



Statement Regarding Minnesota Adult Basic Education Services and COVID-19

March 17, 2020

[Executive Order 20-02](#) requires all public and charter schools in Minnesota be closed by Wednesday, March 18. 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.

Goals

In response to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Minnesota Department of Education ABE team has prioritized the following goals:

1. Prioritize the safety of students, staff and communities.
2. Provide high quality programming for students throughout any program disruptions.
3. Support ABE grantees in meeting the above two goals.

Goal 1: Safety

Our understanding is that the primary goal for all Minnesotans is to minimize person to person contact in order to lower and spread the peak incidence of COVID-19 infections in order to ensure that health care systems are not overwhelmed and that the rate of infection, especially among high-risk individuals--those who are older and have pre-existing conditions. We also believe that the common denominator in all mitigation efforts is to, as much as possible, practice social distancing by staying home. Given that, we believe that the risk of contributing to virus spread posed by in-person programming is greater than the cost of the loss of in-person instruction and believe that programs should as quickly as possible transition to providing services at a distance.

Goal 2: Programming

State and Federal ABE aid have been awarded for fiscal year 2020. This means that ABE services are funded through June 30, 2020. Use those funds to deliver services at a distance in whatever ways are possible throughout any period of school closure.

As possible and based on public health recommendations and guidelines, staff paid through ABE funding should continue to work and be paid for their work during this time. The work of adult education will look different no matter what role we serve, and it will likely involve working remotely.

Please do not worry about generating contact hours. Instead, focus on supporting students at a distance with their educational work, even if that support involves activities that cannot be counted as contact hours per our contact hour policy. The Minnesota Department of Education ABE team is working with Literacy Action Network to advocate for the adjustment of the contact hour reporting period so that the time that we are seeing statewide ABE program closures will not count for next year's funding. Note that there is a provision already in [statute](#) that provides protection against a significant loss of funding in the event of service disruption (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/124D.518#stat.124D.518.4a>).

Goal 3: Support

Governor Walz has, by executive order, 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.

The ABE community, including MDE, Literacy Action Network and all ABE Support Network providers, will continue to share ideas, resources and strategies with ABE programs. A list of frequently asked questions and a central source for those resources will be shared later this week. Please send questions you would like to be addressed in the FAQ to cherie.eichinger@state.mn.us.