

# The **GED**® Credential

*High School Equivalency In South Dakota*



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Published April 2025. Report compiled by:



# Importance of High School Completion

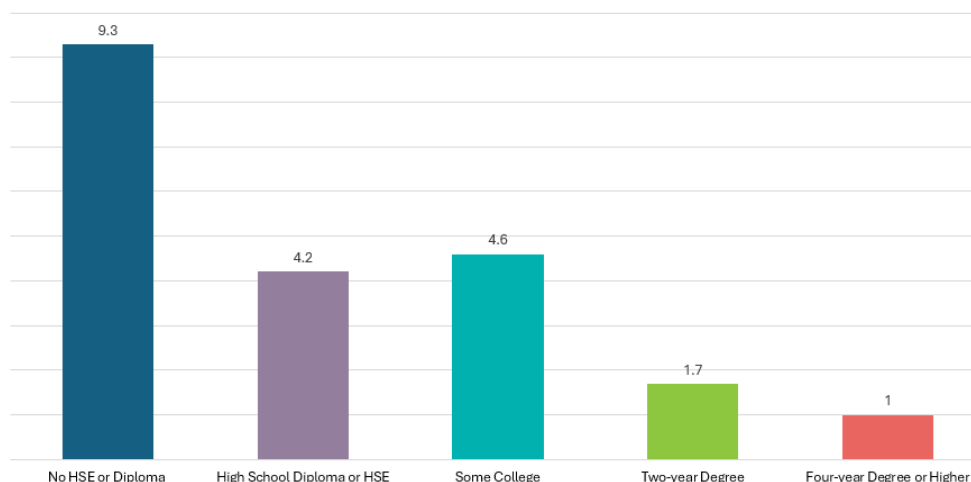
The world of work and of postsecondary education traditionally view a high school equivalency (HSE) credential as an equal measure of high school completion. High school completion statistics generally include both students who graduated with a traditional high school diploma and individuals who earned an HSE credential like the GED®. From a college and career readiness perspective, a high school diploma and a high school equivalency credential are largely interchangeable.

## College and Career Success

Both the U.S. Department of Labor and the South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation (DLR) categorize workers with a high school diploma or an HSE credential together at the same educational attainment level on their statistical reporting. A full 98 percent of postsecondary institutions in the United States, and all public South Dakota institutions, accept students who have earned an HSE credential, and the U.S. military does not differentiate between individuals who have a high school diploma and those with an HSE credential<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, this report will cite “high school completion” as having obtained either credential.

High school completion is an important factor in a state’s economic health and prosperity. A report prepared in 2022 for the DLR provided a detailed analysis of South Dakota’s Labor Market including data points on educational attainment and employment.

**Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment in South Dakota  
2018-2019 (CPS 2-Year Averages)**



The report makes clear that individuals who had not completed high school or earned an HSE credential were far more likely to be unemployed than those who attained high school completion. The unemployment rate for South Dakotans without a high school education was more than twice

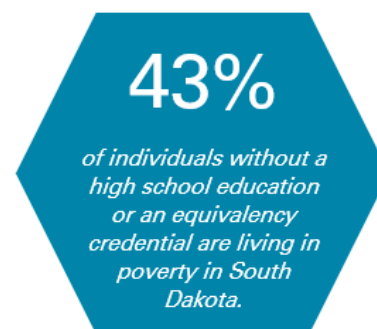
<sup>1</sup> GED Testing Services™. (2019). *Can You Go to College with a GED?* Retrieved from <https://www.ged.com/blog/can-you-go-to-college-with-a-ged>

<sup>2</sup> USAGov. (n.d.). *Requirements to join the U.S. military.* Retrieved from <https://www.usa.gov/military-requirements>

as high (9.3 percent) than for individuals who had earned a high school diploma or HSE credential like the GED® (4.2 percent)<sup>3</sup>.

In a 2023 report, the DLR reported that the median earnings for individuals without a high school diploma or equivalent averaged nearly \$10,000 less a year (\$29,330) than their peers who had completed high school (\$39,793)<sup>4</sup>. An individual's lifetime earning potential is directly linked to their educational attainment.

Completing high school is a necessary step to enrolling at one of the state's public technical colleges or universities, which can further increase an individual's lifetime earning potential and their contributions to the state's economic health. South Dakota technical colleges boast an impressive 98-99 percent job placement rate for college program completers. The South Dakota Board of Regents also reports that 46 percent<sup>5</sup> of students enrolled in their universities stay in South Dakota to live and work after finishing college. Individuals who earn a postsecondary degree can expect lifetime earnings between two to four times that of an individual without a high school diploma or equivalent and are much less likely to experience unemployment throughout their lifetime. For many people who did not complete high school, earning an HSE credential is a crucial stepping stone to finding success with a postsecondary degree.



<sup>3</sup> Fogg, N., Harrington, P., & Khatiwada, I. (2022). *Growth and Change In South Dakota's Labor Market*. Center for Labor Market Policy, Drexel University.

<sup>4</sup> South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation. (2023). *2023 South Dakota Workforce Report*. SDDLRL. Retrieved from [https://dlr.sd.gov/lmic/publications/labor\\_market\\_reports/workforce\\_report\\_2023.pdf](https://dlr.sd.gov/lmic/publications/labor_market_reports/workforce_report_2023.pdf)

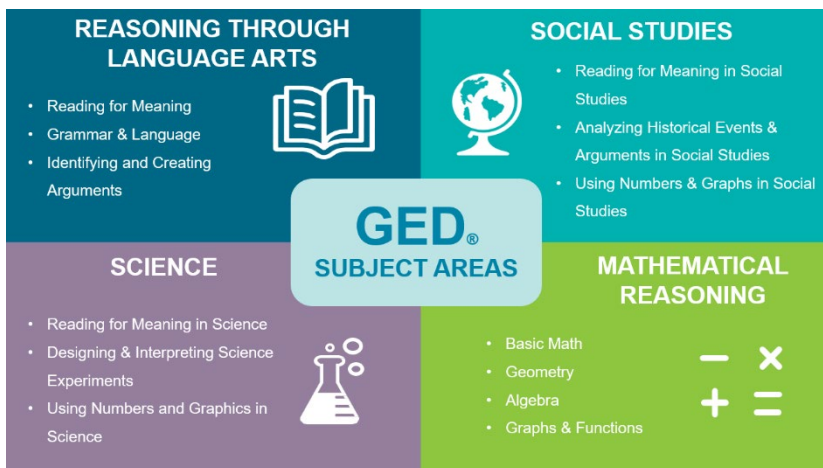
<sup>5</sup> DBOR. (2021). *SDBOR Economic Impact Report 2021*. Parker Phelps. Retrieved from <https://sdbor.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/South-Dakota-BOR-Economic-Impact-2021-Report.pdf>

# Understanding The GED® Exam

The GED®, or the General Education Development Test, is the only high school equivalency credential issued in South Dakota. The GED® exams measure whether a person has gained the same or “equivalent” knowledge of a traditional high school graduate.

## The Test

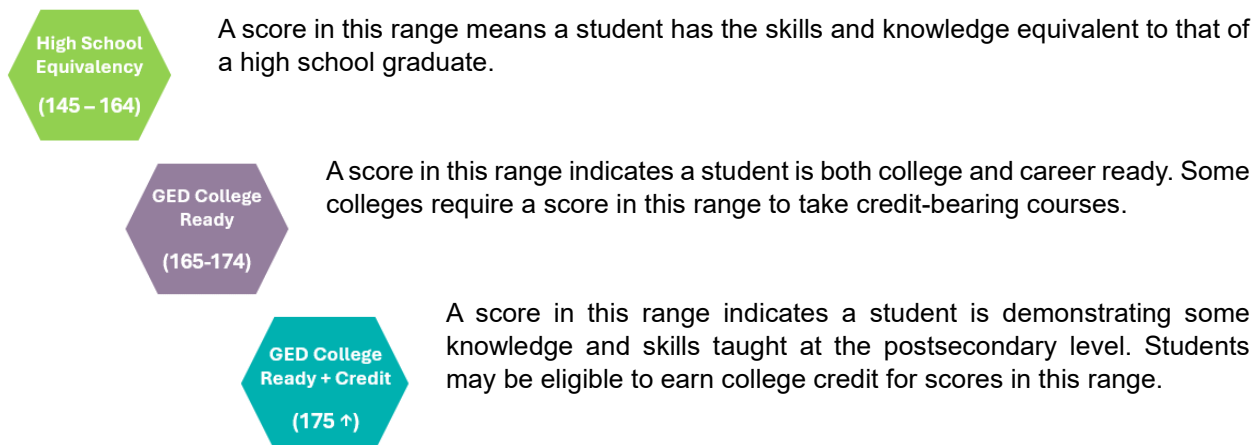
Originally developed in the 1940s, the GED® test was created to help veterans who joined the military without finishing high school earn a credential that would allow them access to careers and postsecondary programs requiring a high school diploma. Today, the test is a series of four separate exams, developed by the American



Council on Education, that assess an individual’s competency in the areas of Reasoning through Language Arts (RLA), Social Studies, Science, and Mathematical Reasoning. ***Only after an individual has successfully passed all four exams do they earn their GED® credential.***

GED® earners are just as prepared to enter the workforce, launch a career, and enter a postsecondary degree or training program as their traditional high school graduate peers. In many cases, GED® graduates also come with additional skills and training they’ve learned and earned along their journey to completing their credential.

Each GED® exam assesses a student’s competency at three different levels.



## Content Alignment

Each of the four content exams that make up the GED® test cover a range of standards-aligned content that demonstrates core competencies but also assesses college and career readiness indicators. This alignment ensures GED® credential earners are not only equivalent to their high school graduating peers, but also ready to enter the workforce and continue their training, education, or skills development at the postsecondary level.



### Reasoning Through Language Arts

An integrated English language arts and reasoning exam, the RLA exam assesses an individual on essential areas like close reading of complex text, clear writing, and the ability to edit, understand and use the written English language in context. Text passages include both fiction and nonfiction ranging in complexity and topic. The exam includes an emphasis on understanding informational text and the importance of being able to read and understand documents necessary for workplace and postsecondary success.

### Mathematical Reasoning

The major domains covered in the Mathematical Reasoning exam include quantitative and algebraic problem solving. Individuals must be able to answer questions related to geometry, algebra, and graphs and functions. They are also assessed on deeper conceptual understanding, procedural skill, fluency of numeracy and mathematics, and their ability to apply these functions and fundamentals in real situations.



### Science

The Science exam incorporates content from three major scientific domains including life science, physical science, and Earth and space science. Individuals must be able to demonstrate they can comprehend scientific data and presentations, investigate the design process, and develop conclusions from evidence and data. They are also assessed on accurately expressing scientific information, understanding concepts of probability and statistics, and their understanding of various scientific theories.



### Social Studies

The Social Studies exam includes content from several major domains: civics, government, U.S. and world history, economics, and geography. The use of primary and secondary source documents require individuals to apply strong reasoning skills, make inferences, analyze events, ideas, and multiple points of view, and examine relationships between peoples, cultures, or historical events. Individuals read and interpret graphs, charts, and other data, and write analytical responses to source text.

# GED® Preparation and Testing in South Dakota

## Current Programs

GED® preparation and testing has changed throughout the years, not only at the national level, but also in South Dakota. In 2024, there were 17 approved, non-corrections public and private testing location across the state and at least 25 different locations offering GED® preparation services. In 2020, GED Testing Services® also began offering online testing, which allows South Dakotans to test anywhere.

## Dakota GED® Preparation and/or Testing Centers

Individuals can currently access GED® preparation in South Dakota through one of the following programs:

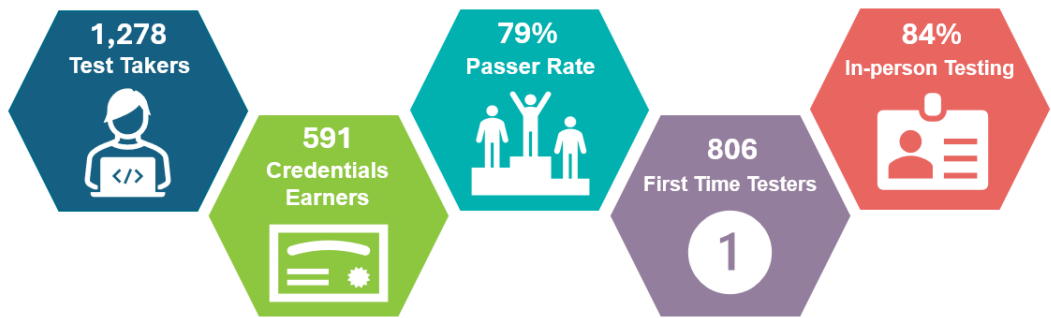
- Adult Basic Education (ABE) Programs
- Correctional Programs
- Tribal Programs
- School-Aged Programs
- Online Programs



Through GED® preparation centers, individuals receive one-on-one tutoring and have access to GED® classes and other preparation resources. Additionally, GED® candidates have access to a variety of online preparation services and the ability to test online. While online testing is especially helpful for individuals working toward their credential in parts of the state where testing “deserts” exist, in-person preparation and testing is still the preferred option for most South Dakotans. In 2024, 84 percent of all GED® exams were taken in-person at an approved testing center.



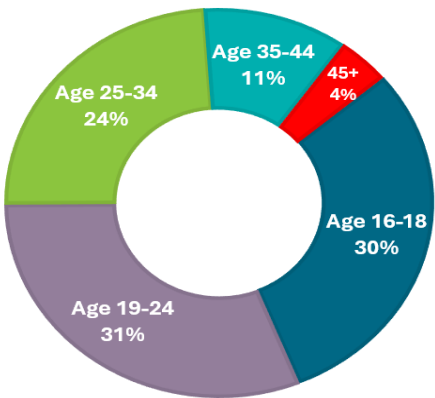
# 2024 GED® Data Summary



2024 saw several increases in GED® data points across a variety of categories in South Dakota. This increase included more GED® test takers and more individuals earning the credential. In 2024, 1,728 individuals took at least one GED test and 745 of those candidates completed all four of the required exams within the 2024 calendar year. Of these completers, 591 individuals went on to achieve passing scores on all four GED® exams to earn their HSE credential. This resulted in a passer rate of 79 percent, higher than the national passer rate of 74 percent.

GED TESTERS BY AGE, 2024

Most individuals testing in South Dakota in 2024 were between the ages of 16-24 (61 percent), with 17-year-olds accounting for nearly a quarter (23 percent) of the 16-24 age group’s test takers. The 2024 population of those who passed all four GED® exams followed a similar pattern: 33 percent of the individuals who earned a GED® credential in 2024 were between 16-18, and 35 percent were between 19-24.



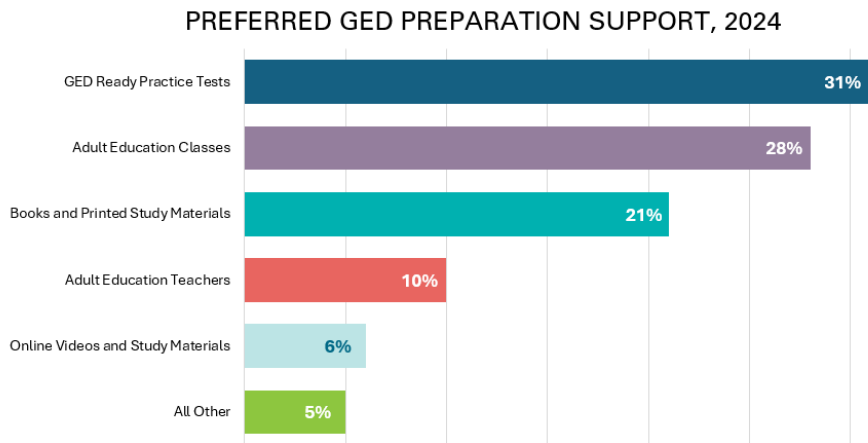
2024 Scores Summary	Math	RLA	Science	Social Studies
Average South Dakota Scores	153	154	156	155
South Dakota Pass Rate	78%	85%	89%	84%
National Pass Rate	74%	83%	88%	85%
SD College Ready Percentile	4%	8%	7%	9%
SD College Ready + Credit Percentile	3%	2%	2%	2%

Average tests scores have remained relatively stable over the years. The average overall test score (average of all scores across all four content areas) was 155 in 2024. Average scores by content area and pass rates remained above the national rates in all content areas except Social Studies.

The percentage of those receiving in-person support from GED® preparation centers has declined in recent years. Just over half (54 percent) of test takers in South Dakota in 2024 were affiliated with an approved GED® preparation program. GED® credential earners reported that



the resources most helpful to them in preparing for their exams were access to adult education classes, the GED Ready® practice tests, books, and other printed study materials, and the support they received from adult education teachers.



**Adult Basic Education (ABE) Programs**

The South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation has approved five non-correctional Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) providers and one DOE-recognized private ABE program. They include:



- Cornerstones Career Learning Center
- Lake Area Technical College AEL Program
- Career Learning Center of the Black Hills
- Lutheran Social Services’ Center for New Americans
- Southeast Technical College AEL Program
- The Right Turn

Combined, these programs served 521 test takers at more than a dozen locations. In 2024, ABE Programs administered 1,336 exams with an average passer rate of 81 percent. Importantly, approximately 20 percent of test takers at these locations in 2024 were also associated with a school-aged program that had partnered with the site.

**Adult Correctional Programs**



In 2024, 366 individuals associated with a correctional program (either state- or county-level) took 1,055 GED® exams. Of these 366 testers, nearly 80 percent earned their credential while still incarcerated. These data points do not include youth corrections.

## Online Programs



Online testing accounted for 16 percent of all exams taken in 2024, with 229 individuals choosing to take one or more of their tests online. A total of 620 GED® exams were taken online with a pass rate of 85 percent.

## School-Aged Programs



In 2024, most programs supporting school-aged HSE programs provided GED® preparation support services to their enrolled students but did not provide onsite GED® testing. This means most school-aged GED® tester data is not easily trackable by program.

This data is tracked and presented by age rather than by affiliated program. The school-aged GED® population also includes students receiving alternative instruction without the support of a local school district prep program. In 2024, 384 individuals between the ages of 16-18 took at least one GED® exam, with 228 completing all four, and 199 students earning their GED® credential. This indicates an 87 percent passer rate for school-aged (16-18) test takers in South Dakota.

## Tribal Affiliated Programs

The following tribal colleges, schools, and employment programs currently offer state-approved GED® preparation and/or testing services in South Dakota:



- Lower Brule Community College
- Oglala Lakota College
- Sinte Gleska University
- Sisseton Wahpeton College
- Sitting Bull College
- Yankton Sioux Tribal Education Programs

While some of these programs provide testing and preparation services to the public, others may only be open to approved participants. In 2024, 203 GED® candidates utilized one of the nine testing centers across the state associated with these tribal entities. A total of 548 exams were taken, with a combined average passer rate across all tribal affiliated programs of 68 percent.

# Historical Data

The data summarized below represents trends in GED® performance, demographic information about test takers in South Dakota, and historical data and trends related to GED® testing centers and cost over a 15-year period, between 2010 and 2024.

**Test Taker, Completer, and Passer Data, 2010-2024**

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Passers	591	532	574	499	349	584	688	623	592	426	201	1100	644	858	757
Completers	745	650	682	588	417	685	769	710	599	464	288	1215	953	1039	940
Total Test Takers	1279	1212	1209	1072	761	1155	1275	1130	1131	807	516	2027	1490	1645	1540
SD Passer Rate %	79%	82%	84%	85%	84%	85%	89%	88%	90%	92%	70%	90%	67%	82%	80%
Natl. Passer Rate %	74%	75%	75%	76%	75%	79%	80%	79%	79%	78%	59%	76%	69%	72%	72%

*\*Some approved testing centers are only available to enrolled students and not public testing facilities.*

**Tester and Passer Data by Age, 2010-2024**

	2024		2023		2022		2021		2020		2019		2018		2017	
	Tester	Passer	Tester	Passer	Tester	Passer	Tester	Passer	Tester	Passer	Tester	Passer	Tester	Passer	Tester	Passer
16-18	30%	34%	37%	41%	40%	47%	36%	41%	28%	26%	25%	27%	25%	27%	29%	32%
19-24	31%	35%	28%	30%	28%	30%	29%	32%	33%	40%	36%	41%	36%	40%	36%	39%
25-29	13%	12%	12%	12%	11%	9%	13%	13%	17%	17%	18%	15%	18%	16%	14%	14%
30-34	10%	9%	11%	10%	10%	7%	10%	5%	9%	8%	10%	9%	9%	7%	9%	8%
35-39	6%	5%	5%	3%	5%	3%	6%	6%	6%	5%	4%	3%	6%	6%	7%	5%
40-49	7%	4%	5%	4%	4%	2%	4%	2%	5%	3%	5%	3%	4%	3%	4%	1%
50-59	2%	1%	1%	<1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	<1%	1%	1%	1%	<1%	1%	<1%
60+	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%

**Tester and Passer Data by Age, 2010-2024**

	2016		2015		2014		2013		2012		2011		2010	
	Tester	Passer	Tester	Passer	Tester	Passer	Tester	Passer	Tester	Passer	Tester	Passer	Tester	Passer
16-18	26%	32%	31%	33%	35%	43%	22%	31%	25%	30%	29%	32%	33%	35%
19-24	36%	41%	42%	45%	42%	36%	40%	41%	41%	44%	42%	46%	37%	41%
25-29	16%	14%	13%	11%	13%	13%	17%	14%	15%	14%	13%	10%	15%	13%
30-34	10%	6%	6%	6%	5%	3%	9%	5%	8	6%	6%	4%	5%	4%
35-39	6%	4%	3%	2%	2%	3%	5%	3%	4%	3%	4%	2%	4%	3%
40-49	5%	3%	3%	2%	2%	1%	5%	3%	4%	2%	4%	3%	4%	3%
50-59	<1%	<1%	1%	<1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%	<1%	2%	2%	2%	<1%
60+	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%

### Average Tester and Passer Age (SD and US), 2010-2024

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Avg. Tester Age (SD)	25	24	23	24	24	24	24	24	24	23	22	25	24	24	24
Avg. Passer Age (SD)	23	23	22	22	23	24	24	23	22	22	21	23	23	23	23
Avg. Tester Age (US)	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	22	21	27.5	26	26	26
Avg. Passer Age (US)	21	21	21	21	22	22	22	21	21	20	19	26	25	25	25

### Tester and Passer % by Gender (SD and US), 2010-2024

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Male Testers (SD)	54%	54%	46%	50%	58%	53%	54%	54%	55%	59%	62%	57%	55%	57%	60%
Female Testers (SD)	32%	30%	35%	37%	34%	36%	36%	35%	38%	40%	36%	43%	45%	43%	40%
Male Testers (US)	49%	49%	49%	49%	51%	54%	54%	54%	54%	54%	54%	52%	55%	55%	56%
Female Testers (US)	43%	43%	44%	45%	44%	42%	42%	43%	45%	45%	45%	48%	45%	44%	44%

\*Data information may not equal 100% if a tester chose not to report this information.

### Tester High Grade Completed, 2010-2024

Highest Grade Completed	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
8th or less	8%	7%	7%	9%	11%	10%	7%	7%	6%	8%	8%	11%	14%	11%	11%
9th	19%	18%	21%	17%	11%	15%	16%	17%	17%	18%	17%	19%	23%	24%	22%
10th	30%	29%	28%	28%	15%	30%	31%	28%	27%	25%	27%	30%	29%	29%	30%
11th	23%	23%	24%	26%	26%	30%	27%	33%	33%	29%	27%	36%	30%	33%	34%
12th	13%	14%	14%	13%	30%	12%	16%	12%	13%	17%	17%	3%	3%	3%	2%
Don't Remember	7%	9%	6%	7%	7%	3%	3%	3%	4%	3%	4%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%

\*Data was self-reported by South Dakota testers. Individuals were not required to report this information.

### Tester Reasons for Testing, 2010-2024

Reasons for Testing	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Educational Reasons	33%	36%	34%	32%	31%	28%	30%	35%	36%	39%	38%	64%	61%	60%	57%
Military Reasons	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	2%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%	6%	6%	7%	8%
Employment Reasons	22%	21%	21%	20%	19%	21%	20%	18%	16%	18%	15%	54%	51%	52%	48%
Social/Other Reasons	5%	6%	7%	9%	12%	13%	12%	10%	13%	13%	14%	25%	31%	34%	33%
Personal Reasons	37%	33%	35%	36%	36%	36%	35%	35%	32%	29%	31%	55%	58%	61%	57%

\*Data was self-reported by South Dakota testers. Individuals were not required to report this information. Respondents could choose more than one testing reason prior to 2014. Starting in 2014, respondents could only choose one reason.

### Testing Center, Cost, and Minimum Age Requirements, 2010-2024

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
GED Testing Centers	17	16	17	18	18	19	19	18	18	17	17	17	13	13	13
Min. Cost to Credential	\$200	\$200	\$150	\$150	\$150	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$130	\$95	\$95
Min. age w/o Exceptions	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18

\*Not all testing sites are accessible to the public. Data does not include correctional testing locations.

# The Future of the GED® in South Dakota

In the last 25 years, more than 22,000 individuals aged 16 and up have earned their HSE credential in South Dakota. The individual and economic impact of this achievement is tremendous -- each South Dakotan who has earned their GED® credential has a different story to tell.



High school equivalency testing in South Dakota has historically focused its efforts through Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs, funded through Adult Literacy and Education initiatives through the Department of Labor and Regulation or through tribal programs.

In-school prep programs are crucial for the success of students for whom a high school diploma might not be attainable. Formal GED®

preparation programs at the high school level are mostly found in larger school districts with capacity to support students through already established alternative schools or programs. Most smaller school districts have relied on limited support from ABE programs or alternative instruction. In general, most South Dakota public-school districts do not offer in-house GED® preparation support as an alternative pathway to on-time high school graduation.

Adult GED® program providers report the most significant barriers adults face in earning their GED® credential include finding a balance between supporting their families and finishing their credential and financial concerns relating to paying for the preparation resources and testing. GED® preparation programs and testing centers also report that meeting the high demand in the state is a challenge.

MOST COMMON BARRIERS FOR SOUTH DAKOTA GED® TEST TAKERS



## Future Capacity

Based on feedback from GED® and ABE programs across the state, GED® testing centers are often at capacity and unable to fully meet the demand for GED® testing in the state. More testing locations, additional in-school programs, and mobile testing sites, especially in the northwestern, north central, and southeastern regions of the state, could help alleviate this issue in the future. There is also growing demand for high school level GED® programming to support students who are currently enrolled in South Dakota public schools but struggling to meet local and state requirements for on-time graduation.

The future of South Dakota relies on a population that is academically prepared to meet the challenges of an ever-changing world. Having a solid foundation in language arts, social studies, science, and math will provide the workforce with the opportunities they need to thrive today and in years to come. Maintaining and growing the state's GED program will ensure that all citizens, no matter their situation, will be able to take advantage of the state's great promise.

# References and Definitions

## References

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## Definitions

**Completer** - Any individuals who had completed all four of the GED® exams. They may not have passed all exams, but they have attempted all four.

**Completion Rate (%)** - Calculated by dividing the number of GED® completers by the number of candidates who took at least one content area test, then multiplying that number by 100.

**GED® Exam** – Individual content exams (RLA, Math, Science, Social Studies).

**GED® Test** – The battery of all four content exams together.

**Passer** - An individual who has completed and passed all four of the GED® exams and earned their credential.

**Tester/Candidate** - Any individual who has created an account with GED® Testing Services and made at least one testing attempt.