

# CLASP

Policy solutions that work for low-income people



CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES  
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# Ability to Benefit

## Implementing Eligible Career Pathway Programs for Federal Financial Aid

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# About CLASP

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) advocates for policies that improve low-income families' economic security.

- CLASP's Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success (CPES) seeks postsecondary and workforce policy reforms that create pathways to education and employment.

# Today's Discussion

- What is 'ability to benefit' (ATB) and why does it matter?
- How it can be used in coordination with efforts to implement AEBG, Strong Workforce, WIOA?
- Adult education program examples that fit ATB criteria
- Issues hampering development of Eligible Career Pathways programs that use ATB
- Discussion on current work, possibilities, challenges

# What is an ATB Program?

- An eligible career pathway program (another name for ATB) allows students to concurrently enroll in connected adult education and federal Title IV eligible postsecondary programs
- To be eligible, the student must demonstrate “Ability to Benefit,” hence ATB.

# Ability to Benefit (ATB)

## Eligibility criteria:

- Individuals lacking high school diploma or equivalency (HSD/E)
- Who have passed an exam or completed 6 credits (or 225 credit hours) *toward a credential* or followed a state defined process
- And are enrolled in an 'eligible career pathway program'

# Ability to Benefit (ATB)

## What Benefits do People Receive?

- Federal student aid (like Pell Grants) to pay for postsecondary coursework (not basic skills, remedial work) and living expenses
- Allows individuals to enroll in postsecondary and gain employment without a requirement to first obtain a high school diploma or the equivalent (GED, et al.)

# Ability to Benefit (ATB)

## Financial aid time savings benefits

- With Federal student aid, students can work less and likely be more successful in their education
- Pell Grant = \$1,480 per semester if half-time
  - = 134 hours at \$11.00 per hour
  - = 8 hours per week over a 16 week semester

# Federal Financial Aid Requirements

To be eligible for federal student financial aid a student must meet all of the following:

- Have a high school diploma or GED or equivalent or be enrolled in an eligible career pathway program (Ability to Benefit, ATB)
- Be enrolled in an eligible degree or certificate program
- Have a valid Social Security number
- Be a U.S. Citizen or Eligible Non-citizen
- Not be in *default* on a *federal student loan* or owe a refund on a federal *grant*



# “How do low-income students afford those first six college credits?”

- Many institutions that have implemented ATB find completing 6 credits is more attainable for students than passing an exam.
- Some use foundation grants or have redirected institutional funds; this is California – we have the Board of Governors Fee Waiver - BOG!

# What are the approved tests?

- To prove Ability to Benefit (ATB) a student can complete at least six credits (or 225 clock hours) counting toward a degree or certificate, or
- Score high enough on one of the following tests:
  - Test: Wonderlic Basic Skills Test (WBST)
  - Test: Spanish Wonderlic Basic Skills Test (Spanish WBST)
  - Test: Combined English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA)
  - Test: ACCUPLACER (Reading Comprehension, Sentence Skills and Arithmetic)
- Tests last updated in GEN DCL 15-09 released June, 2015. Refer to that announcement for further information.

<https://ifap.ed.gov/dpcletters/GEN1509.html>

# Eligible Career Pathway (HEA & WIOA)

... a combination of **rigorous and high quality education, training, and other services** that –

- A. **Aligns with the skill needs of industries** in the economy of the state or regional economy involved;
- B. Prepares an individual to be successful in any of a **full range of secondary or postsecondary education options**, including apprenticeship;
- C. Includes **counseling** to support an individual in achieving the individual's **education and career goals**;

# Eligible Career Pathway (HEA & WIOA)

- C. Includes, as appropriate, **education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation** or occupation cluster;
- D. **Organizes education, training, and other services** to meet the particular needs of an individual in a manner that **accelerates** the educational and career advancement of the individual to the extent

# Eligible Career Pathway (HEA & WIOA)

- F. Enables an individual to attain a **secondary school diploma** or its recognized equivalent, and at least 1 **recognized postsecondary credential**; and
- G. Helps an individual **enter or advance** within a specific occupation or occupational cluster.

# Program for ATB Must Have...

The 7 elements of a career pathway just discussed

- 2 of the 7 focus on adult education & Title IV-eligible postsecondary working together
  - Adult education is defined the same as WIOA
  - Must be designed so students can participate in both components, but the student is NOT required to be concurrently enrolled in adult education and postsecondary.

# Approving a Career Pathway Program

- Institutions make their own determination whether a career pathway program is ATB-eligible and must *document* the basis for this determination.



- Nothing in the law says ED has to “approve or endorse” career pathway programs in order for them to offer ATB.

# Hang-ups with the Financial Aid Office

- ATB might require working across-the-institution in ways not done previously, and/or connecting with a population not previously served.
- Solution: strengthen collaboration between adult education, workforce, and financial aid



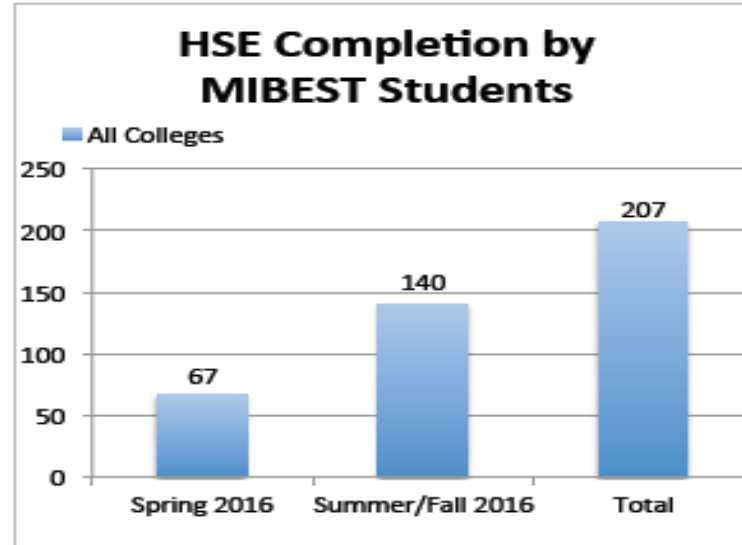
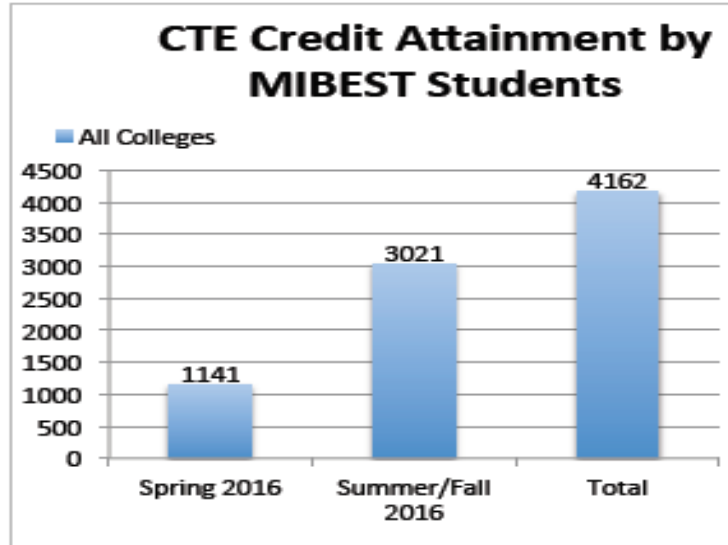
# “I don’t know what a career pathway is”

- **Review** the HEA **definition** of a Career Pathway and build understanding.
- Engage with the **workforce development division of your college**, who may already be implementing or considering career pathways (or similarly structured programs).
- Your **local workforce development board** may also be working with other institutions in the area to develop career pathways and have insight on local needs.
- Consult the U.S. Department of Labor’s (DOL) **Career Pathway toolkit** which helps state partners develop career pathways. The toolkit describes the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) definition of career pathways, which is identical to the definition used by the HEA.

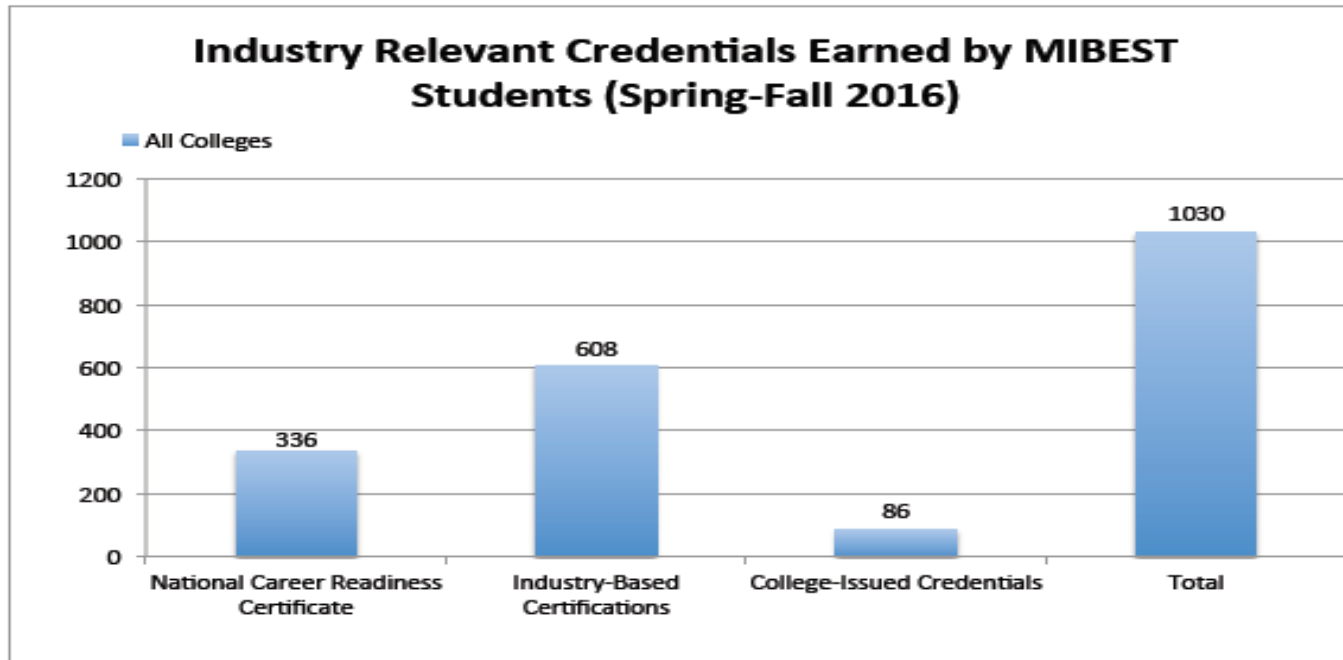
# “Is this worthwhile?”

- More than 1 in 10 adults age 25 or older lack a high school diploma or equivalent. These individuals are an untapped pipeline of students that can help institutions increase their program or institutional enrollment.
- 11.6 million jobs have been created since the Great Recession: 99% of them went to workers with at least some college, whereas >1% have gone to individuals with a high school diploma or less.
- Consult your institution’s adult education division or contact local adult educators in your area to better understand the educational needs that exist for this population.
- Find an institutional or state leader-champion who understands the importance of giving people an opportunity to earn a postsecondary credential through ATB, as well as the opportunity it provides the institution.

# MI-BEST: Student Success



# MI-BEST: Student Success



# Resources

- CLASP's ATB page:  
<http://www.clasp.org/issues/postsecondary/pages/resources-on-ability-to-benefit>
- ED Guidance GEN-16-09
- CLASP IET Paper: <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/WIOA-IET-Model-Programs.pdf>
- Alliance for Quality Career Pathways:  
<http://www.clasp.org/careerpathways>
- Career Pathways Toolkit from U.S. Department of Labor:  
[https://www.doleta.gov/usworkforce/pdf/career\\_pathways\\_toolkit.pdf](https://www.doleta.gov/usworkforce/pdf/career_pathways_toolkit.pdf)
- OCTAE homepage:  
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/index.html>

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