High School Equivalency Diploma Task Force

2016 Report & Recommendation

January 2017

State Board of Education

State of Iowa
Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
400 E. 14th Street
Des Moines, IA 50319-0146

State Board of Education

Charles C. Edwards, Jr., President, Des Moines
Michael L. Knedler, Vice President, Council Bluffs
Brooke Axiotis, Des Moines
Michael Bearden, Gladbrook
Bettie Bolar, Marshalltown
Diane Crookham-Johnson, Oskaloosa
Angela English, Dyersville
Mike May, Spirit Lake
Mary Ellen Miller, Wayne County
Robert Nishimwe, Student Member, Des Moines

Administration

Ryan M. Wise, Director and Executive Officer
State Board of Education

Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation

Jeremy Varner, Division Administrator

It is the policy of the Iowa Department of Education not to discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, sex, disability, religion, age, political party affiliation, or actual or potential parental, family or marital status in its programs, activities, or employment practices as required by the Iowa Code sections 216.9 and 256.10(2), Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. § 2000d and 2000e), the Equal Pay Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. § 206, et seq.), Title IX (Educational Amendments, 20 U.S.C.§§ 1681 – 1688), Section 504 (Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (42 U.S.C. § 12101, et seq.). If you have questions or complaints related to compliance with this policy by the Iowa Department of Education, please contact the legal counsel for the Iowa Department of Education, Grimes State Office Building, 400 E. 14th Street, Des Moines, IA 50319-0146, telephone number: 515-281-5295, or the Director of the Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education, Citigroup Center, 500 W. Madison Street, Suite 1475, Chicago, IL 60661-4544, telephone number: 312-730-1560, FAX number: 312-730-1576, TDD number: 877-521-2172, email: OCR.Chicago@ed.gov.

IOWA

209,740 Iowans over the age of 18 do not have a high school diploma or equivalency.

145,991 of those without a diploma or equivalency are between the working ages of 18-64 – diminishing the opportunity they have to contribute to solving the middle-skills gap in Iowa's workforce.

By 2025, 68% of all jobs in Iowa will require some postsecondary training or education. Without a high school diploma or an equivalency, these Iowans will not be qualified to hold these jobs.

Closing the skills gap will secure a more prosperous future for all Iowans…

Our economic vitality depends on it.

HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY DIPLOMA TASK FORCE

2016 Report & Recommendation

Executive Summary

In support of Governor Branstad's and Lt. Governor Reynolds' ***Future Ready Iowa*** initiative focused on building Iowa's talent pipeline, the Iowa Department of Education convened a High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED) Task Force in July 2016.

The intent of the HSED Task Force was to evaluate the need for alternative pathways to achieve a high school equivalency diploma by demonstrating competencies; evaluate best practices in Iowa and nationwide; evaluate the feasibility of adopting new pathways; and develop a recommendation grounded in comprehensive data, research, and integrity that would ensure rigor and maintain quality standards important to Iowa.

The HSED Task Force was comprised of stakeholders representing business and industry – including industry sector partnerships, Iowa Community Colleges and Adult Basic Education, Department of Refugee Services, Department of Corrections, Iowa Workforce Development, labor, and nonprofit community partners. The task force met in July, September, and December of 2016. In addition, the following five subcommittees were formed and met in the summer and fall of 2016: Refugee/Immigrants; Needs/Demographics; Model/Design; Evaluation/Assessment; and Implementation Legislation.

Task Force Membership

Gisella Aitken-Shadle	Northeast Iowa Community College
Juline Albert	Western Iowa Tech Community College
Mary Bontrager	Greater Des Moines Partnerships
Chad Dahm	Department of Health & Human Services Bureau of Refugee Services
Gayle Gosch	Des Moines Area Community College
Laura Hidlebaugh	Hawkeye Community College
Kristi Judkins	Iowa Workforce Development
Marlyn McKeen	Goodwill of Central Iowa
Renée Miller	United Way of Central Iowa
Steve Ovel	Iowa Association of Community College Trustees
G. Lynn Pickard	Iowa Laborers' Education and Training Trust Fund
Jolene Rogers	Iowa Lakes Community College
Scott Schneider	Eastern Iowa Community Colleges
Sandra Smith	Department of Corrections
Pam Southworth	Iowa Western Community College
Pat Steele	Central Iowa Works
Mak Suceska	United Way of Central Iowa

Iowa Department of Education Staff Support:

Barbara Burrows, Cindy Butler, Tom Deeter, Alex Harris, Mike Williams, Jeremy Varner

Research Support:

Britney Samuelson (United Way of Central Iowa)

Marlana Schnell (Doctoral Student, Iowa State University)

Co-Facilitators:

Renée Miller (United Way of Central Iowa)

Jayne Smith (Iowa Department of Education)

Task Force Recommendation

The HSED Task Force recommends revisions to Iowa Code 259A which would authorize the Iowa Board of Education to adopt additional pathways to achieve a High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED) based on quality standards and demonstrated competency.

Rationale

1. Critical to Iowa's Economy

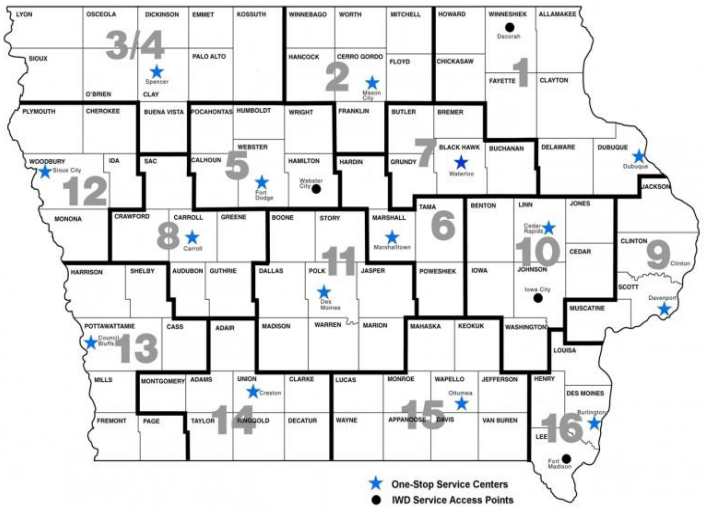
In 2014, Governor Branstad and Lt. Governor Reynolds launched the "Future Ready Iowa" initiative focused on strategies to help Iowa build its talent pipeline for the jobs of the future. The goal is for 70% of Iowans in the workforce to have education or training beyond high school by 2025. In order to achieve this important and ambitious goal, the state must develop solutions for Iowans who do not have a high school diploma or equivalency degree.

Iowa's economy is changing and is in need of a skilled workforce to address the state's skills gap. Fifty-five (55) percent of Iowa jobs today are classified as middle-skilled, requiring some education and training beyond high school, but only 33 percent of the labor pool has the appropriate skillset[1]. Additionally, the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce's analysis of industry and occupational requirements project that, by 2025, 68% of jobs in Iowa will require postsecondary education or training beyond high school. Without offering alternative pathways to achieve a high school equivalency diploma, we risk individuals being unable to fill these important positions.

There is a 22% middle-skills gap in Iowa

For the purposes of this report, we have collected and analyzed statewide data and data defined by the 15 workforce regions established by Iowa Workforce Development as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1



209,740[1] Iowans over eighteen years old do not have a high school diploma, and

145,991[1] are between the working ages of 18-64.

[1] U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates

A postsecondary degree or relevant job certification is the "new minimum" needed to meet the demands of an increasingly knowledge-based workforce with the means to excel in rewarding careers and grow family incomes. However, the route to postsecondary education comes to an abrupt halt if an individual does not have a high school diploma or HSED. Iowa's economic future is in peril if we continue to have more than 145,991 working-age adults without at least a high school equivalency diploma.

A high school diploma or HSED is a foundational step toward achieving self-sufficiency and financial stability for all Iowans. Not attaining a high school diploma or its equivalent poses significant challenges for individuals and produces economic strain on the state. In Iowa, the unemployment rate for persons without a high school diploma is 10.7%[2] compared to the state's overall unemployment rate of 3.8%.[3] During his or her working life, an Iowa high school graduate earns over $700,000[4] more than a high school dropout.

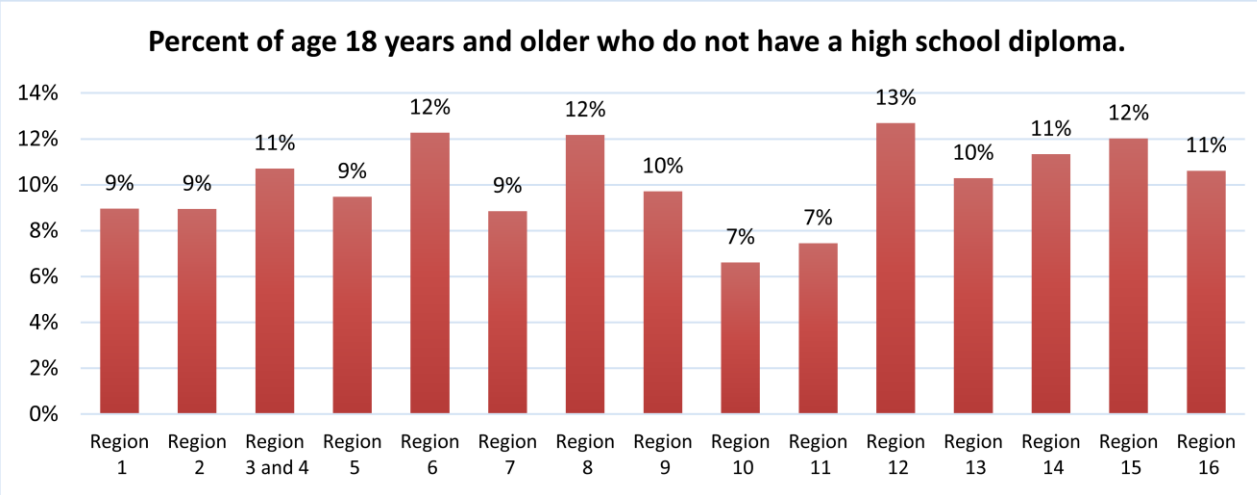
During his or her working life, an Iowa high school graduate earns over $700,000 more than a high school dropout.

Adults without a high school diploma are two times more likely to receive public assistance.

There are also significant costs to society when the population lacks employable skills and formal education. Adults without a high school diploma are two times more likely to receive public assistance from the government - creating an economic strain on both the individual and the state.[5]

As noted in Table 1, the average percent of Iowa's population, by workforce region, that does not hold at least an HSED exceeds 10%, creating distinct disparities in ***all*** Iowa communities and placing a burden on businesses that are struggling to find a qualified workforce.[6]

Table 1



[2] Iowa Workforce Development, Occupational Employment Statistics Survey, 2014
[3] Iowa Workforce Development, Labor Market Information, Nov 2016 Iowa Unemployment
[4] National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, 2016 (adjusted for inflation)
[5] The College Board, 2013
[6] U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates

Table 2

Percent of People without a High School Diploma by Age Group

Age Group	Number without High School Diploma	Percent without High School Diploma
18-24 years old	35,196	11%
25-34 years old	28,020	7%
35-44 years old	26,634	7%
45-64 years old	56,141	7%

Table 2 shows that people in all age groups of Iowa's workforce are lacking their high school diploma. Although the 18-24 year-old Iowans have the largest percentage without high school diplomas, this is not just a problem limited to young people.[7]

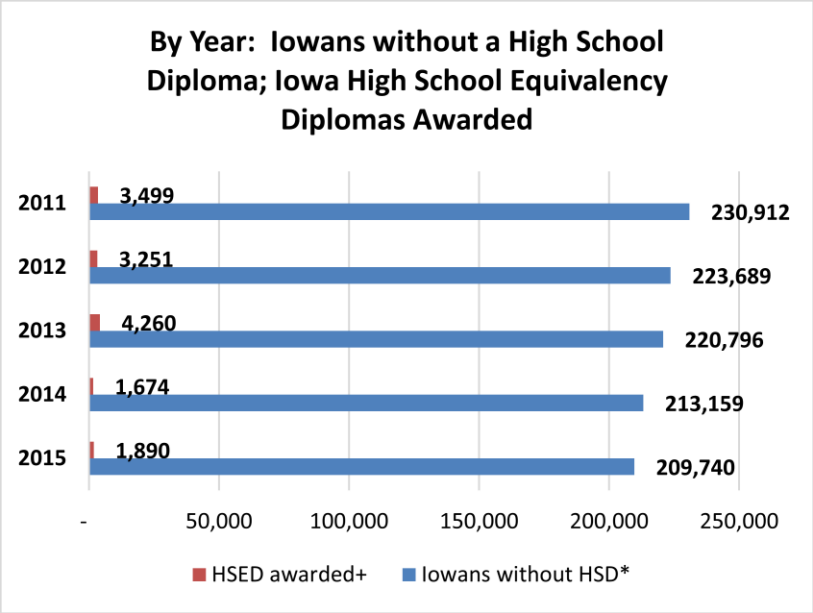
Helping more Iowans achieve a high school equivalency degree would not only begin to close the workforce gap, but it would alleviate the dependence on state support. Further, a Bureau of Labor Statistics current population survey reported that a HSED can help individuals obtain better-paying jobs where they can **earn 38 percent more**[8], and it also gives them the base skills to pursue postsecondary education or training programs to further increase their earning potential by 58%.[9]

2. Evaluation of Current Status

Iowa has always used a high-stakes test to award a high school equivalency diploma (HSED). In 2014, the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) replaced the General Education Development (GED) test as Iowa's assessment that offers individuals who did not complete a high school program the opportunity to earn a state-issued diploma. To pass a HiSET, candidates must successfully complete five subject area tests: Mathematics, Language Arts - Reading & Writing, Science, and Social Studies.

Nationally, during the transition from GED to HiSET, there was a statistical decline in awards. This trend occurred in 1995, 2002, and again in 2014 when

Table 3



* U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates

+GED® ANNUAL STATISTICAL REPORTS (2010-2013); HISET™ ANNUAL REPORT (2014-2015)

[7] U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates
[8] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey
[9] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey

assessment tools were changed. To address this trend, the HSED Task Force, in consideration of the needs of our economy and workforce, was proactive in exploring additional pathway options for adults in need of a secondary credential.

As illustrated in Table 3 above, the gap between those without a high school equivalency diploma and those awarded a diploma has widened since 2011. Iowa's current process for helping people achieve their HSED credential is impacting only 0.9% of the population. In 2011, it was slightly higher at 1.5%. This decline in awards is a clear indication that the current single pathway is not able to meet the needs of ALL Iowans wishing to acquire this important credential in a timely or expeditious manner.

An absence of ability or motivation is typically not the reason people do not complete their HSED program. Their lives are complicated, resources are scarce, and many lack the support necessary to complete the traditional program. In 2015, United Way of Central Iowa, in partnership with Des Moines Area Community College, completed a student barrier assessment (self-report survey of students that had not been awarded a HSED the prior year) and found that academic anxiety and financial concerns were the top two reasons that people did not complete the HSED program. Developing rigorous alternative pathways that minimize potential anxiety and offer solutions that minimize time away from work is a promising solution for those struggling to achieve this credential when traditional pathways do not work.

For certain populations, such as minorities, new immigrants, refugees, and people who are incarcerated, the challenges to obtaining a HSED may be even more significant. Nearly 20% of the individuals who are currently incarcerated in Iowa Correctional Institutions (excluding Community Based Corrections) do not have a high school diploma or equivalency. Studies consistently show that offenders are more successful upon their release when they have had access to education and training during their incarceration. For instance, recidivism decreases by up to 24% when interventions such as high school equivalency completion, vocational education, and soft skills training are implemented in prison.[10]

Recidivism decreases by up to 24% when interventions such as high school equivalency completion, vocational education, and soft skills training are implemented in prison.

In the past five years, Iowa has resettled 3,498 refugees,[11] and while it is difficult to track secondary migrants (refugees who are resettled in one community but move to a second community after resettlement resources have been exhausted), it is estimated that secondary migration is on the rise. While not all are identified as refugees in the report, the 2016 Global DSM International Talent Strategy Recommendations (a joint project of the Greater Des Moines Partnership and the Partnership for a New American Economy) indicated that recent arrivals to the Greater Des Moines area were more likely to have come from other U.S. states in 2014 compared to 2009. Of the 16.2% of foreign-born residents who recently arrived in Greater Des Moines in 2014, 11.3% moved from other parts of Iowa, while 54.1% came from other U.S. states and 34.6% came from abroad. Additionally, 15% of the foreign-born in Greater Des Moines have not completed a high school degree.

[10] Iowa Department of Corrections, *Return on Investment Report: Evidence-Based Options to Improve Outcomes,* May 2012

[11] Department of State, Bureau of Population – Refugees and Migration WRAPS Report, September 2016

63% of those who received 12 or more hours of adult education instruction in 2015 were English language learners.

Most minority groups, including refugee and immigrant groups, present special challenges with English as a second language, requiring a higher level of academic support or an alternative strategy to achieve a HSED. Given 63% of those who received 12 or more hours of adult education instruction in 2015 were English language learners, we cannot ignore the challenges that face this population.[12]

Not enough adult Iowans are pursuing an equivalency diploma, and those who do so are not having as much success as they could if given alternatives. The varied needs of this population are such that there must be multiple pathways to the same end. Offering multiple options for high school equivalency diplomas would recognize and support the wide variety of learning styles, life circumstances, testing format preferences, financial situations, life goals, and postsecondary and workforce aspirations that the diverse students seeking a high school equivalency degree bring with them. Expanding these options will benefit everyone involved by improving individual lives, giving employers a more skilled workforce, and improving the state's overall economic position.

3. Evaluation of Alternatives

Currently, Iowa has only one pathway which is the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) assessment option. The members of the HSED Task Force evaluated several factors with regard to alternative pathways to achieve a HSED in Iowa. The considerations for this evaluation included the questions in the box on the right.

CONSIDERATIONS

Why are multiple pathways important?

What audiences are we trying to reach?

What pathways are most feasible to implement?

What are the benefits to Iowans (particularly those in poverty) and our economy, both locally and statewide?

Our target audience for this work is multi-faceted. The 145,991 working-age adults who do not have a diploma are of greatest importance. Many of these individuals are living in poverty and are faced with several barriers to education and employment.

Iowans with multiple barriers to education and employment need more customized options – no one standard fits all. We need to design a system that is accommodating and allows for alternative means of demonstrating competencies and preparedness for college and career. By providing a system with more flexibility and customization of adult learning and credential attainment, we are positioning individuals for greater success while building a much-needed pipeline of qualified workers in support of Iowa's economy.

[12] Iowa Department of Education, Adult Education & Literacy Program Year 2015 Annual Report

The HSED Task Force evaluated several alternative pathways being utilized in other states. Of those evaluated, some were determined to be most applicable to our target population based on the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of implementation and ability to maintain rigor, standards, and quality. While several alternatives were studied in depth, those with most merits for Iowa's system follow.

ACADEMIC CREDIT-BASED MEASURES

Adult Diploma Model

The Adult Diploma Model offers the ability to bundle prior high school course work with secondary or postsecondary education courses in core areas of study. In order to adopt this pathway, the State Board of Education would establish a minimum set of criteria and standards, as well as a procedure to evaluate the earned credentials. Standards and competencies would be continuously evaluated and monitored by the Department of Education.

On average, about 40 percent of Iowa students who dropped out of high school were less than one course away from attaining their high school diploma. For these students, the Adult Diploma pathway is the most relevant option because it saves time and money by crediting course work they have already done.[13]

Retroactive HSED upon Attainment of AA/AS

The Retroactive HSED offers the ability to award a high school equivalency diploma *(retroactively)* upon the attainment of academic credentials of equivalent or greater rigor, to include credit in core subjects for which the person did not complete high school credits.

In order to adopt this pathway, the State Board of Education would establish a minimum set of criteria and standards, as well as a procedure to evaluate the earned credentials. Standards and competencies would be continuously evaluated and monitored by the Department of Education.

With both of these credit-based options, individuals who have the ability to benefit from postsecondary training and education, and are capable of persisting in their studies, are prime candidates for success.

Other competency-based models, such as the National External Diploma Program (NEDP), Wisconsin's Competency-Based High School Equivalency Diploma Program, and Minnesota's Pilot Competency Completion Options Program demonstrate substantive promise, but need further research as to how they might be adopted in Iowa.

It is imperative for Iowa to address the needs of these important segments of our society, as Iowa cannot afford to have anyone who can work sitting on the sidelines due to a lack of education or credentials. By introducing alternative options, Iowa will reduce barriers for students and experience an increase in the number of high school equivalency diplomas awarded. This will then allow more Iowans to pursue postsecondary education and training, thereby supporting Future Ready Iowa's goal of increasing degree completion and preparing a skilled workforce to meet our future challenges.

[13] Iowa Department of Education, 2016