

COMPONENT III: APPLICATION PROCESS

1) ISSUES AND CONCERNS

A. Customer Satisfaction

An overriding, continuous issue that staff of the testing center should keep foremost in their minds is that of making the application process as easy and as customer-friendly as possible. The Chief Examiner, Dean, or Director of the Testing Center should constantly remind front-line personnel that a certain number of the GED applicants will feel somewhat tense about going through a detailed application process which at some point may involved waiting. Other applicants may be taking the examination only at the urging of a parent.

At times, a customer's anxiety, nervousness or frustration exhibits itself in inappropriate or hostile behavior. It is helpful to be trained in how to deflect this behavior since most customers respond well to a sincere, smiling and truly responsive employee. It is also especially rewarding for an employee to be able to "turn around" the attitude of a client so that he or she leaves the GED test center with no complaints about the application experience. It is the satisfied customer that will not be absent for the exam.

B. Eligibility

All front-desk personnel must be extremely accurate in determining an applicant's eligibility to sit for the GED exam, especially when dealing with the issue of score-based eligibility. To determine a potential applicant's eligibility, the intake staff must screen several different areas:

- age and county of residence
- school-district status
- diploma status
- previous exam forms taken
- dates and locations of previous GED examinations attempted
- readiness level (for "performance-based" high school students and under-age applicants)

The eligibility of a "first-time examinee" is based on age, current educational status, residence and high school diploma-status. It is also important that each "first-timer" be thoroughly aware of the state GED Office policies on retesting. It should be clearly explained to all applicants that to take the GED exam while basically unprepared can result in a 6-month postponement of later GED test administrations.

Because a broad scope of eligibility factors are collected when an applicant completes the first application process, the eligibility of a "retester" is determined by looking at only two parameters - the dates of the applicant's most recent exam and the scores on that exam.

1. Age

Each examination center has its own set of similar policies dealing with “underage” (under the age of 18 years) applicants. It is important to learn both the state and the local policies - especially those dealing with claims of “exceptional hardship” - and understand the reasons behind them. When an applicant with extenuating circumstances presents himself or herself at a center, the staff should consider each situation not only in the light of regulations, but also in the light of local and state intent. *(Sometimes a quick call to the administrator of the Florida State Department of Education GED Office will result in a clearer understanding of guidelines and options. The state GED Office is helpful to administrators in granting or interpreting the amount of leeway available to individual testing centers in specific, exceptional cases.)*

Once an underage applicant has been approved to sit for the GED exam, the testing center should strongly consider requiring that the underage applicant first sit for a Predictive Test to determine the individual's readiness for the GED Exam. If the applicant's scores are high enough to ensure a good chance at passing all subtests of the GED Exam, only then should he or she be permitted to complete the application package. If the scores are too low, then the applicant should be advised to attend a free GED preparation course of study, in any adult education program in the state, or pursue private tutoring in order to make sufficient educational gains to pass the exam.

2. In-County Residency

Students whose required Florida ID shows residency in another county should not be tested until either (1) the center is in receipt of a “permission letter” from the Chief Examiner of the county of residence, or (2) the individual's GED-exam history is determined (through a phone call, or internet hookup to the state GED Office).

If an individual formerly has been tested in Florida, then the applicant's previous testing center should be contacted to locate a clear history of the applicant's date of eligibility, as well as to find out what test forms he or she had previously taken. *(Maintaining fairness and equity for all is a major consideration in a testing center. No one should enter the testing room with a distinct advantage by virtue of the administration of a recently-taken identical exam.)*

3. School-District Status

Regardless of whether the GED testing center is administered by a school district or by a community college, there is a clear need to be able to access the school district's department of student services to confirm an underage applicant's enrollment status if he or she is no longer in possession of an official withdrawal document. For underage, home-schooled applicants, a notarized letter or signed statement from a parent or guardian must be kept on file before the individual may be permitted to sit for the GED exam.

Some high schools offer a state-approved “Performance-based Diploma Program” which requires the successful completion of the GED Exam along with a prescribed course of study and successful scores on the HSCT exam. These

students will be referred by a high school instructor to the testing center. *(The example testing center requires a copy of the student's scores from the Official GED Predictive Test before application may be made. The testing center also distributes examinees' scores and diplomas for all fee-deferred examinees to the instructor in the school district, not to the individual students. This allows for counseling and advising by an instructor who knows and understands each student's situation.)*

4. Retesting Constraints

For a retester, accuracy in determining eligibility, based on previous dates of examination and scores, is of utmost importance. A mistake in interpreting or misreading an exam form or date may affect a customer's educational career or employment plans.

It helps to post a simplified version of the GED retesting policy in an obvious place in the GED registration office. The restrictions on retesting may help to convince an individual who has made no attempt to prepare for the exam that, based on exam scores, he or she may be allowed to sit for the exam only once or twice within the succeeding six-month period. A GED advisor or intake staff member is sometimes the only individual who will have the opportunity to explain to an unprepared applicant the importance of attending a free GED preparation class before attempting the GED exam.

C. Advising/Counseling

The entire staff must have a clear understanding of all local, state and national testing policies as well as the customer-friendly attitude necessary to ensure a high rate of satisfaction. It cannot be stressed enough that if the first staff member a potential applicant meets is interpreted to be unfriendly or non-helpful, a tenuous applicant may leave and never return.

The test center's intake staff must understand and clearly explain the GED scoring system, the most effective ways of raising a total score, and the recourse to which an unprepared applicant may turn. An advisor must also know when circumstances might warrant an exception to a local rule.

D. Special Accommodations

The advisor should be attuned to applicants who may need special accommodations. In some cases an applicant may have documentation of the disability. In other cases, the applicant may be cognizant of his or her disability, but not be in possession of documentation. When the advisor suspects the presence of a disability, especially learning disabilities and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADD or ADHD) the advisor should have at hand the telephone number of the local Vocational Rehabilitation Agency. If the applicant is a student, he or she should be given the name of a local, licensed psychologist who, based on a comprehensive psychoeducational analysis, diagnose or refute the existence of a suspected learning disorder.

Each testing center has a specific brochure (Form L-15) that is used statewide, illustrating some of the learning disorders or disabilities which tend to decrease the

ability of an applicant to exhibit true levels of knowledge or performance on the GED exam. The brochure also explains to the applicant the methods of getting permission from the state GED Office to obtain the proper assistance. Periodically, special instructions are disseminated statewide to the testing centers from the state GED Office, and the GED Testing Service Manual has information on this topic as well.

Each local testing center must collect documentation for submittal to the state GED Office in order to obtain permission to administer special exams for the hearing-impaired, vision-impaired, or motor-impaired. Permission for assistive aids, extended exam times or special exams must be requested at least several weeks in advance of their planned use. More advance time is suggested in case obtaining additional information is necessary. Only an approved Chief Examiner or Alternate Examiner may administer GED exams that are designed for special-needs applicants.

E. Score-Sheet and Application Accuracy

The “bubbling” of score sheets is a very slow and problematic process for some examinees. Double and triple checking of examinee score sheets will significantly reduce the return-rate from the state GED Office significantly. Following are some suggestions as to how to reduce the student-made error rate on the score sheets:

- Once the applicant completes the pages on applicant demographics, check his or her name along with other information by reading (spelling/counting) it back to him or her from the bubbles.
- During the exam - at the end of one or more of the subtests - ask each student to recheck each bubbled page.
- Assign each proctor to be responsible for the final comparative “bubble-check” of score-sheet items copied from test booklets, such as:
 - test codes
 - test forms
 - written and bubbled topic letters
 - booklet numbers on the log
 - bubbling of name and other demographic information (third check)
- Keep records on returned items (diplomas, incorrect score sheets, etc.) and utilize or re-hire the staff with the best proofing records.

(Requesting corrected diplomas from the state GED Office causes a delay in getting an examinee’s diploma, and it costs extra. Trying to figure out why an applicant got a high score on four sub-tests and a very low score on the fifth sub-test (because of incorrect bubbling of “form,” “code,” or “essay topic”) is a real time-consuming activity. It is better for everyone to strive to submit score sheets and application forms that are initially correct.)

F. Local Database

By maintaining accurate score data in the computer records of the testing center, it is possible to generate reports for:

- maintaining access to data affecting departmental decisions
- comparing success rates by curriculum, program, instructors, or site
- other institutional research
- the “Annual DWD 333 Report”
- grant proposals

- preparing local budgets and staffing
- following up on applicants who have partially completed the GED exam
- confirming or denying the state reports on your enrollments and performances
- satisfying administrative “curiosity”

Also of prime importance is the collection of completion data as a check on the records that are independently gathered by the Department of Workforce Development Information System (WDIS) for institutional funding purposes.

If the sponsoring institution is unable to collect the entire range of adult education data easily and accurately on the institution’s main-frame computer, it is suggested that each testing center develop its own database program to collect the following:

- demographics (for follow-up and state-required reports)
- predictor scores (to maintain a check on applicant-readiness by site, or by institution)
- GED exam forms, dates and scores (by examinee - for each test administration)
- delineation between individuals prepared by different agencies, schools, home-schools, or by self
- name of the institution that prepared the applicant for the exam

(Periodic queries to the database should be made to highlight applicants with the same social security number and different names or with the same name and different social security numbers. Each year, because of simple human data-input errors, this type of query detects a few double entries (double Social Security numbers) for one individual. If found quickly, corrective measures can be taken in the local database before the data is transmitted to WDIS.)