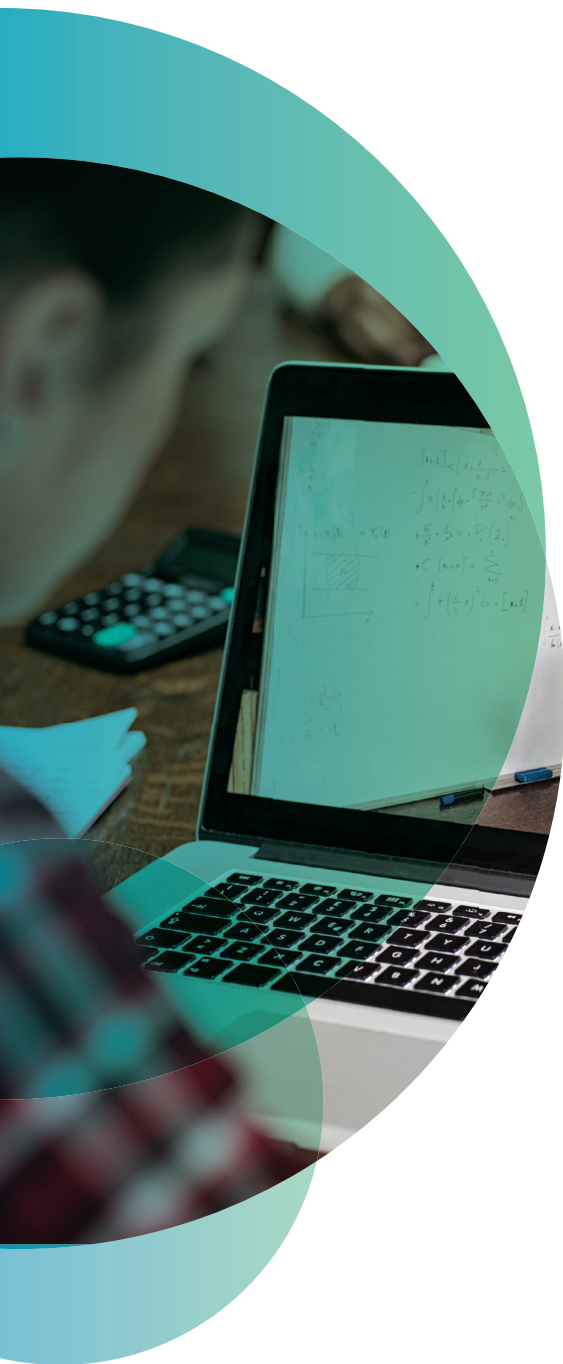


The CESBA Adult & Continuing Education Study: A Report for the Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education

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THE EASTERN REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP
FOR ADULT EDUCATION
(EASTERN RPAE)



Introduction

A&CE programs have the power to transform individual lives, families, communities, and society at large by equipping adults with the skills they need for success in life, work, and further education. In the spring of 2021, CESBA commissioned Drs. Godden and Youmans to conduct a province-wide study of adult and continuing education (A&CE) in Ontario to investigate how A&CE supports the learning and achievement of adult learners and how A&CE programs transitioned to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The two overarching research questions for the study were:

- 1) How are adult learners supported in their learning and achievement (e.g., career pathway planning, PLAR, etc.) through A&CE credit programs across the province?
- 2) How do A&CE educators continue to respond to the challenges of delivering online programming during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Given that all eight school boards with A&CE programs in the Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education (ERPAE) agreed to participate in the study, they received CESBA funding for a regional report and tipsheets that highlight main study findings. This report presents CESBA A&CE study findings for the eastern Ontario region, and builds on that foundational work of the Adult Education Strategy (AES) that the ERPAE participated in between 2016-2019. In this report, information is provided about how the Eastern Partnership for Adult Education (ERPAE) supports adult learners in their A&CE programs and how it responded to the challenges of transitioning to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic is presented. The report concludes with a discussion about key findings and their implications. We hope information in this report will be used to strengthen adult and continuing education programs in the eastern Ontario region, across the province, and beyond.

BACKGROUND

In Fall 2013, stakeholders across Ontario came together to discuss the skills and knowledge Ontario learners would need to possess for successful lives and future employment. Achieving Excellence was the ensuing Ministry document that captured public feedback in the form of a renewed vision and goals for K-12 Education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Achieving Excellence included a statement outlining the need to improve the existing Adult Education system to ensure that “the Adult Education system better supports adult learners in their efforts to finish high school and successfully transition to postsecondary education, training or the workplace” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 13). In response, the Ontario Ministry of Education established an Adult Education Strategy (AES) with three main objectives:

- Improve adult learner outcomes by promoting system innovation and accessibility through collaboration/ coordination and partnerships among school boards at the regional level.
- Better support the provision of EDU adult and continuing education programs and services that are flexible and responsive to learner needs.
- Improve the transitions for learners between EDU adult credit programs and programs funded by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD) and Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI).

The Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education was one of seven Regional Partnerships for Adult Education (RPAEs), which were tasked with promoting a regional and more collaborative approach among school boards to improve adult learner outcomes. Each partnership received provisional funds from the Province to support the implementation of the AES between 2016 to 2019, the project being divided into three distinct phases:

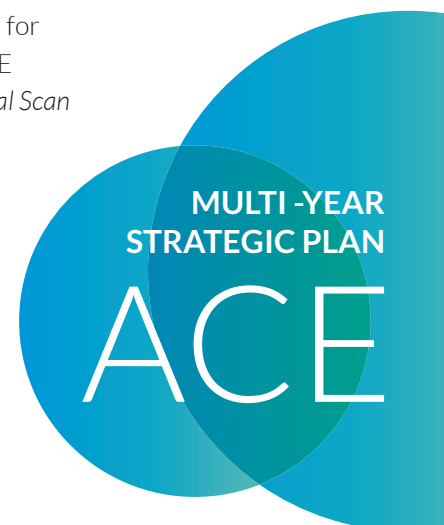
AWARENESS

During the first year (2016-2017) of the three- year project, the ERPAE completed the following deliverables.

PHASE ONE, PART A: Established a collaborative network of school boards within the region that acted to coordinate its member activities that were related to the AES.

PHASE ONE, PART B: Conducted a regional environmental scan that identified opportunities for innovation and collaboration, as well as programming and service gaps, in the delivery of A&CE programs and services. The results of this work are documented in the report *An Environmental Scan of Adult and Continuing Education in the Eastern Ontario Region* (Youmans et al., 2017a).

PHASE ONE, PART C: Developed a multi-year regional strategic plan based on the outcomes of the regional environmental scan, to direct activities that promoted progress in the four key areas in scope, with key milestones and provision for ongoing evaluation and monitoring. Full details were documented in the ERPAE Strategic Plan 2017-2019 (Youmans et al., 2017b).



CAPACITY BUILDING

The Phase Two (2017-2018): Capacity Building stage of the AES was purposefully structured to build upon the collaboration that had been built in Phase One (2016-2017) of the project. The overarching goal of Phase Two was to provide a structure and series of facilitative processes and activities that would support the ERPAE group members by building their capacity in preparation for the Phase Three (2018-2019) Execution of the project, the final implementation of a series of innovative best practices. In order to achieve this, it was important to provide a setting that facilitated both capacity building and professional development activities for all ERPAE group members. The results of this process were documented in the report Phase Two Capacity Building - Affirming, Learning, and Yearning: Sharing and Developing Innovative Best Practices Within and Outside of the ERPAE Region (Godden et al., 2018).

EXECUTION

The Phase 3 (2018-2019) Execution stage of the AES was purposefully structured to build upon the collaboration that had been built in Phase 2 (2017-2018) of the project. The overarching goal for the final year of this project was to provide a series of facilitative processes to support ERPAE group members as they executed their innovative projects. The eight participating district school board members of the ERPAE undertook Innovative Best Practice Pilot Projects in relation to the four AES mandate areas, with all projects culminating in written case studies showcased in the Phase Three report, Execution: Case Studies of Innovative Adult Education projects in the Eastern Ontario Region (Godden & Youmans, 2019).

THE FRAMEWORK FOR OPTIMIZING A&CE

Upon completion of the AES, Godden & Youmans (2020) produced a framework for A&CE grounded in the work of the ERPAE as they had enacted the AES. The resulting Framework for Optimizing Adult and Continuing Education highlighted six key principles that were deemed essential for optimizing A&CE programs, including:

- Raising awareness about A&CE
- Being responsive to adult learner needs
- Offering flexibility for adult learners
- Creating a culture of care
- Developing and sustaining community partnerships
- Fostering innovation

It was hoped that this framework would support A&CE staff as they work to continue to support the success of adult learners across the ERPAE region. To this end, the framework included a series of tips, promising practices, and prompts to help educators and administrators support the success of adult learners.

2021 CESBA Adult and Continuing Education Study: A Two-Part Study

CONTEXT

There were two parts to the CESBA A&CE study. The first part explored how adult and continuing education meets the needs of adult learners in the province. As graduation rates in Ontario continue to climb in the K-12 system, there may be fewer Ontarians without a high school diploma (OSSD). However, the decrease in adults without an Ontario diploma may be offset by an increase in the adult immigration population. These newer cohorts may present, with more challenging barriers.

The second part examined challenges the COVID-19 pandemic created for A&CE program delivery. As A&CE teachers transitioned to online and/or blended delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers delivering credit and non-credit courses were required to make some significant shifts to their teaching practices that will have impacted many adult learners. This unique situation provided an opportunity to investigate challenges faced, and the adaptations and shifts in pedagogical practices that have been developed to respond to the substantially different adult learning environment.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the first part of the CESBA A&CE study was to examine how adult learners are supported in their learning and achievement through A&CE programs across the province. This information can be used to identify best practices for supporting adult learners, potential areas for improving adult learner support, and innovative practices for promoting adult learner support and achievement. Topics included: the delivery of PLAR, adult learner supports and enablers, adult learner challenges and barriers, and innovative practices for supporting adult learner success.

The second part of the CESBA A&CE study investigated how A&CE teachers and staff had responded to the need to change the delivery of their courses to an online environment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This investigation provides foundational work for future development of appropriate and evidence-based contingency plans for (a) any such future on-site school disruptions, and (b) development of a range of promising practice information-sheets ensuring A&CE teachers that are responsible for working with adult learners enrolled in credit programs are adequately supported to effectively and successfully teach and support their learners through such disruptions.

METHOD

Drs. Youmans and Godden collected data from the eight participating district school boards within the ERPAE. Appropriate ethics clearance was obtained prior to data collection. Data was collected from A&CE students, teachers, instructors, guidance counsellors, and administrators via online surveys. Three separate online surveys were developed and distributed

for the purpose of the CESBA A&CE study: one for students; one for teachers, instructors, and guidance counsellors; and one for administrators. All three surveys included closed-ended questions and open-response questions about A&CE supports and how A&CE programs responded during the COVID-19 pandemic. Quantitative data analysis was conducted on

closed-ended responses using SPSS, a statistics software program. Open-ended responses were coded using thematic qualitative analysis. Study results for each of the three participants groups are presented, beginning with students, followed by teachers, and ending with administrators.

FINDINGS: STUDENTS

110 students in eastern Ontario responded to the A&CE CESBA study survey. Students' ages ranged from 19 to 71, with a median age of 29 years old. Sixty-five percent of students were female, 32% were male, and 3% preferred not to disclose information about their biological sex. Twenty-six percent of students were newcomers to Canada and 37% were immigrants. Twenty-six percent of students identified as a racial minority. Six percent of students identified as being First Nations, Metis, or Inuit.

Students were asked why they were participating in A&CE (see Table 1). Over half of students **(56%)** indicated that they were completing their high school diploma. Twenty-nine percent of students were taking part in A&CE to upgrade their high school courses so they could pursue post-secondary education, 8% were training for a new career, and 7% were re-doing their credentials in the Canadian education system.

Table 1. Student Responses About Why They Are Participating in A&CE

Reason for Participating in A&CE	% of Students
Re-doing high school credentials in the Canadian education system	7%
Retraining for a new career	8%
To complete my high school diploma	56%
To upgrade high school courses so I can pursue post-secondary education	29%

Students' explanations about what helped them decide to join A&CE were in line with their reasons for participating in A&CE. The four main motivating factors that students identified were: desire to obtain a high school diploma (13 students), pursuit of post-secondary education (13 students), pursuit of a career (11 students), and to find decent employment (9 students). Samples of student responses for each of these motivating factors are identified to the panel on the right.

Desire to obtain high school diploma

"I joined because I've wanted to get my high school diploma for many years."

Pursuit of post-secondary education

"I am looking to go into nursing at Ottawa U or UofT and need certain courses to pursue my goal."

"I really want to get into a university program. So it was never really a question for me. I signed up immediately."

"I need Math (Grade) 12 to do anything in life."

Pursuit of a career

"I truly love what I do as a medical administrator but I don't see myself doing this career long-term. I would like to be involved more with patients and in the medical field."

To find decent employment: "I missed several job opportunities due to a lack of Canadian credentials (high school and university)."

"I want to further my education for a good job."

"The jobs I want require a grade 12."

"Moving to a city with a competitive and elite job market made me decide to join my Adult & Continuing Education program. I realized the only way to make a living wage here is to have at least a Master's degree."

"Needing to have my high school diploma in order to get a not terrible job."

Students were asked about what type of learning they do in their A&CE program (see Table 2). The majority of students (**64%**) indicated that they do online learning. Fourteen percent of students did hybrid learning, 12% attended in-person classes, and 10% did correspondence.

Table 2. Student Responses About What Type of Learning They Do in A&CE

Type of Learning	% of Students
Correspondence/self-study books/print	2%
Correspondence/self-study online	8%
Hybrid learning (partially in-person and partially online)	14%
In-person classes	12%
Online learning	64%

Students reported seven ways that they learned about adult and continuing education (see Table 3). **Thirty-two** percent of students learned about A&CE through a family member or friend and 30% learned about it through an online search/research. Other ways that students learned about A&CE were through prior school staff (14%), a community partner (10%), ads (5%), known in the community (4%), and prior experience (3%).

Table 3. Student Responses to How They Learned About A&CE

Method for Learning About PLAR	% of Students
Ads	5%
Community partner	10%
Family member or friend	32%
Known in community	4%
Online search/research	30%
Prior experience	3%
Prior school staff	14%

Students identified the learning supports they received through A&CE (see Table 4). **Eighty-three** percent of students reported receiving one or more learning supports. The most frequently reported learning support was guidance counselling, which was used by 43% of students. The other supports reported were technology support (33%), basic skills development (30%), skills inventory (23%), individual programming (20%), and tutoring (20%).

Table 4. Students' Learning Supports in A&CE

Learning Support	% of Students Receiving the Support
Basic skills development (e.g., literacy and numeracy)	30%
Guidance counselling	43%
Individual programming	20%
Technology support (e.g., someone available to answer technology questions, ability to borrow a computer)	33%
Skills inventory to identify your strengths and weaknesses	23%
Tutoring	20%

Students also identified holistic supports they received in adult and continuing education programs (see Table 5). **Fifty-three** percent of students reported receiving at least one holistic support. The three most frequent holistic supports students received were: mental health support (29%), referrals to other agencies (23%), and food (17%). The three least frequent holistic supports received by students were transportation (14%), childcare (9%), and clothing (5%).

Table 5. Students' Holistic Supports in A&CE

Holistic Support	% of Students Receiving the Support
Mental health	29%
Referrals to other agencies	23%
Childcare	9%
Transportation	14%
Food	17%
Clothing	5%

One open-response survey question asked students to describe how they would like to be supported in A&CE. The most frequent answer was more teacher interaction and support (12 students). Students had the following to say about this:

"I would like to have human interaction. I've been communicating with my professor via email, but it would be nice to meet virtually, or even via phone to discuss. This is what I am used to, and this is what would make me feel supported."

"I would like a better system in place for access to the teacher for help."

"More teacher interaction and guidance while doing my schoolwork in Brightspace."

Additional ways that students wanted to be supported in A&CE were as follows:

- Updated courses and materials (5 students)
- Better online instruction (3 students)
- More holistic supports (e.g., income, other support programs, food; 3 students)
- In-person learning (2 students)
- Access to technology and training (2 students)
- Greater flexibility with course completion (2 students)
- More post-secondary guidance (2 students)
- More learning supports (e.g., tutoring, peer study groups; 2 students)
- More holistic supports (e.g., income, other support programs, food; 3 students)

PLAR

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is the formal evaluation and credit-granting process whereby students may obtain credits for prior learning. Prior learning includes the knowledge and skills that students have acquired, in both formal and informal ways. When asked if they knew about PLAR, **only 53%** of students knew what it was. Students who knew about PLAR were asked how they learned about it (see Table 6). Forty-three percent learned about it from a guidance counsellor, 20% heard about it from a teacher, and 14% were told about it from a principal/administrator. Other ways that students learned about PLAR were from peers (6%), administrative assistants (4%), advertisements (2%), and online/school websites (6%). Fifty-six percent of students who knew about PLAR indicated that they had earned PLAR credits. The range of PLAR credits earned was between 2 and 26 (the maximum amount of PLAR credits that can be earned), with the median being 12.

Table 6. Student Responses to How They Learned About PLAR

Method for Learning About PLAR	% of Students
Guidance counsellor	43%
Teacher	20%
Principal/administrator	14%
Peers	6%
Administrative assistants	4%
Advertisements	2%
Online/school websites	6%

Students who had taken part in the PLAR process liked that it:

- helped them earn credits towards their high school diploma quickly (10 students)
- was easy and straightforward (7 students); and
- honoured their prior schooling and life experiences (5 students)

One student summarized the benefit of PLAR with this comment: *"It was great to have my life experiences recognized and to have them count towards my diploma."*

Remote Learning During the Pandemic

Ninety-six percent of students had participated in remote learning during the pandemic. Students were asked to identify challenges they experienced with remote learning (see Table 7). **Sixty-four** percent of students reported one or more remote learning challenges. The most frequent reported challenge was that it was hard for students to make time for online learning because of other responsibilities (30%). Other reported challenges included not liking online learning (24%), finding it hard to work at home (23%), unreliable internet at home (15%), and technology being hard to learn/use (10%).

Table 7. Student Reported Challenges of Remote Learning During the Pandemic

Challenges	% of students
Hard to make time for online learning because of other responsibilities	30%
Do not like online learning	24%
Hard to work at home	23%
Unreliable internet at home	15%
Technology was hard to learn/use	10%

Students were also asked to identify benefits of remote learning during the pandemic (see Table 8). **Seventy-one** percent of students reported one or more benefits of remote learning. The two most frequently reported benefits were that students had greater flexibility to meet other responsibilities (45%) and they did not have to travel for school (30%). Other benefits included that they liked online learning (35%), liked working at home (32%), liked learning new technology (24%).

Table 8. Student Reported Benefits of Remote Learning During the Pandemic

Benefits	% of students
Greater flexibility to meet my other responsibilities	45%
I did not have to travel to school	42%
I like online learning	35%
I like working at home	32%
I liked learning new technology	24%

Students were asked about skills they developed with remote learning during the pandemic (see Table 9). **Sixty-six** percent of students reported one or more skills they developed as a result of remote learning. Nearly half of students reported developing time management skills (43%), technology skills (41%), and work/life balance skills (41%). Students also developed communication skills (31%), organization skills (29%), and problem solving skills (29%) through remote learning.

Table 9. Student Reported Skills Development with Remote Learning During the Pandemic

Benefits	% of students
Skills Developed	% of students
Time management	43%
Technology	41%
Work/life balance	41%
Communication	32%
Organization	29%
Problem solving	29%

FINDINGS: TEACHERS

There were 23 responses to the A&CE teacher survey. Twenty responses were from teachers and instructors and three were from guidance counsellors. The amount of time teachers and instructors had worked in A&CE ranged from 1.5 to 25 years, with the average being 13 years. Participating guidance counsellors had 5 to 6 years of experiences in their role.

For the sake of simplicity, we will refer to teachers, instructors, and guidance counsellors as “teachers” in this section. Many of the teacher questions were open-ended. With this in mind, numbers are reported next to responses to indicate how many people provided the response.

Teachers were asked what skills they focus on developing in adult learners. They identified a combination of soft skills and hard skills:

- Communication skills (8)
- Self-advocacy (5)
- Independence (5)
- Problem solving (4)
- Technology/Digital literacy (4)
- Soft skills (4)
- Academic skills (3)
- Workplace skills (3)
- Perseverance/resilience (3)
- Time management (3)
- Research (3)
- Critical thinking (3)

Learning and holistic supports

Teachers used a number of strategies to support student learning. The most frequent reported strategies for supporting adult learners were:

- Regular check-ins (7)
- Technology (e.g., recording live classes, Google Read and Write, etc.; 6)
- Feedback (e.g., formative feedback, peer feedback; 5)
- Scaffolding (5)
- Supportive classroom environment (4)
- Getting to know students and their needs (3)
- Extra learning support (e.g., tutoring, extra help sessions, one-on-one support; 3)
- Modifications for students with special education needs (3)

When teachers were asked what supports were needed to promote the success of adult learners, they identified the following:

- Access to technology (e.g., computers, reliable internet; 7)
- Flexibility (6)
- Recognition and removal of barriers (e.g., childcare, mental health, food banks, financial support; 6)
- Instructor connection/presence (4)
- Learning support (e.g., tutors, extra help, language learning support; 4)
- Digital skills (3)
- Regular feedback (3)
- Guidance counsellors (3)
- Support system (e.g., peers, community partners) (3)
- Meaningful course content (2)

Teachers were asked about enablers and barriers to access for adult learners (see Table 10). The three most frequent responses to enablers of access were varied methods of delivery (4), multiple locations (4), and website/online ads (4). The three most frequent responses to barriers to access were time commitments (7), lack of technology/internet (7), and lack of transportation (6).

Table 10. Enablers and Barriers to Access to A&CE for Adult Learners

Enablers of Access to A&CE	Barriers to Access of A&CE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varied methods of delivery (4) • Multiple locations (4) • Website/online ads (4) • Guidance appointments (3) • Online registration (2) • Technology available through school (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time commitments (work, family, etc.) (7) • Lack of technology/internet (7) • Lack of transportation (6) • Lack of childcare (4) • Unaware of existence and availability of A&CE in the community (3) • Mental health challenges (3) • Language skills (3) • Lack computer literacy (3) • Lack of flexibility of program/learning support offerings (3) • Poverty (3)

In addition, teachers were asked to identify enablers and barriers to adult learner outcomes in A&CE (see Table 11). The three most frequent reported enablers of outcomes for adult learners were experienced and supportive staff (4), regular check-ins/communication with students (4), and PLAR (4). The four most frequent reported barriers to outcomes for adult learners were other time/commitments/responsibilities (10), lack of internet/technology (4), lack of computer skills (3), and learning gaps (3).

Table 11. Enablers and Barriers to Outcomes for Adult Learners in A&CE

Enablers of Outcomes in A&CE	Barriers to Outcomes in A&CE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced and supportive staff (4) • Regular check-ins/communication with students (4) • PLAR (4) • Flexible schedules (3) • Multiple modes of program delivery (3) • Availability of one-on-one support (3) • Technology provision (3) • Community partners (3) • Co-op programs (3) • Special education resources/staff (2) • Dual credit programs (2) • LBS programs (2) • ESL programs (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other time commitments/ responsibilities (10) • Lack of internet/technology (4) • Lack of computer skills (3) • Learning gaps (3) • Lack of learning support (2) • Lack of transportation (2) • Lack of childcare (2)

Teachers had the following suggestions for removing barriers for adult learners:

- More flexible schedules/program delivery (4)
- Computer/technology training (4)
- Partnerships with LBS to reduce learning gaps and prepare adults for credit pathways (3)
- Wrap around services (3)
- Onsite childcare (3)
- Provision/lending of technology (3)
- Funding for guidance, special education, mental health support (2)
- Language skill development support (2)
- Learning skills training (2)
- Transportation funds (2)
- Availability of in-person support (2)
- Partnering with community sites (2)

Remote Learning During the Pandemic

Supports were put in place during the pandemic when A&CE programs switched to remote learning. Teachers noted the following student supports:

- Technology lent to students – limited amounts (9)
- Designated staff to reach out and check in on students (4)
- Mobile hotspots/wifi sticks (4)
- Tech support available (2)
- Virtual tutoring/support (2)

The supports teachers would like to see for adult learners during a pandemic were the following:

- More tech available to students who need it and internet access (4)
- Virtual learning support and IT Training (4)
- Adjust course/diploma requirements (2)
- Greater scheduling flexibility (2)
- More direct access to community partners and mental health counselling (2)

In addition to students supports, teacher supports were put in place during the pandemic. The following teacher supports were identified:

- IT tools and training support (8)
- Provision of a computer, if needed (3)
- Virtual staff meetings and communication (3)
- Mental health support (e.g., Information about wellness and counselling services available and flexibility of workload and deadlines dependent on personal circumstances) (2)

During a pandemic, teachers, instructors, and guidance counsellors (4) would like to see more professional development about best practices and tools to support online learning.

Teachers were asked to rate how well they were able to manage pandemic challenges related to their professional role (see Table 12). The things most teachers found challenging or very challenging were a lack of face-to-face interaction with their students (67%), making personal connections with students in an online environment (61%), and making learning engaging in an online environment (59%). Achieving work-life balance during the pandemic was challenging or very challenging for over half (56%) of respondents.

Table 12. Teacher Ratings of Pandemic Challenges

Pandemic Challenges	Manageable or Very Manageable	Neutral	Challenging or Very Challenging
Being isolated from colleagues	33%	28%	39%
Lack of face-to-face interaction with students	5%	28%	67%
Adjusting content to make it accessible online	50%	17%	33%
Deciding which technology to use for content delivery	56%	16%	28%
Learning how to use new technology for content delivery	56%	11%	33%
Adjusting to teaching in an online environment	59%	6%	35%
Meeting the needs of different learners in a remote environment	29%	18%	53%
Making learning engaging in an online environment	18%	23%	59%
Making personal connections with students in an online environment	33%	6%	61%
Achieving work-life balance	22%	22%	56%
Working from home	39%	22%	39%
Maintaining mental health and well-being during the pandemic	33%	23%	44%

Teachers were asked to rate the usefulness of strategies for facilitating remote learning during the pandemic (see Table 13). The strategies most teachers found useful or very useful were synchronous communication tools for meetings (94%), making yourself consistently available to answer questions and support learners (94%), using online course communication tools (82%), giving students an orientation of their online course space and tools (82%), and making the online course space as user-friendly as possible (82%).

Table 13. Teacher Ratings of Remote Learning Strategies

Remote Learning Strategy	Useful or Very Useful	Neutral	Unuseful or Very Unuseful
Synchronous communication tools for meetings	94%	6%	-
Using online course communication tools	82%	5%	13%
Training students how to use technology for remote learning	57%	36%	7%
Well-being check-ins with learners	73%	20%	7%
Providing clear course instructions and expectations about content and assignments	67%	20%	13%
Giving students an orientation of their online course space and tools	82%	18%	-
Making the online course space as user-friendly as possible	82%	18%	-
Communicating the skills learners need to be successful online	57%	30%	13%
Building in opportunities for learners to interact with each other in a remote environment	36%	64%	-
Providing structure/accountability for learners	65%	29%	6%
Making yourself consistently available to answer questions and support learners	94%	-	6%

FINDINGS: ADMINISTRATORS

In total, eight administrators from across six of the district school boards in the ERPAE completed the administrator survey. Administrators were asked to identify their role (see Table 14). Five of the 8 administrators were principals, two were vice-principals, and one was a vice-principal and manager.

Table 14. Roles of Administrator Survey Participants

Administrative Role	# Participants
Principal	
Vice-Principal	
Vice-Principal & Manager	

Of the eight administrators, six had worked in administrative roles for more than five years and seven participants have worked in A&CE from more than five years (see Table 15).

Table 15. Number of Years in Administration and A&CE

# of years	In administrative role	Working in A&CE
1-5 years	2	1
5-10 years	4	6
10 years +	2	1

Findings in this section of the report are presented according to the following themes:

- Program Delivery
- Accessing A&CE
- Processes in A&CE
- Program Completion
- Learning Supports
- Participating in AES

Program Delivery

During normal day-to-day operations, five of the six participating school boards deliver their programming in person, and four of the boards include either hybrid, online, or online correspondence (see Table 16). For Board 1, the transition to online learning during the pandemic was easy, as all of their existing courses were either fully online or hybrid. The transition was most difficult for Board 3 because all of its usual programming is in-person. The remaining four boards were able to capitalize on existing infrastructure, with Board 6 aligning to the regular day schools as they pivoted online.

Table 16. School Boards Normal Modes of Operation

	Board 1	Board 2	Board 3	Board 4	Board 5	Board 6
In-Person		●	●	●	●	●
Hybrid	●	●			●	
Online	●	●			●	●
Correspondence/ Self-study online	●	●		●	●	
Correspondence/ Self-study books & print		●			●	

Barriers and Challenges to Accessing A&CE

Across the eight survey participants from the six district school boards, there were seven participants who reported transportation as being the biggest barrier to adults being able to access A&CE during normal programming. Other barriers reported included: lack of childcare, financial, the stigma of attending A&CE, where programming was located geographically, having reliable internet access, a lack of available supports, and life circumstances.

When it came to barriers faced by learners once they were enrolled in A&CE, many of the most significant aligned with those already identified. However, also included were family, confidence, work requirements, fear of others knowing about their lack of OSSD, stable housing, and a lack of appropriate guidance support.

Commonly offered suggestions for removing the barriers and challenges faced by A&CE learners included:

- Social service supports that allow clients to attend school programs without financial worry
- Mental Health and other on-site supports
- Guidance staff
- Increased accessibility to child care in adult centers
- Providing night school options
- Reliable access to technology

The six participating boards reported the following challenges for A&CE programs during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Not being able to run some continuing education programs (e.g., International Languages and tutoring)
- Declining enrolment
- Technology not being returned after being lent out
- Being able to make regular contact with students
- Getting new lessons and courses out to students
- Not enough technology to share with all of the students that needed it
- Navigating the PSW program
- Retaining flexibility to meet long term needs of students
- Remaining connected to some in-person learners
- PLAR difficult to implement, exams could not continue
- Textbook and handout distribution
- Helping teachers become comfortable in their virtual world
- Task integrity and plagiarism

Enablers to Accessing A&CE

When asked about what supports and enablers allowed adult learners to access A&CE in their board, all six participating boards responded with a variety of strategies, including:

- PLAR
- Special Services Counsellors
- Varied delivery sites across their geographic region eliminating the need for transportation
- Providing a 1-800 phone number
- Providing guidance
- Providing some level of childcare
- Training support funds
- Re-engagement services
- Partnerships with community employment services
- Forging relationships and building trust with adult learners
- Promotion of Equity Programs

All six participating boards also identified a number of strategies that had helped enable access to A&CE for adult learners during the pandemic, including:

- Moving registration processes online
- Loaning computers/chrome books
- Loaning wireless hubs
- Daily calls to adult learners by A&CE staff
- Facilitating adult learners to use virtual meeting software to connect with A&CE staff
- Ensuring flexible approach was maintained

In spite of the implementation of the enabling strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic, three of the participating boards noted that enrolment in A&CE programming had decreased during this time, one board reported no change to enrollment, and two boards noted an increase in enrollment.

A&CE Processes to Support Programming

All of the six boards who participated in this study indicated a variety of processes they undertake to support their A&CE programming. In this section of the report, we outline processes used for program intake, learner needs assessment, referrals for other services, and career planning. We also comment on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these processes.

Intake Processes

When asked about intake processes for adult learners, only one board had a completely online registration process prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. One other board had a pre-registration process completed online. Five out of six boards had a face-to-face registration process, or components of the process. This resulted in boards having to move registration online quite quickly. It was noted that online registration is convenient for learners, and that synchronous communication tools had been used effectively to hold the intake process meetings with adult learners.

Needs Assessment

Five of the six boards who participated in the survey reported undertaking needs assessments with their adult learners, which is usually undertaken as part of the intake process, and followed up with an as-needed approach based on individual learner needs. Boards reported that this process largely proceeded in its usual way, the exception being that online and telephone meetings were used instead of face-to-face meetings with the adult learner.

Referrals

All six of the participating district school boards refer adult learners for other services. The types of referrals typically made during regular programming include:

- Community agency groups for addictions, social services, housing, and mental health supports
- LBS and ESL for academic support
- Ontario Works (OW), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)
- Job readiness
- Daycare, food banks, dental care
- Co-terminus who offers blended learning model
- Participating boards noted the increase in mental health referrals during the COVID-19 pandemic

Career and Pathway Planning

Of the six participating boards, four have access to guidance counselors to support their adult learners' career and pathway planning. The roles and responsibilities of guidance counsellors who work with adult learners varies across the participating boards, but typically included:

- A key person (guidance counsellor where available)
- Course selection
- Career exploration
- Emotional support

- Referral to other agencies
- Advocacy
- Initiation of the PLAR process
- Referral to programs like co-op, dual credit, etc.

It is worth noting that five out of the six participating boards wished they could offer more guidance and career planning to their adult learners. Additional provision boards would like to provide included:

- A dedicated guidance person could provide much more in-depth planning and have more time to research other supports and programs
- More individualized training for the guidance counsellors and dedicated guidance for adults would benefit the adult learners

• *We would definitely like to have more time for them to do one on one meetings and pathway planning, our guidance team have a lot of priorities to juggle including pathway planning for our adults (Board 6)*

• *We would like to have more career training for our adults and more opportunities for work experience such as hair dressing, chef training, etc. These opportunities are difficult to access in small rural communities. (Board 6)*

• *I think this is a huge area of need in the A&CE world. I would like to see something more formalized and concrete. It is just a matter of time and bodies! (Board 7)*

• *There does not seem to be enough time or expertise available to ensure the adult knows what to expect. For example, if the pathway is university but the student lacks an academic background, they can be placed into courses which are too challenging and get discouraged early in the program. (Board 8)*

Program Completion

Administrator participants were asked to provide an approximate percentage of adult learners that completed their programs, with resulting percentages ranging between 60 and 78%

All six district school board administrators reported a number of board processes they have in place to support adult learners in completing their programs (see Table 17). The processes used by the most number of school boards were LBS/literacy/numeracy supporting credit programs (4), regular check-ins/home visits/re-engagement calls (4), and flexible modes of delivery (4).

Table 17. Process in Place to Help Learners Complete A&CE Programs

Types of Process	# of Boards
Guidance counsellor	2
Named caring adult	2
PLAR	2
Flexible scheduling	3
Flexible modes of delivery	4
Flexible timelines	2
Student success meetings	2
LBS/literacy/numeracy supporting credit programs	4
Dual credits	1
Regular check ins/home visits/re-engagement calls	4
Tutoring	1
Connection to community programs	1

When asked about the effectiveness of their processes, six administrators reported the following strategies as particularly important:

- Encouraging students to come on site to complete some lessons, as our Action Research [during the AES] showed correlation to increased student success
- PLAR, daily contacts, breakfast, and lunch programs
- Connection with a caring adult/mentor who helps them navigate the system and provides coaching and encouragement
- Student Success Team meetings allows the student’s mentor to access supports and determine next steps
- PLAR is one of the most effective processes in promoting program completion because the recognition of prior learning validates the student’s out of school learning and makes the end goal of graduation more attainable.

- Individualized programing that is developed with the student based on an initial needs’ assessment.
- Building a relationship with them [learners] and being willing to bring some flexibility into the program
- Flexible completion timelines
- Beginning with student voice and establishing their Educational Pathway
- Understand the power of PLAR for mature students

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

Of the six participating boards, five have a policy in place to let learners know about PLAR. When asked to assess the approximate percentage of learners that would be eligible for PLAR in their board, answers ranged between 4% and 90%. All six administrators outlined how PLAR was administered to their adult learners, with the process typically including:

- Being undertaken centrally, through a PLAR lead or department heads
- Initiated at the time of student enrollment
- Registration is sent to an assessor that reviews the student application (consisting of status sheet, transcript and registration form) to determine what next steps are
- Students write assessment packages to prove ability (reading, writing, comprehension, etc.) in specific subject, and when successful junior credits are granted
- Senior credits are awarded based on life experience (student completes a ‘portfolio’ like package, indicating work and life experience). Final 4 credits must be completed to graduate
- LBS instructors determine readiness of students to write PLAR and supervise the testing. The tests are marked by a teacher who is supervised by the principal
- Consistency through Continuing Education. Aligned; begin sooner rather than later to assist students see the light at the end of the tunnel in the context of their education pathway

Students were supported through the PLAR process through each staff member being aware of the PLAR process and teachers exploring the benefits of PLAR with adult learners. The PLAR process is explored with each of the adult learners to ensure the student utilizes the benefits of their past work experience into credits. Administrators reported this as being highly motivating for adult learners. Paid co-op is also utilized where possible. Some boards draw heavily on LBS instructors to support the PLAR process.

Administrators from five of the six participating boards reported the positive impact that PLAR has on adult learners (see Table 18).

Table 18. Positive Impact of PLAR on Adult Learners

Board	Positive Impact
Board 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides an attainable goal for adults missing many credits so they are able to reach completion and move on with their plans in a shorter period of time
Board 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides hope, encouragement and confidence to begin and stick with their studies. Students are often very surprised realizing they are closer to their OSSD than they every realized • PLAR gives our adult learners motivation and optimism. They realize that this process truly is a recognition of their life story and what they have learned along the way. The elusive diploma feels more attainable • It creates a positive school experience because they often come back to education after a negative experience and the PLAR process provides connection, supports and a clear pathway to graduation
Board 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We tend to share learners with our co-terminus board. Our adult students are able to complete their OSSD faster and achieve success which sometimes makes them stick with the plan
Board 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is extremely beneficial to know when students are ready to challenge PLAR
Board 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes previous personal, work, and education experience • Decreases journey time of their path toward their OSSD • Facilitates transition to post-secondary more quickly

Learning Supports

Administrators were asked to identify the learning supports their boards regularly provided for their learners (see Table 19). The most common supports identified were tech support (8), basic skills development (7), guidance counselling (7), and individualized programing (7).

Table 19. Type of Learning Supports Offered Across School Boards

Type of support	# of responses
Basic skills development (e.g., literacy & numeracy)	7
Guidance counselling	7
Tech support	8
Individualized programing	7
Skills inventory	5
Tutoring	3
Other	3 (1 x equipment, 1 x caring adult, 1 x social work, psychological support, addictions services, multicultural liaison officers and breakfast program)

Administrators were also asked about the more holistic supports their boards provided to their adult learners (see Table 20). The most frequent reported holistic support identified by administrators was food (6) and mental health support (6).

Table 20. Types of Holistic Support Offered Across School Boards

Type of holistic support	# of responses
Food	6
Referrals to other agencies	5
Mental health support	6
Clothing (e.g., community closet)	4
Transportation	1
Other (please identify)	1 (informal)

There were a number of additional supports that five of the participating boards reported, including:

- Paid Co-op
- Being assigned a caring adult to track attendance, academic progress and support students that have social or emotional needs (essential practice during COVID-19)
- A mental health nurse attached to every credit campus who can help provide referrals to medical practitioners
- Dual Credit – allows for a taste of college programming, allows students to determine ability to complete programming
- Co-op – opportunities to try out different job opportunities
- Links between credit and non-credit to offer adult learners flexible pathways

Five of the six participating boards described a range of supports they would like to offer their adult learners but for various reasons are currently unable to. These included **increased mental health support, summer programing, transportation, increased child care, more drop-in support options, and creating an adult reception centre.**

Additional supports during COVID-19 pandemic for adult learners

All of the six participating boards had put additional supports for their adult learners in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, and identified the following supports as being particularly important:

- Technology for home use was supplied
 - provision of chrome books and hotspots where necessary
- Creative programming by teachers; curriculum adjustments
- Even more flexible attendance/work accommodations
- Acceptance of photos of completed lessons
- Emailing lessons
- Sometimes staff worked varied hours to connect with working students

Additional supports during COVID-19 pandemic for teachers/instructors

In addition to supporting the adult learners, all six participating boards also put a number of supports for teachers and instructors during the COVID-19 pandemic, which included:

- Made sure had equipment and software they needed to be successful
- Admin team daily check-ins with staff as required to work through challenges, needs, weekly school staff check-ins to assess needs
- Provided scripts to staff in how to communicate with our learners, with resources available
- All technology needs were supported
 - access to their own laptop for home use
 - system supports with technology and implementing courses on a digital platform
 - introduction to new and training on new technology
- Team & community supports
- Technology and availability of workplaces where connectivity was difficult in the home
 - Central departments
 - Curriculum updates including instructional adaptation suggestions and helpful tips
 - Help rooms for teachers with questions around virtual delivery, lots of helpful “tips” provided weekly on Board’s platform - “how to’s”
 - School budget - purchase of online learning devices to facilitate instruction for teachers in most at-risk classrooms

Participating in AES

Five participating boards reported benefits to their participation in the AES, including the best practices they learned from the ERPAE and the innovative projects each board piloted. Interestingly, all six participating boards have continued to adopt innovative practices in their respective boards, continuing the work commenced during the AES (see Table 21).

Table 21. Current Innovative A&CE Practices Across Boards

Board	Current Innovative practices
Board 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online marketing has helped increase enrolment • Online registration process • Hybrid approach to course delivery
Board 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLAR, dual credit, co-op opportunities, focusing on key expectations, mapping of expectations across different courses • Continue to grow classrooms in community facilities
Board 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing our digital footprint
Board 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our main projects right now are working with 2 employment agencies and their Skills Advanced Ontario • Projects to support staff shortages in the long term care facilities. This project has allowed us to enroll enough students to meet the needs in some of our more rural portions of the board and is actually expanding our board PSW program to beyond our borders.
Board 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the in-take form to allow for teacher/principal in-put before the students are placed in courses to ensure students will be successful
Board 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLAR alignment with Cont Ed – direct • Better outreach to settlement agencies • Zoom/google meets with different community partners regarding AHS and our programs • Improving our website has increased “hits” • Adapting our registration process to year-round through online registration has allowed for continuous intake over the entire year

Innovations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Participating boards were asked whether they experienced any particular successful innovations during the COVID-19 pandemic, with five boards outlining:

- Registrations and supports to students virtually through Zoom worked very well
- Increased staff learning about instructing with digital remote learning programs.
- Increased course content available to our students.
- *We have learned a lot about our virtual platform and so have students (Board 5)*
- More teachers and students have embraced on line learning
- *We have been forced to rethink graduation ceremonies and have come up with ways to celebrate successes remotely (Board 5)*
- *We started to move to an online student database for all forms (although we are moving to a new SIS and we are not sure the implications of this yet) (Board 6)*
- *If we are able to supervise PLAR for learners from their homes, this will be an innovation for our board. (Board 7)*
- Moving to online registration
- Teacher support periods/additional help for struggling students
- Student Success - earlier intervention and support

To conclude the administrator section of this report, successes experienced within the A&CE programs for five of the six participating boards during the COVID-19 pandemic are presented (see Table 22).

Table 22. Successes of A&CE Programs during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Board	Experienced successes in A&CE programs
Board 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online registration was very convenient for learners
Board 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In June of 2020 one board graduated 362 students with their OSSD. An increase of 12 students from 2019.
Board 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent number of grads- despite the pandemic, credits continue to be earned • Caring calls home made students feel connected and supported by the school system so when they are ready, they will engage with them again
Board 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers/instructors became more adept at tech/remote learning • Increased flexibility by staff in regards to demonstration of learning
Board 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful in graduating many PSW students and granting experience for the hours worked during the pandemic • Instructors are now more comfortable with technology and are using it more in the classroom • Enrollment in the PSW program increased • eLearning program continued as normal with little change
Board 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has forced one board to try some things that we would not have normally attempted... with success that the board will keep moving forward • Online registration • Integration of more virtual aspects into teaching practice • Curriculum review, development, and implementation • Pushed thinking around A&E, and maintaining course integrity

Key Findings and Implications

The CESBA Adult and Continuing Education study provided the Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education with a unique opportunity to obtain results for the eastern Ontario region because all member boards agreed to participate in the study. In total, 110 students, 23 teachers, and 8 administrators from eight ERPAE member boards with A&CE programs took part in the CESBA A&CE study. Participants’ responses provided insight about the general field of A&CE, how the region supports the learning and achievement of adult learners, and how the region transitioned to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Key findings and implications for these areas are highlighted in table format (see Table 22).

Table 23. Key Findings and Implications of the CESBA A&CE Study in Eastern Ontario

A&CE Area	Key Findings	Implications
Field of A&CE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over half of students (56%) reported joining A&CE to complete their high school diploma The majority of A&CE students are completing their program online (64%) and some are choosing correspondence (10%) The way most adult learners find out about A&CE is through family and friends Teachers focus on developing a variety of soft and hard skills in adult learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are underlying reasons (e.g., learning disabilities, mental health challenges, etc.) adult learners returning to complete their high school diploma were not successful in the regular school system; additional supports are needed to ensure their success While online learning and correspondence offers flexibility needed for adult learners, these modes of delivery should have built-in support structures to promote adult learner success The benefits of A&CE need to be made more widely known so that it does not heavily rely on word-of-mouth referrals A framework for skills needed by adult learners (e.g., study, essential, and employability skills) and how to develop them would be helpful for teachers

Table 23 Continued >

A&CE Area	Key Findings	Implications
Support of Adult Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The percentage of students reporting the use of individual learning supports is low (e.g., 43% for guidance counsellors and 20% for tutoring) Holistic supports help remove some of the barriers to success in A&CE; the percentage of students reporting holistic supports is low (e.g., 29% for mental health and 9% for childcare) Adult learners reported wanting more teacher interaction and support; teachers identified experienced and supportive A&CE staff and their interactions as enablers of adult learner outcomes More modes of program delivery and flexible scheduling were identified by teachers and administrators as enablers of adult learner success PLAR was identified as an enabler of adult learner success by teachers, administrators, and students; only a little more than half (53%) of students knew about PLAR, despite its enormous benefit in helping students obtain a high school diploma Partnerships between non-credit (e.g., LBS and ESL) and credit pathways promoted adult learner success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Given the unique needs of adult learners, learning supports, like guidance counselling and special education staff, should be government-funded Online guidance services, beyond the pandemic, could allow increased flexibility for staff and adult learners Wraparound services are recommended in A&CE to remove barriers to participation through the provision of holistic supports (e.g., mental health, childcare, food, etc.) The role of teachers in A&CE is invaluable; ways to facilitate teacher interaction and support, especially in an online environment, should be examined and adopted School boards with limited modes of delivery should consider expanding their services and look to innovative approaches (e.g., partnering with community sites, like libraries) PLAR should be made more widely known and accessible to students (e.g., one school board made PLAR available online) Partnerships between non-credit (e.g., LBS and ESL) and credit pathways should be strengthened and encouraged

Table 23 Continued >

A&CE Area	Key Findings	Implications
<p>Transition to Remote Learning During the Pandemic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students were supported during remote learning through the provision of technology (limited availability) and wifi, check-ins, tech support, and virtual learning support • Online registration appeared popular with students • During the pandemic teachers reported receiving technology (if needed) and technology training • Teachers found aspects of remote teaching challenging, especially a lack of face-to-face interaction with their students (67%), making personal connections with students in online environment (61%), and making learning engaging in an online environment (59%) • The most frequent student reported challenges to remote learning were competing responsibilities (30%), a dislike for online learning (24%), and working from home (23%) • The most frequent student reported benefits to remote learning were greater flexibility (45%) and not having to travel to school (42%) • Remote learning was an easier transition for school boards that had an existing online delivery infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students require access to technology, reliable internet, technology training, and virtual support • Outside of the pandemic, the provision of technology, wifi, technology training, and virtual support for adult learners in online or hybrid programs is worth considering • A&CE teachers would benefit from strategies and technology training to support adult learner engagement and success with remote learning, and online and hybrid learning, more generally • There are challenges and benefits associated with remote learning; helping adult learners be successful with remote learning may involve some of the same strategies needed for successful online learning, like time management and technology training • School boards could consider developing an online infrastructure to support future transitions to emergency remote learning and to maintain innovative practices that have worked well during the pandemic

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