# DISTANCE EDUCATION POLICY FOR VIRGINIA ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAMS

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. NEED FOR A DISTANCE EDUCATION REPORTING POLICY

This policy defines distance education for adult education programs in Virginia and provides guidelines by which programs can report adult learners' distance education hours to the state Management Information System (MIS). The goal of this policy is to describe the types of activities and curricula approved for distance education and outline the requirements and procedures for reporting distance education activities to the state MIS.

**Policy 1.1**
**Adult education programs must follow the steps and processes described in this document to report distance education classes and related student attendance into the state approved data management system.**

Distance education is a way to increase services to adult learners in Virginia and a means to improve the state's adult education outcomes. It is also a method of increasing access to educational resources for the state adult student population as well as building capacity to serve more students with a wider variety of delivery options. Distance education also provides a way for the under-skilled employed and unemployed adults in the state to access education by offering flexible hours and instruction through a variety of media. Distance education's incorporation of technology allows students who are not able or choose not to attend traditional classes to have another avenue to further their education and improve their skills. Students enrolled in distance education have the same opportunity as traditional students to receive quality instruction taught by trained, knowledgeable instructors.

# II. DEFINITIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

## A. DEFINITION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

The federal Office of Vocational and Adult Education defines distance education for adult education programs as follows.

> *Distance education is a formal learning activity where students and instructors are separated by geography, time, or both for the majority of the instructional period.\* Distance learning materials are delivered through a variety of media including, but not limited to, print, audio recording, videotape, television broadcasts, computer software, web-based interaction, and other online technologies. Teachers support distance learners through communication via mail, telephone, e-mail, or other web-based technologies or software.*
>
> *\* Completion of instructional activities in a computer lab for traditional classes does not qualify as distance education.*

## B. DEFINITION OF ADULT EDUCATION LEARNERS

With the inclusion of distance education as a reportable educational activity, each adult basic education student will be identified as one of two types of learners:

- *Traditional learners*: Traditional learners are students who receive the majority of their instruction through traditional, face-to-face instruction.

- *Distance learners*: Distance learners are students who receive a majority of their instruction through approved distance education services.

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**Policy 2.1**
**Every adult basic education student must be identified as either a traditional learner or a distance learner.**

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A student is classified as a distance learner if the majority of the student's hours earned in a program year are derived by his or her participation in distance learning activities. However, a student's hours in *both* distance and classroom activities must be reported into the data management system.

PERSONAL COMPETENCIES

Distance education may not be the right solution for every adult education learner. Identifying the type of adult populations (e.g. ABE, ASE, ESOL,) to be served and their required minimum NRS-levels, as well as other required competencies, are essential first steps in creating an effective distance education program. For adults to be successful using distance education, they require the appropriate language, reading, mathematics, and writing skills that will enable them to follow written directions, work independently, and communicate effectively. The selected distance education curricula must also be appropriate for the targeted learner population both in content and level of technical complexity.

The following personal competencies should be considered when evaluating the appropriateness of distance education for adult learners. While these competencies are not as easily measured as reading, math, and language skills, they may be ascertained through a thorough and comprehensive intake and interview process.

- Motivation
- Self-direction
- Time management skills
- Organizational skills
- Network of support
- Telephone and Internet access

TECHNOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

The following technological knowledge should be considered when evaluating the appropriateness of distance education activities mediated by technology.  .

- Demonstrated facility with basic technology use, such as sending and replying to e-mail; using a Web browser; downloading, opening, and saving electronic files; and filling out Web-based fields and forms
- Regular access to computer technology with Internet access through the use of a personal or publicly available computer
- E-mail account

## C. APPROVED DISTANCE EDUCATION HOURS

There are two types of student hours that may be counted for reporting purposes: *contact hours* and *proxy hours.*

CONTACT HOURS

Contact hours are defined as time spent interacting with the learner.  Contact hours for distance education students can be a combination of actual face-to-face contact and contact by telephone, video, teleconference, or other online communication where student and program staff are able to interact and through which learner identity is verifiable. Face-to-face interaction includes student intake & orientation, assessment, goal setting, counseling, and classroom-based skills training.

A distance learner may be reported in the NRS data system after 12 contact hours have been completed.

PROXY HOURS

Proxy hours are defined as the time distance education students spend engaged in *approved* distance education activities, such as using distance education curricula. The hours for each approved activity are calculated using one of three models:

I. *Clock-time*: This model assigns contact hours based on the elapsed time that a learner is connected to or engaged in an online or stand-alone software program that tracks time.

II. *Teacher Verification*: This model assigns a fixed number of hours of credit for each assignment based on the teacher's determination of the extent to which a learner engaged in, or completed, the assignment.

III. *Learner Mastery*: This model assigns a fixed number of hours of credit based on the learner's demonstrated mastery of the content of a lesson. This model requires previous engagement by the student on curriculum and materials related to the test. A high percentage of correct responses on the mastery test earns the credit hours attached to the material.

## D. APPROVED DISTANCE EDUCATION CURRICULA

**Policy 2.2**
**Only hours spent engaged with OAEL-approved distance education curricula can be reported in the state Information Management System (MIS).**

See the Appendix to this document for a list of currently approved distance education curricula and their respective, approved proxy-hour models.

As new distance education materials become available, OAEL reserves the right to review and consider the impact of approving them for state use and reporting. A review of approved distance education materials will be conducted as needed. OAEL will establish and maintain a Distance Education Curriculum Review Panel to review and approve distance education curricula and materials. (For more information on this Panel, see the Appendix to this document.). If programs wish to use curricula and/or materials not identified in the Appendix to this document, they must submit the new curricula or materials to OAEL's Distance Education Curriculum Review Panel for review and approval before proxy hours may be reported for students using the newly proposed distance education curricula. See the Appendix to this document for a link to the form that programs may use to request review of proposed curricula or materials.

# III.   ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

## A. ACCOMMODATING LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES OR OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS

**Policy 3.1**
**Learners with professionally certified documentation, issued within five years prior to program registration, who self-disclose a given physical, mental, or emotional disability must be provided appropriate accommodations for participating in a distance education program.**

If a learner self-identifies a disability, it is the responsibility of the distance education program to provide reasonable accommodations. Programs may not deny or prevent access to services based on a learner's disability. Under certain conditions, the program may be required to absorb the costs related to the accommodation(s). By not providing appropriate accommodations for individuals with documented disabilities, programs could find themselves in violation of federal law.

## B. ASSESSMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION LEARNERS

**Policy 3.2**
**All potential distance education students must be given an approved assessment and meet all of the policy guidelines as identified in the *Assessment Policy for Virginia Adult Education and Literacy Programs*.**

All assessments must be administered in a proctored, face-to-face setting. Pre-tests must be administered within the first six hours of instruction. Post-tests must be administered according to the testing specifications of the assessment as identified by the test publisher. If a post-test is administered before the required minimum number of instructional hours, a waiver must be identified and reported as outlined in the *Assessment Policy for Virginia Adult Education and Literacy Programs*.

## C. REPORTING DISTANCE EDUCATION LEARNERS

**Policy 3.3**
**Programs must report all required data on distance education students in the state Management Information System (MIS).**

A student is classified as a distance learner if the majority of contact hours earned in a program year are derived from proxy hours. Non-proxy and proxy contact hours will be recorded in separate fields in the state MIS. The decision about the student's status as a classroom or distance learner will be made at the end of the year when a student's proxy

and non-proxy hours are compared.  If a learner has more than 50% of instructional hours reported as proxy, he or she will be identified as a distance learner. The student's hours in both distance and classroom programs will be included in the NRS reports.

## D. RESOURCES FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Integrating distance education opportunities into a program's service delivery requires thorough planning and professional development.  Teaching in a distance education format requires different skills and competencies from those required in an exclusively classroom-based program.  Program staff may request further technical assistance and training from either the Office of Adult Education and Literacy (OAEL) or the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC).  Contact information for each is below.

Virginia Department of Education
Office of Adult Education and Literacy
Telephone:  (804) 225-2053
Toll Free:  (800) 292-3820
Web site:  http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/adulted/index.shtml

Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC)
Telephone:  (804) 828-6521
Toll Free:  (800) 237-0178
Web site:  http://www.valrc.org/

# IV.   APPENDIX

## List of Approved Curriculum

Distance education curriculum is reviewed and approved by the Distance Education Curriculum Review Panel.  The list of approved distance education curriculum is maintained and disseminated by the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.

A full list of approved curriculum may be found here, or via the Distance Education portal on www.valrc.org.

### Distance Education Curriculum Review Panel Procedures

**Mission**
The mission and purpose of the Distance Education Curriculum Panel is to review and evaluate submitted distance education curricula and determine whether to approve or deny the use of submitted curricula by local adult education programs. The Distance Education Curriculum Panel will also review curricula at the end of its approval period to determine its continued relevance for use in adult distance education courses.

**Panel Members**
The Distance Education Curriculum Panel membership will reflect the programs that provide adult education services in Virginia. The panel will be composed of at least one member from each of the following categories: a Community-based literacy organization (CBLO), an EL/Civics grant recipient, a PluggedInVA program, a Corrections and Institutions instructional program, a representative of the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC), the Office of Adult Education and Literacy (OAEL), and other representatives based on need. Individual members may fulfill multiple categories of inclusion. No more than 13 individuals may hold membership at any given time.

**Appointment**
Membership on the panel is obtained by appointment. Membership is finalized by a majority vote. In the case of a tie vote, the chairperson may cast the deciding vote.

**Terms of Service**
A member's term of service will last for one (1) year. Membership will be reviewed each year, and at that time, a member's term may be extended. A member who has resigned from the Distance Education Curriculum Panel must be reappointed to be reinstated as a member.

**Meeting Procedures**
The Distance Education Curriculum Panel calendar begins on July 1st of each year. At the first meeting of each year, it will be the panel members' duty to nominate a chairperson.

**Nominating a Chairperson**
The panel members will nominate a chairperson by a simple majority vote. To be considered, all chairperson nominees must be a current member of the Distance

Education Curriculum Panel. The chairperson will serve for a term of one year that may be renewed at the beginning of each panel year. Chairperson responsibilities include setting a panel agenda, calling panel meetings to order, and chairing each meeting.

**Appointing a Secretary**
The secretary will be the Education Support Specialist at the Virginia Adult Resource Center. Secretary responsibilities include recording the minutes of each meeting and guiding the panel through a review of minutes at the start of each meeting.

**Meeting Agenda**
The meeting agenda will be sent by the secretary prior to each meeting. Each meeting agenda will have the following broad components: Call to order, Approval of minutes, Old business, New business, and Adjournment. Minutes are approved by assent of panel members and will be posted on the Distance Education Curriculum Panel Wordpress site.

**Panel Responsibilities**
Panel responsibilities include developing and overseeing the process by which curricula are submitted for approval, establishing guidelines for evaluating submitted curricula, and reviewing approved curricula to determine continued relevance for adult education instruction, in accordance with state and federal guidance.

**Approving Curricula**
All submitted curricula must be approved by a Regional Program Manager, an Executive Director of a Community-Based Literacy Organization, or a designee of program leadership prior to submission. To submit curricula, designated individuals must use the Distance Education Submission Form. Approved curriculum will remain on the approved curriculum list for a period of up to 3 years, after which the Distance Education Curriculum Panel will review each curriculum to assess its continued relevance for adult learners.

**Approval Process**
Panel members will review the submitted curricula during each meeting. If the curricula are approved, the field will be notified by an announcement on the Regional Program Managers listservs, in the *First Mondays* monthly newsletter, or other appropriate means.

**Rubric**
The Distance Education Curriculum Panel members will use the Distance Education Curriculum Rubric to evaluate curricula. Such criteria as student and instructor experiences with curricula, innovation, and retention may be considered.

**Removing Curricula**
A curriculum may be considered for removal prior to its expiration. Removals are finalized by a simple majority vote. When a curriculum is removed, an announcement will be made on the VAELN, Regional Program Managers and Regional Specialist listservs, in the *First Mondays* newsletter, or other appropriate means.