



ABILITY TO BENEFIT – THE ILLINOIS STATE-DEFINED PROCESS

What's New in ATB?

Ability to Benefit (ATB) Updates 2025

Agenda

- ATB basics
- New requirement: Eligible Career Pathway Program (ECPP)
- ECPP to ICAPS to Perkins crosswalks
- Cross-college collaborations
- Q&A

Ability to Benefit

- Section 484(d) of the Higher Education Act (HEA)
- Student who has not received high school diploma or equivalent
- Eligible for Title IV Federal Student Aid
- Eligible Career Pathway Program

How Students Qualify for Ability to Benefit (ATB)

Requirements (all options)	Option 1 - test	Option 2 – 6 credits	Option 3 – state-defined process
Must be beyond the age of compulsory education (Can not be dual credit student)	All requirements AND achieve a pre-determined score on an US Dept. of Education approved test.	All requirements AND successfully complete 6 credit hours of college level course work.	All requirements AND follow Illinois's State Plan
Must demonstrate financial need			
Have a valid SSN			
Must be a US Citizen or eligible non-citizen			
Must be enrolled in an eligible degree or certificate program			

Student Eligibility for Alternative Plan

- Adult learner
- Meets all other eligibility criteria for federal financial aid
- Does not meet original ATB criteria
- Assessment of each student's capabilities through means other than a single standardized test.
- Ideal candidates:
 - *Are enrolled in an ICCB approved Alternative Methods of Credentialing for High School Equivalency programming **OR***
 - *Have successfully completed a Bridge Program within Adult Education.*

Assessing student readiness

Multiple measures required, possibilities include these or other assessments:

- GED Ready practice tests
- Instructor or employer referrals
- High school transcript review
- HSE and ESL assessments
- Writing samples
- Student interviews



Benefits of the State-Defined Process

- ✓ Streamlines the processes and procedures
- ✓ Eligibility criteria is more flexible for adult students
- ✓ Creates additional awareness, support, and accountability for ATB implementation

UPDATES TO ATB

Changes to ATB (all forms, not just state plan)

Former language	Updated language
Eligible career pathway (Title IV)	Eligible Career Pathway Program (ECPP) – WIOA and Perkins V definition
No official process for pathway approval	New federal approval process for ECPP--Need first ECPP approved via E-App; rest are automatically approved attesting to same standard

What Is an Eligible Career Pathway?

- Aligns with industry needs
- Workforce preparation/training for specific occupation/cluster
- Includes academic and career counseling
- Education contextualized and concurrently
- Wrap around services
- Enables secondary diploma attainment
- Enter or advance in career cluster
- Has approval from the US Department of Education

Eligible Career Pathway Approval

- All elements required of all ECPP
- Only one ECPP must be submitted via E-App to the US Department of Education for approval
- All other ECPPs are automatically approved thereafter if institution guarantees they are at the same ECPP standard as initial submission
- Documents for guidance about evidence

Uploading Documentation in E-App

Updating the E-App to request ECPP Approval

To apply for *Title IV* approval of ECPP(s) for use with Ability to Benefit (ATB), the institution must answer two questions under #8 – Ability to Benefit on the E-App:

1. Do you use an ability to benefit test for students who do not have a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent?
 - Yes
 - No
2. Do you admit and enroll students through an eligible career pathway program?
 - Yes
 - No

[Applying for Title IV Approval of an Eligible Career Pathway Program for Ability to Benefit | Knowledge Center](#)

- **Question #1:**
“test” means a standardized test but also any method of assessing student readiness via state defined plan verbiage.
- **Question #2:**
Select “yes” to upload your documentation that demonstrates your program is an ECPP.

ECPP Documentation Guidance

34 CFR 668.157 – Eligible Career Pathway Program	Requirement in regulation	Non-exhaustive acceptable documentation examples
(a)	An institution demonstrates to the Secretary that a student is enrolled in an eligible career pathway program by documenting that –	N/A
(a)(1)	The student has enrolled in or is receiving all three of the following elements simultaneously –	N/A
(a)(1)(i)	An eligible postsecondary program as defined in § 668.8	Document that all CPPs meet the eligible program standards in 34 CFR 668.8 . Additional information can be found in Volume 2 of the FSA Handbook .
(a)(1)(ii)	Adult education and literacy activities under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act as described in 34 CFR 463.30 that assist adults in attaining a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent and in the transition to postsecondary education and training.	1. Document that the program offers at least one of the activities listed in paragraphs (a) or (h) of 34 CFR 463.30 and provide a description of how it offers the activity. (Two pages or less); or 2. Provide a funded application from the most recent competitive WIOA Title II Competition.

[Ability to Benefit State Process and Eligible Career Pathway Programs | Knowledge Center](#)

(a)(1)(iii)	Workforce preparation activities as described in 34 CFR § 463.34.	<p>Document how the CPP will help a participant acquire a combination of basic academic skills, critical thinking skills, digital literacy skills, and self-management skills. For examples see 34 CFR 463.34. (Two pages or less)</p> <p>This may also include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employability skills that address competencies in using resources and information, working with others, understanding systems, and obtaining skills necessary to successfully transition to and complete postsecondary education, training, and employment; or 2. Other employability skills that increase an individual's preparation for the workforce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative (two pages or less) demonstrating that the program includes workforce preparation activities, with sources such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Your state or local employability skills standards ○ The U.S. Department of Education's Employability Skills Framework ○ Your state's digital skills or digital literacy framework • •
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[World Education ATB ECPP Documentation Template \[Nov. 2024\]](#)

Regulation	Definition, rule, policy	Federal outline or example	ICAPS documentation	CTE documentation
34 CFR 668.157 – Eligible Career Pathway Program Section (a)	College demonstrates that a student is enrolled in an eligible career pathway program by		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICAPS approval letter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICCB POS approval letter/email
Section (a)(1)	The student is receiving all of the following things simultaneously		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICAPS approval letter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICCB POS application
Section (a)(1)(i)	Eligible postsecondary program	Document that all programs meet the eligible program standards in 34 CFR 668.8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICCB POS application Title IV approval (Financial Aid)
Section (a)(1)(ii)	Adult education & literacy activities that assist adults in attaining a secondary school diploma or equivalent and in the transition to postsecondary education and training	Has at least one of these two options. 1) Document that the programs offer at least one of the listed activities found in sections (a) or (h) of 34 CFR 463.30 and a description of how the activity is offered OR 2) Provided a funded application from the most recent WIOA Title II Competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICAPS application, Adult education Curriculum 	

Illinois-specific Guidance ECPP, ICAPS, and CTE Crosswalk

- Regulation
- Definition/rule/policy
- Federal example
- ICAPS documentation
- CTE documentation
- Documentation examples are not all exhaustive, so add on

ATB for use with ICAPS

The State-Defined Process is intended to be used along with Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs.

These are called ICAPS in Illinois.

ICAPS has 3 basic components:

1. Adult Education
2. Workplace Preparation
3. Workforce Training

Utilization of ATB can help pay for the Workforce Training component of classroom work in the chosen career pathway.

Success Rate-Accountability—new rate!

- ATB enrolled students must have a success rate that is within 85% (prior rate was 95%) of the success rate of students with high school diplomas (non-ATB students).
- Annual student data submission to ICCB
- ICCB will calculate success rates
- Institutions with <85% success rate will follow corrective action planning
- Technical assistance needs

Success Rate Formula

- Compares success rates of students with high school diplomas/HSE and students in the state-defined ATB process
- For each population, calculate the success rate
 - *The number of students during the applicable award year enrolled who-*
 - Successfully completed education or training programs;
 - Remained enrolled in education or training programs at the end of that award year; or
 - Successfully transferred to and remained enrolled in another institution at the end of that award year.
 - *DIVIDED BY*
 - *The number of students without who enrolled in education or training programs in participating institutions during that award year who remained enrolled (minus the number of students who subsequently withdrew or were expelled from participating institutions and received a 100 percent refund of their tuition under the institutions' refund policies.)*
- Divide the state-defined ATB rate by the high school diploma rate
- This is the success rate that needs to be 85% or higher

Success Rate Formula Example

Step 1: Calculation on Students in ATB state plan

- 13 successful
- 19 total
- 68.4% success rate for students in the state-defined ATB plan

Step 2: Calculation on Students with hs diplomas

- 720 successful
- 1000 total
- 72% success rate for students with high school diplomas/HSE

Step 3: Final Success Rate Calculation

- Students in ATB state plan success rate/
Students with hs diploma success rate
- $68.4/72=95\%$

Campus Partnerships

- Adult Education
- Financial Aid
- CTE
- Perkins
- Counseling
- Advising
- Career Services
- Marketing
- Testing Services

Campus Partnership Guidance



MINNESOTA STATE

Ability to Benefit State Process Partnership Checklist

Check the line next to each statement if you agree.

___ We (i.e., campus and ABE representatives) have discussed why we want to implement the AtB State Process and/or the other two AtB options; each organization knows the others' goals and intentions.

___ We agree to make student success and our ongoing relationship the focus of our partnership.

___ We have discussed career pathways and agree to one to four pathways in which to place students. We have documented this in the Career Pathways Checklist document.

___ We have discussed and agree to facilities sharing, data sharing and/or other ways to share our resources and information to facilitate our partnership. We have signed documentation reflecting our agreements.

___ We agree to meet regularly to discuss our process and improve it.

___ We agree to reach out to the system office and/or MDE/ABE leaders to resolve technical or relationship issues that impede implementing the State Process.

___ We agree that regular, positive communication is the foundation for a good partnership and includes at minimum:

- Holding regular meetings
- Using phone calls to resolve issues in the moment
- Copying other point people and key staff on emails to keep everyone in the communication loop

Please type in the names of the CPP and APP who agree with these statements, save this file, copy all signers in an email, attached the signed document and send to both jessica@clarity-collab.com and jess.niebuhr@minnstate.edu.

[AtB Partnership Checklist.pdf - Google Drive](#)

5 Important Conversations for Ability to Benefit, the Illinois State Plan

CONVERSATION 1



ATB Vision

The initial conversation focuses on the goals and anticipated outcomes of ATB within your institution. What are your objectives? How will specific students benefit from it? And which departments will lead the implementation process?

CONVERSATION 2



Interest-based Bargaining

This discussion brings together the department leads responsible for creating and formalizing the process and has them talk about their common ground and their non negotiables for implementation. What concerns do we have about ATB implementation? What mutual interests will ATB serve?

CONVERSATION 3



Practical Questions

The answers to these questions will shape the form ATB takes. Which CTE programs are the best fits for ATB and give students the best return on investment? Which Financial Aid documentation satisfies Title IV? What alternative assessment methods are most effective in documenting college readiness for adult learners?

CONVERSATION 4



Process Design & Controls

This conversation iron out the steps in the process. It's best to start at the end and backward design the process to ensure that all the steps are accounted for and assigned to a department and position. Remember to include data reporting.

CONVERSATION 5



Marketing

This conversation addresses how the process is explained to students and advisors so that it's clear what the requirements are for participation and also what makes this different from other financial aid opportunities.

Resources

ATB/State Plan

- [USDOE ATB FAQ](#)
- [CLASP ATB Resources](#)
- [ICCB ATB Resources](#)
- [Illinois' Letter of Approval](#), from Dept. of Education

Eligible Career Pathway Program (ECPP) information

- [Ability to Benefit State Process and Eligible Career Pathway Programs | Knowledge Center](#)
- [eCFR :: 34 CFR 668.8 -- Eligible program.](#)
- [<https://www.collegetransition.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/World-Education-ATB-ECPP-Documentation-Template-Nov.-2024-FILLABLE-PDF.pdf>](#)
- [Ability to Benefit Resource Page - NCTN](#)

ICCB Contacts

- Contact: Whitney Thompson, Deputy Director for Workforce Education, whitney.Thompson@illinois.gov
- Angela Gerberding, Director for Work-Based Learning, angela.gerberding@illinois.gov



WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR US?

Remember to complete the form about this
year's ATB state plan

<https://forms.gle/sehJRuUm2HfRg2tu8>



WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU
HAVE FOR EACH OTHER?

OR TIPS TO SHARE?

