

NEW ASSESSMENTS TO ADVANCE ADULT LEARNING

What are these new assessments?

Educational Testing Service (ETS) and several Charter states, including the District of Columbia, Maine, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Washington are collaborating on the development of standards-based assessments in the areas of reading and math. The tests are designed for adult learners and linked to current research and theory. These web-delivered assessments will include open-ended tasks that measure and report learners' progress across a broad range of knowledge and skills. Because the assessments are computer-based, many of the administrative burdens associated with scoring, test administration, and record keeping will be eliminated or minimized.

The first three assessments proposed for development in 2006 are:

- **Reads with Understanding** - This test will provide Item Response Theory (IRT) based scores in two critical domains – the ability to read and use information from continuous and non-continuous texts.
- **Reading Components Measure** – This test is for adults experiencing difficulty on the Reads with Understanding scales. Measures of reading components will be administered that will provide information about each test taker's fluency, vocabulary, and word recognition skills.
- **Uses Math to Solve Problems** - This test will provide a single IRT-based score which indicates how well adults can use a variety of math skills to solve everyday problems.

How will these assessments differ from those currently on the market?

The new assessments will:

- be based on current research in the areas of reading and numeracy skills;
- provide diagnostic information which can be used to profile adult learners, inform them of their progress, and guide instructional planning;
- allow measurement of gains at the lowest skill levels;
- map to existing standards-based professional development and curricula;
- use open-ended tasks based on authentic materials selected from adult roles and contexts;
- offer an integrated system which administers, scores, and analyzes responses in real time and which can be used in conjunction with existing state information management systems;
- be linked to the National Adult Literacy Survey and the International Adult Literacy Survey, making it easy for policy makers and program managers to make connections to social and economic benchmarks and to track changes over time; and
 - predict student success in educational and workforce environments.

How can these new assessments be used?

Using enriched score reports, these tests will provide users with detailed information about an individual's strengths and weaknesses in each domain, including a description of a respondent's current skills, skills to strengthen, and skills to build in the future.

With these types of information, these tests can be used to:

- guide placement into appropriate educational and job training programs;
- better focus teaching and learning activities;
- help practitioners know if students are ready to succeed on the GED exam or in a postsecondary job training or educational environment;
- compare results with those obtained in national, and international surveys linking performance in the areas of literacy and numeracy with economic, civic and education behaviors; and,
- show progress for reporting purposes.

What about learners who are not familiar with a computer?

A tutorial that covers basic skills such as how to use a mouse, how to highlight, how to use a keyboard, as well as how to answer test questions will be provided. This tutorial will be available to respondents separate from the test, so respondents can go through it on their own and practice these skills in advance of testing as needed.

Why should your state or institution participate in this effort?

ETS and the Charter states are actively recruiting additional states and institutions for the next phase of development. The benefits of participating in this phase include the opportunity to:

- develop, review, and select tasks to be included in these new measures;
- contribute to the development of diagnostic score reports;
- participate in a standard-setting process that will map these tests to NRS levels;
- pilot these tasks with your adult learners; and
- create a test designed by you with your state's learners', teachers, and administrators' needs in mind.

How can you join in this effort?

We are encouraging additional states and institutions to participate. The next phase begins January 2006. If you are interested and would like more information, please contact Julie Eastland (jeastland@ets.org) or Denyse Leslie (dleslie@ets.org) by email at ETS.