



National Reporting System  
for Adult Education

A Project of the U.S. Department of Education

# State Assessment Policy Guidelines

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Local adult education programs must assess students using standardized assessments to report educational functioning level gain in the National Reporting System (NRS) for adult education. Each State must have a written assessment policy that its local eligible providers must follow in measuring educational gain and reporting data in the NRS. §462.40(b) requires each state to submit its assessment policy for review and approval. The policy must describe the assessments local programs use, when local programs must administer pre- and posttests, training requirements for assessments, and assessment administration and reporting requirements. State implementation of effective assessment policies will result in high quality assessment data from local programs.

To improve uniformity and quality of assessment policies, these *State Assessment Policy Guidelines* describe the essential components of an effective policy. They include the required assessment policy content and the criteria that the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) uses to evaluate the compliance of state assessment policies. This document is organized into three parts.

- 1. Introduction and Context**—includes an overview, summary, and the need for and purposes of the policy in the state context;
- 2. General Assessment Requirements**—defines the students to be assessed, assessments permitted and training requirements; and
- 3. Guidelines for Each Assessment**—explains the procedures for administering and reporting results of each assessment the state allows.

State assessment policies may differ in their format. States may follow the organization used in this document or they may use another format and organization for their policy, whichever best meets state needs. DAEL will accept any format and organization of states assessment policy, if it meets the requirements of 34 CFR Part 462 Subpart D.

## 1. Introduction and Context

The policy should include a section with a basic overview of the policy, a summary of NRS requirements and accountability issues specific to your state. It should describe the need for the policy, your state’s approach to assessment and purposes and uses of assessment data within the state. It will also help local staff accept and implement

the policy if they understand basic issues of validity and reliability and differences between assessment for instruction and assessment for accountability. Also describe here any unique conditions within the state that affect the policy. Below are other suggestions for topics to include to set the state context.

### **A. Need for Assessment Policy**

- Present your state and NRS requirements for assessment that emphasize the need for valid and reliable assessments for measuring achievement of literacy and language skills for adult students, tied to NRS levels. Note the importance of assessment data and how your state uses it, particularly in light of NRS requirements and state performance standards.
- It is advisable to provide definitions of validity and reliability and to note the importance of valid and reliable assessment as an accurate way to measure student progress. Points to make include the need for uniform implementation of policy to allow for comparability across programs within the state. Such comparability is especially needed if your state ties funding to NRS and other outcomes. Sound policy helps ensure this standardization.
- If your state has done any analyses or studies related to the reliability, validity and appropriateness of state required assessments, describe any findings or studies that affect state policy and procedures.

### **B. Purposes and Uses of Assessment**

- Programs should use assessments for instructional purposes and it may be helpful to local staff to distinguish between the uses of assessment for this purpose and for accountability. Addressing this issue may help allay teacher concerns about standardized assessment and is also an opportunity to stress the importance of assessment in instruction. In this light, it is advisable to encourage programs to supplement assessment for accountability with instructional-based assessment, according to your state's policy.

### **C. Summary and Overview**

- A summary of the assessment policy, including a list of the assessments allowed for types of students, pre-and posttesting times, scoring and alignment with NRS levels, to provide a concise reference.

### **D. Resources for Information and Assistance**

- Providing contact information for assistance will help local program staff who have questions or require clarification.

## 2. General Assessment Requirements

The assessment policy should contain a section or sections that describe the general policies that apply to all assessments. You should define which students to assess, list the assessments that are permitted, describe reporting procedures, general training for test administration and accommodation requirements for assessing students with disabilities.

### A. Students to be Assessed

- The policy should identify which students in the state adult education program must be assessed with state designated assessments. At a minimum, all students participating in programming designed to result in an educational functioning level gain as determined by pre- and posttesting should be assessed. If your state does not use alternative placement, all students who will be included in the state's NRS data submission must be tested. Exceptions may be made for students who are unable to understand or respond to the test due to low literacy or English proficiency or due to disability. However, programs must provide some alternative assessment for such students, as explained below in the section on special populations.

### B. Assessments Permitted

- List all assessments allowed for NRS reporting. These assessments must meet NRS requirements:
  - Be appropriate for measuring literacy and language development of adult students,
  - Have standardized administration and scoring procedures,
  - Have alternate, equivalent, forms for pre- and posttesting, and
  - Have evidence linking them to NRS educational functioning level.
- List each test the state allows local programs to use for NRS reporting. Describe each test, including its name, the subject areas it assesses and the types of students for which it is appropriate. Assessments should match the appropriate skill areas that are the focus of instruction for the student.
- Designate a uniform time when a pretest is to be given. This time should be at intake or as soon as possible thereafter. If the assessment has a locator or other placement test associated with it (for example, the TABE), that test should be administered first and the results of the placement test used to inform the form or difficulty level of the pretest to be administered. The policy should also define a reasonable time when programs are to administer a new pretest to students who have “stopped-out” by not been attending for several months (e.g., 90 days or more).

- Describe other assessment requirements applicable to your state that may not be required for the NRS, such as requirements for the percentage of students that must be both pre- and posttested.

### **C. Training for Administering Assessments**

- Describe training policies *for each assessment used in the state*. All training for each assessment should be conducted by a qualified trainer, who has been certified to train for the assessment. The policy should address:
  - Whether the state or local staff (or both) will be responsible for training.
  - Which staff and how many staff from programs should be trained.
  - When training is to be conducted; and
  - Procedures for ongoing training for new staff and to refresh skills of previously trained staff.
- Describe requirements for programs to keep a record of all persons trained for each assessment and record who conducted the training.

### **D. Accommodations for Students with Disabilities or Other Special Needs**

- Describe the procedures for identifying students who require accommodations and procedures for administering assessments to them.
- List and describe the appropriate documentation that local program staff must use to identify students requiring accommodation (e.g., IEP, doctor's report, diagnosis, referral from appropriate agency).
- List the appropriate accommodations, procedures and test forms designated for the appropriate disability by the test publisher, for each test used in the state.

## **3. Guidelines for Each Assessment**

The policy must contain detailed information to local programs on how staff is to administer each assessment approved by the state. The information must include administration procedures, scoring procedures, how assessment scores are linked to NRS levels both for initial and follow-up assessment, posttest time and training requirements for each assessment.

The guidelines below summarize the generic information that the policy should include for each of the assessments that the state uses. The state should also include quality control guidelines for local programs to follow to ensure that the assessment is administered properly.

## **Information to Be Included for Each Assessment**

- The description of students for whom the assessment is appropriate (e.g., ESL students, low-level ABE students). The student population should be one for which the test was developed.
- The alternate forms of the test that are to be used for pre- and posttesting.
- Whether a locator or other pre-placement assessment or procedures are to be used prior to administering the actual assessment.
- If the assessment has subtests in more than one area, the appropriate test for each population must be described, along with procedures for determining which subtest to use on each type of student.
- Training requirements for administering the assessment.
- Time when posttesting should occur, either by calendar date or instructional hours. Test publisher guidelines should be consulted when setting this time.
- Instructions on how to use scale scores from the assessments to place students into NRS educational functioning levels and determine whether students have completed levels.

## **Quality Control Procedures**

The policy should guide local program procedures for ensuring the quality of assessment data by describing the following:

- Time when testing data should be entered into the program data base.
- Quality control procedures (e.g., report from MIS or self-assessment evaluation tool) that allow the program director or other appropriate staff to verify that correct assessment procedures have been followed.
- Purchasing procedures for each assessment.