How States Can Implement Alternative Placement to Expand Access and Strengthen Accountability

NATIONAL REPORTING SYSTEM (NRS) FOR ADULT EDUCATION SUPPORT PROJECT

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AIR®

Meet the Webinar Host and State Presenters

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Agenda

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- Alternative placement as a strategic policy flexibility
- State spotlights
- Technical assistance activities

Alternative Placement as a Strategic Policy Flexibility Within NRS Accountability

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Accountability Through Policy

Alternative placement must be

- ✓ grounded in the state assessment policy;
- ✓ applied to eligible Measurable Skill Gain (MSG)-related program models;
- ✓ supported by documentation; and
- ✓ reported correctly.

Source: Adapted from NRS Table 1 Instructions

Alternative Placement Works When It Is…

Intentional

(targeted to specific programs like Integrated Education & Training (IET) or workplace literacy)

Structured

(supported by policy, documentation, and training)

Monitored

(to maintain data integrity and accountability)

Program Types Appropriate for Alternative Placement

- Integrated education and training programs
- Workplace literacy programs
- Preparatory classes for high school equivalency testing
- Postsecondary bridge programs
- Adult high schools utilizing credits or Carnegie units
- Other adult education programs designed to yield MSG outcomes other than 1a

A Snapshot of Assessment Flexibility

MSG types	Option for alternative placement (yes/no)
Type 1.a. Achievement as measured by a pre- and posttest	No
Type 1.b. Awarding of credits or Carnegie units	Yes
Type 1.c. Enrolled in postsecondary education and training after exit	Yes
Type 1.d. Pass a subtest on a State-recognized high school equivalency examination	Yes
Type 2. Documented attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent	Yes
Type 3. Secondary or postsecondary transcript or report card for sufficient credit hours that shows a participant is meeting the state unit's academic standards	Yes
Type 4. Satisfactory or better progress report, toward established milestones, from an employer or training provider who is providing training	Yes
Type 5. Successfully passing an exam that is required for a particular occupation or progress in attaining technical or occupational skills, as evidenced by trade-related benchmarks	Yes

Assessments

NRS-approved assessments

- BEST Literacy 2.0 and Plus 3.0
- CASAS (Reading GOALS 2, Math GOALS 2, Reading STEPS, and Listening STEPS)
- MAPT (CCR for Reading and Math)
- TABE 13/14
- TABE CLAS-E
- WorkKeys (Applied Math and Workplace Documents)

Alternative placement options

- Authentic assessments
- Criterion-referenced tests
- Crosswalks
- Diagnostic assessments
- Locator tests
- Other?

Source: NRS-Test-Approval-Periods-and-Sunset-Dates-Updated-May-2026

From Policy Guardrails to Program Impact

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From Policy Guardrails to Program Impact

Strong policy creates the conditions for responsible flexibility.

- Access: reduces unnecessary entry barriers
- Placement: connects learners to the right pathway sooner
- System performance: improves coordination and reduces duplication

Access

- Alternative placement reduces entry barriers and accelerates onboarding into programs and pathways.
  - State example—Arkansas (access through reduced barriers)
    - Arkansas removed minimum TABE score requirements for 16- and 17-year-olds after pilot data showed students below the cutoff could still successfully earn a GED.
    - This policy shift opened access to more learners and aligned entry requirements with actual student success patterns.

Placement

- Alternative placement supports earlier alignment between learners and appropriate pathways.
  - State example—North Carolina (improved fit and persistence)
    - IET pilots showed improved enrollment, onboarding, and retention, particularly in health care, hospitality, and skilled trades pathways.
    - Programs aligned with employer demand (e.g., Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) pathways) saw strong learner interest and persistence.

System Performance

- Alternative placement supports smoother coordination with workforce partners and reduces duplication.
  - State example—Maine (workplace literacy + employer alignment)
    - Alternative placement was embedded in workplace literacy programs tied to employer needs, with required MOUs and defined milestones.
    - State and local collaboration ensured processes were feasible in real-world program operations.
    - Developed state policy, documentation processes, and templates to ensure alternative placement and MSG 4 were applied consistently.

Monitoring, Data Integrity, and Guardrails

- Monitor use across providers and program types
- Prevent over-application or inconsistent interpretation
- Document the basis for each placement decision
- Connect placement practices to assessment policy, data quality, and monitoring expectations

Kentucky Assessment Policy Example

- Alternative placement is a targeted flexibility.
- The policy ties alternative placement to workforce-aligned programming.
- The policy defines clear guardrails.
- Alternative placement can reduce duplication and speed up entry.
- Monitoring and data quality remain central.
- The policy reinforces thoughtful implementation.

Source: Adapted from 2026 KY Assessment Policy

Alternative Placement in Georgia (Workplace Literacy)

Approved several alternative assessments, but most have not been used.

Sent many proposals back for pre and post testing, just on a lower value assessment.

Best proposals have used employer criteria for eligibility and a job-focused milestone.

- In FY26, Georgia providers partnered with 17 small- to medium-sized employers in hospitality, agriculture, manufacturing, and more.

Assessment	Workplace Literacy	
	ABE/ASE	ESL
Wonderlic Basic Skills Test	x	
Wonderlic General Assessment of Instructional Needs	x	
eSkill	x	
AFCT/ ASVAB	x	
GED Ready	x	
HiSET Practice Test	x	
GED/HiSET Subject Area Tests		
Outcomes Placement Test		x
Total English Placement		x
Brookline ESL Placement Test		x
Employer Identified Assessment[2]	x	x
Employee Criteria[3]	x	x

Potential Benefits and Considerations

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Potential Benefits of Alternative Placement: Student Impact

- Improved onboarding speed
- Increased initial enrollment
- Stronger retention and persistence
- Increased participation in:
  - IETs
  - Workplace literacy programs
  - Occupational pathways (e.g., CNA, hospitality, skilled trades)
- Better alignment with employer timelines and workforce needs

Potential Benefits of Alternative Placement: Program and System

- Improved onboarding speed
- Increased co-enrollment
- Stronger retention and persistence
- Increased participation in:
  - IETs
  - Workplace literacy programs
  - Occupational pathways (e.g., CNA, hospitality, skilled trades)
- Better alignment with employer and workforce needs

Decision-Making Considerations

- ✓ Where could it reduce barriers without weakening accountability?
- ✓ Which program types or pathways are the best fit?
- ✓ What data, documentation, and monitoring capacity are needed?
- ✓ What concerns need to be addressed before implementation?
- ✓ Could a targeted pilot or phased approach be a safer starting point?

- Do we have program types where this would be appropriate?
- Do staff have the capacity to document and explain placement decisions?
- Can our data system capture the information we need?
- Do local staff understand the difference between alternative placement and informal instructional assessment?
- Do we have a way to monitor use over time?

A Few Alternative Placement Options to Pretesting

- Authentic assessments involve real-world tasks and require students to apply knowledge and skills in practical situations.
- Criterion-referenced tests measure how well a student has learned a specific set of skills that are defined by predetermined standards.
- Diagnostic or locator tests can help identify student strengths and weaknesses in specific areas to inform instructional decisions.

Choosing an Alternative Placement Option—Considerations

1. Does the alternative placement option measure the right competencies for it to be useful for this purpose?
    a. Looking at the content of the alternative placement option, it includes themes, wording, and formats that are relevant for the knowledge or skill being assessed.
    b. While the alternative placement option was originally designed for a purpose other than alternative placement, it can reasonably be used for alternative placement because it covers relevant content and does not include irrelevant content.
    c. The content is at the appropriate level of difficulty for alternative placement purposes, neither too challenging nor too easy.
2. Does the alternative placement option effectively measure the competencies?
    a. The alternative placement option includes enough items, indicators, or evidence to adequately represent the relevant content domains.
    b. Strong performance on this alternative placement option is associated with strong performance on another measure of the same competencies.
    c. Results from the alternative placement option have the same meaning across demographic groups and do not function differently for different populations.

Choosing an Alternative Placement Option—Considerations (cont.)

3. Has the alternative placement option shown evidence that it works for a population similar to the individuals it will be used with?

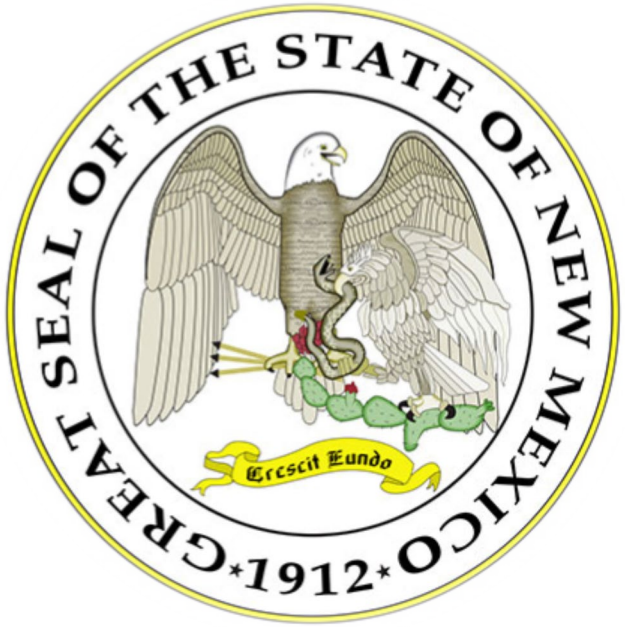
    a. The alternative placement option has been evaluated or used with groups of individuals similar in characteristics such as age, race/ethnicity, educational background, or other relevant demographics.

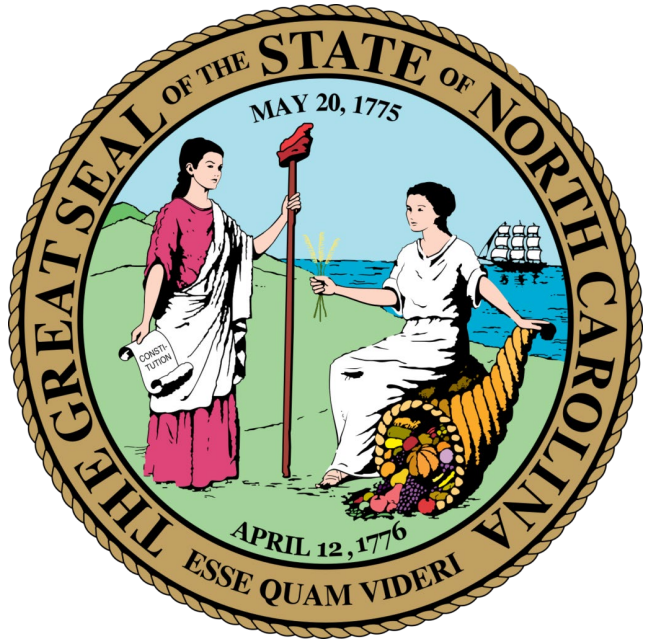
4. Does the alternative placement option produce reliable and consistent results?

    a. Results remain reasonably consistent across different implementation conditions, such as timing, setting, or distractions.

    b. When multiple versions or forms exist, they produce similar results and can be used interchangeably.

State Spotlights: Alternative Placement Approaches





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State Spotlight: New Mexico

Amber Gallup, PhD, Division Director, Adult Education

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From Assessment to Access:
New Mexico's Alternative Placement Journey

Dr. Amber Gallup – *Adult Education Director*
New Mexico Higher Education Department

Why and How NM Piloted Alternative Placement

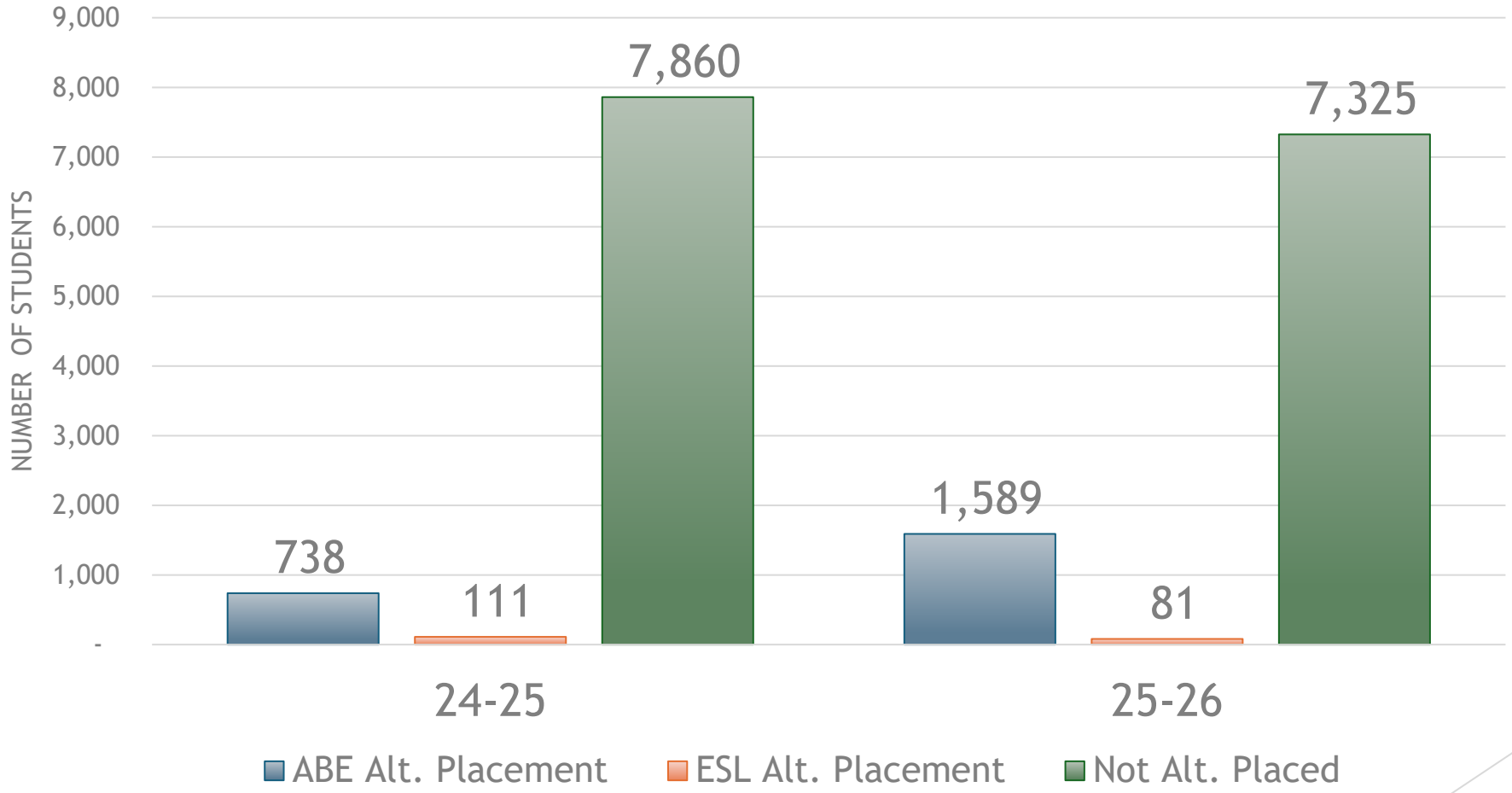
- Concerns about testing-related barriers long expressed by programs
- For state reasons, need to increase MSGs *and* the popularity of IETs
- Pilot began with IETs only in first year, then expanded eligibility to all adult education services in second year
- What we have learned so far…

Some NM Programs' Insights

- **Expand access:** Interviews and shorter/more relevant tests reduce barriers & help provide more nuanced understanding of student needs. Dona Ana Community College (DACC) increased enrollment **66%** over 2 years.
- **Strengthen accountability:** Local and overall state outcomes have improved dramatically since AP implemented. DACC increased **MSGs by 26% and post-test rate by 19%** over 2 years.
- **Support learner success**: High school equivalency completion at DACC has increased by **236%** over 2 years of AP implementation!

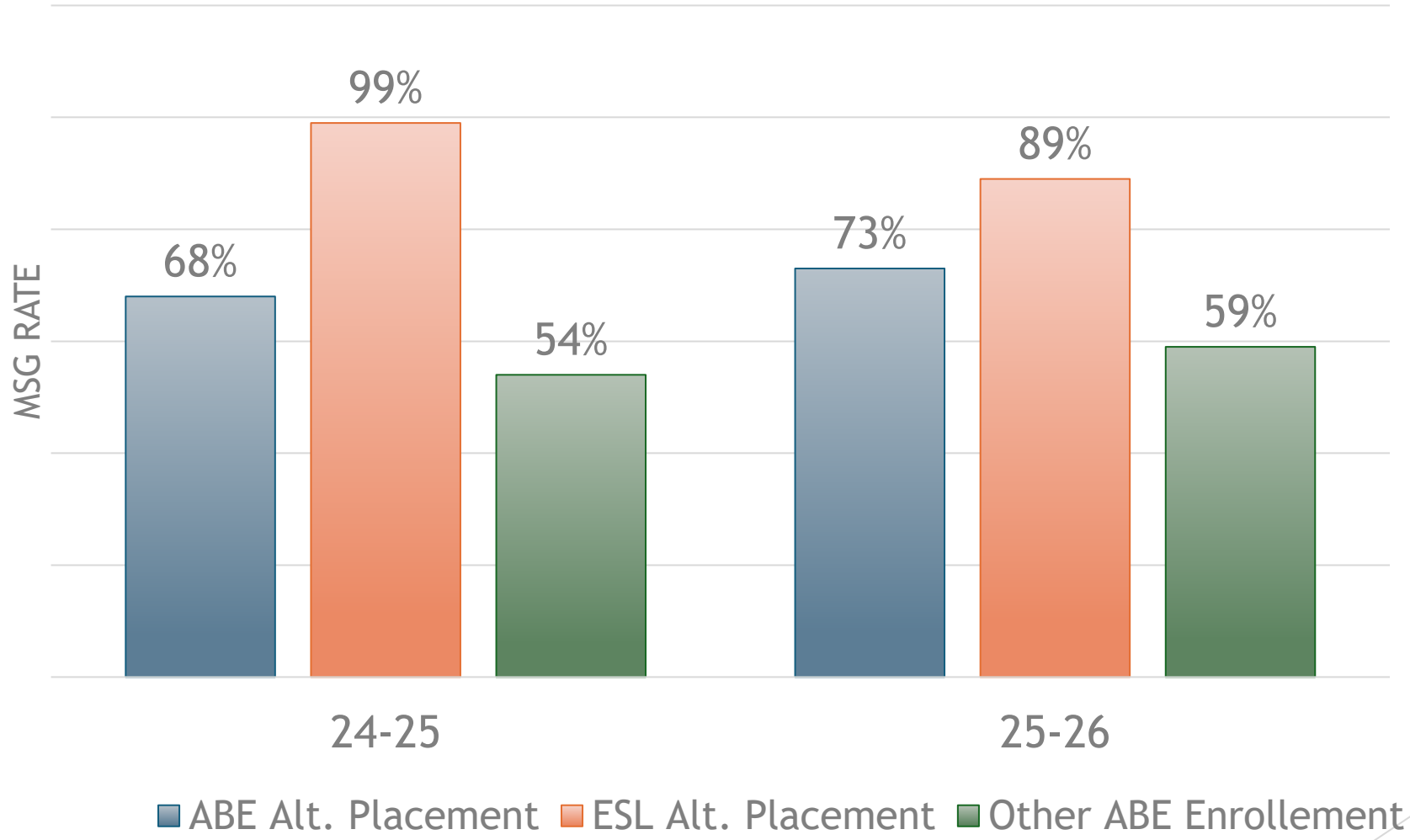
Recommendations: Make sure guidance form state office is clear and detailed. Focus programs on determining *need* for adult education while they are implementing AP.

Enrollment of Alternatively Placed vs. Other ABE Students



*Showing participants with any MSG

MSG Rate Comparison



IET Students & Alternative Placement

Total IET Participants: 1,233 *68% of IET Student are Alt. Placement	IET Participants	Achieved at least one EFL Gain	Achieved MSG Other than EFL Gain or Secondary Diploma	Number Separated before Achieving MSG
ABE Alt. Placed	778	275	408	81
ESL Alt. Placed	66	20	40	5

How does New Mexico set programs up for success with alternative placement?

New Mexico as a state:

- reduces barriers for programs and students by providing access to HiSET, GED, Total Transcript, and NEDP.
- meets with program directors and data technicians one-on-one and bi-annually to review data – *Data Corners*.
- requires programs to submit a monthly data report.
- holds monthly data webinars with all programs.
- helps host ***Continues Program Improvement Institute*** is held every year and solely focused on programs analyzing their data to identify opportunities for growth.
- is efficient at providing guidance to help programs identify which MSGs, aside from MSG 1a- pre and post test, is best for the students and programs to achieve.

Questions?

State Spotlight: North Carolina

Arbony Cooper, Division Director, Adult Education

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Alternative Placement: Opening Doors for Adult Learners

Arbony Cooper, State Director of Adult Education
Dr. Dalanda Bond, Director of Instruction

Adult High School Program Overview and Diploma Requirements

The AHS program is offered cooperatively with a local public school system to offer adults and minors ages 16-17 an opportunity to earn an AHS diploma.

- Participants must be able to master the course standards at the level and rigor at which they are presented.
- Course and graduation requirements are aligned with the standards established by the State Board of Education, the public-school unit, and the local community college.
- The AHS diploma is issued in cooperation between the local boards of education and community college trustees with appropriate signatures representing both educational systems.

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Expanding AHS Access in Rural Communities

In the northeastern part of the state, three community colleges, **Halifax Community College**, **Martin Community College**, and **Roanoke-Chowan Community College**, did not offer the AHS program.

- To address this gap, the System Office established the Regional Adult High School Consortium in July 2025, with an official launch in January 2026.
- The establishment of this consortium brought the total number of Adult High School diploma programs to 51.
- As of 2025, all counties served by these institutions are designated as Tier 1, signifying the highest level of economic distress in the state.
- By implementing a scalable and cost-effective model, community colleges can extend services across multiple counties without incurring the expenses associated with operating separate programs.

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Understanding Course Completion and Student Progress

Accelerated Pathway to Diploma Completion

22-Credit Hour Diploma

- A traditional high school credit represents approximately 120 instructional hours of learning.
  - Students can complete up to two courses per eight weeks
- The AHS Consortium model combines structured instruction, individualized support, and flexible learning options to help students efficiently progress toward credit completion.
- Targeted academic support and highly qualified instructors, students can demonstrate progress and advance toward diploma completion at an accelerated pace.
- The flexible model allows students to balance education with work, family, and other responsibilities while continuing to make meaningful progress.

Workforce Ready, Future Focused

North Carolina ranks first in workforce development, and the AHS Consortium aims to sustain this leadership by supporting students who are working to complete their high school diploma.

- As part of the AHS Regional Consortium, students may elect to complete elective courses that align with Halifax Community College's short-term training offerings. This approach enables students to begin workforce preparation while completing their Adult High School (AHS) diploma.
- To support this process, a structured workflow is initiated at enrollment and guides students through the completion of courses aligned with short-term training credentials.

Halifax Community College's (Short Term Training Programs)	Propel NC Sector	Edmentum Electives (online platform)
CNA I / CNA II (Nurse Aide)	Healthcare II	- Health Science I & II - Certified Nurse Aide (Sem A/B) - Principles of Health Science (Sem A/B) - Medical Therapeutics (Sem A/B) - Anatomy & Physiology (Sem A/B)
Medication Aide	Healthcare II	- Applied Medical Terminology (Sem A/B) - Medical Coding & Billing (Sem A/B) - Health Information Management (Sem A/B) - Principles of Health Science

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Alternative Placement-Adult High School

Programs Approved for Alternative Placement

- Adult High School (AHS) Consortium Project
- Alternative Placement can be used to support enrollment and participation in AHS programming
- Focused on expanding access and reducing barriers to entry for adult learners

Criteria Guiding Alternative Placement Decisions

- Emphasis on rapid entry into instruction
- AHS courses do not require pre-testing and post testing for participation
- Students can begin coursework immediately without assessment delays
- Designed to reduce barriers associated with testing and accelerate engagement

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Impact on Measurable Skills Gains

Data Decision Making

- Weekly review of student success and progression data
- Monitoring course completion and advancement rates
- Comparative analysis between:
  - Students enrolled through Alternative Placement
  - Students enrolled through traditional assessment-based entry
- Data used to identify the most effective pathways for student enrollment and success

Questions?

Resources

2024 NRS Webinar: State Reflections on Alternative Placement Options and Data-Informed Decision-Making

NRS Tips: Quick Review of the 2024 NRS Table Changes

Kentucky Alternative Placement Policy

Georgia Workplace Eligibility Checklist

NRS Technical Assistance Activities and Needs

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Upcoming NRS Events

Live and In-Person Events!

- Regional Training 2026 (July–September 2026)
  - **Theme: Collaboration for Adult Learner Success: Advancing Adult Education Through Workforce, Postsecondary, and Employer Partnerships**
    - Identify models and strategies for partnerships between adult education, workforce entities, or post-secondary institutions.
    - Explore how data can align and mutually benefit participant outcomes for all WIOA partners.
    - Draft a partnership action plan tailored to the state landscape and adaptable by local adult education providers.
    - Two regions left; locations/dates
      - Kansas City, MO 8/25–8/27
      - DC/Crystal City, VA 9/9–9/11
- Technical Assistance Tools Updates
  - **Revamp of the Foundations Toolkit**
    - Content revisions
    - Self-paced courses updates
      - Tentative release date: December 2026

NRS Post-Webinar Feedback

Please complete the post-session feedback form to help inform future events, training, and technical assistance.

Thank you!

Link: How States Can Implement Alternative Placement to Expand Access and Strengthen Accountability

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