Improving Distance Education for Adult Learners

Working Paper No. 7

State Policy for Distance Education Programs for Adult Learners

September, 2005

Project IDEAL is a consortium of states working together to develop effective distance education programs for adult learners. The Project IDEAL Support Center at the University of Michigan provides technical support in the areas of teacher training, research design, data collection, data analysis and reporting. The Center also produces working papers on topics of importance to distance education. Through collaborative research and practice, the consortium is working to provide quality distance education for adult learners across the country.

http://projectideal.org

Working Paper 7

State Policy for Distance Education Programs
For Adult Learners

Leslie I. Petty
University of Michigan

Acknowledgements

First Printing: September, 2005

File: WP7StatePolicyForDistEd!.doc

Contents

State Policy for Distance Education:
A Technical Assistance Paper

In recent years many states have begun to offer distance education options in addition to their regular classroom-based courses. Distance education is perceived as one way to provide additional options for learners, especially those adults who cannot, or will not, attend traditional classroom programs. Those states with the most experience with distance education have found that appropriate policies are needed at every step of the way, from setting up initial experiments to establishing distance as a regular option for all learners. A previous paper [1] identified the arenas in which policy is needed. These came from meetings with state directors of adult education in New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. This paper further defines the arenas, presents some of the key questions states need to consider as they address these policies issues and provides sample policies from several states. These are intended to help guide states that are in the process of developing their distance programs. A companion paper provides recommendations for federal policy on distance education.

Defining Distance Education

We have identified three distinct models of delivering distance education. In all three, the primary instruction occurs with the teacher and student working at a distance. The models vary in how (and if) face-to-face interaction is included in the learning experience. Using distance education approaches to supplement the instruction presented in a traditional classroom setting is *not* considered distance learning, as the primary instruction in that model occurs within the classroom.   The models presented here focus on aspects of delivering distance education that a state or local adult education provider can control. Variations in how a student decides to use classroom and/or distance education (e.g., take one distance education class and one classroom-based class simultaneously or switch between classroom and distance learning depending on the circumstances) are not considered to be distinct distance education models because they are student decisions, rather than decisions about how to make distance learning available.

Pure Distance

The pure distance model is one in which there is no required face-to-face contact between the teacher and the student. Students are assessed, assigned to distance learning teachers and work at a distance. In most states, pure distance is not yet a viable option, because of the challenges involved in assessing students at a distance in ways that meet the guidelines of state and federal reporting systems. However, it is an option states are interested in offering in the future. In this model, contact between teacher and student is via phone, email or regular mail. Intake, orientation and assessment are conducted at a distance. The teacher assigns work, establishes a timeframe for its completion and sets

---

[1] Petty, L. I., Shafer, D., & Johnston, J. (2004). *Exploring Policy Issues and Options in Distance Education for Adult Learners (Working Paper 4)*

expectations for when the student should expect teacher feedback. The student completes all assignments and assessments at a distance and submits them to the teacher. The student does not need to physically come to an adult education agency at any point in the course of study.

Supported Distance

Supported distance differs from pure distance in that the student is required to come to an adult provider for intake, assessment and orientation, but instruction and study then occurs at a distance. As in pure distance, student-teacher communication occurs via email, phone and regular mail. The teacher assigns work, establishes a schedule on which assignments are to be completed and provides feedback to the student. The student completes all assignments and assessments at a distance and submits them to the teacher via a distance modality. When the teacher feels the student is ready, the student returns to the adult education provider for GED testing or other appropriate assessment.

Blended

Blended distance learning combines distance learning with limited face-to-face interaction. As in supported distance learning, intake, assessment and orientation occur in a face-to-face setting. Following that, however, the primary instruction takes place at a distance. Unlike supported distance, however, blended models offer face-to-face contact to provide additional support for the student. The face-to-face interaction may take place in a variety of settings, including a classroom or a drop-in center. The face-to-face interaction is supplemental, not required, and is available for students as needed. The face-to-face time might be used to provide clarification on difficult assignments, practice oral speaking for ESL students or to provide additional resources and materials to the student. Assigning work, setting a timeline for students to complete assignments and establishing expectations about how the teacher will provide feedback can be done either at a distance or during a face-to-face meeting with the student.

Beyond Models

One related issue is whether or not it is possible for a student to be *concurrently* enrolled in a distance education and a classroom program. Some states require a student to be either a distance learner or a classroom learner. Others are willing to allow students to enroll in both types of programs, if they focus on different educational needs (e.g., GED prep and workplace skills). Each state must define what it considers distance education and use that as the starting point for their policy considerations.

In addition to determining how they define distance education, states have many other decisions to make. They need to decide how they will deliver distance education. Some may opt to use a technology-based approach, such as online learning, while others may decide that using a low-tech approach, such as videotapes and print materials, better meets their students' needs. States also need to determine the population they intend to serve via distance learning (GED students, ABE, ESL, workplace learners) and decide what curricula are acceptable for distance use. Yet, regardless of how a state chooses to

implement distance education, the policy issues they need to consider are all remarkably similar.

Five Policy Arenas

There are five arenas in which policy is needed. These are listed below.

Allocation of Resources. This includes issues related to funding for distance education, including how much funding is available, where the funds come from and how decisions about funding are made.

Professional Development and Staffing. This area includes two distinct but related issues. The first focuses on the types of professional development needed to create skilled distance educators and how that professional development will be implemented and supported. The second issue focuses on the level of staffing needed for distance education programs.

Technology. Technology includes both infrastructure needs (e.g., computers, TV broadcast systems, Internet access, etc.) and programming (e.g., materials and licenses for distance curricula).

Assessment and Accountability. This is the area that is of the greatest interest to the U.S. Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE). Key concerns focus on how to include distance learners in the National Reporting System (NRS), developing approximations of the classroom "seat time" measure for distance students and the logistics of assessment for students not regularly attending a classroom based program.

Sustainability/Integrating Distance Learning into Adult Education Offerings. This area focuses on the policy decisions that need to be made as states move from small-scale efforts to including distance learning as a universal option for adult learners.

For each of these issues, a detailed list of questions to help guide policy development is presented. These questions reflect the best thinking of states with experience in delivering distance education. The questions are followed with selected examples of actual policies in place (or under consideration) by particular states[2]. These are not intended to be a complete representation of the policies in the IDEAL states, nor do we endorse any particular set of policies. Instead, we encourage readers to use the information here as a starting point in creating policies to meet the needs in their own states.

---

[2] For more detailed descriptions of the distance learning programs in six of the Project IDEAL states, see Petty, L. I, Shafer, D., & Johnston, J. (2004). **Beyond the Classroom: Six States Develop Distance Programs for Adult Learners** *(Working Paper 6)*

Allocation of Resources

The decision to offer distance education requires funding and resources (e.g., time, personnel, etc). Each state needs to decide how much funding will be allocated to distance learning, what the source of the funding will be and what the funds will support. This may be a multi-step process, as many states initially chose to explore the potential of distance education through small-scale pilot programs before deciding to implement distance learning on a state-wide basis. No matter what implementation approach is selected, allocation of resources, particularly in times of tight budgets, is a critical area for distance education policy.

In a pilot program, states typically set aside special funds for agencies and teachers that are willing to implement this new approach to reaching adult learners. Among the items these funds might cover is program planning, recruitment of learners, teaching time, administrative time, curricular materials (e.g. the purchase of materials and necessary licenses), technology, etc. During this time, states may choose to focus on the implementation process itself and defer decisions about accountability, sustainability, etc. to a later time. The most commonly used approach has been to provide funds to individual agencies as part of a larger program. One state has also used a pilot program to explore the use of a centralized delivery model for distance education. In contrast, other states have chosen to fund distance learning much as they fund other adult education programs. One state with state-wide implementation also funds pilot programs to examine the effectiveness of new approaches. An examination of some of the issues that need to be considered for these approaches, and brief overviews of the programs in selected states that have taken each approach, are presented below.

Pilot Funding to Individual Agencies

If pilot funding to individual agencies is used, the following are some of the decisions that need to be made:

- What is the scope of the project: how long will it run, how many sites will be involved, will there be an RFP process or will sites be "hand picked," what curricula will be taught at a distance, etc.?

- Who determines the scope of the project: who establishes guidelines for minimum requirements for participation as a pilot site; who determines the process for approval; who decides what curricula and what technologies will be used; who supervises the pilot project and has responsibility for ensuring that all elements of the project are implemented?

- What is the total budget for the project?

- What is the budget for each site?

    – What are the funds to be used for (e.g., teachers' time, administrator's time, purchase of equipment and/or

curricular material, development of recruiting
materials, etc.)?

– What are the sites expected to do with those funds?
IDEAL states have required some or all of the
following :

- Recruit and teach a specified number of students using distance
education

- Collect all data needed for the project

- Participate in specified training and professional development

- Participate in scheduled conference calls, video conferences or
face-to-face meetings

- Prepare a final report on their pilot experience

- What requirements will be instituted regarding pre- and post-
testing of students and entering students into both state and federal
(NRS) reporting systems?

- How will the performance of the pilot sites be monitored and who
is responsible for reviewing their performance?

- What will be done at the end of the pilot project to evaluate the
overall project and determine next steps?

- What will be done to disseminate the results of the pilot project?

Pennsylvania: Pilot Sites

Pennsylvania conducted a four-year pilot test of distance education. The Tuscarora
Intermediate Unit (TIU) managed the project. In the first year a competitive Request for
Proposal (RFP) format was used to select the 12 agencies that would teach Workplace
Essential Skills (*WES*) at a distance.   Each agency received $14,900 to serve 50 students
in the six month initial pilot phase. This funding covered the costs of instructional
support, textbooks, recruitment materials, software and administration. Pennsylvania
purchased a state-wide license for *WES*, allowing pilot agencies access to the online
management system contained in the curriculum. Agencies were required to send two
teachers and one administrator to a three-day training session, to collect all data needed
by the project, and participate in monthly conference calls. The TIU received funds for
project management and training activities.

In the second year, Pennsylvania added eight more sites to the original 12. Continuing
sites received $22,400 to serve 75 students in12 months; new sites received $13,100 to
serve 50 students in 6 months. During the third year of the pilot study, all 20 sites
continued using *WES*, at funding levels ranging from $7,550 - $19,550, depending upon

the number of students they contracted to serve (this ranged from 25 to 75). Agencies also were able to offer other curricula including *GED Connection* (*GEDC*), *Madison Heights/LifeLines* (MH/LL) and *TV411* to their distance students and could apply for additional funding to do so. The state purchased statewide licenses for TV411 and *GEDC*; the *WES* license was still in effect. Pennsylvania programs could also purchase MH/LL workbooks and videos at a discount because the state's Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education had participated in the piloting and formation of the series. In the final year of the pilot, the sites continued and were funded at $295 per student to serve "X" number of distance students, ranging from 15 to 130, depending upon the number they served successfully the previous year. They were *not* funded to serve a particular number of students to use a certain curriculum but instead could use the curriculum that best met the needs of their students.

Ohio: Pilot Sites

Ohio also used a competitive RFP process to select seven sites to participate in their three-year pilot program on distance education. The Ohio Literacy Resource Center (OLRC) was funded to manage the project and the OLRC worked closely with a state advisory board. Ohio funded the sites to teach *GEDC* for the entire length of the pilot test, and added additional curricula *(Pre-GEDC* and *SkillsTutor*) in the third year. Each participating agency received $19,500 a year for each of three years. These funds covered teacher time, purchase of workbooks and videotapes, professional development, travel expenses for trainings and meetings, administrative costs and small equipment purchases. In the first two years of the project, pilot agencies were expected to recruit and teach 10 – 20 students per week for the duration of the project; for the third year of the project sites were expected to teach 15 – 25 students (numbers varied depending upon the local populations). Pilot sites were required to participate in initial training and on-going professional development courses, collect all project-related data and participate in specified meetings/conference calls.

Maryland: Pilot Sites

Maryland, like Pennsylvania and Ohio, also used a competitive RFP process to select four sites to participate in a pilot program on distance education. Maryland also chose to use GED Connection as the distance curriculum to be piloted. But Maryland has done two things differently. First, in the initial phase of the experiment, staff from the pilot agencies attended three training sessions on GED Connection over a four month period while concurrently using it just in the classroom. Then in the second, year-long phase of the pilot project agency staff were trained on how to teach at a distance and began recruiting and teaching distance students. In this way teachers learned a new curriculum and a new way of teaching sequentially rather than having to do both simultaneously. Each agency received funding to pay pilot teachers to provide 12 hours of instruction including four hours of open office time per week, as well as funding to pay for six hours of technical assistance per week. Each pilot program has a goal to serve 25 students.

The second thing Maryland did was to invest in a "top down" advertising campaign to support the pilot agencies in recruiting students. The goal was to let the pilot sites focus

on instruction of distance students rather than figuring out how to market distance education. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) produced brochures, flyers and business cards for each of the four agencies; the agencies, in turn, distribute them to their local one-stops and other partner agencies. There is a statewide 800 number which is answered by one of two Adult Literacy Resource Center staff; referrals are passed on to the pilot sites. MSDE public relations staff also have overseen the production of an informational streaming video on distance education for the department website and approved radio "spots" written by the pilot agencies. The Maryland Adult Literacy Resource Center advertises the distance learning program on the "Online GED Preparation Classes" webpage that includes an informational streaming video and a downloadable brochure. On the site, interested persons can fill out a survey online if they are interested in distance learning. Resource Center staff will contact the person about placement with one of the distance pilot agencies. Lastly, MSDE advertises the pilot program via a downloadable flyer on the Division of Career Technology and Adult Education website.

North Carolina

In North Carolina, adult education is delivered through the state's community college system. Many offer college-level distance education classes and may also develop distance learning options for adult learners. Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) implemented one of the most successful of these efforts. They developed a series of instructional "wrap-arounds" to go before and after each of the videotapes in the ESL curriculum Cross*roads Café*. CPCC used their own video facilities and assumed the costs for the development of these videos. Building on this success, North Carolina funded a series of pilot programs focusing on using these materials to provide ESL instruction to adults. They engaged CPCC to develop an implementation model for using this version of *Crossroads Café* at a distance and to provide technical assistance and support (CPCC received approximately $35,000 for these efforts). In a competitive RFP process, eight sites were funded to participate in this pilot program. Funding was typically used for teacher salaries, although sites were allowed some latitude in how they used the funds; one program hired a bilingual recruiter to do community outreach for the distance education project. The state purchased all curricular materials needed in the pilot projects and assumed the costs of statewide training in using distance education with adult learners.

Pilot Funding: Centralized Delivery Approach

If pilot funding will be used to explore delivering distance education via a centralized approach, the following decisions need to be made:

- What is the scope of project: how long will it run, what curricula will be taught at a distance, how many distance teachers will be employed at the centralized agency, etc.?

- Who will supervise the pilot project and have responsibility for ensuring that all elements of the project are implemented?

- What is the total budget for the project?

- What are the responsibilities of agencies that refer students to the centralized agency?

- What training will be provided for those agencies?

- Who will be responsible for planning and conducting the training?

- What training will teachers at the centralized agency receive to prepare them teach at a distance and who will provide the training?

- How will communication and support for students be coordinated between the referring agency and the centralized agency delivering the distance education?

- How will credit for student hours be assigned to the referring agency and the centralized distance learning agency?

- What requirements will be instituted regarding pre- and posttesting of students and entering students into both state and federal (NRS) reporting systems?

- What will be done at the end of the pilot project to evaluate the overall project and determine next steps?

Pennsylvania: Centralized Delivery Model

After several years of experimenting with delivering distance education via local agencies, Pennsylvania chose to pilot a different approach. Agencies could continue to offer distance education to their learners, but they would not receive special funds for doing so. The state would provide, at no cost to the agency, training, technical assistance and workbooks for both *GEDC* and *WES* distance learners. Alternatively, agencies could choose to refer their students interested in distance learning to a centralized agency, the Centralized Distance Teaching Services (CDTS), coordinated by the Tuscarora Intermediate Unit (TIU). Both the referring agency and the TIU would receive credit for serving the student. The TIU was funded to provide training for agencies throughout the state about both referring students to the central agency and delivering distance education locally. They also supported a cadre of qualified distance teachers to serve the students referred to the agency.

Distance Learning as an Integrated Component of Adult Education Offerings

Some states have progressed beyond the experimental stage and have integrated distance learning into the range of options routinely available for adult learners in their state.

New York

New York has an extensive array of distance learning options for adult learners, encompassing a variety of curricula (GRASP,[3] *Math Basics*, *Crossroads Café*, *GED Connection, Another Page, Learn to Read, CFLS* (*Career, Family and Lifeskills*) and is piloting the use of additional curricula (*SkillsTutor*, *PLATO*, *Pass Key*, *Workplace Essential Skills* (*WES*) and *TV411*) at a distance. Agencies with teachers trained in distance education can offer distance learning using one of two student-support models: the phone model or the mail (packet) model. Each of these models follows structured guidelines regarding the amount of time involved for both the teacher and the student; these guidelines form the basis for reimbursement for teaching at a distance. For example, the phone model requires ½ hour of teacher phone contact with the student each week and the student is expected to complete six hours of work/week. In the packet model, the teacher and student mail a packet of work back and forth every two weeks. New York uses teacher instructional hours as the basis for reimbursement for adult education students and agencies and teachers receive compensation for distance students in the same way they receive funds for classroom students.

Illinois

Illinois approached distance education by creating their own online curriculum, *GED Illinois*. Extensive training was conducted throughout the state with the goal of training all adult education agencies in the use of this curriculum. As a result, all agencies in the state can offer distance learning to their students. The state credits students with 50 minutes of "seat time" for each lesson completed to a specified level; this is used as the basis for reimbursing agencies for serving students.

The original funding for the development of GED Illinois came from a Workforce Development grant for $500,000 from the Governor through the Illinois Department of Employment Security. The state's Community College Board continues to support the project with approximately $200,000 per year from federal leadership monies. From the beginning of the project it was recognized that the system would need to be updated on an ongoing basis and that ongoing financial support would be needed.

Missouri

Missouri's distance education efforts began with the development of a statewide online GED curriculum as a pilot project of the North Kansas City School District's Adult Education and Literacy Program; distance learning is now available through 30 adult education providers. In addition, the scope of the curricula has also expanded. Students enter the distance learning system through the "Missouri GED Online" portal and may opt to study either the state developed GED program, or one of two existing curricular products, *SkillsTutor* or *BLS Tutor System, depending upon their level of academic skill*.

Funding for Missouri's distance learning program came from State Leadership funds in FY03 and from federal 231 monies in FY04. Each funded program received an

---

[3] GRASP: Giving Ready Adults a Study Program

allocation request in their regular program budget that included monies for teacher training, teacher time and technology. Each program received $500 to support teacher training, and was funded up to 10 hours/week for teachers to instruct online, up to a maximum of $8,000 per year.

Kentucky

Kentucky focused their distance learning efforts on providing adult education students statewide access to a variety of courses. Rather than considering distance learning a primary educational modality, Kentucky has made online resources available to teachers as another tool for reaching more students. Teachers may utilize distance curriculum as supplemental material to support classroom activities or for independent student study. Kentucky developed a web portal to connect students to courses and their instructors. Students may enroll electronically to connect with the designated cyber-instructor in each county or sign up for courses at their local literacy center. This effort was developed over a period of three to four years as the result of Senate Bill 1 with financing provided by state general funds. Teacher training is provided through product vendors and the KYAE staff. Continued funding is available form state general funds.

Professional Development and Staffing

Policies related to professional development and staffing focus on two distinct, but related, components of distance education. Because distance education is so different from classroom teaching, it has implications for teacher training and for student-teacher ratios.

Professional Development for Distance Teachers

Project IDEAL states agree that teachers need to develop special skills to teach effectively at a distance. As a result, many require additional training—specifically in distance education—above the training typically required for adult educators in their state. When planning for professional development, the following are some of the decisions that need to be made:

- Who needs to be trained: all agencies or selected agencies? Teachers? Administrators? Both?

- What are the objectives of the training?

- What are the characteristics of good distance teachers? What skills should training impart to new distance teachers?

- How much training is required? Is it a one-time workshop or is it a longer-term educational process?

- Who will conduct the training? Will the state use a state-wide approach or a train-the-trainer approach?

- What delivery model will be used for professional development? Will it be face-to-face, at a distance or a blended approach?

- What materials/courses will be used for training purposes? Will a vendor provide any of the curriculum training?

- What are the projected costs for professional development? How will it be funded?

- What professional development is needed to help teachers learn to use a variety of technology approaches to provide better instruction for their students?

- How will the impact of professional development be evaluated and by whom?

A few examples of professional development in Project IDEAL states are presented below:

Ohio

Ohio requires all teachers and agencies participating in the pilot distance project to participate in an online distance education class. Teachers who remain with the project are required to participate in additional online professional development each year. Ohio has primarily used the professional development courses developed by the Project IDEAL Support Center for this purpose.

- Distance Learning 101: Teaching Adult Learners at a Distance

- Distance Learning 102: Study Groups—Teaching Strategies

- Distance Learning 103: Study Groups—Evaluating Online Resources

New York

New York requires that agencies offering distance learning provide teachers with one full day of in-service training along with five and one half hours of professional development. Professional development for adult learners is scheduled through the Regional Adult Education Network (RAEN) in each of the seven regions throughout the state. The RAEN Director conducts a needs assessment to determine the need for professional development in each of the curricula approved for distance education in New York. Distance learning trainers must be certified by the New York State Education Department. Ad hoc committees that include experienced practitioners develop training manuals and scripts to ensure that training is standardized and consistent across the state. Depending on the needs, the RAEN may opt to use a train-the-trainer model or to train

teachers directly. In this way, New York has created a cadre of trainers for each of the curricula taught at a distance.

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania has developed professional development opportunities to support the centralized delivery model. The TIU11, which is responsible for managing the centralized distance teaching project, is also charged with providing professional development. They have opted to use a combination of face-to-face trainings, distance learning and technical assistance to individual agencies to meet that challenge. To prepare new agencies to become referral or provider agencies, five regional *Implementing Distance Learning* trainings were offered.   This training included a six-hour face-to-face session to introduce the key topics related to offering distance learning. After the initial training, participants were expected to complete an agency plan, working in conjunction with a technical assistant and the online version of the Project IDEAL *Handbook for Distance Education*. This approach was later adapted to a nine-week online course for agencies that had been unable to attend one of the face-to-face training sessions. A follow-up course to the Distance Learning Training, focusing on working with distance learners at both provider and referral agencies was offered later in the academic year. In addition, Pennsylvania offered a nine-week online course focused on distance teaching strategies twice during 2004 – 2005. Curriculum training was presented for *GED Illinois*, *Workplace Essential Skills* and *Madison Heights/Lifelines* and a separate training focused on use of the Literacy Link Online Management System (used in *WES*, *GEDC* and *Pre-GEDC*).   A pre-session at the annual PAACE Midwinter Conference focused on distance education and provided another opportunity for professional development. Experienced distance teachers had the opportunity to participate in one of three online study groups: DL102 Teaching Strategies for *GEDC*, DL102 Teaching Strategies for *WES* or DL103 Evaluating Resources for Distance Learning.

Illinois

Illinois trains all programs and instructors in the state in the use of the *GED Illinois* system and curriculum. The state's regionally based Service Center Network developed a training protocol for use with *GED Illinois*. The state has a training coordinator and several regional trainers that provide the training and protocol for use with GED Illinois. Manuals and other training resources have been created and training offerings are continually expanded to meet the growing needs in the field. Trainings are conducted at the statewide, regional and local levels; workshops are held online, face-to-face and via video-conference. The costs for these statewide training initiatives were included as part of the scope of work for the GED Illinois Online Project. Initial training focused on technical issues in using the online curriculum, while later trainings emphasized pedagogical issues related to distance learning.

Missouri

As the scope of Missouri's distance learning efforts expanded, the state decided that it was important to provide support and on-going professional development for new

distance teachers. They developed a Mentoring Program to meet these goals. Distance teachers throughout the state were place in small groups composed of an experienced distance education teacher (who served as the mentor), intermediate distance teachers (who assumed both mentor and mentee roles) and novice distance teachers (the mentees). The mentor program began with a face-to-face training and was conducted at a distance after the initial meeting. Mentors were compensated for the time they spent working with their groups.

In the spring of 2005, participants in the Mentoring Program completed an online survey developed by the Project IDEAL Support Center. Both mentors and mentees reacted favorably to the program. Mentors thought they were effective in a variety of support roles and are interested in continuing to mentor, either the same group of teachers or new groups. Intermediate level teachers played both roles, and seemed comfortable in this capacity. They were able to help the new teachers with questions, and yet had the opportunity to ask questions of their own when needed. Mentees appreciated the support and information that was available from their mentors and the ability to learn from others' experiences. The initial face-to-face meeting was seen as having set the stage for successful virtual communications. A majority of participants reported that this was more valuable than other professional development approaches in helping them accomplish specific tasks. Missouri plans to continue to use this approach for professional development.

Staffing for Distance Education

States (and agencies) need to determine how to staff distance education programs. Key issues to be considered include:

- How many distance students can a teacher support?

- Hiring teachers to teach at a distance: who is likely to be a good distance teacher?

- How can agencies and the state provide support for distance teachers?

- What are the responsibilities of the distance teacher: teaching only, or recruiting and orienting distance learners as well?

- How will distance teachers be evaluated and by whom? What the criteria will be used for evaluating distance teachers?

New York

New York has established expectations for the number of distance students that a teacher can support. In both the phone model and the packet model, a full time distance teacher, working 40 hours a week, can support a *maximum* of 80 active distance students. Active students are defined as those who complete the required assignments in the appropriate one week (phone model) or two week (packet model) time frame. The number of active

students may vary from week to week and it is likely that the number of students enrolled will be greater than the number active at any given time.

North Carolina

North Carolina uses a blended approach to delivering distance education to ESL students via *Crossroads Café*. Students work independently, but are encouraged to come in to the local community college for oral language practice and additional guidance from their instructor. Students also must come in to the community college for mastery quizzes used as a basis for determining "seat time" (see the section on Assessment and Accountability for more details on this). The RFP requires teachers in the pilot sites to target 15 students; most agencies in North Carolina are staffed by part time teachers. However, at least one agency carries a higher student – teacher ratio, and has recently capped the number of distance students per teacher at 35. In addition, North Carolina has more recently begun offering an online only ESL option, using *English for All*. Teachers are reporting that they support between 10 – 25 students in this program.

PA – staffing of centralized model

For the 2004 – 2005 academic year, Pennsylvania's Centralized Distance Teaching Services employed 10 distance teachers. All of these teachers either work for another ABLE agency in the state or are elementary school teachers in addition to their distance teaching responsibilities. Prospective teachers completed an extensive application. Criteria for hiring teachers included experience with distance teaching, experience with distance learning, experience with the Distance Learning Project, experience with the curricula approved for distance in the state and their philosophy of distance teaching. Distance teachers are required to participate in bi-monthly conference calls and attend annual training; topics covered include effective distance teaching strategies, data management, policies and procedures, etc. The distance teachers are also offered the opportunity to participate in other optional training and most have taken DL102 and/or DL103. Teachers report to a staff person at the CDTS.

The CDTS does not have a standardized student-to-teacher ratio. Instead, the number of students assigned to a teacher is based on the number of students a teacher feels comfortable serving, given their other job demands; for 2004 – 2005, teachers supported from seven to 23 active students. CDTS staff report that the amount of time for instruction varies, but expects that teachers spend considerably more time involved in instruction than is allocated in the budget.

Technology

Many states take advantage of new technologies to offer distance education to their adult learners. They need to make decisions in two arenas: curriculum (e.g., what components need to be purchased or licensed) and infrastructure (what technologies are essential to the efficient delivery of the selected curricula). To date, state technology decisions have been largely focused on the first arena. However, several states are involved in the

process of conducting statewide assessments of their technology needs for adult education; while this is not specifically focused on distance education it is likely to have ramifications for distance learning. A number of states also have policy in place about use of technology in the classroom that has implications for distance education. The key issues unique to distance education include:

- At what level are decisions made about curricular and technology needs for distance learning? (state level vs. agency level)

- Where does funding for technology infrastructure come from?

- What technologies (e.g., videotapes, CDs, computers (with or without online access, etc) do students need to use the curriculum? What low tech as well as high tech options can be utilized? What technologies do teachers need to support learners working at a distance?

- Where can students access these technologies?

- What interplay and compatibility are needed among technologies in adult education centers, learners' homes and community agencies that provide access for students?

- If curriculum materials need to be licensed, who assumes the cost of that license—the state or the individual agency?

- What is the state's overall plan for integrating technology into adult education?

  - How was this plan developed?
  - If there is no current plan, how does the state plan to develop the plan?

- What types of support (financial, skill and knowledge building) does the state need to help it make decisions about technology?

- What community agencies are available as partners to provide access to technology for students, e.g., libraries, one-stops, cyber cafes, etc.?

Illinois

Illinois decided they wanted an online option available to adult learners in the state and did not feel that any of the existing curricula filled their particular needs. They opted to develop their own curricula, and conducted an extensive development process. This web-based curriculum was designed to be used either in a classroom or at a distance. It was designed with the lowest end technology equipment in mind. It is easily used on a dial-up as well as with a high speed connection. There are few downloads needed to

experience the full benefits of learning online using the GED Illinois. The technology used and the way the content is presented allow the curriculum to be easily updated. The state of Illinois has made a commitment to the continued support of GED Illinois.

North Carolina

Several community colleges in North Carolina were using the video and workbook curriculum, *Crossroads Café* with ESL students. Central Piedmont Community College decided that the addition of focused introductory and concluding video pieces would make the curriculum a more effective distance learning tool. They developed these video wrap-arounds, with the approval of the series producers, INTELECOM. CPCC used their own video facilities and assumed the costs for the development of these videos. Some of the distance learning sites established virtual classrooms for their distance education students using MOODLE, a free, open source software package, designed using sound pedagogical principles, to help educators create effective online learning communities**.**

Maryland

Maryland has policy that defines technology standards for both teachers and adult learners in adult basic education programs. The standards are intended to guide teachers in designing instruction that is supported by technology. The standards also specify what an adult learner should know and be able to do technologically. Each program has an instructional specialist who teaches part time but also is responsible for providing professional development and mentoring for other teachers in the program. The instructional specialist provides training, models the use of technology and encourages the use of technology by others to ensure that the standards are met for both teachers and learners.

The policy and technology standards have implications for the distance learning pilot programs. The instructional specialist for each pilot agency was a part of a three-person team, including the administrator and distance teacher, who attended all training for the distance learning pilot project. The instructional specialist also was part of the team that developed the agency "program planner" for implementing distance learning in their agency. In two of the four pilot sites, instructional specialists are also teaching distance students.

Ohio

Ohio began their project with a desire to use technology as appropriate. They required that teachers participating in the pilot programs have a specified level of technical skills, so that the teachers would be comfortable with the online components of the curriculum being used. They also experimented with a variety of electronic forms of communication (including Instant Messaging) to build a virtual community of distance educators within the state. The Ohio Literacy Resource Center created an electronic list/mailing list for all the pilot teachers and administrators which enabled them to communicate with each other

using one email address. In addition, some programs created their own electronic list/mailing list so they could do the same.

Kentucky

Kentucky has created an opportunity for adult learners across the state to access a variety of instructional software using a single point-of entry. As they enroll, students choose both their county association and an instructor trained to teach with *PLATO, WIN or GED Connection*. Kentucky Adult Education partnered with Kentucky Virtual University to develop a web portal using the Angel platform. Students anywhere in the Commonwealth can access several curricula, including *PLATO*, *WIN*, and *GED Connection*, *WorkKeys* and *Read on the Web*, using a single sign-in name and password. The Angel platform is also used to provide online professional development to adult educators throughout the Commonwealth. Online professional development courses include an orientation to Kentucky Adult Education, curriculum training in various products, courses focused on ABE, ESL and GED students as well as specialized topics such as learning disabilities.

Assessment and Accountability

Assessment and accountability are among the most challenging aspects of implementing distance education programs. Policies need to address the specific needs of distance learners, yet be responsive to federal reporting guidelines.

- How will distance learners be assessed? (Type of assessment, face-to-face assessment vs. remote assessment, etc). What types of partnerships can be/need to be developed if remote testing it to be used?

- Will distance learning students be expected to meet the same standards for performance as classroom students? Will this vary depending upon the purpose of the distance learning experience (e.g., GED students studying at a distance will be required to meet the same standards as classroom students studying for their GED, but students taking a course to improve their workplace skills will not be held to those standards)?

- Will the state measure seat time for distance students? If so, what algorithms will be used to assign seat time?

- What options, other than using a standardized pre-post test, do teachers have for assessing distance learners or monitoring their progress?

- If distance is a pilot program, will teachers be required to include distance students in NRS? If not, what criteria are used to determine if students need to be included or not?

- How are distance students entered into the state data and reporting systems?

North Carolina

North Carolina organized a series of pilot programs through the community colleges that deliver adult education within the state. In North Carolina, the community colleges are autonomous, leading to a decision to create an advisory board to make recommendations about distance education implementation and policy. Although the board has no regulatory power, the community colleges tend to follow its recommendations as it is composed of their peers. This advisory board established seat time equivalents for using *Crossroads Café* at a distance. Students are required to take a short "mastery" quiz at the completion of each unit of study. If they pass this test with a score of 70% or higher, they are credited with 10 hours of seat time.[4]

New York

As indicated earlier, New York has established a formula for assigning teacher contact hours based upon both the teacher and the student meeting specified criteria. The distance teacher determines if the student has mastered the work and is active in the program. For each active student, the teacher is allowed .5 hours instructional time per student per week. One instructional hour equals 12 contact hours. To help them make this judgment, teachers review the assignment with the student over the phone in the telephone model. If the packet model is used, the teacher receives the completed assignment, reviews it and gives feedback to the student when the new assignment is sent out. Additionally, New York expects that distance students studying for their GED will show similar pass rates for the GED exam as their classroom peers.

Pennsylvania

During the first two years of the pilot test, agencies were not required to pre- or posttest distance learning students and agencies were exempted from including these students in the NRS report. This approach changed in the third year of the project, when a key goal of the project was to determine if a pilot program's distance students could meet the same standards as their classroom students. A pilot agency's students studying GED *Connection,* a curriculum designed to help students prepare for the GED exam, were expected to meet the same standards as their classroom GED students and were included in determining if the agency met performance standards used for NRS reporting. Students studying Workplace Essential Skills, which focuses on workplace-based learning, were exempted from inclusion in the NRS.

---

[4] For a more detailed discussion of seat time and seat time equivalencies, please see Johnston, J., (2005). ***Measuring Seat Time and Educational Progress in Distance Education*** *(Working Paper 2).*

As Pennsylvania transitioned to a centralized delivery model, all distance learning students were expected to be included in NRS reporting. In 2004 – 2005, three curricula were approved for distance study: *Workplace Essential Skills*; *GED Connection*; and *Madison Heights/LifeLines*. These curricula were selected because the experimental work in the previous four years enabled agencies to equate time on task ("seat time") with an average time that would be spent in class on the same assignment. This, in turn, provides a way to account for these learners' time in the NRS. In 2005-2006, the Commonwealth will also include seat time equivalencies for *GED Illinois*, *McGraw Hill Contemporary GED Interactive,* and *GED Connection* (workbook/video only).

Sustainability/Integrating Distance Education into Adult Education Offerings

To move distance education from the pilot stage to an integrated part of adult education offerings, states need to consider several factors, ranging from who will be allowed to offer distance education to how distance education will be funded. This will require that the state evaluate their pilot efforts (if any) and develop a systematic plan for distance education within their adult education rubric. Among issues that need to be addressed are the following:

- How will distance education be funded?

- What curricula will be available for students to study at a distance?

- What requirements, if any, must students meet to participate in a distance education program?

- Who will be eligible to offer distance education? (e.g., all adult education providers, a selected subset of providers, a centralized agency that handles distance students from other agencies)

- What training do agencies need to provide distance education and who will provide that training?

- How will students studying at a distance be supported in their efforts? What coordination of efforts between agencies and/or teachers will be in place to help distance education students succeed?

- What mechanisms will the state develop to allow agencies that work together to support a student to share the credit for that student?

- What reporting systems will be in place for agencies offering distance education?

New York

New York has a clearly articulated distance education plan and policies to support it. Several curricula, including GRASP, *Math Basics*, *GED Connection*, *Learn to Read, Another Page, and Crossroads Café* are approved for use at a distance. Other curricula, including *Workplace Essential Skills, TV411* and CFLS may be used at distance only in conjunction with one of the approved curricula. Models for supporting students and for determining teacher contact hours as the basis for funding are delineated. Distance students are included in NRS reporting.

Illinois

Illinois implemented distance education on a statewide basis with the introduction of *GED Illinois* and professional development for all adult education providers. They have established standards for student performance that form the basis for the assignment of seat time. A consistent funding stream for distance learning and continued improvement of the curriculum is in place. Illinois also includes distance students in their NRS reporting.

Pennsylvania

In the fall of 2004, Pennsylvania moved away from funding pilot agencies and "went to scale" by creating a model and policy that enables any direct service agency to make distance learning available to students in their programs. The original pilot agencies no longer receive special funding to support distance learning. Instead, any agency funded by the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education may now choose one of two ways to offer services: they can provide distance learning themselves, or they can refer students to the centralized distance teaching project for distance instruction. In this way, all agencies have the opportunity to offer distance learning, and eventually, as agencies are trained and make their decisions, any adult student will have the option to study at a distance.