



4.10 British Columbia

Population – 4,400,057

Total Area – 944,735 km²

Population Density – 4.66 people/km²

Capital (Population) – Victoria (80,017)

Number of K–12 Schools – 1949 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Students – 641,592 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Distance Education Programmes – 73

Number of K–12 Distance Education Students – 78,650¹¹

K–12 Distance Education Policy – School Act, Independent School Act, Distributed Learning Policy

Distance Programs

In 2011–12 there were 55 district level public distributed learning schools and 18 independent (or private) distributed learning schools that enrolled approximately 78,000 unique students in one or more courses in British Columbia. LearnNowBC continues to serve as a web portal and single point of entry to information about distributed learning for students, parents and educators in the province. Additionally, Open School BC provides provincial content and online hosting services on a cost-recovery model to Boards without the capacity or desire to manage their own.

Governance and Regulation

The distributed learning landscape in British Columbia has remained relatively stable over the past year. The legislative language in section 3.1 and section 75 (4.1) of the *School Act, 2006*, as well as section 8.1 of the *Independent School Act, 2006*, still govern the operation of distributed learning programs. Both pieces of legislation contain similar language concerning the establishment of distributed learning schools “only with the prior agreement of the minister.” As such, these agreements between the Ministry and the school districts or independent schools serve as the main governance documents for distributed learning in British Columbia. In addition to these agreements, the Ministry also has a series of policy documents that outline the regulations that distributed learning schools must follow (for public school regulations see:

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/dist_learning/ and for independent school regulations see:

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/independentschools/bc_guide/dl_program.htm#dlfund).

One regulatory change that has occurred focuses on altering the way that graduated adults are provided services under the province’s Education Guarantee (see http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/graduation/adult_courses.htm). Graduated adults enrolled in distance education after May 2012 may select courses from a specified list of funded courses. As well, the enrolling district receives a portion of the funding upon enrolment and the remainder upon completion of the course. Prior to May 2012, distributed learning schools received full enrolment funding for graduated adults taking any provincial or approved local course.

¹¹ Due to a mid-year recalculation of distributed learning enrolments, the 2010–11 enrolment figure reported last year (88,000) has been revised. The actual number of students enrolled was 77,053 students.

Another legislative change that may take effect during the 2012–13 school year is a provision in Bill 36 (see http://www.leg.bc.ca/39th4th/1st_read/gov36-1.htm) that provides flexible learning choices for all students. One issue that will still need to be resolved is whether this will provide flexibility to the extent that any student may enrol in any course from any provider (including interprovincial and international offerings), and this issue will be part of the consultation the Ministry will be undertaking in the coming year.

Interprovincial and International

If a student in British Columbia took a course from an online program in another province or territory, or even in another country, the student would present him/herself at a neighbourhood or distributed learning school and request either equivalency for a credential earned in another jurisdiction, or permission to challenge a course for credit based on prior learning or experience. The Ministry's policy is to allow each school to have their own procedures to guide this process.

At present, there is only one school district business company (i.e., SD73 Business Company) that has an agreement with the Ministry to offer distributed learning content to non-resident students. The Business Company, is owned by the district but operates at an arms-length and is not able to grant British Columbia credits at this time. A non-resident student who completes a course through the SD73 Business Company would have to go through the process of receiving credit for the student's course based on the guidelines established in the student's own jurisdiction. Additionally, there are a few distributed learning programs that have specific agreements in place to serve students in a given jurisdiction. For example, the Northern British Columbia Distance Education School can serve students in the Yukon by special arrangement. The Yukon Department of Education is responsible for recognizing those credits (although the Yukon does follow the British Columbia K–12 curriculum).