



TO: Higher Education Committee

FROM: John L. D'Agati *John L. D'Agati*

SUBJECT: Update of Approved Ability-to-Benefit (ATB) Tests for Purposes of Eligibility for State Financial Aid

DATE: October 9, 2018

AUTHORIZATION(S): *MaryEllen Elin*

SUMMARY

Issue for Decision

Should the Board of Regents update the list of approved Ability-to-Benefit Tests for the purposes of eligibility for State Financial Aid?

Reason(s) for Consideration

Review of Policy.

Proposed Handling

This item will be presented to the Higher Education Committee for a recommendation to the Full Board for adoption at its October 2018 Board of Regents meeting.

Background Information

Under Section 661 of the Education Law, as amended by Chapter 57 of the Laws of 2007, a student seeking Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) aid and other State financial aid for the first time, beginning with the 2007-2008 academic year, must pass a federally approved Ability-To-Benefit (ATB) test approved by the Board of Regents if the student does not possess a U.S. high school diploma or its recognized equivalent.

One of the requirements of Education Law §661 is that the Board of Regents identify which federally approved ATB tests will satisfy eligibility requirements for any New York State institution of higher education, including non-degree granting schools, seeking TAP assistance for its students. A 2007 memorandum issued by then Senior Deputy Commissioner of Education of P-16 Johanna Duncan-Poitier (CEO 07-03) and a

subsequent update memo issued by then Deputy Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph P. Frey in 2010 (CEO 10-02) identified the ATB tests approved for use by the Board of Regents for state aid purposes. At that time, the Board of Regents approved four of the eight federally approved ATB tests for New York State financial aid purposes - Accuplacer, Asset, CELSA and Compass (Attachment A is a list of currently approved ATB tests).

Prior to 2012, students without a high school diploma or its equivalent were able to access federal financial aid as long as they were able to demonstrate college readiness through an ATB test. However, the ATB provision for federal financial aid was eliminated as part of the federal fiscal year (FY) 2012 spending bill (Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2012 [Public Law 112-74]). While the federal government would no longer accept the ATB test for eligibility for Title IV support, the USDOE advised the Department that it did not intend for State financial aid to be impacted by this, therefore the list of ATB tests approved by the Board of Regents continued for State financial aid purposes.

The federal government passed new ATB provisions in the 2015 spending bill. Subsequently, the USDOE released federal guidance to notify the field that the following ATB tests were approved for federal financial aid purposes - Asset, Compass/Compass ESL, CELSA, Accuplacer and the Wonderlic Basic Skills Test.

The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) Task Force, comprised of representatives from the Commission on Independent Colleges & Universities (clcu), Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC), Association of Proprietary Colleges (APC), State University of New York (SUNY), The City College of New York (CUNY), New York State Financial Aid Administrators Association (NYSFAA) and SED, reviewed the federal guidance and recommends that the Board of Regents amend the current list of approved ATB tests to include all ATB tests approved for federal financial aid purposes (see Attachment B for a list of recommended ATB tests to be approved by the Board of Regents).

Related Regents Items

[June 2007](#)

<http://www.regents.nysed.gov/meetings/2007Meetings/June2007/0607heppa2.htm>

[September 2007](#)

<http://www.regents.nysed.gov/meetings/2007Meetings/September2007/0907bra3.htm>

[March 2012](#)

<http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/documents/meetings/2012Meetings/March2012/312hed4.pdf>

[March 2015](#)

<http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/meetings/Mar%202015/315accesa1.pdf>

[October 2015](http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/meetings/Oct%202015/1015brca9.pdf)

<http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/meetings/Oct%202015/1015brca9.pdf>

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Regents take the following action:

VOTED: That the Board of Regents approve the updated list of federally approved ATB tests listed in Attachment B for eligibility for the Tuition Assistance Program.


Timetable for Implementation

With the Board's approval, the updated list will be effective immediately.


Ability-to-Benefit (ATB) Testing Requirements for State Financial Aid

A student seeking State financial aid (including TAP) for the first time, beginning with the 2007-08 academic year, must pass a federally approved ATB test identified by the Board of Regents if the student does not possess a U.S. high school diploma or its recognized equivalent. (Section 661 of the Education Law, as amended by Chapter 57 of the Laws of 2007)

Note: to learn more about acceptable U.S. High School diplomas and their equivalents, please see our [ATB questions and answers](#).

The purpose of this and related ATB requirements is to ensure the effective use of financial aid funds and to help align admission requirements, level of curricula, and academic support. Information about the application of the law is summarized in [CEO memo 10-02](#)  (184KB).

Required Institutional Statement on ATB Tests

As part of the amended ATB requirements, all degree-granting and non-degree public vocational institutions must submit the [Statement on Ability-to-Benefit Tests \(NYSED ATB Form 1\)](#)  (99KB), by July 1, 2010, to identify the following:

- the approved ATB tests the institution will use for students without U.S. high school diplomas or the equivalent and who wish to qualify for State student aid;
- minimum passing scores on those tests, consistent with admissions criteria, curricula and academic support; and
- how the institution will administer the tests.

The following four tests have been approved by the Regents for ATB purposes:

- Accuplacer
- ASSET
- COMPASS (including COMPASS/ESL*)
- Combined English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA)*

* Note: an institution using the COMPASS/ESL or CELSA tests must also use the quantitative section of the Accuplacer, ASSET or COMPASS tests.

The minimum passing score an institution sets on an approved ATB test must first be approved by the Board of Regents. Determinations about minimum passing scores on approved ATB tests should be strongly linked to the institution's admission and financial aid policies, as well as with the level of curricula and academic support provided to students.

Annual Certification

Beginning in 2011, each institution that offers ATB tests to qualify students for financial aid will certify annually, by July 1, that its procedures meet the requirements of Section 145-2.15 of Commissioner's Regulations, which implements the amended ATB requirements.

- [Annual certification form \(ATB Form 2\)](#)  (84KB)

Questions and Answers

Please review our [ATB questions and answers](#) for additional guidance.

<http://www.highered.nysed.gov/ocue/ATBhome.html>

ATB TESTS APPROVED BY FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Posted Date: June 24, 2015

Author: Jeff Baker, Director, Policy Liaison and Implementation, Federal Student Aid

Subject: Approved Ability-to-Benefit (ATB) tests

This Electronic Announcement provides a listing of ability-to-benefit (ATB) tests that are approved for determining, under the limited circumstances which are described in Dear Colleague Letters [GEN-15-09](#) and [GEN-12-09](#), the Title IV, HEA federal student aid eligibility of students who do not have a high school diploma, the recognized equivalent of a high school diploma, or who have not completed secondary school education in a homeschool setting. The listing includes four newly approved ATB tests and two ATB tests that continue to be approved. This announcement also includes a listing of six tests that are no longer approved for use as ATB tests. Finally, this announcement shows the passing scores for each of the ATB tests and the effective dates when the tests can be used for Title IV student eligibility purposes.

Newly Approved ATB Tests - The four ATB tests listed below may be used to establish Title IV, HEA eligibility for students who do not have a high school diploma, its recognized equivalent, or who have not completed a secondary school education in a homeschool setting. Applicable effective dates, passing scores, and test publisher contact information are provided.

1. Test: Wonderlic Basic Skills Test (WBST) Verbal Forms VS-1 & VS-2
Quantitative Forms QS-1 & QS-2. This is a paper and pencil test.
Effective Date: July 1, 2015.
Passing Scores: Verbal (200), Quantitative (210).
Publisher: Wonderlic, Inc., 400 Lakeview Parkway, Suite 200, Vernon Hills, IL 60061.
Contact: Mr. Chris Young.
Telephone: (847) 247-2544, Fax (847) 680-9492.
2. Test: Wonderlic Basic Skills Test (WBST) Verbal Forms VS-1 & VS-2
Quantitative Forms QS-1 & QS-2. This is an online version of the tests.
Effective Date: July 1, 2015.
Passing Scores: Verbal (200), Quantitative (210).
Publisher: Wonderlic, Inc., 400 Lakeview Parkway, Suite 200, Vernon Hills, IL 60061.
Contact: Mr. Chris Young.
Telephone: (847) 247-2544, Fax (847) 680-9492.
3. Test: Spanish Wonderlic Basic Skills Test (Spanish WBST) Verbal Forms VS-1 & VS-2
Quantitative Forms QS-1 & QS-2. This is a paper and pencil test.
Effective Date: July 1, 2015.
Passing Scores: Verbal (200), Quantitative (200).
Publisher: Wonderlic, Inc., 400 Lakeview Parkway, Suite 200, Vernon Hills, IL 60061.

Contact: Mr. Chris Young.
Telephone: (847) 247-2544, Fax (847) 680-9492.

4. Test: Spanish Wonderlic Basic Skills Test (Spanish WBST) Verbal Forms VS-1 & VS-2
Quantitative Forms QS-1 & QS-2. This is an online version of the tests.
Effective Date: July 1, 2015.
Passing Scores: Verbal (200), Quantitative (200).
Publisher: Wonderlic, Inc., 400 Lakeview Parkway, Suite 200, Vernon Hills, IL 60061.
Contact: Mr. Chris Young.
Telephone: (847) 247-2544, Fax (847) 680-9492.

SPECIAL NOTE FOR STUDENTS WHOSE NATIVE LANGUAGE IS SPANISH: Dear Colleague Letter [GEN-11-08](#), published on March 25, 2011, noted that when there are no approved ATB test for students whose native language is not English and who are not fluent in English, the regulations permitted the use of any test in the student's native language, as long as the test had not been rejected by the Department. Now that there are two approved Spanish ATB tests, effective November 1, 2015, only those two Spanish ATB tests are permitted for Title IV ability to benefit purposes. We are providing the period of time from the date of this publication until October 31, 2015 for institutions to make the transition to one of the now approved Spanish tests. Institutions are encouraged to make the transition to the new eligible tests as soon as possible, but no later than November 1, 2015. However, the guidance in GEN-11-08 remains applicable for students whose native language is neither English nor Spanish.

ATB Tests that Continue to be Approved - The two ATB tests listed below continue to be approved and may be used to establish Title IV, HEA eligibility for students who do not have a high school diploma, its recognized equivalent, or who have not completed a secondary school education in a homeschool setting. The applicable effective dates, passing scores, and test publisher contact information are provided.

1. Test: Combined English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA), Forms 1 and 2
Effective Date: November 1, 2002.
Passing Scores: CELSA Form 1 (97) and CELSA Form 2 (97).
Publisher: Association of Classroom Teacher Testers (ACCT)
1187 Coast Village Road, Suite 1, #378, Montecito, CA 93108.
Contact: Pablo Buckelew.
Telephone: (805) 965-5704, Fax (805) 965-5807.

Note: The CELSA test is approved as provided in 34 CFR 668.153(a)(2) as the additional ATB English language proficiency test that must be taken by students whose native language is not English and who are not fluent in English if the academic program includes an English as a Second Language (ESL) component.

2. Test: ACCUPLACER (Reading Comprehension, Sentence Skills, and Arithmetic)
Effective Date: November 1, 2002.

Passing Scores: Reading Comprehension (55), Sentence Skills (60), and Arithmetic (34).

Publisher: The College Board, 250 Vesey Street, New York, New York 10281.

Contact: ACCUPLACER Program.

Telephone: (800) 607-5223, Fax (212) 253-4061.

ATB Tests No Longer Approved - The following six tests are no longer approved for the purpose of determining students' Title IV, HEA eligibility. Please note the effective dates for each test.

1. Test: The ACT Career Programs Assessment test (CPAt), Forms B and C
Effective Dates: November 1, 2002 through June 30, 2015.
Passing Scores: Language Usage (42), Reading (43), and Numerical (41).
Publisher: ACT, Inc., 500 ACT Drive, P.O. Box 168, Iowa City, IA 52243-0168.
Contact: Joanna Higgins-Freese.
Telephone: (319) 337-1618.
2. Test: The ACT WorkKeys test
Reading for Information – Forms A01AA, A02AA, C01AA, & D10AA.
Applied Mathematic – Forms A01BB, A02BB, C01BB, & D01BB.
Effective Dates: May 19, 2006 through June 30, 2015.
Passing Scores: Reading for Information Forms A01AA (76), A02AA (75), C01AA (77), & D10AA (77);
Applied Mathematics Forms A01BB (73), A02BB (74), C01BB (73), & D01BB (73).
Publisher: ACT, Inc., 500 ACT Drive, P.O. Box 168, Iowa City, IA 52243-0168.
Contact: Joanna Higgins-Freese.
Telephone: (319) 337-1618.
3. Test: The College Board DTLS and DTMS Forms M-K-3KDT and M-K-3LDT tests
Effective Dates: November 1, 2002 through April 27, 2007.
Passing Scores: Reading Comprehension (108), Sentence Structure (9), Conventions of Written English (309), and Arithmetic (506).
Publisher: The College Board, 250 Vesey Street, New York, New York 10281.
Contact: ACCUPLACER Program.
Telephone: (800) 607-5223, Fax (212) 253-4061.
4. Test: ASSET: Basic Skills Test (Reading, Writing, and Numerical) - Forms B2, C2, D2, and E2
Effective Dates: November 1, 2002 through October 31, 2015.
Passing Scores: Reading (35), Writing (35), and Numerical (33).
Publisher: ACT, Inc., 500 ACT Drive, P.O. Box 168, Iowa City, IA 52243-0168.
Contact: Joanna Higgins-Freese.
Telephone: (319)-337-1618.
5. Test: COMPASS Subtests: Prealgebra/Numerical Skills
Passing Scores: Prealgebra/Numerical (25), Reading (62), and Writing (32).
Effective Dates: November 1, 2002 through October 31, 2015.
Publisher: ACT, Inc., 500 ACT Drive, P.O. Box 168, Iowa City, IA 52243-0168.

Contact: Joanna Higgins-Freese.
Telephone: (319) 337-1618.

6. Test: COMPASS ESL:
Passing Scores: Grammar/Usage (64), Reading (70), and Listening (70).
Effective Dates: May 19, 2006 through October 31, 2015.
Publisher: ACT, Inc., 500 ACT Drive, P.O. Box 168, Iowa City, IA 52243-0168.
Contact: Joanna Higgins-Freese.
Telephone: (319) 337-1618.

Note The COMPASS/ESL test is approved, as provided in 34 CFR 668.153(a)(2), as the additional ATB English language proficiency test that must be taken by students whose native language is not English and who are not fluent in English if the academic program includes an English as a Second Language (ESL) component.

Other Recent ATB Guidance - Institutions are reminded that Dear Colleague Letter [GEN-15-09](#), published on May 22, 2015, clarifies the changes made by the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015 for students without a high school diploma (or its recognized equivalent) or who did not successfully complete a secondary school education in a homeschool setting, to be eligible for Title IV, HEA student assistance through ability to benefit (ATB) alternatives, if the student is enrolled in an “eligible career pathway program”. That letter also provides information on “grandfathered students” first explained in Dear Colleague Letter [GEN-12-09](#).

Please direct questions about this Electronic Announcement to Dan Klock at 202-377-4026 or via email at dan.klock@ed.gov.

<https://ifap.ed.gov/eannouncements/062415ATBTests.html>