

3.6 Ontario (ON)

Population: 13,537,994

Number of K-12 Schools: 4,893

Number of K-12 Students: 2,003,253

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: ~81

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: ~94,500



K-12 E-Learning Programs

Each of the 60 English-speaking and 12 French-speaking school boards have the ability to offer some form of online learning using the Ministry-sponsored learning management system combined with the online curricular materials provided or their own. Many of the school boards also participate in one or more consortia designed to allow its school board members to work together to maximize their online offerings by sharing course offerings, resources and students. Additionally, the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) continues to provide correspondence distance education opportunities to adolescent and adult students throughout the province. Finally, there are as many as eight different private or independent K-12 online learning programs, some of whom have formed their own consortium.

The last year the Ministry of Education provided data to researchers was for the 2013-14, when they reported that there were approximately 52,095 students taking e-learning courses (including summer school). Based on less than 10 responses to the individual program survey that indicated an average growth in public school board programs of 15%, researchers estimated that there were approximately 60,000 students taking e-learning courses during the 2014-15 school year. Data from more than 20 school board programs over the past two years have indicated that those programs have experienced a 30% to 35% growth in enrollment over the past two years. Based on this information, it is estimated that there are approximately 67,000 students taking e-learning courses during the 2015-16 school year. It is also estimated the ILC had approximately 20,000 students enrolled in their correspondence courses. Finally, the most recent data available indicated there were approximately 7,500 students enrolled in private online schools.

It should also be noted that in their last response to researchers, the Ministry of Education also indicated that there were approximately 237,930 unique blended learning logins in their system during the 2013-14 school year.

Governance and Regulation

Since 2006, the *Provincial e-Learning Strategy* has guided the Ministry to provide school boards with various supports necessary to provide students with online and blended learning opportunities, as well as providing e-learning leadership within the provincially funded school system. Under this policy,

the Ministry provides school boards with access to a learning management system and other tools for the delivery of e-learning, asynchronous course content and a variety of multimedia learning objects, and a variety of other technical and human resource supports. School boards, that are responsible for the actual delivery of e-learning, must sign a "Master User Agreement" (e.g., see <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/elearning/MasterUserAgreement.pdf>) to access all of the services that the Ministry provides.

Private online schools operate as a business in Ontario, independent of the Ministry of Education. Those schools offering credits towards the Ontario Secondary School Diploma require an inspection. Inspectors look for evidence of ongoing interactions between the teacher and students in the online learning environment, and for a direct link between the specific and overall curriculum expectations being taught and assessed in compliance with Ministry policy and observed practices. Inspectors review online courses for compliance with *Growing Success*, 2010.

[Note that there is a new vignette from Ontario available at the <http://k12sotn.ca/on/> focused on the eLearning at the Upper Canada District School Board (UCDSB), supported by the Ontario eLearning Consortium. The vignette provides a testimony to the effectiveness of the consortium as the UCDSB has tripled their e-learning offerings and expanded to offer a Continuing Education program as well. They did this while addressing geographical and technological challenges. By joining the consortium, the UCDSB not only expanded its course offerings, but improved networking, collaboration, and professional learning opportunities for teachers.]