

OHIO ADULT BASIC AND LITERACY EDUCATION DISTANCE EDUCATION POLICY

Setting the State Context

Background: Six years ago the State ABE office recognized the need to begin to explore instructional delivery options beyond those offered through traditional classroom instruction. At that time, distance instruction was primarily viewed as a way to help students to overcome barriers to traditional classroom education such as conflicting work schedules, family responsibilities and transportation problems. Distance instruction was believed to have the potential to attract new students deterred by these barriers from pursuing traditional classroom instruction. In addition, it was thought that it would have a role in helping existing students who needed to temporarily suspend their classroom education stay connected to their studies.

Distance instruction does help students transcend barriers. But as more tech savvy students enter ABE programs and as curriculum used at a distance becomes more sophisticated, Ohio ABE has recognized that viewing distance instruction only as a backup to classroom instruction is shortsighted. Distance instruction also has the potential to offer instruction that better meets the learning styles and learning pace of some students and to provide a richer educational experience than instruction delivered within the traditional ABE classroom.

From the onset of its involvement with Project IDEAL, the national adult distance education initiative in 2002, the Ohio ABE State Office theorized that distance education was not for every student. It was thought, and information from Project IDEAL's efforts seemed to verify, that higher functioning students would be more likely to succeed as distance students. Thus, Ohio ABE focused primarily on GED preparation when it began exploring distance instruction. Over the subsequent years, ESOL students and ABE students at the pre GED level have also been included in distance instruction as it became apparent to the Ohio ABE programs involved in Ohio's distance initiative that some of these students desired to work at a distance and could succeed in doing so.

Data about Distance Learning: Data for distance students were collected through Project IDEAL from 2002 to 2006 and also inputted into ABLELink, our ABE data reporting system. Currently, data are only reported in the ABLELink system. Over the years, distance students' performance has improved in comparison with performance for all students. In FY 2007, a total of 578 students were enrolled in distance instruction, 90 students were served as ESOL students and 488 as ABE students. The table on the following page summarizes outcomes for those students.

OUTCOMES for OHIO ABLE DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS—FY 2007				
Students	No. Enrolled	No. Completing a Level	% Completing a Level	No. Earning GED
ABE	480	247	51%	122
ESOL	98	79	81%	NA
	578	326	56%	

Overview of Distance Learning in the State. As mentioned in the Background section, Ohio ABLE began pursuing distance instruction by joining Project IDEAL in 2002. At that time, seven Ohio ABLE programs were selected for inclusion in Ohio’s distance pilot project. Initially these projects focused only on GED preparation and they served only their own students.

In 2006, Ohio adopted a Hub-Referring program model that enabled five of the initial seven distance pilots to not only provide distance instruction to their own students, but also to instruct students from other “referring” ABLE programs. This modification was made to make the distance option available to more students in the state. Under this model, a “referred” student remains the student of the referring program. That program provides initial orientation, pre and posttesting, and any needed supplemental, face-to-face instruction. Experience from the early years of the distance project indicated that most students involved with distance education also were seeking additional face-to-face assistance. This delivery model allows students who are not located within the geographic service area of the distance Hubs to continue to receive face-to-face instruction in addition to distance education.

A second change in the Ohio ABLE distance program also occurred in 2006. Four programs were funded to offer ESOL instruction at a distance. Currently, three of these programs remain funded, and this year each opted to also serve as Hubs for ESOL instruction.

A third change in the distance program occurred during program year 2008 when Cincinnati Public Schools was added to the distance project to help develop a model for distance delivery in a large urban school system. Cincinnati is only serving its own students at this time. But, the program is also beginning to utilize distance to serve employees at a hospital system in Cincinnati. The program is looking for ways to expand its use of distance and better meet the needs of employee students and their employers.

Currently, several curricula have been approved for use in the Ohio program. For ABE, approved curricula include: SkillsTutor, Aztec, KeyTrain, GED Connection and Contemporary’s Instruction Targeted for TABE Success. For ESOL, English for All (EFA) and Rosetta Stone are approved. Additional adult education curricula that have a mechanism for tracking student engagement time may be approved for future use. Most curricula approved thus far, with the exception of GED Connection and English For All, have such a tracking mechanism. A Teacher Verification model, developed by Project IDEAL, was used to determine how to count student time on the online portion of GED Connection. Time spent on EFA is determined using a mastery model developed by North Carolina and research from California.

General Distance Learning Requirements

Defining Distance Learners

A student will be reported as a distance learner for federal reporting purposes if he/she received 50% or more of his/her instruction at a distance (proxy contact hours). This determination will be made at the end of the program year. The student's hours in both distance and classroom programs will be included in the Ohio ABLE Annual Performance Report. Students who receive less than 50% of their instruction via distance will not be reported as distance students for federal reporting purposes.

Proxy Hours Accepted

Instructional hours earned via online computer instruction that occurs at a site other than in the ABLE classroom (e.g., a student's home, a library and a learning center) will be considered for proxy hours.

Acceptable Curricula for Distance Learning

Annually, the Ohio ABLE State Office will publish a matrix that lists the curricula currently approved for use at a distance. A program may recommend to the Ohio ABLE Office curriculum to be added to the matrix. A curriculum will be added if it is deemed a suitable curriculum for adult learners and it incorporates a method for tracking student engagement time. The GED Connection and EFA curricula options that utilize a Teacher Verification system for determining proxy hours will remain as options for use in Ohio's distance program. But any new curriculum added will need to have a method for tracking student time.

Measuring Contact Hours

The time spent in face-to-face orientation, testing and instruction and the time spent in distance study will be counted toward students' contact hours. Face-to-face and proxy hours will be recorded separately in ABLE Link, the Ohio ABLE data system. This will be done through placement of a student in the system in a distance class and a regular class. This will facilitate the identification of students to be reported as distance students (receiving 50% or more hours of instruction via distance).

Students who have received some distance instruction but not over 50% of their total instructional hours will have both their face-to-face and distance time counted toward contact hours but they will not be designated nor reported as distance learners.

Assessing Distance Learners.

Ohio's Assessment Policy will apply to all ABLE students—distance and non-distance. Hubs that are instruct students from referring programs will have in place procedures for regular

communication with referring programs about the time logged at a distance by students. Referring programs will utilize this information and their own information related to hours for any face-to-face instruction to determine when posttesting needs to occur. All testing will occur at an ABLÉ program in a secure, proctored setting.

Application and Approval Procedures to Operate a Distance Learning Program

Ohio ABLÉ will offer two options for providing distance instruction—as a distance Hub or as a Program Only provider. Consequently, Ohio ABLÉ programs will have two ways to obtain distance instruction for their students—by referring students to a Hub or by offering distance instruction themselves.

Distance Hub Component: Programs desiring to be considered to serve as a Distance Hub must submit an application to offer this grant component that addresses the following items:

- Evidence of experience providing distance instruction to ABLÉ learners for a minimum of three years
- The availability of a teacher(s) who has received training to provide distance instruction through Ohio’s professional development system, or another comparable training source (Project IDEAL, for example)
- A commitment to seek approved training for additional teachers added to the distance instructional staff during the program year
- Evidence that past distance instruction has been effective as evidenced through ABLÉLink outcomes for referred students
- An estimate of the number of students who will be served from there own program and from referring programs
- The existence of an established, approved process for communicating information about distance students to referring programs and for monitoring referring programs’ compliance with reporting requirements
- Use of a distance curriculum approved by the State ABLÉ Office
- Commitment to provide reports requested by the State ABLÉ Office and to attend required meetings of ABLÉ providers of distance instruction
- Intention to meet all Ohio ABLÉ distance competencies for programs and instructors

Hub applicants must obtain signed copies of agreements with referring programs. A Hub must work with a minimum of three referring programs.

Program-Only Distant Component: Programs may apply to offer a Program Only Distance Component by submitting a plan that includes the following information:

- A rationale for why the program wants to pursue the Program Only model for distance instruction
- An estimate of the number of students who will be served at a distance

- A plan for recruiting students
- The curriculum from the Ohio ABLE approved distance curriculum list that will be used
- Any local partnerships that will be involved, e.g., employers, One-Stop, etc.
- The name of the teacher(s) who will provide the distance instruction and the plan for training the teacher(s) in distance instructional delivery prior to beginning the program's distance initiative
- A commitment to adhere policies and practices for reporting student distance and face-to-face hours
- A commitment to attend an annual meeting of programs offering distance instruction (may be held in conjunction with an ABLE Directors' meeting) and to provide information about the program's distance component and/or students as requested by the State ABLE Office.
- Intention to meet all Ohio ABLE distance competencies for programs and instructors

Programs approved to offer a Program Only distance component may count instructional hours offered at a distance toward a student's contact hours. Programs not approved by the State ABLE Office to offer a distance component may offer distance instruction as a supplement to face-to-face instruction, but hours spent by students in distance may not be counted as contact hours.

Funding for Distance Learning

Hubs have been and will continue to receive additional funding to provide the distance instruction component. Initially, no additional funding will be offered for programs approved to offer a Program Only Distance Component. It is possible that this portion of the policy may change if Ohio ABLE adopts a funding formula that incorporates funding for components.

Training Requirements

Current staff members for the Distance Hubs have been trained as a part of their involvement in Project IDEAL. New instructional staff who will be offering distance instruction will need to receive training prior to beginning instruction. All staff will be informed of opportunities for advance training available at conferences, workshops or online. Distance staff will be encouraged to enhance their knowledge through these opportunities. Distance teachers will take part in an online community such as an electronic discussion list or forum, where they can learn from others and help mentor teachers new to distance instruction.

Instructional staff for the Program-Only Distance Component will need to receive initial training as prescribed by the State ABLE Office and be encouraged to pursue additional training to enhance their skills. Directors of programs offering a distance component will be required to attend an annual meeting, possibly in conjunction with an ABLE Directors' meeting, to share experiences and concerns and to learn of any new implementation or reporting requirements from the State ABLE Office.