

I thought I earned my GED certificate online, but instead I was denied a job.



ONLINE PROGRAMS Offering Illegitimate Credentials using the GED[®] Brand



AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION

Contact:
CT Turner
Associate Director, Marketing and Public Relations
(202) 939-9720 or chris_turner@ace.nche.edu



Online Programs Offering Illegitimate Credentials using the GED® Brand Consumer Problem Overview

The situation

- Every day, state GED® Test administrators receive reports from vulnerable consumers who have spent precious time and resources pursuing what they believe are accredited high school equivalency credentials online.
- These adults, who have not completed high school and typically are of a low socioeconomic status, believe the claims of web sites offering accredited diplomas online and pay fees in the range of \$200-\$1,200. Some of these credentials purport to be issued by a high school while others use the GED trademark without permission. (Some organizations even offer framed diplomas and class rings for an extra fee.)
- Consumers later discover that these dubious credentials are not accepted by employers, colleges or universities. Currently the tests offered by GED Testing Service® cannot be taken online in the United States or Canada.
- Although some online high school programs work diligently with appropriate accreditation agencies and state departments of education, numerous web sites confuse consumers about how to obtain an accepted high school credential.
- Three brief case examples are included on the second page of these materials to further illustrate how this issue is affecting consumers.

Actions GED Testing Service/ACE have taken

- GED Testing Service® (GEDTS), a program of the American Council on Education, has worked diligently to address the situation.
- GEDTS/ACE issued a warning about the illegitimacy of online tests that claim to be GED® Tests and posted it on our high-traffic web site, circulated it via several education e-newsletters, distributed it widely as a press release to education and consumer affairs reporters, and distributed it to every state GED Administrator.
- The story was picked up by the AP wire and pieces appeared in over 12 major newspapers nationally.
- GEDTS monitors sites that infringe on the use of the GED® trademark and takes appropriate action to stop the infringement.

What you can do to help protect your state's residents

- Issue a warning from the Attorney General's office to consumers.
- Notify state officials (e.g., department of education, department of workforce services, and department of social services), outlining the threat of dubious online high school credentialing programs.
- Notify the above to accept only state-issued transcripts that verify GED Test scores, which are difficult to forge, rather than any type of certificate/diploma.
- Ensure that accurate information on your state's GED® testing program is available (see www.GEDtest.org, www.GEDtest.org/administrators, www.GEDtest.org/locator).
- Work with your state department of education to create a list of credible accreditation bodies, and if possible, programs that are recognized as accredited by your state.
- Monitor the legitimacy of online degree-granting programs and take action as appropriate.

GED Testing Service – www.GEDtest.org
American Council on Education – www.acenet.edu

Online Programs Offering Illegitimate Credentials using the GED® Brand **Examples of Actions Taken in Some States**

Examples of actions taken in some states:

- October 11, 2005. NJ Department of Education issues advisory warning against misleading GED® Diploma services. Warning still located on NJ GED® administrator's website.
<http://www.state.nj.us/education/news/2005/1011ged.htm>
- October 26, 2005. NY Attorney General obtained court order against Long Island Home Study. Judgment in the amount of \$750,000 and ordered to pay \$10,000 to consumers.
http://www.oag.state.ny.us/press/2005/oct/oct26a_05.html
- May 04, 2006. NY Attorney General obtained court order against GED Associates, Inc., operating under the name Home Study Careers. Ordered to pay \$30,000 in restitution to consumers and \$20,000 in penalties.
http://www.oag.state.ny.us/press/2006/may/may04a_06.html
- February 14, 2007. Kentucky Attorney General and the Council on Postsecondary Education-Kentucky Adult Education issue consumer alert to students to beware of misleading GED programs.
<http://ag.ky.gov/news/GED-testing-websites.htm>
- Fall 2007. Missouri pursued and sentenced former college employee to more than 10 years in prison for selling 200 forged certificates to students, resulting in more than \$650,000 in fraudulent student loans and grants.
- Spring 2008. The Kentucky legislature is considering a bill to make the forgery of an "academic degree" a class D felony.
<http://www.lrc.ky.gov/record/08RS/record.htm>
- Spring 2009. New York Attorney General shuts down "Long Island Home Study" and "East End Home Study." Man who ran businesses receives jail time, community service and ordered to pay \$5,000 in restitution.
http://www.ag.ny.gov/media_center/2009/mar/mar13a_09.html
- Summer 2009. Better Business Bureau warns your online diploma could be a worthless piece of paper
<http://www.bbb.org/us/article/bbb-warns-your-online-diploma-could-be-a-worthless-piece-of-paper-11830>
- Spring 2010. South Carolina's WYFF exposes diploma mill and tells story of man who fell victim to company but then returned to pass the GED Test and earn his credential.
<http://www.wyff4.com/news/23670087/detail.html>

GED Testing Service – www.GEDtest.org
American Council on Education – www.acenet.edu

Online Programs Offering Illegitimate Credentials using the GED® Brand **Case Examples from Real Stories**

Case Example #1 – Mrs. Garcia

In December 2007, Mrs. Garcia’s mother-in-law spent \$200 on a prominent online high school program. She completed and passed a short online test in her home, for which she was awarded a certificate that indicated she “obtained her GED.” But the certificate was not accepted by a local community college, so her daughter-in-law contacted GED Testing Service® to complain and clarify the confusion. She felt that her mother-in-law was too embarrassed to complain herself, but that it was important to report the issue. She stated that she “would hate to see others get scammed on this, and so-called online schools make a lot of money off people.”

Damage to Consumer: Spent \$200 on a certificate, denied admission to her local community college, and embarrassment.

Case Example #2 – Name not to be released

In 2007, a GED® Administrator’s office was notified of a local complaint from the parent of a recent high school dropout who wanted to earn his high school credential. The parent explained that they had supported their son in pursuing his credential through an online program that “appeared to be accredited.” They paid tuition for the program, a fee for a framed “diploma,” and for their son’s class ring. They refused to be identified or lodge a formal complaint with the state’s attorney general’s office. They wanted GED Testing Service® staff to be aware of the online program and to alert others who might also be vulnerable to the program.

Damage to Consumer: Spent approximately \$950 on tuition, a dubious framed high school diploma, and matching class ring.

Case Example #3 – Mr. Davidson and other Ivy Tech applicants

In fall 2006, the GED Examiner at Ivy Tech Community College reported four students who were not allowed to pursue classes because they possessed illegitimate high school equivalency credentials. The students were allowed to enroll in one class until the credential could be verified – which was an additional cost to the students for a class that would not be valid. One student, Mr. Davidson, paid \$150 for his certificate and “GED Grade Summary Sheet,” which were not accepted by either Ivy Tech or his anticipated employer.

Damage to Consumer: Spent \$150 on an illegitimate credential, \$200 on a community college class, wasted time on a semester-long course, and denied employment.

GED Testing Service – www.GEDtest.org
American Council on Education – www.acenet.edu

Online Programs Offering Illegitimate Credentials using the GED® Brand GED® Testing Program and ACE® Facts

About the GED Testing Program and GED Testing Service®

- The GED® Tests were developed in 1942 to measure outcomes of a high school education. The program began by awarding a high school credential to soldiers returning from World War II, providing them an opportunity to pursue postsecondary education.
- Since its adoption by the state of New York in 1947, GED® testing has served as a powerful second chance for those who did not complete high school:
 - 1.23 million¹ students drop out of high school each year.
 - 39 million Americans, or 18 percent of the population, do not have a high school diploma.²
- Over 780,000 people participated in GED® testing in 2009, and over 470,000 adults earned a high school equivalency diploma/certificate after passing the GED® Tests in 2009.
- Since 1942, over 17 million people have received high school equivalency credentials after passing the battery of tests offered by GED Testing Service.
- The GED® Tests assess academic skills and knowledge taught in a four-year program of high school education.
- Students who meet the minimum passing standard and any additional requirements established by their respective state are awarded a diploma or certificate.
- Tests offered by GED Testing Service® are normed on studies with high school students. The passing standard is set so that 40% of graduating high school seniors would not meet the passing standard on their first attempt.
- GED Testing Service offers a battery of tests consisting of five exams: Language Arts, Reading; Language Arts, Writing; Mathematics; Social Studies; and Science. Testing on all five content area tests takes a total of seven hours.
- GED Testing Service® is a program of the American Council on Education.

About the American Council on Education®

- Founded in 1918, ACE® is the major coordinating body for all the nation's higher education institutions, representing more than 1,600 college and university presidents, and more than 200 related associations, nationwide. It seeks to provide leadership and a unifying voice on key higher education issues and influence public policy through advocacy, research, and program initiatives.

¹ Editorial Projects in Education [EPE]. 2007. Diplomas count 2007: Ready for what? Preparing students for college, careers, and life after high school. Special issue, Education Week 26, no.40: 40-41.

² Population totals for the United States and insular areas include adults aged 16 years and older, without a high school diploma and not enrolled in an educational program, based on 2000 U.S. Census data.