



Mississippi Community College Board

Mississippi State Defined Process for Ability to Benefit

Approved U.S. Department of Education on 4/21/2021

INTRODUCTION

The Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB) serves the state's community college system through coordination, support, leadership, and advocacy. The MCCB, through its 10-member Board, establishes and implements statewide policies for educational programs and serves, and administers state funding provided for community college programs and services, to ensure quality, accountability, and efficiency. It also monitors and reports on federal requirements related to technical college operations and administers funding received under the federal Carl Perkins and Adult Education and Family Literacy Acts.

According to 2014-2018 American Community Survey, 5-year estimate, 2,268,454 individuals make up the total adult population in Mississippi. Of this total, 361,781 individuals have no high school diploma (15.9%). In addition, 40,066 (1.8%) are reported as "speaking English less than very well". Every year, Mississippi's community colleges enroll nearly 12,000 adults in a basic skills program where they can earn a high school credential, develop career-technical skills, and continue their academic pursuits to achieve additional credentials that may be needed for reaching their educational or employment goals.

Mississippi community colleges offer over 250 career pathway programs that award two-year associate degrees, one- and two- year technical certificates, and short-term technical programs and certificates. In addition, the colleges are a major provider of workforce training and technical assistance throughout the state. Over 230,000 individuals access Mississippi's community college academic, career & technical, adult education or workforce programs each year.

All 15 community colleges have successfully implemented the Mississippi Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (MIBEST) Program. The MIBEST program is a service approach that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement (34 CFR 463.35). This concurrent enrollment allows students to earn a high school credential while working on a career pathway that accelerates their ability to enter the workforce or advance within their chosen field, rather than pursuing each of these goals independently.

The MCCB approves all MIBEST Pathways through a highly rigorous review and approval process. All MIBEST programs undergo a further review process in which colleges are required to integrate outcomes and meet other Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Integrated Education and Training (IET) requirements, including ensuring completers will earn certificates and degrees that lead to high demand, living wage jobs.

The MIBEST program utilizes an evidence-based approach to increase the postsecondary education attainment and employment outcomes of low-skilled, low-income youth and adults. The limiting factor impacting access to these opportunities are financial supports.

Currently, in order to be eligible for federal financial aid through Ability to Benefit (ATB), Mississippi students must be enrolled in an approved MIBEST pathway, lack a high school diploma, or its recognized equivalent, and

fulfill one of three options demonstrating they have the “ability to benefit” from receiving aid. According to the federal guidelines the ATB eligibility options are:

1. Passing an ATB acceptable academic assessment or entrance exam;
2. Completing 6 college credits (or equivalent) without financial aid; or
3. Qualifying for and completing a state-defined ATB eligibility process.

Academic and financial barriers limit a prospective student from qualifying for ATB under the first two eligibility criteria. This leaves the third eligibility option – following requirements of a *state-defined* ATB process – as an option for determining candidacy and increasing qualified student enrollment under ATB at the state level if the process is approved.

The MCCB is proposing a state eligibility process containing additional assessments that can be used when identifying students who have the “ability to benefit” and should be eligible for enrollment under ATB. Under the MCCB ATB eligibility process, students can enter an approved MIBEST Pathway and obtain funding for applicable tuition/fees under Title IV federal aid. Additionally, this process will be accessible for students of all backgrounds, abilities, and socioeconomic levels, and it will be especially beneficial for low- income and first-generation college students.

PROCESS HIGHLIGHTS

The MCCB ATB Process provides the following:

- A list of Mississippi community college institutions that will have an opportunity to take part in the MCCB ATB Process;
- Calculations and reporting of the rate of success, as defined by MCCB, using established resources and reporting systems;
- Required services will be provided to ATB students by the participating institutions, including but not limited to – (a) student orientation, (b) assessment options, (c) team teaching / tutoring / academic support, (d) connecting academic goals to career pathways, (e) counseling and case management, and (f) measuring progress and student follow-up;
- Criteria for determining good candidates for enrollment in ATB and a summary of academic supports; and
- Provisions for annually monitoring participating institutions, enforcing corrective actions with participating institutions to maintain state and federal compliance, and terminating participating institutions from ATB participation should there be continued non-compliance.

POTENTIAL PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

1. Coahoma Community College
2. Copiah-Lincoln Community College
3. East Central Community College
4. East Mississippi Community College
5. Hinds Community College
6. Holmes Community College
7. Itawamba Community College
8. Jones College
9. Meridian Community College
10. Mississippi Delta Community College

11. Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College
12. Northeast Mississippi Community College
13. Northwest Mississippi Community College
14. Pearl River Community College
15. Southwest Mississippi Community College

DATA REPORTING STANDARDS

The MCCB uses several data reporting methods and resources to accurately monitor and analyze student data. The primary data repository source used by the colleges for credit-bearing enrollment reporting is the Electronic Audit Reporting System (EARS). The EAR System is a secure, centralized interface through which data can be uploaded, retained, and retrieved. Authorized users can access EARS to exchange enrollment data which are used to report, monitor, and analyze student demography, performance, and outcomes.

The MCCB Process for ATB will ensure required data can be accessed for the purpose of calculating the rate of success for students enrolled at participating institutions. Admitted students identified by their institution as an ATB student will be included in disaggregated state reporting as exchanged through seamless data transmission via the EARS portal.

REQUIRED SERVICES

Under the MCCB Process for ATB, participating colleges are required to provide each participating ATB student with comprehensive support and services. Evidence of support and student engagement are essential to the student's success. These services include:

- A. Student Orientation:** All students who enroll in the MIBEST program participate in a rigorous orientation process. The orientation will familiarize students with the college's policies, campus resources, student rights, and the institution's academic standards and requirements. Orientation will also include information regarding the use of common administrative forms, the use of online learning management systems (including online courses), how to interpret educational terminology/jargon (i.e., FAFSA, GPA, etc.), how to complete online registration processes, how to access web-based student accounts/email/grades, how to access student financial information and billing statements, and the key components of student financial aid options and requirements (34 CFR 688.156 (c)(1)).
- B. Assessment Options:** Students will be provided the opportunity to demonstrate academic capabilities through means other than a single standardized test. Colleges use multiple forms of cognitive assessment, such as ACCUPLACER, GED/HISET test(s), GED/HISET predictor test(s), and other qualifying assessment methods. The MCCB supports the best practice of conducting student assessments across multiple measures, and colleges within our system are also encouraged to consider career interests and non-cognitive factors with the aim of developing comprehensive student assessment profiles (34 CFR 688.156 (c)(2)).
- C. Team Teaching / Tutoring / Academic Support:** In an IET service delivery model, various team teaching strategies are used to deliver coursework. Through this co-teaching process, both instructors support students, and instruction within this context that includes integration of workforce or job-specific skills and academic skills that lead to college credits and industry-recognized credentials. Tutoring/academic support will be provided as appropriate to each student's needs. Services will be free for students and

provided by tutors, instructors, online/virtual services, and/or other individuals who are trained to provide academic tutoring or support services (34 CFR 688.156 (c)(3)).

In addition to classroom instruction, students may be provided with a range of educational supports that enhance their likelihood of success. These may include counseling, advising, financial aid, case management, and various types of classroom supports (e.g., additional classes and labs, depending on student needs, or peer tutoring).

- D. Connecting Academic Goals to Career Pathways:** College and Career Navigators (CCNs) assist students in the development of an individualized Student Success Plan. This plan maps academic goals to career goals, identifies academic and non-academic supports, and addresses the function(s) of financial aid or other financial resources that will help the student reach their goals. Students will be made aware of the clear connection between their academic and career goals, and be provided with educational and training opportunities directly applicable to their desired career or industry. Students will also be instructed in the process of making changes or modifications to their academic plan and how these modifications may affect their career goals (34 CFR 688.156 (c)(4)).

All MIBEST programs are required to provide detailed maps outlining a clear pathway of education and/or training, and should include industry-recognized credentials and wage progression. After completion of their MIBEST pathway, students can either enter the workforce with skills and certifications needed for living wage work, or enroll in the next set of courses in their pathway that leads to degrees, including transfer and applied baccalaureate degrees.

- E. Counseling and Case Management:** The College and Career Navigator (CCN) serves as the single point of contact for students enrolled in MIBEST programs. The CCN provides wraparound support services related to pathway and course selection, retention and completion, coaching, access to financial and other community resources. This also includes other services designed to support students in their work toward certificates and degrees leading to living wage employment. The MCCB process will require a multi-faceted approach to counseling/advising services, which include providing career, academic, and financial information as needed (34 CFR 688.156 (c)(5)).
- F. Measuring Progress & Student Follow-up:** Students will be provided ongoing follow-up regarding their academic performance and any progress made towards their educational and career goals. Faculty, instructors, navigators, advisors, and/or others who are appropriately trained to function in such a role will provide these follow-up services.

Elements of satisfactory progress could include attainment of credential milestones like passing one or more GED/HISET assessments, successful course completions, etc. MIBEST pathways are college-level programming and students receive assessments and grading in the same manner as all college students. Navigators provide additional support and connect students to tutoring and other services designed to support student learning (34 CFR 688.156 (c)(6)).

PROGRAM DESIGN & ELIGIBILITY

Program Design: The MCCB process for ATB is designed to assist students and prospective students that have not earned a high school diploma and are unable to meet the other alternative ATB eligibility criteria (i.e., successfully completing a standardized assessment/exam or successfully completing 6 college-level credits). The MCCB

process requires participating students to be concurrently enrolled in a MIBEST program and adult education, wherein the student is making satisfactory progress toward both a high school credential or its equivalent and an approved post-secondary occupational program/career pathway.

Eligibility: The MCCB proposes that students demonstrate the “ability to benefit” when they co-enroll in Title-IV federal aid eligible program. MCCB’s Process for ATB defines eligibility as any adult student (beyond the age of Mississippi Compulsory Education) who *does not* meet other ATB eligibility criteria, and who:

- qualifies for federally supported levels of basic skills education. The Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) is used to assess and pre-test all basic education students at the start of the program and post-test students following the federally approved Mississippi Assessment Policy.
- meet all entrance requirements to enroll in a MIBEST program. Each MIBEST program sets their own entrance requirements. Many use ABE 4 / ESL 5 WIOA Federal Educational Functioning Levels (EFLs) designation as a baseline, but this varies by program. Some may have additional math, writing, and other assessments;
- meet any other program academic requirements (such as math and/or writing) or other prerequisites in order to maximize student success and positive outcomes.

Candidate eligibility will be closely monitored, determining which students would benefit from ATB enrollment. Therefore, when determining student eligibility, these competencies will be analyzed using the documented method(s) and evidence available (e.g., TABE, GED, HISET), or potentially using documentation of competency through Mississippi’s Competency-Based High School Equivalency Diploma or MCCB’s Credit for Prior Learning Assessment process.

MONITORING & COMPLIANCE

The MCCB will monitor each of the participating institutions for compliance within the MCCB Process for ATB requirements and standards of service on an annual basis. An institution found to be noncompliant with the state-defined process will be placed on a corrective action plan. Colleges placed on a corrective action plan must demonstrate in the subsequent semester that all students on ATB via the state-defined process have met the requirements of the process. MCCB will provide both online and face-to-face training and technical support to ensure the institution has the staffing, resources and processes in place needed for successfully using the state-defined process per requirements in the proposal.

If an institution is not able to demonstrate that they have met the requirements of the corrective action plan, they will no longer be approved to use the state-defined process for a period of one academic year, starting from the time at which the institution has been deemed out of compliance. The institution will be removed from the list of eligible institutions approved to offer the state-defined process.

In acknowledgement of the program requirements, including the expected performance measures, and related monitoring and compliance, the MCCB has developed an ATB Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to guide the colleges that will participate in the state defined ATB process. By agreeing to the MOU, the Mississippi community colleges will confirm their commitment in complying with the state defined process and agree to provide the following to the MCCB:

- a list of MIBEST pathway(s) ATB eligible students will be able to participate in;
- an explanation of the institutional process for identifying students who may benefit from ATB and how the institution intends to recruit and educate students about ATB before students commit to participation;

- an acknowledgement that the institution will track student participation in ATB and report ATB participants within the MCCB, Electronic Audit Reporting System (EARS) for state success rate performance analysis; and
- an explanation of how the institution will monitor and ensure all students participating in ATB receive each of the six services:
 1. Student orientation;
 2. Assessment options;
 3. Team teaching / tutoring / academic support;
 4. Connecting academic goals to career pathways;
 5. Counseling and case management; and
 6. Measuring progress and student follow-up;

The MCCB will review the submitted information to confirm the institution demonstrates commitment in complying with the state defined process. If approved, the institution will be required to participate in the following activities to support MCCB monitoring of institutional compliance with the state defined process:

- Participate in a one-day professional development training hosted by the MCCB to explore the state defined ATB process and compliance requirements;
- Participate in quarterly calls and/or webinars hosted by the MCCB to discuss state defined process requirements and strategies for scaling ATB for eligible students;
- Participate in training offered by the MCCB regarding monitoring and compliance with reporting ATB participants through the MCCB reporting system, and review ATB success rates for reported participants; and
- Submit to the MCCB an annual end-of-year amendment to the previously approved MCCB ATB MOU with changes for the next academic year (e.g. identify newly developed career pathways that ATB eligible students can enroll).

DEMONSTRATED SUCCESS RATES

Historically, the MCCB has always collected the necessary data to calculate a series of federal accountability measures and continuous improvement measures. The MCCB currently reports the required Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) performance measures through the National Reporting System on an annual basis. These measures include:

- Measurable Skill Gains,
- Employment - 2nd and 4th quarter after exit,
- Median earnings - 2nd quarter after exit, and
- Credential Attainment.

To generate these measures, MCCB collects the required AEFLA participant data through the Literacy, Adult and Community Education System (LACES) and has established a series of data sharing agreements with the state unemployment insurance wage system, and the National Student Clearinghouse to assess AEFLA participant employment outcomes, High School Equivalency attainment, and transition to postsecondary education.

Similarly, the MCCB currently reports the federally required Perkins performance measures for CTE concentrators on an annual basis. The MCCB also calculates a series of local continuous improvement measures to assess and improve student outcomes. These measures include program completion, program retention, successful course completion, program student transfer, and program graduate job placement. The MCCB can analyze these

measures at the program and student level and can disaggregate outcomes across course enrollment and student characteristics such as economically disadvantaged status, race/ethnicity, gender, age, and disability status, to identify equity gaps in student outcomes.

The MCCB has the capacity to produce the required state success rate as defined by the US Department of Education. Data to identify completion of a high school credential or its equivalent, program completion, continuous enrollment, and successful transfer among the required student populations will be available for analysis through LACES, the MCCB EARS, and supplemental data matches through the National Student Clearinghouse. Student success rates will be calculated by the MCCB at the end of each year for each community college. Results will help to inform compliance with the state defined process and to identify MCCB technical assistance needs.

Questions about the MCCB Process for Ability to Benefit should be directed to:

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