

Illinois' Ability to Benefit State-Defined Process

The **purpose** of Illinois' Ability to Benefit State-Defined Process is to increase access to federal financial aid for eligible adults without a high school diploma, who with proper support can be as successful as their peers in postsecondary credential and degree completion. Ability to Benefit (ATB), a provision of section 484(d) of the Higher Education Act (HEA), aids in equity of access to Federal Financial Aid for adult learners lacking a high school diploma. The ATB provision allows eligible adult learners who are participating in a career pathway program as amended in Public Law 114-113 under section 484(d)(2) of the HEA at a Title IV eligible institution to have access to financial aid. However, the two currently approved methods of ATB are underutilized due to the challenges they place on students. Thus, an alternative plan is being sought by Illinois as allowed by the U.S. Department of Education to overcome barriers to postsecondary attainment and scale ATB use.

- **A Tool for Postsecondary Attainment:** Expanding access and use of ATB will further contribute to Illinois' Postsecondary Attainment Goal adopted by the P-20 Council¹ established under 105 ILCS 5/22-45 which “strives to increase the proportion of adults in Illinois with high-quality postsecondary degrees and credentials to 60% by the year 2025”.
 - **Student Eligibility Criteria:** Illinois' Process for Ability to Benefit defines eligibility as any adult student (beyond the age of Illinois Compulsory Education) who *does not* meet other ATB eligibility criteria. Students who may make ideal candidates include those who: are enrolled in an Early School Leaver Transition or Alternative high school program; or have successfully completed a Bridge Program within Adult Education.
 - **Requirements:**
 - Not every eligible institution of higher education in the state needs to participate in the Alternative State-Defined Process. However, every institution that plans to utilize and implement the state-defined ATB process *must* be listed within the plan.
 - Each participating institution will provide students with each of the following six student service components.
 1. Orientation regarding the institution's academic standards and requirements and student rights.
 2. Assessment of each student's existing capabilities through means other than a single standardized test.
 3. Tutoring in basic verbal and quantitative skills if appropriate.
 4. Assistance with goal setting and career pathway planning.
 5. Counseling and Academic Advising
 6. Follow-up regarding progress.
 - **Accountability and Success:** ATB enrolled students must have a success rate that is within 95 percent of the success rate of students with high school diplomas (non-ATB students).
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