
Introduction

For decades, California adult education has been developing tools to address how changes in technology in turn change society and therefore learning processes. The focus has been in three areas: “(1) infrastructure—resources and access; (2) uses for technology—instructional, assessment, and student information systems; and (3) approaches to creating learning environments—distance learning, professional development, and communication” (Outreach and Technical Assistance Network 2001; West 2005). This expansion of distance learning has created education opportunities for nontraditional students who have experienced barriers in attending face-to-face classes, such as issues surrounding childcare or work obligations (Parsad and Lewis 2008).

In 2020, the California Adult Basic Education system (like all other education systems) implemented a rapid adoption of distance learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Though California adult education has a well-established history of conducting distance learning, the immediacy and scale of the undertaking to move most services online was unprecedented. In spring 2020, circumstances dictated the rapid development and implementation of distance programming. As the months of 2020 continued, much was learned and a greater depth of plan fullness was possible. The time horizon for action was short, but adult education policy makers and practitioners acted swiftly. The California Department of Education’s (CDE) Adult Education Office (AEO) moved quickly with state leadership partners Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS), California Adult Literacy Professional Development Project (CALPRO), and Outreach and Technical Assistance Network (OTAN) to put into place supports for adult educators. The AEO worked to ensure that all adult education programs had the ability to meet the education needs of adult students. This included the implementation of remote testing and the expansion of online delivery of instruction. Local programs rapidly scaled or implemented new distance-learning program options. This practice will contribute to a longer term understanding of what works and what more is needed.

This evidence to action brief presents recent research on distance learning in adult education and provides an important contemporaneous account of how California adult education rose to meet the challenge of continuing to serve adult learners during the pandemic. There is a limited body of research and evidence that tells us conclusively the impact and effectiveness of distance education on student learning within adult students. Nationally, the corpus of literature regarding distance learning and adult learners is somewhat sparse and studies tend to have small sample sizes. However, the varied available data does point toward similar findings in regards to the challenges. More will be understood over time, but this brief attempts to capture a snapshot of the current state of practice and evidence, including identified challenges and corresponding best practices.

Evidence Base

The available research and evidence emerging from current practices provide insight into how adult education can prepare for the future of online learning. Below we describe: the challenges of distance learning along with corresponding best practices, as well as the patterns of student enrollment and performance within distance-learning programs according to the data collected prior to 2020.

Challenges and Best Practices

Adult education providers were thrust in to almost 100% online delivery in March 2020. In “Adult education in times of the COVID-19 pandemic: Inequalities, changes, and resilience,” James and Thériault state that “in spite of global challenge of COVID-19, the adult learning sector, while facing particularly difficult financial conditions, continues to demonstrate its resilience by going above and
beyond to provide flexible, learner-centered solutions to keep adults in education and reach the most vulnerable groups” (2020, p.131). While there were barriers specific to distance learning, research has shown some practices that work to increase the effectiveness of distance learning with adult learners. Additionally, providers across California were able to find innovative solutions to address these challenges, and those approaches will be explored below in the Practice to Action section.

The first and most oft cited challenge is the lack of access to a reliable internet connection and functional devices, for students as well as instructors (Waller 2020). In May 2020, over 3,400 adult students in Washington D.C. were surveyed about their experience with distance learning. 30% of students replied that they had experienced issues with a lack of device and/or internet (Baird, 2020; Boeren et al. 2020). Schools have reported success with lending computers, tablets and hot spots to students. Instructors also cite that they have had success with sharing information with students about where to access free public internet or connect with low-cost broadband programs. (Beaunoyer et al. 2020; Belzer at al. 2020).

Second, limited digital literacy, for students as well as instructors, is also often cited as a challenge regarding distance learning. Within the DC survey of adult students, 64% of respondents cited learning challenges due to a lack of digital literacy (Baird, 2020). Students are often unable to navigate digital systems, for example, they may be unable to type, download files, check email, or log in to meeting rooms. Programs have cited that they have had success with creating videos for their students that demonstrate how to navigate the platforms used by the school. Programs have also set up basic computer skills workshops that help orient students to the tools they need and prepares them in how to study online. Instructors have reported that the switch to distance learning was the motivation that both they and the students needed to better prioritize digital literacy acquisition, and they are successfully doing so through video tutorials, workshops, and orientations (Belzer et al. 2020).

Third, the traditional barriers to education for adults are still a factor, even regarding distance learning. Students still have conflicts due to work schedules, childcare, family obligations, etc. Within the DC survey of adult students, 19% of respondents cite learning challenges due to distractions at home (Baird, 2020). While scheduling conflicts and distractions at home are challenging, they do not outweigh the benefits of schedule and location flexibility for distance learning students. Learners can choose a synchronous or asynchronous schedule and pace that is compatible with their work and family obligations, without the added time and expense of a commute. Additionally, students living in rural areas may have access to education that was previously geographically out of reach (Belzer et al. 2020; Waller 2020). Instructors noted that additional training in remote classroom management was very helpful in adapting to the different types of interruptions and distractions experienced in a distance learning class.

Fourth, remote recruitment, orientation, and assessment can also be a challenge of distance learning. Regarding remote recruitment, programs are having a lot of success with advertising on social media platforms, as well as in foreign language newspapers and radio stations. Regarding remote orientations, administrators and instructors report that they have had success with scheduling orientations in small groups of around five students, because large groups are too cumbersome and individual orientations require too many staff hours. Regarding remote assessment, this has become simpler throughout the past year has state regulations have opened up and test publishers have been providing remote assessment trainings. As with orientation, administrators and instructors report that they have success with scheduling assessments in small groups of around five students (Belzer et al. 2020).

Lastly, continuing to offer the support services often expected of adult education is a challenge regarding distance learning. Some adult students lack certain necessities, such as food and housing. In these cases, education may not be their highest priority. When classes
are face to face, instructors can direct students to a case manager or someone who can help address the problems the student is facing. During the onset of the pandemic, programs struggled to convert their support services to remote versions. Now, many programs are finding that many support services are easier to offer now that there is a remote option. Teachers have a digital platform to share information about food pantries, eviction protection, domestic violence resources, and any other services the students may need. Additionally, scheduling counseling for a student using a telehealth appointment may be more accessible for the student than when they were previously expected to attend in-person appointment, in which case scheduling and transportation may be a barrier. Programs are now offering counseling, tutoring, and other services through appointment, drop-in Zoom hours, and online chat. (Belzer et al. 2020; CCCCO 2017).

While the challenges are great, a wealth of benefits was also clearly revealed over the past year. James and Thériault state that “during this time of crisis, adult education is even more invaluable to the socioeconomic wellbeing and social mobility of communities worldwide. It can contribute to equipping citizens with life skills that are critical for improving and maintaining adults’ health and well-being during such challenging times” (2020, p.129). As the adult education field looks towards the future of distance education, it can build upon the following benefits. First, distance learning is an opportunity to build digital literacy. Digital literacy is much more than proficiency with foundational computer skills, but also the ability to use those skills creatively and fluently to better navigate their lives, learning, and the world (Jacobs & Castek 2018). Second, distance learning schedules are more flexible. In many ways, the flexibility of distance learning can help broaden the reach of adult learning. Learners can choose a synchronous or asynchronous schedule and pace that is compatible with their work and family obligations, without the added time and expense of a commute (Belzer at al. 2020; OECD 2020). Third, distance learning is more flexible in terms of location. For example, students living in rural areas may have access to education that was previously geographically out of reach. Lastly, distance education requires a smaller investment in infrastructure for school, potentially making it more cost-effective, and ideally those savings could be passed along to the students by way of lower tuition rates (Poulin Straut 2017; OECD 2020; Xu 2020).

Student Enrollment and Performance within Distance Learning

There is an evidence base with respect to the effects of distance learning on students, that can raise awareness about the unintended impacts that may exacerbate equity issues for different adult learner populations. The best practices above (and those described by practitioner in this paper) can prompt and support educators to consider new methods of distance learning delivery that increase equity and access. Without these best practices, researchers speculate that distance learning could have the potential to widen achievement gaps in education if current divides are not addressed. These divides primarily include: (1) race, (2) gender, (3) employment status, and (4) age. First, studies of distance learning have shown that students from historically disadvantaged groups (i.e., notably black and Hispanic students) do not perform as well in distance learning because of a variety of reasons, such as lack of access to technology and high-speed internet (Baldassare et al. 2013; Xu and Jaggars 2013). These students account for 72 percent of adult education students in California and 66 percent of adult education students nationally (NRS Data FY19). Second, in the United States generally, as well as in California specifically, 58 percent of adult education students are women (NRS Data FY19). Evidence suggests that women perform significantly better than men, with some studies suggesting that women also fare better in distance learning. Instructors anecdotally reported that women tended to be more skilled with self-study and scheduling, as well as with written and online communication. Men are statistically more likely to be employed full-time and experience barriers to learning because of work obligations (Xu and Jaggars 2013). In California, 37 percent of students are employed, 26 percent are not in the labor market, and 37 percent are unemployed (the numbers are similar nationally, with 40 percent employed, 26 percent not in the labor market, and 34 percent unemployed) (NRS Data FY19). Third, studies have shown that full-time students fare better academically and remain in their distance-learning programs longer than part-time students, which may be because full-time students are less likely to have work and child-care obligations that present barriers to their learning (Xu and Jaggars 2013). Fourth, students who are already comfortable with technology are more adaptable to distance learning than those who are not, and studies have found a strong correlation between age and comfort with technology (Stewart, Bachman, and Johnson, 2010). Nationally, 27 percent of students are 16 to 24 years old,
California Context

State-level Actions

California’s decades-long investment in distance- and blended-learning practices have resulted in an array of models that range from the distribution of paper packets and instructional DVDs to fully online curriculum offerings, where learners may complete their learning at any time and at any pace. This prior-sustained investment and experience enabled California adult education to move expeditiously to offer distance learning on the scale needed to continue services. In the early months of the pandemic, CDE issued two surveys to programs: the Emergency Situation Impact Survey and the COVID-19 Critical Event Survey. The purpose of each was to understand: (1) the impact and disruption on normal operations such as registration and enrollment, testing, fiscal and data management, and partnerships; (2) if the adult education agency had plans to offer remote learning options for students; (3) what education technology (edtech) tools the agency had available to use in this effort; (4) which instructional programs (in the agency’s estimation) were better suited to remote learning; and (5) what were the greatest challenges and what assistance could the CDE offer agencies during this time.

CDE and California Adult Education Program (CAEP) through its leadership projects (OTAN, CASAS, CALPRO, and CAEP—Technical Assistance Project) focused on those survey responses that it felt it could best address in the rapid shift to online operations. This included a COVID-19 Field Support web page (https://otan.us/resources/covid-19-field-support/). OTAN—the long-time provider of technology and distance-learning professional development—focused on addressing online instructional resources, technology training, and how to serve the most at-risk students, such as English language learners and students who lacked internet access, devices, and digital proficiency. CALPRO and CASAS adapted all professional learning to be offered at a distance. With CASAS support, EL Civics funded agencies began remote administration COAAP assessments as well as the two Citizenship assessments. While the support offered at the state level by leadership projects shifted the impact of the pandemic on adult education direct service providers and programs was significant.

According to California adult education program data collected by CASAS, overall enrollment decreased by 12 percent in program year (PY) 2019–20 compared with PY 2018–19. However, enrollment in distance-learning programs increased substantially: from 10,754 in PY
2018–19 to 72,483 in PY 2019–20. In PY 2019–20, even though distance-learning enrollment increased almost sevenfold, programs in California still maintained their high measurable skill gains (MSG) for distance-learning students. MSG can be demonstrated by showing an educational functioning level gain through pre and post-tests, awarding high school credit or enrolling in postsecondary education. In PY 2019–20, 45.62 percent of distance education students achieved an MSGs compared to 38.72 percent for all participants, according to CASAS table 4C. The MSG achieved by distance learning students in PY 2019-20 (with almost seven times as many students) is comparable to fiscal year 2018–19, when 51.96 percent of distance-learning students achieved an MSG. These data points illustrate a dramatic shift in practice that achieved a level of success under difficult circumstances. In the next sections, practitioners from the field describe how they were able to maintain this level of success under challenging conditions.

**Program Actions**

Staff from five local adult education agencies across California and the Office of Correctional Education at the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) shared their experience with distance learning for the purposes of this brief.

Kristi Reyes, a noncredit English Second Language (ESL) instructor from MiraCosta College, shared that the college has been offering distance-learning classes since 2015. MiraCosta serves over 2,000 students annually. Their hybrid classes used a flipped model in which students completed asynchronous prework in the learning management system, Canvas, and then attended in-person classes with instructors. In March 2020, MiraCosta was on spring break when the state of California entered a safer-at-home plan. The college delayed resuming credit and noncredit classes by an extra week to provide trainings for instructors on distance learning, Zoom, and Canvas. To address the unique needs of noncredit classes, ESL program, faculty who were certified in online teaching developed an optional professional development program called NOTE (Noncredit Online Teaching Excellence). NOTE adapted the general distance-learning training to adult education needs by including issues of literacy, accessibility, and equity.

Thoibi Rublaitus, the principal of Corona-Norco Adult School (CNAS), shared that before the pandemic, all their course offerings were either face-to-face or used self-study models. CNAS serves around 3,000 students annually. In March 2020, CNAS had a team of three teachers finishing up the two-year Digital Leadership Academy (DLAC) facilitated by OTAN. The school was also in the pilot phase of a blended-learning model for ABE classes using Canvas. The DLAC team helped the school transition to distance-learning mode in two weeks by providing rigorous training for the instructional team via Zoom. Each of the three team members mentored 7 to 10 teachers. They rapidly transitioned all ESL and career and technical education (CTE) classes to Google Classrooms, ABE classes to Canvas, and Adult Secondary Education (ASE) classes to the online curriculum program, Edgenuity. Teachers in all three programs continued to have monthly professional learning communities (PLCs) to discuss best practices and share tech tools.

Lila Young and Courtney McMahon, of Fresno’s Clovis Adult Education (CAE), report that their school also shifted to distance learning quickly in March 2020. Their ESL program is run through daily Zoom meetings, their High School Equivalency program continues with Edgenuity, and their CTE program is run through the learning management system, Moodle. All their distance-learning courses also include asking students to come to campus to pick up homework packets from their instructors and return them for review.

Stephanie Kriebel, Coordinator of Mateo Adult & Career Education (SMACE), reports that the school works with partners to offer hybrid distance-learning courses in Health Careers, Business Office Technology, and Professional Communications. Career Training Solutions (CTS) is
their partner for the Pharmacy Tech and Clinical Medical Assistant courses, and they use the iCEV platform to offer industry certifications in Business Office Technology and Professional Communications. They note that CTS and iCEV platforms offer easy-to-use learning management systems for both students and instructors.

Theresa Petersen and Yecsenia Lorenzo, of Hacienda La Puente Adult Education (HLPAE), report that since March 2020, their ESL, ABE, ASE, Citizenship, Parent Education, and Integrated Education and Training (IET) courses have been delivered 100 percent online through both synchronous and asynchronous instruction. HLPAE serves more than 15,000 adult students annually.

Shannon Swain, Martin Griffin, and Hillary Iserman, who oversee ABE services for CDCR, shared their efforts to conduct both instruction and professional learning to continue services in California’s prison-based adult education schools. In 2020 approximately 1,900 teachers provided ABE, ASE, CTE, Transitions, Library and Law Library, College Correspondence, and Student Support Services via independent study to approximately 45,000 enrolled students. Prior to the pandemic, PLC implementation had been a major districtwide initiative. To continue to support the learner population, CDCR enacted online support through teleworking and virtual platforms. Working regionally, academic coaches were able to identify teachers who could best model the PLC process and could convey that knowledge to their peers at multiple sites. Thus, the academic coaches became facilitators of the exchange of expertise. The virtual PLC support provided a means to maintain a connection with other education professionals during the isolation of telework. This enabled professional development to be further discussed in PLCs and for teachers to share effective instructional practices that had been proven to work in correctional education. As peers shared successful practices, other teachers emulated their practices. Many teachers have shared that this socio-emotional support from their peers was the most effective aspect of virtual PLCs. In CDCR programs, instruction is tailored to meet individualized learning needs of students, aligned to the college and career readiness content standards. During the pandemic, schools recorded video-based lessons in English language arts and mathematics that were placed on the institutional televisions in offender housing units to supplement learning.

Challenges and Practices that Worked

First, despite the efforts to quickly provide distance-learning trainings for adult education instructors across all six programs, challenges remained and there was a common thread throughout each program. The lack of access to reliable internet connections and functional devices, as well as the limited digital literacy of students, were cited as the biggest challenges. Reyes reports that at MiraCosta College a critical barrier was access to reliable technology and the requisite ability to use it to join in class sessions. Therefore the college used The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds to purchase laptops and hotspots to loan to students. However, for the beginning level ESL students, using the technology was the biggest challenge because of their varied levels of literacy, English language literacy, and digital literacy.

CNAS also noted that this challenge led to a sudden loss of students. The beginning level ESL students were especially hit hard as they could not switch to the distance-learning model. By October 2020, CNAS used leftover WIOA funds and CARES Act funds, provided by the county supervisors’ offices through Workforce Development Board, to procure devices and hotspots for students. The distribution of devices led CNAS to learn the importance of onboarding students during distribution. The school has now handed out almost 200 devices with hotspots to students who needed devices.

CAE also states that not all of their students have access to wireless internet; and those that do may have weak wireless connections, while network-saturated bandwidths drop students from Zoom meetings and prevent them from uploading assignments. Kriebel states SMACE discovered that basic training in how to study online, the platforms, and interact over Zoom are necessary at the beginning of distance learning for students to be successful. Without this preparation at the beginning of each course, students struggle and then fall behind simply because they are challenged by the technology. To meet this need, SMACE offers its students and staff computer basics training and support at both individual and group levels.

Second, the traditional barriers to education for adults are still a factor, even regarding distance learning. Students still have conflicts from work schedules, childcare, family obligations, etc. CNAS reports that other factors contributed to the loss of ESL students, the most significant being that 62 percent of CNAS students are
parents, and many had to become de facto teachers for their children. CAE reports that another issue is students’ distractions in the home, where children or pets may interrupt Zoom meetings and work, making overtime a requirement, not an option. Professional development on distance-learning for teachers, specific to virtual classroom management helped to better prepare instructors to alleviate those distractions.

Third, SMACE describes the additional challenge that some types of learning are difficult to make virtual, and most of their CTE programs require skills labs that are typically in-person to provide experiential learning. HLPAE reports that they have a hybrid approach for career and trades programs, utilizing both distance learning and in-person instruction and opportunities for hands-on learning to meet specific program requirements and to prepare students safely and appropriately for their careers of choice. This hybrid approach was a success, as students were both afforded more flexibility in distance learning and were able to take advantage of hands-on training.

Fourth, remote recruitment, orientation, and assessment remain a challenge across programs. At MiraCosta College, program enrollment dropped overall, but instructors found practices that helped orient new students and retain existing students. Instructors have created welcome videos to include in the emails they send out. They have also created video tutorials showing students how to use Canvas.

Last, continuing to offer student support services has been a challenge of distance learning. Student support services at MiraCosta College, which include counseling, tutoring, library, and a writing center, were adapted and made available through appointment, drop-in Zoom hours, and online chat.

Impacts of Digital Learning Approach

The programs shared their evidence of the effects of virtual instruction on student enrollment, persistence, retention and testing. Each program reported that the flexibility of distance learning in terms of schedule and location has greatly benefited their students. At the time of this writing, MiraCosta College was running a full schedule of classes, conducted synchronously in Zoom with additional asynchronous work in Canvas. All classes have more than 10 students enrolled, and many have maintained enrollment up to the pre-pandemic class caps of 24 students to 30 students. Reyes notes that students who had started and stopped their program over the years because of work and child-care scheduling conflicts were better able to participate and keep up in their ESL classes because they could view recordings of class meetings they had missed and could follow the classwork in Canvas.

Remote testing has continued to be a challenge, but Reyes notes that MiraCosta College finds evidence of student learning and the program’s success by student retention rates. In fall 2019, the average retention in managed enrollment classes was 86 percent. In the term that ran from January 2020 to March in 2020, the retention was 85% percent. In the term immediately following the transition to remote instruction, the program’s retention rate was 94 percent. The staff credits the flexibility of online learning for its increased retention rates. The conveniences of not having to drive or take a bus to class, not needing to secure childcare, and being able to do classwork in Canvas or view Zoom recordings of class meetings when they have time and at their own pace all contributes to retaining students. A researcher from the MiraCosta’s Office of Research, Planning, and Instructional Effectiveness conducted a survey of Continuing Education students in fall 2020. There were 322 respondents from the ESL program, and 70 percent indicated that they strongly or somewhat strongly agreed that taking classes online instead of in-person was more convenient. The percentage of respondents who reported that they would prefer to take classes online in the future instead of in an actual classroom location was 57 percent. Last, 87 percent indicated they prefer to continue synchronous classes in Zoom rather than asynchronous coursework in Canvas.
CNAS has observed that, although enrollment numbers are down, the impact of distance learning on student learning and persistence has shown substantial growth. Most students have learned digital literacy and how to navigate the internet. The program coordinators started with the Civic Objectives and Additional Assessment Plans on digital literacy and online safety for all ESL students, which helped students learn relevant and meaningful content, thus assisting them to gain Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education outcomes. The administering of the English Language Civics tests remotely also helped teachers and students measure their learning.

Plans and Advice

The following programs shared their plans to build distance- and blended-learning models, and the advice they would give other programs. MiraCosta will continue offering hybrid and fully online courses, as they expect moving forward there will be an increased demand for a variety of formats. Reyes believes that students and teachers have learned that they can do online education, and teachers need to continue to find ways to re-create all the effective, research-proven best practices for in-person instruction in the online environment.

Rublaitus reports that CNAS is committed to developing an action plan that provides learner-oriented alternative modes of learning. CNAS is in the process of training a group of teachers who would assess students’ digital literacy levels and offer resources that prepare students enrolled in ESL and ABE classes for digital competence. The ABE/ASE program is piloting a Steps to Success class that will help students onboard their online courses. Students will learn on-time management, problem-solving, and SMART goal-setting strategies when they embark on online classes. Rublaitus states that her advice for other programs is:

Do not hesitate to invest in your teachers and staff with professional development. Investing two weeks of professional development time for all teachers before pivoting to distance learning and monthly PLCs have helped teachers and staff feel comfortable, connected, and collaborative, and that they are growing.

Young and McMahon of CAE also emphasize the importance of professional development for teachers in distance learning. HLPAD plans to continue to build out its distance- and blended-learning offerings based on community and student needs. One such need and current focus is building a technology-orientation class on a distance-learning platform for new students who are registering for classes. The distance-learning technology orientation class will support students in their online learning success. Students learn technology skills that are specific and pertinent for their learning program and for job skills. The goal of the orientation is to encourage students, improve confidence, and help new students adapt to the technology programs. Petersen and Lorenzo state:

The mode of delivery in much of our programs may have changed due to current needs, but the core elements and purpose remain the same. Our school’s success in integrating technology in our classrooms has been founded in establishing a culture of innovation, team effort and collaboration. Continued innovation and building of our distance learning programs will provide students with not only better and more dynamic programming but allow students greater success.

Looking to the Future

At the time of this writing, California adult education programs are operating under stay-at-home orders and are still utilizing distance learning. What remains to be seen as PY 2020–21 concludes and PY 2021–22 begins is to what extent the shift to distance or blended formats is durable and permanent. While the challenges are great, a wealth of benefits was also clearly revealed over the past year. There will be an expanding body of work and literature that captures the challenges, successes, and effects of the mass trial of distance learning. Educators have gained significant experience and been able to improve and refine practices during the extended stay-at-home period. California has invested through its leadership projects in professional learning to support educators in offering effective distance learning. Programs have made investments in the necessary infrastructure and processes to offer distance education on a large scale. One of the lasting impacts of the pandemic on education will be the extent to which blended- and distance-learning models will be considered largely viable as a primary program model and instructional mode. Some of the critical questions that will need to be studied and explored through data, research, and practitioner voices in the years to come include:
1. What is the effectiveness and impact of distance- and blended-learning education on student achievement, and for which populations of students?

2. To what extent does distance- and blended-learning education improve or exacerbate issues of equity and access for learners?

3. What differentiation and customization is needed for distance learning to be effective with special and at-risk population (e.g., English language learners, students with low literacy, the incarcerated)?

4. What differentiation and customization is needed for program models such as IET?

5. What professional learning is necessary to sustain an ongoing, large-scale distance-learning endeavor?

6. What state level policies and investments enable sustain an ongoing, large-scale distance-learning endeavor?

As adult education looks toward the future of distance education, it can build on the many benefits it can offer students. First, distance learning is an opportunity to build digital literacy. Second, distance-learning schedules are more flexible. In many ways, this flexibility has the potential to increase access for learners. Learners can choose a synchronous or asynchronous schedule and pace that is compatible with their work and family obligations, without the added time and expense of a commute. Third, distance learning is more flexible in terms of location. Students living in rural areas may have access to education that was previously geographically out of reach. Last, distance education requires a smaller investment in infrastructure for schools, potentially making it more cost-effective. As adult education continues to address the identified challenges of distance learning in innovative ways, as well as to harness the ample benefits, the future is full of potential for students. Reyes states:

"The pandemic has impelled us to begin to rethink how we will use technology to deliver instruction more often and better as the digital divide hopefully narrows for our adult students in the post-pandemic years to come."

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