

Fall 2003



# Project IDEAL Update



Project IDEAL Support Center  
Institute for Social Research  
University of Michigan

Project IDEAL — Improving Distance Education for Adult Learners—A Collaborative of the states of Arkansas, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Washington and West Virginia

**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.

## It's Working!

Some of the first data for learners studying at a distance are now available from Ohio and Pennsylvania. Here are some highlights.

### *GED Connection Distance Students*

Ohio's and Pennsylvania's experiments suggest that adult learners are capable of seriously studying for their GED at a distance. The two states recruited a combined total of 523 learners to study GEDC at a distance and enrolled more than 80% of them. Student seat time studying GEDC varied, but the early indications are that adult learners can be found who want to work on their studies outside of a classroom, and that they will put in as much time as they would if they could attend a classroom program.

### *Workplace Essential Skills Students*

Distance education also has the potential to help students gain workplace skills. Pennsylvania enrolled 81% of the 824 students they recruited to study WES at a distance. WES students tended to accumulate fewer seat time hours than GEDC students, reflecting the difference in their educational goals. Many WES students had focused goals which they were able to successfully meet studying at a distance for a short period of time.

### *Next Steps*

In the coming year, both Ohio and Pennsylvania plan to examine how distance students compare to classroom students studying the same curricula in terms of seat time and learning gains.

## August in Ann Arbor

Project IDEAL brought together 30 consortium members and guests for the second annual Writing Workshop and Retreat in Ann Arbor. This week-long session provided state staff with an opportunity to share lessons learned during Year 1 of Project IDEAL from other member states, work on data analysis and report writing activities for their state-specific reports, and receive additional training and individual consulting from IDEAL staff. Guidelines for supporting distance teachers in Year 2 of Project IDEAL were formulated and refined.



## New Logs Released

Based on your feedback, we've updated the student seat time logs for each product and created more detailed instructions for how to use the logs. Logs and instructions can be downloaded from "idealdata". Contact Donna Walter (drwalt@umich.edu) if you have questions about the logs. Donna has provided extensive training in three states and is prepared to help teachers in other states.

## Welcome to Michigan!

We are pleased to welcome our newest member—Michigan! Michigan's State Director of Adult Education, Dianne Duthie, and Education Consultant Barbara Neumann-Scott joined us at the Annual Workshop and have been working with Support Center staff to get Michigan's distance program underway.

## Arkansas

In Year 1, Arkansas' five sites recruited 63 learners; 50 studied for 12 or more hours. Four sites used GEDC and/or WES; the fifth developed a hybrid model using *PLATO* with AR's WAGE (Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy™) certificate program. In this model, seven of the 20 retained participants earned an Employability Certificate during their distance studies. In addition, five of the distance GEDC students earned their GEDs.

This fall, AR will expand its GEDC distance program, with the goal of having eight sites each recruit and teach fifty students. The WAGE hybrid program has continued and has 32 active students. Teachers and administrators were trained for Year 2 in early November.

## Idaho

Idaho will restart DL101 in the fall with the goal of attracting ABE teachers interested in working with students from rural Idaho. At the completion of the course, new teachers will be paired with a mentoring teacher who successfully completed the course and implemented a project this past spring. Idaho plans to have ten teachers involved in the project.

Year 1 has given Idaho a baseline for teaching with *SkillsTutor*; Year 2 will examine how different treatments (variations in orientation, hybrid vs. distance only, etc.) change student performance and attendance patterns. Data will be matched with the student information in the state database to identify promising practices.

## Illinois

Illinois is in the process of reexamining its distance efforts in relation to its state-developed program, *GEDIllinois*. The initial RFPs did not result in the desired responses, so the state is considering issuing a different RFP to encourage

potential distance teachers to apply.

Once a new selection process is complete, teachers will be trained using both DL101 and *GEDIllinois*. IL hopes to begin experiments Spring, 2004.

## Kentucky

Kentucky's initiative in distance education is web-based. It includes a web portal ([www.kyvae.org](http://www.kyvae.org)) that leads learners to an online version of *PLATO*. Concerned about the large number of learners that log in to the site but don't persist in their studies, KY is conducting two studies. A telephone survey of "dropouts" was completed this summer and reveals general satisfaction with the web resources. An experiment is underway to see if KY can increase retention through a face-to-face orientation process. Adults that sign on to the web portal but don't contact their local literacy center are being contacted and offered an orientation session. Afterwards, a teacher will contact half of the orientation group and ask if they would like assistance. KY hopes to learn how much support is required to help adults reach their educational goals.

## Maine

This past spring, administrators from across the state participated in the online course. This fall, Maine is working to develop its distance learning program and research plan. In December, Maine will host a planning day to work with IDEAL staff on a variety of research and program start-up activities. Pilot sites will be selected in early 2004 and teachers will begin DL101. Recruitment, orientation, and teaching activities will begin during the spring and run throughout the summer. Maine plans to use GEDC and WES in its distance experiments and will use lessons from the spring-summer pilot to implement its full roll-out in Fall 2004.

## Michigan

This fall and winter, Michigan will

identify and recruit sites and teachers to participate in IDEAL experiments. Experiments will begin in September, 2004, and will focus on issues associated with the state's large migrant worker population and on GED student preparation.

## Missouri

Missouri offers several options for students to prepare for their GED. The state has a *GED Online* classroom in operation and hopes to recruit 10 new teachers for this program. *GED Online* currently has approximately 2200 active students and serves up to 5600 students a year.

Missouri is also partnering with its state library system to pilot test GEDC and WES. This experiment will involve a hybrid model for distance learning. Teachers housed in libraries and Career Centers, or who are working with other workforce programs, will be eligible to offer the GEDC and WES materials for student use. These curricula will also be available at a variety of libraries across the state. At the same time, PBS stations will be airing the videos for students to view.

## New York

New York has four teachers and four administrators working on developing their WES distance program. NY plans to recruit 60-80 students in hopes of having 40 active learners. In Phase 1, teachers will focus on two issues: (1) improving initial assessment and enrollment, and (2) seeking consistent participation in programs. In Phase 2, teachers will recruit up to 20 students per agency to deliver WES with a focus on recruitment, orientation, developing online connectivity and usage, assessing learner participation, and cost of delivery. NY plans to document the various learner support strategies implemented during Phase 2. The distance team's ultimate goal is to influence the design and delivery of statewide distance learning programs.

## North Carolina

Twenty-one teachers took the online course in June to prepare for teaching ESL at a distance. To support their ESL learners, the state has developed a video “wrap-around” series for Crossroads Café that they will use in their distance experiments for this fall. NC plans to have eight sites with two distance classes per site and a goal of retaining 30 students per class. The distance model will be a hybrid in which students meet every 1-2 weeks with a distance teacher to exchange materials, receive academic support, and complete content mastery tests.

## Ohio

Ohio has funded the seven sites who participated in the first year of experimentation to continue their efforts in teaching GEDC at a distance. The pilot sites will again explore what does and doesn't work in implementing distance learning programs for adult learners. In addition, the pilot sites need to develop ways to include their distance learners in Ohio's newly revised ABLE Standards-Based Education (SBE). Sites will need to maintain portfolios of the work done by distance students that are comparable to those maintained for all adult learners, yet designed to meet the unique needs of distance students. The GEDC curriculum will also be aligned with the new standards. These efforts should provide valuable insights into using alternative forms of assessment—both for monitoring student progress and accountability purposes—with distance learners. A full report on Ohio's first year's experiments will soon be available at [www.projectideal.org](http://www.projectideal.org).

## Pennsylvania

In 2003-04, Pennsylvania plans to serve 1,170 distance learners utilizing 38 teachers. Nineteen agencies have contracted to serve from 25 to 130 students using WES, GEDC, and/or TV411. Key research questions are:

- Can funded agencies serving WES distance learners meet the state's new performance standards for agencies?
- What types of goals do WES distance learners set and meet in the time they spend learning and what is the appropriate way to classify them in the NRS system?
- How do GEDC distance students compare to their classroom counterparts?
- What is the impact of TV411 on later participation in distance learning?

The most significant change in 2003-04 is that, instead of being funded to use a particular curriculum at a distance, this year agencies are being funded to serve "X distance learners." This change is consistent with the move from a curriculum model to a programmatic implementation model. Most significantly, teachers will be able to "mix and match" curricula to meet learner needs.

In 2002—2003, Pennsylvania's research addressed many

issues, including whether or not distance students could meet the same standards for enrollment and retention as classroom students and the importance of professional development for distance teachers. The complete report will be available at [www.projectideal.org](http://www.projectideal.org).

## Rhode Island

Rhode Island will continue to explore the impact of differing levels of teacher support on student persistence and performance when teaching *SkillsTutor* at a distance. A subset of students from the first year will continue their studies and 120 new students will be recruited. Research questions include:

- What supports are needed to maintain student motivation and encourage participation?
- How many students can a single teacher successfully handle?
- What are characteristics of those students who are good candidates for distance learning?

In addition, a descriptive study will examine one site's processes for recruiting students and teaching using GEDC. Students will be recruited from existing classroom programs in one of two models: (1) Move more independent classroom learners to working on either *SkillsTutor* or GEDC at a distance; (2) add a distance component to classrooms for interested learners.

## Washington

After spending the summer creating and refining their online content, five community college basic skills instructors are piloting online courses using the Blackboard virtual classroom platform. The five courses include: (1) "ESL in the Workplace," which utilizes the *English for All* online curriculum, (2) "Writing for the GED and Beyond," which incorporates online GEDC activities, (3) "Writing for High-Intermediate ESL Students," a hybrid online supplement for students taking "on-ground" classes, (4) "Transitioning after the GED," online modules designed to guide prospective GED recipients to further education and training, and (5) "El Ingles y La Tecnologia," an online course introducing low-level ESL students to computers. The instructors will regroup and reflect on lessons learned when their courses wrap up in early December and will offer improved versions of the courses again in January.

## West Virginia

AdvantageGED is West Virginia's newest component of its adult distance education program. This summer, eight “Cybertechnicians” were trained to teach students working at a distance. To date, over 200 students have been referred to adult education programs throughout the state for orientation and assessment. Those who have chosen to study via the telecourses aired over the WV Public Television Network began their course of study October 4 when the first video was aired statewide. Those who have chosen to study online have been assigned a Cyberteacher who will guide and assist them through their course of study. Kathy Hollingsworth and Ellen Killion presented this new concept at the summer adult education conference in Charleston.



## New Products Released

Fall is the time when Project IDEAL Support Center publications are updated based on lessons from the previous year. The DLC in each state will receive copies of the new publications as they are released. They will also be available to download.

- *Accountability in Adult Education for Learners Studying at a Distance.*
- *Tools for Assessing the Educational Progress of Distance Learners.*
- *Handbook of Distance Education for Adult Learners, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*
- *Distance Learning 101: Teaching Adult Learners at a Distance, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.* Course includes updated online exercises as well as a revised *Study Guide* and *Trainer's Guide*.

The US Department of Education will distribute the Handbook of Distance Education to all of the states and territories.

## New State Staff

Kentucky DLC Sandy Kestner; Maine DLC Shannon Flavin Cox; Missouri Trainer Phyllis Shelby; New York DLC Kathy Sheehy; North Carolina DLC Katie Waters and trainers Gilda Rubio-Festa and Rachel Humphries; and, Pennsylvania State Director Rose Brandt, DLCs Carol Shefrin and Sara Plantz, and Trainer Tess Crossen.

## IDEAL Staff on the Road Again

Project IDEAL staff have been busy meeting with various state staff, keeping our DLC contacts up to date, and presenting at conferences. Since the August workshop, IDEAL staff have visited several states to assist them in training their distance education teachers and administrators, including training in the use of DL101 and the IDEAL data collection logs. IDEAL staff are scheduled to travel to other states in the next few weeks to assist them in planning their distance education projects and developing research plans.

In addition, Project IDEAL staff have made presentations at the National Even Start Association conference in San Diego and the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education conference in Detroit. If you are interested in having someone from the Support Center Staff assist in your state, please contact Deb Bourque (dbourque@umich.edu).

## Study Groups Launched

Distance Learning 101 has played an important role in training teachers in the basics of teaching at a distance. Once teachers are comfortable with recruitment, orientation, and assessment issues they can begin working on the important challenges of teaching at a distance. The Support Center—working closely with the states of Pennsylvania and Ohio—has designed Distance Learning 102—Study Groups. This class is a virtual study group for teachers who want to explore ways to improve their teaching.

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The first study group was launched in November. It has six teachers from Pennsylvania and Ohio who are teaching GED Connection at a distance. Each teacher has written a case study of a difficult teaching-learning situation that they have encountered. For six weeks they are spending two hours a week “discussing” each case, generating solutions to the problems posed. After a get-acquainted conference call, they are carrying on their discussions using the electronic discussion tool in a new website set up just for Study Groups. Deb Walker, an experienced online teacher, is facilitating the discussion. Teachers in each state will earn professional development credit for their efforts.

Building on lessons from this first Study Group, two more will be launched in the winter. If these are all judged to be successful, the Support Center hopes to make Study Groups a resource widely available to member states.

The screenshot shows a web application interface for "Study Group 102A: GED Connection". At the top left is the IDEAL logo. Below it is a navigation menu with tabs for "Welcome", "What's New", "Explorer", and "Administration". A sidebar on the left contains a list of menu items: "What's New", "Explorer", "Calendar", "News Notes", "Discussions", "Contributions", "Lists", "Polls", "File Sharing", and "Member List". The main content area features a "Calendar" section with two entries: "E-Discussion Practice" (Thursday, November 13, 2003 to Friday, November 14, 2003) and "Wk1 1st Post" (Saturday, November 15, 2003 to Monday, November 17, 2003). Below the calendar is a "Discussions" section with search and view options.