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Assessment of the Plattsmouth, Nebraska, general educational development program

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ASSESSMENT OF THE
PLATTSMOUTH, NEBRASKA,
GENERAL EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAM

A Field Project
Presented to the
Department of Educational Administration
and the
Faculty of the Graduate College
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Specialist in Education
University of Nebraska at Omaha

by
Ralph F. Tarnasky

April 1988

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FIELD PROJECT ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Specialist in Education,
University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

American society has long held that credentials are needed to provide access to economic and educational success. One such credential is the high school diploma. Completion of high school is an important indicator of attainment. Having a high school diploma has been recognized by employers and institutions of higher academic and vocational training as an indicator that the individual has certain skills, habits, and knowledge necessary for employment and further education.

In spite of the importance of high school completion, there are currently 57 million men and women in the United States aged 16 years old and over who are not enrolled in and have not graduated from high school (Malizio and Whitney, 1981). Many of these individuals have awakened to the fact that they are living with a handicap, and, as a result have decided to take the Test of General Educational Development (GED) in order to demonstrate the attainment of high school equivalency, facilitate enrollment in postsecondary institutions, and to improve in their future employability or current job. The number of people who decide to take the GED is significant. According to the 1986 GED Statistical Report, one of every seven high school diplomas in the United States is based on the results of the GED test.

Completion of the GED appears to be a widely accepted alternative to the standard high school diploma. All fifty states, the District of Columbia, six U.S. territories or possessions, and many Canadian provinces now administer the GED tests. In addition, most colleges and university admissions offices accept credentials resulting from GED test scores in lieu of complete high school transcripts (Malizio and Whitney, 1981).

In Plattsmouth, Nebraska, the GED tests are made available through the GED Instructional Center. This center has been in operation since the 1977-1978 school year and has helped a total of 764 students through the 1986-1987 school year. Although some students came to the center only to improve their capabilities in reading, speaking English, mathematics, or another area, a total of 196 students successfully completed the GED test and received a diploma.

The GED Instructional Center is open on a part-time basis for a total of $10\frac{1}{2}$ hours per week. It is staffed with five paid employees, and numerous volunteers. The center is funded through a Nebraska State Department of Education Adult Basic Education grant, and its funding is based on the number of students enrolled. This figure has ranged from approximately two thousand dollars in the 1977-1978 school year to six thousand in the 1986-1987 school year. The number of graduates from the Plattsmouth center compares rather closely with the national average.

Malizio and Whitney (1980) state that nearly 15 percent of diplomas issued nation-wide are based on GED test results. In Plattsmouth the figure is approximately 19 percent.

Statement of the Problem

Given the economic and employment realities faced by high school dropouts, there exists a definite need and desire on the part of many dropouts to better their outlook and potential in our society. Many high school dropouts choose to improve their situation through completion of the GED test. The review of literature shows that while some take the GED as a means of improving their self-image and confidence, a more significant number approach the test intending to meet enrollment requirements for institutions of postsecondary education, or as a means of getting a better job. Of dropouts planning to gain entry into postsecondary education by means of the GED, the figures range from nearly 55 percent (1986 GED Statistical Report) to 75 percent in a national survey (Cevero and Peterson, 1982). The same studies also show that approximately 75 percent of the respondents expected to qualify, by means of the GED test, for a better job.

If the goal of the GED Instructional Center is to assist students in attaining a GED certificate so that they in turn are eligible for postsecondary enrollment or improved employability, then questions remain. Are GED

graduates' expectations being realized? Does the Platts-
mouth GED Instructional Center assist the GED graduate
in improving their employability and access to post-
secondary opportunities?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if GED
graduates of the Plattsmouth Community Schools have a-
chieved their goals in postsecondary training or job
improvement.

Definition of Terms

GED. The Test of General Educational Development. It is
a nationally standardized high school equivalency test
comprized of five sub-tests: writing; social studies;
science; reading; and mathematics.

GED graduate. A student who has successfully completed the
GED test battery and earned an equivalency diploma.

GED non-graduate. A student who ended his enrollment in the
GED Instructional Center prior to completion of the
GED test battery.

Non-paid. An individual employed as a homemaker or volunteer
(see Tables 1 and 2).

Other. A retired worker, a self-employed worker, or one who
is on lay off status from work (see Tables 1 and 2).

Delimitations

This study is limited to graduates and non-graduates of the Plattsmouth, Nebraska, GED Instructional Center who were enrolled between August 1982 through June 1987.

Limitations

Since those surveyed for this study were enrolled in the GED Instructional Center, many of whom expressed a desire to change employment or enroll in postsecondary education, a poor questionnaire return was expected. It was found, due to the transient nature of the population surveyed, that many of the addresses on file were not current.

METHODOLOGY

To answer the questions of whether or not the GED students of the Plattsmouth Community Schools have achieved their goals in postsecondary enrollments or job improvement, and to assess whether or not the instruction they received assisted in their employability and access to postsecondary opportunities, the writer:

- 1) developed a questionnaire to assess the GED graduates' employment and enrollment in postsecondary education, and
- 2) developed a questionnaire to assess the non-

graduates' employment and enrollment in postsecondary education.

The instruments consisted of questions from five basic areas concerning employment and training activities. A sixth section elicited comments from the respondents. These question areas included:

- 1) employment status and expectations in regard to future job or postsecondary enrollment prior to taking the GED tests
- 2) employment and training activities after completion of the GED tests.
- 3) current situation in regard to employment and training activities
- 4) perceptions of how the GED helped in gaining employment or postsecondary training
- 5) assistance the GED Instructional Center did, or could have provided to the student, and
- 6) individual comments.

Survey planning activities included identifying the GED graduates from the years 1982 through 1987, as well as a representative sample of non-graduates. Questionnaires were mailed, and a telephone follow-up was conducted. A proportional sample of the graduates and non-graduates was identified and a list of alternatives was established. A copy of both questionnaires and the cover letter appear in Appendices A, B and C. Findings and information gathered are displayed in the tables and charts in Chapter 4 of this study.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter 4: Presentation of the Findings

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Importance of a High School Degree

Cevero (1983) states that the completion of high school is an important indicator of attainment in the structure of the American educational system. McLawhorn (1981) agrees adding that the importance of having a high school diploma has long been recognized by employers and institutions of higher academic and vocational training. Possessing such credentials certify that the individual has certain pre-requisite skills and knowledge for employment and further education.

Although completion of high school is important, the Current Population Reports (1980) indicates that nearly 25 million women and 22 million men in the United States aged 16 years old and over are not enrolled in and have not graduated from high school. Considering the numbers of people who have not completed high school, and recognizing the importance of its completion, one concludes that many will, and have already awaken to the fact that they are living with a handicap. A second chance for high school completion for dropouts is available through the Tests of General Educational Development (GED).

Background and Development of the GED

According to Malizio (1981), the GED testing program

began in 1942 with the development, by the examination staff of the United States Armed Forces Institute, of a battery of tests designed to measure the major outcomes and concepts generally associated with four years of high school education.

A basic description of the GED tests is provided by Wolf (1983). He lists the five tests including: Interpretation of Reading Materials in Social Science; Correctness and Effectiveness of Expression; Interpretation of Literary Materials in the Natural Sciences; Interpretation of Literary Materials; and the test of General Mathematical Ability. The test format features multiple choice questions and are designed, according to Malizio (1981), to not penalize candidates who lack recent academic or classroom experience. Candidates are tested primarily on their retention of broad concepts and generalizations. Additionally, Swartz (1987), states that the GED Testing Service uses a hierarchy to describe the critical thinking skills needed to complete GED test items successfully. Items used on the GED tests are classified according to an adaptation of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Bloom, et al., 1956). Items classified at the highest cognitive levels (e.g., synthesis, evaluation) require the use of skills described at the lowest levels (e.g., knowledge, comprehension).

The tests have undergone some changes. In 1975 new

versions of the GED tests began to be developed. In 1977 the tests were standardized and equated with a random sample of high school students (Malizio, 1980). Swartz (1987) has indicated that the GED tests represent a sampling of expected outcomes of high school education.

The most recent GED test versions to be used, beginning in January 1988, have been developed through a five year review process. Part of the process involved a survey of adult educators in the United States and Canada. Three areas noted by survey responses included: a) first, a clear majority favored the addition of a writing sample to the Writing Skills Test; b) second, there was a widely expressed interest in testing critical thinking and problem solving skills, and; c) third, there was a concern that examinees be made aware of the importance of computer technology (Swartz, 1987). Swartz went on to say that these concerns will be addressed in the new tests and added that themes will also be addressed: a) the high-level thinking and problem solving skills should be viewed as a set of comprehensive and integrated skills; b) there should be an emphasis on the relationship of skills to the aspects of the world of work; c) certain consumer skills should be addressed in the context of many of the tests, and; d) the tests should use settings that adult examinees would recognize. The GED Testing Service has stated that these studies indicate that the GED tests are highly reliable and passing

rates are comparable for GED candidates and high school seniors (GEDTS, 1979).

The Importance of the GED Tests

According to the 1986 GED Statistical Report, many students take advantage of this second opportunity for high school completion. Since 1971, the program has enabled over six million adults to obtain formal recognition of their educational development through their attainment of a high school equivalency certificate through the GED test program. It is further noted that 1 in 7 high school diplomas is issued on results from the GED test scores. Findings such as these clearly indicate the importance of high school diplomas or equivalency certificates.

In 1979 the United States Department of Labor stated that graduation from high school has become almost standard. In our changing society and in the competitive labor market one often needs education beyond the high school diploma to compete and be successful. Therefore, one needs to look at completion of high school or the GED tests as a starting point upon which to build, either with job experience or post-secondary education.

Postsecondary enrollment or job success are recognized by GED graduates and potential graduates as important motivation for taking the tests. Malizio and Whitney (1981) found that about 31 percent of GED candidates cited job related reasons as their primary reason for taking the

tests, and almost 30 percent stated that meeting admissions requirements for postsecondary training was their reason. In the 1986 GED Statistical Report it is also shown that over half the examinees were planning to go on to some course of further study.

In a 1982 study by Cevero and Peterson, it was found that 75 percent of those responding to a survey who had completed the GED tests, were planning to attend some sort of educational program in the future. Of that same survey group it was also found that the GED credential was more useful in helping people obtain a new job as opposed to improving their situation on their current job.

Future Success of GED Examinees

Although surveys and studies indicate that large numbers of people who take the GED tests plan to improve their own future by going on to school or a better job, a question may be raised about their future success in such endeavors. Does the GED certificate help them to compete successfully?

There are relatively few studies that look at the success of GED examinees in postsecondary enrollments or job related areas. Wolf (1983) states that studies using the high school GED battery as a predictor have been lacking. Moore (1982), in a follow-up study of adults who took the GED test in Kentucky agrees, stating that past evaluations concerning client impact are relatively sparse in comparison to other types of studies. Willett (1982) agrees, stating

that a limited amount of research has been conducted on the GED educated adult.

Of four studies found dealing with postsecondary success of GED examinees, Quin and Haberman (1986) found that at the University of Wisconsin, GED holders as a group performed worse than high school graduates. Among the areas compared they found that after four semesters, only 31 percent of GED holders were still enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, compared to 62 percent of high school graduates from the lower half of their class. Thus, they concluded that the GED holder is a high-risk student in the four year college. In a study comparing first semester college performance of high school graduates with GED examinees, Rogers (1977) found that at the University of Northern Kentucky the mean grade point average of GED recipients was 1.71 compared with 2.11 for students who had completed high school. In a study by Ayers (1978) comparisons were made of the academic success of GED graduates and high school graduates at Surry Community College in North Carolina. No significant differences were found between the two groups relative to grade point averages. In an investigation of postsecondary performance of high school diploma graduates and GED graduates at South East Community College in North Carolina, McLawhorn (1981) found that there existed no comparisons to infer that GED graduates performed better or worse than the rest of the student body. These four studies with their mixed findings, combined with

the significant number of GED examinees who plan to continue their postsecondary training and improve their employability, lead one to further questions about the GED testing program and services. Can local programs work to provide needed information about employment and postsecondary education to GED examinees? Is there a lack of communication between postsecondary institutions and GED examinees? Would such communication and providing needed information insure greater future success of GED examinees?

Behal (1983) examines the GED graduates' need for postsecondary information. She states that a serious communication gap exists between postsecondary programs and the population of GED examinees. She further states the need for postsecondary educational counseling at the local level GED testing facility. Read (1984) elaborates on this same theme, stating that the GED graduate and the postsecondary community would gain if each were more aware of the opportunities that the other could provide.

McLawnhorn (1981) also considers the idea of the GED examinees' self-concepts. She suggests that there is a need to encourage the adult student as their success in returning to school rests largely upon this. Ayers (1978) is in agreement. He recommends that GED graduates should be encouraged to attend college and that college admission offices should enroll GED test graduates on the same basis as traditional high school graduates.

Rogers (1977) takes a different approach. He states

that GED persons must be made aware of the fact that college is tough and that their chances of success may be diminished because of some areas lacking in the GED program of study. To remedy this, Behal (1983) recommends that her study be repeated at the local and state levels to determine areas for program modification and expansion with the purpose of incorporating postsecondary educational counseling. In her conclusion she states that the GED examinees are a new consumer population of the postsecondary community, and should be viewed not on the basis of past academic performance, but rather on academic potential. Such an approach would be mutually beneficial.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine if: 1) the GED students of the Plattsmouth Community Schools achieved their goals of postsecondary education enrollment, or employment improvement after leaving the GED Instructional Center; and 2) to assess whether or not students perceived the instruction they had received assisted in their employability and access to postsecondary education. To answer these questions, two similar questionnaires were developed. One was distributed to GED graduates and the other to non-graduates.

The Instruments

In order to answer question number one, whether or not students had achieved their goals in postsecondary enrollment or improved employment, the following questions were asked about present, past, and future outcomes and plans relative to employment and postsecondary enrollment:

- 1) What was your employment status before taking the GED test?
- 2) What is your present employment status?
- 3) Before you took the GED test, did you think that the tests would help you to keep your job, get a job promotion, get a salary increase, qualify for enlistment in the armed services, or be admitted to college or trade school?

- 4) After you took the GED test, did you find that the program helped you to keep your job, get a promotion, get a salary increase, qualify for a job, qualify for enlistment in the armed services, or be admitted to college or trade school?
- 5) Are you now a student?
- 6) What type of school have you attended, or do you plan to attend?

To answer question number two, assessing whether or not the students perceived that the instruction they received assisted in their employability and access to post-secondary opportunities, the following questions were asked:

- 1) Did the teachers during the GED classes provide information on colleges or trade schools, job or career possibilities, or job search skills?
- 2) Do you think that the GED teachers should provide information about jobs and colleges?

An open ended section was included on both questionnaires to elicit individual comments. Respondents were asked in this section to share opinions relative to their GED experience and their perceived impact upon their lives. The responses in this section were categorized to provide additional feedback to the GED instructional staff on the success or shortcomings of the GED Instructional Center (see Appendix D).

To facilitate comparisons between groups, the two questionnaires were parallel in structure; that is, both graduates and non-graduates were asked similar questions, while additional questions were asked of graduates relative

to future postsecondary goals. The instruments of this study made use of questions from a similar, national study by Cevero and Peterson (1982). With the assistance of Mrs. Beverly A. Harter, Plattsmouth Director of Community Education, the questions were adapted to fit the local GED program. The questionnaires used were approved in their final form by Dr. Thomas Petrie, Professor of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (see Appendices B and C).

Selection of the Population

The population surveyed was a proportional sample of the GED graduates and non-graduates from the years 1982 through 1987 at the Plattsmouth Community School's GED Instructional Center. Each graduate and non-graduate of the GED Instructional Center was assigned a number by the program staff upon their enrollment into the program. In order to select the study population, random numbers were drawn by the researcher. To allow for comparisons between graduates and non-graduates, 10 graduates and 10 non-graduates were drawn from each of the five years, 1982 through 1987. The total size of the study population was 100. An additional list of 70 students, 35 graduates and 35 non-graduates were drawn as alternates.

Procedures

Each participant was sent a cover letter asking for their assistance in this study (see Appendix A). Included in the letter was a brief description of the study and its purpose. All participants were addressed in the letter as former GED students, making no distinction as to whether or not they were graduates or non-graduates. With the cover letter the participants received one of the two questionnaires and a stamped, self-addressed envelope for its return.

The last questionnaire was returned on February 3, 1988. There was a return of 17 questionnaires from the 50 graduates, or 34 percent, and six questionnaires were returned by the non-graduates, or 12 percent. Sixteen percent of all questionnaires were returned by the post office as undeliverable. This return was determined to be insufficient and follow-up survey was conducted by telephone with the alternates. Telephone calls were made in the late afternoon and early evening. The alternates were asked the questions directly from the questionnaires. Telephone contact was made with 26 graduates and 29 non-graduates. These responses were tallied with the questionnaires previously returned by mail. No distinctions were made as to which responses were by telephone and which were by mail. The total response including mail returns and telephone contacts was 43 graduates, 50.6

percent, and 35 non-graduates, 41.2 percent. This number was determined to be satisfactory, due to the transient nature of the survey population.

Treatment of the Data

The questionnaires conducted by mail and telephone were compiled and tallies were made of the responses. The response counts were converted to percentages and charts and tables were developed to help illustrate the findings. The data were analyzed to see what this sample of GED graduates and non-graduates had attempted in terms of postsecondary goals, and what impact they perceived their GED instruction to have on access to postsecondary education and improved employability. The outcomes of the responses were tested for significant difference.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

This study was undertaken to determine if 1) students in the Plattsmouth GED Instructional Center have achieved their goals in postsecondary enrollment or job improvement after leaving the center, and 2) to assess whether or not the instruction they received assisted in their employability and access to postsecondary opportunities. This chapter will present data obtained from two questionnaires, one completed by GED graduates from the years 1982 through 1987, and the other by non-graduates from those same years.

In order to address the question of improved employment, respondents from both groups were asked in question number one about their current employment status. It was found that the numbers of both graduates and non-graduates who were gainfully employed had increased upon leaving the GED Instructional Center. The largest gains were made by GED graduates. Among graduates 55.8 percent were gainfully employed prior to their enrollment in the GED Instructional Center, and 72.1 percent were gainfully employed after leaving the center (see Table 1). The category of full-time employment showed the largest gain for graduates. In testing for significant difference, probability was shown to be at the .05 level. These gains are offset by corresponding decreases in unemployment.

Table 1

Pre and Post Enrollment Employment Patterns of GEDGraduates

Employment Status	Graduates pre		Graduates post		
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>P</u>
Full-time	15	34.9	26	60.5	.05
Part-time	8	18.6	5	11.6	.20
Unemployed	9	20.9	2	4.7	.10
non-paid ^a	10	23.3	7	16.3	.20
other ^b	1	2.3	3	7.0	.20

^aNon-paid is defined as homemakers and volunteer workers.

^bIn the graduate pre column one stated he was self-employed and in the graduate post column two stated they were on lay off from work and a third stated he was retired.

Among non-graduates there was also an increase in numbers employed full-time upon leaving the GED Instructional Center (see Table 2). It was found that 54.3 percent of non-graduate respondents were gainfully employed prior to their entry into GED instruction, and upon leaving the center 65.7 percent were found to be gainfully employed. Non-graduates largest gains in employment were found in the category of full-time workers. In testing for significant difference, probability was shown to be at the .10 level. A decrease in numbers of non-graduates who were unemployed after leaving the center was also found.

Table 2

Pre and Post Enrollment Employment Patterns of
Non-graduate GED Students

Employment Status	Pre-enrollment		Post-enrollment		<u>P</u>
	<u>N</u>	%	<u>N</u>	%	
Full-time	14	40.0	16	45.7	.10
Part-time	5	14.3	7	20.0	.20
Unemployed	10	28.6	6	17.1	.10
Non-paid ^a	6	17.1	6	17.1	.20
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	--

^aNon-paid is defined as homemakers and volunteer workers.

To determine the numbers of graduates who now are, or were formerly, enrolled in postsecondary education after leaving the GED Instructional Center questions were asked. It was found that among graduate respondents nearly one third or 32.6 percent are presently enrolled in postsecondary education. More than one third of the respondents or 39.5 percent were formerly enrolled in some type of postsecondary training. Twelve respondents, or 27.9 percent of the graduates stated that they had never enrolled in a postsecondary course of study.

Among non-graduates it was found that nearly one third of the respondents were currently enrolled in some type of postsecondary education. In response to the question of whether or not they had formerly been

enrolled in a postsecondary program of study, 39.5 percent stated that they had. Of the non-graduates 27.9 percent stated that they had never enrolled in postsecondary education.

GED graduates were asked questions on how they had thought that the completion of the GED tests would help them prior to taking the tests, in terms of access to postsecondary training and improved employability. They were then asked if completion of the GED tests had actually helped them in those same categories (see Table 3). It was found that there were decreases from the perceived outcomes to the actual outcomes in the categories of whether or not they thought the GED would help them to keep their present job, gain a salary increase, allow for enlistment in the armed services, and allow them to be admitted to college or a trade school. Increases from perceived to actual outcomes were noted in the categories of gaining a job promotion and qualifying for a job.

Table 3

Perceived and Actual Benefits of GED Completion

Will/Did GED help:	Perceived		Actual		P
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	
Keep job	24	55.8	22	51.2	.20
Job promotion	25	58.1	26	60.5	.20
Salary increase	31	72.1	27	62.8	.20
Qualify for job	24	55.8	25	58.1	.10
Enlistment	12	27.9	7	16.3	.10
College admission	28	65.1	21	48.8	.05

Question numbers six and seven were asked of graduates in order to determine the types of postsecondary training in which they had enrolled or in which they planned to enroll. It was found that 42.9 percent of those who had attended postsecondary training had enrolled in technical or trade schools, 9.5 percent had enrolled in a community or junior college, 7.1 percent had enrolled in a four year college or university, while the remainder of those who had continued their education beyond the GED stated that they had participated in On the Job Training programs or training while in the armed services. When those who had not previously enrolled in postsecondary education were asked about their future educational plans, 41.9 percent stated that they had no plans to attend school, while 30.2 percent stated they might attend a technical or trade school. An additional 11.6 percent of the respondents said they plan to attend a four year college or university and 9.3 percent stated plans to attend a community or junior college.

To determine if students were provided information on careers, job search skills and postsecondary education, both graduates and non-graduates were asked questions on the type of information they did or did not receive while enrolled in the GED Instructional Center. Of the graduate respondents, less than 26 percent reported receiving school and career information. Among non-graduates less than 23 percent received career or school information (see Table 4).

Table 4

Postsecondary Information Provided to GED Students

Type of Information	Graduates		Non-graduates	
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
College or trade school	8	18.6	6	17.1 ^a
Job or career	11	25.6	8	25.9
Job search skills	8	18.6	3	8.6

^aNumbers and percents are for affirmative responses.

As a follow-up to the information presented in Table number six, respondents from both groups were asked whether or not they thought the GED teachers should provide information on jobs and colleges. Ninety-three percent of GED graduates answered that they thought this information should be provided, and 80 percent of the non-graduates expressed that this same information should be provided.

The last question of both questionnaires asked respondents to share opinions or comments they might have regarding the GED test and its impact upon their lives. The responses to this section are categorized in Appendix D.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Completion of high school is an important indicator of attainment in American society. This completion opens access to postsecondary education and is recognized as an indicator that the individual has certain skills, habits and knowledge necessary for employment. For a variety of reasons, many students do not finish high school. Of those who do not finish, a significant number take the GED tests as an alternate means of demonstrating proficiency of high school equivalence.

The purpose of this study was to gather information to determine if students in the Plattsmouth, Nebraska, GED Instructional Center were meeting their goals of postsecondary enrollment and job improvement. Additionally, this study was done to determine if the instruction the students received assisted in their employability and access to postsecondary opportunities.

Questionnaires sent to two groups, GED graduates and non-graduates of the Plattsmouth GED Instructional Center from the years 1982-1987, were used to collect the data. The findings revealed that gains were made by respondents in the areas of improved employment status and postsecondary enrollments. Responses also revealed that the majority of respondents thought that the GED Instructional Center should provide career search information and help and that postsecondary information regarding

schools and their course offerings should be provided to them.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the survey questionnaire, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. While GED graduates fared better as a group than did the non-graduates, both made gains in improved employment upon leaving the GED Instructional Center.
2. Over two thirds of the GED graduates and approximately one fourth of the non-graduates attended some type of postsecondary training upon leaving the GED Instructional Center.
3. Prior to completion of the GED, graduates perceived benefits of GED completion were rather consistent with the actual outcome in terms of keeping one's job, gaining a job promotion and qualifying for a job.
4. The largest percent of GED graduates who go on to postsecondary education enroll or plan to enroll in technical or trade schools.
5. Both non-graduates and graduates expressed a need for career and college information to be provided in the GED Instructional Center.
6. Based on comments regarding the GED experience, many respondents believed that GED attainment was a satisfying experience and they were thankful that such an opportunity exists.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Much research is done on graduates of traditional secondary schools and their subsequent enrollments and employment; however, much remains to be done for the grad-

uates of GED programs. While the typical high school student receives educational and job counseling on an ongoing basis, the GED graduate must rely on his own devices and decisions. Based on the findings of this study, 65 percent of the graduate respondents indicated that they felt the GED would provide future access to postsecondary training. Upon completion of the GED the same graduate respondents were asked if the GED had provided access to postsecondary training. The number of those answering affirmatively dropped 17 percent. These figures demonstrate an incongruity that needs to be clarified. There is a need for GED testing and instructional centers to be expanded to include, or become associated with providers of postsecondary educational and career counseling. Ninety-three percent of graduates and 80 percent of non-graduates who participated in this study were found to agree with this need.

Often it seems that the GED graduates are looked upon in terms of their past performance in schools rather than in terms of their future potential by employers and postsecondary institutions. The comments received on the questionnaires reflected an attitude of increased self-confidence and self-satisfaction on the part of the respondents. Employers and postsecondary training institutions would do well to capitalize on this renewed outlook of potential employees and students.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Asst. Superintendent
Elementary Principal
Dr. Douglas Alan Townsend

Senior High Principal
Steve JN. Bernth

Asst. Senior High Principal
Doug Kyles

Middle School Principal
Dale E. Chesley

Elementary Coordinator
Allan D. Pestel

Plattsmouth Community Schools
PLATTSMOUTH, NEBRASKA 68048

Superintendent
Jack L. Herweg

Ralph F. Tarnasky
Plattsmouth High School
1724 8th Avenue
Plattsmouth, Nebraska 68048

December 31, 1987

Dear Former GED Students:

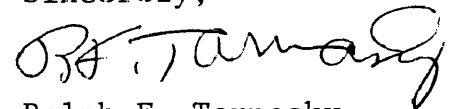
I would appreciate your help with the enclosed survey regarding your experiences with the Plattsmouth GED program.

Would you please take a few minutes to complete it, and send it to me in the enclosed envelope?

I am doing this as part of a research course I am taking at the University of Nebraska. Your answers on this survey will help me in my studies, and the future success of the GED program in Plattsmouth and its students.

Thank you for your help on this project.

Sincerely,



Ralph F. Tarnasky

Enclosures

APPENDIX B
PLATTSMOUTH COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

35

GED QUESTIONNAIRE

DIRECTIONS: Please mark an "X" in the space next to your answer.

1. What was your employment status when you took the GED tests?
 a. Employed full-time for pay.
 b. Employed part-time for pay.
 c. Unemployed.
 d. Non-paid worker (homemaker, volunteer, etc.).
 e. Other, please explain _____
2. What is your present employment status?
 a. Employed full-time for pay.
 b. Employed part-time for pay.
 c. Unemployed.
 d. Non-paid worker (homemaker, volunteer, etc.).
 e. Other, please explain _____
3. Before you took the GED test, did you think that taking the tests would help you to:
 yes no a. Keep your job?
 yes no b. Get a job promotion?
 yes no c. Get a salary increase?
 yes no d. Qualify for a job?
 yes no e. Qualify for enlistment in the armed services?
 yes no f. Be admitted to college or trade school?
4. Has taking the GED test helped you to:
 yes no a. Keep your job?
 yes no b. Get a job promotion?
 yes no c. Get a salary increase?
 yes no d. Qualify for a job?
 yes no e. Qualify for enlistment in the armed services?
 yes no f. Be admitted to college or trade school?
5. Are you now a student?
 a. Yes, full-time.
 b. Yes, part-time.
 c. No, but I have attended college at some time in the past.
 d. No, never.
6. If you have attended college or trade school, what type?
 a. Community or junior college.
 b. Four-year college or university.
 c. Technical or trade school.
 d. Other, please explain _____
7. What type of school do you plan to attend?
 a. None.
 b. Community or junior college.
 c. Four-year college or university.
 d. Technical or trade school.
 e. Other, please explain _____

8. Did the teachers during the GED classes provide information on the following:
- yes no a. colleges or trade schools?
yes no b. job or career possibilities?
yes no c. job search skills (resumes, applications)?
9. Do you think that the GED teachers should provide information about jobs and colleges?
yes no
10. Please share any opinions or comments that you have regarding the GED tests and the impact that taking the tests has had on your life.

Thanks again for taking the time to complete this survey. Your answers will help others who will be taking the tests, and your teachers.

APPENDIX C
PLATTSMOUTH COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

GED Questionnaire

Directions: Please mark an "X" in the space next to your answer.

1. What was your employment status before you began to study for the GED?
 a. Employed full-time for pay.
 b. Employed part-time for pay.
 c. Unemployed.
 d. Non-paid worker (homemaker, volunteer, etc.)
 e. Other, please explain _____
2. What is your present employment status?
 a. Employed full-time for pay.
 b. Employed part-time for pay.
 c. Unemployed.
 d. Non-paid worker (homemaker, volunteer, etc.)
 e. Other, please explain _____
3. Are you now a student?
 a. Yes, full-time.
 b. Yes, part-time.
 c. No, but I have attended college some time in the past.
 d. No, never.
4. Did the teachers during the GED classes give you information on:
 yes no a. Colleges or trade schools?
 yes no b. job or career possibilities?
 yes no c. job search skills (resumes, applications)?
5. Do you think that the GED teachers should provide information about jobs and colleges?
 yes no
6. Please share any opinions or comments that you have regarding the GED tests and the impact that studying for them has had on your life:

Thank you again for taking the time to complete this survey. Your answers will help others who will be studying for the GED in Platts-mouth, and your teachers.

APPENDIX D

COMMENTS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Selected Comments of GED Graduates:

- 1) "I took the GED as a means of personal satisfaction." This comment was made by nearly one third of the respondents.
- 2) "I am thankful for having the chance to work on my GED. I was really scared at first to go back to school, but now I'm so happy I did it. Thank you all for your help."
- 3) "I always felt bad because I quit high school. Thank you for helping me get the GED."
- 4) "Since I got my GED I've been going to college. I'm happy I made it through the GED. Thank you."
- 5) "I'm still not working, but I think the GED will help me get a job."
- 6) "Now that I have my GED I feel better about myself and feel like I can help my kids with some of their homework."
- 7) "It has made me feel better about myself!"
- 8) "All the teachers were very nice and helped in any way they could. I would recommend this GED program to everyone who needs it."
- 9) "The reason I took the GED test was if I ever wanted to get a job I'd have a better chance of getting one with a high school diploma."

Selected Comments of Non-graduates:

- 1) "I really should go back to finish my GED." This comment was made by numerous respondents.
- 2) "I moved away from Plattsburgh so I can't finish my GED right now."
- 3) "I liked the teachers and the way they helped me do the work."
- 4) "I'm working now so I can't make it to class."