

STATE BOARD OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Multiple Pathways to High School Equivalency

Request:

The Multiple Pathways to High School Equivalency Ad Hoc Committee, with the endorsement of the NC Association of Community College Presidents, requests the State Board to approve the Multiple Pathways to High School Equivalency model as an alternative for earning a high school equivalency diploma through a combination or repackaging of currently established academically valid elements to document achievement of specifically determined content standards.

Rationale:

It is well documented in community college completion literature that students often stop in and out as they pursue academic goals, often “swirling” from one college to the next, yet never quite getting what they need to earn some form of credential for further education or career training. Students seeking to earn a high school equivalency diploma are no different, except that without a high school baseline, additional opportunities may not even be possible.

Background:

In 2014, an ad-hoc committee was established by the NCCCS Presidents’ Association to explore a more holistic model for earning a high school equivalency diploma using multiple pathways for documenting competency in identified content areas. Led by Johnston Community College President Dr. David Johnson, a committee comprised of administrative representatives from across the community colleges and the system office convened to study the potential completion initiative and to address a multiple pathways approach to facilitate the use of individual tests from across the three high school equivalency assessments now approved for use in North Carolina.

Development:

The Multiple Pathways to High School Equivalency model could provide an alternative for earning a high school equivalency diploma through a *combination or repackaging of currently established academically valid elements* to document achievement of specifically determined content standards, rather than by using a single testing instrument or path to completion. The end goal remains the same—to facilitate persons advancing in careers or to grant entry to postsecondary education.

A review of existing options for earning a high school equivalency diploma revealed a *single commonality in alignment across the various assessments* – the College & Career Readiness Standards by the US Department of Education - Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE). Based on these standards, as well as N.C. Essential Standards established by the Department of Instruction, five primary content areas were determined for the Multiple Pathways model including: Language Arts Literacy, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and

Technology. These content areas are *packaged as independent elements* with each having multiple established and validated pathways through which students can earn high school equivalency credit.

High School Equivalency Credential:

The NCCCS currently awards the high school equivalency diploma based on the completion of a single assessment from among the three approved options, (GED®), HiSET® and TASC™). Multiple Pathways to High School Equivalency provides yet another model that represents a comprehensive, flexible, program of pathways. Each community college can choose the high school equivalency assessment(s) and/or model that best suits the needs of that college and the learning community it serves.

Contact Person:

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Multiple Pathways to High School Equivalency

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Rationale

The objective of this initiative was to research and develop an alternative for earning a high school equivalency diploma through a *combination or repackaging of currently established academically valid elements* to document achievement of specifically determined content standards, rather than by using a single testing instrument or path to completion. The end goal remains the same—to facilitate persons advancing in careers or to grant entry to postsecondary education. Under the direction of President David Johnson of Johnston Community College, an ad hoc committee comprised of community college administrators from across the state was convened in 2014 to study the option. The committee was further challenged to develop a Multiple Pathways approach that would address the issue of using high school equivalency assessment scores from different tests in combination to award a high school equivalency credential.

Development of Content Standards and Pathways

Research for the development of content standards for the Multiple Pathways option began with a review of the information available for each of the three high school equivalency assessments and the National External Diploma Program (NEDP). As expected, there was significant overlap of content areas and competencies across the various instruments. Technology skills were also identified as paramount for current high school graduates to support higher levels of both employability and successful transition to college coursework.

The review of existing options for earning a high school equivalency diploma revealed a *single commonality in alignment across the various assessments* – the College & Career Readiness Standards by the US Department of Education - Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE) that provide a *comprehensive set of standards* for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics areas and could serve as an appropriate structure for the development of Multiple Pathways in these two content areas.

In the absence of comprehensive content standards for Science and Social Studies from the College and Career Readiness documents, an alternate organizing structure was found in the NC Essential Standards of Science and Social Studies of the NC Public Schools – standards already established and in use in the state.

Based on the standards from these structures and the review of existing high school equivalency options, five primary content areas were determined for the Multiple Pathways option. Instead of completing all parts of a single HSE assessment for high school equivalency, the content areas are instead *repackaged as independent elements* with each having multiple established and validated pathways through which to earn high school equivalency credit.

Repackaged Perspective – Content Areas Viewed as Independent Elements for Earning Credit

Current HSE Assessment Completion Options Approved by NCCCS	Current process - students must complete all content areas in a single HSE assessment	New Perspective	Re Package FIVE Primary Content Areas as <u>Independent Elements</u> for Earning Equivalency Credit	Earn Using Multiple Validated Pathways as Credit Options– Choose a <u>single pathway</u> to Earn Credit for EACH Content Area*
GED	Reasoning Thru Language Arts Mathematical Reasoning Science Social Studies	View HSE based on Credit Awarded for Individual Content Areas.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. English Language Arts/Literacy 2. Mathematics 3. Science 4. Social Studies 5. Technology NEW - Demonstrated & documented proficiency in the use of technology 	Previously earned High School Credit (validated thru public schools)
HiSet	Reading & Writing Mathematics Science Social Studies	Use OCTAE College and Career Readiness Standards and NC Public School Science and Social Studies Essentials as the structure.		Credit earned in Adult High School (validated thru Agreement between public schools and CC)
TASC	Language Arts/Reading & Writing Mathematics Science Social Studies			Credit earned for individual section of approved HSE assessments (validated by individual vendors)
				College-ready benchmarks on other standardized assessments (validated based on comparison of HSE assessment pass scores and college-ready benchmarks)
				College course credit (Transfer of college level work)
				Credit by Experience (Based on established options for awarding college credit from experience)

*Credit may be awarded based on a combination of two pathways, if a single element is not sufficient to fully support credit for a content area.

The innovative aspect of this proposal is to give credit for previous academic accomplishments and/or demonstrated prior learning thereby accelerating students' access to post-secondary education and greater earning potential. A comprehensive, yet flexible, program of pathways to a high school equivalency diploma, of which the NCCCS has ultimate control and responsibility, may be an exciting and appropriate opportunity.

Eligibility and Documentation of Credit

The Multiple Pathways option for earning a high school equivalency diploma is available to individuals based on the same eligibility guidelines as with other Basic Skills programs for persons seeking to earn a high school credential. Students must be officially dropped out of high school and provide documentation as required currently by the community college. As per community college guidelines, special circumstances and documentation are required for students who are 16 and 17 years of age. It will be the students' responsibility to obtain and/or develop official documents from appropriate sources based on the guidelines. Community colleges will designate the person(s) who will review the document(s) presented by students who are seeking to determine if content area credit may be awarded based on the Multiple Pathways option.

The pathway elements for earning credit in any of the content areas are outlined in detail in the *Multiple Pathways to High School Equivalency Official Transcript of Documentation* template and Instruction document accessed through an established link with the NCCCS website.

Implementation

The Multiple Pathways to High School Equivalency option will be implemented in two phases. The initial phase will involve the use of the following five pathways in which students may earn credit for content areas to include:

- High School Courses
- Adult High School Courses
- High School Equivalency Assessments
- Other Standardized Testing
- College Courses

These pathways primarily involve the use of documented assessment scores and transcripts requiring minimal training. The second phase will be the implementation of the sixth pathway, Credit by Experience, which is currently in development. The utilization of this pathway will require training in the evaluation of personal portfolios and experiential documentation that will be guided by using a template for each of the content areas.

Professional Development/Training

Training will be critical in providing the guidance necessary for community colleges to effectively implement a Multiple Pathways structure for awarding the high school equivalency diploma. The plan is for the initial roll out of general information to be presented to the local institutions through a series of webinars introducing the Multiple Pathways option and how it can be implemented at the local level, followed by regional face-to-face workshops and conference

presentations to provide training on the development of documentation in each of the content areas using the various elements of credit. Special emphasis will be placed on the development of the Credit by Experience pathway.

Timeline

The development of the Multiple Pathways option began in the Educational Programs committee of the Presidents' Association. For this high school equivalency option to be fully approved for use in community colleges across the state and for the achievement to be recognized by the awarding of a high school equivalency diploma by the North Carolina Community College System, the following activities and approvals are required:

- Presentation and endorsement by the Presidents' Association
- Presentation and approval by the State Board of Community Colleges

Conclusion

Although a departure from the more traditional options from which students have been able to choose to earn a high school equivalency diploma, Multiple Pathways to High School Equivalency could provide an exciting option for prospective students of our colleges. Well documented in community college completion literature, our students often stop in and out of their pursuit of academic goals as well as “swirl” from one college to the next – yet never quite getting what they need to earn some form of credential for further education or career training. Students seeking to earn a high school equivalency diploma are no different, except that without a high school baseline, additional opportunities may not even be possible.

Through the Multiple Pathways to High School Equivalency option, colleges could generate opportunities for persons who may already have an accumulation of prior academic, career, or personal accomplishments to come in for a review and perhaps package their credit to finally achieve high school completion. Demonstrating a high level of respect for what students have previously accomplished in their lives could prove to be a critical element in recruiting and retaining students. This opportunity focuses on prospective students who otherwise may not have many options for entry into a workforce that values education and skills training and requires at-minimum a high school equivalency for entry.

Multiple Pathways to High School Equivalency Committee

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