



After GED test overhaul, Philly organizations ready for change

By: Erin Kane | January 10, 2014

On January 1st, the GED test underwent major changes, becoming for the first time a computer-based assessment that measures core curriculum along with college and career-readiness skills.

The new exam has also generated mixed reception. Some claim the test's increased cost — from \$75 to \$120 — and difficulty will prove to be a barrier for test-takers. Others like Michael Mander, a GED instructor at the nonprofit [Center for Literacy](#), are embracing the changes.

"I definitely think the test is moving in a direction that's necessary with the changes in the world," Mander says. "Everyone needs to be computer literate, and it's making sure that you're on that level playing field with those coming out of high school."

Mander and his colleagues are preparing students for the tech-driven world by giving web assignments, and some teachers use their own websites to complement in-class activities.

"Even before the changeover, we said, 'let's make this contextual, let's make this work,'" says instructor Michelle Jensen, who uses workplace documents, such as memos, to help students apply their skills beyond the classroom.

The new GED test, aligned with current high school standards, has four content areas — literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies — and requires test-takers to demonstrate some subject mastery in order to pass. They will also have to demonstrate the ability to write a cogent argument.

"For the old test, once you were proficient in reading comprehension, you could take any of the tests, except math, and pass," explains Michael Westover, Center for Literacy's chief executive officer. "Now you have to have some knowledge of the content areas."

Test-takers who did not complete all sections of the old pen-and-paper exam will have to retake the more complex computer-based version.

Responding to the GED's higher stakes, Westover adds: "Everyone is very concerned about the test being much more difficult, but we have to keep in mind that the test was 'normed' on seniors who graduated from high school in June."

Preparing for Change

At [Community Learning Center](#), an adult literacy organization in North Philadelphia, instructors are getting ready to implement a newly configured GED prep program on January 13th.

(Continued on next page)

After GED test overhaul, Philly organizations ready for change (continued)

“From a teacher’s perspective, the theoretical framework of the test is different,” says Rebecca Wagner, the group’s executive director. To prepare students for the new exam, teachers overhauled the curriculum last summer and piloted it during the fall.

“We’re prepared, we knew it was coming,” adds Wagner. “I don’t throw my arms up. We’re not negative about it all. We’re very prepared and actually excited.”

[The Mayor’s Commission on Literacy](#) has also taken steps to prepare test-takers and instructors for the new exam. “We’ve been training instructors for about a year now, and we’re continuing that,” says Executive Director Judith Rényi.

Before the changeover, the Mayor’s Commission conducted substantial outreach, hoping to encourage those who were just shy of passing the old GED to get to a testing site. With a half-dozen new locations across the city, “there were more seats than ever for test-takers,” Rényi acknowledges.

But more challenges may lay ahead. Above all the other changes, Rényi is most concerned about the test’s complexity.

“Most of the GED prep teachers are used to teaching reading and writing in general, and the math, but the new tests go in-depth in science, history, technology and math, as well as literature. That’s a big change,” she says.

Still, Rényi remains hopeful that adult learners preparing for the GED will take the new exam in stride. “Learners might find it much more interesting and appealing,” she adds. “This population isn’t blinkered by the old style of learning. Since they have open minds, there’s nothing barring the way. I think they have the capacity to learn more complex material.”

View this article at <http://www.generocity.org/2014/after-ged-test-overhaul-philly-organizations-ready-for-change/>