

The Texas GED Problem Is Getting Worse

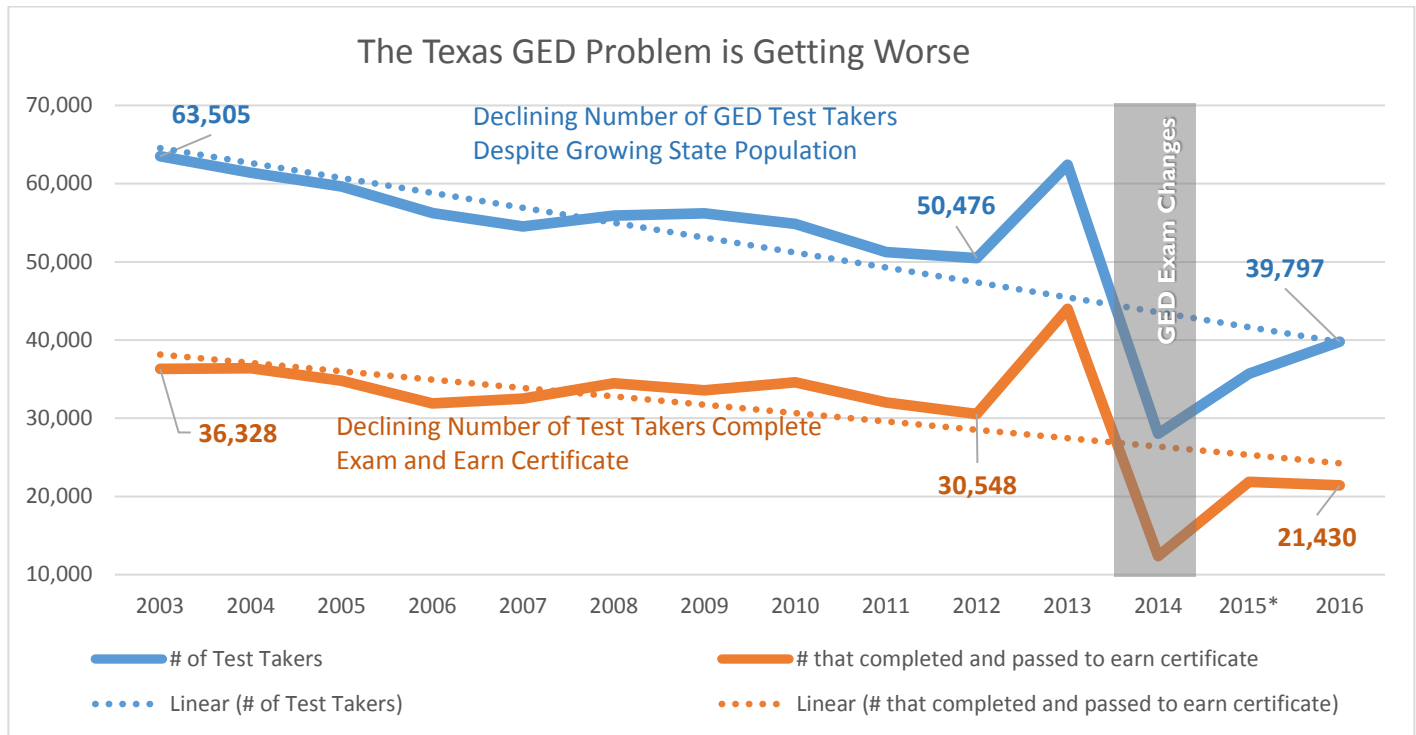
As our population grows, the number of GED test takers is dropping

by Chandra Villanueva

A high school diploma is the cornerstone of education in the United States and is required for most types of employment. And yet, in Texas there are more than 3 million adults who lack a high school diploma or equivalent. Changes to the national GED test in 2014 made this problem worse. Governor Greg Abbott and the Texas Legislature have appointed a committee to study school finance during the legislative interim period, and the State Board of Education (SBOE) is currently forming a new [long-range plan for public education](#). Both entities should engage in a full discussion of the GED problem in Texas and identify goals and strategies to help address shortcomings.

Why are So Few Texans Taking and Passing the GED Exam?

The Texas education system does not do enough to help adults who did not complete high school obtain their high school credential. Between 2003 and 2012, an average of 33,700 students per year from across the state received their high school equivalency credential by passing the GED. During the same time period, there was a gradual decline in the number of test takers in the state, despite significant population growth. In 2014, following the introduction of a new GED test in collaboration with the Pearson company, the number of students who were able to pass the exams and obtain their Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency declined dramatically. The Texas Legislature must address this issue at this critical period for high school equivalency programming.



Source: Data obtained from the Texas Education Agency

* In 2015, GED administrators reduced the score needed to pass the new version of the test and applied that change retroactively for 2014 test takers. TEA estimates that an additional 3,200 Texans earned a high school equivalency due to the pass score change over those two years. Because the change was retroactive, TEA reports 2014 and 2015 data combined. Our analysis uses 2014 numbers made available before the pass score change, with all the retroactive HSE awards reflected in 2015. Before the pass score change, TEA reported 28,020 test takers and 12,372 HSE certificates awarded in 2014.

Are New Alternatives to the GED Exam Helping Texans?

As Pearson's GED test has encountered criticism across the country following changes to the exam in 2014, two competitors, McGraw-Hill (now Data Recognition Corporation, or DRC) and Educational Testing Service (ETS) took the opportunity to introduce alternatives to the GED exam. In January 2016, the SBOE voted to allow for DRC's Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC) and ETS's

High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) to certify high school equivalency in Texas. Students now have three different test options that will enable them to receive a Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency from the Texas Education Agency. ETS's HiSET test became available January 2017, and DRC's TASC exam has yet to be administered in Texas. As a result of this change, the SBOE also decided to increase the administrative fee charged to test takers from \$15 to \$25 due to the increased cost of processing three different exams, effectively increasing the cost to all students.

	GED	HiSET	TASC
Vendor Fee	\$80	\$50	\$54
State Administrative Fee	\$25	\$25	\$25
Test Center Fee	\$40	\$50	\$45
Total Fee per Test	\$145	\$125	\$124

Data Source: Texas Education Agency, 2017

Legislative and State Board Recommendations to Address the GED Problem

Changes to the GED test and state approval of two new exams creates an environment of uncertainty for those looking to attain their Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency. Both the Texas Legislature and the SBOE can review the implementation of these tests and ensure that the state helps more students obtain their diplomas or Texas Certificates of High School Equivalency. They should consider two critical strategies:

Track Long-Term Outcomes for All Three High School Equivalency Tests

The state has very little data available on adults who have participated in a high school equivalency preparatory program. There is also no data-matching to track the long-term educational and workplace outcomes of test takers and completers. The state should track more information about the students who get their high school equivalency and report on what sort of career and educational outcomes they achieve. With the introduction of the new exam options, the state should examine whether outcomes are similar among test takers who complete different exams.

Align High School Equivalency Testing with Developmental Education Testing

Students entering college must demonstrate that they are ready for college-level work to avoid enrolling in and paying for remedial education courses that do not provide college credit. While there are several ways to meet this requirement – such as scoring at a benchmark level on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) or by earning a high score on the SAT, ACT, or the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSI) – Texas does not accept the college ready designation included in any of the approved high school equivalency tests. This creates an additional barrier for adult students who have earned their Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency but still must sit through another long, standardized test and pay an additional fee in order to test out of remedial education courses in college. The state should work with high school equivalency test providers to determine how they can align their college ready standards with the state's own TSI assessment.

Read more in the report, *The Texas GED Problem Is Getting Worse*, at CPPP.org. The report is a follow-up to CPPP's July 2015 report, [Texas Has a GED Problem](#).