

## GED® collapse: Ohio needs launch pads, not barricades

By Hannah Halbert

The number of people attempting and passing the GED has plummeted. The Ohio economy is tough on low-wage workers with limited formal education. Without a high school diploma, it is virtually impossible to get a family-supporting job. But the GED has become a barricade, blocking Ohio workers from career goals, instead of a launching pad.

The GED – the copyrighted brand name of the test Ohio uses to award high school equivalency diplomas – fundamentally changed when PearsonVUE, the world’s largest private, for-profit education corporation, took over the test. After Pearson changes were implemented, the number of Ohioans passing the test plunged by 85 percent, from more than 14,800 a year on average between 2009 and 2013 to fewer than 2,200 in 2014. So few passed the GED, the scoring system was changed. We estimate that 7,251 people have now passed the GED in the two years since the changes were implemented. This is cold comfort given that more than 15,000 Ohioans passed the test in the year prior to the testing changes. As a result, there are about 22,000 fewer Ohioans with an equivalency degree than we would have had if we had kept pace. That’s 22,000 workers blocked from a good career ladder, and 22,000 potential hires that Ohio employers are missing out on.

The changes Pearson made include tripling the cost of the test from \$40 to \$120, requiring test-takers to use a computer, testing more analytical and complex skills, and requiring online registration with an email address and a credit card. In a perverse way, the changes create huge barriers for the very population that needs a high school equivalency. About 48 percent of Ohioans without a diploma have either no computer or no Internet service. Many also lack a bank account or credit card. Median earnings for the 795,664 working-age Ohioans without a high school degree were \$20,122 in 2014, about \$15,000 less than for the population as a whole. Now, to increase their income and afford the Internet, they must pass an expensive, computerized test. Recommendations for Ohio:

- Add more alternate testing options as 21 states have done.
- Reinvest in high school equivalency instead of cutting funding.
- Evaluate the system and get back on track, regardless of the testing product.

Changes to Ohio’s newly privatized GED have clobbered participation and passage. Far fewer Ohioans are able to gain this credential. This hurts families, employers and our economy. Ohio must fix our high school equivalency degree system.

### Key Recommendations

The number of Ohioans taking and passing the GED has collapsed. Employers are missing out on 22,000 potential hires who are blocked from economic mobility. We must retool. Three ways to start:

- The GED is broken. The state must expand our high school equivalency exam options.
- Ohio should evaluate our system to identify roadblocks. We must encourage greater participation and passage regardless of exam vendors.
- Ohio has reduced funding and should instead invest in high school equivalency.