

3.9 Alberta (AB)

Population: 4,025,074

Number of K-12 Schools: 2,152

Number of K-12 Students: 691,876

Number of K-12 E-Learning Programs: ~20

Number of K-12 E-Learning Students: ~60,000



K-12 E-Learning Programs

It is believed that approximately 20 school divisions in the province offer an assortment of online learning, catering mostly to students in their own geographic jurisdiction. Some of these district-based programs manage students in other regions of the province, but at present there is only one single province-wide program (i.e., the Alberta Distance Learning Centre [ADLC]) that offers courses to over 44,000 students in the province. The Ministry reports that the provincial student information database indicated that there were 9,985 students enrolled in online programs during the 2015-16 school year, but many school authorities currently do not code their students as being online. Accordingly, the actual number of students engaged in some form of distance or online learning across all education authorities is unknown. Based on the most recent responses of the annual individual program survey from 11 of the e-learning programs, there were approximately 50,000 students engaged in distance and/or online learning.

While the Ministry of Education does not collect enrollment data for blended learning, it is believed that the level of blended learning is growing in the province. For example, blendedED – a conference focused on fostering the growth of quality blended learning opportunities for students in Alberta that began two years ago – has attracted approximately 300 participants each year from outreach programs, learning centres, distance learning programs or classrooms that are using the online environment to expand and extend learning opportunities and building flexibility to student learning. This past year the Alberta’s BlendEd Learning Society was organized to support the annual blendedED conference specifically to promote structured dialogue and share emerging practices while providing opportunities for networking.

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 programs. The Ministry has generally not exerted that authority beyond outlining some specific requirements primarily related to the amount of required instructional time as a part of its annual *Guide to Education*.

The service agreement for ADLC has been extended for a period up to and including August 31, 2018. The extension allows the Ministry to engage in work that will inform the next steps for the future of distance, online and blended learning in Alberta, and will enable the Ministry to share more robust information in the future. The *Centre francophone d'éducation à distance*, the online service provider for the five Francophone school boards in the province, operates under an annual conditional grant from the Ministry with other operational funds secured from the Francophone boards and adult education service provision.

It should be noted that since 2007 there have been consultation initiatives related specifically to distributed learning policy, that was later included as a part of the consultations on the 2011 *Inspiring Action in Education* initiative. These consultations were followed by a two-year review of distance education programs and services offered in the province conducted by an external consulting firm with the goal of recommending a provincial model for distance education delivery. In 2016 an online learning advisor was appointed by the Ministry to address the need for changes in policy, as well as the establishment of standards, guidelines and quality indicators in online and blended learning. In addition, efforts are underway to identify more accurate data regarding e-learning throughout the province.

[Note that there is a new vignette from Alberta available at the <http://k12sotn.ca/ab/> focused on the role of the online learning advisor that was appointed by the Ministry in 2016.]