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Summary:

The Oregon Legislature devalued public school diplomas by removing proficiency requirements for high school graduation. Students deserve an alternative way to demonstrate their academic competence. The Legislature should remove all state barriers to taking the GED test, a widely accepted measure of high school skills.

Word Count: 591

“This year, HB 2589 went into effect, mandating that students deemed ‘college ready’ by the GED be treated the same by Oregon public universities and community colleges as students who graduate with a diploma.”

Remove Oregon’s Age Restriction on GED Tests

By Eric Fruits, Ph.D.

COVID-19 disrupted—and may continue to disrupt—in-person learning at many Oregon public schools. For many high schoolers, this has led to reduced academic achievement and a decline in mental health. At the same time, some students, colleges, and employers worry that a new law removing a longstanding graduation requirement that students prove proficiency in essential learning skills may make an Oregon diploma meaningless.

Oregon students need an alternative to the risks of online learning and the diminished value of an Oregon public school diploma. Fortunately, there is a successful alternative that’s been in place for nearly 80 years: the GED.

General Educational Development tests are a group of standardized exams on four subjects that measure proficiency in science, mathematics, social studies, and language arts. When passed, the GED provides certification that the test-taker meets high school graduation level academic skills. Higher scores demonstrate college readiness, and even higher scores can qualify students for college credit.

The GED Testing Service requires test-takers be 16 years of age or older. However, Oregon [requires](#) that a person be 18 years or older to take the tests. The state permits people as young as 16 to sit for the GED only in very limited circumstances, such as if they already dropped out of high school, are married or emancipated minors, or are in juvenile detention.

This needs to change: anyone age 16 or older should be permitted to take the GED. On the one hand, high achieving students deserve the ability to verify their proficiency in key subjects so they can get on with college. On the other hand, struggling students deserve a clear path to demonstrate their academic proficiency, successfully exit the school system, and get on with their careers.

(cont’d)



In the upcoming session, the Legislature should make it a priority to remove all state barriers to taking the GED in Oregon, specifically by allowing anyone 16 or older to take the GED, with no limitations; and deeming that anyone who scores high enough shall have satisfied the state’s graduation requirements and can leave school.

Opponents to this proposal will likely make a nanny state argument that a GED is “not as good” as a traditional high school diploma and should be only a last resort. Some argue that GED recipients have worse employment and income outcomes than those who graduate with a diploma. But employment and advancement opportunities are already limited for high school dropouts, emancipated minors, and incarcerated juveniles. Indeed, much of the GED’s stigma is because of the legal barriers to obtaining one. The GED does not limit opportunities, but rather expands them, by releasing students who can meet high school standards out of the requirement of attending high school. If the GED is open to anyone and “successful” students start exercising that option, the stigma will disappear.

There is already near-universal agreement among Oregon legislators that the GED is as good as a diploma. This year, [HB 2589](#) went into effect, mandating that students deemed “college ready” by the GED be treated the same by Oregon public universities and community colleges as students who graduate with a diploma.

This is an ideal nonpartisan solution for our times. It will cost virtually nothing to enact the legislation and would likely have little net effect on district finances. The bill itself would be a page or less and could pass with bipartisan support. Oregon’s students have been severely disadvantaged by policy and pandemic alike over the past two years. They deserve a break, and the GED is the break they need.

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