

Section Six: Program Resources

6.1 Describe the use of technology, including distance learning to increase the quality of instruction and lead to improved outcomes for students.

The greatest resource that SW ABE has is its dedicated teaching staff. Though many of them work full time outside the ABE classroom, when they enter the ABE classroom, they bring their entire focus to the learners in the classroom, offering creative teaching, including the use of technology, designed to help the students gain knowledge in whatever they may be studying.

The classrooms in SW ABE have a variety of technology available for use by teachers and students. Many classrooms are equipped with SMART Boards which allow the teachers to expand the worldview of their students. They can enhance instruction by projecting pictures and videos to illustrate words or concepts that might otherwise be difficult to explain. Additionally, most classrooms have a variety of other technology available for student use, including computers, iPads, and chrome books. In today's high-tech world, a familiarity with technology is a plus in many jobs. So while English language learners are enhancing their English skills, they can also enhance their digital literacy skills, both of which will increase their employability.

The use of technology is also very important for GED students. The current GED exam is offered only online at approved test centers, so a basic understanding of computers, use of the mouse, and keyboarding are all invaluable skills for the students to develop. All GED students start class by setting up an account on GED.com so that they can see what they will be required to do to move through the GED process/program. They are then directed to online sites that they can use to study, in addition to the GED study books that are available. When the student and the teacher determine that the learner is ready, SW ABE will provide vouchers for the GED Ready practice tests, so that we can verify their readiness to take the final GED exams.

Distance learning is another valuable option for our learners. For those who are unable to attend a regular class due to their work schedule or family responsibilities, we are able to offer them the opportunity to study at home. Additionally, we have encouraged students who are currently attending, to enroll in a distance learning program to increase their time working on English. The programs that we have used extensively include Read Theory, USA Learns, and Moby Max. As we introduced the use of Read Theory, we offered the students the opportunity of participating in a contest. The student

that read the most stories won a book. The contest was so successful, that we ran another contest this year, with gift certificates as prizes.

Some of our English language learners have the option of using Burlington English online, to work on their language skills. It has been an excellent program for helping our students improve their pronunciation, as well as building vocabulary. This program has also been used in a blended classroom, where the teacher uses the presentation portion of the program to introduce concepts, and then allows the students to work online on the program to build language skills.

For learners seeking to earn a GED, one very popular distance learning program is GED Academy. This program allows GED students to study for the GED at home. Along with this program, learners frequently use Khan Academy, which is a great program, particularly for building math skills. A number of students have successfully completed their GED after using these programs.

Finally, our career pathway students make use of Learner Web, a distance learning program that has career-focused learning options, particularly in the area of healthcare. The use of this program has allowed learners to build knowledge prior to beginning their certification classes. Our CNA students complete courses in Learner Web to enhance their understanding of working as a CNA during the bridge. Our Community Interpreter students complete the Medical Terminology course in Learner Web as the prerequisite to their training.

The COVID-19 pandemic has really pushed all of our staff to explore additional ways of providing instruction via distance learning. Staff are exploring a variety of different methods for maintaining contact with students, and learning which methods work the best. For learners who had already been engaged with a distance learning program, the teachers have spent many hours checking student progress, asking how the student is doing in general, and answering questions as necessary. These check-ins can take place in the form of texting, email, or phone calls. Teachers that had not been using distance learning programs in their classes have had a much steeper learning curve for both themselves and their students. Some had to familiarize themselves with the distance learning program prior to attempting to present it to their students. The introduction of the new learning programs generally was done via a combination of written instructions and a phone call. The COVID-19 pandemic has informed our technology plan, and distance learning in the consortium will be a primary focus moving forward.

6.2 Describe any resources, other than state and federal ABE funding, that are used to support ABE programming. This can include financial resources, such as grant funding or charitable contributions. It can also include coordination with community partners to provide support services such as transportation, counseling or childcare. (Refer to items 5.3 and 5.4 as appropriate.)

Fifteen years ago, SW ABE partnered with the National Head Start Family Literacy Center/Sonoma State University to develop an online reading program called “Reading Skills for Today’s Adults”. This program has materials that are appropriate for both English language learners and native English speakers who have CASAS scores between 200 and 235 (reading grade levels 1 through 8). This popular program combines the research-proven strategies of repeated reading and guided oral reading to aid in building learners’ fluency and comprehension skills. The readings are designed to help learners become more informed consumers, parents, employees, citizens, and community members. To date, this program has received over 500,000 visitors from not only the United States, but from places around the world. In the past several years, interest has surged in the additional development of this program for online use. SW ABE signed an agreement with Flink Learning (now known as The Family Learning Company) to allow them to build an online site with additional learning activities, built on the stories from Reading Skills for Today’s Adults, with a portion of the profits coming back to SW ABE. At the same time, it was decided to realign the original stories to current lexiles, and create activities aligned to the CCR standards. The funding for this work came from Southwest Initiative Foundation and Marshall Community Foundation. The updated materials include the stories, the CCR-aligned activities, and recorded readings of the stories. These materials will still be free to all users, and can be found at www.readingskills4today.com

Following the successful pattern of Reading Skills for Today’s Adults, a new online program was developed called “Reading Skills for Healthcare Workers”. This program was written for readers at grade levels 5.5 through 8.5, with the focus of all of the readings being on healthcare topics. The same research-based strategies are used in these stories. They can be viewed at www.reading4healthcareworkers.com. These stories have become an integral part of our healthcare bridge. The funding for these stories came from Southwest Initiative Foundation, Marshall Community Foundation, and Avera Marshall Hospital.

The Pathways to Prosperity grants that have been awarded to our Career Pathways partnership have allowed our programs to offer additional training to our learners that meet their educational and employment goals. These funds have allowed us to employ

additional teachers. Courses that we have offered include CNA, Commercial Driver's License, Community Interpreter, Diesel Powertrain and Hydraulics, Medical Terminology, and Trained Medication Aide. The grants that fund these programs are submitted by our career pathways partnership team that is built primarily by the Private Industry Council, Minnesota West Community College and SW ABE.

This same partnership has also received On-Ramp grants where the focus is learners who have lower English skills. The students are taught some workforce basics, leading to a certificate, to help them enter the workforce. Some of the classes that have been taught using these funds include English for Driving, First Aid, CPR, Infection Control, and Food Handler. Additionally, there is a focus on computer skills, using the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment and standards.

A few years ago, SW ABE manager Pat Thomas explored the idea of providing synchronous instruction via a web-based platform. She worked with the tech department at SW State University at Marshall, with the idea of using their licenses for Adobe Connect. SW ABE was able to secure a Bremer Grant to help pay for the costs of building this plan. Additionally, our regional transitions funding provides additional funding to support this program.

Worthington ABE has had the opportunity to partner with local employers who want to provide English language classes for their employees. In the past we have worked with JBS, a Worthington pork production facility, to provide English classes at their facility. We also provided English classes at J&B Pork at their site in Pipestone. Until the plant closed in the fall of 2019, they provided a classroom, paid our ABE teacher, and paid their employees for the time they spent in class. We have a long-term partnership with Monogram Meats, a snack food company in Chandler. We have provided English classes for their employees in Chandler and in Worthington. Again, they provided the site, paid our ABE teacher, and paid their employees while they attended classes.

For the past several years, Worthington ABE has been a sub-recipient of a Citizenship grant, partnering with the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota and the Minnesota Literacy Council (now Literacy Minnesota). This grant has allowed Worthington ABE to offer additional Citizenship classes.