 

# Minnesota State Standard Adult High School Diploma Program Pilot

Minnesota’s new state adult high school diploma is a standard competency-based secondary credential issued by the Minnesota Department of Education for adults that complete an approved Adult Basic Education (ABE) program.

***“We are so pleased with the ABE students’ responses to having another high school completion option available in Minnesota. We see renewed energy and interest in our adult students because they have an attainable option in view.”***

**13 ABE consortia applications were accepted and selected to pilot the new state standard adult high school diploma.**

1. Cass Lake-Bena-Walker ABE
2. Central Minnesota ABE (St. Cloud)
3. Department of Corrections (St. Cloud and Faribault facilities)
4. Hiawatha Valley ABE (Red Wing)
5. Lakeville ABE
6. Metro North ABE (Blaine)
7. Minneapolis Adult Education (Volunteers of America)
8. Osseo ABE
9. Robbinsdale Adult Academic Program
10. Rochester ABE
11. Southeast ABE (Faribault)
12. Southwest ABE Region Collaborative (Mankato, New Ulm, BIC Graphics/Sleepy Eye, Hutchison, Willmar, LeSueur, St. Peter, Marshall, Worthington, Granite Falls, and Blue Earth)
13. St. Paul Community Literacy Consortium (Hubbs Center)

The pilots launched February 2015. Standard Adult Diploma programming took place at **26 sites throughout Minnesota**, **serving more than 300 students** in the initial piloting period. 100 of those enrollees made significant educational gains.

**14 adults earned their diploma during the first five months of programming, enabling them to obtain new job opportunities, enter postsecondary education, and advance to their next steps in life.**

The new graduates averaged about 4 months to earn their state standard adult high school diploma, using their prior experience, G.E.D.® scores, ABE instruction, and other methods to demonstrate their competencies in the content domains. An estimated 200 adult students are persisting with the adult diploma program beyond the initial pilot period.

Of those adult students that did stop out, they did not persist due to the following reasons:

1. Employment changes, like obtaining a new job or a changing work schedule; (One student stopped out to start a new business);
2. Completed their G.E.D.;
3. Pregnancy and other health issues;
4. Classroom behavior issues or program violations;
5. Correctional facility transfer or release;
6. Unrealistic expectations regarding the time and effort needed;
7. Family and childcare emergencies, issues and/or conflicts;
8. Participation in postsecondary programming;
9. Moved to another location;
10. Other personal issues and/or conflicts; and
11. Unknown reasons.

All student records are retained by the pilot programs to facilitate a smooth re-entry into the Adult Diploma Program if/when the student returns.

## Adult Diploma Piloting Process

This timeline shows the major events in the initial pilot and plans for the second pilot phase.

| **Date** | **Event** |
| --- | --- |
| *Monthly* | *Adult Diploma Working Group Meetings: Provides ongoing training and technical assistance for pilot program staff in all roles, including administrators, instructors, and advisors (73+ staff participating from pilot programs)* |
| *Quarterly* | *Adult Diploma Consultation Team Meetings: Provides forum for stakeholder input for adult diploma development, including MnSCU, DEED, DHS, workforce development, K-12, ALC’s, employers, tribal nations, adult education, and others* |
| December 2014 – January 2015 | Initial 3-day training for pilot program staff (93 staff participated) |
| February 2015 | Pilot programs launch |
| May-June 2015 | Additional standards training for pilot staff in Mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) |
| June-July 2015 | Specialized advanced standards training for 12 pilot staff |
| August 2015 | Sessions and special standards training for interested local staff wanting to become new diploma programs (ABE Summer Institute) |
| October 2015 | Applications released for new/expanded diploma programs (pilot phase 2) |
| November 2015 | Applications for new diploma programs due |
| October-November 2015 | Special advanced Math and ELA standards training for diploma pilot 1 program staff |
| November 2015 | New diploma pilot 2 programs selected (up to 10 ABE consortia added, meaning most ABE consortia will be participating) |
| January-June 2016 | Training new diploma pilot 2 programs |
| July 2016 | New diploma pilot 2 programs launch |

## Special ABE funding and resources were integrated to support the pilots

Each pilot received up to an additional $10,000 from the Minnesota Department of Education with their Adult Basic Education’s (ABE) consortium funding to develop and implement the pilot program. Most ABE consortia participating in the pilots generated or supplemented the pilot with additional funding (anywhere from $3,000-$50,000 per pilot program). Some pilot programs were unable to accurately calculate the actual in-kind costs due to the integration of the adult diploma pilot with other classes and staff roles.

## Additional funding and resources are needed to support this new diploma option

Creating competency-based, standards-aligned adult educational programming is very beneficial, but it creates high and standardized expectations for students and staff. Local programs work in a variety of contexts, including leveled classes, correctional settings, one-room schoolhouses, and co-located in buildings operated by other partners, such as workforce centers and postsecondary institutions. Local education programs continue to develop new programming, revamp current programming to align to the standards and create meaningful opportunities for adult students to demonstrate their competencies. These efforts are ongoing in all the pilot programs. These major changes are time- and resource intensive, stretching local program budgets and staffing capacity.

## Scaling Up and Working with Key Stakeholders

Key stakeholders have been a key part of the piloting process.

* The Consultation Team meets quarterly to discuss the diploma and provide feedback on their implementation needs related to the new adult diploma. The team includes 15 representatives from MnSCU, DEED, DHS, workforce development, K-12, ALC’s, employers, tribal nations, adult education, and other entities.
* MDE staff have conducted trainings and distributed flyers and targeted communications to organizations such as Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs, State-Approved Alternative Programs, Minnesota Workforce Council Association, Minnesota Community Education Association, Literacy Action Network, Job Counselors’ Training, DHS and other venues and opportunities.
* MDE and pilot staff discuss successful local collaboration with K-12 schools and ALC’s.
* MDE staff provide technical assistance for the adult diploma to over 20 calls a week from stakeholders and potential students.
* MDE staff are developing updated adult diploma information for the MDE website.

## Top Requests from Local Programs

Based on feedback from the Consultation Team and pilot programs, the following are expressed areas of need for our ABE programs:

1. Continue to find ways to make this program more financially sustainable, especially with 1-1 student-staff time, individualized learning plan development, advising, and portfolio management at both the local and state levels.
2. Further enable collaboration and sharing curriculum resources with other local ABE and adult diploma programs.
3. Provide additional training and resources on staff training, technology tools, experiential learning, advising and other topics.
4. Continue to provide technical assistance to clarify program expectations and standards.
5. Increase staffing capacity at the state level for rapid increase of program administration and portfolio approval.
6. The Adult Diploma particularly fits the needs of the older adult, one who has aged out of K-12 supports, and may not find the traditional course for credit classroom approach feasible for their work, family, and life needs. Given this, along with the statewide focus of regional and local workforce development, the Adult Diploma is expected to be a viable option for more Minnesota adults looking to increase their educational and career opportunities.

Being that the Adult Program implementation is optional for ABE programs, it is important to consider the financial implications and sustainability of the standard adult high school diploma for the local providers. Most providers value the program, but do not feel that the program is sustainable yet, particularly as community awareness of the program grows, participation increases, and that additional funds are needed.

Many pilot programs believe that with a combination of additional funding targeted for Adult Diploma in the areas of staff training quality standards implementation curriculum and resource development and dissemination, administration at the state and local levels, the program be more feasible for local implementation and sustainability.