

General Education Development program 50 years old

By the Learning
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The General Education Development (GED) program has been helping individuals obtain a high school diploma for 50 years, according to Jean Lowe, director of the American Council on Education's (ACE) GED Testing Service.

"This year marks the 50th anniversary of the GED tests which have enabled more than 12 million adults to obtain formal recognition of their academic skills. Each year about 95 percent of U.S. colleges, universities, and employers recognize the GED Diploma as equivalent to a high school diploma, thereby enabling GED graduates to seek further education and be gainfully employed," she said.

Annually, one in every seven high school diplomas issued in the United States is a GED Diploma.

The GED testing program began in 1942 with the development of a battery of tests for United States military personnel who had not completed their high school studies.

The Tests of General Education Development (GED Tests) provided an opportunity for these people to demonstrate that they had acquired the learning outcomes expected of a high school graduate.

Because of this program, many people were able to qualify for jobs and pursue postsecondary education upon leaving the military service.

After the war, it became apparent that civilians could also benefit from this program, a need the ACE under-

took to fill. Since that time, ACE has guided and directed the GED program.

In the 1960s, several states began to recognize successful GED candidates by issuing high school credentials based on the examinations. These credentials were considered equivalent — for purposes of occupation, military service, and college admission — to a high school diploma earned at the end of formal study. Today, the credential is known as a GED High School Diploma.

From this modest beginning, the GED testing program has grown considerably during the past four decades. Today, the tests are used in all 50 states, in most Canadian provinces, and in the U.S. territories.

In 1991, more than 800,000 people took the tests, and about 72 percent qualified for a diploma according to the standards set by their states or provinces.

In North Carolina, 19,220 people were tested in 1991 and 86 percent passed the test. Thus, 13,331 GED

Diplomas were issued in the state last year. Over the years, the GED Tests have provided personal satisfaction as well as professional and academic opportunities for millions of adults who, for many reasons, were unable to complete their formal high school studies.

The GED Tests cover five academic areas — writing, mathematics, science, social studies, and literature and the arts.

The tests focus on general skills and important concepts; the ability to evaluate, analyze, and draw conclusions; and the ability to understand and apply information and concepts. New and revised tests were introduced in 1988 and the battery now includes an essay component designed to evaluate the ability to organize a written answer on a topic of general interests.

Other changes were made to require more analytical and problem-solving skills. The tests are available in U.S. and Canadian editions, Spanish and French language editions, braille, large print, and audio-

cassette formats.

The GED Tests are developed by committees of professional educators in each subject area under the direction of the GED Testing Service. The standards are set by each state or province.

The GED Tests are administered to a scientific sampling of high school graduating seniors each spring as part of on-going research in order to establish norms.

In the 1989 GED Performance Study conducted by the GED Testing Service, key findings revealed that the overall performance of GED graduates, averaged over all five tests, equaled that of seniors.

Also, GED graduates' performance on the Social Studies, Science, and Interpreting Literature and the Arts Tests surpassed those of seniors. Although no formal education is required, many people attend adult education classes offered by local school districts, colleges, and community service agencies before taking the tests.

Locally, the GED program is offered through Western Piedmont

Guest Opinion

Community College at the Learning Lab on campus, the East Burke Center in Hildebran, and at various industry and community classes.

To enter the program, an individual must first take placement inventories in reading and math. An instructor will then design a program of individualized instruction based on the student's academic strengths and weaknesses.

The classes and study materials are free; however, the student pays a \$7.50 testing fee then he or she is ready to take the GED Tests. Graduation ceremonies are held in the spring and fall to honor the GED High School Diploma recipients.

WPCC's Learning Lab is proud to be a part of the 50th anniversary of the GED testing program, and a reception is being planned to honor this event. Interested individuals are encouraged to call the Lab at 438-6110 for more information about the GED program.