



THINK YOU KNOW GED TESTING SERVICE?

GED® 21st CENTURY INITIATIVE
Helping more adults become career- and college-ready.

Background

The GED® 21st Century Initiative will transform the GED® test into a comprehensive program that will prepare more adult learners for postsecondary education, training, and careers. The program's structure includes three major components:

1. Nationally accessible preparation programs designed to prepare more adults more quickly to perform on the new GED® exam;
2. The new assessment system will continue to measure high school equivalency as it's done since 1942. But it doesn't stop there. We're taking a quantum leap forward in score reporting and we've added the opportunity for adults to demonstrate career- and college-readiness through a new endorsement;
3. A transition network that supports and links adults with postsecondary education, training and career opportunities -- providing them a chance to earn a sustainable living wage.

The initiative will contribute to the nation's vital goal to build a globally competitive workforce by ensuring more adults, who previously dropped out of high school, become college- and career-ready through this new GED® program. Learn more about how the program will evolve in the [Frameworks of the GED® 21st Century Initiative](#) (PDF).

COMPUTER-BASED TESTING

TAKE THE GED TEST

videos



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- THE NEW ASSESSMENT (2014)
- TESTING ON COMPUTER
- REPORT FRAUD
- NEWSROOM
- LOCATE A TEST CENTER [CLICK HERE](#)

Visit the GED Testing Service online at www.gedtestingservice.com. For information on the 2014 assessment, go directly to www.gedtestingservice.com/assessment.

GED® 21st Century Initiative

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GED® 21st Century

An Interview with C.T. Turner, GED Testing Service

Progress editor Hillary Major spoke in January with C.T. Turner, Director of Public Affairs at GED Testing Service.

Hillary: Thanks for joining us. Today I'm going to ask a few questions that I think are on teachers' minds concerning changes, fears, and curiosity about the upcoming 2014 GED® test. First, can you tell us a little bit about the decisions behind the partnership between the American Council on Education (ACE) and Pearson?

C.T.: I've been with GED Testing Service for a little over four years now. Two years ago, many of us from ACE and GED Testing Service sat together in a room and asked: What's needed in the marketplace? President Obama had

issued some ambitious goals for education by the year 2020; he'd talked about our national competitiveness, showing that the United States is falling behind in terms of the number of folks going on to postsecondary education even though we know that, by 2018, 63% of jobs are going to require some form of education or training beyond high school. We looked at this and we said: A high school diploma is not enough. It used to get you a nice-paying job, but it's just not enough anymore, and the same really is true about the GED® credential. What do we do to make this credential more valuable, to be a stepping stone for adults so they really can earn that sustainable living wage in today's environment and workplace?

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In two short years, we expect to have a new version of the GED® test. It has been ten years since the GED® test was revised, but it doesn't seem that long since we were in the midst of the *GED Get Ready* campaign to help as many students as possible pass all of the tests before the looming 2002 deadline. At the same time, we were training teachers to teach students to use the calculator, to incorporate higher order thinking skills into instruction, and to teach essay writing differently. Today, we are faced with similar challenges as we gear up for the 2014 implementation, with one big difference—computer-based testing.

This issue provides an overview of the new GED® test. In an interview, C. T. Turner, Director of Public Affairs at the GED Testing Service, provides up-to-date information about the changes, challenges, and expectations the new test will bring. Debbie Bergtholdt, GED State Administrator, follows with perspective on Virginia's plans to wind down the current test and to implement the 2014 assessment. David Rosen, a respected leader in adult education at the national level, presents some questions and concerns that have been raised about the new test, including possible development of rival high school equivalency credentials.

While controversy over the new assessment may continue, adult educators must begin to address the changes. Heather Pike Agnello, an ABE/GED counselor from Henrico County Adult Education, shares ways of incorporating technology into the classroom so that both digital natives and digital immigrants can develop the skills they need not only to pass the GED® tests, but also to transition successfully into jobs with futures. Jason Guard, former VALRC Specialist, writes about initiatives to help GED® non-passers across the state pass all of the tests before their old results become invalid in January 2014.

We may well paraphrase Thomas Paine by saying that "these are the times that try adult educators' professional abilities," but we know from past experience that our field will rise to meet the challenges. We will support our students so that they can gain the skills and knowledge that will take them into the future with confidence.

Calendar

May

Get Caught Reading Month

July

29 - August 1

Correctional Education Association 67th International Conference
St. Paul, MN

September

8 International Literacy Day

17 Citizenship Day



Virginia Faces the Music

by Debbie Bergtholdt

"Dueling Banjos" is the song that is running through my head as I write this article. On one hand, we have thousands of incomplete and unsuccessful testers that need help and encouragement so they can pass the current GED® test. On the other, we have the need to start preparing for the GED® 21st century test coming in 2014. Oh, and did I mention that we need to get students and teachers up to speed on their computer skills? How are we going to manage all of this?

So, first, what do we need to do to ensure no current examinee is left behind when we start the new test in 2014? We are fortunate to have the robust data capabilities that NRSpro provides us. Most programs are already identifying and tracking their incomplete and non-passers. Locating these examinees is often the greatest challenge, but resourceful people are turning to new means such as social media to contact them and encourage them to return. When you analyze your data, you will find that many people have passed all the subjects except one or two, usually math and/or writing. Many programs are planning special "invitation only" workshops and activities for these students that culminate in taking the section of the test that they still need to pass. We will soon be forming a steering committee that will help guide our efforts and the work of the Resource Center to ensure that we are providing the support you need. The GED Testing Service is developing promotional materials that will be ready in July. We will be able to add our contact information to these materials and use them as we continue to get the word out that the test is changing.

As you will read in the interview with C.T. Turner from GED Testing Service, the *Assessment Guide for Educators*, giving information about the 2014 test, is now available. It was released in three chapters. The first installment contains an overview of the new assessment, item types and layouts, and a terminology section. Chapter 2 outlines the theory used as the foundation of the new assessment. Chapter 3 discusses

the content passages and how the constructed response items (questions requiring written responses) will be scored. (The Literacy and Social Studies sections of the test will each include an extended constructed response.) An actual item sampler should be available in July. Publishers are getting information from the testing service, and you will soon find materials available from them that support the 2014 test.

We hope to start computer-based testing (CBT) in Virginia soon. We will start with one or two existing Pearson VUE testing centers that will add computer-based GED® testing to their current offerings. Paper and pencil testing will continue to be offered at these sites. It is not too early to start the application to become a Pearson VUE testing center. All the requirements can be found on the [Pearson website](#). As testing centers become Pearson VUE sites, we will add them to the state's plan for conversion to computer based testing so a date can be established for their conversion. Beginning in 2014, CBT will be the only testing option. Programs should call me if they have any questions about the conversion to computer-based testing.

Finally, as we migrate to computer-based testing, we need to be mindful of the technology needs of our teachers and students. The Resource Center will be offering technology training, and I've talked to some vendors that are writing curricula designed specifically to enhance the computer skills of our students and to assist teachers. It is not too early to have your students composing essays and reading passages on a computer.

After putting these plans in writing, the "Dueling Banjos" music is fading. With all the planning we are doing and the support you will receive, I'm confident that we will successfully end the current series of GED® tests and transition smoothly to the 2014 test and CBT. ■

Debbie Bergtholdt is GED State Administrator for Virginia. She can be reached via phone at 804-371-2333 or via email at Debbie.Bergtholdt@doe.virginia.gov.

Adult Education 2.0

by Heather (Pike) Agnello

How do we think about technology in the adult education classroom? How have we thought about it in the past, and how must we think about it now? These are questions I wrestled with last semester as I took An Introduction to Technology Resources, an excellent online VCU class taught by Jill Baedke. I'm usually a fairly diligent student, but I paid especially close attention in this class, due in no small part to upcoming changes to the GED® test.

As most of us probably know by now, significant changes to the GED® test are scheduled to take place in 2014. These will include changes in content designed to better reflect the needs and demands of higher education and the working world. These are big changes that will require a lot of our time and commitment. And yet it is the other change, from the paper and pencil test we've known for years to a computer-based exam, that has our heads spinning.

For some of our learners, this will be no big deal. In fact, for the digital natives in our midst, it very well may come as a welcome change. There is no place that makes them feel more at home than in front of the computer screen. But for others, especially our older adults and individuals hailing from developing countries, the implications are significant. Nor can we ignore the impact this will have on teachers and counselors, as we learn to think differently about how we teach and deliver information to an ever-changing population. (For more information, see "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants" by Marc Prensky: <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/prensky-digital-natives-digital-immigrants-part1.pdf>.)

No longer is the web simply a giant resource room, a library of sorts ... It's also a meeting place, one in which people can share ideas and make their own contributions to a living, breathing body of information.

Technology is not and cannot be thought of as enrichment any longer.

An Introduction to Technology Resources allowed me to process these changes while immersing myself in educational technology, thus diffusing some of my anxiety about the unknown. After all, I am, like many of our adult learners, a digital immigrant. I have learned to utilize and depend greatly upon technology, but unlike the digital native, it is not my native language.

Which is perhaps why one of the most valuable things I gained from this course was a new way of thinking about technology itself. We spent a significant amount of our time exploring Web 2.0, the increasingly dynamic and interactive web. No longer is the web simply a giant resource room, a library of sorts where you can go in and look through stacks and stacks of books in hopes of finding what you need. It's also a meeting place, one in which people can share ideas and resources and make their own contributions to a living, breathing body of information. This has its draw-backs, as well as marvelous potential. But either way, the reality of Web 2.0 cannot be ignored.

So what does all this have to do with adult education? Hasn't it seemed, for a long time, that we've had a bit of a buffer from the world of our K-12 colleagues? Between budget constraints and the very different needs of an older population, some of us (myself included) were able to get by with handing out a list of educational websites and building the occasional computer-based lesson into our lesson plans. Technology is not and cannot be thought of as mere enrichment any longer. More and more digital natives are walking through our doors needing services, young adults who think and learn very differently from us, and who would benefit greatly from classrooms that incorporate technology more effectively. In addition, the technological demands on our older adults are increasing all the time. I remember, years ago,

helping a Spanish-speaking woman learn basic navigation skills on the computer. She told me that when she went to Walmart to apply for a job, she was told she would need to do it online. Others, laid off from work and hoping to obtain their GED® credential and go on to college, are unprepared for the digital rigors of the college campus. Like me, many of these adults need a new way of thinking about technology in their lives.

Practically speaking, what might this look like in the adult education classroom? Obviously, some of that depends on the resources available to you and your learners. But even with limited access to computer technology, there are things that can be done. During my course, we explored a wide variety of Web 2.0 sites, collaborated using Google Docs, and created our own voice threads, wikis, individual blogs, and podcasts, all with an eye for how to utilize them in our individual classroom settings. Here are a few of the most practical, accessible sites I discovered, along with ideas on how they might be used in the adult education classroom:



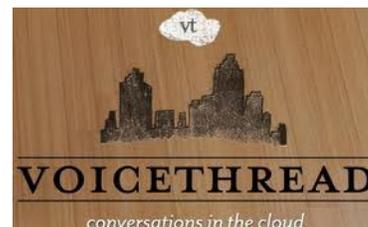
Diigo is a social bookmarking sight that quickly became one of my favorite online tools. It allows you to take notes and highlight web pages. You can bookmark and save and tag information to keep things organized. You can also share this information with others, allowing them access to what you have found and accessing related information they have found as well. All of this is saved online and can be accessed from any computer or phone with browsing capabilities. For more information, see the diigo website.

 **Google Docs**, simply put, provides a way to create, store, and share documents online. Docs are a great way for teachers and learners to collaborate and share information and are very useful for distance learning.

In the classroom:

- Have learners post a recent GED® essay on Google docs, then read each other's essays and provide peer editing and constructive feedback.
- Create a class Google doc where weekly assignments and online resources are posted. Students could ask questions and make comments here, as well.
- Create a program-wide Google doc for general announcements and information (like a program newsletter, but interactive). Students could ask questions and make comments. This would be a great place to share achievements, student needs (i.e., carpooling), and more.

Voice Thread is a collaborative, multimedia slide show that holds **images, documents, and videos** and allows people to navigate slides and leave **comments** using voice, text, audio file, or video.



In the classroom:

- Teachers can create short, online tutorials that supplement class work and focus on "trouble spots" such as math skills, reading maps and graphs, poetry, etc.
- Adult education staff might create promotional videos used by local programs to recruit adult learners from businesses and community organizations and/or educate employers about opportunities and resources available for their employee population.

Plans for the New 2014 GED® Exam: Changes, Improvements, and Concerns

by David J. Rosen, Ed.D.

Beginning in January 2014, adult learner test-takers in Virginia and other states across the country will have a new General Educational Development (GED®) exam. The GED Testing Service (GEDTS), now in partnership with Pearson VUE, an electronic testing company, promises some important changes. Some of these may address problems with the current GED® exam, and some may create new problems. Some will be changes that test takers and practitioners

will need to get used to, but in time may prove beneficial. It's difficult to know, nearly two years before launch, which issues to be concerned about, but here are five that I plan to keep an eye on over the next few years:

1. **Testing by Computer.** Nearly all students

now need to use computers, and testing by computers is a set of skills that students going on to postsecondary education or work now need to have; however, some adult literacy education students may not have enough access to computers at home, work, or at their programs – at a time when resources for programs in many states have been cut. They may not have good enough keyboard skills, and they may be intimidated by computers. Some people are particularly concerned about how this will affect older and immigrant students who may not have had opportunities to use keyboards, computers, and/or computer-based testing. Another concern is that the GEDTS tutorial on how to take the test online will be available only four months before the new GED® exam begins. Some practitioners feel this is not enough time to get learners up to speed.

2. **Possibly Fewer Test Centers in Some States.**

Because testing centers have to be licensed (and there may be considerable new costs to a center involved with this), there may be fewer testing centers. This could be a problem, especially in large states where people may need to travel many miles to find a licensed test center.

3. **Higher Education and Common Core State Standards Alignment.**

The exam will be aligned with Common Core State Standards, with higher education standards, and

(according to GEDTS) with Texas and Virginia standards. This is potentially beneficial to those whose goal is higher education; currently, a very large percentage of adult education students who have that goal do not complete a college certificate or degree program because they have not been academically well prepared.

4. **Cost.** It is likely that the price of the GED®

test will rise, possibly putting a great burden on low-income adults. Georgia proposed raising the cost to test-takers from \$95 to \$250 if the tests are taken separately or \$175 if all are taken in one sitting. As a result of a statewide advocacy campaign by Georgia Adult Literacy Advocates (GALA),

the proposed increase has been rescinded, at least for now, although it is likely that students will face a cost increase of some kind in Georgia as well as in other states.

5. **Expanded Privatization of the Adult Literacy Education Field.**

Pearson VUE, now a partner in GEDTS, is the world's largest education and testing company. Some practitioners are concerned (whether justifiably or not) about the slippery slope of privatization in what has until now been largely a public and not-for-profit service, as well as the potential for an unfair competitive advantage. At least one state is concerned that, because GEDTS is partnering with a for-profit enterprise, high school students may be recruited to drop out to take the GED® exam.

At least two states, New York and Texas, are exploring alternatives to the 2014 GED® test.

New York State

According to the state Education Department's Deputy Commissioner for Adult Career and Continuing Education Services, Kevin Smith, "We intend to consider any and all instruments that meet standards for the State High School Equivalency diploma as established by the New York State Board of Regents. These standards are anticipated to be based on the Common Core

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Building Up for the Big Test Out

A Last Hurrah with the 2002 GED Test

by Jason Guard

There are 28,588 people in Virginia who have taken the 2002 series GED® test, but have yet to pass it (we call them

“non-passers”). On top of that, 8,694 simply haven't finished taking the whole test (we call them “incompleters”). With a new GED® test coming out in January 2014, it is our job to help these GED® testers finish what they started and earn their credential. By the same token, everyone who studies in our adult education programs, currently through the middle of 2013, also needs to be put on a course to pass the 2002 series GED® test before a new version replaces it and they need to reorient.

Many programs haven't wasted any time getting started on this effort, employing their own homegrown tactics. Perhaps some of these ideas will inform your program's approach.

Augusta County

Program Manager Janita McNemar shared, “We've been working on this process for the last few years. When our center was closed for two weeks during a snowy February in 2010, I had time to print out a test history list of all of the incompleters and non-passers who had tested at our GED® testing center. I noticed some trends: many of these testers just needed passing scores in Math or Writing, or battery average points.”

The term McNemar uses for her testers missing passing Math, Writing, or battery-average scores is “high-impact testers.” In recent months, her Augusta County program has contacted all of the high-impact testers who tested in 2010 or 2011. Since the addresses of GED® testers often change, especially over a several-year time period, the program plans to get creative with finding people. “Hello, Facebook!” said McNemar.

The Fast Track courses initially promoted in response to the Race to GED also focused on near-passers with profiles similar to McNemar's “high-impact testers.” In her most recent Race to GED grant, McNemar proposed an intensive math and writing class. “We were successfully funded and offered the 10-week classes during the following winter/spring,” she shared. “We used NRSpro data to target the classes to people who had taken the GED but had not yet passed the math or writing.”

Chesterfield County

Chesterfield GED Coordinator Cynthia Barnes provided an update on the county's approach: “We are offering a free math retester clinic meeting on four consecutive Saturdays from 2-5 p.m. You have to have a GED or OPT of 380 or higher to participate, but some 370s snuck in. In the weeks around the holiday break, we ended up with 19 participants. 10 attended 3-4 of the clinics; 9 attended 1-2. We [offered] it again in March with sessions for Critical Thinking (Reading / Science / Social Studies), Writing, and Math.”

“We have been getting a great response from announcements on our school's Facebook page,” Chesterfield's program manager, Dawn Wells, elaborated. “We will definitely use Facebook to advertise retester opportunities in the future.” Computer-based instruction is also useful in the test-out transition, as Chesterfield learners are offered online lessons to accelerate their learning. The opportunity to study online from home is available, for just \$70, to all students in Chesterfield's traditional classes who want extra prep work. That opportunity also includes unlimited day and evening labs and Saturday clinics. Students who participate in 60 or more hours of instruction earn a voucher that can be used for testing or for the next class session. Finally, all students at the GED® level take OPTs to determine test readiness.



Billboards (above) and round TUITs (bottom right) encourage residents in Lee, Scott, and Wise counties to pursue a GED® credential.

Charlottesville

Charlottesville has launched GED Flex, a more accessible preparation experience for learners who need or prefer online work at a distance on their own schedule. In addition to instructional activities and prescriptive pretests, the course uses Open Classroom to host learner interaction with one another and their instructors via discussion boards and video chat. Charlottesville offers a multi-faceted learning environment to help remove barriers to learner participation.

Program Manager Susan Erno explained, "We have a strategy to re-contact the near passers and encourage them to finish, then place them in appropriate classes including GED Math and Advanced GED. We also have a GED Flex class; quarterly Super Saturdays, by invitation only, for near passers; and special GED Math Workshops, like Pi night, for all current students. We figure a variety of options and approaches are needed because everyone is different."

Lee, Scott, & Wise Counties

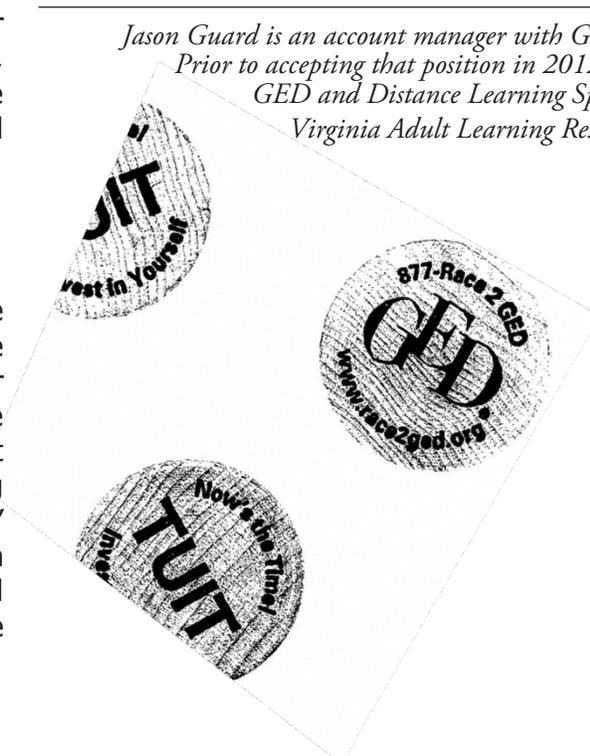
Program manager Rebecca Scott shared the current thinking in Lee, Scott, and Wise counties: "Of course we are targeting our recruitment on folks who have attempted the GED but not passed, or passed the OPT but not attempted or passed the GED. Our marketing theme for this program year is 'Now's the Time!' and we are using round TUITs (round wooden 50-cent-sized pieces with our website and toll free numbers on the back) as our first phase effort of get folks in."

Despite the big push they're making in the southwest, there is still concern around the rapid approach of the new GED® test because the transition to a computer-based format is such an ambitious endeavor. Scott is waiting until fiscal year 2012-2013 to kick off Phase Two of her outreach plan, which will include more aggressive direct marketing about the change. But, trepidation isn't stopping Rebecca Scott and her staff from meeting with employers and economic development stakeholders to prepare them for the GED® 21st Century Initiative. And despite worries about the upcoming test and its costs, Scott's newly rebuilt adult education center was designed to meet Pearson VUE's published testing center specifications.

In Conclusion

These methods are just a few that Virginia's programs are using to beat the bushes for GED® test-takers and completers. Statewide, the effort is sure to continue and evolve. Throughout the process of compiling these perspectives on the big test out, I've been wearing one of the blue "Race to GED" wrist bands that Hampton's adult education program gives to every learner who signs up for GED® services (it features the Hampton program's phone number). The idea is for learners to wear the bracelet as a reminder of their commitment until they obtain a GED® test credential. For many, it's persistent reminders and promotions like these that will keep them on track to achieve that goal. ■

Jason Guard is an account manager with GED Academy. Prior to accepting that position in 2012, he served as GED and Distance Learning Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.



Navigating the Transition to CBT: One Practitioner's Journey

by Kristin Hott

When news came that the 2014 version of the GED® test would take a computer-based format, including the construction of writing samples, my reaction, not unlike other instructors I spoke to at the time and since, was a blend of both excitement and anxiety. I was happy to see that the test would be transitioning, like most other high stakes educational assessments, to a digital design and delivery model, but I felt some serious anxiety around issues of access and preparedness – both as an instructor and as a learner advocate.

Among the myriad provocative changes planned for the new test, I zeroed in on the integration of keyboarding skills as essentially game changing.

I thought first of “my people,” those students I just “knew” would be entirely turned off and tuned out to the idea of clicking their way through test questions and typing paragraph-length responses, not to mention using a calculator they could not hold in their hands. As their instructor, I recognized the social, academic, and workplace importance of computer skills for my learners, but I had never formally assessed their digital literacy levels as a part of my curriculum.

This lack of assessment was due to my knowledge that digital literacy was not a necessary outcome for success on the current GED® test as well as to issues of technology access. My classroom was not a



technology-integrated learning environment; therefore, my students had no vehicle to demonstrate their digital literacy skills or lack thereof. I knew that most of my students did not have a computer in the home, which contributed to my assumptions about their skills. I may not have been wrong.

It became apparent, however, that much of my initial anxiety surrounding the change to computer-based testing (CBT) stemmed from a lack of authentic knowledge about how my students might perform. This realization completely redefined my posture toward the new test format. I had uncovered my ignorance, which gave me greater impetus to research and act from a place of knowing. It set me on a course to discover more about my learners' skills and access to technology and training, as a pre-requisite to future meaningful discussions with my program administrators or state officials about how best to prepare programs and students for success with CBT. Likewise, I sought to gain a better understanding of how keyboarding and other digital literacy skills were being integrated into other ABE/GED learning environments.

I reached out through a survey to adult educators in Virginia and other states to ask about their questions and/or concerns about the CBT version of the test. In a week's time, 67 respondents from 13 states participated. My survey did not specifically address technology integration in classroom instruction, but instead

technology-integrated learning environment; therefore, my students had no vehicle to demonstrate their digital literacy skills or lack thereof. I knew that most of my students did not have a computer in the home, which contributed to my assumptions about their skills. I may not have been wrong.

It became apparent, however, that much of my initial anxiety surrounding the change to computer-based testing (CBT) stemmed from a lack of

Teachers' Concerns about CBT: Survey Results

- 76%** – My students have little or no typing skills
- 60%** – My students do not have access to technology to prepare for the new format
- 57%** – Students will spend more time typing and write less content
- 52%** – Students may not be familiar with a computer keyboard
- 41%** – I think students should be given more than the same 45 minutes for the new test format

focused on teacher assessments of students' keyboarding skills, keyboarding as a specific skill-based training offered at the program level, and teachers' familiarity with CBT. When asked to rate their top five concerns related to the GED® test's transition to CBT, teachers reported the concerns listed on page 10.

Other responses included concern over the introduction of whiteboards for scrap paper and lack of keyboarding instructional training. I quickly realized that I was not alone in my thinking.

Of course, teachers also shared my excitement about the possibilities that CBT offers for students in preparing for their transition to careers or postsecondary education. 60% asserted that students would gain valuable workplace skills in the process of preparing for CBT assessments. 55% felt it would help students prepare for college level work, force students to address gaps in digital literacy skills, and make editing and revising essays easier. When given the opportunity, some survey respondents elected

59% of adult learners surveyed reported that they would "feel happy [about typing instead of hand-writing an essay] because typing is easier for [them]."

to include a personal statement about their concerns. It was here that issues of teacher's preparedness and access surfaced: "We do not have enough computers for all our students to use." "Even if we have computer access, classes will need to be extended to teach keyboarding." "This is another skill that I will have to teach in my class and I don't have enough time now!" The complex nature of the transition to CBT for instructors, students, and programs became a bit clearer; mixed emotional responses seemed fairly universal for those closely involved with GED® test preparation.

I moved on to gather information from students themselves. In my program, located on a community college campus with access to a dedicated computer lab and classroom projector and laptop, I interact with new applicants on a bi-weekly basis as part of our intake and assessment process. These applicants are between the ages of 18 and 24, seeking to enroll in our college transition/GED® preparation

program. I developed a survey to assess their

60% of teachers surveyed asserted that students would gain valuable workplace skills in the process of preparing for CBT assessments.

keyboarding training, self-reported efficacy with typing, and what, if any, information they had about the move to a computer-based GED® test. Over a four-month period, more than 200 applicants completed the survey, prefaced by a brief explanation of its purpose as a tool to guide implementation of keyboarding training in response to need.

When asked about their self-reported confidence in their ability to "plan, organize, and type an essay" in forty-five minutes on the day in question, 70% of respondents indicated they could do so, while 28% reported they could not. When asked the same question about their ability to "plan, organize, and hand-write" an essay in the same time period, respondent confidence rose to 77%, while an additional 22% stated that they could not perform the task. Of the total respondents, only 9% reported a lack of ability to either type or hand-write an essay in the time period, citing in at least one case that they had "never done it before."

When asked to indicate how they would "feel" about having to type rather than hand-write a GED® essay, 59% of the full cohort indicated they were "happy because typing is easier for [them]," while an additional 4% claimed no preference and three noted that "either way is fine." Only 11% of respondents reported feeling "worried, because I can't type."

The data invokes the psychological aspect of high stakes testing. Does having more familiarity with a given test format increase learner confidence and self-efficacy? Perhaps. In this case, however, mere psychological advantages would be unlikely to outweigh a tester's proven ability to demonstrate keyboarding proficiency at a rate sufficient to compose a writing sample worthy of a passing score. Those testers who have received no formal training and/or do not practice keyboard-based typing on a regular basis will likely be at a disadvantage when the transition to CBT is complete. They may even avoid testing in subject areas where these keyboarding skills are required, which, for now, appears to be at least two of the four tests in

the proposed battery.

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Navigating the Transition to CBT

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Further data gathering that includes additional age demographics in the adult education community will prove important in representing a more complete picture of the needs and skills our learners possess or seek from our programs.

How we as instructors address this gap in learners' knowledge and skills will be quite different from other needs-based instructional design accommodations. We will not address it merely by identifying the gap and applying a new instructional strategy from our current repertoire of teaching methodologies. What helps people learn keyboarding skills is a keyboard, attached to a computer. Unfortunately, for many adult educators and local programs, access to and meaningful use of this resource remains a challenge due to funding, logistics, or a lack of teacher training. **Implementing keyboarding skills assessments as a component of intake will also likely become standard in the adult education community, both at local and national levels.**

A significant missing piece in this puzzle appears to hold the shape of organized training and practice opportunities, needed to introduce and improve upon our learners' basic keyboarding skills. The larger pieces lie at the state and federal level, where decisions will be made about allocation of funding for technology improvements, increased access points for both testing and training services, and teacher

What helps people learn keyboarding skills is a keyboard. Those testers who have received no formal training and/or do not practice keyboard-based typing on a regular basis will likely be at a disadvantage when the transition to CBT is complete.

training. While the GED Testing Service (GEDTS) continues to move swiftly in the direction of the computer-based test, beginning with the phase in of a CBT complement to the current 2002 version of the test, states will have to begin prioritizing funds and collaborating with local program directors about plans for implementation, costs, and outreach to testers.

Instructors may have to wait and see which way the path is carved in order to begin concrete preparations for practical classroom accommodations. Students and test-takers

In my own program, 24-hour online programming, including basic keyboarding modules, supports classroom learning in a hybrid model.

may find themselves the last to know all of the details surrounding the change, perhaps not until they walk in to register for a class or the new test itself. Conversations about how the eventual change to CBT will take place in Virginia are happening, and I am hoping that other practitioners like me will become active in those conversations. Our state coordinators can help by continuing to make information available to the field and involving teachers and students wherever possible.

In September 2011, I participated in a week-long open discussion forum hosted by the Literacy Information and Communication Service (LINCS) based in Washington, D.C. GED Testing Service representatives, including Director of Public Relations C.T. Turner, responded daily to questions and comments about the new GED® 21st Century Initiative and its implications at various levels. While I learned quite a bit of technical knowledge about the tests themselves and the proposed credentialing tiers, there were no additional or clearer answers about how the transition would occur at the state and local levels other than the information already made public on the GEDTS' micro-site (www.GEDcbt.org). It became obvious that, in order to be a part of that discussion, I would need to reach out locally, and with specific goals in mind. Part of that begins with my own exploration of how my program can address the changes.

Facing the change to CBT proactively may necessitate that adult education classrooms, where GED® seekers enroll in a variety of subject-based classes, serve as catalyst for learners to place increased value on formal keyboarding instruction that could have the added benefit of increasing their employability. Students may even begin to prioritize acquisition of a personal

computer for home use, as it is situated as an essential tool for their development in the new landscape of a technology-integrated ABE/GED classroom environment. Provided with adequate resources and training, more instructors might begin to incorporate keyboarding practice and word processing into daily instructional activities and attach those goals to learner outcomes. This is the hope. Financial and logistical realities, however, may prove formidable obstacles in the path of such a transformative educational shift.

In my own program, early implementation of keyboarding and digital literacy assessments has already begun, and digital literacy training is now being offered every semester. Access to 24-hour online programming, including basic keyboarding modules, supports classroom learning in a hybrid model. More formalized keyboarding training is being considered as a

part of the next phase of responsive and ongoing preparation, an attempt to remain one step ahead of the curve in preparing our students for success at the next level, whether at college or on the job. I must also keep in mind and be vocal about the critical issues both access and preparedness will continue to play at all levels as the GED® test shifts to a format that is touted as having greater reach and ease of use for testers and programs. As a student advocate, it is my mission and my duty. ■

An adult education practitioner in Virginia for more than 10 years, Kristin Hott is the GED Coordinator/Instructor at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College's Middle College program in Richmond, Virginia. She also serves as a trainer in the Virginia Adult Education Certification Program.

Plans for the New 2014 GED® Exam: Changes, Improvements, and Concerns (continued from page 7)

standards. Since GEDTS has indicated that the new exam will be Common Core based, we believe the exam will remain as a viable pathway to the equivalency diploma. New York would like to consider establishing multiple pathways based on the Common Core standards." He added, "While doing so we remain responsible and concerned for the administration of the GED exam as the state's (and nation's) dominant pathway to the State High School Equivalency diploma. Due to announced changes in rigor, format, and fee, we have anticipated that there will be a significant increase in the number of test-takers taking the test before January 2014. We need to be financially and operationally ready to make the transition."¹

Texas

According to Jennifer Jacob, the Texas State GED Administrator, "The GED Testing Service is now a for-profit entity under Pearson, Inc., which has announced plans to align the GED assessment with the Common Core State Standards, an initiative in which Texas has elected not to

participate. The for-profit status raises concerns that this may create a set of conditions where students are recruited to take the GED who might otherwise receive their high school diploma. Our goal as a state has been to increase the number of students graduating; students who take the GED are not recognized as graduates by the federal government or the state of Texas. As a result, the State Board of Education (SBOE) directed the Texas Education Agency to explore other testing options and/or opportunities to ensure that students are assessed to the same standards we use in our state. This includes discussions around the development of an alternative high school equivalency exam designed to reflect the rigor of our Texas state standards. Texas is currently looking for something aligned to our standards and exploring options but it is too early to determine the direction of the SBOE."² ■

David Rosen is President of Newsome Associates, a consulting firm. He served for nearly fifteen years as Director of the Adult Literacy Resource Institute/SABES Greater Boston Regional Support Center at the University of Massachusetts Boston and has experience

working with regional, national, and international education programs.

1. January 2012 email correspondence with David Rosen

2. *ibid.*

GED® 21st Century: An Interview with C.T. Turner, GED Testing Service

(continued from front page)

Thinking about this, we knew we needed to do more. We needed to get more involved in preparation and link those programs even more closely with the testing experience. We needed to work with the Department of Labor, Workforce Investment Boards, and other stakeholders in adult education. The bottom line is that GED® test-takers are folks who had trouble navigating the system the first time through. In the U.S., we have a “system of adult education” that’s really cobbled together; it runs on some funds that come from the feds, some funds that come from the states ... but really, it runs on goodwill and passion from adult educators and adult education programs. At GEDTS, we asked ourselves: What can we do to provide a more integrated system? What is our part?

We knew that releasing a new test series like we have in the past was not the answer. Just updating content based on what’s currently going on in high schools and stopping there was not what we needed to do. We needed to be thinking about the GED® test as a stepping stone, we needed to be thinking about the requirements of those training programs beyond high school, and we needed to be thinking about how to prepare people for college readiness as well as for the workforce. About that same time, other states were developing new curricula standards and the Common Core standards were coming out. There was more consensus around the country that we need to do more in terms of curriculum in high school. So, there were some things we needed to start looking at in the development of the new assessment.

As we started developing, we knew we had to address all three legs of the stool – preparing, performing (or the actual test), and then progression (getting folks on a springboard into workforce and college). And we realized: We can’t do this on our own.

But who would? The feds weren’t going to do this; the states weren’t in a position to do this. ACE had some great resources and a great history, but it wasn’t in a position to deliver on all of these things that we wanted to do for adult educators. And so we started having conversations with

lots of different entities. We talked to about twenty-five foundations altogether. And we had conversations with Pearson VUE and discovered they had a passion for adult education. They said: We’ve done a lot of assessment, and this is a field where we really think we can have some impact on economic development and helping people prepare for jobs, helping the country and adult learners.

The bottom line is that GED® test-takers are folks who had trouble navigating the system the first time through. At GEDTS, we asked ourselves: What can we do to provide a more integrated system?

So, I think there was a good confluence of interests and personalities. In March 2011, we formed a new joint venture between ACE and Pearson. This venture [the new GEDTS] is modeled after a public/private partnership. The joint venture is a new entity; it’s governed by ACE and Pearson jointly (four folks on the board are appointed from Pearson and four are appointed from ACE). The joint venture has one goal, which is the same as it always has been: to prepare adults for college and careers. And to accomplish that, we need to get more people into the adult education system and to better prepare people to earn a sustainable living wage. So no matter what ACE’s agenda is or Pearson’s agenda is (and they’re going to be complementary), GED Testing Service is focused on that one mission.

The GED® test has been providing a pathway to a high school credential since 1942, and this is a continuation of that mission. The new assessment system will look different, but it’s going to continue to offer that second chance for adults to earn high school equivalency. Now, it’s also going to have an additional performance level above high school equivalency that will allow folks to demonstrate readiness for career and college programs.

Terms to Know

Hillary: I know that mission is one that adult educators and teachers are passionate about, and we're looking forward to some exciting possibilities. But I also know that a lot of teachers are worried that, since GEDTS is no longer a nonprofit, low income adults may have trouble affording testing in the future. I guess there's a fear that if, say, GEDTS were to discover a profit incentive to testing fewer people on a more expensive test, you might pursue that kind of profit-motivated agenda. Can you speak to these kinds of financial concerns?

CT .: One thing I'll say is that, from the very foundation of this entity, from the board, in our mission statement, what is ingrained in the culture here is that a need exists, and we're focused on that need to prepare more adults for the economic development of this country. This joint venture isn't about pulling money away from anything; it is about adding resources to the adult education ecosystem. Some of the capital, the expertise, and the infrastructure support that comes from the Pearson side of the joint venture are additions to what ACE was able to do with the past editions of the GED® test. In terms of philosophy, thinking, and mission: if I believed that we were here to make a profit and test fewer people, I wouldn't be here. I choose to work at organizations that have a mission for a reason.

I can speak a little more about the fee structure for computer-based testing specifically. (Obviously, any of the fees associated with paper-based testing will be consistent through the end of the test series in 2013.) Even though we know that much of the population taking the GED® test is disadvantaged (although we have testers across the whole spectrum), we've done market research over the years and we know that there is no strong correlation between the cost of the test and the number of people who take the test or between the cost of the test and performance on the test.

New York state is a prime example. Testing in New York state is free as mandated by the legislature, but that also means that the number of people who can take the test is determined by the amount of money the legislature decides to put into the program each year. What they've learned in New York is that, when testers don't have to pay any kind of fee, they sometimes don't prepare for the test. So, what New York gets for

GED 21st Century Initiative:

This refers to GEDTS' over-arching goal of updating the GED® assessment, and the way it is prepared for and delivered, to reflect the evolving requirements of high school completion and college and career readiness. The initiative includes but has a larger scope than the specific changes in content and delivery that will be part of the new 2014 series GED® test.

CBT: computer-based testing

Note that, although the 2014 test will have a computer-based format, this does not mean that the GED® test will be available online.

Common Core State Standards

(CCSS): These content standards aim to provide a clear and consistent framework of "knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers so that they will graduate high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs" The Common Core standards, along with Texas standards and Virginia's SOLs and college and career ready performance expectations, informed GEDTS' selection of the assessment targets, or specific skills and knowledge to be measured by the 2014 GED® test.

Extended Response (ER) Test

Item: Instead of a single GED® essay, both the Literacy and Social Studies tests will require "test-takers to demonstrate their written communication skills and analysis of text ... by producing a writing sample in response to a prompt."

Technology-enhanced (TE) Test

Item: The 2014 GED® test will include a number of new, interactive question types, made possible by the computer-based format. These include drag-and-drop, fill-in-the-blank, hot spot, and cloze items.

GED[®] 21st Century: An Interview

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their investment in free testing is actually the lowest pass rate in the country, right alongside Washington, D.C. It also means that there's a long wait list, sometimes up to six months in New York City, in order to actually find a seat for the test. People are signing up at multiple centers trying to find a seat, and when they get in, they're not cancelling their other registrations. So New York has a six month waiting list, one of the highest no-show rates in the country, and the lowest pass rate in the country. That tells us there's not a strong correlation between *free* and better performance or *free* and more people actually taking the test.

We've also done market research where we surveyed people who are thinking about preparing for a GED[®] credential as well as GED[®] graduates who have earned a credential within the past five years. We asked them about challenges and barriers and gave them a list of things that they could choose from and rank. By far and away, the number one barrier was fear. They were afraid of the process, of not being able to pass the test; they were worried that

because they didn't pass high school or dropped out they wouldn't be successful in returning to education. The next biggest challenge was time to prepare for the test with everything going on in their lives; child care and convenient times and locations to take the test were other challenges. Cost didn't come up until number five on the list. So, while we know we need to keep costs lean, at the same time we know that offering a test for free is not a panacea. We also know that there's a return on investment for earning that high school credential.

Hillary: That's true. I do think some of those case studies might be a little different than what Virginia's seen historically, because we definitely have had higher testing rates and higher numbers of completions when we've been able to run either free practice testing or freetesting promotions. However, we certainly see that time, fear, transportation, and child care are in many cases the big concerns for testers rather than the price tag on the test itself.

Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) Model*

1. Recall

Recall of a fact, information, or procedure (e.g., Where are three critical skill cues for the overhand throw?)

2. Basic Application of Skill/Concept

Use of information, conceptual knowledge, procedures, two or more steps, etc. (e.g., Explain why each skill cue is important to the overhand throw. "By stepping forward you are able to throw the ball further.")

3. Strategic Thinking

Requires reasoning, developing a plan or sequence of steps; has some complexity; more than one possible answer; generally takes less than ten minutes to do (e.g., Design two different plays in basketball and explain what different skills are needed and when the play should be carried out.)

4. Extended Thinking

Requires an investigation; time to think and process multiple conditions of the problem or task; and more than ten minutes to do non-routine manipulations (e.g., Analyze three different tennis, racquetball, and badminton strokes for similarities, differences, and purposes. Then, discuss the relationship between the mechanics of the stroke and the strategy for using the stroke during game play.)

Roughly 80 percent of the items across all four content areas will be written to DOK levels two and three, and roughly 20 percent will require test-takers to engage level one DOK skills.

*Excerpted from GEDTS *Assessment Guide for Educators*, Ch. 2

with C.T. Turner, GED Testing Service

C.T.: I think Virginia is kind of a rare example, to be honest with you. I'm somewhat familiar with what happens in Virginia, and you do a lot more marketing to test-takers than other states. You've done text messaging campaigns; you've worked with Charter Media to produce video spots; you've done a variety of things to get the word out to kind of drive volume, get people interested, and let them know where to go. I think that's been really helpful in Virginia.

The other thing I'll say about fees in general and the difference in fees between the ways things have been and what's going to be charged as part of computer-based testing (CBT) is that, even though the fees to test-takers vary across the country from free to a little over \$300, the GED® test is still a seven-and-a-half hour test. The largest cost involved in delivering the test on paper right now is labor – people to staff centers, to take registrations, to do scheduling, and then to actually sit and proctor the test. So, even though that test may be free to test-takers or \$7.50 in North Carolina or wherever it is, when the people who are running the testing centers actually look at their numbers and their business model, they'll discover that they are subsidizing the largest portion of GED® testing costs. Those testing centers may be community-based organizations or community colleges or other agencies. Our challenge in moving to a CBT model is to somehow to keep those subsidies and the folks who are contributing them in the system.

When we did a study a year and a half ago with all of our testing centers across the country, they reported three million dollars' worth of scholarships or subsidies in the system going directly to test-takers to offset testing fees. I can't travel anywhere across the country where I haven't talked to someone at a testing center who told me that, if they know an individual who really can't scrape together \$20 or \$60 or whatever the fee is, they'll help with the cost or find a local employer or foundation to help with the funds. I think that, with CBT, we have something like that built in: there's a voucher model. We could be pitching this to the states, local communities, nonprofit organizations, and foundations to encourage them to create

By far and away the number one barrier [for GED test-takers and potential test-takers] was fear. The next was time. Cost didn't come up until number five.

scholarship funds and buy vouchers to support testing for people who really do need assistance.

Hillary: Can you talk a little more about the new test? Am I right in thinking that it sounds more like a re-visioning of the GED® credential itself than just an update based on educational trends like we got in 2002?

C.T.: Yep; that's absolutely true. The 2014 test is going to be developed differently, from the items themselves to the way they are presented. It's not just going to be multiple choice; there's not going to be just one essay.

Briefly, a key benefit of the new test is that that there are going to be dual performance levels. One is going to continue to measure high school equivalency. For that benchmark or level, the scoring will still be influenced by what's happening with graduating high school seniors and how they are performing. The content will reflect what's being taught in high schools as well as what's needed in the workforce and college.

Hillary: Are you saying that the first performance level will be norm-referenced in a way that's similar to how the test is norm-referenced now?

C.T.: I was trying not to get too technical, but it sounds like you can take it. The psychometricians tell me that the actual approach is called a "briefing book method." That's a blended approach. The old test is fully norm-referenced, but we didn't go fully criterion-referenced for the new test. Instead, both performance levels are actually going to use in a blend of both norm- and criterion-referencing.

Hillary: Tell me about the second performance level.

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C.T.: As a placeholder, we're calling it the College and Career Readiness endorsement; that will be a secondary level that will be measured alongside the high school equivalency level. When you sit for the test (which is expected to be about the same length if not a little shorter than the current test; questions will be linear, not adaptive), it will measure both performance levels. So, the testing outcome could be that you met the high school credential level or it could be that you met the standard for the high school credential plus the College and Career Readiness endorsement. The College and Career Readiness endorsement won't be across the board. So, I could earn the high school equivalency across the board but I could earn the College and Career Readiness endorsement just in literacy, or I could earn it in literacy and math, or I could earn it across all four of the subjects we're going to be measuring.

Hillary: It sounds like the high school equivalency level will be scored in a way similar to the current test, in that test-takers have to make a certain score on each subtest plus meet a total battery score requirement, but that test-takers won't need to make a battery score for College and Career Readiness because that will be subject-specific.

C.T.: The mechanics of how the scoring is actually going to work will not be released until later this year. Personally, I'm hoping that it's based on minimum scores across each of the subject areas with no requirement to make up some extra points across the battery because sometimes that's really hard to explain to folks.

The next major benefit I see in the new assessment is an enhanced score report. Right now, someone takes the test and gets a score, and the score tells them they've met the minimum passing standard or have a big gap or a small gap, but that's really all. What we're envisioning for the new score report is that someone will get more detailed information within the subject to know where they need remediation and what

Find up-to-date information about the new assessment and GEDTS' Assessment Guide for Educators at www.gedtesting.com/assessment

they've mastered. Let's say someone goes in and doesn't pass math. They could take the score report back to their adult education center and the teacher could say look at it and say, "It seems like you're having issues in these areas, so let's focus on this." Right now testers are either put back in a classroom where they may be relearning skills they've already mastered, or they have to go through another assessment. I think an enhanced score report will be really valuable to the test-takers studying on their own as well as those who are working with adult educators.

Hillary: I agree. I think instructors can use as much diagnostic information as they can get.

C.T.: I don't know if I mentioned that there are going to be three components to the assessment system that's coming out. There will be a diagnostic test (the date when that's going to be released hasn't been determined yet), there will be a practice test, and then there will obviously be the computer-based operational assessment that will replace the current GED[®] test.

Hillary: So what's the difference between the diagnostic test and the practice test?

C.T.: The diagnostic test is going to measure an adult's proficiency with foundational skills and abilities that are necessary for them to be successful on the actual operational test. Someone who walks in to an adult education classroom would take the diagnostic test, which would tell an adult educator where that student is performing. The latest information I've received is that the diagnostic test may even measure down to almost a third grade level.

Mathematics on the 2014 Assessment*

The GED® Mathematics Test will focus on two major content areas: quantitative problem solving and algebraic problem solving. ... The Common Core State Standards include *Standards for Mathematical Practice*, which describe the types of practices, or behaviors, in mathematics that are essential to the mastery of mathematical content. One of the most important practices is modeling, which emphasizes the application of mathematics to real-life work situations as well as to academic problems in fields other than mathematics itself. Therefore, the GED® Mathematics Test will include modeling tasks that will require candidates to apply mathematics in a real-life context.

- Approximately 45 percent of the test will focus on quantitative problem solving, and roughly 55 percent will focus on algebraic problem solving.
- The test will include items that test procedural skill and fluency as well as problem solving.
- The contexts within which problem solving skills will be measured will be taken from both academic and workforce contexts.
- The statistics and data interpretation standards will also be measured in the GED® Social Studies and Science tests.
- Candidates will be provided virtual, online calculators to use on a portion of the items in the GED® Mathematics Test.

*Excerpted from GEDTS' *Assessment Guide for Educators*, Ch. 2. See the guide for other important information and assessment targets.

The practice test is for when an adult educator or learner thinks that a learner is ready to sit for the test but, instead of spending the individual's money or a state subsidy, they want to get an indicator of whether the person is truly ready. It's much less expensive to administer a practice test than the operational test.

Hillary: So the four components of the new test will be math, science, social studies, and a combined language arts test?

C.T.: Correct. We're calling the combined language arts area Literacy. I know that the literacy component specifically is really going to focus on testers demonstrating the ability to read closely and critically, to be able to understand a range of topics and complex tasks that are taken from workforce or workplace settings as well as social studies, science, and literacy contexts.

There will also be Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies tests.

I think I mentioned to you that there's not going to be just one essay portion. There will be writing questions (short answer or constructed response, whatever folks want to call those) spread out over the test. There are also going to be two extended response items, one in literacy and one in social studies.

Before I give you too much detail, I want to encourage your readers to familiarize themselves with our *Assessment Guide for Educators*. We're releasing that in three chapters, starting in mid-February, and that is going to be the absolute best resource. We've developed an [assessment resource](#) section on our website where people can download the guide and view other materials as they come in to get the most up-to-date information about the assessment.

Hillary: Great. Will that include sample questions and examples of the types of readings that might be on the literacy or social studies tests?

C.T.: Yes. Chapter One is going to be an overview of the item types. There will be screen shots of what the formatting of the different kinds of questions might look like. There will also be a terminology reference sheet so that we all start speaking the same language around the new assessment.

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Chapter Two is going to outline the assessment targets for each of the subjects. That will also have some information about the underlying theory of how we're developing the assessment.

Chapter Three is going to focus on the short answer items and the extended writing items. It's also going to give information on how they selected passages for the literacy test and other sections of the test.

Once the *Assessment Guide* information is out, we're going to do some calls with adult education directors and professional development administrators in every state. We're working on setting up some mechanisms to have broader communication with the folks on the ground, the adult education community, as well. We'll probably do a couple of webinars or mass calls and then set up a blog or system for people to send in questions; we'll compile those to create FAQs for the website and aim to answer questions in a variety of ways.

Hillary: Are the Common Core State Standards themselves the underlying foundation of the new assessment, or has the development been based more on a combination of those Common Core standards with other information about what employers and colleges are looking for?

C.T.: Thanks for bringing that up. As you probably know, the Common Core are curriculum standards or curriculum guides; they're really not assessment targets. We've looked at Common Core and some other prevailing state standards, like those from Texas and Massachusetts. So we really took a variety of sources and inputs into account as we've formed our assessment targets. The Common Core, however, has been really helpful for us in determining some of the academic skills and knowledge that are going to be needed in order to prepare folks for college and for a career.

Hillary: With your knowledge about the test as a whole and what's in the works, what do you think

the most significant content or subject matter changes are going to be, things that our instructors are going to need to prepare learners for?

Our driving mission here is to get more people into the system and prepare more people so that they can be successful in life and in supporting their families.

C.T.: This is a layman speaking, not a development person or a psychometrician, but I see a shift in some things. Science is a perfect example. The science content test on the current GED[®] test is really more geared towards reading comprehension. I think that, on the new test, folks are going to have to come in with some basic level of subject matter understanding. So right now you really don't need to know anything about cells or protons or electrons, you just need to be able to understand context as it's written and be able to answer the science questions based on your problem solving ability. On the new science test, I think you're going to need some background information and context in order to answer the questions.

Hillary: I know you talked about preparation as being different with the new test, and I've heard that there's going to be a National Preparation Program. Can you tell me a little bit about what that is and how it's going to work?

C.T.: We aren't necessarily developing a program. What we want to make sure is that there are programs that are available nationally that support folks in preparing for the test. One of the things that we know from our statistics is that just over half of all people who sit for the GED[®] test report going through no adult education program. They're doing this on their own. So what this said to us is that we need to develop better resources and work with publishers and people who are experienced in delivering support in innovative, interactive

Literacy on the 2014 Assessment*

ways through online and electronic means to help people prepare for the test. Of course we need to advocate for more funds and better capacity in adult education programs, but we also need to supplement that for when there are wait lists and when people choose not to come into adult education.

We have been working more closely with publishers than we ever have before. We're challenging as many people as possible to start thinking creatively about serving this population and really digging in a little deeper on the preparation side. We're working with all of the usual folks, including Steck-Vaughn and McGrawHill, to give them information about the new assessment so that they can develop materials. We're obviously going to be talking with folks who've done some preparation over on the Pearson side. We're going to be packaging the official practice test differently. We're doing mobile apps for iPhones and Droids because we know that much of our population has smart phones even though they don't necessarily have high speed Internet access at home.

We want to look at a whole host of things to better serve test-takers, going beyond just serving the test-takers in the current population. Our driving mission here is to get more people into the system and prepare more people so that they can be successful in life and in supporting their families.

Hillary: Are you seeing this effort as a variety of service offerings with different people establishing their own costs for different elements?

C.T.: You know, it really will depend. I know that even ProLiteracy and some other organizations have developed preparation materials and teacher professional development programs. I think another linchpin in all of this is how to help prepare and arm teachers so that they feel like they can be successful in preparing test-takers. We have regular communication with DOE about that. We're talking with the state adult education directors; we plan to be talking to foundations; we need to be banging every door we can to make sure we have resources, time, and energy devoted to professional development as an ecosystem. I don't mean just us at GED Testing Service; I mean the adult education community as a whole. We need to evolve. Our country needs it.

Continued on back cover ...

In alignment with career- and college-readiness standards, the GED® literacy assessment will focus on three essential components:

- The ability to read closely
- The ability to write clearly
- The ability to edit and understand the use of standard written English in context

The writing component integrates reading and writing into meaningful tasks that require candidates to support their written analysis with evidence from given source text(s).

- Seventy-five percent of the texts in the exam will be informational texts (including literary nonfiction and a range of texts from workplace contexts); 25 percent will be literature.
- The texts included in the test will cover a range of complexity, including texts at the career- and college-readiness level.
- For texts in which comprehension hinges on vocabulary, the focus will be on understanding words that appear frequently in texts from a wide variety of disciplines and, by their definition, are not unique to a particular discipline.
- U.S. founding documents and "the Great American Conversation" that followed will be required texts for study and assessment.
- The lengths of texts included in the reading comprehension component of the test will vary between 450 and 900 words.

*Excerpted from *GEDTS' Assessment Guide for Educators*, Ch. 2. See the guide for other important information and assessment targets.

Energized and Inspired at the 2011 **LESLLA Symposium**

by Tanya Conover

A *ttending the 2011 LESLLA Symposium at the University of Minnesota last September 29-October 1, with my colleague Debby Cargill, was one of the highlights of my year.*

I recall how warm prairie breezes greeted visitors to “The City of Lakes” on those days and evenings, energizing us all with a feel of Indian summer. Meanwhile, back home in the South, the Weather Channel reported cold rain with temperatures in the mid-50s. Not only did the good weather at the 2011 LESLLA Symposium exceed expectations, the entire event proved to be a professional development and networking opportunity worth attending.

Adult ESOL instructors well know how difficult it can be to find good, real-world resources for our low level literacy ESOL students — materials free of clowns, kittens, and cute mice. What a pleasure and inspiration it was to attend research-based workshops, lectures, and presentations carved from the cutting edge of adult literacy. One of my favorite

presentations was a solid, research-based discussion of developing workplace materials given by Betsy Wong, Adult ESOL instructor and trainer from Virginia’s own Fairfax County Adult and Community Education program. Another highlight for me was an interactive preview of *What Next*, a new phonics-based ESL program for literacy level adults, presented by the author herself, Lia Conklin, an instructional coach at the Ronald M. Hubbs Center for Lifelong Learning in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Though I was not able to attend, my colleagues reported that author Kate Singleton, of Fairfax County Public Schools, hit it out of the virtual Minnesota Twins Target Field Ballpark with a presentation on her Adult ESL Health Literacy Curriculum. As a matter of fact, Kate’s health literacy picture stories were the original inspiration for the Prince William County Public Schools Adult ESOL Program presentation that Debby Cargill, ESOL lead, and I offered at LESLLA: *Our Voices are Not Silent*, A Picture Stories Reading Curriculum.

Highlights from LESLLA 2011

by Betsy Wong

LESLLA was a very special conference in that everyone attending was united by a desire to serve a population that is often marginalized:

Adult ESL students with limited formal education. At so many conferences, workshops are geared toward practitioners who serve a student population that is proficient in reading and writing. At LESLLA, virtually everyone I met could share stories about their adult learners who were just beginning to develop literacy skills – and they spoke in terms of the rewards of working with them. I never heard a comment along the lines of, “What can I do with these people who

can’t read or write?” Instead, there was a true appreciation for the shared, unique population that we choose to serve.

I presented a session on “Developing Materials for LESLLA Workplace Learners,” which demonstrated how to integrate “best practices” from adult ESL literacy instruction and elements of successful workplace programs into the development of materials for LESLLA learners in multilevel workplace settings.

One of the most interesting sessions I attended was “From Cultural Dissonance to a Learning Paradigm.” The standard practices and formats used in our educational system may clash with the assumptions and values of our learners

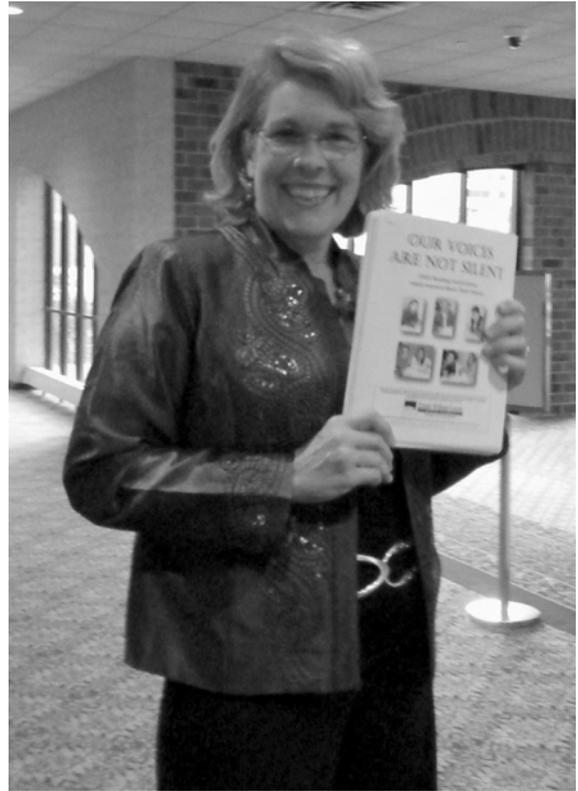
All LESLLA presenters had been instructed to prepare for the possibility of 55 attendees per session, which seemed like a safe margin of over-planning at the time. Little did we imagine that almost 60 individuals would read the PWCS LESLLA presentation description and pack that University of Minnesota meeting room on the very first morning of the symposium. The program blurb read: "Our Adult ESOL program goals include empowerment for all learners, especially literacy level readers! Come review *Our Voices Are Not Silent*, our new standards-based, socially significant, reading curriculum that our literacy learners love! Participants will take home many resources."

Following our early morning presentation, many participants approached us throughout the remainder of the symposium, and later by email, giving enthusiastic feedback. Instructors shared their plans to go back to their classes to inspire their literacy level adult learners to produce meaningful narratives via picture stories, just as our PWCS students had created using a process approach to Adult ESOL writing. Thank you, Kate, for your original inspiration with your health literacy picture stories!

Motivated more than ever by the 2011 LESLLA Symposium, we returned to our PWCS Education Adult ESOL Program to work on a final draft of *Our Voices Are Not Silent*. We hope to have it posted on the PWCS Adult Education

from less traditional educational backgrounds. In this plenary session, presenters Andrea DeCapua and Helaine Marshall made a strong case for being sensitive to the ways of learning held by those with limited schooling – and blending elements of these practices into "Western-style" learning paradigms. They gave the example of learners who marked every single "True/False" question as "True" because of their assumption that, as an expert and authority figure, a teacher would never present something to the students that was not true. A way to help learners understand this pedagogical format, the presenters said, would be to use a "Yes/No" question format instead and gradually transition learners to the "True/False" format. ■■

PROGRESS in Adult ESOL, Instructor and Trainer for Fairfax County Adult and Community Education.



Tanya Conover at LESLLA 2011 in St. Paul, Minnesota

Program website by the end of 2012 so that everyone can access it.

A note to readers: If you are lucky enough to attend the 2012 LESLLA Symposium in Finland this year, I'm sure you will find it equally as rewarding as LESLLA 2011. Perhaps there will even be warm winds blowing in from the steppes of Russia! One way or another, I'm sure participants will be energized and inspired to continue studying and meeting the needs of low literacy adult learners. ■■

Tanya Conover, a presenter at the 2011 LESLLA Symposium, is EL/Civics Coordinator for Prince William County Schools Adult Education.

LESLLA
www.leslla.org

Adult ESL Health Literacy Pictures Stories

**Our Voices, Our Lives, Our Communities
PWCS EL/Civics Process Writing Curriculum**

GED[®] 21st Century: An Interview with C.T. Turner, GED Testing Service

(continued from page 21)

Hillary: Do you have anything to say about professional development and the kinds of skills or knowledge that teachers or program managers should be thinking about and seeking out in light of the new test?

C.T.: A lot of the specifics on professional development are going to be tied to the detailed assessment targets that are coming out in *The Assessment Guide for Educators*.

One thing that's really obvious that we haven't talked too much about is basic keyboarding skills. As we get closer to 2014 and the test is offered on computer in each of the states, those skills will be important. In 2014, the test will be delivered solely on

computer except for instances where people have approved accommodations. We know

Computer literacy and basic technology skills are part of literacy itself.

that basic technology is being integrated into every facet of the workforce. From construction workers to nurse technicians to stock clerks, they're all interfacing with technology. It's not that someone decided it would be nice and interesting for adults to learn keyboarding: basic technology skills are something the workforce demands. The Department of Education is now saying that computer literacy and basic technology skills are part of *literacy* itself.

I think as a community, building up basic keyboarding skills is a logical place where we're going to have to focus a little bit of energy. We know that will be a challenge for some folks, but when we did our usability study and score comparability study, even those who said they were less familiar or had little familiarity with technology performed well on the test. Their scores are comparable across the paper- and computer-based formats and, almost to a person, everyone who took the test on computer finished faster than the paper-and-pencil testers. Very soon there's going to be a generation of folks who will never have composed an essay by

Hillary: Definitely. I've seen some of the information from the usability studies, which helped to allay some fears, but I also wondered: who were those users? Was there a wide range of ages? There's a concern that older adults who may be reskilling or re-entering the workforce may have a lack of familiarity with technology that will hurt their performance.

C.T.: A broad range of folks were represented in that sample. We did oversample a bit on an older demographic, and we oversampled a bit on folks who responded that they had little familiarity or regular interface with technology.

I can also tell you that we are implementing CBT right now in one state. That pilot has

provided a representative sample of people who have chosen to take the test on computer, and everything is mirroring the paper-based testing population. There's been even more enthusiasm for people signing up take that computer-based test in a non-young (older than 22) demographic.

hand. Times are changing.

On the surveys, we've had a couple of quotes like, "Why has this taken so long? Why isn't the test already offered on computer?"

Yes, there will be some challenges just as with any change, but we think the CBT format is going to be less difficult for most folks across the board.

Hillary: Is there anything else that you'd like to pass on to Virginia educators?

C.T.: I think that's about it. I just want to make sure that everyone understands that as an organization "we are fully in." This is a full court press. We want to work hand-in-hand with adult education, using whatever resources and whatever connections we have to the adult education community to provide leadership, advocacy, and assistance.

Hillary: Thank you. 🍀