



# OHIO ABLE OFFICE'S DISTANCE EDUCATION POLICY

March, 2011

The United States Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education has authorized states to provide distance education as a formal option for delivering adult basic and literacy education services. This authorization acknowledges the reality that an increasing number of ABLE students have both the capabilities and desire to pursue their ABLE studies at a distance.

This policy defines the practices and procedures that govern the delivery of distance education in Ohio ABLE Programs.

## **State Context:**

Ohio recognized the need to explore distance education in 2002 when a decision was made to join Project Ideal, the national project at the University of Michigan funded to assist state adult basic education programs to establish a distance option. State leaders recognized that a structured, monitored distance education program could provide an instructional option for students who had difficulty attending classes due to work schedules, family obligations or other situations that prohibited their regular class attendance. It could also assist students to study throughout the summer when some programs required reduced class offerings.

## **Definitions:**

**Distance education** is defined as a learning activity where students and instructors are separated by geography, time or both for the **majority** of the instructional period. **Distance education students** are students who receive distance education services for **more than 50%** of their total instructional time. Actual contact hours are hours in which the student is physically present in the program for progress monitoring, testing or instruction. Proxy contact hours are hours of instruction provided at a distance.

## **Ohio ABLE Programs Offering Distance Education**

Ohio ABLE Programs must be approved by the State ABLE Office to provide distance education. A program must submit a plan to offer distance education to its own students (Distance Education Component) or to its own students and students referred from other ABLE programs (Hub Distance Component). In the plan, the program must provide all required information including but not necessarily limited to: the name of the approved curriculum to be utilized at a distance, the names and qualifications of the distance instructor(s), the method to verify and report student proxy hours in



ABLELink, strategies for scheduling posttesting for distance education students, and, if applying to be a Hub, agreements with partner programs.

### **Hours for Program Enrollment**

Distance students as with classroom students must have at least 12 hours of contact before they can be counted for federal reporting purposes. Contact hours for distance students can be actual or proxy hours.

### **Type of Proxy Hours Accepted**

Instruction hours earned via online, computer instruction that occurs at a site other than in the ABLE classroom (e.g., a student's home, a library, a learning center) will be considered as proxy hours.

### **Measuring Proxy Hours**

Proxy hours will be counted utilizing what the National Reporting System refers to as a Clock Time Model. This means that hours will be credited for time spent online utilizing a curriculum that the Ohio State ABLE Office approves for use at a distance. Most curricula that will be considered for approval will incorporate a formal tracking system that measures the amount of time students are engaged in instruction and that disconnects after a period of inactivity. Other curricula that do not include an internal tracking mechanism will be considered for approval after a formal process for determining the average seat need to complete a unit or section at a minimum 80% mastery. The process for making this determination must be approved by the state ABLE Office prior to its implementation.

### **Assessment**

All formal assessment utilized for formal accountability purposes must occur in person at an ABLE program. Programs must establish procedures for notifying student as to when and where posttesting should occur. Decisions about posttesting should be made based upon evidence of student progress within the curriculum, hours of instruction the student has received and/or days of enrollment.

The policy that is in place for when traditional, classroom students should be assessed is also applicable for distance education students. Ohio's current assessment policy indicates that posttesting should occur according to test publisher guidelines as indicated in our most recently approved Ohio ABLE Assessment Policy.

### **Reporting**

Distance education students (those receiving over 50% of their instruction via distance) must be so classified in ABLELink. These students would be counted in the program Table 4 and 5 of APR along with all of the program's students. In addition, programs will need to count distance education students alone on Table 4c and 5a.