

There's an alternative to the GED

National program gives credit for life experiences

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testing, attending classes and navigating a multiple-hour, fill-in-the-bubble-type exam. For those who aren't good test takers, repeated failure is possible.

The NEDP is much different.

First of all, it's not a test, but rather a program built on a portfolio-based assessment, allowing those who have life experience to show what they are able to do — especially helpful for those who suffer from test anxiety.

Jessica Derleth graduated from the Rochester School for the Deaf in 2007 with an IEP diploma. When she decided to attend college, she found it difficult to be accepted without a "real" high school diploma.

"I had no interest in college when I was attending high school," she said. "Many teachers know many deaf students have difficulty with reading and writing. They tried to help me. I tried several times to pass the RCT tests. It was very frustrating because I just missed passing by one or two points in reading, so I graduated with an IEP diploma.

"I was working on my GED with Amanda Marshall," she continued. "Amanda was concerned about my success in the program because I have test anxiety and, like many deaf people, I have a difficult time with reading. Amanda thought this program would be a good fit for me ... she was right."

Signing up for the NEDP starts with a phone call to BOCES. BOCES gathers basic information and sets up a face-to-face

"It's one of our best-kept secrets."

— **JOHN BORONKAY**

BOCES DIRECTOR OF CAREER, TECHNICAL AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

meeting.

Don't have transportation? No problem. Within the four-county area, there are a number of locations — libraries, town halls and an assortment of other places are among them — suitable for advisors to meet with interested individuals.

Be warned: There is one small testing segment. In order to complete the NEDP, an individual must possess at least a ninth-grade education for reading and math.

A little rusty in those areas? That's OK. BOCES will work to enhance the skills necessary to move on to the next step.

The primary part of the NEDP portfolio is a set of five task booklets created by Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems, or CASAS: Personal, Home, and Community; Community, State and World; Making Judgments and Influencing Decisions; Planning for Life's Changes; and Exploring the World at Work. Each of these 30- to 50-page booklets requires the completion of simple tasks to show real-life abilities. Interviews take place after each task booklet if finished.

While individuals have up to a year to complete the program, many achieve the task in 4-6 months.

Another NEDP plus:

Some individuals meet with their advisor only once a week for an hour, helpful for people working full time and those who have families. Also, the program is offered during evening hours.

The NEDP also seems well suited for those with learning disabilities or ADHD, because there is no sitting for multiple hours to complete an exam.

"The program was a big challenge for me, but I was determined to get my high school diploma," Derleth said. "Every week I met with Angela Barlow, and she would review the tasks assigned to me from the week before and test me. It was great. I could work at my own pace and, with the completion of each task, I had confidence that I could be successful with the next one.

"Angela was very patient and supportive. I always felt that it was her personal mission to get me through the program."

The final step of the NEDP is being interviewed on entry-level job skills. Satisfy that requirement and walk away with a diploma.

People completing the NEDP will be counted as part of a school district's graduating class for that the year. While the high school transcript reflects participation in the NEDP, the military and employers regard the diploma just like the real thing.

"Getting through this program really gave me a lot more confidence in myself," Derleth said. "I gained a new friend. I still keep in touch with Angela. She is pleased with my successes.

"Obtaining my high school diploma opened a new door to my future. The reason why I wanted a diploma was so I could attend [RIT's National

Participating schools

The following area school districts have participated with the National External Diploma Program:

- Bloomfield
- Canandaigua
- Clyde-Savannah
- Dundee
- Gananda
- Geneva
- Marcus Whitman
- Honeoye
- Lyons
- Red Jacket
- Marion
- Newark
- North Rose/Wolcott
- Penn Yan
- Midlakes
- Romulus
- Seneca Falls
- Sodus
- Waterloo
- Wayne
- Williamson

Technological Institute of the Deaf]."

As of last June, 372 people had graduated through the NEDP offered through W-FL BOCES. There are 43 students enrolled right now.

Perhaps the best part of the NEDP? It's free.

Sue Deidrich coordinates and advises the local NEDP. She has been with W-FL BOCES since January 2000, and started working with the NEDP in 2002. Five assessors work with her.

Deidrich works under the direction of Boronkay. Both rave about the program.

"Many people decide to do this for their kids," Deidrich said. "They want to lead by example. It gives them validation and enhances their self-worth."

"This is a very good way to demonstrate, in an authentic manner, what you are able to draw from your personal experience," Boronkay said. "This is a wonderful alternative for those who are not 'bubble-sheet' people. There are no Bs or Cs. Everyone passes this with a 100 percent, unlike the GED. It shows that you did it until you did it right.

"You have to be hungry and want to do the work. This program is for motivated, independent learners."

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