

POLITICO

A tough test for the new GED - The Center for American Progress makes its case for the America COMPETES Act - Fundraising off Common Core contention

By Caitlin Emma
September 2, 2014

A TOUGH TEST FOR NEW GED: High school dropouts seeking an equivalency degree have been struggling with the revised GED exam, launched Jan. 1 as a profit-making joint venture between publishing giant Pearson and nonprofit American Council on Education. The pass rate on the old GED hovered around 72 percent and dipped only slightly after the last major revision to the exam in 2002. The new exam, aligned to the Common Core, is meant to be much harder — and indeed, just 53 percent of test-takers have passed. Most have gotten tripped up on the math section, which includes more algebra and word problems, according to CT Turner, senior director of state accounts for the GED Testing Service. The good news: About 80 percent of people who fail the math section “are just two to three right answers away from passing, so it’s not a hopeless cause,” Turner said. The GED Testing Service is analyzing the concepts that have proven most tricky and plans to help adult education teachers hone in on those subjects.

— **The new test is not only harder, it’s also more expensive**, with exam fees of up to \$120, plus \$30 to retake a section. (Some states subsidize the exam costs, so the actual cost to students varies.) Students appear quite wary of giving it a go. Through the end of July, just 105,000 students had taken the new GED. In a typical year, 750,000 students take the test. Turner said a steep drop was expected because of the format change — but even so, the numbers have been disappointing, he said. “We’ve seen a lot of anxiety from adult learners and from education centers,” Turner said. “I think we have a lot of work to do.”

CAP MAKES CASE FOR COMPETES: The Center for American Progress is out with a report today analyzing funding for scientific research authorized by the America COMPETES Act. COMPETES authorizes basic research through the National Science Foundation and other government agencies. CAP estimates the gap between sequester-level spending and the spending levels in the House Democrats’ proposed rewrite of America COMPETES and finds there’s a \$13 billion spending gap between 2015 and 2021. The report comes on the heels of Senate Democrats releasing their own proposed COMPETES reauthorization. Read the report: <http://politico.pro/1pRtZbI>

FUNDRAISING OFF THE CORE: The tea party group FreedomWorks wants to raise funds off opposition to the Common Core. The goal: Bring in \$250,000 by next weekend. To help the cause, Republican Sen. Mike Lee of Utah sent around an email Monday asserting that “the future of our country is on the line.” He urged donations of \$5 or more to help FreedomWorks “make this Common Core’s last school year.” Another email went out last week from Rep. Thomas Massie, a Kentucky Republican, who urged contributions to fight “the horrors of Common Core” — including “awful one-size-fits-all tests” and “liberal propaganda in the classroom.” The pitches come after FreedomWorks reaped a trove of email addresses from participants in Glenn Beck’s interactive town hall meeting, “We Will Not Conform,” which was simulcast earlier this summer in hundreds of movie theaters nationwide. For more on the anti-Core campaign: <http://bit.ly/Pxn9cc>

— **Speaking of the Common Core**, a staunch opponent and proponent of the standards call for a restart to the debate in *The Washington Times* today. Both sides can agree on a few things, write Fordham Institute’s Michael Petrilli and Cato Institute’s Neal McCluskey. The standards weren’t created by Washington, they don’t stipulate a single curriculum and adoption was “technically voluntary.” Read their piece here: <http://bit.ly/1rJodGA> Or tune into C-SPAN’s *Washington Journal* at 8:30 a.m. ET to listen to Petrilli and McCluskey talk Common Core contention.

GOOD TUESDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 2. Did you miss us?! I hope everyone had a wonderful Labor Day! I spent mine lounging in the sun by the Marine Corps War Memorial and Netherlands Carillon with my stepdog, Rox: <http://bit.ly/1FomdJ>. Morning Education is back in action [<http://bit.ly/1B9fHX9>] after a week-long hiatus, so make sure you send tips and amusing GIFs to cemma@politico.com or [@caitlinzemma](https://twitter.com/caitlinzemma). Events: educalendar@politicopro.com. And follow us on Twitter: [@Morning_Edu](https://twitter.com/Morning_Edu) and [@POLITICOPro](https://twitter.com/POLITICOPro).

AL FRANKEN ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL: Maggie Severns caught up with Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) on the campaign trail over the weekend, starting at a small block party in north Minneapolis where Franken stumped about his work on the HELP and Judiciary committees. Franken said Congress underfunding Head Start is a particular frustration. Constituents in the neighborhood, much of which is low-income, were more interested in hearing about job creation and sentencing reform.

— **Later that afternoon at the Minnesota State Fair**, fans lined up by Franken’s booth [<http://bit.ly/1pjeUKy>] to shake hands and snap photos [<http://bit.ly/1sV2RqG>] with the Senator. The booth is parked across the street from a “dairy barn” where Minnesotans stick it out in the long line for milkshakes and soft serve — and a couple blocks down from the booth of Republican businessman Mike McFadden, who is challenging Franken for his seat. McFadden has accused Franken of trying to slide by with a low-profile campaign. “I don’t know what he means by that,” Franken said, adding that he’s been traveling around the state frequently for several years. “I’ve been totally available to Minnesota press,” Franken added, though he hasn’t given D.C. reporters as much access. They “don’t like the fact that I don’t stop and talk to them in the subway, or something,” Franken said.

— **Franken told Morning Education** he often talks with voters about funding for mental health in schools and workforce policy — in particular, partnerships between community colleges and workforce boards. Both have been a focus for Franken during his first term in the Senate. If he's re-elected, Franken said he wants to zoom in on early childhood education. "I think as a country, we don't emphasize that enough," Franken said.

MIXED FEEDBACK FOR HEA PLAN: Friday was the deadline for comments on the Higher Education Affordability Act discussion draft [<http://1.usa.gov/1EZeHo>]. While congressional Republicans are taking what Senate HELP Chairman Tom Harkin called a "piecemeal" approach to reauthorization, Harkin and congressional Democrats are pushing the massive omnibus bill, which they say would better address core college cost issues. Groups including the Association of American Universities published their lengthy and at-times critical comments last week. AAU said it supports the bill's overarching goal of strengthening accountability in higher ed, but also cautioned against excessive and conflicting federal regulations [<http://bit.ly/1qhFfgO>]. The American Council on Education, on behalf of 21 higher ed groups, also had some concerns: <http://politico.pro/1x2Cky1>

THE LATEST TENURE TALK: California Gov. Jerry Brown late last week appealed a judge's final decision that struck down certain job protections for teachers and challenged tenure in the Golden State. Attorney General Kamala Harris filed the appeal on Friday in a Los Angeles County court, the Associated Press reports [<http://bit.ly/1AovUvI>]. Here's a refresher of the judge's final decision from Maggie Severns: <http://politico.pro/1n3zXRX>.

— **In New York**, a judge set to hear on the consolidation of two tenure lawsuits Wednesday has recused himself [<http://politico.pro/1r6XpT5>]. The cases include *Dauids v. New York* and a case filed by former CNN anchor Campbell Brown and her group, the Partnership for Educational Justice. Because the judge has recused himself, the conference is cancelled for now. Last week, the law firm supporting *Dauids* and Students Matter said they were withdrawing their support from *Dauids* due to the impending consolidation. More from me: <http://politico.pro/1qwxPWm>

ALLIES FOR A UNION AGENDA: Lily Eskelsen Garcia officially assumed the presidency of the National Education Association on Monday — and celebrated by appearing alongside President Barack Obama at a Wisconsin rally in support of organized labor. She called on Americans to join unions in fighting for more investment in education, a higher minimum wage and policies to make college more affordable.

NEW ED REFORM GROUP DEBUTS: Peter Cunningham, a former assistant secretary for communication in Arne Duncan's Education Department, launched a new ed reform group this weekend with backing from the Broad Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation and Bloomberg Philanthropies. The group backs charter schools, Common Core and teacher evaluations based in part on student test scores. The website: <http://bit.ly/Z59ePg>

THE TOUGH THING ABOUT TEACHER EVALS: No one said teacher evaluation reform would be easy. States are scaling back on their efforts, slowing down and in some cases, making delays until the Obama administration is out of office. Complicated evaluation formulas tied to student test scores, teachers union pressure, error-riddled evaluations and a wave of more difficult tests for students have won many teachers a reprieve from the newfangled evaluations during the school year now getting underway. I have the story here: <http://politico.pro/1EYvpj>

REPORT ROLL CALL

— September is Attendance Awareness Month, and Attendance Works is out with a report showing that poor attendance is a national challenge, affecting academic achievement and the achievement gap. More here: <http://politico.pro/1r77wHo> and here: <http://politico.pro/1sVAg4z>

CALENDAR

— 8:30 a.m.: Fordham Institute President Michael Petrilli and Cato Institute Director of the Center for Educational Freedom Neal McCluskey discuss the Common Core on C-SPAN's Washington Journal.

— 9 a.m.: The University of California's Civil Rights Project holds a briefing titled, "Do Higher Ed Accountability Proposals Narrow Opportunity For Minority Students and Minority-Serving Institutions?" CVC-Congressional Auditorium and Atrium, U.S. Capitol.

— 4 p.m.: The Thomas B. Fordham Institute holds a book discussion on "Building a Better Teacher: How Teaching Works (and How to Teach It to Everyone)." 1016 16th St. NW.

SYLLABUS

— The Michigan Education Association and Koch-funded group Americans for Prosperity are locked in a battle over labor. The Detroit Free Press: <http://on.freep.com/1zZVjpo>

— California passes first-ever bill to define sexual assault on college campuses. Time: <http://ti.me/1zQRBoP>

— Security measures increase as schools open for new year in a new era. The Washington Post: <http://wapo.st/1CkoOWt>

— Oklahoma lost its waiver, but won an accountability reprieve. Real Clear Education: <http://bit.ly/1udILtp>

– Editorial boards at The Washington Post and The Times-Picayune criticize Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal for his attack on the Common Core. The Times-Picayune: <http://bit.ly/1CkffH6>

– Duke University adds voluntary admissions questions on sexual orientation and gender identity. Inside Higher Ed: <http://bit.ly/1x4Evkw>

– University of Texas at Austin runs an eight-year capital campaign, exceeding its \$3 billion goal. The Texas Tribune: <http://bit.ly/1ClDRzq>