



4.6 Ontario (ON)

Pop: 13,537,994

K–12 Schools: 4,913

K–12 Students: 2,051,865

of K–12 DE Programmes: ~82

of K–12 DE Students: 76,337

The development of K–12 online learning in the Province of Ontario began at the district level around 1994–95. For the next decade, these district-based programmes began to proliferate until 2005–06, when the Ministry of Education began the process of providing a centralized learning management system (LMS) and standardized online course content. Under this new model, districts were still responsible for the operation of their own distance education programme and could choose whether to use Ministry services and materials. At present, most school boards in the province maintain some form of online and/or blended learning programme, with many participating in one or more of the consortiums that have developed to allow school boards to cooperate in their provision of distance education opportunities for their students.

Distance Programmes

All 60 English-speaking and 12 French-speaking school boards offer some form of K–12 distance education. Many of these school boards have come together to form a consortium, designed to allow its school board members to work together to maximize their online offerings by sharing course offerings, resources and students. Examples of these consortia include:

- Ontario eLearning Consortium – 20 members
- Ontario Catholic eLearning Consortium – 29 members
- Northern e-Learning Consortium – 15 members
- *Consortium d'apprentissage virtuel de langue française de l'Ontario* – 12 members.

Along with the distance education offered by these public school boards, the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) continues to provide high school credit courses, high school diploma and GED High School Equivalency Certificate distance education opportunities to adolescent and adult students throughout the province. There are several private K–12 online learning programmes:

- Canadian World Schools
- Canada eSchool/Ottawa Carleton e-School
- Canadian Online High School

- GED Preparation Centre Private High School
- Link on Learning
- Ontario Virtual School; Ontario eSchool
- Virtual Elementary School
- Virtual High School

Finally, the eLearning Consortium (previously the Conference of Independent Schools eLearning Consortium) is a consortium of or private schools that deliver online curriculum for the students of the 19 member independent schools.

It is estimated that in 2012–13 there were approximately 51,853 students taking e-learning courses, including summer school, from school boards as part of the Provincial e-Learning Strategy—and approximately 125,373 unique blended learning logins. It is also estimated the ILC has 19,484 students enrolled in their correspondence courses. Finally, the most recent data available indicated there were approximately 5,000 students enrolled in private online schools.

Governance and Regulation

In 2006, the Ministry of Education launched the Provincial e-Learning Strategy, with the French component, the *Stratégie, d'apprentissage électronique Ontario*, launching a year later. As part of this strategy, the Ministry is responsible for providing school boards with various supports necessary to provide students with e-learning and blended learning opportunities, as well as providing e-learning leadership within the provincially funded school system. School boards are responsible for the delivery of e-learning, including programme direction, hiring staff, registering students, teaching students and granting credits. School boards participating in the Provincial e-Learning Strategy have access to a provincially licensed learning management system (LMS), Ontario Educational Resource Bank, E-Community Ontario and Seat Reservation System. Most school boards deliver e-learning credit-courses through the provincial LMS. Blended learning was piloted in 16 school boards in 2009–10 and 19 school boards in 2010–11. The success of the pilots, along with a new LMS contract, prompted the Ministry to make blended learning available to all school boards on September 1, 2011.

The Ministry is providing funding for one e-Learning Contact (eLC) per board in 2013–14. The purpose of the eLC position is to ensure that there is coordination and leadership in boards for e-learning, blended learning, Homework Help and Ministry-funded digital resources. ELC funding was also provided to school boards in 2011–12 and 2012–13.

As part of the Provincial e-Learning Strategy, students may enrol in an e-learning course that is offered by another board provided they do so through their home school. In such a situation, the applicability of provincially established fees for students taking e-learning courses from a school of another school board shall be worked out locally between the two boards. Where it is agreed that fees are

appropriate, the fee is the amount established by the Ministry. For 2013–14 the fee is \$725. Students enrolled in e-learning courses will not be charged any fees, including fees for registration, materials, or administration. The Ministry covers the students' costs when the board places these students on the appropriate funding register.

Vignette: Online Learning and the TDSB Local OSSTF

When the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) introduced its e-learning day-school credit programme circa 2008, the local Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers Federation (OSSTF) bargaining unit executive had immediate concerns that we had no workload language specific to the teaching conditions within which our members assigned to these courses would work. Among our specific concerns in relation to the introduction of this new programme were how teachers' workloads might be affected by having students from multiple schools enrolled in their courses and that the teacher would potentially be expected by students to be immediately available on a 24/7 basis. In addition, our class size caps at that time did not contemplate e-learning courses, nor did our language related to qualifications and staffing for online instruction.

Through an established process, the appropriate bargaining unit personnel shared these concerns with the appropriate personnel in management, establishing the following protections for teachers:

- A teacher must be qualified to teach the curriculum in the credit offering of an e-learning course and must provide his or her consent to teach in an e-learning programme. Once they have taught e-learning once, teachers are considered experienced, but not certificated in e-learning for the purposes of future staffing, but have the ability to have e-learning removed from their certification records at will.
- Class size limits that apply to traditional classes will also apply to e-learning classes.
- Initially no teacher could be assigned to teach more than three e-learning courses in a semester, or in a full year school, per year. This condition has now been modified so that a willing teacher could have up to a full timetable (six courses) of e-learning classes.
- Teachers establish availability hours for student access.

In agreeing to these limitations, both the Board personnel and union officials agreed that these working conditions would help to protect the quality of the new e-learning programme.

These conditions (like all working conditions agreed upon between OSSTF District 12 Secondary Teachers Bargaining Unit and the TDSB) are reviewed annually with the possibility of mutually agreed upon refinements being implemented. They also form part of the regular bargaining process where mutual agreement for change is not achieved.