

## Strategies for Improved Post-Test Rate and Data Collection

Excerpts from responses to a survey from programs with 65% and above post-test rates

### Example 1

The MAERS 2.1 Post Test report, which I believe is new this year, was extremely helpful in tracking down information, because it says YES if the student is eligible for post-testing but has not taken it yet. We will be sure to use it at least monthly. This will help us catch students who should've tested, but somehow missed it (maybe due to absence).

We use STUREC as well as MAERS to track attendance hours, and will be doing so on a weekly basis.

One thing that would really help is if we had the online versions of CASAS and TABE. It would be easier and less costly, in terms of additional staff time, to administer tests on an individual basis. The TABE test is fairly complicated to administer, because of the likelihood of using multiple test booklets depending upon ability level. CASAS e-tests for students at different levels could be administered at the same time if we used the online version.

We also contact eligible students who have left the program early, and ask them to come back in to take the post-test. A number of students leave the program because of work, childcare, or transportation conflicts, but they might still be able to return for the test.

### Example 2

We went from being a free program to charging a \$25 non-refundable registration fee at orientation and saw a big increase in retention. If a learner continues in the program, they don't have to pay again, but if they don't meet our attendance expectations, they have to pay again to re-enroll. We believe this contributed to our increased retention rate which helped us meet the post-test rate. Generally we do not do a TABE pre-test for individuals who have not paid the fee. This helps screen those who are not serious about joining the program. Over 90% of our learners are low-income; many receive public assistance. We have found that individuals from low-income households are able to pay the modest fee despite their income though we will make payment arrangements when students cannot pay all at once and waive the fee for those living in shelters or group homes.

Other factors that help with retention / post-testing:

- High weekly attendance expectations: Our learners are with us 16 hours per week which allows for more frequent re-tests. We expect learners to attend four days / week, which perhaps leads to learners making education higher on their priority list. Learners understand that they will be dropped if they don't attend regularly. Re-testing is a condition of continuing in the program. One learner described it as, "you all are serious about this, so we had to become serious too."
- A warm, supportive, and caring environment among learners, volunteers, and staff.

### Example 3

A strategy that we are testing this year to increase the number of GED graduates who return for a final test is to charge a \$50 refundable fee for GED testing. We use non-WIA funds to pay for the learners' GED tests. After a learner takes the last TABE test, we refund the money to the learner. We can report at the end of the fiscal year if we think is a success.

#### **Example 4**

A staff member enters attendance data in our internal database weekly. The program director runs internal monthly reports by the 10<sup>th</sup> of the following month. Using the data from our internal database, a staff member enters the monthly data for each learner into MAERS. The program director reviews monthly MAERS reports.

#### **Example 5**

In order to stay alive, our program began charging a tuition fee a number of years ago. The tuition was set at \$350 per semester for 12 hours of instruction a week, 16 weeks per semester. \$50 of that is a required testing fee, and is deducted from the tuition fee if the student registers. This eliminated a number of students who would test here and then go to another program and take the test again. It also made a huge difference in retention. As we all know, people don't appreciate something they get for free. However, we do have a high number of refugees and immigrants that can't afford to pay. So we ask them to bring in proof of income/proof of no income, and use the free lunch scale to determine if they receive a 'scholarship' -- which really means enter for free. Through the years this number has increased and we have 35% or more who do not pay tuition.

#### **Example 6**

Our program suffers with retention issues as others do. What our program has done is develop programming that builds a foundation. Some of this comes from the experience we learned with PowerPath.

The basic bullets would be as follows:

- 1) Realistic expectations drawn out, with the integrating the experience of success which our program delivers in the student orientation
- 2) Quick entry into the program, so processes have to be developed that are consistent and dependable
- 3) Using the adult model of learning in which self-knowledge is power
- 4) Volunteers (which is what we depend upon) need to have a positive experience also, which is expressed in several different ways
- 5) Students need to have support

In relationship to the support piece, our program is developing a mentoring program. The goal is to create support among the study body themselves. This may be similar to a student council, but we have put together skill development programming in which the students themselves are trained in order to train others. This program is in its infancy, but it has had a great response from the few students that are involved. It develops leadership skills along with the support net the students need. It pulls strongly on the Adult Learning model which gives them the tools they need to create their own success.

### **Example 7**

We have scheduled dates for post testing all students at the end of the term. This is handled through the district assessment office, and our assessment tech is very good at tracking who has or has not tested. During the term, student instructional hours are tracked by our evening supervisor and our Adult Ed Clerical support. Any students who have 60 hours are referred to our assessment tech for scheduling. But the key to all this is having the entire staff realize the importance of this testing, relative to both the program and the students.

### **Example 8**

What strategies do implement to help achieve a 65% or higher post-test rate?

- a. Teachers develop a relationship with each individual student.
- b. Teachers keep track of absences and call students when absences are extended.
- c. Teachers encourage students to share information about their plans for the school semester – their goals etc.
- d. Teachers understand that some students have specific goals concerning the length of their commitment to class for that term or year – ex. Pregnancy, transfer or move home.
- e. Teachers keep track of student hours and assessment history
- f. Teachers inform students at the beginning of the term that the program has expectations for their attendance and testing and why.

What strategies do you implement to help enter accurate data in a timely manner?

- a. Tests are generally administered within the last two weeks of the semester.
- b. Students who will be leaving the program early for personal reasons (move, pregnancy, job et.) are tested before they leave as long as they have reached the minimum number of hours.
- c. Tests are scored and recorded in STUREC as well as MAERS and then filed in the student's file folder in the office.
- d. The teachers and the office staff work together to achieve accuracy and efficiency in this area.

### **Example 9**

We do these basic things:

1. Track attendance daily and enter it weekly.
2. Notify the teachers when a student needs to test after attending 40 hours so we get a base follow-up test in case a student suddenly leaves.
3. We have a well-trained Data Entry person who enters monthly attendance in MAERS.
4. Testing schedules are set at the beginning of the school year, and each teacher has a calendar in their Teacher's Handbook.
5. Also of importance is our retention policy that we have honed over the years.
6. Charging tuition immediately increased student retention so it is easier to obtain a 40 hour and/or post-test.
7. Students understand the importance of taking the post test, and that it affects our funding and the possibility of raising the tuition fee.

8. Students receive a student handbook that tells them to call if they are going to miss a class. If they are absent 5 days without calling in they may be dropped from the class and someone on the waiting list will take their place.
9. Teachers are instructed to call any student who has been missing class for two days. (This contact plays an important role in a student maintaining attendance.)
10. Teachers are given a list of any student who does not have a post test, and the minute that they see that student return, they post -test them.

All of these strategies work, but the biggest thing is having a responsible and competent person who enters the data into MAERS as required

### **Example10**

We test with TABE every 30 to 60 hours so if a student stops coming and he or she is dropped from enrollment we have an exit participant to report. We also have a time-line that each student is shown at new student orientation. This is a visual aid that shows each student when a post-test is required. We keep a close eye on both our students' progress and their hours of attendance. Our program is self-paced which helps to motivate our students because they learn at their own pace. Also, each student has their own customized curriculum based on their gaps which helps retention rates. By filling in these gaps, our students have a strong foundation for basic reading, math and language and show substantial gains from pre-test to post-test. The staff uses Powerschool to keep track of students' attendance.

### **Example 11**

Each teacher has a copy of their students ALP on file. Once a student takes a post-test, the teacher records the new scores along with hours of attendance on their copy of the ALP. After that, the teacher gives the test to the secretary where she records the scores on the official ALP as well as into MAERS. Having a copy of the ALP for each student serves as a reminder to the teacher what the student needs to be tested on.

Our program tracks each student's attendance when 40 instructional hours has been met based on our attendance spreadsheet (as explained below), then the post-test date for each class is scheduled. The teacher's give advance notice to their students of the scheduled post-test, wall signs with the dates are posted, and the teacher's call their students the night prior to testing as a reminder to attend. We really stress the importance that all students are in attendance and participate in this activity. Those students who are absent are immediately called by the office support to inquire about their absence and expected return date. Teachers also contact their absent students to get a confirmed return date. The office support sends a memo to each class indicating those students who still need to test. When those absent students return, the office support post-tests them.

### **Example 12**

Our program has developed and uses a spreadsheet that documents and maintains student daily and monthly attendance and instructional hours for each student for each class. It also tallies the total cumulative instructional hours on a monthly basis and for the entire semester for each student. We can easily and readily ascertain the required MAERS data when reporting is due on a monthly basis and at the end of the program semester/year. We can also readily identify those students that enrolled but did not attend class and those that discontinued participating in the program 12 hours or less.

The attendance is entered into the spreadsheet on a weekly basis and is the responsibility of a designated staff person. No one else has the authority or permission to input the data, therefore, we can address any misgivings to the person responsible. The attendance data is cross-referenced and inputted based on the daily student sign-in sheets and the weekly class attendance forms that are submitted by each of the teachers on a weekly basis. If there are any errors, we can always refer back to the original documents submitted by the teachers for verification and/or revisions (correction).

We also have a designated person to enter this data into MAERS (currently, it is the program coordinator) to minimize the chance for errors. This data is substantiated by the MAERS AESER and SIMPLEPART reports

### **Example 13**

Our goal is to utilize technology to maintain our records and supporting data for each student. Hopefully, in the near future, we will be able to retrieve the attendance and instructional data for each student when querying by name. As our program expands, so will our technological needs.

In a nutshell, our strategy can be summarized as an attempt to automate all aspects of data collection and processing. Students' information forms, daily sign-in sheets, attendance logs, etc., have all been replaced with various computer programs (ex. procaresoftware.com, it is actually a child care management software, so it requires a bit of customization, but once that's done it works very well.) that exchange data between each other. For instance, students' attendance is tracked by attendance management software that includes a check-in module that students use to sign in every time they come to class. The system automatically tallies up attendance hours and alerts instructors when a student has attended for more than 40 hours and is thus eligible for testing. Also the system alerts the teacher when someone hasn't attended classes for more than a week prompting the instructor to follow up with the student. Finally, the system generates automated monthly reports containing attendance information for each student. These reports are periodically emailed to the instructor and the data is entered into MAERS. Overall, our Adult Ed students' information is contained in a comprehensive electronic database that is also set up to generate customized periodic reports specifically tailored to MAERS requirements. This also facilitates timely data entry. We still use paper test forms and scoring sheets processing which requires a considerable amount of time from our instructors. This however is also set to change with transition to CASAS online e-testing scheduled to occur during this program year.

### **Example 14**

- We try to make post-testing meaningful to the students by:
  - Keeping them informed – before post-test is given each student knows pre-test score (3-digit number only, not grade level).
  - Post-test scores are shared with students.
  - During class time, teachers use advising process to explain why progress is important:
    - Scores reflect student progress.
    - Scores reflect teacher effort and success.
    - Composite scores for all students (not individually) are part of consideration and rationale for offering GED testing at no cost to student. (i.e. need to show progress to maintain grant funding).

- Post-test results are studied by teaching team to assess teaching strategies for remainder of semester.
- Teachers demonstrate concern about how students are progressing (for class as whole and students individually) and they apply information gained from the post-tests to students' individual study plans.
- All program components that affect students (i.e. registration, orientation, pre-testing, instruction, advising, class structure, etc.) are continuously evaluated in terms of their impact on student engagement and retention.
- See overall approaches above. In addition to these approaches, the administrator budgets for compensating staff for the time it takes to do this well.
- Lead teacher acts as liaison, coordinating everyone (teachers and support staff) to ensure understanding and accuracy.
- The lead teacher not only coordinates and acts as liaison, he/she is also the central test keeper. She/he makes sure tests are not lost and that data (in the form of ALPs) is collected and organized effectively.
- The administrative support staff person and lead teacher attend all MAERS training together. This enables them to support each other in understanding the systems, problem solving and knowing when to call for outside help. The MAERS entry team consists of the lead teacher, the ESL teacher and administrative support staff, and they work closely to ensure accurate and complete data entry.
- Every effort is made to integrate systems for data recording and collection in ways that make sense to the teachers and fit consistently into other systems (i.e. advising, report cards, etc.).
- All teachers are trained about the importance of data (how its used in the classroom and by the state) so they have meaningful frames of reference when completing ALPs.
- A new system implemented last year – a team of two teachers carried out all semester-end data entry. They supported each other in accurately capturing and recording attendance, post-test scores, number of Practice Tests given (for ABE-GED), goals attained, completion and follow up data. The system created and that we now utilize includes:
  - The team meeting and talking on the phone to answer all questions, clarify all areas.
  - Team members do not hesitate (and encourage each other) to call the state with questions and for clarification.

## **Summary and Highlights from Strategies for Improved Post-Test Rate and Data Collection**

Use STUREC as well as MAERS to track attendance hours daily, and enter it on a weekly basis

Using MAERS 2.1 Post Test report on a monthly basis

Contact eligible students who have left the program early, and ask them to come back in to take the post-test.

Charging a \$ fee non-refundable registration fee at orientation.

Charge a \$ refundable fee for GED testing and refund the money once they take the post-test.

Run an internal monthly reports by the 10<sup>th</sup> of the following month. Using the data from our internal database, a staff member enters the monthly data for each learner into MAERS. Someone reviews monthly MAERS reports.

Strong, successful student orientation. Letting students be aware of their expectations.

During the term, student instructional hours are tracked by our evening supervisor and our Adult Ed Clerical support. Any students who have 60 hours are referred to our assessment tech for scheduling. But the key to all this is having the entire staff realize the importance of this testing, relative to both the program and the students.

Teachers keep track of absences and call students when absences are extended.

The teachers and the office staff work together to achieve accuracy and efficiency in this area.

Testing schedules are set at the beginning of the school year.

Students understand the importance of taking the post test, and that it affects our funding and the possibility of raising the tuition fee.

Teachers are given a list of any student who does not have a post test, and the minute that they see that student return, they post -test them.

We also have a time-line that each student is shown at new student orientation. This is a visual aid that shows each student when a post-test is required.

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Post-test results are studied by teaching team to assess teaching strategies for remainder of semester.

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