



DEPARTMENT OF
CAREER SERVICES

Workforce Issuance

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Policy Information

To: MassHire Workforce Board Chairs
MassHire Workforce Board Directors
MassHire Career Center Directors
MassHire Fiscal Officers
MDCS Operations Managers

cc: WIOA State Partners

From: Beth Goguen, Director
MassHire Department of Career Services

Date: February 5, 2026

Subject: **Youth Eligibility: High Poverty Area**

Purpose: To notify MassHire Workforce Boards, MassHire Career Center Operators and other local workforce partners of the updated process to determine whether a youth lives in a high poverty area for low-income eligibility purposes for participation in programs funded by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Policy Revisions Include:

- Updated instructions to determine if a youth resides in a high poverty area.
- Clarification that a high poverty area is defined as a census tract with a poverty rate of at least 25 percent.

Background: In accordance with WIOA [20 CFR §681.200](#) and [20 CFR §681.260](#), 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, a set of contiguous Census Tracts, Indian Reservation, tribal land, or Native Alaskan Village or county that has a poverty rate of at least 25 percent

as set every 5 years using American Community Survey 5-Year data.

All In-School Youth and certain Out-of-School Youth who: (a) have a secondary diploma or it's recognized equivalent and are either basic skills deficient or an English language learner; or (b) require additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment must be low-income to be eligible for WIOA program services. In-School Youth and the aforementioned Out-of-School Youth who live in a high poverty area are considered low-income.

Policy: American Community Survey (ACS) census tract data may be used to determine whether youth reside in a high poverty area by comparing the poverty rate of the census tract in which they live to the poverty rate threshold of 25%. Whereas at least 25% of the residents are economically disadvantaged.

The attached instructions are to be used in the determination of whether youth live in a high poverty area for the purpose of satisfying the WIOA low-income eligibility criterion for youth program eligibility.

Source Documentation:

Please maintain a screenshot showing the people in poverty percentage rate for the youth's census tract. A printed or electronic copy must be documented in the participant's file for monitoring purposes.

Action

Required: MassHire Workforce Boards must follow the process above to determine and document the use of the high poverty area rule in establishing WIOA Title I Youth eligibility. MassHire Workforce Boards must include the high poverty area criterion and outline how it is determined and documented in their local policies and procedures.

Please ensure that all appropriate staff, managers, and partners are knowledgeable of the content of this policy.

Effective: Immediately

Inquiries: Please email all questions to PolicyQA@mass.gov. Also, indicate Issuance number and description.

Attachment: Instructions: Determining if a Youth Resides in a High Poverty Area

References: [20 CFR §681.200](#): *Who is Eligible for WIOA Youth Services?*
[20 CFR §681.260](#): *How does the Department define “high poverty area” for the purposes of the special regulation for low-income youth in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act?*