



**White Paper**  
**Topic – High School Equivalency Diploma**  
**May 2017**

**Introduction**

In Region 11, over 43,000 individuals of ages 18 and over do not have a high school diploma or equivalency (ACS 2011-2015). Research shows that to obtain a job that pays a living wage, individuals need to have at least a diploma, high school equivalency diploma (HSED), or higher degree. Additionally, there is a shortage of qualified job applicants to fill middle-skill jobs which require, at a minimum, a high school diploma or equivalency. Therefore we believe there is a need for greater access to this training to benefit both individual earning capacity and to fill the Central Iowa job market pipeline.

Region 11 – Central Iowa	Total Population ages 18 and over	Without HS Diploma ages 18 and over	%
Boone County, Iowa	20,436	1482	7.3%
Dallas County, Iowa	53,432	3295	6.2%
Jasper County, Iowa	28,560	2430	8.5%
Madison County, Iowa	11,543	827	7.2%
Marion County, Iowa	25,158	2021	8.0%
Polk County, Iowa	337,833	29,446	8.7%
Story County, Iowa	77,434	2449	3.2%
Warren County, Iowa	35,494	1808	5.1%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>589,890</b>	<b>43,758</b>	<b>7.4%</b>

Source: 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Middle-skill jobs are plentiful in Iowa and comprise 55% of all jobs statewide. However, only 32% of the labor market possess the necessary skills to fill these jobs, leaving a 22% GAP (IWD, November 2015.) Many middle-skill jobs in Iowa are in the areas of advanced manufacturing, energy/construction, financial services, and health care. These jobs require a credential beyond a high school diploma (such as an Associate’s Degree, a certificate, an apprenticeship, or other industry-recognized credential), but not a four-year degree. As a result, a focus is needed to increase the number of individuals who achieve an HSED and pursue additional training up to an Associate’s Degree. If we can increase the number of individuals

with this education and training, we not only increase the pipeline of skilled workers essential to our Central Iowa economy, but we also increase individual's long-term financial potential.

Individuals who achieve their HSED are better positioned to increase their lifetime earnings. It is estimated that with a high school equivalency diploma or higher degree, an individual is able to earn \$700,000 more over their lifetime than a person who does not have a high school diploma or equivalency. The HSED, coupled with post-secondary training and education (credit or non-credit), further advances an individual's ability to increase their earning potential and move from poverty into financial independence.

### **Community Capacity**

During July 2015 through June 2016, the following high school equivalency efforts took place

- 2,806 adults enrolled in the High School Equivalency Testing (HiSET) program
- 1866 individuals received a High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED) from the State of Iowa.

In order for more Central Iowans to improve their financial position in today's economy, through the attainment of an HSED, we need to grow our community's capacity to engage more individuals and enhance the preparation process to ensure successful completion. However, without large-scale collaboration and an infusion of funds, the gap in this region's labor force will persist and we will continue to have individuals unable to become financially self-sufficient.

In the Region 11, HiSET preparation classes are currently offered at the following locations:

- Central Iowa Shelter and Services
- DMACC – Ames Campus
- DMACC-Ankeny Campus
- DMACC- Boone Campus
- DMACC - Newton Campus
- DMACC - Perry Camus
- DMACC - Southridge Career Academy
- DMACC-Urban Campus
- DMACC-West Campus
- Society of St. Vincent de Paul
- Iowa Workforce Development Center

The testing for HiSET takes place through DMACC in Region 11. The State of Iowa requires pre- and post-testing, which DMACC performs. Most preparation sites can administer the test for HiSET.

## **Additional Option for Providing Training**

An additional educational option for those interested is to develop a charter school such as those in the Indianapolis, Indiana, area which arms students with a high school diploma as well as possible additional industry-related certifications.

The Excel Center model provides adults, 18 and older, who did not complete high school the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and go on to higher education and better-paying jobs. The school provides a flexible structure and supportive relationships with staff to help students manage work, life, and family concerns as they achieve their educational goals.

The Excel Center meets the particular needs of adult students as they work toward a high school diploma, working with them to remove non-academic barriers to their educational success. On-site day care, public transportation passes, and a personal life coach are provided to encourage students to persist toward the goal of graduation. In Indiana, The Excel Center and Goodwill Industries of Central Indiana continue to work with students after graduation to provide assistance and track outcomes.

The Excel Center not only improves the lives of individuals, it improves communities. In Indiana, median earnings for high school graduates are 41% higher than those of individuals who dropped out of high school. Adding an industry-recognized certificate boosts earnings an additional 20%.

Goodwill Industries of Central Iowa is currently exploring the feasibility of developing a local Excel Center. Different policy and legislative changes with the state of Iowa, such as charter school legislation, will need to take place to make this option viable.

## **Community Goal**

United Way of Central Iowa has set a goal of 10,000 HiSET awards by 2020, which equates to 2,000 HSED earned per year. With the collaboration of more partners and increased funding, more individuals can attain their HiSET. A major tool to achieve this goal is the Bridges To Success program.

The Bridges model is an evidence-based approach to equivalency attainment that incorporates a strategic focus on meaningful student engagement throughout the preparation experience. The core elements of this model include:

- Comprehensive student barrier assessment – academic and life circumstances
- Success coaching, career pathway planning, and extensive wrap-around support services including childcare and transportation

- Integration of full-time instructors who have been trained in the skills required to teach adults with numerous educational barriers
- Increase of in-class time for instruction, academic support, and career pathway navigation
- Integration of work-ready curriculum – which includes relevant work-environment context in the areas of greatest job potential in central Iowa
- Early alert system – a technology-based warning system that instructors can use to immediately notify career coaches that a student is facing challenges (i.e. missing class, in need of additional academic support, in need of additional wrap-around support, etc.)

### **Legislative Impact**

As of Spring 2017, the state of Iowa has only one pathway to receive a HSED after the age of twenty-one, the High School Equivalency Test. The Department of Education convened the Iowa HSED Task Force, which examined the need for alternative pathways to achieve a HSED, assessed best practices, and evaluated the feasibility of adoption. HF 473 took the task force recommendations and allowed for the expansion of additional pathways for high school equivalency. Passed unanimously by the Iowa House and Iowa Senate, this legislation was signed into law by the Governor on April 20, 2017. The Iowa State Board of Education is charged with adopting the rules for HF 473. Adult learners will have more opportunities for success in achieving their HSEDs, which will allow them to gain further education and training to advance their skills.

### **Summary**

It has been long known that there is a skills gap in Central Iowa. It is also known, that too many Central Iowa families live in poverty. Providing additional local training to enable individuals to obtain their high school equivalent or high school diploma and possibly industry-level certification, would benefit not only individuals and families, but the Central Iowa economy as a whole.

The child of someone who has not completed high school is 50% more likely to drop out of high school than the child of a graduate. The child of a graduate who also has some post-secondary education is only 5% likely to drop out of high school.

In addition to lower earnings, those without a high school diploma/equivalency are much more likely to be recipients of government welfare, and are eight times more likely to be incarcerated than high school graduates. It is clear that improving educational attainment benefits the community as well as the individual. Providing education at any time, any place, any pace, is crucial to the success of an individual getting that high school diploma/equivalency. It is also an educational process for employers to recognize the HiSET for meeting entry-level educational requirements.

## **Next Steps for the Central Iowa Workforce Development Board (CIWDB)**

Part of the CIWDB's responsibility is to set strategy for the workforce development region. By taking the following actions, the CIWDB will be supporting its determination to make HSED achievement an area of focus for Region 11.

- Increased financial support is needed in order to increase HiSET classes and provide service to more people. CIWDB should evaluate possible funding options through its own budget sources, as well as continue to identify other potential funding streams which may align with HiSET's goals.
- Support access to the HiSET program by maintaining HiSET preparation classes at the One Stop Center located in Des Moines
- Review identified policy issues that impact high school equivalency/diplomas and determine what, if any, action the CIWDB will undertake.
- Participation of CIWDB staff on committees and in other community efforts to increase the number of people in Region 11 that receive their HSED.