

**State Board of Education  
Comment/Response Form**

This comment and response form contains comments from the February 5, 2020, meeting of the State Board of Education when the discussion resolution was considered.

**Topic:** Revised Qualifying Scores for State-Issued High School Diplomas

**Meeting Date:** March 4, 2020

**Code Citation:** N.J.A.C. 6A:8-5.2 and 6A:20-1.4

**Level:** Adoption Resolution

**Division:** Academics and Performance

**Completed by:** Office of Adult Education

**Summary of Comments and Agency Responses:**

The following is a summary of the comments received from State Board of Education members and members of the public and the Department of Education's (Department) responses. Each commenter is identified at the end of the comment by a letter or number that corresponds to the following list:

- A. Andrew J. Mulvihill, Vice President  
State Board of Education
- B. Dr. Ronald K. Butcher, Member  
State Board of Education
- C. Dr. Joseph Ricca, Jr., Member  
State Board of Education
- 1. Joyce E. Campbell, Executive Director, Trenton Area Soup Kitchen
- 2. Charles J. Jeffers III, Adult Education Coordinator, Goodwill's Helms Academy
- 3. James Maguire, GED Program Coordinator (Retired), Middlesex County College
- 4. Carey Lawrence Savage, Professor of Mathematics, Camden County College, Blackwood Campus
- 5. Samantha Rodriguez, Camden County College student in the Adult Basic Skills Program
- 6. Essence Paige, Camden County College student in the Adult Basic Skills Program
- 7. Unidentified Camden County College student in the Adult Basic Skills Program
- 8. Briana Branch, Camden County College student in the Adult Basic Skills Program
- 9. Unidentified Camden County College student in the Adult Basic Skills Program
- 10. Marilyn Medina, Camden County College student in the Adult Basic Skills Program

1. **Comment:** The commenter asked whether passing one of the three high school equivalency assessments represents that the test taker has the knowledge that the State says a student should possess to graduate high school or something else. (A)

**Response:** The Department agrees that research has established that an individual passing a high school equivalency assessment matches up to a set of knowledge and competencies that are equivalent to what is required from students to earn a high school diploma in New Jersey.

2. **Comment:** The commenter stated that one representative of the three assessment vendors who presented last month talked about a range of scores and how the higher range was really what was equivalent to graduating from high school, which is not the passing score. The commenter said the presenter's statement seems to be at odds with the Department's view of the high school equivalency assessments. (A)

**Response:** College readiness is a mark that is further up on the continuum of the score range and it can be viewed in the same way as New Jersey's public high school students and their readiness to master college-level work. Graduates who took four Advanced Placement (AP) courses in which they have earned a score of five on the AP test and who have been in honors classes throughout their high school years are more likely to be successful in college-level courses than students who had less rigorous coursework, have indicated a lower mastery of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards, and may need more scaffolding as they move on to a post-secondary opportunity. Nevertheless, the State sets a benchmark of readiness for exiting high school.

The median age of individuals who take one of the high school equivalency assessments is 25, so the State-issued diploma might represent an employment opportunity, entrance to military service, or something similar. Therefore, the State-issued diploma represents something different than the State-endorsed diploma.

3. **Comment:** The commenter stated the important distinction is that individuals who take a high school equivalency assessment are not necessarily students who attended high school in New Jersey; they are adults. The commenter also stated high school equivalency test takers come from various backgrounds and they are not taking a test to say that they passed a New Jersey high school graduation exam, but a General Education Development (GED) test designed for adults to prove they met standards that are consistent across the country and compliant with high school graduation. (B)

**Response:** The Department thanks the commenter for the support. The Department also notes that an individual who has a State-issued diploma is not considered a graduate of a New Jersey high school. Individuals who take a high school equivalency assessment have not met all of the State and local high school graduation requirements needed for a State-endorsed diploma. When adults pass a high school equivalency assessment administered by a public high school, they are not considered a graduate of that high school.

4. **Comment:** The commenter asked for clarification that an individual who takes a high school equivalency assessment may not have met State and local course requirements because they may not have attended New Jersey's public schools. (A)

**Response:** A student who takes one of the high school equivalency assessments may have met some State and local course requirements; however, he or she is no longer enrolled in a New Jersey public school and has opted to take one of the high school equivalency assessments.

5. **Comment:** The commenter expressed support for the change in the high school equivalency assessment cut scores because it will reduce barriers for individuals to become gainfully employed. The commenter also stated high school equivalency test takers are men and women who, for one reason or another, were not able to achieve the traditional schooling experience and

to the revised cut scores could provide an alternative pathway to help the individuals get to a place where they can elevate their lives. (C)

**Response:** The Department thanks the commenter for the support.

6. **Comment:** The commenter asked how many states use the GED as their high school equivalency assessment. The commenter also asked what high school equivalency assessments are used by states that do not administer the GED. (A)

**Response:** The GED is administered in 40 states plus the District of Columbia. The states that do not utilize the GED may use one of the other two high school equivalency assessments (High School Standard Equivalency Test (HiSET) and Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC)).

7. **Comment:** The commenter, who has experience in administering adult high school equivalency assessments to individuals from both New Jersey and Pennsylvania, stated that individuals from Pennsylvania pass the test more frequently. The commenter also stated that many test takers from New Jersey consistently received scores of eight and would have received their high school equivalency diploma if they did not live in New Jersey. The commenter further stated that adult high school equivalency test takers are a vulnerable population whose self-esteem and motivation to continue testing can be negatively impacted when having to continually retest. The commenter also stated that most individuals taking an adult high school equivalency test do not want to enroll in higher education but want to be employed in jobs that require a high school diploma. (1)

**Response:** The Department thanks the commenter for the support.

8. **Comment:** The commenters discussed the [research from the Center for Women and Work at Rutgers University](#) on the sharp decline in the number of individuals receiving a State-issued high school diploma due to the higher passing scores needed in New Jersey. The commenters stated that adopting the lower passing scores on the HiSET and GED will be equitable for all students. (2, 4)

**Response:** The Department thanks the commenters for the support and the presentation of third-party research on this issue.

9. **Comment:** The commenter stated that there are no negative consequences of lowering the cut scores for the adult high school equivalency assessments, only additional positive results. The commenter also stated that eight percent of students in their GED prep program would have received a State-issued diploma last year if the GED cut score was 145. The commenter further stated the life change that occurs when a person passes the test is incredible, but the devastation of human potential when an individual fails is real. (3)

**Response:** The Department thanks the commenter for the support.

10. **Comment:** The commenters expressed support for changing the HiSET score from a nine to an eight since all other states have eight as the cut-off score. The commenters stated that a lower score would provide more adult students the opportunity to pass the assessment and start moving forward with their lives through better job opportunities and further education. (5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10)

**Response:** The Department thanks the commenters for the support.



State of New Jersey  
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Adoption Resolution  
March 4, 2020

**A Resolution to Adopt The Revised Qualifying Scores for State-Issued High School Diplomas**

**Whereas**, the New Jersey State Board of Education (State Board) has required that adult education students pass all sections of one of the New Jersey High School Equivalency Assessments in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:8-5.2 and 6A:20-1.4.

**Whereas**, the State Board in 2013 adopted three different tests (GED, HiSET, and TASC), which qualify a person for a State-issued high school diploma, and each test's initial qualifying scores; and

**Whereas**, after the test's initial qualifying scores were adopted by the State Board, the General Education Development (GED) had established in 2016 the passing score per subject to be 145; and

**Whereas**, the High School Standard Equivalency Test (HiSET) also established in 2014 that the passing score per subject to be 8, with a total battery score of 45; and

**Whereas**, the passing score of 9 instead of 500 per subject was adopted in 2014 for the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC); and

**Whereas**, in 2019 the Department researched the studies of the passing scores of GED and HiSET to determine the validity of and the theoretically appropriate passing scores for those tests; and

**Whereas**, based on this research, the Department recommends to the State Board that revisions be made to the qualifying scores for the GED, HiSET and TASC and that those passing scores for the GED and HiSET be applied now and retroactively from 2014; and

**Whereas**, the Department will monitor the impact of these new qualifying scores on the passing rates for each subject area and will report any problems with the same to the State Board; and now therefore be it

**Resolved**, that the State Board hereby approves the Department's recommendation to adjust the qualifying scores for the GED, HiSET and TASC and that those passing scores for the GED and HiSET be applied now and retroactively from 2014; and be it further

**Resolved**, that the New Jersey State Board of Education hereby acknowledges and approves the following passing scores, effective March 4, 2020:

## Passing Scores

<b>[Subtest]</b>	<b>[GED] HiSET</b>	<b>[HiSET] GED</b>	<b>TASC</b>
	Each subtest score range: 1-20	Each subtest score range: 100-200	Each subtest score range: 300-800
<b>Language Arts – Writing</b>	8 and at least a score of 2 on the writing essay	145	500 and at least a score of 2 on the writing essay
<b>Language Arts - Reading</b>	8	Included with writing	500
<b>Social Studies</b>	8	145	500
<b>Science</b>	8	145	500
<b>Mathematics</b>	8	145	500
<b>Total Score Needed</b>	45	NA	NA

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Lamont O. Repollet, Ed.D., Commissioner  
Secretary, N.J. State Board of Education

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Kathy Goldenberg, President  
N.J. State Board of Education