

# GED test was first launched in 1942

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start but drop out. Program leaders never know who will be back and who won't.

Before the new requirements kicked in nationally, the Tribe was seeing 10 to 25 people a year earning their GED certificates. That will be a tough act to follow now, Simmons said.

The GED test was first launched in 1942 as a boost to veterans whose education was interrupted when the United States joined World War II. The test allowed thousands of service members to get a credential they could use to go on to college.

Since then, its reach has grown dramatically. By 1958, there were more civilians taking the test than veterans. Today, it's known to some as "America's Largest High School." Thanks to government incentives, the test has become a ticket to some federal jobs programs, college grants, and, for prisoners, a chance to get out of jail a little sooner.

The GED test has been revised over the years, but in 2014 it underwent a complete overhaul, becoming more difficult and more expensive. For years, the GED test was dismissively called the "Good Enough Diploma" because passing the test was so much easier than earning a traditional high school diploma. Now it's been aligned with more rigorous college and career readiness standards and will be far more difficult.

Into early March, the Tribal program has only seen one certificate awarded. David Garren, 29, of Salem took the tests and passed all of them in little more than a month after beginning to study for it at the



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

David Garren is the first Tribal member to earn a General Educational Development certificate under the new, more difficult requirements.

start of January. The time would have been even shorter if not for the early February snowstorm that put the last test off a few weeks.

Garren ended his high school career after his junior year owing to a substance abuse problem, but in the last year, he said, "I just knew I needed it. The 477 Program required me to get it. I had already started it and it was something I wanted to get."

Before the new requirements and more difficult test began, Garren had taken the pre-test for the easier requirements and did "extremely well" on it.

When he came to Simmons at the beginning of this year, they worked on standard deviation, the only question Garren had missed in the math section, and then signed up for the test.

"I saw him one time and felt pretty confident," Garren said.

Today, he already is in the pro-

cess of signing up for automotive classes at Chemeketa Community College. He said he has been working on cars "all my life."

"It was a quite an accomplishment," he said. "It showed me that I can actually do this. It gave me confidence that I could go forth and succeed."

Seventeen-year-old Promiss Kellogg had passed two of four tests by early March, and was confident she would pass the others.

Family issues had her traveling between her parents' homes, and she finally decided earlier this year to come back to Grand Ronde, where she lives with her grandparents and is earning her GED.

"It's pretty easy," Kellogg said. She had passed the language arts and social studies tests in the previous two weeks and she was headed to her science test after class that day. "My only difficulty is math, algebra," she said.

Kellogg does not intend to use her GED for college, as some do, but to succeed in the workforce. After she earns her certificate, she plans to go back to Las Vegas to live with her mother, get a job in retail and work toward her ultimate goal of working in a retirement home.

In a way, she lives in a retirement home now, with her grandparents, Patsy and Joe Kellogg.

"It's nice to have her back," said Patsy, who accompanied Promiss to class and was supporting her effort on the science and social studies test after class. "It's temporary, but it's nice having her."

Often enough, would-be students start when they come out of rehabilitation, Simmons said. "They're fired up for about two weeks, and then you won't see them for weeks or not at all. It's the cycle of trying and not doing well," he said.

Kenneth Martin, 40, dropped out of Dallas High School in the 11th grade.

"I was young and hanging out with the wrong crowd, really," Martin said.

He now works for the city of Dallas fixing roads on a work crew, and is one of those who started the GED program and was interrupted by substance abuse.

He began the GED program in the middle of last year and dropped out when he went into rehab in December. He came out after 30 days

and resumed his studies.

"I'm not getting any younger," he said. And he was influenced by his younger brother, Christopher Martin, who earned a GED and now is attending Chemeketa Community College while working in the Tribe's Social Services Department.

"His influence got me to go and get my GED," he said. He feels pretty confident that he will succeed. "I'm clean and sober now," he said. "Now I have more motivation. It's kind of fun now, too."

The 477 Program is a big help, he said, "and giving me a lot of support."

On the other hand, he has no illusions about the difficult road ahead. "It's a little harder than I thought. It wasn't as intense as last year. I have to work a little harder, but yeah, I'm going to stick with it."

"You even need a GED to work at McDonald's," said Rachel Lucas, 39. She dropped out of school in eighth grade. "I was a rebellious teenager," she said, "tired of learning and I was going to be a mom. I didn't really care about it until now."

Her mother went back for her GED at the age of 50 and became an inspiration to Rachel.

"I'd like to have it for college," she said, "and for business. I want to stop putting walls up without an education."

Lucas said her husband also has gone his life without a high school diploma, but he has no interest in one. As a construction and landscaping worker, he says he can get jobs without one.

Their four children, however, all either have high school diplomas or are working at them. "They've seen me struggle with trying to find jobs," she said, "and I always told them to stay in school and get your education."

Meanwhile, Simmons is on the blackboard with fraction problems: numerators, denominators, improper fractions. "Reduce and simplify," he says.

Students work on their own in the Learning Lab from 1 to 3 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays and 9:30 a.m. to noon Tuesdays and Thursdays. The program is housed in the Tribe's Adult Education Division.

Simmons said that for students who do not graduate high school, and want to, the GED program is their only option.

A Bureau of Indian Affairs grant pays for Chemeketa courses and testing fees, Simmons said, reducing the cost of the program for students.

Success to Simmons is more than just the certificate here in Grand Ronde. "We'd like to get them up and on board to help build community," he said. On the most immediate level, he is talking about the course. "When you're doing fractions, there's no reason to struggle alone."

On another level, though, Simmons said he is talking about the larger community and the valuable role that better educated and fully employed citizens play.

Interested in starting work toward a GED? Contact Kevin Simmons at 503-879-1345. ■

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