

Study shows earning GED improves job success and earnings

A bulletin from the Iowa Department of Education

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(DES MOINES) Iowans who earn GED diplomas see significant gains in employment, earnings, skill levels and job satisfaction, according to results of a study released today (Feb. 17) by the Iowa Department of Education.

For 50 years, the General Educational Development certificate has offered high school dropouts across the country a second chance to finish high school and increase their opportunities for getting jobs and continuing their education. The Iowa study is one of the first in the nation to measure the long-term impact of earning a GED. About 1,600 Iowans who earned certificates in 1980, 1985, and 1988 were queried to determine the impact the GED had on their careers and quality of life between the time they passed the GED and 1990.

While 19 percent of the respondents were unemployed before passing the GED, only 9 percent were unemployed in 1990. Although 54 percent had been employed before passing the GED, 71 percent had jobs in 1990.

The respondent's personal income increased substantially, according to the study. Average personal income rose from \$12,404 before passing the GED to \$17,764 in 1990, an increase of 43 percent. Adjusted for inflation, respondents' average income for all Iowans decreased by more than 10 percent between 1980 and 1990.

Far fewer of the GED holders received public assistance payments. Of the 192 people surveyed who received welfare before earning their GED, 135 (70 percent) were no longer on welfare by 1990. Five percent of those who did not receive welfare before passing the GED did receive it in 1990.

Employment benefits increased substantially for the survey respondents. Before passing the GED, 62 percent had health insurance, 51 percent had life insurance and 17 percent were enrolled in pension programs. In 1990, 74 percent had health insurance, 67 percent had life insurance, and 34 percent were enrolled in pension programs.

The respondents also indicated they had jobs which required more skills, and they were more satisfied with their jobs.

"All the evidence indicates earning a GED has positive and long-lasting results," said John Hartwig, Coordinator of the

study for the Iowa Department of Education. "Efforts by educators and family members to encourage adults to get their GED are important because a GED can open doors to jobs and further education that might otherwise be closed," said Hartwig. "This has always been the philosophy behind the program, but we now have reliable data to document the positive effects."

Most respondents said that earning a GED had affected their lives in other ways, including helping them assist their children with school work, helping them to be better parents and improving their self-esteem, said Hartwig. "These intangible results may be some of the most beneficial," he said. "The respondents said the most significant result the GED had on their lives was improving their self-esteem."

Among other results of the study were:

- Employment gains were greater for women than for men. Before passing the GED, 47 percent of women and 67 percent of men were employed. In 1990, 69 percent of women and 78 percent of men had jobs.
- The average number of hours respondents worked per week increased from 19.8 hours before passing the GED tests to 27.1 hours in 1990.
- Personal savings and home ownership also increased. About half of the respondents reported they did not have savings before passing the GED, while less than a third reported no savings in 1990. About half owned their own homes before passing the GED, while 70 percent were home owners in 1990.
- Twelve percent of the respondents who enrolled in an adult basic education program to prepare for the GED exams said the program had helped them pass the tests. The programs are offered mainly by Iowa's 15 community colleges.
- The study was conducted in the spring of 1991 by the Department of Education with Hal Beder, Associate Professor, Rutgers University, New Jersey.
- About 5,000 Iowans earn a GED each year by completing a series of tests in math, writing, natural science, social studies and literature. Nationally, over 430,000 Americans pass the exam annually. The GED is produced by the American Council on Education, a private not-for-profit organization.
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