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Maine Adult Education Guidance for Distance Education

Introduction

The State of Maine is transforming to a learner-centered, proficiency-based educational system in which learners advance only when they have demonstrated mastery of defined learning outcomes. (Additional information is available at <http://www.maine.gov/doe/proficiency/>) This shift toward standards that ensure all students who earn a high school credential are prepared for success in college, careers, and life has created a new imperative for all the stakeholders in education, including adult education programs. To meet these rigorous benchmarks, adult education providers are working with their local school administrative units to move toward alignment of proficiency-based pathways, through which student learning is marked by mastery rather than seat time. This system has the potential to open new opportunities for students to learn — and demonstrate their learning — in meaningful ways that build toward their ultimate readiness for college and careers.

Students in proficiency-based learning environments should be able to access engaging learning opportunities that are grounded in application and relevant to their career aspirations and employment prospects. Proficiency-based strategies provide flexibility in the way that credit can be earned or awarded and provide students with personalized learning opportunities. Such strategies include distance and blended learning, dual enrollment, project-based and community-based learning, among others. These types of learning modalities, where content is relevant to each student and tailored to their unique needs, more effectively support student engagement.

Distance Education Implementation in Maine

The Maine Department of Education (MDOE) Adult Education office recognizes distance or online education as an opportunity to mitigate student barriers of time and place and increase access to, and participation in, adult education programming throughout the state. Through this technology assisted delivery system, students enrolled in distance education will have the same opportunity as the traditional classroom-based students to receive quality instruction and services. The effective use of technology and multiple delivery systems, including implementation of distance education to increase quality and instructional intensity, are also Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act considerations for Title II funding.

Building the capacity to offer more distance education opportunities across Maine Adult Education programs is one of the primary goals identified by the office of Adult Education and Family Literacy. This document is intended to provide guidance for Maine Adult Education programs on the incorporation of proficiency-based, distance learning courses and activities into their program offerings; including adult basic education, high school equivalency preparation, English language acquisition and college transition.

Definition of Distance Education

The U.S. Department of Education Office of Career and Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE) defines distance education for adult basic education programs as follows:

Distance education is a formal learning activity where students and instructors are separated by geography, time, or both for the majority of the instructional period.¹ Distance learning materials are delivered through a variety of media including, but not limited to, print, audio recording, videotape, television broadcasts, computer software, web-based interaction, and other online technologies. Teachers support distance learners through communication via mail, telephone, e-mail, or other web-based technologies or software.

Definition of Adult Education Learners

- **Traditional Learners:** Students who receive the majority of their instruction through traditional face-to-face instruction.
- **Distance Learners:** Students who receive a majority of their instruction through distance education services. The *Maine Intake and Assessment Guidelines, 2016* (page 16) defines a distance learner as follows:

A distance learner is a student who is separated by time and/or distance from an instructor for the majority of the instructional period. If a student takes both distance learning and classroom-based courses during the year, a student is classified as a distance learning student if, at the end of the program year, 60% or more of the hours he/she participated in were through distance learning.

Note: Programs can count a student only once, as either a distance education or traditional classroom learner.

- **Blended Learners:** Students who receive a majority of their instruction through traditional face-to-face instruction and also participate in distance education activities. These students mainly use technology to support classroom learning. For NRS reporting purposes, blended learners are classified as traditional learners.

Distance Learning Curricula

While the state office does not mandate specific curricula, programs are to use curricula that are research based, rigorous and aligned with the College and Career Readiness Standards. Programs must also designate the proxy hours model being used for each curriculum.

¹ Completion of instructional activities in a computer lab for traditional classes does not qualify as distance education.

To support programs in selecting appropriate curricula, the state office recommends the following two nationally recognized and research based resources for evaluating online course providers and/or building high quality online learning experiences for students:

1. Southern Regional Education Board - Checklist for Evaluating Online Courses - http://publications.sreb.org/2006/06T06_Checklist_for_Evaluating-Online-Courses.pdf
2. International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) - National Standards for Quality Online Programs - <http://www.inacol.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/national-standards-for-quality-online-programs.pdf>

Assessment of Students in Distance Education

Distance learners must be assessed under the same guidelines as all other Maine adult education learners (*Maine Adult Education Intake and Assessment Guidelines, 2016*). Local adult education agencies are required to assess all non-enrichment students using the state's NRS approved assessments. These tests are administered in a standardized fashion and assessment results provide the basis for state and federal accountability reporting. All students must be post-tested after the appropriate number of hours of instruction specified by the test developer, at the end of the semester, or upon completion of defined curricula. No distance learning students will be included in state and federal reporting that do not have assessment results arrived at by following the state's assessment policy.

- All pre-and-post assessments (CASAS) must be administered in a face-to-face, secure setting with a trained test administrator.
- All students must be pretested prior to 12 hours of instruction.
- Distance education students are subject to the same post-test instructional hour intervals as traditional learners.

All student assessment data will be recorded in MaineSTARS.

Measuring Contact Hours

Distance learners, as defined above must have at least 12 hours of contact with a Maine Adult Education program before they can be counted for federal reporting purposes. Contact hours for distance learners can be a combination of actual contact and contact through telephone, video, teleconference or online communication, where student and program staff can interact and through which learner identity is verifiable.

Proxy Hours

Proxy hours are defined as the time distance education students spend engaged in distance education activities, such as using distance education curricula. Programs should choose the proxy model most appropriate for the curricula being used. The hours for each activity are calculated using one of three models:

1. ***Clock-time:*** This model assigns contact hours based on the elapsed time that a learner is connected to and engaged in an online or stand-alone software program that tracks time. The software must provide a mechanism to time-out or logout students after a preset period of inactivity.
2. ***Teacher Verification:*** This model assigns a fixed number of hours of credit for each assignment based on the teacher's determination of the extent to which a learner engaged in, or completed, the assignment. Contact hours for the teacher verification model are determined and established through a study conducted by the local program according to the following plan:
 - Distance learning materials/resources are chosen.
 - A sample of classes track how long they spend teaching the content, on a unit-by-unit basis.
 - Average times for each unit are calculated from sample classrooms and that time is assigned for proxy contact hours for that unit.
 - Training is conducted for each new set of educational materials added.
3. ***Learner Mastery:*** This model assigns a fixed number of hours of credit based on the learner's demonstrated mastery of the content of a lesson. This model requires previous engagement by the student on curriculum and materials related to the test. A high percentage of correct responses (typically 70-80%) on the mastery test earn the credit hours attached to the material.

Reporting Distance Education Learners

As a part the National Reporting System (NRS), Maine must provide information about students enrolled in Distance Education instruction in all NRS tables according to current requirements. Local adult education programs will report both proxy and actual contact hours in NRS Table 4. Distance learners will also be reported separately in Table 4c and in Table 5a. Only students in distance education are to be reported in these new tables and all contact hours (proxy and actual) are to be reported in Table 4c (new tables attached).

Application and Approval Procedures to Operate a Maine Adult Education Distance Learning Program

Adult Education programs interested in offering a distance learning program are asked to complete a Distance Learning Application to be submitted to the state office for review. The application is available at the following link <http://goo.gl/forms/b7kxS1UzCW>

All distance learning programs must understand and agree to the following:

- ✓ Program director and any staff members (i.e. instructors, advisors, data entry personnel) directly involved participate in distance learning professional development training provided and/or approved in advance by the state office.
- ✓ Personnel affiliated with distance learning program will adhere to the same professional development, training and certification requirements as other state/federal funded adult education personnel.

- ✓ Select an individual to serve as the lead distance learning coordinator.
- ✓ Provide ongoing access to support services for distance learners including an orientation to online learning to ensure student success in the distance learning environment.
- ✓ All potential distance learning students must be assessed in accordance with the *Maine Adult Education Intake and Assessment Guidelines, 2016*.
- ✓ Classify a student as a distance learner when 60% or more of their student participation hours in a program year are through distance education learning activities.
- ✓ Set up distinct distance learning classes in MaineSTARS to track activities.
- ✓ Report distance education hours, both actual contact and proxy, in MaineSTARS.
- ✓ Any product, curricula, activities, etc. used for distance learning must be rigorous, research-based and aligned with College and Career Readiness Standards.
- ✓ Report and document distance learning curricula, including identification of proxy model and/or providers used to implement distance learning to the state adult education office.
- ✓ Complete required state and NRS reports on time.
- ✓ Coordinate marketing efforts to recruit additional partner agencies/employer partners and potential distance learning students.
- ✓ Maintain communication on success and challenges with state staff.

Training Requirement

Distance learning is sufficiently different from classroom teaching to require some new skills and adaptations to current skills and practices for the online environment. In addition to the criteria listed in the preceding section, teachers involved in monitoring and supporting students in distance learning environments are expected to participate in continuous improvement and ongoing professional development relevant to distance learning.

Training may consist of state provided courses through the state's course management system (Schoology), workshops, courses from accredited higher education institutions, the Distance Learning course sequence (DL101-104) offered by [Project IDEAL](#), or other equivalent and accredited training opportunities. The state office continues to plan and develop distance learning training opportunities.

Funding for Distance Learning

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) supports the use of technology for the improvement of teaching, learning, professional development, productivity, and system efficiencies. The definition of "workforce preparation activities" describes a new allowable activity for programs funded under WIOA Title II. This definition specifically names digital

literacy among the list of programs, activities, or services that comprise workplace preparation. This activity supports the expanded purpose of the Act, which includes “assist[ing] adults in attaining a secondary school diploma and in the transition to.” The activity is also a component of another newly allowed activity, Integrated Education and Training.²

WIOA requires states to provide technical assistance to providers on the use of technology to improve system efficiencies; and, allows states to use funds for “the development and implementation of technology applications, translation technologies, and distance education, including professional development to support the use of instructional technology.”³

Inclusion of the required implementation of the career pathways system of practice laid the groundwork for the rigorous, research-based instruction, college and career readiness services, accountability, and collaborations that are integral to the successful implementation of the educational and employment goals of WIOA. When WIOA passed, the components of Maine’s career pathways plans were adjusted to align with career pathways as defined in WIOA as well as with the Title II 13 Considerations for Adult Education and Family Literacy Act funding. Of the 13 Considerations states must use when selecting providers, three considerations deal specifically with how providers use technology. Eligible providers should demonstrate:

- how they “effectively use technology, services, and delivery systems, including distance education in a manner sufficient to increase the amount and quality of learning and how such technology, services, and systems lead to improved performance;”
- that their “activities are delivered by well-trained instructors, counselors, and administrators...who have access to high quality professional development, including through electronic means; and,”
- whether they maintain “a high-quality information management system.”⁴

The Maine Department of Education allows local adult education providers to include all expenditures for equipment, supplies, and staff time required for the implementation of a successful distance learning program in the budgets of the local applications submitted by adult education providers.⁵ A reallocation of existing state and/or federal funds may be necessary to support expenditure for distance learning.

The state office does not anticipate offering specialized distance education grants. No special or additional funds are anticipated for distance learning.

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² Pub. L. 113-128, July 2014, Title II, Sec. 202.

³ Pub. L. 113-128, July 2014, Title II, Sec. 223(a)(2)(B).

⁴ Pub. L. 113-128, July 2014, Title II, Sec. 231(e).

⁵ This excludes enrichment classes.