

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

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CLOSURE OF ABE PROGRAMMING

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

The Governor's executive order requires all public and charter schools in Minnesota be closed to students through Monday, May 4, 2020. He encourages non-public and 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** that 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. (All the Governor's Executive Orders are posted online at: <https://mn.gov/governor/news/executiveorders.jsp>).

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.

2. How long will in-person classes at ABE programs be closed?

We currently do not know the answer to that question. Currently, schools are closed through May 4, 2020. Guidance from the governor and the education commissioner have said to prepare for school closings through possibly the end of the school year. We recommend that ABE providers prepare for the possibility of extended closure of in-person ABE programming.

3. What plans are being made for ABE programs to resume in-person classes?

When the Stay at Home order is lifted and once it is deemed safe to restart in-person instruction, then local ABE programs should work with their district(s) or organization(s) and sites to determine the base way to restart classes. It is possible that social distancing should still be maintained with in-person instruction. Specific guidance from the Governor, the CDC and the Minnesota Department of Health will help determine the guidance for restarting in-person classes.

4. Will ABE programs be allowed to open again in May or June, even if K-12 schools remain closed for the remainder of the school year?

At this time, we do not know. Currently, schools are closed through May 4, 2020. Guidance from the governor and the education commissioner have said to prepare for school closings through possibly the end of the school year.

ABE INSTRUCTION AT A DISTANCE

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

In offering instruction at a distance, there are synchronous and asynchronous options.

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. MDE does not prohibit or require specific tools, but individual districts or organizations may. Use the tools that work best for you and your students. Record hours for this time in SiD. (See Contact Hours Section).

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 Google Classroom are not currently approved for proxy hours, but should be considered as an effective learning tool. (see also questions below.)

6. Can we count contact hours for students who watch a recording of a distance learning class or other recorded instructional material?

No, time spent watching a recorded class or other material 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 that time as contact or proxy hours in SiD. Also, when recording please be certain you have appropriate permission from any student whose image and/or voice will be recorded.

7. What student privacy issues need to be considered for ABE students when using online instruction? Are the student privacy rules for ABE students the same as for K-12 students?

In MN, ABE teachers are employed by a variety of different organizations and organization types. Each of those organizations likely has a set of data privacy practices that they require employees follow. Most of those organizations are K-12 school districts that may have online instruction policies that focus on K-12-related data privacy requirements. Given that, ABE programs may want to consult guidance provided by the federal Privacy Technical Assistance Center and use that information as a means of identifying requirements in their organizations' plans that might be revised for ABE programming. Obvious examples would be that ABE students can provide their own consent to have their image and/or voice recorded during a class, or to have examples of their work used as exemplars for other students.

The US Department of Education, Office of Technology, Privacy Technical Assistance Center <https://tech.ed.gov/privacy> has a variety of resources related to education privacy issues Their PowerPoint regarding data privacy and online instruction is an good place to start: [FERPA and Virtual Learning During Covid-19](#)

8. Can we count hours for student work completed in a Learning Management System like Schoology or Google Classroom?

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.

9. Can we create some classes in a Learning Management System (LMS) like Schoology or Google Classroom 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.

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

It’s variable, 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.

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

CONTACT HOURS

12. What changes have been made to allowable contact hours as a result of COVID-19?

At this point, no laws or policies have been changed. The following activities can still be counted as contact or proxy hours:

- Synchronous instruction at a distance using ANY TOOL (examples include but are not limited to: Skype, Zoom, Google Meet and telephone)
- Educational counseling/advising and supporting students in accessing distance education, as long as it happens synchronously, over the phone or another online tool (see examples in bullet above)
- Online learning with approved distance learning platforms (more information on approved platforms can be found at: <http://mnabe-distancelearning.org/>)

The following activities cannot be counted as contact or proxy hours, but may still be valuable, important and worthwhile activities for ABE programs to use with students, especially during the month of April, 2020:

- Packets, handouts, worksheets and/or textbooks that the student works through independently on their own time
- Videos or recorded lessons that a student watches on their own time
- Online learning using platforms not currently approved as Distance Learning platforms (more information on approved platforms can be found at: <http://mnabe-distancelearning.org/>)
- Emails
- Text messages

13. 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.

14. 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.

15. Can we count contact hours for synchronous time spent with students helping them access and set up their technology and distance learning tools in order to participate in distance education?

Yes.

16. Can we count synchronous hours that volunteers might generate working one-to-one with learners remotely?

Yes, if the volunteers have gone through an approved 12-hour pre-service volunteer training, they can generate contact hours. In district-based ABE programs, the instruction/curriculum needs to be overseen by a licensed teacher.

17. Can we count contact hours for contact with learners via text messaging?

No. 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.

18. 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.

19. 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.

20. 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.

21. 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 you can submit a platform that has not yet been approved for consideration by the distance learning team (see next question).

22. 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](http://mnabe-distancelearning.org/approved-dl-platforms) 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.

23. 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

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

BEST-Plus has announced an option for remote testing. TABE and CASAS have indicated they are looking into possibilities for remote testing, but it is not currently allowed and no specifics have yet been released. It is important to note that any remote testing option will be limited to computer-based testing. There is currently no discussion of paper/pencil testing remotely.

25. How can we pretest new students?

There currently is no approved way to pretest students at a distance using CASAS or TABE. 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 11.75 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.

26. 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 in this situation. 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.

27. How can we posttest current students?

There currently is not an approved way to posttest students at a distance using CASAS and TABE. ABE programs using BEST Plus will be able to do remote testing but must follow the publisher guidance.

28. 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.

29. 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 these students or enter these students' hours as non-NRS hours, 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.

DATA ENTRY

30. 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.

CORRECTIONS

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

STANDARD ADULT DIPLOMA

32. 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.

33. 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.

GED TESTING

34. 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. GED Testing Service is exploring methods to safely administer testing through ideas such as proctoring from a distance and paper-based testing. GED test proctoring from a distance might be available as early as mid- to late-May but likely only in specific cases based on need. Paper-based testing might be an option for some correctional facilities where that could be done safely. GED Testing Service and the Minnesota Department of Education are exploring this issue and will email ABE programs and GED testing centers as possibilities become available.

GRANTS AND FINANCE

35. How will the current school closure situation affect our funding for our ABE programs for the current fiscal year (which ends June 30, 2020)?

ABE program funding awards have been made for this current fiscal year (2019-2020). These funds go through June 30, 2020. These awards will not change. The current closure of schools and resulting loss of contact hours will not reduce or otherwise affect this funding. ABE programs are encouraged to continue employing all ABE staff (including teaching staff and other support staff) at the levels planned and budgeted for in the current year's budget. ABE staff can be paid for the following activities:

- Working from home
- Providing instruction remotely to students
- Providing intake and educational counseling/advising remotely
- Online professional development
- Planning and capacity building - especially around future online and distance education

36. How will the current school closure situation affect our funding for our ABE programs for the upcoming fiscal year (starting July 1, 2020)?

The contact hour reporting period that will determine funding for Fiscal Year 21 (July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021) has been adjusted. **The new reporting period is March 14, 2019 - March 13, 2020.** This means that the total contact hours generated between March 14, 2019 and March 13, 2020 will be used in the calculation of ABE state and federal aid for this upcoming fiscal year. Hours generated from March 14 - April 30, 2020 will not be included in the aid calculation. In other words, ABE staff do not need to be concerned with any decline of contact hours that in mid-March to April of this year.

37. When will hours start “counting” again towards funding?

The contact hour reporting period for this current year has been changed (see question #36). This means that hours generated between March 14 and April 30, 2020 will be irrelevant to future funding. On May 1, 2020 a new contact hour reporting period will begin. That contact hour period will be May 1, 2020 through April 30, 2021. According to standard practice, hours from this period would be used to calculate funding for Fiscal Year 22 (July 1, 2021- June 30, 2022). However, it is possible that an adjustment will be made to that contact hour reporting period, for similar reasons as the adjustment being made this year (i.e. disruptions due to COVID-19). However, it is FAR too soon to determine this for sure. So our recommendation is to assume that contact hours generated starting May 1, 2020 will likely count in the funding calculation for the following fiscal year.

38. I see that the new contact hour reporting period ended on March 13, 2020. Because of this, should I go back and edit the proxy hours I entered for distance learning for March? I entered monthly totals for March hours into student records dated March 31.

Yes. Please follow this procedure:

- Determine (to the best of your ability using the tools available in each distance learning platform) which hours were earned between Mar 1 and Mar 13, and which were earned between Mar 14 and Mar 31.
- Delete the original proxy hours entry that included hours for the entire month.
- Create two new entries: one with hours on or before March 13, 2020 and one with hours after that date.

39. Have any changes been made regarding the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) grants?

IELCE grants will continue, however, site visits through June have been canceled.

40. If we have been saving some funds for a spring project, would it be possible to carry over funds into the next fiscal year?

ABE consortia may spend up to 20% of current year state funds in the first quarter of next fiscal year.

41. What if we haven't spent down regional funds?

Regional funds are from federal funding, which cannot be carried over by an ABE consortium to the next fiscal year.

42. Have any changes been made regarding Pathways to Prosperity (P2P) grants?

Pathway to Prosperity (P2P) providers received a Q&A from DEED the week of March 30th.

PARTNERS

43. Have any changes been made regarding Pathways to Prosperity (P2P) grants?

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44. 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.

RESOURCE SHARING

45. 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!

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

Yes, those can be shared in the Resources section of the COVID-19 & Distance Education Resource Hub Schoology group. They can also be posted on the [OER Commons](https://www.oercommons.org) (<https://www.oercommons.org>) to reach a broader audience.

47. 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