

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

ONLINE PROGRAMS
Offering
Unauthorized
GED Credentials



AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION



GED TESTING SERVICE™

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Online Programs Offering Unauthorized GED Credentials

Consumer Problem Overview

The situation

- Every day, state GED® administrators receive reports from vulnerable consumers who have spent time and precious 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, are lured by claims of web sites offering accredited diplomas online and pay fees from \$200 to \$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 find, after the fact, that these dubious credentials are not accepted by either employers or colleges or universities. Currently, the GED Tests cannot be taken online in the United States or Canada.
- Although some online high school programs work 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 studies are included on the second page of these materials to further illustrate how this issue is affecting consumers' lives.

Actions GEDTS/ACE have taken

- GED Testing Service™, 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 GED testing and posted it on our high-traffic web site, sent it out in 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 Associated Press news wire and enjoyed wide circulation.
- GEDTS continues to monitor web sites that may infringe on the use of the GED trademark and takes appropriate action against these users.

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

- Using the attached example, issue a warning from the Attorney General's office to consumers.
- Notify state offices (e.g., the department of education, department of workforce services, and department of social services) to the threat of dubious online high school credentialing programs.
- Inform your state's citizens that there is only one GED Testing Program and that the GED Tests are not a generic credential available from any other source.
- Notify the above state offices to accept only official GED Transcripts, which are difficult to forge, instead of a certificate or diploma.
- Ensure that accurate information on your state's GED testing program is available on one of the official GED testing program web pages (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.
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Examples of Actions Taken in Some States

- October 25, 2002. Judgment issued against Queens based GE Career Center for operating fake GED business. NY Attorney General won thousands in refunds for victims.
http://www.oag.state.ny.us/press/2002/oct/oct25a_02.html
- October 11, 2005. NJ Department of Education issues advisory warning against misleading GED diploma services. Warning still located on NJ GED web site.
<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 4, 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. Illinois Secretary of State issues warning regarding fraudulent GED companies in fall 2007 Literacy Newsletter.
http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/publications/pdf_publications/illiteracy_fall07.pdf
- Fall 2007. Missouri pursued and sentenced former college employee to more than 10 years in prison for selling 200 forged GED 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>

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Case Examples

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, for which she was awarded a certificate that indicated she "obtained her GED." When the certificate was not accepted by a local community college, her daughter-in-law contacted GED Testing Service to complain. 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 withheld

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 how they had supported their son in pursuing the credential through an online program that "appeared to be accredited." They paid tuition for the program, as well as fees for a framed "diploma" and a class ring for their son. They did not want to be identified or lodge a formal complaint with the state's attorney general's office, but wanted GED Testing Program staff to be aware of the problem and to alert others who might also fall victim 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 the fall of 2006, the GED Examiner at Ivy Tech Community College reported four students who were denied admission to classes due to invalid GED credentials. Initially, the students were allowed to enroll in one class until their credentials could be verified. Because the credentials were ultimately deemed invalid, the cost of the class represented an additional cost to the students. One of the students, Mr. Davidson, paid \$150 for his certificate and "GED Grade Summary Sheet." Because neither were official GED documents, they 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.

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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 do not complete high school:
 - 1.23 million students drop out of high school each year.¹
 - 39 million or 18 percent of Americans, do not have a high school diploma.²
- Over 700,000 people participated in GED testing in 2007, and over 450,000 adults earned a GED diploma/certificate in 2007.
- There have been more than 16.8 million GED credential recipients since 1942.
- Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) anticipates 15,000 GED Test-Takers to support U.S. military recruiting demands in the next year.
- The 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.
- GED Tests 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.
- The GED Tests consist 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.
- The 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 16 years and older, without a high school diploma and not enrolled in an educational program, based on 2000 U.S. Census data.



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The Unifying Voice for Higher Education

ACE Warning against Online GED® Testing

The General Educational Development Testing Service™ (GEDTS), a program of the American Council on Education® (ACE) and architect of the Tests of General Educational Development (GED Tests), is aware of various entities claiming to offer GED exams online.

Please be advised that the GED credential cannot be earned via the Internet nor through correspondence programs. The GED Tests, developed by GEDTS, require extensive preparation and the demonstration of a high level of high school knowledge and academic skills.

The GED Tests are administered in each U.S. state and insular area, Canadian provinces and territories, the U.S. military, and federal correctional institutions via **Official GED Testing Centers ONLY**. To identify an Official GED Testing Center, please visit <http://www.GEDtest.org/locator> and link to “Locate a GED Testing Center.”

Any services that purport to offer a GED credential through any other means are **NOT** affiliated with GEDTS or ACE, may be of dubious value, and may deliver a product that is not accepted by employers, colleges and universities, or the military.

Hiring personnel, college admissions officers, and military enlistment personnel: To verify the authenticity of an individual’s GED credential, please contact the appropriate jurisdictional agency that administered the GED Tests. A complete listing of these agencies can be found at <http://www.GEDtest.org> by linking to “Contact your Jurisdiction’s GED Testing Program.”