Expanding and Improving Distance Learning Options for GED® Students In Rural Pennsylvania

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A high school education is a prerequisite for pursuing postsecondary education and for securing stable, higher-wage employment. Many rural Pennsylvanians lack a high school or GED (General Educational Development) diploma, yet have limited access to adult education courses. Distance learning (DL) is a promising way to enable rural youth and adults to obtain a GED credential. In this study, the following GED distance learning providers were identified: Pennsylvania Department of Education – Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE), national online companies, some community colleges, a public broadcasting station, and community-based organizations.

What is the need for GED instruction in PA?
- Approximately 1.2 million Pennsylvania adults have trouble performing the complex literacy activities that many well-paid jobs require. 3
- In 2000, 19% of rural Pennsylvanians aged 25 or older had less than a high school education. 4
- In 2008, only 1.5% (23,645) of the 1.6 million Pennsylvanians without a high school education took the GED Tests. 5

What are the benefits of a GED credential?
- GED recipients earn $115 more per week and $3,500 more in annual personal income than adults without a high school education. 6
- Adults who obtain the GED at or before age 20 earn, on average, $77 more per week than those who postpone high school completion. 6
- Adults with a GED credential are more likely to vote and volunteer than those who have not completed high school. 6

What is distance learning?
- Students complete all or part of an educational program in a geographical location apart from the institution hosting the program.
- Uses print-based materials, television, video, radio, the Internet, and/or other technologies.

Why use distance learning?
- Reaches learners who would otherwise be unable to enroll in a GED program due to barriers such as transportation, child care, work, disabilities, scheduling conflicts, or privacy concerns.
- Rural PA distance learners in ABLE programs are as likely to make educational gains and to pass the GED Tests as face-to-face learners.
- Can be as effective and cost-efficient as traditional education for adult basic education students. 7

Who is currently participating in DL programs?
From 2004 to 2008, 4% (975) of all rural GED students in ABLE-funded programs participated in DL. These learners:
- Are young, with a median age of 22
- Are more likely to be female (65%) and low-income (60%) than face-to-face learners
- Tend to have goals of entering or retaining employment
- Typically have a 10th grade education—higher than rural face-to-face learners

Having my GED has improved my self-esteem. There is hope. There is nothing stopping me. I know that anything is possible.
~ Linda W., GED Distance Learning Student

Recommendations:
Based upon the findings, the following recommendations are made to expand and improve distance learning opportunities for rural Pennsylvanians studying for their GED Tests.

Increase:
- awareness about the GED credential and distance learning through a campaign in English and Spanish
- availability of high-speed Internet and access to computer software and hardware
- funding for GED instruction via distance learning
- access to the Official GED Practice Test® and GED Test Centers in rural areas
- DL students’ opportunities to transition to college
- types of sites where adults can enroll in DL
- range and types of materials that can be used by DL students

Ensure:
- data reporting systems that accurately reflect the number of DL students passing the GED Tests
- ongoing professional development and support of research on best practices in DL
- social, academic, and financial support for rural DL students

Create:
- an accelerated DL GED course for academically qualified candidates

Protect:
- rural residents from unauthorized online GED credential programs

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This project was made possible, in part, by a grant from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a legislative agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly.