Distance Learning Policy
Effective July 1, 2011

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Setting the State Context

Background
Michigan's economy is transforming to one that demands new skills, knowledge, and credentials, especially post-secondary education. Michigan workers can no longer expect to hold a family-sustaining job with only a high school diploma. Michigan employers have also had to respond to rapidly changing market demands. During this transformation to a global economy, Michigan dramatically shifted focus away from basic adult education programs. This shift resulted in substantially fewer programs serving fewer adults, despite a growing need. Michigan must ensure workers are prepared to thrive in this new world and currently, One out of three working age Michigan adults 1.7 million people lack the basic skills or credentials to attain a family-sustaining job and contribute to the state's economy. (US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2006) Distance education is looked to as one way to increase the capacity of the system by expanding access to educational opportunities for adult learners using distance learning strategies to eliminate barriers and extend learning beyond traditional classroom settings.

General Distance Learning Requirements
Defining Distance Education
Distance education is 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, broadcasts, computer software, web-based programs and other online technology. Teachers support distance learners through communication via mail, telephone, e-mail or online technologies and software.

Defining Distance Learners
Distance learners are students who receive distance education services as defined above. For learners who receive both distance education and traditional classroom instruction during a program year (such as through blended distance –classroom approach or concurrent enrollment in both types of instruction). The decision about the student's status as a classroom or distance learner will be made at the end of the year and will be based on which category of hours is over 50% of the student's total instructional hours. If a student is physically present, for example in a learning lab, using software these instructional hours would be considered traditional classroom instructional hours. For NRS reporting, programs can count a student only once, as either a distance education student or traditional classroom learner.

Distance Learning Approved Curricula
Distance Education curriculum is determined by the provider, but should be aligned with the Workforce Development Agency mission and adult education content standards.

Measuring Instructional Hours for Learners in Distance Education
Instructional hours for distance learners can be a combination of direct contact and contact through telephone, video, teleconference or online communication, where student and program staff can interact and through which learner identity is verifiable.

In addition to direct contact hours, programs will track locally proxy hours (instructional hours received in a distance education program) of time students spent on distance learning activities. Proxy hours maybe measured in one of three ways depending on the software used by the provider:

1. **Clock Time Model** which 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. This model is used for PLATO, E2020 or Skills Tutor software.
2. **Teacher Verification Model** which assigns a fixed number of hours of credit for each assignment based on teacher determination of the extent to which a learner is engaged or completed the assignment. This model is used for Workplace Essential Skills.
3. **Learner Mastery Model**, which assigns a fixed number of hours of credit based on the learner passing a test on the content of each lesson. Learners work with the curriculum and materials and when they feel they have mastered the material, take a test. A high percentage of correct answers (typically 70%-80%) earn credit hours attached to the material this model can be used with PLATO and E2020.

Assessment of Students in Distance Learning
All assessment policies apply to participants enrolled in distance education programs.
- All participants must be pre-tested according to assessment guidelines.
- Direct contact and proxy contact hours must be accurately documented. These hours will be reported in MAERS as total instruction hours; however, programs must be tracking the number of hours that are traditional classroom and proxy hours for monitoring purposes.
- All participants must be post tested according to assessment guidelines
- Testing must be administered at a proctored site. Assessments not conducted through face-to-face interaction with a trained test administrator in a secure setting will be invalid.

MAERS Reporting for Students in Distance Education
ALL Students, regardless of the number of instructional hours received, must be reported in MAERS. States will report all required NRS data elements on distance education students in all NRS tables, according to the current requirements. Hours of instruction must include all direct contact and proxy hours. Students in distance education will also be reported separately in a new Table 4c identical to NRS Table 4 and 5A identical to NRS Table 5.

Training Requirements

Personnel affiliated with distance learner providers are required to adhere to the same training requirements as personnel affiliated with any state-funded adult education provider. Distance Learning administrators and instructors must hold valid Michigan teacher certification. Additionally, distance learner teachers should have training in the curriculum/software as well as distance learning facilitation methodology.