Working Paper 6

Beyond the Classroom: Six States Develop Distance Programs for Adult Learners

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Abstract

Beyond the Classroom: Six States Develop Distance Programs for Adult Learners

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Over the past few years, the states involved with Project IDEAL, a consortium of states working to develop, implement, and sustain distance education programs for adult basic learners has explored the use of distance education as a way to both expand access for adult learners not currently served in classroom programs and to provide additional options for all adult learners. Because distance education programs can vary in terms of instructional goals, delivery models, and curricula used, each state has been able to develop a program to meet their specific needs. This report presents case studies of the efforts of six of the states in the consortium based upon interviews with key people in each state and supplemented by data collected as part of the project, where available. Themes that emerged across states are also discussed.

Distance education can successfully meet a variety of needs in the field of adult education as learners seek alternatives to classroom learning and agencies search for ways to expand services. At the global level, factors critical to effectively implementing distance learning programs are strong state leadership and vision, adequate financial support, professional development for teachers and administrators and allowing programs adequate time to develop. At the program level, factors important in the implementation process include face-to-face orientation for learners, appropriate screening of students and the selection and support of teachers.

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Introduction

For many states interested in providing greater access to educational services and more options for adult learners in need of improving basic skills, distance learning is an intriguing possibility. It offers an innovative approach to reaching and teaching learners, and has the potential to remove some of the barriers (e.g., transportation problems, work schedule conflicts, child care demands, physical disabilities, etc.) that may keep adults out of classrooms. It also offers privacy and confidentiality for adults who choose not to attend classroom programs but prefer to study alone. Over the past few years, a growing number of states have been exploring the use of distance education to serve adult learners. These states have been working in conjunction with Project IDEAL, a consortium of states working to develop, implement, and sustain distance education programs for adult basic learners. This paper presents the stories of the efforts of six of these states.

One of the attractions of distance learning is that it can be adapted to serve a variety of needs. This is readily apparent in the variety of forms that state distance learning programs assume. States use distance education to support a range of students at different educational levels with different instructional needs. Some states use existing curricular products, while others chose to develop new products specifically for distance education. Some programs are designed so that students rarely, if ever saw their instructors, while others use a hybrid model in which distance study is supplemented with face-to-face interactions with a teacher or other students. In other words, each state designed a distance program to meet the unique needs of its learners.

The authors interviewed key people in each state's distance education effort to gain insights into each project, including a) the rationale for using distance education, b) the process the state went through in implementing the program and c) what state staff learned from their efforts. This information is supplemented with highlights of data collected by some of the states over the course of their projects.

Each state clearly has a distinctive story and approach to distance education. Pennsylvania's story is presented first because, among the states in the IDEAL consortium, it has been experimenting with distance learning the longest. The stories from Rhode Island and Ohio are next because they followed similar curriculum-based models funding pilot sites to serve distance learning using a specific curriculum, either *Skills Tutor* or *GED Connection*. The North Carolina story comes next; it presents how one state established state level policy and a funding formula for full-time equivalent distance students to serve non-English speakers. Last are two stories of how Missouri and Illinois developed their own online learning systems to meet the needs of GED students in their states. Each state learned a set of unique lessons. Yet some lessons cross state boundaries; the final chapter looks at some of these cross-cutting issues.

These state stories serve as examples of various ways in which distance education can be used to meet the needs of adult learners. By understanding what has already been done,

we hope readers find useful examples upon which to build their own programs. From the challenges and successes of states such as those profiled here will emerge models of implementation that others can use as the field of distance education continues to grow and develop. A second edition of this paper in 2005 will present updated information from the states and additional research and will explore these models further.

Pennsylvania: The Pioneers

.Introduction

Pennsylvania has more experience in the systematic exploration of using distance education with adult learners than any other state in the IDEAL consortium. Over the past several years, Pennsylvania has moved from an experimental program in which pilot sites attempted to implement distance education programs to serve a total of 400 students using a single curriculum, *Workplace Essential Skills* (WES), to a new model in which they are now offering distance education to meet varying educational needs on a statewide basis via a centralized system using multiple curricula. In their most recent distance learning effort, Pennsylvania served 481 students using *GED Connection* (GEDC) and 411 students using the WES curriculum.

Why Distance Learning?

Spurred by the vision of then state director, Cheryl Keenan, (now Director, Division of Adult Education & Literacy, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), United States Department of Education), Pennsylvania decided to experiment with distance education as a possible method for reaching students not currently being served in traditional programs. A secondary goal was to develop a partnership with the PA Department of Labor & Industry and provide a unique education service, distance learning, using the WES curriculum in the One Stop Centers, called *CareerLinks*. Although an initial attempt at using *Crossroads Café* at a distance had failed to meet expectations several years earlier, Pennsylvania saw value in the distance learning approach and launched an experiment to learn if distance education could serve learners in need of improving their work-related basic skills

Implementation: A Series of Experiments

Pennsylvania began with a very basic question: can distance education work to serve adult learners in the state? At Keenan's insistence, the state took an experimental approach to distance learning with a clear focus on learning both what *did* and what *did not* work in implementing distance education. Their experiments have progressed through three phases:

- Using WES at a distance
- Expanding curricular options available to students studying at a distance and testing standards
- Making distance education available statewide

Workplace Essential Skills at a distance

The first round of distance learning experiments in Pennsylvania pre-dates Project IDEAL. These experiments were focused on whether WES could effectively be used at a

distance with adult learners. Goals of this initial phase of the research included reaching students not currently served by existing programs and building bridges with the One-Stop centers (called CareerLinks) within the state. The latter goal led to the selection of a curriculum that focused on work-related skills.

Following a competitive RFP process, 12 pilot sites were selected to participate in the program. Selection criteria included:

- Prior experience with distance learning or a strong agency record of innovation;
- Plans for developing a relationship with the local One-Stop centers;
- Letters of cooperation from the local Public Broadcasting station (WES was developed by the PBS LiteracyLink Project and aired on many PBS stations); and,
- Plans for building other partnerships that might help reach adult learners not being served.

The program was funded with State Leadership monies (Federal 231 funds). Each pilot site received money to cover salaries for two part-time teachers, a small portion of an administrator's time, workbooks and technology. During the first two years of the project, the amount to each agency ranged from $13,100 to serve 50 students for 6 months to $22,400 to serve 75 students for a year. In the final year of pilot site funding, the funding formula changed and each site was funded a dollar amount per student served. In addition, the project funded training for all pilot sites and a support center based at the Tuscarora Intermediate Unit (TIU 11) headed by Dehra Shafer, former Project Director. TIU11 assumed responsibility for implementing the project. As part of the implementation and research process, TIU 11 contracted with the Institute for Social Research (ISR) at the University of Michigan to conduct an outside evaluation component. TIU 11 also managed the purchase of all curriculum licensing fees.

TIU created a training and support structure to assist the pilot sites in implementing their distance learning projects. Participating agencies were required to send one administrator and the teachers selected to work on the project to a two-day training session. During this time, agencies received training in the WES curriculum from PBS/LiteracyLink staff, were provided with information about teaching at a distance and began developing program implementation plans with ISR staff. After the training session, agencies completed the program plans and returned them to the ISR staff. Additional supports for the fledgling programs were available through TIU 11, which provided technical support for use of WES and computer-related concerns, visited the pilot sites, and assisted with program planning. Pilot sites also participated in monthly conference calls moderated by ISR staff. These calls were originally intended as a way to obtain ongoing qualitative data about the implementation process, but quickly became an important support mechanism for agencies as they tried this new approach to delivering adult education. The site visits conducted by the TIU 11 staff also provided insights into the communities

in which the agencies were located and how agencies were adding distance learning to their adult education services.

One of the more challenging aspects of Shafer's job was to convince the pilot sites that the state was serious about approaching this project from an experimental perspective. The pilot sites were charged to serve 50 distance learners the first year. Unlike in their classroom programs, they were not held accountable for reporting pre- and posttest scores or educational gains for their distance students. Instead, they were asked to be partners in an effort to see if distance learning could work for adult basic education students – and, if so, what were the most effective ways to reach learners. The consistent message delivered to the pilot sites was that the project was *exploratory* in nature and that much could be learned from both successful and unsuccessful efforts. Initially, it was difficult for the pilot agencies to accept this idea, and it took a great deal of encouragement and support from Shafer and her staff to help them make this transition. Once the pilot sites embraced this approach, it created an environment in which innovations were welcomed and flourished as agencies developed new partnerships and tried novel approaches to recruiting, orientating, and teaching students.

During the six-month initial experimental pilot, agencies learned lessons related to recruiting and orienting distance students:

- At the start of the pilot project, most of the pilot sites indicated they would open their distance learning projects to any student interested in studying workplace skills. However, they quickly realized that distance learning was not appropriate or effective for all students. Sites realized they needed to screen students to try and determine if the distance learning program was a good "fit" for each student's educational abilities and goals.
- The state strongly encouraged pilot sites to provide services for their students through a "pure distance" approach in which there was no face-to-face contact between teacher and students. The goal was to research distance learners, not hybrid learners. However, within the first month or two, agencies argued persuasively that they needed to have a face-to-face orientation in order to get students logged into the online portion of WES. Agencies began to develop orientation programs that allowed teachers to get a sense of students' readiness for distance learning and students to get a feel for what distance learning might involve.

At the end of the first experimental phase, agencies reflected upon the program plan they had developed at the start of the project. Based upon what they had learned in the first experimental period, they revised the plan for their efforts in the coming year

All of the original pilot sites were funded to continue in the project for a second year and eight new sites were added. For a second year, agencies were again exempted from pre- and post testing distance learners and reporting data for NRS accountability. For most of the year, the returning and new sites operated as separate cohorts. The new sites needed

to focus on the basics of implementing a distance learning program, and the returning sites were ready to explore teaching issues in more depth. The new sites had the advantage of learning from the experience of the original sites and were able to implement their programs more quickly and efficiently. To facilitate this, TIU 11 provided training for all participating agencies and continued to provide technical assistance throughout the year. Also, representatives from all 20 agencies participated in roundtable sessions at the state adult education conference (PAACE) where they were able to share experiences and learn from each other, and for a second year, ISR staff conducted two sets of monthly conference calls (one for the returning sites and one for the new sites).

Expanding distance education curricular options and testing standards

One frustration of agencies involved in the distance learning experiments was that the project was curriculum-driven, rather than driven by the students' educational needs. Teachers commented that when GEDC became available through the same online entry portal as WES, many of their students requested to study that instead. As a result, in the third year of experimentation, an attempt was made to broaden distance learning options in the state. Agencies could be funded to:

- Teach WES at a distance
- Teach GEDC at a distance
- Use TV411 as a classroom-based preparatory program prior to studying WES at a distance

This provided agencies with the option of using distance education to meet a broader range of student needs and abilities. Three programs offered only WES, one offered only GEDC, eight offered WES and GEDC, four offered TV411 and WES. Two agencies offered all three curricula to their students.

In the fourth year of experimentation, to further support a learner-centered model rather than a curriculum-focused model, pilot programs were funded "to serve 'x' number of distance learners." Agencies could mix and match curricula to best meet the learning needs of an individual learner in the same way that a classroom teacher might use multiple curricula. Pilot agencies responded favorably to the flexibility this new approach gave them to better serve distance learners.

At the same time, state officials were concerned about the ability of distance students to meet the standards originally established for classroom learners. The overriding questions for the fourth year of the project were: Can distance students meet the same standards (for enrollment and retention) as classroom students? If not, what performance standards are appropriate for distance students? Based on input from a focus group of pilot site administrators and an advisory committee of project stakeholders, it was decided that GEDC students would be tracked in the state's reporting system (known as the e-data system) but that separate standards for learners studying the WES curriculum would be pilot-tested. This decision reflected both early research on WES students which suggests they differ from classroom students in terms of their educational goals and the

poor match between WES content and standardized assessments. Therefore, in the fourth year, WES distance students were exempted from meeting performance targets for classroom learners and NRS data was tracked in Project IDEAL Seat Time Logs.

Making distance education available statewide

After four years of working with pilot sites to deliver distance, Pennsylvania shifted to a statewide implementation model. The new model aims to make distance learning available to any student in the state and provide ongoing professional development for adult educators interested in making this option available to their students. Adult education agencies in Pennsylvania can make distance learning available to their students in one of two ways:

- Although they will not receive special funding for offering distance education, agencies can offer it as one of the services available for their students. The pilot sites from the experimental phase of the project already have staff trained to offer distance education. Other agencies interested in offering distance learning will be able to participate in trainings offered by TIU 11.
- If agencies do not offer distance learning, they can refer interested students to a centralized distance learning center, based at TIU 11. Both the referring agency and TIU 11 will be credited for the student's hours. The referring agency will be responsible for screening, intake, assessment and orientation. TIU 11 will handle the distance teaching responsibilities. Training will be available for agencies interested in identifying and orienting potential distance learning students.

While it is too early to assess the impact of this centralized model, the hope is that it will make distance learning a possibility for any interested student and increase access for learners throughout the state.

Research Approach and Data Collected

Pennsylvania has collected both qualitative and quantitative data over the course of its distance learning project. During the first year, qualitative information was collected during conference calls and through the program plan revisions. Quantitative data included the number of students served, the number of active students and the number of students completing one or more strands of WES. In addition, data were collected about the number and frequency of recruitment and orientation activities to provide a sense of the amount of teacher and administrator effort involved in the project.

Conference calls continued during subsequent years of the project. These calls provided regular "snapshots" of how implementation was progressing in the field and what agencies were learning about effective delivery methods; they also served as a forum in which agencies could share best practices, brainstorm around problems they faced, and support one another. In addition, quantitative data were collected using tools developed by Project IDEAL. Teachers completed Teacher Time Diaries aimed at providing a

better understanding of the demands of offering distance education on teachers' time. Teachers also completed Seat Time Logs, which tracked student work and provided an approximation of the seat time concept used in classroom-based programs. In the third year, data on all distance students, except those studying WES, were also entered into the state's e-data system. Teachers and administrators also completed end-of-project online surveys developed by Project IDEAL.

What the Numbers Show

The numbers suggest that distance learning appears to be an effective way to reach some adult learners who might otherwise not have been served. Detailed reports for the early years of the Pennsylvania's project are available at www.padistancelearning.org. Key findings from Pennsylvania's experience include:

- The number of GED students served increased as teachers and agencies became more experienced in delivering education at a distance. In the first year of teaching GEDC at a distance, Pennsylvania agencies recruited 308 students and enrolled 249 (81%) of them. In the second year, these numbers increased: 524 students were recruited and 481 (92%) were enrolled. Teachers reported that about half of these students were recruited from among the students who came to their centers to enroll and were presented with the opportunity to study at a distance.
- How long did these distance learners study? To address this question, teachers completed Project IDEAL Seat Time Logs[1]. For both GEDC and WES, teachers examined student work and judged whether assignments were completed to the level they might have been if a student had worked on them in a classroom; the student was then assigned a predetermined amount of "seat time" for that work. These data indicate that seat time for GEDC students increased as the agencies became more experienced. In the first year, the median seat time for students (involved in a 4–6 month experiment) was 18.5 hours; in the second year of teaching GEDC at a distance, median seat time was 21.1 hours. Pennsylvania reports that the median seat time earned by a student in a closed entry/exit class of one semester is 26 hours. This suggests that GEDC distance students can be guided to study for periods of time comparable to classroom students.
- Programs teaching WES at a distance also noted an increase in the proportion of students they enrolled. In the first year that teachers kept seat time data, agencies recruited 824 learners; 667 of these (81 percent) were formally enrolled. Overall numbers studying decreased the following year (the same year sites were also able to

[1] For more details about Pennsylvania's seat time data see: Johnston, J. (2004). *Measuring Seat Time and Educational Progress in Distance Education Programs*. Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.

offer GEDC) to 457 students, but agencies enrolled 411 (90%) of them.

- Median Seat Time for WES students working at a distance was 16.5 hours the first year that data were collected and 20 hours in the second year. This is somewhat less than Pennsylvania students earn in a typical classroom course.
- Distance can be an effective way to deliver educational services to adult learners. Students showed educational gain: of the 125 GEDC students who took a pre- and posttest, 54% showed an EFL gain equal to or greater than one; 41% of the 120 WES students who were posttested showed similar EFL gains.

What Pennsylvania Has Learned

Pennsylvania's experience has demonstrated that distance education is an effective way to reach some adult learners in the state. As adult education agencies became more proficient at implementing and maintaining distance learning programs, they acquired a body of knowledge about distance education. They learned things at both the global level (strong support is critical if local distance learning programs are to succeed) and at the more pragmatic, implementation level (e.g., what components need to be included in orientation for distance learning students). The knowledge they gained provides guidance for other agencies within the state that wish to implement distance programs and for other states interested in learning what has been successfully implemented elsewhere.

The global level

A diverse concept..When interviewed, Pennsylvania's Distance Learning Coordinator, Sara Brennen, reported that the state has learned that distance education can take a variety of forms and serve a wide range of educational needs. Distance learning provides a way for students to learn outside of the classroom and away from the teacher. Distance learning is much broader than simply online learning. Although the state was originally thinking in terms of "pure distance," it learned that distance education can be used by itself or in conjunction with other learning approaches. Brennen pointed to the example of rural students who are often unable to make it to a classroom during the winter due to poor road and weather conditions but can continue their education using distance learning during this time.

Support. Pennsylvania also recognized that a variety of changes are necessary to implement distance programs and worked to support agencies as they made those changes. They used site visits and conference calls to put a human face on the distance project and provided opportunities for professional development both through the project and at the PAACE conference. To facilitate the change process, agencies offering distance learning complete an Agency Plan developed by Project IDEAL for the *Distance Learning 101* (DL101) course (DL101 is an introductory online course to prepare adult educators to provide distance learning opportunities to their students.. Teachers may also

receive individualized technical assistance, participate in Pennsylvania's "Distance Teaching Strategies" online course, or study in online study groups with other distance teachers. Content training for GEDC or WES is also available.

Implementation level

Pennsylvania has learned a great deal about how to effectively plan and implement a distance learning program. Distance learning requires changes in how students are recruited, assessed and oriented and in how teachers work with their students.

Recruitment. Although distance learning can meet a variety of educational needs, it is not an appropriate educational approach for all students. At the start of the distance learning experiments, Pennsylvania teachers allowed any student interested in distance education into their programs. They quickly discovered that this was not a reasonable approach: many students failed to stay with the program. In response, the pilot agencies became more selective in allowing students to study at a distance. Teachers reported that students now must have certain academic skills to work with a particular curriculum and that the student must have independent study skills. Many agencies have suggested that distance education seems to be a better fit for students with higher level skills. Brennen also expressed interest in helping programs find ways to work at a distance with students with lower level skills and those who need more support, possibly by using hybrid or blended models. This shows the growth of distance education in Pennsylvania from a curriculum-centered approach in which only one curriculum was available to students wanting to study at a distance to a student-centered approach in which teachers could select from several curricular options to best meet a student's needs.

Orientation. Pennsylvania has modified its original expectation that teachers and students would have no face-to-face contact. One impetus for this change was the teachers' realization that, in many cases, they needed an orientation session at which they could build a personal relationship with the student and prepare the student to learn at a distance. Students know what to expect from a classroom program, but distance learning is quite different. It is important that the orientation process clearly set expectations for how the program will proceed, what work is expected from the student and how the teacher and student will communicate, because what works in the classroom does not necessarily work at a distance.

Orientation also assumed a greater importance when agencies were required to pretest their distance learners. This was not required during the early years of the experiment, although many teachers reported that doing so helped them determine if the student was ready to work at a distance. Many teachers also reported that including assessment at orientation allowed them to help students set goals, to assess their academic skills, and to tailor instruction. In addition, it allowed agencies to meet requirements for reporting and tracking students they served.

Teaching. The role of a distance education teacher is different from that of a classroom teacher. Distance teachers are facilitators of students' learning rather than the source of most content information. While some teachers easily make this transition, it is more challenging for others; some never comfortably make the change. The best distance

teachers tend to be those who *want* to assume this professional challenge rather than those who are simply assigned to teach at a distance. Ongoing professional development and support for distance teachers are important aspects of Pennsylvania's distance learning program. Brennen suggested that agencies offering distance education have at least two teachers involved in the endeavor so they can support and assist each other. She is looking forward to the opportunities for professional development and potential for support among the teachers who will be involved in the new centralized delivery model.

Pennsylvania's experiences also suggest that the individualized nature of teaching at a distance takes a great deal of teacher effort. It requires that the teacher be thoroughly versed in the curriculum because students are working at many different levels and are engaging the curriculum at different places. The teacher also needs to have access to supplemental materials and know how, and when, to provide these to students. For example, Brennen noted that the section in WES on ratios is more condensed and compact and assumes more prior knowledge than would be the case in a classroom. The teacher, therefore, needs to be able to guide the student through this section, providing additional materials and assignments as necessary for the student to master the content. Teaching in this way requires extra prep work for the teacher and should be taken into consideration when allocating teacher time and compensation.

Keys to success

Pennsylvania embraces the concept that distance learning is different from classroom learning. For distance education to succeed, strong leadership at the state level is needed. This leadership has the responsibility for setting the vision, helping local agencies grasp that vision and providing the supports to help the vision become a reality. Funding is also critical; distance learning programs will struggle unless there is adequate and consistent financial support for these efforts.

Pennsylvania learned that distance learning appears to have the potential to meet a variety of educational needs by assuming a variety of forms and by using different curricula. Distance education provides a way for students to learn outside of the classroom and away from the teacher: it is much broader than simply online learning. It can encompass a variety of educational levels and educational goals and can be used by itself or in conjunction with other learning approaches.

Key to Pennsylvania's success was the climate of experimentation that was a guiding force for the distance learning experiments. This meant that all stakeholders – from the state level down to local teachers – were open to the idea of change and willing to take some calculated risks. Major changes, such as adding a new model of delivering educational services, can be both exciting and frightening opportunities. Pennsylvania understood that their teachers need training and support as they make the transition from classroom to distance teachers and that teachers need to be recognized for embracing new challenges.

Rhode Island: Team Work that Works

Introduction

Rhode Island has completed two years of experimentation with distance learning for adult basic education students. In their first year, four pilot sites used the *SkillsTutor* curriculum to serve learners; in the second year, one site using GEDC was added. In the second year of experimentation, the goal was to serve 30 GEDC distance students, 75 "pure" distance students using *SkillsTutor*, and another 20 students using *SkillsTutor* to augment classroom instruction. Teachers and administrators are able to work closely across the state because of Rhode Island's small geographic size. They plan together and support one another in conference calls and at meetings every 4-6 weeks. Bob Mason, recently retired State Director, often attended the meetings. The focus of their research this past year was to look at the impact of varying levels of support for students on retention and educational gain.

Why Distance Learning?

The genesis of distance learning in Rhode Island goes back to the 1999 National Education Summit hosted by former Vice President Al Gore. Each State Director of Adult Basic Education was challenged to choose a strategy for increasing learning opportunities for adult students and then to implement it. Mason was attracted by the idea of "expanding access" by making learning available to adults "24/7."

About the same time, students were beginning to call Mason to ask if they could *prepare* for their high school equivalency test online. Mason was also approached by Achievement Technologies about using their online product, *SkillsTutor*. Mason thought that *SkillsTutor* might have the potential to meet the Summit challenge of expanding access and meet the needs of the learners who had been contacting him; he arranged for interested adult educators to review the *SkillsTutor* curriculum. Concurrently research pointed to the emergence of distance learning in the field of adult basic education as having an unrealized potential for meeting both learner and program needs. Thus it was the convergence of three key factors—the 1999 Summit, student demand, and an emerging trend in the field of ABE—that Mason would later call a "triangle of rationale" for offering distance learning in Rhode Island

Implementation: Team Work and Problem Solving

After deciding to pilot the use of *SkillsTutor* at a distance, Mason sent out notices to all adult education programs funded by the Rhode Island Department of Education. Staff from seven programs with a track record for innovation attended an introduction to distance learning and *SkillsTutor* presented by Achievement Technologies. Sites were provided with a free, 30-day trial use of the product so teachers and students could work with the learning modules. Pilot sites self-selected to experiment with *SkillsTutor* at a distance. Four agencies that were truly interested in and enthusiastic about distance learning attended a second, in-depth training session presented by Achievement Technologies about the modules and how to use the built-in reporting system. The

training also included the roles and responsibilities of administrators and teachers within the distance learning experiment. These agencies also participated in IDEAL's DL101 online professional development course.

While curriculum and program planning training was important, Rhode Island pilot site staff reported that their inter-agency support of each other and the state-level support they received from Mason were the key factors in their implementation of distance learning. Program administrators and teachers work as a team. They rely on meetings and conference calls to support one another. Their group is small enough (five teachers and four administrators) that communication is good. This support has proved to be particularly important for the one teacher who was recruited to use GEDC with higher-level distance students who were preparing to take the GED test. Being the lone GEDC teacher in the state, she has had little training. (In addition to support from her colleagues, she also has now joined the IDEAL Pennsylvania Community Zero website where she has the opportunity to interact with other GEDC teachers.)

Throughout the two years of experimentation, the distance learning team has focused on problem solving. They feel they are beginning to learn what the profile is (as discussed later) of students who are most likely to do well. Based on that information, they are looking at the best ways to recruit and retain students. They also want to streamline the process for student intake so it is standardized in agencies with all using similar learner surveys, intake forms and orientation procedures. They also worked together on data collection for Project IDEAL. For example, they supported each other in completing Seat Time Logs and Teacher Time Diaries this past year and in figuring out how to do required reporting.

Financial support for Rhode Island's experiment in distance learning included $12,000 to renew the GEDC broadcast license for five more years and about $22,000 to renew the *SkillsTutor* licenses for three more years for the four pilot sites. The total budget for the second year of distance learning was about $75,000, which was a substantial portion of Rhode Island's State Leadership monies. The four pilot sites are individual grantees, and their program budgets include teachers' time and a small portion of administrators' time. One agency's budget also includes $14,000 for membership in Project IDEAL. Mason noted that, since he is retiring, it will be essential to keep the need to support distance learning from State Leadership dollars in the "institutional memory." In particular, it will be important not to lose record of the licensing fees that come up for periodic renewal.

Research Approach and Data Collected

In their second year of the project, Rhode Island asked the research question: "Do different levels of support for students impact retention and level of performance?" Part of their experiment involved dividing students studying *SkillsTutor* into two groups. Students in both groups were supported by teacher-initiated contacts for the first six weeks. After six weeks, students were randomly assigned to one of two groups. Group 1 continued to receive at least one teacher-initiated contact every other week during the next six weeks. Group 2 did not receive teacher-initiated contact after the initial six weeks, but teachers responded when these students initiated contact. The pilot sites

collected a full year of data in the Project IDEAL Seat Time Logs. Seat Time Logs also provide quantitative data on students. Results are discussed in the next section.

Rhode Island also anticipates they will have a great deal of qualitative information, especially in the Teacher Time Diaries. There would be insights about the richness of teachers' experiences (for example, how teachers address students concerns) in the logs that could be codified by someone analyzing the documents. This will be a task for the new State Director to take under consideration.

What the Numbers Show

Rhode Island has collected data on a small number of students. *SkillsTutor* automatically tracks the time a student spends interacting with the materials. Since the software provides guided instruction, clock hours are viewed as instructional hours, and can be viewed as analogous to seat time.[2]

- During the first year that Rhode Island tracked seat time data, 25 students were officially enrolled (upon reaching 12 hours of seat time). The mean seat time for these students was 25.8 hours and the median was 20.3. On average, Rhode Island adult learners engaged the *SkillsTutor* materials for a period of 29 weeks. Thus they averaged less than 1 hour per week of study time.
- Rhode Island also conducted an experiment to examine the impact of differing levels of support on student retention. Data showed no differences between the groups of students who received more and less frequent teacher-initiated contact. This may be due, in part, to the nature of the *SkillsTutor* curriculum. It is self-contained and designed to require less teacher facilitation than some of the other curricula being used at a distance by IDEAL states.

What Rhode Island Has Learned

Implementation

Rhode Island has learned a great deal about how to effectively plan and implement a distance learning experimental program. A key to their success is their small geographic size. Administrators and teachers from the four pilot sites are all within a half-hour drive of each other so they can meet regularly to problem solve and support one another. Also, being a small state enables Rhode Island's organizational structure to be "flat." Pilot site program administrators report directly to the State Director, and Mason met frequently with teachers. As a result, communication is direct and all key players are involved in the decision-making process. Following are some key lessons learned during their two-year experiment.

[2] For more detail about Rhode Island's seat time data see: Johnston, J. Measuring Seat Time and Educational Progress in Distance Education Programs. (2004). Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.

Recruitment. "If recruitment is difficult, retention is even harder." That statement was made with certainty and intensity by the Rhode Island program administrator and teacher who were interviewed with the State Director. They admitted they are just beginning to understand the profile of, what they called, a "true" distance student who is successful, and they think this will aid in recruitment. They characterized true distance learners as people who "get involved with a curriculum and then they're off and running." How a true distance learner accesses and uses a curriculum such as *SkillsTutor* is different from how a client would access it in class or when a student gets help in a computer lab during drop-in hours. These students work independently and do not depend on classroom support. The challenge for agencies remains finding an effective way of identifying students who have these characteristics.

The pilot project staff also admitted to learning lessons about recruitment the "hard way." For example, staff members were excited about placing placards advertising distance learning in bus shelters. But the idea "bombed," and they do not have a good understanding of why it did not work as hoped.

Pilot sites also conducted recruitments in conjunction with the state's One Stops. An outreach person for distance learning contacted every adult education agency in the state, as well as social service agencies, businesses and all four One Stops in Rhode Island. As a result, most of the One Stops are supportive and a good source of student referrals. Clients can come into a One Stop and can access *SkillsTutor* on site in a computer lab and then will be referred to a distance pilot program. If students test at a higher level, then they are referred to the GEDC distance teacher.

Most recently, the National Guard has expressed interest in the Rhode Island distance learning program. They have a lot of young recruits they want to enlist who need to earn their GED; the National Guard recognizes that distance learning might meet the educational needs of these recruits.

Orientation. For Rhode Island, a well-done orientation has emerged as a major factor in students persisting in their learning and ultimately becoming successful distance learners. The better the orientation, the more likely it is that the student will stay in the program. Therefore, over the past two years, orientation for potential distance students has evolved to include some key elements.

Orientation provides an opportunity for teachers to review the *SkillsTutor* curriculum with students and help students determine whether it is appropriate for their learning. Orientation typically takes several hours and may be spread over multiple sessions. A key component of these orientations involves giving a prospective student at least an hour of practice with *SkillsTutor*. This allows students to get a sense of how product functions and to decide whether they are comfortable with this educational approach. During orientation, teachers also present students with strategies for navigating through *SkillsTutor* that they can use when they are studying independently. For example, teachers instruct students in what to do when they don't know an answer but the *SkillsTutor* software program doesn't allow them to skip a question. The combination of teacher guidance on using the program combined with extensive practice while at

orientation helps students "self-select" into this distance learning program. For example, lower performing students are not discouraged from signing on for distance learning, but they usually opt out because they get enough of a "heavy dose" of *SkillsTutor* to realize they need the support of a classroom experience to manage studying the curriculum. However, if they insist on signing up for distance learning, the teacher explains the challenges and will provide additional support to that student as needed.

In the orientation sessions for potential GEDC students, the teacher has several goals. First, she wants to establish a good rapport with students because most work solely at a distance; they are not also enrolled in classroom programs, nor do they meet regularly with a teacher in a face-to-face setting. Second, she administers the CASAS test to discern their ability levels for appropriate placement and to ensure they have the reading ability necessary for independent learning. Finally, she does some goal setting with the students. She believes this may be the most important component of orientation. She wants a student to leave not only with a sense of purpose (long term goal) but also with the immediate task in mind that s/he will work on in the coming week (short term).

At orientation teachers also go over logistical considerations such as how to set up an email account and how to contact the distance teacher. They have found it critical to follow up and contact prospective students within one week after orientation. To date, this has been done by mail or by email. The pilot sites feel that this procedure has had a positive impact on retention.

Teaching. The State Director and two pilot site staff interviewed indicated that the key feature of distance teaching is that the teacher must "connect" with students despite the distance. Therefore, teachers must be able to project their personalities when they communicate with students, whether it is over the phone or in writing via email and mail. Their empathy for the students must "come through" as it would in a classroom setting. In order to do this, a teacher needs knowledge of individual students. At orientation it is important to get information about students such as school history, personal background, work history, if any, as well as pre-test scores. It is also important for a teacher to develop rapport with students at orientation and convey that s/he is "reachable" despite the distance.

In an effort to develop rapport and a sense of community with students, one Rhode Island teacher has developed a website for her students outside of the *SkillsTutor* system. She set it up using nicenet.org, a free website that provides the platform for communication; students access the site from the pilot agency's homepage. Currently she is piloting it with her 20 hybrid distance learners using it for information exchange and for giving them extra assignments. However, she intends to expand its use to her "pure" distance learners in the coming year.

The Rhode Island distance learning staff who were interviewed also noted that the role of the distance teacher differed depending upon the curriculum being taught. *SkillsTutor* teachers primarily provide support, motivation and educational counseling. Yet they must also have great familiarity with all the *SkillsTutor* modules so they can direct students to the appropriate activities and assignments. With GEDC, there is more contact

with students through the Online Management System that enables a teacher to set up a virtual classroom and review students' portfolios of learning activities online. The Rhode Island *SkillsTutor* staff felt that using GEDC would be more like "real teaching" because the teacher provides feedback on assignments and monitors students' progress. The GEDC teacher agreed that she does those things, but she also thought there is one major difference. Since writing is her only means of communication with students, she thinks very carefully about what she writes. She focuses on two things: clarity and compassion. The content of what she writes must be concrete, organized and concise so that a student understands and can follow directions if necessary. As she said, "You can't assume anything about what they know or don't know." However, the style of her writing must also convey that she cares that the student does well because she wants the student to feel comfortable enough to contact her again.

Finally the Rhode Island interviewees indicated that the hardest thing teachers have to do is help students with technology at a distance. They feel this is a major problem not only because troubleshooting at a distance is difficult but also because, if using the computer is a barrier to participation, then a student gets discouraged and drops out. Figuring out how to help students at a distance with technology would have a double reward: students would stay connected and retention rates would improve for the pilot program.

Assessment. All potential distance students are assessed at orientation. When prospective students are pre-tested, they are told what their test scores mean and why they need to do placement tests. This helps them see the value in the process. When asked about assessment, the immediate response from the Rhode Island program administrator and teacher who were interviewed with Mason was, "The hardest thing about assessment is getting students to come back for post testing." They also commented that they would like to have the TABE test available online and that they liked New York's idea of post testing at a distance using PictureTel, two-way interactive compressed video technology that allows people in multiple locations to both see and hear one another on a TV monitor.

Keys to success: What would you tell another state new to distance learning?

Each of the Rhode Island representatives from the distance learning project was asked what recommendations they would have for states considering or just beginning implementation of a distance learning program. Each of the four—the State Director, a program administrator and the two teachers—had a different perspective and offered different advice. Taken as a whole, they provide a broad overview of key issues in implementing successful distance learning programs.

From the state director's point of view:

- You can't be impatient or expect instant success with distance learning. It is a process. If you're going to make the investment, you must give the experiment time to "percolate."

- The state must provide support upfront in the beginning of the pilot project and provide it consistently throughout the life of the project. It can't be an "up and down" thing.
- Be sure the distance curricula used are appropriate to meet the needs of the learners you want to serve. Include a review process of available curricula in the state's planning process.
- Distance learning is not going away. It is important for the future because of its potential to expand access to education for adult basic education students.

From a program administrator's point of view:

- You need dedicated teachers who are interested and passionate about what they do. Distance teaching, at least initially, is hard work, and teachers must learn new skills. In addition to teaching, pilot teachers are asked to do a lot of data collection, which creates additional work.
- You need top-down, consistent, financial support from the state like the Rhode Island pilot sites have had. This is particularly important to cover the additional teacher time needed.

From the teachers' points of view:

- It is important to teachers that the distance learning program is structured so that students get the guidance they need at orientation to make good decisions about whether to sign on for distance learning.
- It is important to teachers that administrators give them the extra time they need to teach distance students individually.
- It is important that program administrators have a state administrator who provides the funding to hire teachers for the time it takes them to do their jobs and to do them well.
- Teachers need the flexibility to do some of their work at home, and to be compensated for it. Distance teaching requires individualized instruction that takes more time than what teachers usually have available during the day. Pilot teachers also put in additional time, both for teaching and for data collection, which they usually do not get to report.

Ohio: A Focused Experiment

Introduction

Ohio has completed two years of distance learning experiments and participation in the IDEAL consortium. Seven pilot programs have used *GED Connection* (GEDC) to serve approximately 200 students in the first year and over 300 students in the program's second year. The sites were selected initially through a competitive grant process and the state continued to fund those same seven programs in subsequent years. The project is run through the Ohio Literacy Resource Center (OLRC) based at Kent State University. The Center provides professional development and technical assistance support to the pilot sites under contract with the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) office.

Why Distance Learning?

The decision to pilot the use of GEDC with distance learners was the result of the convergence of several happenings. First, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) ABLE office decided it needed to offer a different kind of service to reach adults not coming to classroom programs. The department was particularly interested in finding ways to meet the needs of adults whose work schedule conflicts, childcare needs, and/or lack of transportation were barriers to attending class. Second, in previous years, use of *GED on TV* with classroom learners had indicated the strong appeal of media-based learning for adults. Many GED teachers had reported that adults who were enrolled in their classroom programs tended to watch *GED on TV*. The Ohio Literacy Network (OLN), based in Columbus, had coordinated the broadcast and use of *GED on TV* through local PBS stations around the state. Thus, there was a proven track record in the use of media-based learning (videos and/or TV and texts) with adults. Finally, at roughly the same the time, Denise Pottmeyer, the State Director, asked Kim McCoy from the Ohio Literacy Resource Center to attend a meeting of states interested in distance education in New Orleans hosted by the National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (NAEPDC). McCoy, with her enthusiasm for and commitment to the use of technology in education, brought back a favorable report from the meeting. As a result, Ohio developed a multi-year project to introduce distance learning in the state and joined the Project IDEAL consortium as it was forming.

Implementation: Using *GED Connection* to Reach Distance Learners

To help guide distance learning efforts within the state, Pottmeyer established an Advisory Committee that included representatives from each professional development region of the state. One strength of the committee was that it included people with different perspectives each of whom was able to bring a unique point of view to the process. The committee decided that selecting the pilot sites would be a competitive process and established criteria for doing so. Because technology expertise among teachers was considered of prime importance, a "technology experience" survey was

included with the Request for Proposals (RFP) that was sent to all of the 136 adult basic education programs in the state.

The selection process was done by the Advisory Committee, which used a grid to score proposals. Primary consideration was given to applicants who:

- Described prior experience with use of technology in the classroom **or** with distance education **or** discussed accomplishments of the organization using alternative forms of education **or** provided a statement of how the project would impact the local community;
- Exhibited a working knowledge of the GEDC curriculum;
- Described the relationship among partners, the role of each partner and how each partner would contribute to the implementation of the distance program;
- Provided evidence of the technology skills of teachers;
- Demonstrated that an agency had Internet-ready computers available for student use;
- Committed to attending training sessions and meetings and to participating in conference calls.

The original goal was to select eight sites, two from each of the state's four geographic regions. Sites selected varied in size, program type and location (urban vs. rural). However, only seven of the proposals were perceived as strong by reviewers, and the advisory board decided it was more important to have quality programs than to have a specific number of pilot sites.

Training for program teachers and administrators included an introduction to the GEDC curriculum, a review of the grant requirements and introduction to Project IDEAL's *Distance Learning 101* (DL101) professional development course. The course provided the opportunity for participants to learn how to apply principles of distance education in the development of an agency plan; the course website provided a mechanism for establishing a sense of community at a distance among the pilot sites. During the course and throughout the remainder of the year, a critical element of implementation was the technical assistance and ongoing support provided to the pilot site teachers and administrators. During DL101, McCoy notes she "sent hundreds of email messages and made lots of phone calls" to course participants. Staff also set up a listserv for teachers and administrators, and course participants selected buddy names for Instant Messaging (IM) to use for communicating with fellow distance teachers. After the course, email continued to be an important venue for communication. Other supports included several conference calls and face-to-face meetings as well as site visits by McCoy. Kim found it valuable to see the setting of each program. For example, being on site provided insight into agency-level recruitment challenges. During the project's second year, experienced distance teachers participated in *Distance Learning 102* (DL102), a second professional

development course developed by Project IDEAL. This course is aimed at helping teachers increase their repertoire of effective distance teaching strategies.

Financial support for the pilot sites comes from the Ohio Department of Education's State Leadership funds. For each of the first two years, a pilot site received $19,500 to participate. Most funding was designated for teacher time, but could also be used for equipment if needed, technology, materials, books, a little administrative time and travel to training and meetings. The Ohio Literacy Network purchased the LiteracyLink Online Management System licenses for each site.

In the third year of the project, the same sites will again participate with the same level of funding. However, the sites will add the online *SkillsTutor* curriculum to provide pre-GED level instruction as well. New administrators and teachers are taking DL101. Teachers who joined the project in its second year will participate in a DL102 Study Group. Pilot sites also will get some help with recruitment. The state will produce two PSA's: one tailored to recruit learners directly and one directed at non-pilot agencies that have students who are on waiting lists or who are unable to attend classroom programs.

Research Approach and Data Collected

Ohio's experiment in distance learning has focused on answering the question: "Can distance learning work for targeted learners currently not being served by classroom programs?" A second question involved determining the amount of teacher and administrator time required to working with distance learners. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from a variety of sources and include:

- Notes from conference calls and meetings;
- Observations during site visits;
- Statistical analysis of seat time and assessment data;
- Survey data results from IDEAL end-of-year administrator and teacher surveys.

Conference calls and meetings provided the Advisory Committee with qualitative data on "how everything was going," and pilot sites had the chance to share problems as well as success stories. Site visits provided the Advisory Committee members with insight into the context in which each program operated and provided a perspective on the demographics of each site, (e.g., differences between rural and urban recruitment strategies). McCoy also heard first hand what the pilot sites' concerns were.

What the Numbers Show

Data from Ohio indicate that agencies can recruit, enroll and support students to study GEDC at a distance. They also indicate that students can study for periods of time comparable to classroom students and that distance students can make educational gains. Detailed reports about each year of the Ohio experiments can provide more specifics than can be presented here. Key findings from the Ohio distance learning experiments include:

- In the first year of their distance learning experiments, Ohio recruited 215 adults to study GEDC at a distance; 183 (85%) of them stayed for 12 hours and qualified as official students. In the second year, 304 students were recruited, with 275 (90%) becoming enrolled. This suggests the agencies became more skilled at both recruiting and screening for appropriate distance students and in providing the supports to help them reach enrollment status.
- The amount of time the Ohio distance students spent studying GEDC was approximated by the use of the Project IDEAL seat time logs. Data from these logs[3] indicates that Ohio learners, like Pennsylvania learners, can be guided to spend about as much time studying as classroom students. For the first year of experimentation, the mean seat time for GEDC distance students was 35.8 hours, and the median seat time was 29.0. During the second year, the mean and the median seat times were 32.5 and 23.0 hours, respectively. Ohio reports that classroom students (classified at levels 5 and 6) spend an average of 28.4 hours in a single class.
- The data also show that Ohio learners studying GEDC at a distance demonstrated educational gains. Of the 59 learners for whom both pre- and posttests were available, more than half (56%) demonstrated an EFL gain of one or more. Placing a value on these results in relation to classroom learners is difficult because comparable statistics are not available. However, the results do show that for over 50% of distance learners who do get tested, they have the potential to make significant learning gains.

What Ohio Has Learned

Implementation

When asked if distance learning is working in Ohio, McCoy responded "yes!" but with the caveat that it seemed more productive or, at the very least, different in different areas of the state. Project staff gained much insight about these differences in four critical areas through conference calls and face-to-face meetings.

Recruitment. Agencies had to deal with the problem that large numbers of students expressed interest in distance learning but only a small percentage stayed with the program. Also, only a small percentage actually qualified to be distance learners based on screening tools that the teachers used. As will be seen below, agencies have been

[3] For more detail about Ohio's seat time data see: Johnston, J. Measuring Seat Time and Educational Progress in Distance Education Programs. (2004). Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.

addressing the challenges of recruitment and retention through changes in orientation and teaching practices.

Orientation. Ohio learned that doing better orientations for adult learners improves retention. A few sites are now doing individual orientations instead of group ones. They found that distance learners may not want to be in groups; that working and being alone may be part of the reason they chose distance learning. This may also have something to do with the comfort level (or lack of) for a group process among people who prefer to be independent learners. Ohio agencies also identified some specific actions that can be taken at orientation. Some programs are providing students with business cards with teacher's contact information on them. Also, at some agencies instruction for using IM is now included during orientation as a way for a student to contact a teacher during "office hours."

Teaching. There is not a single distance teaching approach that is appropriate for, and effective with, all learners. For example, one rural program, that struggled to recruit students in year one, increased their numbers of recruits in year two by taking a more learner-centered approach to teaching. In doing so they found that the new recruits were not choosing to study the online lessons. They preferred using books and videotapes. Although the students did have access to computers in libraries or adult learning centers, they were just not used that much. Two lessons emerged for these teachers from this experience. First, distance learning is more than learning on the Internet. Second, distance learning works differently for different learners. Thus, various sites are now setting up distance learning programs differently depending upon the skills and interests of the distance learners they serve.

Another example of these differences in approach can be seen in an urban program which also improved recruitment and retention of students through changes in how they offered instruction and support. This program opened its computer lab on Saturday mornings so students could work in the computer lab and/or drop off lessons. A teacher was available to answer questions and help with computer instruction. Providing more opportunities for face-to-face support for students seemed to both increase the number of students the program served and increase retention of those students. Thus the hybrid or blended model seems to be working the best for at least one of Ohio's pilot programs.

A guiding principle for the project leadership is that distance education requires a different way of teaching. Therefore, professional development is needed to create a mindset among agency staff to help them get "out of the box" in their thinking about how to set up and teach at a distance. Teachers must not be afraid to try new things, but rather should look for innovative approaches to use with their students. For example, one creative teacher, after being introduced to IM by McCoy, immediately took the idea and adapted it for communicating with her students.

Other changes for distance teachers were related to how they make themselves available to students for help. Pilot programs were creative, and their expanded support services included:

- One program set up a listserv for students so that any teacher could respond to a student's questions;
- Another site set up a helpline. Students can call in, leave a message and every day a teacher checks for messages and returns calls;
- Another teacher is experimenting with nicenet.com to build a community online with students.

Finally, teachers must not be afraid of trying out new technologies. In this regard, pilot programs were successful because Ohio chose pilots sites with "tech-savvy" teachers and OLRC staff modeled use of technology during the face-to-face training.

Assessment. Ohio, like many other states, has found that assessing learners at a distance for accountability is a major problem. Getting learners to come back to an agency for post-assessment is the big hurdle. Although Ohio has a portfolio assessment system that can be used to gauge the progress of any learner, including distance learners, collecting appropriate and beneficial materials for a distance student's portfolio has been a challenge.

Keys to success

Project leadership in Ohio identified "selecting the right people to teach" as the most important key to success. These teachers absolutely must be technology savvy. Another key to success is having people at the state level who understand technology and support the project. Having this level of person involved also sends a message to pilot site staff that this project is important to the state. A third is having diversity on the Advisory Committee with regard to experience and capabilities. And last, but certainly not least, is the importance of having enthusiastic people in the pilot programs who want to be involved and will champion distance learning in their agencies.

North Carolina: Learning Language at a Distance

Introduction

North Carolina began experimenting in 2001 by allowing local adult education providers to offer distance education using a variety of curricula. The most successful was the use of a specially designed version of *Crossroads Café* to teach English as a Second Language (ESL). The state decided to build on this success through their involvement with Project IDEAL. Distance learners in pilot sites around the state studied *Crossroads Café* in a hybrid distance approach, which included opportunities for students to meet with a teacher to practice their language skills. In North Carolina's second year of participation with Project IDEAL, 202 students were recruited to study *Crossroads Café* at a distance and 175 (87%) of these were enrolled. Pleased with the success of this program, North Carolina will be adding a second ESL option, the online and video curriculum, *English for All*, in the coming year.

Why Distance Learning?

North Carolina has had a huge influx of adults in need of ESL services in the past ten years; one estimate is that the ESL population has increased more then 700% during that time. The existing adult education services, administered through the state's community college system, were seeking new ways to reach this population. In addition, they hoped that distance education might serve some of those adults who faced barriers that did not permit consistent attendance in a program. They also thought this might allow them to better serve students with different learning styles and address the shortage of classroom space. At the same time the state was beginning to explore distance learning, Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) took the initiative and produced wrap-around segments to go both before and after each episode of the video tapes in the multi-media curriculum, *Crossroads Cafe* to make it easier for them to be used for independent study.

Implementation

In North Carolina, adult education programs are administered through the state's community college system. An advisory board, composed of 14 people (two from each of the five basic skills regions, two Deans of Continuing Education at community colleges and two open slots, filled by people serving as representatives to the state's professional conferences) was established to set policy for distance learning in the state. This group can make recommendations but can not require adherence to polices because local community colleges in the state have a great deal of autonomy. In their earliest efforts to use distance education, the State Board of Community Colleges developed a short-term policy so that community colleges could get FTE (full-time equivalent) reimbursement for distance learning students. Programs responded by using a variety of curricula in a variety of formats at a distance. The pilot project was considered successful and has been continued.

The most successful of these early projects was developed by the staff at Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC). They developed a "wrap-around" video

modification for the *Crossroads Café* series produced by Intelecom. Each wrap-around showed an instructor who appeared at both the beginning and the end of each episode and focused students on the key content in the videos to help independent learners gain more from viewing. These materials were used in a hybrid distance learning approach, which included opportunities to meet with a teacher to practice language skills. When North Carolina decided to participate in the Project IDEAL consortium, they chose to focus on using distance learning to meet the needs of their ESL students, and arranged with CPCC to provide technical assistance.

RFP's were sent out soliciting sites to participate in a pilot distance learning project. The proposal specified the length of program, required training and other requirements for participating in the program. Eight programs were selected; each established two distance learning classes using *Crossroads Café*. CPCC provided technical support and assistance for all pilot sites.

Pilot sites participated in two phases of experimentation. Pilot sites ran the distance learning program as a 16-week, semester-long program. During this time, students viewed the 13 *Crossroads Café* episodes, worked in the worktexts and had the chance to meet weekly with their teacher. Two six-month phases were implemented, and recruited a total of 202 students.

Sites received $12,000 to cover the costs of implementing the distance learning programs. Most of the funds were used to cover teacher salaries, but agencies were given some leeway in how they used the funds. For example, one pilot program hired a recruiter/advisor who was bilingual in Spanish (which was the first language for the largest proportion of their ESL students) to work specifically on the distance education project. The state assumed the costs for statewide training in using distance education and purchased materials for the pilot agencies.

Research Approach and Data Collected

North Carolina's research was focused on understanding if distance learning could meet the needs of ESL students. CPCC collected both qualitative and quantitative data throughout the project. Students were surveyed to get feedback on the materials and the distance learning approach, and a profile of the students was created. In addition, North Carolina teachers completed the Project IDEAL Seat Time Logs to provide information about student persistence and achievement.

What the Numbers Show

North Carolina was able to effectively recruit and support ESL students to learn at a distance. Like several of the other states, they also examined seat time equivalents. However, they took a different approach than that used for either GEDC/WES or *SkillsTutor*. Seat Time Logs for *Crossroads Café* were developed that assigned seat time

credit for students when they passed (with 70% or more correct) a unit quiz at the end of each study unit of Crossroads Café.[4] Seat Time Credit Earned. Key findings include:

- North Carolina adult education providers recruited 202 learners to study WES at a distance. They enrolled 175 (87%) of these learners. The median seat time for these students was 52 hours.
- Data from North Carolina also indicated that students can learn English as a second language using the hybrid distance model tested in this project. Pre- and posttest scores were matched for 72 students in reading and 68 students in listening. Of these, 49% posted EFL gains of one or more in reading and 29% posted EFL gains of one or more in listening.

What North Carolina Has Learned

Implementation

Because the focus was on ESL, North Carolina designed its distance education programs as hybrids that included regular face-to-face meetings with the distance instruction component. They felt that this was necessary to allow students an opportunity to practice the language skills they were learning. Katie Waters, the Distance Learning Coordinator for North Carolina, indicated that ESL students need a "community of learners." At the same time, however, she stressed that it was important that the distance learning model remain flexible to allow a program to adapt to fit the educational needs of particular students.

Some agencies emphasized the social aspects of language learning. One program administrator found that students in the pilot program did better when they studied with a family member or friend, even if the level of their language skills varied. In these instances, the higher-level student benefited from knowing more and being "the expert" able to help his relative or friend while the lower-level student was able to practice language skills in a familiar and supportive environment.

Recruitment. To reach potential ESL students, North Carolina's pilot sites found it was important to go into the communities in which these adults lived and worked. For example, one pilot program recruiter was bilingual and familiar with the culture of the largest non-English speaking group the pilot sites hoped to attract. The recruiter visited businesses owned by ESL speakers and used their community connections to reach out to potential students. The college staff learned that in dealing with an ESL population, it is crucial to "know your population."

Orientation. North Carolina found that extensive student orientation was an important component of successful distance learning programs. In addition to familiarizing

[4] For more detail about North Carolina's seat time data see: Johnston, J. Measuring Seat Time and Educational Progress in Distance Education Programs. (2004). Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan

students with the *Crossroads Café* materials, orientations in the pilot sites typically included goal setting, learning style inventories, and information about self-directed learning strategies. One community college began orientation sessions by explaining the concept of distance learning, then testing those who were interested using the CASAS. Students were then walked through the entire process for studying *Crossroads Café* at a distance and asked to take into account factors in their lives that might impact their ability to commit to the program. When interviewed, one program administrator commented that in the Hispanic culture, "their word is their bond," and, for that reason, students were asked to sign learning agreements indicating that this was a serious commitment.

Some of the North Carolina agencies demonstrated their awareness of the community in which they were recruiting in the manner in which they scheduled orientations. For example, in one community, most of the men worked 5 ½ days a week at construction jobs. To accommodate their schedules, orientations were scheduled late on Saturday afternoon. While staff was not sure initially if this would work, it was so successful they kept the same schedule for the second phase of the pilot. Staff members, committed to making distance learning work, were willing to inconvenience themselves and re-arrange their work schedules to better meet students' needs.

Teaching and Supporting Students. The North Carolina pilot sites implemented their programs on a closed-entry basis with students proceeding through the lessons as a cohort group. This provided students with the sense of being part of a "class" and enabled students who came to the face-to-face sessions to be ready to discuss similar topics. However, at least one program found that this approach did not always fit their students' needs, suggesting that the requirement to view one program and complete one set of workbook assignments per week may have been too fast a progression for some students. In the future, this program will allow students to enter and exit on their own time frame and will allow students to take more than a week to complete the required work for each unit. Staff at this program feel that this approach will better enable them to individualize learning for their students and may help keep students from becoming overwhelmed and dropping out.

One concern for the pilot sites was how to ensure that students had access to the videotapes and workbooks. One community college found that their campus library was a valuable resource for materials distribution and trained the library staff to assist in this effort. They worked with the library staff on developing their listening skills, so that they could respond appropriately to students who were not fluent in English. In addition, this community college found they needed to familiarize the students with the campus and the library in order for them to obtain the class materials.

Although students had the option of meeting weekly with a teacher, some North Carolina teachers provided additional ways for students to get feedback on their work and to contact the teacher. If students could not make the face-to-face meetings, teachers would mail their feedback on student work directly to the student or leave it for the students at a central distribution point (e.g., the library where they picked up the videotapes). One

teacher went so far as to give students her cell phone number so they could call her on weekends and evenings if they had questions.

Assessment. Students participating in the program were pre-tested on the listening and reading CASAS assessments; considerably fewer students were post-tested on this same instrument. However, North Carolina obtained ongoing feedback on student achievement from the mastery quizzes required at the completion of each *Crossroads Café* unit. Students scoring at least 70% correct received the equivalent of 10 seat-time hours (FTEs) for their work.

Policy Issues

Waters indicated that North Carolina's distance learning experiments have raised several questions about state policy. In the pilot programs, seat time FTEs were tied to mastery of material, while classroom FTEs are based simply on attendance. While linking funding to learning gains may be desirable, there remains an inequity if programs are not funded to serve all students in a consistent manner. In addition, methods of funding distance learning projects as well as the possibility of a state-wide coordinator for basic skills distance learning are under discussion. These issues will require additional attention from the state.

Keys to Success

North Carolina suggests that there are several things needed for distance learning programs to succeed:

- Give distance learning the necessary time to develop. They suggest piloting the use of distance education in a controlled setting before moving to a larger scale implementation. Pilot testing allows the collection of data on learner gains and student satisfaction, obtain feedback from instructors and make adjustments as needed. North Carolina also suggests pilot testing curricular materials before using them in a distance learning model.
- Instructors and administrators involved in distance education need professional development and training. Include this training in plans for any distance education pilot program. They also suggest requiring administrators and instructors to keep current on distance education research in adult education.
- Distance learning is most likely to succeed when it receives agency-wide support. Involve the administrators at the institution, bring the library staff on board and make all staff aware of what the project can offer to learners. Once past the pilot stage, make distance learning an integral part of the program offerings for adult learners. This will require that all staff are educated about the distance learning option and how to respond to students interested in this educational approach.

Missouri: Testing the Hybrid Model

Introduction

Missouri's distance education efforts began with the development of a statewide online GED curriculum and later expanded to include the use of existing curricular products at a distance. The Missouri GED Online was developed beginning in 2000. It is the online portal through which students enter the Missouri system and choose how they want to study. It was offered initially through one location, the North Kansas City School District, which served learners across the state. As demand for these services grew, two additional regional centers offering the curriculum were added. After three years, 10 more sites offering Missouri GED Online were added and the LiteracyLink curricula, *GED Connection* (GEDC) and *Workplace Essential Skills* (WES), were piloted as distance study options for adult learners. From its inception, through FY03, Missouri's distance learning project served over 5200 students, and they served an additional 2900 students have been served in FY04. Missouri will expand the program to 30 sites in the coming year and will focus on improving distance teaching through the implementation of an extensive mentoring program for teachers.

Why Distance Learning

Steve Coffman, State Director, and Linda Hays, State Supervisor, explained that distance learning started out in Missouri as a coming together of the state's vision of expanded services for onsite programs and the "trenches activity" of the North Kansas City School District. At a time when OVAE was urging states to expand services to reach unserved adults with basic skill needs, North Kansas City wanted to expand services for their onsite program. They hoped that distance learning might be an enhancement to the classroom, allowing, for example, a mother with children at home in the summer to continue her education. The North Kansas City project started out as a partnership with the Kansas City public television station, the Kansas City Literacy Council and a consortium of local community colleges. The television station helped with marketing and initially provided the server and the communication and instructional software, called WebCt, for MO GED Online.

The Evolution of Distance Learning in Missouri

MO GED Online started as a pilot project initiated by the North Kansas City Adult Education and Literacy Program. North Kansas City had a staff excited about using distance education as an enhancement to classroom learning. They did an excellent job of setting up the program and keeping students informed of their distance learning options. Their early recruitment efforts were helped by the fact that teachers played a dual role; they were both onsite and online instructors. This one agency supported any student in the state interested in learning at a distance. They also obtained permission from McGraw Hill/Contemporary to put a portion of the TABE online. Although the results could not be used for accountability purposes, the online test was used for diagnosis and placement of students. However, after using the online TABE for their

early efforts in distance education, Missouri sites stopped this practice because the state wanted the sites to better integrate onsite services with online services. Distance learners are now required to go to one of the participating sites to learn about the distance learning options, participate in testing, and then be assigned to a distance learning teacher.

Demand for distance learning services soon surpassed the capacity of the North Kansas City agency. To meet this need, the state expanded the distance program through a competitive process; two additional regional service centers at Rockwood and Crowder College were added as providers of Missouri GED Online. The two new sites found a different audience responded to the availability of distance learning options: instead of primarily offering additional options for classroom students, these programs attracted a lot of students who came in through the Internet. Interestingly, their peak hours of use of the system were 10:30 p.m. to 2:00 a.m., suggesting that distance learning might be reaching adults for whom classroom programs were not a viable option. The success of these programs resulted in additional growth and the addition of more sites offering Missouri GED Online.

Training for the three original sites was done informally on their own. When the pilot project was expanded to include ten additional sites, training was offered and included: 1) curriculum-specific training; 2) processes for data collection; and 3) reporting requirements for the state. Training in 2005 will include a screening tool for the teachers from the participating agencies so trainers can get a sense of their strengths and questions in advance.

After three years of working exclusively with Missouri GED Online at a distance, the GEDC and WES were added as distance study options for adult learners. Programs working with these curricula were trained along with those using Missouri GED Online.

In the coming year, approximately two-thirds of all ABE/GED programs in the state will participate in distance learning using the Missouri GED Online curriculum, with a total of 30 sites involved in distance education. To be selected to be one of the 30 sites, a center must meet the following criteria:

- Top-down administrator support for distance education;
- Specific qualifications for what teachers should know and what skills they should have;
- Teachers with prior GED teaching experience so they do not have to learn both the curriculum *and* how to teach at a distance;
- Teachers with good computer skills;
- Sites with specific equipment and software;
- Staff available for training and willing to do required reporting.

Staff at these agencies will receive training on what distance learning is and how to work with students at a distance. Missouri also is moving into an exciting new area of professional development in which experienced distance teachers will mentor new

teachers. Finally, as the state expands its distance learning efforts, it will be increasingly important for the sites to understand the benefits to learners as well as for their programs.

Curricular Choices for Distance Learning in Missouri

Missouri GED Online provides three distinct curricular levels or paths for students: Lower level, Intermediate level and Upper level. All three can be accessed via links from the MO GED Online homepage. To get into the MO GED Online system, students fill out an online application which goes to the systems administrator. The administrator then contacts both the student and the online instructor. After the student has taken the TABE pretest onsite, then s/he is given a password to the system and assigned to an online teacher. Students must go back to the site to post test quarterly if they want to continue in the program. Otherwise they will be locked out of the system.

Missouri considers certain curricular choices best for certain populations. They have developed MO GED Online so that the *BLS Tutor System* is the most appropriate choice for lower level students. It is structured with lots of opportunities for drill and practice. They would expect intermediate students to be more likely to study the *SkillsTutor* curriculum. It is a little less structured with fewer tutorials but has more drill and practice and is interactive. It is a good choice for those students who need a refresher in basic skills. Either curriculum is available for any student to study, and the choice is often based on a teacher's knowledge of the software.

For upper-level students, teachers have created lessons and study materials to prepare students to take the GED test. The instructional materials are organized and made available to students through "Blackboard," an online system that supports delivery of content as well as facilitating online communication among students and with the teacher. The lessons are very traditional and similar to what they would study in a classroom. After completing each lesson, a student takes a test and the scores are recorded. Missouri uses averages to estimate how much time a student has spent working on a lesson.

Financial Support for MO GED Online

Funding for Missouri's distance learning program came from State Leadership funds in FY 03 and from Federal 231 monies in FY 04. Each funded program received an allocation request in their regular program budget that included three components: technology, teacher training and teacher time. For the technology allocation, a program must submit annually a plan about installing the technology necessary to update and deliver distance learning. Each program also was allocated about $500 to support teacher training. Lastly, each program was funded up to 10 hours/week for teachers to instruct online, up to a maximum of $8000 per year. This gave each agency the flexibility to adjust time based on its hourly rate for teachers.

Missouri ABE/GED programs are funded based on contact hours with students, not on seat time. Teacher Time Diaries for 2003-04 showed that teachers spent, on average, 10.2 hours/week. That was very close to the level of funding a site received from the state for this project.

Research Approach, Data Collected, What the Numbers Tell

In 2003-04 MO GED Online enrolled 2901 students. In the last quarter, April-May-June, they had 331 active learners. From 2000 – 2003, the pilot project served 5200 students. For research purposes, Coffman and Hays wanted to know if the sites were effective in offering distance learning, i.e., how distance learning was working in their state. They wanted to know if the selected curricula are meeting the students' learning needs. They also wanted to find out how much time teachers spend teaching distance students. To help address these questions, the MO GED Online teachers kept Teacher Time Diaries developed by Project IDEAL; the GEDC and WES teachers maintained Seat Time Logs.

Teacher Time Diaries provided some confirming evidence that teachers were, in fact, teaching approximately the same number of hours per week (10.2) as sites were funded for them to work (10 hours/week).

The original intent for using the Seat Time Logs was to compare the seat time and educational gains of classroom students with distance students studying GEDC and WES. This was not possible, however, because the Missouri teachers ended up only using these curricula in classroom rather than at a distance. Interestingly, seventeen of those classroom students were both pre- and posttested, and nine (53%) posted EFL gains of one or more. This percent is quite similar to the percent of GEDC distance students in Pennsylvania and Ohio who posted EFL gains of one or more (54% and 56%, respectively). This suggests that it is possible to effectively teach GEDC using both classroom and distance models.

What Missouri Has Learned

Hays commented that 2003–2004 had been a year of "hurdles and change" for Missouri. It was a time of transition as they worked on putting some foundation elements in place for distance education. Her research on the hybrid model of learning led the state to its decision to take this approach. Also, eliminating use of the TABE online meant a more team-oriented approach to teaching for the on-site and online teachers because they must work together to test students as well as plan and deliver their instruction. Teachers will be able to support one another, and, as Coffman said, "This medium definitely requires extra support for both teachers and students."

Implementation

Recruitment. Originally, when North Kansas City was the sole distance learning provider in Missouri, the goal was to expand options for classroom learners, and it was obvious which teachers were enthusiastic and did the best "sales job." When two additional sites began offering distance learning, however, Missouri discovered that a web-based system could do its own marketing. Without additional advertising, potential students found the site by surfing the web. When 13 sites began offering distance learning, MO GED Online enrolled 2901 students with very little recruitment effort by the state or agencies. Teachers either recruited students from their classrooms or students found MO GED Online through the Internet and by word-of-mouth. With growth to 30 sites, however, agencies will likely have to recruit outside of the classroom if they are to reach the

targeted number of students. "Top down" support for recruitment is part of the state's plan as well as supporting agencies and teachers to succeed in distance education.

Orientation. Coffman and Hays recognize that Missouri needs to do better at helping on-site teachers (1) conduct orientation for new students and (2) understand distance learning and the expanded opportunities it offers students. They also acknowledge that they need to train on-site teachers to screen students to ensure their readiness for distance learning and to provide teachers with the resources they need to get lower-level students to the required reading levels for distance learning. A lack of communication between on-site teachers and online teachers has been another major challenge. When the TABE could be done online, on-site teachers and online teachers did not necessarily have to talk to one another about placement and instruction of distance students. The new system, however, is more team-oriented and has been a catalyst for improved communication.

Teaching. Hays shared two significant insights from her work with the distance teachers. First, teachers reported that how they communicate online with students is very different from how they communicate in the classroom. One teacher in particular learned the hard way that sarcasm does not work, that instead, you must be professional and clear. At this point in the project most teachers have created a file of various types of correspondence they frequently send to students. That way, each time a teacher emails a student s/he can continually clarify and refine what's been written. Second, Hays commented that teachers are working less in isolation and that there is more teamwork among them. Initially teachers were creating their own file of resources but more recently they have begun to share their materials with other distance teachers as the Blackboard system has made it easier for them to do so.

Keys to success: What would you tell another state new to distance learning?

Clear, Shared Vision. Missouri believes that an important key to success is setting a clear vision of what you want to accomplish and then writing it down so everyone—from state-level personnel to teachers in agencies—knows what it is. The next step is to create an action plan of strategies to make that vision happen. A third step is to define roles. Missouri has taken a year to do that and now has defined responsibilities for the program director, systems administrator, and teachers. Finally, state staff must decide on what training is needed to ensure that everyone understands the vision. For Missouri, the training model now includes a large mentoring component for teachers.

Clear Procedures and a Job Description. When a state is ready to mainstream distance learning, Coffman emphasized the importance of writing down clear procedures for 1) expectations; 2) what you will and won't do to get there; and 3) who is doing what. Eventually these procedures will become policy. Missouri would also recommend job descriptions for online teachers as a way to help focus on quality distance teaching. They are also in the process of developing a screening tool for selecting online teachers. This past year, they used an early version of this tool to help plan training. Eventually it will be available for program directors to use to screen for distance teachers for their agency.

Next Steps: A Hybrid Model of Learning and Mentoring New Teachers

Coffman and Hays are providing leadership for the direction distance learning is currently taking in the state. Hays has reviewed a lot of research that suggests that the hybrid model is often the most effective. Missouri is moving towards this model because they want to establish a program that increases student motivation and helps students become successful independent learners. If they can blend classroom and distance learning, they think it will provide a better support system and allow students more flexibility to learn at their own pace. This past year Missouri had 270 GED graduates from the MO GED Online program. A significant number of them were also part of a classroom program as well. Coffman and Hays believe this information adds credibility to the value of a blended model.

Eliminating the use of the TABE online and requiring students to come onsite for testing has been a move toward implementing the hybrid model. Coming onsite creates increased opportunities for communication between the student and both the online and onsite teachers. Hays suggested that going to a center to get online course access seems to increase student commitment level. It helps them know who to go to and what to do as they study at a distance. In addition, working with a team of online and onsite teachers provides students with additional supports and may increase the likelihood of success.

The hybrid model idea was strengthened when Coffman became interested in and forged a partnership with the University of Phoenix. The University of Phoenix offers a distance education program, called FlexNet, which includes an onsite component. In a five-week class the first and the fifth weeks' classes are held onsite, and the middle three weeks of course work is done online. The University has shown that this model works well with college students, and Coffman thought it had great potential for adult learners. He reported that the University of Phoenix is interested in helping Missouri because the state's GED programs will be a feeder program for the University's college courses.

Coffman also was impressed with the University of Phoenix's approach to improving teacher quality through an extensive mentoring program. He would like to adapt their model for training Missouri's distance teachers as well. This will be done regionally. Each experienced teacher/mentor will oversee three new teachers and help support their students. Mentors and new teachers will have the opportunity to get to know one another at a face-to-face training. Mentors also will have access to their new teachers' Blackboard sites to observe and provide feedback about teacher-student online interactions.

Illinois: Success On Their Own

Illinois has taken a different approach to distance learning than the other states in the Project IDEAL consortium: they have developed their own online GED program—GED Illinois—and trained every adult education agency in the state in its use. GED Illinois can be used by students working at a distance and in classroom settings. They hoped that this curriculum would attract students not being reached by existing programs and increase persistence and the passing rate of the GED test. Following a carefully planned and thorough development process, GED Illinois was launched statewide in June 2002. During the past year 2731 students studied online on GED Illinois.

Why Distance Learning?

The decision to create GED Illinois arose from several concerns. Illinois wanted to attract a larger proportion of adult learners than were being served in their classes and were looking for ways to do this. David Baker, Illinois Distance Learning Coordinator, commented that they realized they knew a lot about the students coming to their programs, but they did not know much about those who did not attend. They did, however, know that for many students who dropped out of classroom programs, work and family conflicts were common. They thought distance education might attract those learners unable or unwilling to come to class. Illinois also thought that distance education might provide a way to help increase persistence and the passing rate of the GED test as well as increase retention, particularly if it was used in a blended or hybrid model with classroom programs.

Illinois had examined existing products for studying GED at a distance and had not found any that fit their needs. They wanted an online distance education program to have a better fit with their adult education system than existing programs did, and they wanted a different interaction with the online system than was possible with programs already on the market. Baker commented that the back ends of existing products were not as flexible or interactive as they desired. In addition, there was a window of opportunity for funding the development of a new product, and they opted to take advantage of that.

The Development Process

The development of GED Illinois was a large, well-planned effort involving people from a variety of backgrounds in its planning and creation. An advisory board was composed of adult education program administrators, the Center for the Application of Information Technology, the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), the Illinois Secretary of State Literacy Office (which is responsible for libraries in the state), the Department of Corrections, and a group of developers who are teachers in the field. This group approached the development of an online curriculum from the perspective of "If anything was possible, how would you want to teach GED to your students?" A second group was composed of the technical people who were responsible for actually developing the product. At the center, acting as a liaison between the two groups, was Crystal Hack,

GED Illinois Online Instruction Coordinator, who could "speak both languages." The two teams worked closely in developing the finished product.

The math content was the first to be developed and was pilot-tested for six months. This allowed the developers to test both the system and the content. Nine pilot sites, located throughout the state and representing various types of adult education agencies, participated in this pilot, which provided informal evaluations to the advisory committee. Adjustments to the system were made on the basis of this test effort. The math content went online in January 2002. Once the math content went online, the other content areas went through shorter pilot tests of approximately one month each. This was possible because the pilot test with the math content demonstrated that the *system* worked, and the evaluation process could then focus on the content. Full implementation of all content areas, on a statewide basis, occurred in June 2002.

To acquaint teachers throughout the state with GED Illinois, an extensive training process was implemented. Illinois has a regionally based Service Center Network which developed a training protocol for use with GED Illinois. They first developed training pieces to be used in the pilot programs; these were adjusted based on that experience. The Service Center Network developed a training manual and conducted training at both regional and local programs. All of the GED programs within the state were trained in using GED Illinois. Costs for this training effort were absorbed into the scope of work for the Service Centers.

Training initially focused on technical issues, such as how to use the program and how to enter students in the data collection system. Later, they saw a need for additional teacher training on effective distance teaching and developed training pieces to meet that need. To date training has been conducted in face-to-face settings, but in the future Baker expects that there will be online training for continued professional development. Illinois also is considering implementing the Study Groups developed by Project IDEAL with interested teachers in the coming year.

Financial Support for GED Illinois

Original funding ($500,000) for the development of GED Illinois came from a Workforce Discretionary grant from the Governor through the Illinois Department of Employment Security. The project continues to be supported by the state's Community College Board with approximately $200,000 of federal leadership funds each year. It is significant to note that from the beginning, there was a clear understanding that this would not be a one-time expense—that the system would, in fact, need to updated and modified. The state made a commitment to this continued support for GED Illinois.

Agencies who use GED Illinois do not receive any special funding, although the pilot sites did receive small stipends for their participation in the developmental phase. Agencies may use GED Illinois as another option for serving their adult learners, and are reimbursed for students served. Based on what was learned during the pilot tests, the state credits students with 50 minutes of "seat time" for each lesson they complete (with 70% or higher correct); this is used as the basis for reimbursing agencies.

What Illinois Has Learned

Keys to Success

Need for a champion. At this time, there is considerable anecdotal evidence—although not yet much quantitative data—about the impact of GED Illinois. The first feedback came from teachers involved in the pilot test. Agencies in this pilot were picked to represent a mix of the types of adult education programs available in the state; they were *not* handpicked because they were known to be particularly technologically sophisticated programs. In fact, the comfort level with the technology varied widely among teachers in the pilot test. During this phase, teachers used GED Illinois as a supplement to their classroom offerings; the focus was on the new curriculum without the added demands of learning to teach it in a new way. Overall, teachers in the pilot test were able to use GED Illinois effectively as part of their classroom programs. Baker noted that it worked best where someone at the agency "championed" it, where there was a strongly supportive administrator and/or a teacher who clearly understood what distance learning could do for the students. He cited the example of one program that had a lot of students completing their GED after studying this curriculum and attributed the success, in large part, to the efforts of a single teacher who was excited about the possibilities this new delivery system offered.

Importance of input from the "field." Baker credited a great deal of the success of GED Illinois to the involvement of adult education teachers and administrators in the development of the product. Their input helped shape GED Illinois into a tool that was useful for educators and helped create "buy in" from the field.

Training. Statewide training was an important element of GED Illinois and a key component in making educators throughout the state familiar with the product. Initial training for teachers focused on *how* to use this new tool – the logistics of navigating the online system. Illinois learned that, because distance education is so different from classroom teaching, they also needed training that included guidance on how to teach effectively at a distance. Additional training pieces focusing on how to take classroom practices and adapt them to distance teaching were developed to meet this need.

As noted, the initial training focused on teachers, not program administrators. Illinois soon saw a need for training aimed at helping administrators understand how to implement GED Illinois within their own agencies. An early attempt to offer training sessions, which included both teachers and administrators using Project IDEAL's DL101 course, did not get the follow-through from agencies that had been anticipated. Since that time, Hack has created training for administrators that emphasizes the tools within GED Illinois that are useful for successful implementation and management purposes.

Finally, Baker noted that the field of adult education has a high turnover rate, for both teachers and administrators. Thus, there is a need to provide continued training opportunities as new people become involved with the curriculum. They offer GED Illinois training three times a year and distribute a quarterly newsletter to keep teachers and administrators informed about the latest developments.

Implementation

Recruitment. In many ways, GED Illinois "recruits itself," according to Baker. Students who conduct an online search looking for GED programs easily find the GED Illinois website. Here, they can get phone numbers to contact Baker or Hack or they can find a local provider using the online provider locator. Baker noted that in the past year the site has had more than 4000 discrete hits, indicating that people are indeed searching for alternative ways to pursue their educational goals. Because interested students can contact either the GED Illinois staff or their local agency, it has been difficult to track the sources of recruitment or to determine which retention efforts are most effective.

Local programs present GED Illinois as one of the options available to students who come in for services. In the early phase of the project, GED Illinois developed two Public Service Announcements (PSAs) featuring students who had been involved in the pilot phase. Local agencies can add their own contact information to these PSAs when running them on local television outlets; about 70 of the 105 programs in the state chose to do this. These were used a great deal when they were first available, but they are not aired as frequently now. This may reflect the fact that there is little need to actively recruit students, as so many find the program on their own.

Orientation. Face-to-face orientations, including TABE testing, are required for students studying GED Illinois. Early orientations, however, did not always provide students with a realistic view of either GED Illinois or studying at a distance. Part of the difficulty initially was the way the online system was configured: it required students to sign up for class before they could access the lessons and see what they were like. Although there were pre-assignments for each module available on the entry portal, Baker commented that these contained some of the driest content of the entire curriculum. To alleviate this problem, sample lessons have since been placed outside of the main site, and students are encouraged to use them. In addition, the GED Illinois site refers to students to the OASIS site, which contains tools to help students determine if distance learning is appropriate for them. Baker knew from research that students fail when they are not given realistic expectations up front. Therefore, teachers are urged to use both the sample lessons and the OASIS tools as talking points with students during orientation.

Two key things to be covered in orientations are expectations for both teachers and students. These include expectations for student work, such as the number of hours/week, the amount of work to be completed, etc. It is also important for the student to have realistic expectations of the teacher's role. Baker commented that, in a classroom, students can see the line of three students at the teacher's desk waiting to ask questions and gauge how long it will take to get their questions answered. Many students tend to think that online teacher feedback will be immediate. Orientation therefore needs to include clear information on teacher availability, when the teacher will be online, and how quickly students can expect feedback on their work and responses to their questions.

Teaching. Teachers need training in how to transfer their classroom teaching skills to an online environment. They not only need to know how to work with the technical elements of GED Illinois but also need to develop a new set of teaching strategies. Additional training in the state has been made available to help teachers gain these skills.

Assessment and Accountability. Illinois has "learned the lesson, but not found the solution" to the problem that programs have in getting students to return to the centers for post testing on the TABE. There is interest in exploring the possibility of online testing in the future, but concerns include the accuracy of the test and security issues.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that GED Illinois students are indeed passing their GED test, but this is not currently tracked consistently throughout the state. The Illinois Community College Board is exploring ways to accurately capture this data.

Next Steps for Illinois

It was always intended that GED Illinois would be modified and improved rather than remain as a fixed curriculum. Thus, a second layer of content is being added to all of the subject areas in GED Illinois. This includes additional lessons to provide more supports for students as they prepare for the GED test.

Illinois is also open to the possibility of expanding the audience GED Illinois currently is serving. The current curriculum is recommended for those students reading at a ninth grade or higher reading level making it appropriate for true GED students. They want to explore if something like this could work with ABE students and are also examining available ESL programs.

Finally, Illinois has talked with several other states about pilot-testing GED Illinois in their states. Collaborations are set began in late 2004.

Looking Across States

The preceding chapters have illustrated the ways in which each state has taken an individual approach to exploring the use of distance education to meet the needs of its adult learners. Each state has found innovative ways in its attempt to use new educational modalities to extend the reach of its adult services. States varied in their choice of what population to serve, what curricula to offer, what distance learning model to employ and how large or small a project to implement. Yet, despite these differences, there are some clear themes that emerge from the states profiled in this monograph. These can provide guidance for other states considering distance learning as an option for adult learners.

On a Global Level

The experiences of these six states suggest some insights into the concept of distance learning and the larger issues surrounding its role in adult education.

- Distance learning is not a unitary construct – in other words, there is no one model or approach that can be used as an exemplar of distance learning. As was seen in the efforts of these states, distance learning can be aimed at meeting different educational needs (ASE, ESL, GED), can use different curricula and different implementation models ("pure" distance vs. hybrid models). Because of this, distance education provides states with a great deal of flexibility to develop programs best geared to meet the specific needs of their adult learner populations.
- States must select a distance learning model that best fits the needs of the learners they aim to serve. Several states have decided that a hybrid, or blended, model is the best distance learning approach for their adult learners. This model provides students with greater support and opportunities for the social components of learning to come into play. Some states have suggested that they particularly find a hybrid model appropriate for lower-level students who need additional support and for ESL students, because it provides an opportunity for them to practice their oral language skills. Pure distance models may be better suited for students with stronger academic skills and more developed independent study skills or a desire for privacy as they study skills they did not acquire earlier in their lives.
- Strong state support is critical to the success of distance learning programs. The state leadership needs to be stakeholders in the process. Also, there needs to be a clear vision at the state level that is shared at the local level. Agencies are more likely to become excited about distance learning if they feel that the state views it as

an important component of the adult education arena. State support also extends to financial support for distance learning. Several states stressed the need for consistent, reliable funding to develop, implement and maintain distance learning programs.

- Distance learning programs need time to mature. Agencies need time to learn to deliver educational services in a new way, and they need time to make the organizational changes that enable distance learning to become a part of mainstream activities. Several states emphasized the importance of having state-level officials understand this need for sufficient time and financial support for programs to evolve. They cautioned against wanting "instant gratification" in terms of recruiting and retaining students and reporting educational gains.
- Because of the great differences between distance education and classroom-based education, professional development support for teachers and administrators involved in distance learning is critical. This training needs to include not only the technical aspects of distance teaching but also needs to focus on teaching and communication strategies that are effective at a distance. Providing ongoing professional development should be an integral component of any distance education program.

At the Implementation Level

Each state gained valuable insights into the best ways to implement and teach in their individual programs. While each program clearly had its own unique nature, there were some lessons that crossed state lines:

- States have found that selective screening of prospective distance learning students is important, as distance learning is not an appropriate educational approach for all students. States report that it is important to determine if the student has the appropriate academic and technical skills, technology access and personal characteristics to work independently. Some of the states noted that they are still figuring out who constitutes the most successful distance learner.
- State-developed web-based learning approaches (e.g., MO GED Online and GED Illinois) seem to recruit students without the need for much external marketing. The fact that students find these programs through the Internet suggests they are likely to have the technology skills needed to navigate through the curricula.
- Face-to-face orientation has taken on a growing importance for states offering distance education. It provides an opportunity to assess the students' abilities and readiness for distance learning and a time for the student and teacher to establish a rapport. Some states suggest that a strong orientation improves the recruitment of

students ready for distance education and therefore, in the long term, increases retention.

- Distance teaching is different from classroom teaching, but distance teaching also varies depending upon the curricula being taught and the distance learning model. Distance teachers are more likely to serve as a facilitator that guides the students in their studies, rather than as the primary source of content instruction. This approach requires a different set of skills than does classroom teaching. In particular, teachers must become adept at communicating—with a personality, voice and empathy—at a distance. They also need to be intimately familiar with the curriculum they are teaching and able to direct the student to supplemental materials when appropriate.
- Just as distance learning is not appropriate for every student, distance learning is not appropriate for every teacher. Distance teachers need to be flexible, innovative, and creative and have the appropriate technology skills. They need to be comfortable with a learner-centered approach to teaching since much of their interaction with students will be on an individual basis. If they are used to being teacher-directed and see their role in the classroom as delivering content, they may not be comfortable facilitating learning in a distance classroom. States suggest that it is better to allow distance teachers to volunteer or self-select, rather than to assign them to teach at a distance.
- Assessing learners for accountability purposes remains a challenge. While programs can usually pre-test students during orientation, they are less successful in getting students to return to a center for post-testing. Several states are exploring ways to address this issue. They are considering ideas like offering incentives for students to return for post tests or setting up testing centers in cooperation with community agencies such as libraries and one-stops. However, as of the writing of this paper, many do not feel they have adequate solutions.

Chronology of State Activities

State	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
PA	-State Director sets vision for using distance learning to serve adults in need of workplace skills who do not attend classroom programs. -RFP process selects 12 pilot sites to experiment using WES with distance students Jan.-June.	-8 new pilot sites + 12 original sites continue experiment using WES with distance students.	-Curricular options expand to include use of GEDC at a distance and TV411 as prep for studying WES at a distance.	-Pilot sites are funded to serve "X distance learners" with flexibility to "mix & match" curricula. -GEDC distance students are tracked for accountability. -Performance standards are piloted for agencies using WES with distance students. -892 students enrolled.	-PA shifting from pilot-agency based experiment to statewide implementation model. -Distance learning available to any student in the state. -Training available for any agency wishing to implement distance learning.
OH		-Ohio DOE/ABLE office decides a different kind of service is needed to reach students not coming to classroom programs.	-State Director establishes Advisory Committee. -RFP process selects 7 pilot sites to implement GEDC with distance students, Jan.-June.	-7 pilot sites continue to experiment using GEDC at a distance with emphasis on expanding use of technology to better serve distance students. -275 students enrolled.	-Curricular options expanding to include *SkillsTutor*. -OH developing plan to "go statewide" with distance learning.
RI	-State Director attends National Education Summit where State Directors are challenged to "expand access."		-State Director selects 4 pilot sites to use *SkillsTutor* with distance students.	-GEDC at a distance is added at one pilot site. -*SkillsTutor* experiment divides distance students randomly into 2 groups to receive different levels of teacher-initiated support. -Goal: 125 students.	-4 pilot sites will continue to use *SkillsTutor* and 1 teacher will continue to use GEDC with distance students.

State	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
NC		-State Board of Community Colleges pilots policy so colleges get FTE reimbursement for distance learners. -Programs use variety of curricula/formats at a distance; pilot policy considered a success and is continued.	-Central Piedmont CC develops wrap-around video additions to CRC. - -Hybrid distance learning model is used with distance students that includes opportunities to practice language skills.	-RFP process selects 8 sites to participate in a two-phase (Jul.-Dec.) and Jan.-June) pilot project using CRC; each site offers 2 classes, 16 weeks each. -Central Piedmont CC provides technical support and assistance to pilot sites. -175 students enrolled.	- CRC distance learning programs will continue to operate. - NC will add a second ESL option, *My English for All*, beginning Jan. 2005. - Coordinators for several areas of adult ed (ESL, adult high school, ABE and GED) will facilitate DL101 course focusing on their areas of expertise.
MO	-North Kansas City School District pilots "MO GED Online" recruiting classroom students to participate. - North Kansas City SD gets permission from McGraw Hill to put the TABE online and uses it for diagnosis/ placement, but not accountability.		-Demand for distance learning increases and MO expands "MO GED Online" program through RFP adding 2 new pilot sites. -New sites find a new audience via the Internet *not* just recruiting from classroom students.	-Additional growth in use of "MO GED Online" requires addition of 10 more sites. -Curricular options expand to include WES and GEDC. -Use of TABE online is discontinued to better integrate onsite and online services. -2901 students enrolled.	-30 sites (about two thirds of all ABE programs) will participate in distance learning using MO GED Online. -MO moving to hybrid model of distance learning; students will receive coordinated support from both an onsite and an online teacher. -New online teachers will be mentored by experienced distance teachers.

State	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
IL	-Il examines existing products for studying GED and does not find any that meets their needs. -Opportunity to apply for funding the development of a new product is available. -Advisory board is created to oversee development of "GED Illinois" that includes teachers. -Online Instruction Coordinator is hired to serve as liaison between advisory board and technical developers.	-Math content is piloted by 9 sites representing various types of adult education agencies, July-December. -Math content goes online January 2002. -Four additional subject areas are piloted, one month each, Feb.-June. -Full implementation of all content areas occurs in June.	-All GED programs within the state are trained in using "GED Illinois."	-Training on effective distance teaching methods is added to original training content that focuses on use of the technology. - 2731 students studied online.	-IL is in discussion with several states about pilot testing "GED Illinois" in those states. -A second "layer" of content will be added to all of the subject areas. -IL will explore possibility of including curricula for ABE and/or ESL students. -IL will explore doing teacher training online.