

# **New Bedford overflow shelter activated Sunday, enforcing social distancing**

Due to the expected temperature drop this evening, New Bedford's overflow shelter at 75 Division Street will be activated. Also due to the coronavirus, the shelter will not be able to lay 30 cots out. Each cot will be 6ft away from each other and the layout will be from head to toe / and toe to head.

The shelter will practice as much social distancing as possible which in turn does affect the number of individuals who will be able to access the overflow. The shelter is doing the best they can under these challenging times and hopes to keep everybody safe.

All inquiries can be forwarded to Sister Rose House and 1-800-homeless.

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## **Gov. Baker, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Explore Medical Capacity Expansion**

By Colin A. Young  
State House News Service

Gov. Charlie Baker and Boston Mayor Martin Walsh had "very productive" conversations Saturday with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers around identifying, retrofitting and using college

dorms, closed nursing homes and other facilities as extra medical treatment capacity as the coronavirus pandemic continues.

Though the state has already taken drastic steps to slow the spread of the highly contagious coronavirus by limiting social interaction, the government and the health care sector are working to ensure that hospitals and clinics will be able to handle the surge of COVID-19 patients that is expected to accompany a significant increase in testing for the respiratory illness.

The governor said Saturday afternoon that the state's Coronavirus Command Center, helmed by Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders, has been talking to hospitals to "scenario plan" for an influx of COVID-19 patients, and will now work to pick some sites in Massachusetts that the Army Corps might be able to convert. It would be a few weeks before the Corps would have any such site ready, he said.

"We got a sense for the kind of work that they can do here in the commonwealth and identified – along with several other folks, including people from the private sector – facilities that could possibly be either converted or modified to provide additional medical care capacity as we ramp up to deal with this virus," Baker said from the State House. He added, "The command center is also working closely with the hospital community on the plans that they're pursuing to develop additional capacity within their four walls."

The governor said some colleges have already expressed a willingness to make dorms available for medical use. The biggest issues, he said, are ensuring that the sites have adequate electricity and water supplies for medical operations. Baker said the Army Corps on Saturday essentially gave the state a "cookbook" that it can use to select sites it wants the Corps to inspect physically.

“This is obviously a mission that our National Guard could assist with as well,” he said. The governor recently activated the Guard to help with “logistical support and other assistance” in the state’s coronavirus response.

The governor gave an update Saturday on the capacity for testing at the state’s public health lab and commercial labs that have been granted approval to conduct testing for the coronavirus.

Between Wednesday and Friday, the governor said, capacity at all labs increased roughly 65 percent, from just under 700 tests on Wednesday to 1,144 on Friday, Baker said. The number of tests actually conducted nearly doubled from 520 tests conducted Wednesday to 962 tests performed Friday, he said.

“And I can tell you based on my own personal discussions with the commercial lab community, their capacity to test is going to continue to grow in significant ways over the course of the next several weeks,” Baker said. “I want to remind folks that as the testing numbers go up and the criteria by which you can be tested expands, we certainly expect that we’ll see an increase in the number of positive test cases as well.”

The state’s first large-scale, drive-through testing facility opened Thursday at a CVS in Shrewsbury, and Baker said Saturday that AFC Urgent Care Waltham had begun to test pre-screened patients. Those types of partnerships, he said, “will play an important role in our overall effort to expand testing capacity across Massachusetts.”

By the beginning of the coming week, Baker and Sudders have said, the state’s public health lab and commercial labs must get to a point at which they can conduct a minimum of 3,500 tests each day.

“The issue here is to get testing to the point we talked about earlier in the week, where we’re doing what we would think of as the same level of testing that you see every single day in

other countries where the combination of testing and chasing – testing, isolation, tracing – that’s where we need to get to,” Baker said Saturday. “And in most of those countries, the way they bent the curve was they bent the curve by testing enough fast enough to be able to catch up to the growth in new cases, and then doing the tracing work and isolating everybody. And that’s where we got to get.”

New testing numbers released Saturday afternoon by the Department of Public Health showed that 5,277 COVID-19 tests have been performed in Massachusetts – 3,031 by the state public health lab and 2,246 by commercial and other labs – since Feb. 28.

For health care providers, grocery store employees and other essential workers, the governor said Saturday that the state has more than 300 locations ready to provide emergency child care beginning Monday, when all other early education centers and family child care providers must close under an executive order issued by the governor Wednesday.

“We know that child care is an especially critical piece of emergency service and that it allows our frontline workers to continue their battle against COVID-19 and to continue their work. And there are times when our families are on the front lines and don’t have another option for their children,” Baker said. He added, “We expect more to come online eventually, but this needs to be implemented safely and the sites should only really be used as a last resort.”

More details on the sites will be provided via the state’s Department of Early Education and Care website Sunday morning, he said.

Sudders responded during Saturday afternoon’s press conference to the news, announced by Prisoners’ Legal Services of Massachusetts, that an inmate at the Massachusetts Treatment Center had tested positive of COVID-19. A notice posted on the

DOC's website said inmate visits by family and friends have been suspended at the state's 16 correctional facilities.

"The Department of Correction has followed all the protocols around isolating the individual, doing the contact tracing – the people who individuals come in contact with – of those individuals, if they were staff went home and are being tested. [The] place was disinfected," she said. "So we believe that the treatment center followed all the protocols that we do in any other facility where you would have a patient, a person, or in this case an inmate, who was tested positive."

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## Massachusetts Public Health reports state's second death from COVID-19

A woman in her 50s from Middlesex County is the second person in Massachusetts to die from COVID-19 related illness, the Department of Public Health announced today. She had a pre-existing condition predisposing her to more severe disease. Details on the first death can be found [here](#).

As of today, more than 5,200 residents of Massachusetts have been tested for COVID-19 by the State Public Health Laboratory and commercial labs. Of those, 525 people have tested positive. New Bedford's first case can be found [here](#).

Yesterday, DPH announced that a man in his 80s from Suffolk County was the first person in Massachusetts to die from COVID-19 related illness. The man had been hospitalized and had pre-existing health conditions that put him at higher risk for COVID-19.

COVID-19 activity is increasing in Massachusetts. At this time, if people are only mildly symptomatic, they should speak to their healthcare provider about whether they need to be assessed in person. If not, they should stay at home while they are sick. Asymptomatic family members should practice social distancing and immediately self-isolate if they develop symptoms.

In the United States, there have been more than 15,219 of COVID-19 and more than 200 deaths, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In Massachusetts and nationwide, the public is being asked to avoid crowds, stay 6 feet away from others, not shake hands or hug, and call/Facetime and online chat with friends and loved ones rather than meet face to face.

More information about COVID-19 can be found at [www.mass.gov/covid19](http://www.mass.gov/covid19).

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## **Fall River reports first case of COVID-19**

The City of Fall River was informed that a resident has tested positive for COVID-19. The resident is now isolated. Those potentially exposed to the diagnosed resident have been traced and contacted. Those individuals are now in quarantine.

Resources for COVID-19 Information:

Behavioral Health: It is important that residents prioritize their mental health during the COVID-19 outbreak. Residents experiencing anxiety, depression, or need emotional support can call 211 to be connected to behavioral health resources.

Massachusetts 2-1-1 provides residents with real time COVID-19 information. Residents with questions regarding COVID-19 should call 2-1-1.

- MA 2-1-1 is available 24 hours a day, 7 days per week
- Information is available in over 150 languages
- All calls are confidential

*Mayor Mitchell: New Bedford has first case of Coronavirus*

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## **Massachusetts Public Health Department reports state's first death from COVID-19**

More than 300 state residents have tested positive for the novel coronavirus.

A man in his 80s from Suffolk County is the first person in Massachusetts to die from COVID-19 related illness, the Department of Public Health announced today. The man had been hospitalized and had pre-existing health conditions that put him at higher risk for COVID-19.

To date, 3,132 residents of Massachusetts have been tested for COVID-19 by the State Public Health Laboratory and commercial labs. Of those, 328 people have tested positive. These figures will be updated on DPH's online coronavirus dashboard at 4 p.m. today.

"I extend my heartfelt sympathies to the family and friends who lost their loved one," said Gov. Charlie Baker. "We are

living in uncertain and challenging times, and our administration is bringing every available resource to bear in the fight against this disease, and remind everyone in our Commonwealth to continue to work together, follow social distance protocols and look after each other to keep our communities safe.”

COVID-19 activity is increasing in Massachusetts. At this time, if people are only mildly symptomatic, they should stay home. If they become more ill, they should speak to their healthcare provider about whether they need to be assessed in person. If not, they should stay at home while they are sick. Asymptomatic family members should practice social distancing and immediately self-isolate if they develop symptoms.

In the United States, there have been more than 10,400 cases of COVID-19 and more than 150 deaths, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In Massachusetts and nationwide, the public is being asked to avoid crowds, stay 6 feet away from others, not shake hands or hug, and call/Facetime and online chat with friends and loved ones rather than meet face to face.

More information about COVID-19 can be found at [www.mass.gov/covid19](http://www.mass.gov/covid19).

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## **Congress Passes Bill With \$1 Billion For MassHealth**

By Matt Murphy  
State House News Service

The state’s Medicaid program is in line to receive an



additional \$1.08 billion under a coronavirus relief package that cleared Congress on Wednesday, which would provide relief to Massachusetts as it braces for a possible surge in the number of people enrolling in MassHealth.

The more than \$1 billion in increased reimbursements would pad a budget of a more than \$16 billion at an agency that provides health coverage to nearly 2 million low-income and disabled residents. The federal share of the MassHealth budget is typically over \$8 billion.

State officials are bracing for revenues to plummet as the economy comes to a standstill due to measures taken by the government to stem the spread of the coronavirus. School, casinos, bars, restaurants, malls and many workplaces have shut down.

U.S. Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey released the state's expected share of Medicaid funding under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act after it cleared the Senate Wednesday evening.

"The additional funding for Medicaid will ensure that all those who need assistance receive it," House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal, who plans on Thursday to visit a breakfast and lunch distribution site for Springfield students, said in a statement. "Folks that receive Medicaid funding are usually some of the most vulnerable and this action is another step in the right direction to make sure that they are cared for."

The bill had already passed the House earlier in the week, and it's the second COVID-19 response bill to pass Congress with money for Massachusetts.

The state has already received over \$12 million in additional support. The bill now awaits the signature of President Donald Trump.

Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley on Wednesday night circulated an email seeking to build support for community health center funding. Pressley, noting she has 15 centers in her district from Cambridge to Roxbury, said centers are being asked to do more and need resources.

“We must make sure the most vulnerable people in our communities receive the critical care they need,” she wrote, asking people to sign her open letter to Vice President Mike Pence, who is leading the White House Coronavirus Task Force.

Gov. Charlie Baker, Lt. Governor Karyn Polito and Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders plan at 10 a.m. Thursday to visit and tour a Quest Diagnostics lab facility in Marlborough where COVID-19 testing is occurring. The closed press tour will be followed by a media availability.

[Michael P. Norton contributed reporting]

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## **Massachusetts Governor Baker to State: “Tough Days Ahead of Us”**

By Katie Lannan  
State House News Service

Cautioning of tough days ahead, state officials said Tuesday they are pursuing multiple ways to ramp up the capacity for coronavirus testing in Massachusetts and outlined several other new initiatives to address ramifications of the pandemic.

Gov. Charlie Baker on Tuesday: “Without question, we are

likely to have some very tough days ahead of us.”

Gov. Charlie Baker, in an afternoon press conference, announced the distribution of \$5 million in emergency funds to local boards of health, along with new emergency orders he said will “cut red tape so hospitals can staff up faster,” adjust minimum standards for ambulance staffing to maintain EMS availability, and facilitate telehealth services across state lines to help keep people out of hospitals in non-emergency situations.

The number of COVID-19 cases reported by public health officials in Massachusetts rose from 197 to 218 on Tuesday, including 21 hospitalizations. At least 33 of the cases involved local transmission, according to the Department of Public Health.

Baker said he is also formally requesting that the Small Business Administration issue a declaration of economic injury for Massachusetts to make low-interest loans available to small business owners affected by the outbreak. That move follows the governor’s announcement Monday of a new \$10 million recovery loan fund for small businesses.

Baker said he was also glad to see federal officials “talking earlier today about a major recovery package.” He said he expects to see “a significant spike” in the number of Massachusetts residents applying for and receiving unemployment benefits.

“Without question, we are likely to have some very tough days ahead of us as we are still at the beginning of the battle against this virus,” Baker said. “But we continue to have great faith and confidence that we will get through this by pulling together, caring for one another, and doing what’s right for our neighbors and our communities, because that is who we are.”

Baker said he’d like to see “way more testing” for the

coronavirus than is currently available, both to determine where the most significant challenges are and to plan for the future.

State health officials continue to encourage residents to engage in social distancing practices. Public Health Commissioner Dr. Monica Bharel said doing so “is a way for each one of us to have an impact on the outcome of the disease.”

“And I know it is challenging for your family and mine to do it, but it is critical in assisting us in flattening the curve,” she said.

Tuesday marked the first day of a new set of widespread closures in the Bay State. Under emergency orders from Baker, schools are shut down for at least three weeks, while restaurants are limited to takeout and delivery only. Most gatherings of 25 or more people are banned, and many people across the state are now working from home, often while juggling childcare responsibilities.

Executive branch employees will receive new telework guidance Tuesday, Baker said. He also said he does not currently have plans to order a statewide ban on regular construction activity like the citywide suspension Boston Mayor Martin Walsh imposed Monday.

Baker opened his remarks Tuesday by reiterating that he is not planning to issue a statewide shelter-in-place order, saying that rumors persist despite his past denials. He stressed the need to obtain information from reliable sources – “not from your friend’s friend’s friend’s friend’s neighbor” – and urged grocery shoppers to “use common sense and moderation and avoid hoarding large quantities.”

At around the same time Baker began his press conference, a group of 10 state representatives and local officials from Cambridge and Somerville sent him a letter urging the governor

to follow the lead of communities in California's Bay Area and order that Massachusetts residents stay home except for trips related to essential needs.

The group asked Baker to issue a shelter-in-place order by the end of the day, saying it's "essential that the spread of the virus be suppressed to protect the ability of healthcare providers to handle the influx of new patients and safeguard public health and safety."

Baker said that managing the spread of the illness is "going to come down here in Massachusetts to the work that everybody does collectively to deal with social distancing and to the extent that they possibly can, not being part of the spread, because that's going to be the mechanism that ultimately determines where the peak is and where it comes down.

The governor's new emergency orders on health care will allow the reactivation of licenses of physicians who have retired within the last year in good standing, and allow providers in other states to obtain emergency licenses to practice in person or through telemedicine.

They also stipulate that no doctor, nurse, social worker or psychologist will be prohibited from using telemedicine across state lines to care for their patients who have been enrolled this year in Massachusetts colleges or universities, which have largely moved to remote learning and sent students home.

The state is also "working all avenues to rapidly increase" capacity to test for the virus, said Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders, who is leading a COVID-19 response command center.

Baker said he would like to see more testing, in part to assist the command center in its ongoing "scenario planning" efforts with the medical community around what the ultimate demand for care might look like.

"From my point of view, I would like to see us test way more than we've tested up until now," he said. "I mean, first of all testing is an important way of determining where you have your most significant issues and challenges, and secondly, it's also something you can use as scenario planning."

Sudders said she spoke Tuesday with local companies PerkinElmer and Thermo Fisher Scientific, who have both committed to help the state in testing. She said officials believe the Broad Institute, a partnership between Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, could serve as a state reference lab, with Thermo Fisher test kits.

"If we're successful, the Broad Institute would be able to test almost 1,000 kits per day," she said. "The PerkinElmer CEO has offered to supply the state lab with a testing machine and supplies with additional capacity for almost 1,000 tests per day."

The command center is also "matchmaking" between academic medical centers that have machine capacity and companies that produce test kits and supplies, Sudders said.

The state public health laboratory had conducted 1,367 tests as of Tuesday morning, yielding 197 positive results. That number is up from 1,092 on Monday. Commercial labs Quest Diagnostics and LabCorp have reported a total of 384 tests, including 13 positives.

Testing numbers had previously been released on a weekly schedule, and Bharel said the new goal is to update those figures daily along with the number of cases.

Bharel said the state lab is able to test 400 patients a day, up from an original 200 a day, and maintains adequate supplies. She said the administration's goal "is to continue to increase our testing capability as quickly and as safely as we can."

“But I understand that it is not at the fast pace that we would all prefer,” she said. “Some of this is due to federal level shortages that Massachusetts and many other states are facing. We are moving as quickly as we can.”

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# **Coronavirus/COVID-19 spreading in Massachusetts, spurring escalation in response**

By Chris Lisinski  
State House News Service

In a dramatic escalation of the state’s response to the spreading coronavirus outbreak, Gov. Charlie Baker on Sunday announced that all Massachusetts public schools must soon close for three weeks, most events with 25 or more people are now banned, and visitors are barred from the state’s nursing homes and assisted living facilities.

Gov. Charlie Baker announced a wide-ranging series of COVID-19 emergency orders in a Sunday evening State House news conference, including school closures, a ban on most gatherings of 25 people or more, and prohibition of on-premises food or drink consumption in restaurants and bars.

New responses unveiled Sunday also include a mandate that all restaurants and bars transition to takeout-only to prevent crowds, a requirement that commercial health insurers cover telemedicine, and steps aimed at making unemployment aid more easily accessible.

The sweeping announcements came hours after the total number of identified COVID-19 cases in Massachusetts hit 164 and as Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel announced that community-level transmission – where investigators cannot trace an individual case back to a source – is now occurring in seven counties.

“I realize these measures are unprecedented, but we’re asking our residents to take a deep breath and understand the rationale behind this guidance,” Baker said, stressing the response could save lives, enable the health care sector to avoid an unmanageable surge, and limit the already rapid spread of the illness.

Public and private K-12 schools will be allowed to return Monday, but starting Tuesday, they must suspend all educational operations until April 7. Baker urged staff to plan for how to provide alternative and remote learning resources equitably to all students during the shutdown.

District buildings can still open to provide food to students or other important non-educational services. Residential and day schools for students with special needs are exempt, as are daycare facilities and preschools.

Baker had resisted ordering a statewide educational shutdown for several days, even as many districts implemented their own weeks-long suspensions and governors in other states implemented similar policies.

“The facts on the ground have changed,” Baker said Sunday. “At this point in time, it’s particularly appropriate that we not only move on the school closures, but also that we get a lot more aggressive around other places and spaces that people gather.”

Two days ago, Baker issued an emergency order banning gatherings of 250 or more people such as conventions, parades and concerts.



On Sunday, he scaled that threshold down to one-tenth its original scope, updating the order to prohibit events that would bring together 25 or more people in an effort to impose social distancing practices that public health experts say are necessary to slow the virus's spread.

The updated order also forbids on-premises consumption of food or drink, effectively requiring all restaurants and bars to transition to takeout-only from its March 17 effective date until at least April 5.

The order banning large gatherings does not apply to normal operations at grocery or retail businesses.

Boston Mayor Martin Walsh had earlier on Sunday ordered restaurants, bars and clubs to limit their capacity to 50 percent and to close early, prompted in part by reports of large crowds at South Boston establishments over the weekend. Baker's order supersedes the mayor's instructions.

Massachusetts has 164 identified coronavirus cases as of Sunday, a more than fivefold increase over the total cases one week ago.

Three commercial laboratories – Thermo Fischer, Quest Diagnostics and LabCorp – have received federal approval to conduct COVID-19 tests, supplementing the roughly 400 tests per day the state's public health laboratory will soon be able to conduct.

At least 969 tests have been done so far between the state lab and private labs, Bharel said. The governor warned this morning that he expects the numbers of total cases to rise significantly as more tests are conducted.

While the majority of cases trace back to a late February meeting of Biogen employees in Boston, community spread is becoming more common. The state's public health commissioner said Berkshire, Essex, Hampden, Middlesex, Norfolk, Suffolk

and Worcester Counties all have evidence of community-level transmission as of Sunday.

“This is an evolving situation,” Bharel said. “Social distancing is our collective opportunity to influence the course of this illness and flatten the curve. Each of us needs to do our part.”

Officials also announced a range of health care-specific restrictions Sunday.

Hospitals must cancel non-essential elective surgeries until further notice starting Wednesday, and those operated by DPH or the state Department of Mental Health must screen all visitors and limit visitation.

All assisted living facilities, including nursing homes, can no longer allow visitors, a step that officials hope will limit transmission risk to especially vulnerable populations. Exceptions will be made for end-of-life and hospice care, and the restriction follows federal guidelines issued Friday.

Education Secretary James Peyser walked onto the stage Sunday evening ahead of Gov. Charlie Baker’s daily COVID-19 response briefing where the governor announced a three-week public schools closure.

As of Monday, all commercial health insurance carriers and the Group Insurance Commission will be required to cover all medically necessary telehealth services – treatment offered by doctors over the phone or a video conference – and pay the same rates as in-person care. They are also prohibited from requiring cost-sharing or prior authorization for any COVID-19 telehealth treatment.

“Telemedicine is one of the most important things we need to divert care from hospitals and ambulatory sites from patients,” said Marylou Sudders, who stepped aside from her usual duties running the health and human services secretariat

to lead the state's coronavirus command center. "By enabling patients to remain at home, rapid treatment delivery can be provided, we can adhere to social distancing protocols, we can optimize efficiency and conserve resources."

The public health orders also authorize certain pharmacies to create their own hand sanitizer and sell it over the counter to supplement stockpiles.

Baker said he would file emergency legislation on Monday that waives the one-week waiting period for unemployment benefits and expanding eligibility, aiming to allow "many of the workers affected by closures to get some financial relief faster."

According to the governor's office, the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development will also file emergency regulations allowing employees affected by the coronavirus to collect unemployment if their workplace shuts down with plans to reopen within four weeks.

Baker's legislation will attempt to address issues municipalities have raised amid the outbreak, such as the potential need to delay annual town meetings and fiscal year 2021 municipal budget discussions that typically take place in the spring.

The Registry of Motor Vehicles will add a 60-day extension to the expiration date for standard driver licenses and other credentials to limit how many customers visit service centers. Vehicle registrations, many of which can be renewed online, will not be extended.

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# **New Bedford Public Schools Food Services to provide ‘Grab and Go’ meals during closure**

New Bedford Public Schools Food Services to provide ‘Grab and Go’ meals during district closure – Beginning on Tuesday, March 17, during school closure days and until further notice, “grab and go” pre-packed school breakfasts and lunches will be available FREE to all students k12 in the city of New Bedford.

Students 18 years and younger may take one (1) lunch and one (1) breakfast for the next day. Meals will be available 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Monday through Friday at the following serving locations:

- Alfred J. Gomes Elementary School
- Campbell Elementary School
- Carney Academy Elementary School
- Hayden-McFadden Elementary School
- Keith Middle School
- Lincoln Elementary School
- Roosevelt Middle School

All meals must be taken and consumed offsite.

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## **Baker: Three weeks of no**

# **school, no dining in at restaurants, no gatherings over 25 as part of new COVID-19 protocol**

Governor Baker has made new protocols concerning COVID-19.

In a Sunday evening press conference, Baker announced that restaurants will be take out only, effective this Tuesday and continuing through April 17th. In doing so, Baker is also prohibiting gatherings of more than 25 people. This does not apply to grocery stores or pharmacies, according to Baker.

Baker is also suspending all schools in the state for three weeks starting Tuesday.

Also announced by Governor Baker, doctors are asked to provide consultations via tele-health and to postpone elective surgeries.

Social spacing is also continuing to be encouraged.