

No high school diploma? You've got options!

If you're done with high school but were unable to graduate, don't give up. You can still get a high school diploma whether you dropped out, failed the California High School Exit Exam, or did not have enough course credits.

As you know, a high school diploma is your passport to a more interesting and better-paying job. Those who do not complete high school will earn \$270,000 less than high school graduates during their working lives, according to U.S. Census estimates. And about 60% of 16- to 19-year-old dropouts are unemployed, according to a recent study.

It's never too late. There are many ways outside of high school to get a diploma, its equivalent, or further education. This Q&A focuses on those options.

How can I still get a diploma?

Most communities in California offer Adult Education. Adult Ed programs are open to students who are 18 years or older. If you are younger than 18, you still might be eligible. You can take Adult Ed if you are an emancipated minor (legally free from parental control), are pregnant or taking care of your child, or have a written agreement with your school district.

Adult Ed programs let you make up credits that you need to graduate. They also offer the exit exam twice a year. If you have all the credits you need, you can focus on English and/or math to help you pass the exam. Check with your guidance counselor, a teacher, the school district office, or a trusted adult to find out about Adult Ed programs

near you. Or go to www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ae, click on "Directory of Schools," and then on "California Adult Education Provider Directory." (You can use a computer at your local library.)

In addition, ask your high school counselor, principal, or a teacher what your school district offers students who cannot graduate by the end of their senior year. Ask them if the district allows seniors to stay in high school longer and retake the exit exam.

Is there any way to get a diploma without taking the exit exam?

At 12 community colleges, students can enroll in Adult Education courses and receive a high school diploma without taking the exit exam. (Often this program is called Adult High School.) However, these colleges have their own set of tough requirements for obtaining a diploma. Community colleges must require at least 160 units of course work (courses you successfully completed in high school would count toward those units), and most colleges require more. In addition, some colleges have their own set of proficiency exams that students must pass to obtain a diploma.

The 12 colleges include:

- City College of San Francisco;
- College of the Desert in Riverside County;
- College of the Siskiyous;
- Copper Mountain in San Bernardino County;
- MiraCosta in San Diego County;
- Mount San Antonio, Pasadena City, and Santa Monica City, all in Los Angeles County;
- North Orange County District School of Continuing Education;

- Both campuses of Rancho Santiago (Santa Ana and Santiago Canyon) in Orange County; and
- Santa Barbara City.

Los Angeles City is also considering some form of Adult High School for its nine campuses. The earliest the program would be offered, if approved, would be spring semester 2011.

If one of these colleges is near your high school, talk to your school's guidance counselor or a teacher. Or go to your local community college's Continuing Education Department, Career Center, or Admissions Office and talk to one of the counselors.

What about the GED?

Most Adult Education programs and all community colleges also offer classes that help students prepare to pass the General Educational Development Test or GED. The GED is recognized nationally as an acceptable substitute for a high school diploma and is a valuable asset for pursuing career and educational opportunities. It has tests in math, reading, writing, social studies, and science.

The exam takes about 7 1/2 hours to complete and includes multiple-choice and essay questions. You may take the exam three times a year at testing centers for a fee of about \$100. You may retake the exam or sections you have not passed, often for an additional fee. Go to www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/gd and click on "Frequently Asked Questions" to find the location of your local testing center and other information. Or call 1-866-370-4740 for information in English and Spanish, including a listing of testing centers throughout the state. Also check with your school district to see if the district offers the GED test at a lower price.

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Students who are within 60 days of their 18th birthday or older can take the GED. Under certain circumstances, 17-year-olds can also take the exam. (See www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/gd and click on “Frequently Asked Questions.”) Special Education students can request an accommodation, such as more time to take the exam, by contacting the testing center at least 30 days before the test.

In addition, many local GED testing centers have preparation programs available without charge or can refer you to a preparation program. Most bookstores and public libraries have GED test-preparation materials if you want to study for the GED on your own.

If you are deciding between getting your diploma or the GED, consider the following:

- How many courses do you have to take to be eligible for a diploma? If that number is high, you might prefer taking the GED.
- Is the only reason you are not graduating because you have not yet passed the exit exam? If so, it might be easier to study just English and math for the exit exam rather than the four subjects covered by the GED.
- How old are you? The GED may be more appropriate if you are 20 or older and not in Special Education.
- Do you know where you want to work when you graduate? Find out if the employer prefers a high school diploma to the GED. Some employers like a diploma because it shows that the job applicant has the ability to complete what he or she has started.

I need to support myself. Are there any programs that provide a salary while I'm studying for my high school diploma or GED?

Yes. Some organizations offer help with the high school diploma or GED and a salary as well.

Students who join **Job Corps**, a federal program, are paid a monthly allowance. Job Corps helps you learn a trade at the same time you are getting a high school diploma

or GED. It also helps its graduates find jobs. To learn more, call 1-800-733-JOBS (or 1-800-733-5627). Operators who speak English and Spanish are available 24 hours a day. An operator will provide you with information about the program, refer you to the admissions counselor closest to your home, and mail you an information packet. You can also go to the Job Corps website at www.jobcorps.gov.

You can earn a GED or high school diploma as a member of the **California Conservation Corps (CCC)**, a state program for 18- to 25-year-olds. You also learn life skills and work hard doing fire protection, emergency response, or environmental conservation (such as building trails, planting trees, or working in a salmon fishery). The CCC pays minimum wage and offers a grant for further education once you successfully complete the program. Some programs provide housing or a chance to travel to other countries. Go to www.ccc.ca.gov. Or you can call 1-800-952-JOBS (or 1-800-952-5627) and leave your name, address, and phone number (in English or Spanish). A recruiter will call you in about a week.

In addition, the state runs a **Youth Employment Opportunity Program (YEOP)** for 15- to 21-year-olds that offers peer advising, referrals to supportive services, workshops, and job placement assistance. Go to www.edd.ca.gov/jobs_and_Training/Services_for_Youth.htm for locations of YEOP programs and other information. Or call your local Employment Development Department—which is listed in the front of the telephone book under State Government Offices—to find out if there is a YEOP program near you.

Can I enroll in a job-training program if I don't have a high school diploma or GED?

Although many job-training programs require a high school diploma or GED, some do not. For example, the 74 state-funded regional occupational centers and programs (ROCPs) do not require a high school diploma and most offer courses for adults.

To find an ROCP near you, go to www.carocp.org/carocps.html or ask your guidance counselor or a teacher.

In addition, there are programs run by other organizations, including apprenticeships. To find out more about the minimum requirements for a variety of apprenticeships, go to www.dir.ca.gov/das, which has some information in Spanish.

For more information about career-technical opportunities, see EdSource's guide *About to graduate from high school? Consider career education programs*, available in English and Spanish. To download for free, go to www.edsource.org/pub_CareerEdGuide4-06.html or call 1-650-917-9481.

Do I need a diploma to go to college?

In California, you only need to be 18 years or older to attend a community college. A high school diploma is not required, though you may have to take remedial courses offered by the college and some majors, such as engineering, may require a GED before you can transfer to a four-year university.

Besides preparing students for four-year universities, community colleges also provide career-tech programs, such as firefighting, carpentry, auto mechanics, graphic arts, and nursing. Go to your local college's career center or admissions office and talk to one of its counselors. Or see www.cccco.edu/StudentSupport/tabid/925/Default.aspx for a statewide list of colleges and their programs.

What if I need financial help to attend a community college?

Contact the Student Aid Commission at www.csac.ca.gov, click on “Financial Aid Programs,” then click on “Cal Grant C.” You can also call 1-888-CA-GRANT (or 1-888-224-7268) to see if you qualify. (You may have to call more than once to get through.) Also check out www.icanaffordcollege.com, which includes information on how to get a community college fee waiver. 