

**Minnesota Adult Education (ABE)**

# Distance Learning Policy

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## 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, found online at the* [*NRS Web site*](http://www.nrsweb.org/) *(www.nrsweb.org).*

Distance learning (DL) is a good fit for many adult learners, including those with non-traditional learning schedules. It may hold particular potential for learners who live some distance from the nearest Adult Basic Education (ABE) program, those with work or childcare schedules that make regular class attendance difficult, and learners who are in classes and want to further study on their own. It can also be helpful when social or public health concerns make it inadvisable to attend class in person. Distance learning can benefit all adult learners by fostering the independent learning and digital literacy skills essential for many jobs, training, and higher ed experiences.

Studies and experience demonstrate that ABE learners participating in hybrid/blended distance learning, which combines face-to-face instruction 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. To meet this need, Minnesota ABE has adopted the Northstar Digital Literacy Standards as one of the three sets of Minnesota adult education content standards, and a Northstar location license is provided to each ABE consortium. Integrating digital literacy instruction into a wide range of ABE courses is encouraged, and passing the core basic digital literacy skills assessments is required for the Minnesota Standard Adult High School Diploma.

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 Minnesota Adult Education Distance Learning Delivery Requirements

Intake and orientation may be provided face-to-face or at a distance, and pre- and post-testing for ABE learners accessing distance learning can be provided either face-to-face or virtually, according to test vendor requirements. Training recommendations for ABE staff to deliver distance education vary according to the distance education platform(s) utilized and the distance learning model being used by the ABE program. Only staff who have completed state mandated DL professional development (see Professional Development section of this policy) will be allowed to count reimbursable proxy hours for their learners.

Minnesota allows a time-on-task approach, a mastery approach, or a teacher verification model 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.
3. Teacher Verification Model (TVM) allows staff who have been trained and TVM certified to assign asynchronous lessons, verify work completed, and assign proxy hours, adhering to state guidance.

Note that proxy hour allotments can include an allowance above actual time on task spent in a given platform or on assigned asynchronous student work. This allowance accounts for staff time associated with varying tasks, such as managing student use of the platform, verifying student work, and providing feedback to students. It also accounts for a learner's meaningful online activity that is not tracked by the distance learning platform, such as reviewing test score answers, communicating with their teacher, and taking time to write down notes or questions.

ABE programs must maintain records of proxy hours to meet state and federal reporting requirements. Proxy hour reporting and documentation varies by distance learning platform. Reporting guidance for each platform can be found on the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Platforms page](https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning/dl-platforms) (www.literacymn.org/distancelearning/dl-platform). Proxy hours must be recorded in the statewide ABE data system (SiD) in classes with titles that use standard naming conventions that include the name of the distance learning curricula and the words “proxy hours,” for example: “Edmentum 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, as well as in the Platforms page of the DL website.) In most cases a digital document, such as a PDF or a spreadsheet from a platform's reporting/admin system should be sufficient.

## General Distance Learning Requirements

### Professional Development

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

**PD Requirements**: All ABE staff who work in distance learning must complete the online course *Distance and Blended Learning Basics for Minnesota Adult Education* or participate in a DL 101 cohort. Staff must complete the online course 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.

***Distance and Blended Learning Basics for Minnesota Adult Education*** provides an overview of DL essentials for managers, instructors, and support staff. It is available online at the [Literacy Minnesota Online Training Site](https://literacymn.crhosts.cloud/) (https://literacymn.crhosts.cloud/). This course provides strategies and resources that are essential for both setting up and implementing distance education or teaching with a blended approach. It includes six modules: Getting Started With Distance And Blended Learning; Outreach, Screening, & Orientation: Supporting Distance Learners From The Start; Effective Distance & Blended Learning Instruction; Assessment; MN ABE Distance Education Policy and Procedures; and Teacher Verification Model (TVM) in Practice. Modules 1 through 5 are required for all Minnesota adult educators who want to offer distance learning and who have not previously completed DL 101 or DL Basics online (the precursor to this online course). Modules 5 and 6 are required components of the Minnesota Teacher Verification Model Certification.

**Teacher Verification Model Certification:** In order to become certified to use the Teacher Verification Model, a teacher must:

1. complete the Distance and Blended Learning Basics for Minnesota Adult Education online course, including Modules 5 and 6;
2. participate in a TVM Certification Webinar; and
3. have a sample TVM lesson approved.

More information about the TVM certification process can be found on the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Teacher Verification Model page](https://www.literacymn.org/teacher-verification-model) (https://www.literacymn.org/teacher-verification-model).

**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.

More information about the DL101 and DL102 can be found on the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Professional Development page](https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning-PD) (https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning-PD)

### 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 Policies page](http://www.mnabe.org/abe-law-policy/mn-abe-policies) (www.mnabe.org/abe-law-policy/mn-abe-policies).

### 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. Students without strong digital literacy skills should receive digital literacy instruction to support their success in distance education.
2. Hybrid – 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 synchronous and asynchronous instruction for a single group of learners. In blended learning, a form of hybrid learning, the asynchronous components and synchronous components are integrated and support each other.
3. Dual Enrolled – In this delivery model, the learner takes synchronous class(es) and is also enrolled in a pure or supported 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 one of the following:
   1. An approved DL platform found on the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Platforms page](https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning/dl-platforms) (https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning/dl-platforms);
   2. An approved online course through a learning management system; or
   3. A TVM lesson created by a TVM certified teacher.
2. Learners are working independently 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/course/lesson 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 details on ABE distance education guidelines, including approval forms and determining online education learner eligibility, go to the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Policies and Procedures page](https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning-mn-policies-procedures) (https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning-mn-policies-procedures).

In-class work and work completed synchronously with an instructor at a distance should be counted as ABE contact hours, not as proxy hours.

### Counting Distance Learning Contact Hours

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

1. **Contact Hours (Synchronous Hours)**: Face-to-face or synchronous online interactions between an instructor and learner(s). These occur in distance learning for orientation, counseling, pre- and post-testing, or classroom instruction, either in person or via online technologies such as webinars, chat, Facetime, Google Meet, Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, etc. For all synchronous hours, Minnesota ABE programs will follow the ABE Contact Hour Policy (found online at the MNABE Policies page (<http://www.mnabe.org/abe-law-policy/mn-abe-policies>). **This time needs to be recorded as contact hours (similar to in-class time).**
2. **Proxy Hours (Asynchronous Hours)**: Asynchronous instruction is provided when a learner:
   1. Works independently using one or more of the approved distance learning platforms listed on the[Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Platforms page](https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning/dl-platforms) (https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning/dl-platforms);
   2. Works independently in an approved teacher-created course through a Learning Management System, or LMS.
   3. Completes a lesson assigned by a Teacher Verification Model (TVM)-certified teacher.

Proxy hours can occur 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 utilizing a distance learning curriculum. An example of on-site asynchronous hours includes a learner working on an approved DL platform in an ABE program’s computer lab after class, when this time is not counted as in-class contact hours. **This time needs to be recorded and entered in the statewide ABE data system (SiD) as proxy hours for the DL platform the student was using.**

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

### ABE Auditing Requirements

For auditing purposes, programs must keep records documenting student distance learning achievements and proxy hours claimed. 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 information about how long and in what format records need to be retained by the adult education program, please refer to the Records Retention Policy, found on the [Minnesota ABE Policies page](http://www.mnabe.org/abe-law-policy/mn-abe-policies) (www.mnabe.org/abe-law-policy/mn-abe-policies).

#### Distance Learning Platforms and Teacher-Created Courses

**For distance learning platforms and teacher-created courses, a digital document, PDF, or spreadsheet from a platform's reporting or admin system is generally sufficient documentation.** Some other acceptable measures of documentation include:

* Printed or digital learner screenshots
* Printed or digital software-generated reporting tables
* Teacher-signed learner logs
* Other approved documentation as identified in the distance learning platform listings on the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Platforms page](https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning/dl-platforms) (https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning/dl-platforms).

The documentation for platforms and courses that are approved for **unit-completion** proxy hours must include:

* The name of the distance learning product or course;
* The learners’ names;
* The total number of unit(s) and/or lessons each learner completed or mastered; and
* A date or date range of completion.

The documentation for platforms and courses that are approved for **time-on-task** proxy hours must include:

* The learners’ names;
* The name of the distance learning product or course;
* The total amount of time each learner spent on the platform or course; and
* A date or date range of completion.

For specific documentation requirements by distance learning platform, go to the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Platforms page](https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning/dl-platforms) (https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning/dl-platforms).

#### Teacher-Verified Lessons (Teacher Verification Model)

A record of every TVM lesson delivered must be submitted on the TVM Lesson Checklist and Submission form. The link to this form is provided to those who complete TVM certification.

The completion of teacher-verified lessons and proxy hours claimed must be documented on lesson logs. A TVM lesson log template is available on every class summary page in the statewide ABE data system (SiD), but it is allowable to make your own lesson log, which then must include:

* Learner name
* Learner ID number from SID
* Lesson title as submitted in the TVM Lesson Checklist and Submission Form
* Proxy hours for the lesson
* Date that the learner(s) completed the lesson

### 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

Overall, there are three types of distance learning curricula that can get approved for proxy hours:

1. A pre-packaged **distance learning curriculum platform**;
2. A teacher-created **course offered through a learning management system**; and
3. A **TVM lesson created by a TVM Certified teacher.**

Approval for each type of distance learning differs.

**For Distance Learning Curriculum Platforms:** There are two categories of approved DL platforms available to Minnesota ABE:

1. Products purchased and supported with state funds.
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 on the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Platforms page](https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning/dl-platforms) (https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning/dl-platforms).

*To Get a Distance Learning Curriculum Platform Approved:*Information and forms detailing the process to request approval of a distance learning curriculum platform for proxy hour purposes can be found on the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Policies and Procedures page](https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning-mn-policies-procedures) (https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning-mn-policies-procedures).

**For Courses in a Learning Management System:**  To get approved, a course must meet the requirements and complete the application process. The approval request form and process is described on the[Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Policies and Procedures page](https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning-mn-policies-procedures) (https://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning-mn-policies-procedures).

**For Teacher-Created Lessons:** Only TVM certified teachers can use the Teacher Verification Model. In order to count proxy hours for a TVM lesson, the teacher must develop and deliver the lesson, complete an online form, and verify student completion of the lesson. The TVM certification and documentation process is described on the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Teacher Verification Model page](https://www.literacymn.org/teacher-verification-model) (https://www.literacymn.org/teacher-verification-model).

### Helpful Distance Education Definitions

**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.

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

**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.

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

**Hybrid Learning**: There are a variety of hybrid instructional models, but generally, this includes a combination of synchronous (in-person or online) and asynchronous instruction, which is added to intensify or accelerate learning.

**Blended Learning (BL):** A form of hybrid learning in which the asynchronous components and synchronous components are integrated and support each other.

**HyFlex**: An instructional model that allows students to choose how they participate in a class: in-person, synchronously online, or asynchronously online.

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

**Pure DL**: Delivered totally at a distance, including intake, assessment and instruction.

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

**Synchronous** (learning, communication, etc.): Instruction is happening with teachers and students at the same time; interactions are conducted in real time, either in-person or online via Zoom, Google Meet, phone, etc.

**Teacher Verification Model (TVM)**: A distance learning model that allows proxy hours to be counted for completed asynchronous lessons that have been verified by a TVM certified teacher.

## For More Information

This **policy**, along with all other ABE policies and resources, can be found online at the [Minnesota ABE Policies Page](http://www.mnabe.org/abe-law-policy/mn-abe-policies) (www.mnabe.org/abe-law-policy/mn-abe-policies).

**Distance Learning** resources can be found online at the [Minnesota ABE Distance Learning Website](http://www.literacymn.org/distancelearning) (www.literacymn.org/distancelearning).

If you have any questions about Minnesota ABE policies, performance or data, contact:

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