Project IDEAL Update

Improving Distance Education for Adult Learners

Project IDEAL Support Center
Institute for Social Research

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

Is Distance Teaching for You?

Project IDEAL, in conjunction with the Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE), released a free, online self-assessment that teachers can use to gauge their readiness for distance teaching (www.adultedonline.org). In 20 minutes or less, teachers learn about distance teaching and assess how their skills fit with those needed by distance educators. The self-assessment includes a variety of resources teachers can explore to develop their distance teaching skills and knowledge.

The *Distance Teaching Self-Assessment* (DTSA) helps teachers gauge how prepared they are to handle tasks and activities involved in successful distance teaching. Short video clips introduce distance teaching skills and characteristics. The self-assessment then guides teachers through a series of items designed to help them better understand how their current skills fit and where they need professional development.

A special section for administrators allows them to invite staff to take the DTSA and view individual teacher profiles (with permission). Results can be used to help select distance teaching staff and to design professional development activities.

The DTSA is one of two online assessments being created under a contract with the US Department of Education. The second, the *Technology Integration Self-Assessment*, will help teachers measure their technology knowledge and skills, learn about ways to integrate technology into the classroom, and identify knowledge and skills they would like to develop. Results will include a technology profile and a personalized professional development plan. This assessment will be available Fall 2007.

A Success Story in Ohio

Over four years of experimenting with distance education, Ohio has tripled enrollments, increased achievement, and reduced the cost of delivery from $738 to $293 per student.

What accounts for Ohio's success? They began with a carefully designed, small-scale experiment and a dedicated group of 14 teachers. At the end of each pilot year, the state holds a meeting in which the pilot programs work together to evaluate their experiments and make adjustments for the following year. This process of testing ideas and then implementing changes has led to a solid, successful distance education program. The chart below reflects changes Ohio has made in each year of its pilot program.

Enrollment vs. Cost Per Student
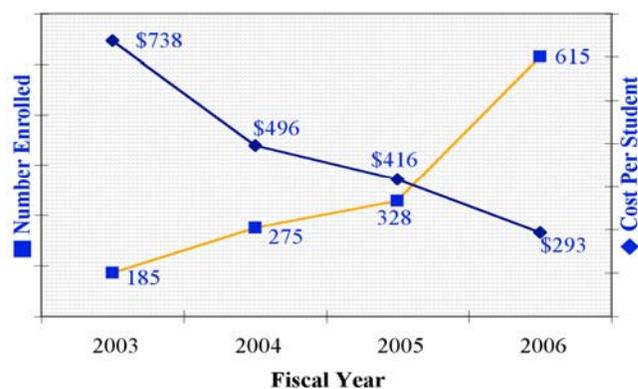
	Evaluation	Action Steps
Year 1	Teachers need more professional development	Added PD: Teachers participate in DL102—an online course
Year 2	One curriculum is insufficient to serve all ABE distance learners; need to add curricula	Added GED & pre-GED curricula Continued PD: Teachers participate in DL103
Year 3	Distance program is ready to expand	Implemented a hub-based delivery model to increase reach of DL programs
Year 4	Ready to offer distance to a broader audience	Added ESOL distance component

Project IDEAL's 5th Annual Distance Education Workshop was held August 7th-10th at the University of Michigan. Leaders from 12 states explored the central theme of the week: Persistence & Achievement in Distance Education. Participants shared ideas, reported on their programs, and developed plans for the coming year. Topics included exploring ways to fund programs beyond the pilot phase, selecting and using curricula, interpreting annual survey results, and using data to manage distance education efforts.

Strategies to Increase Persistence & Achievement

In the *2006 Project IDEAL Teacher Survey*, teachers were asked to suggest strategies to increase persistence and post-testing.

Communication

Teachers consider communication—frequently and using a variety of methods—as the most important determinant in persistence. They recommend connecting with students as soon as they begin their distance studies and then building relationships through regular communication and ongoing positive reinforcement.   Teachers use multiple approaches to staying in touch with students including e-mail, e-cards and postcards, telephone, face-to-face contact, and instant messaging as well as awarding certificates of accomplishment.

> "Teachers consider communication… the most important determinant in persistence."

Pre-Instruction

To increase the likelihood of persistence, teachers recommend students be carefully screened and assessed *before* they begin coursework to make sure they study appropriate materials. Teachers also recommend helping students set realistic goals, build study skills, and learn about time management to better balance school, work and home life. This combination of screening and pre-instructional skills development helps provide the foundation students need to succeed academically.

Achievement

How successful are distance students? To address this question, outcome data is needed. Unfortunately, getting students to return for post-testing continues to be a challenge for distance programs.

Teachers agree that setting expectations at the beginning of a student's distance studies is an important first step. To encourage students to post-test, they suggest:

- Showing how post-testing enables students to see their own educational progress
- Explaining how post-testing is tied to program funding
- Offering incentives, including gift cards, books, food, and parties
- Setting up testing at locations and times convenient for the student
- Exploring online or remote testing

Going to Scale

How do states move from small pilot programs to larger, statewide programs? At the August workshop, representatives from Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio and Pennsylvania participated in a lively and informative panel discussion about the approaches their states have taken to make distance education available to more students.

Contrasting Approaches

Each of the four states has developed a way to increase the scope of distance learning that suits its needs. **Missouri** created its own curriculum, *GED Online*, and began with one teacher supporting students across the state. As demand for distance education grew, so did the need for trained distance teachers. After a concerted professional development effort, Missouri now has distance teachers in every district in the state.

Most adult basic education and ESOL programs in **North Carolina** are offered through the state's extensive community college system. When those programs proved successful, the state implemented a "train-the-trainer" model to create a corps of distance teachers at community colleges throughout the state. Adult learners now have a distance learning option at most of the state's community colleges.

Adult education agencies in **Pennsylvania** have two ways to provide distance education to their students. Local programs can provide distance education services directly to their students or they can refer students to the state's

Distance Works for ESOL

Is it possible to teach ESOL learners at a distance?

Although many educators were skeptical about the possibility of using distance to serve ESOL students, North Carolina was one of the pioneers in this arena. Their success paved the way for Ohio's and Indiana's ESOL distance programs. Data from these states indicate that distance learning can be an effective way to serve ESOL students.

> "The hybrid model seems particularly well-suited for language learning."

All three states use a hybrid model in which most instruction is done at a distance, but where students have the option of face-to-face meetings. The hybrid model seems particularly well-suited for language learning as it provides more opportunities for students to practice their speaking and listening skills.

Programs in all three states have been highly successful in getting students to return for post-testing and all show high numbers of students making an EFL gain. Both the percentages of ESOL students taking a post-test and those posting an EFL gain are higher than for ABE/GED students in all other Project IDEAL states. This outcome mirrors results from classroom programs, where ESOL students also tend to outperform their ABE/GED counterparts.

ESOL Students Making EFL Gain

State	Number Enrolled	%Gain* >=1
North Carolina	396	44%
Ohio	128	69%
Indiana	39	85%

*Percent of those with post-tests.

GED Teachers Rate Curricula

A question states frequently ask is: *Which GED curriculum works best with distance learners?*

In 2006, the Support Center surveyed 155 distance teachers about the curricula they use with their GED learners. Teachers rated *GED Connection* (GEDC), *GED Illinois*, *GED Online Missouri*, *MHC GED Online*, and *SkillsTutor*. In general, the four online curricula were rated higher than the multimedia curriculum GEDC. However, no one product stood out as a clear favorite among teachers. Teachers found strengths and flaws in the content and instructional delivery system for each curriculum, but expressed overall satisfaction with the GED product(s) they used.

Interestingly, 82% of teachers assign supplemental materials. This suggests teachers recognize the limitations of working solely with one curriculum and are finding ways to ensure students receive comprehensive instruction. States are looking for ways to support their distance teachers in using multiple curricula and in providing tailored instruction for their distance learners. States are also exploring how and whether to count hours students spend working on these supplemental assignments.

> "No one product stood out as a clear favorite."

Workshop Participants

New Study Group on Persistence

One of the most important issues in DE involves finding ways to help learners persist in their studies. The Support Center staff is designing a new DL102 Study Group that will focus on the issue of persistence. The Center has been consulting with NCSALL regarding their study circle on persistence in classroom programs. The new course will be available beginning Winter 2007.

Online Data Collection System in Compliance with NRS Changes

Project IDEAL's Online Data Collection System—now called the Distance Student Tracker (DST)—has been upgraded to be in compliance with the revised *NRS Implementation Guidelines* published in July 2006. ESOL descriptors for EFLs have been revised as have standardized test recommendations and associated scaled score ranges for ESOL and ABE/ASE. Student data collected in the DST beginning July 1st, 2006 will adhere to the new guidelines.

Roster from Distance Student Tracker with Sample Data

Name	Seat Time Log	Seat Time	Last Update	Status	Post-Tested?	Weeks
Spencer, Lucky	EFA GEDC	9.5	11/09/2005	Active	Yes	57
Marquez, Jose	Crossroads Cafe EFA	2		Active	Yes	14
Jax, Jasper	Crossroads Cafe EFA	10	11/02/2005	Active	Yes	57
Davis, Alexis	GEDC Skills Tutor	37	08/09/2006	Active	Yes	53
Corinthos, Sonny	GEDC	8	01/18/2006	Active	Yes	44
Corinthos, Carly	Crossroads Cafe EFA	19	10/19/2006	Active	No	9

New Working Paper

This fall the Support Center will release a Working Paper titled: *Accommodating Distance Learners in Student Record Systems.* It provides guidelines to states that want to adapt their student record systems to handle the indicators unique to distance education—especially proxy contact hours.

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

Website Gets a Facelift

We are working on changes to our website: projectideal.org. Look for new resources and information in 2007.

Centralized Distance Teaching Service (CDTS). The referring center conducts testing and orientation and gets "credit" for the student, while the CDTS provides the distance instruction to learners throughout the state.

Ohio is experimenting with a hub system to deliver distance. A hub is an agency that has experienced distance teachers on staff. Each hub creates a partnership with at least two other adult education providers. The partner agencies refer students interested in distance learning, conduct testing and orientation, and receive credit for the student. The hub agency receives funding to cover costs of providing instruction. Hub and partner agencies are encouraged to maintain strong communications to coordinate support for distance students.