



# IDEAL Consortium

A Project of the EdTech Center @ World Education

Innovating Distance Education for Adult Learners

## 2019 IDEAL Consortium Summer Institute Report

### Stronger Together!

The IDEAL Consortium, a project of the EdTech Center at World Education, works with member states to support the development of quality distance and blended learning opportunities for adult basic education learners.

In August 2019, education leaders from IDEAL Consortium member states gathered for two days of learning marked by collaborative discussion and presentations from national experts on critical issues impacting distance and blended learning in adult basic education. States represented were Arizona, California, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, and Virginia. This year marks the largest membership for the IDEAL Consortium, a community of practice focused on developing policy and effective professional development to initiate or enhance online learning options for ABE learners. This was the largest Summer Institute since it first started as Project IDEAL at the University of Michigan in the mid-2000s.

### Discussion and Collaboration on Critical Issues

This year, the IDEAL Institute was structured around a series of small group discussions on high interest topics including these key issues:

- **Administration and policy:** data practices, use of a hub model for distance learning (DL), and the teacher verification model for determining proxy hours.
- **Instruction and access:** provision of wrap-around services to support persistence, integration of ISTE Digital Literacy Standards, and use of Google Applied Digital Literacy Skills curriculum.
- **Professional development and program capacity:** supporting distance in rural areas, use of IDEAL Consortium professional development (PD) resources, and marketing and outreach strategies to build visibility of programs.

Focused discussion on these topics allowed for attendees to leave the IDEAL Institute with concrete examples of how other states work to mitigate challenges that they share.

At right: Penny Pearson and Neda Anseri from California's Outreach and Technical Assistance Network (OTAN) share their report on new initiatives supporting ABE teachers in California.



## State of the States

### Distance and Blended Learning Innovation

Participants discussed current initiatives and challenges that define programming in their states. Each state implements programs given unique circumstances; however, there was much common ground shared throughout the meeting.

**New Partnerships.** Several states are looking to expand and broaden their partnerships to support innovation in their programming. For example, some are collaborating with COABE and Google to train teachers to use Google’s Applied Digital Skills curriculum. In Rhode Island, partnership means collaboration with RI ISTE to ensure digital literacy instruction aligns with ISTE’s innovative standard work. In Michigan, diverse partnerships with private industry support access to new technologies that deliver instruction to broader student audiences; in both Texas and Virginia, programs are partnering with large employers like Tyson Foods to deliver technology-rich blended learning opportunities for employees. These new partnerships bring opportunities and new challenges.

This meeting is the only place where you can talk about these issues with such depth.

~Karisa Tashjian, Rhode Island

**Social Connections in Distance Learning.** New technologies are opening up new possibilities in delivery of distance and blended learning. An important innovation shared is leveraging the power of social connection to help distance learners persist. In Maine this happens in “virtual high schools”. Arizona’s ‘virtual learning pilot’ employs communication technologies to target opportunity youth living in rural areas. Leaders in Arizona knew the struggles that teachers faced using their state-approved proprietary curriculum with this group of learners, so they empowered teachers to create custom lessons that target the strengths of their opportunity youth (16-24 year olds who are neither employed nor in school) students at a distance. Illinois ABE programs are reshaping what DL looks like through their use of iPathways, by using live virtual classrooms delivering lessons using Facebook Live. These lessons are recorded and accessible by students via a digital library

I found myself tearing away from conversations. Being here fuels my upcoming work.

~Penny Pearson, California

**Rethinking the hub model for DL.** The hub model for delivering DL is gaining prominence in new places and affirmation in places that have relied on it in the past. Massachusetts has created one stable hub to handle distance learning hours but is simultaneously helping local programs build blended learning capacity. This flexible model enables education providers to respond to unique needs of their learners. Maine has plans to build on the current regional hubs model of service delivery in the state - exploring ways to add distance learning as a program offering in the hubs. Pennsylvania has found continued evidence that many programs don’t want to take on DL, rather they would continue to use the hub model for their distance learners. In Virginia, the focus is just the opposite: the state is revamping distance education administered by localities, not at the state level. The Department of Education’s role is to provide support and PD around implementation and delivery, and is less involved in content decisions.



Dr. Heide Wrigley's work in support of English language learners has influenced teachers for decades. Her current efforts to unite language instruction, digital literacy skill development, and learner self-advocacy will impact what comes next.

Heide has been and continues to be a source of sound thinking, research, and practice for the entire field.

~Tom Cytron-Hysom,  
Northstar Digital Literacy

**Teachers as DL Content Creators.** An innovation springing up in a few states is a new use of the Teacher Verification Model (TVM) for awarding proxy contact hours (PCH). The NRS Guidelines for counting hours of learning at a distance include TVM as a model that “*assigns a fixed number of hours of credit for each assignment based on teacher determination of the extent to which a participant engaged in, or completed, the assignment*”. A number of states have recently revised their policies on PCH to allow for TVM. The message to teachers is “we trust you”. Understanding that with access to OER and management systems in place to structure online learning, teachers can curate or create content best aligned with the needs of their learners. Instructional blocks or activities result in a “deliverable”, and upon completion and evaluation of it, teachers release PCH. Feedback so far in Arizona has been that programs are excited about the flexibility, but feel some confusion about data collection and entry. Pennsylvania, Minnesota, and New Hampshire similarly rely on TVM and have worked out systems to structure how time is awarded.

## EdTech Center Lifetime Achievement Award

Each year the IDEAL Consortium membership nominates recipients to receive special recognition for innovation in the areas of digital literacy, technology integration, and distance/blended learning. This year, *Dr. Heide Spruck Wrigley*, nominated by the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment team, received the EdTech Center Lifetime Achievement Award. Congratulations to Dr. Wrigley - a mentor to many of us!



## Innovative Collaboration with Publishers

The IDEAL Institute is a platform for educators, publishers, and ed-tech companies to come together and learn from one another. Discussions at the IDEAL Institute help state-level leaders make informed decisions about product adoption.

*Aztec Software* conducted a focus group based on a pilot of their products in support of work-focused learning. Mitch Rosin lead a discussion about Aztec’s current initiative to use their products as a resource supporting collaboration between ABE programs and other workforce development agencies in support of Integrated Education and Training programs. Participants shared observations on the pilot and offered suggestions for affordances they would find useful.

We were very excited to participate in the Adult Literacy XPRIZE Communities Competition. Through support from the EdTech Center and IDEAL Consortium, we built a mobile learning pilot - building on resources and ideas shared by other team members.

~Ginnette Chandler, New Hampshire

*Learning Upgrade* supported a discussion of Team World Education's mobile learning initiative as part of the Adult Literacy XPRIZE Communities Competition. In the session, practitioners discussed strategies they used to support learner onboarding and engagement during the competition. Kathleen O'Connell (workplace ESL teacher at World Education), Linda Beliveau (Technology Teacher Specialist from Nashua Adult Education, New Hampshire) and Dr. Janet Wilson from Tarrant County College in Texas all shared the strategies they found successful in using Learning Upgrade and the other apps that were free for learners during the Competition (Cell-Ed, Codex/City of Lost Words, and Amrita Learning).

*New Readers Press* has commissioned the publication of a Blended Learning Guidebook. The guidebook authors, David Rosen and Jen Vanek, reviewed the manuscript and gathered suggestions from practitioners to shape it into a practical roadmap for initiating a blended learning program.

*Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment* (a program of the Minnesota Literacy Council) supported the attendance of award winner Dr. Heide Wrigley, whose contributions to the meeting discussion helped make important connections between research and ideas put forth to help attendees solve problems they face implementing distance and blended learning.

*Voxy* reported on use of their ESL curricula in workplace ESL pilots. Tadd Wamester shared challenges and successes observed in a blended learning scenario, gleaning suggestions to enhance their learning resources.

*We thank our sponsors for providing support and participating in the work of the IDEAL Consortium Summer Institute!*

---

## **IDEAL Consortium**

### **EdTech Center @ World Education**

Jen Vanek, Director of Digital Learning and Research

jen\_vanek@WorldEd.org

*World Education, Inc.*  
 44 Farnsworth St  
 Boston, MA 02210

<https://edtech.worlded.org/professional-development/ideal-consortium/>