

# Foreword

by Joan Chikos Auchter, Executive Director, GEDTS

*The beginning is the most important part of the work.*  
*Plato*

**A**t the close of the 20th century, the nation recognized the full impact of moving from an industrial to an information-based society. During the last decade, we observed trends and initiatives that have made a high school diploma essential in order to qualify for additional education and training, or to enter the workplace. While in the 1950s, a high school diploma was an asset in the labor force—one held by about half of the population ages 25 through 29—the world in which we now live has progressed. In a workplace rampant with technological advances, we find increasing demand for a skilled labor force in which a high school diploma represents the minimal entry requirement.

Moreover, the past decade has witnessed unprecedented changes in welfare-to-work laws. Since President Clinton and Congress replaced the New Deal-era welfare system with state-run programs featuring work rules and time limits, welfare rolls have dropped 45 percent. Today, fewer than 6.6 million people remain on welfare. However, those that remain are often without high school credentials. In addition, even with low employment rates, more and more employers require a high school diploma as a fundamental criteria to qualify for work.

As a result, the focus on literacy has exploded during this closing decade. In February, more than one hundred experts from all points along the literacy continuum gathered in Washington, DC, at the National Literacy Summit 2000. This group was charged with developing a 10-year plan to ensure that the United States becomes a literate nation by 2010. Representative Bill Goodling (R-PA), a major legislative force in the literacy movement, struck an alarm at

the summit: “Six years ago, when I spoke of functional literacy, I stated that a person should be able to read, write, think, and compute at the sixth grade level. Things have changed; today I would define functional literacy as the ability to read, write, think, and compute at the 12th grade level.” Ohio Representative Tom Sawyer, also on the platform, reinforced Goodling’s statement with these words: “If America is to remain competitive, every American must be employable.” With that smooth transition to the workplace, Phyllis Eisen, representing the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), stressed to the summit the urgent need to better equip American businesses, pronouncing that “the workforce is desperate for quality workers.”

While the high school diploma may be a minimal entry requirement, it remains an essential beginning. In 1999, nearly 860,000 adults of all ages recognized the need to earn a high school credential as the beginning of forward movement in their personal, academic, and work lives in the next millennium. The number of adults taking the tests in 1999 increased 4.5 percent program-wide. In the past, the GED program has seen such booms during economic slowdowns. Therefore, this increase is especially significant in a year when the economy is booming and unemployment has reached an all-time low. We must recognize a few initiatives that have contributed to this increase.

Over the past decade, some societal factors have emerged that may account for the increased number of 16-, 17-, and 18-year-old adults



above the 1 million mark. These children often seek the GED Tests as a way to document their learning and qualify for postsecondary scholarships and financial aid.

In addition, despite the increased importance of the high school diploma, the high school completion rate has increased only slightly over the last quarter of a century. According to the latest report from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Dropout Rates in the United States 1998*, over the last decade, between 350,000 and 550,000 10th through 12th grade students left school each year without successfully completing a high school program.

In 1993, to address concerns about young adults who have landed outside the traditional education setting, Congress authorized the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program as a pilot program in 10 states. Now expanded to 26 states, the program is sponsored and managed by the National Guard Bureau through agreements with the Governors and Adjutants General of the requesting states. ChalleNGe serves high school dropouts ages 16 to 18, who must be unemployed, not currently involved with the criminal justice system, and drug-free. The program's aim is to provide youth with values, life skills, education, and self-discipline. Young adults who join the program spend five months in a quasi-military residential phase, followed by a community-based mentoring phase that lasts an additional year. The ultimate goal of ChalleNGe is to place all participants who graduate into jobs, military service, and/or postsecondary education programs. Of the 4,159 youth enrolled in ChalleNGe during fiscal year 1998, 72 percent earned their GED high school equivalency diploma.

Military recruitment also has been affected by the low unemployment rate. GED has a long and interesting relationship with the military. In 1942, the GED testing program was established in response to the military's desire to validate the high school-level skills of service men and women returning from World War II. At that point in GEDTS and the military's joint history, attrition was not an issue; service to

taking the GED Tests to earn a high school equivalency diploma. The number of school-aged children receiving home schooling has been growing rapidly. In the fall of 1990, an estimated 250,000 to 350,000 U.S. children were educated at home. By 1995, the number rose to between 700,000 to 750,000. The growth has continued at rates between 7 and 15 percent per year. Assuming this growth rate has continued, the number of children educated at home during 1999 could be well

the country was complete and the GED program offered a transition to civilian pursuits. We've now come full circle. Civilian men and women now take the GED Tests to validate their high school-level skills to qualify for military service. Today, as in 1942, the military recognizes the GED Tests as a way to validly and reliably measure the academic skills and knowledge of a four-year high school program of study. However, the military is seeking a way to ensure that the GED graduates, once recruited, will stay in service through their first enlistment.

In 1999, we celebrated three major breakthroughs driven by a need across most of the armed services for more personnel. These changes are highlighted in the rollout of three new recruiting initiatives in the Army and Navy in early 1999. The first and simplest was a change implemented by the Army and the Navy. In 1999, the Army and Navy both increased from 5 to 10 percent the proportion of recruits that can enter service with a nontraditional credential.

In addition, the Navy launched a special program in September 1999 that offers all non-high school graduates (roughly 10 percent) who arrive for recruit training at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center in Illinois the opportunity to take the GED Tests. To accomplish this, the Navy's Recruit Training Command (RTC), in conjunction with the Great Lakes Navy College Office and the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES), opened a new GED Testing Center at Great Lakes. To enter the Navy, eligible non-high school graduates must demonstrate their superior ability by scoring in the upper 50 percent on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test. They then report to boot camp a week early for additional training called Academic Capacity Enhancement. While these recruits aren't required to take the GED Tests while at Great Lakes, about 90 percent did so. The ability of nontraditional *continued on page iv*

*continued from page iii* graduates to excel in the Navy was demonstrated this spring when Division 051, made up entirely of non-high school graduates, won the Chief of Naval Operations award flag for its outstanding performance. By early March, 549 recruits from 19 divisions had taken the GED Tests and 450 new sailors had earned their high school equivalency diplomas. This program may be largely responsible for the 70 percent increase for completing and 66 percent increase for adults meeting the passing score requirement by U.S. military personnel tested on military bases within the continental United States.

Finally, on February 3 the U.S. Army launched a new initiative, the GED Plus pilot program aimed at increasing recruitment levels and improving educational opportunities for Americans who serve in the Army. While the Army has always valued the academic skills of GED graduates, a recent U.S. General Accounting Office study of FY93 cohorts reports GED holders as having the highest first-term attrition rates. In an effort to meet its own recruitment requirements and to offer a second opportunity to those who have the desire and the ability to serve the country, this program will run as a three-year test in approximately 40 percent of the United States.

In this initiative led by Army Secretary Louis Caldera, the Army (with the help of the Rand Corporation, a private think tank) has designed a three-year pilot program to target recruiting efforts in the GED market by adopting alternate predictors of success. General Colin Powell remarked in supporting the program, "We should have no fears that in any way we're going to lower the standards of the United States Army. What we are saying is that there are young people out there who need a second opportunity." To qualify for service, the GED graduate must score in the top half of the country on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT). But most importantly, he or she

must also score in the top 75 percent on the Assessment of Individual Motivation (AIM) Test. Caldera, citing a high correlation between AIM test scores and attrition, has stressed the key role AIM test scores play in this equation. The Army has pledged to bring in as many as 6,000 nontraditional high school graduates, 2,000 of them to the Army Reserves, each year until the program ends on September 30, 2003. After the pilot ends, if the Army can identify GED graduate subgroups with acceptable attrition rates, those GED subgroups will move up to Tier One recruitment status.

As a result of three initiatives, the military reported the greatest increase program-wide of adults both completing the GED test battery and earning a GED high school equivalency diploma by meeting their jurisdictions' passing score requirement.

The GED Tests continue to offer a second opportunity to adults who, for whatever reason, leave high school without graduating. While the GED program served more than 850,000 adults in 1999, that number is only 1 percent of the more than 50 million adults in the United States and Canada who are without high school diplomas. The GED Tests serve only as an assessment instrument to validate the academic skills and knowledge that the adult has learned in both formal and nontraditional settings. The commencement ceremonies that follow are just that—a beginning for future hopes and aspirations.

In celebration of publishing the *Who Took the GED? The GED 1999 Annual Statistical Report*, we owe special thanks to those who labored to produce it. With dedication, Lisa Richards Hone has coordinated production and directed data collection and quality control activities. Sen Qi continued to refine and extend procedures for data analysis and verification and for producing tables and graphs. Special thanks to former GED Director Doug Whitney, who provided an insightful interpretation and substantive analysis of the tables, while Suzette Stone Busa, Fred Edwards, and Lyn Schaefer added their expertise to the review of the accuracy and presentation of the information. Our sincere appreciation to the GED Administrators (whose names appear beginning on page 36) and Chief Examiners who serve the GED candidates and collect and report the data that make this report possible. Most importantly, we dedicate this report to those who took the GED Tests, and we wish them success with their new beginnings.

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# 1999 Statistical

## TRENDS IN GED TEST-TAKING

▶ Nearly 860,000 adults participated in the GED testing program in 1999—almost 37,000 more than in 1998, a 4.5 percent increase (Table 2). Of those adults taking the tests, 750,714 completed the GED test battery, also a 4.5 percent increase over 1998 (Table 1). This number exceeds all previous counts in the program's 57-year history, except 1996, when 758,570 adults completed the tests prior to the introduction of the 1997 higher passing standard (Table 11).



▶ Of the 750,714 adults completing the GED test battery in 1999, more than half a million (526,411), or 70 percent, met their jurisdiction's passing score requirements and earned a GED high school equivalency credential, a 4.1 increase over 1998 (Table 1). This passing rate is 3.3 percent higher than 1998 and 6.2 percent higher than 1997, when the GEDTS higher passing standard was introduced. This number brings to nearly 14.2 million the estimated number of adults who have earned GED high school equivalency credentials since 1949 (Table 11).

▶ As a result of the GED 1997 increased passing standard, all GED graduates must meet a standard that exceeds the performance of at least 33 percent of traditional graduating high school seniors (Table 12). Fourteen jurisdictions (38 percent) of the 36 required to increase their passing standard require-

ments in 1997 reported passing rates that were higher in 1999 than in 1996. The rate changes are: Arizona (18.9), Georgia (0.8), Hawaii (2.3), Iowa, (4.3), Kansas (5.1), Maine (2.1), Minnesota (4.8), New Hampshire (0.6), Rhode Island (0.2), South Carolina (2.1), Tennessee (0.8), Wyoming (1.4), Guam (8.8), and Puerto Rico (8.4) (Table 13A).

▶ In 1999, the military reported the greatest increase of both adults who completed the GED test battery and who met their jurisdictions' passing score requirements. Military testing locations in the continental United States (CONUS) reported a 70 percent increase for completing, and a 66 percent increase over 1998 figures for adults meeting the passing score requirement (Table 1).

▶ Area II, the Southern Region, recognized a 6.6 percent increase of the number of adults who completed the battery in 1998 (Table 1).

▶ Canada reported a 10 percent increase in both adults meeting their jurisdictions' score requirements and adults earning a credential (Table 1). This increase reverses the recent pattern of declining participation in Canada. Eight of the 11 Canadian jurisdictions reported passing rates that were higher in 1999 than in 1998: Alberta (5.9), British Columbia (0.2), Manitoba (20.5), Northwest Territories (8.1), Nova Scotia (14.4), Prince Edward Island (22.3), Saskatchewan (1.9), and Yukon Territory (14.4) (Table 13B).

▶ Program-wide, only 1 percent of the more than 50 million adults in North America without diplomas earned GED high school credentials in 1999 (Table 10). These rates have not changed appreciably during this decade. Three states at least tripled the 1 percent program-wide credentialing rate: Alaska (4.3), Idaho (3.3), and Utah (3.2).



# Highlights



## Age, Formal Schooling, and Academic Goals

▶ Among the adults taking the GED Tests worldwide in 1999, seven in ten (70.4 percent) were 19 and older. Only 1.3 percent of adults who participated in the GED program in Canada are younger than 19 years old. In the Federal Contracts programs, the percentage of persons under age 19 is 5.2.

▶ In the United States and Insular Areas and Freely Associated States (e.g., Guam, Puerto Rico) only 15.2 percent of adult participants were younger than 18, the age when most U.S. youth complete their high school education (5.2 percent) (Table 3).

▶ The average age of adults taking the GED Tests worldwide was 24.6–24.4 in the United States and Insular Areas and Freely Associated States; 30.7 in Canada; and 30.2 in Federal Contracts programs (Table 3).

▶ Since 1979, the average age of the adults taking the GED test battery has remained within the 24.6 (average age in 1999) to 26.7 (average age in 1988) range. The recent drop in average age may reflect the increasing numbers of young adults who are home schooled (Table 10).

▶ As in previous years, more than two of every three (66.6 percent) adults reported having completed tenth grade or higher before leaving formal schooling. In addition, 37.1 percent completed eleventh grade or higher before leaving high school (Table 7).

▶ There was a 33 percent increase in active duty military personnel taking the tests from 1998 to 1999. CONUS military almost doubled their number (486 in 1998 to 920 in 1999) and overseas military increased by 43 percent (90 in 1998 to 129 in 1999) (Table 8).



▶ The percentage of adults planning further study has steadily increased over the past two decades from 40.8 percent in 1979, to 53.6 percent in 1989, and to 65.0 percent in 1999. In two decades, the percent planning further study increased 24.2 percent. This trend reflects the move to an information age, one requiring more education and training for entry-level jobs. Since 1949 (34.8 percent), there has been a 53 percent increase in the number of adults planning further study in 1999 (65.0 percent) (Table 11). In 1999, 29 percent taking the GED Tests reported they were motivated by employment reasons (Table 8).

## Special Editions and

### Special Testing Accommodations

▶ In 1999, while two of every five adults took the Spanish-language GED Tests in Puerto Rico, more than half (57 percent) took the Spanish-language tests in the continental United States (Table 5).

▶ The number of specific learning disability (SLD) accommodation requests increased by 35 percent from 1998 to 1999. In 1999, there was an overall 9 percent decrease in the number of special accommodations granted (Figure 6).

▶ Over 1,600 adults used special reading devices (e.g., magnifiers) or marking devices (e.g., scribes or keyboards) to accommodate individual needs, a 9 percent increase from 1998 to 1999 (Table 6).