Assessment refers to the collection of information using specially designed instruments regarding a student's initial skill level and the development of his or her literacy and language skills as a result of instruction. The Federal *NRS Implementation Guidelines* state:

- At intake, an individual learner's educational functioning level is determined within the functioning level descriptors, using a uniform, standardized assessment procedure approved by the state and OVAE. The assessment procedure must include standardized scoring protocols.
- To determine gain, the learner should be assessed again at least once after a standard instructional period, at the end of the class or at the end of the program year, as determined by state policy.

As part of its effort to comply with federal National Reporting System (NRS) guidelines, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) mandates that adult education programs use standardized tests to determine students' initial skill levels, as well as the educational gain they achieve as a result of their participation in a program.

NYSED's assessment policies were developed to provide guidance to local programs while adhering to Federal assessment requirements. All programs funded through NYS Adult Education are required to administer state approved assessments to report results according to NRS guidelines; therefore, programs should use these policies as the sole basis for assessment. However, programs are free to administer additional forms of assessment as they see fit in response to the needs of their students.

The Rationale for Standardized Assessment
Standardized tests are used to:

- Determine the student's skill level at intake. Assessments administered during the student intake process helps determine the instructional setting in which a student will be placed. As a result of the assessment process, the student is placed into an Educational Functioning Level as determined by the Federal guidelines and then referred for appropriate level instruction.
- Determine educational gain; the intake assessment provides the basis for determining educational gain, which is calculated by comparing students' future skill levels to those ascertained during the initial intake.
- Assess educational gain. Students should be tested at regular intervals to determine if their reading, math, or English skills are improving. For Adult Basic Education students, the lower of the two scores (reading or math) will determine the student's placement of educational functioning level. The NRS guidelines mandate that the only way a program can report educational gain is by demonstrating that a student has moved from one NRS level to the next based on his or her standardized assessment scores.
- To guide instruction, NYS requires all programs to employ the diagnostic tools associated with each standardized assessment. These tools determine a student's strengths and skill gaps.

Mandated Tests in New York State
The instrument used to assess educational skill levels should correspond to the instruction a student receives. The NYSED-approved tests for adult education programs in New York State are as follows:

Adult Basic Education Students:
    Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE)
- TABE Reading (complete battery only) forms 9/10
- TABE Math (complete battery only) forms 9/10
- TABE Reading and Math (level L) for levels 1 & 2 (optional)

English as a Second Language Students:
    Basic English Skills Test (BEST)
- BEST Plus 2.0
- BEST Literacy (for students who score above 565 on the BEST Plus 2.0 as pre-test)

Please note the following policies regarding assessment:
- When using the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), programs may administer ONLY the complete battery
- When using TABE Math, programs must administer both sub tests (Computation and Applied) and both scores must be entered into the electronic management information system.
- Administration of the TABE Language and Spelling are not required for NRS purposes, however, agencies may wish to use them for diagnostic purposes.

Educational Functioning Levels
The NRS defines six functioning levels each for ABE and ESL. During the intake process, programs will use the aforementioned standardized tests to place students in one of these levels. Students will be assessed periodically during the course of their participation in a program to determine whether they have acquired enough literacy or English skills to advance to the next NRS level. The percentage of students who complete one level and move on to the next level is an important NRS measure. The NRS levels and associated assessments are summarized below.

Instruction Type – Grade Equivalents – ABE – TABE Testing

ABE Beginning Literacy	0 – 1.9 Grade Equivalent
ABE Beginning Basic Education	2 – 3.9 Grade Equivalent
ABE Intermediate Low	4 – 5.9 Grade Equivalent
ABE Intermediate High	6 – 8.9 Grade Equivalent
ASE Low	9 – 10.9 Grade Equivalent
ASE High	11 – 12.9 Grade Equivalent

Instruction Type – Score Ranges – ESL - BEST Plus

NRS EFLs and BEST Plus Score Ranges	
NRS Educational Functioning Level	**BEST Plus 2.0 Score Range as of JULY 1, 2016**
Beginning ESL Literacy	**88 to 361**
Low Beginning ESL	**362 to 427**
High Beginning ESL	**428 to 452**
Low Intermediate ESL	**453 to 484**
High Intermediate ESL	**485 to 524**
Advanced ESL	**525 to 564**
Exit criteria from NRS	**565 and higher**

Instruction Type – Score Ranges – ESL – BEST Literacy

ESL Beginning Literacy	0 - 20
ESL Beginning	21 - 52
ESL Intermediate Low	53 - 63
ESL Intermediate High	64 - 67
ESL Low Advanced	68 - 75
ESL High Advanced	76 +

Pre- and Post-testing
To monitor progress, students must be tested at regular intervals during the course of their participation in a program.
- The pre-test must be administered before the student completes 12 hours of instruction.
- The skill level ascertained by the pre-test provides the basis for all future evaluations. Student progress and educational gain is determined by comparing future skill levels to those ascertained during the pretest.
- Subsequent tests given during the fiscal year are referred to as post-tests. While students may be administered an unlimited number of post-tests, they may take only one pre-test of any given type. For example, an ABE student is allowed to have only one TABE Reading pre-test score and one TABE Math pre-test score, however, he or she may have several TABE Reading post-test scores, each representing the result from a test administered at a different time during the year, and each indicating the student's skill level at that specific point in time.

Note: Students enrolled in distance education programs must be tested using the same instruments and following the same procedures as all other students. Distance education students must be physically present when taking standardized assessment tests at a designated testing site.

Calculating Educational Gain:
To determine educational gain, a student's earliest and lowest pre-test score will be compared to his or her highest post-test score of the same type. For example, if a student has both a TABE Reading and a TABE Math pre-test score, and the Math score is lower, his or her gain will be determined by comparing the TABE Math pre-test to the highest TABE Math post-test. The following are additional considerations that may affect educational gain calculations:

- A pre-test score that was obtained more than six months prior to the beginning of a fiscal year is considered "stale"; i.e., it is not a valid indicator of the student's initial skill level for that fiscal year.
- For students who have multiple pre- and post-tests, their earliest and lowest pre-test score will be compared to their highest post-test score (post test score must be within the confines of the fiscal year) in order to measure gain.
- A pre-test score used as the basis for educational gain in one fiscal year cannot be used again as a pre-test in any subsequent fiscal year.
- Students whose pre-test places them in the ASE High level (NRS level 6) in both Math and Reading, must obtain a NYS High School Equivalency Diploma or NYS High School Diploma in order to complete that level.
- Students whose pre-test places them in ESL High Advanced (NRS level 6) must obtain the maximum score (or higher) on the BEST Plus in order to complete that level.

Developing an Effective Testing Schedule
Devising an effective testing schedule is critical to program success. Being able to post-test a high percentage of students is important for two reasons. First, post-test scores determine educational gain, which is an important NRS measure. The percentage of students post-tested is also used to measure student retention. NYS sets a performance measure of 70% meaning a minimum of 70% of students must be post tested. A low percentage indicates that a program is unable to retain its students long enough for them to be post-tested. There is no formula or universal testing schedule that can be applied to all adult education programs. Programs are encouraged to customize their testing schedules based on the average contact hours evidenced in each program area. The intensity of a program should also be considered when determining a post-testing schedule. At the very least, a program should post-test after a minimum of 40 contact hours.

When developing a testing schedule, programs should consider the following questions:
• *How long do students stay enrolled in our program?* If a program waits too long to post-test its students, it may measure a lower student retention percentage because some of its students may have left the program before they've had a chance to be post-tested. However, programs should be careful not to test students too close to the beginning of the term nor should they test students too frequently—excessive testing can be discouraging to the student in addition to costly to the program.
• *What is the intensity of our classes?* A class that is more intense—i.e., a class that offers more

frequent and extensive sessions in a given time period—may be more effective in helping its students achieve educational gain than one that meets less frequently for shorter sessions.
Therefore, programs should schedule post-tests accordingly.
The table below lists minimum requirements for post-testing schedules:

Intensity of Program	Post Test Schedule
Six to Nine hours per week	Posttest every 40 - 60 instructional hours
Ten or more hours per week	Posttest every 60 - 80 instructional hours
Volunteer Tutorial Program	Posttest every 30 contact hours

Assessment Guidelines

For assessments to serve as an effective indicator of a student's educational progress, it must be implemented with care and competence. This guide does not provide step-by-step instructions for administering the TABE, BEST Plus, or BEST Literacy. That information can be found in each test's administration manual and at required training sessions scheduled by NYSED and the Regional Adult Education Network (RAEN) in seven geographic regions across the state. The following is a schedule of training necessary for staff charged with administering each of the required assessments:

- TABE – test administrators must complete training and be certified through the RAEN once every **three** years. The training is 6 hours in length
- BEST Plus 2.0 – test administrators must complete training and be certified through RAEN and CAL (Center for Applied Linguistics – publisher of the BEST Plus 2.0) and be re-certified through a BEST Plus Refresher training (also provided through the RAEN) once per fiscal year.

T*est score reliability*. This term refers to the degree to which test scores are free from errors of measurement. NYS has implemented validity tables for all Forms and Levels of the TABE (Addendum A) These tables are used as guides in determining whether a score is valid and will count toward educational gain.

Additional Requirements for NYS:

For TABE Reading and Math, programs must administer a TABE locator. The resulting score on the locator along with other information the program achieves on the student, should be used to determine the level test used to test students. (the exception are those programs using TABE Online). Using a test that does not match a student's skill level will provide unreliable results.

- o At a minimum, all programs must purchase the E(asy), M(oderate), and D(ifficult) levels of the TABE. Each level corresponds to a different skill range. Therefore, using the E level of the TABE would be inappropriate for students at the High ASE level, whereas the D level would yield unreliable results for a student at the lowest literacy level.
- o Programs are expected to provide reliable data for use in program evaluation. The New York State Education Department will publish specific guidelines regarding the range of scores on each of the TABE subtests that are acceptable (refer to Addendum A). Students who test outside of the acceptable range on the TABE subtests must be retested on a higher or lower level as appropriate.
- o Programs are allowed to compare pre-tests and post-test scores using different levels of the TABE as long as the levels represent contiguous skill ranges. For

example, a student may be pre-tested on TABE E(asy) and post-tested on TABE M(oderate).

o Programs must use different forms of an assessment when pre- and post-testing their students. If a program administers the same form, students might remember items from the previous testing session. Therefore, if a TABE 9 is administered as a pre-test, then a TABE 10 must be administered as a post-test.

o Programs may choose to use other tests as part of their comprehensive testing strategy; however, to report results according to NRS guidelines, they are required to administer state-approved tests.

o Standardized instruments must be administered in accordance with the procedures listed in the test administration manual and with NYS policy.

o Programs that offer both reading and math instruction as part of their ABE curriculum must administer both the TABE Reading and the TABE Math. However, programs that are funded to provide only instruction in reading OR funded to provided only instruction in math, may assess students only in the one area in which they are funded to provide instruction. These exceptions must be approved by NYSED prior to implementation.