

# Abstract

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**F**or most high school non-completers, the GED® credential provides a bridge to postsecondary education, but little is known about how successfully GED Test candidates make that transition and whether enrollment rates change with time. The American Council on Education (ACE) has begun a three-year longitudinal study to understand the effect of the GED credential on postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and completion. This study reports the latest data available from a 2003 cohort of GED candidates who tested shortly after the introduction of the current 2002 Series GED Tests.

This study is in support of a new effort to transition adults without a high school diploma to the GED credential and career and college readiness via accelerated learning. The initiative is a comprehensive, multiyear program designed to dramatically increase the numbers of individuals who earn the GED credential. It consists of three key components: education and preparation; enhanced career- and college-ready assessment aligned with the Common Core State Standards and enhanced credentialing process; and connections and transition services to postsecondary education and career opportunities.

The 148,649 GED Test passers in the 2003 cohort study attended 2,787 postsecondary institutions throughout the United States. The vast majority of students who had passed the GED Test initially enrolled in colleges offering programs of two years or fewer; 77.8 percent enrolled in public two-year or fewer-than-two-year institutions. The majority of passers in the 2003 cohort who enrolled in postsecondary institutions enrolled within the first three years after passing the test (i.e., 2003, 2004, or 2005) and tended to take their time to progress in postsecondary programs, perhaps at a less consistent pace than other adult learners. A majority (66.6 percent) who enrolled maintained enrollment for two or more semesters, yet only 11.8 percent of 2003 passers who enrolled graduated from a postsecondary program by September 2009.

Major findings of interest in this first year of a three-year study reflect a positive relationship between the GED credential and entering postsecondary education. Findings of predictive survival analyses for event occurrence of postsecondary enrollment and graduation are presented in this report. Other results include comparisons between postsecondary institutions that GED credential recipients attend and postsecondary institutions in general, and between GED credential recipients and traditional high school graduates. A discussion of findings and their implications for future longitudinal research follow.