

Section 4: Educational Quality

4.1 *Provide an explanation of how high-quality educational services are developed by the consortium. Address the following:*

How are decisions made about what kinds of courses and instruction to offer?

The Great Rivers staff reviews the data from the current year and dialogues about the successes from the program year as well as what improvements are necessary. With information from SiD, staff assesses the efficacy of teachers and classes as interpreted through the data.

The program decides what kinds of courses to offer by reviewing student CASAS scores, student interests, and student needs. Surveys are conducted on student availability and interest to provide in-person classes versus online classes. Based on the results, the class offerings and schedules are created. Most importantly, attendance rates of courses are monitored through SiD to determine future course offerings.

Courses and instruction are evaluated by teacher evaluations (both formal and informal) by the manager, peer observations, student surveys, student success rates both formal and informal, and test scores.

Great Rivers ensures that all students have access to sufficient intensity of instruction in order to make learning gains in numerous ways. After each CASAS test, a staff member fills out Individual Diagnostic Profiles (IDPs), and skill sheets are compiled for each student based on the IDP. Packets are created using different platforms such as Ellii, Moby Max, ESL learners, and teacher created worksheets. The packets include skills from the test that the students have not yet mastered. Volunteers and teachers work with students on these specific skills. Digital literacy is used to ensure learning gains for all students. Moby Max and USA Learns are the primary digital platforms for ESL learners in the program. Aztec and Edmentum platforms serve learners working towards their GED and/or high school diploma. Furthermore, open lab times are available an hour before classes start in the morning courses for students to come in

to use the computers and get individual help with specific skills either using digital literacy platforms or 1-on-1 time with the teacher. For the GED/Diploma students as well as the learners working on improving career skills, students are welcome to use computer labs at the main office site any time during the day.

Instruction in the program incorporates the essential components of reading instruction (alphabetics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) through sight word practice, phonetic reading practice, reading aloud to volunteers. In class, textbook/other reading resources are used or provided as homework with reading comprehension materials, quizzes, unit quizzes, vocabulary practice with quizzes, and learning games. Each unit in the Ventures book series contains vocabulary words that are taught in numerous ways. Students have numerous opportunities to read aloud in class, with peers for partner reading, and with volunteers.

Comprehension is practiced by using reading passages and questions in the Ventures textbooks, passages in Readworks.org, Moby Max and USA Learns activities, and practice test questions using a variety of resources.

Staff gathers the previous program data and evaluates student survey responses regarding students' needs, student requests, and students' interests. Also considered are data regarding in-demand careers and from DEED, the Regional Workforce Service Areas, and the Local Workforce Development Boards serving the communities within our boundaries.

Any program decision involves balancing out possible contact hours, teacher pay, and finding a teacher with the best skill set for the content. The cost of materials, space available, student interest, transportation, and childcare concerns are considered. Student outcomes, measurements of success, educational levels based on CASAS scores, and possible community and business partnerships contribute to the decision-making process.

All courses use a curriculum that has been aligned with College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS), ACES TIFF, and NorthStar Digital Literacy objectives.

How are courses and instruction evaluated to determine whether they are high quality?

To determine the quality of the course and instruction, leadership evaluates several sets of data, as well as self-reflection/questions:

1. Are students learning? Teachers use formative and summative assessments to determine student understanding.
2. Are students attending? Staff tracks the factors that decrease the likelihood of consistent attendance and problem-solve strategies to mitigate those barriers.
3. Are students engaged?
4. Are students referring their friends to the classes?
5. Is there a certification/diploma/credential awarded for completion?

This data set may include general information on student attendance. Factors such as consistent attendance, how the time of day and hours/duration of the class meets the needs of students; how transportation needs/barriers affect attendance; how school start and end times affect consistent attendance for students who are also parents/guardians and those who have jobs - especially in the service industry - how do our classes meet their needs?

How does the consortium ensure that all students have access to sufficient intensity of instruction in order to make learning gains?

Assessing students' access to sufficient intensity of instruction in order to make learning gains begins with using the CASAS GOALS exam, GED Ready tests, and informal assessment of listening/speaking level upon enrollment. Students are placed in leveled ESL classes including pre-literacy, low-level, intermediate-level, and advanced levels of learning.

The GED/Diploma classes are structured for 1:1 work, to meet the students needs based on the results of tests, instead of a direct instruction model. These classes are

delivered in a small group setting to ensure student comprehension and understanding.

Students have the opportunity to advance in the program after 40–60 hours of instruction by way of post-testing. When students receive post-tests and the results show improvement, students may be moved to a different leveled class. Students utilize online platforms such as Moby Max or Aztec to challenge themselves when not in class.

The GED team looks at scores on a weekly basis. The GED teachers offer GED Ready tests with a free voucher code in the content area of their focus. The GED Ready tests provide a score and feedback for specific guidance on how to improve learning outcomes. When the teacher discusses the parts of the GED Ready test that the student needs to improve upon, it enables the student to think about the learning involved in the task. The teacher focuses specifically on learning the parts that the student did not get correct.

How does instruction incorporate the essential components of reading instruction (alphabetics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension)?

In Great Rivers classes, reading instruction is much more than being able to read a text. It's about understanding the text and being able to summarize the information and communicate it to others. Teachers use materials that allow the student to learn how to contextualize information as needed on the official tests. As such, instruction incorporates the essential components of reading instruction (alphabetics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension). It starts with the teacher creating lessons that will help students achieve specific lesson objectives.

Three members of the current team are STAR (STudent Achievement in Reading) trained. While no longer following the specifics of the STAR method, the teachers continue to incorporate many of the instructional principles.

To teach alphabetics and phonics, teachers focus on letter recognition and phonemic awareness. They practice identifying letters and the sounds they make.

They teach decoding letter and sound combinations, starting with monosyllabic words and building towards more complex constructions.

Teachers select vocabulary that challenges their students. They include clear and concise definitions and help students identify how to interpret vocabulary by using cues and clues in the text. Additionally, teachers provide opportunities for their students to practice using the words in conversation and by using their new words in the original communication.

Depending on students' levels, educators apply different strategies to support reading comprehension. For lower-level readers, asking *many* questions as they read helps students stay engaged and piques their attention. Student-friendly and closed-ended questions encourage student participation for lower-level ELLs. For intermediate and advanced students, using higher-level questions, such as 5W H questions, engage students to analyze and interpret the text, rather than simply respond to it.

The GED teachers instruct, model, and explain to students what is involved in learning how to comprehend – to really think about what every paragraph in a passage is trying to convey or what the author is trying to explain. GED Reading and RLA teachers need to instruct the students to think about what they are reading and connect with the text by activating and using prior knowledge to make connections.

4.2 Describe how the consortium's distance/hybrid learning programming has expanded over the past 2 years. Address the lessons learned and best practices adopted in recent years, as well as intentions and plans for continued improvement of distance and hybrid learning.

Great Rivers offered a hy-flex classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic, following a year or more of being fully online. Hy-flex classes included students onsite and remote. This is a beneficial option for students who have transportation issues, sick children, or weather-related concerns.

Offering remote learning during winter weather storms when the district moved to remote learning for our K-12 classes worked well. Students receive training and are knowledgeable on how to join classes virtually and complete class sessions via the school-approved online platform. The program had teachers become TVM(Teacher Verification Model) certified, this allowed the teachers to create lessons that could be assigned to students as part of the program's distance learning plan.

Great Rivers staff learned valuable lessons and created new procedures as the need to pivot occurred. Students who are remote need to feel included and need a way to engage with the whole class, not just the teacher. When clear expectations are not set, it is hard to teach and learn. Training students on the etiquette of being in an online classroom or hy-flex classroom became embedded in the daily opening routine of each class.

Best Practices:

- Have clear expectations for engagement and participation
- Use the owl camera to help make the students attending virtually more comfortable and easier for them to engage not only with the teacher and with classmates.
- Create lessons that engage students on-site and remotely.

Continued Improvement:

The program continues to monitor our students' needs as far as their need for remote learning or hy-flex learning. We will continue attending Professional Development classes to help our teachers stay updated with changing policies and procedures.

4.3 Give an overview of how the consortium has integrated all three sets of the state's content standards for ABE (CCRS, ACES/TIF and Northstar) into instruction to date. Address the following. Refer to document J as appropriate.

- What content standards training have staff participated in?

Most of the staff – all full-time teaching and administrative staff – has participated in (at least) foundational training for all three content standards: CCRS, ACES/TIF, and Northstar.

- *How has instruction changed as a result of standards integration and how has that changed the way staff plan instruction?*

Since implementing all content area standards across the program, teachers have become more deliberate about planning and understanding how their lessons integrate the sets of standards. Previously lessons would “check the boxes” necessary, but now they are much more intentional in articulating which *specific* standards are addressed in each lesson. Staff uses a lesson plan form that *literally* allows them to check the boxes to identify which standards/substandards/anchors/skills are addressed.

- *How have the standards informed changes in course offerings and program structures?*

Having the standard vocabulary to apply to the lessons and objectives has been helpful in being more conscious about how teachers create their lessons. It provides a checklist/roadmap that helps guide teachers to more deliberate connections between their lessons and units.

At the beginning of each school year and when conducting orientation with new staff, seasoned staff presents the three content standards areas to all teachers with the objective of introducing the standards, articulating their importance in lesson planning/building, and ensuring that new teachers have a basic understanding of how to identify which standards are being met in their lessons.

4.4 *Give an overview of college and/or career-focused programming, including Integrated Education and Training (IET) programming, transitions to*

postsecondary programming or programming that helps students attain a recognized credential or certification. Refer to document I where appropriate.

For the past 8 years, we have offered programming made possible by funding from DEED under the Pathways to Prosperity competitive grant. The focus of these pathways has been the business services sector and the manufacturing sector, both are sectors in high demand in Washington County.

In addition to reinforcing literacy and numeracy skills in the Manufacturing bridge class, the Manufacturing Skills Standards Council (MSSC) training helped to develop skills specific to the manufacturing industry and prepared students for the Certified Production Technician certification.

The bridge focused on the business services sector prepared students by providing literacy content with a concentration on communication skills and numeracy skills centered on fundamental mathematical operations, the *order* of operations, and basic accounting principles. The job skills portion of the pathway provided intensive productivity software instruction, project-based learning opportunities, and a path to the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification.

Finally, the program offers five IETs. Two of the IETs provide a pathway/training towards a career in the hospitality or food services industries; another two are aimed at the business services industry (similar to our P2P model); the fifth is an internship at the coffee shop in our program center.

4.5 *Give an overview of any current adult diploma programming, which allows ABE students to complete a high school diploma (not high school equivalency assessment prep, such as the GED®/HiSET®). Include credit completion adult diploma programming, as well as Standard Adult Diploma programming. Refer to Document I as appropriate.*

Great Rivers Adult Education Consortium works with adult students in the community that would like to complete their K-12 diploma. A student who started their education

within one of our two districts (SoWashCo or Hastings Public Schools) will receive a diploma from their respective district school after completing all necessary requirements. Students who began their education outside of the consortium can complete the K-12 diploma by submitting their high school transcript for transfer. The team completes a credit check, has it verified by a school counselor, and informs the student of the required credits needed to complete their diploma.

Once a student is identified as a candidate for the K-12 diploma program, the Coordinator works with the student to get registered and the home school transfers them to the Great Rivers K-12 Diploma program. A credit check is completed for each student to identify needed credits and classes. Students attend orientation, receive their login information for online learning platforms, complete any necessary CASAS tests, and have time for questions and answers about their pathway.

Prior to COVID-19, all classes were in person. During COVID-19, all classes were held via Zoom. Zoom continues to be an option for those who need that option. SoWashCo uses the online learning system, Edmentum, for credit completion. Each credit unit is made up of tutorials, mastery quizzes, and post-tests. Students work on their tutorials at home or in the computer lab. It is required that students take the mastery and post-tests supervised by teachers. The current schedule allows a variety of days and times during the week that teachers are available in person to work with students that need help in a subject area or to supervise tests. Up to three credits are assigned to a student at a time. Teachers verify and sign off on each completed credit. Office staff updates the transcript.

Once a student has completed all requirements to earn a district diploma, a final credit check verification is completed. The SoWashCo Student Information Department issues the diploma. Students have the option to participate in one of the graduation ceremonies.

4.6 Describe how volunteers are utilized and trained in the consortium.

Address the following:

- *What are common activities and roles for volunteers?*

- *How do volunteers enhance student success in the consortium?*
- *How are the consortium's volunteers oriented and trained? (Training requirements are outlined in the Volunteer Training Standards Policy.)*
- *What training is provided and/or required on an ongoing basis for volunteers, locally and/or through other entities? (Volunteers who have tutored for more than one year are required to participate in a minimum of 2 hours of professional development annually after initial training, as outlined in the Volunteer Training Standards Policy.)*

In the past five years, the Great Rivers Adult Education Consortium has had many unique volunteers. Volunteers are essential to students' success in school. Having volunteers in the classrooms opens the door to opportunity, not only for the students, but for the community as well. Providing a safe environment for students and community members to come together and learn about each other's culture, makes the student feel valued, and gives the volunteers value in making a difference in their community.

The volunteers serve ESL and ABE students one-on-one, to focus on extended learning material based on the curriculum. Teachers create beginner-level packets that focus on basic English skills such as the alphabet, basic numeracy, money, vocabulary, and personal information are provided to volunteers to work on with pre-lit students. The Individual Diagnostic Profiles (IDPs) referenced in section 4.1 are used to enforce the learning needs of the student. Citizenship preparation is another common topic for volunteers to work on with students.

Having volunteers in the program is an important part of student success. It gives students extra small group or individual opportunities to either work on concepts they are struggling with or expand on concepts that have come easy to them. The students recognize the help of the volunteers as crucial to their learning. Increased confidence and level gains are the direct result of having volunteers.

Upon completion of an orientation, the volunteer outreach coordinator assigns an initial training program or verifies supplemental education or work experience for

each candidate. Courses that are recommended for volunteer training include but are not limited to Literacy Minnesota's online training:

- Volunteer in the Adult ESL Classroom
- Tutoring Basics
- Citizenship Tutor Training

Once volunteers have completed their training, they are matched with teachers to provide specific orientation to the class and site where volunteers will work with students. The assigned teacher provides direct supervision and support to the volunteer. Opportunities that require volunteers to work outside of the teacher's supervision require additional training and certification or licensed teacher experience.