

The Abell Report

What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about

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ABELL SALUTES: “CitiStat,” Making Baltimore City Government More Responsive

“If you want to change the outcomes produced by government, you have to change what government does.” That is the credo of CitiStat, the O’Malley administration’s hands-on, no-nonsense, no-delay response mechanism designed to deal promptly and effectively with citizen complaints. Modeled after New York City’s similar CompStat, the system holds managers accountable every 14 days for the handling of everything from the simple pothole nuisance to the more sophisticated problems of drug-related crime.

Every two weeks the agencies and organizational units participating in CitiStat submit detailed information about indicators that determine performance and service. These numbers quantify such matters as complaints about overtime, unscheduled leave, performance markers, retention rates for recovering addicts in treatment, or how long it takes to abate a pothole complaint. Geographic information is plotted and displayed on detailed computer maps that help policy makers and managers spot problems and formulate strategies to solve them. CitiStat hallmarks include accurate and timely intelligence, rapid deployment of resources, effective tactics and strategies, and relentless follow-up and assessment.

Here are a few examples of CitiStat at work:

- Baltimore’s health standards dictate that all moderate to high-risk food

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Raising the Bar Presents Problems: New, more rigorous GED test poses another challenge for 1 in 5 Maryland residents who lack a high school education

Needed: More alternatives for earning a high school diploma in school and out-of-school; adequate State funding for adult education

According to 2000 Census reports 772,306 adults in the affluent State of Maryland (or 21%) had not yet earned a high school diploma.¹ Conversely, the State Department of Education promotes Maryland’s #1 national ranking in recent years with 95% of 18-24 year olds completing high school – a statistic that includes alternative certifications like the GED. While Maryland receives high marks for young people completing high school, the number of Maryland residents without a high school diploma continues to increase. There have been an estimated 70,000 high school dropouts in Maryland since 1993, for example, and only 41,000 individuals of all ages passed the GED in that period.² It is the role of Maryland’s under-funded and oft-neglected adult learning community to make up this mathematical difference.

The more significant of the two alternative routes to earning a traditional high school diploma³ in Maryland is the GED (General Educational Development) test. While the national pass rate for this high school equivalency assessment hovers near 70%, Maryland’s average pass rate is less than 54%. In Baltimore City, these

figures are more dismal, with only 29% of test takers passing the GED in 2000; furthermore, this percentage has declined over the past three years. Now the bar is being raised: beginning in January 2002 a new, substantially more rigorous GED test with a performance orientation will be introduced that is anticipated to cause higher failure rates. Simultaneously, Maryland’s new high school subject assessments will be administered this year to all ninth grade students. Although these challenging subject tests are not yet graduation requirements, they are expected to be in the future, potentially increasing the dropout rate – an outcome the State Department of Education has acknowledged if not fully addressed.

As one in eight high school diplomas in Maryland is currently awarded on the basis of passing the GED, it is a critical component of the State’s educational system. In reality, adult education, including the GED and its sister alternative program, the External Diploma Program, receives little attention and even less funding from the State of Maryland.

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¹ Briefing by the Task Force to Study Adult Education in Maryland to the Maryland State Board of Education, October 30 2001.

² “Maryland Adult External High School Diploma Program.” Division of Technology and Adult Learning, Maryland State Department of Career Technology and Adult Learning, December 2000.

³ High School graduation requirements in Maryland currently include passing Maryland Functional Tests, completing specific course requirements, a student service learning requirement, and fulfilling the required “seat” time in school.

Charting the Course to 2002: a Summary of Changes to the GED Tests

TEST	What's the Same	What's Eliminated	What's Included for 2002
Writing Skills (renamed Language Arts, Writing)	45-minute essay; 3 item types (correction, revision, and construction shift); Sentence structure, usage, and mechanics; Informational documents ("passages"); Part I, multiple-choice, and Part II, essay; Examinee must complete both parts.	Spelling—except for homonyms, possessives, and contractions. Commas—only tested when they are used to eliminate confusion.	Business Communications (letters, memos, reports, applications, etc.); "How to" texts (e.g., dressing for success, leasing a car, planning a trip, etc.); both 200–300 words, 12–18 sentences. Organization—transitions, text divisions, topic sentences, and unity/coherence. Essay scoring rubric changes from 6-point to 4-point scale.
Social Studies	Multiple-choice in sets and single items; Measures comprehension, application, analysis, and evaluation; Covers history, geography, civics, government, and economics; National, global, and adult contexts; Text and visual sources.	Behavioral science—psychology, sociology, anthropology—not tested as separate content area; some concepts tested within context of other areas.	More history, civics, and government; More graphics, photographs; More clearly defined content in U.S. and world history; More analysis; Different content areas tested within same item set; More single-item questions; At least one "practical" document (voters' guide, tax form, etc.); At least one excerpt from <i>U.S. Constitution</i> , <i>Declaration of Independence</i> , <i>Federalist Papers</i> , or landmark Supreme Court cases.
Science	Multiple-choice in sets and single items; Text and visual sources.	More single items, fewer item sets.	Integrated with National Science Education Content Standards; Earth science includes space science; Physical science includes physics and chemistry; Increased focus on environmental and health topics (recycling, heredity, disease prevention, pollution, climate) and on science's relevance to everyday life; 50% conceptual understanding; 50% problem-solving. Increase in graphic stimuli from 30% to 50%.
Interpreting Literature and the Arts (renamed Language Arts, Reading)	Reflect diversity—gender, ethnicity, age, region; Passages range from 300–400 words; One poem (8–25 lines) and one piece of drama represented; No graphics, viewing addressed in textual manner.	Definitions: Popular Text and Classical Literature redefined as time periods; "Literal comprehension" now "comprehension"; "Inferential comprehension" now "synthesis."	Content areas defined by type of text: Literary (75%) and Nonfiction (25%); At least one comparison/contrast question, Nonfiction will include one business document and one selection about visual representation; 20% comprehension, 15% application, 30–35% analysis, 30–35% synthesis.
Mathematics	Measures algebra, geometry, number relations, and data analysis. 25% set-up questions—examinee must identify correct way to solve problem.	"Not sufficient information" questions decreased from 12% to 4%.	More emphasis on data analysis and statistics; Two parts: Part I permits calculator, Part II does not; Candidate will have practice time with calculator prior to test; Alternate Format items approximately 20%; Item sets in which candidate must access multiple pieces of information—pie charts, bar graphs, tables. All candidates will use Casio <i>fx-260 Solar</i> .

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What is the status of the GED and comparable high school equivalency programs? What is the potential to serve the 21% of Maryland adults who have not yet earned a high school diploma?

The GED was developed in 1942 and used initially as a credential to admit World War II veterans without a high school diploma to college. In the following decade, states began to issue high school equivalency diplomas to those who passed the GED. The test was devel-

oped, and is still operated by American Council on Education (ACE). The current GED in its third reiteration focuses on measurement of knowledge with objective questions. Until 1988, when a 200-word written essay was added, the GED was comprised exclusively of multiple-choice questions. It has been possible, in fact, to currently pass the GED without successfully completing the written essay. That is set to change on January 1, 2002.

The GED tests candidates in five sections: Writing Skills, Social Studies, Science, Interpreting Literature and the Arts, and Mathematics. The current test is composed of 286 questions and one written essay, requiring 7 hours and 35 minutes to administer. Maryland traditionally

offered the GED in a one sitting format only, but two years ago added a few two-day test sites. Passing scores have been determined by administering the GED tests to a nationally stratified random group of approximately 15,000 graduating high school seniors each spring. Historically the official passing score has been set at the point where two-thirds of these traditionally-educated students can pass. That too, will change. Passing scores for the new GED exam will be set so that only 3 of 5 seniors can pass. As of 1998, the American Council on Education increased the minimum passing score to 225 of a possible 400 points; in addition,

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⁴ Virshup, Amy. "Ticket to Where?" *The Washington Post Magazine*, July 25, 1999

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a minimum score of 40 is required for each of the five tests. Individual states may set a higher passing standard than the ACE, but must adhere to its minimum scores. Eligibility, fee structure, and testing format for the GED are the only determinations decided at the state level.

Yet, GED standards can at best, only reflect the state of current high school performance. As noted by Joan Auchter, executive director of ACE's GED testing service: "All we can do is measure what graduating high school seniors know and can do – not what they should be able to do."⁴ In an effort to stay abreast of what it views as secondary education trends, the American Council on Education will launch the fourth version of the GED in January 2002.

GED Facts and Findings

According to evaluations completed annually by the National GED Testing Service:

- GED diplomas account for one of seven high school diplomas earned annually in the United States; in Maryland, the rate is one in eight.
- About two of three persons taking the GED Tests report that they plan to enter a two-year college, four-year college, or trade, technical or business school during the next year.
- About two-thirds of the people taking the GED Tests finished the tenth grade before leaving high school; about 37% completed the eleventh grade.
- Only one in 20 GED test-takers say academic problems led them to leave school.
- More than half of those who take and pass the GED Tests are 24 or younger; nearly one-third are under 20. The average age of test takers in 1998 was 24.6 years and is decreasing.
- The number of GEDs awarded annually has doubled since 1971 nationwide.

External Research Studies

In 1992, James Heckman, University of Chicago, found that the GED credential

had a low impact on earnings as compared to the traditional high school diploma, particularly among young males. More recent research from Harvard (Richard Murnane, John Tyler, John Willett, 2000) asserted that GED recipients "aren't the labor-market equivalent of regular high school graduates," but more closely resemble high school dropouts. While low-skilled white male dropouts experienced an increase (10-19%) in annual income as a result of earning a GED, there was no discernable impact upon minorities in the five years after earning a GED. In fact, Murnane et al. found that GED graduates earned approximately the same income after passing the GED – approximately \$11,000 a year in 1995 dollars.⁵ Murnane, nonetheless, concluded that the GED is an important credential for low-skilled candidates with weak work records and does signal a minimum level of competencies to employers.

Murnane also concurs with a recent study by the U.S. Department of Education indicating that literacy and math skill levels are at least as important as educational credentials in determining income. Long term earnings appear to be a function of both educational attainments (a GED diploma, for example) and individual literacy skill competencies.⁶ While Murnane also posits that GED acquisition increases the potential for post-secondary enrollment, he found that those with a traditional high school diploma were substantially more successful in college completion: 20% of those with a high school diploma earned a bachelor's degree – only 1% of GED recipients did so.

Very little study has been done on the long term consequences of the GED diploma or the curricular distinctions between a traditional high school diploma and the GED, leaving policy makers with insufficient evidence. The GED is alive and well, according to James Heckman, because state and local governments are enamored with that fact that it's "cheaper, looks to be effective, is easily monitored, and the success statistics (a 70% national pass rate) look pleasing."⁷ More than 90% of U.S. colleges and universities admit students

with GED diplomas, and governmental policies have encouraged and provided funding for GED preparation. For better or worse, the GED has gained acceptance as the primary equivalent to a high school diploma in every state in the nation. In the process, Maryland and other states have acceded much of the authority for determining what constitutes alternative high school credentials to a national assessment.

The GED in Maryland

As approved in COMAR regulations, Maryland presents three options to earning a high school diploma:

1. graduate from a public high school, recognizing the fulfillment of the minimum enrollment, competency prerequisite, credit count, and student service requirements;
2. pass the GED exam; or
3. meet the qualifications of the Adult External High School Diploma.

Although all states do use the GED, it is a state decision to establish passing scores, determine eligibility and design testing format (one-day, two-day, by individual test). Maryland policy-makers have chosen the following criteria for eligibility GED applicants must be:

- at least 16 years old,
- not a high school graduate,
- a Maryland resident for three months, and
- officially withdrawn from the regular high school program for a minimum of three months.

As mentioned earlier, Maryland follows the new minimum requirements for passing recommended by the ACE with a total of 225 (of a possible total of 400 points) and a minimum of 40 (of a possible 80) per individual test. Prior to the GED's 1998 increase in minimum passing score, the State Board of Education had set Maryland's rate slightly above the existing national recommendation. The GED is generally administered the second Saturday of every month in 20 locations around the state. Test-takers must complete the entire battery over a 7.5 hour

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⁵ Murnane, Richard and Tyler, John. "The Increasing Role of the GED in American Education." *Education Week*, Vol. 19, No. 34, May 3, 2000: 64/48.

⁶ Sum, Andrew M. "Literacy in the Labor Force." Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1999.

⁷ Virshup, p 56

period. While two-day testing options are now offered in five Maryland locations, the State does not give candidates the option to take and pass one of the five sections of the GED test at a time as some states do. Considering the testing anxiety experienced by many of these second-chance student, the State might consider this more graduated testing format.

Maryland has thrust much of the financial responsibility for GED test administration onto the test-taker. The cost of the testing is now \$45 which includes a first time scheduling fee and diploma; the retest⁸ fee is also \$45. Maryland has increased the burden for GED candidates in the last five years by raising the existing test fee from \$25 and the retest fee from \$10 to \$45. A fee waiver for testing is available, but rarely publicized.

The State Department of Education (MSDE) funds and monitors the basic and secondary educational training offered by 34 Literacy Work agencies it has accredited. In 2000, approximately one-third of the Maryland residents who passed the GED were enrolled in a preparation program with a Literacy Works provider. Because there is no pre-determined schedule for GED preparation, the cost per person ranges greatly. One Literacy Works provider estimated that the cost for GED preparation for a candidate with ninth grade level skills averaged \$1000 a year.

Maryland's Other Alternative Diploma Option

The Adult External High School Program

The other alternative route to a high school diploma, the Adult External High School Diploma Program (EDP), is nationally validated by the American Council on Education and has been adopted by 11 states; in Maryland the program operates in 14 counties and Baltimore City. Maryland began offering the EDP in 1978; although state funding was discontinued in 1997, it was subsequently reinstated and currently runs through 2006. The current state allocation of \$281,000 is less than the federal funding contribution,

and half the amount granted by the State for EDP in 1990. Targeting a population of adults over 21, the EDP is an "applied performance, competency-based assessment program" that awards a high school diploma based on academic skills acquired through work and life experiences rather than in the classroom. The average age of an individual who earns an EDP is 36 years old.

Applicants for this diploma must be 18 years old, not currently enrolled in high school, and not a high school graduate; all potential candidates must first pass a screening test in math (geometry and some elementary algebra) and reading. Although the statewide rate is higher, only one in four Baltimore City applicants is successfully pre-screened for the EDP due to the ninth grade level math and reading requirements.

- I. **Diagnostic Phase/Pre-screening:** Adult basic skills are assessed in reading, writing and math as well as entry level job skills. The candidate receives a prescriptive analysis of skills to be improved. It is the student's responsibility to pursue the means for fulfilling requirements. If a student is deemed to have math and reading skills at the ninth grade level, he or she may advance to the Assessment Phase. As might be expected, many candidates do not meet these threshold skills and are referred to basic education programs.
- II. **Assessment Phase:** Candidates must complete 65 competencies (communication, computation, self-awareness, scientific awareness, and occupational preparedness) that are integrated within a task such as locating a job. Performance is evaluated at each center by nationally-trained and certified EDP assessors. Required Demonstration of required job skills may be evaluated by an employer or a "community expert" in the field in conjunction with the EDP assessor.

The External Diploma Program is self-paced and requires an average of nine

months to complete. Candidates have a choice of performance-based options that range from take-home projects to oral interviews in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, oral communication, and critical thinking. The assessment asks participants to demonstrate understanding through reading a newspaper, provide measurements for carpeting a room, or calculate interest on a credit card. Mathematics problems must be answered with 100% accuracy.

The EDP is administered by MSDE in partnership with selected local education agencies; in BCPSS runs the EDP at Fairmont-Harford High School. According to Ralph Galvin at the State Department of Education, Maryland's program meets the performance measure goal negotiated with the U.S. Department of Education that 25% of current EDP/GED enrollment is awarded the External Diploma on an annual basis. The number of external diplomas issued in Maryland has remained fairly steady in the last five years, after a significant drop in 1995 when the EDP was revised (again, increasing difficulty to match state standards). Most of the individuals interested in applying for the EDP program can be accommodated, although Mr. Galvin reported a waiting list in Baltimore City.

With an average of 400 diplomas awarded per year, the cost per graduate of the External Diploma Program is approximately \$2,000 including state, federal, and local matching funds. On average, participants pay a \$150 enrollment fee to participate in the EDP process.

Outcomes/Completion Trends of Alternative High School Programs

One of the difficulties in evaluation in the adult education arena is the lack of standardization of data. National statistics do not always concur with state level data: for example, there is inconsistency on whether the GED pass rate is calculated on the number of test applicants, the number who sat for the test, or the number who completed all sections of the test. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education and the

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⁸ Retesting regulations: If the total score is less than 225, all five tests must be retaken; if, however, the total score is above 225, only those tests with scores below 40 must be retaken.

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ACE use different GED reporting schedules based on a fiscal and calendar year respectively. As characterized by such ambiguity, adult education outcomes are difficult to compare and often are discrepant even as reported by MSDE. There is inconsistency, for example, in Maryland adult outcomes as reported in the “Maryland Fact Book”, Literacy Works data reports, and from the GED testing office at the MSDE based on whether the data is preliminary or revised data.

Nevertheless, the demand for the GED has grown as a proxy for the traditional high school diploma, while the average age of candidates has dropped steadily over the last three years.

THE GED:

Maryland’s GED pass rate has aver-

aged near 54% in the past four years while the national GED pass rate has generally hovered around 70%. The number of adults sitting for the GED test has increased by 6.6% and those seeking an external diploma has increased 65% in the last four years. Those who sought the support of a Literacy Works agency had slightly lower GED pass rates (49%) than the overall rate, 53%.

At the same time, the percentage of GED test takers under 25 years old is increasing.

Maryland’s lower pass rates can be explained by the state’s open door testing policy, according to Patricia Bennett, Chief of the Adult Education and Literacy Services Branch at MSDE. Many states allow only “qualified” pre-screened candidates to sit for the GED. Kentucky, for example, requires (and pays for) every GED candidate to take a practice version

of the test. Based on the results, candidates qualify to take the GED for a \$30 fee or are referred to one of the local literacy centers for free instruction. In order to sit for the official GED, students must be certified as ready. This strategy has increased Kentucky’s GED pass rate from 62% in 1994 to 73.4% in 2000 without impacting long term participation: 12,264 GED diplomas were awarded last year compared to 6,200 in Maryland. In addition, Kentucky offers students tuition refunds for fee-based GED classes, and their employers may qualify for tax credits.

The External Diploma Program

While there has been a large increase in the number of applicants to the External Diploma Program, the number of graduates has grown at a much slower rate. MSDE claims that the percentage of students graduated is underrepresented and will be corrected with FY01 data. Still the pass rate is particularly low: in 2000, only 25% of those admitted to the program received the accreditation over a twelve-month period.

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Age of GED Test Takers In Maryland

	1997	1998	1999
GED test takers under 25 years of age	63%	64%	66%

Maryland Pass Rates⁹

1997-2000

	1997		1998		1999		2000	
	MD	Balt City	MD	Balt. City	MD	Balt. City	MD	Balt. City
# of applicants	13,708	NA	14,293	NA	14,362	NA	14,175	NA
# taking GED test	10,970	1,900	11,655	2,072	11,586	2047	11,704	2,156
# passing GED Test	5,855	561	6,466	717	5,944	619	6,200	623
Pass rate (%)	53.4%	29.5%	55.3%	34.6%	51.3%	30.2%	53.0%	28.9%

⁹ Statistics from MSDE Chief of GED Testing office

Pass Rates — Maryland External Diploma Program

1995-2000

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
No. of Applicants* for EDP	1,019	1,669	1,549	2,086	2,477	2,551
No. enrolled in EDP	NA	NA	NA	1,147	1,177	1,677
No. of External Diplomas awarded	301	364	341	408	411	414
Annual pass rate (% of enrollees)	NA	NA	NA	36%	35%	25%
Annual pass rate (% of applicant pool)	30%	22%	22%	20%	17%	16%

* Applicants include all learners who apply, including those who drop out or do not meet criteria to advance. N/A, not available.

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As regards External Diploma outcomes, Maryland has the highest rate of participation among 13 states, accounting for nearly half of the national participants. On the other hand, Maryland's completion rate of 25% in 2000 is one of the lowest. Nationally, the average pass rate for the EDP in the same year was 41%, and states like New York and Connecticut generally post pass rates of 50-55%.

A large number of applicants do not successfully complete EDP's placement tests for admission to the program; in Baltimore City, for example, the failure rate is 80% (although some are successfully admitted after tutoring). As a result, only 32 External Diplomas were awarded last year from an enrollment of 180 Baltimore City residents. As shown by the substantial growth in applicants over the last six years, there is an increasing demand for this high school alternative. Baltimore City has a waiting list of 45 for screening and 25 for program entry. While Baltimore Director Dorothy Murphy advocates the value of and growing interest in the EDP for those who cannot pass the GED, two of her staff people were cut as a result of failing to meet program goals for number of graduates. Rather than "adjusting" Workforce Investment Act funding for EDP programs, the State might opt to increase the effectiveness of these agencies. At a cost of approximately \$2,000 per graduate, there is potential for this program to serve a larger audience. Given the fact that only 16% of initial applicants graduate in any given year (and many are turned away due to insufficient skills), this program will never be large-scale solution.

Funding Gap

Maryland's lower pass rate has also been attributed to the State's meager allocation of funding to adult education – the 48th lowest funding in the country ahead of only Rhode Island and New Hampshire. On a per student basis, Maryland's 2001 Adult Education contribution is the lowest of 18 East Coast states: at \$45 per student Maryland's funding is dwarfed by state contributions in Massachusetts (\$1,506 per participant), Delaware (\$610 per partici-

Math sample questions

Current test

The ordered pair $(-4, -5)$ corresponds to Point F on the graph below.

Which point corresponds to the ordered pair $(-4, 5)$?

(1) A
(2) B
(3) C
(4) D
(5) E

Correct answer: (2)

Source: American Council on Education

2002 test

A system of linear equations is given below.

$$y = 3x - 4$$
$$y = x$$

What point represents the solution of the system of equations?

Correct answer: filled-in circle

pant) and Florida (\$602 per participant).

Since 1990, when the Census revealed number of residents lacking a high school diploma, the State of Maryland has cut its funding to adult education by nearly a third, leaving local sources to shoulder much of the responsibility for meeting the mandatory federal funding match of 25%.

Anticipated Impact of the New 2002 GED Test

The GED Test Center will release a new version of the test in January 2002 in an effort to reflect what it perceives to be current high school curriculum standards and assessment. "These types of test questions not only mirror the tasks students are being asked to perform in the K-12 environment, but also closely match the ways adults must function as effective workers, parents, students, and citizens," said GED Testing Service Director Joan Auchter. Despite publicity efforts nationally and by MSDE, this decision will take many by surprise. As of January 1, the current GED will be discontinued and all partial GED scores will be declared invalid. In other words, all GED candidates, including those who have passed some, but not all five, sections will be compelled at retake all tests. As the GED is a national product, the revised test and subsequent ruling invalidating previous partial passing scores were adopted in Maryland without vote, much less approval, by the State Board of Education.

Major changes in the content of the GED include:

- Inclusion of "business-related and

adult-context information texts" across all five tests in an effort to be "authentic".

- The Language Arts/Writing test has new focus on organization and a new scoring scale. Except in the case of homonyms, possessives and contractions, spelling is not tested. More importantly, candidates must now pass the essay in order to pass this section of test.
- GED Math will have two test booklets: Part I requires the use of scientific calculator; Part II does not. Students must use the Casio fx-260 calculator supplied by the testing center, but will be given an opportunity to practice with it prior to testing. It is a foregone conclusion that they must arrive knowing how to use the calculator. The new GED will also include questions on statistics and data analysis for the first time. Lastly, the revised math test will not rely exclusively on multiple choice questions as in the past, but will ask test takers to supply the correct answer with "fill in the blank" questions.
- The Social Studies test will now ask students to interpret excerpts from The Constitution, Declaration of Independence, to Federalist Papers, or important Supreme Court cases.
- In Science, candidates will be asked the best ways to set up experiments, interpret results, apply scientific conclusions to real life, and explain the accomplishments of prominent scientists.

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Dolores Bramer, a Literacy Works center director in Baltimore City expressed concern about the rigorous nature of the revised GED. The new test requires more sophisticated information processing and interpretation of charts, graphs, and other symbolic pictorials. In addition, the testing process itself is more complicated: beyond calculator use, Scantron answer sheets require test takers to manipulate special coding for math symbols - something that this Director believes will be “difficult to walk right off the street and understand.” Ms. Bramer predicts that the pass rates, at least in Baltimore City, could be cut in half.

According to Maryland’s GED Testing Chief Jaqueline Brown-Baxter, passing scores for the new test have been set at 41 points per subject test (one point higher than the existing GED) and 225 points overall (existing total). While 2 of 3 high school students passed the “old” GED only 3 of 5 will meet the new standards.

Adult Education Task Force Report forthcoming

As of May 2001, The Governor and General Assembly charged a Task Force to study adult education services in Maryland further highlighting a need for more information. A report on the statewide demand, funding, implementation, and impact of adult education services (including preparation for GED and adult external high school program) is due out by January 1 and hopefully will inform future funding and strategies.

Findings

- A more rigorous version of the GED is due out in January 2002, invalidating all partial GED pass scores. There is little doubt among adult learning educators surveyed that the pass rate will be substantially reduced, at least initially, in a state with already low pass rates.
- There is increased demand in Maryland for both the GED and the EDP in the last five year, and these programs are increasingly serving younger adults. Nationally, 13% of test takers

are school-aged youth, 18 and under, an audience never intended for the “second-chance” GED test. With the introduction of the Maryland High School Assessments, the potential for even greater high school drop-out rates exists, causing more young people to opt for alternative diplomas. While MSDE struggles for state funding to adequately prepare students for increased high school graduation standards, the lack of flexible options in our K-12 system encourages many youth to look mistakenly to the GED as a “quick fix.”

- Maryland’s high cost for taking and retaking the GED, as well as limited alternatives to the seven and a half hour test administration, is creating obstacles for potential GED candidates. Unlike several other states, Maryland does not offer candidates an opportunity to take a practice GED test as a diagnostic free of charge. Neither does the State offer test takers the opportunity to take and pass the five different segments of the test, one at a time.
- While Maryland has abdicated much of the authority for high school equivalency programs to The American Council of Education and its GED test, each state makes important policy decisions regarding eligibility and fees. The cost of a GED test has increased from \$40 to \$120 in the last five years and is expected to increase to \$150 in 2003. Unlike current practices, Maryland must find ways to absorb these costs rather than passing along the exorbitant burden to those least able to shoulder it – the applicant.
- This is an educational arena where data collection, analysis, and program evaluation have not been fully accessible, making it difficult for all parties to make intelligent funding decisions. Nevertheless, Maryland’s dramatic decrease in funding for Adult Education is asynchronous with the state’s increasing demand for high school equivalency programs. Hopefully, the current Maryland Task Force on Adult Education Services will produce recommenda-

tions to correct these inadequacies.

- According to American Council of Education research, two-thirds of test takers pursue the GED in order to access post-secondary education. Findings have also indicated that GED graduates meet less success in post-secondary endeavors than those with high school diplomas. Both findings suggest a need for greater articulation between GED testing and post-secondary admission, including pre-college counseling.

Harvard researcher Richard Murnane has suggested four potential goals for adult learning and recommends that states grapple with their practices and policies to achieve all in varying degrees:

1. Give a second chance to high school dropouts with weak skills and subsequent poor work records

Maryland currently puts the majority of its alternative education “eggs” in the GED basket – a strategy that essentially makes Maryland a bystander in decisions made at the national level by the American Council of Education. Considering the increasing rigor of the GED and the minimal capacity of the Adult External Diploma program, Maryland might be wise to add alternative means to award a high school diploma such as its own accredited on-line virtual program (a strategy under consideration by MSDE for the last two years).

In the short term, MSDE might revisit decisions about GED test cost, test administration (allowing students to take the five sub-tests in different sittings, for example), and encouraging a diagnostic practice test at no charge. Furthermore, practitioners suggest that more funding, and thus more trained counselors would increase the capacity and effectiveness of the External Diploma Program. Ultimately, Maryland must consider whether these two options, and more importantly, the meager adult education funding stream, are sufficient to service the large and growing audience for alternative high school certification.

2. Provide access to post-secondary level education – in other words, treat the GED as a legitimate

pipeline for college admission

There is currently no substantive effort in Maryland to assist those who earn a GED to enroll wisely in post-secondary education – particularly community college programs and career schools. The state might consider developing strategies such as general college advising within its literacy centers for successful GED applicants. Based on the limited economic impact of a GED diploma, the GED might be bundled with post-secondary program completion as an educational goal.

3. Team with the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development to create incentives for high school age youth (particularly those with low skills) to prevent them from dropping out in order to pursue the GED. Focus on increasing literacy and mathematical skills of these students.

The traditional high school diploma is the preferred credential and it is best to earn it the first time around. “Staying in school” counseling should be accompanied by a significant expansion of more

and flexible high school curricula options (online education for example), differentiated instruction, flex scheduling, dual college enrollment, etc. Again, incentives for both the public school systems and other alternative high school providers must be encouraged. The Department of College Labor’s Workforce Investment Act for Youth and Youth Opportunity Grants allocated \$8.7 million for youth ages 14-21 in FY’01. While the focus of these programs is largely on out-of-school youth, this funding represents significant opportunity for increasing the high school graduation rate for both in-school and out-of-school youth.

With one in eight high school diplomas awarded in Maryland through the GED and other alternative diploma programs, it is time to fully integrate and expand alternative high school certification into Maryland’s K-12 educational system. As evidenced by the introduction of Maryland’s state-level high school assessments and the national revision of the 2002 GED, educational standards and resultant accountability are rising. These higher expectations may potentially result in greater high school dropout rates and lower GED pass rates even as research

findings on wage earnings suggest that people are better served by completing a traditional high school degree than one of the alternative diploma programs. Yet in its current K-12 public school system, Maryland offers few options to the general high school diploma beyond the traditional Carnegie unit “seat time” formula. School-aged youth are increasingly choosing or being directed towards the GED: the average age of GED test-takers has been declining and includes a high percentage of school age youth. The challenge for Maryland is to insure that pass rates for high school equivalency programs increase while insisting that high school graduation rates also rise. As importantly, recognizing the economic value of post-secondary education, a system should be developed to provide a seamless articulation between GED acquisition and post-secondary education enrollment. All of this will require a greater focus and funding commitment to Adult Education from the State than what has been granted to date. Only in this way, will Maryland be able to reduce the gap between high school dropouts and graduates, and ultimately open the door to post-secondary options that lead to real wage gains.

The full text of the “New, More Rigorous GED Tests” is available on The Abell Foundation’s website at www.abell.org. or Write to: The Abell Foundation, 111 S. Calvert Street, 23rd Floor, Baltimore, MD 21202

ABELL SALUTES:

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establishments undergo a Hazardous Analysis and Critical Control Point inspection at least once a year. Last November, however, the backlog of uninspected food establishments had climbed into the hundreds, a fact brought to light by a news report.

The issue was immediately addressed at the Health Department’s next CitiStat session. It turned out that though the department had standards for how often restaurant inspections should occur, productivity standards for inspectors had never been developed. The department was challenged to eliminate the inspections backlog as soon as possible.

With the help of CitiStat, the Health Department developed performance stan-

dards for its inspectors that require them to visit more restaurants during the workday, while maintaining the highest quality of inspections. The department systematically reduced the backlog of uninspected restaurants, and in just a few months announce that the backlog had been eliminated.

- Meter readers from the Department of Public Works Bureau of Water and Wastewater are required to read every water meter in the city system four times each year. According to Mayor O’Malley, “When we started measuring this activity through CitiStat we saw that the bureau was incurring a considerable amount of overtime at the end of each quarter, trying to satisfy requirements. Over recent months, watching this area very closely every two weeks in CitiStat, we find that we haven’t used an hour of overtime to read water meters since the end of the first quarter of

2001. That’s six months and counting.”

- In some cases analysis of a complaint using CitiStat data shows that the complaint is not well-founded. For example, when a television station aired a news story on what it said was as a high number of number of broken fire hydrants in the Baltimore area, the Mayor’s office immediately took up the matter with the Bureau of Water and Wastewater and the Fire Department. Tracking by CitiStat revealed that, in fact, the condition of the city’s hydrants did not and does not represent a risk.

The Abell Foundation salutes CitiStat, for its well-directed, energetic efforts in meeting citizens’ expectations of their government and for contributing to the improvement of the quality of life in Baltimore.