

Chapter 1

NRS Manual Overview






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Using the New York State NRS Manual

In an effort to support local programs, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) has designed this manual to describe federal National Reporting System (NRS) guidelines, identify New York State policy, and recommend best practice for local programs. This manual does not replace the federal *NRS Implementation Guidelines*.

Throughout the manual, points of interest have been highlighted with the following bullets to distinguish levels of information:

-  ALIES-related information
-  A definition
-  Federal policy or a direct passage from the NRS guidelines
-  State policy as set by the New York State Education Department
-  Program level recommendations or best practice

A Brief History of the NRS

- The 1993 Government Performance and Review Act (GPRA) established accountability for federal programs, including adult education programs.
- In 1994 and 1995, state directors of adult education asked the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) to develop a data system to collect national outcome data on adult education students.
- In March 1996, DAEL devoted a meeting to developing a framework for program accountability.
- As a result of the 1996 DAEL meeting, the NRS formally commenced in October 1997.
- In August 1998, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act within the Workforce Investment Act (WIA - P.L. 105-220) became law, changing the voluntary nature of the NRS. The new act established accountability requirements, resulting in the expansion of the NRS to create the measures and methods needed to conform to the WIA requirements.
- On July 1, 2000, New York State implemented the NRS in all adult education programs.

The Importance of the NRS

The NRS ensures accountability for federally funded adult education programs. Developed with the help of adult educators, the NRS specifies the reporting requirements for adult education programs. The information collected through the NRS assists in assessing program effectiveness and improving the adult education delivery system. At the same time, it enables federally funded adult education programs to meet the accountability requirements as defined by Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). The U.S. Department of Education uses information from the NRS to meet accountability requirements and to justify federal investment in adult education programs.

Because it allows for routine evaluation, the NRS is important to states, programs, teachers, and students. Administrators and teachers can track changes or trends in program performance and make adjustments as needed, thus enabling educational systems to produce better-educated adult students.

The NRS includes the following:

- Student measures that assess the impact of instruction on adult education
- Methodologies for collecting the measures
- Reporting forms and procedures
- Training and technical assistance activities to assist states in collecting and monitoring the data

Implications for Funding

To promote program effectiveness, WIA requires all states to negotiate performance standards with the U.S. Department of Education on the core indicators of student success and ties state incentive grants to these standards. As one condition of local funding, the WIA requires states to evaluate local program performance on these same core indicators. Each state may choose other indicators to evaluate programs and make funding decisions.

States can either establish separate standards for local programs or apply the same standard to all programs. States can apply different standards for assessing program effectiveness when features, such as program structure, curriculum, or student body makeup, considerably affect a program's outcomes. Programs that fail to meet state standards will have an opportunity to implement corrective action before their funding is affected. (See Chapter 7.)

An Overview of NRS Measures

Adult education programs administered by New York State vary widely in their services delivered, goals, and objectives, as well as in the resources they have available to collect and report data. The NRS has developed outcome measures that are broad enough to accommodate these differences, yet sufficiently standardized to allow for the establishment of a uniform, national database.

The NRS measures are broken into two categories:

- ✘ Core measures, which are required by all states
- ✓ Secondary measures, which are required by New York State

There are three types of core measures:

- Outcome measures, which include educational gain, entered employment, retained or improved employment, receipt of secondary school diploma or GED, and placement in postsecondary education or training.
- Descriptive measures, which include student demographics, reasons for attending, and status.
- Participation measures, which include contact hours and enrollment in instructional programs for special populations, such as family literacy.

Although descriptive and participation measures may be taken into consideration when establishing performance targets, only outcome measures will be used to evaluate agency performance.

The secondary measures involve employment, community, and family:

- Employment refers to reduction in receipt of public assistance (which applies only to those students receiving public assistance upon entry).
- Community refers to citizenship skill attainment, voting behavior, and general involvement in community activities.
- Family refers to involvement in children's education and literacy-related activities.

Educational Functioning Levels

- The educational functioning levels define and describe educational gain, which is a core outcome measure.
- Educational gain measures literacy skills acquired as a direct result of instruction. This measure applies to all students enrolled in a program.
- To determine this measure, local programs must assess students during intake to establish educational functioning levels. There are six levels for both adult basic/secondary education (ABE/ASE) and English as a Second Language (ESL).
- Each level describes a set of skills and competencies held by a student at that level in reading, writing, numeracy, speaking, listening, functional, and workplace areas.
- Using these descriptors as a guideline, programs must determine each student's appropriate initial level based on the results of his or her standardized assessment.
- After a predetermined amount of instruction or suggested time period (to be determined by each state), programs must conduct follow-up assessments for each student and use the functioning level descriptors to determine whether the student has advanced one or more levels.
 - ✘ The NRS federal guidelines provide a detailed breakdown of the educational levels. (See the *NRS Implementation Guidelines* at www.nrsweb.org for details.)

Federal, State, and Local Responsibilities

Federal Level

- By developing the framework and measures for the NRS, the U.S. Department of Education has established a national database for adult education.
- The federal government will continue to assist states through training and technical assistance by developing materials for state staff and by overseeing state data collection efforts to ensure quality control.
- The U.S. Department of Education will maintain the national database of measures.

State Level

- To ensure that measures of educational gain are meaningful, New York State has established a standardized assessment system based on specific state-approved tests.
- New York State has identified secondary measures on which programs must collect and report data.
- To ensure that local programs collect measures and methods in accordance with NRS guidelines, New York State has made provisions for staff development and technical assistance. To ensure that data is valid, the state has recommended quality control procedures. (See Chapter 7.)
- New York State has implemented the Adult Literacy Information and Evaluation System (ALIES) to include data from all programs.

Program Level

- To ensure comparability across programs, each local program is responsible for using valid, uniform procedures to collect measures.
- Programs must maintain data in an electronic individual student record system.
- Programs must use standardized methods as identified by NYSED for assessing students during intake and after instruction.
- Programs must conduct a follow-up survey on each student that indicated a follow up goal at intake.