

Section Six Program Resources



Erik spent two years working toward his GED. He needed assistance applying for an accommodation to take the exams and struggled with the Math test. After working with teachers on-line and in-person, he succeeded and promptly enrolled into Graphic Arts at the local community college. Upon completion of his GED, Erik asked to have his graduation picture shared on AEOA's Facebook page so he could share it with his family who live out of state.

6.1 Current Use of Technology

AEOA ABE administrators, teachers and students make extensive use of technology at all levels. ABE provides computers and internet access in all our permanent classrooms. Teachers also have access to printers, photocopiers, fax machines, webcams and microphones. Instructors located on community college campuses access additional technology provided by the MN State partner. Such items may include smartboards, ITV, teleconference, and assistive devices and are offered at no cost to AEOA ABE. In addition, classrooms located at Workforce Centers have limited access to public resource room computers. The program also has two iPads available for “checkout” for specific instructional purposes. Most often these iPads are used for a timesheet application mimicking the experience a student may encounter in a mainstream work environment. Certain ABE Instructors are also provided an Agency-funded cell phone due to travel status or classroom location.

AEOA has a large Information Technology (IT) Department, but only one staff person is assigned to the entire eight-county Employment & Training Department as well the Central and Senior Service Departments. The ABE program follows all guidelines set forth by the Agency and computers are imaged by the IT staff person before being deployed to the classrooms. All computers, no matter their location, are governed by AEOA's *Internet Acceptable Use and Safety Policy*. Each staff member takes an annual online training developed by the Human Resources and IT Departments on the use of agency technology.

AEOA's cost allocation plan designates a per computer cost for monthly internet, anti-virus software, malware protection, Open DNS, Office 365, payroll software, and other

agency-specific software. These costs vary depending on location, and computers provided by college campuses do not incur these fees for our program. The college partners provide network access and student and instructor computers for our program to insure they comply with all MN State guidelines. Classrooms located at Workforce Centers are connected to the State of Minnesota network and hardware and software are provided by AEOA.

Two years ago, our program worked with the Minnesota Literacy Council to provide fifty (50) free computers to ABE, MFIP, and dislocated worker participants. These students used these resources for GED prep, keyboarding and computer skills practice, email access, college training, job search, and career exploration. We have an ongoing partnership with the local PCs for People programs in Koochiching and Itasca Counties and the Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training (NEMOJT) in St. Louis County. It is important to note, more and more students have access to personal smart phones and can stay connected with their instructor by email and text, even if they don't have a computer.

Our program uses numerous approved online instruction tools to engage students who cannot otherwise attend class in-person. All teachers are required to take the ATLAS Distance Learning (DL) 101 online and our designated distance learning administrator was part of our program's cohort that attended DL 102. Through this we implemented DL services throughout our region. The program's designated distance learning administrator also hosts state-wide one-room schoolhouse discussions on Schoology.

Online platforms utilized by our instructors include: Kahn Academy, Plato Edmentum, iPathways, Skills Tutor, D2L (on college campuses), and Mindquest. We have also implemented the Northstar Digital Literacy certification process throughout our program.

While these online tools are available for all instructors, program management leaves implementation decisions to each individual instructor as they know what best serves their students.

**AEOA ABE Distance Learning Table A
Program Year 2016-2017**

Pre Test EFL	# of Distinct Students	DL Hours
ABE Level 1	1	6.5
ABE Level 2	10	117.5
ABE Level 3	21	888.25
ABE Level 4	27	354.5
ABE Level 5	7	37.5
ABE Level 6	42	684
ESL Level 4	1	11
None	1	8.5
WBP	1	5.5
Total	111	2113.25

**AEOA ABE Distance Learning Table A
Program Year 2017-2018**

Pre Test EFL	# of Distinct Students	DL Hours
ABE Level 1	1	2.75
ABE Level 2	10	376.75
ABE Level 3	18	249
ABE Level 4	15	180
ABE Level 5	10	135
ABE Level 6	29	616.5
None	6	24.25
Total	89	1584.25

At first glance, looking at the annual Table A for distance learning between the 16-17 and 17-18 program years one would notice a drastic decrease in hours. The December 2016 discontinuation of Skills Tutor, which had been a popular and easy-to-use platform, likely affected numbers for both program years. Closer analysis of the data shows that at many levels students were utilizing the resource for longer amounts of time. This is due, in large part, to instructors gaining knowledge about the tools available and providing resources that better fit the needs of their students.

Asynchronous distance learning is not for all students; many of the students we interact with do not have access to computers and internet and struggle with time in their daily life outside of the classroom due to other commitments which limits their ability to fulfill these requirements on their own. To address this need, AEOA ABE implemented a pilot

GoTo/Telepresence distance learning option for students in our more remote communities. Our teacher provides instruction via the GoToMeeting or local school telepresence software while students gather online to watch, listen, and learn as a group or one-to-one. Courses in job skills, reading, math, GED preparation, and financial literacy are some examples of courses taught in this manner. This resource has provided access to individuals who may not otherwise be able to attend a classroom setting due to travel time, availability, or other personal hardship. Teachers can also access meetings and professional development through the web-based GoToMeeting client. Meetings are recorded and can be viewed later for a refresher or for those instructors who miss the original session. Session topics have included, but are not limited to: student intake, data tracking, CCRS, ACES, curriculum development, technology training, policy updates, or general program meetings.

Distance learning tools are used to enhance the learning process for students within our classrooms as well. The platforms can both be part of a hybrid model or used just in class by students without access to the Internet at home. Students have the experience of working with online materials while the instructor is present to help with navigation and content questions. Students are encouraged to take breaks, do their tension glide exercises and re-focus their eyes, look back at what they have accomplished and keep on trying. The instructor helps them to switch back and forth between textbooks and online lessons and make the connections across them. In-class use of DL platforms are counted as part of regular contact hours; DL proxy hours are recorded separately.

Students are provided additional support for learning concepts via multiple online platforms and certain resources are used daily to reinforce concepts and provide access to

advanced knowledge. For some students, the email account their ABE instructor helps them set up is their first encounter with computer technology. Over time they build confidence online with internet searches, improve their keyboarding skills with simple online lessons and end up working in DL classes. They increase their autonomy as learners and learn how to explore topics that spark their curiosity.

In addition to the DL platforms, instructors each have their favorite go-to websites for answering and generating questions. One recent staff meeting gave instructors the opportunity to present and discuss their best picks and compile them in an annotated list on Google docs. For example, Mathtv.com, which covers dozens of topics in detail, with several short 2-3-minute mini-lectures by multiple presenters on each topic, is a good supplement for Plato math lessons. Students have said they appreciated having more explanation or a different type of explanation than what was on Plato. The Hip Hughes history videos on <http://hiphugheshistory.weebly.com/> are popular, too, with entertaining visuals, an energetic presentation, and solid content. The short pieces on TodayinHistory.com give students a daily opportunity to encounter a range of history events, people and concepts with a combination of texts, videos and photographs. The teacher needs to supplement it with “questions worth answering”. It accustoms students to locating themselves and events across the timeline of history and gives them background knowledge needed for the GED social studies exam. The PBS educational site <https://wdse.pbslearningmedia.org/> and www.c3teachers.org are rich sources of material for all subjects and grade levels. Having a positive in-class experience using the DL platform and other online materials and knowing their instructor is engaged with their learning even when they are working at home have

helped students stay involved. The goal with materials in any format is to provide coherence, develop a line of inquiry, and mesh with CCRS. Another consideration is that when working online, students ideally should be accruing hours in the state-approved platforms.

Another technology advancement is the use of the Student Information Database. Since its inception, AEOA ABE has provided instructors ongoing training in its use. Previously, we had a centralized data input process, now our teachers can individually input their data and maintain daily records on each of their students. This advance enables each of them to keep close track of attendance and observe patterns of absenteeism before too much time elapses without contact. The log, history, assessment and benchmark tabs provide easy access to information on student progress. Switching over to online tracking from paper files is still in process, but especially for instructors with multiple sites, access through the cloud is a big improvement.

6.2 Plans for Maintaining, Enhancing, or Replacing Technology

AEOA ABE adheres to the IT Department practice of replacing instructor computers every three years. The program often purchases used computers from other agency programs (i.e. Energy Assistance, Transit services) to utilize as classroom student computers or we pass down the instructor computer for student use. Computers are provided by community college partners as they deem fit.

The program has a technology inventory sheet which outlines type of equipment, which classroom/staff person it is issued to, and date of purchase. This inventory assists the

Program Manager in making decisions about replacement based on age of the equipment as well as utilization. IT staff collect the outdated equipment for wiping and recycling.

AEOA's IT Department and Department Directors meet monthly to discuss technology upgrades that can improve agency services overall. Often learning from other departments guides advancement in technology for ABE and vice versa. AEOA is also a regional Head Start service provider and knowledge is shared across AEOA programs to support efficient services to learners and families, some of whom are co-enrolled in ABE.

Program management evaluates new opportunities as they come along and weighs the potential for successful adoption by instructors and students against any costs for purchasing, training the users and providing tech support. It is equally important to expand the use of the programs to which we already have access and make certain instructors are aware of all their features. Staff are provided ongoing training opportunities in-person and online to hone their technology skills and gain familiarity with the content and reporting potential of the learning platforms.

Additionally, AEOA has invested in the Laserfiche product. Laserfiche "creates enterprise content management, business process automation, workflow, records management, document imaging and webform software." Laserfiche has been fully implemented into processes across four of the six departments and Employment & Training is just now expanding to utilize this valuable resource. Given the vast geographic service area of our classrooms there is real potential for implementing new methods of records and data management for our students.

6.3 Plans for Maintaining, Expanding, and/or Developing Distance Learning

As previously mentioned, AEOA ABE implemented a pilot GoTo/Telepresence distance learning option for students in our more remote communities. The intent is to have contact with more students in isolated locations who need interactive instruction for learning. Many of the already utilized DL platforms are meant to be used independently and some learners cannot thrive in this environment. AEOA ABE is seeking interactive solutions such as ITV, telepresence, or GoToMeeting for our more remote learners in need of a hands-on type instruction without access to our classrooms. The last few years have seen drastic reductions in classrooms in rural areas. Given the vast geographic area we serve, this method of instruction will be imperative for reaching all those in need of our service. AEOA is also involved with local broadband initiatives aimed at securing better internet access to the communities we serve.

6.4 Any Resources, Other Than State and Federal ABE Funding

As part of one of the state's largest community action agencies, AEOA ABE has an opportunity to leverage a wide array of funding resources to enhance services to our students.

AEOA ABE has numerous internal and external partners which aid in student success. Internal partners include AEOA's Employment, Food Shelf, Head Start, Housing, and Transit services. Our connection with employment services allows for leveraging support service dollars from the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Dislocated Worker, Displaced Homemaker, and Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) to help students attend class by covering

childcare, transportation, and car repair costs. Our connection with the food shelf network and SNAP Outreach and SNAP E&T allows us to alleviate food insecurity permitting students to concentrate on learning in the classroom. Head Start referrals work both ways – they connect parents to our classrooms and we connect families to Head Start services for their children. We also use our housing programs to help students who may be experiencing homelessness or are precariously housed. And finally, Arrowhead Transit provides both bussing and volunteer driver services to help students get to our classrooms and to the sparsely-located GED testing centers in our region. Arrowhead Transit is the largest rural public transit system in the United States; keep in mind there are only three GED testing centers across an area that is larger than ten states.

External partners include mental health providers (Range Mental Health Center, Human Development Center), chemical dependency services (Arrowhead Center), county probation, and the Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training (NEMOJT). NEMOJT is the region's WIOA service provider. AEOA and NEMOJT have co-located services throughout the region and partner on numerous programs from dislocated workers to career pathway services. Students in our youth programs (YouthBuild and Youth at Work) are co-enrolled in out-of-school youth services and our ABE teachers provide TABE services to dislocated worker and public assistance program orientations to ensure direct referral and program outreach to those populations.

Most of our classes are provided during the day, but we provide targeted training courses in evenings based on community and student need. We have offered multiple

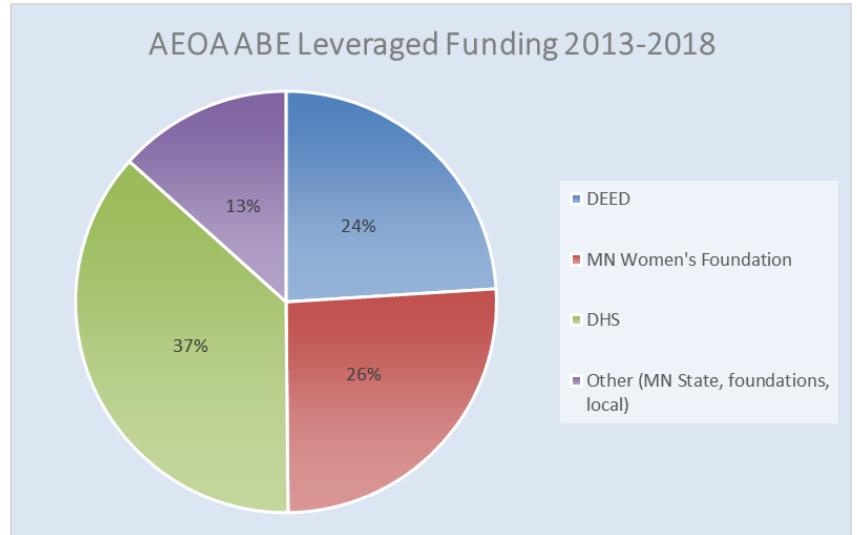
evening courses as part of past FastTRAC or Pathways to Prosperity partnerships with MN State campuses.

While we do connect students to previously mentioned programs for support services we also have provided our own support services through specialized funding from the Minnesota Department of Health and Human Services Innovation Funding. This funding allowed us to run a program entitled Parents in Education (PIE) which extended additional career advising and goal setting support as well as additional dollars to address barriers to attending class and completing it successfully. Those dollars have since been eliminated, but our connections with Employment Counselors across the region remain, enhancing our ability to connect students to programming, co-enroll them in Title I services, and access support service dollars.

Additionally, AEOA has accessed many diverse resources to match our federal ABE funding and to braid resources ensuring overall program success. We have requested and retained funding from the Minnesota Department of Education, Employment and Economic Development, Health and Human Services, and Office of Economic Development; Minnesota State Colleges and University Innovation Excellence dollars; Minnesota Women's Foundation; Blandin Foundation; Women's Economic Security Act direct appropriations; and county human service agencies. The program engages with AEOA's Planning Department to identify possible program partnerships, new programming and funding opportunities, and for writing of grants to access diverse funding sources. The program benefits from the fact that the current Planning Director is a past ABE Program Manager and understands the ABE funding and policy model.

AEOA ABE has leveraged an additional \$272,251 since our last narrative submission, 6% of the overall base budget for the same time frame. An overview of funding across the last five years is provided in the

graph below. The bulk of leveraged resources come from the Minnesota Department of Health and Human Services and the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. These resources



are typical for workforce development programs across the state and make sense given AEOA's community action and employment services background. Also, based on our overall agency engagement with single-female head households (a population disparately represented in our poverty programs), AEOA has placed special emphasis on moving women and girls into non-traditional fields of employment. This focus is evident in the second largest portion of funding from the Minnesota Women's Foundation.

We also receive very small amounts of funding from community partners who pay for limited services. An example would be the Northland Recovery Center, which pays \$50 for monthly two-hour life skill presentations from an AEOA ABE staff member. Another is the past Blandin Foundation support (\$20,000) of ABE's involvement with families in an early childhood program.

As previously mentioned, AEOA is also the Regional Transition Plan fiscal agent. Those funds are shared with Duluth ABE and are split nearly 50/50 across the two consortia, providing roughly \$122,000 additional dollars for AEOA to perform various collaborative projects. This represents another 3% of the overall program budget since the last narrative.

AEOA ABE also has access to the AEOA Foundation Fund, a discretionary resource of AEOA meant as a fund of last resort for those who cannot have their needs addressed through one of the Agency's many programs. An applicant can receive up to \$300 to resolve their needs and the funding can be, and often is, paired with other community resources. The Employment and Training Department's designation is the Laura Prettyman Fund. Laura was an ABE Instructor and Employment Counselor in Aitkin County who passed away while employed at AEOA. The Laura Prettyman Fund helps assist students and those on public assistance with paying GED testing fees and employment-related needs such as interview clothing, transportation assistance, and childcare assistance. The Fund has limited dollars and is able to support only a handful of individuals throughout a calendar year, yet it is a fine example of how even small donations can be personalized and creatively put to good use anonymously and collectively.