

Assessment refers to the collection of information using specially designed instruments regarding a student's initial skill level and the development of his or her literacy and language skills as a result of instruction. The Federal *NRS Implementation Guidelines* state:

- At intake, an individual learner's educational functioning level is determined by an initial assessment. Programs must use a uniform, standardized assessment procedure approved by NYSED and OCTAE. The assessment procedure includes standardized scoring protocols.
- The initial assessment, the pre-test, must be completed on 100% of all students who accrue a minimum of twelve (12) contact hours. Pre-test must be administered in person within the intake and orientation process during those first 12 hours of contact.
- To determine gain, the learner is assessed again at least once after a standard number of contact hours where a student is receiving instruction. This period of time is prescribed under state policy.

As part of its effort to comply with federal National Reporting System (NRS) guidelines, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) mandates that adult education programs use standardized tests to determine students' initial skill levels, as well as the measurable skill gain they achieve as a result of their participation in a program.

NYSED's assessment policies were developed to provide guidance to local programs while adhering to Federal assessment requirements. All programs funded through the Adult Education Programs and Policy (AEPP) office of NYSED are required to administer state approved assessments and report results according to NRS guidelines. Programs are free to administer additional forms of assessment as they see fit in response to the needs of their students.

### **The Rationale for Standardized Assessment**

Standardized tests are used to:

- Determine the student's skill level at intake. Assessments administered during the student intake process helps determine the instructional setting in which a student will be placed. As a result of the assessment process, the student is placed into an Educational Functioning Level as determined by the Federal guidelines and then referred for appropriate level instruction.
- Determine Measurable Skill Gain (MSG); the intake assessment provides the basis for determining Measurable Skill Gain, which is calculated by comparing students' future skill levels to those ascertained during the initial intake.
- Assess Measurable Skill Gain. Students should be tested at regular intervals to determine if their reading, math, or English skills are improving. For Adult Basic Education students, the lower of the two scores (reading or math) will determine the student's placement of educational functioning level. The NRS guidelines indicate measurable skill gain when a student has moved from one NRS level to the next or higher based on his or her standardized assessment scores in the lower of the two areas, math or reading.
- To guide instruction, NYS requires all programs to employ the diagnostic tools associated with each standardized assessment. These tools determine a student's strengths and skill gaps.

### **Mandated Tests in New York State**

The instrument used to assess educational skill levels should correspond to the instruction a student receives. The NYSED-approved tests for adult education programs in New York State are as follows:

#### **Adult Basic Education Students:**

##### Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE)

- TABE 11 & 12 Reading all levels L, E, M, D, A
- TABE 11 & 12 Math all levels L, E, M, D, A

**English as a Second Language Students:**

Basic English Skills Test (BEST)

- BEST Plus 2.0
- BEST Literacy (for students who score 565 or higher on the BEST Plus 2.0 as a pre-test)

**Educational Functioning Levels**

The NRS defines six educational functioning levels each for ABE and ESL. During the intake process, programs will use the aforementioned standardized tests to place students in one of these levels representing their lower score in math or reading. Students will be assessed periodically during the course of their participation in a program to determine whether they have acquired enough literacy or English skills to advance to the next NRS level. The percentage of students who complete one level and move on to the next level is an important NRS measure. The NRS levels and associated assessments are summarized below.

**ABE Grade Equivalent– TABE 11/12**

ABE Beginning Literacy	0 – 1 Grade Level
ABE Beginning Basic	2 – 3 Grade Level
ABE Intermediate Low	4 – 5 Grade Level
ABE Intermediate High	6 – 8 Grade Level
ASE Low	9 – 10 Grade Level
ASE High	11 – 12 Grade Level

**ESL Score Ranges - BEST Plus 2.0**

ESL Beginning Literacy	88 - 361
ESL Low Beginning	362 - 427
ESL High Beginning	428 - 452
ESL Low Intermediate	453 - 484
ESL High Intermediate	485 - 524
ESL Advanced	525 - 564

**ESL Score Ranges – BEST Literacy**

ESL Beginning Literacy	0 - 20
ESL Beginning	21 - 52
ESL Intermediate Low	53 - 63
ESL Intermediate High	64 - 67
ESL Low Advanced	68 - 75
ESL High Advanced	76 +

**Pre- and Post-testing**

To monitor progress, students must be tested at regular intervals during the course of their participation in a program as determined by state and federal policy with advisement from the publishers for each respective assessment:

- The pre-test must be administered before the student completes 12 hours of participation on every student, 100% of all students entering the program.
- The skill level ascertained by the pre-test provides the basis for measuring skill gain. Student progress and measurable skill gain is determined by comparing post-test scores to pre-test scores.

- Subsequent tests given during the fiscal year are referred to as post-tests. While students may be administered multiple post-tests, they may take only one pre-test of any given type. For example, an ABE student is allowed to have only one TABE Reading pre-test score and one TABE Math pre-test score, however, he or she may have several TABE Reading post-test scores, each representing the result from a test administered per NYS post-testing policy.
- Programs must administer tests with the prescribed time allocations per publisher recommendations.

**Assessment Data in New York’s Management Information System:**

All student data, including assessment data, must be entered into the data system on a minimum of a monthly basis. Verification of data entry is accomplished through software data checking reports aimed exclusively at pre and post test scores. These data checking reports identify the assessment type and form, raw score, NRS level, and attendance accrual (between pre and posttests). These data check reports are reviewed by state and accountability staff on a monthly basis to identify any gaps, omissions of data, or inappropriate trends.

Depending on the severity of the data errors detected, local programs are given a reasonable time frame to make corrections and are provided technical assistance from our professional development network centers and the contracted accountability office. Within a month’s time, program assessment data check reports are reviewed again for evidence of necessary corrections. Habitual data assessment errors will lead to a program being placed under corrective action which will immediately trigger a site visit team which includes state staff, the technical assistance director, and the accountability director. A plan for action is developed and shared with the local program along with a reasonable deadline for completion.

**Distance Education:**

NYSED supports three home study distance education programs with local state funds. ESL students in NRS Levels 3 -6; Giving Ready Adults a Study Program (GRASP) geared for ABE students at NRS Levels 4, 5, & 6; and Skills to Make Adults Ready to Succeed (SMART) geared for students at NRS Levels 2, 3, and 4.

Students enrolled in distance education programs must be assessed using the same instruments and following the same procedures as all other students. Distance education students must be physically present when taking standardized assessment tests at designated testing sites.

**Calculating Measurable Skill Gain:**

To determine measurable skill gain, a student’s earliest and lowest pre-test score will be compared to his/her highest post-test score of the same type. For example, if a student has both a TABE Reading and a TABE Math pre-test score, and the Math score is lower, his or her gain will be determined by comparing the TABE Math pre-test to the highest TABE Math post-test. The following are additional considerations that may affect measurable skill gain calculations:

- A pre-test score that was obtained more than six months prior to the beginning of a fiscal year is considered “stale”; i.e., it is not a valid indicator of the student’s initial skill level for that fiscal year.
- For students who have multiple pre- and post-tests, their earliest and lowest valid pre-test score will be compared to their highest post-test score (date of the post test must be within the confines of the fiscal year (July 1<sup>st</sup> through June 30<sup>th</sup>) and fall within the student’s Period of Participation or POP).
- A pre-test score used as the basis for measurable skill gain in one fiscal year (or in one POP) cannot be used again as a pre-test in any subsequent fiscal year.
- Students whose pre-test places them in ESL High Advanced (NRS level 6) must obtain the maximum score (or higher) on the BEST Plus 2.0 in order to complete that level.

Measurable Skill Gain will be calculated for each Period of Participation per participant. The post-test from the previous Period of Participation will be brought into the new Period of Participation as a pre-test. The participant will then be required to be post-tested in each Period of Participation.

**Developing an Effective Testing Schedule**

Devising an effective testing schedule is critical to program success. Being able to post-test a high percentage of students is important for two reasons. First, post-test scores determine measurable skill gain, which is an important NRS measure. The percentage of students post-tested is also used to measure student retention. NYS sets a performance measure benchmark of 70% meaning a minimum of 70% of students must be post tested. A low percentage indicates that a program is unable to retain its students long enough for them to be post-tested or the program is negligent in providing timely post tests. There is no formula or universal testing schedule that can be applied to all adult education programs. The intensity of a program must be considered when determining a post-testing schedule.

When developing a testing schedule, programs should consider the following questions:

- *How long do students stay enrolled in our program?* If a program waits too long to post-test its students, it may measure a lower student retention percentage as some students may leave before they’ve had a chance to be post-tested. However, programs should be careful not to test students too close to the beginning of the term nor should they test students too frequently—excessive testing can be discouraging to the student in addition to costly for the program.
- *What is the intensity of our classes?* A class that is more intense—i.e., a class that offers more frequent and extensive sessions in a given time period—may be more effective in helping its students achieve measurable skill gain than one that meets less frequently for shorter sessions. Therefore, programs should schedule post-tests accordingly.

The table below lists **minimum** requirements for post-testing schedules, NYS **does not** allow premature post-testing:

<b>Intensity of Program</b>	<b>Post Test Schedule</b>
Six to Nine hours per week	Posttest after 40 – 60 contact hours
Ten or more hours per week	Posttest after 60 – 80 contact hours
Volunteer Tutorial Program	Posttest after 30 contact hours for students receiving services from a volunteer

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities or Other Special Needs:**

The TABE, as used in NYSED funded adult education programs for ABE students, is a diagnostic tool designed to identify skill gaps in adult students such that the program can follow an educational plan aimed at increasing the student’s skill levels. To be eligible for test accommodations on the TABE, BEST Plus or BEST Literacy, students must have a formal diagnosis from a qualified professional.

For the TABE Forms 11 & 12, NYSED will allow Category 1 (as determined by the publisher) accommodations as described below:

**Category 1 Accommodations**

**Presentation**

- May use visual magnifying equipment
- May use a Large Print edition of the test
- May use audio amplification equipment

May use markers to maintain place (due to the significant cost of the TABE test booklets, using small sticky notes is recommended as an alternative to markers)

**Response**

May mark responses in test book (due to the significant cost of the TABE test booklets, using small sticky notes is recommended as an alternative to marking responses in the test booklet)

May mark responses on Large Print answer document

For selected-response items, may indicate responses to a scribe

May record responses on audiotape (except for constructed-response writing tests)

For selected-response items, may use sign language to indicate responses providing the program can supply a sign language interpreter

May use a computer, typewriter, Braille writer, or other machine (e.g., communication board) to respond

May use a template to maintain place for responding

May indicate responses with other communication devices (e.g., speech synthesizer)

**Setting**

May take the test alone or in a study carrel

May take the test with a small group or different class

May take the test at home or in a care facility (e.g., hospital) with program staff (only when possible for the program to provide)

May use adaptive furniture

May use special lighting and/or acoustics

**Timing/Scheduling**

Take more breaks (Note: breaks should not result in extra time for testing or opportunity to study information in a test already begun)

Have flexible scheduling (e.g., time of day, days between sessions), which should not result in extra time for testing or opportunity to study information in a test already begun

**BEST Plus 2.0 and BEST Literacy accommodations:**

Program and test administrators may provide and allow accommodation in test administration procedures or in the testing environment for individuals with disabilities, provided that the accommodation does not compromise the purpose of the BEST Plus or BEST Literacy tests. Testing environment accommodations for either test might include frequent breaks or individual administration of BEST Literacy.

In the case of BEST Literacy, the purpose of the test is to obtain a measure of reading and writing in English. Permissible accommodations related to BEST Literacy test administration include the use of eyeglasses or magnifying glasses, earplugs, color overlays, or rulers. The purpose of BEST Plus is to obtain a measure of listening and speaking in English. Permissible accommodations related to BEST Plus include the use of hearing aids. BEST Plus is not designed to assess the communicative language skills of hearing-impaired or speech-impaired students, nor should it be used with visually impaired students, as some of the questions depend on a photographic stimulus. It is not an appropriate accommodation for a test administrator to read BEST Literacy test questions to an examinee with sight impairment as BEST Literacy is a test of reading. Similarly, it is not an appropriate accommodation for a BEST Plus test administrator to allow an examinee to read the on-screen prompts as BEST Plus is a listening, not a reading, test.

**Assessment Guidelines and Training Requirements:**

For assessments to serve as an effective indicator of a student's educational progress, it must be implemented with care and competence. This guide does not provide step-by-step instructions for administering the TABE, BEST Plus 2.0, or BEST Literacy. That information can be found in each test's administration manual and at required training sessions scheduled by NYSED and the Regional Adult Education Network (RAEN) in seven geographic regions across the state. The following is a schedule of training necessary for staff charged with administering each of the required assessments:

- TABE – test administrators must complete training and be certified through the RAEN once every **three** years. The training is 6 hours in length
- BEST Plus 2.0 – test administrators must complete training and be certified through RAEN and CAL (Center for Applied Linguistics – publisher of the BEST Plus 2.0 and BEST Literacy 1.0) and be re-certified through a BEST Plus 2.0 Refresher training (also provided through the RAEN) once per fiscal year.
- Assessments provided by test administrators that have not received sufficient training will not be considered valid or reliable and will not be used for measuring skill gain.

Annually, all staff from every local program must attend 14 hours of professional development offered through the RAEN centers. This training must include, but may not be limited to, the assessment certification training described above, National Reporting System training (NRS Foundations, NRS Reports, NRS Advanced Data Management, and NRS Data Informing Practices for teachers) and ASISTS (management information system). All these trainings are provided through the RAEN center on an annual basis. The RAEN is also contracted to record attendance at each professional development activity they host and all the certification and attendance data is stored in NY's management information system. Local programs, the RAEN, the Accountability Specialist, and NYSED staff have full access to these data via the data system and can generate appropriate reports that identify each program's staff and the number of professional development hours they have accrued annually.

#### **Additional Requirements for NYS:**

For TABE Reading and Math, programs must administer a TABE locator. The resulting score on the locator along with other information the program achieves on the student, should be used to determine the initial level test used to assess students. However, as the publisher indicates, these locator scores should be only one of the criteria used to determine the correct level TABE test. The students' previous school experience, information collected during the intake process, and any other mitigating factors may be used to further determine the correct level test to administer.

- At a minimum, all programs must have available the TABE 11/12 forms L, E, M, D, and A levels of the test. Each level corresponds to a different skill range.
- Programs are expected to provide reliable data for use in program evaluation. The New York State Education Department will publish specific guidelines regarding the range of scores on each of the TABE subtests that are acceptable. Scores outside of the acceptable score range are considered unreliable. Students who test outside of the acceptable range on the TABE subtests must be retested on a higher or lower level as appropriate as soon as possible and within a reasonable time frame.
- Programs are allowed to compare pre-tests and post-test scores using different levels of the TABE as long as the levels represent contiguous skill ranges. For example, a student may be pre-tested on TABE E and post-tested on TABE M.
- Programs must use different forms of an assessment when pre- and post-testing their students. Therefore, if a TABE 11 is administered as a pre-test, then a TABE 12 must be administered as a post-test per publishers recommendation and New York State policy.
- Programs may choose to use other assessments as part of their comprehensive testing strategy; however, to report results according to NRS guidelines, they are required to administer state-approved tests.

- Standardized instruments must be administered in accordance with the procedures listed in the test administration manual together with NYS policy.
- Programs that offer both reading and math instruction as part of their ABE curriculum must administer both the TABE Reading and the TABE Math. However, programs that are funded to provide only instruction in reading OR funded to provide only instruction in math, may assess students only in the one area in which they are funded to provide instruction. These exceptions must be approved by NYSED prior to implementation.
- Students preparing to take subtests of the high school equivalency exam (GED) may be exempt for either math or reading TABE testing. The exemption will be as follows:
  - If a student has already achieved a passing score on the high school equivalency math subtest; the program may choose to not assess that student with TABE Math at intake.
  - If a student has already achieved a passing score on the reading, writing, social studies, and science high school equivalency subtests; the program may choose to not assess that student with the TABE Reading at intake.