (http://comptroller.nyc.gov/bureaus/opm/reports/10-15-08_demands-of-times.pdf), a recent report issued by the NYC Comptroller. Taken together, these two new reports reveal the scope of the problems we are facing in connecting low-skill, low-income populations to the adult education, vocational training, higher education, and other workforce development services they need. Here are some of the major barriers:

Lack of information about GED classes. L., a 25-year-old Latina living in Washington Heights, was raised in a single-parent home: her father was incarcerated when she was three years old. She completed 11th grade in high school but dropped out when she became pregnant. After having another child and getting divorced, she decided to get a GED diploma to advance her career and increase her earning potential. L. initiated her quest by asking friends and neighbors where she could find a free GED class, but was unable to get any information. Undaunted, she began calling colleges she found in the phone book and learned about the classes offered at Lehman. L. is now enrolled, but struggling to balance her studies with her parenting responsibilities.

Restrictions on welfare recipient access to basic education. Adult literacy programs reported in an informal survey that the three most common barriers that prevented public assistance recipients from participating in their programs were 1) access to child care (80%), 2) Obtaining approval from the Human Resources Administration (HRA) (50%), and 3) fulfilling other mandatory work requirements. A third of the respondents reported that students receiving public assistance were less likely to complete the program than other students. Reasons cited included HRA compelling students demonstrating success in one program to attend a different one that it selected and HRA insistence that students choose between working and continuing their education, despite government policies that would allow them to remain in class.

Lack of HRA guidance for education and training. HRA clients do not receive the level of career advancement career guidance, job placement, intensive assessment, and training services that job seekers are offered

through Workforce 1 Career Centers, which are overseen by the city’s Department of Small Business Services. In addition, HRA programs and the city’s other workforce development programs are not coordinated with CUNY’s certificate and degree programs in fields where the demand for trained workers is high, according to the Comptroller’s report.

Solutions

Expanded access to GED classes should be part of a comprehensive strategy to improve workforce development programs designed for low-income populations. Specifically:

- Workforce development programs must receive direct support and financial incentives to recruit those facing the greatest barriers to employment, including disconnected youth, the formerly incarcerated, immigrants, and welfare recipients.
- The GED certificate is often the minimum qualification to enter apprenticeship and training programs that prepare workers for a job in unionized industries (where pay is 16 percent higher on average, according to a recent report by the Center for Economic and Policy Research). Low-income individuals should be provided with information about GED classes and pathways to unionized employment simultaneously. HRA should provide information and resources to clients on how they can participate in these programs as part of their overall Employability Plan.
- With few exceptions, the adult education system is largely disconnected from the higher education system. The city must support more programs that create smooth transitions between GED classes, GED testing, and subsequent enrollment in post-secondary education or vocational training.
- The Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies strongly supports the recommendation of the NYC Comptroller to establish a Mayor’s Office for Skills Education to centralize and oversee all of the city’s workforce development systems. Its major responsibilities should include:
 - o Fully aligning adult education with CUNY and with SBS-administered workforce development programs;
 - o Supporting parallel GED and vocational training in specific high-demand industry sectors;
 - o Expanding full-immersion GED preparation programs that provide intensive GED training to shorten the amount of time it takes for students to attain the GED;
 - o Generating more direct outreach on GED preparation programs to individuals in low-income communities who do not have a GED or high school diploma;
 - o Directly investing more resources into existing GED preparation programs offered by DOE, CUNY, libraries, EOCs, the Consortium for Worker Education, and community based organizations; and
 - o Organizing and overseeing partnerships between Workforce 1 Career Centers, CUNY, EOCs, and other workforce development programs. ●

Community Education Pathways to Success

Building Effective Literacy Programs for Older Youth

> Annie Moyer, with Peter Kleinbard, Vivian Vazquez Youth Development Institute, and Patricia Campbell, PhD, of Campbell Kibler Associates, Evaluator

"In the end / You'll be the one who's sure to win / So keep on moving / Don't Stop / You have a destination to be reached / You have no choice / You can do this." – C. Dixon

These words of a young student who dropped out of school and is now on the long path to a GED and further education concisely describe both the challenge and hope inherent in this journey.

When students drop out of high school, the reason they cite most frequently is that they do not have the skills to keep up with the curriculum. In fact, among high school dropouts, more than 70 percent enter high school at very low academic levels, making them ineligible for most WIA and GED programs after they dropout. As a result, there has been little work on developing models for these young people. With low literacy and math skills and no diploma, their economic outlook is poor.

Community Education Pathways to Success (CEPS), an initiative developed by the Youth Development Institute (YDI), has taken up the challenge of improving their prospects. YDI is testing a new approach designed to enable youth who have dropped out with low academic skills to reach the GED-level and beyond, including college. The focus is on improving the capacity of community based organizations to serve this population. Now in its fourth year, the model has achieved highly promising results. Participating CBOs have sharply improved their capacity, which is reflected in marked increases in student retention and academic gain.

The YDI program is now operating at eight New York City CBOs: East Side House Settlement, Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, New Heights Neighborhood Center, Turning Point, Settlement Housing Fund, F.E.G.S, Citizens Advice Bureau, and New Settlement Apartments. YDI is also providing training and technical assistance to eight additional sites—five CBOs and three libraries—that serve the same population and are funded by New York City. In total, the program will reach at least 600 young people in 2008-09.

The students participating in CEPS range in age from 17 to 24. When they come into CEPS, they test between 4th and 8th grade reading level on the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE). The majority enter at the 5th grade reading level.

Building Blocks

YDI is continuously refining its CEPS model in consultation with staff of the participating sites and the evaluator. Currently, the model has four building blocks that sites are trained to integrate into a unified approach to working with students:

- **Youth Development Principles.** Seven principles guide program design and practice: safety; caring adult relationships; high expectations;

youth voice and participation; mastery and competence; engaging and meaningful activities; and continuity.

GED NUMBERS

National

Labor force participation rate, December 2008, adults age 25 and over	
BA or graduate degree	78 %
Some college	72 %
High school diploma (including GED)	63 %
Less than high school diploma	47 %

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Dept. of Labor

GED certificates issued since test began in 1943	16.8 million
Adults age 16 and over who lacked high school diploma and were not in school in 2007	39 million (18%)
Number of people who passed GED exam in 2007	451,000
Pass rate on 2007 GED exam	71%
Average age of adults who passed the 2007 GED exam	24
Percentage of adults who passed who were	
Male	57%
Female	43%
Proportion of different groups lacking high school diploma	
African American	21%
Asian	14%
Latino	40%
Native American	24%
White	13%
Proportion of adults who passed GED test who were	
African American	18%
Latino	16%
Native American	2%
White	61%

Source for all of above: GED Program Statistical Report, American Council on Education

- **Instructional methods.** After considerable research, YDI determined that it should work with core curriculum methodologies developed by America's Choice Inc., a national organization that specializes in creating high quality literacy programs for adolescents. Together, the two organizations have collaborated with participating CBOs to adapt these methodologies to an out-of-school setting. In the classroom, CEPS instructors implement routines and rituals that include

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Call for Nominations for Literacy Recognition Awards

The LAC invites you to join us in celebrating the achievements of the NYC literacy community by nominating outstanding practitioners to be honored at the 25th annual Literacy Recognition Award Ceremony. The ceremony will take place on Thursday, June 18, 2009. Each honoree's program will receive a library development grant from the Bookbinders' Guild of New York.

Eligible candidates must be:

Administrators, teachers, volunteers, counselors, staff developers, or support staff members currently working in a BE, ESOL, Math, BENL, GED, family literacy, health literacy, or related program that serves learners age 16 and over; an outstanding contributor to the success of their students, their program, and/or the NYC literacy community.

For nomination guidelines and to download a nomination form, visit our website at www.lacnyc.org. Nominations are due by March 15, 2009.

Save the Date

The 25th Annual Literacy Assistance Center Literacy Recognition Awards Ceremony will be held on Thursday, June 18, 2009 at Scholastic, Inc., 557 Broadway.

LAC Wireless

Visitors to the LAC who bring their own laptop are now able to use our wireless service when they attend events here. For information on how to connect, please ask a staff member in the 10th floor reception area.

USA Learns

On November 7, the U.S. Department of Education launched U.S.A. Learns, a free website to help immigrants learn English. Located at www.USALearns.org, it provides easily accessible and free English language training.

The Division of Adult Education and Literacy at the U.S. DOE Office of Vocational and Adult Education oversaw the design of U.S.A. Learns and provided core funding. The Uni-

versity of Michigan and Sacramento County Office of Education assisted in the development of the website, which uses materials previously developed with public funds.

CONFERENCES

March

WE LEARN

Stronger Leadership @ Literacy: Empowering Women to Action.

Women Expanding: Literacy Education Action Resource Network will hold its sixth annual (Net)Working Gathering & Conference on Women and Literacy March 6-7, 2009, at the University of Rhode Island, Downtown Providence Campus. Registration Information and Schedule Outline at <http://www.litwomen.org/conference.html>

National Center for Family Literacy

National Conference on Family Literacy
March 1 - 3, 2009, Orlando, Florida
<http://www.familit.org>

May

New York City Consortium for Adult Basic Education

The NYC Consortium for ABE will be celebrating its 30th annual conference year on Saturday, May 2, 2009 at Fashion Industries High School in Manhattan. The conference will offer three formats: panel discussions, presenter-centered sessions, and inquiry-based/participant-centered sessions.

As in the past, the conference is designed to serve the staff-development needs of BE, ESOL, BENL, PRE-GED, GED, and (CTE) Career & Technical educators in New York City. The NYC Consortium for ABE is interested in presentations that highlight outstanding and innovative practices as well as capture relevant issues affecting our field. Presenters are encouraged to actively involve teachers and students in the workshop, to use audio-visual aids, group activities, open/panel/roundtable discussions in designing their presentations, and to have team presentations. For

a presenter's application, please contact NYC Consortium For Adult Basic Education, Old Chelsea Station, PO Box 472, New York, N Y 10011 or Carolyn Fernando at (212) 243-5458 or email: sonofhendrick@yahoo.com.

New York Association for Continuing and Community Education

NYACCE will hold its 58th annual conference May 3-5, 2009 at the Marriott Hotel in Albany. The theme will be Proud History... Bright Future, celebrating the history of adult and continuing/community education in New York. Suggested topics include ABE/GED programming and instruction, distance learning, family literacy, leadership, and support services. More information is available at <http://www.nyacce.org/NYACCE-CFP-2009.pdf>.

International Reading Association

The International Reading Association will hold two conventions this year. The one in the West (Phoenix) was held February 21-25). The East convention will be in Minneapolis, May 3 - 7, 2009, at the Minneapolis Convention Center. Prepaid registration closes April 6, 2009.

Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFITEA VI)

UNESCO holds its international conference on adult education every seven years. This one will be held in Belem, Brazil, May 19-22. The theme is Living and Learning for a Viable Future: The Power of Adult Learning. This will be the first time in more than 25 years that the US will have an official delegation. It will submit a report to the conference on the status of adult education in the United States, which will merit widespread dissemination in the adult literacy community.

CALENDAR of events >>

February 3

ASISTS Data Entry Training
Tuesday, February 3, 9:30am–1:30pm

Facilitator: Nell Eckersley

Beginning with a general overview of the tables and reports available on Adult Student Information System and Technical Support (ASISTS), this training will give data managers and other staff members the tools to manage their NRS data throughout the year. We will discuss best practices for creating a reports schedule and over how to use reports to troubleshoot specific issues in NRS tables.

February 3

Introduction to Leadership Coaching
Tuesday, February 3, 9:30am–3:30pm

Facilitator: Be Jensen

This workshop will introduce the LAC model of leadership coaching as a powerful tool to develop emerging leaders. Workshop participants will learn coaching strategies they can use to enhance the communications, management, and leadership skills of new and potential leaders in their organization.

February 4

BEST Plus Administrator Training
Wednesday, February 4, 9:30am–3:30pm

Facilitator: Be Jensen

Become a certified BEST Plus Test Administrator. Practice administering the print-based and computer-based versions of the test and familiarize yourself with the scoring rubric. Participants will receive a test administrator guide and practice CDs.

February 5

Women's Literacy Study Circle
Thursday, February 5, 1:30pm–3:30pm
Facilitators: Barbara Sparks, Be Jensen

What issues and challenges arise in designing women-focused literacy programs? Where are the model programs? What components should be taken into consideration when planning and implementing programs for women? This study circle will be inquiry-based, looking at model women-focused programs nationwide. Monthly follow-up sessions will be scheduled based on participants' availability and level of interest.

February 6

Teaching Health Literacy Study Circle: Health Care Access and Navigation, Session II
Friday, February 6, 9:00am–1:00pm
Facilitators: Winston Lawrence, Estella Natal

Health Literacy is a vital part of adult literacy education. In this foundation series, participants will learn a new approach to the teaching of literacy. The focus will be of identifying the skills needed to navigate the health care system and developing ways to integrate this instruction into the curriculum. Participants will develop lesson plans and try them out in their classrooms.

This session is open only to participants in the initial session on January 23.

February 11

TABE Test Administrator Training
Wednesday, February 11, 9:00–2:00pm

Facilitator: Be Jensen

Participants will be introduced to the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) Forms 7, 8, 9, and 10--the main test used by adult literacy programs funded by the New York State Education Department to place students in adult basic education (ABE) classes and to measure educational gain. Participants will become familiar with the content and format of the tests, learn how to administer it, and use the scoring tables. They will also discuss the relationship between TABE test scores and National Reporting System (NRS) levels.

February 12

Theme-based Instruction Arts and Literacy at PS 1
Thursday, February 12, 11:00am–2pm
Facilitator: Calder Zwicky

Participants will learn how art education can support literacy acquisition, enhance instruction for parents and children, strengthen a programs outreach to parents participating in low-level ESOL classes, provide a means of self-expression for language learners, and build confidence in language development. Participants will also explore educational resources available through PS 1 and ways of introducing visual arts in the family literacy or adult literacy classroom.

This workshop will be held a PS 1 in Queens.

February 19

ASISTS Data Entry Training
Thursday, February 19, 11:00am–2:00pm
Facilitator: TBA

This training introduces new users to the Adult Student Information System and Technical Support (ASISTS) web-based data system. Topics covered include navigating ASISTS data entry screens; inputting student, class, and instructor information; updating outcomes, tests, and contact hours and running management and funding reports.

February 20

Results-based Program Planning in Family Literacy
Friday, February 20, 9:30am–3:30pm
Facilitator: Be Jensen

Results-based program planning focuses on identifying performance targets in order to improve program outcomes. This session presents a model that facilitates strategic program planning.

February 25

Action Research Project in Women's Literacy and Learning, Session II
Wednesday, February 25, 10:30am–3:30pm
Facilitator: Barbara Sparks

Working with women learners entails understanding gender differences and instructional needs including how women construct knowledge, make meaning and

use literacy skills in everyday life according to findings of two focus groups conducted by the LAC.

This action research project into women's literacy and learning seeks to delve deeper into questions of contextualized programming for women in various types of literacy centers. Each participant will be guided in conducting inquiry into questions of interest in her or his individual program, (such as developing more culturally relevant curriculum, collecting and using women's feedback in program design, understanding the unique needs of women learners) with the objective of implementing and integrating new findings into existing practices and evaluating outcomes.

This session is open only to participants in the initial session on January 21.

February 27

Teaching Health Literacy Study Circle: Health Care Access and Navigation
Friday, February 27, 9:00am–1:00pm
Facilitators: Winston Lawrence, Estella Natal

Health Literacy is a vital part of adult literacy education. In this foundation series, participants will learn a new approach to the teaching of literacy. The focus will be on identifying the skills needed to navigate the health care system and developing ways to integrate this instruction into the curriculum. Participants will develop lesson plans and try them out in their classrooms.

This session is open only to participants in the two prior sessions.

All LAC events take place at 32 Broadway, 10th floor.

Building management is now requiring that all visitors have picture ID and sign in. Please leave extra time for this procedure.

February 27

ALECC - Module 4, Cohort 1
Friday, February 27, 1:30pm–5:00pm

Facilitator: Marilyn Rymniak

Due to illness, the ALECC sessions have been pushed back by one month. Module 5, Cohort 1, originally scheduled for February 27, will take place on March 27. Module 6, Cohort 1 will take place on May 15 and the final session will take place in June. The LAC regrets any inconvenience this change may cause.

LAC Professional Development Center Open Hours

Every Monday, 1–5 pm

Computer Learning Center

Visit our 16-station Internet-connected computer lab to explore ways to use computers to enhance instruction. Browse the web for sites that lend themselves to your lessons, or build a project that uses common office software to enhance communication skills. For information, contact Mariann Fedele, 212.803.3325 or mariannf@lacnyc.org.

Dan Rabideau Clearinghouse

Explore the city's largest collection of materials for adult literacy education, including books, journals, and audiovisual materials on professional development as well as curricular and reading resources for ESOL, ABE, and GED classes. For information, contact Dr. Winston Lawrence, 212.803.3326 or winstonl@lacnyc.org.

Why We Became a GED Test Site

>Linda Avitabile Director of Education and Training, Highbridge Community Life Center
(Testimony at the City Council Youth Services and Education committees hearing)

Highbridge Community Life Center became a GED test site last year. I can explain why in two words: self defense.

We have GED and GED in Spanish classes as part of our adult education program and this was the only way to ensure that our students could get tested in a timely manner in a location near where they lived. Before we became a test site, our GED instructors did everything to try and get our students access to the GED exam, from memorizing the coffee preferences of every GED Coordinator in the Bronx and Upper Manhattan to taking student on dry runs from the Bronx to test sites in Brooklyn to ensure that they wouldn't get lost when they made the three-borough trek for real.

And yet, while applicants and GED instructors run all over the city to try and get test slots, over half of the slots are unused. This is due to the non-centralized application process. People apply to multiple locations in the hope of getting in somewhere, and GED test sites send out acceptances to people who have been scheduled at other locations. Adding to the system chaos, most test-takers are unprepared and uninformed about the exam requirements and procedures.

expected that the GED test would be easy. They often did not know basic information, such as the number of subjects they would be tested in, the scores needed for passing, or the length of time it would take to complete the test. More than 75 percent of them failed the practice test.

Assessing applicants, providing information on the test and counseling those who need adult education before they are ready to take the exam should be part of the functions of the exam process itself. But they are currently unfunded. At Highbridge, we spend approximately a dollar out of scarce general operating monies for these purposes for every dollar we draw down for the test itself.

The GED testing process needs to be treated with an importance that corresponds to the effect attaining a GED as on the lives of successful test takers. The connection between a high school equivalency diploma and employment opportunities is clear. "[A]dults with GED credentials on average earn about \$80 more than adults with less than a high school-level education on a weekly basis," according to a 2008 report by the American Council on Education. More than 65 percent of people on welfare who have a high school diploma or GED leave welfare and become self-sufficient within two years, according to the New York State Education Department, while the majority of persons without a diploma remain on the rolls for five or more years.

At Highbridge Community Life Center, our workforce development unit which assists public assistance recipients in gaining employment, can attest to this. Those without a GED have fewer opportunities for full time employment at a living wage with benefits than those who have that credential. Even when someone who does not have a high school diploma or a GED has worked at a job, for example at an office, if they are laid off from that job—a common occurrence, unfortunately, in this economy—their experience does not compensate for the lack of a high school credential when trying to secure new employment.

Jobs available to those lacking a GED are often part time, per diem, or temporary in nature, and at a minimum wage. Even in the rare niche fields, such as certified nurse aide, where participants who have that credential can secure employment with benefits, the lack of a GED limits access to employment and acts as a bar to advancement.

Highbridge Community Life Center has a successful health careers training department, which includes nurse aide training. Certified nurse aides who do not have a high school diploma or GED can secure employment in many area nursing homes for an average starting salary of \$10-\$13 an hour. However most, if not all, hospitals require a GED or high school diploma. These hospitals are more likely to offer opportunities for advancement both within the certified nurse aide job category and beyond it. Additionally, if these nurse aides wish to advance in the health field to Phlebotomy/EKG positions that have an average salary of \$18/hour or become a Licensed Practical Nurse, then the high school diploma or GED is a requirement.

The GED test process needs to help people on the path to employment and future career advancement, not serve as an additional barrier. This is a problem too important not to solve. ●

GED NUMBERS New York City

Number of adults age 16 and over who lacked high school diploma and were not in school in 2007 1.6 million (29%)

Source: US Census

Number of adults who took GED exam in 2007 27 thousand

Source: New York State Education Department

Percentage of test-takers who were

Male 55%

Female 45%

Source: New York State Education Department

Test takers who passed in 2006 13 thousand (43%)

Source: New York State Education Department

For these reasons we urge the implementation of the findings in Jacqueline Cook's report, Our Chance for Change. Its recommendations include the development of a centralized, web-based application system, improvements in staff training to ensure that applicants understand the test process and the demands of the test itself, and the development of resources to assess and support GED candidates' test-readiness.

At Highbridge, we pretest all GED applicants with the Official Practice Test (OPT) and only schedule those participants with a pass score for the GED exam. This has increased the pass rate on the GED test to approximately 90 percent at our last test. Most participants who had not been in a GED program prior to taking the OPT

NYC GED Reform *continued*

4. When the new GED test is introduced in 2012, make passing the OPT mandatory for anyone who wishes to take it.

II. GED testing operates in a continuously changing environment. Space restrictions, inadequate resources, and changes in the field of GED testing have considerable impact on a test center's ability to provide quality services. The following recommendations are designed to optimize the test-taking experience for candidates and support their efforts to perform as well as they can.

1. Take measures to improve testing conditions, such as creating more test sites that have strong connections with educational providers and developing procedures for larger test sites that address wait-time to enter the exam and adequate time and facilities to accommodate test-takers' needs during breaks.

2. Expand testing options by methods such as reviewing the distribution of testing capacity across the city and matching it with community and program needs.

3. Improve the professional skills of GED test examiners and other testing staff by implementing a comprehensive review and revision of the GED examiner training course.

4. Expand the number of test administrations prior to the introduction of Version 5 of the GED examination on January 1, 2012.

An efficient and effectively organized GED testing system must provide reliable and complete information; communication and planning throughout the city; coordination of operations on the local level; and systems to solicit input from test-takers and practitioners.

III. An efficient and effectively organized GED testing system must provide reliable and complete information ; communication and planning throughout the city; coordination of operations on the local level; and systems to solicit input from test-takers and practitioners. The following recommendations will build those elements into the system:

1. Formalize the GED Testing Network as a component of the NYC Regional Adult Education Network (RAEN). Expand it to include the GED Plus program operated by the NYC Department of Education and other programs serving young adults and use it to coordinate system enhancements.

2. Improve the availability of accurate, timely, and comprehensive

data by measures such as developing a citywide GED testing application database and convening a task force to examine testing data.

3. Enhance the capacity and utilization of 311, the NYC information hotline by measures such as developing a phone response protocol and providing information on who to contact, schedules, hours, and locations.

4. Implement a feedback system that encourages test-takers to comment on their experience and gives practitioners opportunities to share their experiences and offer suggestions for improvement.

5. Identify field liaisons who could perform functions such as providing a direct link between GED programs and testing services and develop procedures for the Official Practice Test.

GED NUMBERS New York State

Number of residents without high school diploma 2.85 million

Source: US Census

Number of residents who passed GED test in 2007 31,000

Source: 2007 GED Program Statistical Report, American Council on Education

Proportion test-takers who passed in 2007 60%

Source: 2007 GED Program Statistical Report, American Council on Education

IV. Improving understanding of the GED and its importance to the economic health and social fabric of the city will require a robust awareness campaign with the following elements:

1. Developing a training module to improve practitioner understanding of the GED exam and its policies and procedures. This module, which should be incorporated into the State Education Department's Adult Literacy Educators Core Curriculum, would answer questions such as: Who should take the GED test and why? What content does the test cover?

2. Developing a robust public awareness campaign to educate potential test-takers, community advocates, policy makers, and the general public.

3. Prepare a citywide report on out-of-school youth and adults without a high school diploma that would include demographic information and analyses by neighborhood.

V. Build the resources and capacity of the NYC GED testing system. This investment in tomorrow's workforce requires strategic partnerships among practitioners, union and business leaders, policy makers, and advocates in the public and private sectors. The following recommendations identify critical strategies for increasing state resources from the current level of \$3.9 million to \$10 million.

1. Launch a robust advocacy campaign to promote public understanding and understanding within the field of the need to look beyond the GED to training, college, and employment, or better employment.

2. Campaign for \$10 million in state financing to fully fund a basic GED testing system as part of a larger expansion of education and workforce development funds for out-of-school youths and adults. ●

TEACHER'S Corner

Teaching GED Realism

> Curt Mills *Highbridge Community Life Center*

“ “[The GED exam is] not that hard. Just read it, everything to answer the questions is right there.” This response, given to me by a student who had come to take the GED Official Practice Test, is typical of a wide variety of students. This student, not unlike many of those that come to take the OPT, was not in any formal GED prep program. He was certain, based on information he had from his guidance counselor and from friends, that anyone could pass the GED. Many students approach the GED examination unprepared because they follow misinformation from both school officials and friends. In order for us to increase the size and composition of the passing pool for the GED, we must help the GED candidates better understand the purpose of the exam, its structure, and the skills and knowledge necessary to pass it.

Many of the students who make up our classes believe the GED stands for “Ghetto Equivalent Diploma.” For them, the stigma of not having completed high school is only compounded by the fact that they believe their state GED diploma to be worth less than a diploma received from a high school. In fact, the GED or General Educational Development exam is a test to measure the student’s learning and his or her ability to learn compared to a traditional high school graduate. We must help our students realize that the level of the GED is not less than a conventional exit exam given to high school students. The GED is accepted by many colleges across the country and is recognized by employers as a valid certificate of achievement. Perhaps more GED candidates would enter preparation programs if they were not under the belief that others will look down on them for successfully completing an alternative program. Besides, over 800,000 people sit for the GED exam each year, chances are most of them do not live in the “ghetto.”

Another area that needs to be clarified to the GED student is the structure of the exam and how to understand the scores. When students come to me to take the OPT, they are surprised to find out that they must take a five subject test. One student was so incredulous of the fact that she had to write an essay, that she called her mom to ask her advice. She told me that when her mother took the exam, “She only had to complete a multiple choice section for the essay test.” I am unable to comment on the validity of her statement; I guess the GED has changed and improved over the years. The students also think the total passing score of 2250 and an average score of 450 to be unfair. They base this judgment partly on the previous total score of 225 and average score of 45. Prior to 2001, “The passing score was lower,” they say. The students need to know that the score is based on the percentage of questions answered correctly, and that the higher total score does not necessarily mean that one must answer a greater number of questions correctly to obtain a passing score. One difference that I point out to students is the minimum passing score on each test. Before the 2001 test, a score of 40 was sufficient to pass a section, now the minimum is 410. We

must also improve the number of students willing to re-take the GED if they fail. Students who score over the requisite 2250 total points, but still fail the test, are sometimes discouraged by the unfairness of it all. “Couldn’t they just give me one or two points?” they may ask.

Helping students process the material provides them with a basis for further study

I advise the students if their total score is below passing, they may want to take the entire test over, not just the sections they have failed. If they choose not to take the entire test, they should, at a minimum, take any section on which the score was below the average of 450 per subtest necessary to earn their GED diploma. Not doing so often results in the scenario of passing all the tests with a minimum score of 410, but not having enough total points. One of my students received her scores over the Christmas break, and this is what happened in her case. When she returned, she simply said, “No need to say it, I know I should have followed your advice.” Worse was when she said that she felt like giving up. After speaking with her, I believe that she changed her mind about giving up.

Not a few students leave high school and become GED candidates with the misconception that this must be the easy path to academic success; however, the American Council on Education clearly states: [the] ACE GED exams are designed to assess whether the students possess the skills and knowledge of the high school graduate. The GED is intended to determine not only what the student knows, but also what he is capable of learning. (American Council on Education; www.education.com) Simply because the GED is an alternative course for those who do not meet standards for the traditional high school diploma does not mean that no preparation is required. The prep courses are practice sessions for the students. I often tell them that during class time it is more important to learn why your answer is correct rather than merely arriving at the correct answer. Helping the students process the material provides them with a basis for further study and learning on their own. It is very rare that a student, who does not put in additional hours of study, will achieve a GED. I advise the students to go to the library and to make use of the many web sites on the Internet for additional practice. When we help the students see that through hard work and steadfast determination their goal of obtaining a GED can be realized, we will have served a purpose. ●

independent reading, read-aloud/think aloud, whole group instruction, and work periods. Students learn explicit reading strategies that can be used both within and outside the program, such as determining importance, asking questions, visualizing, inferring, retelling, summarizing and synthesizing, and monitoring comprehension. YDI has found that explicit reading strategies and highly structured classrooms give older students a sense of purpose and consistency and help them understand clearly how to progress.

All CEPS programs offer their learners career exploration services ranging from soft skill development and internships to job placement and college access.

- **Social Support.** CEPS programs offer extensive social supports to engage young people, help them identify and build on their strengths, overcome personal obstacles, and bolster their progress in academic and work-based skills and understanding. We use the Primary Person Approach, in which each student has a designated adult who advocates for him or her and provides support. This helps ensure that students receive the guidance that they need. In addition, leaders, social support staff, and instructors meet regularly to discuss students and plan strategies to support them. These teams review student work to deepen their understanding of each student as a learner.

- **Career Exploration.** All CEPS programs offer their learners career exploration services ranging from soft skill development and internships to job placement and college access. Career readiness goals and academic goals are linked in the CEPS model, and are often mutually reinforcing. At the most basic level, work—ranging from entry level jobs and internships to higher skilled positions—can boost student retention. The deeper premise is that CEP learners will need to work throughout their lives and require a range of skills if they are to become self-sufficient adults.

- **A Blended Approach.** The central strategy of CEPS is to ensure that all of the staff members at the participating sites fully integrate the first four elements so that they coordinate their efforts, use the same language and practices, and send students consistent messages.

Capacity Building

Beyond the CEPS model, the success of this project depends on the strength and skills of the staff at each site. YDI supports the work of CEPS teams in three ways:

- **Training.** The frequency and content of trainings have evolved over the course of CEPS implementation. In the initial years, CBOs

participated in monthly team trainings to ensure that the entire staff had a basic knowledge of the principles of the model, such as instruction and social supports. As organizations have become more comfortable with the model, the training schedule has shifted to quarterly team trainings and monthly trainings in the specific disciplines.

- **On Site Coaching.** Each CEPS site receives on site coaching at least twice a month: once with a literacy coach and once with YDI staff who address administrative and operational issues. Additional coaching sessions covering social supports are offered when necessary. The onsite coaching focuses on each site's specific strengths and needs, while always working towards the goal of helping each team create and meet its own benchmarks.

- **Leaders' Network.** CEPS leaders convene monthly at YDI. In these meetings, they get additional training, especially in how to supervise and provide support for instructors. A majority of the leaders come from a social work background and appreciate concrete tools such as "supervisor's checklists," which aid them as they learn more about literacy instruction. Supervisors are also given additional training on the CEPS blended approach; strategies for retention, attendance, and engagement; the primary person approach; and how to use their data to make program decisions. Most importantly, these meetings serve as a learning and support network for participating leaders.

Implications

Since it was launched three years ago, the CEPS model has evolved to meet the needs of participating sites and organizations. During this time a majority of the young adults in CEPS programs have improved their reading significantly. Many of these students now take great pleasure in reading, whereas in the past they had never read an entire book. Improvements in math scores have also been impressive, though the development of a core math program requires additional exploration and testing.

The early success of students and the growth of CEPS organizations suggest that CBOs can play a significant role in helping students resume their education and progress on a path to success. On average, participating students have gained 1.5 reading levels within 3-6 months of enrollment, according to an external evaluation of CEPS being conducted by Campbell, Kibler Associates. Since the program began, sites have almost doubled the number of students served while maintaining the same rate of improvement in literacy skills.

CEPS has begun a new program developed in collaboration with NYC College of Technology and Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, a CBO, to provide supports for students with GEDs who enroll at the college. So far, participating students have far higher college retention rates than their peers who lack these supports.

YDI staff members are already working on the next stage of CEPS, a skills training component that will be integrated into the existing model.

Other publications describing YDI's work are available at www.ydinsitute.org. To contact the CEPS team, email Vivian Vazquez, Program Director at vvazquez@ydinsitute.org. ●

I was clean but I was still running the streets

(Testimony at the City Council Youth Services and Education committees hearing)

My name is Francisco Gonzalez. I live in the Bronx. I'm 30 years old. In May 2006 I came home after doing 7 months in Rikers Island for drug sales. By August I was back on the streets, doing the same stuff that got me locked up. I was on the streets for about four months, but I saw the destruction I was doing to the community and to my family. I didn't want to go back to jail. I didn't want to have to explain to my daughter again where I had been for four or five years. But I felt helpless. That's all I knew; that's all I could do. I wanted change, but I didn't have anyone to help me.

In December 2006, I went to apply for Public Assistance. Someone there from the Fortune Society making a presentation said, "It doesn't matter if you did one day in jail or a year, Fortune can help you." The next week I went down to the Fortune Society. Fortune helps people involved in the criminal justice system re-enter into society. They have an education program, career development, substance abuse treatment, alternatives to incarceration, housing, and more.

I enrolled in Fortune's treatment program and in January 2007 I stopped getting high. I was clean, but I was

still running the streets. In July 2007, I lost my housing and moved into the Castle, Fortune's residence on 140th Street and Riverside Drive. That was when I really made the change. I enrolled in Fortune's Career Development program. When I finished that, I started taking GED classes and computer classes.

When I signed up to take the GED test the first time, it took me three months to get a test date. When I got to the test site, there were 100's of people on line. They were mostly all walk-ins, but I had to get on the same line with them. It was very disorganized. It was noisy and under-supervised. On that test I passed everything but the writing. So I went back to class and kept studying. The next application I sent out never came back. Finally, my teacher got me a date at LaGuardia Community College. That time I passed the writing and obtained my GED. Since then I got a job. I'm working as a chauffer. Six months ago, I moved out of the Castle into my own apartment. And I'm going to start at BMCC on January 26th.

We need more GED classes and more testing. Before I obtained my GED that's all I wanted. Once I did, I said, "Why stop there. The sky's the limit."



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