



Diploma to Career Pathways

In fulfillment of: Ohio Revised Code 3333.041 (A)(1) and Ohio Revised Code 3345.061 (H)

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Background

Ohio's Challenge in Creating High School Equivalency for All

Nationwide, close to 40 million adults lack a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) credential (GEDTesting Service – 2012). Nearly a quarter of high school freshmen do not graduate. In Ohio, the number of students leaving high school annually without a formal diploma numbers 24,000.

Additionally, there are over one million Ohioans (roughly 9% of Ohio's population) aged out of the high school-delivered diploma service who instead are eligible for the Adult Basic and Literacy Education program (ABLE) that delivers GED preparation services. Of that population, a majority wait, on average, at least nine years before returning to an education institution to pursue their GED. Of those who engage in pursuing a GED, 52 percent of that population is currently on public assistance.

The Need for Tying High School Equivalency Credentialing to Education Programs with Labor Market Value

Ninety-five percent of enrolled GED participants state they are pursuing a high school equivalency as a means to securing employment, obtaining a promotion at a current job, or entering post-secondary education. A review of the OhioMeansJobs.com state-sponsored job matching system reveals that 87% of Ohio's employment opportunities, posted in OMJ require, at a minimum, a high school diploma or GED. No longer can Ohio build a talented workforce that hinges on the attainment of just one credential.

The unemployment rate of high school graduates has been more than twice that of college graduates over the past two decades nationally. At the same time, the employment rate of high school grads has been 16 ½ percent lower. Last year, the employment rate of high school graduates past age 25 was 54 percent, while that of college graduates was approximately 73 percent (*Brookings Education Research Opinions – Gary Burtless, Senior Fellow, Economic Studies*). Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce reports that nearly two thirds of all jobs will require some post-secondary education or training beyond a high school diploma by 2020.

Workforce and Education Challenge

Shifts in population demographics, changing and increasing skill needs of businesses, economic hardships, and sluggish job creation numbers have created a national focus on the role education will play in the attainment of economic vitality, at the individual, community, and state level. Ohio finds itself wrestling with current education and workforce strategies designed to meet needs that are now in the rear view mirror. The state grapples with education policy and practices, workforce systems that require high-level alignment, and the injection of innovative approaches and strategic supports.

The state is facing those challenges head on with the establishment of the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation (OWT), new designs in funding for higher education, and approaches in the awarding of post-secondary credit and credentialing that focus on the success of the student. OWT continues the work to better align higher education with the state's workforce needs.

If we as communities, as an economy, and as a state, are to succeed in the pursuit of sustainable wages, vibrant careers, and economically sound cities, we have to boldly address those left behind; the high school dropouts being serviced by our high school equivalency programs.

The impact of technology across industries has enhanced the menu of skills an individual must possess in order to engage with the world of work. Increasingly, employers are raising minimum hiring requirements. Rapidly disappearing are entry-level employment opportunities for those without a high school diploma, as those first rungs on the career ladder are increasingly being tied to education attainment beyond a diploma and include the possession of post-secondary delivered skill sets, but less than a bachelor's degree. In the Ohio public education system, that credential delivery originates from some universities, but most often from our community colleges and Ohio Technical Centers.

Empirical evidence confirms that increased education is positively associated with higher earnings across career fields and demographics. Increased education also appears to lead to better overall state economies, eradicating the poverty gap inflicted by education divides.

The number of Ohio ABLE enrollees that transitioned to employment in 2012 placed Ohio 2nd nationally in getting individuals to work after education. In moving individuals on to post-secondary attainment from ABLE, Ohio placed 3rd nationally in 2012. In assisting enrollees in obtaining their credential, ABLE placed 7th nationally. (*See exhibit on ABLE Ohio Fast Facts*)

From a high-level view, Ohio is doing well in comparison to other state delivery systems in achieving high school equivalency credentials, employment of those credential seekers, and their eventual transition to other post-secondary programs that broaden their career options. But one has to step back to the overall context in which this work is performed.

More than one million Ohioans are in need of a high school diploma/equivalency, with 24,000 leaving the K-12 system every year. In comparison, Ohio is performing well, but the enormity of the task at hand is currently exceeding forward progress, with 7,435 unused seats in the current ABLE delivery system.

Federal changes implemented in January 2014 are having negative impacts on populations needing a high school diploma/equivalency. While GED preparation and testing continues to be a combination of technology and print materials, the majority of the instructional delivery and testing have moved from paper and pencil platforms to online delivery, providing yet another challenge for those with lower literacy skills and the need for individualized instruction in computer literacy. GED testing standards have risen and testing costs have tripled, with Ohio providing a testing voucher to offset the initial cost increase for an as yet undefined period of time.

Those able to enter post-secondary programs by passing entrance tests, but not possessing high school diploma/equivalency, are now unable to secure federal financial aid, an option available to them prior to 2014. Federal financial aid now “requires” that an individual first possess a GED or high school diploma to secure funds to attend post-secondary programming. Many post-secondary programs regulated by licensing and credentialing agencies for industry-recognized credentials also require that enrollees already possess a high school diploma/equivalency.

What road could be narrower for an individual than the path without high school attainment? What initial condition is more consistent in predicting lifelong poverty than the lack of a high school diploma/equivalency? What other circumstance impacts opportunity in a manner that follows an individual well beyond their youth into their 20s, 30s, and 40s?

Obtaining a Diploma in Ohio

By what methods can an individual obtain a high school diploma or equivalency in Ohio? The state offers four options that recognize student achievement of a high equivalency as administered through the Ohio Department of Education. These include:

1. Ohio High School Diploma – Administered through the Ohio Department of Education
2. Ohio High School Equivalence Diploma (2014GED®) – Administered by the Ohio Department of Education
3. Adult Career Opportunity Pilot Program - Sec. 3313.902
4. Enrollment of individuals ages 22 and above - Sec. 3317.23

1. Ohio High School Diploma (Administered by Ohio Department of Education)

Ohio legislators passed Ohio's new high school graduation law in June. In September, the State Board of Education approved two essential elements of the new requirements: the graduation points system and a list of tests students can take in lieu of Ohio tests.

Graduation Points - students can accumulate their scores from end-of-course exams. The higher a student scores on any end-of-course exam, the more graduation points he or she earns:

- Advanced Level = 5 points
- Accelerated Level = 4 points
- Proficient Level = 3 points
- Basic Level = 2 points
- Limited Level = 1 point

Once a student reaches 18 graduation points overall, he or she becomes eligible for a diploma. Of these overall points, a student must earn at least four points between the math exams, four points between the English exams, and six points between the science and social studies exams.

Substitute Exams - Students in certain courses can take a substitute exam, such as an Advanced Placement (AP) exam, instead of the state's end-of-course exam. AP exams approved by the State Board of Education may be substitute tests for the following courses:

Physical Science:

- AP Physics 1: Algebra-Based
- AP Physics 2: Algebra-Based

American History:

- AP United States History

American Government:

- AP United States Government and Policy

Retaking Exams - A student who scores below "proficient" on any end-of-course exam may retake the exam after receiving extra help from the school. A student scoring "proficient" or higher can retake an exam only if he or she has taken all seven end-of-course exams and remains below the minimum point requirements. Any student who *automatically* earned three graduation points from a course can retake the exam for a higher score.

Highest Score Counts - The highest score a student gets on a test will count. For example, if a student retakes an end-of-course exam, or if he or she takes the college admissions test before or after it is offered by the state, the student's highest recorded score will count.

Transfer Students - Districts will scale down the graduation points requirements for students who arrive at a school with credit for applicable tested courses. However, these students still must earn at least five points between the English II and either the Geometry or Integrated Math II exams.

Students who transfer having taken all of the tested courses will take the college admissions test (see below for more information on this test). If the student does not reach the score needed for graduation, the student must take the English II and Integrated Math II exams and earn five points between them.

Phase-in Exemption and Automatic Points - If a student earned high school credit for a tested course before July 1, 2014, the student automatically earns three graduation points. Students who earn credit for a first semester block course in American history, American government or physical science before January 31, 2015, will also automatically earn three graduation points. If a student receives automatic points, he or she does not have to take the exam, unless that student chooses to take it. The exemption for block schedule students is part of a rule that will be finalized in December 2014, after the compilation of this report.

Industry Credentials - The State Board of Education approved the criteria for the industry credentials that a student may use to assist in qualifying for a diploma. All credentials must be tied to jobs that are in-demand, either statewide or locally. A student can use any credential for graduation that appears on the state-approved credential list during the student's junior year, even if that credential comes off the list during the senior year. A student may always use new credentials added to the list after his or her junior year. The department will release the first approved credentials list in December 2014.

2. Ohio High School Equivalence Diploma (2014GED®) (Administered by the Ohio Department of Education)

GED Attainment – The Adult Basic Literacy and Education program (ABLE) was nationally instituted to address the dynamics of those without a high school diploma/equivalency. The ABLE program provides a number of free services that support adults in securing a high school equivalency (GED), literacy assistance and English speaking education. ABLE also provides services for individuals who need life, employability and computer literacy skills and partners to transition individuals to post-secondary attainment.

ABLE prepares individuals for the four subjects tested on the GED® exam, which are: Reasoning through Language Arts (RLA); Mathematical Reasoning; Science; and Social Studies. All tests are based on a 12th-grade curriculum, and are aligned with the Common Core State Standards. There are new scoring requirements that an applicant must achieve to earn an Ohio GED®. The GED® test will have a passing score of 150 for each subject. Therefore, students will need to reach a score of at least 150 on each subject and a total score of 600 or higher across all four subjects in order to receive the GED® test credential. Students may also earn an "Honors" score if they receive a score of 170 or higher on any subject. See below for the full score scale:

- Below Passing: 100 – 149
- Passing Score: 150 – 169
- Honors Passing Score: 170 – 200

Effective April 1, 2014, Ohio will transition its GED® credentialing process from the issuance of paper transcripts and GED® diplomas (e.g. Ohio High School Equivalence Diplomas) to a paperless electronic transcript system. The Ohio Department of Education remains the issuing agency. The diplomas and transcripts can be accessed by students and the free electronic transcript can be emailed directly to potential colleges and employers.

3. Adult Career Opportunity Pilot Program (Sec. 3313.902)

The new Adult Career Opportunity Pilot Program permits a community college, technical college, state community college, or technical center that provides post-secondary

workforce education to offer a program that enables individuals who are at least 22 years old and have not received a high school diploma or an equivalence certificate to obtain a high school diploma and a post-secondary delivered, industry recognized credential.

The governing legislation requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction, in consultation with the Chancellor of the Board of Regents, to adopt rules for the implementation of the program, including requirements for applying for program approval. The Superintendent has the authority to award planning grants in fiscal year 2015 of up to \$500,000 to no more than five eligible institutions geographically dispersed across the state for the purpose of building capacity to implement the pilot program. The Superintendent, in consultation with others, will develop recommendations for the method of funding and other associated requirements for the pilot program, with a report of the recommendations due to the legislature by December 31, 2014.

4. Enrollment of Individuals Ages 22 and Above (Sec. 3317.23)

Beginning with fiscal year 2015, individuals age 22 and above who have not received a high school diploma or equivalence certificate may enroll for up to two cumulative school years in any of the following for the purpose of earning a high school diploma: (1) a city, local, or exempted village school district, or a community school that operates a dropout prevention and recovery program, (2) a joint vocational school district that operates an adult education program, or (3) a community college, university branch, technical college, or state community college.

For fiscal year 2015, the legislation limits the combined enrollment of individuals ages 22 and above under the act's provisions to 1,000 individuals on a full-time equivalency basis, as determined by the Department of Education. The Department is required to annually pay an educational entity, for each individual enrolled under the act's provisions, \$5,000 times the individual's enrollment on a full-time equivalency basis, as reported by the entity and certified by the Department, times the percentage of the school year in which the individual is enrolled.

Individuals enrolled under the act's provisions may elect to satisfy the requirements to earn a high school diploma by successfully completing a competency-based instructional program that complies with standards adopted by the State Board of Education.

The legislation requires a joint vocational school district, community college, university branch, technical college, or state community college, if an individual completes the requirements for a diploma, to certify the completion to the city, local, or exempted village school district in which the individual resides, which then must issue a high school diploma to the individual. The Ohio Department of Education is required, by December 31, 2015, to prepare and submit a report to the General Assembly regarding services provided to individuals ages 22 and above under the act's provisions.

Recommendations

Ohio is focused on how to increase the participation of adults in high school equivalency programs as well as tying programs to additional education delivery that holds labor market value as one tool to addressing Ohio poverty and improving education attainment rates. Both the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents have been collaborating on strategies in this space. The recommendations below focus on the Adult Basic Literacy Education (ABLE) program administered by ODE through OBOR.

Recommendations Focused on Current Resources

1. **Increase Access through Partnership Development** - OBR will explore with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services the feasibility of a partnership to expand access to computers and physical locations for the delivery of ABLE services. This would entail the joint usage of OhioMeansJobs Centers across the state during off-service hours for the purposes of conducting ABLE classes. This strategy would build on infrastructure investments already made by the state and would expose ABLE participants who are job seekers to the workforce system structure and services for securing employment.
2. **Increase Access through Technology** – OBR will explore technology resources that can broaden access points in areas of Ohio where face-to-face class delivery settings can be challenging due to the distance between ABLE providers and their client base. Additionally, OBR will work with ABLE providers to identify those populations that can more effectively manage their education in conjunction with other life responsibilities through the usage of online provided instruction and ensure this option is made available to those individuals.
3. **Expand Adult Participation through Partnership**
 - a. OBR will explore with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections the resources and coordination efforts that would be needed to develop a requirement that ex-offenders, enrolled in re-entry programs and not possessing a high school equivalency, be enrolled in an ABLE GED preparation program as a part of the probation process.
 - b. OBR will explore with the Office of Human Service Innovation opportunities to formally connect individuals utilizing assistance and without a high school diploma/ equivalency to ABLE GED preparation programs as part of the state-provided assistance process, or to orientation programs about post-secondary options and the role of high school equivalency in future education and employability options.
4. **Increase Access through the establishment of Supportive Service Strategies** – OBR will meet with the Office of Human Services Innovation to explore opportunities to jointly apply for federal funds or utilize existing state funding structures to improve the connection of those seeking a high school equivalency to supportive services such as vouchers for transportation, childcare, and other similar services.

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5. **Expand the connection of high school equivalency attainment to Career Pathway Strategies** – Ohio, through the ABLE program, is one of 14 states involved in a national project (Moving Pathways Forward) to focus on career pathway development. While many at the local-delivery level who are involved in facilitating career pathway connections see a desire for career pathway implementation and are involved in local career pathway program delivery, the state does not have a formal definition, vision, or mission around the deployment of career pathways across education programs and education agencies, nor a set of career pathway metrics. The development of a formalized strategy in career pathways across agencies would play a large role in connecting high school equivalency strategies and post-secondary delivery, bringing great benefits to the populations targeted in this report. OBR will facilitate an inter-agency team across state agencies to work with this national effort, and then connect that work specifically to populations without a high school diploma/equivalency. This work is already under way with the first inter-agency team meeting scheduled for January 14, 2015.
 6. **Increase Adult Participation through outreach-marketing/public awareness strategies** – OBR will work with partners that can support the development of marketing and public awareness strategies to highlight the positive messages and the imperative messages our community members must hear related to the attainment of a GED. This will include working with low-cost public address-type programming and seeking and securing foundation partners, both within Ohio and nationally, that can provide resources and talent toward this work through a statewide campaign.

Recommendations Requiring Investment

1. **Career pathway strategies with local labor market value** - OBR will explore a plan to develop and launch “Career Rungs.” This will be a “one-two-three” series that moves those seeking a GED through the first three rungs of the career ladder with the goal of creating self-sustainability. Those “rungs” are identified as GED attainment, securing a post-secondary or industry-recognized credential, and providing employment search preparation skills and job placement services. The goals of this strategy are to increase GED completion rates and impact poverty status by placing GED completers on a self-sustainable career path using integrated GED and post-secondary programming similar to examples provided in this report. This will include post-secondary programs and USO institution utilization of non-profit community partner programs, locally endorsed industry credentials, and post-secondary workforce alliances with industry. This strategy will include (1) funding for non-profit/post-secondary education coordination; (2) local industry-recognized credential delivery by post-secondary job developers to ensure graduate ability to conduct a personal job search; and (3) navigating the employment process and receiving job placement services aligned against the State of Ohio In-Demand Jobs list and relying on ODJFS labor market data. However, the delivery of the integrated GED and post-secondary coursework will be funded using existing ABLE allocations from the federal program to provide GED education that will be simultaneously delivered with career-building skills. The post-secondary partnership delivery will require funds outside of ABLE.

2. **Increasing Adult Participation in securing high school equivalency – Early Withdrawal or Compulsory Language** – Focusing on those aged 16-18 and formally petitioning for withdrawal from high school, OBR and ODE will explore requiring ABLE GED program attendance as part of the high school early withdrawal process. ABLE delivery will be reconfigured to support this population through a variety of early withdrawal needs, such as delivering GED education to new parents and those students withdrawn from high school, and going into the workplace to secure badly needed family income. As of 2013, there was an unused capacity in the ABLE program of 7,435 seats. This strategy will not entail the investment of new funds for ABLE, but most likely will require agency partnering and solutions for the addition of childcare, transportation, and other services to ensure the target population has access to and retention of supportive services that enable their continuation in educational programming.

Defining the Work Ahead

While this report mentions a number of high school equivalency options and programs, the offering administered by OBR through an agreement with the ODE, is the Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) program. Much of the detail contained in this report refers to the ABLE program.

OBR set three parameters in investigating the high school equivalency issue:

1. Increasing adult access to diploma programs
2. Increasing adult participation in high school equivalency programming
3. Integrating the delivery of high school diplomas simultaneous with post-secondary education or industry recognized skill programs that have labor market value (results in graduates obtaining employment)

Two approaches are explored in this document related to the parameters outlined above: reframing the work using current state resources, and program enhancements that will require investment.

In defining the work, it is important to note that the State of Ohio is currently in the process of finalizing a new Unified Plan across the federal ABLE, Perkins, and Workforce Investment Act Title I programs. These programs cross at the agency level between ODJFS, ODE, and OBR. The focused strategies contained in the plan will result in positive impacts on the programs and services that those without a high school diploma/equivalency can access across the three agencies. Therefore, some of what is discussed in this report will also be addressed under the Unified Plan strategy or be a complement to that work.

What follows is an outline of the factors affecting each of the report parameters of access, participation, and integrated program delivery with labor market value.

1. Increasing Adult Access

Access in the context of delivering high school equivalency programming contains the following elements:

- Program access points: number of program offerings, locations and delivery times
- Available supportive services: transportation, childcare and other supportive service elements that enhance the ability for consumers to participate in the education offering
- Outreach/program marketing strategies that drive public awareness of the offered services and their potential impact on poverty rates and income status

Program access points (technology) - Program access points can certainly be impacted by a broadened use of technology. ABLE providers come in many shapes and forms, from technology equipped sites such as libraries and college campuses to sites less imbedded with technology such as churches and recreation centers. Additionally, ABLE participants come with varying life conditions: the responsibilities of employment, caring for children or elder family members, limited access to transportation, and other life scenarios. At times, those life conditions can better be met by securing ABLE coursework through technology-based platforms that can be accessed in the participant's home or a nearby computer-enabled access point.

However, technology cannot be the sole tool used in broadening access. Participants in high school equivalency programs are vulnerable populations often best served in face-to-face, individually tailored education programs. Additionally, a portion of these populations does not have access to home internet, computers, or phone data plans. For those that do, it is incumbent upon the state to ensure they have access to this education delivery method.

Program access points (partnerships) - Broadening access can also be accomplished through partnering. For example, Ohio Department of Jobs & Family Services' (ODJFS) OhioMeansJobs Opportunity Centers (one-stops) are often closed to the public in the evening and on weekends. A large majority of high school equivalency programs take place in the evening and during weekend hours so that participants who are employed can work during the day and receive education assistance in settings beyond the 8 A.M. to 5 P.M. timeframe. This is particularly true in the delivery of the GED preparation program. Developing partnerships with ODJFS might be a solid step not only in creating more locations for programming, but also broadening the access to available computers.

Another example of using partnerships to drive access is the expansion of Ohio employers offering GED programming at their business sites. Whirlpool Corporation in Marion, Ohio recently initiated a new hiring program. Individuals applying at OhioMeansJobs.com can secure employment with Whirlpool through Kelly Services and complete their GED at the Whirlpool site after or before their work shift. Once they have obtained a GED, those individuals become eligible to be interviewed for full-time employment with Whirlpool. Not only are employers like Whirlpool raising the skill level of their workforce, but they also are contributing to the overall education attainment of their local communities and the ability of community members to reach self-sustaining wages. One member of the pilot program had this to say about

"For me it means I get a second chance for something I gave up when I was 18 years old. That GED is going to help me get in here permanent, full-time, so I have a nice career."

- John Coykendall,
Whirlpool employee and participant
in the company's GED program

the opportunity: “For me it means I get a second chance for something I gave up when I was 18 years old,” John Coykendall said, recalling that he dropped out of Harding High School to secure employment when he learned he was going to be a father. “That GED is going to help me get in here permanent, full-time, so I have a nice career.” (*Adapted from the article “Marion Whirlpool program promotes pursuit of GED” by John Jarvis of the Marion Star, published on 4/8/2014*).

Working with industry to provide more access to worksite GED programming can have multiple benefits in raising high school equivalency attainment, as well as lifting poverty levels in a community by broadening the potential career options available to incumbent workers.

Another potential access partnership for exploration is with the Office of Rehabilitation and Corrections in assessing how to provide ex-offenders with opportunities to access GED programming. “The Effects of Prison Education Programs on Recidivism,” a study published in the December 2010 *Journal of Correctional Education*, asserts that it is wise for states to fund education programs for inmates, citing that it reduces recidivism dramatically. A survey research study of eight states, including Ohio, reported results that educational programs cut recidivism from 49% to 20%. (*Recidivism Rates*).

Ohio has strong strategies in this space for GED and career technical delivery for those who are incarcerated. In looking at ways that partnering can drive more adults to high school equivalency attainment, looking at organizations responsible for the probationary status and monitoring of parolees through re-entry programs certainly might herald a partnership to explore making GED attainment a condition of parolee or probationary status.

The examples cited above provide solid foundations on which to build an Ohio plan to increase program access elements.

Program Access (Availability of Supportive Services) – Vouchers for childcare and transportation can greatly improve the ability of adults to access education programs. The Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services and the Office of Human Service Innovation and other state agencies are working to remove barriers for individuals to acquire work, education, and other services. By exploring with other agencies the structures under which funds may be used, the state may be able to create a more streamlined access to those supports. Additionally, these agencies should explore together any potential opportunities at the federal level to apply for pilot, demonstration or other funds that might supplement this work. For example, the national Opportunity Youth Innovation Fund, established by the Jobs for the Future advocacy group and its partner, the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions, is exploring how to connect earning a diploma or its equivalency to higher postsecondary education outcomes. Through a \$6 million investment, these organizations seek to improve education and career outcomes for youth disconnected from school or work, also known as Opportunity Youth in twelve communities across the country.

Program Access (Outreach/Marketing/Public Awareness) – Getting the word out about any state-sponsored service or program is a challenge. OBR has been exploring the development of an outreach campaign with components that will make information about high school equivalency program options more visible. That strategy will incorporate a plan around adult access issues and is explained in more detail in this report under the “Increasing Adult Participation – Outreach/Marketing/Public Awareness” section of this document.

2. Increasing Adult Participation

Increasing the participation of adults in programs contains the following elements:

- Outreach-marketing/public awareness strategies
- Stigma
- Utilization of career pathway strategies with local labor market value in education delivery
- Participant qualifying events

Current providers in the ABLE system have program capacity to help. In 2013, among contracted Ohio providers, there was an unfilled enrollment capacity of 7,435 across the state. If Ohio can be successful in implementing strategies that drive more of the one million individuals eligible for GED services into programs, current funding can accommodate a gradual increase in participants.

Increasing Adult Participation (Outreach/Marketing/Public Awareness) – All high school equivalency programs would benefit from some form of marketing-based outreach strategies. The ABLE program in particular operates in relative obscurity. Ohio is the only state to use the ABLE moniker, basically naming a program after the funding stream that supports it. Those seeking GED services have no idea what ABLE stands for, and even if aware, most do not connect GED with the menu of services ABLE provides. Inserting “GED” into the Google search engine returns a large menu of GED testing sites, but does not connect the searcher with GED instruction, nor is the ABLE program ever included in the list of returned search options.

In addition to not finding the instruction services or the ABLE offering, eligible participants have no expectation of free education delivery, yet that is the cornerstone of what will drive those to use ABLE services, especially those in poverty.

One large barrier to youth and adults seeking academic services is a fear of being assessed out of education programming. The words “assessments, testing, and entrance exams” give those with solid education credentials pause, let alone the masses who failed to get the first level of credentialing represented by high school equivalency. Yet a significant highlight of the ABLE program is that “everyone” (with very minor accommodations) can

access the services. They are not assessed out of program delivery, but assessed into coursework and services that match their ability levels.

Two of the largest barriers populations in our communities face in the pursuit of knowledge - cost and individual suitability - are removed by the ABLE delivery system. Yet there are few better kept secrets within Ohio's borders than the ABLE program.

OBR must seek partnerships to assist in developing marketing-based outreach strategies for adults who failed the non-ABLE high school equivalency option programs. State agencies are not best equipped to develop the vehicles for outreach plans that need to rise to the heights of private service advertisements in driving participation.

Increasing Adult Participation (Modeling Older Adults as Program Champions through Marketing)

- In benchmarking activities undertaken by Graduation Alliance (an organization that has given school districts across the nation the resources and support needed to serve students for whom life obstacles have prevented prior academic success, and that is accredited by the Northwest Accreditation Commission, a division of AdvancEd and a recognized partner of the America's Promise Alliance), their experience has been that providing multi-generational access to programs to offset issues where poverty recycles is key to eradicating poverty and creating credential attainment. A student pursuing a high school equivalency may be at the last course prior to finish and the first person to graduate from high school in the family. Often, peers and family may be threatened by that education attainment and can often label it a betrayal. To break the cycle of poverty, Graduation Alliance recommends that Ohio include older adults in the outreach strategies of the education programs aimed at this problem, as a means to increase adult participation and successful graduation.

To break the cycle of poverty, Graduation Alliance recommends that Ohio include older adults in the outreach strategies of the education programs aimed at this problem, as a means to increase adult participation and successful graduation.

Increasing Adult Participation – (Stigma) – Individuals without a high school diploma or equivalency experience a sense of shame or a need to hide from others their lack of a credential. There are few ways outside of vigorous marketing of positive messages that can offset that condition. Linking the message to broadening access to jobs and wages and improved self-esteem are necessary to remove one of the most common and initial barriers to adult engagement in program offerings – the stigma issue. How do we make the attainment of these credentials commonplace in Ohio? How do we move the conversation to

an everyday request for a service without an attached stigma for those seeking assistance? Exploring with a skilled marketing planner the manner in which to move acquiring a GED or other high school equivalency from shame to gain is vital to driving more adults into the programming and could be accomplished through the outreach strategies described above.

Increasing Adult Participation (Utilization of Career Pathway Strategies with Local Labor Market Value in Education Delivery) -There are several factors important to note in reviewing this strategy.

Career Pathways –To meet the need in the U.S. for a better skilled and credentialed 21st century workforce, career pathways has emerged as a promising approach for increasing the number of individuals who gain the skills and academic and industry-recognized credentials needed for work in high-demand occupations. In April 2012, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Education (ED), and Health and Human Services (HHS) issued a training and employment service among public agencies to facilitate the delivery of career pathway services. This alignment requires the coordination and connection of different parts of multiple public and private services and activities to create a comprehensive education and training system. To support the development of career pathway systems, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE) funded *Moving Pathways Forward: Supporting Career Pathways Integration*, a new three-year project to assist states in advancing career pathway systems to growth occupations. The project goal is to further integrate adult education into broader career pathway system development at the state and local levels by building upon the successes and lessons learned from earlier federal and state investments in career pathways. The project supports state and local activities to create career pathway systems involving industry; career and technical, adult, and postsecondary education; and workforce and economic development. The project will also address barriers to the implementation of cross-system policies that support transitions for adult learners into postsecondary education and employment (*Taken from the Moving Pathways Forward – Overview of the Moving Pathways Forward Project – OCTAE - 2012*).

Currently, Ohio has no formal definition, vision, or mission around the deployment of career pathways across education programs and education agencies, nor defined data collection metrics statewide. The development of a formalized strategy in career pathways would play a large role in connecting high school equivalency strategies and post-secondary delivery, bringing great benefits to the populations targeted in this report. Ohio's effort will focus on reaching a state-level consensus on the definition of a career pathway system as well as developing strategies and metrics to implement such a system through the six JobsOhio regions. This will include an encompassing vision and mission for the work across agencies such as: OBR, ODE, Ohio Department of Job & Family Services, Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation and the Ohio Association of Community Colleges. Additionally, the public and private sector will engage to collaborate to increase education and training opportunities for unemployed and under-employed adults with an emphasis on those who are low income, matching education and training opportunities with explicit career pathways that support high-growth, high-demand occupations in Ohio.

The Moving Pathways Forward initiative provides intensive technical assistance to the 14 participating states and a developed inter-agency team (*see exhibit for a listing of inter-agency team members*). Participating states include Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin (*see map*). Key components of career pathways state systems, as defined by the Moving Pathways Forward project, include:

- Cross-agency Partnerships and Industry Engagement;
- State Vision for a Career Pathways System and Communications about this Vision
- Alignment of Policies and Programs
- Education, Training, and Support Services;
- Professional Development and Technical Assistance;
- Data Systems and Evaluation; and
- Funding and Sustainability

In particular, state system outcomes slated for the work by OCTAE are:

- Change in levels of implementation of career pathway state system components (e.g., strengthening of state partnerships, more targeted professional development to support local implementation of career pathways)
- Capacity to address challenges in developing or expanding state systems
- Use of differentiated approaches to implement career pathways that account for variations in target population, availability of resources, and other regional differences

Local implementation of career pathways will be expressed in outcomes such as the following:

- Increase in the number of ABE programs implementing career pathways
- Level of implementation of career pathways in ABE programs,
- Integration of adult education career pathways with other career pathways systems in the state
- Number/percent and populations of ABE learners who enroll in postsecondary training and earn a certificate or credential (depending on states' activities)

Career pathway strategies with local labor market value - It is important to note that those possessing a high school diploma are suffering in the labor market. No longer can Ohio build a talented workforce that hinges on the attainment of just one credential.

Partners for a Competitive Workforce in Cincinnati is a partnership in the Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana tri-state region focused on meeting employer demand by growing the skills of the current and future workforce. They have joined to coordinate the region's workforce

efforts under a common umbrella, setting joint priorities. Director for the organization, Janice Urbanik, states that **32% of the individuals they train for the workforce can fill entry-level jobs**. However, the next set of jobs representing progression along a career ladder is requiring post-secondary credentials at a rate of 60%.

Responding to these and similar statistics, the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation has been working on a unified plan with the goals of increasing access to and the delivery of foundation skills, high school completion, and connecting businesses to a highly skilled workforce. Additionally, that office has also been working with OBR and the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services to develop a supply and demand photo of the Ohio labor force. ODJFS is using a number of data elements to identify the most In-demand jobs in Ohio. OBR is feeding to ODJFS education supply data (student graduates from USO programs). ODJFS is taking both data sets, aligning them against Standard Occupation Codes, and producing information that can result in both educators and potential students making more informed career pathway selections that make connections leading out of poverty. According to Graduation Alliance, Ohio is one of the national leaders in recognizing that this work equates to an economic issue.

This data will also display to adults seeking jobs a listing of occupations that "require" a high school diploma/equivalency as the minimum requirement for employment (see *exhibit*).

But most alarming about the quoted statistics is the real world photo it paints about the value of credentials in today's labor market. While it is predicted that 60% of the jobs of the future will lie in the middle skills area, that means that individuals will need to possess a high school diploma/equivalency AND some post-secondary or industry recognized credential to obtain employment.

Nationally, contextualized delivery has shown great gains in assisting individuals in connecting the abstract delivery of foundational skills such as math, reading, and so on with the simultaneous delivery of technical skills that are of most interest to individuals whom education has already failed. It makes sense that imbedded GED delivery or high school equivalency obtainment occur simultaneously with technical skills delivery. This provides individuals the base credential required for employment and the technical credential that can launch the graduate higher on the wage scale toward self-sustaining careers. Also, contextualized delivery has shown higher GED retention and passage rates.

However, few GED programs are well linked to college or training programs. Even those on post-secondary education campuses can often run in a silo-like manner compared with other career-technical programs delivered on a campus.

Other states are beginning to implement integrated delivery strategies. Louisiana views dropouts as an untapped labor pool. Petro Chemicals – BASF is a large employer in Louisiana. BASF has stated that the dropout issue is not an education issue, but an economic issue. Petro-chemical companies have committed \$80 billion in investment in the state of

Louisiana over the next five years, but there is a significant skills gap and talent shortage in the state, particularly for middle-skill jobs. Employers are looking to adult dropouts as a potential source to fill the existing skills gap. Graduation Alliance is working with industry partners in this effort.

The I-BEST model (Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training), developed in the state of Washington, is certainly the most well-known among workforce and education professionals as a successful implementation of innovation in the high school equivalency design carrying labor market value. Basic skills instructors and community college technical faculty jointly design and teach college-level occupational classes that admit basic skills-level students. By integrating basic skills and professional-technical skill instruction, I-BEST seeks to increase the rate at which adult basic education students advance to college-level programs and complete postsecondary credentials. I-BEST pairs two instructors in the classroom – one to teach professional and technical content and the other to teach basic skills in reading, math, writing, or English language – so students can move through school and into jobs faster. As students progress through the program, they learn basic skills in real-world scenarios offered by the job-training part of the curriculum. I-BEST challenges the traditional notion that students must complete all basic education before they can even start a job-training program. Those approaches often discourage students because it takes more time, and the stand-alone basic skills classes do not qualify for college credit. I-BEST students start earning college credits immediately.

A study of the LaGuardia Community College “Bridge to Health and Business Programs” is another note-worthy model. Rather than focusing solely on passing the test, the program was designed explicitly as a pathway to college and careers. The curriculum integrates materials from the fields of healthcare and business. Students attend more hours over the course of a semester than the typical GED delivery requirement, and an intensive advising structure was aligned with the program delivery. The concept moves away from generic exercises that develop math, writing, and reading competencies to a model where students learn by using materials specific to the health care or business track they are pursuing. This combined curriculum engages the student at a higher rate, leading to increased retention and progression along the career pathway and post-secondary attainment.

The GED Bridge program was targeted to low-income individuals in New York City without a high school diploma or equivalency, 18 years of age or older and with an income level below 200 percent of federal poverty. The program evaluation shows that the GED Bridge students completed the course at a significantly higher rate than those not in the program, 68% compared to 48%. Bridge students passed the GED exam at a higher rate at

“The thing that’s most motivating is that everything we’re doing is about health. It’s getting us into something that we want to do. Being in a regular GED course isn’t the same.”

- Participant in New York City’s
GED Bridge program

53% versus 22%. Bridge students enrolled in college at much higher rates than students in the traditional GED pre course, at 24% compared to 7%. The policy brief that reviewed this work (*Enhancing GED Instruction to Prepare Students for College and Careers*, Vanessa Martin and Joseph Broadus) quoted one participant who tried to explain how the integrated course work affected student performance: “The thing that’s most motivating is that everything we’re doing is about health. It’s getting us into something that we want to do. Being in a regular GED course isn’t the same.”

A good example of such programming in Ohio is the Parma City Schools program. OhioGuidestone, a non-profit organization, in partnership with the Parma City Schools ABLE program, offers students of YouthBuild an opportunity to study conjointly for the GED and for construction skills. YouthBuild programs focus on low-income young people ages 16 to 24. These individuals work full-time for six to 24 months toward their GEDs or high school diplomas while learning job skills by building affordable housing in their communities. YouthBuild programs place emphasis on leadership development, community service, and the creation of a positive mini-community of adults and youth committed to each other’s success. Today, there are 264 YouthBuild programs in 46 states, Washington, D.C., and the Virgin Islands engaging approximately 10,000 young adults per year.

In the Parma City Schools program, the curriculum used for both of the sessions is a collaboration of the GED instructors of Parma City Schools ABLE program and the construction instructors of OhioGuidestone, with emphasis on contextualizing the curriculum. The students’ projects include building and renovating for the Habitat for Humanity and various other community organizations. The students receive paid work experience and internships for the program plus continual support for employment even beyond the program.

At a recent ABLE graduation event, participants in the YouthBuild program wrote letters to Gary Cates, the Senior Vice Chancellor guiding the ABLE program at Regents. Those voices are most eloquent in demonstrating what an integrated GED/post-secondary or credentials with labor-market-value program can achieve:

Jeremiah Walker – “I was depressed and angry when I realized that I couldn’t make it without a GED or find a great paying job.”

Anthony Heard – “I never could imagine the level of help and support that I am getting from anybody, let alone a program that helps with learning, getting your GED, finding jobs, helping with housing, learning construction etc. If I didn’t have this great program I might have been locked up or worse, dead and gone. My heroes of all time are the YouthBuild leaders from OhioGuidestone and ABLE.”

Eric Matheny – “When I first heard of this program I thought it was too good to be true, there was no way I could get my GED and also get paid to learn construction. After I complete this program I plan on joining an apprenticeship program to further my construction education. Now that I am in this program I am refreshed and I am a lot

better at all educational subjects, especially math. I am grateful for getting this chance to come to Youth Build and get this education to make something great out of myself. If it wasn't for this program I would not really be doing anything with my life, I would still be sitting at home making no progress towards a career. YouthBuild really helped me unlock my potential by showing me what I can do."

Erik Zitney – "I am excited to say this program is one of the best opportunities I have ever encountered. I used to have a job and worked every day while enjoying volunteering when possible. After I had lost connection with the workforce, it became hard for me to face day-to-day living. I plan to achieve a career in construction. This program is a hopeful and strong start to this journey."

Kayla Martinez – "I really never cared about my life. I never really liked getting up for school because I felt like I didn't learn anything. I feel like my dreams are coming true. I'm getting my GED while being able to learn construction, which is something I always wanted to do. I want to be able to show my family I can do it. Youth build has made a big change in my life."

These examples underpin why Ohio must expand opportunities to integrate the delivery of high school equivalencies with skills holding labor market value. Mentioned previously, ODE has a pilot program proposed in this space, the "Adult Career Opportunity Pilot Program." OBOR needs to explore similar options for GED populations like the Youthbuild and Whirlpool examples that will not only level, but lift individuals out of poverty and on the road to careers. The highlighted GED Bridge program, as well as the IBEST model, and the Parma City schools programs demonstrate the promise such models hold for strengthening links between low-income students who need high school equivalency and post-secondary training for employment and careers.

Increasing Adult Participation (Participant Qualifying Events) – There are a number of scenarios where "life events" could be leveraged to increase participation in high school equivalency programs. Early withdrawal from high school or high school compulsory language and public assistance program requirements are two areas that come to mind and are discussed below.

Life Event (Early Withdrawal/Compulsory Education Language) – A number of states are changing their compulsory education laws. All but 20 states have eliminated the ability for students/parents to early withdraw a child/student prior to age 18. However, as these are newer implementations, there is not yet solid data to offer that this change in age requirement for the ability to withdraw from school is having a marked impact on high school diploma attainment. It would stand to reason that if students are already struggling, changing an age requirement without accompanying strategies around tutoring and innovative academic delivery and supportive services to that student do not change their "ability" or their "circumstances" related to the requirements to graduate high school.

Even collecting data can be challenging as some schools have gone as far as changing the data label - no longer defining students as a “drop out.” They instead label these students as habitually truant or school refusal students, which is correlating to their disappearance from drop out statistics. Raising the age of early withdrawal and relabeling the condition may fall short of creating academic gain.

Seventy-eight percent of Graduation Alliance students state they left high school for a non-academic reason, such as parenting, not a fit for the high school environment, boredom, a need to secure immediate employment, programs not providing time or location conducive to other issues the student wrestled with, and so on. However, these same students also stated that “access” will play a big role in how they engage going forward.

Another strategy to apply to early withdrawal students might be approving the appropriate early withdrawal scenarios as outlined by the legislature and coupling that with required GED attainment language. In their report on, “Making Good on a Promise: What Policymakers Can Do to Support the Educational Persistence of Dropouts,” Jobs for the Future outlines the following related to the drop out dilemma:

- Dropping out is not confined to a small group of young people. In fact, about 20% of all students drop out. This represents close to 40% of students in the nation’s lowest socioeconomic group, but also 10% of people from families in the highest two socioeconomic status levels.
- Socioeconomic status – which is based on a parent’s income and education, rather than race, is the key indicator for dropping out.
- Most dropouts are remarkably persistent in their drive to complete a secondary education. The perception of dropouts as unmotivated and lacking in mainstream values about the importance of education is not borne out by the facts. Close to 60% of dropouts eventually do earn a high school credential – in most cases a GED certificate.

Focusing on those aged 16-18 and formally petitioning for withdrawal from high school, Ohio Board of Regents and Ohio Department of Education could explore requiring ABLE GED program attendance as part of the high school early withdrawal process, targeting certain populations. ABLE delivery could be reconfigured to support this population through a variety of early withdrawal needs such as delivering GED education to new parents and those students withdrawn from high school to go into the workplace to secure badly needed

family income. As of 2013, there was an unused capacity in the ABLE program of 7,435 seats. This strategy will not require the investment of new funds for ABLE, but most likely will require agency partnering and solutions for the addition of childcare, transportation and other services to ensure the target population has access to those services that enhance their ability to engage in education under their particular “life event.”

Life Event (Public Assistance Participants) – Exploring requirements that might move those receiving public assistance, between the ages of 16 and 44, to enroll in and attend a GED program. Under previous federal welfare legislation, the JOBS program, welfare recipients could attend adult education/GED programs full time in preparation for employment and self-sufficiency. When WIA was implemented, the emphasis moved to a “work first” priority nationally and in Ohio. For the most part, Ohio reduced public assistance recipients’ education and training assignments and increased their work assignments, creating an unintentional barrier to achieving basic skills, among them GED credentials. Under the Governor’s focus on poverty, a new Office of Human Services Innovation was recently instituted. Partnering with this office to explore work requirements that include GED attainment might be an effective dual strategy at moving individuals out of poverty where direct employment due to the lack of credentialing is an issue. The Office of Human Services Innovation is currently reviewing its work requirement strategies in relation to GED attainment, so the timing of this proposed partnership may be very appropriate.

Conclusion

All of the above information has been collected and recommended in collaboration with the Ohio Board of Regents staff focused on the ABE and post-secondary delivery programs, the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation, the Ohio Department of Education, the Ohio Association of Community Colleges, and the information gathered from stakeholders during the unified state plan meeting regarding their challenges in bringing their clients toward education success. It is submitted with the intent of improving the overall delivery of a high school equivalency through the state-provided ABE programs and connecting that delivery to additional post-secondary education or industry-recognized credentials as appropriate. The overall goal of those involved has been to innovate our delivery in these spaces and positively impact the income and education level of those serviced by the ABE program.



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