Increasing the Use of Ability to Benefit and Creating a State-Driven Process

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## Ability to Benefit (ATB) 2016 Before and After

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before 2016</th>
<th>After 2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students are eligible for only a partial Pell Grant Award.</td>
<td>Students are eligible for a full Pell Grant Award.</td>
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<tr>
<td>No definition of pathway, or Adult Ed, other than “concurrent enrollment in Adult Education and postsecondary programs.”</td>
<td>Allowable Pathway options mirror WIOA pathways; new definition includes “enables individual to attain” a high school diploma or its equivalence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students must be co-enrolled in Adult Education and Postsecondary at the same time.</td>
<td>Students have to participate in both portions but can be in Adult Ed prior to postsecondary coursework.</td>
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Requirements for Students and Colleges

Students:

- Must either pass an approved test or earn six college credits (or 225 clock hours) before placement on Ability to Benefit, or complete a state process approved by the U.S. Secretary of Education before placement on Ability to Benefit AND
- Must be enrolled in a Title IV-eligible career pathway program

Colleges:

- Colleges must maintain documentation that the programs students enroll in are Title IV eligible
- Colleges must offer students on Ability to Benefit the opportunity to also earn a high school credential

ICCB ATB Survey Results (Feb. 2019)

Goals of Survey

1) Understand if and how community colleges were utilizing ATB

2) Understand the challenges faced in the implementation or scale of ATB

Response Rate: 33 of 48 community colleges = 68.75%
Survey Results

Q1. Is the college utilizing the ATB provisions?

- 31% yes
- 29% no
- 40% unknown
Q2. Specifically, is the college utilizing ATB for adult students enrolled in Adult Education /Integrated Education and Training programs?

- Utilizing with IETs – 36.36%
- Not utilizing with IETs – 63.64%

*Because no IETs available, college not using ATB, or ATB is underutilized*
Survey Results, cont’d

Q3. Who are the primary populations utilizing ATB?

- English Language Learners (in Adult Education) – 2.6%
- Students without high school diploma (in Adult Education) – 27.7%
- Non-Adult Education students – 69.7%
Survey Results, cont’d

Q4. Please describe challenges your college has encountered with ATB.

5 most selected answers:
• Lack of knowledge of when and who can use ATB under the new guidelines (7)
• The current ATB provisions limit which students actually can qualify to receive federal aid (5)
• No challenges (4)
• Establishing an “eligible career pathway program” (3)
• Cross-departmental coordination and training (3)
Q5. What do other colleges need to consider as they scale implementation of ATB?

5 most selected answers

- Not sure (5)
- Ensure frontline staff understand the ATB provisions and refer students to take an ATB test (3)
- Communication plans with departments and students (3)
- Develop a process for monitoring program changes to ensure student still qualifies for aid under ATB (2)
- Information Guides and Materials for Students, Families, and Parties unfamiliar with ATB (2)
Questions and/or Advice on ATB
CLASP Context

• CLASP is a national nonprofit committed to racially equitable policies that alleviate poverty.

• In ATB, we help build knowledge about the provision, how schools can leverage it for students’ benefit, and share best practices.
Ability to Benefit (ATB)

- ATB is a special rule in the Higher Education Act that allows students who lack their high school diploma or equivalent (e.g., GED) to access federal student aid.
  - Aid includes Pell Grants, work-study, and other grant and loan aid
- Students can use that aid to pay for college coursework and living expenses.
Students Have to Show They Can Succeed in Higher Education

They have 3 ways they can do that:

– Pass a U.S. Department of Education-approved exam;
– Complete 6 college credits (or its equivalent); or
– Complete a process defined by their state
Pass an Exam

**PROS**
- Option that may be most familiar/accessible to adult education and the college
- Typically low cost and affordable for the student

**CONS**
- Some common exams aren’t on the approved exam list (like TABE 11 & 12)
- Students may lack time to prepare for the exam
- Test anxiety
- If the student can pass this, why not just give them the GED test?
Complete 6 Credits/225 Clock Hours

**PROS**
- Student is making progress toward their credential
- Arguably a more accurate measure of their ability to succeed in college than an exam

**CONS**
- Expensive for the student; cost could prevent them from enrolling or require the development of creative financing schemes
State Process

**PROS**

• State can define student requirements and what matters to it
• Potentially no cost to the student or college
• Direct oversight done by ICCB, not feds

**CONS**

• The process doesn’t exist
Creating a State Process & Examples

- WI and WA are the first states to have plans approved!
- ICCB would lead this process, informed by you and other stakeholders they identify.
- ICCB drafts a plan and submits to the U.S. Secretary of Education
- Secretary has 6 months to approve. If not approved, the state can make edits and resubmit.
Questions About State-Defined Process
Discussion

• Should Illinois develop and pursue a state defined process?
• What elements would you like to see addressed?
  – In terms of Assessment?
  – In terms of Academic Support Services?
  – In terms of Student Support Services?
  – In terms of Data Gathering and Reporting?
  – In terms of Monitoring Student Progress?
• Who needs to be involved?
• What support should be provided to campuses, if a plan is approved?
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