# TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION Adult Education and Literacy Letter

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| **ID****/No:** | AEL 08-20 |
| **Date:** |  |
| **Keyword:** | AEL |
| **Effective:** | Immediately |

**To:** Adult Education and Literacy Grant Recipients

Adult Education and Literacy Special Initiative Grantees

Local Workforce Development Board Executive Directors

Commission Executive Offices

Integrated Service Area Managers

**From:** Courtney Arbour, Director, Workforce Development Division

**Subject: High School Equivalency Subsidy Program**

## PURPOSE:

The purpose of this AEL Letter is to provide Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) grantees[[1]](#footnote-2) with information and guidance on the implementation of the high school equivalency (HSE) subsidy program.

## RESCISSIONS:

None

## BACKGROUND:

House Bill (HB) 3 §1.046, enacted by the 86th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2019), added new §48.302, Texas Education Code, titled “Subsidy for High School Equivalency Examination for Certain Individuals,” and required the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to enter into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with TWC when transferring funds to provide a subsidy for the cost of an HSE exam for individuals who are 21 years of age or older. HB 3 also required TWC to develop rules addressing program implementation and eligibility requirements for this subsidy program.

Currently, two vendors of the HSE exam, GED Testing Service (GED exam) and ETS (HiSET exam), are approved by the State Board of Education to operate in Texas, and test takers who pass these exams are issued a State of Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency (TxCHSE). Each HSE exam, or the complete battery of the exam, comprises individual tests. The HiSET exam is composed of five tests, while the GED exam contains four tests. The individual tests correspond to the subject areas of mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts.

On March 31, 2020, TWC’s three-member Commission (Commission) approved a policy concept for rule development that adds Subchapter E, High School Equivalency Subsidy Program, to TWC Chapter 805 Adult Education and Literacy rules. The new subchapter outlines the HSE subsidy program implementation and eligibility requirements, which are further explained in this letter. The proposed rules in this new subchapter describe how the subsidy program will prioritize eligible individuals participating in the AEL program and outline the voucher distribution process to AEL grant recipients.

[On August 4, 2020](https://www.twc.texas.gov/files/twc/commission_meeting_material_080420_item14_dp-hse_voucher_distribution-twc.pdf), the Commission approved both a distribution of HSE vouchers to AEL grantees to implement the subsidy program and granted flexibility for AEL grant recipients to develop local policies to distribute the vouchers to eligible non-AEL participants or former AEL participants.

Because of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on closing many HSE testing centers statewide, both GED Testing Service and ETS have been phasing in online and remote proctoring options in Texas. As AEL providers and test takers adapt to these new test-taking formats and await the full reopening of testing centers, it is likely that the number of HSE tests taken across the state will vary greatly when compared to recent years. TWC staff will monitor the usage of vouchers to determine whether a redistribution of vouchers across AEL grantees is needed, based on AEL grant recipient usage and demand from test takers.

TEA appropriated $750,000 each year of the 2020–2021 biennium for this program, and funds for the HSE subsidy program expire August 31, 2021.

## PROCEDURES:

**No Local Flexibility (NLF):** This rating indicates that AEL entities must comply with the federal and state laws, rules, policies, and required procedures set forth in this AEL Letter and have no local flexibility in determining whether and/or how to comply. All information with an NLF rating is indicated by “must” or “shall.”

**Local Flexibility (LF):** This rating indicates that AEL entities have local flexibility in determining whether and/or how to implement guidance or recommended practices set forth in this AEL Letter. All information with an LF rating is indicated by “may” or “recommend.”

**Definitions**

**NLF:** AEL grantees must be aware of the following definitions, as they relate to the HSE subsidy voucher program:

**HSE voucher tracker** is the Microsoft Excel reporting tool that grantees use to track HSE vouchers released to subsidy recipients. This tool requires grantees to document the grantee information, student information, and HSE voucher information. The terms “regular” and “retake” are used to describe the different types of vouchers available for each HSE exam; a regular voucher is for a regular HSE test, and a retake voucher is for a retake test.

**Subsidy** is an amount not to exceed the cost of one HSE exam, inclusive of all subject areas or the complete battery, as negotiated by TEA with the HSE exam vendors, GED Testing Service (GED exam) and ETS (HiSET exam). Each HSE exam, or the complete battery of the exam, comprises individual tests or subtests. The HiSET exam is composed of five tests, and the GED exam contains four tests; individual tests correspond to the subject areas of mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts. The test fees per battery and per subject for each of the HSE exams is located on the TEA webpage at <https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/certificate-of-high-school-equivalency/test-information-at-a-glance>.

**Subsidy recipient** is anindividual eligible to receive an HSE subsidy and is a Texas resident who is 21 years of age or older at the time that a voucher for the subsidy is issued to the individual and who lacks a high school diploma or its equivalent. A subsidy recipient may be:

* a current AEL participant;
* a former AEL participant within 365 days of exit; or
* a non-AEL participant who is otherwise eligible to receive the subsidy.

**Voucher** is an electronic or paper-based voucher provided to an eligible individual for taking an individualized HSE test. The amount for a voucher may vary, due to the cost differences in test administration delivery, such as paper-based, online- or remote-proctored, or computer-based tests.

## TWC Voucher Distribution to Grantees

**NLF:** AEL grantees must be aware of the number of vouchers which are available to the AEL grantee, as shown in Attachment 1, which were approved by the Commission on August 4, 2020.

**NLF:** Following the proposed rules in Subchapter E, High School Equivalency Subsidy Program, and as approved by the Commission on August 4, 2020, AEL grantees are responsible for the management and local implementation of the HSE subsidy program.

**NLF:** AEL grantees must be aware that AEL staff will notify grantees as to when vouchers may be used for the HSE subsidy program.

**NLF:** Vouchers must only be used to pay for an individualized HSE test.

**NLF:** The value of avoucher will not exceed the cost of an HSE test, including the cost of a regular test and retake test; further, the total value of vouchers given to a subsidy recipient may not exceed the cost of an HSE exam, or the full battery for the HSE exam.

**NLF:** AEL grantees must be aware that the Commission may redistribute the number of HSE vouchers initially approved to that grantee, as shown in Attachment 1, based on the usage and demand of HSE vouchers in the grantee’s service delivery area either midyear or at a time deemed appropriate by staff.

**LF:** Vouchers may be used for any allowable method of test administration, such as computer-based, remote-proctored, or paper-based, as negotiated between TEA and GED Testing Service and ETS. Information on the test administration for each HSE exam may be found on the TEA TxCHSE webpage at <https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/certificate-of-high-school-equivalency/test-information-at-a-glance>.

**NLF:** HSE vouchers mustnot be used to pay for a test-readiness assessment.

**NLF:** AEL grantees must be aware that the cost of an individual HSE test is determined by TEA with the HSE vendors, ETS and GED Testing Service, and are available on TEA’s website at <https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/certificate-of-high-school-equivalency/test-information-at-a-glance>.

The value of a voucher for taking a GED test is as follows:

* $36.25 for a computer-based test of online-proctored test (regular test)
* $16.25 for a computer-based retake test (retake test)

The estimated value, as test center fees may vary slightly, of a voucher for taking a HiSET test is as follows:

* $25.75 for a computer-based test (CBT regular test)
* $30 for a paper-based test (PBT regular test)
* $33.25 for a remote-proctored tests (RP regular test)
* $15 for a computer-based and paper-based retake test (CB/PB retake test)
* $22 for a remote-proctored retake test (RP retake test)

**NLF:** AEL grantees must request the number of vouchers from TWC AEL staff at [TWC.TxCHSE@twc.texas.gov](mailto:TWC.TxCHSE@twc.texas.gov), which may not exceed the distribution amounts approved by the Commission as shown on Attachment 1, and indicate:

* how many vouchers for GED, HiSET, or both exam types, are being requested; and
* the type of vouchers for each exam, such as regular or retake vouchers.

## Subsidy Recipient Eligibility

**NLF:** AEL grantees must be aware that subsidy recipients must, at the time a voucher for the subsidy is issued to the recipient:

* be 21 years of age or older, as required by Texas statute;
* lack a high school diploma or its equivalent;
* be a Texas resident; and
* be determined as HSE test-ready.

**NLF:** AEL grantees must be aware that the distribution of HSE vouchers to ineligible individuals may result in disallowed costs.

**NLF:** AEL grantees must prioritize the distribution of HSE vouchers to current AEL participants or former AEL participants within 365 days of exit. AEL participants includes those enrolled in state leadership-funded initiatives such as Accelerate Texas and Ability-to-Benefit.

**NLF:** AEL grantees must have a process to distribute the HSE subsidy to eligible non-AEL participants.

**LF:** AEL grantees may refer non-AEL participants seeking HSE vouchers to the AEL program.

**NLF:** Subsidy recipients who are not current or former AEL participants will not count toward an AEL grantee’s performance accountability measures.

**NLF:** **Test-readiness Eligibility:** Before distributing a voucher to a subsidy recipient, AEL grantees must ensure that the recipient is HSE test-ready using an assessment tool. The subsidy recipient’s instructor, or assigned AEL program staff member, will

* determine that the recipient is test-ready based on an assessment tool score; and
* for retake tests, confirm the recipient is able to take the HSE test, following the HSE vendor’s retest policies.

If a subsidy recipient is test-ready, the instructor will recommend to the AEL director that the individual receive an HSE voucher.

**LF:** AEL grantees may use an assessment tool suitable for determining a subsidy recipient’s readiness to take an HSE test, such as, but not limited to, the GED Test Ready, HiSET Practice Tests, or other assessments; such assessments are not required to be those approved by the National Reporting System, as outlined in the Texas AEL Assessment Guide. Grantees should consider any test-readiness scores required by the HSE exam vendors, such as test-ready scores required for online-proctored tests for the GED exam.

**LF:** Grantees may consider factors other than an assessment score to determine a subsidy recipient’s test readiness.

**NLF:** **Photo ID and Texas Residency:** Before distributing a voucher to a subsidy recipient, AEL grantees must verify that the recipient has a government-issued photo ID, and proof of residency, following the TEA’s HSE test-taker requirements available online at <https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/certificate-of-high-school-equivalency/eligibility-requirements-for-high-school-equivalency-testing>. If an individual does not have the required documentation for taking an HSE exam, as determined by TEA, then that individual is not eligible to receive an HSE voucher.

## Local Distribution of Vouchers

**NLF:** **Unique ID:** AEL grantees must enter all subsidy recipients into Texas Education Adults Management System (TEAMS), including non-AEL participants, in order to create a unique TEAMS ID. Current and former AEL participants will already have an assigned TEAMS ID, which must be used for HSE voucher tracking purposes in the HSE voucher tracker and when registering the student for the HSE test.

**NLF:** AEL grantees must determine for which HSE exam the subsidy recipient will receive vouchers, either the GED or HiSET. For example, an AEL grantee may not distribute three GED vouchers to a subsidy recipient, and then additional vouchers for HiSET tests, unless there is a justification on the participant’s file for the change in the HSE vendor that will enable the recipient to achieve a TxCHSE certificate.

**LF:** AEL grantees may partner with state leadership–funded AEL program partners to distribute vouchers to AEL participants in those programs, such as Accelerate Texas and Ability-to-Benefit.

**NLF:** **Release of Voucher:** The AEL director is the only AEL program staff authorized to approve the distribution of a voucher to a subsidy recipient. At a minimum, the director must confirm the following elements, before approving the release of a voucher to a subsidy recipient:

* Eligibility
* The recipient’s ability to take the test following the HSE exam vendor’s retest policies
* The recipient has not been given vouchers exceeding the value of a subsidy either from the same AEL program or another AEL program

Upon approving the release of a voucher to a subsidy recipient, the AEL director must enter the recipient’s assigned TEAMS ID and the voucher code given to the subsidy recipient in the HSE voucher tracker.

**LF:** AEL grantees may reference the “Support Services” page in TEAMS to assess how many vouchers have been redeemed by the subsidy recipient, in order to determine if the recipient has redeemed a number of vouchers exceeding the allowed subsidy amount.

**LF:** AEL grantees may distribute more than one voucher to a subsidy recipient at a time, if the recipient is deemed test-ready to take the tests.

**NLF:** **Test** **Registration:** Once a subsidy recipient is approved to receive a voucher, the recipient’s AEL instructor or other assigned staff member must assist the recipient in registering for the HSE test online to ensure that:

* the test is scheduled to be taken as soon as possible based on availability of test dates when registering; and
* the unique TEAMS ID is entered into the appropriate field when registering for the test.

**NLF:** **Redeemed Vouchers:** AEL grantees must be aware that once a voucher is used to register for a test, it is considered redeemed and counted toward the recipient’s use of the full subsidy, even if the recipient does not sit for the test at the scheduled time. For example, if a recipient is eligible for four HSE vouchers for regular tests, then that recipient may only redeem four vouchers and no more.

## Tracking Voucher Usage Locally

**NLF: GED Manager**™**:** AEL grantees, which are distributing vouchers for GED tests, must obtain access to the GED Manager™ by emailing the GED Manager™ point of contact. This will enable grantees to view all scheduled tests for subsidy recipients taking GED tests paid with a redeemed HSE voucher, as well as the status of tests taken using the voucher.

**NLF:** **Adult Educator Access:** AEL grantees, which are distributing vouchers for HiSET tests, must obtain access to Adult Educator Access, as it becomes available.

**NLF:** AEL grantees must enter the voucher code and type in TEAMS for any subsidy recipient, under the “Support Services” page on the participant’s record in TEAMS.

**NLF:** AEL grantees must be aware of the following process for receiving and tracking voucher codes from TWC:

1. TWC AEL staff will send the AEL director a set of voucher codes for the requested HSE exams via the HSE voucher tracker. Voucher codes will be designated as either a regular test or a retake test for the GED and HiSET exams.
2. Upon approving the release of a voucher for a recipient, the AEL director will enter all subsidy recipient information required on the HSE voucher tracker, including the unique TEAMS ID, the voucher number, and whether that voucher is for a regular test or a retake.
3. When a subsidy recipient is registering for an HSE test online, the instructor must ensure the unique TEAMS ID and voucher code is entered before completing the purchase transaction for the test.
4. AEL grantees must enter all voucher numbers redeemed by a subsidy recipient, including non-AEL participants, in TEAMS on the ”Support Services” page by the monthly data entry requirements outlined in the Texas AEL Assessment Guide, or the 15th of each month for vouchers redeemed by a subsidy recipient the previous month.
5. At least weekly, AEL grantees must reconcile the vouchers redeemed, meaning used to register for an HSE test online, as noted on the HSE tracker and TEAMS, GED Manager™ or Adult Educator Access.
6. By the monthly data validation date, grantees must verify subsidy recipients who have taken a test, attained a TxCHSE, or did not take a test for which they were registered. Additionally, grantees must verify the total amount of vouchers granted to a recipient who has not exceeded the cost of the HSE exam.

## Standard Operating Procedures

**NLF:** Grantees must develop a standard operating procedure for implementing the HSE subsidy program that addresses, at a minimum, the following elements:

* Eligibility determination of subsidy recipients
* Process for distributing vouchers to non-AEL participants, including referral of these individuals to AEL
* Tracking voucher usage using the HSE voucher tracker and in TEAMS
* Verification and reconciliation of voucher usage
* Reporting to TWC the redeemed vouchers
* Tracking performance through GED Manager™ and/or Adult Educator Access and notifying TWC if earned credential is not showing in data match

## INQUIRIES:

Send inquiries regarding this AEL Letter to [AELpolicy.clarifications@twc.state.tx.us](mailto:AELpolicy.clarifications@twc.state.tx.us).

## ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Voucher Distribution to AEL Grantees

## REFERENCES:

House Bill 3, 86th Legislative Session Regular Session (2019)

Texas AEL Assessment Guide

1. For the purposes of this AEL Letter, AEL grantees are entities that receive AEL funds through the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)