

3.6 Ontario (ON)

Population: 13,537,994

Number of K-12 Schools: 4,897

Number of K-12 Students: 2,015,411

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: ~81

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: 78,095



K-12 Distance Programs

Districts are responsible for the operation of their own online learning program, however they are able to choose whether to use a Ministry-sponsored learning management system and online curricular materials, or their own. As such, all 60 English-speaking and 12 French-speaking school boards should offer some form of K-12 online learning. Many of these school boards also participate in one or more consortiums designed to allow its school board members to work together to maximize their online programs by sharing course offerings, resources and students.

Along with the online learning offered by these public school boards, the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) continues to provide high school credit courses, high school diploma and GED High School Equivalency Certificate 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 these programs are also members of the e-Learning Consortium.

It is estimated that in 2013-14 there were approximately 52,095 students taking e-learning courses, including summer school, from school boards through the Ministry of Education's virtual learning environment, and approximately 237,930 unique blended learning logins. It is also estimated the ILC has approximately 20,000 students enrolled in their correspondence courses. Finally, the most recent data available indicated there were approximately 6,000 students enrolled in private online schools.

Governance and Regulation

Since 2006, the Provincial e-Learning Strategy has guided the Ministry in providing school districts 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. These supports have included a provincially licensed learning management system, Ontario Educational Resource Bank, E-Community Ontario, Seat Reservation System, and an e-Learning Contact per district funded by the Ministry of Education. School districts are responsible for the delivery of online learning (e.g., program direction, hiring staff, registering students, course delivery and granting credits).

As part of the *Provincial e-Learning Strategy*, students may enroll in an online course offered by another district provided they do so through their home school. In such a situation, the applicability of provincially established fees for students taking e-learning courses are worked out locally between the two boards.

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. The Ministry of Education's inspection of an online private school is based on a review of posted online content, a review of asynchronous conferencing between teachers and students, interview with the principal and other school staff, visits to synchronous online sessions and an examination of school documents and records of students' work. 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*; including the presence of learning goals and success criteria as well as peer and self-assessment.