

	<h2>British Columbia</h2>
<p>Population – 4,419,974 Total Area – 944,735 km² Population Density – 4.68 people/km² Capital (Population) – Victoria (78,057) Number of K-12 Schools – 1976 (2009-10) Number of K-12 Students – 649,952 (2009-10)</p>	

British Columbia is the most westerly province in the country, as well as the largest and most populace of the Western Canadian provinces. The largest city in the province is Vancouver, which is also the third largest in Canada, and the greater Vancouver region has approximately 2,300,000. If you exclude the greater Vancouver region and the metropolitan Victoria area, the population density of the province drops to 2.1 people/km².

K-12 Online Learning

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Province-led programme	Yes	
Other online programmes	Yes	53 public & 12 independent
Provincial-level policy	Yes	School Act, Sections 3.1 & 75 (4.1) Distributed Learning Policy Independent School Act, Section 8.1

Online Programmes

The primary distance education programmes, or distributed learning schools (as they are referred to in the province), are at the district level. At present there are 53 public distributed learning schools and 12 independent (or private) distributed learning schools. LearnNowBC is a web portal and single point of entry to information about distributed (online) learning in British Columbia for students, parents and educators. This one-stop educational portal provides access to choices and free services such as tutoring, advising, homework help, etc. for learners of all ages. There is a searchable course database that lists courses from all 53 distributed learning schools. In 2009-10, there were 71,405 unique students enrolled in one or more courses through distributed learning in British Columbia. This has increased from 59,345 students in 2008-09, 48,941 students in 2007-08, and 33,022 students in 2006-07.

Open School, previously supported with Ministry of Education funding and now operated on a cost-recovery model by another Ministry, provides provincial content and online hosting services to Boards without the capacity or desire to manage their own.

Governance and Regulation

The legislative language in the *School Act, 2006* allows for a student engaged in distributed learning to enrol in educational programmes falling under multiple jurisdictions (or boards of education—see section 3.1 of the *School Act*), and that any school district wishing to establish a distributed learning school can do so “only with the prior agreement of the minister” (see section 75 (4.1) of the *School Act*). The *Independent School Act, 2006* contains similar language concerning the establishment of distributed learning schools “only with the prior agreement of the minister” (see section 8.1). As such, these agreements between the Ministry and the school districts or independent schools, combined with policy, serve as the main governance documents for distributed learning in British Columbia.

In addition to the distributed learning agreements between the Ministry and the individual school districts, the Ministry also has a series of policy documents that outline the regulations that distributed learning schools must follow. The key features of these regulations are:

- boards of education are responsible for distributed learning;
- boards must use BC certified teachers;
- students taking distributed learning must meet the same course requirements as any other student;
- it must be tuition free;
- it must provide appropriate support within a coordinated province-wide distributed learning system;
- courses taken through distributed learning are equivalent to the same course taken in a classroom; and
- students enrol at the school of their choice, not through the Ministry.

Links to all of the policy documents, along with the general agreements between the Ministry and school districts are available on the Ministry’s website.

Since 2006, distributed learning is funded on a course-based model, and pro-rated based on who is delivering the courses. Each full course is considered equivalent to 1/8 FTE and a normal FTE is 8 courses. For example, if a student takes 2 courses from a virtual school and 6 courses from a brick-and-mortar or neighbourhood school. The virtual school would get 2 courses of funding (1/4 FTE) and the other school 6 courses (3/4 FTE). However, it should be noted that students are not capped at 1 FTE. A neighbourhood school can provide support for students at their school engaged in distributed learning and receive a “DL Support Block” equal to 1/8 of the FTE funding. For example, if a student takes 7 courses at his neighbourhood school, which also provides him with a support block, and 1 online course from a virtual school. The neighbourhood school would get 1 FTE funding and the online school would get 1/8 FTE funding. Neighbourhood schools that provide this school-level support are still capped at 1 FTE.

The responsibility for quality assurance falls upon the Ministry, which is undertaken through the use of compliance audits and quality review site visits that combine a series of quantitative and qualitative measures. This process was described earlier, in the Brief Issue Paper written by Tim Winkelmanns from the e-Learning Programmes Unit of the Ministry of Education.