

# *Is the Dream of KERA Over?*

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S O L U T I O N S

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# ***Is the Dream of KERA Over?***

## **- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY -**

A foundational goal of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) is to develop an educational system in which all students can learn at the highest level. But recent policy decisions indicate that state education officials are losing faith in KERA's lofty ambitions.

An example is evident in the Kentucky Department of Education's (KDE) success in persuading lawmakers to approve House Bill 178 (HB 178) during the 2004 General Assembly. Passage of this bill led to the creation of a watered-down secondary General Educational Development (GED) program for Kentucky's public schools.

When HB 178 was introduced, legislators were told it would merely change Kentucky's definition of a high-school dropout to agree with the definition used by the U.S. Department of Education. By itself, manipulating dropout statistics with GED data is incompatible with KERA's goal of increasing Kentucky's education levels.

However, the far more serious consequences of HB 178 did not become apparent until after its passage. The legislation is being used to create a second-tier high school credential based on passing the GED test. The consequences of HB 178 are highly problematic for the following reasons:

- *Education standards are lowered.*
- *Dropout rates are further distorted.*
- *Inappropriate pressures are applied to schools and students.*
- *The validity of the existing GED program suffers.*
- *There are many unresolved legal issues.*
- *There are no cost estimates or funding authority for the program.*

What can be done?

- *Legislators can repeal HB 178.*
- *The current GED program can be adjusted to better capture high school dropouts.*
- *Continue to hold Kentucky's public schools accountable by requiring GED recipients to be considered dropouts.*
- *Determine if Extended School Services meets class scheduling needs for potential dropouts.*

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If the goal of state educators is to benefit school administrators looking for ways to manipulate their dismal dropout rates and test scores, then the new GED program is the right choice. However, choosing that path represents a major policy shift that signals a belief among the state's education leaders and lawmakers that KERA's dream – that all of Kentucky's children can achieve at a high level – remains an elusive fantasy.

# ***Is the Dream of KERA Over?***

## **- EVIDENCE THAT KERA'S GOALS ARE FADING -**

*" ... there is a history of reform in the last 30 years that has lost sight of the goal."*

– Kentucky Education Commissioner Gene Wilhoit  
Kentucky Board of Education meeting, Feb. 2003 <sup>1</sup>

Commissioner Wilhoit made his comment while addressing education reform efforts in general. But it also serves as a prophetic statement about a recent change in the direction of Kentucky's education program. This alteration marks a profound departure from policy that has existed since the highly acclaimed Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) was enacted in 1990.

The recent decision by state education officials to implement a Secondary General Educational Development (Secondary GED) program offers disturbing evidence that Kentucky is losing sight of KERA's original and important goal that all students can learn at high levels. This new certificate program was the result of House Bill 178 (HB 178) and reduces education standards and diminishes the future opportunities of its recipients (See Attachment 1).

Worse yet, it appears that the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), which vigorously supported implementation of the Secondary GED track at the behest of a few school superintendents, is being motivated primarily by an attempt to obscure unsatisfactory dropout numbers. Using the GED to hide low graduation rates and test scores is highly inconsistent with the original goals of KERA.

## **- CHANGING THE DEFINITION OF A DROPOUT -**

In an attempt to portray GED holders as public high school successes, HB 178 changes the long-held definition of a dropout student in a way that places the policy in clear conflict with KERA and the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. Even the head of the GED Testing Service is on record against considering GED recipients as having taken the most productive path.

GED recipients are "dropouts," says Joan Chikos Auchter, executive director of the GED Testing Service. "That is what they are. They are dropouts who went on to get a certificate." <sup>2</sup>

The KDE is being motivated primarily by an attempt to obscure unsatisfactory dropout numbers.

It is disturbing that Kentucky’s education establishment ignores so much evidence just to make itself look better on dropout statistics and state testing (See Attachment 3 for even more evidence).

**- FAST-PACED GED TRACK AIMED AT STRUGGLING STUDENTS -**

The new regulations generally establish reduced standards for students in the Secondary GED track. According to KDE staff notes and testimony, the Secondary GED track is intended to be a “fast-track” program with loose entry requirements.<sup>3</sup>

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To enter the new program, students will only be required to have a ninth grade CTBS/5 score of 29 on the Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) scale. That is equivalent to a mere 15th percentile score – an incredibly low hurdle providing virtually no academic entry restrictions.<sup>4</sup>

Students will be allowed to enter the new GED program at the age of 16, and there is no restriction on when they can graduate from the program. Thus, there are no constraints to prohibit schools from creating academically shallow, fast-track secondary GED programs.

The new program’s regulations also allow schools to avoid accountability for poor dropout rates. If a dropout gets a GED quickly – by October following the school year in which they dropped out – the schools are not required to count the student as a dropout.

**- NEW GED WILL AFFECT CATS PARTICIPATION -**

HB 178 contains language requiring students who take part in the new GED program to take the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) assessment. Lawmakers clearly wanted to prevent schools from using the new GED as a gimmick to bypass school accountability. Yet the KDE’s regulations have been established in a way that will result in few students actually staying in school long enough to take those portions of CATS that weigh heaviest in a school’s overall rating.

**Table 1**  
*Official Kentucky Dropout Figures by Year and Grade<sup>5</sup>*

	2000	2001	2002
9th	2532	2167	1652
10th	2567	2490	2034
11th	2447	2136	1963
12th	1808	1812	1520
<b>Grade 9 + 10 Percent of Total</b>	<b>54.5%</b>	<b>54.1%</b>	<b>51.4%</b>



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A majority of Kentucky’s students drop out either in the ninth- or 10<sup>th</sup>-grade (see Table 1 above) – most after having been held back in previous grades.

Students who progress normally usually reach the age of 16 near the end of their 10<sup>th</sup>-grade year. But those retained in the ninth-grade after reaching the age of 16 are going to be two grades behind as soon as their original freshman classmates finish 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The new Secondary GED program allows students in this situation to start on the GED during the summer while their peer group waits for the fall semester of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade to begin.

Most new GED students will still be considered ninth-graders and will never have been exposed to any instruction at a higher grade.

The ninth- and 10<sup>th</sup>-grade portion of CATS accounts for only a very small portion of a school’s overall score with the bulk of the assessments being administered in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Students who are still nominal ninth-graders who begin preparing for the GED during the summer and complete the track by October will not be required to participate in the portion of CATS that weighs heaviest in a school’s scores. They quite simply will leave school before they can be tested. Even students who are nominal 10<sup>th</sup>-graders upon entry into a Secondary GED also won’t be around long enough to take much of the CATS.

The new Secondary GED policy dictates that students are to receive a minimum of 15 hours of direct instruction each week. However, it is unclear if this is to be the amount of time dedicated to GED preparation or if it also includes continued instruction on the regular classroom curriculum.

The waiver request submitted by the KDE to the GED Testing Service, which is required in order for the new policy to be approved, implies that the 15-hour minimum refers to dedicated GED preparation time and that students will spend the remainder of their time participating in the school’s regular program.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless, students in the new GED track will clearly participate in far less of Kentucky’s standard curriculum program than students striving for a regular high school diploma. Thus requiring GED students to take the CATS assessment would be extremely unfair.

### - WHY THE RUSH? -

Not only can the new Secondary GED program be used for schools to offer a more rosy analysis of their dropout numbers, it can also be a tool to produce artificially high CATS scores.

Most new GED students will still be considered ninth-graders

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It's a policy that's likely to impact more than just potential dropout students. The temptation will be nearly irresistible for administrators to push even somewhat stronger students who otherwise would get their regular diploma into the fast-track GED. These students likely won't remain in school long enough to take the meat of the CATS assessment and thus won't drag down the school's average.

At the August 2004 meeting of the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE), representatives of the education department acknowledged that the new Secondary GED would likely result in many of its participants totally avoiding the 11<sup>th</sup>- and 12<sup>th</sup>-grade CATS tests. Yet even while conceding that such policy represents serious problems, the department continues to push ahead with an ill-advised policy.

The temptation will be nearly irresistible for administrators to push students into the fast-track GED.

The desirability of any education program – GED or otherwise – that requires a rush to completion is questionable. Such a program cannot offer much of an academic environment and obviously conflicts with some of KERA's most important principles.

#### - DOES "ALL" STILL MEAN "ALL"? -

The 1990 Kentucky General Assembly approved House Bill 940 (HB 940), which launched KERA. The law has been described as "one of the most comprehensive pieces of education reform legislation ever enacted in the United States."<sup>7</sup>

HB 940 made considerable changes ranging from the way schools are governed, financed and evaluated to alterations in curriculum that supporters hoped would cause widespread and dramatic improvements in Kentuckians' overall education.

Section 3 of HB 940 clearly states the primary aim of KERA and the changes it would bring: "Schools shall expect a high level of achievement for all students."<sup>8</sup> This goal was highlighted by the new state Board of Education, which HB 940 also reformed. The board made it clear that its guidelines for policy decisions would be made on the premise that all children can learn at high levels.

In the ensuing 15 years, the state's education officials have consistently repeated their commitment that "all means all," and that this doctrine should serve as the foundation for Kentucky's education policy. Education officials sought to reassure Kentuckians throughout KERA's first generation that the goal was high standards for all students and that no second-level criterion would be accepted.

Examples of KDE's commitment to the principle that all students can learn at a high level abound. In 1997, a KDE staff note prepared for the

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KBE (see Attachment 2) noted that the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS), which was the state's assessment prior to CATS, "is intended to increase learning for *all* the state's children [emphasis added]." The 10th anniversary report on KERA stated " ... the new system set the same achievement goals for every Kentucky child and for every Kentucky school."<sup>10</sup>

In an August 2002 KDE staff note updating the state's efforts to prevent dropouts, KERA's early goals were again reiterated.

"The Department's and local school districts' dropout programs must maintain the focus of high accountability and high achievement for all students, including those that are at risk of failure," the note said.<sup>11</sup>

Before the new Secondary GED, no second-rate standard was acceptable.

**- MORE DROPOUTS, FEWER GRADUATES -**

A favorite mantra of supporters is the Secondary GED policy will keep potential high school dropouts from leaving school empty handed. Yet a piece of paper that represents little true accomplishment is a shallow promise, at best.

By creating this program for dropouts, supporters openly admit that Kentucky has failed to reach KERA's goal of providing the highest standards for all students, "including those that are at risk of failure" noted in the KDE staff note mentioned earlier.

Educators should be concerned about dropouts. Since the inception of KERA, a smaller percentage of Kentucky's public school students have graduated from high school with a regular diploma (see Figure 1 below).<sup>12</sup>

The state's public high school graduation rate was actually higher in the latter part of the 1980s before KERA was even enacted. Kentucky's graduation rate even briefly rose above the national average in the early 1990s before KERA really began to impact schools. However, a constant decline in performance persisted throughout the rest of the decade.

While Kentucky made a small recovery in the rate following the 1999-2000 school year, the most recent public school data shows that in 2002, the state's graduation rate remained below the national average. The state's current rate remains well below pre-KERA figures as well.

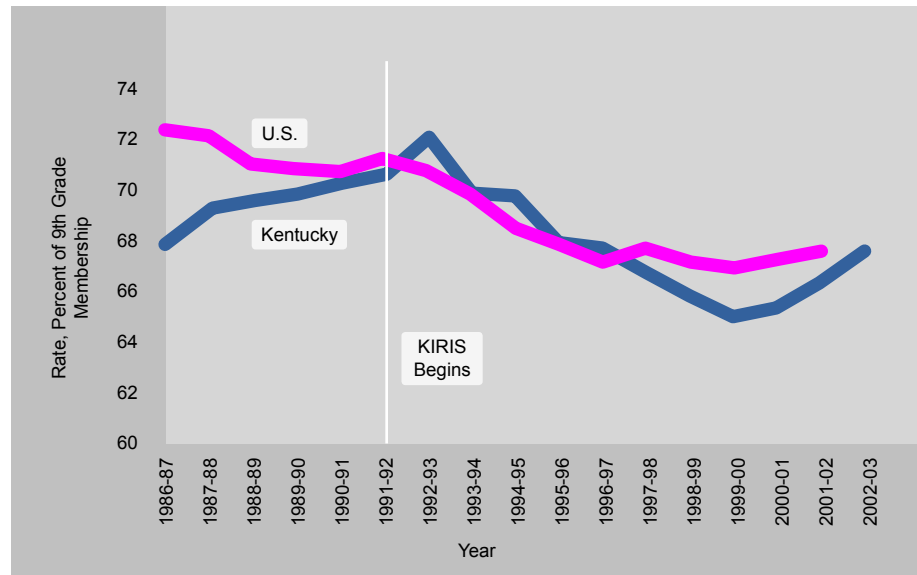
The KDE's own nonacademic statistics, which include the department's dropout and graduation data as well as fall enrollment figures and the number of students prevented from moving to the next grade, raise

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additional questions about the department's dropout claims.<sup>13</sup> A closer look at the KDE figures indicates that Kentucky's true public high school dropout figures probably should be at least 50 percent higher than the department officially reports (See Attachment 7).

**Figure 1**

*Kentucky and U.S. Graduation Rates By School Year (Percentage of 9th Grade Fall Enrollment that Graduates Four Years Later)<sup>14</sup>*



Lawmakers are so concerned about the department's reports that they ordered an audit of Kentucky's dropout data in August

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**- QUESTIONABLE KDE DROPOUT INFORMATION -**

Lawmakers are so concerned about the department's reports that they ordered an audit of Kentucky's dropout data in August 2003.<sup>15</sup> The audit has been delayed until 2005 because KDE's current database is not detailed enough to conduct the appraisal. Such inadequacy does not generate optimism that the department has dropout reporting under control.

But even the KDE's official dropout numbers, which, doubtless understate the true severity of Kentucky's predicament, spurred lawmakers to call for action. Policymakers see what all Kentuckians need to know: Even the KDE's understated dropout rates are more than large enough to fuel concern that Kentucky's public education system is not functioning in a way that results in all children – including those “at risk of failure” – learning at high levels.

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**- WRONG PROGRAM, WRONG REASONS -**

Policymakers are right in claiming that something must be done about Kentucky's high dropout and low graduation rates. But HB 178 and its GED program is the wrong solution.

Not only is this bill's tactic of using GEDs to hide problems with graduation rates a poor choice, but the policy it creates contains additional deficiencies that could further decay the academic quality of Kentucky's public schools. We now turn our attention to some of those concerns.

**- KERA, NCLB AGREE: GED NOT THE SAME AS A DIPLOMA -**

Some of the state's most influential editorial pages continue to refer to a GED certificate as a "diploma." It is not despite the fact that the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) dropout formula treats GEDs as though they are equivalent to regular diplomas.

Many well-respected national research groups that address graduation and dropout rates offer extensive criticism of the NCES formula. Among these groups are the Urban Institute, The Manhattan Institute and the National Bureau on Educational Testing and Public Policy.

Each derides formulas that allow public schools to treat GEDs as an indication of success. Special criticism is reserved for policies that allow schools to use GED statistics to obscure the real rate of success in the number of students who obtain a regular high school diploma.<sup>16, 17, 18</sup>

So much concern has been expressed around the nation about the NCES dropout reporting formula that a federal task force is considering changing it. As a result, legislation such as HB 178 could be rendered obsolete.<sup>19</sup>

Instead of misleading the citizens of Kentucky with artificially reduced dropout figures, the General Assembly should push the NCES to make appropriate changes in the definition of dropouts so that all state school systems are held to the same reporting standards that Kentucky observed prior to HB 178.

As mentioned earlier, KERA frowned upon counting GEDs as an indicator of a school's success. KERA's original policy insisted that students who dropped out of Kentucky's public schools should be classified as dropouts in assessments of the state's performance – even if they eventually earned a GED.

The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act echoes KERA's original sentiment against treating GEDs as a high school success.

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While NCLB does not deal with dropout statistics per se, it requires states to compute closely related – and more accurate – graduation rates. Federal law explicitly prevents states from using GEDs to inflate graduation rate figures. Only regular diplomas may be considered.<sup>20</sup>

**- RESEARCHERS AGREE: GED TESTS NOT AS RIGOROUS -**

The general conclusion of respected researchers on the issue is that the GED simply is not a rigorous test, or at least not as challenging as the regular high school track. Credible research also indicates that GED recipients do not do as well later in life as regular diploma holders (Attachment 3).

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Compelling commentary on the rigor of the GED tests was recently issued by the American Diploma Project (ADP), of which Kentucky is a participating state. The ADP report, which is posted on KDE's Web site ([www.education.ky.gov](http://www.education.ky.gov)), clearly shows that GED exams are far less demanding than the work required for a high school diploma.

The ADP reports that the GED reading assessment involves nothing more challenging than the 10th-grade level of difficulty with half of the questions appropriate for sixth-grade to eighth-grade students. The research implies that students with no more than a ninth-grade reading proficiency level will easily get a passing score while students with even lower reading skills might also be able to pass the test.

The ADP study expresses concern that the GED reading test does not require adequate ability to qualify for postsecondary education and that the writing assessment is weighted at an even lower grade level than the reading portion.

The report also identifies technical errors in some questions, raising additional concerns about the value and validity of the GED test. Technical errors give students with advanced knowledge of the mistakes an advantage, making "teaching to the test" activities more relevant to the final score than real subject knowledge and skill.

Of course, the GED Testing Service disputes claims about the program's rigor. The service boasts that 40 percent of high school graduates cannot pass the GED. But is such an assertion credible? Research shows that GED recipients who do go on to college are far less successful than regular high school diploma holders (See Attachment 3, Report 8). That would seem to suggest that at least for the college bound, the 40-percent factor does not apply.

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## - SKEWED GED SCORING SCALE -

The GED scoring scale is determined from the results of a GED exam given to a sample group of 12th-graders during the second semester of their senior year.

The senior students in this sample group get little, if any, advanced test preparation. Because they take the test “cold” and are not aware of possible technical errors in the questions, it’s likely the students would score lower than if they were prepared.

However, additional factors make it even more likely the GED service’s 40-percent claim is inaccurate.

Educators across Kentucky point out that senior student apathy – especially in the second semester – is a problem on any test. This is the main reason why educators shifted the majority of Kentucky’s own assessment program from 12th grade to lower grades in the mid 1990s. Educators were concerned that seniors simply were not providing a good-faith effort because the tests had no consequences for individual students.

That same apathy impacts the GED sample of second-semester high school seniors. If there were real repercussions for 12th-graders in the GED sample tests, the percentage with high scores would undoubtedly be higher. Thus, the norming scores for the GED undoubtedly do not represent good faith efforts from real high school graduates.

The GED technical manual provides additional proof of an apathy problem in the GED’s sample. It claims that the scores from the sample of graduating seniors show much more variability than those of the actual GED candidates.<sup>21</sup> The manual says that difference is because the demographics of the sampling group (high school seniors) is more variable than the makeup of the group of GED candidates themselves. This is doubtful.

Unlike the high school seniors used to determine the GED scoring scale, actual GED candidates range in age from 16 to more than 60 years old. Their level of maturity and life experiences combined with the evolution of education during this wide time frame makes the GED participants much more diverse than the sample of high school seniors. Also, GED candidates drop out of school for a large variety of reasons. Not all are weak students.

Therefore, it seems more likely that educational diversity in the GED candidates themselves is probably far greater than the variability of the group of high-school students.

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Thus, the more plausible explanation for the scoring diversity noted by the GED Testing Service is that some smart students in the score-norming sample of 12th-graders offer lackadaisical efforts on the test, which increases the variability of the group's scores.

It is probable that if those 12th-graders had real stakes in the exam, sample scores would be much higher and that the 40-percent claim would be easily disproved.

**- 'AN ENCOURAGED DROPOUT PROGRAM' -**

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Fast-track GED policies in other states similar to the program that Kentucky educators want to implement impair rather than aid education reform efforts.

For example, the New York Times reported that increasing numbers of New York City high school students are bailing out of regular diploma programs to take the GED. New York's education establishment made it more convenient for these students to drop out of school by setting up numerous GED preparation centers throughout the city.<sup>22</sup>

The New York Post reported that the city's GED program might actually have contributed to a rise in the number of students who end up with neither a regular diploma nor GED certificate.<sup>23</sup>

Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who apparently considers the policy to have created an undesirable trend, announced that several of the GED centers would be closed down. Bloomberg believes the money being spent to make dropping out of school more convenient can better be used for programs that help keep students in school and working toward a regular diploma.

But the problem is not limited to New York City. Duncan Chaplin of the Urban Institute was quoted in the New York Times as saying he had "found pretty strong evidence that the GED option has been encouraging kids to drop out of high schools nationwide."<sup>24</sup>

In fact, a two-track education policy was considered in Kentucky in the past. A program based on the Certificates of Initial Mastery and Advanced Mastery, which closely resembles the fast-track GED approach, was rejected in the mid 1990s.



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## - MISLEADING LAWMAKERS, AVOIDING ACCOUNTABILITY -

Policymakers are right to demand action to address Kentucky's high dropout and low graduation rates. But the education hierarchy's GED program is the wrong solution.

Based on the testimony offered before HB 178 was approved, it's likely that many lawmakers who supported the bill were not aware that the KDE would use the legislation to create a Secondary GED certificate.

Among those who testified for HB 178 were the superintendents of the Burgin and Harrodsburg independent school districts in Mercer County.

Burgin Superintendent Richard Webb and Harrodsburg Superintendent H.M. Snodgrass offered legislators the distinct impression that their primary goal in supporting the bill was to align Kentucky's dropout formula with the rules used by the NCES.<sup>25</sup> However, in a newspaper interview following their testimony, Snodgrass and Webb made it clear that they want to use the Secondary GED program as a way to improve their school districts' dropout numbers.

Former Rep. Jack Coleman, who represented Mercer and Anderson counties, shepherded HB 178 through the House and Senate. Coleman supports both the new GED program and the manner in which the superintendents plan to use it.

"What we are finding was one dropout or bad test score could have an adverse effect on these small school districts," said Coleman, who was quoted in The (Danville) Advocate Messenger.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, the newspaper article includes a denial by Coleman and the superintendents that they are trying to avoid accountability. Yet since dropout rates are part of the state's accountability system, KERA offers definite benefits to schools with lower ones. But the benefits are intended only for schools where dropout rates have actually declined – not for districts sly enough to use statistical gyrations to offer a more favorable impression to lawmakers and parents.

There can be little argument that the proposed secondary GED program will allow schools to report artificially improved dropout rates and inflate their accountability scores. Yet the negative, if unintended, consequences, of offering the new GED certificate are certain to outweigh whatever embarrassment some school districts are trying to avoid.

Repercussions are sure to include a large number of Kentucky 16- and 17-year-olds needlessly ending their public school careers early with a

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certificate that represents far less academic accomplishment and greatly reduced earning power than a regular high school diploma.

The push for a new GED program by some superintendents indicates yet another prophetic fulfillment of Wilhoit's statement that many reform efforts have "lost sight of the goal." Wilhoit was not talking about Kentucky, but he could have been.

### - LEGAL 'CATCH-22' -

There are a couple of legal problems with the Secondary GED plan that have not been addressed by KDE.

Finally, there are a couple of legal problems with the Secondary GED plan that have not been addressed by KDE and which policymakers must be aware of.

First, the policy may violate legal requirements that forbid students to be tested on material that they have not had a fair chance to learn.<sup>26</sup> The new plan requires schools to test Secondary GED candidates with CATS for as long as the students remain in school. Yet a student placed into the rapid pace GED path simply will not receive the same level of CATS content preparation as students in the regular high school track.

The GED Testing Service requires that a fair portion of a GED candidate's time be spent studying for the GED exam. The new program's regulations also require Secondary GED candidates to spend part of their time on service learning or cooperative extension activities (See Attachment 6).

These requirements will divert effort away from study aimed at passing the CATS assessments. The Secondary GED regulations make it impossible for a GED student to receive near the same amount of CATS preparation that his regular diploma track contemporaries are receiving. This may well be a violation of the law.

Policymakers also need to be aware of an unresolved legal "Catch 22" concerning how students with learning disabilities would be served in the Secondary GED program.

The GED Testing Service does allow accommodations for some individuals with disabilities. But the types of accommodations allowed and the rules for qualifying for them have not been harmonized with those offered to learning disabled students taking CATS tests.

Kentucky allows learning disabled students considerable latitude in the types of testing accommodations they receive on CATS. (The most controversial of these adjustments makes it legal to vocally *read* "reading tests" to these students.)

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The disabilities issue could be further complicated by the fact that federal law deals with discrimination against students with disabilities and generally makes it illegal to exclude them from most programs. Federal law mandates that these students receive the same accommodations on any test they take in the school system.

The resulting legal conflict is that some disabled students could be prevented from taking the Secondary GED because the schools cannot legally provide their unique accommodations without violating GED testing standards. On the other hand, the school will surely be breaking the law if it does not allow disabled students entry into a GED program.

## **LAWMAKERS SHOULD REPEAL HB 178**

### **- NEW PROGRAM NOT NEEDED -**

Kentucky's education officials have failed to show how the proposed Secondary GED created by HB 178 is the best policy for our students. Indeed, all indications are that such a program will move Kentucky away from KERA's lofty goals that include the belief that all children can learn at the highest level.

But it's the failure to prove the necessity of the new program that provides an even stronger impetus for lawmakers to put a halt to KDE's plans.

### **- ADJUST CURRENT GED PROGRAM TO CAPTURE DROPOUTS -**

If the real goal of the KDE is to help dropout students by quickly enrolling them into a GED program, the current adult GED system permits the action right now. (See Attachment 5 for the current adult GED regulations.)

The existing GED regulations require 16-year-old GED applicants to obtain an exemption from the superintendent of the school district in which they reside. Of course, the existing program offers no inducements for superintendents, such as the opportunity to artificially inflate test scores or lower dropout rates. As a result, some superintendents are not issuing waivers.

Lawmakers could easily make the current GED program accessible to high school dropouts as quickly as the proposed Secondary GED track by removing the need for a superintendent's waiver.

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This approach would not only spare Kentucky taxpayers from unsound policy that creates another costly program, but it would also keep the pressure on schools to do everything possible to prevent students from dropping out.

**- SECONDARY GED STUDENTS DON'T  
HAVE ADULT GED ATTITUDES -**

Business owners and college admissions officers are going to consider Secondary GED recipients as students who take the easy way out and are poor decision makers. Adult GED recipients, on the other hand, demonstrate important positive attitude shifts that prove they are serious about reviving their education.

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Their better attitudes make adult GED holders a reasonable risk both for businesses and schools of higher education. The “fast-track” Secondary GED graduate, however, likely will have very different attitudes. Many if not most Secondary GED recipients will be looking for a quick way out, not a way back in. These recipients will not recognize that leaving school early without a full education and the related diploma is a mistake.

Thus, allowing this new program actually endangers the reputation of the current adult-based GED program by flooding the market with a new breed of GED holders who are less desirable than adult recipients. These would be unfortunate circumstances because the adult GED has performed a valuable role for its students who are serious about reviving their educational and career opportunities.

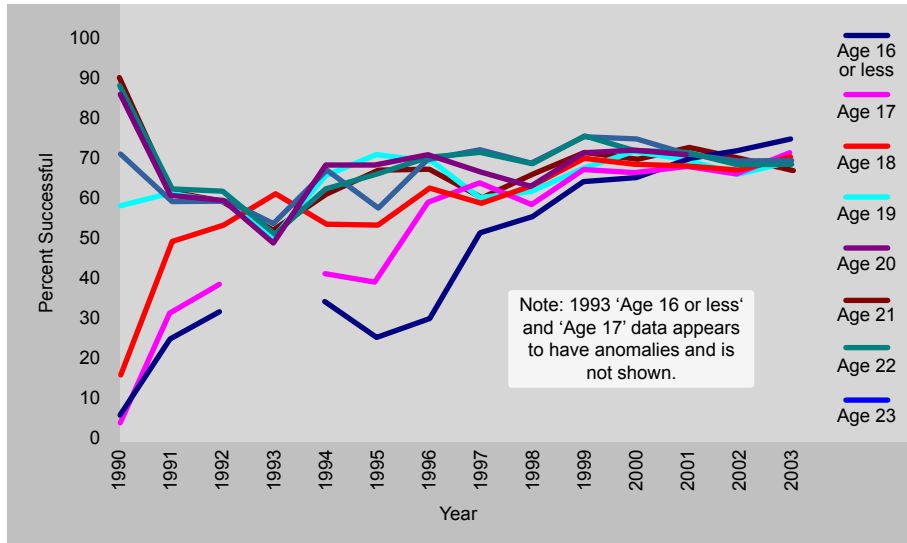
**- KDE'S RESISTANCE BASED ON FAULTY EVIDENCE -**

The KDE couches its opposition to adjusting the adult-based GED to let dropouts participate with claims that the current program poorly serves younger children.

While it is true that the current GED does not offer students free lunches and transportation – as would the new program – research indicates that the adult program does an exemplary job with younger students.

Figure 2 (top of next page) shows the success rate for younger students attempting the adult-based GED test has greatly improved during the past 15 years. In fact, younger students now do even slightly better than older GED participants, which disproves KDE's argument.

**Figure 2**  
**GED Success Rate in Calendar Year**  
**Percent of Those Tested Who Received a Certificate<sup>27</sup>**



Note: After discussion with the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, some of the 1993 data appears to have an anomaly and is not presented.

There have been no public estimates on the price tag of a new Secondary GED program. But it is likely to be costly.

One reason the adult GED program functions well with Kentuckians of all ages is that it is student-paced. Many dropouts are unlikely to receive the extra help most will need in a fast-paced environment. The adult system might actually be more beneficial to such students than the fast-track Secondary GED.

In researching this report, it was discovered that the adult GED program has good success with younger students because it offers very flexible class schedules, including weekend and after-school options. Kentucky’s Extended School Services (ESS) program is supposed to offer the same flexibility for students in the regular diploma track. However, it appears that the ESS policy is not working effectively for all students. Legislators should investigate the ineffectiveness of the ESS program.

**- SHOW US THE FUNDING -**

Another important indication that the legislature never intended to create a Secondary GED track is HB 178’s lack of spending authority for such a program.

Funding for a new program or agency is usually either included in the bill establishing the function or in the state’s spending plan. However, HB 178 does not include expenditures for a new GED project and appears written to contemplate only the use of the adult GED program.

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Also, Kentucky is presently operating without an approved budget bill. Under a continuing funding ruling issued by the courts, there is no authority for the governor to establish a new program. It is possible that the Secondary GED program may have been created without proper authority or funding. If legislators do decide to move ahead with implementation of the program, they must properly authorize funding for it.

Also, there have been no public estimates on the price tag of a new Secondary GED program. But it is likely to be costly.

With more than 30 percent of Kentucky's current high school students failing to get a regular diploma, the potential costs for the GED program could be very substantial. Kentucky's schools claim to already be reeling from the costs of administering existing programs. Adding still more demands – possibly very expensive ones – is not going to improve their financial condition.

Whether schools choose to do the GED instruction in-house or by contract, a new program will require additional staff and more money – resources that Kentucky's public schools simply don't have. Trying to provide them may strain schools to the breaking point. How are they going to cope?

Besides, the state's CATS assessment is already one of the most expensive testing programs in the country. Adding even more expense to introduce a separate GED test into schools is not going to make the state's testing bill look any better.

Unlike the current GED, which is paid for by dropouts, the public schools will still be required to provide transportation, reduced-cost meals and supplies for those students in the fast-track Secondary GED program. Such demands will add further strain to tight school budgets.

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**- CONCLUSION -**

Despite all attempts on the part of schools, parents and communities, some high school students will insist on dropping out of school and taking the GED. It seems appropriate to allow those students – after thorough counseling for them and their parents – to enter the existing adult GED program.

However, it is highly inappropriate to support attempts by public education officials to usurp the current successful GED process by creating a new program that diverts resources away from Kentucky’s public schools while distorting dropout rates and test scores.

The emphasis of Kentucky’s public school educators should remain on helping students get their high school diploma, not providing greater convenience for those who want alternatives that are far less demanding.

KERA’s original goals stipulated a single and high standard for all Kentucky public school students. The proposed Secondary GED program is an obvious contradiction to those goals and should be summarily and immediately rejected. Otherwise the dream of KERA will remain nothing more than an elusive fantasy.

**- ABOUT THE AUTHOR -**

Richard G. Innes is an education analyst at the Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions ([www.bipps.org](http://www.bipps.org)), Kentucky’s only free-market think tank.

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- ENDNOTES -

- 1 Statement by Gene Wilhoit, Kentucky Commissioner of Education, regarding "Policy Discussion on Refocusing Secondary Education," in Summary Minutes, Kentucky Board of Education, Regular Meeting, February 5-6, 2003, as presented in the *Kentucky Board of Education Agenda Book for the April 2-3, 2003 Regular Meeting*, Frankfort, KY, Page 16.
- 2 Auchter quote from Jay P. Greene, "GEDs Aren't Worth the Paper They're Printed On," *The City Journal*, Winter 2002, On-Line at: [http://www.city-journal.org/html/12\\_1\\_geds\\_arent.html](http://www.city-journal.org/html/12_1_geds_arent.html)
- 3 The author personally attended this KBE presentation and noted the specific use of the term "fast track" to describe the proposed GED program. Tapes of this testimony can be obtained from the Kentucky Department of Education, Frankfort, KY.
- 4 Calculated from a graph in *How Is The Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) Intended To Be Used?*, CTB/McGraw-Hill, Monterey, CA, Undated.
- 5 Dropout figures come from KDE, *Briefing Packet, Nonacademic Data, 1993 to 2002, State Totals*, July 30, 2003, page 6. Ninth Grade Fall Membership comes from the KDE Fall Growth Factor/Ethnicity Report for the 1998-99 school year, On-line at <http://www.kentuckyschools.org/>
- 6 See Guideline I-4 in the *KDE Waiver Application for the GED Option for Selected Secondary School Students*, Draft Dated 7-12-04, Kentucky Department of Education, Frankfort, KY. Guideline I-4 from the GED Testing Service indicates that sufficient instruction to the GED option must be provided, and the KDE says they will dedicate 15 hours a week. However, it isn't clear if this is dedicated solely to the GED curriculum or to both the GED and Kentucky curricular programs.
- 7 Thomas R. Guskey, Editor, *High Stakes Performance Assessment*, Corwin Press, Inc. Thousand Oaks, CA, 1994, Page 1.
- 8 *House Bill 940*, Kentucky General Assembly, Regular Session 1990, Part I, Section 3, (a).
- 9 KDE, Staff Note in KBE's *Agenda Book, Regular Meeting, February 4-5, 1997*, Frankfort, KY, Page 13.
- 10 KDE, *Results Matter, A Decade of Difference in Kentucky's Public Schools, 19990 - 2000*, Page viii.
- 11 KDE, Staff Note in KBE's *Agenda Book, Regular Meeting, August 7-8, 2002*, Frankfort, KY, Page 233.
- 12 See, for example, the author's extensive listing of KERA Updates dealing with these issues on line at: <http://www.eddatafrominnes.com>.
- 13 Richard G. Innes, *Exploration of the KDE Statistics for the Classes of 1999 to 2002*, , 27 May 2004, On-line at [www.eddatafrominnes.com](http://www.eddatafrominnes.com).
- 14 Kentucky graduation rates calculated by the author from fall enrollment data and graduation data from KDE. US graduation rates calculated by author from fall enrollment data and graduation data from various annual issues of the *Digest of Education Statistics*, National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, DC.



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- 15 Kentucky Legislature Program Review and Investigations Committee vote, August 2003.
  - 16 Christopher B. Swanson and Duncan Chaplin, *Counting High School Graduates when Graduates Count: Measuring Graduation Rates under the High Stakes of NCLB*, Education Policy Center, The Urban Institute, Washington, DC, Revised: February 25, 2003, Pages 2, 7, 10 - 11.
  - 17 Jay P. Greene, Ph.D. and Marcus A. Winters, *Public School Graduation Rates in the United States*, The Center for Civic Innovation, The Manhattan Institute, New York, NY, November 2002, Page 4.
  - 18 Walt Haney, et. Al., *The Education Pipeline in the United States 1970 –2000*, The National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy, Boston College, Boston, MA, January 2004, Pages 55, 61.
  - 19 Per a 17 Jun 04 telephone discussion with Chris Chapman, NCES Dropout Rate Project Officer, these meetings are being conducted by a contractor for NCES and meeting minutes are not available to the public. In a 7 Jun 04 telephone discussion Dr. Jay Greene of the Manhattan Institute confirmed the organization of this group. Greene is a member of the committee.
  - 20 No Child Left Behind, PL 107-110, GPO On-Line Version, Page 23.
  - 21 *The Tests of General Educational Development, Technical Manual*, First Edition, American Council of Education, Washington, DC, © 1993, Page 33.
  - 22 For an interesting overview of how the New York City schools have abused their school operated GED programs, see: "More Youths Opt for G.E.D., Skirting High-School Hurdle," *The New York Times*, May 15, 2004.
  - 23 Jay P. Greene & Greg Forster, "GEDs Just Don't Cut It," *The New York Post*, 1 October 2004.
  - 24 Mr. Chaplin is quoted in: "More Youths Opt for G.E.D., Skirting High-School Hurdle," *The New York Times*, May 15, 2004.
  - 25 Ann R. Harney, "Small Mercer Schools Help Change Laws," *Advocate-Messenger*, Danville, KY April 19, 2004.
  - 26 Ronald K. Hambleton, et. Al. *Review of the Measurement Quality of the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System, 1991 – 1994*, Office of Educational Accountability, Kentucky General Assembly, June 1995, Pages A-3 to A-10.
  - 27 Figure 2 is based on an analysis of data on GED test takers by age and year and GED's awarded by age and year from the Kentucky Council on Post-Secondary Education, Frankfort, KY, which currently manages the Kentucky GED programs. The associated data tables are in Attachment 5.

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- ATTACHMENT 1 -

**House Bill 178, Enrolled Version**

Note: House Bill 178 modified language from an earlier bill that was enacted in 1998. The changes are in bold typeface.

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**AN ACT relating to student dropouts.**

*Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky:*

**Section 1. KRS 158.145 is amended to read as follows:**

**(1) The General Assembly hereby finds that:**

- (a) Little progress has been made in reducing the state's student dropout rate;
- (b) The number of school dropouts in Kentucky is unacceptable;
- (c) The factors, such as lack of academic success, poor school attendance, lack of parental support and encouragement, low socioeconomic status, poor health, child abuse, drug and alcohol addictions, alienation from school and community, and other factors that are associated with an increased probability of students dropping out of school, occur long before the end of compulsory school age;
- (d) Students who drop out of school before graduation are less likely to have the basic capacities as defined in KRS 158.645 and the skills as defined in KRS 158.6451;
- (e) The number of school dropouts seriously interferes with Kentucky's ability to develop and maintain a well-educated and highly trained workforce;
- (f) The effects of students dropping out of school can be felt throughout all levels of society and generations in increased unemployment and underemployment, reduced personal and family incomes, increased crime, decreased educational, social, emotional, and physical well-being, and in increased needs for government services; and
- (g) The positive reduction in school dropouts can only be achieved by comprehensive intervention and prevention strategies.

**(2) The General Assembly declares on behalf of the people of the Commonwealth the following goals to be achieved by the year 2006:**

- (a) The statewide annual average school dropout rate will be cut by fifty percent (50%) of what it was in the year 2000. ***All students who drop out of a school during a school year and all students who have not graduated, fail to enroll in the school for the following school year, and do not transfer to another school, shall be included in the statewide annual average school dropout rate, except as provided in subsection (1)(b) of Section 2 of this Act;***
- (b) No school will have an annual dropout rate that exceeds five percent (5%); and
- (c) Each county will have thirty percent (30%) fewer adults between the ages of sixteen (16) and twenty-four (24) without a high school diploma or GED than the county had in the year 2000.

**Section 2. KRS 158.6455 is amended to read as follows:**

It is the intent of the General Assembly that schools succeed with all students and receive the appropriate consequences in proportion to that success.

- (1) (a) After receiving the advice of the Office of Education Accountability; the School Curriculum, Assessment, and Accountability Council; and the

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National Technical Advisory Panel on Assessment and Accountability, the Kentucky Board of Education shall promulgate administrative regulations in conformity with KRS 158.6471 and 158.6472 and KRS Chapter 13A to establish a system for identifying and rewarding successful schools. A reward shall be distributed to successful schools based on the number of full-time, part-time, and itinerant certified staff employed in the school on the last working day of the year of the reward to be used for school purposes as determined by the school council or, if none exists, the principal. The Kentucky Board of Education shall identify reports, paperwork requirements, and administrative regulations from which high performing schools shall be exempt.

- (b) Effective July 1, 2006, the Kentucky Board of Education shall reward schools that exceed their improvement goal and have an annual average dropout rate below five percent (5%). *A student shall be included in the annual average dropout rate if the student was enrolled in the school of record for at least thirty (30) days during the school year prior to the day he or she was recorded as dropping out of school. A student shall not be included in a school's annual average dropout rate if:*

- 1. The student is enrolled in a district-operated or district-contracted alternative program leading to a certificate of completion or a General Educational Development (GED) diploma; or*
- 2. The student has withdrawn from school and is awarded a General Educational Development (GED) diploma by October 1 of the following school year.*

- (c) A student enrolled in a district-operated or district-contracted alternative program shall participate in the appropriate assessments required by the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System established in KRS 158.6453.*

(2) After receiving the advice of the Office of Education Accountability; the School Curriculum, Assessment, and Accountability Council; and the National Technical Advisory Panel on Assessment and Accountability, the Kentucky Board of Education shall promulgate by administrative regulation in conformity with KRS 158.6471 and 158.6472 and KRS Chapter 13A the formula for a school accountability index to classify schools every two (2) years based on whether they have met their threshold level for school improvement, with school years 1998-2000 serving as the baseline. The formula shall reflect the school goals described in KRS 158.6451, except there shall be no measurement of the goals included in subsection (1)(b)3. and (1)(b)4.

(3) After receiving the advice of the Office of Education Accountability; the School Curriculum, Assessment, and Accountability Council; and the National Technical Advisory Panel on Assessment and Accountability, the Kentucky Board of Education shall promulgate an administrative regulation in conformity with KRS 158.6471 and 158.6472 and KRS Chapter 13A to establish appropriate consequences for schools failing to meet their threshold. The consequences shall be designed to improve teaching and learning and may include, but not be limited to:

- (a) A scholastic audit process under subsection (4) of this section to determine the appropriateness of a school's classification and to recommend needed assistance;
  - (b) School improvement plans;
  - (c) Eligibility to receive Commonwealth school improvement funds under KRS 158.805;
  - (d) Education assistance from highly skilled certified staff under KRS 158.782;
  - (e) Evaluation of school personnel; and
  - (f) Student transfer to successful schools.
- (4) (a) After receiving the advice of the Office of Education Accountability; the

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School Curriculum, Assessment, and Accountability Council; and the National Technical Advisory Panel on Assessment and Accountability, the Kentucky Board of Education shall promulgate an administrative regulation in conformity with KRS 158.6471 and 158.6472 and KRS Chapter 13A establishing the guidelines for conducting scholastic audits, which shall include the process for:

1. Appointing and training team members. The team shall include at least a highly skilled certified educator under KRS 158.782, a teacher, a principal or other local district administrator, a parent, and a university faculty member;
  2. Reviewing a school's learning environment, efficiency, and academic performance of students and the quality of the school council's data analysis and planning in accordance with KRS 160.345(2)(j);
  3. Evaluating each certified staff member assigned to the school. Only certified members of the audit team shall evaluate personnel; and
  4. Making a recommendation to the Kentucky Board of Education about the appropriateness of a school's classification and a recommendation concerning the assistance required by the school to improve teaching and learning.
- (b) For information purposes, the board shall also conduct scholastic audits in a sample of schools that achieved their goal and report to the public on the resulting findings regarding each aspect of the schools' operations required under subparagraph 2. of paragraph (a) of this subsection.
- (5) (a) Notwithstanding subsections (2), (3), and (4) of this section and KRS 158.645 to 158.805, the Kentucky Board of Education, after receiving the advice of the Office of Education Accountability; the School Curriculum, Assessment, and Accountability Council; and the National Technical Advisory Panel on Assessment and Accountability, shall promulgate an administrative regulation in conformity with the provisions of KRS 158.6471 and 158.6472 and in accordance with KRS Chapter 13A, establishing a formula for school accountability and a school improvement goal for each school for the 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 school years, with the 1996-97 and 1997-98 school years serving as the baseline. The formula shall be based on the academic and nonacademic components that are administered in a consistent manner during the four (4) year period.
- (b) 1. The Kentucky Board of Education shall reward schools that exceed their improvement goal and have an annual average dropout rate below eight percent (8%). *All students who drop out of school during a school year shall be included in a school's annual average school dropout rate, except as provided in subsection (1)(b) of this section.*
2. Schools failing to improve as identified by the board shall be reviewed by a scholastic audit team appointed by the state board under subsection (4) of this section. The audit shall not include a formal evaluation of each certified staff member. The team shall determine whether the school shall have highly skilled education assistance for advisory purposes. All schools failing to achieve their goal shall develop a school improvement plan and shall be eligible for school improvement funds under KRS 158.805.
- (6) After receiving the advice of the Office of Education Accountability; the School Curriculum, Assessment, and Accountability Council; and the National Technical Advisory Panel on Assessment and Accountability, the Kentucky Board of

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Education may promulgate by administrative regulation, in conformity with KRS 158.6471 and 158.6472 and KRS Chapter 13A, a system of district accountability that includes establishing a formula for accountability, goals for improvement over a two (2) year period, rewards for leadership in improving teaching and learning in the district, and consequences that address the problems and provide assistance when the district fails to achieve its goals set by the board.

(7) After receiving the advice of the Office of Education Accountability; the School Curriculum, Assessment, and Accountability Council; and the National Technical Advisory Panel on Assessment and Accountability, the Kentucky Board of Education shall promulgate administrative regulations in conformity with KRS 158.6471 and 158.6472 and KRS Chapter 13A, to establish a process whereby a school shall be allowed to appeal a performance judgment which it considers grossly unfair. Upon appeal, an administrative hearing shall be conducted in accordance with KRS Chapter 13B. The state board may adjust a performance judgment on appeal when evidence of highly unusual circumstances warrants the conclusion that the performance judgment is based on fraud or a mistake in computations, is arbitrary, is lacking any reasonable basis, or when there are significant new circumstances occurring during the biennial assessment period which are beyond the control of the school.

**Section 3. KRS 158.146 is amended to read as follows:**

(1) No later than December 30, 2000, the Kentucky Department of Education shall establish and implement a comprehensive statewide strategy to provide assistance to local districts and schools to address the student dropout problem in Kentucky public schools. In the development of the statewide strategy, the department shall engage private and public representatives who have an interest in the discussion. The statewide strategy shall build upon the existing programs and initiatives that have proven successful. The department shall also take into consideration the following:

- (a) Analyses of annual district and school dropout data as submitted under KRS 158.148 and 158.6453;
- (b) State and federal resources and programs, including, but not limited to, extended school services; early learning centers; family resource and youth service centers; alternative education services; preschool; service learning; drug and alcohol prevention programs; School-to-Careers; High Schools that Work; school safety grants; and other relevant programs and services that could be used in a multidimensional strategy;
- (c) Comprehensive student programs and services that include, but are not limited to, identification, counseling, mentoring, and other educational strategies for elementary, middle, and high school students who are demonstrating little or no success in school, who have poor school attendance, or who possess other risk factors that contribute to the likelihood of their dropping out of school; and
- (d) Evaluation procedures to measure progress within school districts, schools, and statewide.

(2) No state or federal funds for adult education and literacy, including but not limited to funds appropriated under KRS 164.041 or 20 U.S.C. sec. 9201 et seq., shall be used to pay for a high school student enrolled in an alternative program operated or contracted by a school district leading to a certificate of completion or a General Educational Development (GED) diploma.

(3) The department, with assistance from appropriate agencies, shall provide technical assistance to districts requesting assistance with dropout prevention strategies and the development of district and schoolwide plans.

~~(4)(3)~~ The department shall award grants to local school districts for dropout prevention programs based upon available appropriations from the General Assembly and in compliance with administrative regulations promulgated by the

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Kentucky Board of Education for this purpose. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the available dropout funds shall be directed to services for at-risk elementary and middle school students, including, but not limited to, identification, counseling, home visitations, parental training, and other strategies to improve school attendance, school achievement, and to minimize at-risk factors. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the funds shall be directed to services for high school students identified as likely to drop out of school, including, but not limited to, counseling, tutoring, extra instructional support, alternative programming, and other appropriate strategies. Priority for grants shall be awarded to districts that average, over a three (3) year period, an annual dropout rate exceeding five percent (5%).  
(5){(4)} The department shall disseminate information on best practices in dropout prevention in order to advance the knowledge for district and school level personnel to address the dropout problem effectively.

**- ATTACHMENT 2 -**

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STAFF NOTE

(NOTE: Emphasis Added in ***Bold Italics*** by Richard B. Innes)

Action/Discussion Item:

Dropout Definition/Guidelines

Applicable Statute(s) or Regulation(s):

KRS 158.145, KRS 158.146, KRS 158.6451, KRS 158.6453, 703 KAR 5:001, 703 KAR 5:020

Action Question:

Should the Kentucky Board of Education fully implement the National Center for Education Statistics' definition/guidelines of a 'dropout' by recognizing a GED recipient as a nondropout? ***Should the Kentucky Board of Education implement a Secondary GED program?***

History/Background:

Existing Policy. KRS 158.146 directed the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to provide assistance to local districts to address the student dropout problem in Kentucky. The General Assembly declared in KRS 158.145 that several percentages pertaining to dropouts be reduced by the year 2006. 703 KAR 5:020 explains how the dropout rate will be used for assessment and accountability purposes. Dropout is not defined in statute or regulation.

The Kentucky Department of Education's NonAcademic Data Report Guidelines requires dropouts be reported using the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) definition adopted by the Kentucky Board of Education. However, there are differences in the interpretation of the dropout definition as used by KDE to collect and report data and by other states that report the dropout data to the NCES (See Attachment A).

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The Instructions for Completing the Nonfiscal Surveys of the Common Core of Data as published by the NCES states that “a dropout is an individual who: ...3. Has not graduated from high school or completed a state or district approved educational program.” The directions further explain that a “state or district approved program is one that leads to the receipt of formal recognition of completion from school authorities. It may include ...programs administered by a secondary education agency...leading to a GED-based diploma.” Also, according to NCES guidelines a student who drops out of school but obtains a GED based diploma by October 1 of the following school year should not be counted as a dropout.

Currently, the Kentucky Department of Education considers any student who withdraws from school, enrolls in an adult GED program and subsequently receives a GED diploma a dropout.

In Kentucky, a student who drops out of school once they reach the compulsory attendance age of sixteen must wait to pursue a GED until they are seventeen years old, have been out of school for one year or the last class they were enrolled in has graduated to pursue a GED. A sixteen year old who feels that there are exigent circumstances involved may request an exemption of the previous requirements from the local school district superintendent. Some superintendents will not sign exemptions for students of their district; others are less strict with exemption approval.

In order to completely align Kentucky’s dropout definition with that of NCES, a nationally accepted model, KDE is recommending that a student who drops out of school but obtains a GED by October 1 of the following school year not be counted as a dropout. This will allow these students to pursue postsecondary options and ensure Kentucky’s data is comparable with the NCES criteria for purposes of national comparisons.

*Additionally, the Kentucky Department of Education does not have an approved secondary GED program, nor does the KDE have standards that districts are to follow in order to create and implement a district approved GED program leading to a GED-based diploma. The secondary GED program would not be appropriate for every potential dropout. However, it would allow credit deficient, but capable students to obtain an equivalency diploma rather than being counted as dropouts and would ensure comparable data for national comparison purposes by aligning with the NCES definition for dropout. These students would leave high school with the basic skills necessary for employment and further educational study. The KDE could set minimum standards, requirements and guidelines that would best fit the needs of Kentucky’s students. Increasing the number of students receiving a diploma, either by traditional or alternative means, will increase the pool of citizens who can avail themselves of postsecondary educational opportunities when they are ready.*

Policy Issues/Options:

1. Should the Board recognize a student who has received a GED by October 1 of the following school year as a non-dropout?
2. *Should the Board allow districts to define and implement secondary GED programs?*
3. *Should the Board approve the implementation of a state secondary GED program?*

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Options for the KBE include:

1. Approve the full implementation of the National Center for Education Statistics' definition/guidelines of 'dropout' and create a state-approved secondary GED program.
2. Approve the use of certain guidelines pertaining to the National Center for Education Statistics' definition of 'dropout'.
3. *Ask staff to gather more information regarding 'dropout' and/or secondary GED programs and bring it back to the next meeting.*
4. *Reject the full implementation of the National Center for Education Statistics' definition/guidelines of 'dropout' and the creation of a state-approved secondary GED program.*

Staff Recommendation(s) and Rationale(s):

Approve the full implementation of the National Center for Education Statistics' definition/guidelines of 'dropout' and create a state-approved secondary GED program. This will make Kentucky totally consistent with the NCES definition (a nationally applied model), allowing for comparable national comparisons, and allow a positive alternative for students who would have previously been classified as dropouts.

**Impact on Getting to Proficiency**

Goal 1 of the Kentucky Board of Education strategic goals for reaching proficiency by 2014 is "High Student Performance." By allowing the creation of a secondary GED program and not counting students who withdraw and receive a GED by October 1 of the following year as dropouts, the State Board would give many students who would have been dropouts, the ability to transition into adult life with better opportunities.

Groups Consulted and Brief Summary of Responses:

Local Superintendents Advisory Council  
Kentucky Directors of Pupil Personnel

All groups were supportive of the changes.

Contact Person:

Kyna Koch, Associate Commissioner  
Office of District Support Services  
502-564-3846

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Deputy Commissioner

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Commissioner of Education

Date: April 2004



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## - ATTACHMENT 3 -

### What Leading Researchers Say About the GED and the NCES Dropout Rate Definition — Extracts from Various Reports

Notes: Comments, including source page numbers, from Richard G. Innes in *bold italic* typeface. Emphasis in quotes is in boldface without italics.

#### 1. “High School Graduation Rates in the United States”

November 2001 (Revised April 2002)

Jay P. Greene, Ph. D. Senior Fellow, The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research

- The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) finds a national high school completion rate of 86% for the class of 1998. The discrepancy between the NCES’ finding and this report’s finding of a 71% rate is largely caused by NCES’ counting of General Educational Development (GED) graduates and others with alternative credentials as high school graduates, and by its reliance on a methodology that is likely to undercount dropouts. (*From Exec. Summary*)

People who received GEDs or other alternative credentials were not counted in the graduation rates calculated in this report for a number of reasons. First, the purpose of computing graduation rates here was to develop a measure of the success of high schools at graduating students. Recipients of GEDs are not, properly speaking, “graduates” of any high school. The fact that some students leave high school and later receive a credential from a community college, while in prison, or from some other organization cannot be credited to the high school. Similarly, a doctor cannot claim as “cures” patients who have transferred to other doctors for treatment.

**Second, the GED is simply not equivalent to a regular high school diploma. (*Emphasis Added*)** Similar effort and knowledge are not necessary to achieve a GED as are necessary to receive a typical high school diploma. Most importantly, the future prospects for recipients of GEDs are significantly worse than the future prospects for recipients of regular high school diplomas. In fact an analysis of national data by Stephen Cameron and Nobel prize winning economist, James Heckman, concludes that: “Exam-certified high school equivalents are statistically indistinguishable from high school dropouts.”<sup>14</sup>

Other researchers find moderate benefits of receiving a GED for certain groups, but no research supports the claim that the GED is equivalent to a regular high school diploma.<sup>15</sup> Counting GEDs in the same group as those awarded regular diplomas masks the true graduation rate.

(Page 6)

**(Note: The CPS is the Comprehensive Population Survey assembled by the US Census Bureau each month by telephone. Note how Greene here indicates that many are confused about whether family members even received a GED. Thus it appears there may be real problems with statistics dealing with the number of GEDs in this country)**

Fourth, the self-reporting bias in CPS is especially severe when it comes to distinguishing GED recipients from regular high school graduates. As Duncan Chaplin of the Urban Institute put it: “The major problem with the CPS data is that information on GED status appears to be very inaccurate.”<sup>19</sup> Chaplin reports that more than 60% of people initially described as GED recipients in the first survey are later described as regular high school graduates when re-surveyed the next year. As Chaplin ex-

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plains: "it appears that there is a very large amount of random misreporting of GED status in the CPS, perhaps because respondents are rushing to answer questions quickly and/or because they are not aware of the GED status of teenagers living in their households." Chaplin also reports that the number of new GED recipients according to the CPS is less than half the actual number of GEDs awarded according to the GED Testing Service. In short, the lack of quality results on the number of GED recipients in the CPS undermines the reliability of its estimate of high school graduates. *(Pages 7 to 8)*

## **2. Public School Graduation Rates in the United States**

November 2002

Jay P. Greene, Ph.D. Senior Fellow, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research

With Marcus A. Winters Research Associate, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research

Second, the GED is not equivalent to a high school diploma. The effort and knowledge necessary to obtain a high school equivalency certificate is not the same as is required to graduate from high school with a regular diploma. Most importantly the future prospects of those receiving a GED are more closely related to dropouts than graduates. Some researchers find moderate benefits from obtaining a GED, while research by Stephen Cameron and Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman finds that there is no difference between the outcomes for a dropout and a recipient of an equivalency certificate.<sup>8</sup> Though there may be disagreement over the degree of difference between GED recipients and dropouts, no study that we are aware of claims that outcomes for a recipient of a GED are equivalent to those who receive a regular diploma. *(Page 4)*

## **3. Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States**

September 2003

Jay P. Greene, Ph.D. Senior Fellow, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research

Greg Forster, Ph.D. Senior Research Associate, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research

Some researchers find that GED recipients are statistically indistinguishable from high school dropouts in their expected employment prospects and earnings (see Cameron and Heckman 1993). Other researchers see modest advantages for GED recipients over dropouts (see Murnane, Willett, and Boudett 1995). But no research suggests that GED recipients are even close to equivalent to regular high school graduates in terms of their future prospects. Grouping GED recipients and regular high school graduates together as "high school completers" combines two unlike categories of students, a practice that obscures more than it reveals.

Furthermore, counting GED recipients as if they were high school graduates is misleading if our purpose is to gauge the success of the high school system in graduating students. Properly speaking, GED recipients are dropouts from high school who later decided to seek a credential. Crediting the efforts of these GED recipients to the high schools from which they dropped out is a grave distortion of reality. Unfortunately, as we will see below, counting GED recipients as graduates of the high schools from which they dropped out is a distortion that also occurs in other methods of computing graduation rates. *(Page 2)*

1) GED is an acronym for General Educational Development. Some people mistakenly believe that the "E" in "GED" stands for "equivalency." *(From Endnotes)*

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#### 4. Counting High School Graduates when Graduates Count: Measuring Graduation Rates under the High Stakes of NCLB

Original: January 3, 2003, Revised: February 25, 2003

Christopher B. Swanson and Duncan Chaplin, Education Policy Center, The Urban Institute

2) The issue of which credentials should be included in estimates of graduation rates is salient for several reasons. **First, a great deal of evidence suggests that GED recipients do not fare nearly as well as regular graduates in terms of labor market and educational outcomes (Cameron & Heckman, 1993; Murnane, Willet & Tyler, 1998; and Boesel, Al Salam & Smith, 1998). (Emphasis Added)** In addition, different treatment of the GED credential is a major source of discrepancies in reported estimates of high school completion rates. Indicators that include GEDs produce far more positive results (i.e., higher completion rates) than more conservative estimates that exclude the GED (Chaplin, 2002). For example, completion rates that count GED recipients among high school graduates have remained stable or risen since the 1970s, while rates excluding the GED are much lower on average and have fallen over the same period of time (Chaplin, 2002; Cameron & Heckman, 1993; Kaufman, 2000). *(In Footnote, Page 2)*

Additional guidance provided in the final Title I regulations offers further clarification on several specific points that bear directly on methods for calculating these graduate rates for purposes of accountability under NCLB. First, graduates are considered to be only those students to receive a *regular high school diploma*, which must be fully aligned with the state's academic content standards. Therefore students receiving a GED or other state-issued credential (such as an attendance certificate or other form of recognition) that fails to meet those standards will not be counted as a graduate. Final guidance also explicitly stresses that states must avoid classifying dropouts as transfer students for purposes of calculating the high school graduation rate. *(Page 7) (In other words, the Congress has looked at the GED issue and clearly decided the certificate program does not meet its criteria for a high school graduate. Why would they make such a determination if the GED is of high quality?)*

NCES defines as high school graduates all students who receive either a regular state-issued diploma or another type of completion credential. **The latter category does not include GED certificates, which are not officially conferred by the public education system. (Page 16) (This is a key issue. While NCES will allow a GED to inflate the dropout statistics, it will not allow the GED recipient to be counted as a high school graduate. Note the apparent inconsistency.)**

As discussed earlier, one of the main points of contention in debates over measuring high school graduation rates is which credentials should be counted. **It is generally agreed that GED recipients should not be considered high school graduates for most purposes. (Page 24)**

#### 5. The Education Pipeline in the United States 1970 –2000

January 2004, Walt Haney Et. Al., The National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy

11) Haney (2001) discusses recent evidence indicating that in terms of employment opportunities, recipients of GED high school "equivalency" diplomas are more like high school drop outs than like high school graduates. *(In footnote, Page 61)*

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## 6. Kentucky Public High School Cohort Survival Analysis for the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence

August 27, 1999; Thomas G. Mortenson, Higher Education Policy Analyst, Postsecondary Education Opportunity

Alternative high school credentials include the GED (a test of General Educational Development administered by the American Council on Education), diplomas awarded by the National External Diploma Program, or various distance study diploma programs recognized by the Distance Education and Training Council.

National data on alternative high school credentials were first collected by the Census Bureau in the Current Population Survey in 1988. Between 1988 and 1997 the rate at which high school students acquired the diploma declined by 3.6 percentage points, from 80.3 percent in 1988 to 76.7 percent in 1997. During the same period, the rate at which students who were considered high school graduates acquired alternative credentials increased by 4.9 percent, from 4.1 to 9.1 percent. These data are not available on a state basis from the Census Bureau because of the limited size of the CPS sample.

**Note that studies of alternative high school credentials by labor economists and by the Defense Department have found that those pursuing the alternative credentials route do not perform as well as do regular high school graduates. (Page 6)**

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## 7. Population Representation in the Military Services, Chapter 2, on-line at: [www.dod.mil/prhome/poprep2000/html/chapter2/c2\\_recruiting.htm](http://www.dod.mil/prhome/poprep2000/html/chapter2/c2_recruiting.htm)

### Educational Credentials

DoD implemented a three-tier classification of education credentials in 1987. The three tiers are:

- Tier 1 — Regular high school graduates, adult diploma holders, and non-graduates with at least 15 hours of college credit.
- **Tier 2 — Alternative credential holders, including those with a General Education Development (GED) certificate of high school equivalency. (Emphasis Added)**
- Tier 3 — Those with no education credential.

The Services have different standards for individuals in each tier. Generally, Tier 3 applicants must have higher AFQT test scores than **Tier 2 applicants, who must have higher test scores than Tier 1 individuals**. The Air Force and Marine Corps follow these differential standards, requiring different minimum test scores for each tier. The other Services apply the standards slightly differently. The Army and Navy require applicants with alternative credentials (Tier 2) and those with no credentials (Tier 3) to meet the same AFQT standards, which are more stringent than those for high school graduates (Tier 1).

*(The GED is considered a lower-grade credential for military recruitment. A GED recipient must score higher on the Armed Forces Qualification Test than a high school diploma recipient to be competitive for enlistment. This strongly indicates the military finds a GED to be a lower-grade credential)*

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## 8. Labor Market Performance of GED Recipients

February 1998

David Boesel, National Library of Education, Nabeel Alsalam, National Center for Education Statistics, Thomas M. Smith, National Center for Education Statistics, National Library of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education

Downloaded from US Government Website at:  
<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/GED/execsum.html>

*(Note: This is somewhat dated information)*

From the early years of the GED, critics charged that passing the tests was too easy and did not reflect the skills of high school graduates. Beginning in the 1980s, new challenges to the test arose in several areas. First, a series of **studies by military manpower researchers showed that enlistees with GEDs tended to have high attrition rates**. Second, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction found that **GED recipients enrolled in Wisconsin colleges were much more likely than high school graduates to leave and that their grades and other measures of performance were lower than those of high school graduates**. Third, a 1993 study by economists Stephen Cameron and James Heckman concluded that **GED certificate holders are less likely to be employed, earn less, and experience more job turnover than high school graduates, once other factors are controlled**.

Analyses of data from the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) and the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) show that GED certification designates non-high school graduates whose cognitive skills exceed those of other dropouts. On average, GED recipients have adult literacy skills equal to those of high school graduates. **In terms of ASVAB scores, GEDs are not equal to graduates, but they are closer to graduates than to dropouts**.

The GED process tends to select dropouts who have more schooling and higher socio-economic status than other dropouts, as well as stronger cognitive skills. They have fewer of these assets than high school graduates, however.

In general, GED recipients are less likely than high school diploma holders to complete their postsecondary education. While GEDs graduate from vocational programs at about the same rate as their counterparts, they are only half as likely to earn associate's degrees and much less likely to earn bachelor's degrees.

These attrition rates are probably not a "result" of GED certification, but of other predisposing factors associated with possession of the credential, such as single-parent status and delayed enrollment.

In controlled analyses, the wages of male GEDs were 6 to 12 percent higher than those of dropouts; female wages were up to 13 percent higher; and the wages of GED adults (both sexes) were 5 to 11 percent higher. In all studies but one, however, GEDs earned less than high school graduates.

**In some respects, GED recipients resemble high school graduates; in others, they resemble dropouts; in still other ways, they fall between the two. Given these mixed findings, the common practice of counting GEDs as high school graduates in educational statistics should be reconsidered.**

*(In other words, the GED should not be equated to a high school diploma)*

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## 9. The Educational and Labor Market Performance of GED Recipients, A Forum Brief

October 23, 1998

David Boesel

Senior Research Associate

Office of Educational Research and Improvement

Nabeel Alsalam

Principal Analyst

Congressional Budget Office, U.S. Congress

Washington, DC 20515

This information is from an American Youth Policy Forum held on October 23, 1998 on Capitol Hill.

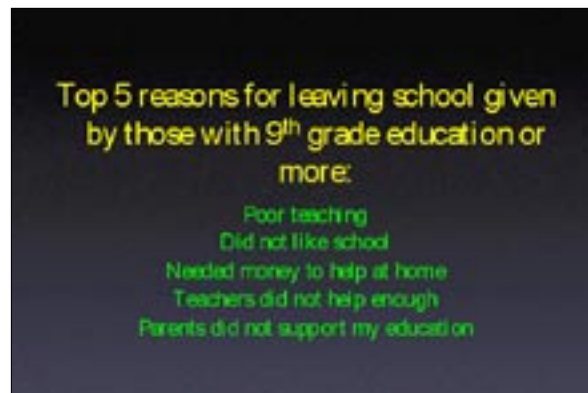
The educational and labor market performance of GED recipients indicate that the GED should be seen as an opportunity for more education, but not as a substitute for it. **It is important to continue encouraging prospective dropouts to stay in high school, put more emphasis on high school completion programs and provide counseling for GED recipients to remain in college.** To improve outcomes for high school dropouts, some states, such as Rhode Island, Tennessee and California, are experimenting with adult programs geared toward obtaining a regular high school diploma. Fifty years of research on GED shows that a high school diploma is still the best tool for a better future.

## 10. From a PowerPoint Presentation at:

[az-aall.org/AALL/Pages/Links/GED2002new.ppt](http://az-aall.org/AALL/Pages/Links/GED2002new.ppt)

GED 2002, What Do We Know So Far?

Claire Ludovico



*(Note: Two of the reasons students said they dropped out of school were directly related to teaching – “poor teaching” and “teachers didn’t help enough.” One reason relates to poor support from home and another expresses a direct dislike of school. Given this list, is a new GED program likely to improve the attitudes of students who plan to drop out of school? The teachers*

*will be the same while parental support for a GED is likely to be even worse than for a full diploma. Besides, if the student already dislikes school, keeping him there even longer is not going to improve his disposition or performance. The proposed GED program offers no solutions to any of these major problems.)*

## 11. Kentucky, Assessing The Test Gap: Findings From The Gap Analysis For The American Diploma Project

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY at [www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Default.htm](http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Default.htm)

See Attachment E-3-a, July 2002.

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## GED Reading

Kentucky was one of four states to examine the GED. The General Educational Development, published by the American Council on Education, is designed as an equivalent measure to a traditional high school diploma. As such, the GED is intended to provide the same benefits, including access to two- and four-year colleges. According to ACE, about one in seven high school diplomas awarded yearly is to a GED recipient.

In 2002, ACE introduced an updated GED that, among other things, is intended to provide more “business-related and adult-context information.” The teams reviewed the official GED practice test for the 2002 form, which represented one-half of the full test. According to ACE, the items were equivalent to those found on the actual test.

The reviewers determined that the GED reading test does not demonstrate readiness for postsecondary reading. Many of its questions were poorly written; several invited more than one answer and some questions could be answered accurately without reading the passage at all.

About half of the reading passages were judged to be at the grade 9-10 level and half at the 6-8 level, with about the same breakdown for the level of the multiple-choice questions. (Emphasis Added) The questions presented a moderate challenge (65%), and 40% of them required some interpretation. The GED and KCCT-reading were comparable in the amount of analysis required by the test items.

## GED Writing

The GED writing test has two portions: an editing test based on reading passages and a writing prompt. Neither was judged likely to produce writing at the postsecondary level.

The editing test contained passages judged to be 92% below grade 9 level. The editing questions were equally low-level, although editing questions tend to pull down averages because grammar and spelling are usually taught at the upper elementary level. Only 8% of the editing skills were at grade 9-10; there was no example of a complex cognitive challenge, and 68% of the items were procedural (again, not unexpected in editing tests, because most concern the application of a known grammatical or syntactical rule).

The writing prompt did not specify audience or purpose, and required low-level informational writing. It depended on prior knowledge, which may contaminate a writing test because not all candidates may share the knowledge.

*(These comments strongly indicate poor technical quality in the test that will lead to serious validity and reliability problems. Technical deficiencies also make results much more dependent upon test prep activities. Students who know what is likely to be on the test and how questions are technically deficient have a distinct advantage)*

## 12. Coming of Age in the 1990s: The Eight-Grade Class of 1988 12 Years Later

NCES 2002-321

March 2002

Steven J. Ingels, et. Al.

*This report represents one of the most recent studies available with GED data separated from regular diploma data. Unfortunately, the report suffers from some fairly significant sampling problems. However, several of the tables contain such dramatic*

*differences that even the relatively large sampling errors do not change the impression that there are significant differences between GED and regular diploma recipients. Several examples follow:*

*(From Table 4)*

<b>Method of High School Completion by 2000</b>	<b>Percent Employed For Pay</b>	<b>Standard Error Of The Measurement</b>
<b>High School Diploma</b>	88.1%	0.82
<b>GED Certificate</b>	77.5%	3.12
<b>No Diploma or Equivalent</b>	78.8%	3.37

*Note that GED's are far more like dropouts than graduates on this statistic.*

*(From Table 18)*

<b>Method of High School Completion by 2000</b>	<b>Percent Volunteered In A Youth Organization</b>	<b>Standard Error Of The Measurement</b>	<b>Percent Volunteered In A Civic or Community Organization</b>	<b>Standard Error Of The Measurement</b>
<b>High School Diploma</b>	20.6	0.75	23.7	1.11
<b>GED Certificate</b>	14.9	2.27	12.3	1.76
<b>No Diploma or Equivalent</b>	7.9	1.47	9.5	1.80

*Note: GED's are not the same as regular diploma recipients on these interesting indicators of participatory citizenship. When it comes to civic involvement, GED holders behave more like dropouts in most cases.*



- ATTACHMENT 4 -

**Kentucky GED Data — Total Tested by Age**

Calendar Year	Age 16 or less	Age 17	Age 18	Age 19	Age 20	Age 21	Age 22	Age 23
1989	124	1,265	2,311	1,719	1,288	924	635	569
1990	125	1,323	2,503	2,137	1,470	1,040	724	623
1991	136	1,351	2,379	2,203	1,760	1,195	905	742
1992	159	1,291	2,236	2,006	1,641	1,256	965	732
1993	202	1,174	2,105	1,803	1,393	1,159	931	756
1994	263	1,242	2,002	1,729	1,241	996	857	766
1995	274	1,373	2,483	1,852	1,353	914	779	733
1996	302	1,109	1,888	1,893	1,400	941	730	617
1997	409	1,436	2,073	1,883	1,394	862	719	576
1998	368	1,310	1,980	1,981	1,348	908	681	586
1999	468	1,569	2,011	1,939	1,385	981	682	563
2000	529	1,742	2,293	2,056	1,505	1,101	813	695
2001	694	2,313	3,032	2,989	2,227	1,932	1,477	1,200
2002	417	1,284	1,381	1,241	881	644	606	474
2003	406	1,518	1,794	1,546	1,138	910	709	654
<b>Percent Change 1989 to 1999</b>	277	24	-13	13	8	6	7	-1
<b>Percent Change 1989 to 2003</b>	227	20	-22	-10	-12	-2	12	15

**Kentucky GEDs Awarded by Age**

Calendar Year	Age 16 or less	Age 17	Age 18	Age 19	Age 20	Age 21	Age 22	Age 23
1989	91	23	341	1,245	1,122	760	517	437
1990	8	33	405	1,238	1,310	962	654	449
1991	35	432	1,185	1,364	1,071	738	573	434
1992	52	501	1,218	1,199	974	746	596	443
1993	202	1,256	1,304	909	681	601	471	412
1994	88	499	1,094	1,148	853	606	534	518
1995	67	520	1,348	1,341	934	610	514	424
1996	89	672	1,208	1,345	998	636	516	433
1997	213	922	1,249	1,148	935	516	515	418
1998	210	793	1,265	1,233	838	602	469	408
1999	309	1,083	1,443	1,346	957	702	518	430
2000	357	1,190	1,643	1,499	1,088	773	586	527
2001	496	1,621	2,188	2,155	1,592	1,397	1,067	858
2002	305	882	967	858	613	450	418	331
2003	307	1,094	1,288	1,082	804	615	490	459
<b>Percent Change 1989 to 1999</b>	240	4609	323	8	-15	-8	0	-2
<b>Percent Change 1989 to 2003</b>	237	4657	278	-13	-28	-19	-5	5

*Source: Kentucky Adult Education, Kentucky GED Statistical Reports*

**Kentucky GED Success Rate By Age Calculated As Percentage of Those Tested**  
**(100 % x (# Awarded)) / (#Tested) — Derived from Data on Previous Page**

Calendar Year	Age 16 or less	Age 17	Age 18	Age 19	Age 20	Age 21	Age 22	Age 23
1989	73.4	1.8	14.8	72.4	87.1	82.3	81.4	76.8
1990	6.4	2.5	16.2	57.9	89.1	92.5	90.3	72.1
1991	25.7	32.0	49.8	61.9	60.9	61.8	63.3	58.5
1992	32.7	38.8	54.5	59.8	59.4	59.4	61.8	60.5
1993	100.0	107.0	61.9	50.4	48.9	51.9	50.6	54.5
1994	33.5	40.2	54.6	66.4	68.7	60.8	62.3	67.6
1995	24.5	37.9	54.3	72.4	69.0	66.7	66.0	57.8
1996	29.5	60.6	64.0	71.1	71.3	67.6	70.7	70.2
1997	52.1	64.2	60.3	61.0	67.1	59.9	71.6	72.6
1998	57.1	60.5	63.9	62.2	62.2	66.3	68.9	69.6
1999	66.0	69.0	71.8	69.4	69.1	71.6	76.0	76.4
2000	67.5	68.3	71.7	72.9	72.3	70.2	72.1	75.8
2001	71.5	70.1	72.2	72.1	71.5	72.3	72.2	71.5
2002	73.1	68.7	70.0	69.1	69.6	69.9	69.0	69.8
2003	75.6	72.1	71.8	70.0	70.7	67.6	69.1	70.2

*Note: 1993 data may contain an error. The Kentucky Council on Post-Secondary Education is unable to explain the apparent discontinuity in the 1993 figures.*

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**- ATTACHMENT 5 -**

**Adult GED Governing Regulation**

**785 KAR 1:130. GED eligibility requirements.**

RELATES TO: KRS 151B.023, 151B.125

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: KRS 151B.023, 151B.410

NECESSITY, FUNCTION, AND CONFORMITY: KRS 151B.410(1) requires the Department for Adult Education and Literacy to promulgate necessary administrative regulations and administer a statewide adult education and literacy system through the state. KRS 151B.023 designates the Department for Adult Education and Literacy to carry out the statewide mission on adult education. The department has the responsibility for all administrative functions of the state in relation to the management, control, and operations of programs and services in adult education and literacy. KRS 151B.125 recognizes the general educational development (GED) test for high school equivalency purposes in Kentucky. This administrative regulation establishes the eligibility requirements for taking the GED test.

Section 1. Eligibility Requirements. Except as provided in Sections 2 and 3 of this administrative regulation, the GED test shall be administered to an applicant with a Kentucky address who:

- (1) Has reached his 19th birthday; or
- (2) Is at least seventeen (17) years of age, and:
  - (a) The applicant has officially withdrawn from public or private school as certified by the local school district; and
  - (b) The applicant's last enrolled class has graduated; or
  - (c) The applicant has been out of formal instruction for a period of one (1) year.

Section 2. Exigent Circumstance. An applicant at least sixteen (16) years of age who believes exigent circumstances exist and who does not meet the conditions of Section 1 of this administrative regulation may request an exemption from the local school superintendent or designee in the district where the applicant resides. An exemption granted on the basis of exigent circumstances or a denial shall be in writing. A copy of all exigent circumstance decisions shall be mailed or faxed within five (5) working days of the decision to the state GED administrator. An applicant may appeal a denial by the local school superintendent to the Commissioner of the Department for Adult Education and Literacy.

Section 3. Exemptions. An applicant at least sixteen (16) years of age with a Kentucky address shall be eligible to take the GED test if the applicant is:

- (1) Committed or placed in a state correctional facility;
- (2) Enrolled in the Jobs Corps Program of Instruction;
- (3) Considered a state agency child, as defined by KRS 158.135(1)(a) and receives approval for the GED test from his interdisciplinary team; or

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(4) Detained in a juvenile detention center or juvenile holding facility, and the applicant:

(a) Is at least one (1) year behind academically from his graduating class;

(b) Has a minimum stay in detention of thirty (30) days; and

(c) Is approved for the GED test by the local school superintendent.

Section 4. Test Readiness. An applicant shall be certified as test-ready by a Department for Adult Education and Literacy designated entity.

(1) Before taking the official GED test, an applicant shall:

(a) Successfully complete the Official GED Practice Test with the same passing scores required for the GED test or present a Kentucky Educational Television GED Connection Voucher.

(b) Complete the GED Testing Application Form. This form shall be available from a local adult education provider, local school superintendent, or the Department for Adult Education and Literacy.

(2) Military personnel shall:

(a) Not be required to complete the GED Testing Application Form prior to taking the test; and

(b) Complete the Military GED Application (Form 300-M) before a high school equivalency diploma shall be issued.

Section 5. Incorporation by Reference. (1) The following material is incorporated by reference:

(a) "GED Testing Application (DAEL-6)", revised 10/12/01 edition, Cabinet for Workforce Development, Department for Adult Education and Literacy; and

(b) "Application for High School Equivalency Diploma or Certificate (Military GED Application) (Form 300-M)", revised 6/96 edition, GED Testing Service, Washington, D.C.

(2) This material may be inspected, copied, or obtained, subject to applicable copyright law, at the Department for Adult Education and Literacy, Capital Plaza Tower, Third Floor, 500 Mero Street, Frankfort, Kentucky 40601, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (28 Ky.R. 1276; Am. 1637; eff. 1-14-2002.)

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**- ATTACHMENT 6 -**

**Final Version of New Secondary GED Regulation**

Education Cabinet  
Kentucky Board of Education  
Department of Education  
(New Administrative Regulation)

704 KAR 7:150. Secondary GED Program.

RELATES TO: KRS 151B.125, 158.145, 158.146, 158.6455

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: KRS 156.070, 156.160

NECESSITY, FUNCTION, AND CONFORMITY: KRS 158.146 requires the Department of Education to establish and implement a comprehensive statewide strategy to address the student dropout problem in Kentucky public schools and take into consideration comprehensive student programs and services that include, but are not limited to, identification, counseling, mentoring and other educational strategies for elementary, middle and high school students who are demonstrating little or no success in school, or who possess other risk factors that contribute to the likelihood of their dropping out of school. KRS 151B.125 requires that a high school equivalency diploma be issued upon successfully passing the GED tests given by the General Educational Development Testing Service (GEDTS) of the American Council on Education. The American Council on Education grants waivers to states to establish a secondary GED program as an integral component of a high school curriculum. The GEDTS specifies that the secondary GED program must align with the five content areas measured by GED tests as well as with high school content in mathematics, writing, social studies, reading and science. The General Educational Development Testing Service requires that states request and receive approval prior to administering the GED tests to students enrolled in secondary schools. KRS 156.160 requires the Kentucky Board of Education to establish standards that school districts shall meet in student, program, service and operational performance. KRS 158.6455 requires that a student not be counted in a school's annual average dropout rate if enrolled in a district-operated or district-contracted alternative program leading to a certificate of completion or a General Education Development (GED) diploma. The purpose of the secondary GED program shall be to provide a potential dropout student who has the academic capability to complete high school graduation requirements but who is behind the cohort group in the credits needed to graduate the opportunity to stay in school and prepare for and obtain the GED certificate. This administrative regulation establishes requirements governing the Kentucky Secondary GED Program.

**Section 1. Eligibility**

- (1) To be eligible for participation in the secondary GED program, a student shall:
- (a) be at least sixteen years old;
  - (b) be at least two grades behind (as measured by Carnegie Units) the cohort group the student entered high school with and have earned at least four credits toward graduation;
  - (c) be academically able to participate in the program as identified by:
    - 1. a Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) of at least twenty-nine (29) in reading, language and mathematics on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) assessment administered in the ninth grade;
    - 2. other assessment data; and
    - 3. professional judgment by school and district staff; and
  - (d) be provided all available intervention and support options to complete regular high school graduation requirements including counseling, appropriate remedial services, or alternative education before placement in the secondary GED program is considered.

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(2) Prior to assigning an eligible student to a secondary GED program, a local district shall:

(a) provide pre-entry counseling involving an administrator, teacher and counselor to the student and parent or guardian that includes discussion of alternative educational options available and a detailed explanation of the requirements of the GED program; and,

(b) obtain a written agreement from the student and parent or guardian to voluntary program participation and arrangements for payment of GED test fee, applying 702 KAR 3:220 for waiver of fee when appropriate.

(3) A student with a disability who has an Individual Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan shall be placed in the secondary GED program only if the eligibility requirements established in subsection 1 (1) of this section are met and the admissions and release committee or 504 committee determines and documents placement in the secondary GED program as appropriate.

## **Section 2. Instructional Program**

(1) A local district implementing the Kentucky secondary GED program shall design a high school level instructional program that includes for each student who is to participate in the secondary GED program:

(a) the development of an individualized educational plan for each student consistent with the student's Individual Graduation Plan (IGP) and the student's goals for continuing education and employment;

(b) curriculum and instruction aligned with the Program of Studies as established in 704 KAR 3:303, student learning goals applicable to all students in the school district, and the content assessed by the GED Test;

(c) student participation in the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System as established by 703 KAR Chapter 5 and KRS 158.6455 while enrolled in the program;

(d) materials and resources specifically designed to prepare the student to pass the GED Tests and obtain a GED certificate;

(e) continuous assessment and progress reports;

(f) a minimum of fifteen (15) hours of direct instruction each week;

(g) student participation, in addition to the required hours of direct instruction, in at least one of the following each semester:

1. service learning;

2. vocational education;

3. additional coursework;

4. an internship;

5. a cooperative learning project; or

6. any other learning activity aligned with the student's Individual Graduation Plan; and

(h) varied instructional strategies that shall include some combination of all of the following:

1. Individualized instruction;

2. Small group instruction;

3. Applied instruction; and,

4. The development of basic technology literacy skills.

(2) A local district shall assign properly certified teachers to supervise the instruction of students enrolled in a secondary GED program.

(3) A local district shall provide a student to teacher ratio of no more than fifteen (15) to one (1) for students enrolled in a secondary GED program, unless an exception is approved by the Department of Education.

(4) A local district shall provide academic, career and personal counseling services to a student enrolled in a secondary GED program throughout program participation.

(5) A local district may contract with another provider to offer the secondary GED instructional program but shall ensure that the provider meets all student eligibility and instructional program requirements.

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### **Section 3. GED Testing and Program Completion**

- (1) A local district shall establish criteria describing when students may take the GED Tests.
- (2) The student shall be prepared to take the GED test as measured by standard scores of not less than 430 on each of the five tests and an average standard score of not less than 480 on the Official GED Practice Test prior to taking the GED Test.
- (2) A local district shall coordinate the scheduling of and access to GED Tests with the official state GED testing centers.
- (3) A local district shall establish criteria for secondary GED program completion.
- (4) A local district shall provide a student who has passed the GED Tests and completed the secondary GED program with a certificate of high school completion in addition to the Kentucky High School Equivalency Diploma .
- (5) A local district shall provide official, public recognition to a student completing a secondary GED program.

### **Section 4. Funding and Attendance Accounting**

- (1) For purposes of Support Education Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK) Program funding eligibility, for students enrolled in a secondary GED program a local district shall conform to the uniform method of recording pupil attendance as established in 702 KAR 7:125.
- (2) A local district may seek approval from the Department of Education to administer a secondary GED program under a performance-based credit plan as identified in 704 KAR 3:304, Required Program of Studies.

Section 5. Application Procedures. (1) A local district shall submit an application to the Department of Education and secure approval prior to establishing a new secondary GED program. The written application shall describe how the local district will:

- (a) identify, counsel and admit eligible students in compliance with Section 1;
  - (b) meet the instructional program requirements in compliance with Section 2;
  - (c) meet the testing and program completion requirements identified in Section 3;
- and,
- (d) organize, administer, prepare teachers and counselors for the program, as well as evaluate the program.
- (2) The initial application for a secondary GED program shall include written assurance from the local superintendent that the program will be administered in compliance with state statutes and administrative regulations.
- (3) A local district shall submit an application to establish a new secondary GED program at least ninety (90) days prior to the first day on which services are to begin.
- (4) The Commissioner of Education shall notify the local superintendent of a decision on the application no later than forty-five (45) days after the application is received.

### **Section 6. Reporting and Program Evaluation**

- (1) A local district operating a secondary GED program shall submit to the Department of Education no later than June 30 of each year an annual report on the secondary GED program that shall include:
  - (a) a summary of demographic information about the students who participated in the secondary GED program during the just concluded school year, including gender, age, race and ethnicity;
  - (b) the number of enrolled students who have an individual education program (IEP) or 504 plan;
  - (c) the number of enrolled students who are eligible for the national free and reduced lunch program;
  - (d) the number of students who attempted a GED test or tests;

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- (e) the number of students who passed a GED test or tests;
  - (f) the number of students who completed the secondary GED program; and
  - (g) the qualifications of the supervising teachers.

**Section 7. Monitoring**

(1) Based upon the data submitted in the annual report and desk audits, the Department of Education shall provide or identify appropriate assistance to a district that is not meeting the standards for a secondary GED program as set forth in this administrative regulation. (2) The Department of Education may revoke program approval if a district fails to meet the standards for two (2) consecutive years.

This is to certify that the chief state school officer has reviewed and recommended this administrative regulation prior to its adoption by the Kentucky Board of Education, as required by KRS 156.070(4).

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Gene Wilhoit  
Commissioner of Education

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Keith Travis, Chairperson  
Kentucky Board of Education



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## - ATTACHMENT 7 -

This attachment contains additional discussion about the questionable accuracy of Kentucky's current dropout rate statistics. The comments below are based on a paper "Examination of the KDE Statistics for the Class of 2003" which is available at [www.eddatafrominnes.com](http://www.eddatafrominnes.com)

### **One approach to comparing dropout rates**

The graduation rate can be considered to be the complement of the four-year dropout rate for a given class.

For example, Kentucky's class of 2002 had a graduation rate of 66 percent when calculated in the classical manner, which divides the number of graduates in 2002 by the class membership in the fall of their ninth-grade year. The four-year dropout rate would be computed as 34 percent, which equals 100 percent minus the 66 percent of students who actually graduated.

To get the annual rate, divide the 34 percent dropout rate by four – the number of years that regular graduates attend high school – and the annual dropout rate for the class of 2002 is 8.5 percent. However, KDE's official figures indicated an official dropout rate of only 3.97 percent for the 2001-2002 school year.

### **A second comparison**

A criticism of the first approach is that it's an "apples to oranges" judgment because it compares the dropout performance of a single class across four years to a dropout performance calculated across four different classes in just one year. Other methods of evaluation are available.

The data supporting one alternative approach is found in Table 1 (below) that looks only at the number of officially reported dropouts experienced by the Class of 2002 during its progression through high school. The total number of officially claimed dropouts for the four-year period is divided by the number of students that were enrolled in the ninth-grade during the fall of the 1998-99 school year, when the members of the Class of 2002 were freshmen.

The resulting four-year dropout rate for the Class of 2002 based on the official dropout data is only 15.9 percent. However the more reliable four-year dropout rate for the Class of 2002 is nearly double the KDE's official data.

**Table 1**

*Data To Calculate Four-Year Dropout Rate for the Kentucky Public High School Class of 2002 and Resulting Dropout Rate and Results Calculated from the Graduation Rate Data [R]*

School Year	Grade for Class of 2002	KDE Reported Dropouts for Listed Grade in this Year	KDE Reported 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade Fall Membership for Class of 2002 in this Year
1998-99	9	2,465	54,743
1999-00	10	2,567	
2000-01	11	2,136	
2001-02	12	1,520	
<b>Total Dropouts for the Class of 2002 Cohort</b>		8,688	
<b>Dropout Rate for the Class of 2002 Across 4 Years Based on KDE Data in Previous Rows</b>	<b>100% x (8,688) / 54,743 = 15.9%</b>		
<b>Compare! ⇅</b>			
<b>Dropout Rate for the Class of 2002 Across 4 Years As Compliment of the Graduation Rate (See discussion below for derivation)</b>	<b>34%</b>		

**Additional comparisons, similar conclusions**

“Examination of the KDE Statistics for the Class of 2003” mentioned earlier provides a technical analysis of data developed using yet another method that offers evidence that Kentucky’s official dropout rates need to be increased by at least 50 percent. This detailed discussion also shows that more than 60 percent of the state’s total dropouts occur in the ninth- and tenth-grades.

**Summary**

There is considerable evidence that the KDE’s data significantly understates the magnitude of Kentucky’s dropout predicament. Unfortunately, a better picture is not available until 2005 because the existing KDE database is not adequate to support a meaningful audit.

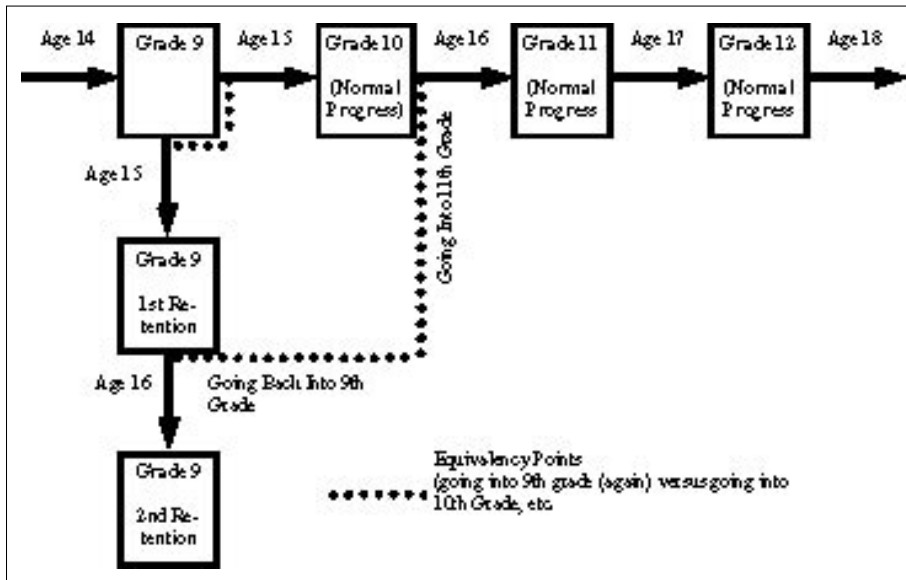
- ATTACHMENT 8 -

**How a retained ninth-grade student will bypass most CATS testing**

The figure below compares the high school career tracks of a normally progressing high school student to that of a student who is retained (held back) in ninth-grade until the age of 16. The normal progression is shown horizontally across the top of the figure with a student entering ninth-grade at age 14 and eventually graduating at age 18. This is typical for most normal students.

The vertical progression follows the retained student. At the end of his first ninth-grade year, the retained student turns age 15. As shown by the dotted lines, he is now one school year behind his cohort class, as they are entering the 10<sup>th</sup> grade while the retained student is repeating the ninth-grade.

The retained student completes his second year in ninth-grade and is retained again. He is now, once again, an entering ninth-grader, but his cohort class has graduated from 10<sup>th</sup> grade and is now chronologically entering 11<sup>th</sup>-graders. The retained student is now two years behind and can legally request entry into the Secondary GED program at this point. Assuming he completes the proposed Secondary GED no later than the following spring, he will never be in a position to be considered even a 10<sup>th</sup>-grade pupil. Even if the presumption is made that this student is in 10<sup>th</sup> grade for CATS purposes, the student will not be in school by the time the 10<sup>th</sup>-grade portion of CATS can be administered.



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