

TO: Members of the State Board of Education  
FROM: Kelly M. Schulz, Secretary *(KMS)*  
DATE: April 26, 2016 SBOE Meeting  
SUBJECT: GED® and National External Diploma Program Update

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PURPOSE:

The State Board of Education and the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation issue a Maryland High School Diploma to individuals who have passed all subjects of the GED® test and to individuals who successfully complete the National External Diploma Program (NEDP). Secretary Schulz will present the annual report and updates to the State Board on the administration of these two programs.

BACKGROUND:

The GED® tests were historically available only in a paper and pencil delivery format. Early in 2011, the national GED Testing Service® announced that starting in January 2014, the GED® tests would be delivered solely on computer in official Pearson VUE testing centers, and the content and format of the tests would be revised to respond to the more rigorous curriculum of the Common Core State Standards. Computer based testing is offering a much more efficient process for registering and receiving test results. Testing data show significantly higher pass rates for computer based testing, however overall testing volume has declined since the introduction of the 2014 test series.

The NEDP has served as an alternative method for adults to earn a high school diploma. This program is based on authentic assessment whereby students demonstrate mastery of competencies associated with high school equivalency, through the completion of assignments and assessments. The NEDP has also recently been revised to align with current standards for high school graduation and has adopted a computer delivery format.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In partnership with the State Board of Education, the Department administers GED® testing and the NEDP for Maryland adult residents who have not earned a high school diploma.

GED® computer-based testing provides many benefits to test-takers such as 24/7 online registration and scheduling, instant unofficial score reports and a self-paced testing experience allowing for testing by individual subject module.

DLLR has received an upward adjustment to the General Fund support of GED® testing in order to maintain the \$45 testing fee to test takers. There are twenty-seven public computer testing centers throughout the state and over 20 centers in correctional facilities. There are testing seats available within a week of registration in most centers.

The NEDP continues to be offered to adults through 13 local Consolidated Adult Education and Family Literacy Grantee Programs in Maryland. These grantees have participated in training and upgrading of technology resources in order to implement the online delivery of the program.

Adult Instructional programs throughout the state are receiving professional development to enhance the depth of knowledge incorporated in the curriculum. Through this expansive teacher training for a variety of instructional formats and modalities, we are preparing adult learners for the higher level of challenges encountered in earning a high school diploma and transitioning to postsecondary education and employment.

DLLR's annual report for fiscal year 2015 was shared with the State Board in the Fall of 2015. At this time, DLLR is providing updates to the current participation and outcome data for GED and NEDP programs, along with some recent changes in standards adopted by the GED Testing Service.

ACTION:

The Department requests that the State Board of Education continue its partnership by awarding the Maryland High School Diploma for all students who pass the GED® test and demonstrate 100% mastery of all NEDP competencies.



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
500 North Calvert Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Baltimore, MD 21201

November 25, 2015

Guffrie M. Smith, Jr.  
President  
Maryland State Board of Education  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am pleased to submit the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation's Annual Report on the oversight of the GED® testing program and the National External Diploma Program® for July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015.

The Department appreciates the partnership with the State Board of Education and look forward to the continuation of our collaboration for the betterment of Maryland's Adult Learners. I am pleased to report that both of the critical credentialing programs for adults maintain all state and national standards for issuing the Maryland High School Diploma.

We look forward to our continued work with you to offer this valuable opportunity for adults and welcome the opportunity to respond to any questions or comments from the Board.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kelly M. Schulz".

Kelly M. Schulz  
Secretary

KMS/bsb

## **Annual Report to the Maryland State Board of Education**

**July 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015**

### **Maryland's High School Diploma by Examination for Adults The GED® Testing Program and the National External Diploma Program**

The Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR) is pleased to submit the annual report that details key program activities of Maryland's implementation of the GED® Testing Program and the National External Diploma Program® (NEDP).

**Background:** On June 23, 2009, the Maryland State Board of Education, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), and DLLR executed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding the two Maryland High School Diploma programs for adults: The GED® testing program and the NEDP. The programs are administered by DLLR and the diplomas issued pursuant to these programs bear the signatures of the President of the Maryland State Board of Education and the Secretary of DLLR.

The MOU requires that DLLR submit an annual report to the Board on the status of the GED® testing program and the NEDP.

#### **THE GED® TESTING PROGRAM**

##### **Assurances**

**General Assurances:** The Maryland GED® testing program, administered by DLLR's Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning, Office of Adult Education and Literacy Services, upholds and maintains all policies and procedures prescribed by the GED® Testing Service. The policies and procedures include: adhering to the minimum age to test; the number of times a candidate can take the GED® tests within a calendar year; maintaining a secure database of candidate information; awarding credentials based on the minimum earned score requirement; testing candidates between the ages of 16-18 who have officially withdrawn from school; verifying the identity of the candidate prior to testing; advertising the location of test centers and the test dates; and publicly acknowledging the role of the State Board of Education as a partner and signatory of the high school diploma programs for Maryland's adult learners.

Additional MOUs: The GED® Testing Jurisdictional Sole Source Contract is maintained annually between the GED® Testing Service (GEDTS), a joint venture of the American Council on Education and Pearson VUE, and the Office of the Secretary at DLLR. The contract requires that DLLR appoint a GED Administrator™ within the agency to ensure that the agencies, individuals and vendors who administer the GED® test adhere to all policies and procedures for testing outlined by GED® Testing Service. The GED Administrator™ is responsible for the oversight of the GED test within the jurisdiction.

All local test centers contract separately with Pearson VUE to conduct GED® Testing in compliance with GED® Testing Service and DLLR policies and procedures. Pearson VUE is a division of Pearson Education, Inc. that delivers many different tests through a comprehensive, secure network of test centers. The centers are monitored by Pearson VUE and DLLR's GED® Administrator on an on-going basis. GED® test administrators at local centers are required to complete an online preparation program and exam prior to receiving certification to administer the tests.

Separating Testing and Instruction: GED® testing centers are monitored for compliance with the policies and procedures set forth by the GED® Testing Service regarding separation of instruction and testing. Separation of instruction to prepare students to sit for the GED® tests from the actual testing is ensured by the Director of Adult Education and Literacy Services at DLLR. The DLLR GED® Administrator and the Director oversee monitoring that GED® Test Administrators are not engaged in instruction. The GED® Testing Office staff maintains integrity by not engaging in adult education activities.

### Testing Methods

In January 2014, the GED® tests experienced a major change in content and format. The former Series 2002 tests included 5 multiple choice sub-tests delivered in a paper and pencil format with one essay question. In contrast, the four subject Series 2014 tests are administered only by computer and include a variety of question types: multiple choice, fill in the blank and extended response. The tests are aligned to the Common Core State Standards, the Career and College Readiness Standards for Adult Education, and standards used by individual states such as Texas and Virginia. Passing standards for the tests were set by administering the tests to a national sample of recent high school graduates in 2013.

An additional note is that computer-based testing permits testing by content area (per module) separately from the entire battery; whereas, the 2002 Series tests were scheduled to be taken on the same date with the exception of re-testing where not all tests needed to be repeated.

### **Diplomas Issued Series 2014 GED® Test**

From July 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015, in Maryland there were 5,607 test takers and 3,166 completers. Completers are those individuals who completed all four modules of the new GED® tests. Of this completer number, 1,986 passed the tests and were awarded the Maryland High School Diploma. The pass rate for this period was 63%, which is higher than the pass rate in any previous year.

The total number of diplomas earned via GED® testing in Maryland during FY15 declined to 1,986, compared with annual diploma numbers of 4,677 for FY11, 5,023 for FY2012, 5,056 for FY13 and 4,033 for FY14. Fiscal year 2014 was the transition year from paper-based testing to full computer based testing. The implementation of the computer-only series began on January 2, 2014. National trends also reflect declining numbers of testers and pass rates.

### **Waiver Requests**

No fee waivers were offered.

### **Disability Accommodations**

Requests for accommodations are now processed directly by GEDTS. Persons with documented disabilities may apply for reasonable testing accommodations directly to GEDTS' Accommodation Division for formal review. During the time period July 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015, fifty-five (55) requests were submitted to GED Testing Service for review. Thirty-five (35) requests were approved, nineteen (19) were returned as incomplete, and one (1) was denied. The accommodations included extended time, private room testing, provision of scribe computer modifications for those with vision and hearing impairments, and uninterrupted testing with supervised breaks.

## **Testing Center Irregularities**

For computer-based testing, candidates must read and agree to Pearson VUE's *Test Candidate Rules Agreement* and they must leave the testing room immediately for any suspicion of misconduct such as cheating, disruptive behavior, accessing cell phones, or study guides. Incidents are reported directly to Pearson VUE by the Test Center Administrator before the close of the testing day.

## **Testing Sites**

The following public computer-based test centers offered the 2014 Series GED® tests in Fiscal Year 2015:

1. Howard Community College, Columbia
2. College of Southern Maryland, LaPlata
3. College of Southern Maryland, Prince Frederick
4. College of Southern Maryland, Leonardtown
5. Anne Arundel Community College, Arnold
6. Anne Arundel Community College, Hanover
7. Digit All Systems, Baltimore
8. Western Maryland Consortium, Hagerstown
9. Hagerstown Community College, Hagerstown
10. Charles County Public Schools, Pomfret
11. Wor-Wic Community College, Salisbury
12. Chesapeake College, Wye Mills
13. Garrett College, McHenry
14. Allegany College, Cumberland
15. Community College of Baltimore County, Hunt Valley
16. Community College of Baltimore County, Randallstown
17. Cecil College, North East
18. Harford Community College, Bel Air
19. Frederick Community College, Frederick
20. Montgomery College, Germantown

21. Montgomery College, Rockville
22. Baltimore City Community College, Liberty Campus
23. Carroll Community College, Westminster
24. Prince George's Community College, Largo
25. Anne Arundel Workforce Development Center

In addition, the following private sites offered the 2014 Series GED® tests in Fiscal Year 2015:

- All State Corrections Facilities (13)
- Montgomery County Detention Center
- Anne Arundel County Correctional Center
- Baltimore County Detention Center
- Frederick County Detention Center
- Charles County Detention Center
- Wicomico County Detention Center
- Charles H. Hickey Juvenile Corrections Center
- Green Ridge Juvenile Corrections Center
- Freestate Academy, Aberdeen, MD

### **Quality Control Processes and Procedures**

- All public and private Test Center Administrators took and passed Pearson VUE's Test Center Administrator Exam prior to being granted approval to open as a test center. All Test Center Administrators must take and pass this test annually.
- All Testing Centers are monitored by the DLLR GED® Office Staff for compliance with Maryland jurisdictional regulations.

### **Legislation**

COMAR was updated in September 2013 to reflect the change in registration requirements. The 60-day wait period for re-testing was abolished, as was the three-month residency requirement and the three-month waiting



period following withdrawal from high school. COMAR continued to require that test takers document residency in Maryland and that 16-18 year olds must document withdrawal from school.

House Bill 830 (2013) required DLLR to submit a report on alternative measures of high school equivalency to the state legislature. The report was shared with MSDE and the State Board of Education prior to submission. While all known alternatives sanctioned by U.S. states were mentioned in the report, no recommendations for adoption of any of the alternatives in Maryland were made. An ongoing evaluation of high school equivalency measures will be continued by DLLR in collaboration with MSDE on behalf the State Board.

### **Maryland GED® Data Systems**

Currently, the GED® Testing Office maintains an accurate, secure historical file of scores, transcripts and credentials within MGETS (the Maryland GED Testing System). This was the primary database to collect and store candidate and test score data for the paper version of the GED® tests. During FY 2015, DLLR continued to receive a daily feed of test taker information from Pearson VUE for all Maryland testing sites. The data is utilized to validate the issuance of diplomas and transcripts. Exploration of additional data storage and retrieval options continued through FY 2015. GED Analytics™ is the GED Testing Service® online product, which provides various reporting metrics such as pass rates and volume of test takers by individual testing site or for the state totals.

### **Professional Development**

Two GED® Specialists attended the annual GED® Testing Service Conference in July 2014. The State Administrator participates in regular conference calls and webinars sponsored by the GED® Testing Service and Pearson VUE. The State Administrator participates in the Maryland College Test Administrator (MCTA) meetings and annual conferences as well as the annual MAACCE meeting.

The Maryland GED® testing office offers professional development training on the new processes for registration and scheduling GED® testing to stakeholders such as workforce development staff, local library system staff, Consolidated Adult Education and Family Literacy Services grantees, Department of Social Services staff, Home School administrators, and other stakeholders.

## **THE NATIONAL EXTERNAL DIPLOMA PROGRAM®**

### **Assurances**

Maryland's administration of the National External Diploma Program® (NEDP) remains in compliance with all processes and procedures of the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) National External Diploma Program. All NEDP implementation utilizes the standards and materials issued by CASAS in accordance with DLLR's annual payment of site fees. The Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning provides oversight to the 13 Maryland NEDP sites and maintains a close working relationship with the CASAS/NEDP to ensure all policies and procedures of Maryland's program are in compliance with the NEDP. CASAS remains the sole source of all student and practitioners' materials. Other assurances are as follows:

- In the awarding of FY 2015 local NEDP grants, all grantees signed assurances to ensure the continued integrity of the diploma.
- Maryland NEDP sites were required to undergo rigorous desk audits by local, regional and state monitors throughout the year.
- Policies to ensure program compliance remain in place regarding privacy and educational records for all NEDP clients. No personal information is released to third parties without written authorization of the clients.
- Current and accurate NEDP files are maintained in the Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning at DLLR and are available for inspection by the Maryland State Board of Education. NEDP candidates may not be concurrently enrolled in classroom instruction.
- NEDP sites are monitored to ensure no instruction occurred during the assessment phase of the program. NEDP Advisors and Assessors may not be involved in the instruction of their NEDP clients or the review of their portfolios.
- Candidates continue to be required to demonstrate 100% mastery of the NEDP competencies. Multi-level reviews of a candidate's mastery continue to be conducted prior to the awarding of a diploma.

### **NEDP Results**

During FY 2015, two hundred and three (203) Maryland High School Diplomas were awarded to adult who successfully completed the requirements of the National External Diploma Program (NEDP). This is a decrease

from FY 2014, wherein four hundred eight-eight (488) Maryland High School Diplomas were issued. Similar to the decreases seen both in Maryland and nationally in regard to the GED® tests, decreases in the NEDP completion rate may likely be attributable to the increased rigor and the full implementation of a computer-based delivery. Despite a drop in diplomas issued this fiscal year, Maryland continues to be a leading producer of NEDP graduates in the nation.

### **National Leadership**

Maryland is represented on the CASAS National Policy Council that reviews CASAS assessment policies to ensure compliance with the National Reporting System (NRS) of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Career Technology and Adult Education (OCTAE). Maryland continues to work closely with CASAS/NEDP regarding policy changes and new program initiatives. In FY 2015, Maryland became the first state to implement the electronic version of the writing prompt required for entry into the program and several state practitioners have been called upon to share their experience and expertise with other states regarding the written prompt.

The revised competencies of the NEDP, launched in FY 2014 reflect a substantial alignment with Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics, and CASAS continues to make improvements to the program to reflect many of the changes of then new WIOA legislation and to ensure that NEDP graduates are prepared to transition into post-secondary education, training and the workforce.

### **Legislation**

No changes in the NEDP program were suggested or implemented during the 2015 legislative session.

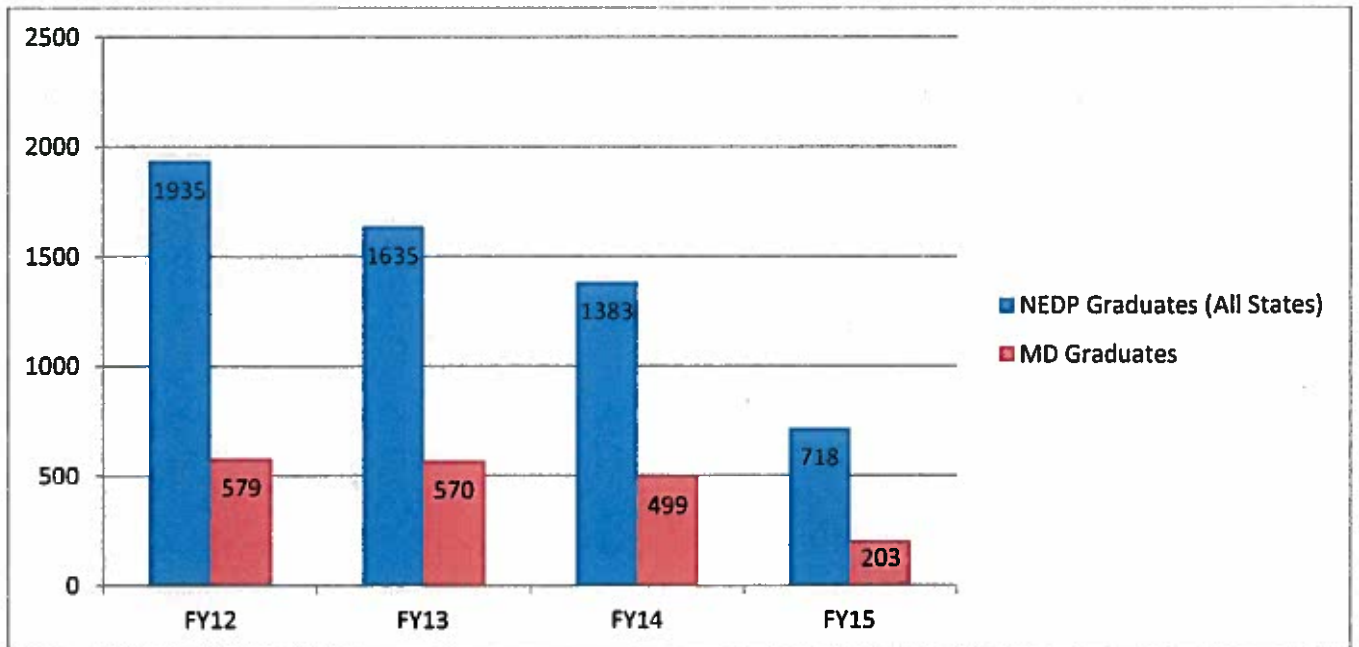
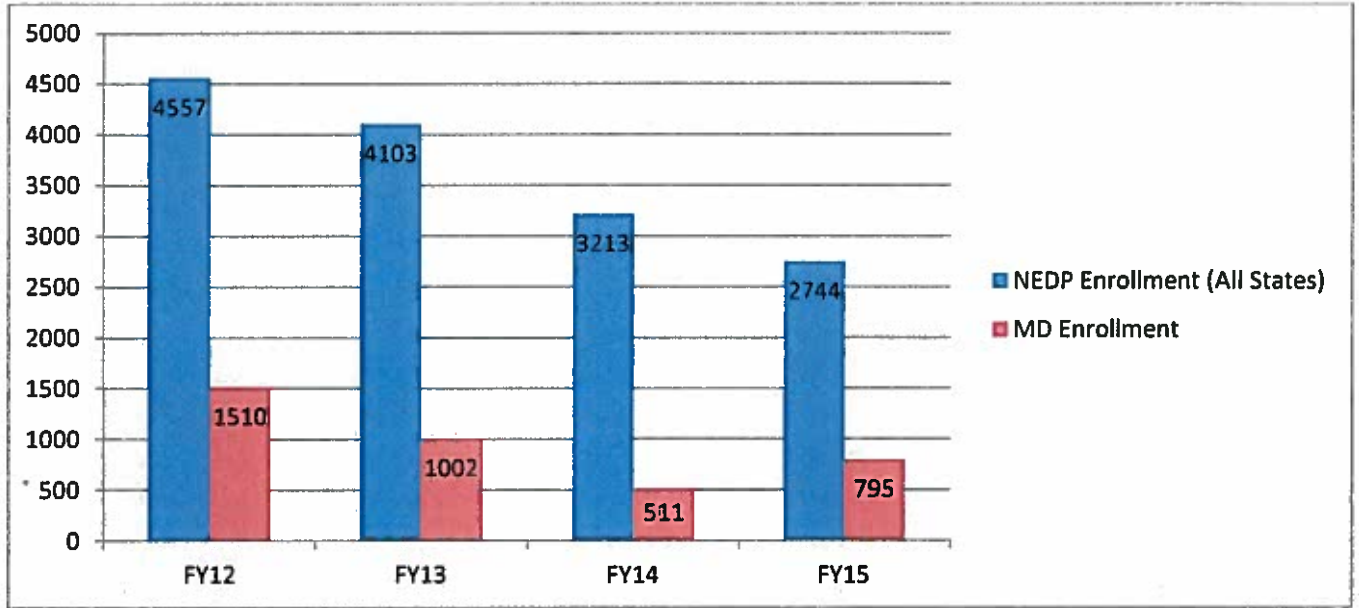
### **Professional Development**

Trainings are conducted by nationally certified staff each year and reported to the National EDP to maintain national certification of all Maryland NEDP Advisors and Assessors. Professional development highlights for FY 2015 are as follows:

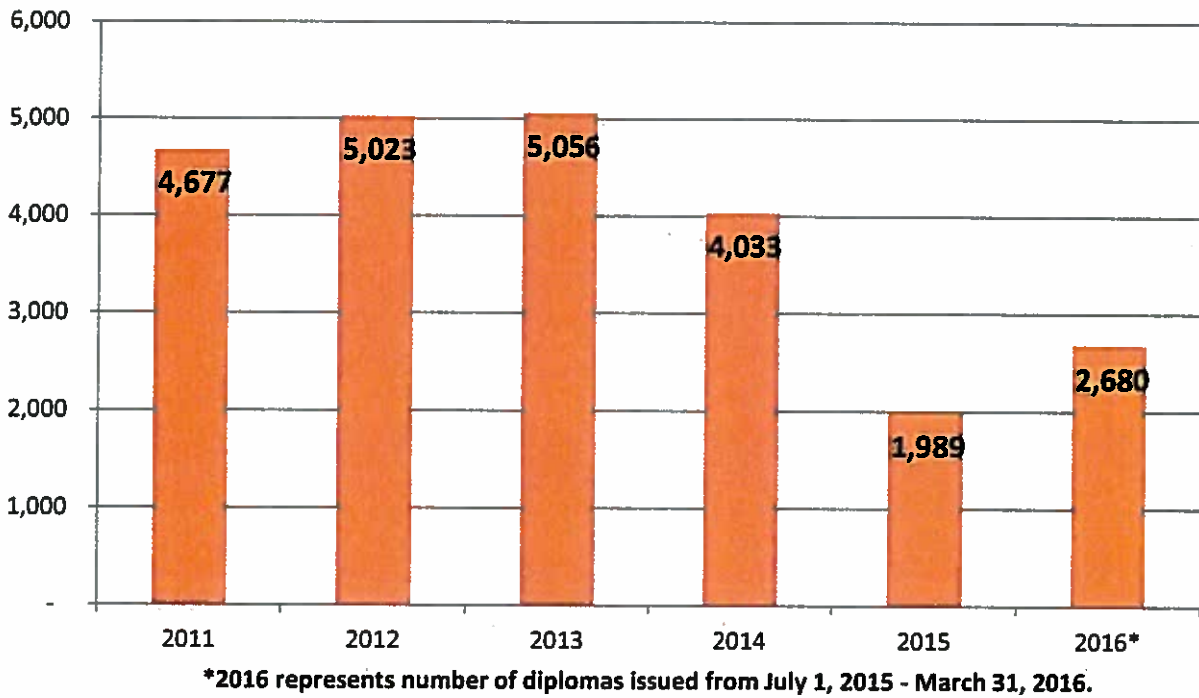
- The NEDP statewide meeting for administrators and practitioners occurred on March 19, 2015.
- NEDP Implementation training, formerly known as New Hire Training, was held October 2014 and a new state trainer began the process of being certified.
- The state coordinator for the NEDP met quarterly with state trainers for planning and coordination of services.
- The state coordinator of the Maryland NEDP attended the CASAS Summer Institute in June 2015.
- NEDP staff representing all of Maryland's NEDP sites attended the AELS Directors meeting in January 2015.
- The NEDP Statewide Consensus meeting occurred in November 2015.



### NEDP Data



## Maryland: Number of High School Diplomas Issued by GED Office



## Maryland: GED Pass Rate

