

## Attachment E

# Cognitive Interview Research Report

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**Findings and Recommendations  
Resulting from Pretesting Activities  
With the Current Population Survey's  
High School Validation Study Questions**

**Submitted:** January 11, 2006

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- Attachment C – Recommended Questionnaire Version

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Purpose**

In response to the creation of a new question series regarding high school educational attainment, called the Current Population Survey's (CPS) High School Validation Study, staff from the Center for Survey Methods Research (CSMR) in the Statistical Research Division (SRD) cognitively pretested these questions for the U. S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Demographic Surveys Division (DSD). In addition to these external and internal sponsors for this research, the Population Division (POP) also helped to guide the pretesting agenda.

Collaboration between the NCES and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) resulted in the CPS High School Validation Study questionnaire, to be embedded (as follow-on questions) into the CPS's 2006 education supplement. The universe for these questions includes residents of the sampled address between the ages of 18 and 24. The NCES initiated the validation study in an effort to better understand reporting behavior for "regular" high school diplomas and General Education Diplomas (GED) collected by core and supplemental CPS questions.

### **Method & Results**

During October and November of 2005, a total of 25 cognitive interviews were conducted via a paper questionnaire with respondents of varying educational, gender, and racial characteristics. The interviews were carried out with a scripted protocol consisting of retrospective probing and a debriefing.

Cognitive interview results mainly indicate comprehension problems with the main concepts and over-reporting for questions that collect respondents' credential type from the last high school they attended (referred to here as the Question 2 series). During the first 13 interviews, these issues were pervasive enough to require a revision and another iteration of interviews. The design for this series, a four-part question requiring "yes/no" responses to each, seemed to encourage over-reporting in questions that contained technical terms or for which question intent seemed vague. One of the most difficult concepts to properly convey was the "certificate of attendance" (Question 2B). Unfamiliarity with this technical term—which intends to capture respondents who received a credential not equivalent to a high school diploma—caused respondents who received high school diplomas to respond affirmatively, since they presumed "certificate of attendance" must mean "perfect" school attendance. One respondent who did, in fact, receive a certificate of attendance misreported his credential as a high school diploma, perhaps because he did not realize he had a certificate of attendance-type credential.

The second round of 12 interviews with the revised Question 2 series resulted in reduced, yet persistent, misreporting of the "certificate of attendance" concept. Fewer instances of over-reporting were apparent in the revised question series, mainly due to change in question structure (i.e., fewer discrete questions regarding high school credentials were administered—the diploma/GED/equivalent concepts appear in a single question, followed by the certificate question). The success of this question series may also be attributed to new question wording in the certificate of attendance question that forces respondents to choose between the credential they reported in the previous question (i.e., a diploma or equivalent) and a certificate of some

type. Even though the question continues to use the unfamiliar certificate terms, most recipients of high school diplomas successfully reported they obtained a diploma and not something else.

Despite the successes of this revised question set, two questions that ask about more common types of credentials (i.e., a diploma or equivalent) seemed redundant to respondents, and the certificate question that followed sometimes suffered from respondents' perception that they had reached this question in error (e.g., respondents were asked: "...Instead of a high school diploma did you receive a certificate of attendance or a completion certificate?" after having reported receiving a diploma).

### **Recommendations**

Although the revised Question 2 Series seems to discourage over-reporting, the redundancy and logic issues should be addressed. This is especially true for the certificate of attendance question, if it is included in the validation study's question set. Suggested revisions for the Question 2 Series, and the Question 4 Series (since it contains similar questions), are discussed in the "Findings and Recommendations" section of the following report. These recommendations are also illustrated in Attachment C, which contains the full version of the proposed questionnaire.

# Cognitive Interview Research Report: Findings and Recommendations Resulting from Pretesting Activities with the Current Population Survey’s High School Validation Study Questions

## 2. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

In response to the creation of a new question series regarding high school educational attainment, called the Current Population Survey’s (CPS) High School Validation Study, staff from the Center for Survey Methods Research (CSMR) in the Statistical Research Division (SRD) cognitively pretested this set of questions for the U. S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Demographic Surveys Division (DSD).<sup>1</sup> In addition to these external and internal sponsors for this research, the Population Division (POP) also helped to guide the cognitive pretesting agenda.<sup>2</sup>

Collaboration between the NCES and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) resulted in the CPS High School Validation Study questionnaire, to be embedded (as follow-on questions) into the CPS’s education supplement in October of 2006.<sup>3</sup> The universe for these questions includes residents of the sampled address between the ages of 18 and 24.

The NCES initiated the validation study mainly to better understand reporting behavior for “regular” high school diplomas and General Education Diplomas (GED) collected by core and supplemental CPS questions. Due to the changing landscape of state-specific high school diploma programs—offering credentials that fall below, meet, and exceed the minimum requirements of a regular/standard high school diploma—there is also interest in further analysis of potential response issues among credential recipients who have not met the requirements for earning a regular high school diploma. These individuals, for example, may have earned credentials called (in some states) a “certificate of attendance,” a “completion certificate,” or a “certificate of achievement” when the individual attended high school but did not score high enough on a proficiency test. In other cases, high schools have modified diploma programs that adapt high school diploma requirements (e.g., modified requirements or additional assistance in completing existing requirements) for special education students or those struggling with impediments/impairments such as attention-deficit disorder.

The CPS High School Validation Study intends to contact respondents’ high schools to compare the survey responses with existing administrative records to gain insight into sources of reporting error and any other potential response issues. The CPS High School Validation Study questions collect several types of information toward this goal: 1) the type of high school diploma, equivalent, or credential received by respondents; 2) information about the issuing school or

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<sup>1</sup> SRD/CSMR staff conducting the cognitive interviews included Theresa DeMaio, Andrew Jocuns, and Ashley Landreth, while Lorraine Randal handled much of the recruiting. NCES staff included Chris Chapman. DSD staff included Maria Reed and Bonnie Tarsia.

<sup>2</sup> POP staff included Kurt Bauman and Jessica Davis.

<sup>3</sup> AIR staff included Matt DeBell.

organization (e.g., name, whether it is a public or private institution, and address); and 3) the year in which the diploma or credential was earned. In conjunction with these data, CPS core data regarding respondents' highest educational attainment are referenced so that inconsistencies in credential sequences can be verified. For instance, respondents will be asked to verify they did not receive a high school diploma or equivalent if they report obtaining any credential or education past that which can be earned in secondary school.

### **3. METHOD**

During October and November of 2005, iterative rounds of pretesting were conducted using a paper questionnaire, for a total of 25 cognitive interviews. The first round of 13 cognitive interviews was carried out with a single questionnaire (i.e., Version 1, see Attachment A), and the second round of 12 cognitive interviews was conducted with a revised version of the original questionnaire (Version 2, see Attachment B).

Staff from the Center for Survey Methods Research (CSMR) conducted the interviews with a scripted protocol consisting of retrospective probes and debriefing questions. Cognitive interviewers also used the “think-aloud” method, in which respondents are instructed to verbalize their thoughts as they proceed through the questionnaire, to generate verbal reports of issues they may encounter at various stages of the response process. Any overt issues observed were probed in a neutral manner, noted, and then revisited in greater detail during the retrospective portion of the interview—after the survey questions were administered. Respondents were also asked a short, general set of debriefing questions.

### **4. RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS**

Respondents were recruited from the Census Bureau's general cognitive interview respondent pool, in addition to local social service agencies. Respondents were selected to represent variation in the highest level of educational attainment (Table 1), gender, and racial characteristics (Table 2). Additionally, respondents originated from the metropolitan Washington D.C. area; however, many were suburban—versus city—residents.

Of the 11 respondents who earned a high school diploma in the U.S., two earned an International Baccalaureate, which indicated they had completed higher level college preparatory courses in addition to coursework required for a regular high school diploma (See Table 1 on the following page). Four respondents earned the equivalent of a U.S. high school diploma as a result of attending secondary schools in other countries. Of the five respondents who earned a GED, two indicated they did so while incarcerated. In addition, three respondents earned a Certificate of Attendance (COA) and two respondents earned no certificates, diplomas, or credentials and were enrolled in GED programs.

Table 1. Respondents' Educational Characteristics: Highest Level of School/Degree Completed\*

<b>Questionnaire Version</b>	<b>Regular U.S. H.S. Diploma</b>	<b>International H.S. Diploma Equivalent</b>	<b>General Education Diploma (GED)</b>	<b>Certificate of Attendance (COA)</b>	<b>No Credential</b>
<b>Version 1</b>	5	3	2	2	1
<b>Version 2</b>	<u>6</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>

\*N=25

Among the respondents who earned a regular high school diploma, several (from each iteration of cognitive interviewing) were recruited from a local nonprofit social service agency in Maryland offering job and life skills training for individuals with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities. These individuals were high-functioning program participants (e.g., they could read with only a little difficulty and many held a job), reportedly passed the “Maryland Functional Test”<sup>4</sup> in order to receive their high school diploma, and are most likely considered to have mild cognitive disabilities. The three individuals participating in this project who received certificates of attendance, instead of a high school diploma, were also recruited from this agency. These respondents were observed having noticeable difficulties reading (e.g., the consent form and the term recognition task during the debriefing section of the cognitive interview), and were likely at a greater cognitive disadvantage compared to those respondents who earned a high school diploma.

The resulting respondent pool interviewed for this study was heavily male and African-American (See Table 2 on the following page). Of the 25 respondents, 16 were male and 9 were female. Fifteen respondents were African-American, six were Caucasian, and four additional respondents reported having earned the equivalent of a high school diploma from another country (i.e., Nigeria, Hong Kong, and Peru).

According to self-reports, all but one respondent attended a public high school or secondary school. The Asian and Peruvian respondents earned something equivalent to a U.S. high school diploma in their respective countries of origin, and entered the U.S. to attend an American university. Though the Nigerian respondent reported earning a high school diploma in his native country, he indicated he was unable to obtain a record of the credential, and as a result, was currently enrolled in a GED program here in the U.S.

<sup>4</sup> The Baltimore City Public School System indicates: “The Maryland Functional Test (MFT), developed by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), assesses students in the subject areas of reading, mathematics, and writing.” Furthermore, “...12<sup>th</sup> grade students...must pass the MFT in order to receive a high school diploma.” <[http://www.bcps.k12.md.us/Student\\_Performance/PDF/SA\\_Eye\\_on\\_The\\_Maryland\\_Functional\\_Testing\\_Program.pdf](http://www.bcps.k12.md.us/Student_Performance/PDF/SA_Eye_on_The_Maryland_Functional_Testing_Program.pdf)> [Accessed December 30, 2005]



Table 2. Respondents' Other Demographic Characteristics: Gender and Race\*

<b>Questionnaire Version</b>	<b>GENDER</b>		<b>RACE</b>				
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>African- American</b>	<b>Caucasian</b>	<b>African</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Peruvian</b>
<b>Version 1</b>	7	6	7	3	0	2	1
<b>Version 2</b>	9	3	8	3	1	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

\*N=25

The recruiting process for this project intended to attract respondents of universe-appropriate ages (i.e., 18 to 24 years of age), but due to miscommunication with intervening contacts at a social service agency, three respondents interviewed were over the age of 24. These three were interviewed during the first iteration of cognitive interviewing, with Version 1 of the questionnaire. Two of the three respondents earned a GED while incarcerated, a situation that revealed response issues for reporting the issuing organization at Question 5 (discussed later in the Results section below).

## 5. RESULTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The results and recommendations portion of this report focuses on three main areas of the CPS High School Validation Study questions: the Question 2 Series; Question 5; and Question 7. Response problems observed were concentrated at these places in the questionnaire, and any remaining questions either failed to illicit evidence of response issues or were never asked due to the respondents' path through the questionnaire.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the response issues observed in this pretesting study center around the Question 2 series, which collects the type of diploma or credential received. After the first 13 interviews, over-reporting was so prominent the pretesting team recommended revising these questions (along with Question 4 series, which are identical but are asked of respondents with an eighth grade education or less). Therefore, the bulk of the question-specific results in this section will discuss findings from the original and revised Question 2 and Question 4 series.

<sup>5</sup> We were unable to recruit respondents with certain types of education histories, and therefore, particular sections of the questionnaire were not administered during pretesting. For example, none of our respondents pursued post-secondary education without at least having previously earned a GED or high school diploma. Thus, Questions 10 and 11 were never posed to respondents. We do not, however, anticipate response issues in these questions. Question 10 merely verifies the information reported earlier in the questionnaire, and Question 11 is the education attainment question found in the core CPS (i.e., EDUCA1). While questions like EDUCA1 do tend to produce first responses that cause interviewers and respondents to negotiate further to generate an answer that can be field coded, survey managers are typically aware of these types of issues from previous research.

In addition to presenting some general findings for the Question 2 Series, a short discussion regarding respondents' educational histories and their effect on response and comprehension for these questions is also included (i.e., "regular" high school diploma recipients, as well as those who received GEDs, Certificates of Attendance, those who attended secondary school in another country, and those who did not earn a diploma, equivalent, or certificate). Other response issues are also presented in this section for Questions 5 and 7, where additional response issues were detected (but were far less severe). Accompanying the discussion of response difficulties for these particular questions are questionnaire recommendations.

### **Question 2 Series**

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Cognitive interview results mainly indicate comprehension problems with the main concepts and over-reporting for questions that collect respondents' credential type from the last high school they attended (the Question 2 series). During the first 13 interviews, these issues consistently appeared across respondents, so the question set was revised:

Version 1: >Q2<

**Did [you / NAME] get any of the following from [SCHOOL NAME FROM Q1A]...**

**A. An equivalency diploma after passing the GED test?**

1. Yes
2. No

**B. Certificate of attendance?**

1. Yes
2. No

**C. A regular high school diploma?**

1. Yes
2. No

**D. Any other high school credential or diploma?**

1. Yes (If needed, ask: **What is that high school credential or diploma called?**  
Specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )
2. No

Main findings from Version 1 of the Question 2 Series are presented below:

#### ***Version 1 Findings, Round 1***

- General over-reporting occurred throughout the entire Question 2 series due to unfamiliar terms, misinterpretation of main concepts, and question structure (i.e., prompting a yes/no response for each credential category);
- Over-reporting in the Certificate of Attendance question (Q2B) occurred—uncertain of the intended meaning, respondents consistently created their own meaning (i.e., a certificate for "perfect" school attendance);
- Under-reporting in the Certificate of Attendance question (Q2B) occurred—respondents who earned a certificate of attendance reported they received a high school diploma instead, and in these instances the reporting behavior seemed due to knowledge rather than sensitivity issues;

- Over-reporting in the GED question (Q2A) occurred—some respondents were unfamiliar with the terms “GED” and “equivalency diploma,” but many said “yes” because the word “diploma” was used; and
- A risk of misreporting was observed in the high school diploma question (Q2C) due to the use of the term “regular”—a few international students hesitated to report their high school credential in this question since they were not schooled in the U.S.

Following the first round of cognitive interviewing, revisions to this question series attempted to draw a contrast between typical high school credentials and other types. This was accomplished with the addition of an introduction (Q2INTRO) and reducing the question series into two main sections (two questions that ask about more traditional credentials and one that asks about certificate-types of credentials: Q2ANY and Q2TYPE). In addition, an optional GED definition was added to the traditional diploma-types questions for inquisitive respondents, and the certificate question (Q2COA) reinforces the contrast between other types of diplomas and a certificate by asking respondents whether they received a certificate instead of a diploma or a GED. The revised question wording appears below:

Version 2: **>Q2INTRO<**  
**Some people do not earn a credential from their high school while others receive different types of diplomas or credentials.**

**>Q2ANY<**  
**Did you receive a high school diploma, a GED, or a diploma equivalent of any kind from [Q1A SCHOOL NAME]?**

(INTERVIEWER: READ IF NEEDED: “**A GED is a credential that you earn after successfully completing specific GED tests, and is usually something you would get instead of a high school diploma.**”)

1. Yes → go to Q2TYPE
2. No → go to Q2COA

**>Q2TYPE<**  
**Was it a high school diploma, GED, or something else?**

(INTERVIEWER: READ IF NEEDED: “**A GED is a credential that you earn after successfully completing specific GED tests, and is usually something you would get instead of a high school diploma.**”)

1. Diploma
2. GED
3. Both
4. Other (specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )

*(all responses go to Q2COA)*

**>Q2COA<**  
**Instead of a high school diploma, some students might receive a certificate for attending classes without meeting the requirements for graduating with a high school diploma. Instead of a high school diploma, did you receive something like**

a “certificate of attendance” or a “completion certificate” from [Q1A SCHOOL NAME]?

1. Yes
2. No

The second round of 12 interviews, conducted with Version 2 of the Question 2 Series, resulted in reduced, but persistent, misreporting of the “certificate of attendance” concept. Main findings from Version 2 of the Question 2 Series are as follows:

### ***Version 2 Findings, Round 2***

- Fewer instances of over-reporting were apparent in the revised Question 2 series, mainly due to change in question structure (i.e., fewer discrete questions regarding high school credentials were administered—diploma/GED/equivalent concepts appear in a single question, followed by the certificate question);
- Perceived redundancy between Q2ANY and Q2TYPE—these questions seemed identical to many respondents;
- Perceived redundancy and logic problems between high school diploma-type questions (Q2ANY and Q2TYPE) and the longer certificate question (Q2COA)—for respondents reporting a high school diploma the Q2COA seems illogical, since it asks them if they received a certificate instead of the credential they just reported;
- Revised Q2COA seemed to work, despite the continued use of the unfamiliar “certificate of attendance” and “certificate of completion” concepts, probably because this question forces a contrast between the credential they just reported and receipt of a certificate (e.g., they know they have a high school diploma and not something else);
- A few misreports were observed in Q2COA for certificates of recognition; and
- Cognitive interviewers note Q2COA is too wordy—“high school diploma” appears too many times.

### ***Results of the Term Recognition Task***

In the debriefing portion of the cognitive interview, respondents were shown a list (non-exhaustive) of credentials students might receive in order to assess whether these terms were recognized and correctly interpreted by respondents:

Certificate of attendance  
Completion certificate  
Certificate of achievement  
International baccalaureate  
Regency diploma

Much like the misinterpretations we observed for the “certificate of attendance” concept earlier in the interview (in both questionnaire versions), most respondents either did not recognize any of the terms on this list or they ventured a guess, which were also incorrect. Respondents were

most comfortable guessing at the meaning for the first three terms, which they thought must represent some kind of an award or recognition for good behavior, perfect attendance during the school year, or overcoming some type of obstacle. None of the respondents unfamiliar with these terms thought these were high school credentials one would receive instead of a high school diploma. In fact, many were convinced these types of credentials are given in addition to a high school diploma.

Only a few respondents correctly interpreted the certificate of attendance concept, although one respondent did not recognize the term but was able to explain the process. Two respondents were intimately familiar with the certificate of attendance process; one was steered away from this credential by a parent and instead earned a high school diploma, and the other received a certificate (though he reported receiving a high school diploma—discussed in greater detail in the section below).

Most respondents did not recognize the international baccalaureate (IB) or regency diploma, and did not venture a guess. Only a few respondents recognized the IB diploma, and those were the ones who had earned one.

Although the General Education Diploma (GED) was not part of the term recognition task, we did probe respondents for their interpretation of this concept, and the results are interesting to note. What seemed like a common and readily identifiable concept for respondents who completed high school less than five years ago, was not for certain individuals. Some of our respondents were recruited through a local social service agency that administers job-training programs to people with cognitive disabilities (mild to moderate). At least five of these respondents, who earned a high school diploma, believed the GED was a type of college degree. A few respondents who had no cognitive impairment, and who also earned high school diplomas, had never heard of the concept and were unaware of any other way to obtain a credential similar to the diploma.

### ***Response Issues Related to Respondent Characteristics***

Respondents' experiences in the Question 2 Series were influenced by their educational histories, which sometimes affected their interpretation of question intent and resulted in response error. Below is a discussion, organized by type of educational history, of respondent issues in the Question 2 Series:

Respondents with High School Diplomas: As noted above in the bulleted list, respondents with regular high school diplomas who received Version 1 of the questionnaire were likely to over-report the number of credentials received due to the vague terminology used in each sub-question, as well as a question structure that provided four opportunities to respond affirmatively. Version 2 fared a little better in preventing over-reporting by limiting the number of opportunities for respondents to respond affirmatively, in addition to removing much of the vague terminology that was misinterpreted by respondents (e.g., “regular” high school diploma). This version, however, did still include specific certificate-type terms/names that almost every respondent with a high school degree interpreted incorrectly (i.e., as recognition for “perfect attendance” in school).

Respondents with International Baccalaureate Diplomas: Two respondents with international baccalaureate (IB) diplomas were interviewed in Round 2, with Version 2 of the questionnaire. The questions worked well for these respondents. One answered all the questions directly and seemingly with ease, and did not mention his IB diploma until the debriefing questions. He realized that his high school diploma covered four years of work and his IB diploma covered the particular courses that he took during his last two years. He seemed to be familiar with all the terms that were probed at the end of the interview. He did not seem to have any problems at all. The second respondent mentioned in Q2ANY that she received a high school diploma as well as an IB diploma. At Q2TYPE, she reported that she received a high school diploma, and didn't mention the IB diploma. During the debriefing she said that an IB diploma is more specific detail about the program pursued in high school, it is not something you associate with the level of degree. This respondent did not recognize all the terms probed at the end of the interview, but made good guesses as to what they were. She did think that certificate of achievement was something awarded for good work, excellence in academic or extracurricular work.

Respondents with Credentials from Other Countries (International Students): The cognitive testing included four respondents who had attended high school overseas. Of these, two were from Hong Kong, one from Peru, and one from Nigeria. Three of the respondents received Version 1 of the questionnaire and one respondent was administered Version 2. The international student respondents who were administered Version 1 over-reported during the Question 2 series, while the respondent who received Version 2 did not over-report. Due to the differences between how high school is structured internationally cognitive interviewing with Version 1 revealed a potential for over-reporting concerning equivalency exams, certificates of attendance, and certificates of achievement. In some cases international student respondents mentioned that they did receive a certificate of attendance and/or a certificate of achievement. Yet this over-reporting is due to semantic differences. For instance, in Hong Kong attendance, as well as certificates of achievement, are part of the degree. However, semantically the respondents were referring to different types of certificates that one can receive alongside, rather than in lieu of, a regular high school diploma. Similarly, the respondent from Peru mentioned that she received a "certificate" for completing high school as well as being on the honor roll. Two respondents answered that they did take an exam for the GED, yet they were actually referring to a different type of test—one they took in order to pass a grade, continue on in school, and/or to graduate. In sum, Version 1 of the questionnaire yielded a potential for over-reporting during the question two series, but Version 2 did not.

Respondents with Certificates of Attendance: The performance of the respondents who received a certificate of attendance was mixed. Two respondents, both of whom had mild cognitive disabilities, were interviewed in Round 1, with Version 1 of the questionnaire. One correctly reported that he received a certificate of attendance, and did not report any other types of credentials in Q2. The other reported both a certificate of attendance and a high school diploma in Q2, and when probed, he said a certificate of attendance was a certificate you received if you didn't miss any school and you weren't late—in other words, a certificate of perfect attendance. (Many respondents with other types of high school backgrounds also shared this interpretation of certificate of attendance.) He did attend a graduation ceremony with his high school classmates, but according to the director of his training program, he did not receive a high school diploma.

In Round 2, using Version 2 of the questionnaire, one respondent who received a certificate of attendance was interviewed. In response to the revised Q2, which does not mention certificate of attendance, the respondent mentioned that he had a “certificate,” instead of answering yes or no. In Q2TYPE, he correctly answered “something else,” and then reported his certificate of attendance in Q2COA.

In responding to the probes about different types of credentials, he exhibited mediocre comprehension of the terms. He thought the different terms represented different types of tests that one takes in order to receive a diploma. He did not know the actual meaning of GED (did not know it as a graduate equivalency diploma) but he knew it was something you “could go real far” with. He didn’t know what a diploma equivalent was, but he knew that a diploma was better than a certificate.

Respondents with General Education Diplomas (GEDs): Regardless of the questionnaire version they received, respondents wanted to report they had received a GED, but the Question 2 series prevents interviewers from recording this information when the credential was not received from the last high school they attended—which was the case for our respondents. Though conversationally awkward during the interview, these types of respondents were routed to Question 3, which allowed this information to be captured soon after it was offered in the Question 2 series. One respondent who skipped high school altogether and earned a GED instead was routed through a similar question path (Question 4 series), which also captured her information without any sign of response difficulty. In her case, she skipped the Question 2 series altogether, since she reported in Question 1A that she never attended high school (the skip instruction for that response option instructs interviewers to go immediately to Question 4).

Respondents with No Diploma and No GED: For the two respondents we interviewed in this situation (i.e., they dropped out before or during high school) both versions of the Question 2/4 series captured their situation adequately, and they had no difficulty in reporting their circumstances correctly. Perhaps this is because these respondents do not have to process question intent/meaning very carefully; they already know they will report having received no high school credentials. The respondent who received Version 1 of the Question 2 series dropped out of high school and was currently enrolled in a GED study program. He was able to report the last high school he attended and that he received no credentials before leaving school. The respondent who received Version 2 dropped out of middle school after completing the eighth grade and never attended high school (but who was also studying for the GED). She was routed through the Question 4 series (a question set similar to the Question 2 series). She seemed unaffected by response difficulties in the Question 4 series, which handled her situation appropriately without generating undue sensitivity. She was able to report not having attended high school and was given the opportunity to report whether she ever received some type of high school credential.

***Question 2/4 Series Recommendations:*** Although the revised Question 2 Series seems to discourage over-reporting, the redundancy and logic issues should be addressed. This is especially true for Q2COA, if it is included in the validation study’s question set. Suggested revisions for the Question 2 Series, and the Question 4 Series (since it contains

similar questions), are illustrated in Attachment C (the recommended questionnaire version) and include:

- 1) Fold Q2TYPE into Q2ANY—ask Q2ANY and allow interviewers to verify type of diploma if necessary using Q2TYPE wording:

**>Q2ANYTYPE<**

**Did you receive a high school diploma, a GED, or a diploma equivalent of any kind from [Q1A SCHOOL NAME]?**

(Read if needed: **“Was it a high school diploma, GED, or something else?”**)

(Read GED DEFINITION if needed: **“A GED is a credential that you earn after successfully completing specific GED tests, and is usually something you would get instead of a high school diploma.”**)

1. No diploma, No GED, No equivalent
  2. Diploma
  3. GED
  4. Both a diploma and a GED
  5. Other (specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )
- 2) Eliminate the second “high school diploma” phrase that appears at the end of the introductory statement in Q2COA to reduce wordiness/redundancy (see proposed question under #3 below);
  - 3) Eliminate unfamiliar terms altogether in Q2COA (i.e., “certificate of attendance” and “certificate of completion”) because they seem to encourage over-reporting. Refer to this phenomenon more broadly as “certificate” to reduce misinterpretations caused by the term “attendance.” In addition, in the case of an affirmative response an open-ended follow-up question would be needed to capture the name of the certificate type:

**>Q2COA<**

**Instead of a high school diploma, some students might receive a certificate for attending classes without meeting all the requirements for graduating.**

**Instead of a high school diploma, did you receive a certificate of some kind from [Q1A SCHOOL NAME]?**

1. Yes (**What is that certificate called?** RECORD RESPONSE: \_\_\_\_\_ )
2. No

and;

- 4) Ask Q2COA only when respondents do NOT report a high school diploma in Q2ANY/TYPE to reduce the perception of path logic error/redundancy. Asking high school diploma recipients this question is overtly redundant, and those who should have reported a certificate of attendance (but reported a diploma instead) may lack the knowledge to identify their credential as such. The “check item prior to Q2COA would look like so:

[If Q2ANYTYPE = 1 (no diploma/GED/equivalent) or 3 (GED) or 5 (another type), go to Q2COA; Else go to Check Item 3]



**Sponsor Feedback:** The sponsor accepted these suggestions.

### **Question 5**

---

This question is used to capture the name of the school or institution that issued the high school credential, in cases where respondents either report having not attended high school or report receiving the credential from a school/institution other than the last high school they attended. Question 5 wording remained the same across the two iterations of cognitive interviewing, as shown below:

**>Q5<**

IWER INSTRUCTION: Repeat Q for each credential reported in Q3 or Q4

**What school, agency, or organization awarded the [GED / diploma / credential]?**  
(use school look-up, verify name/city/state/country –OR— ask Qs below)

For responses that are the names of high schools, the sponsor intends the interviewer to access a database to confirm the school name and location (i.e., city, state, country). In cases when the school information cannot be confirmed by the database, a series of follow-up questions are asked to capture this information, which is recorded in open-ended fields by interviewers. When respondents report having received a GED, the sponsor hopes to verify responses (post-survey) with a GED database containing much the same information as is contained in the high school database interviewers will access during the interview.

Four respondents received this question, all of whom were GED recipients, and each had difficulties surrounding the response task. Two of these respondents were over 40 years old and outside the age universe (i.e., 18-24 years of age), but their circumstances surrounding the GED attainment (i.e., earning the GED while incarcerated) caused a relevant response and data quality issue shared by another respondent in a less complicated situation.

The cognitive testing of GED recipients illustrated a potential problem with locating the geographical place where they took the exam and/or the degree-granting agency for their GED. The problem that arose with these respondents has to do with geo-coding. There is the potential that the respondents may not know what to answer as far as where did they receive the degree. Respondents struggled in deciding whether to provide an answer reflecting where they physically took the test or the agency that ultimately awarded the degree. Some respondents knew both, some only one. In one case the respondent said that he received it while in Federal prison, but did not know the organization that awarded the credential. The other respondent obtained his GED through the District of Columbia. The school he went to while enrolled in the GED program has since closed. However, the respondent knew that in order to receive a copy of the diploma he would have to go through the University of the District of Columbia to obtain it. This was also the case with one of the respondents who fell within the age range scope; he knew the University of the District of Columbia awarded the credential. Yet another GED respondent earned her diploma at the age of 16, just before entering community college, and she could only provide the county and state in response to this question. She was convinced there was no agency name she could provide that would have “awarded” her the degree.

**Question 5 Recommendations:** Provide a separate question for GED recipients that avoids asking which institution “awarded” the degree to avoid confusion, and continue to use the preexisting follow-up questions:

>Q5<

IWER INSTRUCTION: Repeat Q for each credential reported in Q3 or Q4

[IF R REPORTED A “GED” IN Q3 OR Q4 ASK Q5A;  
FOR ALL OTHER CREDENTIAL TYPES REPORTED BY R IN Q3 OR Q4 ASK Q5B]

**A. Where did you take the GED test?**

**B. What school, agency, or organization awarded the [diploma / credential]?**

(use school look-up, verify name/city/state/country –OR— ask Qs below)

**Sponsor Feedback:** The issue and solution were discussed and reached with the sponsor’s input in the final meeting. The sponsor is confident that, in the case of GED recipients, capturing the test administration site will be enough information by which to conduct post-survey verification of the credential in the GED database. This suggestion was accepted and incorporated into questionnaire wording.

## **Question 7**

---

Question 7 wording remained constant over two iterations of cognitive interviewing.

This question captures the last school respondents attended if they do not report receiving a high school diploma, GED, or other type of certificate (including certificate of attendance types of certificates). Respondents are asked this question whether or not they report ever having attended high school (i.e., respondents who completed the eighth grade or less are also eligible for this question path under certain conditions).

In the event that a respondent may have obtained post-secondary education or attended some other type of trade or technical school, without having received a high school credential, the sponsor decided to ask a more restrictive question (i.e., Q7A1). In an effort to avoid college or technical/trade school responses from respondents in this circumstance Q7A1 is explicit in excluding these types of answers in its question wording (see below), while Q7A2 should be asked when respondents do not report post-secondary education.

>Q7A<

[IF EDUCA1  $\geq$  39 (high school graduate and/or greater), READ Q7A1; ELSE READ Q7A2]

**1. Excluding college or other places you attended beyond high school, what was the last school [you / NAME] attended?**

**2. What was the last school [you / NAME] attended?**

(1) [School look-up; confirm name/street/city/state]

Record school name: \_\_\_\_\_ – GO TO Q7B

(2) Never enrolled in school – GO TO SKIP INSTRUCTION ABOVE Q10

(3) Don't know/refused – END INTERVIEW

Since the wording for Q7A1 was designed later in the questionnaire development process—just before cognitive interviews began—we were particularly curious about its performance. Due to interviewer error, two respondents should have been asked Q7A2 (the simplified, broader question), but were not. Instead, they, along with a few other respondents who were accidentally routed through the more complex question (Q7A1) seemed to have no problem understanding the intent of Q7A1 and responding appropriately in light of their situation. The two respondents who were correctly routed to Q7A1/2 (neither finished high school, and one only completed the eighth grade), seemed to interpret question intent correctly; one reported the name of a high school and the other reported a middle school. Because neither of these respondents reported any post-secondary degrees/education, we imagine they would have answered Q7A2 in a similar fashion.

***Question 7 Recommendations:*** None.

## 6. CONCLUSION

While the recommended version of this questionnaire, incorporating the suggestions made in this report, seems able to capture meaningful information for use in the post-survey validation study, further consideration should be given to the inclusion of the certificate of attendance question. While the group guiding this research seems to have reached a workable version of this question for current purposes, more research could be done to inform future versions of this question.

Given the complexity of measuring state-specific high school credentials in a national survey, future research might include exploratory efforts to better understand aspects of this evolving phenomenon. For example, conducting focus groups with school administrators and/or recipients of certificates of attendance-type credentials may reveal experiential/circumstantial themes and basic parameters around which alternative questions could be fashioned to improve reporting of high school credentials not equivalent to the high school diploma (i.e., certificates of attendance/achievement/completion).

**Draft Questionnaire for Cognitive Interview Research  
CPS High School Completion Validation Study**

*Version C (Version 1, Round 1)*

UNIVERSE: ages 18-24

>NAME<

FOR PURPOSE OF COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ONLY

**Please tell me your first and last name.**

First: \_\_\_\_\_

Last: \_\_\_\_\_

>EDUCA1<

**What is the highest level of school [NAME / you] [has / have] completed or the highest degree [NAME / you] [has / have] received?**

- (31) Less than 1<sup>st</sup> grade
- (32) 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade
- (33) 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- (34) 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- (35) 9<sup>th</sup> grade
- (36) 10<sup>th</sup> grade
- (37) 11<sup>th</sup> grade
- (38) 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- (39) HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE – high school DIPLOMA or the equivalent (For example: GED)
- (40) Some college but no degree
- (41) Associate degree in college – Occupational/vocational program
- (42) Associate degree in college – Academic program
- (43) Bachelor’s degree (For example: BA, AB, BS)
- (44) Master’s degree (For example: MA, MS, MEng, Med, MSW, MBA)
- (45) Professional School Degree (For example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
- (46) Doctorate degree (For example: PhD, EdD)

>INTRO< Fill:

[IF EDUCA1 =  $\geq$  35 (i.e., 9<sup>th</sup> grade or more), FILL “high school” FOR >INTRO<]

>INTRO<

**Now I would like to ask you a few questions about your [SEE FILL INSTRUCTION ABOVE: high school] education.**

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 1: Does R have 9<sup>th</sup> grade education or more?

Yes → go to Q1A

No → go to Q4

\*\*\*\*\*

[IF EDUCA1 = 31, 32, 33, 34 ( ≤ 8<sup>th</sup> grade) GO TO Q4;  
ELSE GO TO Q1]

>Q1A<

**What high school did [you / NAME] last attend?**

(1) [School look-up; confirm name/street/city/state]

Record school name: \_\_\_\_\_ – GO TO Q1B

(2) Did not attend high school – GO TO Q4

(3) Don't know/refused (request proxy to "find out" the information from the person and restart the interview later) – END INTERVIEW

>Q1B< Fill:

[IF CORE CPS = R BORN OUTSIDE OF USA, FILL "or country" FOR >Q1B<]

>Q1B<

**What city and state [SEE FILL INSTRUCTION ABOVE: or country] is [FILL: SCHOOL NAME FROM Q1A] in?**

city: \_\_\_\_\_

state/country: \_\_\_\_\_

>Q1C<

**What street is that school on?**

street: \_\_\_\_\_

>Q1D<

**[Is / Was] that a public or private school?**

(1) Public school

(2) Private school

(3) Don't know/refused

>Q2<

Did [you / NAME] get any of the following from [FILL: SCHOOL NAME FROM Q1A]...

A. An equivalency diploma after passing the GED test?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

B. Certificate of attendance?

- 2. Yes
- 3. No

C. A regular high school diploma?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

D. Any other high school credential or diploma?

1. Yes (If needed, ask: **What is that high school credential or diploma called?**) Specify:

\_\_\_\_\_
2.No

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 2: Is there more than 1 “yes” in Q2A-D?

Yes → go to Q2VERIFY

No → go to Check Item 3 (after Q2VERIFY)

\*\*\*\*\*

[IF ≥ 2 IN Q2A/B/C/D = “yes,” GO TO Q2VERIFY;
ELSE GO TO SKIP INSTRUCTION ABOVE Q3]

>Q2VERIFY<

Just to confirm, [FILL: SCHOOL NAME FROM Q1A] gave you [FILL CREDENTIALS
RECEIVED FROM Q2A/B/C/D: a GED / and a certificate of attendance / and a regular
high school diploma / and the other high school credential you mentioned (specify)]?

(1) Yes

(2) No (Ask: **Which of those credentials did you receive from [FILL: SCHOOL NAME
FROM Q1A]?) RETURN TO Q2A/B/C/D AND RE-ENTER CORRECT DATA**

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 3: Does Q2C = “no” (no regular HS diploma)?

Yes → go to Q3

No → go to Q6

\*\*\*\*\*

[IF Q2C = “no” (no regular HS diploma), GO TO Q3;
ELSE GO TO Q6]

>Q3<

Did [you / NAME] ever get a...

[IF Q2A = "no" (no GED), READ Q3A; ELSE READ Q3B]

A. **GED?**

- (1) Yes
- (2) No

B. **Regular high school diploma?**

- (1) Yes
- (2) No
- (3) Don't know/refused – GO TO Q7

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 4A: Is Q3A **or** Q3B = "yes"?

- Yes → go to Q5
- No → go to Check Item 4B

Check Item 4B: Is Q3A **and** Q3B = "no"?

- Yes → go to Q7
- No → go to Q7

DKs and REFs also go to Q7

\*\*\*\*\*

[IF Q3A OR Q3B = "yes," GO TO Q5;  
IF Q3A AND Q3B = "no," GO TO Q7;  
IF Q3B = "DK/ref," GO TO Q7]





>Q5<

IWER INSTRUCTION: Repeat Q for each credential reported in Q3 or Q4

**What school, agency, or organization awarded the [GED / diploma / credential]?**

(use school look-up, verify name/city/state/country –OR— ask Qs below)

Institution #1:

name: \_\_\_\_\_ (What's the name of [FILL SCHOOL FROM Q5]?)

city: \_\_\_\_\_ (What city & state [or country] is that in?)

state/country: \_\_\_\_\_

street: \_\_\_\_\_ (What street is that school on?)

type: \_\_\_\_\_ ([Is / Was] that a public or private school?)

Institution #2:

name: \_\_\_\_\_ (What's the name of [FILL SCHOOL FROM Q5]?)

city: \_\_\_\_\_ (What city & state [or country] is that in?)

state/country: \_\_\_\_\_

street: \_\_\_\_\_ (What street is that school on?)

type: \_\_\_\_\_ ([Is / Was] that a public or private school?)

>Q6<

IWER INSTRUCTION: Repeat Q for each credential reported in Q2 or Q3 or Q4

**What year did [you / NAME] receive the [diploma / GED / credential]?**

Institution 1:

Specify year: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution 2:

Specify year: \_\_\_\_\_

[GO TO Q9]

>Q7A<

[IF EDUCA1 ≥ 39 (high school graduate and/or greater), READ Q7A1; ELSE READ Q7A2]

1. Excluding college or other places you attended beyond high school, what was the last school [you / NAME] attended?

2. What was the last school [you / NAME] attended?

(1) [School look-up; confirm name/street/city/state]

Record school name: \_\_\_\_\_ – GO TO Q7B

(2) Never enrolled in school – GO TO SKIP INSTRUCTION ABOVE Q10

(3) Don't know/refused – END INTERVIEW

>Q7B< Fill:

[IF CORE CPS = R BORN OUTSIDE OF USA, FILL "or country" FOR >Q7B<]

>Q7B<

What city and state [SEE FILL INSTRUCTION ABOVE: or country] is [FILL: SCHOOL NAME FROM Q7A] in?

city: \_\_\_\_\_

state/country: \_\_\_\_\_

>Q7C<

What street is that school on?

street: \_\_\_\_\_

>Q7D<

[Is / Was] that a public or private school?

(1) Public school

(2) Private school

(3) Don't know/refused

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 6: Is there a "yes" in "did not attend school" for Q7A?

Yes → go to Check Item 7

No → go to Q8

\*\*\*\*\*

[IF ANY SCHOOL INFO OBTAINED, OR DK/REF IN Q7A or Q7B, GO TO Q8;  
IF NEVER ENROLLED IN SCHOOL, GO TO SKIP INSTRUCTION ABOVE Q10]

>Q8<

What year did [you / NAME] last attend [FILL: SCHOOL NAMED IN Q1A or Q7A]?

Year: \_\_\_\_\_ (record year)

>Q9<

Sometimes people change their names, for instance, if they get married, or for other reasons. In school, did [you / NAME] ever go by any name other than [FILL: FIRST & LAST NAME]?

(1) Yes (Ask: What was [your / NAME's] full name in high school?)

Specify, but do not record nicknames: \_\_\_\_\_

(2) No

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 7A: Is EDUCA1 less than 40 (only HS diploma/equiv or less)?

Yes → go to Check Item 7B

No → go to >END<

Check Item 7B: Is Q2A **and** Q2C = “no” (no GED or HS diploma)?

Yes → go to Check Item 7C

No → go to >END<

Check Item 7C: Is Q3A **and** Q3B = “no” (no GED or HS diploma)?

Yes → go to Q10

No → go to >END<

\*\*\*\*\*

[IF EDUCA1 ≥ (40) (at least some college) AND NO HS DIPLOMA OR EQUIVALENT/GED REPORTED IN Q2/Q3, GO TO Q10; ELSE GO TO >END<]

>Q10<

You said that [you / NAME] did not receive a high school diploma. Earlier I recorded that the highest [grade / level] [you / NAME] completed was [FILL: SCHOOL LEVEL REPORTED IN EDUCA1]. Is it correct that [you / NAME] did not receive a high school diploma?

(1) Correct, Person did NOT receive a high school diploma – GO TO Q11

(2) Person DID receive a high school diploma – GO TO Q4

>Q11<

**Is it correct that [you / NAME] completed [FILL: SCHOOL LEVEL REPORTED IN EDCUA1]?**

(1) Yes

(2) No (If needed, ask: **What was the highest grade or level of education you completed?)**

Record highest level of educational attainment: \_\_\_\_\_

(31) Less than 1<sup>st</sup> grade

(32) 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade

(33) 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade

(34) 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade

(35) 9<sup>th</sup> grade

(36) 10<sup>th</sup> grade

(37) 11<sup>th</sup> grade

(38) 12<sup>th</sup> grade

(39) HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE – high school DIPLOMA or the equivalent (For example: GED)

(40) Some college but no degree

(41) Associate degree in college – Occupational/vocational program

(42) Associate degree in college – Academic program

(43) Bachelor's degree (For example: BA, AB, BS)

(44) Master's degree (For example: MA, MS, MEng, Med, MSW, MBA)

(45) Professional School Degree (For example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)

(46) Doctorate degree (For example: PhD, EdD)

>END<

**Those are all the questions I have. Thank you.**

[If interview was completed by proxy, seek interview with the subject person and restart.]

**Draft Questionnaire for Cognitive Interview Research  
CPS High School Completion Validation Study**

*Version C; Revised Q2 Series (Version 2, Round 2)*

UNIVERSE: ages 18-24

>NAME<

FOR PURPOSE OF COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ONLY

**Please tell me your first and last name.**

First: \_\_\_\_\_

Last: \_\_\_\_\_

>EDUCA1<

**What is the highest level of school [NAME / you] [has / have] completed or the highest degree [NAME / you] [has / have] received?**

- (31) Less than 1<sup>st</sup> grade
- (32) 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade
- (33) 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- (34) 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- (35) 9<sup>th</sup> grade
- (36) 10<sup>th</sup> grade
- (37) 11<sup>th</sup> grade
- (38) 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- (39) HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE – high school DIPLOMA or the equivalent (For example: GED)
- (40) Some college but no degree
- (41) Associate degree in college – Occupational/vocational program
- (42) Associate degree in college – Academic program
- (43) Bachelor’s degree (For example: BA, AB, BS)
- (44) Master’s degree (For example: MA, MS, MEng, Med, MSW, MBA)
- (45) Professional School Degree (For example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
- (46) Doctorate degree (For example: PhD, EdD)

>INTRO< Fill:

[IF EDUCA1 =  $\geq$  35 (i.e., 9<sup>th</sup> grade or more), FILL “high school” FOR >INTRO<]

>INTRO<

**Now I would like to ask you a few questions about your [SEE FILL INSTRUCTION ABOVE: high school] education.**

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 1: Does R have 9<sup>th</sup> grade education or more?

Yes → go to Q1A

No → go to Q4

\*\*\*\*\*

[IF EDUCA1 = 31, 32, 33, 34 ( ≤ 8<sup>th</sup> grade) GO TO Q4;  
ELSE GO TO Q1]

>Q1A<

**What high school did [you / NAME] last attend?**

(4) [School look-up; confirm name/street/city/state]

Record school name: \_\_\_\_\_ – GO TO Q1B

(5) Did not attend high school – GO TO Q4

(6) Don't know/refused (request proxy to "find out" the information from the person and restart the interview later) – END INTERVIEW

>Q1B< Fill:

[IF CORE CPS = R BORN OUTSIDE OF USA, FILL "or country" FOR >Q1B<]

>Q1B<

**What city and state [SEE FILL INSTRUCTION ABOVE: or country] is [FILL: SCHOOL NAME FROM Q1A] in?**

city: \_\_\_\_\_

state/country: \_\_\_\_\_

>Q1C<

**What street is that school on?**

street: \_\_\_\_\_

>Q1D<

**[Is / Was] that a public or private school?**

(4) Public school

(5) Private school

(6) Don't know/refused

>Q2INTRO<

Some people do not earn a credential from their high school while others receive different types of diplomas or credentials.

>Q2ANY<

Did you receive a high school diploma, a GED, or a diploma equivalent of any kind from [Q1A SCHOOL NAME]?

(INTERVIEWER: READ IF NEEDED: “A GED is a credential that you earn after successfully completing specific GED tests, and is usually something you would get instead of a high school diploma.”)

- 1. Yes → go to Q2TYPE
- 2. No → go to Q2COA

>Q2TYPE<

Was it a high school diploma, GED, or something else?

(INTERVIEWER: READ IF NEEDED: “A GED is a credential that you earn after successfully completing specific GED tests, and is usually something you would get instead of a high school diploma.”)

- 1. Diploma
- 2. GED
- 3. Both
- 4. Other (specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )

*(all responses go to Q2COA)*

>Q2COA<

Instead of a high school diploma, some students might receive a certificate for attending classes without meeting the requirements for graduating with a high school diploma. Instead of a high school diploma, did you receive something like a “certificate of attendance” or a “completion certificate” from [Q1A SCHOOL NAME]?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 1.1: Is Q2ANY = “no” **and** Q2COA = “no”?

Yes → go to Q2OTHER

No → go to Check Item 3 (after Q2VERIFY)

\*\*\*\*\*

>Q2OTHER<

What credential or diploma did you receive from [Q1A SCHOOL NAME]?

- 1. Other (specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )
- 2. None

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 2: Is there more than 1 credential reported in Q2TYPE?

- Yes → go to Q2VERIFY
- No → go to Check Item 2.1

Check Item 2.1: Is there 1 credential reported in Q2TYPE and Q2COA?

- Yes → go to Q2VERIFY
- No → go to Check Item 3 (after Q2VERIFY)

\*\*\*\*\*

>Q2VERIFY<

**Just to confirm, [FILL: Q1A SCHOOL NAME] gave you [FILL ALL CREDENTIALS RECEIVED FROM Q2TYPE & Q2COA: a GED / and a certificate of attendance / and a certificate of completion / and a regular high school diploma / and the other high school credential you mentioned (specify)]? Is that correct?**

- (1)Yes
- (2)No (Ask: **Which of those credentials did you receive from [FILL: Q1A SCHOOL NAME]?) RETURN TO Q2ANY/Q2TYPE/Q2COA AND RE-ENTER CORRECT DATA**

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 3: Does QANY = “no” (no HS credential)?

- Yes (no H.S. credential) → go to Q3
- No (R has H.S. credential) → go to Check Item 3.1

Check Item 3.1: Does R report a H.S. diploma in Q2TYPE?

- Yes → go to Q6
- No → go to Q3

\*\*\*\*\*



>Q3<

Did [you / NAME] ever get a...

[If no 'GED' reported in Q2TYPE, READ Q3A; Else read Q3B]

A. **GED?**

(3) Yes

(4) No

B. **High school diploma?**

(4) Yes

(5) No

(6) Don't know/refused – GO TO Q7

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 4A: Is Q3A **or** Q3B = "yes"?

Yes → go to Q5

No → go to Check Item 4B

Check Item 4B: Is Q3A **and** Q3B = "no"?

Yes → go to Q7

No → go to Q7

DKs and REFs also go to Q7

\*\*\*\*\*

[IF Q3A OR Q3B = "yes," GO TO Q5;

IF Q3A AND Q3B = "no," GO TO Q7;

IF Q3B = "DK/ref," GO TO Q7]

**>Q4INTRO<**

**Some people do not earn a credential from their high school while others receive different types of diplomas or credentials.**

**>Q4ANY<**

**Did you ever receive a high school diploma, a GED, or a diploma equivalent of any kind?**

(INTERVIEWER: READ IF NEEDED: **“A GED is a credential that you earn after successfully completing specific GED tests, and is usually something you would get instead of a high school diploma.”**)

- 1. Yes → go to Q4TYPE
- 2. No → go to Q4COA

**>Q4TYPE<**

**Was it a high school diploma, GED, or something else?**

(INTERVIEWER: READ IF NEEDED: **“A GED is a credential that you earn after successfully completing specific GED tests, and is usually something you would get instead of a high school diploma.”**)

- 1. Diploma
- 2. GED
- 3. Both
- 4. Other (specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )

*(all responses go to Q4COA)*

**>Q4COA<**

**Instead of a high school diploma, some students might receive a certificate for attending classes without meeting the requirements for graduating with a high school diploma. Instead of a high school diploma, did you ever receive something like a “certificate of attendance” or a “completion certificate”?**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 4C: Is Q4ANY = “no” **and** Q4COA = “no”?

Yes → go to Q4OTHER

No → go to Check Item 5

\*\*\*\*\*

>Q4OTHER<

What credential or diploma did you receive?

- 1. Other (specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )
- 2. None

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 5: Is there a “yes” in either Q4TYPE or Q4COA?

Yes → go to Q5

No → go to Q7

\*\*\*\*\*



>Q5<

IWER INSTRUCTION: Repeat Q for each credential reported in Q3 or Q4

What school, agency, or organization awarded the [GED / diploma / credential]?

(use school look-up, verify name/city/state/country –OR– ask Qs below)

Institution #1:

name: \_\_\_\_\_ (What’s the name of [FILL SCHOOL FROM Q5]?)

city: \_\_\_\_\_ (What city & state [or country] is that in?)

state/country: \_\_\_\_\_

street: \_\_\_\_\_ (What street is that school on?)

type: \_\_\_\_\_ ([Is / Was] that a public or private school?)

Institution #2:

name: \_\_\_\_\_ (What’s the name of [FILL SCHOOL FROM Q5]?)

city: \_\_\_\_\_ (What city & state [or country] is that in?)

state/country: \_\_\_\_\_

street: \_\_\_\_\_ (What street is that school on?)

type: \_\_\_\_\_ ([Is / Was] that a public or private school?)

>Q6<

IWER INSTRUCTION: Repeat Q for each credential reported in Q2 or Q3 or Q4

What year did [you / NAME] receive the [diploma / GED / credential]?

Institution 1:

Specify year: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution 2:

Specify year: \_\_\_\_\_

[GO TO Q9]

>Q7A<

[IF EDUCA1  $\geq$  39 (high school graduate and/or greater), READ Q7A1; ELSE READ Q7A2]

1. Excluding college or other places you attended beyond high school, what was the last school [you / NAME] attended?

2. What was the last school [you / NAME] attended?

(1) [School look-up; confirm name/street/city/state]

Record school name: \_\_\_\_\_ – GO TO Q7B

(2) Never enrolled in school – GO TO SKIP INSTRUCTION ABOVE Q10

(3) Don't know/refused – END INTERVIEW

>Q7B< Fill:

[IF CORE CPS = R BORN OUTSIDE OF USA, FILL "or country" FOR >Q7B<]

>Q7B<

What city and state [SEE FILL INSTRUCTION ABOVE: or country] is [FILL: SCHOOL NAME FROM Q7A] in?

city: \_\_\_\_\_

state/country: \_\_\_\_\_

>Q7C<

What street is that school on?

street: \_\_\_\_\_

>Q7D<

[Is / Was] that a public or private school?

(1) Public school

(2) Private school

(3) Don't know/refused

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 6: Is there a “yes” in “did not attend school” for Q7A?

Yes → go to Check Item 7

No → go to Q8

\*\*\*\*\*

[IF ANY SCHOOL INFO OBTAINED, OR DK/REF IN Q7A or Q7B, GO TO Q8;  
IF NEVER ENROLLED IN SCHOOL, GO TO SKIP INSTRUCTION ABOVE Q10]

>Q8<

What year did [you / NAME] last attend [FILL: SCHOOL NAMED IN Q1A or Q7A]?

Year: \_\_\_\_\_ (record year)

>Q9<

Sometimes people change their names, for instance, if they get married, or for other reasons. In school, did [you / NAME] ever go by any name other than [FILL: FIRST & LAST NAME]?

(1) Yes (Ask: What was [your / NAME’s] full name in high school?)

Specify, but do not record nicknames: \_\_\_\_\_

(2) No

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 7A: Is EDUCA1 less than 40 (only HS diploma/equiv or less)?

Yes → go to Check Item 7B

No → go to >END<

Check Item 7B: Is Q2A **and** Q2C = “no” (no GED or HS diploma)?

Yes → go to Check Item 7C

No → go to >END<

Check Item 7C: Is Q3A **and** Q3B = “no” (no GED or HS diploma)?

Yes → go to Q10

No → go to >END<

\*\*\*\*\*

[IF EDUCA1 ≥ (40) (at least some college) AND NO HS DIPLOMA OR EQUIVALENT/GED REPORTED IN Q2/Q3, GO TO Q10;  
ELSE GO TO >END<]

>Q10<

**You said that [you / NAME] did not receive a high school diploma. Earlier I recorded that the highest [grade / level] [you / NAME] completed was [FILL: SCHOOL LEVEL REPORTED IN EDUCA1]. Is it correct that [you / NAME] did not receive a high school diploma?**

- (1) Correct, Person did NOT receive a high school diploma – GO TO Q11
- (2) Person DID receive a high school diploma – GO TO Q4

>Q11<

**Is it correct that [you / NAME] completed [FILL: SCHOOL LEVEL REPORTED IN EDCUA1]?**

- (1) Yes
- (2) No (If needed, ask: **What was the highest grade or level of education you completed?**)

Record highest level of educational attainment: \_\_\_\_\_

- (31) Less than 1<sup>st</sup> grade
- (32) 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade
- (33) 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- (34) 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- (35) 9<sup>th</sup> grade
- (36) 10<sup>th</sup> grade
- (37) 11<sup>th</sup> grade
- (38) 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- (39) HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE – high school DIPLOMA or the equivalent (For example: GED)
- (40) Some college but no degree
- (41) Associate degree in college – Occupational/vocational program
- (42) Associate degree in college – Academic program
- (43) Bachelor's degree (For example: BA, AB, BS)
- (44) Master's degree (For example: MA, MS, MEng, Med, MSW, MBA)
- (45) Professional School Degree (For example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
- (46) Doctorate degree (For example: PhD, EdD)

>END<

**Those are all the questions I have. Thank you.**

[If interview was completed by proxy, seek interview with the subject person and restart.]

**Draft Questionnaire for Cognitive Interview Research  
CPS High School Completion Validation Study**

*Version C: Recommended Questionnaire Wording*

UNIVERSE: ages 18-24

>NAME<

FOR PURPOSE OF COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ONLY

**Please tell me your first and last name.**

First: \_\_\_\_\_

Last: \_\_\_\_\_

>EDUCA1<

**What is the highest level of school [NAME / you] [has / have] completed or the highest degree [NAME / you] [has / have] received?**

- (31) Less than 1<sup>st</sup> grade
- (32) 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade
- (33) 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- (34) 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- (35) 9<sup>th</sup> grade
- (36) 10<sup>th</sup> grade
- (37) 11<sup>th</sup> grade
- (38) 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- (39) HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE – high school DIPLOMA or the equivalent (For example: GED)
- (40) Some college but no degree
- (41) Associate degree in college – Occupational/vocational program
- (42) Associate degree in college – Academic program
- (43) Bachelor’s degree (For example: BA, AB, BS)
- (44) Master’s degree (For example: MA, MS, MEng, Med, MSW, MBA)
- (45) Professional School Degree (For example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
- (46) Doctorate degree (For example: PhD, EdD)

>INTRO< Fill:

[IF EDUCA1 =  $\geq$  35 (i.e., 9<sup>th</sup> grade or more), FILL “high school” FOR >INTRO<]

>INTRO<

**Now I would like to ask you a few questions about your [SEE FILL INSTRUCTION ABOVE: high school] education.**

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 1: Does R have 9<sup>th</sup> grade education or more?

Yes → go to Q1A

No → go to Q4

\*\*\*\*\*

[IF EDUCA1 = 31, 32, 33, 34 ( ≤ 8<sup>th</sup> grade) GO TO Q4;  
ELSE GO TO Q1]

>Q1A<

**What high school did [you / NAME] last attend?**

(1) [School look-up; confirm name/street/city/state]

Record school name: \_\_\_\_\_ – GO TO Q1B

(2) Did not attend high school – GO TO Q4

(3) Don't know/refused (request proxy to "find out" the information from the person and restart the interview later) – END INTERVIEW

>Q1B< Fill:

[IF CORE CPS = R BORN OUTSIDE OF USA, FILL "or country" FOR >Q1B<]

>Q1B<

**What city and state [SEE FILL INSTRUCTION ABOVE: or country] is [FILL: SCHOOL NAME FROM Q1A] in?**

city: \_\_\_\_\_

state/country: \_\_\_\_\_

>Q1C<

**What street is that school on?**

street: \_\_\_\_\_

>Q1D<

**[Is / Was] that a public or private school?**

(1) Public school

(2) Private school

(3) Don't know/refused



>Q2INTRO<

Some people do not earn a credential from their high school while others receive different types of diplomas or credentials.

>Q2ANYTYPE<

Did you receive a high school diploma, a GED, or a diploma equivalent of any kind from [Q1A SCHOOL NAME]?

(Read if needed: “Was it a high school diploma, GED, or something else?”)

(Read GED DEFINITION if needed: “A GED is a credential that you earn after successfully completing specific GED tests, and is usually something you would get instead of a high school diploma.”)

1. No diploma, No GED, No equivalent
2. Diploma
3. GED
4. Both a diploma and a GED
5. Other (specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )

\*\*\*\*\*  
 [If Q2ANYTYPE = 1 (no diploma/GED/equivalent) or 3 (GED) or 5 (another type), go to Q2COA; Else go to Check Item 3]  
 \*\*\*\*\*

>Q2COA<

Instead of a high school diploma, some students might receive a certificate for attending classes without meeting all the requirements for graduating.

Instead of a high school diploma, did you receive a certificate of some kind from [Q1A SCHOOL NAME]?

1. Yes (What is that certificate called? RECORD RESPONSE: \_\_\_\_\_ )
2. No

\*\*\*\*\*  
 Check Item 1: Is Q2ANYTYPE = “1” (no diploma/GED/equivalent) **and** Q2COA = “no”?  
 Yes → go to Q2OTHER  
 No → go to Check Item 3 (after Q2VERIFY)  
 \*\*\*\*\*

>Q2OTHER<

What credential or diploma did you receive from [Q1A SCHOOL NAME]?

1. Other (specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )
2. None

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 2: Is there more than 1 credential reported in Q2ANY/TYPE?

- Yes → go to Q2VERIFY
- No → go to Check Item 2.1

Check Item 2.1: Is there 1 credential reported in Q2ANY/TYPE and 1 in Q2COA?

- Yes → go to Q2VERIFY
- No → go to Check Item 3 (after Q2VERIFY)

\*\*\*\*\*

>Q2VERIFY<

**Just to confirm, [Q1A SCHOOL NAME] gave you [FILL ALL CREDENTIALS RECEIVED FROM Q2TYPE & Q2COA: a GED / and a high school diploma / and the other high school credential you mentioned (specify)]? Is that correct?**

- (1) Yes
- (2) No (Ask: **Which of those credentials did you receive from [Q1A SCHOOL NAME]?**) RETURN TO Q2ANY/Q2COA AND RE-ENTER CORRECT DATA

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 3: Does QANYTYPE = no H.S. credential of any kind?

- Yes (no H.S. credential of any kind) → go to Q3
- No (R has some type of H.S. credential) → go to Check Item 3.1

Check Item 3.1: Does R report a H.S. diploma in Q2TYPE?

- Yes (R has H.S. diploma) → go to Q6
- No (R has some other kind of H.S. credential) → go to Q3

\*\*\*\*\*

>Q3<

**Did [you / NAME] ever get a...**

[If no 'GED' reported in Q2TYPE, READ Q3A; Else read Q3B]

**A. GED?**

- (1) Yes
- (2) No

**B. High school diploma?**

- (1) Yes
- (2) No
- (3) Don't know/refused – GO TO Q7

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 4A: Is Q3A **or** Q3B = “yes”?

Yes → go to Q5

No → go to Check Item 4B

Check Item 4B: Is Q3A **and** Q3B = “no”?

Yes → go to Q7

No → go to Q7

DKs and REFs also go to Q7

\*\*\*\*\*

[IF Q3A OR Q3B = “yes,” GO TO Q5;

IF Q3A AND Q3B = “no,” GO TO Q7;

IF Q3B = “DK/ref,” GO TO Q7]

>Q4INTRO<

**Some people do not earn a credential from their high school while others receive different types of diplomas or credentials.**

>Q4ANYTYPE<

**Did you ever receive a high school diploma, a GED, or a diploma equivalent of any kind?**

(Read if needed: “**Was it a high school diploma, GED, or something else?**”)

(Read GED DEFINITION if needed: “**A GED is a credential that you earn after successfully completing specific GED tests, and is usually something you would get instead of a high school diploma.**”)

1. No diploma, No GED, No equivalent
2. Diploma
3. GED
4. Both a diploma and a GED
5. Other (specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )

\*\*\*\*\*

[If Q4ANYTYPE = 1 (no diploma/GED/equivalent) or 3 (GED) or 5 (another type), go to Q4COA; Else go to Q5]

\*\*\*\*\*

>Q4COA<

Instead of a high school diploma, some students might receive a certificate for attending classes without meeting all the requirements for graduating.

Instead of a high school diploma, did you ever receive a certificate of some kind?

1. Yes (What is that certificate called? RECORD RESPONSE: \_\_\_\_\_ )
2. No

\*\*\*\*\*  
 Check Item 4C: Is Q4ANYTYPE = “no H.S. credential of any kind” **and** Q4COA = “no”?  
 Yes → go to Q4OTHER  
 No → go to Check Item 5  
 \*\*\*\*\*

>Q4OTHER<

What credential or diploma did you receive?

1. Other (specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )
2. None

\*\*\*\*\*  
 Check Item 5: Is there a “yes” in either Q4ANYTYPE **or** Q4COA?  
 Yes → go to Q5  
 No → go to Q7  
 \*\*\*\*\*  
 .....

>Q5<

IWER INSTRUCTION: Repeat Q for each credential reported in Q3 or Q4

[IF R REPORTED A “GED” IN Q3 OR Q4 ASK Q5A;  
FOR ALL OTHER CREDENTIAL TYPES REPORTED BY R IN Q3 OR Q4 ASK Q5B]

A. Where did you take the GED test?

B. What school, agency, or organization awarded the [diploma / credential]?

(use school look-up, verify name/city/state/country –OR— ask Qs below)

Institution #1:

name: \_\_\_\_\_ (What’s the name of [FILL SCHOOL FROM Q5]?)

city: \_\_\_\_\_ (What city & state [or country] is that in?)

state/country: \_\_\_\_\_

street: \_\_\_\_\_ (What street is that school on?)

type: \_\_\_\_\_ ([Is / Was] that a public or private school?)

**Institution #2:**

name: \_\_\_\_\_ (What's the name of [FILL SCHOOL FROM Q5]?)

city: \_\_\_\_\_ (What city & state [or country] is that in?)

state/country: \_\_\_\_\_

street: \_\_\_\_\_ (What street is that school on?)

type: \_\_\_\_\_ ([Is / Was] that a public or private school?)

**>Q6<**

**IWER INSTRUCTION: Repeat Q for each credential reported in Q2 or Q3 or Q4**

**What year did [you / NAME] receive the [diploma / GED / credential]?**

Institution 1:

Specify year: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution 2:

Specify year: \_\_\_\_\_

**[GO TO Q9]**

**>Q7A<**

**[IF EDUCA1 ≥ 39 (high school graduate and/or greater), READ Q7A1; ELSE READ Q7A2]**

**1. Excluding college or other places you attended beyond high school, what was the last school [you / NAME] attended?**

**2. What was the last school [you / NAME] attended?**

(1) [School look-up; confirm name/street/city/state]

Record school name: \_\_\_\_\_ – GO TO Q7B

(2) Never enrolled in school – GO TO SKIP INSTRUCTION ABOVE Q10

(3) Don't know/refused – END INTERVIEW

**>Q7B< Fill:**

**[IF CORE CPS = R BORN OUTSIDE OF USA, FILL "or country" FOR >Q7B<]**

>Q7B<

What city and state [SEE FILL INSTRUCTION ABOVE: or country] is [FILL: SCHOOL NAME FROM Q7A] in?

city: \_\_\_\_\_

state/country: \_\_\_\_\_

>Q7C<

What street is that school on?

street: \_\_\_\_\_

>Q7D<

[Is / Was] that a public or private school?

- (1) Public school
- (2) Private school
- (3) Don't know/refused

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 6: Is there a "yes" in "did not attend school" for Q7A?

Yes → go to Check Item 7

No → go to Q8

\*\*\*\*\*

[IF ANY SCHOOL INFO OBTAINED, OR DK/REF IN Q7A or Q7B, GO TO Q8;  
IF NEVER ENROLLED IN SCHOOL, GO TO SKIP INSTRUCTION ABOVE Q10]

>Q8<

What year did [you / NAME] last attend [FILL: SCHOOL NAMED IN Q1A or Q7A]?

Year: \_\_\_\_\_ (record year)

>Q9<

Sometimes people change their names, for instance, if they get married, or for other reasons. In school, did [you / NAME] ever go by any name other than [FILL: FIRST & LAST NAME]?

- (1) Yes (Ask: What was [your / NAME's] full name in high school?)  
Specify, but do not record nicknames: \_\_\_\_\_
- (2) No

\*\*\*\*\*

Check Item 7A: Is EDUCA1 less than 40 (only HS diploma/equiv or less)?

Yes → go to Check Item 7B

No → go to >END<

Check Item 7B: Is Q2A **and** Q2C = “no” (no GED or HS diploma)?

Yes → go to Check Item 7C

No → go to >END<

Check Item 7C: Is Q3A **and** Q3B = “no” (no GED or HS diploma)?

Yes → go to Q10

No → go to >END<

\*\*\*\*\*

[IF EDUCA1 ≥ (40) (at least some college) AND NO HS DIPLOMA OR EQUIVALENT/GED REPORTED IN Q2/Q3, GO TO Q10;  
ELSE GO TO >END<]

>Q10<

**You said that [you / NAME] did not receive a high school diploma. Earlier I recorded that the highest [grade / level] [you / NAME] completed was [FILL: SCHOOL LEVEL REPORTED IN EDUCA1]. Is it correct that [you / NAME] did not receive a high school diploma?**

- (1) Correct, Person did NOT receive a high school diploma – GO TO Q11
- (2) Person DID receive a high school diploma – GO TO Q4

>Q11<

**Is it correct that [you / NAME] completed [FILL: SCHOOL LEVEL REPORTED IN EDCUA1]?**

(1) Yes

(2) No (If needed, ask: **What was the highest grade or level of education you completed?**)

Record highest level of educational attainment: \_\_\_\_\_

(31) Less than 1<sup>st</sup> grade

(32) 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade

(33) 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade

(34) 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade

(35) 9<sup>th</sup> grade

(36) 10<sup>th</sup> grade

(37) 11<sup>th</sup> grade

(38) 12<sup>th</sup> grade

(39) HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE – high school DIPLOMA or the equivalent (For example: GED)

(40) Some college but no degree

(41) Associate degree in college – Occupational/vocational program

(42) Associate degree in college – Academic program

(43) Bachelor's degree (For example: BA, AB, BS)

(44) Master's degree (For example: MA, MS, MEng, Med, MSW, MBA)

(45) Professional School Degree (For example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)

(46) Doctorate degree (For example: PhD, EdD)

>END<

**Those are all the questions I have. Thank you.**

[If interview was completed by proxy, seek interview with the subject person and restart.]