

1 **TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION**  
2 **Adult Education and Literacy Letter**

<b>ID/No:</b>	AEL 01-21, Change 1
<b>Date:</b>	March 22, 2021
<b>Keyword:</b>	AEL
<b>Effective:</b>	Immediately

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4 **To:** Adult Education and Literacy Grant Recipients  
5 Adult Education and Literacy Special Initiative Grantees  
6 Local Workforce Development Board Executive Directors  
7 Commission Executive Offices  
8 Integrated Service Area Managers

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

11 **Subject:** **High School Equivalency Subsidy Program—Update**

12

13 **PURPOSE:**

14 The purpose of this AEL Letter is to provide Adult Education and Literacy (AEL)  
15 grantees<sup>1</sup> with updated information and guidance on the implementation of the high  
16 school equivalency (HSE) subsidy program. Nonsubstantive edits to language throughout  
17 have also been made.

18 **RESCISSIONS:**

19 AEL Letter 01-21

20 **BACKGROUND:**

21 House Bill (HB) 3, enacted by the 86th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2019), added  
22 §48.302, Texas Education Code, titled “Subsidy for High School Equivalency  
23 Examination for Certain Individuals,” which required the Texas Education Agency  
24 (TEA) to enter into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with TWC when  
25 transferring funds to provide a subsidy for the cost of an HSE exam for individuals who  
26 are 21 years of age or older. HB 3 also required TWC to develop rules addressing  
27 program implementation and eligibility requirements for this program.

28 Currently, two vendors of the HSE exam are approved by the State Board of Education to  
29 operate in Texas: GED Testing Service, which administers the GED exam, and ETS,

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this AEL Letter, AEL grantees are entities that receive AEL funds through the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC).

1 which administers the HiSET exam. Test takers who pass these exams are issued a State  
2 of Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency (TxCHSE). Each HSE exam, or the  
3 complete battery of the exam, comprises individual tests. The HiSET exam is composed  
4 of five tests, while the GED exam contains four tests. The individual tests correspond to  
5 the subject areas of mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts.

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

13 [On August 4, 2020](#), the Commission approved a distribution of HSE vouchers to AEL  
14 grantees to implement the subsidy program and granted flexibility for AEL grant  
15 recipients to develop local policies to distribute the vouchers to eligible non-AEL  
16 participants or former AEL participants.

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

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

## 27 **PROCEDURES:**

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

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

## 36 **Definitions**

37 **NLF:** AEL grantees must be aware of the following definitions, which relate to the HSE  
38 subsidy voucher program:

39 **HSE voucher tracker** is the Microsoft Excel reporting tool that grantees use to track  
40 HSE vouchers released to subsidy recipients. This tool requires grantees to document the

1 grantee information, student information, and HSE voucher information. The terms  
2 “regular” and “retake” are used to describe the different types of vouchers available for  
3 each HSE exam; a regular voucher is for a regular HSE test, and a retake voucher is for a  
4 retake test.

5 **Subsidy** is an amount not to exceed the cost of one HSE exam, inclusive of all subject  
6 areas or the complete battery, as negotiated by TEA with the HSE exam vendors, GED  
7 Testing Service (which administers the GED exam) and ETS (which administers the  
8 HiSET exam). Each HSE exam, or the complete battery of the exam, comprises  
9 individual tests or subtests. The HiSET exam is composed of five tests, and the GED  
10 exam contains four tests; individual tests correspond to the subject areas of mathematics,  
11 science, social studies, and language arts. The test fees per battery and per subject for  
12 each of the HSE exams are located on the [TEA website](#).

13 **Subsidy recipient** is an individual eligible to receive an HSE subsidy and a Texas  
14 resident who (1) is 21 years of age or older at the time that a voucher for the subsidy is  
15 issued to the individual and (2) lacks a high school diploma or its equivalent. A subsidy  
16 recipient may be:

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

20 **Voucher** is an electronic or paper voucher provided to an eligible individual for taking an  
21 HSE test. The amounts for vouchers may vary due to the cost differences in test  
22 administration methods. These differences depend on whether the exam is paper-based,  
23 online- or remote-proctored, or computer-based.

#### 24 **TWC Voucher Distribution to Grantees**

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

28 **NLF**: AEL grantees must be aware that they are responsible for the management and local  
29 implementation of the HSE subsidy program by following the proposed rules in  
30 Subchapter E, High School Equivalency Subsidy Program, approved by the Commission  
31 on August 4, 2020.

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

34 **NLF**: AEL grantees must be aware that vouchers may only be used to pay for individual HSE  
35 tests, including both regular tests and retake tests.

36 **NLF**: AEL grantees must be aware that an HSE subsidy will not exceed the cost of an HSE  
37 exam; furthermore, the total value of vouchers given to a subsidy recipient may not  
38 exceed the cost of an HSE exam, also referred to as the full battery for the HSE exam.

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

5 **LF:** Vouchers may be used for any allowable method of test administration, such as  
6 computer-based, remote-proctored, or paper-based, as negotiated between TEA and the  
7 HSE exam vendors, GED Testing Service and ETS. Information on the test  
8 administration for each HSE exam may be found on the [TEA TxCHSE web page](#).

9 **NLF:** AEL grantees must be aware that HSE vouchers must not be used to pay for a test-  
10 readiness assessment.

11  
12 **NLF:** AEL grantees must be aware that the cost of an individual HSE test is determined by  
13 TEA and the HSE exam vendors and is available on [TEA’s website](#).

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

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

20 **Subsidy Recipient Eligibility**

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

- 23 • be 21 years of age or older;
- 24 • lack a high school diploma or its equivalent;
- 25 • be a Texas resident; and
- 26 • be determined to be HSE test-ready.

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

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

33 **NLF:** AEL grantees must have a process to distribute the HSE subsidy to eligible non-AEL  
34 participants, which should include collection of minimum information needed to create a  
35 student record in the Texas Educating Adults Management System (TEAMS).

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

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

- 4 • determine that the recipient is test-ready based on an assessment tool score; and
- 5 • for retake tests, confirm that the recipient is eligible to take the HSE test according to  
6 the HSE vendor’s retest policies.

7  
8 If a subsidy recipient is test-ready, the instructor or staff member will recommend to the  
9 AEL director that the individual receive an HSE voucher.

10  
11 **LF:** AEL grantees may use an assessment tool suitable for determining a subsidy recipient’s  
12 readiness to take an HSE test, such as the GED Ready practice test, HiSET practice tests,  
13 or other assessments. Such assessments are not required to be approved by the National  
14 Reporting System, as outlined in the Texas AEL Assessment Guide. Grantees should  
15 consider any test-readiness scores required by the HSE exam vendors, such as test-  
16 readiness scores required for online-proctored tests for the GED exam.

17  
18 **LF:** Grantees may consider factors other than an assessment score to determine a subsidy  
19 recipient’s test-readiness.

20  
21 **NLF: Photo ID and Texas Residency:** Before distributing a voucher to a subsidy recipient,  
22 AEL grantees must verify that the recipient has a government-issued photo ID and proof  
23 of residency, following [TEA’s HSE test-taker requirements](#). If an individual does not  
24 have the required documentation for taking an HSE exam as determined by TEA, then  
25 that individual is not eligible to receive an HSE voucher.

### 26 **Local Distribution of Vouchers**

27 **NLF: Unique ID:** AEL grantees must enter all subsidy recipients, including non-AEL  
28 participants, into TEAMS to create a unique TEAMS ID. Current and former AEL  
29 participants will already have an assigned TEAMS ID, which must be used for HSE  
30 voucher tracking purposes in the HSE voucher tracker and when registering the student  
31 for the HSE test.

32  
33 **NLF:** AEL grantees must determine for which HSE exam (the GED or the HiSET) the subsidy  
34 recipient will receive vouchers. For example, an AEL grantee may not distribute three  
35 GED vouchers and then additional vouchers for HiSET exams to a subsidy recipient  
36 unless there is a justification in the recipient’s file that the change in the HSE vendor will  
37 enable the recipient to achieve a TxCHSE certificate.

38  
39 **LF:** AEL grantees may partner with state leadership–funded AEL program partners such as  
40 Accelerate Texas and Ability-to-Benefit to distribute vouchers to AEL participants in  
41 those programs.

42  
43 **NLF: Release of Voucher:** The AEL director or director-designated staff member is the only  
44 AEL program staff member authorized to approve the distribution of a voucher to a  
45 subsidy recipient. At a minimum, the director or designated staff member must confirm  
46 the following elements before approving the release of a voucher to a subsidy recipient:

- 1 • Eligibility
- 2 • The recipient’s ability to take the test, according to the HSE exam vendor’s retest
- 3 policies
- 4 • That the recipient has not been given vouchers exceeding the value of a subsidy either
- 5 from the same AEL program or another AEL program
- 6 • That the recipient has a GED account or a My HiSet account and has included his or
- 7 her TEAMS ID number on the account

8  
 9 Upon approving the release of a voucher to a subsidy recipient, the AEL director or  
 10 designated staff member must enter the recipient’s assigned TEAMS ID and the voucher  
 11 code given to the subsidy recipient in the HSE voucher tracker.

12 **LF:** AEL grantees may reference the Support Services page in TEAMS to assess how many  
 13 vouchers have been redeemed by the subsidy recipient and to determine whether the  
 14 recipient has redeemed a number of vouchers whose value exceeds the allowed subsidy  
 15 amount.

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

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

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

25  
 26 **NLF:** **Redeemed Vouchers:** AEL grantees must be aware that once a voucher is used to  
 27 register for a test, it is considered redeemed and is counted toward the recipient’s use of  
 28 the full subsidy, even if the recipient does not sit for the test at the scheduled time. For  
 29 example, if a recipient is eligible for four HSE vouchers for regular tests, then that  
 30 recipient may only redeem four vouchers. AEL grantees must redeem HSE vouchers by  
 31 August 31, 2021.

32  
 33 **NLF:** **Redeemed GED Vouchers:** AEL grantees must be aware that, while GED vouchers  
 34 must be redeemed by August 31, 2021, tests scheduled with the vouchers may take place  
 35 after that date. For example, a GED voucher may be redeemed on August 28, 2021, for a  
 36 test scheduled to take place on September 2, 2021.

37  
 38 **NLF:** **Redeemed HiSET Vouchers:** AEL grantees must be aware that HiSET vouchers must  
 39 be redeemed by August 31, 2021, and all tests scheduled with the vouchers must take  
 40 place on or before that date.

41 **Tracking Voucher Use Locally**

42  
 43 **NLF:** **GED Manager™:** AEL grantees that are distributing vouchers for GED tests must  
 44 obtain access to the GED Manager™ by emailing the GED Manager™ point of contact.

1 This will enable grantees to view all scheduled tests for subsidy recipients taking GED  
2 tests paid for with an HSE voucher, as well as the status of tests taken using the voucher.

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

5  
6 **NLF**: AEL grantees must enter the voucher code and a comment on the type of HSE test for  
7 which a voucher was redeemed for any subsidy recipient. These entries are made on the  
8 Support Services page in the participant's record in TEAMS.

9  
10 **NLF**: AEL grantees must be aware of the following process for receiving and tracking voucher  
11 codes from TWC:

- 12 1. TWC AEL staff will send the AEL director a set of voucher codes for the requested  
13 HSE exams via the HSE voucher tracker. Voucher codes will be designated as for  
14 either a regular test or a retake test for the GED or HiSET exam.
- 15 2. Before releasing a voucher to a recipient, the AEL director or designated staff  
16 member must confirm that the subsidy recipient has created a GED Manager™  
17 account or a My HiSET account, as appropriate, and has entered the TEAMS ID into  
18 the account.
- 19 3. Upon approving the release of a voucher for a recipient, the AEL director or  
20 designated staff member will enter all subsidy recipient information required in the  
21 HSE voucher tracker, including the unique TEAMS ID, the voucher number, and  
22 whether that voucher is for a regular or a retake test.
- 23 4. When a subsidy recipient is registering for an HSE test online, the recipient must  
24 enter the unique TEAMS ID and voucher code before completing the purchase  
25 transaction for the test.
- 26 5. After a subsidy recipient has redeemed a voucher, the designated staff member must  
27 look up the voucher in the appropriate HSE test management system to confirm that  
28 the voucher has been redeemed.
- 29 6. AEL grantees must enter all voucher numbers redeemed by subsidy recipients,  
30 including non-AEL participants, in TEAMS on the Support Services screen by the  
31 15th of each month, as outlined in the Texas AEL Assessment Guide's policy on  
32 monthly data validation dates.
- 33 7. At least weekly, AEL grantees must reconcile the vouchers redeemed to register for  
34 an HSE test online as noted on the HSE tracker and TEAMS, GED Manager™, or  
35 Adult Educator Access.
- 36 8. By the monthly data validation date, grantees must verify whether subsidy recipients  
37 have taken a test or have not taken a test for which they were registered. Additionally,  
38 grantees must verify that the total value of vouchers granted to a recipient has not  
39 exceeded the cost of the HSE exam.
- 40 9. By the monthly data validation date, grantees must submit an updated HSE voucher  
41 tracker to [TWC.TXCHSE@twc.texas.gov](mailto:TWC.TXCHSE@twc.texas.gov).

#### 42 **Standard Operating Procedures**

43  
44 **NLF**: AEL grantees must develop a standard operating procedure for implementing the HSE  
45 subsidy program that addresses, at a minimum, the following elements:

- 1 • Eligibility determination of subsidy recipients that includes test-readiness
- 2 • Process for distributing vouchers to current, former, and non-AEL participants,
- 3 including referral of non-AEL participants to AEL
- 4 • Process for tracking vouchers offered to state leadership-funded AEL program
- 5 partners such as Accelerate Texas and Ability-to-Benefit and for distributing
- 6 vouchers to AEL participants in those programs
- 7 • Tracking voucher usage using the HSE voucher tracker and TEAMS
- 8 • Verification and reconciliation of voucher usage
- 9 • Reporting the redeemed vouchers to TWC via the HSE voucher tracker by the
- 10 monthly data validation date
- 11 • Tracking performance through GED Manager™ and/or Adult Educator Access and
- 12 notifying TWC if an earned credential is not showing in data match

13 **INQUIRIES:**

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

15 **ATTACHMENTS:**

16 Attachment 1: Voucher Distribution to AEL Grantees

17 **REFERENCES:**

18 House Bill 3, 86th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2019)  
19 Texas AEL Assessment Guide