

CASS LAKE=BENA-WALKER ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Cass Lake-Bena-Walker encounters a variety of pressing challenges due to the nature of barriers our students face in navigating life in a predominantly Native American community. As adults, our students face pressures such as an increase in personal/family/ and community substance abuse, mental health, gang activity, and transportation in addition to numerous support system leadership changes, and family or community deaths have greatly increased in the past years. Many of our students have a lack of stability or an almost non-existent support system within their family and community. They often lack the self-efficacy and self-management skills to deal with never-ending stress of navigating systems such as healthcare and welfare.

Covid-19 has exasperated these barriers. The temporary closing of onsite classes has more than impacted just the instruction of our students. CLBW ABE is a place where students go for more than instruction grounded in their Native culture and traditional wisdom and values. It is a place to feel free from many of the stresses of their home life in addition to being a safe place to share what is happening in their life and in the lives of those they care about. They looked forward to having coffee, tea snacks, and lunch that were offered to anyone. It was a time to feed their minds and body as well as a place to slow down and share what was on their hearts without judgment. So, when they closed campus in March following COVID-19 lockdown orders, it not only impacted academics but also affected their student's wellbeing even more deeply. Many of the learners looked forward to the various weekly events on campus such as Monday Drum Ceremonies, Talking Circle, Lunch and Learns, Ojibwe Immersion Lunch, and more. These activities provided a way to share a meal and safely connect with the community.

Adult education is a "fluid" endeavor that is called to be ever flexible in its response to the needs

of the students and community that it serves. Therefore, Due to Covid-19, we had to quickly shift to offering our classes as distance only. We made numerous attempts to reach students via phone, email, text, Facebook to let them know what was happening. We continued offering services via DL platforms, Zoom, Google Meets, etc. with little success.

All testing centers were closed in March and students were not able to test until mid-June via Online Proctor GED testing. Only one student registered. Fortunately, he endured the wait and passed his test. Although one local testing center reopened at the end of summer, few students registered to test. Our local site was a place of familiarity and the learners felt comfortable and have stated they are waiting until our site reopens. CLBW ABE staff renewed their PV certification for 2020-2021, but our site remains closed until the site restrictions are lifted. We are working on being able to offer on-site testing and assessments by appointment only as soon as it is safe to do so. Our staff is continuously encouraging students to practice online via different distance learning platforms and register for their tests via OP as well. Many received extra practice test vouchers to prepare them for the Official GED test.

Before Covid-19 reared its ugly head, CLBW ABE had started developing an effective and consistent implementation of distance learning into student schedules. We were a technology-rich program that did not have a strong foundation or history of true implementation of distance learning. Our students used distance learning platforms during class times because they do not have adequate or consistent devices or internet/WIFI able to sustain distance learning. Our students are mainly low-income and highly mobile with limited technology access outside of the school space which has been further hampered by moving to offer distance learning access. We worked with the Leech Lake Tribal College and Cass Lake School district's IT departments to create a student/community technology survey to gauge true levels of technology access in the community, which will hopefully provide additional guidance on how to continue moving forward. These surveys are sent out and updated as needed with a 20% response rate.

Our Distance Learning Plan provides an opportunity for students to have access to appropriate educational materials and receive weekly interaction with ABE staff. We will maintain educational continuity, ensuring equity and equal access in all our plans. Equity is demonstrated by offering an education developed to meet their individual needs in a safe, nurturing, and respectful environment. They support a learning-rich culture provides opportunities for equity, collaboration, critical thinking, creative problem, solving risk-taking, and celebrating success with individual diversity

To maintain relationships, the main mode of communication is utilizing the phone system or Google Voice for daily conversations. Other methods used to facilitate communication will vary depending on student access. These include using the Remind App, Google Classroom, and Google docs, and text messaging. All calls to our class and office phones are being forwarded to the Coordinator's phone to keep a prompt response a requirement and priority.

CLBW ABE recent efforts to support student success have been heavily focused on the impact of COVID-19 and campus closure on students' lives and the ability to perform academically amidst these new and unfamiliar challenges. Cass Lake School District and Leech Lake Tribal College are working with CLBW ABE to provide our learners with technological issues and concerns, finding alternative means for distance learning and safely providing the materials for students to use at home.

Many of our students lack home computers and internet access, and many are also experiencing food insecurity and/or mental health issues. Our staff has spent much of the time helping students find access to computers, Wi-Fi access points, and finding connections for mental health services.

CLBW is striving to provide academic, emotional, and community resources in addition to understanding the realities our students are facing in this ever-changing world. We are attempting to meet their basic needs and keeping them enrolled and progressing with their studies Many are unable to attend online

Zoom meetings during the day, as they need to be engaged with their at-home K-12 children or they are working extra hours to survive. We will still be here when they are ready to continue their education.

Some of the lessons learned during this pandemic are:

Accessibility Equity: having the proper devices, connection, software

Autonomy: Ability to set goals, develop time management skills, avoid, or work through distractions

Clear communication with students and clarity over expectations: well-explained tasks with well-explained rationales (what they need to do and why we are asking them to do it) eventually leads to positive self-regulation

Career focus: revise current career pathways curriculum utilizing CareerForce and MCIS sites with embedded links, continued communication with local employers and CareerForce centers

Collaboration with the community: Cass Lake School District, Leech Lake Tribal College, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, BiCap and Leech Lake YouthBuild, CareerForce, MNCEP, Evergreen, Leech Lake Gaming, and other community resources

Communication, and Connectedness: Read between the lines

-Which venue or platforms to use, how often to contact students, respond within 24-48 hours if possible, create consistent office hours, use positive words and tone, give feedback

Create a Digital Home Base: self-created class website for students and staff with the most recent and up-to-date information to cultivate stability and consistency

Simplify: cut back on the expectation to help reduce anxiety. Design learning experiences with clear instruction, learning, and assessment to address skill gaps

On a positive note, this summer we had two students complete the requirements for the Adult Diploma,

and one was motivated after years and years to complete the last credit needed to earn his high

school diploma. Several other students have taken the opportunity to dive in and are working diligently

to complete the local high school diploma requirements and are on target to graduate by spring, if not

earlier. Many of the GED students are slowly plugging away preparing for the day we reopen at our

Leech Lake Tribal College. We will continue to persevere and offer support for any academic, emotional,

or find resources to help our students continue on their path to reach any goals they have set. We want

to provide content, experiences, and connection with our students so they can continue to learn as part of our wonderful, supportive community.