



Statement Regarding Adult Education Student Eligibility and Distance Learning

December 2020

Issue/Background

In Minnesota, nearly all adult education consortia are awarded grants to serve specific geographic areas defined by school district boundaries. Grant amounts are based, in part, on demographic counts associated with those school districts. In the past, many consortia have served at least some students who reside outside their geographic grant area, but the recent dramatic increase in ABE instruction being provided via distance education has made it much easier for consortia to serve students regardless of where they live. This raises questions of which students each consortium can or should be serving.

Related Considerations

State and federal ABE funding is intended to serve the state of Minnesota, and our statewide Adult Education system has been aligned to geographic school district boundaries specifically so that we can offer services to ABE eligible individuals across the entire state. However, ABE programs that are located near a state border (e.g. Moorhead, Duluth, Winona, Red Wing) often serve students who do not reside in Minnesota, but who are members of the broader community served by the consortium. Also, many consortia, particularly within the Twin Cities metro area, serve students who reside within a different consortium. Currently, there is no regulation (permission or prohibition) regarding where a student must be living (or working/visiting/travelling) in order to participate in instruction provided by an adult education consortium in Minnesota. In other words, there is no requirement that a student live in the state of Minnesota to attend a Minnesota ABE program, and similarly there is no requirement that a student live within a particular consortium's geographic area in order to be served by that consortium.

Consortia must adhere to accountability expectations, such as intake and testing, for all students served. However, many ABE programs have currently shifted to online models for intake and orientation, eliminating the need for students to be physically present for these processes. To fulfill NRS testing requirements, some ABE programs have begun to use remote testing, while others have used the COVID-19 exemption to assign a level to students without administering an official NRS assessment. Both of these are acceptable approaches to continue serving ABE students during the pandemic.

Before COVID-19, the guideline for serving a student via distance learning (DL) was: DL students should be able to physically come to your building at the minimum for intake and every 40-60 hours for post-testing. For now, ABE programs have allowable methods of serving DL students without those students ever being physically present in the ABE programming space.

Guidance on core ABE programming (e.g. ESL, GED prep)

All ABE consortia must prioritize serving people living and/or working in the communities (school districts or special populations) identified in their most recent ABE 5-year narrative and federal ABE grant application

(submitted in 2017). Consortia should not intentionally seek to grow their own core ABE programming by expanding into the service area of another consortium, or by creating or promoting programming designed to attract people living and/or working outside their consortium's service area. ABE consortia should maintain a collaborative approach with neighboring and other consortia statewide when serving students who live and/or work within the boundaries of another consortium.

Recommended best practice is: if a new DL student finds their way to an ABE consortium that is not the one serving their location of residence, the consortium may serve that student, but should also share information with the student regarding services available from their "resident" ABE consortium (i.e. information found on the Minnesota Adult Literacy Hotline). Ideally, the non-resident consortium should reach out to the consortium of residence in the event that coordinated services would better meet the needs of the student. For example, the resident consortium might conduct intake, testing and an in-person English class, while the non-resident consortium provides online math instruction.

Guidance on career-focused and other specialized ABE programming

In the case of specialized programming (e.g. career-focused programming, such as integrated education and training (IET)), where recruiting from multiple service areas may be necessary in order to offer sustainable programming, consortia should collaborate with other consortia staff to refer and recruit students who might benefit from the specialized programming. Ideally, consortia would collaborate beginning in the planning phases of developing and providing career pathway programming.

What if a student moves?

If a student who has been participating in a Minnesota ABE consortium moves within Minnesota the consortium may continue to serve them. However, such students should be advised of services available from their new "resident" consortium (see best practice described above).

Consortia may also continue to serve a student who has moved out of state in cases where the student continues to be a member of the community served by the consortium, e.g. a student moves from Moorhead to Fargo, but continues to work in Moorhead. Consortia may also continue to serve a student who is on vacation, is visiting their home country, or has temporarily moved out of the state, as long as the student is planning on returning to Minnesota within 90 days.

Students who make a permanent move outside Minnesota and adjacent border communities should be encouraged to explore the adult education resources available to them in their new state. Note that the consortium may allow the student to participate for a limited amount of time after moving in order to complete a course in progress, reach 40 hours of instruction and complete a post-test, complete a short-term goal such as passing the GED, or to facilitate a transition to local adult education programming. During this limited time of transition, which should not exceed 90 days, the student's hours may be recorded as usual in SiD. However, if the decision is made to continue to serve the student beyond 90 days, or it is not reasonable to assume the student can reach their educational goal within 90 days, the student's record must be marked as non-NRS in SiD (which means the student's contact hours do not count towards state or federal funding) and the student must not be taking a spot that would be otherwise occupied by a Minnesota resident. This also holds true for a student who moves out of the country; after a period of transition to finish current coursework or complete a post-test, they may be allowed to continue participating in distance learning, but only as a non-NRS student, and only if they are not taking the place of a Minnesota student.