

2016 High School Equivalency Review

South Dakota Department of Education

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Background

South Dakota has long-recognized GED as the state's high school equivalency exam. In 2014, two competitors entered the market: HiSET and TASC. About that time, South Dakota reviewed the three assessments and determined that GED was the only test option aligned with the state's expectations for high school. Since 2014, test developers have invested in improvements to their assessments, so the state undertook a fresh review in June 2016 to re-assess the tests' alignment to core requirements for high school.

Adults who earn high school equivalency can use the credential for multiple purposes: complete high school, seek employment, or apply for entrance to postsecondary education. High school equivalency represents an individual meeting the minimum competencies of core knowledge required in high school. Equivalency does not indicate that the individual has met all graduation requirements leading to a high school diploma or completed the required coursework for benefits such as the South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship. In most cases, earning equivalency does not prove an individual's readiness for credit-bearing coursework in college; higher education placement assessments are most commonly used to determine individuals' abilities to enter credit-bearing coursework.

Review Process

Six staff from the Department of Education reviewed the three available high school equivalency exams (HiSET, GED, and TASC) to identify which align with South Dakota's expectations for high school graduation. Two tiers of considerations were made:

1. Which option(s) aligns with South Dakota's expectations for high school graduation?
2. What are the requirements for implementing the option(s) in South Dakota? Which of those can or cannot be accommodated?

Department of Labor & Regulation staff provided information on each of the assessments such as available formats, costs, and implementation requirements. Resources used for the review included equivalency exam blueprints, test item specifications, technical manuals, validity studies, test

comparisons made by third parties, assessment guides, sample questions, and South Dakota's high school content standards.

For the purposes of high school equivalency, the review team identified South Dakota's expectations as the convergence of core content requirements in the state's high school graduation requirements and the appropriate depth of knowledge (rigor) for the content. Core content requirements of the state's high school graduation requirements include:

- **English Language Arts:** 11th – 12th grade standards for reading and writing
- **Math:** Algebra and Geometry standards
- **Social Sciences:** US History, World History, Government, and Geography standards
- **Science:** Biology and Physical Science standards (may include Chemistry or Physics content)

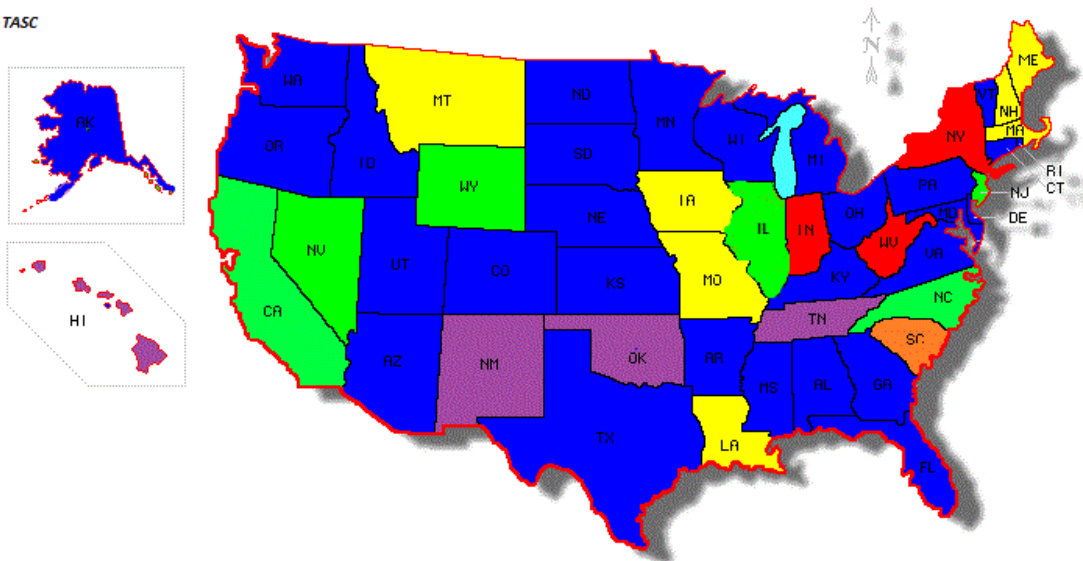
Review Findings

All three tests were found to be valid assessments. In other words, the tests assess the knowledge the developers say they assess.

The map below identifies the high school equivalency assessments recognized in each state as of July 2015:

- - GED + HiSet
- - GED
- - HiSet
- - TASC
- - GED + HiSet + TASC
- - GED + TASC

High School Equivalency Tests Offered by State



	HiSET	GED	TASC
Test content topics align with SD high school core content requirements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes: ELA and Math. Emphasis on literary text in ELA section. - No: Social Sciences and Science. The assessment tests ELA skills using Social Studies and Science passages; direct assessment of content knowledge is not strong. 	Yes	Yes. ELA emphasis is on reading for information. High school Geometry standards are included.
Is test content addressed adequately for the rigor of SD high school expectations?	<p>Content for 64% of ELA items were found to be aligned to 5th grade or lower expectations. Only 18% of ELA items were aligned to 9th – 12th grade expectations. Only 30% of Math items were aligned to high school expectations (<i>WestEd study, September 2015</i>). Information on the required depth of knowledge for social studies and science was not clear.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ELA: Identified Webb levels range from 1-3 where the state expectations are from 2-3. - Emphasis of Math section is on grades 6-8 content. Large focus on Algebra and little on Geometry. About ½ of math questions are written to Webb level 2. - Webb level expectations for Social Studies are on target at 2-3. - Strong Science Webb levels (2-3) with questions including interconnectivity between scientific knowledge and application to scientific scenarios. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ELA and Math include strong Webb levels of 2-3. - Social Sciences depth of knowledge identified mostly at Webb level 2. - Science depth of knowledge identified at levels 1-2.
Format(s) of test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Computer-based - Paper/Pencil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Currently only computer-based - Developing a paper/pencil option 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Computer-based - Paper/Pencil
Cost of assessment	\$50	\$120	\$52
Available practice tests	Free	\$6	\$2.50
Total Time	7 hours, 5 minutes	7 hours, 25 minutes	7 hours, 45 minutes
Available languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - English - Spanish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - English - Spanish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - English - Spanish

	HiSET	GED	TASC
Available accommodations	Examples: - Screen magnification - Selectable background and foreground colors - Alternate test formats (ex. Braille) - Assistance (ex. Scribe or Oral interpreter for directions) - Extended testing time - Extra breaks	“Individualized and considered on a case-by-case basis” Examples: - Separate testing room - Extended testing time - Extra breaks	Examples: - Extended testing time - Allowable resources (ex. ear plugs) - Alternate test formats (ex. Braille)
Current pass rates	82%	81%	65% - Lower pass rate may be connected to NY laws allowing 16 year olds to test and the high number of test takers in NY compared to other states that recognize the test. The test also appears to require more of test takers than HiSET and GED.
Accepted for financial aid purposes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wait period for re-test after third form used	January of the next year	60 days	6 months
State agreement with vendor required?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cost is low and practice tests are available for free - Employs two cut scores: one for high school equivalency and one for college readiness - Strong pass rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Computer-based assessment with technology enhancements, allowing test takers to share evidence beyond traditional multiple choice questions - Available rubrics are informative and clear - Strong pass rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Standards addressed in the test are clearly divided into high, medium, and low emphasis with a large focus on high school-level standards (thoughtfully designed) - Cost is low as are practice tests - Technology enhanced items included in the computer-based version

	HiSET	GED	TASC
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Documentation of cognitive complexity is limited. - Test takers can't re-take the assessment until January of the next year, which could be nearly a year later - Appears to only contain multiple choice questions in math 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Math expectations are low (large portion aligned to middle school) - Expensive compared to other options - Computer-based only which may impact returning adults' abilities to complete the test 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Depth of knowledge expectations in science are relatively low; the application of science isn't as strong as the scientific knowledge - Lower pass rates
Additional notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aligned to College and Career Readiness standards for Adult Education - Three surrounding states recognize HiSET (MT, WY, IA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Four surrounding states recognize GED (WY, ND, NE, MN) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One surrounding state recognizes TASC (WY)

Summary of Review Findings

In summary, the review team found:

- All tests include lower than expected math knowledge and skills.
- TASC appears to align most closely with South Dakota's high school expectations when considering both content topics and depth of knowledge tested.
- HiSET does not meet South Dakota's high school expectations due to its lack of content alignment to all core content requirements and the lack of information available regarding the tested depth of knowledge.
- GED is not as strongly aligned to the state's high school expectations as estimated, though it does require test takers to provide evidence and explanation through constructed responses and technology enhanced test items. Until another test option is piloted and proven as good or better, the GED option should remain in place.
- Emphasis should be put on ensuring test takers are prepared to take their high school equivalency exam. The review team discussed requiring common standards for pre-test preparation at all of the state's testing centers.
- Employers should carefully consider the use of high school equivalency as the base for employment. Due to the low levels of math knowledge and skills required in the tests, the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) may be a better indicator of individuals' preparations for positions. For example, a company looking to hire a residential and commercial construction worker would likely be able to better identify a candidate's math skills as required in construction by the NCRC than by high school equivalency.

Recommendation of the Review Committee and Considerations for the Future

The review committee recommends the following for South Dakota:

1. Continue recognizing the GED as an option for high school equivalency.
2. Pilot TASC as an option for high school equivalency for 2-3 years and then re-assess all assessments, including the results of the state's TASC pilot.
3. Do not recognize HiSET as an option for high school equivalency at this time.
4. Consider common test preparation requirements of test takers at all testing centers in the state.
5. Allow all testing centers in the state to choose whether they would like to offer GED, TASC, or both tests during the pilot period.
6. Offer both GED and TASC as computer-based tests only as testing centers in the state already have the capacity to offer tests in this manner. In addition, computer-based assessments usually have lower risks of fraud than paper/pencil assessments. The only possible exception may be offering a paper/pencil assessment for inmates in state correctional facilities.
7. Clean up codified laws and administrative rules referencing high school equivalency, GED, and the like during the 2017 legislative session.
8. An increase of approximately 20% in state staff time will be required to add an additional assessment option at testing centers. This equates to about 208 hours of staff time per year. Someone with that time and the ability to assist with state test administration will need to be identified.
9. Allow testing centers in the state to choose which assessment(s) they provide at their center. Staff training to add a new assessment will be required.
10. Update and secure agreements with test providers, including the ability to share data between DLR and DOE for the calculation of the state high school completion rate.
11. Educate testing center employees, employers, state agencies, tribes, secondary educators and counselors, and higher education institutions on high school equivalency and the available test options in the state.
12. Update the DLR and DOE websites regarding high school equivalency.
13. Work with higher education institutions regarding admissions policies and practices for applicants with high school equivalency.