# 

# Virginia Department of Education Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education

## Request for Application (RFA)

Issue Date: October 2, 2023

Title: High School Equivalency (HSE) Examination Provider

Issuing Agency: Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)

Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education

James Monroe Building

101 North 14th Street, 21st Floor

Richmond, Virginia 23219

**RESPONSES DUE: 2 p.m., ET on Thursday, November 16, 2023**

Applications arriving after this deadline will not be considered in this application period. If using a delivery service, the Virginia Department of Education assumes no responsibility for failure by the service to deliver applications by the published deadline.

Provide one (1) original and five (5) printed copies of the RFA with responses, including all attachments the respondent chooses to append. Any proprietary information should be clearly marked. ***RESPONSES SHOULD BE MAILED DIRECTLY TO THE ISSUING AGENCY SHOWN ABOVE.***

In addition, the applicant must provide an electronic copy to [OAEL@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:OAEL@doe.virginia.gov) by the same due date. This one (1) electronic copy must be in Microsoft Word format or searchable Adobe PDF of the entire response, including all attachments.

### **Part I. General Instructions**

1. This application shall be signed by an authorized representative of the HSE examination provider. All information requested must be submitted for evaluative purposes.
2. Responses should emphasize completeness and clarity of content when answering RFA prompts. Responses to each prompt in the RFA should provide a straightforward, concise description of capabilities to satisfy the VDOE’s *High School Equivalency Examination Guidelines* (*Guidelines*). To download VDOE’s *Guidelines*, scroll down to the bottom of the VDOE [HSE webpage](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/adulted/ged/index.shtml).
3. Responses should be organized in the order in which the requirements are presented in the RFA. Number all pages.
4. Any additional information which the respondent desires to present, but is not specifically requested, should be limited in quantity and referred to only as confirmation of the response given for each prompt. These materials should be attached at the end of the application and designated as “Additional Material.” Make specific reference in your response (i.e., document and page number) to anything contained in this section which will confirm the written response provided. **NOTE: Providing only a reference to a specific document and page number in the “Additional Material” section will not be considered an acceptable response to an RFA prompt.** The External Evaluation Committee members are not required to read the “Additional Material” section.
5. Each copy of the application should be bound and contained in a single volume, including all attachments the respondent chooses to append as “Additional Material.”
6. Ownership of all data, materials, and documentation originated and prepared for this RFA shall belong exclusively to the State and be subject to public inspection in accordance with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).
7. All inquiries for information or clarification about the RFA or the RFA process should be directed to Dr. Beverly Godwin, Specialist for High School Equivalency, at [OAEL@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:OAEL@doe.virginia.gov) or by telephone at (804) 887-3306 no later than five business days before the response closing date.

### **Part II. Applicant Affidavit**

HSE Vendor:

Primary Contact Person:

Title:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Telephone:       FAX:

Email Address:

Printed Name:

Signature:       Date:

**Certification**

I,      , certify that the information contained in, and attached to, this application is true and correct to the best of my knowledge. If changes occur in the operation or ownership of the testing program, I further certify that I will notify the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, prior to or immediately following such changes. If the HSE examination our company provides is approved, I understand that providing false, misleading, or incomplete information or failing to notify the VDOE, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, of changes as they occur may result in the removal of the entity from the list of approved HSE examinations as provided for in the *High School Equivalency Examination Guidelines for Virginia*.

Signature of Authorized Official: Date:

Title

### **Part III. Purpose**

The *Code of Virginia* § 22.1-254.2 states that “The Board of Education shall establish a program of testing for high school equivalency through which a person may pass a high school equivalency examination approved by the Board of Education through which persons may earn a high school equivalency certificate or may earn a diploma as provided in subsection F of § 22.1-253.13:4.” This *Code* allows the Board of Education (Board) to approve an HSE examination(s), as well as set the standards for determining which examination(s) to approve; thus, any HSE examination(s) meeting the standards set forth in VDOE’s *Guidelines,* which was approved and accepted by the Board on September 10, 2015, and revisions approved and accepted on September 22, 2016, may become an approved HSE examination provider in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Applications will be reviewed by an External Evaluation Committee selected by the VDOE, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. Membership on this committee will consist of professionals who have expertise in curriculum, instruction, assessment and accountability, adult education, and/or postsecondary education. The applications will be reviewed based on the completed responses to the RFA and how these responses align to satisfy each of VDOE’s *Guidelines*. This evaluation committee will prepare a report within 65 business days of the close of the application period for the VDOE administration.

The HSE vendor(s) will receive official notification of approval or denial by mail within 80 business days of the close of the application period. Currently, the GED® test is the only approved HSE examination in Virginia through June 30, 2026. Actual implementation of any additional HSE examination(s) approved in this application period will begin July 1, 2024.

If an HSE examination is approved for use in Virginia, the approval will remain in effect for five years. The vendor whose examination is not approved may reapply during an open application period as set by the VDOE, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education.

The approved HSE vendor(s) will comply with all of the criteria listed within VDOE’s *Guidelines*. If a vendor, once approved, does not comply, the VDOE has the right to remove the HSE vendor from the list of vendors approved to administer an HSE examination in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

### **Part IV. Information Required**

Information required for this application is divided into four major subheadings, as described in VDOE’s *Guidelines*:

1. Quality of the HSE Examination
2. Accessibility of the HSE Examination
3. Administration of the HSE Examination
4. Vendor Quality

All vendors seeking approval of their HSE examinations to be administered in Virginia shall meet all of VDOE’s [*Guidelines*](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/adulted/ged/index.shtml). **Applicants should** **refer to the RFA prompts and VDOE’s *Guidelines* as they prepare responses for this application, ensuring that the information provided is as thorough and detailed as possible in order to provide sufficient evidence the External Evaluation Committee needs to determine if each standard has been met or satisfied.**

#### **Quality of the HSE Examination**

1. **Alignment**

The vendor must provide evidence from a third party evaluator (one who is not affiliated either directly or indirectly with the test development of the HSE examination that you provide) that the HSE examination is aligned to the *College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) for Adult Education* and also aligned to the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) for high school English, Grade 8 Mathematics, Algebra I, and Geometry. Provide a copy of the two alignment studies conducted within the last 5 years that have addressed the alignment of CCRS and Virginia SOL to the HSE examination. The studies should include a description of who conducted the study, procedures, participants, timeline, and results.

1. **Rigor of test**

Evaluate the rigor of your HSE examination by including the following information.

1. Provide detailed, empirical evidence that the HSE examination meets or exceeds the most recent content and technical standards established by the 2014 edition of the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (SEPT), a product of the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association (APA), and the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME). Evidence should include a description of participants, timeframe, procedures, and results.
2. Provide evidence that 80 percent of the HSE examination includes items using Depth of Knowledge Levels 2 and 3. Evidence should include a description of participants, timeframe, procedures, and results.
3. Provide evidence that the HSE examination will measure test takers’ skills in interpreting, analyzing, reasoning, and problem solving, as appropriate for the subject and standard. Evidence should include a description of participants, timeframe, procedures, and results.
4. **Test Development: Initial and Future**

What were the guiding principles in developing the HSE examination? How was the test developed for demonstrating high school equivalent knowledge and skills? Describe the manner in which test items were constructed and selected for the examination. What content areas are covered? What plans are established for future development, updates, or improvements to the examination? Be sure to include the following in your response:

1. Evidence that the HSE examination’s design process is based on the SEPT.
2. A description of the plan for reviewing and updating the question pool, including procedures and timeframe.
3. **Reliability of Test**

What is the consistency and stability of the HSE examination and the plan to maintain reliability over time? Include the following:

1. Results of the most current reliability studies to show both the consistency and stability of HSE examination scores. The summary should include participants, procedures, and results.
2. A description of the psychometrics used to determine reliability.
3. A description of the plan to maintain reliability over time.
4. **Validity of Test**

Provide evidence that the inferences drawn from HSE scores are valid. Include in the evidence participants, procedures, and results. Describe plans to maintain adequate evidence for validity over time. Include the following:

1. Results of the most current validity studies to show that the HSE examination measures what it intends to measure.
2. A description of the psychometrics used to determine validity.
3. A description of the plan to maintain and measure validity over time.
4. **Norming of Test**

How was the norming process completed before releasing the test for administration? When was the most recent norming study completed? What are your plans for future norming studies? Include the following:

1. A description of the norming study conducted with graduating high school seniors within the last two years of test development. Include participant characteristics and sampling.
2. Evidence that the norming study was conducted in accordance with the SEPT.
3. A description of your plan for future norming studies, for both new test items and for overall HSE examination norming, to ensure that the set cut scores on the HSE examination remain consistent with high school completion requirements.
4. **Cut Scores**

Provide the rationale used to determine cut scores. Describe the procedures for determining cut scores, including the standard-setting methodology, description of participants, timeframe, and specific data regarding percentages of false positives and false negatives. Provide evidence that a minimum of two cut scores have been identified, one for high school equivalency and another for college and career readiness.

1. **Test Forms: Sections**

Indicate the number of test forms for each subject tested. Include the following:

1. A description of the process for providing a minimum of three English language HSE examination forms each year.
2. A description of the process for providing the HSE examination in other languages. What other languages are offered? How many test forms are available in other languages?
3. Evidence that the HSE examination contains subtests in the areas of writing, reading, mathematics, science, and social studies.
4. **Test Security**

Identify security protocols at the local and state level. Include the following:

1. A summary of procedures that ensure the security and integrity of the HSE examination, taking into consideration local testing centers’ capabilities.
2. A summary of procedures that ensure the security and integrity of the HSE examination if an online proctored (OP) test is offered.
3. A description of how the computer-based HSE examination is secure on the Internet and accessible by testing administrators only, whether at an in-person testing center or for OP testing, if applicable).
4. A description of testing procedures for addressing testing irregularities that occur during testing administration, whether in an in-person testing center or an OP testing situation, if applicable.
5. A description of procedures for addressing national, state, or local breaches in security with the HSE examination and how breaches will be addressed.
6. A description of procedures for informing the VDOE and local testing centers of any problem concerning test security, including a resolution process.
7. **Official Practice Tests (OPT)**

What OPTs are available? What is the method of delivery and the scoring procedures for the OPTs? Are the official practice tests diagnostic in nature? What are their reliability and validity, showing alignment to the operational test? What is the OPT’s predictive value? Include the following:

1. Differentiate between OPTs and any other practice tests that might be available.
2. Evidence of a minimum of three English language OPT forms. Also, include other languages offered, if applicable, and the number of OPT forms available.
3. Empirical evidence that the OPTs are aligned to the operational HSE examination and predictive of an examinee’s performance on the operational HSE examination.
4. A detailed description, or include a sample, of the diagnostic report from the OPTs that will assist the examinee in preparing for the HSE examination.
5. **Credibility/Recognition of Test Name**

Address the following:

* 1. Provide evidence that the HSE examination is nationally portable and broadly accepted by employers and postsecondary institutions.
  2. What plans are in place to increase its recognition to all stakeholders?

1. **Test Delivery: Computer-Based Testing (CBT) and Paper-Based Testing (PBT)**

Describe all methods of test delivery of the HSE examination, both CBT and PBT, to include how it relates to usability by correctional facilities; test security requirements; test center operational requirements; technology requirements; alignment, rigor, reliability, and validity for PBT. Include the following:

1. Evidence of test delivery that the HSE examination can be administered, whether as CBT, PBT, or OP.
2. Evidence that a downloadable CBT option is available for use by correctional facilities.
3. Evidence that the HSE vendor is equipped with the connectivity and computing capacity to handle a high volume of HSE examination data.
4. Evidence that the PBT meets the same standards as the CBT in alignment, rigor, reliability, and validity.
5. Evidence of how PBT examinations and related materials will be securely shipped to and from the test sites designated by the VDOE.
6. Evidence of procedures that will ensure a secure method of scoring the PBT.
7. Evidence of emergency preparation plans to offer continuity of testing services during a natural or public health disaster, i.e., OP testing.

#### **Accessibility of the HSE Examination**

1. **Registration Process**

Describe the process for all prospective examinees to register to take the HSE examination, including how the test taker pays for taking the HSE examination and accesses the customer support services available. Include the following:

1. A complete description of the registration process for the CBT, PBT, and OP testing (if applicable) including procedures for examinees needing accommodations and those in correctional facilities.
2. A description of the customer service supports available for the prospective examinee during the registration process if additional assistance is needed.

**2.** **Test Centers**

Describe the requirements and application process to become an in-person testing center. Include the following in your description:

* 1. Describe the process of how currently approved testing sites will be allowed to continue to operate for any HSE examination administered.
  2. Describe the process used to approve new testing centers that will administer the HSE examination.

1. **Cost**

What will be the cost for the HSE examination? Include the following:

1. Provide an explanation and justification of the HSE examination’s cost structure, including the pricing of services, and the costs to test taker, testing center, and the VDOE.
2. Indicate all costs for administering and scoring of the CBT, PBT, and OP testing, **if applicable.**
3. **Testing**

Testing entails how the test will be administered to the examinee, assuring the identity and eligibility of examinees before being allowed to test. Include the following:

1. Describe the scheduling of tests by a test taker for the first attempt, as well as retakes, for all methods of test delivery.
2. Describe what is required to authenticate a test taker’s identity and eligibility to test.
3. Detail the requirements to work with test takers under the age of 18 who are still enrolled in public education. Address how you will work with VDOE to ensure that only eligible students are allowed to take the HSE exam.
4. **Cancellations/No Shows**

Describe the cancellation policy. Are there any exceptions considered for a “No Show”? What is the rescheduling policy? Include the following:

1. Evidence of a clear policy on testing cancellations and how rescheduling of a test is allowed and the cost involved.
2. Evidence of policy or rules for exceptions if someone is a “No Show” to the testing center and how rescheduling of test is to occur.
3. **Retakes**

Provide a clear policy regarding when an examinee may retake the HSE examination. Describe your retake policy, to include the number of times a test taker can take the test in one year, cost, rescheduling tests, and the wait time between testing attempts.

1. **Accommodations**

Describe the extent to which the HSE examination complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADAA), as amended by the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, (Public Law 101-336, Sec. 36.309 Examinations and Courses). This includes the requirement that any private or public entity that offers examinations relating to certification or credentialing for secondary or postsecondary education shall offer such examination in a place and manner accessible to persons with disabilities or offer alternative arrangements for such individuals as special accommodations. What accommodations are available for CBT, PBT, and OP testing, if applicable? Describe the process and standards for approving test accommodation requests, the timeframe for approval, how the test taker will be notified of the decision, the appeals process, and who bears the cost of the accommodation. Include the following:

1. Evidence that the HSE examination offers alternative forms of delivery that accommodate those diagnosed with physical, mental, sensory, or cognitive disabilities. Confirm that the available accommodations are in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as Amended.
2. A description of the step-by-step process to request accommodations for examinees who are eligible for testing accommodations.
3. Identification of whose sole responsibility it will be for reviewing and approving examinees’ requests for accommodations.
4. Evidence that the validity of all allowable accommodations is supported and documented.
5. A description of the process for determining and providing appropriate assistive technology for eligible examinees.
6. A confirmation of how long it takes to complete the determination of accommodations approval process.
7. A description of the appeals process to those who have been denied accommodations.
8. **Scoring of Tests/Access to Scores**

Describe the scoring processes for both multiple choice and essays or constructed responses. In addition, address who scores the tests, the length of time to receive results, how results are reported, and access to scores, by both individuals and the state officials. Describe procedures for quality control and quality assurance to verify scoring results. Include the following:

1. A description on how scoring will occur.
2. A description of how and when scores will be available to the examinees and to the VDOE, regardless of test administration (CBT, PBT, or OP testing, if applicable).
3. Evidence of procedures for quality control and quality assurance to verify scoring results.
4. Evidence of what the score report will include and how this information will assist the examinee.
5. Explanation of how VDOE has electronic access to all examinees’ scores in the state.
6. **Suitability for Correctional Institutions and Local and Regional Jails**

How can the HSE examination be used by correctional facilities when considering accessibility to testing, technology required, and the registration process? Include the following:

1. Describe the extent to which the test is suited to the test-taking conditions and administrative needs of local and regional jails, the Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC), and the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).
2. Describe an alternative registration process for local and regional jails, the Virginia DOC, and the Virginia DJJ if their examinees cannot self-register.

#### **Administration of the HSE Examination**

1. **Technology**
2. Provide a complete description of the technology required to provide CBT at local testing centers and in correctional facilities, and OP testing, if applicable.
3. Provide statistical information on system uptime availability, security measures, downtime incidents, and back-up procedures.
4. **Data Management**

Describe the data management system available for the HSE examination, including the levels of access available, training required, availability of the data management system, and file updates. Include the following:

1. Confirmation that the vendor understands that all data, current and historical, is the intellectual property of VDOE.
2. Evidence of how the vendor will maintain all Personally Identifiable Information (PII) in accordance with Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), state privacy laws, and current [Virginia Information Security Standards (SEC 501-11.4)](https://www.vita.virginia.gov/it-governance/itrm-policies-standards/).
3. Evidence of a data management system that produces analysis of scores, statistical and demographic reports, and any other customized, generated reports required by the VDOE.
4. An explanation of when the data management system will be accessible to the VDOE.
5. A description of technical assistance available for the use of the data management system.
6. A description of the levels of access to the data management system in accordance with VDOE regulations.
7. A description of how files will be updated, as well as backup of files, in the database on a daily basis.
8. A description of the plan for how the vendor will maintain all necessary configurations and data for file restoration, if necessitated by loss of files.
9. **Training: Teachers, Staff, Administrators**

Describe what training on testing guidance will be required of and available to local testing centers, adult education teachers, examiners, local program administrators, and state staff. Who will approve testing administrators?

1. Describe the plan to provide professional development, as it relates to testing, to the state at all levels and the costs that would be involved with the implementation of the plan.
2. Describe the specific minimum qualifications for testing center personnel.
3. Describe the process to certify testing center personnel.
4. Provide test administration guidance and how this will be made available to each certified testing site.
5. **Transcripts/Certificates**

Describe all credentialing services available to test takers and the state HSE staff, including web-based credentialing services, that offer test takers the ability to order official transcripts and/or official HSE certificates online, turn-around time for credential attainment, access by state personnel, editing options, and customer support services. Include the following:

1. A description of the credentialing service that is used for the HSE examination. Include (1) their ability to maintain all current and historical records for VDOE; (2) how VDOE will receive all current and historical data returned if there is a cancellation or termination of services; (3) how they maintain all PII; and (4) how all data will be provided to the credentialing service from the vendor.
2. A description of any fees that the credentialing service may charge to provide copies of electronic and paper transcripts or certificates, including both initial credentialing documents and duplicate copies of credentials requested.
3. A description of the time frame once a request for a copy of a transcript or certificate is made.
4. A resolution process to address the concerns of a graduate who has requested a transcript or certificate and who has not received the document(s) ordered, or if no records are found by the credentialing service.
5. An explanation of how the official state certificate will be honored and issued to all graduates.
6. **Classroom Preparation Materials**

How can test takers prepare to take the HSE examination? Include the following:

1. Describe the HSE examination’s content, format, and scoring process.
2. Describe recommended study materials to prepare students to take the HSE examination.
3. **Collection of Testing Fees**

How are testing fees collected? Include the following:

1. Provide a process of how testing fees will be collected from all test takers.
2. Describe the monthly reconciliation procedures with testing centers for the disbursements of testing center fees.
3. Describe the process to allow state-supported adult education programs the opportunity to purchase testing vouchers.

#### **Vendor Quality**

1. **Vendor Experience with Large-Scale Assessment**

Provide evidence of your company’s experience in developing and administering large-scale, “high-stakes” testing.

1. **Technical Assistance for Testing Center Personnel**

Provide a technical assistance plan that will be made available to the state HSE staff and the local testing centers.

1. **Customer Service for Examinees**

How is customer service provided? Include the following:

1. Provide a comprehensive customer service plan as it relates to the test taker.
2. Explain the procedures for the state HSE staff to identify and communicate concerns of testing centers and examinees.
3. What processes are in place for the resolution of specific testing issues and complaints?
4. **Compliance**

State how your company will ensure compliance with all of the criteria listed within VDOE’s *Guidelines* if your HSE examination is approved for use in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

**Note: This public body does not discriminate against faith-based organizations in accordance with the *Code of Virginia*, § 2.2-4343.1 or against an applicant because of race, religion, color, sex, national origin, age, disability, or any other basis prohibited by state law relating to discrimination in employment.**