



4.9 Alberta

Population – 3,645,257

Total Area – 661,848 km²

Population Density – 5.51 people/km²

Capital (Population) – Edmonton (812,201)

Number of K–12 Schools – 2166 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Students – 614,757 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Distance Education Programs – 21

Number of K–12 Distance Education Students – 69,126

K–12 Distance Education Policy – None

Distance Programs

At present there is a single province-wide program administered by the Pembina Hills Regional School Division, the Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC). ADLC offers courses in a variety of formats (e.g., print, online, and blended formats), and also manages the Vista Virtual School and partners with *Centre francophone d'éducation à distance*. In 2011–12, the ADLC had 46,424 secondary students, 5111 elementary/junior high, and approximately 2700 fee-paying adult learners enrol in one or more distance courses.

In addition to this province-wide program, there are also 19 district-based programs supported by the various public and Catholic school districts in the province. These district-based programs accounted for an additional 14,341 students. Finally, there is an Aboriginal focused online school—SunChild E-Learning Community, which enrolled 550 students.

Governance and Regulation

At present, the School Act grants the Minister of Education the authority to make regulations with respect to public and private distance education program. The Ministry has yet to exert that authority beyond outlining some specific requirements primarily related to the amount of required instructional time as a part of their annual *Guide to Education*. Over the past five years, there have been several consultation initiatives with respect to distance learning in the province. The first began in 2007 when the Ministry of Education reviewed K–12 distance education with the goal of developing a *Distributed Learning Strategy*. While there was a broad consultation process (including 1774 responses to an online survey, 60 interviews, 28 focus groups, and 21 site visits), that initiative appeared to be subsumed into a subsequent larger initiative.

The *Inspiring Action on Education* initiative began in June 2010, with the release outlining the policy directions within the broader context of provincial government strategies and initiatives aimed at building a stronger future for Alberta. The report aimed to provide a framework for systematic discussion of the vision, values, principles and policy directions for transforming Alberta's education system. Public feedback occurred from June to October, followed by a series of Ministry-generated reports in December summarizing the responses.

This past April (2012) the Government introduced *Bill 2: Education Act* that did not specifically mention distance or distributed learning programs, but included in its preamble:

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta recognizes the importance of enabling high quality and socially engaging learning opportunities with flexible timing and pacing through a range of learning environments to meet diverse student needs and to maximize student success;

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta is committed to providing choice to students in education programs and methods of learning. (p. 12)

While this was not an indication that the Government plans to increase the amount of online and blended learning that is occurring in the province, Alberta is the only province to have legislation that authorizes the operation of charter schools and the only province where K–12 distance education is growing in the absence of any real regulation or governance of the delivery model.

Earlier this year, Alberta Education contracted Schmidt and Carbol Consulting Group to conduct a province-wide review of distance education programs and services. The review, which was initiated because of a pending renewal of the educational services agreement concerning the ADLC between the Ministry and Pembina Hills Regional Division, will examine various service, governance and funding models for distance education and provide recommendations to ensure that distance education in the future reflects the vision set out in *Inspiring Action on Education*.

The review began in April 2012 and will conclude in January 2014.

Interprovincial and International

If a student takes a course from another province, territory, or country the student will receive a report card from the school authority providing the course. If the student wishes to receive credit for the course the process for applying to receive transfer credit is described in the “Awarding Course Credits” section of the *Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12*.

It is the expectation of the Ministry of Education that school authorities will focus on providing programming to Alberta students and out-of-province students who physically come to Alberta to learn. Alberta Education does not provide funding for out-of-province students unless they are residents of Alberta and maintain a home in Alberta with the intention of returning to the province. It is the practice of the Ministry to not provide services to students in other countries without a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two governments. Alberta has established a number of MOUs, enabling the establishment of accredited out-of-province schools that use Alberta’s programs of study and have Alberta certificated teachers. In examining the list of international schools currently approved, none appear to provide distance education service.