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By The Repository Editorial Board

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## Editorial: Kasich's proposal would expand options for earning diploma

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It's supposed to offer hope, but for thousands of Ohioans the GED, or General Educational Development certificate test, has become a hindrance.

Until 2012, the high school equivalency test was run by a nonprofit association of colleges. That changed when it partnered with the for-profit corporation Pearson, which also provides the PARCC Common Core Exams.

The cost to take the test tripled and it no longer could be taken on paper. Not only must the test be taken on a computer, but registration must be done online, too, using an email address and credit card.

As the study's author, Hannah Halbert, wrote, "In a perverse way, the changes create huge barriers for the very population that needs a high school equivalency. About 48 percent of Ohioans without a diploma have either no computer or no Internet service. Many also lack a bank account or credit card."

As a result of these changes, passage rates in Ohio "plunged by 85 percent, from more than 14,800 a year on average between 2009 and 2013 to fewer than 2,200 in 2014," a study released in February by Policy Matters Ohio found.

That prompted changes to how the test was scored. Still, the study estimates that about 22,000 fewer Ohioans hold a high school equivalency degree than if the state had "kept pace." That means there are 22,000 fewer Ohioans who can secure a meaningful job or advance their education.

The changes didn't impact Ohio alone. According to The Plain Dealer, 22 states have started offering an alternative test because of the changes to the GED. In Ohio, though, the GED still has a monopoly — for now.

Gov. John Kasich this week proposed changes that would reverse this trend. The Ohio Department of Education would allow students to choose from two additional high school equivalency exams, and it would award a state high school equivalency diploma to any student who passed one of the three. The state would continue to pay up to \$80 for each first-time test taker, a subsidy that could cover most, if not all, of the cost if the competition created by the two additional tests drives down test costs, as The Plain Dealer reported.

We applaud Kasich for his proposal. It's a necessary move aimed at helping Ohioans make better lives for themselves and their families and assists employers whose success relies heavily on a skilled, educated workforce. State lawmakers should fast-track the proposal once it is introduced formally. We have valuable ground to make up.

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