WEST VIRGINIA CODE: §18-2-6B

§18-2-6b. General Educational Development (GED) diploma; legislative findings and intent; examination costs; testing materials and procedures; report required.

(a) The Legislature makes the following findings related to the General Educational Development (GED) examination:

(1) The GED examination is an instrument for success that can keep a student from dropping out of school and can transform the future for both school age and adult individuals who attain a GED diploma. One in every seven Americans with a high school credential has received the GED, as well as one in every twenty college students. For those who have not graduated from high school, attaining a GED diploma greatly increases their employment opportunities and earning potential.

(2) While West Virginia's average per-capita income has increased over the past ten years as the state's economy has held steady or grown slightly, most other states have shown declines. Despite these positive changes, West Virginia still ranks as one of the five poorest states in the nation. Additionally, many counties within the state fall far below the state average; therefore, the current cost of the GED examination is difficult for many citizens to afford without help, and significant cost increases will make the GED examination cost prohibitive.

(3) In addition to the cost factor, large areas of West Virginia are without broadband Internet access or without adequate broadband Internet access speeds, which results in diminished opportunities for rural residents to participate in the rapidly unfolding digital revolution compared to their nonrural neighbors. Citizens living in these areas have few opportunities to become adept in computer technology. Therefore, most such citizens, especially adults seeking to earn a GED years after leaving the public school system, are not proficient or even comfortable using the Internet.

(4) Individuals who may benefit most from earning a GED diploma are those who lack many of the skills needed to secure employment or to function successfully in an age dependent upon technology. Because such individuals also lack the financial resources to obtain those needed skills, if the GED is unattainable they are likely to remain in a state of poverty.

(b) It is the intent of the Legislature to make the GED diploma available to the widest possible range of state residents who have not achieved a high school diploma. To that end, an examination of the following issues is required:

(1) The impact on prospective GED test takers of the proposed changes in the design and delivery of the qualifying examination made by the American Council on Education (ACE) in 2011;

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(2) The impact of the increase in costs per individual tested; and

(3) The alternatives available to reduce costs and to retain the option of pen and paper testing for those who desire it.

(c) The State Board shall perform an exhaustive study of the issues surrounding administration of the GED examination in the state including, but not limited to, the following:

(1) Analysis of research, pilot testing, or both, that was done in West Virginia by the American Council on Education prior to its decision to eliminate pen and paper examinations, along with the justifications offered for eliminating this type of examination as a possible option;

(2) Determination of the current and future costs to the state to provide GED examinations free of charge to eligible individuals; and

(3) Recommendations for statutory or rule changes to achieve the following goals:

(A) Reducing or controlling escalating costs of administering the GED examinations; and

(B) Retaining paper and pen testing for those individuals who request or require it; or

(C) Eliminating or reducing significantly the difficulty for individuals who are not comfortable or proficient in taking online examinations.

(d) The State Board shall complete its work and report its findings, conclusions and recommendations, together with drafts of any legislation or rule changes necessary to effectuate the recommendations, to the Legislative Oversight Commission on Education Accountability no later than July 1, 2012.

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