



Adult Education Participants in Distance Education

Introduction

The popularity of distance education in adult education instruction has grown substantially as technology improves and more online instructional tools have become available, States have discovered they can reach more participants with available resources using distance education models. When traditional classroom instruction is not possible, due to natural disasters or health emergencies, the use of distance learning becomes critical as an indispensable way to reach students. This NRSTips reviews NRS definitions of distance learning participants and summarizes how to establish participant status, record contact hours and posttesting approaches for distance learning participants.¹

Defining Participants in Distance Education

In the NRS, distance education is defined as formal learning activity where students and instructors are separated by geography, time, or both for the majority of the instructional period. Local programs can deliver distance learning materials 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 by mail, telephone, e-mail, or online technologies and software.

A distance learning participant receives all or a majority of instruction through distance methods. For a participant who receives both distance education and traditional classroom instruction during a program year, such as through a blended distance-classroom approach or concurrent enrollment in both types of instruction, the State must have a procedure in place that defines how local programs are to classify the participant. For NRS reporting, States can count a participant only once, as either a distance education participant or a traditional classroom participant.

Defining Participant Status for Distance Education

Like all participants, participants in distance education must have at least 12 hours of contact with the program before they can achieve participant status for Federal reporting purposes. The initial 12 contact hours for distance learners can be any combination of in-person contact and contact through telephone, video, teleconference, or online communication, where participant and program staff can interact and through which participant identity is verifiable.

¹ This NRSTips is drawn from the NRS TA Guide (<https://nrsw.org/policy-data/nrs-ta-guide>), pages 23, 46 and 48.

Reporting Contact Hours for Participants in Distance Education: Optional Use of Proxy Contact Hours

After the participant achieves the initial 12 contact hours, States may, but are not required to, report additional proxy hours of time that participants spent on distance learning activities. To ensure that local providers follow uniform procedures statewide and to create transparency on how programs are collecting and reporting contact hours for distance education participants, OCTAE recommends that States develop a State distance education policy that includes the following.

- The curricula that local programs can use to provide distance education.
- The model or models used to assign proxy contact hours for each type of curriculum. States may develop proxy contact hours using any of the following models but should use the proxy contact hour model appropriate for the distance education curricula.
 - **Clock Time Model**, which assigns contact hours based on the elapsed time that a participant is connected to, or engaged in, an online or stand-alone software program that tracks time. The software should disconnect after a preset period of inactivity. The policy should describe the procedures used to develop proxy contact hours.
 - **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 participant engaged in, or completed, the assignment. The policy should describe the proxy contact hours assigned for completing requirements for each type of curriculum used.
 - **Learner Mastery Model**, which assigns a fixed number of hours of credit based on the participant passing a test on the content of each lesson. Participants 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 a minimum of 70%) earns the credit hours attached to the material. The policy should describe the proxy contact hours assigned for completion of units of material comprising the curriculum.

Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) and Posttesting Participants in Distance Education

States may report MSG for distance education participants the same way as for all other participants: by completion of an educational functioning level measured by pre- and posttesting, credit completion, or entry into postsecondary education after program exit; or by attainment of a secondary school diploma. If posttesting is used to measure MSG, States should posttest these participants after the same amount of instructional time as other participants, according to the State's approved assessment policy. Although not required, States can use the proxy contact hours to determine the posttest time for distance education participants. For example, if the State's assessment policy requires posttesting after 80 contact hours, programs must posttest distance education participants after 80 proxy contact hours, as determined by the State model.

States that choose not to collect and report proxy contact hours must develop procedures for determining the appropriate time for posttesting participants in distance education, as long as the posttesting time is after the same amount of instructional time as other participants. The State

describes the methodology it employs for determining posttest time and procedures for posttesting distance education participants in the State assessment policy.

Local programs can administer pre-and posttests to measure MSG of distance education participants for NRS reporting in two ways: in person, at a secured, proctored program site within the State that meets the requirements of the State's assessment policy, or through virtual proctoring. States that choose to use virtual proctoring can use only NRS-approved tests for which the test publisher has established procedures for virtual administration of the test. The test publisher procedures on virtual proctoring will address such topics as the proper identification of the student, test security, training requirements for test proctors, technology requirements, and procedures for retesting should virtual administration of the test be interrupted.