



# ADULT LEARNING

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## Tests and Assessment

**New Research Examines Factors of Effective Teacher/Student Assessment**

**Implementing a Comprehensive, Effective Assessment System**

**The GED as a Program, Student Evaluation Tool**



**Teaching Strategies for Different Learner Types**

**Planning Continuing Education for the Military**





## TESTS & ASSESSMENTS

# Assessment Update

*In the following pages, the newest initiatives of three major assessment programs are described—the National Adult Literacy Survey, Educational Testing Services (ETS); the National External Diploma Program; and the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS).*

*If you would like to learn more, contact the following for more information:*

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*National External Diploma Program: Florence Harvey, Director, National External Diploma Program, Center for Adult Learning and Educational Credential, American Council on Education, One Dupont Circle, Washington, DC 20036.*

*Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS): Patricia Rickard, Director, CASAS, 2725 Congress St., Ste 1M, San Diego, CA 92110.*

## The External Diploma Program

In March 1990, the American Council on Education's (ACE) Commission on Educational Credits and Credentials approved the affiliation of the National External Diploma Program (formerly the New York External Diploma Program) with the council's Center for Adult Learning and Educational Credentials. The National External Diploma Program (EDP) becomes the second high school completion program for adults sponsored by ACE (it has sponsored the GED for nearly five years).

In the next few months, ACE plans to review the program's competencies and update some performance indicators to better meet the needs of the adult in the twenty-first century. The goal is to have the National External Diploma Program (EDP) as an alternative adult diploma program in all fifty states by the year

2000. Training for new adoptions will be available by this summer. Many of the EDP competencies and those suggested as necessary by the Workforce 2000 research are similar.

The EDP is an applied performance assessment that asks adults to demonstrate high school level skills through simulations of tasks adults do at home and at work. It offers adults an alternative to multiple choice testing and tends to appeal to adults who are between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five and who have never attempted any other credentialing option.

To earn a high school diploma through the External Diploma Program, adults are required to demonstrate sixty-four competencies that incorporate seven generic areas: communication, computation, self-awareness, scientific

awareness, social awareness, and occupational preparedness. Performance indicators include items such as the ability to—

- Identify information from a variety of written material such as leases, maps, and warranties
- Identify, from a taped speech, main idea, details, conclusion, inference, fact, opinion
- Compare costs of credit for loans
- Draw a conclusion from data presented in a bar, circle, and line graph

Each graduate must also demonstrate an individualized ability either in an occupational, an academic, or a specialized skill.

There are two parts to the EDP program. The first part is diagnostic evaluation, which first identifies basic skill deficiencies that might prevent an





**An assessment appointment: returning homemaker, now a secretary with a government agency, is evaluated through the External Diploma Program in Fairfax County, Virginia**

adult from demonstrating the level of skill required in the second part of the program and then refers adults to existing adult learning and literacy resources to get help. The second part of the program, known as assessment, is the high school level demonstration of competencies. Here a multi-method assessment is conducted through a variety of testing modes such as oral interviews, demonstrations, documentation review, and take home projects. The skill is usually applied in a practical, relevant life task. For example,

an adult might be asked to locate an apartment in her/his local community; locate on a map the nearest hospital, library, and school; compute the distance between school and home; measure for carpeting; read and interpret a lease; and write a letter of complaint to the landlord. Diplomas are issued by local high schools, school districts, or state departments.

The EDP was developed by the Syracuse Research Corporation and the New York State Department of Education in the early 1970s. ▲



**External Diploma Program assessment: former firefighter, now studying for the ministry, demonstrates his map skills**

## The ETS Adult Literacy Studies

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) has been awarded a contract by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics to develop and conduct a national survey of the literacy skills among adults, sixteen to sixty-four years of age. Approximately 13,000 adults will be assessed by 175 trained interviewers who are experienced with interviewing techniques and testing methodology. Field testing for the project took place this winter; the main assessment will occur in the spring of 1992, with results reported in 1993.

Each assessment involves a face-to-face interview lasting approximately one hour and will consist of forty-five minutes of simulation tasks and fifteen minutes of background questions. The simulation tasks are designed to measure a broad set of literacy skills associated with materials encountered at home, at work, and in communities. Adults respond to reading, writing, speaking, and listening tasks that require them to demonstrate a range of skills and knowledge that include recognizing, acquiring, organizing, interpreting, producing, and applying information found in various types of printed materials. The background questionnaire will focus on factors associated with various levels of literacy.

Three scales representing distinct aspects of literacy will be used by the study:

- Prose literacy tasks involve the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts that include editorials, news stories, poems, and fiction;
- Document literacy tasks involve the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in job applications or payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables, and indexes;
- Quantitative literacy tasks involve the knowledge and skills needed to apply arithmetic operations, either alone or sequentially, that are embedded in printed materials, such as balancing a check book.

A major goal of the survey is to provide policy makers, business and labor leaders, educators, and researchers with information on the condition of literacy in America that is not currently available from school-based surveys. Reports will be tailored to the needs of these audiences.

The U.S. Department of Labor has also commissioned the ETS to conduct a two-stage workplace literacy assessment. The first activity involved assessing and

profiling the literacy proficiencies of the following three populations served by DOL: persons enrolling in Job Training Partnership Act programs; persons applying for jobs through the Employment Service system; persons filing claims for Unemployment Insurance benefits.

These groups include a significant segment of Americans who, with proper assistance, could enhance their literacy skills. The information about these

populations can enhance training efforts and will assist the development of programs to address specific literacy needs of these client populations.

During the second stage of the assessment, ETS is developing a test that is appropriate for estimating the literacy proficiencies of individuals in various DOL populations. The new instrument is designed to better meet the changing needs of learners, program providers, and policymakers. ▲