

# **Assessment Policy For AEFLA Programs**

**Alabama Adult Education and Family Literacy**



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Revised 2011**

**Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education  
135 S. Union Street  
Montgomery, AL 36104**

# **Alabama Adult Education Assessment Policy Guidelines**

## **1. Setting the State Context**

### **A. Overview of State Policy**

This document provides the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education's guidelines for developing and implementing a comprehensive state and local assessment policy for Alabama's Adult Education Program which includes: (1) adult basic education (ABE), (2) English as a Second Language (ESL), (3) adult secondary education/GED programs (ASE/GED), and (4) workforce and family literacy programs.

The state accountability system works in accordance with the National Reporting System (NRS) for Adult Education guidelines. The NRS is the accountability system for the federally funded adult education programs.

The policy guidelines identify key assessment policies that are aligned with NRS levels for documenting achievement and support:

- Selection and use of appropriate assessment instruments;
- Appropriate test administration, scoring, and reporting of test scores;
- Appropriate use of tests results to inform instruction and improve programs;
- Setting Performance Standards; and
- Reporting valid and reliable assessment results and related information for accountability and potential performance based funding to local, state, and federal funding sources and policymakers.

Adherence to state assessment policies and guidelines ensure the selection and use of appropriate learner assessment and procedure for:

- Consistent testing and security protocols to ensure comparability and quality data
- Accurate learner placement into appropriate program and instructional level;
- Diagnostic information to form instruction;
- Pre- and post testing to monitor progress toward goals; and
- Certification of NRS levels of achievement and program completion.

## **B. NRS Requirements and Accountability Issues**

### **Validity and Reliability**

The Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education Adult Education Program prescribes that adult education agencies use CASAS, TABE, or BEST Plus assessments with proven validity and reliability that correlate to the National Reporting System (NRS). All TABE and CASAS assessment instruments have undergone rigorous test development and validation procedures. **Validity** refers to the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of the specific inferences made from test scores. The **validity** is a measure of the extent to which test items measure what they are intended to measure.

The TABE, CASAS, and BEST Plus technical manuals provide data on the **reliability** of their respective item banks and specific test series. Test **reliability** indicates the degree to which a test yields consistent results. Statistical techniques determine reliability and help ensure that there would not be a radically different score if the student were to attempt the test a second time with no additional learning.

### **Uniform implementation and comparability**

Agencies/organizations allocated funds shall submit enrollment, attendance, and retention standards that are in objective, quantifiable, and measurable terms and that reflect the need for each client to attend on a sustained, consistent basis in order to achieve one or more of the core indicators of performance as identified in the National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS) during each program year (July 1-June 30).

Agencies/organizations allocated funds shall be held accountable for the execution of a core set of critical activities. These activities shape the program's mission, guide program efforts and decisions, lend the program integrity, and allow for continual program improvement (see model in Appendix B).

Evaluation is the key to continual program improvement. Indicators of performance are outcomes that reflect the impact of instruction on client achievement. Numeric measures are the data used to determine the quantitative level of the impact of instruction on client achievement. Performance standards define the acceptable program performance in terms of a specific measurement of variable. These performance measures mandated by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, the National Reporting System for Adult Education, and Alabama's goals were negotiated with the U.S. Secretary of Education. Programs shall be evaluated as whole entities so that not only are client outcomes evaluated, but also the processes through which these outcomes are achieved.

In awarding grants, Alabama will consider the past effectiveness of the eligible provider receiving funds under the subtitle in improving the literacy skills of adults and families, and in meeting or exceeding such performance measures.

### **C. Purpose and Use of Assessments**

The administration of standardized tests provides results that are the basis for state and federal accountability reporting. Standardized assessments are used in the Alabama Adult Education Program to ensure accuracy in learner placement, in diagnosis of learner strengths and weaknesses, to inform instruction, in monitoring progress, and in certifying learner mastery.

Feedback based on evaluation is a critical element in directing the learner's attention to useful methods to make up learning deficiencies. This cycle of reassessment, POI development, and learning continues until the learner reaches mastery. Appropriate records documenting assessment results, assignments, and progress shall be maintained on each learner.

In order to demonstrate whether or not learning has taken place, one hundred percent (100%) of the clients should be post-tested at least once during the program year. Programs will be held accountable for ensuring that no less than seventy (70%) percent of all learners are post-tested.

Instruction based assessments may be used to supplement standardized assessments. The use of teacher-made tests, unit tests, portfolios, applied performance assessment, and teacher and learner observations are encouraged to monitor learning and to inform instruction on a regular, ongoing basis.

Instructors are encouraged to supplement assessment instruments with instruction based assessment. Instruction based assessment will help with the completion of skills modules. This enables the instructor and student to determine what has been learned and what needs to be learned.

The assessment of students should be in the area(s) in which instruction for completion have been focused. Pre-testing is used for initial placement in one of the six (6) educational functioning levels. Post-testing scores are used for measuring gain and advancing students across EFLs. One use and purpose of these data are to monitor compliance with NRS. These gains are reported in Table 4 of the NRS report.

Another purpose and use of assessment results is to develop student goals and to serve as a diagnostic tool for continued instruction in order to reach the goals. During intake/orientation, goals are discussed and determined with each student. Goals must be attainable in a program year, July 1-June 30. Core goals should be as consistent with functioning level as possible.

A learner who is already employed should not choose a goal of “Placement in unsubsidized employment”, whereas a learner who is employed at the time of enrollment would logically choose “retention of employment” as a goal.

All adults who receive any services from adult education and literacy programs are considered **served** students. Students who have 12 or more contact hours within a program year (July 1-June 30) are considered **enrolled** students by the National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS).

The assumed goal of all enrolled learners is completion and advancement of one or more of the NRS Educational Functioning Levels (EFL) from starting level, measured on entry into a program. All student achievement of this goal will be recorded in NRS table 4 and 4B. Program officials have until the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month following the month being reported to enter data into AAESAP (the management information system). All pre-test and post-test scores need to be dated on the exact date the test was administered.

#### **D. Summary and Additional Information**

Implementation of a comprehensive assessment policy enables informed and effective instruction, and ensures reliable and comparable performance reporting.

Alabama Adult Education and literacy classes shall be of such duration and intensity so that learners are afforded the opportunity to achieve one or more of the core indicators of performance as identified in the National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS). All adult education and literacy programs receiving adult education federal and state funds from the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education Adult Education Program must report student data for enrolled students using the state student management information system, Alabama Adult Education System for Accountability and Performance (AAESAP). All students who have 12 or more contact hours of service within a program year, (July 1 to June 30) are considered enrolled students.

Program officials must enter and approve all student data into AAESAP by the 15<sup>th</sup> day of each month following the month being reported.

The NRS approved assessment instruments are used to diagnose, evaluate, and place adult learners in the proper educational functional level (EFL) or in the case of ESL learners, a Student Performance Level (SPL). The results of a properly administered assessment instrument that has been approved by NRS, is used to develop a plan of instruction (POI) that identifies each objective and/or skill for which each learner has demonstrated either non-and/or partial mastery.

**Approved Assessments**

ABE/ASE:      TABE & CASAS

ESL:            BEST Plus, BEST Literacy, CASAS. TABE CLAS-E

**NRS Functional Entry and Progress Levels**

Local eligible providers shall use the following entry and progress levels for ABE/ASE, Corrections Education, Family Literacy, and Workplace Education:

**Educational Functioning Levels**

**ABE/ASE**

TABE Scale Scores		Initial EFL (NRS Educational Functioning Level)	CASAS Scale Scores	
Reading	0-367	Beginning ABE Literacy 0-1.9	Reading	0-200
Math	0-313		Math	0-200
Language	0-389		Writing	0-200
Reading	368-460	Beginning Basic Education 2-3.9	Reading	201-210
Math	314-441		Math	201-210
Language	390-490		Writing	201-225
Reading	461-517	Low Intermediate 4-5.9	Reading	211-220
Math	442-505		Math	211-220
Language	491-523		Writing	226-242
Reading	518-566	High Intermediate 6-8.9	Reading	221-235
Math	506-565		Math	221-235
Language	524-559		Writing	243-260
Reading	567-595	Low Adult Secondary 9-10.9	Reading	236-245
Math	566-594		Math	236-245
Language	560-585		Writing	261-270
Reading	=>596	High Adult Secondary 11-12.9	Reading	=>246
Math	=>595		Math	=>246
Language	=>586		Writing	=>271

**ESL**

BEST Plus Scale Scores	BEST Literacy Scale Scores	Initial EFL (NRS Educational Functioning Level)	TABE CLAS-E Scale Scores	CASAS Scale Scores
0-400	0-20	Beginning ESL Literacy 0-1	Reading & Writing 225-394 Listening & Speaking 230-407	Reading 0-180 Listening 0-180
401-417	21-52	Low Beginning ESL 2	Reading & Writing 395-441 Listening & Speaking 408-449	Reading 181-190 Listening 181-190 Writing 136-145
418-438	53-63	High Beginning ESL 3	Reading & Writing 442-482 Listening & Speaking 450-485	Reading 191-200 Listening 191-200 Writing 146-200
439-472	64-67	Low Intermediate ESL 4	Reading & Writing 483-514 Listening & Speaking 486-525	Reading 201-210 Listening 201-210 Writing 201-225
473-506	68-75	High Intermediate ESL 5	Reading & Writing 515-549 Listening & Speaking 526-558	Reading 211-220 Listening 211-220 Writing 226-242
507-540	76-78	Advanced ESL 6	Reading & Writing 550-607 Listening & Speaking 559-600	Reading 221-235 Listening 221-235 Writing 243-260
=>541	=>79	ESL 7+ If pre-test score, re-test in ABE/ASE If post-test score, exit criteria (level completion) for ESL 6		Reading =>236 Listening =>236 Writing => 261

**Publisher Recommended Timeframes for Pre- and Post-testing  
Adult Education Assessments**

<b>Test Name</b>	<b>Recommended Pre- and Post-testing Timeframes</b>	<b>Contact/Notes</b>
BEST Plus	Will follow the publisher's guidelines 80-100 hours recommended ( 60 hours minimum)	Frank Finamore BEST Plus Project Manager Center for Applied Linguistics 4646 40th Street, NW Washington, DC 20016-1859 frank@cal.org 202-362-0700
BEST Literacy	Same as above	See above
CASAS	Will follow the publisher's guidelines 70-100 hours recommended (40 hours minimum)	Linda Taylor, Director of Assessment Development, CASAS ltaylor@casas.org (800)255-1036 ext. 186
TABE, Forms 9 and 10	Will follow recommendation of CTB/McGraw-Hill for testing with alternate forms	Mike Johnson CTB/McGraw-Hill (800)538-9547
TABE CLAS-E	Same as above	Same as above

**II. General Assessment Requirements**

Learners to be assessed

All new registered students must be pre-tested at intake or within 12 contact hours of attendance. Students with 12 contact hours of attendance and an educational functioning level will be reported in the NRS database. The management information system will automatically roll over students' latest test score (s) from one program year to the next to determine the students' Entering Educational Functioning Levels for the new fiscal year.

The learner will be reassessed using an alternate and equivalent version of the state and NRS approved assessment instrument, according to the publishers recommended timeframe or the conditions of the POI, whichever is first. The results of the reassessment shall be used to develop a new POI.

All adult education students in the state of Alabama must use proper procedures during the administration of the assessment instrument. Test must be accurately timed during administration and results must be properly graded and recorded. The publishers of TABE recognize that time extensions may be warranted to accommodate persons with certain disabilities, or when TABE is being used exclusively to diagnose the learning objectives an individual still needs to master.

Students with documented disabilities from a licensed professional will be granted reasonable accommodations upon request during pre and post-testing.. The publishers of the NRS approved assessment tests are consulted to determine proper accommodation procedures for special populations for the administration of individual tests.

Use of a straight edge, use of colored overlays, removal from fluorescent lights, use of graph paper, or taking individual tests on different days are interventions that do not require disability accommodations.

TABE-PC is appropriate for some students who have difficulty taking paper and pencil tests. Accommodations such as allowing extra time to complete the test or letting students mark answers in test booklets rather than on separate answer sheets may also be considered for students with special needs.

### **Allowable assessments for NRS reporting**

The following assessments have been approved for use in the Alabama Adult Education Program:

TABE 9/10 (Reading, Language, and Math)  
BEST Plus (Speaking and Listening)  
BEST Literacy  
CASAS Life Skills series (Math and Listening)  
CASAS Life and Work series (Reading and Math)  
TABE CLAS-E (Complete Language Assessment-English)

### **Standardized administration and scoring:**

Alabama uses only NRS approved assessment instruments. These instruments assess literacy, numeracy, and language skill development. Therefore, the instruments meet the requirements of being **valid**, actually measuring what it intends to measure, and **reliable**,

obtaining consistent results. These assessment instruments have standardized administration and scoring which are tied to educational functioning levels for placement and for reporting educational gains.

Alternate testing forms:

Alternate and equivalent forms of the same test will be used for the pre-test and post-test.

**Pretest guideline:**

Pre-tests are administered within the first twelve hours of attendance and post-tests are administered according to publisher's guidelines or upon completion of a skill. The purpose of pre and post-test data is to document educational gain for each student.

Proper use of the TABE Locator Test as a determinant of appropriate content level testing is mandatory. The Alabama Adult Education Division discourages random and frequent testing as it will not present valid gain scores and could create a practice effect. Instructional intervention between testing periods is necessary in order to maximize academic gain. All instructors should follow the test publisher's recommended timeframe for pre- and post testing.

Assessment for the adult learner may be in all three learning areas, a combination of two areas, or any one of the three focus areas, reading, language, or math. If the learner is functioning in different levels in different areas, the lowest functioning level will be the basis for the NRS entering educational functioning level placement. To determine gain, the learner should be post tested on a different form of the same test.

For students who have separated from the program and return within 90 days, no new pre-test is required. For those who have not been active for over 90 days, a new pre-test is needed to determine functioning level.

**Post-test Guideline:**

The State Assessment Policy Guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, specifies the requirements for state assessment policies for measuring educational gain within the National Reporting System (NRS) and including minimum recommended times for when post testing should occur, based on instructional hours, which are provided by test publishers.

One of the purposes of post testing is to provide evidence of level completion for annual reporting to the U.S. Department of Education. Based on past performance and continuous improvement requirements, the Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) negotiates with the State to establish performance targets for student educational gains at each Educational Functioning Level, as well as targets for attainment of student goals related to the core outcome measure of employment, high school completion, and postsecondary education.

The assessment of students should be in the area (s) in which instruction for academic completion have been focused. The pre and post-test must follow these guidelines:

1. Initial placement in one of the six functioning levels
2. Post-test for what has been learned and what needs to be learned
3. Documentation of advancement into the next (or higher) level
4. Attendance of at least one hour after post test in order to advance to next level

## **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities or other Special Needs:**

### Procedures to identify special populations

It is the responsibility of the local program to accommodate the individual needs of special populations, such as disabilities, language barriers, and limited literacy skills. These accommodations are made to allow the test taker with a disability to demonstrate his or her skills and abilities more accurately than if no modifications were made. In all cases, accommodations must meet the needs of the examinees without changing what the test is intended to measure.

Regional and statewide professional development meetings are held with program staff for the purpose of sharing current information about learning disabilities issues, in order to ensure that students are informed about availability of accommodations as part of their enrollment process or orientation. Adult learners with disabilities are responsible for requesting accommodations and for submitting documentation of their disability at the time of registration, program entry, or after professional diagnosis while enrolled.

Documentation of the need for specific testing accommodations must be maintained in the learner's files as confidential information. The documentation must show that the disability interferes with the student's ability to demonstrate performance on the test. The information can come from a doctor's report, a diagnostic assessment from a certified professional, documentation from a vocational rehabilitation agency, or student's secondary school record.

### **Accommodations for students with disabilities:**

CASAS: Identified students may be allowed to take only one test per day or to test in an alternate quiet room. Learners may also use a variety of strategies when they take a test, such as a plain, straight-edge ruler, magnifying strips or glass, colored overlays, ear plugs, or other devices as deemed appropriate. Other accommodations may include extended time, alternate schedule, frequent breaks, scribe/writer, computer with spelling and grammar check disabled, simple calculator, sign language interpreter for test directions only, head phones for those taking a listening test, magnifier. Any testing accommodation should be consistent with documentation in the student learning plan.

TABE: Accommodations must minimize any advantage or disadvantage of completing the test. If the accommodations under consideration are not used in instruction, then it should not be used in the testing situation. Accommodations suggestions for TABE are available in the CTB Assessment Accommodations Guide which can be ordered from CTB/McGraw-Hill. Large-print, Braille, and audio editions of TABE forms 9 & 10 are available from CTB McGraw-Hill.

BEST Plus: In the computer adaptive version, computer software selects test items appropriate to the examiner's ability after the locator items have been administered. In the print-based version, a quick locator determines the appropriate level of the test form for the examiner.

## **III. Requirements for Administering Assessments**

### **Test Administration Manuals**

All AEFLA-funded programs in Alabama are required to follow the test administration guidelines in each test administration manual (TAM). All local adult education programs must maintain copies of TAMs on site for all assessments used. Test administration manuals provide quality control guidelines to ensure proper test use, administration, scoring, interpretation of results,

### **Appropriate assessments for learner type:**

#### **ABE/ASE:**

Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, Corrections Education, Family Literacy and Workplace Education functioning level placement shall be determined by the use of TABE, or CASAS assessment instruments.

Providers shall use the following Functioning Level Table for ABE/ASE learners:

Beginning Literacy	0-1.9
Beginning ABE	2.0-3.9
Low Intermediate ABE	4.0-5.9
High Intermediate ABE	6.0-8.9
Low Adult Secondary Ed.	9.0-10.9
High Adult Secondary Ed.	11.0-12.9

### **ESL**

Programs should assess ESL students with the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) Plus, BEST Literacy, TABE CLAS E, or CASAS (Life Skills) . The BEST Plus computer adaptive test has multiple test versions built into the programming. A different form of the test is given each time the student is given the computer version. The BEST Plus also has three different print-based versions. BEST Literacy has three forms available.

Providers shall use the following Functioning Level Table for ESL learners:

ESL Beginning Literacy
ESL Low Beginning
ESL High Beginning
ESL Intermediate Low
ESL Intermediate High
ESL Advanced

### **Training for Administering Assessments:**

#### **Training policies:**

Each local director is responsible for training instructors, paraprofessionals, and volunteers in the proper procedures for administering NRS approved assessments. All staff members involved in gathering, analyzing, compiling, and reporting NRS data shall participate in professional development training as specified in the State Plan, Chapter 3, (4) (b).

In order to provide professional development opportunities for all local providers, the state staff will conduct three regional meetings and one state conference annually. These conferences include seminars and workshops on assessment policies and procedures,

accommodations for assessing students with disabilities, NRS policy, data collection procedures, definitions of measures, and specific training for conducting assessments used in the program.

In accordance with the State Plan, Chapter 3, (5) (g), the local program director shall direct a professional development program providing pre- and in-service training opportunities for staff who administer or score each of the assessment tests used in the program. Instructors, paraprofessionals, and volunteers shall receive pre-service training prior to being assigned his/her respective duties. Adult Education Directors shall maintain individual training records on employees. As directed in the State Plan, Chapter 3 (2), “instructors must attend at least ten (10) clock hours of continuing training per program Year. Instructors who are unable or unwilling to comply with these requirements and/or who fail to meet the standards of improvement established through evaluation shall not be reimbursed adult education and family literacy funds.”

The state also provides opportunities throughout the year for instructors to become certified in the administration of the BEST Plus assessment. A state BEST Plus trainer, certified by the Center for Applied Linguistics, will conduct the training for the test administration and the refresher course. The training sessions are scheduled annually plus on an as needed basis for new personnel. Records of trained personnel are maintained by the state trainer and by the Center for Applied Linguistics.

TABE CLAS-E (Complete Language Assessment System-English) Professional Development materials include a DVD or VHS video tape for use with individuals or group training sessions. This includes information on how to use the system, examples of test items and score reports. This training is administered by the local program director. Training records are maintained by the local program director,

Instructors learn to administer CASAS tests and interpret results from a certified state-level trainer. CASAS requires agencies to complete a training workshop before ordering and administering most test. Training is available at the annual CASAS National Summer Institute, through regional training workshops, or in a distance training format. Records of training are maintained locally and also by CASAS.

As new assessment instruments are added to the list of acceptable assessments by NRS, consideration of the appropriateness and usefulness in the program will be determined. Training for the administration and data collection procedures will be done on an as needed basis.

## **Quality Control Procedures:**

The Alabama Adult Education Program has the following quality control procedures in place to insure that appropriate assessment procedures have been followed:

- Quarterly desk top audits of local program data

- Controls built into the management information system, AAESAP, to insure that appropriate assessments are entered and scores match EFLs
- Data quality is monitored during site visits

Trainings are provided annually and quarterly and also on an as needed basis for data entry staff. Daily tech support is provided by state staff via phone and email.

Program officials have until the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month following the month being reported to enter data into AAESAP (the management information system).

### **Distance Education-Specific Assessment Policy:**

Distant Learners in the Alabama Adult Education Program are students who are separated from the instructor by geography, time, or both for the majority of the instructional period. Distance learning materials are delivered through a variety of media including, but not limited to, print, audio recording, videotape, broadcasts, computer software, web-based programs, and other online technology. Teachers support distance learners through communication via mail, telephone, email, or online technologies and software.

Students in distance education must have at least 12 hours of contact with the program before they can be counted for federal reporting purposes. Contact hours for distance learners can be a combination of actual contact and contact through telephone, video, Tele-conference or online communication, where student and program staff can interact and through which learner identity is verifiable.

During a program year, if a student is dually enrolled in a traditional classroom and distance education, for NRS reporting, the student can only be counted once. The person that is assigned to a traditional class in addition to distance learning is counted as a traditional student. On-line education serves as supplemental learning. Students enrolled in a strictly Distance Learning class are counted in the Distance Education category

Programs must administer all pre-and post-assessments used to measure educational gain of distance education students in person at a proctored program site. Alabama uses only NRS approved assessment instruments. Tests must be accurately timed during administration and results must be properly graded and recorded. Appropriate records documenting assessment results, assignments, and progress shall be maintained for each learner.

Students in distance education programs will use the same methodology as other students for determining post-test time. Post-test will be administered according to the publisher's guidelines or upon completion of a skill. A Clock Time Model is used for determining contact hours. The software used for distance education calculates the time the learner spends interacting with the instructional material. This McGraw-Hill/Contemporary GED On-line curricula is currently used in Alabama and it assigns contact hours based on the elapsed time that a learner is connected to, or engaged in the online software program.

The number of contact hours will be determined by the data collected in the on-line curriculum management database.

A Clock Time Model will be used to determine contact hours. The curricula used for distance education will be *GED On-Line* by McGraw-Hill/Contemporary Publishing Company. This software program tracks the exact time a learner spends interacting with the instructional material. This curricula assigns contact hours based on the elapsed time that the learner is connected to, or engaged in the online software program. This program disconnects after a preset period of inactivity.

### **Information and Assistance:**

Naomi Scales  
[nscales@dpe.edu](mailto:nscales@dpe.edu)  
334/293-4563

Interim Director  
ESL and E.L. Civics  
Monitoring and Evaluation

Paula Thompson  
[paula.thompson@dpe.edu](mailto:paula.thompson@dpe.edu)  
334/293-4564

Data Collection and Reporting  
Assessment Policy  
Monitoring and Evaluation  
MIS Technical Assistance

Ron Russell  
[rrussell@dpe.edu](mailto:rrussell@dpe.edu)  
334/293-4562

Professional Development Training  
Monitoring and Evaluation

John Vines  
[john.vines@dpe.edu](mailto:john.vines@dpe.edu)  
334/293-4571

GED Testing