



ABILITY TO BENEFIT

USER GUIDE



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This guide was produced with generous support from the Center on Law and Social Policy (CLASP). The information contained in this guide is intended to serve as an introduction to the provisions of Ability to Benefit and the steps required to successfully align college services with local and regional stakeholder partners.

What is Ability to Benefit?

Ability to Benefit (ATB) is a provision in the Higher Education Act (HEA) that allows a student who has not received a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent to be eligible for Title IV Federal student aid. This includes eligibility for Federal Pell Grants, need-based aid that helps low-income students cover the cost of tuition and living expenses. In order to receive financial aid through ATB, the student must also be enrolled in a career pathway program which meets the federal definition.

In order to gain eligibility for Federal student aid through ATB, a student who has no high school diploma must complete one of 3 ATB Alternatives for eligibility:

1. The student receives a passing score on one of the Department of Education approved ATB tests. In Wisconsin, the **Wonderlic Basic Skills Test (WBST)** and **ACCUPLACER** are commonly used for determining ATB eligibility. Tests must be administered according to ATB Test Policy.
2. The student completes at least 6 credit hours or 225 clock hours that are applicable toward a Title IV-eligible degree offered by the postsecondary institution.
3. The college must be a participant in the State's process approved by the Secretary of Education ("State-defined process"). The Wisconsin Technical College System has submitted its proposal for a State-defined process which is currently under review by the Department of Education at the time of this publication.

Why Should We Expand the Use of ATB?

ATB is an opportunity to make college accessible and affordable for those without a high school credential and promotes economic mobility. Nearly 30 percent of adults with household incomes at or below the poverty line lack a high school credential. Meanwhile, nearly 40 percent of adults enrolled in adult education are unemployed.¹ Individuals without a high school diploma are a largely untapped labor source and their needs align with the education and training that our colleges provide. ATB also may create additional enrollment opportunities for students interested in approved career pathways. ATB makes college affordable for individuals without a high school diploma, allowing them to gain educational experience and ultimately find meaningful employment.

Did You Know?

- More than 1 in 10 adults age 25 or older lack a high school diploma or equivalent.
- In Wisconsin alone, over 295,000 adults age 18 – 64 don't have a high school diploma.²
- Nearly 60% of all jobs in the U.S. require a high-quality postsecondary credential beyond high school.
- Completion of a high school equivalency is an on-ramp to a high-quality program credential and a source of talent development in Wisconsin.
- With ATB now available, individuals without a high school diploma are a largely untapped source to fill the talent pipeline that support the needs of the local and regional labor market.

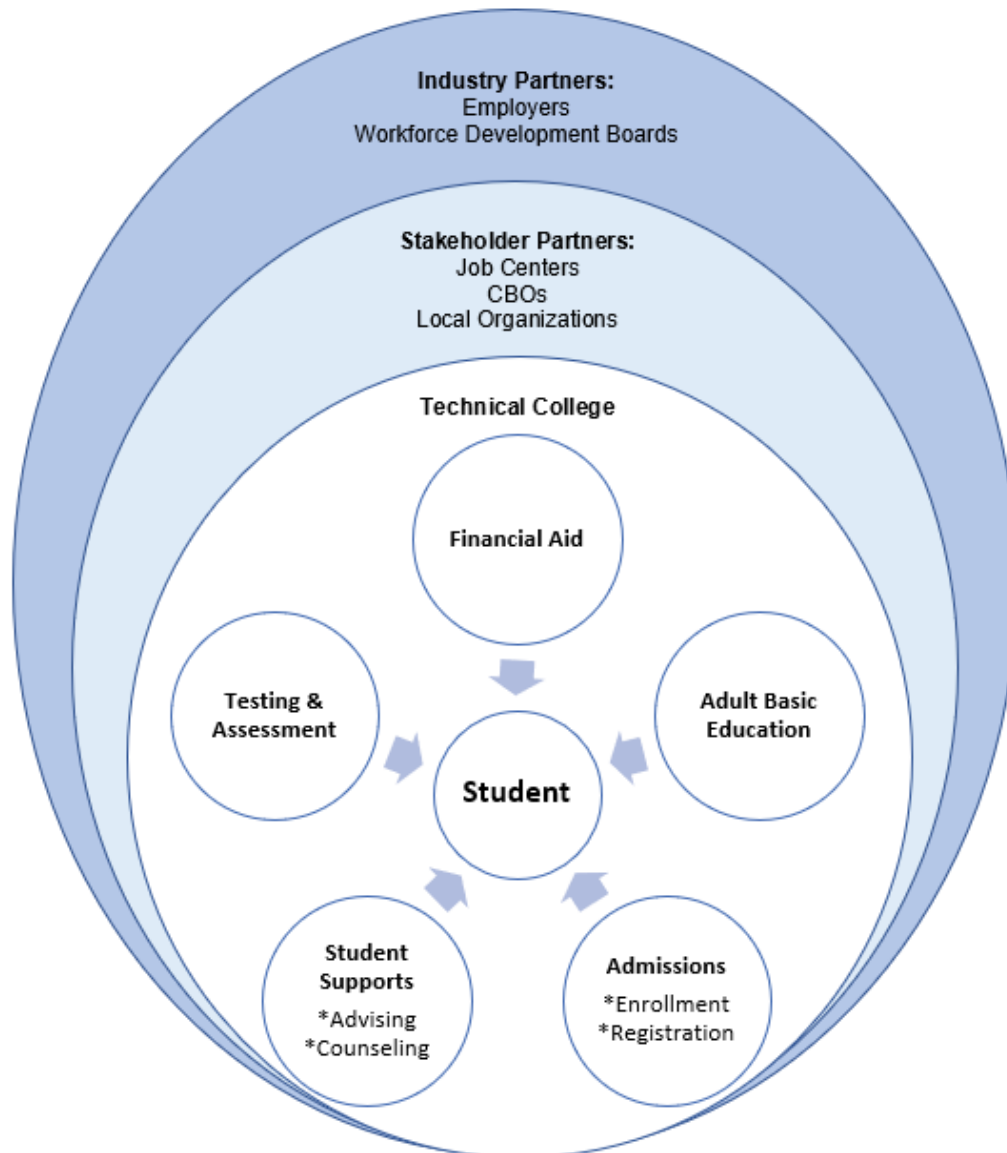
¹Kelly May, Ability to Benefit Fact Sheet, Center for Law and Social Policy, June 2019.

²United States Census Bureau, census.gov

Aligning ATB Processes

Leadership support in growing and aligning the use of ATB is critical as it has a direct correlation on the amount of resources, time, and tools made available to build and scale the ATB processes within your institution. A designated champion group for ATB can also support the growth of ATB by allowing a department or individual to fill the roles of facilitator and/or liaison depending on the needs at your institution. Ideally, the champion is a department/individual that interacts regularly with the other offices involved in the ATB processes (i.e. Student Navigator). A common link between these areas of your institution will provide the intake, assessment, documentation, and support necessary to ensure that the student is successful. (See figure below)

When building an ATB champion team at your college, consider a cross-functional team; including members from all parts of the college noted in the illustration. As we know, prospective students are likely to interact with one or more areas of the college so many champions can ensure that students have access to information and positive experiences as they begin or continue their education. Explore ways that potential ATB students contact your college to learn more about completing a high school credential or equivalency. These are the dialogues that can also explore how they can finish their high school equivalency and concurrently enroll in a program if that is also one of the individual's goals.



Ability to Benefit Planning Tool

The Ability to Benefit Planning Tool has been developed to help individual colleges, if they choose, establish a baseline for alignment of their internal and external processes as it relates to ATB. The tool is organized into two groups of elements (Internal vs. External). You have opportunity to examine each consideration within these two groups by noting the current status, assessing your current state and identifying next steps for enhancement.

When building a team and identifying a champion at your college, we encourage you to find the best person/persons to use the tool as it will be different college to college. Consider a cross-functional team; including members from all parts of the college noted in Figure 1 of the Ability to Benefit User Guide.



ATB Planning Tool

Internal Considerations	Current State: <i>Note the current state of this element.</i>	Not Applicable	No Action Yet	In Progress	Implemented	Next Steps: <i>Note next action steps for enhancing this element.</i>
Internal Elements to Consider						
a. The college has leadership support to fully utilize the provisions of Ability to Benefit (ATB).						
b. The college has a mechanism to engage all parts of the institution around a collaborative strategy to expand the use of ATB.						
c. The college offers academic support services such as tutoring, study skills training and mentoring to support ATB students.						
d. The college has a mechanism to inform ATB students of available support services.						

Internal Considerations	Current State: <i>Note the current state of this element.</i>	Not Applicable	No Action Yet	In Progress	Implemented	Next Steps: <i>Note next action steps for enhancing this element.</i>
e. The college's processes are aligned in such a way that all potential ATB students can quickly and efficiently find the information they need.						
f. The college has a process to monitor ATB student progress toward completing their High School Equivalency and program requirements.						
g. The college has connections with community and/or workforce partners to assist the student in accessing wrap-around support services such as financial aid, scholarships, childcare assistance, transportation assistance, food assistance and healthcare assistance.						

External Considerations	Current State: <i>Note the current state of this element.</i>	Not Applicable	No Action Yet	In Progress	Implemented	Next Steps: <i>Note next action steps for enhancing this element.</i>
External Elements to Consider						
a. The college has a process around community engagement and has identified the key stakeholders in workforce, industry and the community.						
b. The college has a process in place to engage stakeholders for outreach and referral of students who can benefit from ATB.						
c. The college has a strategy or plan to strengthen and maintain partnerships with external stakeholders.						
d. The college has a strategy or plan to engage business and other industry stakeholders to ensure that ATB options align with in-demand career pathways.						
e. Ability to Benefit options are promoted externally and in collaboration with the college marketing department.						

Sample Ability to Benefit Checklist

Student Name: _____

Email: _____

Student ID: _____

Advisor: _____

HS Completion Option: 5.04 5.05 5.06 5.07 5.09

Activity	Who's Responsible	Initials & Date Completed
Complete ABE First Steps to Success Orientation	Student	
Determine Program Pathway: _____	Student and Advisor	
Apply for Admission (fee waiver form)	Student and Advisor	
Determine path to apply for Ability to Benefit: Six (6) credits OR ATB Test	Student and Advisor	

ATB – six (6) credits of Post-Secondary coursework (must successfully complete course with a “C” or better)	Who's Responsible	Initials & Date Completed
Determine if prior six (6) credits of post-secondary coursework qualify	Student and Advisor	
Print and attach unofficial transcript with classes that qualify	Student and Advisor	
Review documentation with Financial Aid office representative	Student and Fin Aid	
Print and attach proposed student schedule	Student and Advisor	

OR

ATB Test	Who's Responsible	Initials & Date Completed
Meet with Financial Aid Specialist	Student	
Apply for Financial Aid	Student & Fin Aid staff	
Notify Assessment Center of student taking ATB test	Financial Aid Office	
Schedule ATB test	Student	
Take ATB test	Student	
Notify Financial Aid office of ATB test scores	Assessment Center	
Schedule appointment with Advisor	Student	
Review ATB Results with advisor	Student and Advisor	
Confirm eligibility for ATB with Financial Aid office	Student	

ATB Test Information:

- Must pass all three (3) tests in one sitting.
- If one or more tests is/are not passed, must wait two (2) weeks to retest and must take all three (3) tests again.
- ATB Scores, if high enough, will count towards regular Accuplacer scores but not vice versa.

Assessment Center				
Subject area	General Education Score Requirements	Program Requirements	ATB Requirements For Financial Aid only purposes	Student Scores
Arithmetic	250*		34	
Algebra	250*			
Reading	250		55	
Sentence Skills	250		60	

*Some program courses require Accuplacer Scores higher than 250.

ATB Required Check-Ins		
Date	Comments	Advisor Initials

Student Agreement

- I will spend a minimum of three (3) hours each week in an Adult Basic Education course.
- I will attend required check-ins with a Transition or Program Advisor a minimum of twice during the semester.
- I understand that in order to obtain my high school credential, I must complete all GED/HSED _____ requirements (see next page).
- It is my goal to complete _____ program credential.
- In order to maintain my financial aid, I will comply with all other Financial Aid requirements.

Signature

Date

High School Completion Options:

- 5.04 GED: Individual passes four (4) timed subject area tests and Wisconsin Civics exam.
- 5.05 HSED: Individual passes four (4) timed subject area tests, Wisconsin Civics exam, and completes health test/course requirement, and employability skills.
- 5.06 HSED: Individual earns twenty-two (22) high school credits in certain subject areas and passes Wisconsin Civics Exam.
- 5.07 HSED: Individual earns twenty-four (24) post-secondary credits in a program, including credit in subject area not completed in high school, and passes Wisconsin Civics Exam.
- 5.09 HSED: Individual demonstrates competency in academic areas by completing ABE or program level coursework and passes Wisconsin Civics Exam.

Frequently Asked Questions About ATB

What is an *eligible* Career Pathway under ATB?

- The Wisconsin Technical College System utilizes the definition of a career pathway provided under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the Carl D. Perkins Act (Perkins V). The Higher Education Act (HEA) also utilizes this definition where it defines a career pathway as: A combination of rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services that:
 - A. Aligns with the skill needs of industries in the economy of the State or regional economy involved;
 - B. Prepares an individual to be successful in any of a full range of secondary and postsecondary education options, including apprenticeships registered under the Act of August 16, 1937;
 - C. Includes counseling to support an individual in achieving the individual's education and career goals;
 - D. Includes, as appropriate, education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;
 - E. Organizes education, training, & other services to meet the needs of an individual in a manner that accelerates the educational and career advancement of the individual to the extent practicable;
 - F. Enables an individual to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and at least one recognized postsecondary credential; and
 - G. Helps an individual enter or advance within a specific occupation or occupational cluster.
- A career pathway program eligible for ATB must concurrently enroll students in adult education and Title IV eligible postsecondary programs as well as provide students with course sequences that are articulated and contextualized. The program must contain two primary items: 1.) An adult education component integrated with 2.) a Title IV eligible postsecondary program component.

Who approves the pathways?

- The Wisconsin Technical College System Office approves new curriculum and credential creation, in addition to program/credential revisions. Each college or institution approves and documents ATB student participation.

What documentation should my college maintain regarding an eligible career pathway program and the students who receive Title IV aid for their enrollment in that program?

- Colleges must maintain documentation that each of its eligible career pathway programs meet the requirements in the definition of an eligible career pathway program in section 484(d)(2) of the HEA and described in Dear Colleague Letter GEN-16-09. This includes documentation that the program includes workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster and is aligned with the skill needs of the State or regional economy.
- Also, for each student who received Title IV aid for enrollment in an eligible career pathway program by successfully completing one of the ATB alternatives, the institution must document:
 - Evidence that the student successfully completed one of the ATB alternatives; and

- That the student was enrolled in both the Title IV eligible postsecondary program component and the component that enables an individual to attain a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent.
- It is the college's responsibility to document its compliance with all applicable programmatic and student eligibility requirements.
- College must also designate the student as an Ability to Benefit student in the Client Demographic record after the student successfully completes one of 3 ATB Alternatives for eligibility.

To use the 6 credit ATB Alternative for student eligibility, do remedial or developmental coursework satisfy the ATB requirement that the student has completed at least six credit hours that are applicable toward the degree or technical diploma?

- No, the requirement is that the six credit hours (or 225 clock hours) must be applicable to a degree or other credential offered by the Title IV eligible postsecondary institution. The completion of remedial or developmental coursework does not qualify. In addition, the federal guidelines make it clear that the coursework must be part of a high school completion option, which in the WTCS can be different coursework than typical remedial/developmental courses

Is an ATB student required to be concurrently enrolled in both a component that enables them to attain a high school diploma (or its recognized equivalent) and postsecondary coursework throughout the student's enrollment in an eligible career pathway program?

- Within the overall scope of the program, a student is concurrently enrolled; however, there may be times (e.g. between semesters, during summer break) when a student is participating in either the adult education or the postsecondary education but not both simultaneously.
- Note that the eligible career pathway program must include a Title IV eligible postsecondary program component as defined under 34 CFR 668.8, and provide a component that enables an individual to attain a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent under 34 CFR 600.2. Therefore, the eligible career pathway program must be designed in such a way that students participate in both the Title IV eligible postsecondary program component and the component that enables an individual to attain a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent. However, the attainment of a postsecondary credential is not contingent on obtaining a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent. Similarly, a student who has met the requirements of the secondary component of the eligible career pathway may be awarded a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent even without completing the full program.
- Career pathways additionally require that the educational components provide training for introduction or advancement in careers that are in-demand in the regional or state economy, that they are in context with the workforce preparation, and that students are provided career counseling to help them meet their educational goals.

Which tests are approved to establish Title IV, HEA eligibility for students without a high school diploma or its equivalent?

- Combined English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA), Forms 1 and 2
- ACCUPLACER (Reading Comprehension, Sentence Skills, and Arithmetic)
- Wonderlic Basic Skills Test (WBST) Verbal Forms VS-1 & VS-2
- Spanish Wonderlic Basic Skills Test (Spanish WBST) Verbal Forms VS-1 & VS-2

- US Education publishes the Approved ATB Tests annually:
<https://ifap.ed.gov/fsahandbook/attachments/1819FSAHbkVol1Ch1.pdf>

What is the process for testing students for ATB eligibility using the Accuplacer?

- The Accuplacer testing process for ATB is different from regular Accuplacer testing because it must be done through the College Board Accuplacer ATB account, 004592. This is a specific testing site reserved only for ATB eligibility testing. Accuplacer Tests taken through an alternative site are not valid.
- Tests can only be administered by a certified ATB Test Administrator.
- Tests must be completed in one testing session. Students must pass all parts of the test in a single session.
- More information regarding the Accuplacer ATB test policy can be found here: <https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/accuplacer/atb-program-manual.pdf>

What score must a student achieve on the Accuplacer exam?

Based on the **College Board Accuplacer Policies and Procedures for Administering Ability to Benefit (ATB) Tests 2019**: Passing Scores set as the qualification for ATB are one standard deviation below the mean for students graduating from high school who have taken ACCUPLACER in the last three years. The approved passing scores are shown below:

ACCUPLACER Test	Passing Score
Reading Comprehension	55
Sentence Skills	60
Arithmetic	34

A candidate must meet or exceed the minimum scores on each of the three approved tests in a single test administration. Candidates who do not meet or exceed all three passing scores must retake the complete set of three tests and pass all three tests in that administration. Scores from two different administrations cannot be mixed or combined. A student must pass all three tests during a single test session.

(College Board Policies and Procedures for Administering Ability to Benefit Tests 2019).

When is a student no longer considered an ATB student?

A student who gained Title IV eligibility under one of the ATB alternatives is an ATB student until the student obtains a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent. At that time, the student would no longer be subject to restrictions placed on ATB students, including the requirement that the student continue to be enrolled in the eligible career pathway program and the student could enroll in any Title IV eligible postsecondary program and receive Title IV assistance (assuming all other eligibility requirements are met).

How can we share ATB opportunities with potential students?

To successfully partner with internal and external stakeholders to share ATB options and eligibility. Two common ways that potential ATB participants may connect with the college are:

- Working with the Adult Basic Education departments and other community programs to learn more about getting their GED or HSED;
- Applying for entrance to a college program where a potential student indicates that they do not have a high school diploma or equivalent credential.

Direct communication and marketing that reaches students where they are. These approaches include but are not limited to:

- Job Centers/One-Stop Agencies
- Staffing Agencies and local businesses
- Social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, Twitter, and SnapChat)
- Internal and external visual marketing (e.g. flyers, posters, billboards, brochures)
- High Schools - Particularly school officials (guidance counselors and social workers) who work with students 18 and older and are at risk for not graduating from high school
- Community Centers - Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, YWCA
- Community Agencies - Social Services, Workforce and Job Centers
- Local churches and community-based organizations

All potential candidates should be guided to a face-to-face meeting with the Student Navigator or Academic Transition Specialist to determine their eligibility for ATB.

Some colleges use a student navigator to coordinate the ATB process; what does a student navigator do?

- The Student Navigator connects current and prospective students to the appropriate Student Support Services experts in the areas of the application process, financial aid, programs of study, program qualifications, course content, course selection, advising, registration, admissions, and college pathways opportunities.
- The Student Navigator also assists students in the identification of career goals, including career exploration, decision making, college choices, and targeting jobs using a variety of resources based on the needs of the student.
- WTCS has highlighted Northcentral Technical College's use of an Academic Transition Specialist (ATS) that works closely with Adult Basic Education staff to identify potential ATB candidates as a best practice. The ATS will typically meet with the candidate, assist them to navigate the eligibility process, connect them with an ATB financial aid representative, and meet with the candidate multiple times throughout the program period to make sure they remain ATB compliant and are making progress. Upon completion of the GED or HSED, the ATS notifies the financial aid office to remove the student from ATB when they become financial aid eligible on their own.

Who should be involved with this work outside of my institution?

- Stakeholder partners in your community include workforce boards, job centers, community-based organizations, and others who may have contact with potential students.
- Colleges are encouraged to use the **Ability to Benefit Planning Tool** to explore opportunities for alignment with internal and external partners.



BLACKHAWK	blackhawk.edu
CHIPPEWA VALLEY	cvtc.edu
FOX VALLEY	fvtc.edu
GATEWAY	gtc.edu
LAKESHORE	gotoltc.edu
MADISON COLLEGE	madisoncollege.edu
MID-STATE	mstc.edu
MILWAUKEE AREA	matc.edu

MORAINES PARK	morainepark.edu
NICOLET COLLEGE	nicoletcollege.edu
NORTHCENTRAL	ntc.edu
NORTHEAST WISCONSIN	nwtc.edu
SOUTHWEST TECH	swtc.edu
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