

Examinee and High School Senior Performance on the GED® Tests
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(GED Testing Service® Research Study, 2007-1)

Abstract

This study compares performance on the GED Tests, U.S. edition, across three groups of examinees: (1) graduating high school seniors in the GED U.S., 2001 norm group, (2) GED Tests candidates who took one or more tests in the United States between 2002 and 2004, and (3) GED Tests candidates who passed the tests in the United States between 2002 and 2004. By comparing graduating high school seniors and GED Tests examinees, this report provides evidence of the academic value of the GED credential. The results should be useful primarily to employers and admissions officers evaluating applicants who have a credential based on passing the tests. Additionally, adult education administrators and teachers can use this information when planning and developing instructional programs for GED Tests candidates.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report was to add to evidence of the academic value of the GED credential and also to identify academic content and cognitive levels in which GED Tests examinees are likely to have difficulties. This study compared the performance on the U.S. edition of the GED Tests across three groups of examinees: (a) graduating high school seniors in the GED Tests U.S. 2001 norm group, (b) GED Tests candidates who took one or more test(s) in the U.S. in 2002-2004, and (c) GED Tests candidates who passed the tests in the U.S. in 2002-2004. Standard scores, percentile rank distributions, item difficulty statistics, and each of the content and cognitive levels measured by the tests were analyzed.

Demographic characteristics of GED Tests examinees and high school seniors show that seniors were more likely to have completed more years of school and earned higher grades in courses than GED Tests candidates or passers. Echoing several other studies, these results corroborate that GED Tests candidates often drop out of high school because of lack of credits and academic difficulties.

General performance results include the following:

1. Overall, GED Tests candidates who completed the test battery—regardless of their passing status—performed better than graduating high school seniors on the test battery as a whole, and especially so on the Language Arts, Reading Test, where candidates far outperformed the seniors. However, seniors performed in general better than candidates on the Language Arts, Writing, and Mathematics Tests.
2. Performance differences between GED Tests candidates and seniors were found to be generally opposite of performance differences reported in a similar 1982 GEDTS study. Such differences may be due to the fact that today's candidates appear to have completed more years of high school, have been out of school fewer years, and are less likely to be employed than

candidates in 1980. Today's credential holders possess a higher level of academic knowledge and skills than ever before demonstrated.

3. The most difficult tests for all three groups were the Mathematics and Social Studies Tests. However, the Science Test was the most difficult test for the seniors while the Language Arts, Writing Test was the most difficult one for the GED Tests candidates and passers.

Results regarding *content-level performance* include the following:

1. The most difficult items for seniors were observed in the areas of writing organization, world history, reading nonfiction critical reviews, and measurement/geometry. The most difficult items for GED Tests candidates and passers were all of the content areas in the Mathematics Test.
2. The easiest items for all three groups were observed in the three reading content areas of poetry, workplace documents, and general nonfiction texts, and in the writing content area of usage.

Results regarding *cognitive-level performance* include the following:

1. The most difficult cognitive-level items common to all three groups were those in the Mathematics Test, while seniors had difficulties with the Social Studies and Science Tests items measuring application, analysis, and evaluation, and those in the Mathematics Test measuring application, modeling, and problem solving. On average, the easiest cognitive-level items for all three groups were those measuring comprehension and application in the Language Arts, Reading, Test.
2. Overall, GED Tests candidates and passers correctly answered a greater percentage of cognitive-level items than seniors on all tests, except on the Mathematics Test, for which seniors outperformed candidates in algebra, functions, and patterns, while passers outperformed seniors in number operations and number sense; data analysis, statistics, and probability; and on the conceptual cognitive levels.

Results regarding the *level of performance on each content-area test* can be found in the full report.

In summary, GED Tests passers outperformed seniors on items in every content and cognitive level in every test except within the Mathematics Test. In mathematics, seniors outperformed passers in all content areas and cognitive levels except the content areas of number operations and number sense, and data analysis, statistics, and probability and on items measuring the conceptual cognitive level. This could be related to several factors: (1) candidates likely had a heightened awareness of the current minimum standard score requirements and were oriented toward achieving that standard, (2) many candidates may have pursued instruction or self-study and delayed taking the tests until they were reasonably confident of earning passing scores, (3) the availability of, and for several states, the mandatory passing of, predictive tests (e.g., Official GED Practice Tests) may have contributed to the relatively small number of candidates who earned standard scores below the passing standards, and (4) the

passers used in this study may have tested multiple times or received remedial instruction to achieve higher passing scores while the seniors took the test(s) only once.

These results should be useful primarily to employers and college admissions officers evaluating applicants who have a credential based on passing the tests. Additionally, adult education administrators and instructors can use this information when planning and developing instructional programs for GED Tests candidates.