



COVID-19 and ABE Programs Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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NOTE: Questions/answers in this document that have been added and/or updated since the last FAQ (dated April 9) appear in blue text. Items that have not been updated are in black.

SUMMER 2020 ABE PROGRAMMING

1. What should ABE programming look like this summer?

Per guidance from the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Education released on May 15, ABE providers will be allowed to provide hybrid (in-person + distance) programming in the summer (after the end of the 19-20 school year), as long as the in-person component of hybrid programming complies with all health and safety requirements from the Minnesota Department of Health.

All ABE providers that are considering offering hybrid ABE programming in the summer of 2020 must read and utilize the guidance provided in the two documents listed below.

[Minnesota Summer Programming Guidance for Schools](#) - guidance from the Minnesota Department of Education

https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=MDE032733&RevisionSlectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary

[Guidance for Social Distancing in Youth and Student Programs](#) - guidance from the Minnesota Department of Health

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/socialdistance.pdf>

In addition to this state level guidance, all ABE programs should follow requirements set forth by the local ABE consortium, district, organization and/or site.

2. What does “hybrid” programming look like in an ABE context?

The main goal of hybrid programming is to help ABE programs deliver ABE services in a more equitable way to all ABE students in the communities they serve, while still following public health guidelines that will limit the spread of COVID-19.

In the guidance to K-12 schools, the Education Commissioner describes hybrid programming as “all students are on an alternating schedule of being in the school building, while maintaining social distancing, and doing distance learning from home.”

For ABE programs, the model and delivery of hybrid programming can vary.

First, hybrid programming for ABE programs does not necessarily mean that ALL students access both in-person and at-home education. Instead, it’s quite likely that an ABE program would offer hybrid programming to some students in certain limited situations, while other students continue to participate in distance education only (see question #3 below).

Second, ABE summer hybrid program students might continue to spend the bulk of their instructional time on activities they complete at a distance. For example, ABE learners could report to the building only for specific activities such as turning in and/or picking up independent work, getting support with device set-up, and/or getting help with access to online learning platforms.

Lastly, for students who have had difficulty participating in instruction at a distance, programs may choose to provide a higher portion of instruction in-person, including building students’ capacity to participate in distance learning.

3. How do we decide whether or not to offer any in-person programming this summer, and what specific activities to offer in-person?

Keep in mind that the main goal of hybrid programming is to help ABE programs deliver ABE services in a more equitable way to all ABE students in the communities they serve, while still following public health guidelines that will limit the spread of COVID-19.

In making the decision of what type of summer programming to offer, ABE staff are encouraged to use an equity lens by asking questions such as:

- Which students have had difficulty engaging during this period of school closure? Can we serve them more effectively using a hybrid approach?
- What barriers have made it difficult for students to access distance learning? How can hybrid programming address those barriers?
- What systems, practices and/or procedures can we build with students using a hybrid programming approach this summer, that will facilitate future distance and/or hybrid learning?
- What types of programming require an in-person or face-to-face component, and how can we adapt those to follow public health guidelines?

4. Does this mean we can decide to go back to the ABE programming that we had before, as long as we follow all MDH guidelines around safety of programming?

No. For this summer, all educational programs (including ABE) can provide either hybrid programming, or distance education. Hybrid programming includes a combination of in-person learning and at-home learning. All ABE programs should continue to develop and implement plans and strategies for providing ABE instruction at a distance. It is possible there could be periods of the time in the future when all schools in the state are required to go back to distance education only. It is also possible some communities could experience outbreaks that would require a distance education only decision specific to that community. In addition, please keep in mind students in your communities who cannot participate in in-person programming due to higher risk factors for COVID-19. Please continue to operate your ABE programming with these students, and all future possibilities, in mind.

5. What are the most important things to know about the MDH guidelines and how they apply to ABE programming?

Some of the key factors included in the public health guidelines from MDH are maintaining 6 feet between all people at all times; maintaining no more than a 1:9 staff to student ratio (and a smaller ratio in spaces that don't allow for 6 feet of space between 10 people); establishing a regular cleaning routine for desks, equipment and materials; promoting the use of cloth masks; and minimizing the use of community supplies, such as writing utensils.

But please note that this answer is a brief overview and it is critical for ABE programs to thoroughly read the MDH guidance found here: [Guidance for Social Distancing in Youth and Student Programs](#)

6. What if our host agency, like the county or a college, provides guidance that is different than the guidance from the MDE Adult Education Office?

ABE programs operating in different types of organizations, like correctional facilities and colleges, will have additional guidance from their leadership. We encourage you to work with them and share the MDH guidance with them. If offering any in-person ABE programming, ABE programs need to adhere to MDH guidance that includes social distancing, cleaning, and the promotion of masks. Other agencies that host ABE programs should not override that guidance.

7. When are ABE programs allowed to start offering hybrid ABE programming?

The Education Commissioner recommends a start date of late June for K-12 schools choosing a hybrid approach to summer learning. However, ABE programs are allowed to start hybrid summer programming starting at the end of the 19-20 school year, but no sooner than June 1.

8. Should we plan for in-person NRS testing for all students this summer?

No. Expectations for NRS testing have been adjusted due to program closures related to COVID-19. These adjusted expectations remain in place. The COVID EFL Exemption will continue to be available within SiD, so there is currently no restriction on how many hours a student can generate before they receive a pre-test. Programs are encouraged to consider remote NRS testing as feasible, but can and should continue serving students even when administering an NRS assessment is not possible. When making decisions about whether to use in-person methods for intake and testing, programs should prioritize collecting information for instructional and placement purposes rather than testing solely for accountability purposes, such as measurable skill gains or testing rates. Keep in mind that the goal of in-person programming this summer is to allow for more equitable delivery of ABE programming.

9. Can ABE funding be used to purchase cleaning supplies and masks for students?

Yes. Both state and federal ABE funding can be spent on any supplies necessary for running ABE programming. Please note that these supplies cannot then be used for any other purpose (e.g. K-12 programming).

10. Will we be able to offer in-person ABE programming this fall?

We don't know at this time. Please continue to focus on building capacity to serve all students at a distance in order to be prepared in the event of future restrictions on in-person programming. Throughout this summer and into the fall and possibly beyond, ABE programs should offer appropriate

services for students who cannot participate in in-person programming, because of health concerns that put them at higher risk, or because they have a household member who is at higher risk.

11. Can our ABE program be held liable if someone were to contract COVID-19 and blame us? Should we be having students or even staff sign a release form?

Unfortunately, the Adult Education Office at MDE cannot answer that question. Please ask your employer to answer and provide guidance on liability.

ABE INSTRUCTION AT A DISTANCE

12. What online tools/platforms/software can we use to deliver ABE instruction at a distance? Is there a list somewhere?

In offering online instruction at a distance, there are synchronous and asynchronous options.

You can use any tool available to you for **synchronous** distance learning (real-time instruction to individuals or groups of students from a distance). Common tools are Skype, Google Hangouts and Zoom but there are many others. MDE does not prohibit or require specific tools, but individual districts or organizations may. Use the tools that work best for you and your students. Record hours for this time in SiD. (See Contact Hours Section).

Students can use any online platform or software for **asynchronous** distance learning (independent learning online when a student is not communicating with the teacher in real-time). If the platform is one of the platforms approved by the MN ABE Distance Learning team for proxy hours (check the list here: mnabe-distancelearning.org), record those hours in SiD. If the platform is not approved, do not record the hours in SiD.

To request approval for proxy hours for an online platform or software that is not currently approved, follow the process outlined in #29 below.

Courses built in a Learning Management System like Schoology or Google Classroom can also be approved for distance learning proxy hours. See #16 below for more information.

13. Can we count contact hours for students who watch a recording of a distance learning class or other recorded instructional material?

No, time spent watching a recorded class or other material cannot be counted as contact hours. This is because watching a recording is not synchronous instruction. Please consider recordings that students watch later to be a valuable instructional tool, and encourage students to access instruction that way if they can't join live. But do not record that time as contact or proxy hours in SiD. Also, when recording please be certain you have appropriate permission from any student whose image and/or voice will be recorded.

14. What student privacy issues need to be considered for ABE students when using online instruction? Are the student privacy rules for ABE students the same as for K-12 students?

In MN, ABE teachers are employed by a variety of different organizations and organization types. Each of those organizations likely has a set of data privacy practices that they require employees to follow. Most of those organizations are K-12 school districts that may have online instruction policies that focus on K-12-related data privacy requirements. Given that, ABE programs may want to consult guidance provided by the federal Privacy Technical Assistance Center (PTAC). The information from PTAC can be used to identify requirements in their organizations' plans that might be revised for ABE programming. Obvious examples would be that ABE students can provide their own consent to have their image and/or voice recorded during a class, or to have examples of their work used as exemplars for other students.

The US Department of Education, Office of Technology, Privacy Technical Assistance Center tech.ed.gov/privacy has a variety of resources related to education privacy issues Their PowerPoint regarding data privacy and online instruction is a good place to start: [FERPA and Virtual Learning during Covid-19](#)

15. Can we count hours for student work completed in a Learning Management System like Schoology or Google Classroom?

For contact hours, no. For distance learning proxy hours, yes, if the course meets the requirements and is approved through the process described below in #16.

16. Can we create some classes in a Learning Management System (LMS) like Schoology or Google Classroom and submit that for approval for proxy hours?

Yes. A new process has recently been developed to approve teacher-created courses (on a Learning Management System (LMS) or other website) for distance learning proxy hours. Teachers who have developed a course on an LMS or website can apply for approval of their course, in a similar fashion to the application and approval process for published DL platforms.

Note that a “course” is defined as at least 12 units totaling a minimum of 20 proxy hours. Teachers may apply for a course as either time-on-task (where the system logs student activity) or unit-completion, where a fixed amount of time is awarded when students complete a unit, depending on the capabilities of the LMS used.

More information and applications can be found on the DL website at: mnabe-distancelearning.org/resources/state-policies-procedures-information.

A frequently asked questions document with helpful links and resources regarding teacher-created courses can be found at:

docs.google.com/document/d/13VQ3H64iLtC8DNuMIAQ1c1C5ub8XwTGLk7rGUNOB0oY/edit?usp=sharing

17. How long does it usually take to get a Distance Learning platform approved/reviewed once an application is submitted?

It’s variable, and largely depends upon how thorough the application is. Approval time can be anywhere from one or two days to six weeks, depending on how many questions the DL Team has and how quickly the applicant provides clarifying information once this is requested, and if adjustments need to be made to the course or to reporting documentation. Completing applications thoroughly - answering all questions - will help expedite the approval process.

18. Do teachers who are teaching using Zoom, Google Hangouts, etc., need to take [Distance Learning Basics for Adult Basic Education](#) first?

It is not required. However, teachers working in this format may find some of the DL Basics information helpful, so we encourage them to access the course. Other sections of the course relate to choosing a DL Platform or teaching asynchronously, and are less relevant unless teachers are also supporting asynchronous DL.

CONTACT HOURS

19. What changes have been made to allowable contact hours as a result of COVID-19?

At this point, no laws or policies have been changed. The following activities can still be counted as contact or proxy hours:

- Synchronous instruction at a distance using ANY TOOL (examples include but are not limited to: Skype, Zoom, Google Meet and telephone)

- Educational counseling/advising and supporting students in accessing distance education, as long as it happens synchronously, over the phone or another online tool (see examples in bullet above)
- Online learning with approved distance learning platforms (more information on approved platforms can be found at: mnabe-distancelearning.org)

The following activities cannot currently be counted as contact or proxy hours, but may still be valuable, important and worthwhile activities for ABE programs to use with students:

- Packets, handouts, worksheets and/or textbooks that the student works through independently on their own time
- Videos or recorded lessons that a student watches on their own time
- Online learning using platforms not currently approved as Distance Learning platforms
- Emails
- Text messages

20. Can we count contact hours for teaching ABE students at a distance using tools like Skype, Zoom, Google Hangout or FaceTime to teach students in real time?

Yes, these are all forms of "synchronous distance education". Synchronous distance education should be recorded as contact hours in SiD, just as you enter hours for in-person classes.

21. Can we count hours for contact with learners via telephone?

You can count hours for synchronous distance education and educational counseling/advising via telephone. You can also count hours for intake and registration. Other synchronous contact time should not be counted for contact hours. For example, calls to students to update them on program closures would not be counted.

22. Can we count contact hours for synchronous time spent with students helping them access and set up their technology and distance learning tools in order to participate in distance education?

Yes.

23. Can we count synchronous hours that volunteers might generate working one-to-one with learners remotely?

If the volunteers have gone through an approved 12-hour pre-service volunteer training, yes, they can generate contact hours. In district-based ABE programs, the instruction/curriculum needs to be overseen by a licensed teacher.

If the volunteer has not gone through an approved 12-hour pre-service training, the hours may or may not be countable. The Minnesota Department of Education's (MDE) Adult Education Office is temporarily waiving this 12-hour training requirement for current volunteers who are tutoring remotely and generating contact hours if they:

- Were serving as classroom assistants prior to March 17, 2020;
- Are tutoring ABE students remotely;
- Are receiving curriculum/lesson planning guidance from a teacher; and
- Are doing activities that meet the State ABE criteria for generating contact hours.

Volunteers that do not meet the above criteria must still adhere to training expectations outlined in the Volunteer Training Standards Policy. The full text of the Statement Regarding Temporarily Waiving the 12-Hour Training Requirement for Current Volunteers Who Are Tutoring Remotely can be found online at the Minnesota Adult Basic Education site (www.mnabe.org).

24. Can we count contact hours for contact with learners via text messaging?

No. However, please serve your students as best you can. MDE encourages you to maintain communication with students and offer them appropriate learning resources and activities, whether or not you can count that time the student spends on those activities as official ABE contact hours.

25. Can we count contact hours for teaching via email?

No, because it isn't synchronous instruction (see #19). However, please serve your students as best you can. MDE encourages you to maintain communication with students and offer them appropriate learning resources and activities, whether or not you can count that time the student spends on those activities as official ABE contact hours.

26. Can we count contact hours for student packets or other instructional materials that students complete at home?

Not at this time. MDE encourages you to offer appropriate learning resources and activities (such as packets) whether or not you can count the time students spend on those activities as official ABE contact hours. The DL Team and MDE staff are considering future options that could include counting proxy hours for take-home packets, but to date no decision has been reached on this.

The one exception is for specific distance learning curricula that have already been approved. There are a small number of curricula that are not online, but are video and paper packets that students complete at home. Additionally, activities from the newly approved ReadWorks.org can be counted for proxy hours for both the online and paper versions.

27. Can we count contact hours for distance learning platforms that have already been approved for proxy hour counting?

Yes. Continue counting and recording these as you always have.

28. Can we count contact hours for distance learning platforms that have not (yet) been approved for proxy hour counting?

No. However, MDE encourages you to use such resources whether or not you can count the time the student spends on the platform as official ABE contact hours. Note also that you can submit a platform that has not yet been approved for consideration by the distance learning team (see next question). [When a new DL platform is approved, proxy hours can be counted for it retroactively to the beginning of the program year \(May 1\). This allows programs to pilot new curricula and claim the hours once the approval process is complete.](#)

29. How do we get a distance learning platform approved for proxy hours?

A distance learning platform can be approved for ABE proxy hours by the state's distance learning team. The team will need details about the platform. These details can be provided in the online [Google Form](#) that can be found at the MNABE Distance Learning site (mnabe-distancelearning.org/approved-dl-platforms). Once the form is completed and submitted, someone from the distance learning team will contact you to follow up.

30. Should we enter data in their regular SiD classes if they are meeting online now? Or should we make a new SiD class for that purpose?

We strongly recommend that you create a new SiD class for synchronous distance education (instruction that happens real-time, but at a distance using technology tools). Please name the class with "Online" plus the online tool/software used and the content. (For example, "Online Zoom ESL 3" or "Online FaceTime GED Math.") If you have questions about how to create or name a class in SiD, please review SiD support (mnabe.zendesk.com) or contact SiD support (email at support@mnabe.org).

31. Currently our teachers are doing a lot of one-on-one work as well as assigning homework and creating packets that do not count for contact or proxy hours. These activities don't generate a lot of contact hours. I am afraid this model will not be financially sustainable, and that this will result in a major reduction in funding for our program in the future. How do we balance questions of program quality and financial sustainability?

In this unprecedented time of global pandemic, ABE services, like almost every other aspect of life, look significantly different than before. One-on-one remote work with students and homework packets are appropriate ways to meet student needs in this time. ABE providers across the state of Minnesota are using those same strategies. We encourage you to continue all effective practices for providing ABE services during the pandemic, regardless of the amount of contact/proxy hours generated.

As you are making decisions about future programming and budgets, please keep in mind some key points, including:

- Funding starting July 1, 2020, is based on hours from before COVID-related ABE closures.
- All programs face similar challenges, and will likely be utilizing similar techniques, resulting in fewer hours statewide for 2020-2021.
- The Contact Hour Working Group will develop recommendations on the 2020-2021 contact hour reporting period to help ABE programs statewide.
- ABE programs can apply to get some options approved for proxy hours for online platforms and courses in Learning Management Systems (LMSs, like Schoology).

See more detail on these key points below.

Funding starting July 1, 2020

For Fiscal Year 2020-21: The total state ABE funding for our statewide system will increase by 3%. Hours from March 14, 2019 - March 13, 2020 will be used to calculate the distribution of this funding to consortia. In other words, any loss of hours due to the pandemic will not result in a funding decrease for ABE programs through at least June 30, 2021.

Fewer hours statewide for 2020-2021

It is nearly impossible to predict what the statewide total of hours will be between May 2020 and April 2021. But we know that all programs across the state face similar challenges (i.e. COVID-19 and related closures/restrictions) and are using similar techniques to address the challenges (e.g. moving to online instruction, spending more time one-on-one with students, utilizing packets when online instruction is problematic). Remember that a statewide decline in hours does not result in a statewide decline in funding. Rather, a statewide decline in hours results in an increase in the contact hour rate. Furthermore, the time period during which hours will “count” towards the funding formula remains to be determined (see next point below).

The Contact Hour Working Group

Because of the unprecedented disruption to regular ABE programming, and by extension ABE contact hours, the MDE-ABE team believes it is reasonable to consider some adjustment to the contact hour reporting period for 2020-2021, such as the adjustment made for 2019-2020. However, it's far more difficult to know what that adjustment should be since the disruption may affect the entire year, not just the last six weeks. That is why a working group of ABE staff is being convened by LAN and MDE this summer to dive deeply into this question and make a recommendation. The working group will represent the diversity of ABE programs across the state (Twin Cities, greater Minnesota, districts, CBOs, corrections, one-room-schoolhouse, etc.)

We strongly recommend that until the working group has reached a decision, and an announcement has been made about any adjustments to the contact hour reporting period, that ABE managers remain focused on meeting ABE student needs, regardless of the amount of contact hours generated.

Apply to Get Some Options Approved for Proxy Hours

If some platform or model is working well in teaching students yet is not currently countable for contact or proxy hours, determine if that platform or model could get approved for contact or proxy hours. For example, the state DL team can approve publisher-created distance learning platforms and teacher-created LMS courses for proxy hour counting. The MDE Adult Education Office and the state DL team are talking about how to approve models like teacher-created packets for proxy hour purposes.

Given these key points, we encourage you to make programming decisions that balance financial sustainability with program quality, reaching as many students as possible.

ASSESSMENT, PRE/POST TESTING AND INTAKE

32. When will ABE programs be allowed or expected to go back to in-person pre- and post-testing?

When programs start doing hybrid programming with some in-person instruction as early as June, they could then decide whether and with whom to start doing in-person pre- and post-testing. Please note that expectations for NRS testing have been adjusted due to program closures related to COVID-19 and that these adjusted expectations remain in place. Because of these adjusted expectations, there is currently no restriction on how many hours a student can generate before they receive a pre-test. Programs are encouraged to consider remote NRS testing as feasible, but can and should continue serving students even when administering an NRS assessment is not possible. When making decisions about whether to use in-person methods for intake and testing, programs should prioritize collecting information for instructional and placement purposes rather than testing solely for accountability purposes, such as measurable skill gains or testing rates. Keep in mind that the goal of in-person programming this summer is to allow for more equitable delivery of ABE programming.

33. If we choose not to do hybrid programming and continue to do distance education only, can we do intake at a distance with new or returning students?

Yes. ABE providers are allowed to do intake at a distance with new students. Some ABE programs have created online registration forms using tools such as Google Forms, and are then completing the intake process using the phone, email, Zoom, FaceTime or other online tools. You can administer an NRS assessment remotely if possible (see question #35 below).

If it's not possible to do an NRS assessment remotely, you can use other tools available to help assess the student's level (for example, some programs are using assessments in Read Theory (readtheory.org) for this purpose) and place them into instruction. In this case, be sure to use the COVID EFL Exemption when creating the new student record in SiD. (See question #36)

For more information on doing intake remotely, look in the Schoology group - COVID-19 & Distance Education Resource Hub. In the Resources section you will find a folder with resources for remote intake. Instructions for joining this Schoology group can be found in question #55.

34. How do we get a student's signature on the intake form if we're doing intake remotely?

The MDE Adult Basic Education office does not require ABE programs to obtain a student signature on the intake form. The Tennessee warning does NOT require a student signature. When you give a Tennessee warning, you are informing a student that they must give some of their personal information, and what you will do with that information. When the student provides you with their information, this indicates their consent.

Your district or organization may require a signature for other reasons (such as for photo or data release). In this case, you can investigate options such as those offered by Adobe Acrobat for obtaining virtual signatures. We recommend you work with your district or organizational leadership to find options that will meet your requirements.

35. How can we do NRS testing remotely?

TABE, CASAS and BEST-Plus have all announced options for remote testing. The Minnesota Department of Education ABE team has confirmed that remote NRS testing is an allowable option for all Minnesota ABE programs, provided requirements and guidelines from the test publishers are carefully followed. Generally speaking, remote testing is limited to computer-based testing, and there are currently no options to provide paper/pencil testing remotely.

- For more information about offering TABE remotely, visit tabetest.com
- For more information about offering CASAS remotely, visit www.casas.org/product-overviews/remote-testing
- For more information about offering BEST-Plus remotely visit www.cal.org/aea/covid-19

The state assessment trainers and staff from the MDE Adult Education Office led a webinar on remote testing options on May 15. The session slides, recording and other materials can be found online at the MNABE State ABE Presentations page (www.mnabe.org/state-abe-presentations).

36. If we are unable to do NRS testing remotely, can we still enroll and serve new distance learning students?

Yes, the MDE ABE Office has temporarily lifted the 12-hour restriction for students without a pre-test. You can do an intake at a distance (see question #33) and use the COVID EFL Exemption in SiD. When you create the student record in SiD, instead of entering a TABE or CASAS score, enter the COVID EFL Exemption in the assessment tab of the student record. This will indicate that the student could not be pre-tested, and will allow you to enter hours for the student. If you create the student record without a test score or the COVID EFL Exemption, SiD will block you from entering more than 11.75 hours for the student.

The complete Statement Regarding Temporarily Lifting 12-Hour Restriction for Students without a Pre-test can be found at www.mnabe.org

For more information on the COVID EFL Exemption, see this SiD Help article: mnabe.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360042480492--COVID-EFL-Exemption-for-Students-w-No-Valid-Pre-test

37. We have entered the COVID EFL Exemption into the SiD record for a new student who started as a distance learning student with us in April. Now can we go back and enter the student's previous hours?

The COVID EFL Exemption is valid as of May 1, 2020. If a student started with you in April, you can enter the COVID EFL Exemption into their record with a date of May 1. This will allow you to enter hours in May for this student. You still will not be able to enter more than 11.75 hours for this student in April.

38. How can we reach our MSG targets for ABE and ESL students if we can't post-test them? Will we be placed in Program Improvement next year because of this?

We recognize that the difficulty of post-testing means that programs may not be able to achieve as many MSGs as in the past. Next year's program improvement process will take this into account. Student and staff safety should take precedence over testing at this time.

DATA ENTRY

39. Does this current situation change May's planned implementation of the current plus prior month data entry window?

Not at this time. We still plan to implement the current plus prior month data entry window starting with student contact hours and tests for May 2020. The May student contact hours and tests need to be entered by the end of June 30, 2020.

VOLUNTEERS

40. How can we onboard volunteers during this time when they are unable to attend the 12 hour training at MLC?

The Literacy Minnesota Volunteer Training team is working on developing online and hybrid training options. The timeline and release date for those options is still unknown. Contact Rob Podlasek (rpodlasek@literacymn.org) or Andrea Echelberger (aechelberger@literacymn.org) at Literacy Minnesota for suggestions if you do have new volunteers.

41. Can we count synchronous hours that volunteers generate working one-to-one with learners remotely?

If the volunteers have gone through an approved 12-hour pre-service volunteer training, yes, they can generate contact hours. In district-based ABE programs, the instruction/curriculum needs to be overseen by a licensed teacher.

If the volunteer has not gone through an approved 12-hour pre-service training, the hours may or may not be countable. The Minnesota Department of Education's (MDE) Adult Education Office is temporarily waiving this 12-hour training requirement for current volunteers who are tutoring remotely and generating contact hours if they:

- Were serving as classroom assistants prior to March 17, 2020;
- Are tutoring ABE students remotely;
- Are receiving curriculum/lesson planning guidance from a teacher; and
- Are doing activities that meet the State ABE criteria for generating contact hours.

Volunteers that do not meet the above criteria must still adhere to training expectations outlined in the Volunteer Training Standards Policy. The full text of the Statement Regarding Temporarily Waiving the 12-Hour Training Requirement for Current Volunteers Who Are Tutoring Remotely can be found online at the Minnesota Adult Basic Education site (www.mnabe.org).

CORRECTIONS

42. Should we continue our ABE programming within a jail or prison?

ABE programming located within a correctional facility should work with the leadership of that facility to determine the best strategies for student and staff safety. This applies to both the state correctional system and local or county jails.

STANDARD ADULT DIPLOMA

43. We have a number of students in Standard Adult Diploma programming who were on track to graduate this spring who need to finish up classes. Will Standard Adult Diploma submissions still be reviewed?

Yes. The diploma review team is reviewing portfolios. Portfolios should still be reviewed within one month of submission.

44. If a student does work on the Standard Adult Diploma from home, can that be used as student-produced evidence in the portfolio?

Yes. Instructors should still review and evaluate the work for quality. As much as is possible the instructor or ABE program staff should make sure the student was the person that completed the work. Student work does not have to count for ABE contact hours in order to be included as evidence in a portfolio.

GED TESTING

45. Can potential testers take the GED test? If so, is it in person or via some other option?

This is an evolving issue. Several GED testing centers have reopened at a limited capacity, making in-person testing a possibility. In addition, remote GED testing will be piloted likely starting late May or early June.

In-Person GED Testing

On May 5, Minnesota Department of Education Commissioner, Mary Cathryn Ricker, announced that operating a GED Testing Center in compliance with Minnesota Department of Health guidelines is an allowable use of a school building. The Education Commissioner's "allowable use of a school building" provision:

- Applies only to GED Testing Centers located in K-12 public schools; the provision does not apply to GED Testing Centers located in non-school buildings which continue to be subject to other Executive Order provisions.
- Is permissive, meaning it permits, but does not require GED Testing Centers located in public schools to reopen.
- Requires that programs follow the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) guidance provided in the School Building Use Guidance for In-Person Assessment/Hands-On Course Completion (link below).
- Does not waive GED Testing Service or Pearson VUE requirements regarding test center operations. GED Testing Centers must comply with all GED Testing Service and Pearson VUE requirements, while also following Minnesota Department of Health guidance.

GED testing centers in other locations would follow guidance from the organization overseeing the site, must adhere to guidance from GED Testing Service and Pearson VUE, and should also follow guidelines from the Minnesota Department of Health and the Center for Disease Control.

Remote GED Testing

Remote GED testing is also known as OP for OnVUE Proctor. OP involves the tester taking the test at a distance (for example, at home or another approved location) via a computer that meets technology requirements with a proctor from OnVUE. OnVUE is a remote test proctor entity. When OP testing becomes available, the first testers that will be able to participate include those that had GED tests canceled due to COVID-19 closures. The second group of prioritized OP testers include those that have a GED Ready score of “Likely to Pass” and have either passed three of the four tests or are on the state list of prioritized testers. To get your students added to the state prioritized tester list for OP, send the tester name, GED ID number, and reason for needing OP testing to Brad Hasskamp (brad.hasskamp@state.mn.us) as soon as possible. After piloting in late May -June, more testers may become eligible for OP testing.

46. How do we proctor GED Ready testing remotely for those who need age waivers?

You can set up a distance proctoring option for GED Ready Testing. Here are a couple of common options for remotely proctoring GED Ready Testing:

- **On-Site Trained Adult Proctor:** An ABE program can train an adult (like a parent) that is at the place where a potential tester is located. This training should include what the tester can and cannot do, what the tester can and cannot have with them during testing (for example, the tester cannot use their phone during testing), and other things a proctor should be watching and assuring during testing. After testing, the program could check back with the designated proctor to ask about the testing and any questions the proctor may have.
- **Video Proctoring by ABE Staff:** The ABE program could virtually proctor the test by watching the potential tester complete the GED Ready Test. This could be via a video call on a device. (I don't know if a video call can be happening simultaneously on the same device that the tester is using to take the test. The device might need to be a smart phone, tablet or laptop in the same

room where the proctor can observe the tester.) The ABE program staff acting as a virtual proctor should be able to watch the tester complete the test and assure that the tester did not cheat.

The proctor is expected to do the following:

- A. Watch the tester complete the entire test;
- B. Know what is and is not allowed during testing;
- C. Verify that the tester did not use a device or resource not allowed during testing;
- D. Check that the student is not recording the test questions or responses; and
- E. Assure that the tester did not cheat.

Additional proctoring options could be allowable. Contact Brad Hasskamp (brad.hasskamp@state.mn.us) with other ideas or questions about GED Ready Test proctoring.

Please note that GED Ready Testing can be counted for either contact hours or proxy hours. If the student is completing the GED Ready via video proctoring (like noted above), then contact hours can be counted like with other synchronous distance learning. If the student is completing the GED Ready on their own without proctoring, then proxy hours can be counted, adhering to guidance on www.mnabe-distancelearning.org.

47. If the May 13th guidance from the Minnesota Department of Health for summer programming is different than the April 29th guidance from Minnesota Department of Health for GED testing, does that mean we should now use the guidance from May 13th in GED testing centers?

No. Both guidance documents from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) are still valid and serve different purposes. GED Testing should still utilize and reference the MDH guidance from April 29th for in-person GED testing. That guidance is called “School Building Use Guidance for In-Person Assessments/Hands-On Course Completion” and can be found online ([School Building Use Guidance for In-Person Assessments/Hands-On Course Completion, 4/29/20](#))

48. In GED remote testing, also called GED OP testing, will there be additional costs to students and will the vouchers still be honored?

The cost for OP will be the same as the in-person GED test. Subsidies like the MNGED30 code will work for OP. If you have additional questions about OP testing, please email Brad (brad.hasskamp@state.mn.us).

GRANTS AND FINANCE

49. How will the school closure situation affect our funding for our ABE programs for the current fiscal year (which ends June 30, 2020)?

ABE program funding awards have been made for this current fiscal year (2019-2020). These funds go through June 30, 2020. These awards will not change. The closure of schools and resulting loss of contact hours will not reduce or otherwise affect this funding. ABE programs are encouraged to continue employing all ABE staff (including teaching staff and other support staff) at the levels planned and budgeted for in the current year's budget. ABE staff can be paid for the following activities:

- Working from home
- Providing instruction remotely to students
- Providing intake and educational counseling/advising remotely
- Online professional development
- Planning and capacity building - especially around future online and distance education

50. How will the school closure situation affect our funding for our ABE programs for the upcoming fiscal year (starting July 1, 2020)?

The contact hour reporting period that will determine funding for Fiscal Year 21 (July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021) has been adjusted. **The new reporting period is March 14, 2019 - March 13, 2020.** This means that the total contact hours generated between March 14, 2019 and March 13, 2020 will be used in the calculation of ABE state and federal aid for this upcoming fiscal year. Hours generated from March 14 - April 30, 2020 will not be included in the aid calculation. In other words, ABE staff do not need to be concerned with any decline of contact hours that occurred in mid-March to April of this year.

51. When will hours start "counting" again towards funding?

It has already been determined that hours generated between March 14 and April 30, 2020 will not be counted in the funding formula for Fiscal Year 2020-21 (see question #40). Traditionally hours generated between May 1, 2020 and April 30, 2021 would be used in the funding formula for Fiscal Year 2021-2022 (which begins July 1, 2021). However, it is clear that disruptions related to COVID-19 and resulting school closures will significantly affect contact hours during this time period. Because of this, the Minnesota Department of Education ABE team and Literacy Action Network have decided to convene a working group of Minnesota ABE staff to discuss this issue in depth and provide a recommendation on what the contact hour reporting period should be for Fiscal Year 2021-2022 funding. A recommendation from this group and an official determination is expected in August, 2020.

For now, ABE staff and programs should continue to offer ABE instruction to eligible ABE students using all possible means, both those that can be counted for contact hours and those that cannot. All countable contact hours, including distance learning proxy hours, should be recorded in SiD. Programs

should consider how to track non-countable hours, as well, if feasible, either within SiD as non-NRS hours, or in another format such as a spreadsheet.

52. I see that the new contact hour reporting period ended on March 13, 2020. Because of this, should I go back and edit the proxy hours I entered for distance learning for March? I entered monthly totals for March hours into student records dated March 31.

Yes. Please follow this procedure:

- Determine (to the best of your ability using the tools available in each distance learning platform) which hours were earned between Mar 1 and Mar 13, and which were earned between Mar 14 and Mar 31.
- Delete the original proxy hours entry that included hours for the entire month.
- Create two new entries: one with hours on or before March 13, 2020 and one with hours after that date.

Note that this process must be completed before hours are submitted on the ABE Annual Application due June 1.

53. Have any changes been made regarding the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) grants?

IELCE grants will continue, however, site visits through June have been canceled.

54. If we have been saving some funds for a spring project, would it be possible to carry over funds into the next fiscal year?

ABE consortia may spend up to 20% of current year state funds in the first quarter of next fiscal year (July 1 - September 30, 2020).

RESOURCE SHARING

55. How can I connect with other ABE practitioners and programs to share resources, ideas, and questions around COVID-19 and its impact on MN adult education programs?

Join the Schoology group: COVID-19 & Distance Education Resource Hub! Sign up for a Schoology account (if you haven't already) as an instructor at www.schoology.com. Then go to the Groups tab at the top of the screen. Click on My Groups > Join a Group. Enter the group access code: 4PQM-9XNK-FRF7X, and you're in!

56. If someone does develop an online course will there be a place that it can be viewed and shared?

Yes, those can be shared in the Resources section of the COVID-19 & Distance Education Resource Hub Schoology group. They can also be posted on the [OER Commons \(www.oercommons.org\)](http://www.oercommons.org) to reach a broader audience.

If neither of those options works in a particular case, the DL Team will collaborate with the course creator to determine the best way to share the course materials. However, course creators are not required to share their course materials, and may choose to develop courses solely for their own individual use. This may be the case when teachers incorporate proprietary materials that they cannot openly share, for example.

57. Any thoughts on training older teachers? Our program is primarily retired teachers and it has been challenging just getting them set up on Google Drive.

Consider having these teachers work through some of the Northstar online learning modules to improve their technology skills. Also, here are some new Google resources that may help in the use of technology: edu.google.com/latest-news/covid-19-support-resources/?modal_active=none