

Memorandum

To: Adult Basic and Literacy Education Directors/Coordinators
From: William Russell, Associate Vice Chancellor, Adult Education and Institutional Collaboration
CC: State ABLE Program Staff, State Leadership Network
Subject: Stackable Certificates
Date: September 21, 2009

The purpose of the Stackable Certificate Initiative is to provide accessible pathways for adults preparing for career-relevant postsecondary education and training. The Stackable Certificate Initiative directly supports the Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents' goal of raising the educational attainment of Ohioans as stated in the *Strategic Plan for Higher Education 2008-2017*.

The Stackable Certificates are a formal way to document student progress. ABLE programs are not required to participate in the Stackable Certificate Initiative, but they are encouraged to do so. FY 2010 is the first year for the formal issuing of the certificates, thus it is considered a pilot year. Revisions will be made in the process based upon what is learned.

The programs that choose to participate this year must adhere to the attached Stackable Guidance.

Below are highlights from the Guidance:

- The Basic Skills Certificate acknowledges that students have demonstrated a mastery of reading, writing, and math competencies through the National Reporting System (NRS) Level 4 – High Intermediate Basic Education, approximately an 8.9 grade level equivalency.
- The Advanced Skills Certificate acknowledges that students have demonstrated a mastery of reading, writing, and math competencies through NRS Level 6 – High Adult Secondary Education, approximately a 12.9 grade level equivalency.
- The Oral Communication Skills Certificate acknowledges that English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students have demonstrated a mastery of listening and speaking competencies through NRS Level 6 – High Advanced ESOL, approximately an 8.9 grade level equivalency.

- **Teachers are expected to teach all of the level benchmarks to document level completion for the Basic, Advanced, and Oral Communication Skills Certificates.** Documentation is maintained in the student portfolio. All of the competencies from the standards and benchmarks could not be included on the back side of the certificates, only key ones were included to provide a sample of what a student at this level needs to know and be able to do.
- For the state to look at alignments among various tests, ABLE programs are required to use a minimum of **two assessments** when issuing the Basic and Advanced Skills certificates; one assessment must be an NRS approved standardized test. Student performance on that test determines certificate completion. Scale scores from a supplemental assessment such as COMPASS, Accuplacer, or WorkKeys will be used to compare level completion. Programs may administer the supplemental test or acquire the data from a collaborating agency, such as a community college or adult workforce program, if available. The test must have been administered within the last 90 days to be valid. All test information is to be entered into ABLELink. The purposes of collecting data on two assessments is (1) to determine if accurate cut scores are in place for issuing certificates and (2) to have shared test data among the University System of Ohio educational programs (ABLE, adult workforce education, and community colleges) so that students will have a seamless pathway for advancing their education.
- Only one assessment, the Best Plus, may be used for issuing the Oral Communication Skills Certificate.

Stackable Certificate resources can be accessed on the ABLE website at <http://uso.edu/network/workforce/able/> under the Stackable Certificates section. Please contact your State ABLE Staff, if you have any questions. Thank you.

Ohio

Ted Strickland, Governor
Eric D. Fingerhut, Chancellor

Board of Regents

University System of Ohio

Adult Basic and Literacy Education
Guidance for Issuing Stackable Certificates

September 2009

Introduction

“The future of jobs growth in Ohio is in investing in our regional strengths and in making sure we have the most educated, highly skilled workforce possible.” – Governor Ted Strickland

To assist Ohio in meeting this goal, Ohio has implemented the Ohio Skills Bank Initiative. This initiative strategically positions the state’s collection of adult education, training, and workforce assets to build pathways for Ohioans. However, the pathways must provide a way to address the needs of the adult learners. To do this, it is necessary to include an avenue for those adults who are not ready to advance directly to postsecondary education and training. This is the goal of Ohio’s “**Stackable Certificates**” Initiative.

Stackable Certificates provide the academic foundation for the work of the Ohio Skills Bank Initiative and facilitate systems integration, particularly for the introduction of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) into the University System of Ohio. The certificates are grounded in an adult learning system that aligns academic content standards and assessments with institutions’ programs and services that are responsive to both employer needs and the career advancement requirements of workers.

Stackable Certificates are based on competencies and experiences as opposed to “seat time.” Students may enter and exit the system as their individual abilities and circumstances warrant. To earn a certificate, students must achieve **all** competencies required for the certificate. Each milestone achieved by students adds to their career advancement and earning potential. Even more significant, career advancement and earning potential awaits individuals who build their academic and technical skills through the addition of college-level Stackable Certificates.

Stackable Certificates provide:

- **Students** - a clear and accessible path to advance their education so that students can build on their success one certificate at a time.
- **Educators** – a framework for teaching competencies that align with the Ohio ABLE Standards
- **Employers** - documentation of a student’s academic skills

How Certificates Work

Because all of the Reading, Writing, and Math competencies from the ABE/ASE standards and benchmarks could not be included on the Basic and Advanced Skills Certificates, only key ones were included - enough to give a sample of what a student at this level knows and can do. **Teachers are expected to teach all of the level benchmarks to document level completion for the Basic and Advanced Certificates.** Documentation is maintained in the student's portfolio. The certificates are an enhancement to the standards-based ABE Portfolio System. For more information about the Portfolio System and its classroom applications, please refer to the *Portfolio Connections* document on the ABE web site: <http://uso.edu/network/workforce/able/>

When the authorized ABE agency representative signs a skills certificate, he/she is acknowledging that the student has demonstrated a mastery of the Reading, Writing, and Math competencies at that level, either 8.9 grade level equivalency for the Basic Skills Certificate or 12.9 grade level equivalency for the Advanced Skills Certificate. The Oral Communication Skills Certificate for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students acknowledges that the student has demonstrated mastery of listening and speaking skills through an 8.9 grade level equivalency. All certificates are endorsed by the Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents (OBR) and the ABE program. Verifying that the student demonstrated mastery of the skills, through both standardized tests and performance criteria, will be critical before issuing a certificate (see the charts in the following sections for requirements). As with any testing situation, proper test administration and scoring is essential to ensure accurate, consistent results.

Standardized testing is the preferred method to demonstrate mastery of a skill. Some competencies, especially writing skills, cannot be measured by the National Reporting System (NRS) approved tests. In these cases, the program needs to use performance, or alternative, assessment(s) to measure achievement of the competencies. Some examples of alternative assessments include (1) a rubric that identifies the criteria and level upon which a competency is evaluated, (2) teacher judgment based on documented observation and (3) portfolio that includes samples of student work over time to track skill development. For example, the basic skills writing competency of "*demonstrate the ability to publish text using technology*" cannot be measured using TABE, CASAS, or WorkKeys. This competency would be measured by an alternative assessment method such as teacher observation of student performance.

In order for the state to look at alignments among various tests, it is important that during this pilot year of the Stackable Certificate Initiative, ABE programs use a minimum of two assessments; one assessment must be an NRS approved standardized test. Student performance on that test determines certificate completion. Scale scores from a supplemental assessment such as COMPASS, Accuplacer, or WorkKeys will be used to compare level completion. Programs may administer the supplemental test or acquire the data from a collaborating agency, such as a community college or adult workforce program, if available. The test must have been administered within the last 90 days to be valid.

For example, the state will be collecting data to determine correlations between TABE and WorkKeys, WorkKeys and COMPASS, GED test results and COMPASS, etc. It is important that the programs accurately administer and report test data. All test information is to be entered into ABLELink.

The purposes for collecting data on two assessments are (1) to determine if accurate cut scores are in place for issuing the certificates and (2) to have shared test data among the University System of Ohio educational programs (ABLE, adult workforce education, and community colleges) so that students will have a seamless pathway for advancing their education.

The Basic Skills Certificate

The competencies on the Basic Skills Certificate are ABE Reading, Math, and Writing benchmarks for High Intermediate Basic Education (Level 4). Completion of this level equates to an 8.9 grade level equivalency. Following are ways this subset of competencies may be assessed:

Reading Competency	TABE	CASAS	WorkKeys	Alternative
Apply word learning strategies to determine the meaning of unknown words	✓	✓	✓	
Understand some specialized content vocabulary	✓	✓	✓	✓
Read level-appropriate texts smoothly and accurately				✓
Use comprehension strategies to identify important details that may not be clearly stated	✓	✓	✓	
Analyze elements of the text	✓	✓	✓	
Use print and electronic reference materials to determine and clarify word meaning				✓

Math Competency	TABE	CASAS	WorkKeys	Alternative
Compute fractions, decimals, ratios, proportions, percents	✓	✓	✓	
Use formulas to calculate perimeter, circumference, area and volume for basic figures	✓	✓	✓	
Apply measurement units to geometric figures	✓	✓	✓	
Determine real-life probabilities	✓	✓	✓	
Apply basic theorems of parallel lines, perpendicular lines, angles, congruent figures, and similar figures	✓	✓	✓	
Evaluate and simplify algebraic expressions	✓	✓	✓	
Graph linear equations	✓	✓	✓	
Calculate mean, median, mode, and range	✓	✓	✓	

Writing Competency	TABE	CASAS	WorkKeys	Alternative
Compose multi-paragraph text using revising and editing strategies			✓	✓
Present ideas logically using correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization			✓	✓
Publish text using technology				✓
Present information using a variety of means such as oral, visual, written, or multimedia				✓

The Advanced Skills Certificate

The competencies on the Advanced Skills Certificate are ASE Reading, Math, and Writing benchmarks for High Adult Secondary Education (Level 6). Completion of this level equates to a 12.9 grade level equivalency. Following are ways this subset of competencies may be assessed:

Reading Competency	TABE	CASAS	WorkKeys	Alternative
Establish and adjust reason for reading				✓
Understand the meaning of extensive specialized vocabulary	✓	✓	✓	✓
Analyze and evaluate text	✓	✓	✓	
Apply comprehension strategies across multiple texts	✓	✓	✓	
Use print and electronic specialized reference materials to determine and clarify word meaning				✓

Math Competency	TABE	CASAS	WorkKeys	Alternative
Estimate and compute ratios, percents, proportions, scientific notation, roots and integers exponents	✓	✓	✓	
Apply basic theorems of parallel lines, perpendicular lines, angles, congruent figures, similar figures, and triangles	✓	✓	✓	
Apply Pythagorean theorem	✓	✓	✓	
Use basic trigonometry	✓	✓	✓	
Use theoretical and experimental probability	✓	✓	✓	
Solve equations, inequalities, and quadratic equations	✓	✓	✓	
Construct arithmetic/geometric patterns and sequences	✓	✓	✓	
Calculate mean, median, mode, range, interquartile range, standard deviation, and variance	✓	✓	✓	

Writing Competency	TABE	CASAS	WorkKeys	Alternative
Use sentences of varying lengths and structure which are appropriate to audience, purpose, and context			✓	✓
Use correct grammar and usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling	✓		✓	✓
Edit and revise writing for clarity, organizational structure, and fluency	✓		✓	✓
Cite sources with a focus on academic and workplace writing	✓	✓	✓	✓

Performance Standards

Performance standards, or cutoff scores for awarding the stackable certificates, are consistent with the NRS scale scores for level completion. Refer to the following chart for determining performance standards for the Basic and Advanced Certificates.

Basic Skills Certificate Educational Functioning Level 4 High Intermediate Basic Education 8.9 grade equivalent	Advanced Skills certificate Educational Functioning Level 6 High Adult Secondary Education 12.9 grade equivalent
TABE 9 Survey scale score: Reading: 566 and above Total Math: 565 and above Language: 559 and above	TABE 9 Survey scale score: Reading: 676 and above Total Math: 691 and above Language: 621 and above
TABE 9 Complete Battery scale score Reading: 566 and above Total Math: 565 and above Language: 559 and above	TABE 9 Complete Battery scale score Reading: 713 and above Total Math: 701 and above Language: 685 and above
TABE 10 Survey scale score Reading: 566 and above Total Math: 565 and above Language: 559 and above	TABE 10 Survey scale score Reading: 653 and above Total Math: 668 and above Language: 654 and above
TABE 10 Complete Battery scale score Reading: 566 and above Total Math: 565 and above Language: 559 and above	TABE 10 Complete Battery scale score Reading: 700 and above Total Math: 707 and above Language: 692 and above
CASAS scale score Reading: 235 and above Math: 235 and above	CASAS scale score Reading: 256 and above Math: 256 and above
WorkKeys scale score Reading for Information: 78 and above Writing: 77 and above Applied Mathematics: 77 and above	WorkKeys scale score Reading for Information: 87 and above Writing: 88 and above Applied Mathematics: 87 and above

The Oral Communications Certificate

The Oral Communications Certificate was developed to identify listening and speaking competencies for adult ESOL students. The competencies for this certificate are ESOL Listening and Speaking benchmarks for Advanced ESOL (Level 6). Completion of this level equates approximately to an 8.9 grade level equivalency. All competencies can be measured using the BEST Plus test.

Recording the Stackable Certificate

Certificates will be issued through the provider agency. The installation file for ABLELink2010 includes four files in addition to the ABLELink databases and related ABLELink files: Advanced Skills Certificate template, Basic Skills Certificate template, Oral Communication Skills Certificate template, and Certificate Tracking Sheet. The templates are fill-in PDF files, and the Tracking sheet is in Excel. These files will be extracted to your C:\ABLELink2010 folder.

The “Authorized ABLE Agency Representative” signature on the front of the certificate must either be an authorized ABLE administrator or the project contact on the approved ABLE grant. This is determined at the local level. All procedures for signing, issuing, and reporting the certificates should be consistent at the local agency, and this process needs to be available in writing to all staff. On the front of the certificate is a Certificate Number that will be reported in ABLELink. This tracking number verifies that a student has been issued a certificate; therefore, if the student misplaces or needs another copy of the certificate, he/she may obtain another one through the local program. The tracking numbers are formatted in the following way:

Advanced:	IRN-Fiscal Year-A-consecutive number
Basic:	IRN-Fiscal Year-B-consecutive number
Oral Communication:	IRN-Fiscal Year-E-consecutive number

For example, the first Advanced Certificate awarded in fiscal year 2010 for IRN 123456 would be: 123456-2010-A-1 and the 20th Basic Certificate awarded would be 123456-2010-B-20.

For FY2010, a spreadsheet has been developed to help programs track certificate numbers. In subsequent years, this functionality will be built into ABLELink.

To record the certificate in ABLELink:

- (1) Track the certificate numbers in the Certificate Tracking spreadsheet – there is one tab for Basic Certificates, one tab for Advanced Certificates, and one tab for ESOL Oral Communication Certificates.
 - a.) When using the spreadsheet for the first time, on each spreadsheet tab, enter the program name on the first line and enter the program's

IRN number in cell B4 (which will have the default 123456). This will change all of the certificate numbers from the default IRN to the program's IRN.

b.) When awarding a certificate, enter the ABLELink ID and First/Last Name of the student and the issue date on the next available line of the spreadsheet.

(2) Check "Obtained Stackable Pilot Certificate" on the Exit Form Goals tab in ABLELink and

(3) Enter the corresponding consecutive number from the spreadsheet and date issued for either a Basic, Advanced, or Oral Communication Certificate.

In the example below, only the number 1 would need to be entered into the Advanced Certificate number field in ABLELink (the full certificate number is 12456-A-2010-A-1).

Certificate number	ABLELink ID	First Name	Last Name	Issue date
123456-2010-A-1	19	John	Smith	1/11/2009

In the above example, John Smith completed the competencies for an Advanced Certificate (A) on January 11, 2009. He has an ABLELink ID of 19 and is the first person (1) for receiving the certificate in the program.

Key

A = Advanced Skills Certificate

B = Basic Skills Certificate

E = ESOL Oral Communication Skills Certificate

To create and print a Stackable Certificate:

(1) Go to your c:\ABLELink2010 folder

(2) Double-click the Certificate template you need to complete

(3) Acrobat will open the file and pop up a dialog box noting that you can't save the file with data in it, click OK

(4) There are 6 highlighted form fields in each certificate, be sure to complete all fields before printing. The fields are:

a.) **Student Name** (under "This certifies that") - enter the student's legal name. This field will hold 35 characters including spaces. If you have a student whose name and spaces require more than 35 characters, please contact your State ABLE Consultant or OLRC Tech Support to request a template which will hold more characters.

- b.) **Authorized ABLÉ Agency Representative** – enter the name of the person authorized to issue Stackable Certificates
- c.) **Authorized Agency** – enter the name of the authorized agency (generally the fiscal agent for the ABLÉ grant)
- d.) **Date of issue** – the date that the certificate was issued. The format can be entered as 1/1/2009, 1-1-2009, or 1.1.2009 and the template will convert it to the more formal January 1, 2009 automatically.
- e.) **Certificate Number** – the *entire* certificate number (not just the last digit) shown in Column A on the Certificate Tracking Sheet. Examples for FY2010 are:
 - i. Advanced: 123456-2010-A-10
 - ii. Basic: 123456-2010-B-8
 - iii. ESOL: 123456-2010-E-12
- f.) **Phone number** (field after “...Local Program Site at...” on the second page) – enter the agency’s phone number (without extensions). Phone numbers can be entered as: 3305551212, 330-555-1212, or 330.555.1212, and will be automatically converted to the format: (330) 555-1212.

Awarding the Stackable Certificates

Since the goal of the certificates is to provide students a clear and accessible path to advance their education, certificates should be awarded as soon as possible after achieving the level. For example, if a student places above the Basic Skills Certificate level initially, but not high enough to obtain an Advanced Skills Certificate, programs should issue the Basic Skills Certificate immediately in order to recognize the student’s “first step” in the pathway to higher education. The student can build upon that certificate to the “next step,” the Advanced Skills Certificate, in his/her advancement in the University System of Ohio.

If the student places at or above the skill level for the Advanced Skills Certificate initially, he/she probably does not qualify for ABLÉ services. The ABLÉ program can award the Advanced Skills Certificate and encourage the student to attend postsecondary education.