I-Better: Successes and Lessons Learned Through Implementing IBEST Programs

Questions generated from the webinar, and our responses

1. HS credential can be a barrier for many ESOL learners. Do you require students to earn a HSE? Do you recognize HSE from a student’s home country?

We do indeed recognize HSE from other countries. In our Hotel and Restaurant Management IBEST, we recruited English language learners who had a high school diploma from their own country. ESL students in the BHS IBEST were also seeking an HSE diploma. They all know that they need a diploma to succeed in the U.S.A.

2. Does part of your program include foreign credential evaluation? If so, what does that look like?

Our college refers out for foreign credentials. This hasn’t been much of a problem thus far. Students with advanced degrees are often trying to get training in a new field. If they already have a bachelor’s degree in a field and want to continue in that field, I would refer them to the University of Arizona’s graduate school, also located in Tucson.

3. What are AAS and AA??

Associate of Arts and Associate of Applied Science.

4. What are the key strategies to develop right partnerships if colleges do not already have access to right partners for implementing these programs?

We looked for the right partners within the College, and for strong links between our OneStop (WIOA Title I), the College, and industry. When looking for strong partners within the College, we worked with our Workforce Development team to identify those programs with the strongest sector and career potential. From there, we met with potential partners at the College, sharing documents we produced that describe IBEST goals, expectations and possible roles. It’s important to make sure that we all start with clarity on what we aim to do! At that point, we can narrow down the possible program partners, as some will not have the capacity or desire to engage with this program. As for industry partners, we work through the OneStop in our area, and the faculty themselves to engage with industry, as they are most closely connected with industry partners.

5. What is the cost to the learner to enroll in one of these programs? Are scholarships available?

The vast majority of students received scholarships or grants. IBEST students can apply for federal financial aid under the Ability-to-Benefit clause. Some students received grants from the Health Professions Opportunity Grant (HPOG) funds. Still others received WIOA funds through the Pima County OneStop.
6. Have you seen the report produced by the Urban Institute with implementation lessons from Accelerating Opportunity, which scaled up I-BEST in four states?

Yes, this is a very interesting report. Thank you for calling our attention to it. It can be found at urban.org.

7. Please explain "Employer Visit" further

Sometimes a worker from the career field comes in and tells students what their day-to-day job entails. Sometimes an HR person comes and describes the traits they look for in an employee. The goal of employer visits is to give students a better idea of what the work world in their field looks like and what they will need to be successful. It is also a way for us to connect with employers and let them see what great future employees we are training.

8. GED practice test and making students take it together is a great idea!
   (a) Did your program pay for their GED?
   (b) What if there is a gap between basic skills completion and GED administration? Did you face this problem?

Thanks, we learned this lesson the hard way. With our first BHS IBEST cohort, we did not plan the GED Ready during class time. We scheduled special times for students to come in and take the test. Some of them tested and some did not. There were a couple of students who never took the GED Ready in math because they were scared. In this last cohort, we did the GED Ready in class during the first couple of weeks of school. All students finished the GED Ready in all 4 subjects. It worked out well, the students had more confidence to take the official test.

Our state provides some vouchers for adult education programs. We used these vouchers to pay for the GED Ready. Our OneStop partners paid for all the official tests and retakes.

We live in a city, so it isn’t too hard for our students to schedule a GED test. Our students tended to take one test at a time as soon as they were ready.

9. Where might a volunteer staffed basic literacy program fit into this scenario?

I assume that if you are teaching basic literacy, other adult education programs exist in your area for students at higher reading levels (above 4th grade level). If this is the case, a literacy program could serve as an on-ramp for IBEST programs by teaching literacy skills within the context of career clusters. For example, it would be great if students came to the program with improved reading skills from reading about the trades. In this way, they would already have some content knowledge by the time they came to the IBEST program. Also, we know students learn better when engaged, so it is very likely that technically minded students would improve their reading more quickly by reading materials from their chosen field. Usually at these lower levels, several broad content areas are targeted such as medical careers, business and trades – in this way students don’t need to know exactly what interests them, but they begin in a general area they like.
10. Can you expand on what you cover in the 2-3 week pre-class?

We describe our 2-3 week class as an on-ramp. We use this time to frontload college readiness training. We teach note-taking, time management, basic computer skills such as file management, reading strategies, syllabus decoding, etc. Students take the GED Ready so that we have baseline scores for each student. To a certain extent, the skills we frontload depend on the career cluster. In Behavioral Health, we knew students would need to write a research paper, so we frontload a lesson on how to find peer-reviewed research articles. In Industrial Technology coursework, no such skills are needed, but more extensive computer instruction will be frontloaded to help with the CAD classes. Some of the goals of the on-ramp are to expose students to essential college skills, create group cohesion and develop confidence.

11. Did linking attendance help with retention? Did you implement EARLY ALERT to help the tracked students with attendance hurdles?

It seems to be helping quite a bit. In past cohorts attendance got worse during the fourth month and beyond. We are currently in month 4, so we will know definitively by January or February. We haven’t used the College’s Early Alert system because we have an “earlier alert” system in place. Teachers keep close tabs on attendance. In addition, the teachers, coordinator and student advisor meet every two weeks to discuss each individual student. If there are problems, we try to attend to them quickly.

12. How did you evaluate the contextualization component (level of contextualization) in the curriculum and classroom teaching?

This is a great question. We haven’t evaluated it formally. In my experience contextualization takes time. It was fairly easy to contextualize the reading portion of the ABE curriculum. We would use the CTE textbook and other materials as primary texts. For writing, we scaffolded assignments to scale-up to the CTE writing assignments or created assignments that would simulate what students would need in the workforce. The hardest subject to contextualize has been math. There was little to no math in the BHS curriculum, so the teacher had to create new materials. When it wasn’t practical to contextualize to the career area, we would contextualize to college and career readiness. For example, the ABE teacher had students calculate their grades in the credit class to teach fractions, decimals and per cents. We are far from being fully contextualized in math, but during each successive cohort, we are getting better.

We also make sure to gather regular student feedback on their perspectives of the contextualized curriculum, course structure and co-teaching. Through frequent student reflections, and occasional focus groups and individual conferences, we learn what approaches are most effective and how to adjust for greater success. These opportunities lead to greater student engagement, and certainly guide both our teaching practice and program design.

13. Built-in planning time is essential for CTE-basic skills instructor collaboration, we have heard again and again. How do you ensure this in teacher preparation time?

This has been one of our greatest challenges. Here is what we have done to try to address it.
1. Make the expectation clear in the MOU. Be specific about how much time and how often.

2. Pay for planning time.

That being said, we are still facing challenges with planning time. Some of our CTE faculty work full time jobs and moonlight as adjunct faculty. They have very little available time for planning. We try to schedule some time well ahead, so that those who work during the day can prepare for the planning days and leave a bit early. We also use email and Google docs to share planning processes and content. This is never as effective as face-to-face planning, but it certainly helps keep things moving forward.

14. What are the success measures (you mentioned certificate completion, increased ESL skills and employment in pathway/industry) you track for all career clusters? How did you track workforce outcomes?

We tracked TABE scores, GED completion, GED subtests passed, certificate completion and employment in the sector. Workforce outcomes were the most difficult data points to track. We called all our former students and relied on their reports. In addition, we gathered some attitudinal data through pre and post surveys of students, measuring things like increased self-confidence and perceived college readiness.

15. Can you tell us about the ESL level of the students you have selected, and why you have selected this level?

The English level for the Hotel and Restaurant Management program was at High-Intermediate reading skills and above. We based this on what the demands would be for engaging with college-level text. It turned out to still be quite challenging. There was a lot of work done early-on with how to read textbooks, understanding how to paraphrase, and take notes.

In general, we try to make sure that our ESL learners are at a high-intermediate level or higher. Below that, they would have too much trouble understanding the content in the credit classes. Also students must have good listening scores in order to survive in college classes, so a student with good written knowledge of English but little listening comprehension would be a bad fit. In our program, most students are immigrants and have better listening/speaking skills than reading/writing skills, but another program serving a different demographic might not show the same pattern of student skills.

Thank you for your participation in the webinar, and for your great questions. Feel free to contact us directly if you would like to talk further about these topics.

Wendy Scheder Black  wscheder@pima.edu
Laurie Kierstead Joseph  lkierstead@pima.edu