

High School Equivalency Test Criteria Recommendations

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This is a list of criteria recommended for procuring Minnesota's approved high school equivalency test(s). These criteria were drafted by staff at the Minnesota Department of Education and revised with feedback from Adult Basic Education (ABE) practitioners, including the ABE stakeholder working group.

Suggested Criteria for Approval

The process in statute would **require implementation of an official procurement process through the Minnesota Department of Education and Minnesota Department of Administration**. It is also important to note that the statute requires consultation with ABE stakeholders, yet no convening, curriculum, training, or staffing costs have been allocated to pay for these transitions or this work, which will impact implementation at both the local and state levels.

In order to approve an assessment for state-issued diploma purposes, several criteria need to be considered:

Requirements: Any approved testing vendor must provide the following:

- A. Academic Content Standards Alignment:** Approved test(s) must be content standards aligned (Adult Basic Education (ABE) and K-12 Academic) to ensure equivalency to K-12 diploma.
- B. Test Subjects:** The test needs to assess English Language Arts, math, social studies and science.
- C. Test Format:** A vendor is required to provide computer-based testing. A vendor needs to allow appropriate accommodations, including paper-based testing, in special situations or with special populations as needed and with the approval of the commissioner.
- D. Test Center Infrastructure, Support and Technical Assistance:** Since the Minnesota Department of Education does not have infrastructure or resources to create and sustain testing centers, the vendor must have the capacity to establish, maintain, and help monitor testing centers with approval from the Minnesota Department of Education. Any approved test vendor must provide high-quality communication, technical support, and testing system maintenance that is reasonable and timely for test centers and test takers. The process and estimated cost to establish and maintain a testing center should be clearly outlined, including training requirements, certifications, staffing and fees. (Also see *Transferability and Access* below.)
- E. Ability to Receive Data for Diplomas and Transcripts:** The state maintains a database of graduates for the test-based secondary credentials as a permanent record. Any approved test vendor must be able to send daily data of graduates and test takers to the Minnesota Department of Education.

- F. Testing Logistics:** A test vendor must provide a process for registering and taking tests that is reasonable and not unnecessarily complicated for testers.
- G. Transferability and Access:** The test vendor is required to help ensure reasonable geographic access to their test across the state of Minnesota. Currently the Minnesota Department of Education does not have the authority to authorize testing centers or require that locations offer tests, meaning test vendors must also help establish, certify and maintain testing centers. Local ABE programs have a right to opt in to become a testing center for any vendor. Adults seeking test-based secondary credentials move around the state, so the same tests should be reasonably available across Minnesota. In addition, any approved test needs to be able to be offered in correctional settings.
- H. Professional Development Plan:** Any approved test vendor must be able to provide a plan to support local adult education providers with training, including assessment overview information, testing logistics, and curriculum and instructional strategies.
- I. Tester Subsidy Support:** The Minnesota State Legislature has routinely allocated funds to subsidize high school equivalency testing. Any vendor must be able to incorporate allocated subsidies to decrease costs to testers as part of their contract with the Minnesota Department of Education and Minnesota Department of Administration.
- J. Accommodations for Disabilities:** Many adults seeking a high school equivalency diploma have disabilities and need accommodations, so any approved test vendor needs to have clearly articulated allowable accommodations and procedures for approval that meet the state's accessibility requirements and other state and federal laws. The vendor must provide a process for accommodations requests and testing that is reasonable and does not provide undue burden to testers or testing centers.
- K. Standard Adult High School Diploma:** Any test vendor selected must allow for the tests to be used in Minnesota's Standard Adult High School Diploma. This means the vendor must allow anyone passing single or multiple subject tests to have access to and use those scores for a Standard Adult High School Diploma with an approved program.
- L. Practice Tests:** Approved test(s) needs to have affordable or free practice tests that are reliable, current, and provide diagnostic information for testers and ABE programs. These practice tests should be formally equated to the official test to be reasonably similar, including time limits, content, and format.
- M. Bias:** A test vendor needs to present analysis to determine whether the test has bias in the areas of race/ethnicity, gender, sex, disability, and any other protected status, according to Minnesota Statutes, section 363A.
- N. Test Language:** The test must have an English Language version. Tests should be offered in multiple languages. (Additional points can be offered for tests that are offered in multiple languages.)

Additional Factors: Any approved testing vendor should provide the following:

- A. Credentialing System Ability:** Approved test vendor(s) should be able to provide instant official electronic credentials to graduates, especially for employment and postsecondary verification purposes.
- B. Reputation, Relationships, and Success with Postsecondary Institutions and Employers:** Many or most graduates of these tests need to be able to use the credential to gain admission to and succeed in careers and postsecondary education, so the tests should align with requirements from, be trusted and understood by, and have a record of success with postsecondary institutions and employers.

- C. Test Price:** Many testers live in poverty, so they need to be able to afford the test, either through subsidies and/or overall affordable test costs. In addition, adult education instructors and programs require training on the tests offered, which has local and statewide costs. Vendors need to clearly articulate the services provided with the price. Actual cost comparisons and considerations need to consider the services delivered and features across tests and vendors, including but not limited to registration, performance data analysis, administration, training and additional implementation and system maintenance expenses.
- D. Passing Score Determination:** Passing scores and how the score is determined should be clearly defined. Ideally, any approved vendor would offer differentiated testing scores noting levels of passing scores and what they potentially indicate for high school equivalency and career and college readiness.
- E. Additional Funding and Resources Required:** ABE programs and testing centers are facing resource shortages, affecting testing availability. They claim additional resources are needed to offer testing, especially if a new test is being approved. Additional points could be awarded to a test vendor that can provide any of the following:
 1. A contribution paid by any approved vendor to create a fund to support testing in rural and underserved areas;
 2. Funding to market the test and promote ABE programs;
 3. Appropriate funding should be available for materials and training, potentially with the ability to personalize the materials by individual ABE programs and testing centers; and/or
 4. Funds available for testers that cannot afford to pay for testing.

Potential Criteria up for Debate

Number of Vendors Selected: ABE stakeholders are divided on whether one test or multiple tests should be approved. Feedback includes:

- Only one test and vendor should be selected. Multiple tests would create confusion for students. ABE programs and testing centers do not have enough resources to market, advise and prepare students for, and provide multiple tests, especially considering curriculum, marketing and other communication and education resources needed. This could be extremely difficult logistically.
- Multiple tests and vendors should be selected. This gives students, local communities, ABE programs, and/or high school equivalency testing centers the ability to choose the test or tests that works best for them.

Testing Logistics: In addition to the testing logistics criteria above, a couple other recommendations were suggested:

- Repeat Test Non-Passers: The vendor should help deter students that are not ready from taking the test repeatedly.
- Payment Options: The vendor should allow multiple types of payment for testing.

Questions

Test Choice

- How do students choose which test to take if multiple tests are offered?
- How do ABE programs prepare students for multiple test options?
- *Could students mix and match scores across different tests to earn a high school equivalency diploma? **No. Tests are not allowed to be mixed and matched for the high school equivalency diploma but students can use single subject tests for the Standard Adult High School Diploma.***

Transferability and Access

- How do we ensure geographic testing center access, especially in rural and other underserved areas?
- *Will every ABE program need to offer every test option if multiple tests are approved? **No. ABE programs and testing centers would be able to choose which test(s) to offer based on their community needs and available resources.***
- *How will records across state lines follow students with different tests? **This will be negotiated with the test vendor. Currently, test vendors have procedures outlining when and how to limit and permit tester data access across states.***
- *What will happen to a tester's partially completed test scores if we change approved tests every five years? Will the student need to start over? **If an approved test and vendor change, the tester, the ABE program, and the testing center will be notified in advance to help students complete their diploma. If a student does not complete before the transition period ends, they will still be able to use those passed tests for the Standard Adult High School Diploma.***

Disabilities and Accommodations

- How are mental illness, test anxiety, and/or students with extremely low IQs taken into account for accommodations?
- *What about students that have an IEP (Individual Education Program) from K-12 that are older than 21? **Typically, IEPs do not hold validity after K-12, but the documentation that supported the IEP may be used for testing accommodations requests if they have not expired. In addition, ABE programs can use information from a student's IEP to adapt appropriate instructional methods.***

Resources

- Do the state, ABE programs, and testing centers have the necessary resources, including time, materials, staff, professional development, etc. to make changes to our high school equivalency testing system?

Professional Development

- What will professional development and training look like if we offer multiple tests in the state? Should programs specialize on one test? Can they realistically understand and prepare students for multiple high school equivalency tests? How will we structure ABE classes and curriculum if we need to include

multiple tests? What do we tell students about multiple tests? How will that affect our communities and the students' experiences, especially regarding one unified goal versus disjointed goals?

Reputation, Relationships, and Success with Postsecondary Institutions and Employers

- How do ABE programs and the Minnesota Department of Education communicate the assessment options to postsecondary institutions, employers and other entities, if multiple tests are offered?

Content

- How are writing skills tested? Does the vendor offer a writing test? Should writing be offered as a separate test or integrated with reading as one English Language Arts test? If it is integrated, should acceptable writing skills be required to be demonstrated as part of passing the test?

Vendor Evaluation

- How do we ensure that a selected vendor actually does what they say they would do in their proposal?

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