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**Informational Letter**

**Section 1**

<b>Transmittal:</b>	09-INF-08
<b>To:</b>	Local District Commissioners
<b>Issuing Division/Office :</b>	Center for Employment and Economic Supports
<b>Date:</b>	March 26, 2009
<b>Subject:</b>	Distance Learning Education and Training
<b>Suggested Distribution:</b>	Employment Coordinators TOP Coordinators Staff Development Coordinators
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<b>Attachments:</b>	None

**Filing References**

<b>Previous ADMs/INFs</b>	<b>Releases Cancelled</b>	<b>Dept. Regs.</b>	<b>Soc. Serv. Law &amp; Other Legal Ref.</b>	<b>Manual Ref.</b>	<b>Misc. Ref.</b>
08-ADM-07		18 NYCRR 385.9			Final TANF Rule (73 FR 6781)

## Section 2

### I. Purpose

The purpose of this Informational Letter (INF) is to provide local departments of social services (LDSS) with information and resources to support participation by public assistance (PA) recipients in education and training that is conducted through distance learning. This INF is intended to provide information on several methods of distance learning available that may enable districts to address the education and training needs of clients who have difficulty attending traditional classroom instruction and also provides information on the method of monitoring participation in a distance learning setting.

### II. Background

The lack of basic educational achievement and relevant job skills often results in limited employment options and opportunities for advancement in the workplace. Available data suggests that a high percentage of PA recipients are deficient in the skills and knowledge necessary to attain economic security. To address these needs, it is important to consider distance learning options for providing education and job skills training as an alternative to traditional classroom study for those recipients unable to participate in traditional classroom training or as a supplement to classroom based training and education.

As defined in [08 ADM-07](#), distance learning is a formal, accepted learning method in which students and instructors are separated by geography, time or both during the instructional period. There are generally three methods of delivery:

- Computer-based (internet or downloadable)
- Workbook (take home, instructor determines the number of hours necessary to complete assignments)
- Television (such as through Public Broadcasting)

Distance Learning models can provide a viable option for PA recipients:

- for whom increased participation in educational or job skills training activities would help them attain necessary skills;
- who are currently participating in an acceptable manner through a combination of educational and work activities, but could benefit from additional education and training that can be arranged around other activities; or
- for those who are employed and due to work schedules would receive a more realistic opportunity to participate in education and job skills instruction through distance learning.

In all instances, districts are expected to assess a client's ability to successfully participate in a distance learning program, including the client's motivation to actively participate and the basic skills necessary for the distance learning activity.

### III. Program Implications

#### Distance Learning Can Benefit Recipients

Distance learning is a means for recipients to increase skills through participation in education or job skills training that may otherwise be unavailable. Distance learning options are available for programs including adult basic education (ABE), GED preparation, English Language Instruction (ELI) and a range of job skills training such as customer service, computer software, building trades and health care professions. Providing education or job skills training via distance learning offers one possible method of addressing the barriers to participation in a traditional classroom, such as lack of transportation or childcare, work schedule, or the presence of physical limitations. Additionally, verifiable hours of participation in these activities via distance learning may count toward client participation requirements.

In 2001, an on-line learning pilot project was conducted through the New Jersey Department of Labor and Rutgers University Center for Women and Work which targeted low-wage single mothers. The results demonstrated that online learning is an effective mode of skills delivery. The participants succeeded in completing courses, receiving credentials and other formal certifications, received job promotions, increased wages, and increased self esteem. Many women reported they would not have been able to take the classes if they were not offered online due to work schedules, daycare challenges, and fear of failure in traditional classroom settings. A large number of participants reported that the program's scheduled face-to-face meetings with instructors and other students were essential to their success. This finding reinforces the importance of monitoring and support for distance learning models. The report further states that at-home learning also had the unexpected consequence of the parent becoming a positive role model for their families. Parents who are observed by their children as working toward educational goals highlight the importance of education and hard work. Following is a link to the full report: <http://www.itwd.rutgers.edu/PDF/FindingsfromField.pdf>

#### Counting Distance Learning Hours Toward Work Participation

Documented actual hours of participation in an approved education or job skills training activity provided via a distance learning program are countable toward the TANF / SN-MOE and SN non-MOE all families work participation rates to the same extent as classroom-based instruction. According to 08 ADM-07, districts are authorized to report **up to ten hours weekly** of participation in education or job skills training activities that are conducted through distance learning. Additionally, educational activities may be provided solely through distance learning instruction in those instances where the participant is determined by the district to be unable to participate in traditional classroom instruction because of a medical or mental health condition.

The ADM provides the following guidelines:

“For all educational and job skills work activities, countable hours of participation may include up to ten hours weekly through a distance learning model. For hours of participation to be reported toward the federal participation rate, the educational or job skills work activity must meet the federal definition for the respective work activity and all hours of participation via distance learning participation must be documented by on-line participation or completion of instructional learning packets or workbooks.”

Additionally, any distance learning component must be supported by face-to-face instructional support, unless otherwise approved by the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA). Districts should discuss situations that do not include face-to-face instructional support with their OTDA Employment Technical Advisor and will need to submit a description of the component, including the instructional support, to OTDA for review and approval. However, educational activities may be provided solely through distance learning instruction in those instances where the participant is determined by the district to be unable to participate in traditional classroom instruction because of a medical or mental health condition.

### **Tracking and Documenting Hours of Participation**

08 ADM-07 further stipulates:

“The district is responsible for verifying and documenting these actual hours of participation and must ensure that such activities are supervised. Mechanisms for verifying and documenting actual hours of supervised participation may include on-line tracking of time participating in the educational activity, combined with intermittent review of work assigned to and completed by the student or reasonable approximations of the time required to complete work packets as determined by the education provider and approved by the social services district. Detailed records of the instruction provided, dates when student packets were sent out and received, performance on the assigned work as well as the assignments completed by all students on the roster must be maintained.”

There are generally three methods for tracking participation in Distance Learning models:

**Clock Time Model** – Some academic resources, especially for online and computer-based training, have the capacity to track hours of time a student spends interacting with the materials. The system turns off automatically if the user is idle for a certain period of time.

**Teacher Judgment Model** – The instructor assigns a fixed number of hours credit for each assignment based on their judgment of the time it would take for the learner to complete the assignment. This model is used for distance learning in Adult Education Programs funded by the New York State Education Department.

**Learner – Mastery Model** – The instructor assigns a fixed number of hours credit based on passing a test on the content of each lesson.

**Note:** Hours assigned by the instructor for purposes of judging the participation time in a distance learning activity must be based on the hours necessary for all students in the program to fulfill the education requirements and not a distinct requirement due to the receipt of temporary assistance.

According to 08 ADM-07, hours of participation in countable educational activities, including those that are provided through distance learning, may include supervised homework/study time such as monitored study sessions, and up to one hour of unsupervised homework time for each hour of instructional support provided the total number of hours of homework/study time does not exceed the hours of homework/study time expected by the educational provider. The social services district must ensure that documentation from the educational provider to verify the number of hours of homework/study time expected is maintained as part of the social services district or provider's documentation. Unsupervised participation in educational activities or homework/study time that is not consistent with these requirements (including unsupervised homework/study time that exceeds one hour for each hour of instructional support and supervised homework/study time that exceeds the hours expected by the educational provider) cannot be reported as hours of participation.

Information on distance learning can be found at the New York State Education Department's Adult Education and Workforce Development web link. Refer to the Employment Preparation Education (EPE) Manual and Program Manager and Instructor Guide for Distance Learning at:

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/aewd/dl.shtml>

### **Appropriate Distance Learning Participants**

Distance learning models can provide a viable option for recipients who may be limited in their ability to participate in traditional classroom instruction due to factors such as work schedules, transportation barriers, lack of child care, or limitations resulting from a disability.

Distance learning is not generally appropriate or countable for job readiness activities, such as development of appropriate workplace behaviors, given that individuals who require such interventions would most benefit from more intensive, contextual and directed instruction.

Most distance programs have minimal face-to-face contact with an instructor or with other students taking the same course. Therefore, distance students need to possess the kinds of characteristics (e.g., self-motivation, independence, and effective organization and study skills) that enable them to succeed without the extra support a classroom environment typically provides. Additionally, PA recipients interested in a distance learning program should be able to demonstrate a need for at-home learning and must also meet the standards of the particular program for which they are being considered.

The following tool may be useful in screening students for at-home learning programs. This questionnaire, provided through the New York Regional Adult Education Network, may be used by LDSSs as a resource for determining whether studying at a distance is the

right option for a client. It explores a person's study habits, organizational skills, access to and comfort with technology, and life routines. Clients' responses may be used as points for discussion to help decide if clients are suited for distance learning and whether they need additional training to prepare for distance study.

Intake Survey for Distance Students from Project IDEAL  
[http://apps.nyraen.org/learner\\_intake\\_survey.pdf](http://apps.nyraen.org/learner_intake_survey.pdf)

LDSSs are encouraged to develop written policies for evaluation and selection of recipients to ensure standards are consistent across the district and that suitable candidates are approved for referral to distance learning programs. Local policy should be consistent with your biennial Employment Plan Section 3.6.

Districts are expected to closely monitor client progress in distance learning assignments to ensure that the arrangement is benefiting the participant. If the participant is not satisfactorily participating or making progress toward education and skill goals, the district should explore the reasons for lack of progress and reevaluate the appropriateness of the assignment.

## **Distance Learning Resources**

A number of resources are available pertaining to distance learning; several are highlighted below. The links provide background information. Local social services districts must ensure that educational activities provided via distance learning meet the definition of the respective work activities and meet the requirements outlined in 08 ADM-07 before reporting hours of participation toward the federal participation rate.

### **A) ATTAIN Labs**

The Advanced Technology Training and Information Networking (ATTAIN) program addresses the basic skills deficiencies of out-of-school/out-of-work youth and adult learners in communities across the state. The technology-based program is sponsored by SUNY University Center for Academic and Workforce Development (UCAWD.)

ATTAIN labs are overseen by a lab manager who is able to access student accounts through an electronic courseware monitoring system. They offer a variety of academic and vocational programs, including a Digital Literacy Curriculum. This program helps students to develop a fundamental understanding of computers and consists of five courses: Computer Basics, the Internet and World Wide Web, Productivity Programs, Computer Security and Privacy, and Digital Lifestyles. Additional ATTAIN courseware includes the following:

- Academic Skills Series: High School Proficiency Mathematics, Reading and Writing Advanced Reading Comprehension
- Employability Skills Series: Working with People, Workplace Readiness, Workplace Mathematics
- Life Skills Series: ELLIS – English Language Learning Instructional System, Mavis Beacon Typing, Microsoft Office Suite 2003, Steck-Vaughn GED

- Occupational Skills Series, Carpentry, Plumbing, Child Care Worker, Customer Service, Home Care Aide, Introduction to Office Technology, Security Guard, Office Skills Program

For a listing of ATTAIN Labs across New York State:

[http://www.attain.suny.edu/labs\\_list.php](http://www.attain.suny.edu/labs_list.php)

Districts may contact their local ATTAIN lab manager to develop a method to refer clients, monitor participation and assess student progress.

## **B) New York State Department of Education (NYSED)**

Local districts are encouraged to explore local adult education providers that offer distance learning options to their students and to pursue programs that are approved by NYSED.

Academic resources that have been approved by NYSED include:

- GRASP and GED Connections

Adult Secondary Education (ASE) programs for students at a ninth grade level or above in reading

- Pre-GED Connection, Learn to Read, and Skills to Make Adults Ready to Succeed (SMART)

Adult Basic Education (ABE) for students below a ninth grade level in reading

- Crossroads Café

Program for English Language Instruction (ELI) students

GRASP stands for Getting Ready Adults a Study Program. It is designed for adults with a minimum reading grade level equivalent to 9.0 who are seeking a high school equivalency diploma. Students must be able to work independently and devote at least 6 hours per week to studying. Individualized home study packets are delivered twice a month via the regional library network, by mail or in person.

GED Connection is an online home study course offered on public television that prepares participants to take the GED test and offers instruction in the five GED content areas. GED Connection includes 3 workbooks on Language Arts: Reading & Writing, Science & Social Studies, and Mathematics. The workbooks provide skill-building and test-taking practice. There are online activities, lessons and practice tests at [www.pbs.org/literacy](http://www.pbs.org/literacy). Learners may save their work in an online portfolio. GED connection is designed for adults with a reading level of grade 9.0 or higher.

Pre-GED Connection is designed for intermediate learners with reading grade levels from 6 to 8.9. Instructors may customize the learning experience for different ability levels. There are online components, VHS video programs and pre-GED workbooks. A free online component has links to related websites for each workbook lesson, also at [www.pbs.org/literacy](http://www.pbs.org/literacy).

Learn to Read is a televised beginning reading program that is used to help adult students with reading grade levels from 0-4. It is designed to help adult students develop reading skills needed to enter the pre-GED/GED Connection Curricula. SMART is for reading grade levels equivalent to 4 through 7.

Crossroads Café helps students build English language skills and increase their knowledge of American culture. Crossroads Café is appropriate for English language learners in adult literacy and basic skills (pre-GED), workplace and correctional educational programs. There are 26 videos (in VHS or DVD) which can also be used in a traditional classroom. Print materials are available at several levels, from low-beginner to high-intermediate, in different formats for maximum flexibility. Students must be at least a National Reporting System (NRS) level 4 to participate in Crossroads Café.

In addition to the above workbook programs, NYSED is piloting the Internet-based products *Plato*, *Passkey* and *Skills Tutor* to evaluate their effectiveness as stand-alone distance learning models.

The primary funding source to local school districts and BOCES for distance learning is the Employment Preparation Education (EPE) program, administered through NYSED. In order to qualify for an EPE-funded distance learning program, students must be at least 21 years of age. At intake, students must test at a minimum of 4th grade level through TABE, and ESL students must achieve a level 4 on the NRS through the BEST Plus oral test. Results of these scores may be used to determine in which program the student should be placed.

The following link to SED's Distance Learning Guide provides additional information:  
[http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/aewd/Distance\\_Learning\\_Guide-Final-1-2-07.pdf](http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/aewd/Distance_Learning_Guide-Final-1-2-07.pdf)

### **Regional Adult Education Network (RAEN)**

The Regional Adult Education Network is one of the Technical Assistance Centers coordinated through the State Education Department. Technical Assistance Centers are designed to work with specific segments of learners in the state. RAEN provides professional development and technical assistance and acts as a liaison between adult education providers and the Office of Adult Education and Workforce Development (AEWD). The Network works to provide training and professional development that assists educators in providing academic, employment and supports to enable adult learners to achieve educational, employment and family outcomes. GED Connection, Crossroads Café and other programs are available through local RAENs.

For a listing of RAEN centers:

<http://www.nyraen.org/about/consortia.html>

### **C) Project IDEAL (Improving Distance Education for Adult Learners)**

Project IDEAL is a consortium of states dedicated to developing effective distance learning programs for adults. Their website's "Publications and Resources" section contains useful links to research reports, working papers and additional distance learning



resources. The following link to “Exploring Distance Education Curricula for Adult Learners” provides descriptions for various distance learning programs.

<http://www.projectideal.org/pdf/WorkingPapers/WP8ExploringDistanceCurricula2005.pdf>

For additional information on Project IDEAL:

[www.projectideal.org](http://www.projectideal.org)

The information provided in this INF is intended to serve as a resource for local districts in support of their efforts to expand educational opportunities for clients.

**Issued By**

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