



Adult Diploma Policy

Policy Development Date: January 31, 2006

Latest Policy Revision Date: January 9, 2013

Policy Overview

Policy Intent

The intent of this policy is to ensure that programs funded under Minnesota State Statute 124D.51 (State ABE aid) are using this limited source of state aid in a manner that:

- a. Maximizes the opportunity for an adult student to obtain a high school diploma within a reasonable period of time; and
- b. Supports the integrity of the high school diploma issued through an ABE funded program.

Background

There are two key issues pertaining to the need for a formal policy for adult diploma programming that is conducted by state-funded ABE programs: academic readiness and diploma integrity.

Academic Readiness: The first issue is one of enrolling students into credit-bearing or competency-based adult diploma programs who are not ready academically (i.e. students have low basic skills and/or English skills). Adult students who have basic academic skills or English skills below the 6th grade level would be more effectively served by programs which focus on these basic skills before they enroll in credit-level high school courses in an adult diploma program.

Diploma Integrity: The second issue is the need to ensure the integrity of a diploma issued through an ABE program. If employers or college intake staff doubt the credibility of a diploma issued to a student who attended an ABE funded adult diploma program, the value (and perhaps future funding prospects) of ABE programs in general can be undermined.

The state ABE office has reason to believe that without a policy addressing these two issues, state-funded ABE programs could (for well-intended reasons) enroll students who are functioning below a 6th grade level of reading, and secondly, programs could exempt adult diploma students with limited English proficiency from the state's required graduation examinations, thus creating a credibility issue for the adult diploma as a valid certificate of high school competency.

Policy Statement

In order for a state-approved Adult Basic Education program to count and submit student contact hours for a program that offers credit (or a competency set) toward an adult high school diploma, the following three conditions must be met:

1. **Student Eligibility (ability to benefit):** The program must serve only those students who have a:
 - a. TABE reading score of 6.0 or higher grade equivalent;
 - b. CASAS score of 236 or greater; or
 - c. Should unusual circumstances exist, scores from another state or nationally recognized standardized test(s) and/or an achievement profile may be presented to and deemed sufficient as threshold eligibility by the Minnesota Department of Education state ABE office on a rare and case-by-case basis.

If a prospective student scores below this criterion, they are eligible to be enrolled in other, lower-leveled ABE funded programs, but not in the credit based adult diploma program.

2. **Competence Equivalency Determination:** In order for a program to award a diploma, each adult diploma student must:
 - a. Achieve the full complement of credits (or competency set) required by the sponsoring school district; **and**
 - b. Pass the Minnesota graduation tests required of all students, using the same criteria for passing. Minnesota has already vetted state's tests with a determination regarding equivalency. So a district may check this list or make its own determination if another state's test(s) is/are not already on the list. This could be made using the state's K-12 reciprocity standards found on the Minnesota Assessments Portal Web Site (see the link in the "For More Information" section).
 - i. Please note that a testing waiver may be obtained from the Minnesota Department of Education for adult diploma students who were born before 1982.
3. **Accommodations:** Adult diploma program providers must offer reasonable accommodations for access, instructional delivery, and testing for enrollees in adult diploma programs who qualify for such accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 or under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Information on these laws may be found at the [U. S. Department of Education's Disabilities Policy Page](http://www.ed.gov/policy/rights/guid/ocr/disability.html) (<http://www.ed.gov/policy/rights/guid/ocr/disability.html>).

Details on Student Eligibility Requirements

A student may not be enrolled in the adult diploma program unless they attain a 6.0 or above on a TABE reading test or a score of 236 or above on the CASAS. This criterion ensures that the student is academically ready for credit-level high school courses and has a reasonable chance to complete a rigorous high school program. If students were allowed to enter an adult diploma program and they lacked basic reading or English competence (below the 6.0 grade level), there is a high likelihood that a typical, credit-earning diploma program would be too difficult for them and it would take them an unreasonable amount of time to acquire their high school diploma.

For adults falling below the student eligibility requirement: This policy is not intended to limit the options for adults who are seeking their high school diploma. If an adult does not yet attain a score needed for eligibility, he/she can attend a lower-level, non-credit ABE class until he/she meets the eligibility criteria.

Enrolling a lower-functioning student into an adult diploma program may give the student a false hope that they will attain a diploma in a short amount of time, or in the same amount of time as a higher-functioning student – this approach would be misleading and unethical.

Details on Competence Equivalency Requirement

High School Equivalency Credit Work: It is expected that ABE programs that offer diploma classes will ensure that the credits being earned by the adult diploma student are rigorous high school level credits. ABE students in a credit program should not be awarded credits for studies that are for academic work below the high school level.

Graduation Assessment: In order to receive a diploma, an ABE adult diploma student must demonstrate competency on the state-required high school graduation examination, according to standards currently in place for the majority of under-21 students who are enrolled in the K-12 system funded through state foundation aid. For example, current K-12 students have procedures that allow students to graduate without passing the MCA Math Assessment; ABE students are allowed to follow the same procedures and still receive a diploma. Note the reciprocity details in the policy statement above and in the “For More Information Section.”

The state ABE office believes that it is in the best interest of the student and the integrity of the ABE diploma program to require the state graduation examination under current policies as proof of competence.

Exceptions Regarding the Graduation Assessments: The only exception (by waiver) to the graduation examination requirement are for students who were born before 1982, since no test was required for students to graduate high school at that time. Additionally, certain instructional and testing accommodations (not test exemptions) are allowable for students with disabilities who qualify under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the American Disability Act of 1990.

ABE as a Transitions Program: ABE programming is viewed by its funders as a program to transition adults into post-secondary education and/or work. In both cases,

the quality of the diploma is critical to the success of the individual. At the post-secondary level, if a student's diploma does not equate with actual high-school level basic skill attainment, the student may not pass a postsecondary entrance exam and would more likely need to take numerous remedial or developmental classes that do not count toward a degree or certificate program. Further, students that take many remedial classes often are using Pell grant funds which consequently expire for that student long before he/she can finish the degree program.

Employers of students who discover after the fact that employees who received diplomas without passing the graduation tests will legitimately question the quality of the ABE delivery system. Employers are not shy about communicating the shortcomings of educational systems to local and state officials – some of whom are officials that make funding decisions for ABE programs.

Regarding Adult ESL Students: While the concept of having an exemption from the graduation test for some K-12 limited English speaking students (with less than three years of US education) is allowable in the under-21 K-12 foundation aid system, a similar exemption is not allowed under this adult diploma policy. The ABE system does not want to be in the position to issue diplomas to students who have only met seat-time credit criteria and cannot demonstrate competency levels equivalent to regular K-12 graduates.

Additional Policy Implementation Details

Policy Transition: An adult diploma program provider may use their own, locally established student eligibility and competence equivalency determination criteria for students who were enrolled in the ABE-funded local adult diploma program prior to the effective date of this policy, January 31, 2006.

Contracted Services and Downstream Providers: Approved ABE providers who contract services to other organizations, such as alternative schools, community based organizations, or charter schools, have the responsibility to ensure that the services delivered by those partners comply with this policy.

Non-Compliance Consequence: If an ABE consortium counts and submits student contact hours to the state ABE office for one or more students that were admitted to the adult diploma program who did not qualify for eligibility as specified by this policy, or if a consortium does not comply with the graduation examination requirement as stated above, all student contact hours for that consortium's adult diploma program may be at risk of non-funding for that fiscal year.

For More Information

This policy, along with other ABE policies and resources, can be found online at the [Minnesota ABE LINCS Law, Policy and Guidance Page](http://www.mnabe.org/program-management/law-policy-guidance) (www.mnabe.org/program-management/law-policy-guidance).

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Information on Minnesota's graduation standards can be found on the [Minnesota Department of Education's Graduation Requirements Page](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/StuSuc/GradReq/index.html) (<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/StuSuc/GradReq/index.html>).

Information on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 or the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) can be found at the [U.S. Department of Education's Disabilities Policy Page](http://www.ed.gov/policy/rights/guid/ocr/disability.html) (www.ed.gov/policy/rights/guid/ocr/disability.html).

Information on reciprocity guidelines, including a list of other states' tests approved-for-reciprocity in a chart at the end of the document, can be found on the [Diploma Resources Page of the Minnesota Assessments Portal Web Site](http://www.mnstateassessments.org/diplomaResources.html) (www.mnstateassessments.org/diplomaResources.html).

If you have any questions about the Minnesota Adult Diploma Policy, contact:

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