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Dropouts Immediately Pursuing a GED®: Their Institutions' Characteristics, Self-Reported  
Reasons for Dropping Out, and Presence of High-Stakes Exit Exams

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Perspective

The characteristics of dropouts and measures to prevent students from dropping out have been highly researched areas in educational policy in the United States. The National Center for Education Statistics' *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2001* (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2004) reports characteristics on dropouts such as gender, race/ethnicity, family income, age, and geographic region, and other studies focus more on the student and family factors contributing to dropping out of school. These studies find that absenteeism, school performance, disciplinary problems, mobility, educational level of parents, and parental support are contributing factors (Battin-Pearson, Newcomb, Abbott, Hill, Catalano, & Hawkins, 2000).

Institutional characteristics, such as locale and classroom size, have also been reported as factors contributing to dropping out rates at secondary schools (Cotton, 1996; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999). However, a review of the literature finds that research on institutional characteristics associated with dropping out of school is, for the most part, limited to the college and university level.

Another speculated source of impact on dropout rates is high-stakes testing (Cavanaugh, 2002). Beyond affecting dropout rates, some critics have questioned whether high school graduation exams and federally mandated testing encourage schools to place their low-performing students in high school equivalency programs.

As the research on factors contributing to dropping out of school continues to develop and as research on the impact of high-stakes testing continues to grow and provide inconsistent conclusions, this study was designed to provide empirical data on a specific subset of high school

dropouts: those who recently left high school and pursued a high school equivalency credential within one year. For the first time on a national level, institutional characteristics of the last K-12 school attended, along with self-reported reasons for not completing high school, are reported for dropouts who immediately pursued a General Educational Development (GED®) high school equivalency credential. The institutional characteristics examined in this study are those commonly reported on a national level and included the following: geographic region, locale, school type, enrollment size, percentage of students eligible for free lunch, and pupil/teacher ratio. Forty-three self-reported reasons for leaving school that cover family, social, academic environment, and student performance issues were gathered from the GED examinees before their first test session.

It is anticipated that the empirical results gathered from this study will contribute to at-risk youth research by providing further insight into what dropouts who immediately pursued a GED reported as reasons for not completing high school and how those reasons vary across the institutional characteristics of the school last attended and by the presence of high-stakes exit exams (HSEEs). The research topics addressed in this study include the following: reasons dropouts who immediately pursued a GED did not complete high school; characteristics of the schools those GED examinees last attended; differences in the reasons for not completing school by school characteristics; and relationship between states with and without HSEEs and reasons for dropping out. By identifying variability in reasons for dropping out across institutional and state characteristics, this study serves to introduce new information that may contribute to shaping educational interventions for at-risk students by providing information useful in identifying and serving at-risk communities and thereby encouraging students to complete high school.

It is important to keep in mind that the results from this study represent an initial examination of the relationship between reasons for not completing school and institutional characteristics and HSEEs. The current study did not examine the combined effect of individual and/or institutional variables but, rather, focused on a simple reporting of percentage of examinees endorsing the reasons for not completing school by institutional characteristics, and by states with and without HSEEs. Furthermore, it should be recognized that not all of the institutional characteristics examined in this study are alterable by the schools; for example, a school cannot change its geographic region and locale.

#### Method

The data analyzed were from two databases: the Common Core of Data (CCD) Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey 2001-2002 from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) and the Tests of General Educational Development (American Council on Education, 2002) International Database (IDB). Data extracted from the GED IDB included data from the 2002 examination cycle of the GED Tests. The GED data contained examinee demographic data from GED Tests administrations in 48 states and the District of Columbia (Ohio and Connecticut data are not included). Included in the examinee data were self-reported reasons for not completing high school. Examinees could indicate one or more of 43 reasons for not completing high school; 93% of the final sample endorsed 14 reasons or fewer. The CCD Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey 2001-2002 from NCES provided a listing of all public schools in the country and basic information on the schools, their students, and their teachers. The two databases were merged using NCES school codes and thereby resulted in a link between information on GED candidates and characteristics of the last K-12 school they attended.

Sample selection first involved extracting data from the 2002 GED IDB on examinees who indicated that they last attended traditional K-12 school in years 2001 or 2002 ( $N = 121,244$ ). Second, records that did not indicate a valid NCES code for the last K-12 school attended (46,478) and records for examinees who did not indicate at least one reason for not completing high school (7,497) were deleted. The final sample size for this study was 67,269 GED examinees from 12,449 schools.

### *Analyses*

For the total sample, descriptive demographic data on age, gender, race, primary language, and highest level of education completed were compiled. Institutional characteristics of the last K-12 school attended were summarized for geographic region (South, West, Midwest, and Northeast), locale (urban, suburban, and rural), school type (regular, special education, vocational, magnet, and charter), enrollment size, percentage eligible for reduced-price lunch, percentage eligible for free lunch, and pupil/teacher ratio.

To explore differences in reasons for leaving school across institutional characteristics, the percentage of high school dropouts indicating each of 43 reasons for not completing high school was calculated by region, locale, school type, enrollment size, pupil/teacher ratio, and percentage of students eligible for free lunch.

The sample was then divided into two groups: those examinees whose last K-12 school attended is located in a state requiring passing a high school exit exam in 2002 or earlier (17 of the states in the data source) and those whose last school attended is located in a state that did not require a high school exit exam. The states with high-stakes exit exams in 2002 or earlier are Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and

Virginia (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). In an attempt to explore the relationship among the presence of HSEEs and reasons for leaving school, the percentage of recent high school dropouts indicating each of 43 reasons for not completing high school was calculated for each group. Specific attention was paid to seven reasons for not completing high school that were hypothesized to be related to the effect of HSEEs if HSEEs were encouraging schools to place their low-performing students in high school equivalency programs.

*Definition of Terms (adapted from NCES)*

*Region.* The states in the Northeast region are Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The states in the Midwest region are Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The states in the South region are Alabama, Arkansas, District of Columbia, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. The states in the West region are Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

*Locale code.* Locale code is defined based on a school's location relative to populous areas, which is based on the school's address. An *urban* locale is defined generally as "large city," "mid-size city," "urban fringe of large city," or "urban fringe of mid-size city" and defined as urban by the Census Bureau. A *suburban* locale is defined generally as "large town" or "small town" as designated by the Census Bureau. A *rural* locale is one defined as such by the Census Bureau.

*School type.* A *regular* school is defined as a public elementary/secondary school that does not focus primarily on vocational, special, or alternative education. A *special education*

school is defined as a public elementary/secondary school that focuses primarily on the following student populations: hard of hearing, deaf, speech-impaired, health-impaired, orthopedically impaired, mentally retarded, seriously emotionally disturbed, multi-handicapped, visually handicapped, deaf and blind, and adapts curriculum, materials or instruction for students served. A *vocational/technical* school is defined as a public elementary/secondary school that focuses primarily on vocational education, providing education in one or more semi-skilled technical operations. A school defined as *other* is a public elementary/secondary school that addresses the needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, and falls outside of the categories of regular, special, and vocational education.

A *charter* school is defined as a school providing free public elementary and/or secondary education to eligible students under a specific charter granted by the state legislature or other appropriate authority and is designated by such authority to be a charter school. A *magnet* school is defined as a special school or program designed to attract students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds for the purpose of reducing, preventing, or eliminating racial isolation (50% or more minority enrollment); and/or to provide an academic or social focus on a particular theme (e.g., science/math, performing arts, gifted/talented, or foreign language).

*Enrollment size.* The reported total membership of the school across all grades.

*Free and reduced-price lunch.* The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day to students in public, nonprofit private schools, and residential child care institutions. Students in families where the income is below 130% of the poverty level are eligible to receive free meals; children from families where the income is between 130% and 185% of the poverty level are eligible for

reduced-price meals. Schools must use the cash subsidies and donated commodities to provide meals that meet federal requirements to eligible children.

*Pupil/teacher Ratio:* The number of teachers per one student in the school or district.

## Results

### *Total Group Analyses*

Descriptive demographic data on age, gender, race/ethnicity, primary language, and highest level of education completed for the sample are reported in Table 1. As the sample was selected to include only examinees that last attended school in 2001 or 2002 and completed the demographic questionnaire in 2002, examinees with a reported age of 24 or greater were assumed to have provided an invalid date of birth. Sixty-three percent of the sample was male and 68% was White. Nearly 98% of the sample reported English as their primary language and over 77% reported completing tenth grade or higher. For comparison purposes, Table 1 also provides demographics for the population of GED examinees who tested in 2002 and reported 2001 or 2002 as the year they last attended school. Based on this comparison, the study sample was slightly younger (95% vs. 94% less than 20 years old), had more White examinees (68% vs. 65%), and was less schooled (77% vs. 79% completed 10th grade or higher) than the population of examinees who tested in 2002 and reported 2001 or 2002 as the year they last attended school.

Institutional characteristics of the last K-12 school attended by the GED examinees in the sample are reported in Table 2 and include geographic region, locale, school type, enrollment, percentage eligible for reduced-price lunch, percentage eligible for free lunch, and pupil/teacher ratio. A majority of the sample, 56%, last attended school in the South while only 9% last attended school in the Northeast; 61% last attended school in an urban locale, while only 17%

last attended school in a suburban setting. Ninety percent of the examinees last attended schools classified as regular schools, followed by 9% of examinees last attending

Table 1  
Demographics of Dropouts in 2001-2002 Who Immediately Pursued a GED®: Sample ( $N = 67,269$ ) vs. Population ( $N = 121, 244$ ) Comparison

	Sample		Population	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
<b>Age</b>				
16 to less than 17	7,002	10.4	11,900	9.8
17 to less than 18	24,758	36.8	41,036	33.9
18 to less than 19	22,889	34.0	41,468	34.2
19 to less than 20	9,543	14.2	19,161	15.8
20 to less than 24	2,484	3.7	6,444	5.3
Assumed invalid (< 16, 24 or greater)	593	0.9	1,235	0.7
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	42,010	62.7	74,941	62.5
Female	25,030	37.3	45,028	37.5
<b>Race/ethnicity*</b>				
White	42,335	67.7	73,159	65.0
Black	10,025	16.0	20,205	17.9
Hispanic	7,427	11.9	14,111	12.5
American Indian or Alaska Native	1,391	2.2	2,231	2.0
Asian	1,028	1.6	2,221	2.0
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	353	0.6	683	0.6
<b>Primary language</b>				
English	64,405	97.6	106,244	96.9
Spanish	1,092	1.6	2,050	1.9
French or other	508	0.8	1,358	1.1
<b>Highest level of education completed</b>				
7th grade or less	295	0.5	110	0.1
8th grade	3,751	5.8	5,993	5.1
9th grade	10,589	16.4	18,015	15.5
10th grade	19,356	30.1	34,137	29.3
11th grade	27,386	42.5	49,246	42.2
12th grade or more	3,037	4.7	8,705	7.2
<b>Year last attended school</b>				
2001	35,516	53.0	65,254	53.8
2002	31,753	47.0	55,990	46.2

Note. Sample data based on GED® examinees testing in 2002 who (a) indicated they last attended school in the year 2001 or 2002, (b) reported a valid NCES code for the last school attended, and (c) indicated at least one reason for not completing school. Population data based on GED® examinees testing in 2002 who indicated they last attended school in the year 2001 or 2002.

\*0.02% ( $N = 18$  examinees) race/ethnicity codes were out of range

Table 2

Institutional Characteristics of Schools Last Attended in 2001-2002 by Dropouts Who Immediately Pursued a GED®

	Schools		Examinees			Schools		Examinees	
	N	(%)	N	(%)		N	(%)	N	(%)
Geographic region of U.S.					% eligible for reduced-price lunch				
South	5,619	45.1	37,713	56.1	Less than 10%	8,215	66.0	48,461	72.0
West	2,662	21.4	13,170	19.6	10% - < 20%	2,380	19.1	8,900	13.2
Midwest	2,695	21.7	10,203	15.2	20% - < 30%	108	0.9	254	0.4
Northeast	1,473	11.8	6,183	9.2	30% or greater	23	0.2	40	0.1
					Missing	1,723	13.8	9,614	14.3
Locale of school					% eligible for free lunch				
Urban	6,506	52.3	40,994	60.9	Less than 10%	2,466	19.8	13,450	20.0
Suburban	1,988	16.0	11,408	17.0	10% - < 20%	2,386	19.1	14,052	20.9
Rural	3,884	31.2	14,656	21.8	20% - < 30%	1,899	15.2	11,110	16.5
N/A	71	0.6	211	0.3	30% - < 40%	1,331	10.7	6,666	9.9
					40% - < 50%	956	7.9	4,612	6.9
School type					50% or greater	1,688	13.6	7,765	11.5
Regular	10,974	88.1	60,536	90.0	Missing	1,723	13.8	9,614	14.3
Special education	68	0.6	140	0.2					
Vocational/tech	166	1.3	589	0.9					
Other/Alternative	1,241	10.0	6,004	8.9	Pupil/teacher ratio				
					Less than 10:1	777	6.2	2,273	3.4
Magnet	309	2.5	1,979	2.9	10:1 - < 20:1	8,597	69.1	45,931	68.3
Charter	281	2.3	854	1.3	20:1 - < 30:1	1,872	15.0	11,825	17.6
					30:1 or higher	140	1.1	565	0.8
Enrollment					Missing	1,063	8.5	6,675	9.9
0-499 students	4,621	37.1	13,439	19.9					
500-999	3,265	26.2	14,522	21.6					
1000-1499	1,898	15.2	14,311	21.3					
1500-1999	1,281	10.3	12,012	17.9					
2000-2499	685	5.5	6,826	10.2					
2500 +	486	3.9	5,523	7.9					
Missing	213	1.7	906	1.4					

Note. Sample data based on GED® examinees testing in 2002 who (a) indicated they last attended school in the year 2001 or 2002, (b) reported a valid NCES code for the last school attended, and (c) indicated at least one reason for not completing school. Population data based on GED® examinees testing in 2002 who indicated they last attended school in the year 2001 or 2002.

schools classified as alternative/other. Though only 42% of the examinees last attended schools that had an enrollment size of less than 1000 students, 63% of the schools in the sample had enrollment sizes of less than 1000 students. As expected from the data in Table 2, the greatest percentage of examinees last attended schools in South-urban (32%), South-rural (14%), and West-urban (14%) (see Table 3).

Table 3  
Number and Percentage of Examinees and Schools in Sample by Region by Locale

	<u>Examinees</u>		<u>Schools</u>	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
South-Urban	21,307	31.7	2,627	21.1
South-Rural	9,639	14.3	1,960	15.7
West-Urban	9,191	13.7	1,710	13.7
South-Suburban	6,693	10.0	1,004	8.1
Midwest-Urban	6,077	9.0	1,223	9.8
Northeast-Urban	4,419	6.6	946	7.6
West-Suburban	2,166	3.2	362	2.9
Midwest-Suburban	2,052	3.1	491	3.9
Midwest-Rural	2,035	3.0	963	7.7
West-Rural	1,745	2.6	571	4.6
Northeast-Rural	1,237	1.8	390	3.1
Northeast-Suburban	497	0.7	131	1.1
Missing locale	211	0.1	71	0.2
	<u>67,269</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>12,449</u>	<u>100.0</u>

#### *Top Reasons for Not Completing High School*

This study examined the percentage of examinees endorsing 43 reasons for not completing high school for the overall sample and by the following variables: geographic region, locale, school type, enrollment size, percentage of students eligible for free lunch, and pupil/teacher ratio, as well as by states with and without a required high school graduation exam in 2002 or earlier. For all analyses, the same reasons for not completing high school were always ranked in the top five: “Was absent too many times,” “Did not like school,” “Was bored,” “Wasn’t happy in school,” and “Poor study habits.” The top five reasons are separated by a line from the other 38 reasons for not completing school in all tables.

#### *Institutional Characteristics by Reasons for Not Completing School*

Tables 4 through 9 report both the percentage of examinees endorsing each reason and the rank of the reason for not completing school by institutional characteristics. The identification of statistical significance is not included in this study because it is only preliminary

reporting. Instead, only the reasons for not completing high school for which the largest two differences in percentages across institutional characteristics were observed were highlighted and are presented below.

*Region (Table 4).* The largest difference in percentages of examinees endorsing the reasons for not completing high school across regions was 9 percentage points and was seen for “Social life was more important than school work,” with a greater percentage of examinees from the Midwest (29%) than the South (20%) endorsing the reason; “Got married,” had a greater percentage of examinees from the Northeast (12%) than the West (3%) endorsing the reason; and “Too old for my grade” had a greater percentage of examinees from the South (18%) than the West (9%) endorsing the reason.

The second largest difference in percentages of examinees endorsing the reasons for not completing high school across regions was 8 percentage points and was seen for “Poor study habits,” with a greater percentage of examinees from the Midwest (43%) than the Northeast or South (both 35%) endorsing the reason; “Poor grades,” had a greater percentage of examinees from the Midwest and West (both 36%) than the South (28%) endorsing the reason; “Too old for my grade,” had a greater percentage of examinees from the South (18%) than the Midwest (10%) endorsing the reason; and “Did not get along with other students,” had a greater percentage of examinees from the West (13%) than the Northeast (5%) endorsing the reason.

*Locale (Table 5).* The largest difference in percentages of examinees endorsing the reasons for not completing high school across locales was 7 percentage points and was seen for “Was absent too many times,” with a greater percentage of examinees from urban locales (54%) than rural locales (47%) endorsing the reason.

The second largest difference in percentages of examinees endorsing the reasons for not completing high school across locales was 5 percentage points and was seen again for “Was absent too many times,” with a greater percentage of examinees from urban locales (54%) than suburban locales (49%) endorsing the reason; “Did not get along with teachers,” had a greater percentage of examinees from rural locales (25%) than urban locales (20%) endorsing the reason.

*School type (Table 6).* The largest and second largest differences in percentages of examinees endorsing the reasons for not completing high school across school types was 16 and 15 percentage points, respectively, and were seen for “Got suspended/expelled,” with a greater percentage of examinees from special education schools (33%) than regular (17%), vocational (18%), and magnet schools (18%) endorsing the reason.

*Enrollment (Table 7).* The largest and second largest differences in percentages of examinees endorsing the reasons for not completing high school across enrollment size was 8 and 7 percentage points. The percentage endorsing “Had problems with law/police” and “Didn’t get along with teachers” generally decreased as enrollment size increased. The percentage endorsing “Was absent too many times” generally increased as enrollment size increased. The percentage endorsing “Did not like school” had a 7 percentage point decrease between examinees last attending schools with an enrollment size of 1000-1499 (51%) to 2500 or more (44%).

*Pupil/Teacher ratio (Table 8).* The largest and second largest differences in percentages of examinees endorsing the reasons for not completing high school across pupil/teacher ratio was 11 and 8 percentage points. The percentage endorsing “Was absent too many times” generally increased as pupil/teacher ratio increased. Twenty-three percent of examinees from schools with

a pupil/teacher ratio less than 10:1 reported “Had problems with the law/police” as a reason for not completing school compared to 12% and 15% of examinees from schools with pupil/teacher ratios of 10:1 to less than 20:1, and 20:1 to less than 30:1, respectively. Twenty-three percent of examinees from schools with a pupil/teacher ratio less than 10:1 vs. 15% of examinees from schools with 20:1 to less than 30:1 reported “Got suspended/expelled” as a reason for not completing school.

*Free lunch percentage (Table 9).* The largest and second largest differences in percentages of examinees endorsing the reasons for not completing high school across percentage of students eligible for free lunch was 14 and 12 percentage points, respectively. The percentage of examinees endorsing “Didn’t like school,” “Was bored,” and “Wasn’t happy in school” generally decreased as percentage of those eligible for free lunch increased.

#### *Required High School Exit Exam by Reasons for Not Completing School Analyses*

Table 10 reports both the percentage of examinees endorsing each reason and the rank of the reason for not completing school for the overall sample within states that did and did not require a HSEE in 2002 or earlier. Seven reasons were hypothesized to vary if high-stakes exit exams are encouraging schools to place their low-performing students in high school equivalency programs: “Poor grades,” “Poor test scores,” “School official told me to leave,” “Had trouble with math,” “Had trouble with reading,” “School work was too hard,” and “Homework was too hard.” These seven reasons appear in boldface in Table 10.

Four of the seven reasons were endorsed by lower percentages of examinees from states with HSEEs than those without HSEEs: “Poor grades,” “School official told me to leave,” “School work was too hard,” and “Homework was too hard”. The remaining three reasons, “Had trouble with math,” “Had trouble with reading,” and “Poor test scores,” were endorsed by equal

percentages of examinees from states with and without HSEEs. Thus, the observed differences appeared to be different from what was originally hypothesized. Although “Too old for my grade” was not one of the originally hypothesized reasons, it showed a difference in endorsement rate between examinees last attending schools in states with and without HSEEs of 7 percentage points; a greater percentage of examinees from states with HSEEs (18%) endorsed the reason compared to those from states without HSEEs (11%).

Table 4  
 Percentage of GED® Examinees Endorsing and Rank (#) of Reason for Not Completing High School by Region of School Last Attended

Reason for Not Completing High School	All <i>N</i> =67,269		Midwest <i>N</i> =10,203		Northeast <i>N</i> =6,183		South <i>N</i> =37,713		West <i>N</i> =13,170	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Was absent too many times	52	55	1	56	1	49	1	54	1	
Did not like school	49	53	2	53	2	48	2	50	2	
Was bored	44	48	3	44	4	41	3	49	3	
Wasn't happy in school	43	44	4	47	3	41	4	43	4	
<b>Poor study habits<sup>2</sup></b>	38	<b>43</b>	5	<b>35</b>	5	<b>35</b>	5	42	5	
<b>Poor grades<sup>2</sup></b>	31	<b>36</b>	6	30	6	<b>28</b>	7	<b>36</b>	6	
Had trouble with math	29	26	8	26	7	29	6	30	7	
<b>Social life was more important than school work<sup>1</sup></b>	23	<b>29</b>	7	23	11	<b>20</b>	10	28	8	
Did not feel part of the school	22	25	9	24	8	21	9	24	9	
Did not get along with teachers	22	23	10	23	10	22	8	19	13	
Poor teaching	19	18	15	20	12	19	11	20	10	
Poor test scores	19	21	11	20	13	19	12	18	14	
Had emotional problems	19	20	13	24	9	18	13	20	11	
Got a job	18	17	17	17	16	17	16	19	12	
Got suspended/expelled	18	21	12	19	14	18	14	16	19	
Teachers did not help me enough	17	16	19	16	17	17	17	17	15	
Had problems with the law/police	16	20	14	15	19	16	18	15	20	
Could not adjust to school routine	16	18	16	18	15	14	19	17	17	
<b>Too old for my grade<sup>1,2</sup></b>	15	<b>10</b>	23	15	18	<b>18</b>	15	<b>9</b>	27	
School work was too easy	14	14	20	14	20	12	20	17	16	
Had problems with drugs	13	17	18	13	21	12	21	16	18	
Couldn't work and study at same time	10	11	21	10	23	10	22	10	22	
<b>Did not get along with other students<sup>2</sup></b>	10	9	27	<b>5</b>	33	9	23	<b>13</b>	21	
Pregnancy	8	10	25	8	28	8	25	8	29	
Had problems with alcohol	8	11	22	9	26	7	28	10	25	
School official told me to leave	8	10	24	9	24	8	24	9	28	
School did not offer courses I wanted	8	8	29	9	27	6	33	10	23	
Family moved too often	8	8	28	9	25	8	26	7	31	
Lacked a good place to study at home	7	9	26	8	29	7	27	10	24	
<b>Got married<sup>1</sup></b>	7	7	30	<b>12</b>	22	6	35	<b>3</b>	41	
Personal and/or family illness	7	7	34	4	39	7	29	9	26	
Other family members did not complete school	7	7	32	6	32	6	34	7	32	
Had trouble with reading	6	7	31	6	30	7	31	7	33	
Needed at home to care for family	6	6	35	6	31	7	32	4	39	
Needed money to help at home	6	4	40	1	43	7	30	7	30	
Job took too much time	5	5	37	5	34	5	36	6	34	
School work was too hard	5	6	36	5	36	5	38	5	37	
Homework was too hard	5	7	33	5	35	5	37	6	35	
Not enough vo/tech courses	5	4	39	5	37	4	39	5	36	
Did not feel safe at school	4	5	38	5	38	4	40	5	38	
Parents did not support me educationally	3	3	41	2	40	3	41	4	40	
Had trouble understanding the English language	2	2	42	2	41	2	42	2	43	
Did not have enough money to go to school	1	2	43	2	42	1	43	2	42	

Note. Bolded entries indicate largest and second largest differences in percentages endorsing a reason across regions.

<sup>1</sup> Exhibited the largest difference (9) in percentages endorsing across regions.

<sup>2</sup> Exhibited the second largest difference (8) in percentages endorsing across regions.

Table 5

Percentage of GED® Examinees Endorsing and Rank (#) of Reason for Not Completing High School by Locale of School Last Attended

Reason for Not Completing High School	All <i>N</i> =67,269		Urban <i>N</i> =40,994		Suburban <i>N</i> =11,408		Rural <i>N</i> =14,656		N/A <i>N</i> =211	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
<b>Was absent too many times<sup>1,2</sup></b>	52		<b>54</b>	1	<b>49</b>	2	<b>47</b>	2	55	2
Did not like school	49		48	2	50	1	52	1	55	1
Was bored	44		44	3	43	4	44	4	46	3
Wasn't happy in school	43		41	4	44	3	45	3	38	4
Poor study habits	38		37	5	38	5	38	5	36	5
Poor grades	31		31	6	31	6	32	6	32	6
Had trouble with math	29		29	7	28	7	29	7	31	7
Social life was more important than school work	23		24	8	22	10	22	10	26	8
Did not feel part of the school	22		22	9	24	9	23	9	22	9
<b>Did not get along with teachers<sup>2</sup></b>	22		<b>20</b>	10	24	8	<b>25</b>	8	17	15
Poor teaching	19		19	12	19	12	20	12	16	17
Poor test scores	19		18	13	19	11	21	11	17	14
Had emotional problems	19		20	11	19	13	18	14	18	11
Got a job	18		17	16	17	17	18	16	15	21
Got suspended/expelled	18		18	14	17	16	18	13	21	10
Teachers did not help me enough	17		17	15	18	14	18	15	15	20
Had problems with the law/police	16		16	18	18	15	16	17	17	16
Could not adjust to school routine	16		17	17	14	19	14	19	17	13
Too old for my grade	15		15	19	14	18	15	18	16	18
School work was too easy	14		14	21	12	21	12	21	14	22
Had problems with drugs	13		14	20	14	20	13	20	18	12
Couldn't work and study at same time	10		10	22	10	22	10	22	12	23
Did not get along with other students	10		10	23	10	23	9	23	16	19
Pregnancy	8		9	24	9	25	8	27	10	26
Had problems with alcohol	8		8	26	9	24	9	24	9	29
School official told me to leave	8		9	25	8	26	8	25	11	24
School did not offer courses I wanted	8		7	30	7	28	8	28	9	28
Family moved too often	8		8	27	8	27	8	26	10	25
Lacked a good place to study at home	7		8	28	7	30	7	30	10	27
Got married	7		6	33	7	32	7	32	5	37
Personal and/or family illness	7		8	29	7	33	6	33	8	30
Other family members did not complete school	7		6	32	7	31	7	31	6	36
Had trouble with reading	6		6	31	7	29	8	29	3	41
Needed at home to care for family	6		6	34	7	34	6	37	3	38
Needed money to help at home	6		6	35	6	35	6	34	7	31
Job took too much time	5		6	36	5	38	5	38	7	32
School work was too hard	5		5	37	6	36	6	35	7	33
Homework was too hard	5		5	38	6	37	6	36	7	34
Not enough vo/tech courses	5		4	40	4	40	4	40	2	42
Did not feel safe at school	4		5	39	5	39	4	39	7	35
Parents did not support me educationally	3		3	41	3	42	2	42	3	39
Had trouble understanding the English language	2		2	42	3	41	3	41	1	43
Did not have enough money to go to school	1		2	43	1	43	1	43	3	40

Note. Bolded entries indicate largest and second largest differences in percentages endorsing a reason across locales.

<sup>1</sup>Exhibited the largest difference (7) in percentages endorsing across locales.<sup>2</sup>Exhibited the second largest difference (5) in percentages endorsing across locales.

Table 6  
 Percentage of GED® Examinees Endorsing and Rank (#) of Reason for Not Completing High School by Type of School Last Attended

Reason for Not Completing High School	All N=67,269		Regular N=60,536		Sp Ed N=140		Vocat'l N=589		Other/Al N=6,004		Magnet N=1,979		Charter N=854	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Was absent too many times	52	51	1	53	1	48	2	56	1	53	1	52	1	
Did not like school	49	49	2	46	2	49	1	49	2	44	2	44	2	
Was bored	44	44	3	39	3	41	3	45	3	40	3	44	3	
Wasn't happy in school	43	43	4	39	4	40	4	39	4	37	4	39	4	
Poor study habits	38	37	5	38	5	38	5	39	5	37	5	35	5	
Poor grades	31	31	6	29	7	30	6	31	6	32	6	26	7	
Had trouble with math	29	29	7	29	8	27	7	29	7	30	7	29	6	
Social life was more important than school work	23	23	8	22	11	23	8	28	8	24	8	24	9	
Did not feel part of the school	22	22	9	21	13	19	14	22	11	20	9	22	10	
Did not get along with teachers	22	22	10	20	14	21	10	21	12	16	17	20	15	
Poor teaching	19	20	11	19	15	21	11	17	18	20	10	18	16	
Poor test scores	19	19	13	18	16	23	9	18	16	18	13	15	20	
Had emotional problems	19	19	12	21	12	20	13	20	14	19	11	21	12	
Got a job	18	17	15	17	17	19	15	21	13	14	18	21	11	
<b>Got suspended/expelled<sup>1,2</sup></b>	18	<b>17</b>	14	<b>33</b>	6	<b>18</b>	16	24	10	<b>18</b>	12	21	14	
Teachers did not help me enough	17	17	16	16	18	16	17	16	19	17	14	18	17	
Had problems with the law/police	16	16	17	23	10	11	21	25	9	13	19	24	8	
Could not adjust to school routine	16	15	18	15	21	15	18	18	17	17	15	18	18	
Too old for my grade	15	15	19	11	23	21	12	14	20	17	16	14	21	
School work was too easy	14	13	21	16	19	12	19	14	21	12	21	15	19	
Had problems with drugs	13	13	20	24	9	11	22	20	15	12	20	21	13	
Couldn't work and study at same time	10	10	22	8	28	12	20	11	24	10	22	11	25	
Did not get along with other students	10	9	23	8	30	7	26	12	22	8	24	14	22	
Pregnancy	8	8	24	16	20	7	27	9	28	8	25	12	24	
Had problems with alcohol	8	8	25	15	22	5	35	12	23	7	28	13	23	
School official told me to leave	8	8	27	9	26	9	23	11	25	7	29	9	28	
School did not offer courses I wanted	8	7	29	11	25	6	32	7	32	7	30	8	29	
Family moved too often	8	8	28	9	27	9	24	10	26	8	27	7	32	
Lacked a good place to study at home	7	8	26	11	24	6	30	9	27	9	23	9	27	
Got married	7	7	31	6	32	7	29	4	39	5	36	5	35	
Personal and/or family illness	7	7	32	5	36	6	31	7	31	8	26	8	30	
Other family members did not complete school	7	6	35	4	40	7	28	8	30	6	33	5	36	
Had trouble with reading	6	7	30	8	29	8	25	7	33	6	32	7	33	
Needed at home to care for family	6	6	34	5	37	6	34	5	38	4	37	5	34	

Table 6  
 Percentage of GED® Examinees Endorsing and Rank (#) of Reason for Not Completing High School by Type of School Last Attended

Reason for Not Completing High School	All <i>N</i> =67,269		Regular <i>N</i> =60,536		Sp Ed <i>N</i> =140		Vocat <sup>1</sup> <i>N</i> =589		Other/Al <i>N</i> =6,004		Magnet <i>N</i> =1,979		Charter <i>N</i> =854	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Needed money to help at home	6	33	6	33	6	33	5	36	8	29	6	31	10	26
Job took too much time	5	38	5	38	5	38	4	37	6	34	5	35	7	31
School work was too hard	5	37	5	37	6	34	4	38	6	35	4	38	5	37
Homework was too hard	5	36	5	36	7	31	6	33	6	36	4	40	4	41
Not enough vo/tech courses	5	40	4	40	5	39	4	41	4	41	3	41	4	39
Did not feel safe at school	4	39	5	39	2	42	4	39	5	37	6	34	5	38
Parents did not support me educationally	3	41	3	41	6	35	4	40	4	40	4	39	4	40
Had trouble understanding the English language	2	42	2	42	2	43	3	42	2	43	1	43	2	42
Did not have enough money to go to school	1	43	1	43	4	41	2	43	2	42	2	42	1	43

Note. Bolded entries indicate largest and second largest differences in percentages endorsing a reason across school types.

<sup>1</sup> Exhibited the largest difference (16) in percentages endorsing across school types.

<sup>2</sup> Exhibited the second largest difference (15) in percentages endorsing across school types.

Table 7

Percentage of GED® Examinees Endorsing and Rank (#) of Reason for Not Completing High School by Enrollment Size of School Last Attended

Reason for Not Completing High School	All N=67,279		0-499 N=13,439		500-999 N=14,522		1000-1499 N=14,311		1500-1999 N=12,012		2000-2499 N=6,826		2500 + N=5,523		N/A N=906	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
<b>Was absent too many times<sup>2</sup></b>	52	49	2	<b>48</b>	2	53	1	<b>55</b>	1	<b>55</b>	1	54	1	54	2	
<b>Did not like school<sup>2</sup></b>	49	49	1	50	1	<b>51</b>	2	50	2	49	2	<b>44</b>	2	56	1	
Was bored	44	44	3	42	4	45	3	45	3	46	3	41	3	52	3	
Wasn't happy in school	43	42	4	43	3	44	4	43	4	43	4	38	4	35	5	
Poor study habits	38	39	5	36	5	37	5	38	5	39	5	36	5	38	4	
Poor grades	31	31	6	31	6	31	6	32	6	31	6	30	6	32	6	
Had trouble with math	29	29	7	28	7	29	7	29	7	29	7	28	7	27	8	
Social life was more important than school work	23	24	9	21	10	23	8	25	8	25	8	25	8	24	12	
Did not feel part of the school	22	23	10	23	8	23	9	22	9	22	9	19	9	22	14	
<b>Did not get along with teachers<sup>2</sup></b>	22	<b>24</b>	8	23	9	22	11	20	11	19	12	<b>17</b>	12	25	11	
Poor teaching	19	20	12	20	11	20	12	19	12	20	10	19	10	16	19	
Poor test scores	19	19	15	19	13	19	13	19	13	19	13	16	15	22	13	
Had emotional problems	19	19	14	19	12	20	10	20	10	19	11	18	11	17	17	
Got a job	18	19	16	17	15	18	14	17	14	17	15	15	18	18	15	
Got suspended/expelled	18	20	13	18	14	18	15	17	15	16	16	16	13	29	7	
Teachers did not help me enough	17	18	17	17	16	17	16	17	16	16	17	16	16	17	16	
<b>Had problems with the law/police<sup>1</sup></b>	16	<b>21</b>	11	15	18	15	18	15	18	<b>13</b>	19	16	14	26	9	
Could not adjust to school routine	16	15	20	14	19	16	17	16	17	17	14	16	17	15	20	
Too old for my grade	15	15	19	16	17	15	20	14	20	13	20	12	20	25	10	
School work was too easy	14	13	21	12	21	14	19	14	19	15	18	14	19	12	22	
Had problems with drugs	13	16	18	13	20	13	21	13	21	13	21	12	21	17	18	
Couldn't work and study at same time	10	10	24	10	22	10	22	10	22	10	22	10	22	11	23	
Did not get along with other students	10	11	22	9	23	9	23	9	23	10	23	10	23	8	28	
Pregnancy	8	10	25	8	25	8	26	8	26	8	27	7	29	7	30	
Had problems with alcohol	8	11	23	8	26	8	27	8	27	8	28	6	30	11	24	
School official told me to leave	8	9	26	8	24	8	25	8	25	9	26	8	26	9	26	
School did not offer courses I wanted	8	8	28	8	28	7	30	7	30	7	32	6	32	8	27	
Family moved too often	8	8	27	8	27	8	29	7	29	7	30	7	28	14	21	
Lacked a good place to study at home	7	8	29	7	29	7	24	8	24	9	24	9	24	7	31	
Got married	7	6	35	7	32	8	34	6	34	4	40	3	40	7	29	
Personal and/or family illness	7	7	31	6	33	6	28	7	28	9	25	9	25	4	39	
Other family members did not complete school	7	7	32	6	34	6	32	6	32	7	31	6	31	9	25	
Had trouble with reading	6	8	30	7	30	7	31	7	31	6	33	5	34	7	32	
Needed at home to care for family	6	6	34	7	31	7	33	6	33	6	34	5	35	5	35	

Table 7

Percentage of GED® Examinees Endorsing and Rank (#) of Reason for Not Completing High School by Enrollment Size of School Last Attended

Reason for Not Completing High School	All <i>N</i> =67,279		0-499 <i>N</i> =13,439		500-999 <i>N</i> =14,522		1000-1499 <i>N</i> =14,311		1500-1999 <i>N</i> =12,012		2000-2499 <i>N</i> =6,826		2500 + <i>N</i> =5,523		N/A <i>N</i> =906	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Needed money to help at home	6	33	7	33	6	35	5	35	5	35	7	29	8	27	5	36
Job took too much time	5	37	6	37	5	37	5	36	5	36	5	35	6	33	5	37
School work was too hard	5	36	6	36	6	36	5	38	5	38	5	37	4	37	6	33
Homework was too hard	5	38	6	38	5	39	5	39	5	39	5	38	4	38	5	38
Not enough vo/tech courses	5	40	5	40	4	40	4	40	4	40	3	41	3	41	5	34
Did not feel safe at school	4	39	5	39	5	38	5	37	5	37	5	36	5	36	4	40
Parents did not support me educationally	3	41	3	41	2	41	3	41	3	41	4	39	4	39	3	41
Had trouble understanding the English language	2	42	2	42	2	42	2	42	2	42	2	42	2	42	3	42
Did not have enough money to go to school	1	43	2	43	1	43	1	43	1	43	2	43	1	43	2	43

Note. Bolded entries indicate largest and second largest differences in percentages endorsing a reason across enrollment.

<sup>1</sup> Exhibited the largest difference (8) in percentages endorsing across enrollment.

<sup>2</sup> Exhibited the second largest difference (7) in percentages endorsing across enrollment.

Table 8

Percentage of GED® Examinees Endorsing and Rank (#) of Reason for Not Completing High School by Pupil/Teacher Ratio in School Last Attended

Reason for Not Completing High School	All	<10:1		10:1-<20:1		20:1-<30:1		30:1+		N/A	
	<i>N</i> =67,279	<i>N</i> =2,273	#	<i>N</i> =45,931	#	<i>N</i> =11,825	#	<i>N</i> =565	#	<i>N</i> =6,675	#
<b>Was absent too many times</b> <sup>1,2</sup>	52	<b>48</b>	2	<b>51</b>	1	53	1	<b>59</b>	1	51	1
Did not like school	49	49	1	50	2	47	2	53	2	51	2
Was bored	44	43	3	44	3	45	3	49	3	41	4
Wasn't happy in school	43	43	4	43	4	41	4	44	4	43	3
Poor study habits	38	35	5	38	5	39	5	39	5	35	5
Poor grades	31	30	6	31	6	33	6	31	6	31	6
Had trouble with math	29	28	7	28	7	29	7	30	7	30	7
Social life was more important than school work	23	23	9	23	8	26	8	29	8	20	10
Did not feel part of the school	22	22	12	23	9	21	9	23	10	21	9
Did not get along with teachers	22	24	8	23	10	18	13	23	11	22	8
Poor teaching	19	19	14	19	11	20	10	23	12	18	17
Poor test scores	19	19	15	19	13	19	12	22	13	20	12
Had emotional problems	19	20	13	19	12	19	11	19	16	19	14
Got a job	18	18	16	17	15	17	14	24	9	18	15
<b>Got suspended/expelled</b> <sup>2</sup>	18	<b>23</b>	10	18	14	<b>15</b>	18	21	14	19	13
Teachers did not help me enough	17	15	19	17	16	16	16	20	15	17	18
<b>Had problems with the law/police</b> <sup>1,2</sup>	16	<b>23</b>	11	17	17	<b>12</b>	20	<b>15</b>	19	18	16
Could not adjust to school routine	16	15	20	15	18	17	15	18	17	16	19
Too old for my grade	15	17	17	15	19	11	21	14	20	20	11
School work was too easy	14	14	21	13	21	16	17	17	18	11	22
Had problems with drugs	13	16	18	14	20	12	19	14	21	12	20
Couldn't work and study at same time	10	9	26	10	22	10	23	14	22	10	23
Did not get along with other students	10	11	22	9	23	11	22	9	25	7	29
Pregnancy	8	10	24	9	25	7	30	11	23	7	30
Had problems with alcohol	8	11	23	9	24	7	29	8	26	8	26
School official told me to leave	8	10	25	8	27	8	26	7	30	8	25
School did not offer courses I wanted	8	8	28	7	29	8	27	10	24	8	27
Family moved too often	8	8	29	7	30	7	28	8	27	11	21
Lacked a good place to study at home	7	7	30	8	26	9	25	7	31	6	33
Got married	7	5	38	7	33	4	39	8	28	10	24
Personal and/or family illness	7	8	27	7	28	10	24	7	32	5	37
Other family members did not complete school	7	7	31	7	31	6	32	7	33	7	31
Had trouble with reading	6	6	33	7	32	6	33	6	34	7	32

Table 8

Percentage of GED® Examinees Endorsing and Rank (#) of Reason for Not Completing High School by Pupil/Teacher Ratio in School Last Attended

Reason for Not Completing High School	All	<10:1		10:1-<20:1		20:1-<30:1		30:1+		N/A	
	<i>N</i> =67,279	<i>N</i> =2,273	#	<i>N</i> =45,931	#	<i>N</i> =11,825	#	<i>N</i> =565	#	<i>N</i> =6,675	#
Needed at home to care for family	6	6	<b>34</b>	6	<b>35</b>	5	<b>36</b>	8	29	8	28
Needed money to help at home	6	7	32	6	34	7	31	6	35	4	40
Job took too much time	5	6	<b>36</b>	5	<b>37</b>	6	<b>34</b>	5	<b>36</b>	5	<b>35</b>
School work was too hard	5	6	<b>35</b>	6	<b>36</b>	5	<b>37</b>	4	<b>38</b>	6	<b>34</b>
Homework was too hard	5	6	<b>37</b>	5	<b>38</b>	5	<b>35</b>	4	<b>39</b>	5	<b>38</b>
Not enough vo/tech courses	5	5	<b>39</b>	4	<b>40</b>	4	<b>41</b>	5	<b>37</b>	5	<b>39</b>
Did not feel safe at school	4	4	<b>40</b>	5	<b>39</b>	5	<b>38</b>	3	<b>41</b>	5	<b>36</b>
Parents did not support me educationally	3	3	<b>41</b>	3	<b>41</b>	4	<b>40</b>	4	<b>40</b>	2	<b>42</b>
Had trouble understanding the English language	2	2	<b>42</b>	2	<b>42</b>	2	<b>42</b>	2	<b>42</b>	3	<b>41</b>
Did not have enough money to go to school	1	1	<b>43</b>	1	<b>43</b>	2	<b>43</b>	2	<b>43</b>	1	<b>43</b>

Note. Bolded entries indicate largest and second largest differences in percentages endorsing a reason across pupil/teacher ratio.

<sup>1</sup>Exhibited the largest difference (11) in percentages endorsing across pupil/teacher ratio.

<sup>2</sup>Exhibited the second largest difference (8) in percentages endorsing across pupil/teacher ratio.

Table 9

Percentage of GED® Examinees Endorsing and Rank (#) of Reason for Not Completing High School by Percentage Eligible for Free Lunch in School Last Attended

Reason for Not Completing High School	All	<10%		10-<20%		20-<30%		30-<40%		40-<50%		50% +		N/A	
	<i>N</i> =67,279	<i>N</i> =13,450	#	<i>N</i> =14,052	#	<i>N</i> =11,110	#	<i>N</i> =6,666	#	<i>N</i> =4,612	#	<i>N</i> =7,765	#	<i>N</i> =9,614	#
Was absent too many times	52	53	2	53	1	51	1	51	1	49	1	49	1	53	2
<b>Did not like school<sup>1,2</sup></b>	49	<b>54</b>	1	<b>52</b>	2	48	2	46	2	44	2	<b>40</b>	2	53	1
<b>Was bored<sup>1,2</sup></b>	44	<b>49</b>	3	<b>47</b>	3	43	3	41	3	39	3	<b>35</b>	3	45	3
<b>Wasn't happy in school<sup>1,2</sup></b>	43	<b>47</b>	4	<b>45</b>	4	42	4	40	4	36	4	<b>33</b>	4	45	4
Poor study habits	38	41	5	39	5	37	5	34	5	34	5	32	5	39	5
Poor grades	31	35	6	32	6	30	6	27	7	26	7	25	7	35	6
Had trouble with math	29	28	7	28	7	28	7	29	6	28	6	29	6	31	7
Social life was more important than school work	23	27	8	25	8	22	8	22	8	20	8	19	9	24	9
Did not feel part of the school	22	24	9	24	9	22	9	20	11	19	11	18	14	24	8
Did not get along with teachers	22	23	10	22	10	21	10	21	9	19	9	19	10	23	10
Poor teaching	19	19	13	20	11	19	11	20	10	19	10	19	11	20	12
Poor test scores	19	21	12	20	12	19	13	17	16	17	17	15	17	21	11
Had emotional problems	19	21	11	20	13	19	12	17	15	17	15	17	15	20	13
Got a job	18	18	16	18	14	18	14	18	13	16	18	15	18	18	15
Got suspended/expelled	18	19	14	18	15	16	16	17	14	17	12	20	8	18	16
Teachers did not help me enough	17	16	18	17	16	17	15	18	12	17	16	17	16	18	14
Had problems with the law/police	16	19	15	15	19	15	18	14	18	17	14	19	13	17	19
Could not adjust to school routine	16	18	17	16	17	14	19	14	19	14	19	13	19	17	17
Too old for my grade	15	12	21	13	21	15	17	15	17	17	13	19	12	17	18
School work was too easy	14	15	20	15	18	14	20	13	20	11	21	10	21	12	21
Had problems with drugs	13	16	19	14	20	13	21	11	21	11	20	12	20	14	20
Couldn't work and study at same time	10	11	22	10	23	10	23	10	23	9	24	9	23	11	22
Did not get along with other students	10	9	24	11	22	10	22	10	22	10	23	9	25	7	35
Pregnancy	8	7	28	8	28	9	24	9	24	10	22	10	22	8	27
Had problems with alcohol	8	10	23	9	24	7	30	7	31	6	33	7	29	9	25
School official told me to leave	8	9	25	9	25	8	25	8	26	7	29	7	30	8	30
School did not offer courses I wanted	8	8	27	8	26	7	31	7	32	6	35	5	36	8	26
Family moved too often	8	7	30	7	30	7	27	8	25	8	25	9	24	10	23
Lacked a good place to study at home	7	8	26	8	29	7	28	7	27	8	26	8	26	8	28
Got married	7	5	35	5	37	6	34	7	30	6	32	7	28	9	24
Personal and/or family illness	7	7	29	8	27	8	26	7	29	7	31	7	32	5	38

Table 9  
 Percentage of GED® Examinees Endorsing and Rank (#) of Reason for Not Completing High School by Percentage Eligible for Free Lunch  
 in School Last Attended

Reason for Not Completing High School	All <i>N</i> =67,279		<10% <i>N</i> =13,450		10-<20% <i>N</i> =14,052		20-<30% <i>N</i> =11,110		30-<40% <i>N</i> =6,666		40-<50% <i>N</i> =4,612		50% + <i>N</i> =7,765		N/A <i>N</i> =9,614	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Other family members did not complete school	7	6	<b>32</b>	7	31	7	32	6	34	7	30	7	31	7	32	
Had trouble with reading	6	7	31	7	32	7	33	6	35	6	34	6	34	8	29	
Needed at home to care for family	6	5	<b>36</b>	6	33	6	35	6	33	7	28	8	27	7	31	
Needed money to help at home	6	5	34	6	34	7	29	7	28	8	27	7	33	3	40	
Job took too much time	5	5	38	6	35	5	37	5	37	5	37	5	37	5	37	
School work was too hard	5	5	37	5	38	5	36	5	36	5	36	6	35	7	33	
Homework was too hard	5	6	33	6	36	5	39	4	39	4	39	4	39	7	34	
Not enough vo/tech courses	5	4	40	4	40	4	40	3	40	4	40	3	40	5	36	
Did not feel safe at school	4	4	39	5	39	5	38	5	38	5	38	5	38	5	39	
Parents did not support me educationally	3	3	41	3	41	3	41	3	41	3	41	3	41	2	42	
Had trouble understanding the English language	2	2	42	2	43	2	42	2	42	2	42	2	42	3	41	
Did not have enough money to go to school	1	1	43	2	42	1	43	1	43	1	43	2	43	1	43	

Note. Bolded entries indicate largest and second largest differences in percentages endorsing a reason across percentage eligible for free lunch.

<sup>1</sup>Exhibited the largest difference (14) in percentages endorsing across percentage eligible for free lunch.

<sup>2</sup>Exhibited the second largest difference (12) in percentages endorsing across percentage eligible for free lunch.

Table 10  
 Percentage of GED® Examinees Endorsing and Rank (#) of Reason for Not Completing High School by  
 High Stakes Exit Exam (HSEE)

Reason for Not Completing High School	All	No HSEE		HSEE		Diff
	<i>N</i> =67,279	<i>N</i> =29,000	#	<i>N</i> =38,269	#	
	%	%	#	%	#	
Was absent too many times	52	54	1	50	1	-4
Did not like school	49	51	2	48	2	-3
Was bored	44	47	3	41	4	-6
Wasn't happy in school	43	44	4	42	3	-2
Poor study habits	38	41	5	35	5	-6
<b>Poor grades</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>-5</b>
<b>Had trouble with math</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>
Social life was more important than school work	23	27	8	21	10	-6
Did not feel part of the school	22	24	9	21	8	-3
Did not get along with teachers	22	22	10	21	9	-1
Poor teaching	19	19	12	19	11	0
<b>Poor test scores</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>
Had emotional problems	19	21	11	18	14	-3
Got a job	18	18	14	17	17	-1
Got suspended/expelled	18	18	15	18	15	0
Teachers did not help me enough	17	17	16	17	16	0
Could not adjust to school routine	16	17	17	14	19	-3
Had problems with the law/police	16	17	18	16	18	-1
Too old for my grade	15	11	22	18	13	7
Had problems with drugs	14	16	19	12	21	-4
School work was too easy	13	15	20	12	20	-3
Couldn't work and study at same time	10	11	21	10	22	-1
Did not get along with other students	10	10	24	9	23	-1
Family moved too often	8	8	28	7	29	-1
Pregnancy	8	8	29	8	24	0
Lacked a good place to study at home	8	9	26	7	31	-2
Had problems with alcohol	8	10	23	7	33	-3
<b>School official told me to leave</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>-1</b>
School did not offer courses I wanted	7	9	25	7	26	-2
Personal and/or family illness	7	7	30	7	30	0
Other family members did not complete school	7	7	31	6	35	-1
<b>Had trouble with reading</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>0</b>
Needed at home to care for family	6	5	37	7	27	2
Needed money to help at home	6	5	38	7	28	2
Got married	6	6	34	6	34	0
Job took too much time	5	6	33	5	36	-1
<b>School work was too hard</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>-1</b>
<b>Homework was too hard</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>-1</b>
Did not feel safe at school	5	5	39	4	40	-1
Not enough vo/tech courses	4	4	40	4	39	0
Parents did not support me educationally	3	3	41	3	41	0

<b>Had trouble understanding the English language</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>0</b>
Did not have enough money to go to school	1	2	42	1	43	-1

Note. Bolded entries indicate reasons hypothesized to be related to presence of HSEEs.

## Discussion

The current study utilizes a sample of GED examinees testing in 2002 that (a) indicated they last attended school in the year 2001 or 2002, (b) reported a valid NCES code for the last school attended, and (c) indicated at least one reason for not completing school. This sample was used to begin an examination of the relationship between self-reported reasons for not completing school and institutional characteristics of the last school attended and the presence of high-stakes exit exams. The sample is a good representation demographically of the population of GED examinees testing in 2002 that indicated they last attended school in the year 2001 or 2002 without the additional constraints.

Several interesting trends are found in the percentage of examinees who self-reported reasons for not completing high school that warrant further investigation. First, regardless of the breakdown of reasons by institutional characteristic or presence of high-stakes exit exam, the same five reasons are always ranked on top for not completing high school: “Was absent too many times,” “Poor study habits,” “Did not like school,” “Was bored,” and “Wasn’t happy in school.” Further research should investigate what underlies the three last attitudinal reasons for not completing school. Second, possible behavior-related reasons for not completing school, such as getting along with teachers, getting in trouble with the law, and getting expelled/suspended are endorsed more frequently by examinees last attending schools with lower pupil/teacher ratios and in rural areas and are endorsed less frequently by examinees last attending schools with higher enrollment sizes. Third, several reasons for not completing school were expected to be endorsed at a higher rate by examinees from states with a high-stakes exit exam if those exams were encouraging schools to put low-performing students into high school

equivalency programs; however, little difference or a lower endorsement by examinees from states without a high-stakes exit exam is observed. Additionally, only 55% of the sample last attended school in a state that had a high-stakes exit exam in place when they dropped out of school. However, an effect of high-stakes exit exams may not have exhibited itself in the reasons for not completing high school that were supplied to the examinees because (a) dropouts from earlier grades did not yet feel the pressure of the requirement of passing the exam, (b) there was variation in the application of the results from the exit exam as a graduation requirement, and (c) the demographic survey did not directly assess HSEEs as a reason for not completing high school, and (d) accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 may have created an additional source of pressure on schools to remove their low-performing students regardless of the presence of HSEEs.

This study serves as a preliminary examination of how reasons for not completing school vary by institutional characteristic and presence of high-stakes exit exams. The current study does not examine the combined effect of individual and/or institutional variables. Without accounting for the relationship between various institutional characteristics, and region and presence of high-stakes exit exams (e.g., the South has more states with HSEEs), a clear picture cannot be gained.

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