DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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

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FAQ Sections

CLOSURE OF ABE PROGRAMMING

1.   Do all ABE classes have to close, even those not in school district buildings?

Executive Order 20-02 requires all public and charter schools in Minnesota be closed to students by Wednesday, March 18. He encourages tribal schools to fulfill the spirit and directives of this Executive Order. This executive order does not specifically address closure of ABE programming, but based on our understanding of the intent of the order, and the public health concerns that prompted it, the Minnesota Department of Education Adult Basic Education (ABE) team STRONGLY RECOMMENDS the following:

As of Wednesday, March 18, all in-person ABE programming across the state of Minnesota should be closed. This includes locations offering drop-in or one-room-classroom type services. ALL in-person ABE programming should be closed to students, including those not located within a school building. ABE providers should encourage their students to stay home when they would have been attending ABE programming.

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

(Cited from [Statement regarding Minnesota Adult Basic Education Services and COVID-19](#)*, distributed via email on Tuesday, March 17, 2020)*

2.   Does the two-week period to prepare for distance learning apply to ABE?

Governor Walz has directed schools to close and for staff to use the time from now until March 27 to build their capacity to provide distance education beginning March 30. We encourage ABE staff to reach out to K-12 staff to share knowledge and resources.

The governor's order does not explicitly prohibit ABE programs from offering distance education during this period. We do not think ABE programs need to discontinue existing distance education to their students during this time. We encourage you to focus both on building capacity for distance education during this time and to find ways to provide distance education to your ABE students as soon as your program is prepared to offer it. However, your programs should follow the guidance from your district or organization regarding limiting work during this time to planning for distance education.

3.   Are ABE programs expected to stay closed after March 27?

We currently do not know the answer to that question. Guidance from the governor and the education commissioner have said to prepare for school closings after March 27. We recommend that ABE providers prepare for the possibility of extended closure of in-person ABE programming.

CONTACT HOURS

4.   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.

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

You can count hours for synchronous distance education and educational counseling/advising via telephone. 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.

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

No, because it isn't synchronous instruction (see #4). 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.

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

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

8.   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.

9.   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, per the answer to #10 below, you can submit a platform that has not yet been approved for consideration by the distance learning team.

10.   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 (http://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.

11.   Should people enter data in their regular SiD classes if they are meeting online now? Or should they 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 (https://mnabe.zendesk.com) or contact SiD support (email at support@mnabe.org).

ASSESSMENT/PRE and POST TESTING

12.   Is there a way to proctor NRS testing remotely?

Not at this time.

13.   How can we pretest new students?

There currently is not an approved way to pretest students at a distance. If you have students who have not yet pretested, or started pretesting but didn't complete, you will not be able to enter more than 12 hours into SiD for those students. However, even if you are not able to pretest a student, you can still continue providing distance education without counting contact hours, as this is a way to serve students and help meet their instructional needs.

14.   Can we keep a tally of hours over 12, and when the student is able to test, and enter them retroactively?

No, hours should not be entered retroactively. However, you can still continue providing distance education without counting contact hours, as this is a way to serve students and help meet their instructional needs.

15.   How can we posttest current students?

There currently is not an approved way to posttest students at a distance.

16.   How can we reach our MSG targets for ABE and ESL students if we can't posttest them? Will we be placed in program improvement next year because of this?

We recognize that the inability to posttest means that programs will not be able to achieve any additional MSGs, at least for now. Don't worry about this at this time. Next year's program improvement process will take this into account. Please focus on providing educational services to your students.

17.   If we have new students interested in Distance Learning, can we serve them?

Yes. You can do an intake at a distance (for example via phone, email, Zoom, FaceTime), and create the student record in SiD. However, you can only enter up to 11.75 hours for this student in SiD, because they will not be able to pretest. Then stop entering hours into SiD for them, but continue serving them. Remember, our top priority in this moment is to provide educational services to eligible students, regardless of whether we can count hours for those services.

CORRECTIONS

18.   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 safety. This applies to both the state correctional system and local or county jails.

ABE INSTRUCTION AT A DISTANCE

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

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. Use whatever tools make the most sense based on what you and your students have available. Record hours for this time in SiD. (See question #11).

Please note that if you record a live synchronous distance learning class and some students watch the recording later, those later hours 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 those hours in SiD. Also, when recording please be certain you have appropriate permission from any student whose image and/or voice will be recorded.

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: http://mnabe-distancelearning.org/), record those hours in SiD. If the platform is not approved, do not record the hours in SiD.

Courses built in a Learning Management System like Schoology or Canvas are not currently approved for proxy hours, but should be considered as an effective learning tool (see also question #20 below).

20.   Can we create some classes in a Learning Management System (LMS) like Canvas and submit that for approval for proxy hours? How long does that take?

You could do so, but you will need to determine the number of proxy hours that should be awarded for the online coursework. Normally that would mean having students working on the materials so you can take an average of their time. The Distance Learning (DL) Team would be interested to see the courses, but due to their current heavy workload there may be some delays in reviewing materials and applications.

21.   Do teachers who are teaching using Zoom, Google Hangouts, etc., also 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.

22.   Is there consideration for programs like Schoology or Google Classroom? Can we report those hours generated where a teacher is assigning and students are completing, but it may be asynchronous?

At this time, no. Current DL policy does not have a mechanism for counting proxy hours for teacher-created or teacher-curated courses on an Learning Management System (LMS). We are investigating whether this could be changed in future policy, and will review any courses that are submitted through the platform approval application (keeping in mind that the present workload is very high, and there may be delays in reviewing these applications). A course on a LMS is a useful tool for learning, and we encourage teachers to experiment with all ways to support their students, regardless of whether that activity "counts" for proxy or contact hours.

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

It varies, 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 have and how easy they are to answer, 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.

STANDARD ADULT DIPLOMA

24.   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.

25.   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.

DATA ENTRY

26.   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. If that changes, we will email Minnesota ABE Managers, Coordinators and Lead Teachers.

PARTNERS / GRANTS

27.   Any direction on other grants? Like Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) and Pathways to Prosperity (P2P)?

Not at this time, however, partners are aware that ABE programming will close. As information becomes available it will be emailed to Minnesota ABE Managers, Coordinators and Lead Teachers.

28.   Some Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) clients are required to be in ABE classes a certain number of hours each week. Any word on whether the Department of Human Services will waive this requirement?

Not at this time.

GED TESTING

29.   Are GED testing centers still open? Are they required to be closed?

This is an evolving issue. Currently, most GED testing centers have postponed or canceled testing. In addition to adhering to guidance from Pearson VUE and GED Testing Service, follow the guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). For health and safety reasons, the Minnesota Department of Education Adult Basic Education (ABE) team recommends closing GED testing centers that are not in corrections and that testing centers should plan for how they could offer testing safely in the future.

Here is guidance from GED Testing Service (March 18, 2020):

Subject: Coronavirus/COVID-19 Communication from GED Testing Service

We understand that test centers, educators and GED students may be concerned about COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and how it may impact GED testing. At this time, many GED test centers in Minnesota are closed based on local school district closures. A limited number of private test centers, plus Corrections, are operating normally and are using standard precautions.

Test centers that deliver the GED are advised to make any closure decisions based upon information provided by local and state authorities and government agencies. Test centers that decide to close for any period of time should notify Pearson VUE immediately, so that they can cancel tests appointments and notify students of their test cancellations as quickly as possible. Test centers should call 1-866-389-3665, option #2 to report a closure.

Students who are impacted due to test center closures will receive notification that their test has been cancelled and their testing fees will be refunded. Students can reschedule their test on GED.com for when the testing site has reopened, or at another open test center.

We are committed to the safety or GED test-takers and test center workers. We will continue to monitor the situation and provide additional information as needed.

RESOURCE SHARING

30.   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 new 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!

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

Yes, but exact mechanisms are to be determined. We'll get back to you on this once we have more information!

32.   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: https://edu.google.com/latest-news/covid-19-support-resources/?modal_active=none