



Ohio Aspire SFY2026 Student Eligibility Policy

July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026

Introduction

As defined by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, “adult education” includes services or instruction below the postsecondary level for students who (A) have attained sixteen years of age; (B) are not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under state law; and (C) (i) lack sufficient mastery of basic educational skills to enable them to function effectively in society; (ii) do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and have not achieved an equivalent level of education; or (iii) are unable to speak, read, or write the English language.

In Ohio, the goals of local Aspire programs are to:

1. Assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency;
 - (A) Assist adults who are parents or family members to obtain the education and skills that –
 - (B) are necessary to becoming full partners in the educational development of their children, and;
 - (C) lead to sustainable improvements in the economic opportunities for their family;
2. Assist adults in attaining a secondary school diploma and in the transition to postsecondary education and training.
3. Assist immigrants and other individuals who are English language learners in improving their –
 - (A) reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension skills in English; and
 - (B) math skills; and
 - (C) acquiring an understanding of the American System of Government, individual freedom, and the responsibilities of citizenship.

Need for the Student Eligibility Policy

The Ohio Department of Higher Education is responsible for ensuring that federal and state Aspire funds are distributed in accordance with state and federal law. Inquiries from local Aspire program providers regarding eligibility of sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen year old individuals, those who are home-schooled or court-ordered, as well as those with other special circumstances, have supported the need to continue review and update the Aspire Eligibility Policy in relation to current state and federal law.

The following information is offered to assist local program staff and others in determining the eligibility of individuals in the Ohio Department of Higher Education-funded Aspire programs.

General Requirements

As defined by the WIOA, “adult education” includes services or instruction below the postsecondary level for individuals who:

- (A) Have attained sixteen years of age;
- (B) Are not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under state law; and
- (C) Are citizens or have entered our country through legal means*
- (D) Who –
 - (i) is basic skills deficient;
 - (ii) does not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and has not achieved an equivalent level of education; or
 - (iii) is an English language learner

Services and instruction will be provided to individuals who:

- (A) Can communicate a goal for participation;
- (B) Make progress toward an academic goal as evidenced by progress on standardized test scores; and
- (C) Can maintain behavior that is not disruptive to the class environment.

***On July 10, 2025, the U.S. Department of Education issued a revised interpretation and clarification of “Federal Public Benefits” as defined in Title IV of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) as it relates to WIOA Title II (Adult Basic Education) and Carl D. Perkins. This interpretation states that both programs are subject to the citizenship and immigration verification requirements of PRWORA.**

[Link to Federal Register](#) | [Related US ED Memo](#) | [Related US ED Press Release](#)

To be eligible for Aspire services in Ohio, including Distance Education, students must live or work in Ohio. Many eligible adult learners in Ohio would benefit from Aspire services. Local programs need to follow policy to ensure that they are serving students most in need who are meeting the mission of the local Aspire programs.

All Aspire students cannot partake in our services if they spend a majority of the calendar year out of state/country. All students must live or work in Ohio to be eligible for Aspire services.

All participants must complete the required forms and orientation and adhere to the Aspire eligibility policy. The only people who may attend class are students who have met the eligibility requirements and for whom the program has documentation, including student identification and emergency contacts. Aspire programs cannot be responsible for individuals who are not enrolled in their programs, including children, drivers, spouses, guests, or friends. Exclusions to this include: those providing physical or educational assistance to students with disabilities, and legally required attendants. Parents/guardians of minor children may not be present in class once the required paperwork for their child has been completed.

Academic Requirements

If a student scores at the highest scale score for the National Reporting System (NRS) level 6 completion in all subject areas at placement, the participant is not eligible for Aspire services. This requirement includes students with a high school diploma or its equivalent. **Students without a high school diploma or equivalent are eligible for services.**

Aspire coursework, including ESOL, cannot include the academic subjects for which the student is enrolled in college or technical programs/courses and paying tuition.

Sixteen, Seventeen, and Eighteen-year-old Requirements

Services and instruction may be provided to individuals sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen years who meet the General Requirements above. Additionally, to satisfy General Requirement (B), the student must:

- (A) Provide documentation of official withdrawal from school on official school letterhead signed by the superintendent or designee, or
- (B) Provide written evidence of a high school diploma.

Documentation of official withdrawal or a copy of the diploma must be verified prior to enrollment and must be kept on file with other required student records (i.e., standardized assessment and other test records). **Please contact an ODHE program manager to verify if a potential participant is exempt from any of the above requirements.**

Limited English Proficient Students - English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Services Requirements

Pursuant to federal law, services and instruction may not be provided to Limited English Proficient students who are in the United States with F-1 visas. These individuals may not enroll in publicly funded adult education programs. Thus, during orientation and intake, individuals who disclose that they have this type of visa should be informed that they are ineligible for Aspire services.

English Language learners cannot partake in our services if they are spending a majority of the calendar year out of state.

~~WIOA does not require that individuals demonstrate that they are legal residents of the United States as a condition of enrollment in Aspire programs. Thus, it is not necessary or appropriate for individuals to present passports, visas, work permits or social security cards to prove legal status in order to enroll. Individuals from other countries need only to satisfy the same requirements as others with the exception listed in this section. *** Please see below memo and press release from the U.S. Department of Education regarding legal status and WIOA Title II funds.~~

[Link to Federal Register](#) | [Related US ED Memo](#) | [Related US ED Press Release](#)

In cases where waiting lists exist, priority will be given to persons who intend to remain permanently in the United States or its territories.

Eligibility of Adults with Disabilities

The Ohio Aspire Program requires that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities and services without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability or sexual orientation. It does not discriminate in admission to its programs, services or activities; in access to them; in treatment of individuals with disabilities; or in any aspect of operations.

In order to provide the best possible services, Aspire programs identify individual differences through appropriate screenings and assessment, then find and implement the appropriate adaptations, accommodations, and instructional strategies to help students progress. Definitions and policies are contained in the Accessibility Policy and the eGuide.

Additional Clarifications

Are home-schooled students eligible for Aspire?

Students who are educated at home are ineligible for Aspire programs. Under Ohio law, homeschooled students are merely excused from school attendance, for the remainder of the school year at most, and the excuse becomes void and subject to revocation if proper home instruction ceases to occur. Further, the WIOA states that it should not be construed to affect home schools, or to compel a parent engaged in home schooling to participate in an English literacy program, family literacy services, or adult education. School districts should not withdraw students as “home-schooled” so that they can enroll in Aspire programs. Home-schooled students are only those who are truly instructed at home.

Are court-ordered sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen-year-olds eligible for Aspire services?

Court-ordered sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen-year-olds (*except under Exemption 2*) are only eligible for Aspire services if they meet eligibility requirements. Being court-ordered does not supersede federal requirements for Aspire eligibility.

Do community schools/charter schools have the same status as other local educational agencies? Yes. References to “school” or “school district” in the policy apply to charter schools.

Exemptions

1. Amish students aged 16, 17, 18 are legally exempt from compulsory education beyond the 8th grade. To attend Aspire they must provide two items: A letter from the bishop or other religious leader confirming completion of the 8th grade (a certificate of completion of the 8th grade will also suffice); and a letter of permission from the potential participant’s legal guardian giving consent to participate in Aspire.
2. Eighteen-year-olds in an adult correctional facility are considered exempt from compulsory education.

When in doubt about student eligibility, please contact the Aspire State office at aspiregrants@highered.ohio.gov

To learn more about High School Equivalence (HSE) Test Eligibility, please reach out to the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. The Aspire state office at the Ohio Department of Higher Education does not oversee the Adult Diploma program, the 22+ program, nor HSE testing options.

<https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Testing/Ohio-Options-for-Adult-Diploma/HSE>

Please refer to the co-enrollment FAQ to learn more about co-enrollment scenarios and policies specific to students leveraging the Aspire program and the ADP and 22+ Ohio Options Programs.