



LOCAL INSTRUCTION NUMBER 23-10, Change 3

To: Catawba Workforce Development Area

Subject: WIOA Youth Program Guidance

Issuance Date: October 20, 2025

Effective Date: July 1, 2025

Updated October 17, 2025

Purpose: To provide guidance on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth Program elements, eligibility, and expenditure requirements. **This guidance replaces Local Instruction 23-10 change 2.**

Change 2 Revision: National Reporting System (NRS) approved assessments are used to determine basic skills deficiency. The US Department of Education (ED) annually publishes in the Federal Register, and posts on the internet, a list of the names of tests and the education functioning levels (EFLs) the tests are suitable to measure, as required by 34 CFR § 462.12©(2). Staff must verify that their desired assessment to measure the youth's basic skill level is currently authorized. An updated list of ED approved assessments can be found at <https://nrsweborg/policy-data/wioa-and-nrs-resources>.

References:

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Public Law 113-128 § 129
- 20 CFR Part 681
- Training and Employment Guidance Letters (TEGLs) 23-14; 8-15; 21-16; 23-19, Changes 1 and 2; 9-22
- Training and Employment Notice (TEN) 22-19

Background: WIOA Title I outlines a broad youth vision that supports an integrated service delivery system and provides a framework through which states and Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs) can leverage other federal, state, local, and philanthropic resources to support out-of-school youth (OSY) and in-school youth (ISY). To be eligible for the WIOA youth program, individuals must meet one or more of the eligibility barriers listed in WIOA § 129(a)(1)(B)(iii) for OSY and WIOA § 129(a)(1)(C)(iv) for ISY. The WIOA youth program includes requirements and exceptions for low-income status for ISY and OSY.

Policy: Specific requirements regarding the WIOA youth program elements, eligibility, and expenditure requirements are outlined below.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS

WIOA requires that local WIOA youth programs make each of the 14 program elements available to youth participants. The following program elements can be made available through specific service providers or partner programs as well as through leveraged resources:

- Tutoring, study skills training, instruction and evidence-based dropout prevention and recovery strategies that lead to completion of the requirements for a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent (including a recognized certificate of attendance or similar document for individuals with disabilities) or for a recognized post-secondary credential
- Alternative secondary school services, or dropout recovery services, as appropriate
- Paid and unpaid work experiences that have academic and occupational education as a component of the work experience, which may include the following types of work experience:
 - Summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities available throughout the year
 - Pre-apprenticeship programs
 - Internships and job shadowing, and
 - On-the-job training (OJT) opportunities
 - Virtual work experiences are allowable. TEGl 9-22 provides in more detail the definition of virtual work experiences.
- Occupational skill training, which includes priority consideration for training programs that lead to recognized post-secondary credentials that align with demand industry sectors or occupations in the LWDA involved if the LWDB determines that the programs meet the quality criteria described in WIOA § 123

NOTE: ISY cannot use youth program-funded Individual Training Accounts (ITAs). However, ISY may co-enroll in the WIOA adult program, and may receive training services through an ITA funded by the adult program, if the young adult's individual needs, knowledge, skills, and interests align with the adult program.

- Education offered concurrently with and, in the same context as, workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster
- Leadership development opportunities, including community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social and civic behaviors
- Supportive services
- Adult mentoring for a duration of at least twelve months that may occur both during and after program participation
- Follow-up services for not less than twelve months after the completion of participation
- Comprehensive guidance and counseling, which may include drug and alcohol abuse counseling, mental health counseling, and referral to partner programs, as appropriate to the needs of the individual youth

NOTE: When referring participants to necessary counseling that cannot be provided by the local youth program or its service providers, the providers must coordinate with the organization to which it refers to ensure continuity of service in the WIOA Youth program.

- Financial literacy education
- Entrepreneurial skills training
- Services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the LWDA, such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration services.

NOTE: These services are reportable under “Services that provide labor market information,” and should **not** be reported as “Comprehensive guidance and counseling.”

- Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to post-secondary education and training

ELIGIBILITY

WIOA defines eligibility criteria for OSY and ISY.

An OSY is an individual who is not younger than age 17 nor older than 24 at the time of enrollment (because age eligibility is based on age at enrollment, participants may continue to receive services beyond the age of 24 once they are enrolled in the program), is not attending any school, and is one or more of the following:

- School Dropout
- Youth who are within the age of compulsory school attendance (defined as under the age of 17 in South Carolina), but have not attended school for at least the most recent complete school year calendar quarter (based on how a local school district defines its school year quarters)
- Low-income individual who is a recipient of a secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent, and is either basic skills deficient or an English language learner
- Offender
- Homeless individual (as defined in the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 or the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act), a runaway, an individual who is in foster care or who has aged out of the foster care system, a child eligible for assistance under the Social Security Act § 477, or an individual who is in an out-of-home placement
- Individual who is pregnant or parenting
- Individuals with a disability
- Low-income individual who requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment

An ISY is an individual who is not younger than age 14 or older than 21 at the time of enrollment, is attending school, is low-income, and is one or more of the following:

- Basic skills deficient
- English language learner
- Offender
- Homeless individual (as defined in the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 or the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act), a runaway, an individual who is in foster care or who has aged out of the foster care system, a child eligible for assistance under the Social Security Act § 477, or an individual who is in an out-of-home placement
- Individual who is pregnant or parenting
- Individuals with a disability
- Individual who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment

“School” refers to both secondary and post-secondary school. However, the US Department of Labor (DOL) does not consider providers of Adult Education under Title II of WIOA, YouthBuild programs, the Job Corps programs, high school equivalency programs, and dropout reengagement programs to be schools for the purposes of determining school status for eligibility. Youth attending these programs are considered to be OSY for WIOA youth program eligibility with one exception. Youth attending high school equivalency (HSE) programs, including those considered to be dropout re-engagement programs, funded by the K-12 school system that are classified by the school system as still enrolled in school are considered ISY.

Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) must establish definitions and eligibility requirements in written policies when using the **“requires additional assistance”** criteria for OSY, as well as ISY. Policies should be reasonable, quantifiable, and based on evidence that the specific characteristic of the youth identified in the policy objectively requires additional assistance.

LOW-INCOME REQUIREMENTS

The low-income requirement for the WIOA youth program is satisfied when an individual meets any one of the following criteria:

- Receives or has received in the past six months (or family receives or has received in the past six months) assistance from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program, the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Program, or other state or local income-based public assistance
- Receives an income (or family receives an income) that, in relation to family size, is not in excess of the most recent family income guidelines (See most recent chrome-[Updated Federal Income Guidelines](#) state instruction and attachments.)
- Is a homeless individual as defined in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Act or the Violence Against Women Act of 1994
- Receives, or is eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (based on the individual student’s eligibility not school-wide eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch)
- Is a foster child on behalf of whom state or local government payments are made
- Is an individual with a disability whose own income meets the income requirement above, but who is a member of a family whose income does not meet this requirement

- Lives in a high poverty area

HIGH POVERTY AREA. A youth who lives in a high poverty area is automatically considered to be a low-income individual. A high poverty area is a census tract, county, or other area listed in 20 CFR § 681.260 that has a poverty rate of at least twenty-five percent as set every five years using the American Community Survey 5-Year data. Instructions for determining high-poverty areas can be found on Workforce GPS:

[Directions for Determining High Poverty Areas for the WIOA Youth Program](#)

FIVE PERCENT LOW-INCOME EXCEPTION. Five percent of LWDA participants, who ordinarily would need to be low-income, do not need to meet the low-income provision. This includes all ISY and those OSY with a high school diploma, or its recognized equivalent who are either basic skills deficient or an English language learner, or those OSY who require additional assistance, as their only barriers. In each LWDA, the five percent is calculated based on the percentage of **newly enrolled youth each program year** who would ordinarily be required to meet the low-income criteria.

For example, a LWDA served 200 youth and 100 of those youth were OSY who were not required to meet the low-income criteria, 50 were OSY who were required to meet the low-income criteria, and 50 were ISY. In this example, the 50 OSY required to be low income and the 50 ISY are the only youth factored into the 5% low-income exception calculation. **(Not currently supported by local WDB).**

FIVE PERCENT IN-SCHOOL YOUTH LIMITATION

Not more than five percent of ISY may be individuals whose only barrier is “requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment.” In each LWDA, this limitation is applied to all ISY **newly enrolled each program year**.

BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT

Basic Skills Deficient means the youth has English reading, writing, or computing skills at or below the 8th grade level on a generally accepted standardized test. A youth who scores a Department of Education’s National Reporting System (NRS) level 4 or below on the TABE 11&12 is considered Basic Skills Deficient (BSD). A youth may also be BSD if the youth is unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual’s family, or in society. If LWDA chooses to use this second definition of basic skills deficient, expanding beyond the sole use of TABE, the LWDB must issue a policy defining how a youth is basic skills deficient under this definition.

In assessing basic skills, local programs must use assessment instruments that are valid and appropriate for the target population, and must provide reasonable accommodation in the assessment process, if necessary, for individuals with disabilities. For purposes of basic skills assessment, local programs are not required to use an NRS-approved assessment, nor are they required to determine an individual’s grade level equivalent or educational functioning level (EFL), although use of these tools is permitted. Rather, local programs may use other formalized testing instruments designed to measure skills-related gains.

In addition to being valid and reliable, any formalized testing used must be appropriate, fair, cost effective, well-matched to the test administrator's qualifications, and easy to administer and interpret results. Alternatively, skills related gains may also be determined through less formal alternative assessment techniques such as observation, folder reviews, or interviews. Observation, folder reviews, and interviews may be particularly appropriate for youth with disabilities given accessibility issues related to formalized instruments. If LWDA chooses to use less formal alternative assessment techniques to define basic skills deficiency, the LWDB policy defining basic skills deficient must include clear guidelines for when it is appropriate to use these alternative assessment techniques. Local programs may use previous basic skills assessment results if such previous assessments have been conducted within the past six months. Assessments older than six months may be used to determine that a participant is basic skills deficient if the following criteria are met:

- The LWDB has developed a policy allowing this.
- The circumstances make it appropriate to use an older assessment.

NOTE: In many circumstances, current assessments may give more accurate results for use in developing the participant's Individual Service Strategy (ISS).

- Conducting a current assessment is a deterrent to enrollment.

In contrast to the initial basic skills assessment described above, **if measuring EFL gains** after program enrollment under the measurable skill gains indicator, local programs must use a NRS approved assessment for both the EFL pre-test and post-test to determine an individual's EFL. ED annually publishes in the Federal Register, and posts on the internet, a list of the names of tests, and the EFLs the tests are suitable to measure, as required by 34CFR § 462.12(C) (2). Staff must verify that their desired assessment to measure the youth's basic skill level is currently authorized. **Note: WIN Ready to Work, nor WorkKeys, are not NRS-approved assessments.**

SELF-ATTESTATION AND DATA VALIDATION

Data validation is a series of internal controls or quality assurance techniques established to verify the accuracy, validity, and reliability of data. The purpose of validation procedures and required performance data are to:

- Verify that the performance data reported by grant recipients are valid, accurate, reliable, and comparable across programs
- Identify anomalies in the data and resolve issues that may cause inaccurate reporting
- Improve program performance accountability through the results of data validation efforts, and
- Outline source documentation required for common data elements.

Self-attestation occurs when a participant states his or her status for a particular data element, such as pregnant or parenting youth, and then signs and dates a form acknowledging this status. The key elements for self-attestation are: (a) the participant identifying his or her status for permitted elements, and (b) signing and dating a form attesting to this self-identification. An electronic/digital signature can include an email, text, or unique online survey response, so long as the response is participant generated and traceable to the participant.

Where self-attestation is listed as an option for source documentation in TEGl 23-19, Change 2, Attachment II, the lack of source documentation must not delay or prevent enrollment and receipt of services in a program. Self-attestation is an acceptable source of documentation for almost all program elements related to WIOA Youth eligibility. Basic skills deficient/Low Levels of Literacy at Program Entry is the only data element related to WIOA Youth eligibility that does not permit the use of self-attestation for documentation. While other documentation sources are preferred when practical, self-attestation is an important option for youth with barriers to obtaining eligibility and reporting documents and ensures such youth can equitably access services.

While the collection of source documentation for data validation will often take place at the same time as the determination of an individual's program eligibility, these actions serve different purposes. Though the lack of source documentation cannot delay or prevent enrollment and receipt of services in a program, **staff should assist the individual, as a service to the participant, in acquiring documentation needed for employment (birth certificates, ID cards, etc.) as lack of appropriate documentation could cause barriers to employment and/or advancement on a career path.** LWDAs are encouraged to use WIOA funding to assist participants in acquiring documentation needed for employment when unavailable through other means.

The WIOA Source Documentation attachment to local Instruction 23-05, Change 1, lists source documentation for data elements by WIOA Title I program. See also SI 20-09, *Performance Data Validation for DOL Workforce Programs*, for further information on source documentation and data validation.

EXPENDITURES

EXPENDITURES ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH

A minimum of 75% of WIOA youth funds is required to be spent on OSY unless a waiver of this requirement has been granted by DOL, though LWDAs may spend up to 100% of their youth funds on OSY if they choose. Administrative costs are not included in the 75% OSY expenditure calculation. The OSY expenditure rate is tracked for a specific program year allocation. While compliance with the requirement is evaluated upon full expenditure of allocated funds. The Grantee will review expenditures on OSY at least quarterly to ensure the requirement is met at the end of the grant period.

OSY EXPENDITURE REQUIREMENT WAIVER. South Carolina has requested and been granted a waiver of the 75% OSY expenditure requirement, reducing our minimum requirement to 50% of Youth funds expended on OSY for Program Years 2022 and 2023. Allocating less funds to OSY will allow WIOA Youth programs to provide increased outreach to ISY with barriers to employment. These increased services include:

- Expanding access to employment and training services for ISY in rural communities
- Increasing engagement and expanding assistance to ISY with barriers to education and employment

- Increasing collaboration with partner programs to assist ISY in foster care, vocational rehabilitation programs, and the juvenile justice system
- Increasing use of work-based learning programs for career exploration and employment preparation

For additional information on this waiver, see the [OSY Expenditure Waiver Memo](#) (May 31, 2023).

WORK-BASED ACTIVITIES

Under WIOA, a minimum of 25% of LWDA youth funds must be spent on work-based activities. Administrative costs are not included in the 25% requirement. Additionally, the 25% expenditure requirement is not applied separately for ISY and OSY; it is applied to the youth program expenditures as a whole. Like the 75% OSY expenditure requirement, administrative costs are not subject to the 25% minimum work-based learning expenditure requirement. This is to say, the work-based learning expenditure rate is calculated after subtracting funds spent on administrative costs. While compliance with the requirement is evaluated upon full expenditure of allocated funds, the Grantee will review expenditures on work-based activities at least quarterly to ensure the requirement is met at the end of the grant period.

Paid and unpaid work-based activities that have both academic and occupational education as a component may include the following categories as discussed in 20 CFR § 681.600(c) and TEGL 9-22 and TEGL 23-14:

- Summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year
- Registered apprenticeship programs
- Pre-apprenticeship programs
- Internships and job shadowing
- On-the-job training (OJT) opportunities

These categories of work experience are not all inclusive of the types of activities that could count for work experience. Under 20 CFR § 681.600(a), an activity meets the definition of work experience if the activity is a planned, structured learning experience that takes place in a workplace for a limited period. For example, volunteer or community service work may be a type of work experience. While community service falls under the program element of leadership development, if it meets the definition of work experience, it can count toward the work experience expenditure requirement.

NOTE: Virtual work experience is allowable under the WIOA Youth program. A “workplace” includes virtual workplaces where remote work experiences are possible and practical. TEGL 9-22 provides in more detail the definition of virtual work experience.

Program expenditures on work-based activities include:

- Wages or stipends paid for participation in work experience

- Staff costs for the development and management of work-based learning opportunities, including staff time used for the following:
 - Identifying and developing potential work experience opportunities
 - Working with employers to identify and develop a work experience
 - Working with employers to ensure successful work experience
 - Evaluating the work experience
- Supportive services that enable WIOA participants to participate in work experiences
- Participant and employer work experience orientation sessions
- Classroom training or the required academic education component directly related to work experience
- Incentive payment directly tied to the completion of work experience

Food

Food at a reasonable cost may be provided to youth program participants as a supportive service. Expenditures on food should be limited to the following principles:

- Food assists or enables the participant to take part in allowable youth activities to reach their employment and training goals.
- Expenditures are limited to reasonable and necessary purchases.
- Food provision is coordinated with other community, state, or federal services that provide food for low-income individuals when possible.

Local areas should have written policies and procedures in place for purchasing and distributing food to ensure consistent treatment of these types of expenses, in accordance with Uniform Guidance at 2 CFR § 200.403.

DIGITAL LITERACY AND ACCESS

WIOA funds can be used to pay for devices and broadband internet service that will allow a participant to create or maintain a wireless connection for distance learning, search for jobs, and engage in other employment and training services where such services are already allowable. LWDA's must have written policies and procedures in place that outline the steps/factors it will consider in approving a cost and ensure that costs are reasonable, necessary, allowable, and allocable to the WIOA grant. In addition, DOL encourages local WIOA Youth programs to inform participants about the Affordable Connectivity Program that helps families access affordable broadband

Action: Please ensure that all appropriate staff receive and understand this policy guidance.

Inquiries: Questions may be directed to Amanda Baker at abaker@catawbacog.org



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