

TAKING A HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY TEST IN MASSACHUSETTS

**Prepared by the Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee
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How do I pursue a high school equivalency diploma?

Any former student who is not enrolled in and has not graduated from high school may take either the General Educational Development (GED)[®] or the HiSET[®] exam in order to obtain a high school equivalency diploma.

You are not eligible to take the assessment in Massachusetts if you:

- are currently enrolled in any secondary school program;
- have previously earned a high school diploma;
- are not a Massachusetts resident.

Students who wish to take the GED or HiSET at age 16 or 17 must provide an “official letter of withdrawal” from their school to the test center.¹

What can I do if I need an accommodation to take the exam?

For information on seeking accommodations for the GED, see <http://www.gedtestingservice.com/testers/computer-accommodations> or email accommodations@gedtestingservice.com.

For information on seeking accommodations for the HiSET, see <https://hiset.ets.org/requirements/disabilities/> or call 1-609-359-5615 or 1-855-802-2748 (toll-free).

Does my IEP continue while I pursue a GED or HiSET?

IEPs should continue for students who pursue a GED/HiSET exam in place of a high school diploma. Until a student’s 22nd birthday, any student who qualifies for special education services is eligible to receive such services until he obtains a diploma.²

Students with documented disabilities may request special accommodations for GED/HiSET testing at no extra charge. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) considers these requests on an individual basis.³ However, the most common accommodations include the following:

- Audiocassette edition (with large-print reference copy);
- Large print edition;
- Use of a scribe;

- Extended time;
- Use of a calculator;
- Supervised frequent breaks;
- Use of a private room for testing.⁴

When applying for GED/HiSET accommodations, students with disabilities should provide as much educational, medical and developmental history as possible.⁵

Is pursuing a GED in lieu of graduating a good idea?

Some students may believe that the GED/HiSET is an easy alternative to completing high school and earning a regular diploma. It is not necessarily the case.

- The GED exam lasts for seven and one quarter hours, and tests writing skills, reading, social studies, science, and mathematics.
- The HiSET exam is about seven hours from start to finish. These seven hours are broken out into five subtests that you can take on different days over a period of time.

Moreover, it is important to know that recent studies have shown that students who obtain their GED/HiSET do not always have the same opportunities as those with a high school diploma.⁶ This research has shown that the GED/HiSET exams are not viewed as equivalent to a high school diploma in the labor market, as those with a high school diploma are likely to earn higher wages.⁷

Therefore, it is important to speak with someone (a career counselor, guidance counselor, or other qualified professional) before making the decision to take the GED/HiSET in order to learn about how it may impact your future.

How much does it cost to take the tests?

As of January 24, 2017, it cost

- \$31.25 per module to take the GED test
- \$24 for the first subtest and \$19 for the remaining four subtests in the initial battery for the HiSET.⁸

What is the difference between taking the GED versus the HiSET?

GED

The GED was revised in 2011. The new GED test assesses four subject areas: reasoning through language arts; mathematical reasoning; science; and social studies. Scores are available within three hours of completion. Writing has become a larger component of the exam. There are still two extended responses, one in language arts and one in social studies. There has been an addition of a short answer question in the science section. Testing is completed at state-approved

testing centers. Additionally, the GED Testing Service has released a predictive practice test to help learners determine if they are prepared for the full exam called GED Ready™.¹¹

HiSET

The HiSET also tests the five subject areas: reasoning through language arts; mathematical reasoning; science; and social studies. The cost of the exam includes two free retakes. Because the HiSET tests the same subject areas as the GED, testers can combine scores from previously taken GED tests. The HiSET is also available online and via paper, but testing locations are left to the state to decide. The test includes Common Core content. Score reporting will be instantaneous if the online option is used. Scores are available in 10 days for the paper test.⁹

ENDNOTES

¹ DESE, High School Equivalency (HSE) Testing Program, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/hse/eligibility.html>.

² See 603 CMR 28.02(9).

³ DESE, General Educational Development (GED): Accommodations for Disabilities, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ged/afd.html>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ General Educational Development Testing Service, Tips for Candidates with Disabilities (2006), <http://www.gedtestingservice.com/testers/computer-accommodations>.
<https://hiset.ets.org/requirements/disabilities/request>

⁶ James J. Heckman, John Eric Humphries, & Nicholas S. Mader, *The GED*, Nat'l Bureau of Econ. Research, (June 2010).

⁷ James J. Heckman, John Eric Humphries, & Nicholas S. Mader, *The GED*, Nat'l Bureau of Econ. Research (June 2010).

⁸ DESE, GED Requirements, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ged/req.html>

⁹ Edmentum, GED®, TASC™, or HiSET®? What is the Difference? (Mar. 14, 2104), <http://blog.edmentum.com/ged%C2%AE-tasc%E2%84%A2-or-hiset%C2%AE-what-difference>.