

“Stepping” Towards Managed Enrollment in Minnesota ABE

The purpose of this document is to start (or continue) discussions around managed enrollment in Minnesota ABE programs. The format is “Q and A,” where the questions and answers were developed from national and state adult literacy resources referenced at the end.

What is open enrollment?

“Open enrollment” policies allow students to enroll and drop out of classes at any time without serious consequences. ABE is the only educational system in the United States in which open enrollment is the norm. In the K-12 system, students have to meet attendance standards in order to pass to the next grade and eventually receive a high school diploma. In the post-secondary system, course adding and dropping is time-limited and tuition is not refundable beyond certain dates. In addition, regular attendance is often configured into final course grades.

Open enrollment is a major contributor to “attendance turbulence” (Sticht et al., 1998) in ABE that undermines classroom commitment and instruction. Because students are allowed to come and go, they do not feel a sense of obligation to the teacher or community with other students. In open enrollment classes, “butterfly instruction” (Strucker, 2006) is delivered individually and/or incidentally; teachers and/or tutors flutter from student to student checking work, but rarely have time to provide direct instruction and build relationships.

What is managed enrollment?

“Managed enrollment” is a set of policies providing more structure, sequence, and expectations for ABE students and teachers. New enrollment into ABE classes is managed by planned entry dates and regular attendance is expected for continued class participation. “Stepping” towards managed enrollment is NOT all or none change! ABE programs may manage enrollment for all classes or some classes, while maintaining alternatives such as drop-in classes, independent study, computer labs, and distance learning for students whose schedules are irregular or unpredictable.

Steps toward managed enrollment include:

1. Structure the school year into a sequence of sessions: 4 weeks, 6 weeks, 8 weeks, or other timelines tailored to program needs
2. Structure one-hour classes for selected Reading, Writing, and Math levels
3. Establish enrollment deadlines for sessions and classes
4. Create a waiting list for students who want to enroll in classes after the deadline
5. Offer alternatives for students on waiting lists or not able to attend on a regular basis
6. Establish a clear attendance policy that defines how many classes can be missed before being “dropped” from managed enrollment classes
7. Provide student orientation for managed enrollment classes to explain the purpose, schedule, attendance policies, and alternatives
8. Enforce the attendance policy by referring “dropped” students to open enrollment classes
9. Create a syllabus or class schedule of lessons and activities
10. Enforce the syllabus or class schedule despite initial attendance turbulence

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What is the research behind managed enrollment?

Research suggests that managed enrollment, which places a high priority on being in class, results in regular student attendance and leads to better retention. In addition, teachers are able to plan and present lessons sequentially, systematically, and provide enough practice for students to achieve mastery. The case for managed enrollment is especially strong for reading instruction. Reading research has determined that evidence-based reading instruction (or EBRI) needs to be assessment-driven, systematic, explicit, and provide multiple opportunities for practice, application, mastery, and monitoring. This cannot be accomplished effectively or efficiently with “butterfly instruction” amidst “attendance turbulence.”

How can my ABE program take steps towards managed enrollment?

1. Examine your program’s data for enrollment, attendance, retention, and level change patterns.
2. Identify problem areas in enrollment, attendance, retention, or level change.
3. Determine which managed enrollment steps may address these problem areas.
4. Survey teachers and students about possible managed enrollment steps.
5. Consider setting up managed enrollment for reading classes only.
6. Talk to teachers about how structure, sequence, and attendance policies may be challenging and disruptive at first, but more effective over time.
7. Talk to students about how structure, sequence, and required attendance will improve their skills over time.
8. Pilot a managed enrollment class for a short term (4 weeks) and then evaluate the challenges and outcomes before making changes or expanding.

References:

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