

# Butler Eagle

## Big changes arrive for GED

Test will meet core standards

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BUTLER TWP — Next month the GED test will be radically changed to align with national Common Core curriculum standards.

The five-section General Educational Development test, considered a high school diploma equivalent, will be converted into four sections: math, science, social studies, and language arts, a combination of the previous reading and writing sections.

The new test will be computer-based and will include fill-in-the-blank as well as multiple choice answers. There also will be an essay section.

The test now is all multiple choice and is taken with pencil and paper.

Because of this change, staff members at Butler County Community College's Adult Literacy Program have seen an influx of people wanting to complete the test before Jan. 1.

Some already have passed some of the section tests and are looking to take their last tests before the end of the year. Others simply want to complete the test before the changes are implemented.

“Everything goes to zero in January. Their scores are gone,” said Barb Gade, an education coordinator and instructor for the program.

Gade said the program's attendance rate of late has been the best in recent memory: 130 students have taken at least 12 hours of classes since July 1.

### 'That piece of paper'

On a chilly weekday afternoon, Mike Tatsch is hard at work in a BC3 computer lab, studying math concepts such as word problems, fractions and algebra problems.

With his salt-and-pepper hair tucked beneath a Pittsburgh Steelers baseball cap, he takes notes, trying to solve problems on a piece of scratch paper.

For several months he's been studying math concepts that many middle and high schoolers struggle with, let alone a man who's been out of school for 36 years.

Tatsch has been coming to BC3's Adult Literacy Program several days a week since March to prepare for the GED exam. He has passed four of the five sections he needs to earn the certificate, but without a high enough math score, he cannot earn the GED.

He's taken the math test unsuccessfully four times. If he doesn't pass it this month, he'll have to take the entire test over, even the sections he's already passed, because of the changes that begin next month.

"I need it. I really do," said Tatsch, 52, of Valencia, who's worked much of his adult life as a laborer and warehouse worker. He currently is unemployed.

He summed up his dire situation: "That piece of paper will stop you from getting anything until you get it."

His lack of a GED not only has limited his career opportunities, he said, but it's also made promotions and upward mobility in the workplace almost nonexistent.

That is the kind of story Deb McAllister, the adult literacy grants director at BC3, has heard over and over.

"We have seen an increased number of people who have been laid off," she said.

Although they may have been working a steady job without a GED certificate, "they cannot use those skills in another situation until they've made a minimum requirement of the GED," she said.

And earning the GED is often an underestimated task. McAllister said students take months, sometimes years, to prep for it. It's often situational, since they have students as young as 17 and as old as 65. Some haven't taken academic tests in months. For others, it's been decades.

## Other changes coming

In January, the revamped GED test not only will be more difficult because of its fill-in-the-blank answers and a computer-based approach. It also is going to align with the Common Core curriculum standards, further emphasizing critical reading and social studies skills.

Even some math problems, which were once multiple choice, will be fill in the blank.

"What's expected of K-12 students will be expected of GED students," McAllister said.

Also, it will cost more.

The current test costs \$15 per section, totaling \$75 for five sections. The new test will cost \$30 per section, totaling \$120 for four sections.

If people retake any of the tests, they pay for those sections again.

And in Butler County, the sole testing site will change locations.

The current test site is at Butler Intermediate High School, but in 2014 the location will be in Slippery Rock.

About 200 people a year in Butler County earn their GED.

McAllister said more times will be offered to take the test, but most of the availability now is on weekday afternoons and evenings. The trek is far for some, especially those commuting from the southern end of the county, so the adult literacy program hopes to initiate a shuttle service to the test center.

At Butler Intermediate, the test has been offered about one Saturday a month. The last test day at Butler Intermediate is Dec. 21.

Even after the preparation and studying, though, earning the GED is usually just the beginning.

## Means to an end

When Tatsch earns his GED, which he hopes to do this month, he wants to further his education. He is considering BC3's own JobTrak program, which provides free training for in-demand fields such as welding and jobs in the shale gas industry.

But if he doesn't pass, he's not sure what will be next. He definitely knows he'll take a break from studying, maybe indefinitely.

McAllister said, "We hope he doesn't get to that point, but we'll get him back in the door."

The BC3 Adult Literacy Program has been prepping for the test changes for almost two years. It offers computer-based assistance every week in addition to the tutoring and prep times.

"Change is scary for almost everyone, except us," McAllister said. "We're used to it."

## For more information

For information about GED preparation and testing, call Butler County Community College at 724-287-8711, Ext. 8350. For information about the GED, go to [www.GED.com](http://www.GED.com).