



The Federal Trade Commission has filed charges against operators of online “high schools” that claim to be legitimate, but are alleged to be little more than diploma mills charging anywhere from \$135 to \$349 for a worthless certificate. The operations bought a number of website names designed to look like legitimate online high schools using terms like “GED” and “GED online” to lure individuals to their the bogus sites. Once consumers arrive at the schools’ sites, they are met with messages that imply that the diplomas offered by the defendants are equivalent to an actual high school diploma. If a program says you can earn your diploma with just “life experience,” it’s almost certainly a scam.

The operators of the online and correspondence schools tap a market of thousands of students who didn’t graduate from traditional high schools, but find they need a diploma to get employed or find a better job.

If you didn’t graduate from high school, but want to get your diploma, you can get what’s called a “high school equivalency diploma” or “high school equivalency credential.” You earn them by taking a test or enrolling in programs to earn class credit. You might have heard of the GED test. That’s one way to get your equivalency diploma, but there are other tests and programs to choose from, depending on where you live.

Many people earn a high school equivalency diploma by taking a test. Tests offer some flexibility, allowing you to study on your own time and at your own pace. However, you have to take them at a set time and place and the tests can be challenging. Most states will accept some credits from online classes, but typically only a few. Legitimate online courses will require you to do real class work, not just take a test. If an online class doesn’t require substantial reading, writing, quizzes and tests, or offers coursework you can finish in a day, it’s not the real thing.

SIGNS OF A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA SCAM

According to the FTC, the following are some red flags that you’ve come across a scam:

You Can Get the Diploma From Home, ASAP

No classes? No in-person test? All online? That’s a scam. Legitimate programs with classes for credit mean you’ll invest weeks or months of time. And real high school equivalency tests are offered at specific days and times, not on-demand. Most people don’t pass without really studying.

You Have to Pay for a Diploma

No legitimate high school equivalency program lets you take a test or classes for free, then charges you for the diploma. You might pay for classes or testing, but you shouldn’t have to pay for the diploma itself.

They Claim to be Affiliated With the Federal Government

The federal government doesn’t offer programs for earning high school diplomas. Legitimate tests or programs are approved by your state. To find out what tests are accepted and recognized by Florida’s education standards, contact the Florida Department of Education at fldoe.org or call (877) 352-4331.

For additional information, or if you feel that you’ve become a victim of a diploma scam, contact the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352), 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832) en Español, or visit 800helpfla.com.



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Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

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