



## **Distance Learning for the Adult Learner: Improving Persistence and Effectiveness**

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## **Distance Learning and Adult Learner Persistence**

Improving learner persistence is a California strategic focus to enhance adult education program outcomes in 2006 and beyond. In adult education student persistence often is linked with the length of time that learners spend in active instruction. Persistence also can be seen as staying engaged in education through a formal adult learning organization.

Increasing persistence addresses methods to retain adult learners in programs long enough to significantly improve their learning skills. This is particularly true for learners enrolled in ESL programs. A recent study (Stiles 2004)<sup>1</sup> of ESL learner gains in California over a four year period showed CASAS reading test scores for ESL learners increased as the number of hours of instruction increased. Although the actual gains in reading scores varied across years and program levels.

1999 research by Comings, Parella, and Scoicone defines persistence broadly as “adults staying in programs for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed study when they must drop out of their programs, and returning to programs as soon as the demands of their lives allow.”<sup>2</sup>

The Comings *et al* contribution recognizes that adult learner’s lives and responsibilities make consistent participation in learning difficult over the approximately 80 hours often necessary to demonstrate learning gains. The research study discusses several strategies to facilitate persistence, and elaborates at some length on self study interventions. It implies that classroom learning is *de facto* superior to self-directed learning. However, it does not dwell on the possible roles for distance learning — though self study and distance learning can be viewed as somewhat interchangeable terms.

In this working paper distance learning is defined as any educational or learning process or system in which the teacher and instructor are separated geographically or in time from his or her students; or in which students are separated from other students or educational resources.

There are semantic and contextual difficulties with the ways the terms student retention and student persistence are applied. They are treated as having almost synonymous meanings. In fact retention refers to institutional strategies designed to keep a learner enrolled long enough to show course completion and learning gains. Persistence refers to the strategies and compromises that learners make

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<sup>1</sup> Stiles, R., 2004. The Relationship of California Adult ESL and ESL-Citizenship Reading Performance to Amount of Instructional Time. *California Adult Education: Research Brief, 2*, San Diego: CASAS. Retrieved January 16, 2006, from [http://www.casas.org/Downloads/more.cfm?mfile\\_id=3692&bhcp=1](http://www.casas.org/Downloads/more.cfm?mfile_id=3692&bhcp=1)

<sup>2</sup> Comings, J.P. Parella ,A. & Socione, L., 1999. *Persistence among adult basic education students in pre-GED classes*. National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, Cambridge, MA., p.3. Retrieved February 17, 2005 from <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/research/report12.pdf>.

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to maintain participation in formal instruction — to persevere. Distance learning is a viable instructional strategy to address both goals.

From the administrator’s perspective the easiest way to improve student persistence and program effectiveness is to post-test more adult learners. Historical data show that significant learning gains routinely occur, on average, with 80 or more hours of instruction. However, the focus in the persistence discussions addresses retention strategies to reduce student drop out and to reengage them when they “stop out.” What are missing are strategies to increase student post testing and a strong emphasis on systematically encouraging and introducing independent learning in curricular strategies. This would include more emphasis on distance and alternative forms of instruction. Likewise strategies to reduce the length of time to demonstrate learning gains are not discussed.

From the distance learning perspective there is no need to “stop out” from learning if the reasons for the break in learning are not catastrophic in nature. Learning can continue through asynchronous distance lessons that place the learner in charge of the pace and place of instruction. California Distance Learning Project research indicates that distance learning and blended learning can be quite effective based on TOPSPro student progress and CASAS testing data.

The research to practice discussion to date has identified a number of interventions to improve learner persistence and retention. They include:

- Improved learner goal setting
- Structured orientation programs
- Making services more valuable or convenient to learners, and
- Systematically addressing learner needs and barriers.

Distance learning and interventions like hybrid and blended learning offer ways to make learning more convenient and accessible to many adult learners. They allow the student to continue learning when classroom or site based attendance is difficult for multiple reasons. In our judgment they should receive substantially more attention as a significant intervention strategy. Unfortunately, they are somewhat overlooked in the research literature and the current California adult education student persistence activities (<http://www.adultlearnerpersistence.org/>).

### **What is a Working Paper?**

A working paper is an evolving document that changes when new information and data are available.<sup>3</sup> Its purpose is to encompass the working knowledge on

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<sup>3</sup> The research and data collection for this paper are funded by Federal P.L., 105-220, Section 223, from the Adult Education Office, Secondary, Postsecondary, and Adult Leadership Division, California Department of Education. However, the conclusions and opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the position of that department or the U.S. Department of Education.

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a particular subject at a given time, but to grow and refine the information as new facts and perspectives become available.

### **Improving Student Persistence and Program Effectiveness**

Increasing learning flexibility should help facilitate student persistence. It should be the basis for providing instructional strategies that accommodate adults' multiple responsibilities that impact their continuing participation and access to adult education. Over time strategies that promote and support asynchronous distance and Internet-based learning will become more important. In the shorter run (1) making classroom learning more engaging, (2) blending classroom and distance learning for the eager learner, and (3) encouraging distance learning for the busy learner should receive more policy and program attention.

Data comparing California adult school ESL classroom and adult school Innovation Program participant progress indicate that distance learners are more persistent in learning participation than their classroom counterparts (Figures 1A – 1D).<sup>4</sup> While there are a number of explanations for this, these and other data continue to point to asynchronous distance learning, used appropriately, as offering flexibility with positive results for the busy adult.

Substantial anecdotal information in California supports the perspective that the distance learning intervention creates a unique and beneficial one-to-one relationship between teacher and student that is not as common in a traditional teacher-directed classroom. As teachers consult and work with the distance learning student, it seems the students feel more motivated to continue their education. Distance learning teachers report that a more direct and immediate connection is formed between teacher and student through regular meetings to review progress.

Distance learning teachers note that students may not want to disappoint the teacher. There's almost a sense that the student feels more obligated to complete what he or she has committed to do. The distance learning student often receives more direct, individual attention. A student can't just get by. There seems to be a higher level of individual, personal accountability. And when a student stops coming, teachers often call and send post cards which brings some students back.

Figure 1A examines the persistence rate of classroom, distance learning students, distance learning only and distance learning blended. Distance learning is the weighted combination of distance learning only and blended learning. Blended learning refers to students who are somewhat simultaneously enrolled in classroom and distance learning courses. Persistence in this context refers to completing a valid pre and post test.

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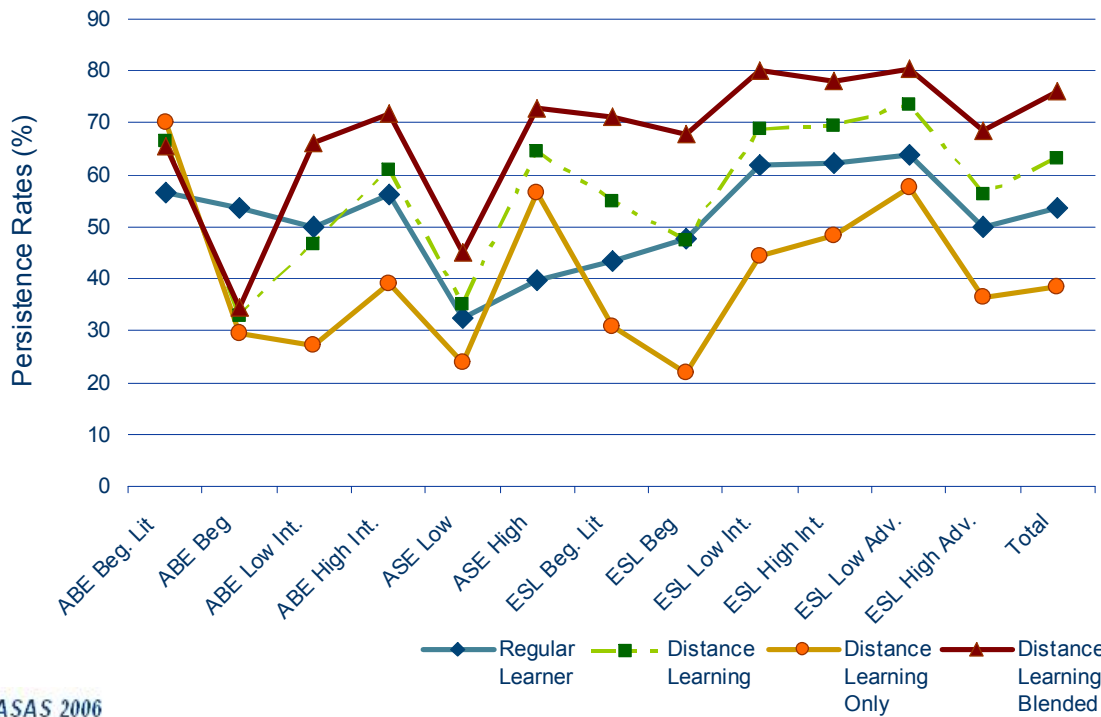
<sup>4</sup> The education code permits California adult schools to spend up to 5% of their apportionment on innovative programs. All of the "Innovation Programs" have been distance learning over the 13 year period since the legislation was passed.

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Based on the analysis of the 2004 – 2005 federal data, blended learning produces the most persistence followed by distance learning, classroom learning, and distance learning only.

**Figure 1A**

**Persistence Rates of Distance Learners Contrasted with Regular Learners  
Federal Table 4**



CASAS 2006

Figure 1B compares student completion of an instructional program level by the four types of interventions — classroom learning, distance learning only, distance learning (distance learning and blended learning combined) and blended learning. These data are influenced by when the student is enrolled in the program – the analyses do not discriminate among long term enrollments (students enrolling at the beginning of the program year and staying enrolled throughout the year) intermittent enrollments (students enrolling and stopping out throughout the year), and short term enrollments (students enrolling toward the end of the program year). Overall the distance learners, regardless of enrollment term, remain more active in their instructional participation. Plus the distance learning approach, for the most part, permits the students to learn at their own pace and their own time.

Figure 1B

**Instructional Program Level Completion Rates of Distance Learners  
Contrasted with Regular Learners (2004 – 05 WIA Title II, Federal Table 4A)**

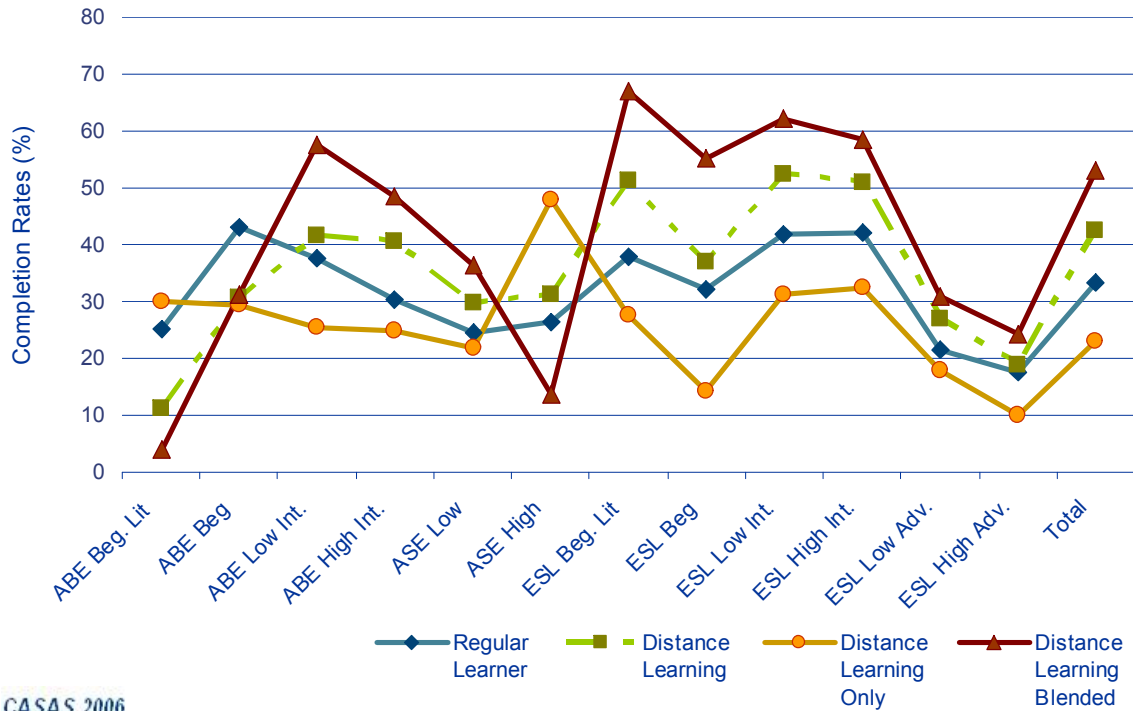


Figure 1C provides a graphic look at ESL institutional program level completion rates for the classroom, distance learning only, distance learning, and blended distance learning student.

These data show the DL only and regular classroom institutional program level completion rates quite similar and the blended learning consistently higher. This should come as no surprise since the blended learner is participating in both classroom and distance learning classes somewhat concurrently and in most cases is likely to be quite motivated. However, these analyses do not discriminate among learners engaging in supplementary distance learning for enrichment versus reinforcement of classroom instruction versus remediation of skills to support classroom instruction.

Figure 1C

Persister Completion Rates Federal Table 4B: ESL Distance Learners contrasted with ESL Regular Learners

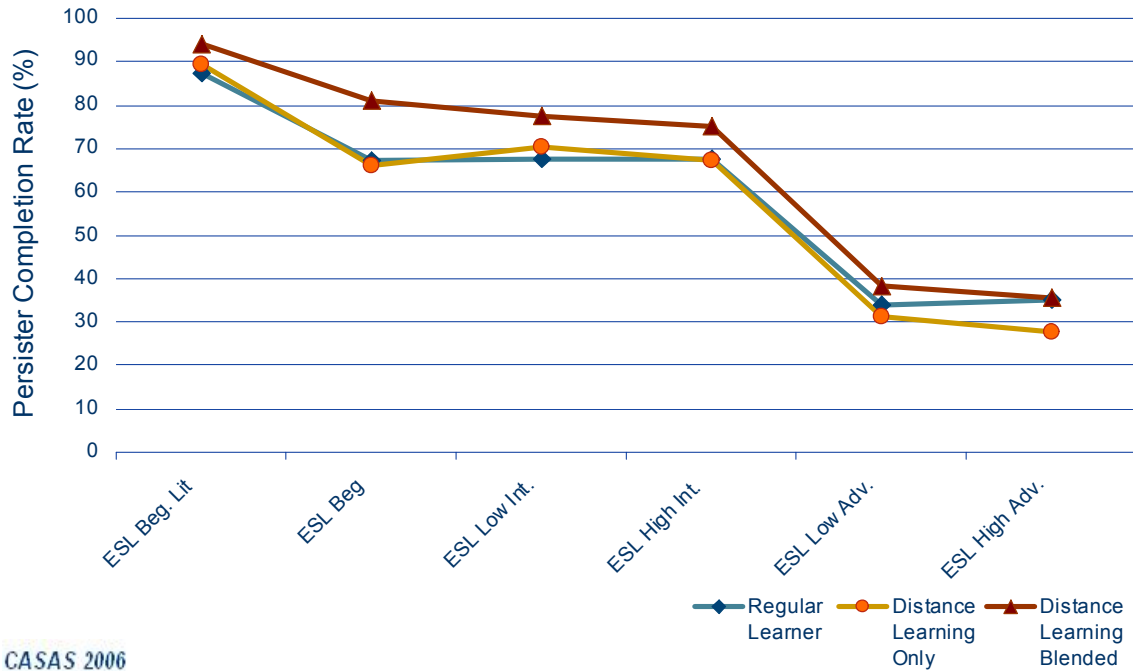


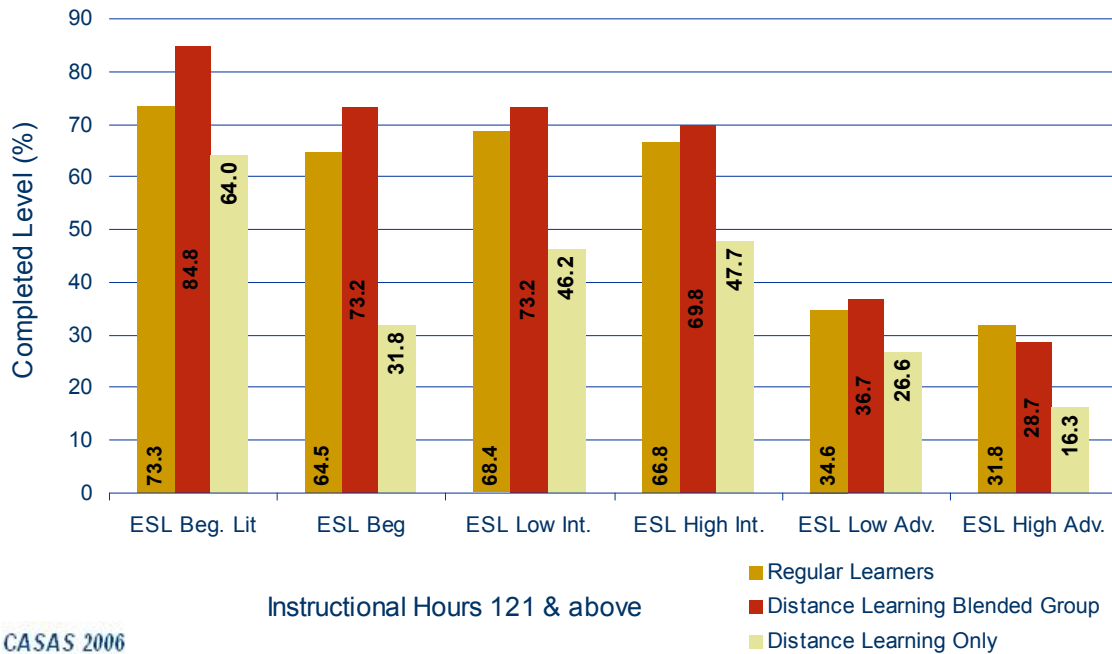
Figure 1 D examines completion rates for students with 121 and more hours of instruction. The largest disparity is with the completion rates for beginning ESL students participating in distance learning.

It will be interesting to see if these beginning ESL data change with the introduction of a new beginning ESL video and print series in 2007.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Currently there are limited instructional materials for the beginning ESL distance learner. The CDLP has licensed the Los Angeles Unified School District's beginning ESL video and print series entitled "Putting English to Work 1." This 20 DVD series will be distributed free in two parts in late 2006 and early 2007.

Figure 1D

Instructional Program Level Completion Rates of ESL Distance Learners Contrasted with ESL Regular Learners with 121 & above Hours of Instruction: (2004 – 05 WIA Title II, Federal Table 4)

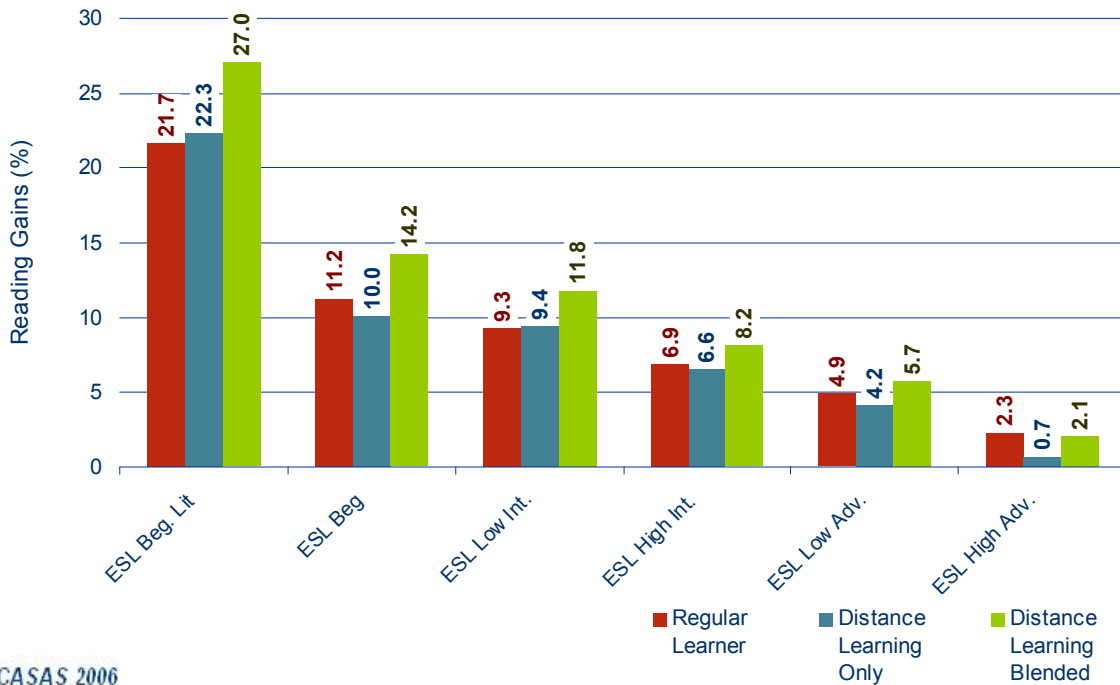


CASAS reading data support the contention that distance learning programs are effective. Figure 2 shows the comparative reading gains by CASAS scale score levels for classroom, distance learning only, and blended learning interventions. Blended learning again shows the best reading gain results.

Historical CASAS data show an overall average of about five (5) point gains after roughly 80 hours of instruction for intermediate ESL program levels.

Figure 2

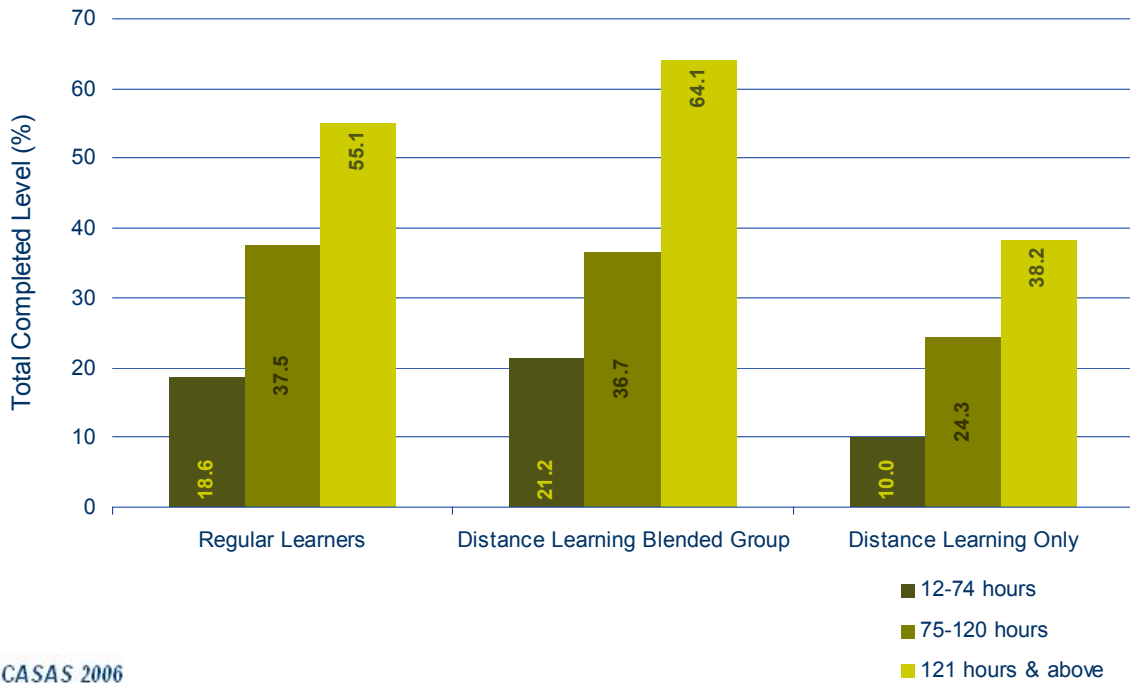
WIA Title II 2004 – 05 CASAS Reading Scale Score Gains for ESL Distance Learners Contrasted with ESL Regular Learners by NRS ESL Instructional Program Level



In Figure 3 classroom, distance leaning only, and blended learning interventions are compared based on completion levels and hours of instruction. Distance learning only shows the lowest completion rates while blended learning completion rates with 75 – 120 hours of instruction are quite impressive. For all three learning interventions, the amount of time in instruction was critical to the completion of an instructional level. Students with more than 120 instructional hours were three times more likely to complete an instructional program level than students with less than 75 instructional hours. This was particularly true for students using distance learning only who were almost four times (3.82) more likely to complete an instructional program level.

**Figure 3**

**ESL Distance Learners Contrasted with ESL Regular Learners by Hours of Instruction: Instructional Program Level Completion Rates in 2004 – 05  
WIA Title II Federal Table 4**

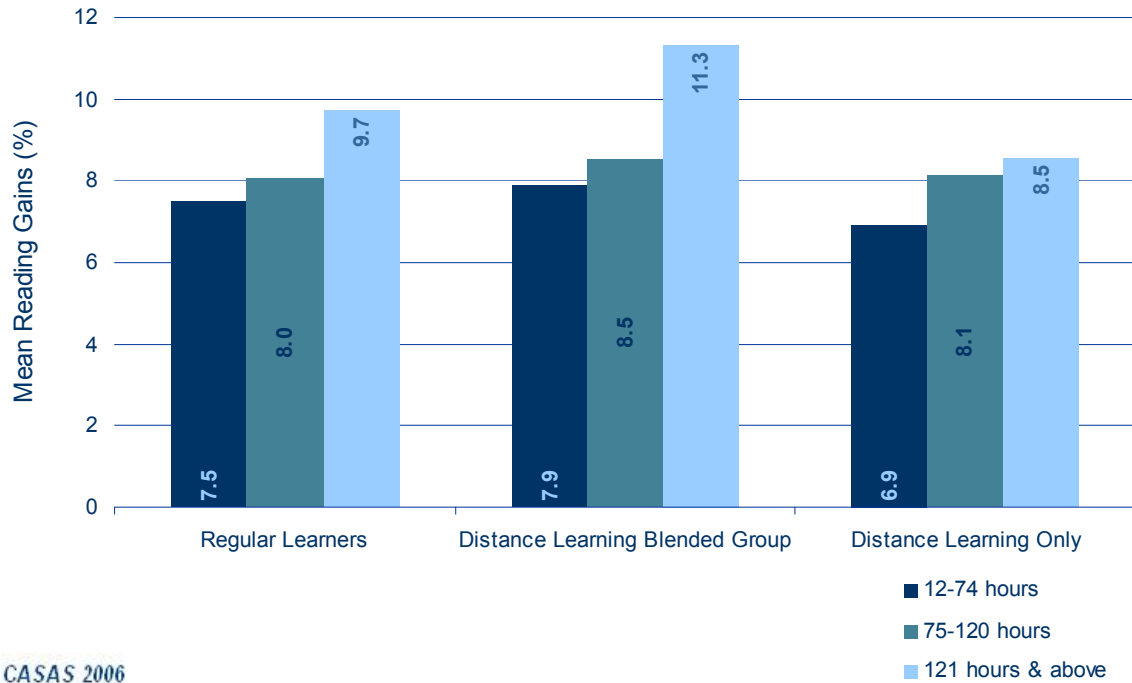


CASAS 2006

When reading gain scores are examined by hours of instruction in Figure 4 the relative gains between the classroom only and distance learners with 75 – 120 hours of instruction are similar (8.0% to 8.1%) while the blended learning gains are highest for all hours of instruction. The student in distance learning only with more than 120 hours of instruction performed similarly with regular and blended distance learning students having 75 to 120 hours of instruction

Figure 4

Mean Reading Gains: ESL Distance Learners Contrasted with ESL Regular Learners by Hours of Instruction: (2004 – 05 WIA Title II)



CASAS 2006

### Conclusion

When comparing classroom data with the Innovation Programs, it is clear that the blended learning programs that combine classroom and distance learning instruction are particularly successful in providing ESL learning opportunities.

This is the first time that CDLP researchers have been able to compare and contrast key outcome data between classroom, distance learning only, and blended learning. The findings alter our understanding of the utility of the distance learning interventions.

## Distance Learning for the Adult Learner: Improving Persistence and Effectiveness

### A Study of Student Persistence

A 2004 – 2005 CDLP study conducted by Dr. Paul Porter and Van Woolley focused on student persistence and learning gains of ESL students in reading.<sup>6</sup> The hypothesis was that “distance learning blended” students will have higher rates of persistence because they have an opportunity to engage in directed self-study, either in between or in conjunction with their regular classroom experiences.

### Methodology

Student persistence data were drawn from “CASAS Persister Reports.” “Persisters” were defined as students who took the CASAS pre-test and stayed long enough to also take the CASAS post-test. Consequently, the key parameter was the percentage of students who took both. Other persistence measures included mean instructional hours per student and completion of instructional levels. The study looked at only two student groups: “ESL Classroom Only” and “DL Blended.” Data were not available for the “DL Only” group because of data element peculiarities of the *TOPSPro Entry Record*. It was determined that students designated as “Distance Learning” were actually “Blended” students.<sup>7</sup>

### Sample

This sample included all adult ESL students enrolled in adult education ESL in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), for the fiscal year 2003–2004 (Total N = 145,550). Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) was the only program covered in the persistence study because it was the only participating program that had persistence data readily available.

### Superior Persistence for Blended DL Students

ESL students taking a combination of regular ESL classroom and DL classes (“blended” students) showed a significantly higher rate of persistence than students taking only ESL classes. These findings are powerful because the data are straight forward and easy to understand, i.e., more DL Blended students stayed long enough to take a CASAS post-test. This provides another compelling reason for adult schools to offer DL programs — to increase student persistence. Simultaneous participation in regular classroom and distance learning programs provided blended students with an opportunity for continued

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<sup>6</sup> ESL Distance Learning Effectiveness Study: Comparative Study of Student Persistence, Reading Score Gains and Program Effectiveness, Dr. Paul Porter and Van Woolley for the California Distance Learning Project, March 2005, pp 2–3.

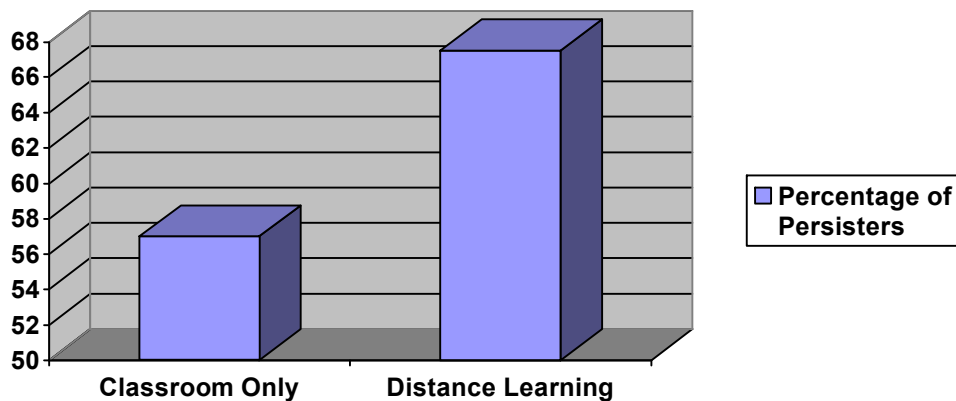
<sup>7</sup> Innovation Program students are identified as “Distance learning” students on the TOPSPro entry forms. No distinction can be made between the distance learning only and DL blended student.

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study when family, work or other circumstances prevented them from attending regular classroom programs. Blended students showed greater persistence because, when they “stopped out” from attending regular classes, their continued enrollment in DL courses kept them from completely dropping out.

**Figure 4**

### Percentage of Persisters: ESL Classroom Only versus DL Blended Group



The percentage of persisters for the DL Blended group was at 68 percent while students enrolled only in regular ESL classes had a rate of 57 per cent. The DL Blended Group, then, had a persistence rate of more than 10 percentage points higher than the ESL classroom group.

These findings support the study’s hypothesis and validate Comings’ (1999) findings on ABE pre–GED students.

### Comparative ESL Learning Outcomes in Classroom, Blended and Distance Learning Only Classes

The 2004 – 2005 study conducted by Dr. Paul Porter and Van Woolley also focused on learning gains of ESL students in reading.<sup>8</sup> The hypothesis of the learning gains study was that there would be no significant difference in reading learning gains between the three ESL student groups. This hypothesis is consistent with statewide CASAS data that show equal learning gains for the “ESL classroom” and “Innovation” (distance learning) groups.<sup>9</sup>

### Methodology

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<sup>8</sup> *ESL Distance Learning Effectiveness Study: Comparative Study of Student Persistence, Reading Score Gains and Program Effectiveness*, Dr. Paul Porter and Van Woolley for the California Distance Learning Project, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> The annual Innovation Program reports are found online at <http://www.cdiponline.org/fivepercent.htm>.

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Three instructional groups were studied including the “Classroom Only,” “Distance Learning Only” and “Blended” groups. Learning gains were determined by noting the difference between students’ scores on appropriate *CASAS Pre Test* and *Post Test* forms. All students in the study had completed an equivalent intervention of 80–100 instructional hours between pre test and post test scores. For distance learning students, instructional hours were awarded based on completed workbook units linked to video or other media. The formula most often used was an award of 10 instructional hours for each completed unit.

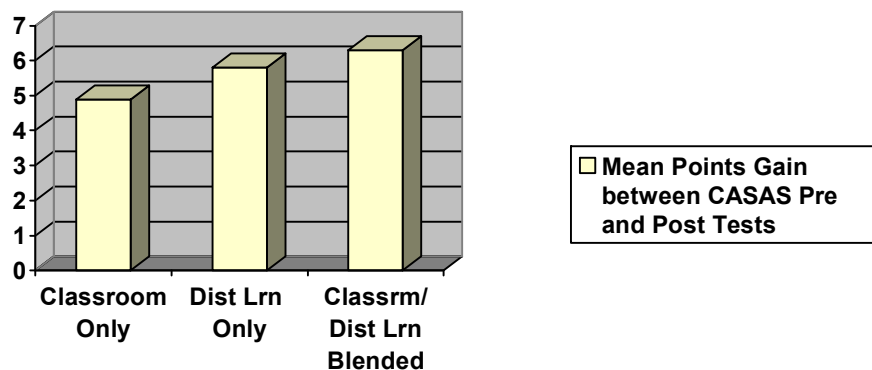
### Sample

A total of 509 ESL students in three instructional groups were studied. All students were registered during the period July 2003 through June 2004. The sample was drawn from adult school programs in three school districts including: Los Angeles USD, Downey USD, and Mountain View/ Los Altos USD.

### Superior Learning Gains for DL Students

With the same amount of instructional hours, ESL distance learning students showed higher learning gains in reading on standardized achievement tests than students in traditional classrooms. Because of the small sample size, however, these findings should be validated by further research. It can be said conclusively that DL students performed “at least as well as” regular classroom students, which is the minimum expectation of the CDE. These findings provide further evidence that distance learning is a viable instructional alternative to regular ESL classroom programming.

**Figure 5**  
**Learning Gains Comparison for ESL Groups**



For the overall sample (N= 509), the “DL Blended Group” had the highest mean learning gain with 6.3 points. The “DL Only” Group had a mean gain of 5.8 points. Students in the “ESL Classroom Only” group scored lowest at 4.9 points

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gain. Therefore, the “Blended” group had learning gains 28.5% higher than the classroom group and the “DL Only” group was 18.3 % higher than the classroom contingent.

### **Greatest Learning Gains at Lower Literacy Levels**

Students at lower literacy levels (at time of CASAS pre-tests) made higher learning gains for both the ESL classroom and DL samples. This finding is compatible with previous statewide CASAS data that show a clear tendency for greater learning gains for students at the lowest literacy levels (i.e., students who scored 200 or below on pre-tests.) Gradual diminution of mean learning gains was evident as literacy levels went up (pre-test scores of 201 and over).

### **Factors Contributing to Higher Learning Gains by DL Groups**

Distance learning staff members from participating programs were not surprised by higher learning gains scores exhibited by the DL groups. They suggested that higher scores could be due to several factors. Teachers explained that DL students, when compared to regular classroom students, are more motivated; have more experience with paper pencil assessments; have more exposure to “life skill” content in media-based instruction; and may receive more one to one attention from teachers (when teachers correct workbook assignments).

These factors appear to have face validity in explaining higher scores for the DL group. Statewide Innovation Program reading and listening test data reported by CASAS showed DL students have higher reading and listening learning gains than their classroom counterparts.

### **Implications**

Over 50,000 adults participated in distance learning programs in program year 2003 – 2004. While they represent only about 4.2% of all adult school students, the outcomes’ statistics cannot be disputed. The Innovation Programs meet the three crucial benefit–cost criteria necessary to be accepted by adult education providers and the California Department of Education. These programs are effective, efficient, and equitable. The utility of providing flexible distance learning options for busy adults is well established.

## **Promoting Persistence and Program Effectiveness — Distance Learning Intervention Strategies**

Non-traditional instruction frequently involves the use of instructional media. Unfortunately distance learning often is compartmentalized into the adult school Innovation Programs, leaving aside other combinations of classroom and small group learning that include engaging multi-media instruction. Learning labs and the limited use of video in the classroom remain the major exceptions to this regrettable reality.

However, it is quite easy to combine classroom, cooperative learning, and self study into a variety of instructional approaches that can serve a broad range of learning needs while bringing more depth and flexibility to the instruction. The following figure outlines a mix of course design and instructional strategies that can make instruction more flexible for the adult learner, enrich classroom and distance learning programs, and promote independent learning.

Because distance learning is based on self-directed learning, it is important for learners to have strategies or procedures to manage, control, and evaluate their learning progress. An important part of mentoring students is helping them articulate, examine, and reflect on when and how this process works best for them.

Figure 6 provides a growing list of strategies to improve student persistence and program effectiveness. Readers are invited to recommend additions. Please email your suggestions to [porter\\_d@pacbell.net](mailto:porter_d@pacbell.net).

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**Figure 6**  
**Intervention Strategies**

Instructional System Component	Approach or Strategy	Implication	Discussion
Outreach and recruitment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Make the distance learning option widely known in language minority communities. Contact employers (businesses, factories, hospitals, hotels) that employ a significant number of ESL students. Form a partnership with these entities. Everyone benefits.</li> <li>2. Contact other community centers, agencies and programs to form partnerships —libraries, recreation centers, job placement centers, churches, etc. Once again, these partnerships can be wonderfully beneficial to all parties, especially for unserved students.</li> <li>3. Make sure that classroom teachers know of the distance learning alternative and its benefits. This is extremely important.</li> <li>4. Advertising, community promotion, and public service announcements are good recruiting tools.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Potential partners are identified to form mutually important relationships.</li> <li>2. Students are aware of the DL alternative.</li> <li>3. Classroom teachers can offer an option for learners having trouble attending classroom instruction.</li> </ol>	<p>Active outreach and recruitment are not parts of many adult education programs. However, many interests are served when partnerships are formed in the community and workplace.</p> <p>It is important, especially in the beginning of the semester, to inform students of and recruit them for distance learning options.</p> <p>Also transition to the classroom sometimes can be easier once a student has enrolled in distance learning and gains some confidence.</p> <p>Teachers should know and understand that distance learning is not a threat to them, their numbers, or their classroom. For teachers to promote something innovative (or otherwise) they need to feel that it's non-threatening as well as of benefit to the student.</p>

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Instructional System Component	Approach or Strategy	Implication	Discussion
Intake and assessment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Make the distance learning option known to the staff and students.</li> <li>2. Encourage students to enroll in distance learning if there are waiting lists for classroom instruction.</li> <li>3. Screen for strong interest and commitment for self study.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The DL option should be routinely explained in detail to all enrolling students (in programs where DL is offered).</li> <li>2. The blended option for ESL learners that combines enrollment in classroom and distance learning shows significant learning gains.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not all adult learners perform well in asynchronous distance learning. While difficult, it is important to screen learners for their commitment to self study and distance learning.</li> <li>2. Offering distance learning and the blended options makes it easier for the learner to continue instruction when classroom participation is not immediately possible.</li> </ol>
Counseling and goal setting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Make the distance learning option known to the students.</li> <li>2. Encourage students to enroll in distance learning if there are waiting lists for classroom instruction.</li> <li>3. Don't overlook the blended approach for ESL students eager to improve their language and literacy skills.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The DL option should be routinely explained in detail to all enrolling students (in programs where DL is offered).</li> <li>2. The blended option for ESL learners shows significant learning gains.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All teaching and support staff should be aware of the distance learning opportunities, their advantages, and their limitations.</li> <li>2. It is easier to open enroll because students don't have to wait for the next semester. Students can work at their own pace. Teachers can check in but not have to completely re-teach the unit or module.</li> </ol>
Orientation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Make the distance learning option known to the students.</li> <li>2. There should be formal orientations whenever possible. Use a distance learning individual education plan and contract approach to help specify roles and responsibilities for students and instructors.</li> <li>3. Encourage students to clearly define their instructional or academic goals.</li> <li>4. Try to identify the self directed or committed learner in the orientation.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The DL option should be routinely explained in detail to all enrolling students (in programs where DL is offered).</li> <li>2. Students should be aware of the roles and responsibilities of teachers as well as their own.</li> <li>3. Goal setting helps students get feedback and monitor progress.<sup>10</sup></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Distance learning can be an abstraction to new learners. A clear orientation program that demonstrates the actual multi-media curriculum, clarifies whether the learner has access to the tools (VHS or DVD player; Internet if not lab based). This is VERY critical to the student's successful use of the materials.</li> <li>2. Time management should be addressed in the orientation in terms of expectations and strategies.</li> </ol>

<sup>10</sup> **What Works in Distance Learning — Guidelines**, Harold F. O'Neil, Editor, Information Age Publishing, Greenwich, CT., 2005, p. 60.

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Instructional System Component	Approach or Strategy	Implication	Discussion
Instruction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is a new self assessment tool for teachers to use to determine how prepared they are to teach via distance learning. Go to <a href="http://www.adultedonline.org">www.adultedonline.org</a>.</li> <li>2. Student – teacher communications are very important. Be certain that time for student contact is built into your approach. Some of this contact might be in small groups, if appropriate.</li> <li>3. Maintaining student interest and identifying and supporting student progress are important.</li> <li>4. Make assignments to build learner confidence. However, don't make them so easy that students will lose interest.</li> <li>5. Classroom teachers can make their curriculum more interesting by adding videos, small group and cooperative learning projects, and individual and group Internet assignments to engage the learner.</li> <li>6. Improving student's digital and media literacy should be important goals for teachers and students. Elements should be embedded in the curriculum.</li> <li>7. Timely feedback and teacher – student interaction are important throughout the course of instruction.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Distance learning teachers can have more personal and useful student contact than in the classroom. This contact can be a key element to success and persistence.</li> <li>2. Encourage students to tell you when there are conflicts to continuing their education. Devising methods to resolve the conflicts can be a useful teaching moment.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not all teachers are comfortable with or suited for distance learning instruction. It requires playing a more coaching and mentoring role than providing direct instruction.</li> <li>2. The first two weeks often are crucial to retaining adult learners. Establish clear and good communication early with your learners.</li> <li>3. Students with specific, challenging goals outperform students with easy goals.<sup>11</sup></li> <li>4. Distance learning materials and Internet assignments can add luster and interest to classroom instruction as can small group participatory learning activities. The move to more Internet based instruction may come from the classroom more than from distance learning courses.</li> <li>5. Improving media literacy should become a goal or overall theme for instructional design.</li> </ol>

<sup>11</sup> What Works in Distance Learning? *Ibid*, p. 60.

**Distance Learning for the Adult Learner: Improving Persistence and Effectiveness**

<b>Instructional System Component</b>	<b>Approach or Strategy</b>	<b>Implication</b>	<b>Discussion</b>
Instructional materials	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Choose materials that reflect learner goals and interests. Adult life skills as well as specific knowledge are important.</li> <li>2. The Internet has a wealth of useful learning materials. Build lists of applicable Internet Web sites to use for individual and cooperative assignments.</li> <li>3. Find the best and most interesting materials available. Consult active Innovation Projects in California for suggestions on materials that are most effective.</li> </ol>		<p>The Innovation Program annual applications are available online in PDF. They are a rich source for instructional materials and approaches. Go to:</p> <p><a href="http://www3.scoe.net/fivepercent/login.cfm?fuseaction=main">http://www3.scoe.net/fivepercent/login.cfm?fuseaction=main</a> and click on "See other participating adult schools".</p> <p>The CDLP Web site has a listing of instructional materials for multiple media. See <a href="http://www.cdlonline.org/instres.html">http://www.cdlonline.org/instres.html</a></p>

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Motivation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consistent, not necessarily continuous, positive feedback, guidance, and praise help the learner achieve learning tasks.</li> <li>2. Encourage learners to reflect on their learning results and progress.</li> <li>3. Encourage learners to continually check on what they know and don't know.</li> <li>4. Award certificates to students who complete a course. These could be given to students in front of their peers at an assembly, in a classroom, or at some kind of ceremony or recognition event. These events also spark interest in Distance Learning. Create competitions with prizes for the student who completes the most units, or for students who achieve a certain landmark number of units. Prizes can be solicited from local businesses.</li> </ol>	<p>The motivational benefits from planning and implementing self-learning strategies are important.<sup>12</sup></p> <p>Reflection on progress improves self awareness.</p> <p>Timely feedback (as close as possible to the learner's response) on the correctness of a response is the strongest reinforcement to positive learning.</p>	<p>Focus performance feedback on successes and learning achievements.</p> <p>Promoting independent learning will have long term benefits for the adult learner.</p>
Testing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Share pre-testing data with the students.</li> <li>2. CASAS post testing yields valuable information on the instruction. Don't overlook it even though it can be hard to collect.</li> </ol>	<p>Statewide distance learning data show positive results. The same should be true for local programs.</p> <p>Sharing the results in a timely manner increases the veracity and legitimacy of the tests and testing procedures in the learner's mind which promotes a more positive approach they take toward testing in the future resulting in more positive test results.</p>	<p>The TOPSPRO and CASAS testing provide standardized looks at distance learning students, their demographics, and how they perform in comparison with their classroom counterparts. These data are important to building the case for expanding distance learning and creating hybrid approaches to instruction that add rich and engaging media and interactive learning opportunities.</p>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 99.

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Follow – up	Student follow–up is not required or practiced in California adult education. However, asking successful students to speak to classes or video tape them to show current distance learning students provides inspiration and motivation.	Some programs have exit interviews. Many contact students if they have not attended for a short while.	Maintaining good contact with enrolled distance learning and classroom students is important. A little bit of caring can bring a student back from the brink of quitting or becoming discouraged.
Professional development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Digital and media literacy are becoming increasingly important for adult education instruction. Local programs should strongly consider offering digital and media literacy classes and reward teachers who demonstrate those teaching competencies.</li> <li>2. Using video and the Internet in the classroom are important steps towards creating hybrid learning opportunities that are synchronous and asynchronous.</li> <li>3. Reward teachers who utilize the Internet and media in their classroom instruction.</li> <li>4. Reward teachers who utilize experiential and cooperative learning activities in instruction.</li> </ol>	<p>There appears to be a demand for a greater focus on using the Internet in the classroom.</p> <p>Digital and media literacy should be part of teachers' skills sets.</p> <p>The distinctions between classroom and distance learning will probably blur in the next few years. Are adult education teachers ready for this change?</p>	<p>Serving the busy student in the digital age implies some attention to the students' media and digital literacy for most instructional areas. In the basic skills areas of ESL, ABE, GED/ASE and career education it is vital.</p> <p>Local and statewide strategies to improve media and digital literacy and empower and enable self directed learning are critical meta themes in adult education. Our statewide professional development should reflect this reality.</p>

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Data collection and reporting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Distance learners should be identified by checking “Distance Learning” on Item 13 “Special Programs” option on the TOPSPro entry form.</li> <li>2. Share pre–testing data and their meanings with the students.</li> <li>3. Use the TOPSPro distance learning data to examine your program and compare student demographics and outcomes with classroom programs and for possible corrective actions.</li> <li>4. Portfolio data should supplement and enrich the standardized TOPSPro data collection.</li> <li>5. CASAS post–testing yields valuable information on the instruction. Don’t overlook it even though it can be hard to collect.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Statewide distance learning data show positive results. The same should be true for local programs.</li> <li>2. Students should be aware of the importance of testing. Students are interested in how they perform and should be given immediate feedback. Knowledge of Results (KOR) is the most powerful reinforcement in the learning process.</li> <li>3. The TOPSPro built in reports can easily yield useful information for planning and demonstrating effectiveness.</li> <li>4. Without CASAS post testing the amount of documented learning that has transpired will be unknown and acknowledged as such.</li> </ol>	<p>The TOPSPro descriptive data and the CASAS testing provide standardized looks at distance learning students, their demographics, and how they perform in comparison with their classroom counterparts. These data are important to building the case for expanding distance learning and creating hybrid approaches to instruction that add rich and engaging media and interactive learning opportunities.</p>