



Guidelines for Effective Distance Learning in Adult Basic Education

**Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Adult and Community Learning Services**

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I. Introduction

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's *Guidelines for Effective Distance Learning in Adult Basic Education* were developed by the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) unit together with input from Massachusetts' Distance Learning Pilot Projects and Distance Learning Advisory Board, Project IDEAL (Improving Distance Education for Adult Learners), as well as other state and national resources.

In Massachusetts, there are more than 1 million undereducated and limited English proficient adults – far more than our community adult learning centers at their current capacity can serve. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education believes that distance learning (DL) has the potential to not only increase the intensity of educational programming for adults enrolled in classes, but also to reach beyond the classroom to those adults who are unable to attend classes. The opportunity to engage in "anywhere, anytime learning" may provide some adult learners with their best and/or only chance to acquire the strong foundation of academic and English communication skills needed to realize their dreams and aspirations.

Perhaps, unlike college students and professionals who may easily adapt to distance learning, ABE students may not have the full array of skills and abilities required to meaningfully access and benefit from instruction delivered remotely through technology. The challenge before us is to provide services while exploring the extent to which distance learning is effective in supporting the acquisition of language and literacy skills. Through such exploration, we will gain an understanding of whether or not each student possesses the metacognitive and executive function skills essential to guiding her or his own learning. In summary, there are three primary purposes for the Department's adult distance learning grant program:

- 1. To provide instructional services using a blended model of distance learning to an average monthly enrollment of 300 students.**
- 2. To provide services whose design utilizes research developed through a study (Appendix C) conducted by UMass Boston Center for Social Policy.**
- 3. To encourage more adult learning centers to build capacity for distance learning by integrating online curricula, making distance learning available to a wider group of participants.**

The provision of distance learning services that meet the established criteria will be supported through an open and competitive request for proposals (RFP).

Please note the distinction in the guidelines between those components and processes that “must” be present in a program and those components and processes that “should or may” be present in a program.

The guidelines are divided into the following categories:

- **Requirements for Community Adult Learning Center Participation** - defines what the applicants need to have in place or to provide in order to be eligible for the grant. It includes enrollment requirements for DL programs, provides definitions for “direct enrollment” and “dual enrollment” as used in the Massachusetts’ blended instructional model, and defines the minimum active participation.
- **The Instructional Hubs** - defines the requirements and responsibilities for the Instructional Hub grantees.
- **Student Services** - explains the Instructional Hub and participating Community Adult Learning Centers’ (CALC) responsibilities to students and addresses program design, student eligibility, outreach and recruitment, intake, orientation, placement, curricula, instructional materials, educational counseling, retention, countable outcomes (student articulated goals), assessment and follow-up.
- **Staff Development** - focuses on the guidelines that the Hubs and participating CALCs must follow for professional development of staff.

II. Requirements for Community Adult Learning Center Participation

This section defines what the adult learning centers must provide in order to deliver and maintain effective distance learning services under Massachusetts’ **blended instructional model**.

Student Hours

The student participation hours in the DL blended model are captured under proxy seat-time and direct time:

- **Proxy Seat –Time:**
 - **Clock Time Model** - hours based on time a learner is engaged in a software program (curriculum) that tracks time.
 - **Learner Mastery Model** – assigns a fixed number of hours based on passing a unit or lesson test.
- **Direct Time**
 - Face-to-face instruction (non-rates classes, tutoring, workshops, etc)
 - Monitored lab instruction
 - Synchronous online discussion, courses
 - Telephone conference call (teacher keeps a log that shows time and instructional topics discussed over the phone)
 - Live video broadcast to remote location (facilitator / teacher keeps a log)

Blended Model

The blended model is based on three required components:

1. Programs must provide distance learning students with ongoing and regularly scheduled face-to-face instructional support. Support may include, but is not limited to individual tutoring, small group drop-in sessions (ESOL or GED subject areas), conversation groups for ESOL students, and group instruction. A designated program center staff person (classroom teacher, counselor,

DL “coach”) must communicate the schedule of face-to-face instructional support to their DL students and the Instructional Hub. ACLS strongly recommends that participating Community Adult Learning Centers and the Instructional Hubs identify and outreach to specific students who may need such additional instructional support in order to persist in online learning environment.

2. At least 50% of distance learning students must be **dually enrolled** in classroom instruction (core classes).
3. All remaining distance learning students (those who are not dually enrolled) must be **directly enrolled**.

Enrollment

- **Direct Enrollment (directly enrolled students)**

Students who are not enrolled in ABE/ESOL classes at the learning center are eligible for direct enrollment in the distance learning program. Directly enrolled distance learning students receive all instruction from the Instructional Hub and receive all other services (face-to-face instructional support, counseling, assessment, etc.) from their participating learning center.

- **Dual Enrollment (dually enrolled students)**

Students who are enrolled in rate-based or stand alone non rate-based classes are eligible for dual enrollment. Dually enrolled students participate in both regular classroom based instruction at their participating learning center and receive supplemental distance learning instruction either from the Instructional Hub (Option 1) or their program (Option 2).

The participating Community Adult Learning Center can choose between option 1 or 2 which determines how dually enrolled distance learning students receive supplemental distance learning instruction:

- Option #1 - dually enrolled distance learning students receive classroom instruction at their program and supplemental distance learning instruction at the Instructional Hub.
- Option #2 - dually enrolled distance learning students receive all instruction (both classroom based and distance learning) from their learning center where they are currently enrolled.

Research and identified good practice from Project IDEAL indicate that adult education students enrolled in traditional face-to-face classes are well-suited and appropriate for distance learning. Data indicate that such students are more likely to persist in distance learning because support is available on a regular, weekly basis at the adult learning center. States who have attempted to institute distance learning for adult basic education students via a “pure” distance learning model (limited or no face-to-face contact) have found that many students do not persist due to a lack of independent study skills, limited instructional support, and inadequate sense of community among a cohort of fellow learners. The components of the “blended model” (p.4) are designed to ensure that all distance learning students (both dually enrolled and directly enrolled) have significant and ongoing opportunities for instructional, technology, and counseling support in the pursuit of distance education as a challenging new mode of independent study and learning.

Funding Options for Adult Basic Education Integrated Distance Learning

Depending on the expertise and resources available at Community Adult Learning Centers, distance learning will be supported through two funding options:

Option 1: All distance learning instruction occurs at the Instructional Hub.

- Each participating Community Adult Learning Center enrolls in distance learning and maintains an active participation of a minimum of **10 students per month**. The distance learning instruction is provided by the Instructional Hub. In Option 1:
 - 50% of those students (minimum 5 students) must be **dually enrolled** (currently enrolled in a rates-based or stand alone non-rates based class at the program and receiving supplemental distance learning instruction from the Instructional Hub).
 - The remaining 50% of DL students (minimum 5 students) must be **directly enrolled** at the Hub (i.e., walk-in students, recruited students, students on the wait list, students who have dropped out, stopped out, or students unable to attend weekly scheduled face-to-face classes). These students receive face-to-face orientation to distance learning, ongoing support, counseling, follow up, reporting and pre/post testing at the program and receive distance learning instruction from the Instructional Hub.
- The participating Community Adult Learning Center is responsible for:
 - “Introduction to Distance Learning” course that is offered on an ongoing basis to introduce distance learning to student cohorts, familiarize students with the “blended model,” introduce the curriculum, supplemental materials, technology skills, social networking tools, and independent study skills necessary for persistence and success in online learning;
 - Ongoing and regularly scheduled face-to-face support to their distance learning students (both directly and dually enrolled students).
- The funding for Option 1 ABE Integrated Distance Learning at the Community Adult Learning is a fixed grant size of \$5,000.

Option 2: Distance learning instruction is delivered by both the adult learning center (dually enrolled students) and the Instructional Hub (directly enrolled students).

- Each participating ABE program enrolls and maintains an active participation of a minimum of **20** students per month. In Option 2:
 - 50% of those students (minimum 10 students) must be **dually enrolled** – both enrolled in a rates-based or stand alone non-rates based class and in a **distance learning instruction at the program**.
 - The remaining 50% of DL students (minimum 10 students) must be **directly enrolled at the Hub** (i.e., walk-in students, recruited students, students on the wait list, students who have dropped out, stopped out, or students unable to attend weekly scheduled face-to-face classes). These students receive face-to-face orientation to distance learning, ongoing support, counseling, follow up, reporting and pre/post testing at the program and **receive distance learning instruction at the Instructional Hub**.

- The participating Community Adult Learning Center is responsible for:
 - “Introduction to Distance Learning” course that is offered on an ongoing basis to introduce distance learning to student cohorts, familiarize students with the “blended model,” introduce the curriculum, supplemental materials, technology skills, social networking tools, and independent study skills necessary for persistence and success in online learning;
 - Ongoing and regularly scheduled face-to-face support to their distance learning students (both directly and dually enrolled students).

- The funding for Option 2 ABE Integrated Distance Learning at the Community Adult Learning is a grant size of \$10,000; baseline funding of \$5,000 plus up to an additional \$5,000 to provide distance learning instruction to dually enrolled students at their program.

Overall responsibilities for Community Adult Learning Centers funded under **Integrated Distance Learning Option 1 or 2** are to:

1. Outreach, recruit, and enroll appropriate students at the Instructional Hub.
2. Integrate distance learning prescreening into the adult learning center’s established intake process (see http://www.projectideal.org/publications_resources/handbook.html , [DL research materials](#)).
3. Offer an “Introduction to Distance Learning” on a regular basis for new cohorts of distance learning students.
4. Conduct intake, placement, pre- and post-testing, and goal setting for all students enrolled at the Instructional Hub.
5. Obtain necessary release of information forms for students enrolled at the Instructional Hub.
6. Enter student participation data into SMARTT for dually enrolled students in a timely manner and in accordance with the ACLS Statement of Assurances.
7. Follow up on student enrollment into distance learning to verify minimum required participation at the Instructional Hub.
8. Provide regularly scheduled and ongoing face-to-face instructional support for DL students.

III. The Instructional Hubs

The total funding available for the distance learning Instructional Hubs is \$150,000 in federal funding (\$75,000 for one ABE Hub and \$75,000 for one ESOL Hub). **The Hub is the online instructional provider** for students from participating adult education programs.

- The ABE Instructional Hub and the ESOL Instructional Hub will **each** be expected to maintain a **minimum enrollment of 100 actively participating students per month**. These students will be identified, screened, and enrolled into the appropriate Hub for instructional services by approximately 20 participating Community Adult Learning Centers.
- The Instructional Hubs must provide instruction for 52 weeks per year, preferably through semester courses or structural/thematic units. DL instruction provided at the Hubs should reflect

a balance of short courses, group and individual instruction, and synchronous and asynchronous instruction. Individualized courses of study with time-defined boundaries may be developed based on students' needs.

- Each Hub will be expected to measure student progress and satisfaction with distance learning at least quarterly.
- Funding at the Instructional Hub will support three to four distance learning teachers at 0.25 to 0.33 FTE each.
- The responsibilities of the Instructional Hub will be limited primarily to distance learning instruction, collaboration with the CALC to support distance learning students, entering of student participation data entry into SMARTT, and supporting learning centers in developing content for "Introduction to Distance Learning". Further responsibilities include:
 1. Provide instruction and academic support for all enrolled students.
 2. Record student participation data into SMARTT.
 3. Schedule post testing for all students at participating adult learning centers.
 4. Provide instructional materials, access to curriculum, and supplemental materials to all students.
 5. Establish and support a sense of community among learners through a social networking platform (e.g., MOODLE, WIGGIO, Elluminate, Skype, Twitter, etc).
 6. Participate in professional development opportunities for distance learning instruction through online forums, list-serv, webinars, etc., on a regular basis.

In the first year of a multi-year grant award, an initial four-week period during which teachers begin training in Project IDEAL DL101 and the approved curriculum product(s) will be allowed to provide sufficient time for Instructional Hub start-up.

IV. Student Services

This section focuses on program design, student eligibility, outreach and recruitment, intake, orientation, placement, curriculum and instruction, instructional materials, educational counseling, retention, countable outcomes (student articulated goals), assessment and follow-up.

Program Design for Instructional Services

- ◆ The following chart shows the available funding for participating Adult Community Learning Centers and the corresponding **minimum enrollment requirement** of actively participating distance learning students.

Available Grant Amount	Minimum Actively Participating DL Students	Dually Enrolled DL Students	Directly Enrolled DL Students
Option 1 (\$5,000)	10	minimum 5 (DL supplemental instruction at the Instructional Hub)	minimum 5 (DL instruction at the Instructional Hub)
Option 2 (\$10,000)	20	minimum 10 (DL supplemental instruction at the program)	minimum 10 (DL instruction at the Instructional Hub)

- ◆ Students who are identified as **actively participating** must meet a monthly minimum number of hours in distance learning instruction.
 - ▶ If ***dually enrolled***, students must engage in at least **10 hours per month of distance learning instruction**. This may only include *proxy seat time hours* in the curriculum product. Additional *direct time hours* should also be reported in SMARTT.
 - ▶ If ***not dually enrolled***, students must engage in at least **20 hours per month of distance learning instruction**. This may include any combination of *proxy seat time hours* in the curriculum product as well as *direct time*.

- ◆ While primary instruction in distance learning is facilitated and takes place at a distance, the blended model combines distance learning with regularly scheduled and ongoing face-to-face interaction that includes support in the curriculum product and HUB-assigned supplementary materials. Intake, orientation, goal setting, counseling, and assessment must also occur in a face-to-face setting and are provided by the participating Adult Community Learning Center. Participating Community Adult Learning Centers should also provide educational and other opportunities that encourage distance learning students to take advantage of activities, services and other community-building resources offered at the program.

Frequency/Duration/Intensity:

- ◆ At the conclusion of the “Introduction to Distance Learning” course:
 - **directly enrolled students** must enter into a written contract and identify at least **twenty hours per month** to be devoted to distance learning study and instruction. Student participation may be a combination of curriculum and supplementary materials as measured by proxy seat time hours and direct (synchronous) time.
 - **dually enrolled students** must enter into a written contract and identify at least **ten hours per month** to be devoted to distance learning study and instruction (proxy seat time hours). Additional *direct time hours* should also be reported in SMARTT.
- ◆ Curriculum products will capture the proxy seat-time of distance learning students. However, the Instructional Hub must record and report direct (synchronous) participation hours to the participating adult learning center for entry into SMARTT.

- ◆ Instructional Hubs are strongly encouraged, through staggered staff schedules, to provide 52 weeks of instruction per year to meet the students' needs and schedules.
- ◆ Contact via e-mail, telephone, or face-to-face between each student and teacher must occur on a regular basis as part of the above defined minimum threshold for distance learning participation.

Outreach and Recruitment

- ◆ Participating Community Adult Learning Centers must employ a variety of outreach and recruitment strategies in order to ensure that all adults at the learning center are aware and have an opportunity to participate in distance learning services.

Student Eligibility

ABE Students

Students must be 16 years of age or older, not enrolled in a secondary school and have a scale score of at least 518 in reading literacy as determined by the Massachusetts Adult Proficiency Test (MAPT). ACLS recommends for the ABE Hub to directly enroll students at the ASE level and dually enroll students at either pre-ASE or ASE levels.

ESOL Students

Individuals with limited English proficiency must have a scale score of at least 439 (student performance level (SPL) 4) as determined by the BEST + test to be directly enrolled at the ESOL Hub and they must have a scale score of at least 401 (SPL 2) to be dually enrolled.

“Introduction to Distance Learning” for Students

The Instructional Hubs and participating CALCs will collaborate to provide a course on orientation to distance learning. Each participating Community Adult Learning Center will provide to all distance learning students, both dually and directly enrolled students, an “Introduction to Distance Learning” course to introduce and familiarize students with the “blended model” used in Massachusetts funded distance learning. The components of the “Introduction to Distance Learning” course are:

- ◆ Introduction to the “blended model” of distance learning as both a supplement to classroom instruction and as an independent mode of learning.
- ◆ Introduction and review of independent learning skills, time management, and communication skills.
- ◆ Training in the curriculum software, instruction in the curriculum product, how to participate in and complete modules, communicate with the instructor, and how to ask for assistance.
- ◆ Assessment of and training in computer skills necessary to work in the curriculum product, navigate the internet, use social networking platforms, and communicate via email.
- ◆ The program’s attendance policy, grievance procedure, rights and responsibilities and basic rules and regulations of participation at the adult learning center.
- ◆ Orientation, intake and initial assessment may count for up to 12 hours of direct contact hours required for federal reporting purposes.

For resources refer to the research materials developed by the UMass Boston, Center for Social Policy, June 2009 http://www.mccormack.umb.edu/centers/csp/our_reports.php:

- [Massachusetts Adult Basic Education and ESOL Distance Learning Programs: How to Assess Student Readiness For Distance Learning?;](#)
- [Handbook of Screening for Online ESOL Programs;](#)
- [Handbook of Support for Online ESOL Programs;](#)
- [Handbook of Screening for Online GED Programs;](#) and
- [Handbook of Support for Online GED Programs.](#)

Distance Learning Curricula

ACLS has approved the following curricula for use in distance learning programs:

GED and pre-GED curricula:

- ◆ McGraw Hill Contemporary Pre-GED (clock time)
- ◆ McGraw Hill Contemporary GED (clock time)
- ◆ GEDi (clock time)
- ◆ Skills Tutor (clock time)

ESOL curricula:

- ◆ English for All (learner mastery)
- ◆ Rosetta Stone (clock time)
- ◆ USA Learns (learner mastery)

ACLS encourages new programs to start with one curriculum product in their first year. Programs that would like to use an online curriculum product that is not on the list must contact ACLS to seek an approval.

Supplemental Instruction and Support

- ◆ Instruction utilizing supplemental materials must be aligned with appropriate Massachusetts ABE Curriculum Frameworks and reflect the diverse educational, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students served as well as those of the broader community.
- ◆ Supplemental instructional materials should incorporate real-life “authentic” contexts that are responsive to the needs, skills, goals and interests of adult students in their roles as students, family members, members of the community and lifelong learners.

Assessment

Participating Community Adult Learning Centers and the Instructional Hubs must follow ACLS Assessment Policy and Procedures posted to the ACLS web site at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/assessment/>. For distance learning programs, the initial assessment may take place at the second face-to-face meeting.

Follow-up

Participating Community Adult Learning Centers must familiarize themselves with the ACLS Countable Outcomes Definitions and Required Documentation chart available at:

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/pawg/COfinitions.html> to inform their follow up procedures.

All ESE-funded programs are required to conduct quarterly follow up with currently enrolled and former students to ascertain goal changes and achievements. The ACLS Countable Outcomes chart is for staff to use in documenting student goals set and met, and is not required or recommended to be given to students. Many programs create more student-friendly tools to help students with goal setting.

System for Managing Accountability and Results Through Technology (SMARTT)

The Adult and Community Learning Services Cluster of the Massachusetts Department of Education has implemented a web-based system for collecting data from adult education programs across the Commonwealth. The **SMARTT ABE (System for Managing Accountability and Results Through Technology for ABE)** is an individual student record system designed to measure and document learning gains on educational functioning levels.

The SMARTT system has several crosschecks that prevent entry of data that does not comply with ACLS guidelines for enrollment, scheduling, staffing, performance and other critical data. The system makes information available at several levels. A user can access Agency information, including personnel and grants data, and move further into the program's operations to project level, site level, staffing information, class lists, schedules, enrollment, and student information. The Community Adult Learning Centers enter data on a weekly basis.

V. Staff Development

This section focuses on the guidelines that participating CALCs and Instructional Hubs must follow for professional development of staff. All programs funded for distance learning (fund code 669) are required to attend ACLS sponsored DL meetings and conferences (e.g. DL Meeting in September, DL Summit in May).

Trainings for Instructional Hub

All distance learning staff should participate in staff and professional development activities that are relevant to the needs of the program, community and students served.

Participation by appropriate program staff in the following activities is required:

- ◆ All distance learning teachers and/or distance learning staff must be trained in Project IDEAL DL 101.
- ◆ In the second and subsequent years of the grant, all distance learning staff members must be trained in Project IDEAL DL 102, DL 103 and DL104.
- ◆ All distance learning teachers and/or distance learning staff must be trained in the approved distance learning curriculum/a.

Trainings for Adult Learning Centers

- ◆ Participating Community Adult Learning Centers (CALCs) are required to ensure that at least two teachers complete Project IDEAL DL 101 within the first year of the project.
- ◆ Participating CALCs are encouraged to utilize program and staff development resources to support the integration of distance learning into the learning center.
- ◆ Participating CALCs are encouraged to provide access for all teachers at the CALC to obtain training in the approved curriculum products in order to support dually enrolled students and to supplement regular face-to-face instruction.

Appendix A - Sample Student Contract

Distance Learning Program Student Contract

(Last Name)

(First Name)

(Middle Initial)

The **(program name)** is a supportive community that encourages and assists students in pursuing educational, career, and higher education goals.

All individuals enrolling in the distance learning Program will participate and complete “Introduction to Distance Learning” (DL-100).

Individuals must agree to adhere to the following terms in order to participate in the distance learning program.

- ◆ Directly enrolled students must complete all work in a timely and appropriate manner, a minimum of **20** hours of studying per month is required.
- ◆ Dually enrolled students must complete all work in a timely and appropriate manner, a minimum of 10 hours of studying per month is required.
- ◆ Adhere to the policies for computer usage at **(the adult learning center name)**.
- ◆ Maintain appointments with the instructor.
- ◆ Maintain weekly contact with the instructor by phone, email, or in person.
- ◆ Notify staff if you will be late for, or unable to keep appointments.
- ◆ Complete all assessments including all pre and post-tests.
- ◆ Return (if in possession of) all loaned software at the completion of the program and/or at the request of the adult learning center.

Check off if you agree to the following term:

(optional) I agree to the use of photographs, videos, and quotations of me/or my child or ward (if under 18), in accounts or promotions of the Distance Learning Program.

In signing this contract, you agree to accept the terms outlined above.

Student’s Signature

Date

Parent/Legal Guardian Signature (if student is under 18)

Date

Appendix B – Tools to Evaluate Teacher and Student Readiness for Distance Learning

The following link <http://projectideal.org> will connect you to the Project Ideal web site and the *Handbook of Distance Learning for Adult Learners, fourth edition* by Leslie Petty and Jerome Johnson, Project IDEAL Support Center at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. This document contains a number of resources to assist you in developing your plans for recruiting and teaching adults at a distance. Among these are:

- *Is On Line Learning for Me?* Page 64
- *Computer Skills Assessment for Teachers* Page 66

Appendix C - Resource and Reference Materials

DL research report developed by the UMass Boston, Center for Social Policy, June 2009:

- [Massachusetts Adult Basic Education and ESOL Distance Learning Programs: How to Assess Student Readiness For Distance Learning?](#)

http://www.mccormack.umb.edu/centers/csp/our_reports.php

Distance Learning handbooks developed by the UMass Boston, Center for Social Policy, June 2009:

- [Handbook of Screening for Online ESOL Programs](#)
- [Handbook of Support for Online ESOL Programs](#)
- [Handbook of Screening for Online GED Programs](#)
- [Handbook of Support for Online GED Programs](#)

http://www.mccormack.umb.edu/centers/csp/our_reports.php