

The California Adult Education 2012-13 Innovation and Alternative Instructional Delivery Program

A Review



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This report is the twelfth in a series of research papers on the California Innovation and Alternative Instructional Delivery Program.ⁱ The purpose is to provide current information on the implementation of distance learning (DL) and offer comparative information on adult education DL in California.ⁱⁱ For ease of reading, the program will be referred to as “Innovation Programs” throughout this report.

Prior to the flex funding of adult education, data used to develop this annual report came from three data sources: Innovation Programs Application submitted by local adult schools; annual adult school program data reports; and data collected from local adult education provider agencies submitting data to the National Reporting System (NRS) to satisfy their data collection requirements in receiving funding from the Workforce Investment Act, Title II (WIA II). Since flex funding sets aside Education Code requirements for adult education and makes both the application and reporting requirements for participation in the Innovation Programs optional, this current report used information from the only existing data source available—WIA II NRS data collected and reported by CASAS.^{iii iv}

The Legislation

On July 1, 1993, AB 1943 became law (Education Code Section 52522), which allowed adult education programs the option, after approval by California Department of Education, to use up to five percent of their block entitlement for innovative techniques and nontraditional instructional methods with new technologies. According to the Education Code, participation in this option was permissive, by application only. Adult schools were required to submit an application and receive approval before program implementation. All proposed instruction was intended and designed for adult populations. All criteria specified in Education Code Section 52523 applied to all instruction provided. Expenditures used to implement this option were not to exceed five percent of each district's adult education block entitlement. The five percent, or any part thereof, was not additional funding for adult schools but were funds already allocated and contained within the district's State adult education block entitlement. Reimbursement for instructional expenses were to be computed on bases other than seat time accounting.

In 2008, legislation expanded the permission to use block entitlement funding from 5 to 15 percent for Innovation Programs, based on specific requirements. The resulting Innovation Programs continued to grow while overall adult education remained relatively static. However in the 2009-10 program year, flex funding was legislated for school districts in California, allowing funds allocated for adult education to be used for any purpose local school boards of education deemed necessary. School districts were no longer bound by the California Education Code to serve adult learners, and; State reporting requirements were no longer required. This action impacted the reported number of adult learners participating in the Innovation Programs during the following four years of flex funding implementation (2009-10 to the current reporting program year 2012-13), resulting in an 88 percent drop in unduplicated enrollment (70,472 in 2008-09 to 9,151 in 2012-13). Some school districts have persisted, continued, and even expanded their

delivery of instruction via DL despite the costs for data collection and reporting. Many others made major cuts to DL programs, in some cases eliminating them entirely. Still others ceased offering instruction to adults all together.

Under current conditions that include flexing of adult education state funding, the provisions and requirements of Education Code Section 52522 are optional for local agencies to follow and will remain so until flex funding is discontinued. There currently is no legislated floor or ceiling limit on the amount of budget local school districts could or should spend on adult education and its programs. Like DL, there was no requirement for adult schools participating in the Innovation Programs to submit an annual application nor annual evaluation. Adult schools have been encouraged to submit applications and maintain the same records as before because accountability would remain critical to the furtherance of DL in the future. Preparing applications and maintaining records incur costs that have deterred many adult schools from submitting applications and completing thorough accountability documentation. However, with state requirements optional through flex funding, the federal NRS reporting requirements continue to be in force for participating WIA II agencies. Data reported through the NRS was used in this report to document the current status of DL in California.

In prior years, the availability of the federal NRS data along with reports and applications required of state funded adult schools enabled more in depth descriptions and examinations of DL program characteristics, learner characteristics, learner progress, and learner outcomes. The current lack of a State requirement with supportive fiscal resources for systematic statewide adult student data collection and reporting has diminished the complexity and diversity of the educational gains adult learners are making through their involvement in a variety of adult education settings including the Innovation Programs of DL.

Innovation Programs participation was, and continues to be, available only to state-funded adult schools in the K12 system. In 2008-09 the federal Office of Vocational and Adult Education issued assessment requirements and guidelines for programs seeking WIA II reimbursement for learner gains in DL courses; California began requiring all WIA II funded agencies to submit an Innovation Programs application if any of their federal fund reimbursements were generated from use of DL instruction. To date no additional agencies have applied, since no additional funding was attached to DL.

Through seven years (2005-2012), this report compared and contrasted key outcome data between classroom learning, distance learning only (DL Only), and a blend of classroom and distance learning (DL Blended). The importance of DL Blended as an effective intervention whenever possible was clearly documented. This had major program implications at the state and national levels. When classroom and the Innovation Programs data were compared, it was clear that the DL Blended approach provided consistently superior results than either classroom or DL Only by themselves in increasing student learning outcomes. However, due to the inherent limitations associated with an operational change in the definition of Blended Learning along with the lag time of local adult schools implementing these changes and the procedures for collecting data migrating from student based to class based, the scope of this current report was extensively limited as well as the scope of data analyses and the resultant reporting.

In California, the adult education DL Blended model had a very specific description. It referred to adult schools with Innovation Programs that offered somewhat simultaneous classroom and DL courses in which learners could dual enroll. The key considerations were that each course must have its own approved course outline, course number, assigned instructor, separate student roster, and distinctive and different full-length course materials. The courses could share the

same course outline (A22), meaning the courses covered the same designated competencies, but the course materials must be different, and each course had its own course number.

N.B. Prior annual reports of the Innovation Programs charted enrollments of all state funded instructional programs from all adult school programs offering DL instruction as an option in addition to adult literacy providers receiving WIA II Federal Funding. Over the past 12 years, enrollment from state-funded-only adult schools accounted for an average of five percent, but ranged between four and nine percent. Data collection and reporting has become optional for state funded programs due to flex funding, and many adult schools have chosen not to collect and submit program data voluntarily. Only the federal program requires data collection and reporting from adult literacy providers participating in WIA II Funding. As a result, data sources used in this report came from only the adult schools that were part of the WIA II data base and its funded programs of English as a Second Language (ESL), Adult Basic Education (ABE), and Adult Secondary Education (ASE), exclusively. Historical and trend data have been adjusted in this report to reflect only the WIA II data for ESL, ABE, and ASE.

Changes in Participation Since 2000

Chart 1 displays the growth and change in the Innovation Programs from 2000-01 to 2012-13 when standardized student enrollment data was available. Since 2004-05, these student enrollments were also unduplicated counts. In 2012-13, there were 9151 learners participating in Innovation Programs and qualifying for inclusion in the National Reporting System (NRS) Tables for federal WIA II accountability. The chart displays the growth of DL over the initial nine years (2000 through 2008-09) as well as the dramatic drop in reported enrollments for the ensuing four years of flex funding (2009 through 2013). Overall, Chart 1 shows a steady growth

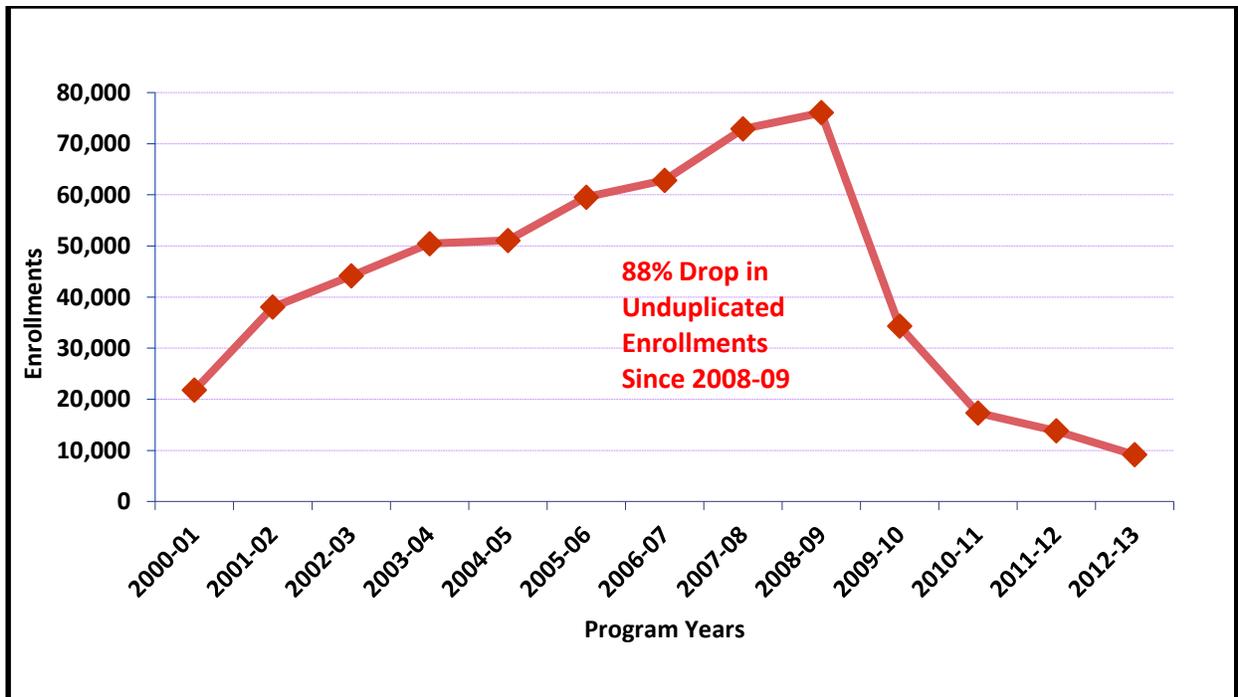


Chart 1: Enrollment/Participation of WIA II Learners in ABE, ESL, ASE Enrolled in the Innovation Programs from 2000 to 2013* showing a 4-year 88% enrollment loss from 2008-09. (Source: CASAS 2013) *Note: The data for 2012-13 only includes distance learners that qualified for Federal Table 4. Previous years used all distance learners reported in the adult school database.

in student participation in DL over a nine-year period until the implementation of flex funding that occurred in 2009-10. From 2000-01 to 2008-09 the program grew in enrollment 239 percent (20,812 to 70,472). With the implementation of flex funding, enrollment plummeted during the next four years to only 9,151 for an 88 percent drop in enrollment from the enrollment highpoint in program year 2008-09. This presented a denial of educational access for 66,910 least educated most in need learners and their families who were previously engaged in critical core curriculum programs of adult literacy that were assisting them to become more independent and more economically self-sufficient. Flex funding is currently extended through 2014-15.

Learner Progress or Status by Program

Learners are monitored on their progress throughout the time they are enrolled. Chart 2 displays the enrollment and course completion status in ABE, ESL, and ASE for learners participating in the Innovation Programs for 2012-13. Chart 2 displays the Innovation Programs status for 2012-13 of learners in ABE, ESL and ASE. By combining three categories of the percentages of learners: completing an instructional level and moving up into a higher instructional level; leaving program after completing an instructional level, and; progressing within but not completing the same instructional level, the degree of positive impact or attribution attained by each program area was documented. For ABE, the positive impact was 66.2 percent, for ESL it was 77.0 percent, and for ASE it was 72.3 percent.

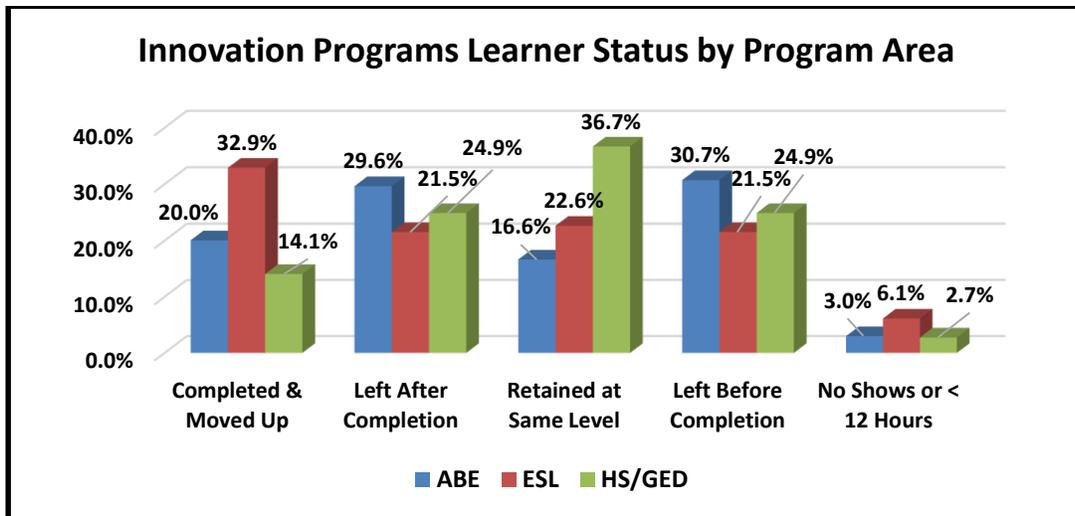


Chart 2: Innovation Program Learner Status by Program Area. (Source: CASAS 2013)

The following Charts 3 through 6 show the percent each of the three positive categories had over a five year period—overall, and individually for ABE, ASE, and ESL. Chart 3 displays these results combining all three program areas of ABE, ASE, and ESL since 2008-09 to 2012-2013. The first four years produced comparable results with roughly a fourth of the learners completing and moving up an instructional level, two-thirds were retained and progressing but not yet completing an instructional level, and the remaining less than ten percent leaving the program after completing an instructional level. However, in the current reporting year (2012-13), the results took a dramatic positive change from the 26 to 28 percent of learners completing and moving up to a higher instructional level attained during the first four years to 42.4 percent in 2012-13—a gain of 14 to 16 percent. Rather than the 6 to 10 percent leaving the program

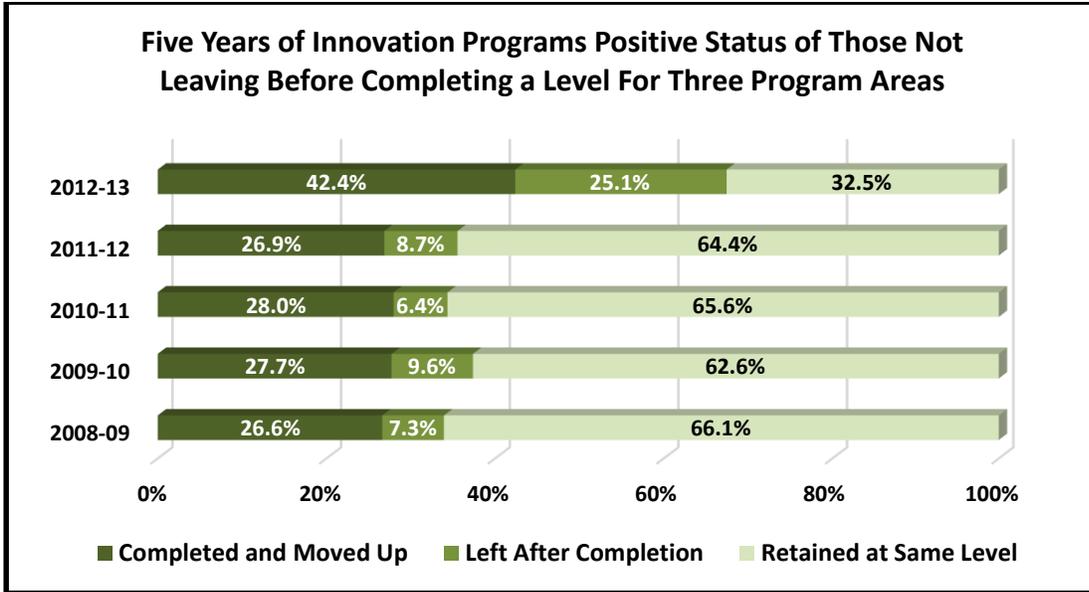


Chart 3: Five Years of Innovation Programs Learner Positive Status in ABE, ESL, and ASE of Those Not Leaving Program Before Completing or Progress in an Instructional Level—2008-2013. (Source: CASAS 2013)

after completing an instructional level, almost three times the proportion (25.1 compared to 6.4 to 9.6 percent) left the program after completing an instructional level—over a 15 percent gain. This gain could possibly allow other learners to access program left by the exiting learners. The proportion of learners progressing and remaining in the program was cut in half with 32.5 percent remaining in the program in 2012-13 versus the 62 to 66 percent experienced in the preceding four years—a gain of over 30 percent. The following three charts (4 through 6) display how these analyses play out in the three program areas of ABE, ASE, and ESL.

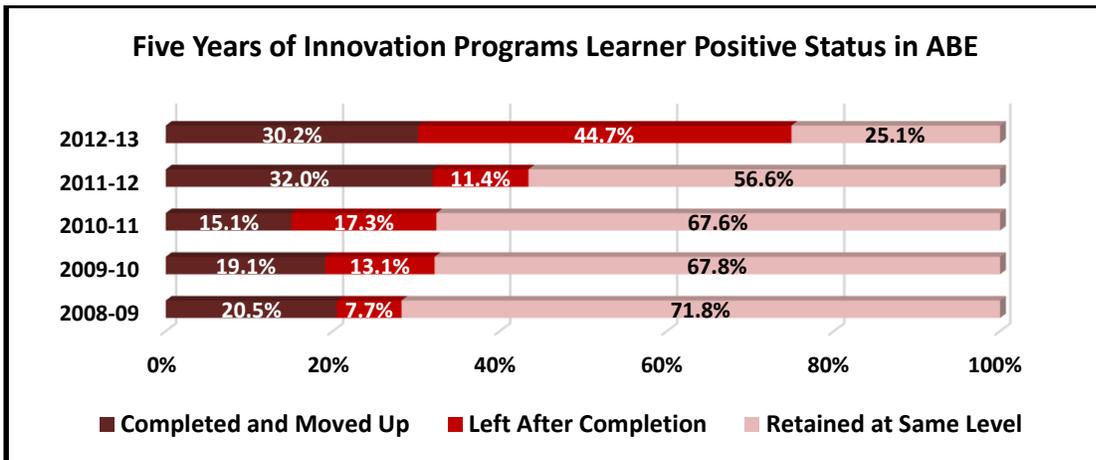


Chart 4: Five Years of Innovation Programs Learner Positive Status in ABE of Those Not Leaving Program Before Completing an Instructional Level—2008-2013. (Source: CASAS 2013)

Chart 4 shows the percent each of the three positive categories had over the last five years for ABE. During the first four years the majority (71.8 to 56.6 percent) of learners were retained and progressing in the same level but not yet completing an instructional level; however in 2012-13 the proportion dropped to 25.1 percent—learners were completing at least one instructional level and then either moving up or moving out. Those completing an instructional level and

moving up went from 15 to 20 percent for the first three years then to 32 percent in 2011-12 and decreasing slightly to 30.2 percent in 2012-13.

Chart 5 displays a more varied trend for learners in ASE than was shown for ABE learners. Over the past five years the majority (74.4 to 50.7 percent) of learners were retained and progressing in the same level, but not yet completing an instructional level with a proportion

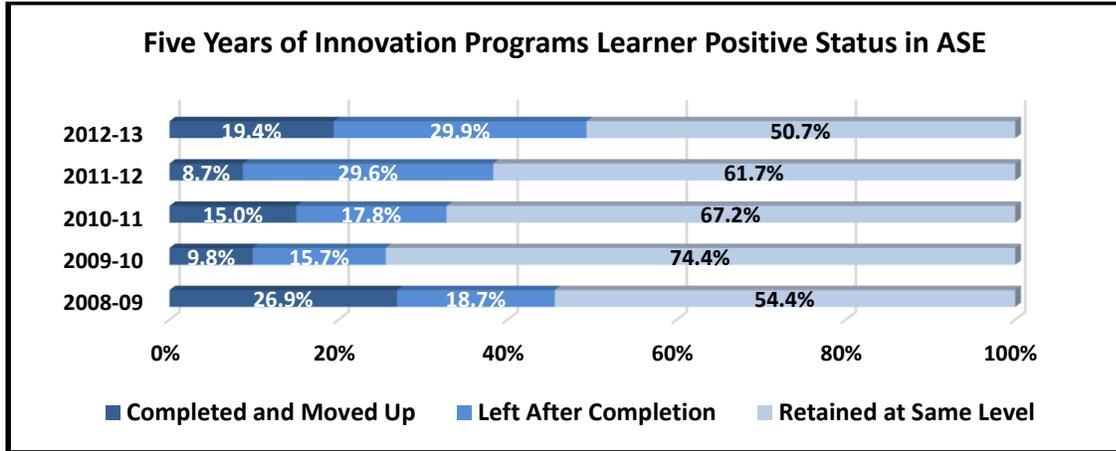


Chart 5: Five Years of Innovation Programs Learner Positive Status in ASE of Those Not Leaving Program Before Completing an Instructional Level—2008-2013. (Source: CASAS 2013)

twice that attained by ABE learners. A lower proportion of ASE learners completed and moved up an instructional level (8.7 to 26.9 percent) compared to ABE learners (15.1 to 30.2 percent). Many ASE learners (15.7 to 29.9 percent) leave the program after completing an instructional level—which can mean that by completing an instructional level they actually have graduated with a high school diploma or passed the GED.

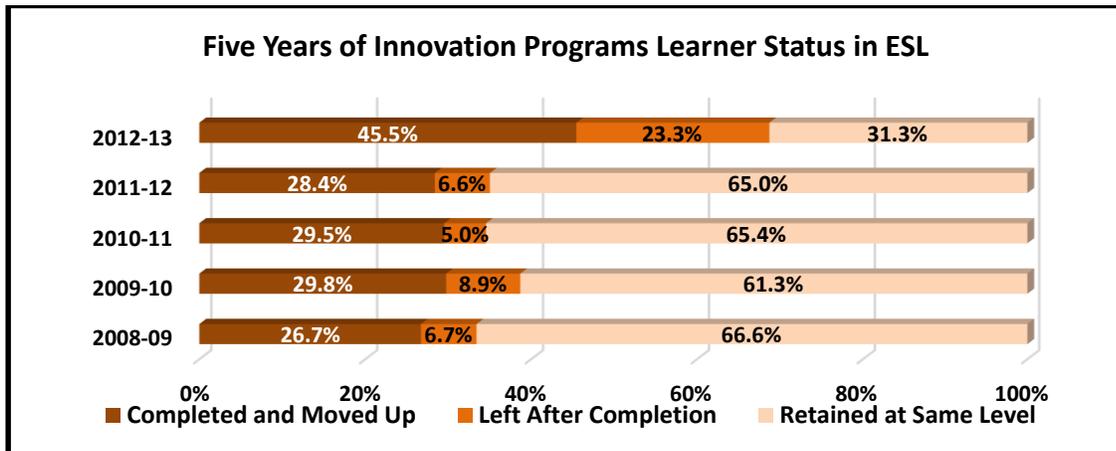


Chart 6: Five Years of Innovation Programs Learner Positive Status in ESL of Those Not Leaving Program Before Completing an Instructional Level—2008-2013. (Source: CASAS 2013)

As shown in Chart 6, during the first four years the categories of positive status for ESL were more consistent than either the ABE or ASE programs. Over a quarter of the ESL learners (26.7 to 29.8 percent) completed and moved up an instructional level; two-thirds (61.3 to 66.6 percent) were retained at the same level and were progressing but not yet completing an

instructional level, and; the remaining learners (5.0 to 8.9 percent) left the program after completing an instructional level. In the fifth year (2012-13), compared to the previous four years, a lower proportion of learners who were retained at the same level and were progressing, but not completing an instructional level was halved from an average of 64.5 for the prior four years to 31.3 percent in 2012-13. The proportion of ESL learners leaving the program after completing an instructional level tripled the average proportion of 6.8 percent from the previous four years to 23.3 percent in 2012-13.

Chart 7 displays the comparison of status performances of classroom learners with distance learners from an analysis of data derived from the 2012-13 NRS Table 4 data. On the positive side for distance learning, a greater proportion of their learners completed an instructional level (49.6 compared to 43.5 percent), or completed and moved up an instructional level (42.4 compared to 24.1 percent) than did learners having only classroom learning. A slightly greater proportion of classroom learners were retained at the same level and were progressing but not yet completing an instructional level (38.9 compared to 32.5 percent). A slightly greater percentage of distance learners (21.0 compared to 17.6 percent classroom learners) left the program before completing an instructional level.

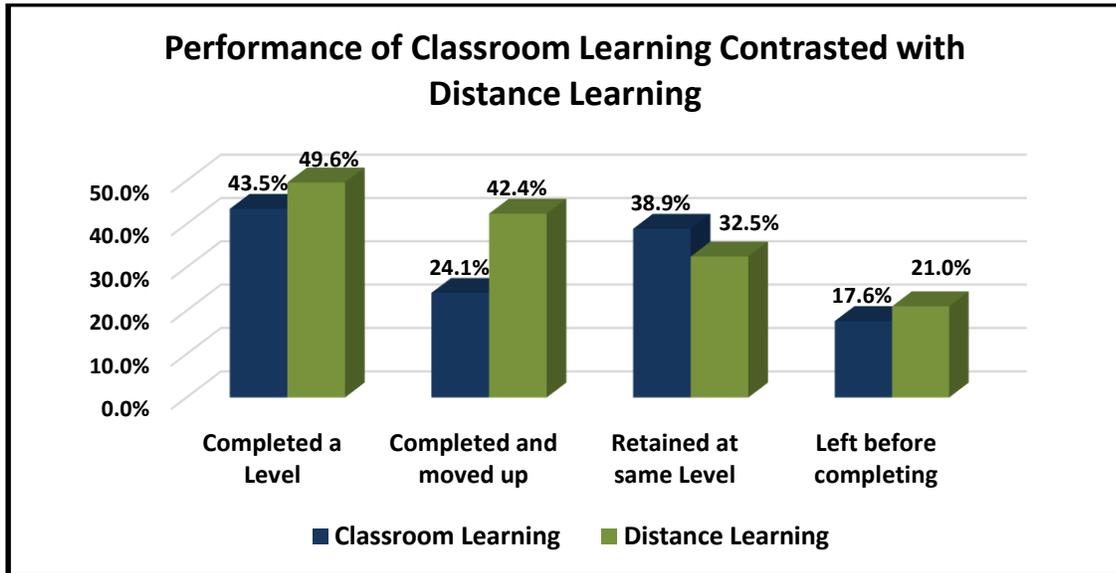


Chart 7: The Performance of Adult Learners in Classroom Learning Compared to Distance Learning—Derived from 2012-13 WIA II Federal Table 4 Data. (Source: CASAS 2013)

Conclusions

Over the last 19 years, Innovation Programs and DL have become well accepted and became vital parts of the delivery of adult basic education in California. Up to the implementation of flex funding, the program provided increased access to a variety of learners who otherwise would have a difficult time attending traditional in-classroom courses or who might not progress at the same rate in a traditional program. Local adult schools reported implementing fees, limiting access, extending DL Blended learning options to regular classrooms, and implementing online instruction as some of the means to maintain DL as a viable instructional modality option. Data from prior reports also showed as learners had more access to instructional resources to increase their time on learning activities their completion rates for instructional levels increased significantly.

In these prior reports, the role of DL Blended as an effective method to serve the adult basic education learner, especially the ESL learner, was firmly documented. The ability to examine and compare key outcome data provided a better view of how DL Only instruction performed in comparison to the classroom only and DL Blended learning. DL Blended learning instruction was more substantive and produced the best results.

Of special note, the DL Only modality held up very well compared with the other two modes of instruction when considering that “no instruction” would likely reveal a “zero” gain in reading and listening; whereas, learners in DL Only continued to make gains independent of face-to-face instructional intervention and sometimes comparable to the results attained through regular face-to-face classroom instruction. This finding has important statewide and national implications.

The Innovation Programs Initiative has continued to provide significant and meaningful alternatives for adults who:

- Need more practice of skills to achieve mastery
- Have work and family obligations that make attending a regular class time difficult
- Lack the full confidence to participate in a large classroom setting in front of other students
- Want the participation, assistance, and support of their families in their learning
- Live in locations without convenient access to traditional classes
- Live in areas where there is no space in traditional classes
- Learn more effectively from video, audio, and Web-based media when moving at their own pace
- Cannot access traditional classroom programs on a regular basis

When comparing classroom completion and persistence data from prior reports within the Innovation Programs, it is clear that the DL programs, especially DL Blended learning, were particularly successful in providing ESL learning opportunities. Local research data on learner persistence and retention supported these findings, and the availability of engaging life skills instructional materials was, in all likelihood, a key factor.

The current data and data from prior reports show that the Innovation Programs continues to meet the three crucial benefit-cost criteria often used to evaluate the utility of a program intervention. They are:

Effectiveness — CASAS pre- and post-test data indicated that ESL learners in the Innovation Programs, on average, showed substantial learning increases in reading and listening. Much of this was attributed to the results of the DL Blended learning model. The ABE/ASE learners showed learning gains consistent with historical data.

Efficiency — Participant and program cost data indicated that the Innovation Programs were cost effective. Although full participation and reporting has greatly attenuated over the past couple years, major adult schools continued to participate in the Innovation Programs despite State apportionment funding not being directed in support of these DL programs.

Equity — Reported years in school, primary language, reading and listening scores on entry, and ethnic data indicated that lower level, often hard-to-serve learners continued to be included as participants in the Innovation Programs.

The Innovation Programs have followed the same accountability requirements as classroom based apportionment programs supported by WIA II Federal Funds. Over the past eleven years the Innovation Programs have been successful in standardizing their reporting procedures, while still maintaining alternative instructional delivery methods. In this current year (2012-13) with flex funding—agencies were encouraged rather than required to track all learners in Innovation Programs using the accountability and tracking system developed and managed by CASAS. All programs were encouraged rather than required to use a standardized format for both program applications and annual evaluation. The mandated requirements resulted in more substantive and meaningful data. The implementation of flex funding for adult education has severely compromised this process.

CASAS pre- and post- reading and listening testing are not required for state programs unless those adult schools participate in the WIA II program. In the past, all state-funded adult schools were strongly encouraged to implement the monitoring of learner progress and standardized testing. In the past, coordinators of Innovation Programs have noted they collect more program documentation and learner progress information than do regular classroom programs. This rich data provided the most detailed comparative examination of adult basic education learning interventions that were available in the United States. It resulted from the implementation of a statewide data system, standardized testing and assessment, and the foresight of California legislators to permit school districts to use DL as an instructional intervention.

ⁱ The research papers can be found on the OTAN Web site at http://www.otan.us/browse/index.cfm?fuseaction=view_ft&catid=31483&recno=4478

ⁱⁱ In the fall of 2008 Assembly Bill 1163 was passed authorizing school districts to claim and expend up to five percent of their adult block entitlement for those innovation programs and more than five percent but no more than 15 percent of its adult block entitlement if the program is approved by the Superintendent under the bill. The bill requires a school district to maintain specified accountability mechanisms for those programs, including maintaining documentation of the hours of student attendance required for apportionment purposes.

The legislation amended Education Code Section 52522. It includes a specific definition of distance learning as follows:

“Distance learning” means instruction in which the pupil and instructor are in different locations and interact through the use of computer and communications technology. Distance learning may include video or audio instruction in which the primary mode of communication between pupil and instructor is instructional television, video, tele courses, or any other instruction that relies on computer or communications technology.”

The authorization began in January 2009, but there is little indication that it changed the nature of program participation for the 2008–09 fiscal year.

ⁱⁱⁱ The research and data collection for this paper are funded by Federal P.L., 105-220, Section 223, from the Adult Education Office, Coordinated Student Support and Adult Education 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.

^{iv} The Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) is a nonprofit organization that “partners with a national consortium of state and local agencies to provide valid competency and standards-based assessment systems, research services, and professional development.” See <http://www.casas.org/>.

