

Iowa Process for Ability to Benefit (ATB)

INTRODUCTION

The Iowa Department of Education's (DE) Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation is the coordinating and administrative oversight body for the state's community colleges. The DE implements statewide policies and standards 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 community college operations and administers funding received under the federal Carl D. Perkins and Adult Education and Family Literacy Acts along with appropriated state funding.

According to 2018 census information, there are approximately 2,420,763 individuals that make up the total adult population in Iowa (18 and older). Of this total, approximately 198,503 individuals have no high school diploma (8.2 percent). In addition, 93,111 (1.6 percent) identified as "speaking English less than very well." This means approximately one in 12 adults across Iowa are affected by employment and educational barriers. Every year, Iowa adult education enrolls nearly 12,000 adults in a basic skills program where they can earn a high school credential, develop vocational skills, and continue their academic pursuits to achieve additional credentials that may be needed for reaching their educational or employment goals.

Iowa's 15 community colleges offer 194 different credit classification of instructional programs (CIP) approved by the state, 1,332 different CTE awards in career pathway programs that award two-year associate degrees, one- and two-year technical diplomas, short-term technical diplomas, and certificates. In addition, Iowa provides classroom instruction for registered apprentices and is a major provider of customized training and technical assistance throughout the state. Over 130,000 individuals accessed Iowa's community colleges each year.

Currently, in order to be eligible for federal financial aid through Ability to Benefit (ATB), students must be enrolled in a career pathway program, lack a high school diploma, or its recognized equivalent, and fulfill one of three criteria demonstrating they have the "ability to benefit" from receiving aid. The ATB eligibility options are: 1) passing an ATB acceptable academic assessment or entrance exam; 2) completing six college credits (or equivalent) without financial aid; or 3) qualifying for and completing a state-defined ATB eligibility process. Unfortunately, the same social-economic barriers that prospective ATB students have likely faced in the past, often remain a hindrance to their qualifying for ATB under the first two eligibility criteria.

This leaves the third eligibility criterion – 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. Capitalizing on this opportunity, the DE is proposing a state eligibility process through a rigorous wrap around process with preparatory skill building instruction WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) funded Title II providers will identify students who have the "ability to benefit" and should be eligible for enrollment under Pell. Under the Iowa DE ATB eligibility process, students can enter a community college career pathway program 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 Iowa ATB process provides the following:

- A list of Iowa community colleges that will have an opportunity to take part in the Iowa ATB process.
- Calculations and reporting of the rate of success, as defined by the DE, using established resources and reporting systems (i.e., Pathways for Academic Career and Employment [PACE], Gap, and WIOA Title II providers).

- Required services that will be provided to ATB students by the participating institutions, including, but not limited to: (a) student orientation; (b) adult education and literacy services; (c) connecting academic goals with career pathways; (d) individualized academic counseling that incorporates an understanding of each student's appropriate class level enrollment or career pathway entry points; and (e) faculty/counselor follow-up regarding each student's classroom performance and their progress towards academic goals and/or program completion.
- Criteria for determining good candidates for enrollment in ATB and a summary of academic and preparatory supports.
- Provisions for annually monitoring participating institutions, creating continuous improvement corrective actions with participating institutions to maintain state and federal compliance, and terminating participating institutions from ATB participation should there be continued non-compliance (financial aid and registrars offices and in-house compliance consultant, WIOA Title II providers, and PACE and Gap Navigators)

POTENTIAL PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

Area I—Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC)
 Area II—North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC)
 Area III—Iowa Lakes Community College (ILCC)
 Area IV—Northwest Iowa Community College (NCC)
 Area V—Iowa Central Community College (ICCC)
 Area VI—Iowa Valley Community College District (IVCCD)
 Area VII—Hawkeye Community College (HCC)
 Area IX—Eastern Iowa Community Colleges (EICC)
 Area X—Kirkwood Community College (KCC)
 Area XI—Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC)
 Area XII—Western Iowa Tech Community College (WITCC)
 Area XIII—Iowa Western Community College (IWCC)
 Area XIV—Southwestern Iowa Community College (SWCC)
 Area XV—Indian Hills Community College (IHCC)
 Area XVI—Southeastern Iowa Community College (SCC)

DATA REPORTING STANDARDS

Currently, the Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation uses several data reporting methods and resources to accurately monitor and analyze student data. The primary data repository source used by the adult education and literacy WIOA Title II providers is the TOPSpro Enterprise (TE). The TE data analysis and reporting system is a secure, centralized interface through which data can be inputted, retained, and retrieved. In addition, the community colleges use a Management Information Systems (MIS) which collects all student data including enrollment by CIP to track career pathway participation. TE and MIS both allow authorized users to access data and generate reports, and those reports are then analyzed and used for monitoring or measuring performance.

The Iowa DE process for ATB will ensure that all required data can be accessed for the purpose of calculating the rate of success for students within participating institutions. To do this, each new student admitted to a community college program under the Iowa process for ATB will be coded for identification purposes within the TE and MIS reporting systems. This code will be used by the system and participating institutions to retrieve and review ATB-specific data and monitor the students enrolled in the Iowa process for ATB. Incorporating the task of reporting ATB data will be seamless.

REQUIRED SERVICES

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

Student Orientation: Through our Pathways for Academic Career and Employment (PACE), our community colleges provide a robust and intensive intake service through embedded Pathway Navigators. These navigators provide case management services in combination with counseling and advising to ensure academic and employment training on a chosen pathway. The orientation and intake should build upon the preparatory course requirement and familiarize students with the specific college's policies, campus resources, student rights, and the institution's academic standards and requirements. Orientation should also include information regarding support services (34 CFR 688.156 (c)(1)).

- Satisfactory academic progress measures will be used to monitor the progress and success of ATB students. Students should understand and agree to the ATB process requirements and expectations. Students should understand the correlation between meeting these requirements and maintaining student financial aid eligibility. Use of a contract for student participation will be required.

Adult Education and Literacy Services: Basic education and English as a Second Language services must be incorporated into the services provided for an ATB student and be provided as appropriate to each student's needs. Services must be free for students and provided by professional tutors and instructors. Services may be classroom-based or delivered by online/virtual services. The WIOA Title II provider must monitor all ATB students' participation in educational activities, and student participation for attendance hours will be tracked and reported quarterly. Progression in adult education and literacy services will be tracked through progress assessments. Furthermore, the DE 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)).

Connecting Academic Goals to Career Pathways: Through PACE, our community colleges provide a robust and intensive intake service through embedded Pathway Navigators. These navigators provide case management services in combination with counseling and advising to ensure academic and employment training on a chosen pathway. Students must be provided ongoing professional assistance in developing and mapping out their educational and career goals as developed in the preparatory requirement. Students should be able to access their educational information for the purpose of monitoring their own progress towards these goals. Students should be made aware of the clear connections between their academic and career goals, and they should also be provided with educational and training opportunities that are directly applicable to their desired career or industry. Use of Iowa specific occupational information will continue to be in place to assist each student in their career development. 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)).

Counseling and Advising: The terms *counseling* and *advising* might also be referred to as *case management*, which is similar to the current PACE and Gap models currently being used by all of the Iowa community colleges, along with our adult education and literacy services offered by WIOA Title II providers. This service will be customized to each student, and it will include components of a holistic student support model. Other important provisions of this mandatory service will be assisting students in creating personal education plans that map their academic goals to career goals, identifying academic and non-academic supports, and addressing the function(s) of financial aid or other financial resources that will help the student reach their goals. The Iowa process will require a multi-faceted approach to counseling/advising services, this includes providing career, academic, and financial information as needed (34 CFR 688.156 (c)(5)). Refer to the details provided in the Program Design related to the role that Iowa's PACE will play in case management and wrap around support for ATB participants.

- The student must enroll in a Title IV eligible program with a goal of completing the program. The college should not enroll a student in an educational program that is not consistent with the student's career and educational goals.

Measuring Progress and Student Follow-up: Students must be provided with follow-up regarding their classroom performance and any progress made towards their educational and career goals. Managed enrollment is a best practice for all of our programs. For PACE and Gap, eligibility is based on required attendance, face-to-face monitoring and completion of the program. These follow-up services must be provided by teachers, counselors, case managers, advisors, and/or others who are appropriately trained to function in such a role ((34 CFR 688.156 (c)(6))).

- Elements of satisfactory progress could include attainment of milestones like gaining an educational functioning level as assessed by CASAS and/or TABE, passing one or more HiSET tests, or successful course completions. Other elements of progress could include required adult education and literacy quarterly attendance, attendance at required case management meetings, and other requirements set by the college.

ELIGIBILITY AND PROGRAM DESIGN

Candidate Eligibility: The DE process for ATB defines eligibility as any adult student (16 years and nine months) who *does not* meet other ATB eligibility criteria, and who is a current or eligible adult education and literacy participant as defined by WIOA. The candidate must have completed the preparatory requirements and is willing to commit to attendance requirements for continued adult education and literacy instruction along with mandatory advising appointments.

- Preparatory Requirements:
 - A college experience with an integrated career exploration component course(s) (up to a minimum of one postsecondary credit) with the goals to connect students to faculty, peers, and college resources, while introducing students to the college's expectations and environment and to strategies that promote and encourage student success in college and life. Competencies should include use of common administrative forms; the use of online learning management systems (including online courses); how to interpret educational terminology/acronyms (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; how to access labor market information, assessing abilities, interests, values, and personalities through various career inventories; and developing an actionable career plan through research; or
 - An eligible career pathway course (up to a minimum of two postsecondary credits) is an opportunity for a student to complete an Integrated Education and Training which includes an occupational skill training or course that is part of or an introduction to the intended eligible career pathway postsecondary program. This course must be applicable to a degree or other credential offered by the Title IV eligible postsecondary institution and be identified as a regional demand.

The preparatory requirements should be integrated and offered concurrently with adult education and literacy services with the expectation that each course must be satisfactorily completed (75 percent or higher) prior to becoming eligible for Title IV funds. Documentation of completion of requirements and candidacy should be recorded and available for audit. Furthermore, students will be required to have identified an eligible career pathway program for their ATB enrollment, as defined under 20 U.S.C. § 1091(d)(2).

Program Design: Iowa's state plan for accessing ATB is designed to assist students and prospective students that have not earned a high school diploma or equivalency and have not met the other ATB eligibility criteria (i.e., successfully completing a standardized assessment/exam or successfully completing six college-level credits). The Iowa process recommends that participating students be required to complete a thorough academic and preparatory support process that includes the completion of preparatory requirements aimed at successfully transitioning to postsecondary education and career exploration. The design also requires continued adult education and literacy services through WIOA Title II providers and to submit attendance, wherein the student is making progress toward a high school equivalency credential and an approved postsecondary occupational program/career pathway. In addition, the design must include mandatory counseling and advising sessions with ATB participants which will assist in the follow-up and progression reporting.

This critical element of the program design will be in partnership with the PACE initiative. Funded in fiscal year 2014 by House File 604, \$5 million is dedicated to Iowa's 15 community colleges for the purpose of implementing a streamlined and comprehensive process, coupled with support services, to enable students to acquire quality education and training to secure a job. Specifically, the funds can be used for integrated basic skills instruction and occupational training, counseling, and case management staff called Pathway Navigators. This program offers on ramps to education and off ramps to employment for flexibility with life circumstances. Funding covers the cost of barriers, like child care, personal finance, and transportation to prevent students from dropping out. Pathway Navigators will provide that support the Iowa's ATB state plan include but are not limited to the following:

- Interviewing students.
- Assessing students' skills, interests, and previous academic and work experience.
- Continuing to work with students to develop academic and career plans and to adjust such plans, as needed.
- Assisting students in applying for and receiving resources for financial aid and other forms of tuition assistance.
- Assisting students with the admissions process, academic credit transfer, course registration, and other procedures necessary for successful completion of career pathways.
- Assisting in identifying and resolving obstacles to students' successful completion of their chosen career pathway.
- Connecting students with useful college resources or outside support services such as access to child care, transportation, and tutorial assistance, as needed.
- Maintaining ongoing contact with students enrolled in ATB and ensuring students are making satisfactory progress toward the successful completion of projects.
- Providing support to students transitioning from adult education and literacy, short-term training, and classroom experience to employment.
- Coordinating adult basic education services.

Each community college participating in Iowa's ATB state plan shall incorporate this option as part of their efforts through adult education and PACE to develop a strong, streamline pipeline system to better serve the academic, training, and employment needs of the low-income, low-skilled individuals.

MONITORING

The DE will annually monitor each of the participating institutions for compliance within the Iowa process for ATB requirements and standards of service. ATB student completion rates must be within 95 percent of the completion rate of students who have a high school credential, HiSET, or recognized HiSET equivalent, as per 34 CFR 668.156 (h).

The DE will identify corrective action(s) if an institution is found to be noncompliant with the Iowa process for ATB requirements, and the DE may terminate an institution's participation if the institution does not meet the goals established by the corrective action(s) as per 34 CFR 668.156 (d).

Questions about the Iowa process for ATB should be directed to:

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