

2.3.3 Alberta

The most western of the three prairie provinces, Alberta has a population of 3,632,483 — or more than three times the population of Manitoba and Saskatchewan (Statistics Canada, 2009). The province has a total area of just over 661,848 km², making it approximately the same size as its two prairie counterparts, although its population density is the highest of the four Western provinces at 5.5/km². The two largest cities in the province are Calgary with a population of almost 1,000,000 and the capital city, Edmonton, with over 700,000 people.

K-12 Online Learning

There was no response from the Alberta Ministry of Education, as such this profile has been developed based on a document analysis of the Ministry's website and other published Government documents.

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Province-led programme	Yes	
Other online programmes	Yes	
Provincial-level policy	Yes	More extensive policies are currently being formulated.

Online Programmes

At present there are over 20 K-12 distributed learning programmes in Alberta (n.b., distributed learning is the terms used to encompass all forms of K-12 distance education in Alberta). There is a single province-wide programme, the Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC), which serves 27,000 secondary school students and 3,000 elementary school students. The ADLC offers courses in a variety of formats (e.g., print, online, and blended formats), and it also manages the Vista Virtual School for its online course offerings.

In addition to the province-wide programme, there are also a series of district based programmes supported by the various public and Catholic school districts in the province (and note that Alberta is a province that has publicly funded Catholic school districts). These include Argyll Centre, Aspen View Virtual School, Battle River Online, Buffalo Trail Students Online, Golden Hills Virtual School, Holy Family Cyber High School, Innovative Learning Services, InterEd, Peace Academy of Virtual Education, Revelation Online, Rocky View Virtual School, School of Hope, St. Gabriel Cyber School, St. Paul's Academy Centre for Learning[®]Home, among others.

Finally, there is an aboriginal focused online school — SunChild E-Learning Community. Note that Alberta is the only province in Canada that has charter school legislation — although at this time there are no cyber charter schools in operation.

Provincial Policies

At present, the *School Act* includes the following provisions related to distance education:

Division 4 – Section 39. (3) The Minister may make regulations:

- (e) providing for correspondence courses and the fees to be charged in connection with them;
- (f) governing registration in, the fees to be charged for registration in and the operation of private correspondence courses and private tutoring institutions that offer correspondence courses or tutoring in the same or substantially the same subjects as those offered in schools.

In addition, Alberta has sections in their annual *Guide to Education* related to distance education, blended learning and online delivery that outline some specific requirements primarily related to the amount of required instructional time. It also advises school authorities that wish to undertake online programmes that they will need to consider:

how student attendance is to be defined, the role of parents in instruction, assessment and supervision of student work, staffing levels, time frames for student access to the instructional expertise of teachers, student evaluation practices, requirements for programme access by students living outside Alberta, programme decisions; e.g., self-paced or teacher controlled, how to deliver all outcomes of Alberta programme of study, provision for writing achievement tests and diploma examinations, programme and teacher evaluation, [and] how to provide alternative forms of programme delivery for non-resident students who are experiencing difficulty in the online environment. (Government of Alberta, 2009, p. 67).

This provides individual programmes with much flexibility in creating their K-12 distance education programmes. It is important to note that the Ministry of Education views online education as one of the potential school choice options, along with the public and Catholic school systems, Francophone, charter and private schools, home education and blended programmes, and alternative education programmes.

Governance, Tracking, and Accountability

Beginning in 2007, the Ministry of Education has undertaken a review of K-12 distance education in the province with the goal of developing a Distributed Learning Strategy. To date there has been a broad consultation process that has included 1,774 responses to an online survey, 60 interviews, 28 focus groups, and 21 site visits (some of which has been archived online by the Distributed Learning Forum Online Community). Fournier (2009) indicates that this process will be completed by 2010-11.

There is no indication that the Ministry keeps records of number of K-12 students who complete courses at a distance. It also does not appear that the Ministry tracks the delivery model in which students complete a course to allow for a comparison of student performance between students who complete their courses at a distance with those who complete them in a traditional brick-and-mortar format. While the Ministry does not appear to track student performance based on deliver model, many of the individual programmes do. For example, the ADLC outlines their completion rates and student averages by school in their *Annual Education Results Report*, which is submitted to the Ministry each year.