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An Evaluation Of One School District's GED Instructional And Assessment Program Following The Revised GED 2014 Test

Marc Hutek

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AN EVALUATION OF ONE SCHOOL DISTRICT’S GED® INSTRUCTIONAL
AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAM FOLLOWING THE REVISED
GED® 2014 TEST

Marc S. Hutek
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education
National Louis University
December, 2017
This document is organized to meet the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the Program Evaluation candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the Change Leadership Plan candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement with a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the Policy Advocacy Document candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

Works Cited


6.20.16
ABSTRACT

In 2014 the GED® test was reintroduced for the fifth time in its history. Despite aligning its adult education program content to the Common Core State Standards, one school district still found exceptionally low initial success rates by students. By obtaining quantitative and qualitative data on behalf of the districts’ stakeholders within the GED® program, this study has identified the overall effective aspects of the program and areas that can be improved to enhance student success. It has created a foundation for the development of a change project for continual program growth and improved performance. In constructing change for continued improvement of the program, new policies and procedures will be developed for the purpose of greater student success.
PREFACE

This dissertation project was initiated in response to what appeared to be a significant concern in the student success rate on the 2014 version of the GED® test. After a complete revision to the GED® subject area content, the overall changes in the testing center development, and implementation of computer-based testing, this project became a necessity. It was my intent to establish this dissertation project to assist in developing a new and improved way of work with the GED® program and testing center leading to greater student success. This project consisted of an initial evaluation to determine what appeared to be working well and what could be improved as identified by the various stakeholders within the program, the development of a change plan for student improvement, and finally the drafting of those necessary policy changes within the program leading to overall program improvement.

As the director over the adult education program with responsibilities overseeing the GED testing center, I recognized the need to evaluate the opinions of the students, teachers, administrators and staff within the program to identify what was working well with the entire organization that could be replicated across the program as well as those areas of concern that could be improved. Every aspect of this project will in one way or another directly impact all stakeholders within.

The alignment of this program and improvements to it will ultimately lead to a direct impact on student achievement and student success in completing their GED® test. The ability to earn a diploma and become more financially independent within the community has ramifications well beyond the student’s home. It directly impacts the community and the finances the community is obligated to spend in supporting the less
educated. The development of a higher educated community impacts many and the improvement of this program will contribute to that community success.

The leadership lessons I learned by having developed this type of project are numerous. Allowing individual members of each stakeholder group to participate has provided a well-rounded view of what is occurring within the program and has allowed me to gain a much clearer understanding of the recent adjustments to the program in response to the new test. It has also allowed me the opportunity to develop clear pathways to improvement by recognizing what stakeholders feel are the areas that could be improved.

In conducting this study, I have also recognized that not only am I much more aware of the program’s status, but have gained significant positive support from the numerous stakeholders for having provided them the opportunity to participate. In looking ahead and implementing the ideas for improvement, I appreciate having this project as a reference I can turn to when making decisions.

As a leader with 20 years of school district administrative experience, I have never before facilitated such a project. Through the process and steps to acquire this data, I have become much more aware of the IRB process to include the legal and ethical considerations of such a study. This project has also provided a roadmap to the development of a systematic process of evaluation and a clearer understanding of how to embrace the need for change, the process of change and the implementation of new policies to support change at the system level within the organization. Recognizing my role in this process and my ability to lead change for the entire program through the
findings of this study and incorporating the process of change and policy implementation has made me a more responsible leader.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In my consideration of returning to school when I had thought my ship had sailed in regard to completing this doctoral degree, my family has been nothing less than amazing in supporting me and my ambitions! I could not be more appreciative of the love and support I have received as week after week my time from “family fun” has been sacrificed to complete this project. Never once was a complaint. Special thanks to my wife who has pushed me on this all the way and made sacrifices for me. I am very lucky!
DEDICATION

To my parents, who always wanted one of their children to earn a doctorate… this one’s for you Mom and Pops!
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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

The General Educational Development (GED®) test was developed in 1942 allowing those veterans returning from World War II the opportunity to complete their high school diplomas (Quinn, 2002). Since its original inception it has undergone major revisions in 1978, 1988, and 2002. On January 1, 2014, a new GED® test (the 5th version) was introduced replacing the 2002 GED® test (4th version). According to Mulhere (2002) initial indications showed a decline in the number of students passing the new test. In the prior year, (2013) 560,000 individuals successfully earned their diploma of the 800,000 that tested. In 2014, (with the introduction of the 5th version of the GED® test) roughly 86,000 successfully earned their diploma of the 248,000 individuals taking it. With the national decline of more than two-thirds in students taking the test in 2014, and a success rate having dropped from 68% to 35%, administrators nationally were looking critically at the GED® programs and how well the new GED® assessment aligned to the curriculum. The trend also brought to question whether revisions to the programs were needed. It was my intention to evaluate the school district’s GED® program to include feedback regarding the implementation of the most recent 2014 GED® test and identify opportunities to improve student success within it, create a plan for improved changes and potentially develop new and improved policies to support those changes.

For the sake of anonymity, I will refer to this school district as Southeast District. The GED® program in Southeast District operates under the direction of the Adult Education Department. Within the department, the primary course offerings involve Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Educational Development (GED®), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), citizenship, and adult high school for students
earning a standard high school diploma. There are eight main sites within the district that are staffed by a community school administrator (CSA) and include a full office staff. One of the eight sites is a stand-alone adult school and the additional seven are housed on school district high school campuses during the evening hours. In addition to the eight main sites, there are also approximately 50 smaller sub-sites throughout the community that are under the direction of the eight CSA’s. Those programs are offered during the day and in the evenings. These sub-sites are often in churches, parks and recreation facilities, workforce centers, corporate buildings, the county jail, and provide many of the same course offerings as the eight main sites.

When students in the GED® programs across the district reach a certain academic skill attainment on the official practice tests for the GED®, they are sent to the official testing center that is also run by district adult education staff. There is one testing center that serves the entire Southeast District and is conveniently located in the center of the community. The processes to educate students and prepare them for GED® testing within the dozens of sub sites (as well as the eight main sites) are uniformly aligned to district procedures.

I chose to evaluate this program because I wanted to determine how the faculty, staff and students within the program perceived its overall effectiveness. I look forward to implementing a change model to address improvements for the future and provide a direct benefit to the students. Within the developments leading to change, I will also implement additional policies and procedures within the department focused in creating additional benefits to those the program serves.
Purpose of Study

I chose to evaluate this program because the implementation of the new test had appeared to draw criticism based on the most recent student success rates and I felt obligated to lead the department to improve student performance. It was important for me to identify a means to gain a clearer understanding of the curriculum focus within the GED® program and its impacts on the student success rates. With the newest GED® test implementation within the Southeast District, the number of students taking the GED® test (5th version) showed initial signs of a significant decrease. In 2013 district reports showed over 8,700 students took the GED® test within Southeast County and in 2014 fewer than 5,000 tested. My specific purpose in conducting this evaluation is to not only gain a clearer understanding of the GED® program but help transform it into a more effective program leading to greater student success. After gaining a clear understanding of what was working well within the program and also what could be improved within the program, it was my desire to create change for improvement. My intention was to then take the obtained data and develop the appropriate responses to needed changes. Once those responses were identified, I would need to develop the policy changes in the program to support those needed changes for improvement. It was my hope to allow all stakeholders involved the opportunity to express their interests and recommendations within the program, increase an overall awareness within the GED® community in regard to the program’s current state, and contribute toward the opportunities in the future. Stakeholder involvement from the beginning of this process will hopefully lead to a clearer understanding of potential policy changes and overall greater support in respect to programmatic changes.
It is my belief that since there is a process in place that allows fully prepared students to test, the decline in students testing may be indicative of an issue with the program preparing those students. I wanted to know: (1) Whether or not students felt prepared for the new GED® test (5th version) in Southeast County and what else could be done to have them feel more prepared; (2) Did the school teachers and administrators feel as if the programs were aligned to the “new” GED® test and if not, what could help that occur; and (3) Did district staff feel the program was best preparing students for success and were there improvements that could be made to support the success of the program.

Ultimately, I intended to utilize the data I obtained from this research to gather a clear understanding of necessary changes in support of the program, develop new policies to assure those changes support the program’s growth and effectiveness, and to improve overall student success on the GED® test (5th version).

**Rationale**

In serving as the director for the adult education department in Southeast District, I have a tremendous obligation to the community and all stakeholders within the district in providing the greatest opportunities for student success in the program. With the introduction of the 2014 GED® test and its implementation behind me, I recognized a startling decrease in the number of students earning their GED® diplomas. Following the 2013-2014 school year in which students rushed to complete the GED® with the 2002 version and the initial offerings of the new GED® 2014 test in January of 2014, the Southeast District Department of Adult Education issued over 3,000 GED® diplomas. One year later following the 2014-2015 school year and all students having taken only the new GED 2014 test, the same department issued under 1,000 diplomas. According
to the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education (NCSDAE) GED® passing rates across the nation had declined dramatically. (See Table 1.) However, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2017), “Over the most recent 5-year period, from 2010 to 2015, the status dropout rate fell from 7.4 to 5.9 percent.” With such performance changes across the country, this reinforced my need to evaluate this program.

Table 1

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<td>2013</td>
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<td>2014*</td>
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*Note. To date estimates; 2014 assessments still being calculated.*

I have also chosen to target this program because I recognized the impact it will have on the community. After having spent the past five years in this current position, I recognized the benefits these programs make on the daily lives of the students and their families. Adults who come to the GED® program have often recognized the challenges of life and the need to earn their high school credential. For whatever the reason they were unsuccessful in earning their high school diploma, the GED® program becomes the beacon of hope to a more optimistic future. I feel it is my moral, ethical and professional obligation to support them in their endeavors and improving this program and identifying factors promoting student success has become a priority for me.

I also recognized that this project impacts my responsibilities in the future pertaining to the GED® program; I hope it may will shed some light and provide some direction for other districts who may face the same concerns with the impacts this most
recent revision to the GED® test may have on their student success rates. This project is important to me, my school district, and other school districts across the state because it will provide insight to the ramifications of the implementation of the new GED® test (5th version). District and site-based administrators, teachers, and support staff will benefit from a greater understanding of this project by recognizing the strengths and weakness of our program in the context of testing performance and the recognition of ways to improve the program generating greater testing success, resulting in a greater number of diplomas earned. Introducing greater numbers of high school graduates into the community results in a more educated society and the opportunities for a more educated and developed workforce.

**Description and Goals of the Program Evaluation**

After considerable research, collaboration and an overall analysis of the performance of Southeast’s GED® program and testing center, my first goal for this program evaluation was to clearly understand how well the stakeholders in this program felt the program was performing. Through additional research, my second goal for this evaluation was to identify factors within the GED® program and testing center that contributed to the success or lack of success on the new GED® test (5th version), and any challenges that needed to be addressed for students to become more successful in the future. In identifying potential shortcomings in student preparation, I can focus the efforts of the district office in supporting those administrators, teachers, and students in preparing to sit for the GED® test. In supporting programs across the district, district staff and site-based support staff will be provided with the necessary feedback from this project so they may be able to offer credible and needed resources to help student
achievement and test performance. Understanding the specific needs of those having been in the program will help provide the foundation to a more data driven program of support and meet the specific needs provided by those most aware: the teachers and students of the program. This was a terrific opportunity for the administrators and leaders to learn from those living in this program each day what they can do to specifically support this program.

It is therefore my overarching goal to improve student passing rates within this program on the GED® test. This will need to be done by improving the program in which students are taught those academic skills needed to be successful on the GED® test. By better preparing students, increasing success rates on the GED® test, and hopefully attracting more students into the program, my aim is to introduce more GED® graduates into the community.

**Exploratory Questions**

In identifying the state of effectiveness with the GED® program in regard to the impacts of the new GED® test, my evaluation focused on four specific exploratory questions and two secondary questions. The study targeted administrators, teachers, students, and district staff. The exploratory questions were: (1) What did selected participants (administrators, instructors, students, and staff) perceive as aspects of the GED® program (to include the new GED® test preparation) that were working well?; (2) What did selected participants (administrators, instructors, students, and staff) perceive as aspects of the GED® program (to include the new GED® test preparation) that were not working well?; (3) What did selected participants (administrators, instructors, students, and staff) perceive as the greatest challenges for student success on the new GED® test?;
and (4) What did selected participants (administrators, instructors, students, and staff) suggest as ways to improve student success on the new GED® test? My two secondary exploratory questions were: (1) What were the perceptions of the new GED® test as reported by the students taking the test? and (2) What were the perceptions of the new GED® test as reported by the instructors who prepare the students to take the test?

**Conclusion**

In choosing to work with this program, I enthusiastically looked to recognize the accomplishments or shortfalls of the program’s student performance on the 2014 GED®. I also looked forward to hearing back from those administrators, teachers and students in learning how they felt about how our district was preparing the students for the new test and identifying those factors impacting our student success regarding the new GED® test. I identified ideas for improvement. It is my hope that expending this effort will not only allow me the opportunity to better lead this program, but ultimately improve student success in it and change the fate and lives of the students this program continues to serve. I also hope the information coming from this project may be viewed as beneficial to other districts as we all look toward continuous improvement in student success.
SECTION TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In working to improve this program within the Southeast District, it was important to have the knowledge and understanding of the GED® test to recognize how recent changes have impacted those programs that support it. A thorough understanding of the evolution of the GED® test and the impacts it makes on communities across the nation is relevant. Learning specific attributes of the new GED® test and a comprehensive understanding of it allow for a clearer understanding to its relevance. This also helps provide the necessary background knowledge to assist in understanding what individuals providing feedback within this evaluation express.

History of the GED®

According to GED® Testing Service (2013), the original GED® test was released in 1942 and has subsequently been revised in 1978, 1988, 2002, and most recently in 2014. The initial offering of the GED® test was during the industrial era and World War 2 (Quinn, 2002) when a high school diploma sufficed for most employment opportunities. The test was designed as a traditional assessment to high school criteria in English, social studies, science and literature. At that time, the American Council on Education was the organization responsible for creating the GED® test (Turner & Kamenetz, 2015). In 1978 however the “new” version was designed around a greater understanding of real life contexts and a separate reading test was developed. In the 1988 revision, a writing essay was incorporated and the test became much more aligned to critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills. The 1988 version also began to reflect a greater understanding of diverse roles in societal change and those contextual settings
relevant to adults (GED Testing Service, 2013). The 2002 series was released with the implementation of national and jurisdictional content standards and the new 2014 GED® as developed on the basis of the Common Core State Standards (Proliteracy, 2015).

As seen in Figure 1 below, the first year following a revision has always reflected a decline in number of tests taken across the country. This pattern supports what appears to have occurred with the release of the 2014 GED® (5th version) as well.

Figure 1. Number of individuals (candidates) taking the GED® test each year since inception (revision years 1978, 1988, and 2002. Source: 2013 GED® Testing Service Data.

Even though very little data had been released from GED® Testing Service for the initial year of GED® 2014 testing when I began this study, national data from 2013 is available and provided a good baseline of who took the test in 2013, the final year of the 2002 version of the GED® test. With 2013 having been a final year for the 2002 version of the GED®, the number of students testing was higher than previous years as it appears many students attempted to complete it prior to the arrival of the “new” computer based GED® 2014 version.
According to GED® Testing Service (2013), nearly 560,000 individuals who passed the GED® in 2013 (representing 75.3% of those 743,000 who completed testing), met the passing score standard by earning scores equal to or higher than the top 60% of graduating high school seniors against which that test had been normed. Also, over the course of the 2002 version of the GED®, the rate of passers was fairly consistent over the years. Pass rates in 2002 were 70.6% compared to 75.3% in 2013. As a point of reference to easily understand the historical trends for the number of students testing and passing the 2002 GED® (4th version), see Figure 2. The significant gains in the 2013 test reflect a greater interest in taking the test prior to the 5th version’s release.

![Figure 2](image_url)

*Figure 2. Number tested, completed, and passed the GED® Test, 2002–2013. Source: 2013 GED® Testing Service Data.*

Additional data from the GED® Testing Services regarding the 2013 administration of the 2002 version of the GED® test reflected of the nearly 850,000 tests given, 51.7 percent of those testing were males and 48.3 percent were female. That data
also reflected that Hispanics made up 25% of the testers nationally, African-American 26%, white 43% and other ethnicities combined to represent 6% of those taking the GED test in 2013.

**Socio-Economic Factors**

According to Kaplan Test Prep (2013), 10% of all GED® test takers are incarcerated and the average GED® taker was 26 years old. Statistically, lack of education tremendously impacts unemployment rates and individual income. Very high unemployment and significantly low wages continue to plague those individuals without a high school credential. Kaplan’s Test Prep (2013) states that only two percent of non-high school graduates (approximately 800,000 individuals) take the GED® every year and the number of U.S. adults without a high school diploma has risen to 39 million.

Education is arguably the most crucial factor that contributes to an individual’s ability to move up the economic ladder. For many young Americans, the decision of whether to complete high school is the first significant choice they will make in life and it will decisively influence their future. Encouraging students to acquire the skills needed to make the right decision is crucial for their chances of upward mobility (Reim, 2014). Education’s direct impact on employment correlates directly to wages and ultimately impacts everyone in society. Statistical data across the country reflects a direct relationship to unemployment and wages, based on level of education. When individuals become more educated, to include attainment of a high school diploma through a GED®, their wages are consistently higher and their levels of unemployment decrease. Figure 3 below represents those educational attainment levels compared to the average wages and unemployment rates nationally.

Overview of the GED® 2014 Test

As traditional k-12 school systems transitioned to Common Core State Standards (CCSS) aligned materials, so did adult education programs. GED® testing service was no exception (Proliteracy, 2015). Within the standards of the “Common Core” initiatives, the 2014 GED® test is broken into four specific tests. According to GED® Testing Service (2013), the GED® test is seven and a half hours long and is computer based. No jurisdiction offers written examinations as the new test also assesses technology skills (Hampton, n.d.).

The first test is called the Reasoning through Language Arts test (RLA) and is 150 minutes long and is broken into three sections. Section one is all content and lasts 35 minutes; section two is extended response and lasts 45 minutes; and section three is 60 minutes and tests all content. The second test, named Mathematical Reasoning, is 115 minutes long and is one single section. The third test, Social Studies, is 90 minutes long.
and is divided into two sections. Section one (65 minutes) tests all content and section two (25 minutes) is extended response. The final test, Science, is 90 minutes long and is one single section. Individuals taking the test must score a 150 on each section for a total of 600 to pass the new GED® and sections of the test are scheduled independently of each other.

A general overview of the changes to the new test reflect that its emphasis is on reading with understanding and solving higher-level mathematical equations (Smith, 2014). With the underlying changes of the 2014 test linked directly to the new standards, and requiring a greater level of complex thinking than prior tests, passing it is probably less likely than at any other point in the 70 year history of the test (McGraw, 2014). However, according to Mulhere (2015) the decrease isn't as severe as it appears between 2013 and 2014, so it is misleading to compare data between 2013 and 2014 due to the transition of the new test as well as the introduction of new, competing tests to the market.

The Nation’s Transition

The revision to the 2002 GED® test was originally scheduled for release in 2012 according to Lipke and Farrell (2013). As our nation incorporated the Common Core State Standards and GED® revised the test in 2014 to accommodate that trend, an interesting concept developed. GED® Testing Services sold the testing rights to PearsonVue Corporation, and organizations across the country who wanted to continue providing that test as a service needed to convert to a “PearsonVue” testing center. School districts, such as Southeast, which had been providing GED® tests to their students for years through paper and pencil administration under the direction of GED®
Testing Services had to invest in a computer lab and sign a contract to become a PearsonVue testing center. In order to become a PearsonVue testing center, the site was also required to have an accreditation visit by PearsonVue personnel and be subject to all rules and regulations defined within the PearsonVue guidelines. For the first time, the GED® test which had always been a “not-for-profit” organization had its testing rights sold to a “for-profit” organization.

In Southeast District, students were charged $70 to take the 2002 version of the GED® test until December 31, 2013 and effective January 1, 2014 with the implementation of the new 2014 computer based GED® test by PearsonVue, students began having to pay $130 for it. Interestingly, two other tests were developed as alternate options to the GED® test and things became a little more complex. According to the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, NCSDAE (2014) two additional high school competency tests were developed as alternatives to the new PearsonVue administered GED®. The HiSET® (High School Equivalency Test) was developed by Educational Testing Services (ETS) and the TASC™ (Test Assessing Secondary Completion) was developed by CTB/McGraw-Hill Corporation. With the introduction of the new tests, several states across the nation opted out of the new GED® test. According to Educational Testing Services (2017) and CTB/McGraw-Hill TASC™ (2015), the following lists of states had opted to offer their tests as a high school competency test:
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States Offering HiSET® Testing</th>
<th>States Offering TASC™ Testing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Nevada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>West Virginia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>Wyoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With these 17 states opting to offer a test other than the GED®, this created another factor that must be looked at when making comparisons to previous years’ testing numbers. GED® was no longer the high school competency test for the entire nation. According to McDaniel (2015), it is estimated that 90,000 people nationwide earned GED® diplomas in 2014 compared to 540,535 in 2013.

**Conclusion**

The GED® test has been an integral aspect in providing high school equivalency diplomas throughout the United States for decades. It appears to have evolved from reflecting simple high school competencies into a higher order thinking assessment with fewer students able to pass. It has transitioned from being the national assessment used by the entire nation as a not-for-profit test into one of three options available today with vested interests by “for-profit” companies. With its revision to a more complex standard based assessment in 2014, the greater cost to take it, and the competitive nature of the
national assessment market, the number of individuals participating on it appears to have decreased.

A study by Brinkly-Etzkorn and Skolits (2014) from the University of Tennessee found that investigating perceptions to the new 2014 GED® will be beneficial for programs. Their research also found negative perceptions by students on the new test. To this point, my studies have not revealed significant research findings in regard to the ramifications of the impacts of the new 2014 GED® test and what can be done within GED® programs to enhance student success. Therefore, with little available research out there in supporting the program, this study becomes incredibly relevant in helping to provide direction within this drive for Southeast District’s improvement. This project will more clearly define the impacts the release of this new version of the GED® test has had on the program I oversee.
SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

In conducting the specific research for this project regarding the current state of the GED® program and testing center within Southeast District, I wanted to gather information from multiple sources. I focused my initial evaluation on quantitative and qualitative data in understanding what the administrators, teachers, district staff, students, exiting testers, and GED® testing staff felt was occurring within the program and what I could do to improve it. In gathering that specific data, my research questions allowed me to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Through a thoughtfully designed representation of stakeholders within the program, I recognized the ability to obtain a 360-degree view of the aspects within. Interpreting and valuing the perceptions of each individual within the quantitative and qualitative data sources will provide the necessary insight required to address each of the research questions posed. This methodology is simple, yet within the organizational structure in Southeast District, a scaled project like this does not appear to have been conducted in the recent past. The research questions within the project are the heart of its purpose. The methodology and design of this program is specific to finding the answers to those questions, addressing them and ultimately improving the program based on the findings. This research provides the opportunities of working to improve those weaknesses and building a better program. This data collection period began immediately following the authorization to proceed based on having received all appropriate permissions through the IRRB process. It was my intention to complete all data collection within 60 days of the date all permissions were received.
Participants

The participants within this project provided a well-rounded representation of those working within the district’s GED® program. There were eight adult high schools and dozens of educational sub-sites within the school district overseeing multiple GED® classrooms. My six targeted participation groups included those students within the GED® classrooms 18 years of age and older, and I did not involve minors in this study. Additional participants were teachers of the GED® classrooms, students taking the GED® test at the testing center 18 years of age and older, administrators over the GED® programs, GED® testing center staff, and the district support staff working with the GED® program. I conducted all surveys and interviews following the attainment of appropriate permissions which included a signed letter of consent from each participant.

In working with my first targeted participation group (classroom students at or above the age of 18), I provided 20 student survey direction sheets (Appendix A) and 20 student surveys (Appendix B) to each of the eight adult school administrators (totaling 160). They provided them to random teachers within their GED® classrooms. Participating students were provided a participant consent form (Appendix C). The classroom teachers screened the students and assured they were of appropriate age. I also conducted five random interviews (Appendix D) with students. Those students were identified by their teachers by their willingness to volunteer. Prior to the interviews, the students were provided with directions (Appendix E) and an informed consent form to sign (Appendix C).

In working with my second targeted participation group (GED® classroom teachers), I provided teacher survey directions (Appendix F), the appropriate consent forms (Appendix G), and surveys (Appendix H) to the appropriate administrators who provided them to the
GED® classroom teachers. I provided two GED® teacher surveys per adult school administrator totaling 16 teacher surveys. I provided classroom teachers with the necessary interview directions (Appendix I) and the staff participant consent form (Appendix G). I also conducted two interviews (Appendix J) with randomly selected GED® teachers.

My third targeted participation group consisted of those students above the age of 18 exiting from taking the GED® test. Each individual who exited the testing lab (over a four-week period) and completed all four sections of the GED® were screened by the receptionist staff to assure they were 18 years of age and older and were asked to participate in a brief survey (Appendix K). Students who agreed to participate were provided access to the survey at that point. Each participant was also provided a participant consent form (Appendix C) by the receptionist staff. According to last year’s testing center schedule, approximately 450 individuals tested every four weeks during the fall period. Even with 450 testers passing through the center, many only came for one test at a time. Following the assessment period, I concluded with 40 surveys from exiting testers who had completed the testing of all four subject areas. I also conducted 10 interviews (Appendix L) with students exiting the testing process within the same four-week period. Participants were randomly chosen and each completed a consent form.

In working with my fourth targeted participation group (administrators over the GED® programs), I provided surveys (Appendix M) and conducted individual interviews (Appendix N) with all eight selected administrators. I also asked each administrator to complete the participant consent form (Appendix G). Each administrator had been in their current positions for several years and had worked through the transition of the new GED® 2014 test. Their experience was invaluable at the district level.
In working with my fifth targeted participation group (GED testing center staff), I conducted interviews (Appendix O) with the GED® Chief Examiner and one of the proctors. They also completed participant consent forms (Appendix G). These individuals had worked through the transition of the new test and were extremely experienced in understanding the processes and changes incurred by the implementation of the new test.

My sixth targeted participation group was the GED® program district support staff. I conducted interviews (Appendix P) with the district resource teacher and program supervisor over the GED® program. Both individuals were very knowledgeable about the release of the 2014 GED® test and how the district transitioned. Just as all other participants, they also completed the consent form (Appendix G).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participating Group Name</th>
<th>#Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Students &gt; 18 YOA</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Surveys)</td>
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<td>Classroom Students &gt;18 YOA</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Interviews)</td>
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<td>GED Classroom Teachers</td>
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<td>(Interviews)</td>
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<td>GED Testers &gt; 18 YOA</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Surveys)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>GED Testers &gt; 18YOA</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Interviews)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Surveys)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Administrators</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Interviews)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>GED Testing Center Staff</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Interviews)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District GED® Support Staff</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Interviews)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Participants</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Surveys

In developing the surveys for this evaluation project there were two main points of interest I attempted to discover. In remembering the purpose of this study, to improve student performance on the GED® test, I needed to learn what those being surveyed thought about the actual test and any feedback they were willing to provide on it, as well as what the school district’s GED® program had done to prepare them. Therefore, the surveys were designed to blend questions targeting both topics. The student survey and the survey targeting those exiting from testing center also contained questions regarding the age, race and gender of the individuals being surveyed so that I would be able to identify any trends pertaining to those factors within the district’s program.

Following a screening to determine the appropriate age of the participants, the GED® teachers provided the classroom survey (Appendix B) to their students in the GED® classrooms 18 years of age and older. I gathered demographic information, information pertaining to their classroom and the instruction they received in preparing them for the GED® test, as well as their opinions regarding what is working well, did not work well, and ideas they had for improvement. Since the information contained student opinions regarding their teachers and the program, I assured anonymity was stressed. This was critical when the survey was presented to them since I had hoped to get honest feedback from them.

I also conducted a survey targeting those students having completed their testing and exited the GED® testing center (Appendix K). That survey was designed to not only reflect the same demographic information the student classroom survey requested, but contained questions pertaining to their testing experience and their experiences and
preparation leading up to their test. It also asked for feedback on what worked well with the GED® test, what did not work well, and ideas they may have had for improvement.

The administrative survey (Appendix M) consisted of five open-ended questions. The questions were designed to get them to reflect on and discuss those areas of their program that they felt were working well, those that were not working well, and any ideas they had for improvement. It was my hope to have them complete their surveys and allow them to become the catalyst for open conversations (future interviews) pertaining to the program in general. I also hoped that the self-exploration regarding their leadership within their programs lead to a renewed interest in improving them.

The teacher survey (Appendix H) consisted of five open-ended questions. Similar to the other surveys and in support of the exploratory questions of this evaluation project, it was designed to provide feedback on what seemed to be working well in preparing their students for the GED® test and what did not appear to be working well. It also questioned what ideas they had for improvement that could result in greater student success. This survey contained no identifying data regarding the teachers who submitted them. To get honest feedback, it was critical participating teachers trusted that their responses remained anonymous. Like student responses, the responses were integral in reflecting what was occurring across the district in the preparation of students for the GED® test.

Several of the questions within the surveys asked the responder to provide an answer on the scale of 1 to 9. Within each question it was clarified to which the values of 1 to 9 meant. This allowed me the opportunity to gain a clearer understanding of how strong the individual’s feelings were on a given subject.
Individual Interviews

The interviews I conducted in this study were critical. My interviews were held with specific individuals representing every aspect of the district’s GED® program. Classroom students (Appendix D), individuals exiting the testing center (Appendix L), GED® teachers (Appendix J), administrators (Appendix N), GED® testing center staff (Appendix O), and district support staff (Appendix P) all play critical roles in identifying the overall perception of the GED® test and program. Interviews were intended to last approximately 10-15 minutes and consisted of six questions. I recorded and transcribed the interviews. It was my intention to develop lists of comments based on the interview results.

Data Analysis Techniques

The survey data represented those factors used to identify what appeared to be the positive and negative aspects to what was occurring within the district’s program and subjective comments pertaining to the potential for improvement. I compiled the data from the surveys and interviews and developed a clearer understanding of the perceptions of those providing the input. By developing lists from the data, I prioritized district initiatives and formulated priorities within the GED® program. For each of the surveys involved I tabulated the responses to identify the range and averages. Within each of the responses, I was able to identify trends by the responders that indicted the information I was searching for. Within several of the surveys, I used a scaled response ranging from 1 to 9. In each of those questions, I felt there may have been the ability to provide a clearer understanding to the level of response. For example, a 1 score may have been reflective of “not so strong” feelings toward an answer where a 9 score could have reflected “very
“strong” as a response. Having that scale helped describe the level of response in regard to personal feelings toward it.

Within the interviews, I transcribed each and developed a list of themes that appeared to be relevant regarding the programs strengths, weaknesses, and needs. I also identified any anomalies that were reported with the understanding that if one individual identified it as relevant, others may as well. The data that has been constructed from this research should easily align to similar programs in other districts.

**Ethical Considerations**

In choosing the participants of this study, it was critical I obtained feedback from teachers, students, administrators and staff. Through the consent forms that every participant received, I was able to assure that every adult participating in this study had a clear understanding of this project’s intent: to improve success rates within the program. I held confidentiality to the highest standards as no specific information pertaining to identification of participant feedback was released and opinions were protected by me as no individuals were harmed in any way for participating. To maximize benefits in retrieving relevant and honest data, participants were not only provided their consent for participation but were also informed of their protection in speaking honestly and openly. I obtained consent forms from every participant.

In evaluating this program, the participants were the most knowledgeable stakeholders to what was occurring every day. I had no intention of involving any participants under the age of 18. All student participants were screened prior to their participation assuring they were of appropriate age and I assured that all permissions and authorizations conducted in this study were approved. Policies involving the IRRB
process within the school district and National Louis University were adhered to and all participants were consistently reminded that every aspect to their participation was voluntary.

From an ethical perspective, honest feedback and honest intentions were critical. Teachers and administrators may have become the target of student feedback that could have been potentially hurtful. In recognizing those possibilities, I had to assure anonymity to minimize harm and assure there were no opportunities for retaliation to honest feedback. Confidentiality was critical and the underlying theme of this project needed to portray the idea for improvement as opposed to the “gotcha” feeling that many school district employees often worry about.

**Conclusion**

The overall methodology to this project was to gather qualitative and quantitative data to determine how Southeast District students were prepared in response to the release of the 2014 GED® test. This data targeted six specific groups of individuals that represented every aspect of the GED® program. Once I evaluated the data it became a project identifying the effective and ineffective happenings of the GED® program leading to ideas for improvement. I think the methods involved in this project not only display my desires as the director over the program to improve it, but also the significance of having feedback from those individuals most closely tied to the program. This methodology is a pretty simple framework and could easily become a model for other districts across the state to follow should they want a more in-depth look at their own program’s performance.
The methodology within this study also provides the students, teachers, various support staff, and administrators across the district with a notion of priority. In seeing the district office take this initiative reaching out to the very individuals impacted by it each day, precedence is set that we are all working together toward improvement. I truly feel the activities within this project will be the catalyst in working to not only develop a clearer understanding of how the district is performing, but the implementation of new ideas leading to program performance growth and greater student success as represented by greater student passing rates on the GED® test.
SECTION FOUR: FINDINGS & INTERPRETATION

Overview

The research tools I used for the evaluation of this GED® program were surveys and interviews targeting six specific groups of individuals. I felt those six populations provided an overall representation of everyone involved with GED® program. The six populations consisted of the GED® students in the classrooms, their teachers, their school administrators, the GED® district support staff, the individuals exiting the GED® testing center and the GED® testing center staff. Surveys were specifically provided to current GED® students (Appendix B), GED® teachers (Appendix H), those individuals exiting the testing center (Appendix K), and to the school administration (Appendix M).

I also conducted interviews with GED® students (Appendix D), GED® teachers (Appendix J), those individuals exiting the testing center (Appendix L), administration (Appendix N), testing center staff (Appendix O), and GED® district support staff (Appendix P). The data collection was completed by June of 2016 within the guidelines set forth by the submitted IRRB.

Student Surveys

It was my intention to obtain 160 student surveys from the eight adult education sites. I provided the student surveys to each of the eight community school administrators and requested each of them randomly choose 20 adult students in their programs who would be willing to sign a consent form and participate in the survey. Upon the conclusion of this data collection, I did obtain 160 student surveys representing 100% of my intended data collection.
The surveys that were provided to classroom students contained three initial questions regarding age, ethnicity and gender. Five additional questions involved a scored numeric response requesting a quantitative value and a final question was an open-ended response. In the gathering of the 160 student surveys the ages of the students ranged from 18 to 62 years. The average age of respondents was 27 years and 79 of the 160 respondents were male, 80 were female and one was not identified. Regarding ethnicity, 53 of the respondents (33%) were black, 33 (21%) were white, 69 (43%) were Hispanic, 3 (2%) were Asian, one (.5%) was Native Hawaiian and one was unidentified. The surveys that were gathered appeared to closely represent similar demographics of the students enrolled in Southeast’s GED® program.

![Age of Survey Respondents-GED Students](image)

*Figure 4. Number tested, completed, and passed the GED® test: 2002–2013*
In reviewing the fourth question of the student survey in which students were asked to rate how well they felt their teacher was preparing them for the GED® test, possible answers ranged from 1 (not good) to 9 (very good) and the average score was
8.19. Of those scores, 98 individuals answered with a score of 9 and the lowest score was a 4, which was provided by one respondent. A total of 17 individuals rated their teacher six or less while 142 rated their teacher 7 or more. One response was not identified.

![Teacher Rating by GED Student Surveys](image)

*Figure 7. Teacher rating by GED® student surveys*

In evaluating this question, I was pleasantly surprised to see an overwhelming number of participants provide a score of nine. I did however want to dig deeper into understanding the population of 17 individuals who scored their teacher a six (“ok” on the rating scale) or less. Of those 17, 11 were female and 6 male. Eight of the 17 were white and the average age was 27. Based on the complete sample of 160 it appeared that a disproportionate number of white females rated their teachers as a score of 6 or less on this question.

The fifth question of the student survey asked respondents to rank on a scale of 1 (not good) to 9 (very good) how they thought their class materials were preparing them for the GED® test. Those items in question were listed as textbooks, workbooks, online
programs, etc. Of the 160 responses, the average rating was 7.58. Within those responses 67 individuals rated their class materials as 9 and 34 responders rated them as an 8. Therefore, 101 of the 160 responses (representing 63%) were an 8 or 9. The lowest rating was a 3 (which represented 4 of the responses) and three individuals rated this question as a 4. The remaining 52 responses rated this question as a 5, 6, or 7. I was happy to see two-thirds of the students rate this question as an eight or nine, but also wanted to identify the population of 32% who rated it as a 5, 6, or 7. With two-thirds of the responders answering this question very positively, I appreciated the adjustments that had been previously made in addressing the new curriculum standards. Of those 52 individuals who rated this question as a 5, 6, or 7, the average age was 25 and the majority the students (37 of the 52) were male. The racial demographics were comparable to the overall survey and it did not appear if one particular population answered this question out of proportion. This was important to me since I wanted to assure that there was not a specific sub-group that was struggling with the resources made available to them.

![Class Materials Preparation-GED Students Survey](image)

*Figure 8. GED® student survey responses – class materials*
Question 6 was posed to identify what the classroom students felt their understanding was regarding the GED® test. The rating scale of 1 (know little) to 9 (know a lot) was used to determine the level of awareness to the GED® test. Of the 160 responses, the average score was 6.31. Individuals answering 1 through 4 on the scale constituted 15 of the total responses. One hundred eight of the respondents rated their score a 5, 6, or 7 and 37 of the individuals provided a rating of 8 or 9. This was a telling response since there had appeared to be higher score averages on the previous questions, meaning this would be a great area to focus on when looking at creating improvement through change. The students’ understanding and awareness to the GED® test is critical, and this data supported that there was significant room for improvement within that level of understanding.

*Figure 9. GED® student survey responses – Familiarity with the test*
Question 7 was written to evaluate the level of knowledge the students had pertaining the GED® test layout. The rating scale of 1-9 was used with 1 indicating (know little) regarding the GED® test layout and 9 (know a lot). Of the 160 responses, the average score was 5.88. Within the responses of 1, 2, or 3, 17 individuals responded. Within the responses identified as a 4, 5, or 6, 79 individuals responded. Sixty-three individuals rated this question as a 7, 8, or 9 and one individual did not respond. The responses from this question left a large number of students (60%) reflecting a response from “know little” to “know some.” I felt that having almost two-thirds of students not having a clear knowledge of the GED® test layout is something that needed to be addressed. This could have also reflected an unclear understanding for “layout” represented within the question. Regardless, there is a clearly expressed concern within this data the majority of responders were not at a higher level of knowledge regarding the GED® test.

![Familiarity With the Layout- GED Students Survey](image)

*Figure 10.* GED® student survey responses – Layout
The final question that utilized a rating scale on the student survey was question eight. This question asked if the respondents knew specifically what the score was needed to pass the GED® test. The scale, like the previous questions used 1 (know little) to 9 (know a lot) as the ratings. Of the 160 responses, nine individuals rated themselves as a 1, 2, or 3, and four individuals rated themselves as a 4. The rating of a 7, 8, or 9 was indicated by 121 of the respondents and the final 25 responses were either a 5 or a 6. The average score was 7.36. To me, this represented a pretty clear understanding of the score required by students to be successful. With only nine of the 160 students indicating they “know little” of the passing scores, this did not appear to be a priority to me, however is something to consider having their teachers address in class.

![Familiarity With Needed Score to Pass GED Student Survey](image)

*Figure 11. GED® student survey responses – Familiarity with needed score to pass*

In attempting to gain qualitative data, I also placed an open-ended question on the student survey. This question requested the respondents write what they felt was the best practice occurring in their classroom helping them to prepare for their test. Of the 160
returned surveys 157 responses were recorded for this question. The answers were very different, however a theme developed in that many of the individuals provided an answer that was more about them and their commitment to their education rather than what was happening in the class. I categorized the responses into three specific areas. First were those responses that led to a student-centered activity that appeared to help them most for the test. Responses such as, “studying, practicing, doing homework, focusing, teaching myself, attending school, and working consistently” were repeatedly presented. Secondly, there were teacher led or classroom based activities that proved to be most helpful. Responses reflected, “worksheets, practice tests, notetaking, bookwork, collaborative learning, and teacher instruction.” And finally, the third type of criteria that presented a theme was specific software or resources such as computer programs, lab work or specific books that aided in instruction.

Of the three themes that were developed for this question, 83 of the 157 responses were of teacher lead activities and reflected the relevance to what was occurring in the classroom. However, a significant number of responses, 61 of the 157 had nothing to do with the classroom or the instruction and were more about the individual’s commitment to his or her own activities being what was helping most. This represented a greater commitment by themselves rather than the instruction in the class. Finally, the third category that reflected a specific resource had 10 individuals respond, particularly in using software programs or a specific book. The data specifically identified that the two greatest areas of feedback pertained to the actions of the teacher in the classroom and the personal circumstances of the students enrolled in the program, both of which will need
to be recognized in the future as major contributing aspects to what was working well in their educational lives.

**Teacher Surveys**

I had also intended on surveying two teachers from each of the eight adult education sites totaling 16. School administrators each randomly provided two surveys to their teachers. Upon the conclusion of my data collection, I did obtain 100% of those surveys. Two teacher surveys were provided to each of the eight site administrators along with the informed consent forms. I asked each administrator to randomly choose the teachers they would like to survey, provide them the survey and informed consent and have them returned directly to me. Since the survey form itself did not contain any identifying information on it, anonymity was easily obtained. The surveys contained three questions specifically targeting this project.

The first question asked what seemed to be working well within the GED® program. Each of the sixteen surveys had a recorded answer. In reviewing the responses, it appears three themes developed. First, it appeared teachers felt they had adequate class materials and the technology resources available to them to support their students. Eight of the 16 responses (50%) commented on either the instructional materials they used in class or the software programs available to their students as what was working well in their classrooms. Secondly, with 6 responses of the 16 surveys, teachers reported the program design as working well. The opportunities for students to work through practice exams, having students placed in classrooms by similar academic performance levels, hands on activities and active participation all seemed to support what worked well within the program. Finally, administrative support was reported in two of the surveys.
With two teachers making that comment, I thought to myself that would have been a great question to ask alone, “Do you feel you have the appropriate administrative support?” These responses provided a well-rounded view of their opinions. Since the question was open ended, the three themes that developed brought to light areas for improvement.

The second question on the teacher survey was designed to provide an opportunity for teachers to express what they felt was not working well in the program. Three of the sixteen surveys did not have a recorded answer for this question. The remaining 13 responses tended to fall into one of four categories. First with four responses (representing 25%) of the total returned teacher surveys, was the response regarding classroom materials and resources. Those teachers indicated they did not have the necessary resources to support the various levels of student instruction. They also stated that since many programs were offered online and since many students did not have access to internet at home, those programs were unavailable. The varied levels of students in classrooms seemed to have been an issue as well.

Three of the 16 responses indicated a concern with such varying levels of abilities in the adult education classrooms, the teachers struggled to differentiate instruction. Three of the 16 responses also indicated that student responsibilities outside of school was a factor in what was not working well. Many obligations to jobs and family contributed to higher classroom absenteeism thus resulting in learning time loss.

Finally, there were points brought up on behalf of three respondents in which they felt the curriculum, support material or practice tests were not aligned to the actual GED® test itself. Apparently in some cases, the students have reported back that what the
teacher had taught them in class is not what was experienced on the GED® test when they tested. There were also concerns that with the implementation of the GED® test leaning toward the new standards, it was no longer aligned to the Test of Adult Basic English (TABE) which was used for classroom placement purchases. This is a critical point and will be well worth the efforts to work with in the future. This alignment may be reflective of teachers having had previous experience teaching GED® content and not moving toward the new standards being implemented. Obviously, this could be directly reflective for professional development to align these as well as a monitoring of fidelity in teaching the new standards. The responses identified by this question have opened up multiple areas for further review, each of which directly impacts the opportunities for greater student success.

**GED® Testers Surveys**

In planning the survey data collection for those students exiting the testing center, I determined that approximately 450 students tested per month. I did not know exactly how many of those 450 were finalizing their GED® tests since there are four individual tests that can be taken at different times. Through the IRRB process, I requested and was granted the authorization to collect up to 450 surveys, however my intention was to gather information from those “testers” who were finalizing their testing so I knew I would not receive that many. Upon the conclusion of gathering my data for those individuals exiting the testing center, I obtained 40 completed surveys on behalf of willing individuals.

The surveys that were provided to those individuals who exited the GED® testing center following the completion of the GED® tests contained three initial questions
regarding age, ethnicity and gender. Four questions followed involving a “yes” or “no” answer or a scored numeric response and the final question was an open-ended response. In compiling the 40 GED® tester surveys, the ages of the students ranged from 18 to 50 years. The average age of respondents was 25 years and 18 of the 40 respondents were male, 21 were female and one was not identified. Regarding ethnicity, 16 of the respondents (40%) were black, 10 (25%) were white, 10 (25%) were Hispanic, two (5%) were Asian, one (2.5%) was Native Hawaiian and one (2.5%) was unidentified. Within the population of the individuals in this GED® testers sample, it appeared to reflect closely the population within the program as a whole.

Figure 12. Exiting testers survey – Age
In reviewing the fourth question of the GED® tester survey in which individuals were asked whether they had attended classes in the school district’s adult education
program prior to taking the GED® test, 31 (77.5%) responded yes, eight (20%) responded no and one (2.5%) did not respond. Understanding this piece was relevant to me since their responses may have helped support an understanding to the program supporting the test. With 20% of the responses coming from individuals who had not attended the program prior to testing, I recognized their responses to be solely reflective of their testing experience.

![Southeast District Program Attendance Exiting Tester Survey](image)

Figure 15. Exiting tester survey – Program attendance

Question five of the survey was targeted specifically to those individuals who had attended classes in the district’s program and asked respondents to rate how well they felt their teacher prepared them for the GED® test. The scores ranked from 1 to 9 with 1 representing a teacher who did not prepare the students well to a 9 representing a teacher who did a great job preparing students for the test. The lowest score by an individual scored a 6 and the highest was 9. Eighteen of the 40 respondents rated their teacher a 9 and 8 of the individuals provided no response to this question. This left 14 responses with a rating of a 6, 7, or 8. The average rating was 8.25. With that high of an average
rating, I concluded that the testers felt their teachers did a good job preparing them. This is data that can be celebrated with the teachers across the district.

Figure 16. Exiting tester survey – Teacher rating

The following question, number 6, asked the respondents how prepared they felt prior to testing with a score of 1 representing not prepared to a score of 9 that represented very prepared. Of the 40 surveys collected the scores ranged from a 3 to 9 with two surveys having been left blank. Ten of the 38 completed responses indicated a score of 8 and the overall average to this question was a 6.95. The responses from this question appeared to reflect lower scores than the previous question regarding the teacher’s responsibility in preparing them. This allowed me to conclude that the students were willing to state that they felt their teacher did well to prepare them, however they also provided additional responses indicating lower scores in their own preparedness. This gap is worth investigating and addressing.
Figure 17. Exiting tester survey – Preparedness

Question seven asked the exiting testers to what extent they found the GED® to be easy or difficult overall. On a scale of 1 to 9 with 1 representing an easy test to a 9 which represented a very hard test, 38 of the 40 surveys contained a response. Within the responses, scores ranged from a 2 to 9 with the score of 7 being most often reflected by a total of 13 individuals. Fifteen of the remaining surveys were rated at an 8 or 9 allowing for 28 of the total surveys reflecting a 7 or greater. The average score of the completed 38 surveys was a 6.89. With 70% of the respondents indicating the test was very hard, I feel this information would serve the program well in trying to develop a clearer understanding to exactly what that meant. I feel this response warrants a change in having teachers work with their students to understand specifically what those difficulties were so additional students may be able to benefit from that understanding in the future.
Question eight asked the respondents whether they had any additional comments they would like to offer regarding the classes, the testing center or the GED® test in general. Surprisingly, 26 left this answer blank or stated “no” or “n/a”. This only left 14 responses. Of the 14 remaining responses, nine praised the testing center or program and indicated some level of appreciation. Seeing 35% of the responses having something good to reflect was very positive. This is also something that is worth sharing with the GED® staff. The final five responses were miscellaneous comments regarding a section of the test or a comment about the program. One expressed the test to be challenging, one expressed the directive to be sure to read the question completely, one discussed Exceptional Education students taking GED® programs, one mentioned questions not aligning to pre-test and the final stating they needed more time for testing. I did not recognize any type of theme or relevance to those comments in the context of evaluating the program. Overall, this question reinforced the positive attributes of the testing center.

Figure 18. Exiting tester survey – Test difficulty

Test Difficulty Overall by Exiting Testers

Average Score = 6.89

No Answer

Score

Number of Responses

13

9

6

2

2

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No Answer

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Figure 18. Exiting tester survey – Test difficulty

Test Difficulty Overall by Exiting Testers

Average Score = 6.89

No Answer

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Administrator Surveys

The eight administrators within the program were each provided with the survey and asked to return them to my office anonymously. Of the eight, I received four back for a response rate of 50%. I did attempt to send a notification requesting adherence to the deadline, however no additional responses were submitted. There were three specific questions on this administrator survey addressing this project. Each question was open ended for the purpose of acquiring qualitative data.

The first question in the administrator survey regarded the identification of what was working well in preparing teachers and/or students for the GED® test. All four of the surveys reflected a statement pertaining to the available instructional materials provided to the classrooms in support of the program. It appeared the classrooms were well equipped with the necessary materials, however only one of the responses listed any comment regarding the quality of the teacher. This was something that identified as a point to explore further in the future. Professional development and training was also identified in two of the four responses. To me, having only half of the administrators comment on professional development in a positive manner was also indicative of a potential area for further exploration.

Within the remaining responses of this first question there were also comments regarding levels of district support for the programs and the appreciation they had for feeling supported, the student access to the GED® Official Practice Test by having the district cover the expenses, and various changes of procedures regarding the implementation of the new test. I do believe that exploring the various changes in testing procedures was probably short-termed because of the “new test” and did not appear
relevant for future efforts. These represented the initial procedural changes involved with the new test. Items such as arranging the new testing center, adapting to locker procedures for personal property brought in by testers etc. Overall this question provided a wide variety of areas to address.

The second question asked if the administrators thought their students felt adequately prepared and why they felt that way. Three of the four responded with yes and additional comments expressed why. One administrator added, “Yes because the number of completions to the program supported it.” Another comment stated, “Yes because students were now able to prepare for one subject at a time and test for each when ready.” The third stated, “Yes except the math portion of the GED® was still too difficult for many students.” However, the fourth response didn’t state “yes” that students were adequately prepared. That survey listed the response as “somewhat” prepared and justified their response by saying less experienced teachers were not as able to cover the GED® materials in the program as quickly as veteran and more experienced teachers. Therefore, the students in those classes were not as adequately prepared. This data showed that one of the four administrators did not feel as though the students were adequately prepared. That is reflective of a potentially large number of students and makes me as the leader have to question whether it could be something within the program, or that administrator specifically that can use additional assistance getting to the “yes.”

The third question in the administrator survey was for them to share any additional thoughts they had on the new GED® test. That question was left blank on three of the four returned surveys. The one comment that was reflected provided a
positive comment regarding a change in cut scores that had recently been introduced by GED® testing services. The comment showed an appreciation for the idea that more students should be able to successfully complete the test based on the new scoring rubric.

**Student Interviews**

In my data collection as it relates to the interviews I had hoped to obtain one student interview from each of the eight adult school sites. I did obtain all eight. This represented a 100% success rate for me. When I decided to interview students, I thought I could go into their classrooms and pull them out into a separate room, conduct the interview, and walk them back into their classroom. I anticipated a simple process, one in which they would be clear about what they felt was good in their programs and what could use improving. Instead what I found was an uncomfortable level of volunteering. These students appeared to have felt as if they were being told to “tell on their teacher” about their programs.

In several cases I had to make jokes about it in class to even get a participant. Once I did persuade volunteers to come with me to another area, they had very little to say. Having them sign a consent form seemed to express a level of formality they were not accustomed to. Even after I made light of the process. I understood that these students were not at the point of having a high school education and in many cases, were not articulate enough to answer the questions with any substance. This was uncomfortable for them in most cases. I experienced a lot of head nodding and “yes” and “no” answers. I felt as though my questions in many cases began to lead them and I had to be cautious of that. Of the five students I interviewed, I feel as though I received very little worthwhile data in evaluating this program. I did however gain a much better
understanding into the process of interviewing pre-GED® students and recognize that if I were to conduct formal interviews in the future, how I would do it differently. Asking open ended questions appeared too overwhelming and the deeper I dug, the more I felt I could get them to say anything I wanted them to.

For the purpose of this evaluation project, I asked them three main questions in order to gain data about what they knew pertaining to the “new” GED® test and their program. I felt their understanding of the test was critical. In response to my first question regarding the positives to the GED®, responses on three occasions aligned to a theme of being able to take one section at a time and prepare the same way. Students liked the idea they could focus on section and then sit for that section. Another student spoke of the software program he was using in his classroom and provided feedback how much he liked it. He did however also comment on the inability of the software program to allow students to go back and check their work. The program did not allow that to occur and in his opinion, that would have been very helpful. I do recognize that as something to address with the software company.

With my second question regarding their overall perceptions of the new test, there were comments made about it being challenging and how important it was for them to be prepared in order to test. This reflected a high level of awareness that seemed to have been passed down by the teachers. Other than that, the comments were positive in nature that the test was an “opportunity” for them and they appreciate having that “opportunity.”

When asked if there was anything else they would like to share about the test, the answer was generally “no”. However, the ending comments to the interview consistently declared the positives to the program and the appreciation the students had for being in it.
Teacher Interviews

For teacher interview I had also intended to obtain one from each of the eight sites. Upon the conclusion of my data collection, I had only collected two. This represented a 25% collection rate of what I had planned. I had a difficult time identifying willing participants and felt some teachers may have been hesitant to speak. I had asked the administrators to help me identify the participating teachers and that may have impacted the poor outcome. In looking back, I should have approached the teachers myself as I feel some teachers were not comfortable being asked by their administrator. Both of the teachers who agreed to be interviewed were seasoned veteran teachers. They were very aware of the changes to the “new” GED® test and were still transitioning from the old to the new.

In response to the first question and what the teachers felt was positive about it, several main points emerged. They appreciated the new test being computer based. This allowed students the opportunity to see only one question on the screen at a time and not looking at a page of questions. They felt that was a positive and all of the students seemed to be able to navigate the computers well. It also appeared that the transition to a more rigorous test was spoken of positively and having students become more critical thinkers was beneficial. Finally, the teachers appreciated the cut score change that would allow more students to be successful. They felt as if GED® testing services was listening to the practitioners and worked to remedy a national concern. These were very positive points and something that could be viewed as small “wins” within the organization.

Within the survey, the teachers were asked about having the necessary resources for their programs. Both stated they did. They recognized the differences in the test and
the need to utilize the supports available to them in instructing toward a new set of standards. They did however recognize that the test was very different from what they were accustomed to and the need to develop their resource pool was still in progress. The data from this response clearly showed the need for teachers to continue developing their classroom resources.

The third question targeted their overall perceptions of the new test. Both participants clearly stated concerns regarding the difficulty of the test. They felt it was a drastic change from the “old” test and was going to take tremendous effort on behalf of the teaching staff to adjust and include greater efforts of the students in order to be successful. The feeling was that this test was “too much too soon” and teachers were going to be held responsible for closing the performance gaps between the old test and the new one. The concerns also came up regarding how they were addressing students with disabilities and whether many of them would be able to comprehend the new material. This feedback has once again supported the grounds for which this entire project exists. This new test has clearly effected every aspect of the GED® program and this data is valuable.

When I asked if there was anything else to share regarding the test or program, the feelings were similar. They liked the test and felt the program was doing well. They felt they had the necessary resources and the level of rigor of the new test will help society by placing more highly educated graduates into the workforce. They also appreciated my involvement in listening to them. This was very positive feedback in that according to them, the department is heading in the right direction; however, there are still many areas to address.
In looking back at my data collection and the interpretation of these teacher interviews, I recognize how valuable their contribution was. If I were to conduct another assessment on a program to this level, I would certainly spend much more time working with this particular subgroup. They truly are the “boots on the ground” population alongside the students and their opinions are significant.

GED® Tester Interviews

I had planned to interview six exiting testers. I did interview six. This represented 100% of my intended outcome. I did find it difficult to obtain individuals willing to participate when they exited the testing center. In many cases those individuals had spent hours testing and they were not interested in prolonging their time at the center by participating. I probably should have offered some type of incentive to have them participate. When I originally planned for students exiting the testing center to stop briefly for a short interview, I expected the majority to comply. What I found was not that at all. Students exiting the testing center were mostly tired and the idea of stopping to answer questions was not appealing. There were some however, that were leaving the testing center who had already received their passing scores online and were jubilant. In those cases, they, too, were not interested in stopping to be interviewed. Following the data collection for this subgroup, I concluded that if I were to conduct research like this again, I would utilize another method that allowed me to make contact with them the following day. It appeared to be too much to ask of them as they were just leaving several hours of testing.

My first question targeted what those individuals exiting the testing center felt was positive regarding their experience. Of the 10 responders, one was less than positive
and the other nine were all complimentary of the staff and had many positive comments. Comments included how warm, professional and welcoming the testing center staff was. The computer-based testing also appeared to be very positive with multiple comments regarding its ease of use and clearly defined directions and navigability. It was reiterated multiple times how conducive the environment was for testing: a nice setting and great atmosphere. The one interviewee who provided negative feedback on this question appeared to struggle with the tests content. I believe that is why the overall negative feelings were evident. The responses to this question were reflective of an overwhelmingly positive experience for those testing.

When I asked those being interviewed if they had anything else to share regarding their experience, six responders had nothing additional to add. Two expressed gratitude and appreciation for the program. One expressed the need for additional time on the test stating they were unable to get through it due to lack of time and was forced to “Christmas tree” it.

On responder, however did bring up a terrific point that I felt could have a significant impact on the entire GED® program. The individual stated that he should have taken his GED® “a long time ago” and that he did not know individuals could “just show up to test without taking courses.” That was a tremendous comment and that assumption in the community can certainly keep those individuals who do not have time for classes away from completing their GED® test. That was a defining response to me and I will utilize that comment in the future when I work to develop necessary changes in the program.
Administrator Interviews

Regarding the interviews of the site administrators, I reached out to all eight. I anticipated all eight would have been eager to participate, yet upon the conclusion of my data collection, only four had participated. I felt as if maybe the deadline to participate had gotten away from them, yet after a reminder prior to the deadline to submit, the other four still did not participate. This represented 50% of my intended response. I do believe my being their immediate supervisor may have had something to do with this. Their opinions were critical since they lead the programs in the schools.

My first question to them questioned what they felt was positive within the program in preparing their students. Of the four administrators, the greatest similarity in their responses regarded the materials available to the teachers and students. All four declared the materials provided for instruction appropriate and perceived that to be “working well.” Secondly, teacher training was expressed by two of the administrators. They stated the specific training aligned to the “new” content was appropriate and effective. Two additional points focused on the classroom teachers following a differentiated instructional model to meet the needs of each individual student and the use of data to help guide the instructional needs. I appreciated seeing the positive comments regarding the materials available for instruction within the program, yet recognize the need to follow up with additional points made.

My second question focused more specifically on the resources available to them and their teachers. There was very little feedback regarding this question as each of them stated they did feel as if they had the appropriate resources available to them. This was
very important to me and I appreciated hearing that. That had been a priority for me as the director as we transitioned the program.

My third question was very general in nature regarding their overall feeling of the program or test and any comments they would like to make about the program. They were very appreciative to have this private opportunity with me and supported my conducting of this evaluation. Their responses were varied. Items that stood out to me that can be utilized more in the future are as follows. The official practice test for the GED® cost a small fee ($6) and I had purchased large blocks of those tests so the students could take it for free. It was not something I had intended to continue funding and did it initially to help the students through the transition of the new test. However, after hearing how beneficial it was to the students in obtaining it free of charge, this is something I feel is necessary for the future.

Sharing best practices among teachers was also recognized to be very beneficial. With all of the implemented changes, it appears that many teachers took the initiative to meet and discuss changes with the program and share those practices that were working well so they each would not have to invent their own new ways of work. This was a valuable finding because it showed the commitment of the teachers to adapt in support of their students and a need of theirs I can support in the future. Communication between teachers and district staff was also mentioned. Teachers needed clear directives regarding their responsibilities within the transition to the new curriculum and GED® test. With significant changes in processes, policies and procedures while introducing the new program, it was critical to hear this feedback and the reinforcing ideas about the need for effective communication.
Finally, the idea of greater community support was reported. Having community members understand the need to support our schools and students by offering bridges to employment, instructional classroom support through mentors, and the overall belief that sometimes it takes more than a teacher to build a caring community. It was refreshing to hear them speak on the terrific support they receive from those in their communities.

**Test Center Staff Interviews**

There were four individuals that were employed in the GED® testing center and it was my intention to interview each of them. Upon the conclusion of my data collection, only two had agreed and made the effort to be interviewed. The two were the highest-ranking officials in the office while the two lowest did not participate in the interview. This represented 50% of my anticipated outcome. It was my belief after speaking to their immediate supervisor that as paraprofessionals, the two that did not participate felt they played a very small role in proctoring the exam and did not deem their participation as worthwhile. Of the four individuals, two agreed to be interviewed. The overall operations within the center seemed to work well. The individuals in the center had all worked together for several years and collaborated efficiently through the transition of the new test. One was the chief examiner and one was clerical.

The first question I asked regarded what appeared to be positive about the “new” test or what they liked. Their responses were identical. Having the test on the computer was highly beneficial and students pre-registered before showing up eased the entire process for their office. Other good attributes included the students having the ability to take one section of the test at a time and also be held responsible for testing fees one test at a time appeared to make the financial burden lighter. The final comments reflected the
benefit to the students in receiving their score immediately as opposed to waiting weeks for the paper test to be scored as was done in the past.

The second questioned regarded whether or not they felt they had the necessary resources to effectively administer the GED® within the district. Once again, their responses appeared identical. They shared that they felt completely supported and had everything they had asked for in equipping their lab. I appreciated hearing the comment that everything in the center “runs like clockwork” since they had every resource they could possibly use.

When I asked them what their overall perceptions of the “new” GED® test were, it was described as a “great test” and a “more credible” test leading to a greater respect in the community. With the shift to a more complex test and fewer students passing it, according to the responders, it had become more impressive in the community when a student was successful taking it.

My final question to them was whether they had anything additional to share. Two points were made. First, the communication that occurred between the district office and the testing center during the transition was critical. The fact that we had spoken regularly on the status of the changes assured everyone was in the loop and on board with the changes. That was a critical aspect. Second, a point was made that maybe the testing office should create a policy that involves follow up with students with remaining tests within six months so the students don’t abandon their efforts. The comment was made that many students claim to have “stepped away” from the GED® testing before they complete and before they knew it a year or two had gone by. It was also expressed that once they did return, they felt they were starting over. Having the
clerical staff member in that office make that recommendation was a fantastic point that I had not previously thought of and will certainly consider addressing it in the future. Both points that were exposed from within question are very meaningful within this project and will not only be useful in the future when new changes are implemented, but also in supporting those students with follow-up.

District Staff Interviews

Finally, regarding the interviews for this evaluation project, I had intended to interview both district staff members who were assigned to supporting the GED® programs across the district and the district’s testing center. I interviewed both and therefore obtained a 100% participation rate. The district staff that specifically supports the GED® program and testing center consists of two individuals. One is a supervisor who the testing center staff directly reports to and the other is a district resource teacher who helps support the testing center and classrooms across the district. Both individuals agreed to participate.

Similar to each of the previous interviews, my initial question focused on what appeared to be working well. The supervisor expressed her satisfaction with the more challenging nature of the “new” test and its alignment to the Common Core. She felt that students who were capable of passing it were much more prepared to take college placement tests and would ultimately be provided more opportunities. To her, this test was more capable of assuring college readiness and the need for fewer remedial courses when the students arrive at college. The other response focused on the convenience for students to get their results immediately rather than wait for weeks like previously required. Both points helped support the positive attributes of the new program.
A second question lead to the overall perceptions from the district staff regarding this program. Within it, they expressed various improvements made recently at the state and local levels. The GED® testing center was efficient and its location near the technical college created a bridge for students wanting to continue their education. A second point made reflected the concerns that this test was released with very few aligned resources available. I found that comment interesting since it had come from the supervisor, when most of the administrators that were interviewed stated just the opposite. The responses within this question not only reflected some positives occurring within this program, but also exposed the differences between what district staff may have been thinking compared to that of the administrators who receive district support.

As a final question to the district staff, I asked if there was anything else they would like to share with me. The resource teacher discussed the abundance of “free” materials available to school districts on behalf of the GED® Testing Service. However, the concern arose regarding the shipping costs for those materials. As the director, I was unaware of the level resources available and can use this information to more closely determine if there are resources that we should be receiving from them to support our programs. This would mean gaining a clearer understanding of the costs involved and the allocation of funds to support obtaining them.

The final response from the supervisor regarded the implemented change of cut score by the GED® Testing Service. In lowering the passing score requirement, it was evident the score was too high and the test to difficult. It appeared that many of the students who were passing the GED® test were consistently scoring higher on college placement tests. With the lowering of the score requirement, according to her, more
students will probably re-attempt the test in the future rather than become discouraged and walk away.

**Organizational Change**

Each of the stakeholders within this study have provided me with an abundance of data that I can use to improve student performance on the GED® test. From a comprehensive view, I recognize the need for changes in aligning to the new “GED®” test involve almost every aspect of the program. It starts with a clear understanding of the test by the teachers and their students. Having the knowledge to understand exactly what is on the test and having the ability to get the students to the point of being fully prepared to take it is a monumental task. The organizational changes needed to reach this point involve a clear understanding of the needed culture, conditions and competencies by students and staff with an overlying umbrella of the complex context in which this entire program lies. The changes to improve this program seemed minor as I interpreted the findings to my data, however, now appear to be major and involve a complete change to the mindsets and way of work on behalf of staff and students.

The findings within study have shown that there is not a clear understanding to what the students need to know on the new GED® test and there are concerns with the teacher understanding as well. There has been little staff development in having teachers understand the changes they must make in teaching their students the new content. There appears to be a culture in which the district office has not provided much support in transitioning to the new test and the need for resources to align in supporting the new initiatives have yet to be addressed. Teachers need more support and leaders need a clearer understanding to their work in adapting to the program changes.
The changes made to the GED® test within the 2014 release are monumental. Even though the content had changed several times through its history, changes to this test were unlike anything that had occurred before. Moving to technology driven platform for administration and having so much of the instruction coming from software programs made this situation different. My experience has shown me that teachers often deal with change in today’s classroom as “new” priorities come regularly. However, this new GED® test appeared to have incredibly low success rates and seemed to require much more effort by students and staff than expected. The changes needed for this program are widespread and will lead to greater success by students.

The problem that I face within the GED® program in Southeast District is the need for programmatic improvements leading to greater student success. I feel the program could be improved based on the responses from my data collection. Through the various qualitative and quantitative data that was collected, stakeholders identified specific areas for improvement that I will use in creating this change plan.

Utilizing Wagner et al. (2006) 4 C’s change model, I identified the state of the GED® program as it related to the findings of the program that called for change or improvement. Within the model, the 4 C’s represent Context, Culture, Conditions and Competencies. The current state of the organization within the 4 C’s model represented the “As-Is” state of the organization (see Appendix Q), and where the organization hopes to move to is known as the “To-Be” (see Appendix R). In evaluating the four areas within this model and having gained a clear understanding where the organization previously lied, a systemic plan was developed by establishing where each can be within the plan to
change for improvement. In evaluating the current state of the GED® program based on
the data I have collected, I recognized the “As-Is” state within the 4 C’s (Appendix Q).

Context

The context of the needed changes of this program represent the overall skills
needed by the teachers and staff to assure the appropriate instruction is occurring, leading
students to success on the GED®. In this case, context related to a clear understanding of
the GED® test content and layout so students were comfortable with what they need to
know in order to be successful. Teachers also have to recognize and understand their
roles in instructing multi-level classrooms in order to lead individual students to success
while understanding that instructional materials and the content they teach also requires a
change in order to more appropriately align to the new GED® test. There was also not a
clear understanding within the community that the GED® test may be taken by any adult,
not just those enrolled in GED® preparation programs. Each of the areas within this
category of context played a significant role in representing what the current status of this
program was.

Culture

Wagner et al. (2006), identifies Culture as, “The shared values, beliefs,
assumptions, and behaviors related to students and learning, teachers and teaching,
instructional leadership, and the quality of relationships with and beyond the school” (p.
102). Within this GED® program, the current state of culture appeared to be one in which
teachers recognized the need to change in meeting the needs of the new test, yet they
seemed to be doing what they have been doing in previous years and not adjusting to the
new test standards are requirements. There also appeared to be a feeling of lack of
administrative support. There was a positive feeling among students and staff that everything seemed to be doing well, however there was a need for greater student performance. It was almost as if teachers and staff had not really been held accountable yet to their performance of the new standards and test and did not actually recognize the relevance to the needed changes. The culture of the district appeared to reflect that new changes would make their way into the system eventually and there did not seem to be any urgency in aligning directives, policies and procedures for consistency among teachers. It appeared the positive culture had set the tone that the program was functioning fine as it had currently operated.

**Conditions**

Based on the feedback that was provided by the stakeholders within this project, I recognized conditions played a significant role. With the introduction of a new test and a completely new way of work in administering it, came the need for change. However, within the need for change also came the need for training and professional development. Content change was relevant in aligning to the new standards being tested as well as procedural changes for web-based testing. It was evident that very little professional development was established and many teachers took the initiative to self-train in order to become more effective. Students still did not have a clear understanding of the new test, the content on it or the layout of it. Staff across the district appeared to recognize the experienced teaching staff in the classrooms were competent in their field and additional supports just had not been provided. It also appears there were still issues with the aligned resources supporting the classrooms. There was never any additional funding put in place to support the transition to new classroom materials or the additional
professional development training costs needed in order to make this transition to an entirely new program.

**Competencies**

Wagner et al. (2006) defines Competencies as the repertoire of skills and knowledge that influences student learning (p.99). This project exposed several deficits within the competencies of the students and staff of this GED® program. The student understanding of the new GED® test needed improving. They did not appear to have a clear understanding of the test’s content and layout. There appeared to be areas of the test that remained uncomfortable to them and could have had significant impacts on their success on it. Teachers and administrators were seemingly struggling with not just multi-level instruction within their classrooms, but utilizing the appropriate curriculum and resources for their courses. In some cases, it appears teachers had not identified the changes they had made in accommodating an entirely new test. The teacher depth of knowledge in instructing to the new standards appeared to be of concern as well. There did not seem to be a formal plan or model that teachers uniformly used for instruction and there also appeared to be no measure of accountability to insure testing readiness by students.

To this point within the study, my unanswered questions focused on the culture I needed to create as the leader of the organization in order to have the students and staff embrace the necessary changes to the program. How did I assure all stakeholders know of their responsibilities in this change and are capable to implement it? What was the timeline that I needed to put into place that expressed urgency but did not appear hasty and create additional problems? How was I going to implement this additional staff
development without funding to pay teachers above and beyond their normal work days in order to acquire the new information? There were many considerations to evaluate as I continued designing a change plan.

My next steps within this project involved the specific analysis of the “As-Is” state and the identification of those specific areas of the program to target for improvement (see Appendix Q). I determined those specific areas of need and created a plan to change what was occurring within them to a new plan that would lead more students to success. Once I identified those priority areas of work to address, I created plans of action for each of them.

**Interpretation**

The findings within this project are tremendous and offered a clear picture of the program’s state following the introduction of a new version of the GED® test. Granting each of the stakeholders the opportunity to provide their opinions and feedback through an anonymous and formalized process was incredibly valuable. Southeast District, like many districts around the nation, had been faced with the obstacles of implementing a new test and this project allowed me the opportunity to evaluate how well this district has fared through the transition.

These results, overall, showed that Southeast District had some very positive aspects to its programs and had done well transitioning to the new test. They also reflected some additional needs directed at continuous improvement insuring all stakeholders involved are effectively moving the program forward. Each stakeholder group within this project had contributed in sharing the positive and effective happenings across this program as well as those areas that could use some attention for improvement.
Comments had also been expressed through the various surveys and interviews that allowed me to consider additional improvements to make within the program to include additional fact finding in order to help evaluate programs deeper.

The reported findings turned out this way because the opportunities were presented in a safe manner for full disclosure of participants’ true feelings. The timing was right for this program evaluation since the transition to a new test had just been completed, yet the required and necessary changes involved were still fresh within the minds of those involved. This project allowed for the discovery of several revelations that will directly impact Southeast District’s way of work in the future.

Judgment

The goals of this project evaluation were to formally evaluate the six populations of stakeholders who work within the program each day in regard to four specific exploratory questions and two additional secondary questions. This included the students in the program, their teachers and administrators, the individuals testing at the testing center, the testing center staff and the district support staff. The initial exploratory questions focused on 1) what appeared to be working well within the program, 2) what did not appear to be working well within the program, 3) what were the greatest challenges for student success in the program and 4) what can be done to support greater student success in the program. The secondary questions related to 1) what were the perceptions of the “new” GED® by students and 2) what were the perceptions of the “new” GED® by the teachers and staff.

The responses by students provided four findings that I felt were substantial in evaluating this program. Through surveys and interviews I recognized them and
specifically identified them as a strength for the program or an area that I can address in the future. The program will benefit from the contributions of these students.

One of the greatest findings was the disproportionate number of responses by white female students who did not rate their teachers as “highly” preparing them for the GED® test. White females provided a lower score on this question compared to other population groups. This discovery will allow me the opportunity in the future in specifically work to identify why that occurred. This is something I will explore in the future.

A second significant finding by students in the program was the overwhelming number of students who expressed a mid-range rating on their understanding of the GED® test and what’s on it. I felt that was a critical finding. For students to be best prepared for the test, they should have a very clear understanding of it and know exactly what to expect on it. This is a necessary project within the program and would make sense to develop in the best interest of student success.

A third relevant contribution by students within this project reflected that 60% of them knew “little to some” of the GED® test layout. Just as the previous finding, it is critical for them to have a very clear understanding of the test layout. Students who do not understand the test layout are also at a disadvantage and I feel it is within the obligation of the program to assure they have that knowledge. This is also a necessary project to embark on.

Finally, it appears that one of the most highly used software programs that the students use in preparing for GED® test does not allow the students the opportunity to go back and check their work once they have completed it. For students to identify that as
something that is not working well, I recognized the need to have that discussion with the vendor. I will first gain a clearer understanding to what that means by signing on to that program myself and working through lessons as a student would so I can best observe what they are talking about. Once I gain that understanding, I will move forward with attempting to find a solution to the issue.

The classroom teacher contribution to this project is deeply appreciated. As an administrator, there is often a disconnect by way of “chain of command” that seems to filter many of the pluses and minuses of a program from getting to the top. This experience has allowed me the opportunity to gain tremendous insight into the program through the lens of the teachers. The overall transition of the program as it relates to the changes of the “new” GED® test appeared to a lot for the teachers to handle. Hearing of their struggles to change made me appreciate their efforts. Overall, teachers felt a major benefit to the new test was the rigor of the new test and the level of college readiness their students will gain once they successfully complete it. That was very positive to hear.

It also appeared the consensus of the teachers regarding having the necessary instructional materials and technology resources in the classroom was positive. There was not a specific finding to indicate the need for materials. However, there were concerns regarding the materials supporting the appropriate level of instruction and the difficulties of classrooms having students needing varying levels of instruction.

This has always been a concern in adult education classrooms since many times one classroom is designed for Adult Basic Education (ABE) serving all grades up to 8th grade and GED® classrooms serving all grades 9-12. This is a finding that I will explore
in assuring that teachers have the necessary materials they need to accommodate the various instructional levels in the classroom. This is also a finding that I can approach the site based administrators with to assure they are doing everything they can to support the fewest academic levels in each classroom. This study has made me question whether each of the administrators has made it a point to work in supporting classrooms with fewer instructional levels.

Within the evaluation aspect of this project, I appreciated learning of the teachers’ positive thoughts on the program’s alignment to the GED® test. The utilization of the practice tests within the program seem to be very positive. The ability for students to academically align to one section of the test at a time also seemed very beneficial.

One finding from the teachers indicated the possible need for additional administrative support. This one did not provide specifics regarding the type of administrative support, but just seeing that finding has sparked my interest. This is something that is not monitored or evaluated within this program but could be. I will follow up with creating a program that assures the teaching staff obtains the necessary administrative support they need to be successful.

There was also an identified finding on behalf of the classroom teachers that led me to believe that some teachers may not have the necessary instructional materials aligned to the GED® test. If this is the case, then they are either choosing to use the outdated materials or they have not been provided the necessary professional development in using the new resources that are aligned and provided to them. Either way, this has confirmed there is a need to evaluate the instructional materials being used.
by each teacher and survey their level of professional development. I will develop a plan to determine where the teachers are with this.

And finally, from the teachers’ perspectives, the concern was raised regarding the amount of work the program has designed around computers and the deficiency of computers in our students’ homes. This is not something I had previously thought to address but this project has exposed this need. I would like to develop a policy or plan to serve those students without computer access at home. Whether it involves getting that technology and internet service into their homes or finding a way for them to have greater access to school computers, this is a project worth pursuing.

Having the opportunity to survey and interview those individuals exiting the testing center was very beneficial. Their feedback has provided me with areas to evaluate further and ideas to improve the testing center. I knew that interviewing individuals who had just spent between two and seven hours testing could be difficult to obtain, but I managed to learn a lot about what seemed to be working well and what could be improved. Almost every one of the exiting testers spoke very highly of the testing center staff, the facility, and the accommodations. That feedback was appreciated since the “new” testing center was difficult to establish and hearing the accolades from those it served was refreshing. There was also consistent positive feedback pertaining to the ease of use for the computer-based testing and the navigability of the test itself. I was satisfied those issues did not appear to be concerns since it was new.

One finding that did arise with those exiting the testing was the difference in how they rated the effectiveness of their teachers preparing them to the actual rating of how prepared they felt. Most the exiting testers rated their teachers high in preparing them for
the test. However, most of them rated themselves low on how well they were prepared. I recognize that both areas need to be explored in greater depth. I will use this data to develop a greater avenue for feedback in identifying more details to support both areas.

Within the feedback regarding the level of readiness and preparation, the responders also stated (overwhelmingly) that they found the test to be “very hard.” This may also be something to explore in greater depth. If all the staff recognizes the testers are finding this test “very hard” we should develop a mindset to address that need for them. More exploration to what “very hard” means is appropriate and then a plan to help our students with that should follow. We need to find out exactly what is hard and be certain they are prepared for it.

A relevant finding that became evident from this study on behalf of those exiting the testing center regarded the idea of testing without attending classes. It had never occurred to me as the director of the program that students in the community did not know they could come take the GED® test without registering for classes if they chose not to. The feedback that was presented led me to believe that if that fact was more widely known, the testing center would probably serve more testers. This is something that needs to be publicly marketed and made easily understood. It makes me realize there are many individuals in our community that do not know this and stay away from testing since they feel they have no time for classes. I will have to create a project in order to get this information out.

The administrators in Southeast District’s adult education program also provided highly beneficial feedback regarding this program. Through their surveys and interviews I felt they generally concurred that their students were adequately prepared for the GED®
test within their programs and their teachers obtained the necessary materials for instruction. They appreciated having the opportunity to express themselves within this project and felt the findings from this would lead to improvements across the district. It was very positive feedback. They also expressed gratitude for the effective communication that had occurred between the district office and adult school sites through the transition. That was a valuable finding since effective communication was a priority of the district office.

One concern that I identified was how little the administrators shared regarding specific professional development for their teachers or the overall quality of instruction within their classrooms. This was something that I assumed they would have spoken of yet they did not. This made me feel as though it is something I should follow up on in the future. Exactly what professional development have they offered their teachers and whether or not they have any concerns with the effectiveness of their teachers.

At various points within the administrator interviews or within their surveys, the topic of the GED® Official Practice Test (OPT) arose. It appears the OPT is the most accurate indicator of student readiness in preparation of taking the GED®. The practice test does cost money and the administrators were very appreciative of the district office having spent funds on acquiring it for the students as the transition developed. However, this evaluation also exposed the idea that funds are not in place to continue providing this to students for free, yet the need for it is tremendous. Therefore, based on this study, I will have to pursue identifying funding sources that will be able to cover the costs involved to ensure our students have access to the OPT in the future just as they have had through the transition.
One of the greatest findings that came from the community school administrators was the understanding of the transitions that were made by the teachers and shared with each other to help adjust to the new test and curriculum within their classrooms. There appeared too many opportunities for the teachers to share best practices with each other while addressing some of the needs based on the changes. As a result, many teachers received necessary assistance and guidance from fellow teachers through informal means. This allowed me the opportunity to understand the relevance and importance in designating time for teachers to work collaboratively while sharing best practices so the need isn’t there to continually “re-invent the wheel.”

Lastly, in working with the administrators, the idea of community support resonated with me. Administrators spoke of the community support in helping them and their programs through the transitions for their students. The ideas of creating bridges to employment, providing support in classrooms through mentors and the drive to build a caring community were highlighted in this study. Those attributes in a community help create successful programs and working to create this consistently among all adult education sites sounds like a positive initiative to embrace.

After interviewing the testing center staff, I was very appreciative of the work they do and how well they handled the transition to the “new” computer based test. Everything they provided was positive and uplifting. The testing center appeared to be running like a well-oiled machine. Everyone seemed to clearly understand their roles and responsibilities and their level of customer service was highly effective. They appreciated the online pre-registration so students were completely registered upon arrival. They acknowledged the ability for students to take one test at a time and the
reduced stress level of the students because of that. They felt the immediate feedback for the test score was extremely efficient. They felt they had all of the necessary resources they required and could not think of any unmet needs. They felt the test was more rigorous and was therefore more “credible.” They also exclaimed their satisfaction with the overall communication of everyone involved in the transition to the “new” testing facility. Overall, they were extremely positive.

I did however, discover something that can be addressed in the future. One comment in the interview discussed the idea of the center following up with students who still had remaining tests to take or those that may have failed a test. The responder stated that in many cases students abandon their efforts for one reason or another and the testing center staff should create a policy to follow up with them after a period of time and assure they are continuing their efforts. In many cases they don’t know what they should do and this would allow the process to continue rather than just stop. I think this is a great idea and will create a plan to address this in the future.

The final stakeholders in this evaluation project were the two district staff members who worked specifically with the GED® program. Similar to the testing center staff, there was only positive feedback. The curriculum alignment to the Common Core Standards was highly beneficial and would lead our students to better college preparation with fewer required remediation courses. The overall perspectives were that the new GED® test was appropriate and the program was well aligned to meet student needs.

They appreciated the immediate score reporting as a benefit to the testers. They also discussed the numerous free materials available from GED® Testing Service that can be used in the classroom but the need to identify a funding source to help cover the cost
for shipping. The adjustment to the cut score was also noted as a benefit to the testers. The district staff were not able to provide any insights for improving the program, but they did confirm that much of what is happening across the district in support of the new program and new test were aligned and appropriate.

**Recommendations**

This evaluation project has exposed many responses to the various exploratory and secondary questions regarding the GED® program and testing center at Southeast District. The exploratory and secondary questions focused on the perception of what was working well and not well in the program, what were the greatest challenges for student success and ways to improve them, and finally, what were the student and staff perceptions specifically toward the new test. This was a very well-rounded approach to not only gathering data and evaluating the program, but providing the program the necessary direction leading toward improved student performance and greater testing success. The introduction to a new curriculum leading to a newly revised GED® test created great change to a program that had been fully established. Each of the stakeholder groups that participated in this project identified positive attributes regarding the work currently being done as well as a clearly identified understanding of improvements that can be made enabling greater student success.

It is my recommendation that in response to the findings of this evaluation project, the GED® program and testing center be afforded the additional policies and programs designed to help support student success. With the identification of seven specific areas to address, the task is becoming clearer. The seven areas that have been identified within this project that will be explored and addressed further are: 1) student
test readiness, 2) aligned resources, 3) multi-level classrooms, 4) computer/internet access, 5) community understanding of testing requirements, 6) tracking unsuccessful testers, and 7) administrative support. Each of those area will be specifically reviewed in Section 6 of this project.

Each stakeholder group has contributed to this evaluation project in a way that has provided a comprehensive overview to what may be done in the future to support the students and community. As the director over the program it is my responsibility to take this newfound information and use it to lead the organization to an improved way of work and greater student success. I specifically selected this program based on the substantial changes in not only test curriculum but test administration as a result of the new 2014 test implementation. I understood that with the transition to the new test, came the need to evaluate student performance and work to develop a more aligned program in reaching greater student success. Greater student learning is dependent on many variables and this project exposed several opportunities for improvement that will lead to more students successfully completing their GED® test.
SECTION FIVE: TO-BE FRAMEWORK

Introduction

In having identified multiple areas for improvement within this program I look forward to establishing a plan to work with the program’s stakeholders in creating greater student success. The timing for this project is excellent as teachers and staff have become comfortable in understanding the changes that have been made at the local, state and federal levels pertaining to the GED® program. The research has provided tremendous insight to the needs of this organization and the remainder of this project will address the development of a plan to improve the program. In my last chapter, I discussed what Wagner et al. (2006), would explain as the “As-Is” within this organization based on the data I collected. It showed me the current state of Southeast District and recognized the necessary areas of change that could lead to greater student performance. In this chapter, I will advance into the “To-Be” state of what Wagner et al. (2006) would say is where I hope to take the organization to. It is this evaluation and understanding data that has provided me with the ability to move forward in bringing change to this organization.

Review of Literature Related to Change

The GED® program at Southeast district, like all GED® programs across the nation, underwent a significant revision in 2014. This project has exposed the need for change in many of the priorities, policies, and procedures within the program and testing center. However, as the leader, I recognize that change is often something that creates confusion and causes anxiety among staff. The leader needs to have a clear vision to the changes needing to occur while keeping all stakeholders involved in the process. Some
people in leadership positions do not have the systemic understanding of the causes of failure (Payne, 2013). As the director of this program, it is essential I address the needs of the department through this systemic approach to gathering, interpreting and developing a new way of work in order to support the successful growth of the students. In this program, the ideas for change being developed will provide greater student success, however the change process must be conducted appropriately as to not create additional obstacles based on the process itself.

In leading this organization to change, I recognized the need to identify what Stewart (2014) claimed in understanding that the greatest needs are often identified using local student data (pg. 29). This project has provided substantial data based on the contributions of the various stakeholders. Equally relevant is the ability for the district to have the capacity for change. It seems as though there have been an excessive list of prioritized initiatives in public education and the perception of “knee jerk” reactions has become a theme to solving obstacles. In this particular project, I have to assure the organization is exposed to strategic planning in making such changes and I have to “include activities that examine the organization’s capacity to change” Rutherford, (2009, p. 3.) This capacity to change can often be reflective of a deep-rooted resistance after individuals in the organization become overly exposed to repeated change initiatives. In this case, I will need to fundamentally change the roots of the paradigms and the relationships of those involved, Miller (2014, Pg. 97).

Berg (2008), identified six ways to accomplish change in advancing schools. His fifth point clearly expressed that leaders of change should, “Work actively toward the validation of learning, expressing how you know the students have learned as intended”
In this study, one of my greatest findings was that many students did not feel prepared to test. This tells me clearly that the students have not learned as intended and clearly justifies this need for change. Berg’s process for change similarly reflects the six critical components of successful school improvement by Williamson (2007). Within those six components, “sustained professional development to improve learning” aligns most importantly in supporting the initiatives of this project. I feel it is critical that the level of professional development provided to the staff aligns to the specific needs of the change I will develop. The teachers and staff have to be assured they know exactly what is expected of them when it comes to the abilities of the students.

In working to reform this GED® program to bring greater success of the students enrolled, I recognize the culture of such change. Just as Ross (2010) states, “Every school possesses a unique culture. Not only does each school share a history, their history is linked to the history of the district and the larger community.” (pg2). I have to recognize that the changes I make in this program also weigh heavily on the local community. In many cases students will need to attend school longer in order to become more prepared for testing. This impacts their families, their employers and the schools in which they are enrolled. Instructional hours will probably increase as will the necessary staffing needs of teachers. Much of this change is going to be reflective of the needed changes identified by the teachers themselves. Wooleyhand (2013) recognized that school leaders must have their teachers look at a variety of data. More importantly, they must make the right decisions based on the right data. It is critical that I provide a clear vision to what that data means to the teachers and based on what the data expressed clear
goals should be identified. In leading change to improve student readiness, I appreciate the data that has identified what is lacking.

Within this study and the pursuit of change, I recognize teachers as a critical stakeholder to this change. Lukas and Galluzzo (2014), claim that “teachers are more active than recipients and more central to school improvement than taking the lead on implementing externally driven reforms” (pg. 101). Within this program, their support of these changes will in most cases provide the greatest opportunities for success. I do however, recognize the need to have a balanced approach to this. I understand some teachers will be quick to support change and some may not. I understand some will be able to understand why change is necessary while others may not embrace it all. Hall and Green (2014) advise on the counterproductive emotions that can arise when change becomes urgent. According to them, “Leaders must learn to redirect their own and their staffs’ sense of urgency to motivate and unify the school community around a common purpose, if the desired change is to prove successful” (pg.9) and within this project, I will need to as well. I will also have to avoid what Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) call “avoiding common traps.” They state, “The passion and commitment that flow from having noble purposes can also make you blind and deaf” (pg.244). This results in an inability to recognize signals that could lead to resistance in having changes supported by stakeholders within this program.

Like in any institution, change disrupts the status quo. Leading change within this organization will probably be best represented by what Nolan (2007) expressed as an opposition at first with a defensive position while responding and reacting to questions and objections of others (pg. 6). Questions concerning why we do the things we do and
the need for data-driven decision-making should be exposed. “Change may be perceived as it resulting in our being removed from our ‘safe’ existing world and put into a potentially challenging situation, where once again we have to learn from the beginning” Young (2007, Pg. 647). As I move forward within this project, I will have to be certain to accept the various anxiety levels on behalf of the numerous staff members in dealing with change.

The changes that I will be planning involve more than just teachers. The students, administrators, testing center staff and district staff are also significantly impacted. According to Hopkins and Woulfin (2015), educational scholarship has “made it clear that neither top-down nor bottom-up reform approaches are sufficient in isolation to facilitate the development” in educational change or development (p 374). Therefore, I have to recognize the involvement of all stakeholders in the planning and implementation of change within the program. It is obvious to me there will need to be a plan that is “co-developed” to include changing patterns of communication and interaction, Umarik, Loogma, & Tafel-Viia (2013).

It is important to have district-wide support as new programs and projects are implemented. “A school-level commitment to the common good is foundational to implementing, and sustaining, change Melville, Bartley & Weinburgh (2012).

In working with several of the faculty and staff members within this GED® program over the past several years, I do feel there is a commitment by them to create better and more effective opportunities for student success. There appears to be a culture of common good and the data that has been presented has exposed areas of improvement that staff will hopefully embrace. This desired culture of student success already exists
and working collaboratively to implement targeted approaches to meeting those additional student needs are easily justified. It is my hope that utilizing the strategies above and understanding the processes in which scholars have identified as means to successful organizational change, that I too will implement this shift in culture to address the identified needs leading to greater student success.

**Envisioning the Success TO-BE**

After having evaluated this GED® program and testing center, several areas have exposed the need for change in creating greater success for the participating students and testers. Similarly, to expectations in K12 in which the goal is often to have students graduate, the same holds true in this GED® program. The end goal is to have more students successfully complete their GED® studies in the classroom and obtain a higher passing rate on the GED® test. In order for this to happen, changes should occur in those areas previously identified from the data collection and programs designed to include those points developed in the literature review. Utilizing Wagner et al. (2006) 4C’s, I have developed what the future contexts, conditions, competencies, and culture could look like if this plan is realized (see Appendix R). This vision allows me as the leader to see specifically what this change plan intends on accomplishing.

**Context**

Within the context of this change it is my intention that staff has a clear understanding of the GED® test content and layout. With staff having a clear understanding of this, that information will be shared with every student to assure they know exactly what they need to. Therefore, students will have a clear understanding of what is expected when they prepare to test and sit for the test.
The software programs that students use will be evaluated specifically for what is working well and what could be improved. Taking the time to hear from the staff and students will be important and once issues are identified, that information needs to be presented to the software companies. It is important that those companies provide the product we need, not that our teachers adapt to what they have.

Student scheduling has been identified as an issue and it is important to recognize the struggles teachers face when multi-level classrooms are continually presented to them. Staff training for the development of master scheduling is needed. A district policy may need to be created in trying to keep classes as “pure” as possible within academic levels.

Greater student access to computers will need to be pursued. The development of a task force to identify current funding for additional computers or the establishing of additional business partnerships is critical. Students across the district need to be surveyed regarding their access to computers and that data can be used to identify the need. A plan of action can be developed in working toward the identified need.

Prospective testers in the community also need to be advised that attending classes is not required prior to testing. This is a marketing initiative that needs to be developed by the testing office and that information needs to be made available community wide. This is something that does not have to be expensive and could be handled primarily on social media avenues within the school districts webpage and various social media addresses.

The testing center staff will also develop a process to correspond with exiting testers who are identified as unsuccessful. A program will be developed to provide the
guidance necessary for them to understand what it means to be unsuccessful and what their opportunities are in remedying their failure. Students that do not re-test following a period of time will be contacted and their options will be presented to them.

And finally, additional professional development will be provided to every teacher in assuring all of these priorities are effectively explained to them and they have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities within each. In some cases, a procedure or policy may change or in others, their assistance may be required in identifying the means to address the issue. It will be a collaborative way of work in working to establish these new priorities.

**Culture**

In working to establish new priorities in this culture of change, it is my intention of working collaboratively with all stakeholders. There will not necessarily be a “top-down” or “bottom-up” approach to the development of the new priorities. Instead, the culture will be reflective of one in which all stakeholders have a clear understanding of what needs to be done and they have the ability to contribute in how they see being able to support it. They will need to work closely to obtain a clearer understanding of the GED® test content and layout.

There will also be a culture of support. Particularly administrative support. It will be critical that this priority be evident to all teachers and staff to assure administrators recognize the need to help guide the process through and be there for those implementing and living through the changes. This culture of support will be continually discussed in meetings to assure its priority is recognized.
Positive attitudes will be important. It will be critical to have follow up with all stakeholders throughout the transition of these changes to assure positive attitudes remain. As less than positive attitudes are identified, it will be a priority to determine the root cause and look to rectify them as to not allow a sense of negativity to take over the program.

Finally, within the culture of this program, teachers and staff have to become comfortable they have a clear understanding with the performance levels of their students. They need to feel prepared in meeting their student needs and not feel challenged on how to best serve them. This will be a professional development opportunity that will allow the teachers to gain the confidence they need to assure they know the appropriate educational prescription for each of their students pertaining to the new standards and the new test.

**Conditions**

In order for teachers and staff to have the best opportunity to appropriately meet the needs of their students on the new curriculum and test, they need to be comfortable with the resources they use. It will be appropriate to conduct a review of those resources and conduct professional development assuring they know to utilize them appropriately. To date this has not occurred. This will involve a much greater opportunity for professional development aligned to the “new” initiatives within the program.

There will also be a process developed to assure classroom instruction is aligned to the new content. Based on the data, that has been a concern. Stakeholders will work together to review lesson plans and classroom resources to assure curriculum alignment.
Teachers will be able to anonymously provide information regarding their needs for training.

One of the greatest conditions within the new changes of this program is that of funding. There will be an understanding that with the new curriculum standards and test, there have not been funds allocated for the transition. Stakeholders will be expected to help develop the plans to address these changes without the opportunity of additional resources. Therefore, when new programs are brought in, something else must go. If new teaching or staff positions are created, others must be deleted. If something will require funding, then a plan must be developed to obtain that funding.

**Competencies**

The competencies within these changes reach every stakeholder involved. Prior to GED® testing students will know everything they need to become fully aware of the test’s content and layout. This is the defining factor for student success in the program. Teachers and staff will have the ability to assure every student is prepared for the contents of the test. Teachers and staff will also assure what they are teaching is aligned to what is known to be on the test.

Administrators will have a greater knowledge and understanding of those changes coming so they can best be of support to their staff. Administrators will know what the data reflects that has resulted in the call for change, what the specific changes are and the process for getting through the change, the expected results, and the vision for success. Most importantly, administrators will know how to support their staff through it all.

Stakeholders will all participate in the opportunity to look at the resources involved in the classrooms and testing centers and make determinations on whether or
not they are appropriate for the program. If resources are deemed effective and appropriate they will continue being used. If the changes to the new curriculum and test lead to the identification of unaligned resources, stakeholders will work to effectively determine new ones that do.

Lastly, student readiness for the GED® test will be specifically defined. A collaborative group of stakeholders will determine what is meant when a student is identified as “test-ready.” It will be within this definition that this program will work in order to allow students the opportunity to proceed to testing when coming through the instructional program. Within that “test-ready” definition also comes the prescription within each area on the services that will be provided in order to get each student to that point. Students who learn the competencies of becoming “test-ready” will have gained the skills to not only perform at an appropriate academic level, but will also have a very clear understanding of the test layout and the procedures involved to take and pass the GED® test.

Conclusion

Within this plan to lead organizational change, I have recognized the scholarly contributions in identifying many factors that can help lead me to success. In understanding the context, culture, conditions and competencies involved within the organization and how I see them “To-Be,” I recognize a complex challenge ahead. The implementation of new GED® test across the nation and the changes that have occurred within the program to date have reflected a true need to establish several areas of change in order to improve student success.
The implementation of an evaluation project has allowed me to identify the shortcomings of the organization in respect to the national changes within the program. The needs that were identified have allowed me to create a current “As-Is” reflection of where the organization sits (Appendix Q). Additional research and an understanding of methods in leading the organization through change have granted me the opportunity to identify my “To-Be” state (Appendix R). It is this “To-Be” state of the organization that is allowing me the vision to develop strategies and actions in creating an improved program. With an identification of needs and vision of the necessary changes, I look to develop the action steps toward successful change.
SECTION SIX: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Introduction

Wagner et al.’s (2006) process of moving the organization from where it currently stands “As-Is” to where I would like it to become “To-Be” has allowed me to clearly identify seven critical areas of improvement that can be addressed to improve the GED® program and lead more students to earning their GED®. It is within the context, culture, conditions and competencies of Wagner et al. (2006) that I have recognized specific areas to address. Each area can now be thoughtfully addressed to bring the needed change into the program. Each particular area within the “To-Be” diagram will play a contributing role in student learning and student performance. Specific strategies and actions for each of the seven areas of improvement can be seen in Appendix S.

Area 1: Test Readiness

With the implementation of a “new” GED® test in 2014, there had never been the opportunity for teachers and staff to develop a clear understanding of specifically what was on the test. It had never been part of the district office’s plan to implement a training to staff to assure they understood everything about the test. There was subject area training specific to those teachers teaching specific areas, however, there was no comprehensive plan to assure all stakeholders had a clear understanding of the test layout and the content of the subject matter within it.

Recognizing this area of improvement will then lead to assuring that information is provided to each of the students in the program. Once faculty and staff have a clear understanding of the test layout and content, they will have a much better opportunity to assure students gain that specific knowledge as well. This will allow each student the
ability to become “test ready” when their teachers can assure they have this knowledge. When students have a very clear understanding of what the test is comprised of, not only can they better prepare academically, but could also experience less anxiety. Their comfort level may impact their testing experience.

In helping staff and students gain a clearer understanding of the GED® test, it will be important to evaluate their understanding of it. Once that is complete professional development modules can be implemented that cover those areas targeting the test layout and the necessary academic competencies that had appeared void. With such strategies, students and will gain a much clearer understanding of the test and ultimately allow students a greater sense of test readiness and greater student success on it. Specific strategies include; the evaluation of faculty and staff to determine their level of understanding of the GED® test, the implementation of a process to assure all staff have the appropriate understanding of it, training for students to assure their understanding of the GED® test and developing a pathway for staff to follow in assuring students understand the test’s content. Actions in support of the strategies include the implementation of a staff development program supporting the findings of the evaluations, defining test readiness and assure all staff meet it, the development of a student assessment to evaluate test readiness and implementing a procedure assuring student readiness prior to test eligibility.

**Area 2: Resource Alignment**

Throughout this evaluation project and within the data that has been provided by the various stakeholders, resources for staff and students has been a prevalent topic. In several of the surveys and interviews, data has been reported regarding the resources
available. What has been exposed is the notion that some staff appear to have worked to align their curriculum to the new test and others have not. It is critical that the resources being used in the classrooms and the software being used by students is appropriately aligned to standards on the GED® test. This may be difficult for some staff since this may take them from their comfort levels in teaching what they have always taught and making changes. Assuring this curriculum is appropriately aligned will have a direct impact on student learning.

In recognizing the need to assure the resource materials are appropriately aligned to the new test, I will need to develop teams of content experts to review the resources. These content experts will need to collectively determine if the materials are appropriately aligned if not, make those necessary adjustments to it. They will then need to develop the appropriate staff development trainings to assure all teachers teaching the content are appropriately trained in delivering the appropriate instruction. Regarding students and software packages used for instruction, the same must occur. I will need to conduct product evaluations to assure that students, who should already have a clear understanding of test readiness, feel that the programs are aligned to their needs. If it is found that the software packages do not align to the curricular needs of the program, changes will need to be made.

Assuring the alignment of resources to instructional needs is a critical component for student success. The programmatic changes with the implementation of the new GED® test are significant. Teachers and students must have the necessary and appropriate tools to best prepare and it is the role of the district office to assure that occurs. Strategies include having content experts review the curriculum materials and
product evaluations by teachers and students. Specific actions would call for identifying those specific materials used in the classrooms and have each specifically reviewed while developing evaluation questionnaires for teacher and student feedback.

**Area 3: Minimize Multi-Level Classrooms**

Since GED® programs are performance based and students work at various educational levels within each classroom, this is a difficult task for instructors. In some cases, classrooms are occupied by students functioning at the elementary academic level while sitting next to another student functioning at the high school level. This creates issues with instructional opportunities for teachers and often allows them to not offer direct instruction. In those cases, teachers often provide students work to complete on their own and they do not actually instruct. They become more like tutors who assist the students when needed.

With the data exposing teachers playing a significant role in the students’ learning experience, I recognize the need for teachers to actually instruct lessons and have the skills necessary to deal with students at all academic levels. However, it will be my intent to limit the range of student abilities within one classroom. Students will need to be clustered with “like” abilities so the teachers are not working with students with very low abilities and very high abilities within one classroom. Within this area of change, I will work to provide training to the teachers in working with multi-level ability classrooms, however, focus much of my efforts in the structuring of the classes. It will be my intent to develop a policy that only allows certain levels of students to be in one classroom so that teachers are not expected to cover the full range of students within one classroom. This should allow teachers more access to teaching students with comparable
abilities and result in more true instruction for them. Strategies within this area include identification of a district policy to address multi-level classroom placements and have it regularly reviewed for compliance while assuring teachers who do face the challenges of a multi-level classroom obtain the necessary skills to be effective. Corresponding actions to the strategies involve the implementation of a professional development opportunity for teachers and staff to gain a clear understanding of the district policy regarding multi-level classrooms while allowing schools the opportunity to self-correct scheduling errors through the year. There would also include a component of professional development specifically targeting effective multi-level instruction within the classroom.

**Area 4: Computer Access to Students**

Throughout this study a reoccurring theme developed regarding the utilization of software programs and online instruction. Through several responses on the interviews and surveys it was made evident that students need greater access to technology when away from school. I listed this area for change with the hopes that in discovering this need, I can use this study as leverage in helping the district and community formally recognize this need and hopefully address it.

In order to gauge the true needs within this program, I will need to conduct a district survey within the Adult Education program to determine who needs the additional technology and what that actually means. Do they need a computer, internet service, or both? Once I determine that need, I will need to think through it logistically and make a determination of the costs involved. At that point, I will need to reach out to district leaders and community members in attempting to raise those funds.
Hopefully upon the success of a fundraising campaign for this program, I will need to develop and implement a program for issuing the computers to the students. This will also involve various policies and procedures. I would implement a committee to complete that task. When students ultimately have full access to their online resources at home or away from work, I can expect that to help them academically. Strategies aligned to this area include identifying the computer needs of the students, determining the cost for providing those computers and work to obtain the needed funds to implement this project. The specific actions involved would include conducting a survey regarding home computer access for students, identifying a cost for each student involved ultimately identify and budget funds for the initiative.

**Area 5: Promote an Understanding of Testing Requirements**

The underlying goal of this entire project is to increase the number of graduates exiting the GED® test successfully. Through the course of this dissertation study I have recognized many areas of success within the program and several areas needing improvement. As the director over this program, one area that I had never thought of was the promotion of testing requirements in the community. Unbeknownst to me, this community had never been advised that sitting for the GED® test is allowable without attending GED® classes. In some cases, students with high academic abilities were not completers in high school and have avoided their GED® thinking they had to enroll in classes.

It will be the responsibility of the GED® district office to develop a clear message for the community that explains the GED® attainment process. The department will then work to get that message out. If the community gains a clear understanding of the GED®
process and requirements of sitting for the GED® test, I would believe more individuals will test. More GED® testing will lead to more diplomas in the community and the benefits involved in being a graduate. Two specific strategies targeting this area of improvement include the development of a clear message clarifying GED® testing requirements and random evaluations across the district to determine the knowledge level the community has pertaining to the policy. Specific actions include marketing the message throughout the community and a continued effort to close that communication gap regarding the program in general.

**Area 6: Keep Unsuccessful Testers on Track**

One of the best revelations within this project came from the GED® testing office staff in which they recommended a procedure to follow up with exiting testers who were unsuccessful. As the director, I assumed that students who tested unsuccessfully went back to their programs for additional instruction and eventually came back to test again. What I did not expect was that in many cases they may have gotten frustrated or had a bad testing experience and decided not to return at all.

In recognizing this as a priority and developing a procedure to address it, I anticipate the testing center will increase graduation numbers. A procedure that calls for follow up with unsuccessful testers to identify their future intentions will allow staff the opportunity to determine the best way to support them in leading to a retest. Whether they have to serve as a motivator rooting them on based on the need for additional schooling or reassure them by boosting their confidence, the support to testers will be valuable. I will work with the testing center to establish the appropriate protocol in determining who will reach out to them and when that should occur. The testing office
will help establish that procedure on behalf of the district plan. Specific strategies include appropriately identifying students following their testing experience who were not successful while implementing a plan to contact and mentor them through the process of continuing to work toward successful completion on the GED®. Actions supporting the strategies would include the development of spreadsheet of those being targeted, a developed timeline for initiatives involving them and an assigned success coach to monitor the efforts.

**Area 7: Provide Greater Administrative Support**

With 20 years of school district administrative experience, I clearly understand the need for teachers and staff to feel supported by their administrator. Prior to this project, I would have thought that all of the school administrators would have felt they had the support of the district office. I would have also thought that teachers and staff members at the adult schools would have expressed content with their administrators. However, with the recent changes to the GED® test and drastic changes in the curriculum standards within it, it appears the level of administrative support has not been where I had hoped.

I think these changes have brought on anxiety among the necessary changes that have been implemented. Just as the data expressed how well the GED® testing office transitioned well to the test due to excellent communication and support, I am not convinced that occurred across the district. This has since left individuals across the district feeling the need for greater support.

Since this project has allowed the need for greater administrative support to surface within this program, I will need to conduct a program-wide evaluation on what
that looks like. I will develop a survey that not only identifies how staff feel regarding their current levels of support, but also include what additional support can be provided to them in order for them to feel as if they have the necessary support to effectively do their job.

It is important for me that staff within this program feel as if they have their administrator’s support. When supported, staff are often more productive, there is often less turn over, the environment is more positive and ultimately students benefit from a better learning environment. This will be a very strong area for improvement when I can determine a list of needs across the district and plan to address them in making all staff feel the support. I also feel this is not something that should occur once on behalf of this project. As part of this, I will need to assure this evaluation regarding levels of support is a reoccurring theme among staff and program leaders and is conducted regularly. Specific strategies that will enhance administrative support of faculty and staff include the evaluation of each determine the level of support they feel, the compilation of needs by them and specific support provided to those targeted areas. The actions involved would allow anonymous surveys to be completed so teachers and staff could speak openly and honestly about their levels of perceived support, while using that feedback to recognize the specific needs. There will also be a continued process to evaluate the perceived level of support and planned responses to them leading to the additional requested support. Communication will be a key aspect of these actions.

**Conclusion**

The strategies and actions that I have developed to target the seven identified priority areas within this project will serve as the foundational scope of work to facilitate
appropriate change in this GED® program. Each area has been appropriately evaluated and tied to the context, culture, conditions and competencies of the program. This approach has allowed me to take tremendous data from the appropriate stakeholders and create the path of change from where the program currently sits to where I would like it to be. With the identified necessary changes within the program comes the intent to develop policies. These policies must therefore be implemented if change is to occur and ultimately improve student success.
SECTION SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The implications to this GED® program based on the seven priority areas I previously identified are tremendous. As I consider how the program and stakeholders will adjust to the evaluation findings and the change plan I developed, I recognize the need to more clearly refine the scope of work. For the purpose of this project, I will narrowly define the proposed path of this project to one specific priority area of the seven previously identified. Even though I recognize the positive impact the program will experience as I continue working with each of the seven areas in the future, the idea of student readiness for GED® testing will be my priority. Data from this project indicated too much of a discrepancy between where students and staff thought they were on the preparedness scale to where they actually identified themselves to be once they attempted their test. Therefore, I will target student readiness as my key priority area for the remainder of this project.

Currently in Southeast District, there is no policy regarding “student readiness,” nor is there a clear definition for it in our bylaws and policies. As it pertains to this project, I define “student readiness” as the student’s ability to show a clearly defined understanding of the test layout and be able to score at the required appropriate academic level within each area tested on the GED® test. Student readiness therefore, becomes the targeted point within the student’s efforts allowing him or her to proceed to student testing. It will also clearly define the purpose of instruction for the students and allow there to be a point of finalization that is realized in assuring the student is ready for GED® testing. The developed assessment indicating the students’ knowledge of the test
layout along with the successful completion of the GED® Official Practice Test will combine to reflect student readiness.

**Policy Statement**

The policy that I am recommending based on the findings of the evaluation project I conducted and after having fully explored the various changes that will be implemented within the Southeast District, pertains to student readiness for the GED® test. Student readiness will be comprised of two specific indicators. The first indicator of student readiness will be student understanding of the test layout. Students will be provided with the necessary instruction to gain an understanding of exactly what the test looks like, the time allotment for taking the test, the sections of the test, the procedures within the testing center and any other rules they would need to know regarding the testing center and process.

Students will also continue utilizing the Official Practice Test (OPT) for the purpose of evaluating their academic readiness for each section of the GED®. Adherence to the academic standards will continue being the classroom priority. However, upon successful completion of an OPT, students will then be required to pass a secondary “pre-test” involving test layout. The new policy will therefore be that all GED® program students must successfully complete the GED® Official Practice Test and a district created GED® overview test prior to official GED® testing.

The data I previously gathered clearly showed a need for students to gain a better understanding of the GED® test itself. I believe that if students have a clear understanding of what they will experience when they take the GED® test along with the academic ability to score at an acceptable level, more successful completions will occur.
When teachers send students to test without the necessary knowledge of the test layout and required curriculum standards, they run a greater risk of being unsuccessful.

Analysis of Needs

Educational Analysis

With the development of this new policy, students and teachers will create a new way of work in preparing students for GED® testing in Southeast District. Traditionally, students have focused on a specific content area and upon the ability to show mastery of the content through the OPT, after which they are referred for testing. Each specific section of the GED® can be evaluated by the OPT. There has not been a plan in place that has assured students have a clear understanding of the test and testing process. With the implementation of this secondary requirement, students will gain greater knowledge of the test itself, testing procedures and the testing center.

Economic Analysis

From an economic standpoint, I recognize several implications regarding this policy. First and foremost, I anticipate this new policy will allow more students the opportunity to experience success on their first attempt of GED® testing. The student’s ability to have a clearer understanding of the test prior to testing will improve test performance. Students who are successful on their first attempt will save financially from having to retest and pay for additional opportunities to test. This improved success rate will also allow larger numbers of students to become successful and graduate. This will also impact the community financially, as Southeast District will then deliver more graduates into the workforce sooner. This could have lasting financial implications across the entire community by not only having a more educated workforce, but could
possibly lead to higher wages for graduates. This, in turn, would mean less community support for them through social services programs. This may also allow students to exit the GED® programs sooner and help reduce the costs to educate the community. Students who exit the program sooner will also have a considerable economic impact on the school district’s Workforce funds that cover the cost of the adult education program. Fewer students remaining in the program would lead to fewer costs involved in hiring teachers.

**Social Analysis**

This policy also has tremendous social ramifications. Greater test readiness leads to greater student success on test performance. According to Doorway to College (2015), there are three dimensions of test preparation. These include teacher inclusion, test strategies and content review with practice (Pg. 1). Greater test performance will lead to increased numbers of graduates within the district. Having a policy in place that leads directly to a greater number of educated members of the community can impact everyone in the community. Based on Figure 3 (US Bureau Statistics, 2013), higher levels of education lead to greater income and a greater quality of life. Individuals who have the ability to take greater care of themselves and their families financially may be less likely to commit crimes in order to provide. This may also result in positive changes in the community. In many cases, individuals who have the ability to earn a high school credential could impact their family’s cycle of poverty and help move them into self-sustainability. It could also create a sense of hope for the future.
**Political Analysis**

From a political perspective, the development of this policy has numerous merits. Community leaders look to improve communities and generate a more educated society with less dependency on social services. This policy is designed to support the students in the program and lead them to a greater chance of success on the GED® test with very little additional expense. Since there consistently appears to be political ramifications in funding educational institutions, improving success rates becomes a political gain. The community will benefit socially and financially-as the workforce becomes more educated. Southeast District’s adult education graduation statistics will improve, the program will become more effective, and the GED® program will show positive gains. Politically speaking, this improvement in graduation rates will also be reflective within the community. From an employment perspective, other organizations will recognize the workforce pool of applicants having earned more diplomas. Community members will also become more aware of what is occurring within the program and the program’s presence will be more easily identified. Positive growth will not only impact the staff and administrators within the district but will also allow the community to appreciate the success occurring in the schools. Community members, school board members, local politicians etc. will each have the opportunity to understand what the positive gains in local graduation numbers can do for the community. This policy will support student success which in turn provides improves the living conditions of those in the community.

**Legal Analysis**

The GED® test has, since its inception, been widely accepted as the alternative to a standard high school diploma. Until the revision of 2014 there appears to have been
very little legal concerns with educational institutions across the country using it. However, with the implementation of two other options being used across the country in response to the new GED® test rights having been sold to a “for-profit” organization, there are legal concerns that come to my mind. Specifically, since many states have chosen the GED® primarily for their district to use, as in Southeast County, is the question of funding the work effort of testing staff to provide the office labor for a profit-earning company. This policy in developing a test readiness requirement prior to official testing does not carry any legal concerns to speak of at the district level, however does represent a significant change in the way of work. Since a policy will be implemented to support it, teachers and staff will be held accountable to it. Like with all district policies, individuals who do not follow it may be subject to repercussions on their employment evaluations.

This policy resides within the GED® program and has been designed as a support to participating students in helping them become test ready. As a district policy, there will always be the ability to add to it, change it or even delete it if necessary. As the director over the program, I would not expect resistance to this policy since it has been established based on the identified needs of the program’s stakeholders through this study. I would need to assure that all faculty and staff are fully trained to not only understand the policy, but feel comfortable in promoting and supporting it across the district. Teachers in the classrooms will need to follow this procedure and will be held accountable in doing so. They will be held responsible for assuring it is implemented appropriately with fidelity and their annual evaluations may be impacted by it.
Moral and Ethical Analysis

The discovery of various data points that reflect the specific need for students to become more test ready within this project have clearly shown that there is a need for the implementation of a policy such as this. According to the Florida Department of Education (2017), and its Principals of Professional Conduct for the Education Profession in Florida, “The educator’s primary professional concern will always be for the student and for the development of the student’s potential.” In developing this policy, I am working to support student success within the program. Now that I understand this specific need within this program to create a better program for teachers and students indicating testing readiness, I am morally and ethically obligated to implement it in order to provide greater support to the students I serve. This policy is right for students. In some cases, teachers may want to bypass this policy in order to send their students to test more quickly. I will need to address that to ensure they understand that this will improve the students’ chances for test success and it is truly in the best interest of our students.

Implications for Staff and Community Relationships

Whenever a “new” policy or procedure is implemented, there seems to be a period of time in which some teachers and staff support it and others oppose it. This is one of those policies that could face some resistance since it involves having teachers participate in additional staff development to gain a clearer understanding of it and their responsibilities toward supporting it. It may look like “another responsibility” for teachers to assume on what appears to be a tremendous workload already. I do believe however, that once I share data from the initial evaluation with teachers and justify the need for this additional test readiness step, most teachers will readily support it. The
positive relationships between my district office and the offices of the community school administrators are instrumental in the support I receive in moving this policy forward. I do feel the trust is present and as I justify the need for such a policy it will be supported.

I recognize the need for the CSA’s to openly share the data that has been discovered through this evaluation to justify the need for this policy. That relationship between the administrators and their staff is critical. Teachers must have the freedom to speak freely regarding any issues they see pertaining to this new policy or any stumbling blocks they may experience. Throughout the implementation of this new policy, there will need to be continued relationships involving trust and openness so everyone involved can help mold this policy’s transition from inception to commonplace.

Above and beyond the staff implications of this policy is the community response. It is my feeling that the community would deem this policy as an effective strategy in support of student success and would embrace it. If students are continuously successful in the program it means more students in the community will possess a high school credential. The community provides tremendous support of the Southeast District’s program and if instances arise after the implementation of this new policy that needs community support, I am quite certain they would advocate for our program,

Implications for Other Stakeholders

Within the development of this new policy requiring two aspects of test readiness prior to student testing, other stakeholders may be impacted. In many cases, students are required to test as a requirement for their job or for admission purposes into the military, post-secondary educational institutions, or other fields of employment. The development of this policy may directly impact them and the timelines within their lives. When
situations such as those arise, it will be necessary for staff to use good judgement so cases like that do not create complications for them. This policy has the intention of working to support the students allowing them to be better prepared to test and should not come across as punitive for those who may need to expedite their testing and not create an additional barrier for them. Throughout the implementation of this new policy and the staff development that will accompany it, the underlying theme will be to assure that it is received as something beneficial for the students and should never become a concern.

Conclusion

Among the many findings within this project, I was successfully able to identify a true need of the students in helping them become test ready. The implementation of this policy will directly support a formalized process of assuring that not only do the students understand the content in which they will be held accountable, but will also have a clear understanding of the GED® test and its layout prior to testing. It is with this policy the program will best support the students as they prepare to test and ultimately improve student success rates in the successful completion of the GED® programs and tests they sit for.
SECTION EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Introduction

The timing was right for an evaluation project within the GED® program at Southeast District. With a change to the GED® test and an uncertainty among district leaders and classroom teachers regarding the effective transition to a “new” program, implementing this project has provided tremendous insight to the current state of the program and opportunities for future growth. Unlike many of the assessment tests used in K12 that experience regular changes in testing standards and procedures, the GED® has been relatively stable and unchanged. This consistency has allowed for classroom programs to become very focused to the specificity of the test. With a new test in 2014, came the need to change the programs that serve it. This was the purpose for this project.

Discussion

The program evaluation project was deemed very positive within the organization. I felt I was able to reach every level of stakeholder within the GED® program and provide a formal process of hearing what many had to say. Through my planning and implementation of the process to include the National Louis University and school district IRRB processes, I learned the methodologies and legalities of a formal research process.

Within the findings of the evaluation aspect of this project I identified various opportunities to create change at the district level. I also identified seven key areas that need to be addressed. I appreciate having this study be the catalyst for such change as I will be able to generate the initial conversations in regard to the specific outcomes of this project. The ability to support change was easy since the recommendations for change
have come directly from the vested stakeholders and not necessarily a mandate from the district office. My ability to have an understanding of each stakeholder’s position allowed a simple transition to take the program from where it was to where it should be.

Following the implementation of the evaluation aspect within this project was the change piece. In recognizing the need for change by identifying specifically where I wanted the organization to be, I identified the areas needing the most improvement. I concluded with a specific list of findings that led to areas of change and to the development of a specific plan to improve student readiness for the GED® test. Through the various data points and having gained a clear understanding of a gap between what the students knew about the GED® test and what the teachers thought the students knew of the GED® test, I identified a need for a process to assure students clearly understood two critical points prior to testing. Students need to be academically prepared for testing and they need a clear understanding of the test layout and the process of the testing center. I believe that identifying this need was critical and developing a plan to address it was a critical intervention of this project. Creating a plan for change in helping to meet the needs of the students became a focal point of this project.

Once this project became finely tuned to the point of identifying one specific area to incorporate a specific policy, I recognized the true value in it. Just as I worked to develop a policy requiring students to show a level of competence in understanding the GED® test and proving test readiness, I realized that I could do the same with several of the other findings. The process of identifying needs, evaluating the current state of the program, looking ahead to where the program could be and considering specific policies to get there, is now a productive system within my own professional practice of being a
change leader. The one policy I have created can potentially serve as a procedural example on how to continue working to create an improved GED® program and produce more successful students within it. The goals that were identified earlier in this project focused on creating a more aligned program and testing center to assist students with meeting the standards of the 2014 GED® test. The findings of the evaluation project, the creation of a change plan to develop a new program and the development of a new policy for creating a more aligned program, all support the best interests of the students.

**Leadership Lessons**

The leadership lessons I have experienced through this process have been life changing for me as a district level administrator. So often within the confines of my job, I recognize the need to address obstacles by making immediate decisions. Never before had I taken the time to implement a process to formally evaluate a program, understand the meanings of its findings, involve all necessary stakeholders, consider a plan for change, incorporate the many implications involved in change and work through a policy to make it all happen. This experience has allowed me the opportunity to explore the type of leader I am, the relevance of hearing from everyone involved and the ability to feel positive about pulling all the staff together to be a part of something big.

Throughout the process of diving deep into the data provided by surveys and interviews, I learned many things about my staff. From those who had many concerns to those who did not say anything. Even gaining a clearer understanding that several staff members would not participate was telling. Speaking to teachers instead of administrators about their programs was eye opening. It made me realize that even though my own career path has taken me out of the day to day functions of the
classrooms, I truly do not know what is happening in them unless I consult with the teachers. What I hear from my administrators is not always accurate.

I learned that staff likes to be involved. I learned that a controlled process in which all stakeholders have the ability to contribute will be accepted more readily. I learned that as the leader, I don’t always have to have the answers but can be more effective when I know what the concerns are among faculty and staff. I also learned that an organized process validates the effort and helps others recognize the responsibility of student improvement is everyone’s responsibility.

**Conclusion**

The implementation of the 2014 GED® test has resulted in a complete overhaul to the GED® program and testing center in Southeast District and the nation. Like many standardized assessments, programs are developed around how to best prepare students for them. When changes occur to the test, the needs of the GED® preparation programs change. This dissertation project has allowed for the opportunity to invite all stakeholders within the district who are involved regularly with the GED® program and testing center, to contribute in developing positive growth and higher student performance on the test.

Through the findings within this project, several needs and/or concerns have been identified and may be addressed in the future. This project has allowed me to identify the current state of the district in response to the changes of the GED® test and the programs accompanying it. It is my intention to address those areas that can be improved and develop a plan for change to meet our program’s needs. Throughout the course of this project, I have recognized the contributions of every stakeholder and valued their input.
As the director over the program, I anticipated the exposure of various needs and knew this would benefit me and this district greatly in gaining a clearer understanding of them. I was also elated to find a high volume of very positive responses about the good things happening each day in the classrooms and testing center.

After having identified many areas of improvement within this program through the working on this project, I developed a new policy that would help students become more test-ready. The implementation of a new policy derived from this project has tremendous credibility since this process has been comprehensive and encompassed numerous stakeholders. This project has led to a specific policy that is right for students. It will become a fixture of the GED® program with Southeast District and may also benefit other districts as well.

I will use the data from this project to create a better program for our students and staff while utilizing many of the same processes in evaluating other aspects of the program. I look forward to these improvements leading to greater student success in classrooms, higher passing rates in the testing center and more graduates populating our community. This project is monumental in this program’s continuous improvement and I’m fortunate to have had this experience.
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Appendix A: Survey Direction Sheet - (GED Students)

The “New” GED 2014

• The survey you about to take should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete and you will not place your name on it (nobody will be able to identify you.)

• The purpose of this survey is to get your opinion on the GED Test and classroom programs to help improve student success in the future.

• Participating in this survey is voluntary.

• Your honesty is appreciated.

• Once you have completed the survey, your answer sheet will be sealed in an envelope and opened only by the individual conducting the survey.

• Thank you for your participation!
Appendix B: Survey (GED Classroom Adult Students)

The “New” GED 2014

The purpose of this survey is to gather information on your perceptions regarding the 2014 GED so the Department of Adult Education can work toward improving students’ success on it. You will not be identified by name and the information you provide is confidential. Please be honest with your answers.

Question 1: What is your age? __________

Question 2: Please indicate your race/ethnicity (check one):

_____ Hispanic/Latino
_____ American Indian or Alaskan Native
_____ Asian
_____ Black/African American
_____ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
_____ White

Question 3: What is your gender? (circle one) Male or Female

Question 4: On a scale of 1-9, how do you feel your teacher is doing preparing you for the GED test? (circle one)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Not Good OK Very Good

Question 5: On a scale of 1-9, how do you feel your class materials (textbooks, workbooks, online programs etc...) are preparing you for the GED test? (circle one)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Not Good OK Very Good

Question 6: On a scale of 1-9, how much do you know about the GED test? (circle one)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Know Little Know Some Know A Lot

Question 7: On a scale of 1-9, how much do you know about the GED test layout? (circle one)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Know Little Know Some Know A Lot

Question 8: On a scale of 1-9, how much do you know about what you need to score in order to pass the GED test? (circle one)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Know Little Know Some Know A Lot
Question 9: What would you say is the best thing you are doing in your classes to help you prepare for the GED test?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________.

Thank you for providing this feedback so we may be able to improve our program!
Appendix C: Participant Consent Form – Adult Student

The “New” GED 2014

GED Students/Testers for Interview or Survey
(Must be 18 Years of Age)

My name is Marc Hutek, and I am a doctoral student at National Louis University. I am asking for your consent to voluntarily participate in my dissertation project. The study is entitled: Evaluating Implementation of the New GED 2014 Test in Southeast District Schools. The purpose of the study is to understand the impacts of the newly released GED 2014 test regarding student success rates. I am also attempting to discover the perceptions of the new GED 2014 test by GED students or those having just completed their GED testing, and any ideas they have in improving the GED program in order to attain greater student success in the future.

My project will address the programs of preparing students for the GED test and acquiring feedback following student participation in taking the test. Current GED students 18 years of age and older will be invited to participate. Individuals exiting the GED test 18 years of age and older will also be invited to participate. I will use the data I collect to understand the impacts the newly released GED 2014 has had on the student success rates compared to previous years as well as comparable districts across the state, the state and national performance rates. I will also obtain data from current GED students and exiting testers to learn what appears to be working well within the GED program and learn of any ideas for improving it. I will conduct surveys and interviews by voluntary participants in regards to their thoughts on the implementation of the new 2014 GED test, the district program currently preparing students for it, and the GED testing center program and process.

You may participate in this study by signing this Consent form indicating that you understand the purpose of the interviews and/or survey and agree to participate. Surveys and interviews are intended to take no longer than 10 minutes. All information collected in the interview or survey reflects your experience and opinion as a GED student or exiting GED tester at least 18 years of age. Surveys may be electronic or written and I will audio tape interviews.

Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue your participation at any time. I will keep the identity of the school and all participants confidential, as it will not be attached to the data and I will use pseudonyms for all participants. Only I will have access to all the interview tapes and transcripts, and field notes, which I will keep in a locked cabinet at my home and on a password protected hard drive, to which only I have access. Participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk beyond that of everyday life. While you are likely to not have any direct benefit from being in this research study, your taking part in this study may contribute to our better understanding of the impacts of the new GED 2014 test and what changes, if any, need to be made to the GED program within the district to ensure greater student success.

While the results of this study may be published or otherwise reported to scientific bodies, your identity will in no way be revealed. You may request a copy of this completed study by contacting me at mhutek@my.nl.edu.

In the event you have questions or require additional information, you may contact me at: email mhutek@my.nl.edu. If you have any concerns of questions before or during participation that you feel I have not addressed, you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Carol A. Burg, email: cburg@nl.edu; or EDL Program Chair (Dr. Norm Weston, NWeston@nl.edu, 224.233.2287; or the NLU’s Institutional Research Review Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth, NLU IRRB Chair, shaunti.knauth@nl.edu, 224.233.2328, National Louis University IRRB Board, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60603.

Thank you for your participation.

_____________________________________
Student/Tester Name (please print)
__________________________________    _______________
Student/Tester Signature                     Date
Appendix D: Interview Questions (GED Students)

The “New” GED 2014

1. What do you know about the 2014 GED test that you feel is positive...or that you like about it?

2. What are your overall perceptions or thoughts on the new GED 2014 test?

3. Is there anything else about the New GED 2014 that you would like to share with me today?
Appendix E: Interview Direction Sheet – (GED Students)

“New” GED 2014

• The interview you about to participate in should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete and you will not be identified by name (nobody will be able to identify you.)

• The purpose of this interview is to get your opinion on the GED Test and classroom programs to help improve student success in the future.

• Participating in this interview is voluntary.

• Your honesty is appreciated.

• Thank you for your participation!
Appendix F: Survey Direction Sheet – (GED Teachers)

The “New” GED 2014

• The survey you about to take should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete and you will not place your name on it (nobody will be able to identify you.)

• The purpose of this survey is to get your opinion on the GED Test and classroom programs to help improve student success in the future.

• Participating in this survey is voluntary.

• Your honesty is appreciated.

• Once you have completed the survey, your answer sheet will be sealed in an envelope and opened only by the individual conducting the survey.

• Thank you for your participation!
Appendix G: Participant Consent Form – School District Staff

The “New” GED 2014

School District Staff Interview/Survey

My name is Marc Hutek, and I am a doctoral student at National Louis University. I am asking for your consent to voluntarily participate in my dissertation project. The study is entitled: Evaluating Implementation of the New GED 2014 Test in Southeast District Schools. The purpose of the study is to understand the impacts of the newly released GED 2014 test regarding student success rates. I am also attempting to discover the perceptions of the new GED 2014 test by school district staff and any ideas they have in improving the GED program to attain greater student success in the future.

My project will address the programs of preparing students for the GED test and acquiring feedback following student participation in taking the test. I will use the data I collect to understand the impacts the newly released GED 2014 has had on the student success rates compared to previous years as well as comparable districts across the state, the state and national performance rates. I will conduct surveys and interviews by voluntary participants in regard to their thoughts on the implementation of the new 2014 GED test and the district program currently preparing students for it.

You may participate in this study by signing this Consent form indicating that you understand the purpose of the interviews and/or survey and agree to participate. Surveys and interviews are intended to take no longer than 10-15 minutes. All information collected in the interview or survey reflects your experience and opinion as a school district staff member. Surveys may be electronic or written and I will audio tape the interviews and transcribe the tapes.

Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue your participation at any time. I will keep the identity of the school and all participants confidential, as it will not be attached to the data and I will use pseudonyms for all participants. Only I will have access to all the interview tapes and transcripts, and field notes, which I will keep in a locked cabinet at my home and on a password protected hard drive, to which only I have access. Participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk beyond that of everyday life. While you are likely to not have any direct benefit from being in this research study, your taking part in this study may contribute to our better understanding of the impacts of the new GED 2014 test and what changes, if any, need to be made to the GED program within the district to ensure greater student success.

While the results of this study may be published or otherwise reported to scientific bodies, your identity will in no way be revealed. You may request a copy of this completed study by contacting me at mhutek@my.nl.edu.

In the event you have questions or require additional information, you may contact me at: email mhutek@my.nl.edu. If you have any concerns of questions before or during participation that you feel I have not addressed, you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Carol A. Burg, email: cburg@nl.edu; or EDL Program Chair (Dr. Norm Weston, NWeston@nl.edu, 224.233.2287; or the NLU’s Institutional Research Review Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth, NLU IRRB Chair, shaunti.knauth@nl.edu, 224.233.2328, National Louis University IRRB Board, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60603.

Thank you for your participation.

_______________________________________
Staff Member Name (please print)

__________________________________    ______________
Staff Member Signature                                   Date

Marc Hutek
Researcher Name

_______________________________________
Researcher Signature                                     Date
Appendix H: Survey (GED Teachers)

The “New” GED 2014

The purpose of this survey is to gather information on your perceptions regarding the 2014 GED test so the Department of Adult Education can work toward improving students’ success on it. You will not be identified by name and the information you provide is confidential. Please be honest with your answers.

Question 1: As a GED teacher what do you feel is working well in the GED program in preparing your students for the GED test?

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

Question 2: Do you think your students feel they are being adequately prepared for the GED test? Why? Might be

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

Please share any other thoughts you may have on the New GED, here:

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

Thank you for providing this feedback so we may be able to improve our program!
Appendix I: Interview Direction Sheet – (GED Teachers)

The “New” GED 2014

• The interview you about to participate in should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete and you will not be identified by name (nobody will be able to identify you.)

• The purpose of this interview is to get your opinion on the GED Test and classroom programs to help improve your students’ success in the future.

• Participating in this interview is voluntary.

• Your honesty is appreciated.

• Thank you for your participation!
Appendix J: Interview Questions (GED Teachers)

The “New” GED 2014

1. What do you know about the 2014 GED test that you feel is positive...or that you like about it?

2. Do you feel you have the necessary resources and/or support to prepare your students for the GED test?

3. What are your overall perceptions or thoughts on the new GED 2014 test?

4. Is there anything else about the New GED 2014 that you would like to share with me today?
Appendix K: Survey (Exiting GED Testers)

The “New” GED 2014

The purpose of this survey is to gather information on your perceptions regarding the 2014 GED so the Department of Adult Education can work toward improving students' success on it. You will not be identified by name and the information you provide is confidential. Please be honest with your answers.

Question 1: What is your age? ________

Question 2: Please indicate your race/ethnicity (check one):
   ___ Hispanic/Latino
   ___ American Indian or Alaskan Native
   ___ Asian
   ___ Black/African American
   ___ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   ___ White

Question 3: What is your gender? (circle one) Male  or  Female

Question 4: Did you attend GED classes recently in Southeast District to prepare for the GED? (check one) ___Yes ___No

Question 5: If you did not attend classes in Southeast District disregard this question. Otherwise, on a scale of 1-9 please rate how well your teacher did to prepare you for the GED? (circle one)

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9
   Bad teacher  OK Teacher  Great Teacher

Question 6: On a scale of 1-9 how prepared did you feel prior to testing? (circle one)

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9
   Not Prepared  Somewhat Prepared  Very Prepared

Question 7: On a scale of 1-9 how hard did you feel the GED test was? (circle one)

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9
   Easy  OK  Very Hard
Question 8: Are there any comments or feedback you would like to provide regarding Southeast District’s Adult Education classes, the GED testing center or the GED test in general?

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

_______________

Thank you for providing this feedback so we may be able to improve our program!
Appendix L: Interview Questions (Exiting GED Testers)

The “New” GED 2014
1. After having just taken the 2014 GED test, was there anything positive that you liked about it?
2. What are your overall perceptions or thoughts on the new GED 2014 test?
3. Is there anything else about the New GED 2014 that you would like to share with me today?
Appendix M: Survey (School Administrators)

The “New” GED 2014

The purpose of this survey is to gather information on your perceptions regarding the 2014 GED so the Department of Adult Education can work toward improving students’ success. You will not be identified by name and the information you provide is confidential. Please be honest with your answers. There is room on the second page for additional answers if needed.

Question 1: As a program administrator what do you feel is working well in the GED program in preparing your teachers and/or students for the GED test?

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

Question 2: Do you think your students feel they are being adequately prepared for the GED test? Why?

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

Please share any other thoughts you may have on the New GED, here:

Thank you for providing this feedback so we may be able to improve our program!
Appendix N: Interview Questions (School Administrators)

The “New” GED 2014

1. What do you know about the 2014 GED test that you feel is positive that you like about it?
2. Do you feel your teachers and/or students have the necessary resources in preparing for the GED test?
3. What are your overall perceptions or thoughts on the new GED 2014 test?
4. Is there anything else about the New GED 2014 that you would like to share with me today?
Appendix O: Interview Questions (GED Testing Center Staff)

The “New” GED 2014

1. What do you know about the 2014 GED test that you feel is positive...or that you like about it?

2. Do you feel you have the necessary resources in administering the GED test on behalf of the district?

3. What are your overall perceptions or thoughts on the new GED 2014 test?

4. Is there anything else about the New GED 2014 that you would like to share with me today?
Appendix P: Interview Questions (District Staff)

The “New” GED 2014

1. What do you know about the 2014 GED test that you feel is positive...or that you like about it?

2. What are your overall perceptions or thoughts regarding the district's GED program?

3. Is there anything else about the New GED 2014 that you would like to share with me today?
Appendix Q: As Is 4 C’s Analysis for Improving the GED Program

Context
- Teachers/testing staff are unaware of student concerns
- Students are unaware of test layout
- Disconnect between what’s being taught and what’s on test

Culture
- Teachers know what’s best
- Students do what they’re told
- Testing center does not recognize issues

Competencies
- Teachers unaware of test items and layout
- Misunderstanding of appropriate utilization of resources
- Misunderstanding of likeness of practice test to the real test

Conditions
- Classrooms work autonomously
- Inconsistent programs across the district for test prep

There are multiple student concerns regarding the GED classrooms and testing center

Baseline AS IS 4 C’s Analysis for Improving the GED Program
Appendix R: To Be 4 C’s Analysis for Improving the GED Program

Context
- Teachers/testing staff are aware of student concerns
- Students are taught test layout
- Students are accurately taught what to expect on test

Culture
- Teachers listen to students in determining program needs
- Students help develop their educational plan
- Testing center identifies and corrects student

Competencies
- Teacher aware of test items and layout
- Teachers fully aware of resources available
- Inconsistencies between practice test and official test are recognized

Conditions
- Classrooms work on aligned curriculum
- Test preparation programs are consistent
- Test center distractions are identified and corrected

Student concerns regarding the GED classrooms and testing center are addressed

Vision TO BE 4 C’s Analysis for Improving the GED Program
### Appendix S: Seven Areas of Need with Goals, Strategies, and Actions

#### Seven Areas of Need with Goals, Strategies, and Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area 1</th>
<th>Goal:</th>
<th>Strategies:</th>
<th>Actions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assure faculty and staff have a clear understanding of GED test content and layout so students gain a clear understanding of each and can be evaluated for test readiness.</td>
<td>• Evaluate faculty and staff regarding an understanding of the GED test content and layout. &lt;br&gt;• Implement a process to assure all faculty and staff have met a level of “test readiness” in their understanding of it. &lt;br&gt;• Provide a training to students targeting the test layout and competencies involved. &lt;br&gt;• Lead students to a successful understanding of the test layout and understanding of its content.</td>
<td>• Implement a staff development program addressing the needs identified in understanding the GED test and content. &lt;br&gt;• Develop an evaluation of “test readiness” for staff to assure they clearly understand it. &lt;br&gt;• Develop an assessment for students evaluating their test readiness. &lt;br&gt;• Implement a procedure assuring student understanding and competency before permission to test is granted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area 2</th>
<th>Goal:</th>
<th>Strategies:</th>
<th>Actions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assure software programs and curriculum materials are appropriately aligned and being utilized to support new GED test standards; meet the needs of faculty and students.</td>
<td>• Conduct content reviews of curriculum materials by content experts. &lt;br&gt;• Conduct product “evaluations” by teachers and students.</td>
<td>• Identify list of all curriculum materials used in classrooms and have each reviewed for content alignment. &lt;br&gt;• Develop evaluation questionnaires for teachers and students regarding each product used in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area 3
Goal:
Minimize multi-level instructional classrooms.

Strategies:
- Identify a district policy on the utilization of multi-level scheduling within classrooms.
- Have school administrators and district staff to regularly review master schedules to identify classrooms exceeding multi-level limits.
- Assure teachers are skilled to work with multi-level classrooms.

Actions:
- Conduct a professional development opportunity for administrators to align to district policy on multi-level classrooms.
- Provide opportunities through the year for schools to correct inappropriately scheduled classrooms.
- Implement professional development targeting multi-level instruction.

Area 4
Goal:
Provide computer access to all students off campus for utilizing online resources.

Strategies:
- Identify the need by the students.
- Develop an implementation plan to provide computers to students and costs involved.
- Work to obtain funds to implement program.

Actions:
- Conduct a survey of students regarding home computer access.
- Identify specific costs for each student to gain computer access.
- Identify budget funds available to use in support of this initiative and look to other sources for additional needed funds.

Area 5
Goal:
Allow the community a clear understanding of local testing requirements.

Strategies:
- Develop a message that clarifies GED testing requirements.
- Conduct random evaluations throughout the community to identify level of knowledge of policy.

Actions:
- Market the message through mass communications means and social media.
- Continue educating the community on testing requirements.
**Area 6**  
**Goal:**  
Assure unsuccessful testers remain on track to continue remediation and future testing.  

**Strategies:**  
- Identify appropriate students to track following their testing experience.  
- Implement a plan to contact them at various points following their testing experience and work to assuring they continue working toward successful completion.  

**Actions:**  
- Create a spreadsheet of students who will be targeted.  
- Create a timeline for contact once students are identified and call them for follow-up. Become a “success coach” for students and work to motivating them toward continued efforts.  

**Area 7**  
**Goal:**  
Provide faculty and staff with administrative support.  

**Strategies:**  
- Evaluate faculty and staff regarding level of perceived support and needs.  
- Compile a list of needs.  
- Target need areas and reevaluate needs.  

**Actions:**  
- Allow anonymous surveys to be conducted by staff regarding administrative support and needs.  
- Recognize needs and identify means to address the needs.  
- Continue process to evaluate support needs and respond by providing necessary appropriate support.