



Definitions:

The American Library Association (ALA) defines digital literacy as “the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.” Such skills are increasingly central to daily life, at school, home, and work; in accessing banking, healthcare, and leisure activities; and in education. The National Digital

Literacy Alliance defines digital equity as “a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy. “ Research from the U.S. Department of Education shows that 32 million adults in the U.S. (about 16%) lack basic digital literacy skills, including using computers and accessing information online.

Lack of digital literacy skills, access, and devices exacerbates other challenges confronting marginalized BiPOC, low-income, rural, and other communities. Without concerted efforts to address digital equity needs, the gaps between those who are digitally literate and those who are not will grow, worsening economic and other challenges. Providing training, access, and devices is a key component of the ongoing struggle for empowerment in many communities.

Importance and Impact of digital literacy:

- **Much of modern life takes place in digital spaces, using digital tools to create and share digital texts and other materials.** Many of our social, work, and educational interactions take place in these digital spaces. Digital readiness or digital literacy skills have already become predictors of success in large areas of life. Many have studied and discussed this reality in-depth by describing it with the phrases, “the digital divide” or digital gap.
- **Those who are disproportionately affected by the lack of digital literacy skills and technology/internet access include many of the learners using Minnesota Adult Education programs and services.** Every adult learner deserves the opportunity to learn and improve their knowledge of content while simultaneously learning in digital spaces with digital tools and current devices.
- **Funding ABE programs to provide professional development for educators on the latest digital instructional tools and best practices is essential.** Funding ABE programs to help adult learners access high-speed internet, current devices, and excellent instruction is a crucial component in supporting our adult learner population to upskill and have the digital literacy and skills necessary for 21st century work and social challenges.

“Greater reliance on digital tools has the potential to increase disparities between those who have skills and access to digital tools and those who do not... Digital literacies and internet connectivity have been called the “super social determinants of health’ because they address all other social determinants of health.”¹

1 Sieck C.J., Sheon A, Ancker JS, Castek J, Callahan B, Siefer A. Digital Inclusion as a Social Determinant of Health. Nature Partner Journals Digital Medicine.2021 4:52; <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41746-021-00413-8>



ADULT BASIC EDUCATION DIGITAL LITERACY & DIGITAL EQUITY



Digital learning and online learning in Adult Education:

The centrality of digital literacy in Adult Education grew substantially as a result of the pandemic. Classes for people of all ages shifted online, and staff met the challenges of online learning with creativity and determination.

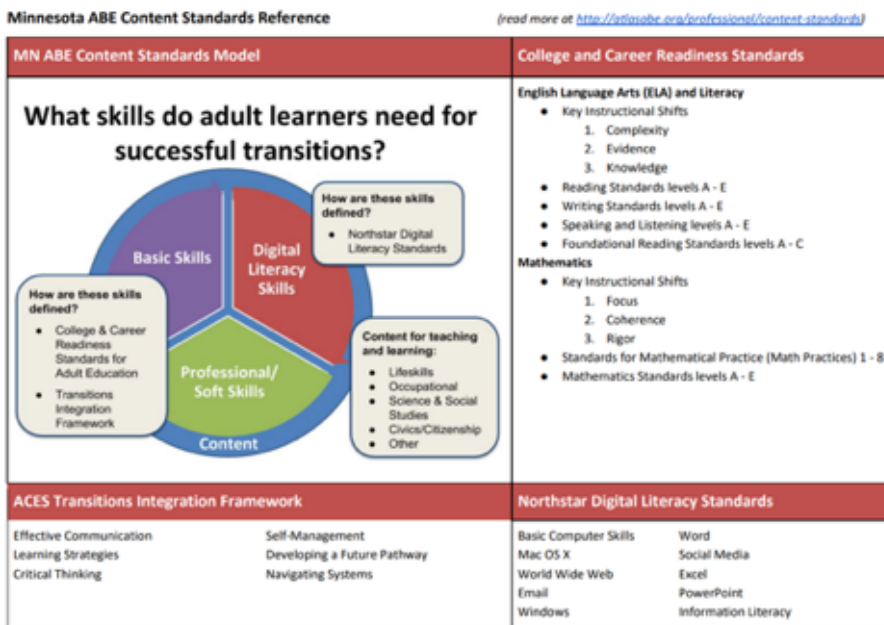


Adult Education programs across Minnesota first worked with participants to guarantee they had the hardware necessary to get online, and then provided the instruction necessary to use it. In the process of learning how to access and participate in class, students also learned transferable digital literacy skills. Not only did students use their ability to navigate URLs, sign-ins, and meeting room codes to attend class, they could also use those skills to support and participate in their children’s distance learning experiences, attend other virtual meetings, and connect with friends and family.

Online learning took a variety of forms across the state for adult learners. Many were in synchronous virtual classes on platforms such as Zoom and Google Classroom. Others created asynchronous modules, websites, and video content to reach students. Whereas in the past barriers such as weather, transportation, and lack of childcare prevented students from attending class, online learning opened opportunities for new people to participate in Adult Education to such an extent that many programs continue to offer online learning options alongside their in-person instruction.

Digital literacy resources used in ABE:

To meet the needs of our state’s adult learners, the field has drawn from varied educational resources. For many years, MN ABE has implemented the home-grown Northstar Digital Literacy Standards as central to the tripod of essential skills instruction standards, along with basic academic skills and soft/professional skills. You can explore the content standards model in more depth here with this graphic excerpted from this MN ABE Instructional Standards PDF:



The Northstar Online (NSOL) curriculum, assessments, and online practice modules are designed for assessing and improving the basic digital literacy skills of all adult learners. Northstar Digital Literacy, a program of Literacy Minnesota, is used in more than 2,500 locations in nine countries.

While the Northstar digital literacy standards, assessments, curriculum, and online learning modules are the foundation around which digital literacy instruction is based, there are many other free resources that educators are implementing in their classes. Teachers connected with students through email, Google Suite, WhatsApp, YouTube, and many other tools, as well as helped them enroll in supplemental distance learning platforms to study independently.