# 7.2 HyFlex To Support Independent Learning

Vanek, J., Simpson, D., Rosen, David J.

Patricia Mautone (Teacher), Monica Campbell (Teacher), and Sachiko Ozaki Oates (Administrator)   
**Santa Barbara City College, School of Extended Learning, Santa Barbara, California**

### Description of program and learners

Santa Barbara City College (SBCC) is a mid-sized city college with robust adult foundational education offerings; indeed, the college’s origin was as an American Federation of Teachers program. It is a federally designated Hispanic-serving institution. The Adult High School, GED (General Educational Development), and ESL programs serve around 1,500 students a year, with 30–40 students in one classroom.

HyFlex was adopted for the Integrated English and Training classes and Adult High School and GED classes, in part, to boost enrollment numbers in the midst of the pandemic.

#### Recruitment and Orientation

Sending email and texts to students about new opportunities was the primary method for recruiting learners. Administrators also placed ads on Facebook and posted fliers. All communications emphasized that classes were available either in person or remotely and were available any time of day, using any modality. An exit survey was used to do outreach for new classes.

Instructors provided new students with orientation on classroom materials and class logistics. The college student services office informed new students about institution-wide resources before they came to class.

### HyFlex in Action: Course and Instruction

Administrator Sachiko Oates noted that the use of HyFlex grew organically; SBCC used it to extend the modality of instruction as students demonstrated a need for new ways of participating in learning. Ultimately, the content and the technology used to deliver that learning was determined by what teachers understood would work best for students.

#### Planning

Program leaders had a very flexible approach to how they planned HyFlex instruction. SBCC’s adult secondary courses are open-entry/open-exit. In all HyFlex offerings, there was an emphasis on student independent learning, where technology was leveraged to support student collaboration and, when guidance was needed, connection with the teacher. Students who needed to be in the same physical space with the teacher to access that guidance — because they lacked access to technologies or the comfort and skill level to use [Zoom](https://zoom.us/) — came on campus. Some students had noisy home environments, so attended in person. Teachers were flexible about how collaboration happened online, so students who would rather work from home had an opportunity to participate in breakout rooms. This worked well for parents, who may have had to step away periodically to check on children. In the IET class on environmental horticulture, the ESL co-teacher provided extra language support to students on Zoom, though some students choose to attend in person.

#### Delivering Instruction

Teachers reported that they had to organize class time differently, allocating some time to work directly with classroom students, some time with the Zoom students, and some time to work with both simultaneously. Three strategies were key to their success: setting up classroom routines that students understood; having assignments and materials available that students could readily work on individually while the instructor worked with others; and assuring students that they could ask for help at any time if they got stuck or had a question.

The Integrated English and Training class had 10–15 learners and was co-taught by an ESOL instructor and a content specialist in environmental horticulture. The teacher emphasized whole-group activities in the first part of class. In the second part, students worked together in small groups. Each class followed a similar routine. The teacher started class with a speaking activity focused on a topic relevant to the class. Students then worked on a short dialog, practicing focal grammar or discourse strategy. Next, students focused on vocabulary and pronunciation. The teacher used [Newsela](https://newsela.com/) or [Burlington English](https://www.burlingtonenglish.com/) for asynchronous or extended learning.

The Adult High School (AHS) and GED class was also structured by a routine. That class met four days a week for four hours, with two of those days set up for HyFlex. The first hour included an opening activity, then an introduction to new content, followed by independent work in the classroom or a breakout room. (In either space, learners received personalized instruction from the teacher or a teaching assistant.) Assigned work was drawn from a range of online learning platforms or classroom materials and assigned to students to meet their learning needs. Those resources included [Edmentum](https://www.edmentum.com/), [Aztec](https://www.aztecsoftware.com/), [Reading Plus](https://www.readingplus.com/), or printed books in the classroom. One of the tasks of the teaching assistants was to note down questions students asked so that the instructor could personalize learning.

In the second hour, students worked on math. There was one dedicated Zoom breakout room for at-home students who wanted to hear whole-group instruction on a math concept. The teacher led this from a podium computer. Others stayed in a Zoom breakout room for independent work. The teacher used both room and Zoom whiteboards to support instruction or to review an assigned Aztec lesson or prepared [Google Slides](https://www.google.com/slides/about/). This part of the class focused on working out math or grammar problems together. This process and setup were repeated in the third hour, with content from a different subject area. The final hour was reserved for classroom students to get more personalized attention while online students worked independently or vice versa. Asynchronous assessments were considered an aspect of independent learning for this class.

#### Technologies

The key technology noted by the interviewees was Zoom, especially breakout room and whiteboard features. The IET class used a “high-tech classroom,” featuring 16 microphones and multiple cameras that captured in-person students’ voices and movements throughout the space. The teacher also made use of laptop webcams and a document camera. This setup created a more “normal” classroom community across modes and resulted in seamless communication, including non-verbal.

The AHS/GED class had three webcams: one built into the teacher’s personal laptop, one at the podium computer, and one at a secondary desktop computer the teacher used to monitor when students entered the main Zoom room. The physical classroom also had a projector with adjustable audio that allowed the instructor and classroom students to hear what Zoom students were saying. Classroom headphones or earbuds helped minimize noise and allowed some privacy when talking to students in the Zoom classrooms; this also allowed in-class students to focus on multimedia presentations while other students participated in discussions and lessons on other subjects.

Digital resources used as content for instruction included comprehensive online curricula: Edmuntum, Aztec, Reading Plus, and Burlington English. The teachers also made use of Newsela, Google Slides, scanned worksheets, readings, essay prompts, and quizzes.

### Technical Support and Training for Teachers and Learners

#### Tech Support

The SBCC IT department supported installing and maintaining the equipment and the bilingual IT help desk staff helped students and instructors with access and other technical issues. SBCC provided free Chromebooks and internet hotspots for registered students. Students got help from Student Support Services and instructors on how to use the Chromebooks and how to access emails, enrollment applications, and other tools.

#### Teacher Training

Sachiko noted that she paid close attention to faculty to provide what they needed but tried to not overwhelm them. She looked out for opportunities to provide technical support or training on topics such as pedagogy, equity, accessibility, or specific devices or software. Her goal was to make everyone feel like they were on the same team. The teachers confirmed that this supportive approach has helped. One teacher said, “Having a supportive manager who listens, is open, who anticipates and responds to needs — plus creates opportunities for us to share ideas and feel like part of a team — has been essential in helping us to navigate all this and serve our students better.”

All three interviewees observed that teachers new to HyFlex benefited from working with a mentor, an experienced HyFlex instructor who could show them strategies. Teachers need to have a disposition to take on new ways of working and be ready for change; they also need to be aware that teaching in HyFlex requires different interaction and engagement strategies. The interviewees noted that educators should be familiar with Zoom and other technology tools, know how to provide accessibility options for students who need alternatives, and need to know how to communicate clear expectations and instruction.

### Implementation: Lessons Learned

Information gleaned from student exit surveys and more casual feedback informed the shape of the HyFlex work at SBCC. SBCC staff reported that enrollment had increased since HyFlex classes were implemented. More students returned to learning, particularly students with disabilities, older students, and Latino male students. Learner persistence also improved, an important metric in this open-enrollment program. Not only were students returning each day, but they were also recruiting family and friends. Students also made learning gains.

#### Benefits

HyFlex fits SBCC’s prioritization of personalized learning well. Teachers relied on data from educational software and used that information to review progress and discuss challenges with students (e.g., “Looks like you are doing great on questions about the main idea, but let's review strategies for how to make inferences”). The flexibility of the synchronous learning modes made it possible for learners who might otherwise stop out to persist.

#### Challenges

Assessment was challenging. Teachers tried a variety of methods: creating quizzes in Google forms, scanning and sharing paper quizzes with instructions for students to show their work, and giving oral quizzes when going over work together.

Although they appreciated the flexibility for their students, teachers noted that there were trade-offs: they could get spread too thin and students online sometimes needed to wait their turn to get help. Teachers needed to constantly keep in mind that they were dealing with two audiences at a time and needed to build in practices to make this transparent to students and to better signal what was happening in the classroom (e.g., “I’m going to step away from the video for a few minutes to help someone, but will be right back; keep on working on that problem”). The instructional aides helped alleviate this issue.

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