

Illinois Community College Board

**HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY (HSE) ALTERNATIVE CREDENTIALING METHODS**

In 2015, the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) approved the recommendations of the High School Equivalency (HSE) Taskforce to adopt and make available statewide three assessments to certify the receipt of an Illinois High School Equivalency Certificate. These include: GED®, HiSet®, and the TASC®. The Taskforce also provided an additional recommendation to form a HSE Alternative Credentialing Methods (ACM) Taskforce to examine other ways in which an Illinois High School Equivalency Certificate could be granted. The ACM Taskforce was formed in March 2016 is made up of Adult Education providers, Community Based Organizations, School Districts, Regional Offices of Education; State Agencies, Career Technical Education and Illinois State Board of Education; Regional Superintendents; and Philanthropic Organizations. The Taskforce met four times to review three very different options. These options include the National External Diploma Program, the Excel High School, and the Wisconsin High School Equivalency Program. An oral presentation will provided and will include an overview of each option. The ACM Taskforce evaluated each option or curricula based on the following:

- Geographic Access
- Affordability
- Accessibility
- Implementation
- Rigor
- Content Standard Alignment
- College and Career Readiness
- Recognition by Employers and Postsecondary Institutions

An oral presentation was given at the November 2016 board meeting.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION**

It is recommended that the following motion be adopted:

The Illinois Community College Board hereby approves the following recommendations from the Alternative Credentialing Methods Taskforce:

1. To create an alternative HSE credential based on a candidate's high school transcript/HSE credit.
2. To create an alternative HSE credential based on a candidate's post-secondary credit.
3. To create an alternative HSE credential based on a candidate's foreign diploma.
4. To create a competency based education alternative HSE credential but use a working group to further investigate the criteria and requirements.

# Illinois Alternative Methods of Credentialing Taskforce

## Purpose

The Illinois Alternative Methods of Credentialing Taskforce (“IAMC Taskforce” or “Taskforce”) was created based on recommendation from the Illinois High School Equivalency Taskforce and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) to discuss alternative options for high school equivalency (HSE) credentialing.

The taskforce members included representation from Adult Education Providers: Community Colleges, Community Organizations, Regional Offices of Education, and School Districts, Regional Offices of Education Superintendents, High School Equivalency (HSE) Testing Centers, State Board of Education, Career Technical Education and Philanthropic Organizations.

## Background

The Taskforce met four times in 2016 (March, May, August and October) to explore alternative methods of credentialing students and produce recommendations for the ICCB to consider at its quarterly meeting on November 18, 2016.

The Taskforce explored three alternative methods of credentialing: the National External Diploma Program (NEDP), Excel High School, and the Wisconsin HSE Diploma options. The Taskforce was asked to consider several key factors when making its recommendations to ICCB.

1. Consistent rigor across all options to ensure the integrity of the IL HSE Certificate;
2. Consistent minimum criteria for individuals to apply for HSE options based on age, residency, entry level of skills, etc.;
3. Minimum completion requirements across any proposed method;
4. Alignment with ABE/ESL Content Standards, Workforce Strategies, Common Core, and College and Career Readiness Standards;
5. Career pathways for HSE graduates;
6. Accessibility of all HSE options;
7. Affordability of all HSE options;
8. Implementation requirements and costs of any potential HSE option; and
9. Recognition by employers and post-secondary institutions.

## Final Recommendations

The Taskforce produced the following recommendations at its final meeting on October 6th, 2016.

1. Approve the creation and implementation of an HSE credential based on a candidate’s high school/HSE credit.
2. Approve the creation and implementation of an HSE credential based on a candidate’s post-secondary credit.
3. Approve the creation and implementation of an HSE credential based on a candidate’s foreign diploma.
4. Continue the Taskforce or develop a committee to further discuss the creation and implementation of a competency-based HSE credential.
5. Decline to approve the creation and implementation of an HSE credential based on the National External Diploma Program.
6. Decline to approve the creation and implementation of an HSE credential based on the Excel High School program.

***Recommendation 1: Approve the creation and implementation of an HSE credential based on a candidate's high school/HSE credit.***

Rationale

- This option recognizes prior learning and keeps candidates from needing to “start over.”
- Pre-existing ROE staff should be able to evaluate transcripts or create a rubric for transcript evaluation that can be used at AE programs.
- This option is simple to modify and incorporate into the current HSE model.
- This option would be accessible for students in all geographic locations.
- This option would be affordable for students.
- This option would not require accommodations.

***Recommendation 2: Approve the creation and implementation of an HSE credential based on a candidate's post-secondary credit.***

Rationale

- This option recognizes prior learning and keeps candidates from needing to “start over.”
- Pre-existing ROE staff should be able to evaluate transcripts or create a rubric for transcript evaluation that can be used at AE programs.
- This option is simple to modify and incorporate into the current HSE model.
- This option may be combined with Integrated Education and Training Models.
- This option would be accessible for students in all geographic locations.
- This option would be affordable for students.
- This option would not require accommodations.

***Recommendation 3: Approve the creation and implementation of an HSE credential based on a candidate's foreign diploma.***

Rationale

- This option recognizes prior learning and keeps candidates from needing to “start over.”
- Pre-existing ROE staff should be able to evaluate transcripts or create a rubric for transcript evaluation that can be used at AE programs.
- This option is simple to modify and incorporate into the current HSE model.
- This option would be accessible for students in all geographic locations.
- This option would be affordable for students.
- This option would not require accommodations.

***Recommendation 4: Continue the Taskforce or develop a committee to further discuss the creation and implementation of a competency-based HSE credential.***

Rationale

*Competency-Based HSE Strengths:*

- This option could be combined with Integrated Education and Training programs. Wisconsin has competency-based options available through Bridge programs at Wisconsin technical colleges.
- Flexibility and adaptability to local needs and local programs.
- This option may be possible to provide with very minimal cost to students if partnered with existing AE programs.
- This option may serve a different population than HSE testing, such as candidates with undocumented disabilities or ESL learners.

- The current Wisconsin 5.09 model requires student testimonials outlining the candidates' educational and career plans.
- This option could be designed to align with ABE/ESL Content Standards, Workforce Strategies, Common Core, and College and Career Readiness Standards.
- This option allows credit to be given for college and career readiness.
- This option may prioritize additional post-secondary, career, and lifelong learning skills the HSE exams do not prioritize.
- This option can integrate digital literacy and technology.
- Accommodations can be built into program requirements for this option.

*Competency-Based HSE Challenges:*

- Not all states have an equivalent to this option.
- Employers and post-secondary institutions may not recognize or respect this option without state advocacy.
- This option will require a communication and marketing strategy.
- If the ICCB recommends a counseling session for this option, as required in Wisconsin, additional resources and staff would be required at AE programs. Counseling session costs would not be covered by federal funding.
- This option is likely to require legislative changes.

***Recommendation 5: Decline to approve the creation and implementation of an HSE credential based on the National External Diploma Program.***

Rationale

- Significant first-year implementation costs for the ICCB and testing sites.
- Significant, continuous annual costs for testing sites.
- Significant, continuous staffing costs for testing sites due to the program's requirement that assessment staff hold bachelor's degrees.
- Significant staffing requirements for AE programs, ROEs, CBOs, and the IL Department of Corrections to offer the program.
- The program is not available in many other states or regions (seven).
- The program is only offered online and requires candidates and sites to have computer and internet access.
- The program is not available in Spanish.
- The vendor does not offer accommodations for the program outside of the built-in accommodations of large print, color, and timed testing.
- Significant time requirements: the average length of completion is 6-8 months.
- The program assumes, rather than teaches, digital literacy.
- The program is not aligned with ABE/ESL Content Standards.
- The program is not well known to candidates, employers, or colleges.

- ❖ **Please note that once the competency based process (Recommendation #4) is developed; National External Diploma Program may revise and submit their program for consideration under the new standards.**

## ***Recommendation 6: Decline to approve the creation and implementation of an HSE credential based on the Excel High School program.***

### Rationale

- This program does not meet ADA accommodation requirements.
  - Taskforce members believed the program's staff did not appear to understand the adult education population.
  - The program is only available for candidates who meet 8<sup>th</sup> grade and above testing levels.
  - Taskforce members believed the program's instructional videos were of poor quality, and noted the videos did not include interactive components.
  - This program is not aligned to ABE/ESL Content Standards or the College and Career Readiness Standards.
  - Taskforce members are uncertain if Excel Education Systems has the capacity to offer this program on a state-wide level.
  - The program is only offered online and requires candidates and sites to have computer and internet access.
  - While the vendor noted the program could be customized to meet the State's needs, designing curricula would be time-consuming and the State does not have the manpower or budget to devote to such a project.
  - While the vendor noted the program could be customized to meet the State's needs, field testing curricula to demonstrate its validity is time consuming and costly.
  - The program does not currently have standardization or norming studies available.
  - The program is only available in English.
  - The program does not include in-person assessment; testing is video proctored.
  - Significant time requirements: the average length of completion is 12-18 months.
  - The program only averages 120 graduates per year nationwide.
  - Taskforce members were concerned the program may not be transferable or equitable across state lines, as the program in each state or region is customized.
- ❖ **Please note that once the competency based process (Recommendation #4) is developed; Excel High School Program may revise and submit their program for consideration under the new standards.**

# IL Alternative Methods of Credentialing (IAMC) Taskforce Recommendations

Friday, November 18, 2016

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# Purpose

The Illinois Alternative Methods of Credentialing Taskforce (“IAMC Taskforce” or “Taskforce”) was created based on a recommendation from the Illinois High School Equivalency Taskforce and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) to discuss alternative options for high school equivalency (HSE) credentialing.

# Taskforce Membership

- Adult Education Providers
  - Community Colleges
  - Community Organizations
  - Regional Offices of Education
  - School Districts
- Regional Offices of Education Superintendents
- High School Equivalency (HSE) Testing Centers
- State Board of Education
- Career Technical Education
- Philanthropic Organizations

# Background

- Taskforce met four times:
  - March 2016
  - May 2016
  - August 2016
  - October 2016

# Background

- The Taskforce examined the following alternative methods of credentialing:
  - National External Diploma Program (NEDP)
  - Excel High School
  - Wisconsin HSE Diploma options
- The Taskforce evaluated each option based upon the following:
  - Geographic Access
  - Affordability
  - Accessibility
  - Implementation
  - Rigor
  - Content Standard Alignment
  - College and Career Readiness
  - Recognition by Employers and Postsecondary Institutions

# **National External Diploma Program (NEDP)**

# NEDP:

## ○ Strengths mentioned:

- Flexibility due to online accessibility
- Good fit for self-directed learners
- May serve a population we have not reached
- Not likely to require legislative changes
- Aligned with CCRS
- Curriculum rather than an exam
- Program may appeal to employers
- Program is designed by CASAS

## ○ Challenges mentioned:

- Staffing requirements for AEPs, ROEs, CBOs, and DOC
- Only offered in 7 other states
- Requires computer & internet access; only offered online
- Significant first year implementation and reoccurring annual costs for testing sites
- Increased staffing costs for testing sites
- Not available in Spanish
- Vendor does not offer accommodations outside of large print, color, timed testing
- Time – takes 6-8 months to complete on average
- Not aligned with Content Standards
- Assumes, rather than teaches, digital literacy
- Not well known to students, employers, colleges

# **Excel High School**

# Excel High School:

## ○ Strengths mentioned:

- Customizable to desired standards/content
- 2,000 items in question bank are randomly sorted so that each test is unique
- Low cost (\$65) to student includes unlimited free retakes
- Flexibility due to online accessibility
- Good fit for self-directed learners
- No training costs for test center sites
- Unlikely to require legislative changes

## ○ Challenges mentioned:

- Does not meet ADA accommodations
- Rigor and alignment to CCRS, IL Content Standards; State would need to design curricula
- Did not appear to understand adult education population; only available for 8<sup>th</sup> grade and above testing levels
- Not available in Spanish
- Poor quality of instructional videos
- Requires computer & internet access
- Time and resources needed for field testing and validity of customization
- No standardization or norming studies available
- Video-proctored assessment
- Time required for completion (12-18 months)
- Low number of graduates
- Transferability of credential

**Wisconsin High School Equivalency (HSE)  
Diploma and Certificate Options**

# Wisconsin Option I: HSE Certificate Based on High- School Credit

## ○ Strengths mentioned:

- Recognizes prior learning
- Can utilize pre-existing ROE staff for transcript evaluation
- Simple to modify and incorporate into current HSE model
- Accessibility of this option to students
- Affordability for students
- Keeps candidates from needing to “start over”
- No accommodations required

## ○ Challenges mentioned:

- Potential difficulty ensuring reliable documentation
- Potential difficulty creating HSE official transcript
- Option not likely to be accessible to ESL students
- How long should HS credits be valid?
- Not all high schools are equal in rigor and curricula; would require a minimum standard
- Does this option encourage transition to post-secondary?

*Note:* WI model requires students to achieve credits that meet WI state minimum HS graduation requirements (22 HS credits in various required subject areas) *and* pass the Civics Test. Postsecondary credits may be used to fill HS credit gaps.

# Wisconsin Option II: HSE Certificate Based on Post- Secondary Credit

## ○ Strengths mentioned:

- Recognizes prior learning
- Can utilize pre-existing ROE staff for transcript evaluation in combination with community college
- Simple to modify and incorporate into current HSE model
- Accessibility of this option to students
- Affordability for students
- Keeps candidates from needing to “start over”
- No accommodations required

## ○ Challenges mentioned:

- Potential difficulty ensuring reliable documentation
- Potential difficulty creating HSE official transcript
- Option not likely to be accessible to ESL students
- Would need to determine how long should post-secondary credits be valid
- Not all colleges and universities are equal in rigor and curricula; would require a minimum standard
- Does this option encourage transition to post-secondary?

*Note:* WI option requires students to achieve credits that meet WI state minimum HS graduation requirements (22 HS credits in various required subject areas) *and* pass the Civics Test. Postsecondary credits may be used to fill HS credit gaps.

# Wisconsin Option III: HSE Certificate Based on Foreign Diploma or Degree

## ○ Strengths mentioned:

- Recognizes prior learning
- Can utilize pre-existing ROE staff for transcript evaluation
- Simple to modify and incorporate into current HSE model
- Accessibility of this option to students
- Affordability for students
- Keeps candidates from needing to “start over”
- No accommodations required

## ○ Challenges mentioned:

- Requires establishment of a method of evaluating transcript
- Potential difficulty ensuring reliable documentation
- Potential difficulty creating HSE official transcript
- Not all high schools, colleges, and universities are equal in rigor and curricula; would require a minimum standard
- How long should credits be valid?
- Does this option encourage transition to post-secondary?

# Wisconsin Option IV: HSE Certificate Based on Competency-Based Program

## ○ Strengths mentioned:

- Can be combined with Bridge/ICAPS programs
- Flexibility and adaptability to local context
- May be possible to conduct with no, or very minimal, cost to student if partnered with existing AE programs
- May serve a different population than HSE testing
- Current WI model requires student testimonial outlining educational/career plans

## ○ Strengths mentioned:

- Can be designed to state standards, CCRS
- Allows credit to be given for college and career readiness
- Can prioritize additional post-secondary and lifelong learning skills
- Can integrate digital literacy and technology
- Accommodations can be built into program

*Note:* WI option requires competency based programs to apply to the HSE State Administrator's Office and reapply annually. Applications include rationale to the benefits and successes of the program, the population it serves, the skill sets it teaches, etc.

# Wisconsin Option IV: HSE Certificate Based on Competency- Based Program

## ○ **Challenges mentioned:**

- Not all states would have an equivalent
- Recognition/respect for this option
- Requires communication and marketing strategy
- Individual counseling, if required, would require additional resources and staff; counseling sessions would not be covered by federal resources
- Likely to require legislative changes

## ○ **Challenges mentioned:**

- Likely to require training of ROE, TC, AE staff
- Time required for design and implementation
- Potential difficulty ensuring rigor/looseness of program
- Potential difficulty creating HSE official transcript that demonstrates candidate accomplishments
- How would the cost of TC and ROE services be offset?

# Process

- Taskforce was asked to examine each model and either by majority vote to determine the model(s) for consideration to be recommended for use in IL. Taskforce participants were given the opportunity to recommend additional options or combined approaches.
  - National External Diploma Program
  - Excel High School
  - HSE Certificate Based on High School Credit
  - HSE Certificate Based on Post Secondary Credit
  - HSE Certificate Based on Foreign Diploma
  - Competency Based Program
  - Any other option to be added

# Recommendations of the IAMC Taskforce

- ***Recommendation 1: To create an alternative HSE credential based on a candidate's high school/HSE credit.\****
  - Examines a high school transcript, postsecondary credits, Reading and Math assessments.
  
- ***Recommendation 2: To create an alternative HSE credential based on a candidate's post-secondary credit.\****
  - Enrollment and completion of a career pathway program, postsecondary credit, Reading and Math

\*Specific guidance will be developed that are based on Illinois' HSE process and the guidance provided by the IAMC Taskforce.

# Recommendations of the IAMC Taskforce

- ***Recommendation 3: To create an alternative HSE credential based on a candidate's foreign diploma.\****
  - Review of a foreign diploma, ensure proficiency in Reading and Math, postsecondary credit
- ***Recommendation 4: To create a competency-based education alternative HSE credential but further investigate the criteria and requirements.\****
  - Requires the development of specific guidelines

\*Specific guidance will be developed that are based on Illinois' HSE process and the guidance provided by the IAMC Taskforce.

# Recommendations of the IAMC Taskforce

- ***Recommendation 5: To not create a HSE credential based on the National External Diploma Program.***
  - ***Averages approximately \$650.00 per student (1<sup>st</sup> year)***
  - ***Site costs approximately \$2,000.00 per site or an average of 200.00 to \$210.00 per student (after 1<sup>st</sup> year)***
- ***Recommendation 6: To not create a HSE alternative credential based on the Excel High School program.***
  - ***Program is not aligned to CCRS, IL Content Standards***
  - ***Program does not match the rigor of other HSE options***
  - ***Program is not designed for ABE, ESL students***
  - ***Program does not provide accommodations that meet ADA standards***

# Questions