

REMOTE ESOL CASE STUDY:

Low- and High-Intensity Remote ESOL Options

Santa Barbara City College School of Extended Learning
Santa Barbara, California



ESOL Program: SBCC School of Extended Learning

Website: www.sbcc.edu/extendedlearning

Reach: Urban/Suburban

Number of ESOL students served per year: 1,300–2,000

Student population: 75 percent Spanish-speaking immigrants

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Photo: SBCC student with her new Chromebook provided by the college

Program Description

SBCC School of Extended Learning is part of Santa Barbara City College, based in Santa Barbara, California. Its mission is to create a gateway to opportunities for lifelong learning and remove barriers to participation in education, while fostering an equitable learning community that embraces, promotes, and supports diversity and inclusion. In addition to regular ESL classes

(SBCC doesn't use the acronym ESOL), the ESL program partners with the Career Skills Institute, also at the School of Extended Learning, to offer intensive Integrated Education and Training (IET) courses, such as Green Gardener (landscaping), that are co-taught by faculty from the ESL program and the Institute. Back to Work, an IET model program funded through the federal CARES Act, targets unemployed adults and pays a weekly stipend. The ESL program also offers stand-alone Vocational English for Healthcare courses, such as the Personal Care Attendant (PCA) training/certificate. In addition, the School of Extended Learning offers parenting courses, adult secondary education, careers skills courses, courses for older adults, and learning circles. Learning circles are informal study groups, facilitated by a volunteer or teacher, that take place once a week for 5–6 weeks on an open enrollment basis, so that there are three rounds of learning circles each semester. SBCC School of Extended Learning did not operate a distance education program prior to March, 2020. The school is funded by Santa Barbara City College, the federal CARES Act, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II, the Santa Barbara Adult Education Consortium, and the SBCC Foundation. The average annual budget is \$1 million. In addition, the school was able to secure federal CARES Act support for non-credit students who have experienced ongoing significant financial hardships as a result of COVID-19. SBCC was allocated \$600,000 that went directly to almost 800 students in the form of CARES Act Emergency Grants.

Notable, Innovative Practices

SBCC School of Extended Learning created and implements intensive, online IET programs for ESOL learners, such as Personal Care Attendant, Green Gardener (landscaping), and Construction. Some of the IET programs target unemployed community members who have been laid off due to COVID's impact on the economy. Thanks to federal CARES Act funding, these students receive \$200/week to attend these intensive IET classes remotely. In contrast to the intensive IET courses, the ESL program offers a "light-touch" option: open-entry, less formal learning circles offered remotely. The learning circles are a regular part of the ESL program offerings.

Remote ESOL Program Design

Students at SBCC School of Extended Learning have multiple remote learning options depending on their interest, availability, and life circumstances. These options range from open-entry learning circles that meet once a week to regular ESOL classes and intensive IET courses that meet 30–32 hours per week in eight-week cycles. Instruction is virtual and synchronous. IET courses that accommodate ESOL students include Personal Care Attendant, Green Gardener (landscaping), and Construction. Each IET program consists of three components: vocational skills, ESOL language support, and career exploration/job search skills. ESOL instructors are teamed up with vocational skills instructors for live, virtual classes on Zoom to support students' language learning and comprehension. Further ESOL support is provided through small breakout room group discussions. In addition, every Friday students participate in a job search skills/workplace readiness small group meeting via Zoom to learn about topics such as resume writing, job interview skills, and using the online job search and career development website Eureka. The goal is for students to be job-ready upon completion. Selected IET courses target unemployed adult students who receive \$200/week to attend classes remotely, funded with federal CARES Act and higher education emergency.

Another program component is open-enrollment learning circles that are offered remotely and synchronously via Zoom once a week in 5–6-week sessions. Learning circle students can join at any time throughout the session and are provided with free BurlingtonEnglish accounts. People who want to join the ESOL program, but missed the beginning of the cycle, are told about the learning circles. The meetups consist of walk-throughs of BurlingtonEnglish lesson units, and watching and discussing different YouTube videos, followed by more in-depth small-group, breakout room discussions about these topics. Learning circles complement more formal classes, offering a more

light-touch option for students who are not able or ready to commit to more rigorous classes. Since they require only a one evening per week commitment, students find them less stressful. Learning circles have been a great success, which is why they have been made part of SBCC's regular ESL program.

Student Onboarding and Persistence Supports

Most students learn about the program by word of mouth. The application and enrollment processes now take place over Zoom, where staff walk prospective students through the steps. ESL instructors also support student onboarding via Zoom onto BurlingtonEnglish, for supplemental online learning, and Eureka, for online career planning. They provide constant encouragement to help students develop more comfort using computers and the software used in classes.

Texting apps are used by individual instructors to allow students to submit their assignments via a mobile device and to foster connection with and among students. Staff do retention phone calls to students who miss classes and send out emails and surveys to better understand students' needs/barriers to engagement. Program-wide mass texting is conducted to remind students of classes if the student opted for this service. Some classes form social media groups and can have as many as 100 members, including former students.

Instruction

The synchronous classes on Zoom are complemented by a variety of apps and software, such as Google Classroom, Stand Out Classroom presentation software, BurlingtonEnglish, Learning Upgrade mobile learning app, Newsela, and Eureka career planning website. WhatsApp and other social media tools are used for communication. For the IET courses, ESL and vocational instructors plan lessons and activities together. Each remote class meeting includes 30–45 minutes of breakout activities to reinforce the vocabulary and communication skills. To provide the hands-on instruction for the Green Gardener (landscaping) and Construction courses, instructors filmed themselves working with the tools.

Digital Learning Supports

SBCC School of Extended Learning was able to secure CARES Act funding to purchase more than 200 Chromebooks and 100 internet hotspots to lend out to learners who needed them. Students were encouraged to stay connected even when using a computer was a barrier. Some students participated in the remote classes through their mobile devices. Students who had digital literacy challenges were encouraged to complete exercises on paper or in notebooks and to show their work on screen via Zoom or take a photo of their work and text or email it to the instructor. For example, in one of the classes, a WhatsApp group was created with 95 current and former students to help learners stay connected through group chats and allow them to submit some of their assignments. The program also provided continued guidance by integrating digital literacy activities into their ESOL lessons.

Support for Students' Basic Needs

SBCC School of Extended Learning was able to secure Federal CARES Act funding for non-credit students who were experiencing significant financial hardships, such as falling behind in rent payments, as a result of COVID-19 pandemic. In December, 2020, \$300,000 was distributed and again in March, 2021, another \$300,000 to almost 800 students, based on income and other indicators of need resulting from the impact of COVID on their lives (e.g., loss of employment, reduced work hours). SBCC provided weekly drive-through/walk-up food distributions on campus for students. Students enrolled in the CARES Act-funded IET courses were given childcare grants of \$100/week/child, as well as career counseling and job search support.

Support for Teachers and Staff

Early in the pandemic, ESOL teachers and other program staff received intensive and mandatory professional development on remote teaching and using Zoom. Teachers were encouraged to further develop their remote teaching skills through ongoing distance-education professional development, for which they were paid. Professional development opportunities included webinar courses (e.g., humanizing online education), workshops, and conferences.

Partnerships

SBCC School of Extended Learning partners with local K–12 districts and community organizations, such as Catholic Charities. The school actively recruits parents of public school children to join their classes. Before the pandemic, the school had 10 satellite locations in the community.

Leadership

SBCC School of Extended Learning leadership advocated for and secured funding to purchase and loan Chromebooks and hotspots to students, to pay stipends to students for participation in the intensive IET courses, and to provide paid professional development for teachers. The coordinator supported teachers to form communities of practice to share best practices. She sought ways to build community, express empathy, listen to concerns and needs, and be available to facilitate meeting those needs.

Indicators of Effectiveness

“I really like taking the Zoom class because I don’t have to stop looking after my children and I feel that I have learned a lot [even though] I don’t have a car to move around.”

–ESOL Program Participant

SBCC School of Extended Learning surveyed more than 220 students (ESOL and high school equivalency) and found that 76 percent of both Spanish and English speakers said they would like to continue remote classes using Zoom. Although enrollment rates for lower-level learners (CASAS level 1 and 2) and men were lower in the remote program than when classes were offered in person, attendance and participation were higher for women, and individual students’ hours spent in class were higher than in-person, pre-pandemic classes.



ABOUT THE REMOTE ADULT ESOL PROJECT

This case study is part of the Remote Adult ESOL¹ (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Project led by World Education, Inc. The project's goal is to document and disseminate viable remote adult ESOL program models and practices so that ESOL instruction can be done at scale efficiently and effectively in a variety of settings. The impetus for the project was to identify strategies for meeting the current interest and unmet demand as well as meeting potential demand prompted by English language requirements for U.S. citizenship under immigration reform. During winter and spring of 2021, the project investigated selected ESOL programs' and learners' needs, experiences, and promising instructional and learner support practices that rely predominantly on technology-rich strategies and tools deployed remotely.

This case study is one of eight full program profiles selected for its innovative program design and promising practices. The eight case studies of programs from across the U.S. are complemented by:

- *Policy and Practice Brief* that presents policy considerations and recommendations;
- *Creating Equitable Access to Remote ESOL and Supports in Multiple Contexts and for Distinct Populations and Purposes*, a cross-case analysis of remote adult ESOL delivery through the lens of the varied organizational settings in which they operate and the supports needed to engage distinct ESOL populations; and
- *Promising Remote ESOL Practices*, a document that highlights specific practices and innovations of selected, nominated programs from onboarding to instruction, digital skills development, and student and teacher supports.

¹ We use the term English for Speakers of Other Languages or ESOL rather than English as a Second Language (ESL) out of recognition that many English Learners already speak more than one language, just not English.