

Preparation for and Performance on the GED® Test
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Abstract and Executive Summary

Abstract

GED testing candidates have many options available to them to prepare for the GED Test, including adult education (AE) classes, practice tests, and self-study. This study focused on candidates who voluntarily took the GED Test and could choose freely among preparation activities. We examined GED Test preparation activities and created eight mutually exclusive test preparation profile groups: public school AE with or without a practice test, community college AE with or without a practice test, individual study with or without a practice test, practice test only, and *none*.

The final sample included 90,032 U.S. candidates who completed the GED Test in 2004 and fell into one of the eight test preparation profile groups. Candidates in the study most often reported studying on their own without a practice test (29 percent) or studying in a public school AE program without a practice test (28 percent). A smaller proportion studied in a community college AE program without a practice test (13 percent) or did not prepare at all (14 percent). The public school and community college AE profile groups had mean GED scores 25 to 34 points higher for candidates who took a practice test. The individual study group means were 20 points higher for candidates who took a practice test.

Among the profile groups, the group members who studied individually with a practice test and the *none* groups scored the highest on average. The lowest mean scores were observed in the group who indicated public school AE preparation without a practice test. All groups' content areas and battery mean scores were higher than the passing requirement (410 and 2,250, respectively). The group with the highest pass rate was the individual study with a practice test group, and the lowest pass rate was recorded for the public school AE without a practice test group.

Executive Summary

GED testing candidates have a number of preparation options available to them, including adult basic classes, practice tests, and self-study. The purpose of this study was to investigate how candidates prepare for the GED Test and how those test preparation activities are related to achievement. In some states, candidates must meet certain prerequisites (such as instruction or passing a practice test) before testing. This study focuses on candidates who voluntarily took the GED Test and were able to choose freely among preparation activities.

The GED Test U.S. Demographics survey asked candidates to indicate which of 27 test preparation activities, including *none*, they undertook. The final sample included 90,032 GED completers from 2004 who fell into one of eight test preparation profile groups. The eight mutually exclusive test preparation profile groups were: (1) public school adult education (AE) without a practice test; (2) public school AE with a practice test; (3) community college AE without a practice test; (4) community college AE with a practice test; (5) individual study without a practice test; (6) individual study with a practice test; (7) official practice test; or (8) "None" (no test preparation).

Candidates in the sample tended to most often report studying on their own without a practice test (29 percent) or studying in a public school AE program without a practice test (28 percent). A smaller proportion studied in a community college AE program without a practice test (13 percent) or did not prepare at all (14 percent). However, different populations of candidates engaged in different test preparation activities. For example, women were more likely to enroll in AE than men, and candidates who entered AE tended to be slightly older. Men tended to take the Official GED Practice Tests (OPT) or not prepare for the GED Test. AE candidates were slightly more likely to report low or no income. Candidates choosing the OPT only or no preparation were younger and out of school fewer years than AE or individual study candidates.

Major findings were:

- ♦ The highest scoring groups were individual study with OPT, *none*, and OPT only. The lowest scoring groups were the public school and community college AE groups without OPT. However, all groups' mean test scores were higher than the passing requirements (410 minimum standard score on a single test and 2,250 total).
- ♦ For candidates choosing AE or individual study, White candidates were more likely to take an OPT. Black and Hispanic candidates were more likely not to take an OPT.
- ♦ For all groups of candidates, the most frequently cited reasons for taking the GED Test were personal satisfaction, pursuing a better job, and enrolling in college. Candidates who took an OPT were more likely than their non–practice test counterparts to select more reasons for taking the GED Test, and more likely to select personal satisfaction, being a role model, and enrolling in a college program.
- ♦ On average, the highest scoring groups were individual study with OPT (545.99), *none* (542.14), and OPT only (538.57). Public school AE

participants without OPT and community college AE participants without OPT scored the lowest (498.48 and 509.42, respectively). AE participants had mean scores 25 to 34 points higher if they took an OPT (PSAE = 527.45; CCAE = 537.76)

- ◆ Taking an OPT was associated with higher GED Test scores. Among the five content areas, the effect was greatest for Mathematics. The effect was also greater for candidates enrolled in AE than for individual study candidates.
- ◆ Even controlling for a large number of covariates, GED Test scores were still lower for the AE groups compared with the individual study group. However, scores for candidates who participated in AE and took a practice test tended to exceed scores for individual study candidates who did not take an OPT.

Whether candidates choose to prepare via AE, individual study, an OPT, or not at all may depend on a wealth of demographic and background characteristics. A few questions remain: What are the implications of young men's tendency to not prepare, or to simply take a practice test before registering for the GED Test? What might be associated with women's preferences to study in an AE program or on their own? Do candidates with little or no income prefer to take a practice test only, while those candidates with additional income opt to study on their own? Adult educators, GED Examiners, publishers of preparation materials, and others who want to assist GED candidates should familiarize themselves with these characteristics and compare characteristics of the candidates they serve at the local or regional level, with particular attention to gender, age, and socioeconomic status.

Another encouraging finding was that standard scores for candidates who made a choice about preparation tended to exceed minimum requirements at even higher levels than for the entire U.S. test-taker sample. Candidates who make this choice may do so in hopes of not simply passing, but doing well on the GED Test. Educators and others who offer test preparation materials and resources must be aware of this finding as they seek to recruit candidates for preparation or offer resources. Counselors, advisers, teachers, and parents can employ this information to encourage potential candidates who are unsure about the advantages of making a choice.

The decision to take a practice test also seems to be critical for candidates who prepare in either type of AE program or on their own. It is worth noting that taking a practice test alone was not associated with higher average standard scores than taking it in conjunction with individual study or as part of AE instruction. As an indicator of readiness for the GED Test, an OPT may offer candidates a potential edge as they finish their preparation. Candidates, educators, testing staff, and other stakeholders of GED Test preparation must be aware that this practice test effect could offer particular value for the content area of mathematics, which is typically one of the more difficult subjects for many candidates.