With the February 2021 renewal of the information collection for the National Reporting System (NRS) for adult education, there are now additional ways to measure and report measurable skill gains (MSG) in Table 4 of the NRS. Beginning with program year 2020 data submitted in October 2021, states may report additional MSG types for participants enrolled in workplace literacy education and integrated education and training (IET) programs. This NRS tip sheet provides an overview of the MSG primary indicator of performance and reporting requirements, focusing on MSG types 3, 4 and 5, and includes examples of the validation and documentation required.

MSG Definition

The Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) Program Memorandum (PM) 17-2 defines MSG as the percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains—defined as documented academic, technical, occupational, or other forms of progress—toward such a credential or employment.

Five Types of Measurable Skill Gains

Depending on the type of education or training program, documented progress is defined as one of the following:

1. Documented achievement of at least one educational functioning level of a participant who is receiving instruction below the postsecondary education level;

Programs may measure educational functioning level gain in one of three ways:

   a. States may compare the participant's initial educational functioning level, as measured by a pretest, with the participant's educational functioning level, as measured by a post-test;

   b. States that offer adult high school programs that lead to a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent may measure and report educational gain through the awarding of credits or Carnegie units; or

   c. States may report an educational functioning level gain for participants who exit a program below the postsecondary level and enroll in postsecondary education and training during the program year. A program below the postsecondary level applies to participants enrolled in a basic education program.

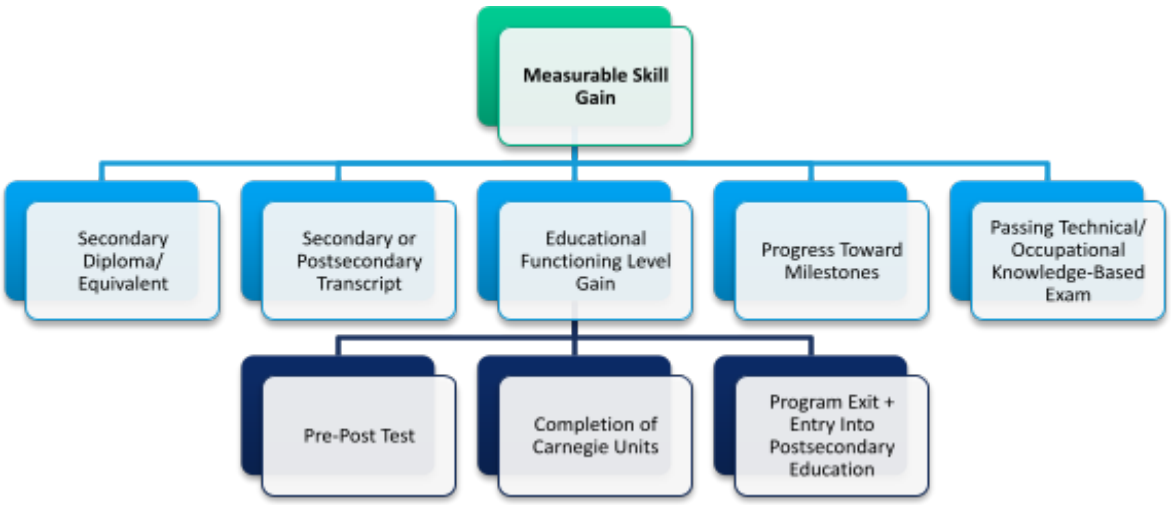
2. Documented attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent;
3. Secondary or postsecondary transcript or report card for sufficient credit hours that shows a participant is meeting the state unit's academic standards;

4. Satisfactory or better progress report, toward established milestones, such as completion of on-the-job training or completion of 1 year of an apprenticeship program or similar milestones, from an employer or training provider who is providing training; or
5. Successfully passing an exam that is required for a particular occupation or progress in attaining technical or occupational skills, as evidenced by trade-related benchmarks such as knowledge-based exams.

Figure 1 illustrates these five types of MSG.

States may report MSG types 1 and 2 for all adult education participants and any of the five MSG types for participants in workplace literacy and IET programs.

Figure 1. Five Types of Measurable Skill Gains under WIOA



Definition of Workplace Literacy and IET Programs

Workplace adult education and literacy activities include adult education and literacy activities offered by an eligible provider in collaboration with an employer or employee organization at a workplace or an off-site location designed to improve the productivity of the workforce.

IET is a service approach that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement.

States may report all MSG types only for participants in workplace literacy or IET programs.

Validating and Documenting MSG

States must follow the requirements for data validation described in OCTAE PM 19-1 for reporting MSG. To illustrate the outcomes that may be reported under MSG types 3, 4, and 5 in the context of a workplace literacy and IET program, the next section focuses on clarifying key terms and requirements

for these types of MSG to help determine whether the specific gain meets the validation requirements for NRS reporting.

MSG Type 3: Secondary or Postsecondary Transcript or Report Card

The transcript type of MSG is applicable only to postsecondary transcripts for participants enrolled in an IET program provided in partnership, most often with a postsecondary institution. The postsecondary institution would be providing the training component of the IET, and a transcript may be provided as documentation that the participant is meeting the state's academic standards for progress in the training course. A full-time participant must also complete a minimum of 12 credit hours per semester; part-time participants must complete a total of at least 12 credit hours over the course of two consecutive semesters during the program year.

Example That Counts

Carlos participated in an IET program at a local community college for certified, licensed automotive technicians. The IET program uses a co-teaching model that integrated basic skills and workplace preparation into the college's technical course for automotive technicians. The program is a 30-hour semester program and includes basic reading and math skills related to the occupation; it is taught by instructors from the adult education program. Upon completion of the course, the adult education program obtained Carlos's transcript, which shows satisfactory completion of the postsecondary course.

Why it Counts

The college maintains a postsecondary transcript for the automotive technician course. The transcript shows that Carlos attended a sufficient number of hours and demonstrated satisfactory progress.

MSG Type 4: Progress Toward Milestones

A progress report documenting sufficient or better progress toward an established milestone is typically well suited for workplace education programs. Workplace education and literacy services are provided in collaboration with an employer or employee organization at a workplace or an off-site location designed to improve the productivity of the workforce. Services tend to be customized to the needs of the employer. Progress milestones for employees should be set in collaboration with an employer when establishing the workplace literacy program. The completion of established milestones can be documented through progress reports from the employer. Progress reports must document development of substantive skills that the participant has gained. PM 17-2 also allows documentation of a participant's increase in pay resulting from newly acquired skills or increased performance.

Example That Counts

The director of the adult education program at a local community college gave a presentation highlighting the programs and services available to the community during a lunch-and-learn meeting sponsored by the local chamber of commerce. Shortly afterward, the adult education program director was contacted by the manager of the local chicken processing plant, who had attended the lunch-and-learn presentation. The plant manager informed the director that her plant is suffering from

high employee turnover and that she would like to improve retention by offering employees opportunities to continue their education, thus leading to career advancement opportunities with higher wages. The plant manager specifically wants to improve the English proficiency of the plant's production line employees.

The adult education program began to offer customized English language acquisition courses and training at the chicken processing plant after collaborating with plant management to develop flexible, adaptable milestones that are measurable and that reflect the job requirements for career advancement opportunities in the plant. Established milestones include the following: (a) improved English proficiency using job-related vocabulary and oral communication, (b) improved written and oral communication skills during in-service and/or required plant trainings, and (c) the ability to read all plant safety protocols and communicate their meaning to plant management in the event of an emergency.

Plant management and adult education instructors developed a progress reporting tool to exchange information about each employee's progress toward the established milestones. The plant manager and the adult education program director agreed to exchange progress reports. The adult education program uses the progress reports to determine whether each student is making sufficient progress toward the established milestones.

Why it Counts

The employer and adult education provider established three progress milestones that identified specific participant outcomes before the start of the program. They established a routine method for tracking progress toward the milestones through progress reports.

MSG Type 5: Passage of an Exam or Progress in Attaining Skills

Because this type of MSG measures demonstrated occupational progress, it is appropriate only for participants in IET programs, given that IET is the only service under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act that allows occupational training. Participants may demonstrate an MSG under this type of gain in one of two ways: passing an exam or demonstrating progress in gaining technical or occupational skills, as evidenced by trade-related benchmarks. The critical requirements for this type of MSG are that the exam must be required for a specific occupation and that the skills must reflect industry benchmarks. The exam can be an employer-required, knowledge-based exam or other test necessary to obtain a credential. Satisfactory attainment of an element on an industry or occupational competency-based assessment can be used to demonstrate progress.

It is critical to emphasize that PM 17-2 and PM 19-1 require that exams and technical or occupational skills used for validation of MSG type 5 must be directly tied to *trade-related benchmarks* and *specific occupations*. Exams must measure skills for a *specific* industry or occupation that are necessary to obtain employment or to advance within the industry or occupation, and that have been developed or endorsed by employers or industry associations.

However, general skills related to an industry or occupation, even if such general skills are broadly required to qualify for entry-level employment or advancement in employment, are *not recognized* for

determining MSG type 5. For example, work readiness exams or certificates are not acceptable for documenting this type of MSG gain because they are not recognized industrywide and do not document the measurable technical or industry or occupational skills necessary to gain employment or advance within a specific occupation.

Example That Counts

A heating and air conditioning service company wants to open a new facility and needs certified technicians. The state requires the certifications for licensure. The employer cannot find sufficiently qualified applicants and contacts a local adult education program to develop a training program. The employer and program staff develop an IET program that includes contextual literacy skills instruction, workplace preparation, and job training. The training encompasses three phases, and after each phase, participants take an assessment that measures their skills mastery in each phase. Program participants are certified for the job when they successfully pass the final assessment.

Why it Counts

The IET program trains participants for a specific occupation, which requires successfully passing a multipart exam to achieve certification. Passing each part of the exam demonstrates progress toward completion, and passing the final exam certifies participants for the job.

Summary Guidance

The ability to use all types of MSG in workplace literacy and IET programs enables programs to demonstrate participant progress in additional ways. Given the variety of occupations and the structure of workplace literacy and IET programs, the validation requirements for MSG types 3, 4, and 5 offer states flexibility in establishing the most appropriate outcomes for demonstrating participant progress in these programs. When considering what may be an allowable outcome, consider the following general principles:

1. States may report MSG Types 3, 4, and 5 only for participants in workplace literacy and IET programs.
    - As with other types of MSG, states report only the most recent MSG outcome per period of participation.
2. Occupational exams, milestones, and courses must be directly required for a specific occupation or must be required to achieve a state-recognized credential. Employer-specific testing, for example, such as interest inventories, hiring assessments, general vocational evaluation assessments, and aptitude tests are not acceptable.
3. The types of MSG are usually applicable to the type of program in which the participant is enrolled. For example, postsecondary transcripts and occupational exams are likely to be most relevant for participants in IET programs, while progress milestones are likely to be most relevant for participants in workplace literacy programs. Table 1 summarizes most likely uses for each type of MSG and valid documentation to show MSG. However, other types of MSG may apply in a specific circumstance and are not limited by program type.

Table 1: Program Application and Documentation Needed for MSG Types 3, 4, and 5

MSG Type and Name	Most Likely Use	Valid Documentation
Type 3: Transcript or report card	Participants enrolled in IET programs that co-enroll participants in postsecondary occupational courses	Transcript showing satisfactory progress in applicable courses, according to state academic standards and with sufficient credit hours
Type 4: Progress toward milestones	Participants in workplace literacy	A satisfactory or better progress report toward established milestones, set in partnership with an employer or documentation that the participant had an increase in pay resulting from newly acquired skills or improved performance
Type 5: Passing an occupational exam or progress toward attaining occupational skills identified by trade-related benchmarks for specific occupations	Participants enrolled in IET	Passing an exam required for a specific occupation or demonstrating progress in attaining technical or occupational skills reflecting trade-related benchmarks.

Resources

These resources provide further information on definitions and validation of all MSG types for adult education participants and NRS state reporting requirements.

NRS Technical Assistance Guide.
https://nrsweb.org/policy-data/nrs-ta-guide

OCTAE Program Memorandum 17-2. Joint performance accountability guidance for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I, Title II, Title III, and Title IV core programs:
https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/octae-program-memo-17-2.pdf

OCTAE Program Memorandum 19-1. Guidelines that states must use in developing procedures for ensuring the data submitted to the departments are valid and reliable:
https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/octae-program-memo-19-1.pdf

NRS Webinar on Table Changes, including changes to reporting MSG for workplace literacy and IET participants (April 2021):
https://nrsweb.org/training-ta/nrs-table-changes

NRSWeb State Discussion Forum on reporting MSG for workplace literacy and IET participants:
https://courses.nrsweb.org/course/view.php?id=59 (login required)