

**Minnesota Adult Basic Education (ABE)**

# Distance Learning Policy

Policy Development Date: July 1, 2008

Policy Implementation Date: October 1, 2008

Latest Policy Revision Date: June 7, 2019

## Policy Overview

### Background

The Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) in the United States Department of Education defines Distance Education as:

“Formal learning activity where students and instructors are separated by geography, time, or both for the majority of the instructional period. Distance learning materials are delivered through a variety of media, including but not limited to, print, audio recording, videotape, broadcasts, computer software, Web-based programs, and other online technology. Teachers support distance learners through communication by mail, telephone, e-mail, or online technologies and software.

Note: For participants who receive both distance education and traditional classroom instruction during a program year (such as through a blended distance-classroom approach or concurrent enrollment in both types of instruction), the State must have a policy, consistent with the NRS definition, that defines how local programs are to classify the participant. For NRS reporting, States can count a participant only once, as either a distance education participant or a traditional classroom participant.”

*Source: Technical Assistance Guide for Performance Accountability under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: National Reporting System for Adult Education (December 2017), found online at* [*www.nrsweb.org*](http://www.nrsweb.org)

Distance learning programs are often a good fit for non-traditional learners’ schedules. They may hold particular potential for learners who live some distance from the nearest Adult Basic Education (ABE) program, those with work schedules that make regular class attendance difficult, and learners in classes who want to further study on their own.

Studies and experience demonstrate that ABE learners participating in hybrid/blended distance learning, which combines face-to-face with distance learning, show increased NRS achievement over those participating in only one of these components. This model thus shows great promise in facilitating more rapid learner achievement.

Digital literacy, including basic computer skills and information literacy, is integral to distance learning. Learners need the ability to access online resources, and to effectively assess, evaluate, and use a broad range of information. Minnesota ABE has adopted the Northstar Digital Literacy Standards as state standards, a Northstar location license is provided to each ABE consortium, and passing the core assessments is required for the Minnesota Standard Adult High School Diploma. Integrating digital literacy instruction into a wide range of ABE courses is encouraged.

Digital literacy and distance learning skills are essential to success in the workplace and in higher education. Building the capacity to offer more distance education opportunities across Minnesota ABE programs in an equitable fashion is one of the primary goals identified by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) ABE Office.

### Overview of Distance Learning Delivery Requirements in Minnesota ABE

Intake and orientation may be provided face-to-face or at a distance, while pre- and post-testing for ABE learners accessing distance learning must be provided face-to-face. Training requirements for ABE staff to deliver distance education vary according to the distance education platform(s) utilized. Only agencies that have completed required training on the specific distance learning platform(s) selected, as well as state mandated DL professional development (see Professional Development section) will be allowed to count reimbursable proxy hours for their learners.

Depending on the distance learning platform, Minnesota allows a “time-on-task” approach or a mastery approach to assign asynchronous proxy hours for work accomplished.

1. Time-on-task platforms have a mechanism to track actual learner time engaged with the platform.
2. Mastery platforms utilize achievement or demonstration of skills sufficient for a learner to move from one unit to the next, through completion of curriculum units and/or passing quizzes assessing lesson comprehension and completion. Mastery proxy hours are not necessarily equal to time spent working online. These proxy hours are established based on pilot studies showing the average learner time required to master specific material.

Note: Both types of proxy hours include an allowance for staff time needed to manage learner use of the platform.

ABE programs must maintain records of proxy hours to meet state and federal reporting requirements. ABE Program Guidelines for determining proxy hours (PH) for DL platforms can be found on the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Website](http://www.mnabe-distancelearning.org) (www.mnabe-distancelearning.org). Proxy hours must be recorded in the ABE data system in classes with titles that include the name of the distance learning curricula and the words “proxy hours,” for example: “Edmentum/Plato Proxy Hours.” Note that programs must also maintain records for each learner identifying the unit/lesson/module completed along with the corresponding proxy hours. (More information about required documentation can be found in the ABE Auditing Requirements section of this policy.) In most cases a digital document, pdf, or spreadsheet from a platform's reporting/admin system should be sufficient.

## General Distance Learning Requirements

### Professional Development

Professional development (PD) designed to facilitate effective DL delivery is a key component of DL in Minnesota ABE.

**PD Requirements**: All ABE staff who work in Distance Learning must complete either DL Basics or DL101. Staff must complete *DL Basics* within three months of beginning to work in the area of DL (existing staff) or within three months of employment (new staff), unless they have completed, or are in the process of completing *DL 101*.

***DL Basics*** provides an overview of DL essentials for managers, instructors, and support staff. It is available online at the [Minnesota Literacy Council’s Online Course Catalog](http://online.themlc.org/login/index.php) (http://online.themlc.org/login/index.php). *DL Basics* reviews state DL policy, provides information on DL learner recruitment, screening, assessment, instruction, and evaluation, and defines proxy hours and attendance requirements. *DL Basics* is required for all ABE staff providing DL programming. A face to face training can be requested from the DL Supplemental Services staff as an alternative.

**DL 101** is a comprehensive cohort professional development option for DL teachers and managers. Programs develop and implement a distance learning plan incorporating best practices. Additional support and technical assistance is also provided. **DL 101 is strongly recommended for all programs or consortia offering distance learning.**

**DL 102** includes more advanced study of actual DL delivery. Courses for managers and teachers are available for those who have completed DL 101. Participation is encouraged but not required.

**Northstar Foundations** is available online through the [Minnesota Literacy Council’s Online Course Catalog](http://online.themlc.org/login/index.php) (http://online.themlc.org/login/index.php). This course provides an overview of the Northstar Digital Literacy standards and digital literacy integration in the ABE classroom. It is not required, but provides excellent resources for all ABE teachers.

### Assessing Learners Using Distance Learning Curriculum

Distance learners must be assessed under the same guidelines as all adult learners in the state and ABE programs must adhere to the Minnesota ABE Assessment Policy, which can be found online at the [Minnesota ABE Law, Policy and Guidance page](http://www.mnabe.org/program-management/law-policy-guidance) (http://www.mnabe.org/program-management/law-policy-guidance).

### Instructional Delivery Models

There are 3 instructional delivery models using distance learning curricula:

1. Distance Education – Learners work independently at a distance or in a site’s computer lab and are not enrolled in face-to-face classes; this mode of instruction is appropriate for learners with strong computer literacy and independent study skills.
2. Hybrid or Blended – This is a delivery model in which a classroom instructor is involved in assigning distance learning work to be done outside of class and is involved in the support and monitoring of learners' progress in the online platform. In this mode of instruction, one teacher supports both face to face and online instruction for a single group of learners, and intentionally integrates the two modes of instruction for the learners’ benefit.
3. Dual Enrolled - In this delivery model, the learner takes face to face class(es) and is also enrolled in a pure or supported DL distance learning program, but the two modes of instruction do not overlap in content or in teacher/staff. The two modes of instruction operate independently of each other.

Proxy hours may be counted when the following conditions are met:

1. The ABE program is using an approved DL curriculum found on the ABE DL website.
2. Learners are working independently on the online curriculum either:
   1. At a distance (not at the ABE program site); or
   2. At an ABE site (e.g. computer lab) and regular ABE contact hours are **not** collected for that same lab time.
3. Learners meet requirements for distance learning curricula used, such as the minimum test scores for entry and complying with intended product use, as defined by the distance learning curriculum developer. (For more information on ABE program guidelines for determining online education learner eligibility, go to the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Website](http://www.mnabe-distancelearning.org) (www.mnabe-distancelearning.org).)

Proxy hours may not be counted for in-class work, which generates contact hours.

### Counting Distance Learning Contact Hours

Classroom (seat time) hours and proxy hours (PH) will be recorded as separate classes in the state data system.

There are two possible “types” of contact hours involved in distance education:

1. **Synchronous Hours**: Face to face or live online interactions between an instructor and learner(s). Occur in distance learning for orientation, counseling, pre- and post-testing, or supplemental classroom instruction, either face to face or via online technologies such as webinars, chat, Facetime, Google hangout, Skype, etc. For all synchronous hours, Minnesota ABE programs will follow the ABE Contact Hour Policy. **This time needs to be recorded as contact hours (similar to in-class time).**
2. **Asynchronous Hours**: Instruction is provided when a learner works independently using one or more of the distance learning platforms listed in the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Website](http://www.mnabe-distancelearning.org) (www.mnabe-distancelearning.org). These hours could happen off-site or on-site, as long as in-class contact hours are not counted for the same activity. Off-site asynchronous hours could be completed at a learner’s home, at a public library, or any other location a learner is completing a distance learning curriculum. An example of on-site asynchronous hours includes a learner working in an ABE program’s computer lab after class, when this time is not counted as in-class contact hours. Asynchronous DL hours are counted as mastery or time-on-task proxy hours, depending on the platform used. **This time needs to be recorded as proxy hours.**

For asynchronous hours, the manner in which proxy hours are determined will vary depending upon the curriculum used. For information on proxy hours assigned to specific approved DL platforms, please refer to the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Website](http://www.mnabe-distancelearning.org) (www.mnabe-distancelearning.org).

### ABE Auditing Requirements

For auditing purposes, programs must keep records documenting student distance learning achievements and proxy hours claimed. **A digital document, pdf, or spreadsheet from a platform's reporting or admin system is generally sufficient.** Some other acceptable measures of documentation include:

* Printed learner screenshots
* Printed software-generated reporting tables
* Teacher-signed learner logs

The documentation must:

* Include the name of the distance learning product
* List the specific unit(s) the learner completed or mastered
* Show that a learner completed and/or mastered the unit according to standards
* Include a date of completion

In an audit, programs must present all required documentation or risk having to pay back state and federal money earned from undocumented proxy hours.

For specific documentation requirements by distance learning curricula, go to the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Website](http://www.mnabe-distancelearning.org/) (www.mnabe-distancelearning.org).

### Federally Reported Distance Learning Participants

The Minnesota Department of Education’s ABE Office has defined “Distance Education” participants as those ABE students with at least 50% of their annual participation generated via proxy hours. Distance Education students are reported by the Minnesota Department of Education to the U.S. Department of Education in statewide reports.

### Approved Distance Learning Curricula

There are two categories of approved DL platforms available to Minnesota ABE:

1. Products purchased and supported with state funds (currently Edmentum and Burlington English).
2. Products that are chosen by and purchased by individual programs/consortia (or are free).

A current list of approved DL platforms can be found at [MNABE Distance Learning Page on Approved Platforms](http://mnabe-distancelearning.org/approved-dl-platforms) (http://mnabe-distancelearning.org/approved-dl-platforms).

### To Get a Distance Learning Curriculum Approved

Information and forms detailing what an ABE program need in order to approve a distance learning curriculum for proxy hour purposes can be found at [MNABE Distance Learning Page on Approved Platforms](http://mnabe-distancelearning.org/approved-dl-platforms) (http://mnabe-distancelearning.org/approved-dl-platforms).

### Helpful Definitions

**Distance Learning (DL) and Distance Education (DE)**

**DE**: A broad term to cover all aspects of programming/instruction that allows for learning outside the classroom

**DL**: What learners are actually doing/working on. We usually use ‘DL’ in MN ABE.

**Pure DL**: Delivered almost totally at a distance; very minimal face-to-face interaction, if any.

**Supported DL**: Learner receives face to face orientation, but after that most or all work and interaction are at a distance (most common in MN ABE).

**Hybrid Learning = Blended learning (BL)**: There are several instructional models, but generally, it’s regular classroom instruction combined with distance learning, where distance is added to intensify or accelerate instruction. Classroom teacher is involved in assigning online work, checking on, and supporting learners in that work. Moves the role of technology beyond that of a useful tool to support learning to being the actual place where the instruction, activities, and assessment occur. Most staff time-intensive, but learners also make the most progress/gains.

**Classroom Technology Integration (CTI)**: Teachers leverage technologies to support their in-class instruction, use class time to strengthen learners’ digital literacy skills, or both.

**Dual Enrolled**: The learner who is taking F2F class(es) and is also enrolled in pure or supported DL, but the two do not overlap in content or in teacher/staff (also common in MN ABE).

**Proxy Hours (PH)**: DL contact hours that may be earned based on face to face time or mastery of content, depending on how the DL platform is constructed and used by learners.

**Synchronous** (learning, communication, etc.): Instruction is happening with teachers and students at the same time; interactions are conducted in real time. Examples include face to face classes, live webinars, chat, Facetime, Google hangout, Skype, etc.

**Asynchronous** (or sequential): Instruction is not happening with teachers and students at the same time. Examples include email, blog, video, online discussion and comments, online courses, Twitter, Facebook, etc.

## For More Information

Distance Learning resources can be found online at the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Web Site](http://www.mnabe-distancelearning.org/) (http://www.mnabe-distancelearning.org/).

This policy, along with other ABE policies and resources, can be found online at the [Minnesota ABE Law, Policy and Guidance page](http://www.mnabe.org/program-management/law-policy-guidance) (http://www.mnabe.org/program-management/law-policy-guidance).

If you have any questions about the Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Policy, contact Brad Hasskamp, (651) 582-8594 or brad.hasskamp@state.mn.us.

If you have any questions about distance learning data and reporting requirements, please contact Todd Wagner, (651)582-8466 or todd.wagner@state.mn.us.