Project IDEAL Update

Project IDEAL Support Center
Institute for Social Research
University of Michigan

Project IDEAL — Improving Distance Education for Adult Learners

Member and alumni states: Arizona, Arkansas, District of Columbia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Washington, and West Virginia

AdultEd Online Launched

Last fall the Project IDEAL Support Center was the successful bidder for an OVAE project to create new technology resources for adult education. Called *AdultEd Online*, the project will create three new online resources—two for teachers and one for learners.

The project is a joint effort with the Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE). Under the direction of John Fleischman, SCOE has created many popular online resources for adult education including *English for All* (myefa.org) and the Study Place (thestudyplace.org).

One of the teacher resources is a distance teaching self-assessment for classroom teachers who want to determine if distance teaching is a good fit with their existing knowledge and skills. When a teacher completes the assessment, the program generates a profile that highlights areas where the teacher could profit from further preparation. The assessment will be ready in October 2006. A companion online assessment will help teachers measure their knowledge and skills in technology integration—using technology to improve the quality of the learning environment in classrooms. This will be ready Fall 2007.

One of the goals of *AdultEd Online* is to help states that do not already have distance education programs explore the idea of adding distance to their offerings. In addition to these Web resources, the funding will support several products of value to states interested in distance education, including an update to the widely used *Handbook of Distance Education for Adult Learners*. Other products are still in the design stage. Minimal funding is provided for working with state directors who want to begin thinking about setting up a statewide distance effort. However, the kind of ongoing support that the Project IDEAL Support Center provides to member states is not funded by the project. Extended assistance with planning, teacher training, data collection, analysis, and reporting, as well as attendance at the annual workshop still requires membership in Project IDEAL.

To find out more, visit our new website: adultedonline.org.

Project IDEAL is a consortium of states working to develop effective distance education programs for adult learners. The Project IDEAL Support Center at the University of Michigan helps consortium states by developing training materials and web-based tools. The Center provides technical support in the areas of teacher training, research design, data collection, data analysis and reporting. Through collaborative research and practice, we are working to provide quality distance education for adult learners across the country.

NRS Considers Distance Learners

In February, a Technical Working Group (TWG), consisting largely of state directors of adult education, met to provide policy advice to the National Reporting System. One item on the agenda was how to include distance learners in the NRS. The group discussed the models developed through Project IDEAL, along with several other options for reporting. Several state director TWG members were also participants in the Project IDEAL studies upon which the Project IDEAL recommendations were based. OVAE takes advice of the TWG into consideration when they set the rules for NRS reporting. OVAE will share options that emerged from the TWG meeting with the states during their November annual meeting.

How Important Is Seat Time?

From its beginning, one of the central tasks for the Project IDEAL Support Center was to develop proxies for seat time or contact hours. The Online Data Collection System was developed because states implementing distance programs needed an easy way to calculate and track seat time for distance learners and their state e-data systems were not set up to accommodate this information.

In our latest publication, *Distance Education - Expanding Options in Adult Education*, we conclude that adult learners are capable of studying on their own, accruing contact hours comparable to classroom learners and passing standardized tests at the same rate as classroom learners. Given the

Updates from the States

Arizona

In its second year as a Project IDEAL member, Arizona continues to fund its seven pilot programs, providing them with professional development opportunities and software licenses. This year, the State has added a pre-GED component to supplement its ongoing GED curriculum. Arizona's 14 distance teachers currently serve over 250 students.

Arizona's distance learning program has evolved considerably from where it was a year ago. Attendance is up, and teachers are reporting that "word of mouth" is drawing more students to the program. Nearly every pilot decided to adopt a hybrid model in lieu of a pure distance one. Similarly, instructors now know which supporting materials to use, and several teachers have even noted improved student engagement by calendaring assignments and assessments. Finally, since the State's distance learning instructors appear more comfortable with managing student data, they have been asked to maintain anecdotal data as well as NRS information. Using these records, Arizona hopes to further improve its retention of distance learning students in future years.

Since most of its distance learning instructors are in their second year with the project, Arizona offered DLI02 to help them build their distance teaching skills. One session has already been completed and two more will be conducted by the end of June.

Indiana

Indiana plunged into their distance learning project with parallel efforts for GED and ESOL students. Following a face-to-face training, teachers and administrators from two adult education programs offering ESOL and four programs offering GED classes

participated in DLI01. The ESOL teachers are using *Crossroads Café* and the GED teachers are using McGraw-Hill Contemporary's *GED Integrated Online.* All programs have recently begun recruiting and orienting students and are excited about the opportunities to have new ways to serve students.

Maine

In the second phase of a three-year distance learning project, Maine added five adult education programs and six new teachers to the four programs and five teachers from the first phase. In the fall, the new programs were trained to use *GED Connection* and completed DLI01. In February, Maine's teachers followed up their initial training by spending a fun-filled day with master teacher, Deb Walker, in the "Online Comfort Zone." All nine programs use a blended model in which distance is the primary learning format and face-to-face instruction is provided as needed.

Beginning in July 2006, Maine's distance learning project will focus on developing a regionalized delivery system for online GED instruction. The goal of this phase of the project is to help two or three of the original nine pilot site programs become regional distance learning centers. These centers will provide GED preparation at a distance to interested students across the state. Also, the Maine Department of Adult Education plans to launch a statewide GED campaign aimed at increasing GED enrollment in both distance and traditional learning formats.

Maryland

Maryland continues to build on the expertise of its experienced distance teachers while expanding the scope of its distance learning options. Four programs are offering *GED Connection* at a distance; experienced teachers in these

programs participated in a multi-state DLI02 course led by Deb Walker. Maryland is also exploring the use of *GED Illinois.* Following a teleconference with *GED Illinois* staff and after having completed DLI01, two additional agencies began teaching at a distance using *GED Illinois.* Feedback from those working with the curriculum has been quite positive.

In addition, Maryland is planning to offer *Crossroads Café* at a distance for its ESOL students. Programs will work in partnership with libraries. Training for this program will begin in the spring and instruction for students is expected to begin in early July. Maryland has been working with North Carolina in planning this program.

Massachusetts

Massachusetts has six distance learning pilot sites – five serving GED learners and one serving ESOL students. The programs vary in the curricula used and how staffing is configured; there are nine instructors involved in the pilot program. As of March, 2006, these programs have served 181 learners.

Massachusetts is focusing on improving learner retention and conducting outreach to the greater adult basic education community. The state creates and distributes a biannual distance learning newsletter that targets both the adult learner community and adult education professionals. A five-minute outreach DVD is in development; this will be available for viewing at the Distance Learning project's new Anywhere, Anytime Learning website in June 2006 (anywhereanytimeabe.org). Plans are underway for the state's fourth annual Distance Learning Summit, a yearly conference that is dedicated to sharing best practices and brainstorming for the future of Massachusetts' distance learning initiative.

Michigan

Michigan is using distance education to provide workplace training and improve the literacy skills of adults in its Work First program. Four distance education pilot programs use *Workplace Essential Skills* in a hybrid model. The project expanded its original focus on young, single mothers to include other adults for whom this seemed to be a good fit. So far, more than 150 learners have been served by these programs. Pilot site participants recently presented a session about their distance learning experiences at the statewide adult education conference. This fall, efforts will focus on evaluating the pilot programs and determining how distance education should be utilized in Michigan adult education programs in the future.

Missouri

Missouri GED Online continues to grow by leaps and bounds with 35 online teachers serving over 1100 distance students using the Blackboard platform to deliver instruction and manage GED classes. Distance learning hours have increased over 40% this year with student enrollment increasing over 30%. In addition, Missouri is continuing its very successful distance teacher mentoring program with more regional trainings and summer workshops. Regional groups and mentors drive new initiatives and the sharing of best practices.

Challenges that continue along with the rapid growth of the program are data management, student retention and measurement. This year, Missouri plans to compare its distance and classroom data to address one of its main research questions: "Which is better/more effective, online or onsite?"

North Carolina

Distance education in North Carolina continues to grow. Agencies offering distance education to reach ESOL students in North Carolina can now use two curricula - *Crossroads Café* and

English for All - to meet their students' needs. To build the ranks of skilled distance teachers, North Carolina implemented a regional training model. A cadre of trainers deliver DL101 and serve as technical assistants to projects located in their assigned region. In addition, they are teaching DL101 totally at a distance to make it easier for more teachers to participate. North Carolina is also using Moodle, an open source course management system, to deliver product training and *English For All* curriculum. They are also using blogs to provide support to distance learning instructors. Blogs have been set up for both *Crossroads Café* and *English for All.*

Ohio

Ohio has taken its distance learning program in two new directions. First, they explored the possibility of extending the reach of distance learning for GED students by creating Distance Learning Hubs. Five pilot sites became "hub agencies" and partner with several other ABLE programs. These partner agencies refer students who are interested in distance learning to the hubs. As of March 2006, ten teachers at five ABLE sites had recruited 403 students, 383 of which are enrolled. Agencies use *GED Connection*, *Pre-GED Connection* and *SkillsTutor.*

Second, Ohio created distance learning options for its ESOL students. Four programs were trained to use *English for All* at a distance to provide instruction for adults with intermediate-level English language skills. As of March 2006, seven teachers at four ESOL pilot sites had recruited 120 students and enrolled 109.

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania is currently in its second year of statewide implementation of distance learning. Over 40 agencies have offered distance learning services to their students to date by either providing the instruction using their own agency staff or referring learners to the Distance Learning Project for instruction.

A new professional development offering was held regionally across the state this year. *Preparing Students for Distance Learning* identified ways agencies can use the intake and distance learning screening process to determine a plan for preparing students for distance instruction. Several PA teachers also participated in a DL102 study group with instructors from Maryland and Ohio.

Texas

Texas kicked off its distance learning project with a two-day training in March. Texas plans to focus its initial efforts on ESOL learners. Teachers and administrators from eight pilot sites, along with representatives of the state's GREAT Centers, were trained in using *English for All* and began DL101. The state focused efforts on professional development and hopes to build a core of skilled distance educators who can train and mentor others in the future.

Washington D.C.

Washington D.C., the newest member of Project IDEAL, has organized a working group to help shape distance education within the District of Columbia. DC hopes to learn from experienced Project IDEAL states and will be visiting their counterparts in Maryland to better understand their distance education process. They expect to determine their target audience, select a distance curriculum, and begin their pilot program in the near future.

Intake Survey in Spanish

An online, Spanish-language version of the *Student Intake Survey* is now available. Project IDEAL would like to thank Eduardo Honold (TX) for his excellent work translating the survey. Contact Donna Walter (drwalt@umich.edu) for more information.

2006 Distance Education Workshop Announced

It's time to plan for the annual Distance Education Workshop in Ann Arbor. This year's workshop will begin with an evening reception on August 6th and sessions will run through August 10th. Our long-standing venue is closed for renovations, but we have found another location in the center of campus. We plan to expand the number of presentations by staff from member states, reflecting the growing expertise of staff throughout the consortium. A big advantage of a consortium is being able to share best practices so you can learn from people who have already solved problems you face. Of course, Support Center staff will continue to share insights that we accrue from looking across all the states. Be sure to set aside these dates and begin thinking about who from your staff will attend. Contact Debbie Bourque (dbourque@umich.edu or 734-615-3628) with questions.

Three New Working Papers

Last fall the Support Center released three new working papers. Copies are available at projectideal.org/publications.

Measuring Contact Hours and Educational Progress in Distance Education Programs updates two previous versions of this paper with data from member states for the 2004-05 year.

State Policy for Distance Education Programs for Adult Learners identifies five areas in which states need to develop policy for distance education and provides examples of policies developed in member states.

Exploring Distance Education Curricula for Adult Learners discusses criteria to consider in selecting distance curricula and describes a variety of adult education products.

New Online Surveys Available

The Project IDEAL Support Center makes available online surveys that member states can use to get feedback from teachers, administrators, and students. Both the teacher and administrator surveys are shorter this year. Surveys will be available beginning in early May. These surveys provide important feedback to planners on the progress of their efforts to build a strong distance program. The Support Center manages all data collection and provides a summary of results shortly after the last response is submitted. Contact Donna Walter (drwalt@umich.edu) to schedule surveys for your state.

Online Data Collection System Upgrade Complete

Project IDEAL data management staff have been working with the database programming firm, DataSmith Consulting, to complete a major upgrade of our Online Data Collection System (ODCS). The new system contains all of the features of the original database, but runs at approximately three times the speed. Teachers are applauding the new system.

Thank you for the great improvements in the seattime logs. It is wonderful and so much faster. – Ohio teacher

The new IDEAL data system works very well. It is so much quicker. – Massachusetts teacher

Entering the SkillsTutor data was a "breeze," as was entering new students! – Ohio teacher

COABE, April 26-29

Project IDEAL Reception:

Wednesday, 5-7 pm, Chevy Chase Room, Galleria.

IDEAL members are invited to join friends for drinks and food.

Presentations:

Thursday, 11 am-12:15 pm. *Teaching ABE Learners at a Distance: What Can We Expect?*

Thursday, 3:45-5 pm. *Delivering Distance Education on a Statewide Basis.*

Friday, 10-11:15 am. *Becoming an Effective Distance Teacher: Professional Development Models.*

Saturday, 8-9:15 am. *Defining Competencies of a Technology Using Adult Educator.*

difficulty of tracking seat time for distance learners, should we stop measuring it and instead focus just on measured educational gain? The Support Center argues no. Distance learners need the same kind of support as classroom learners. Classroom teachers determine when to provide support by regularly reviewing students' work and tracking their progress in a grade book or log. Distance teachers need to maintain the same kind of records if they are going to intervene at appropriate times in their students' studies and help them succeed.

For states that want to incorporate seat time proxies into their state e-data systems, the Support Center is creating a guide listing the key variables and how they are defined. This guide will be available in September.