

3.9 Alberta (AB)

Population: 4,291,980

Number of K-12 Schools: 2,225

Number of K-12 Students: 704,813

Number of K-12 E-Learning Programs: 23

*Number of K-12 E-Learning Students: *64,007*

* enrollments, not students



Governance and Regulation

At present, the *School Act* grants the Minister of Education the authority to make regulations with respect to distance education programs. While distance learning is not defined by the Ministry, online learning is defined as:

a structured learning environment in which students engage with their teachers in one or more courses online. The planning and implementation of instruction, as well as the assessment of student learning in relation to the outcomes from the Alberta programs of study, is the responsibility of Alberta certificated teachers employed by a school authority (Government of Alberta, 2017, p. 80).

Alberta Education is currently developing an online learning tool kit that will provide guidance and direction for families, teachers and school/system leaders.

Enrollment in distance and online learning programs are tracked through the use of specific codes in the provincial student information systems. At present, there are currently three specific coding mechanisms for tracking online enrollments.

1. Schools may indicate on their annual operating plans that they offer an online program.
2. Courses may be identified as virtual and distance learning in provincial student information systems.
3. Students who are completing the majority of their courses online can be identified as such using the online learning student enrollment code.

However, Alberta Education is aware that some schools and school authorities may not use the appropriate coding for distance and online courses and is working with school authorities to increase awareness and improve accuracy in the assignment of student and program codes for online and distance learning programs.

Distance and online learning are also funded differently than brick-and-mortar education. The *Funding Manual for School Authorities* prescribes funding mechanisms that are that are not available

when a student is enrolled as an online learning student (e.g., Plant, Operations and Maintenance; Infrastructure Maintenance and Renewal; etc.). Further, a school authority must be able to demonstrate how 950 hours of distance/online 'access' for elementary and junior high students and 1,000 hours of distance/online "access" for senior high students is being met in order to ensure requirements are met to be eligible for funding.

Finally, it should be noted that during the 2016-17 school year, the Ministry completed 19 field support visits to those providing online programs in order to:

- develop an understanding of the implementation of online programs to inform the development of policy, standards and quality indicators; and
- provide an informal mechanism to raise awareness and seek input throughout the process.

These visits are being used to inform the development of an online learning tool kit, as well as assist in the creation of additional support tools and policy documents.

K-12 Distance and Online Learning Activity

Based on the information in the provincial tracking system, during the 2016-17 school year there were 364 schools that indicated on their operational forms that they had students enrolled in an online program. Additionally, 52 schools used the virtual course enrollment code, eight schools used the distance learning course enrollment code, and 81 schools used the online learning student enrollment code. Overall, there were a total of 12,736 students coded as online learning, as well as 37,608 distance learning course enrollments and 26,399 virtual course enrollments for the 2016-17 school year.

At present, Alberta Education is aware of 23 different distance and/or online learning programs. While most of these are focused at the school division level, there are two programs that are provincial in scope. The first is the Alberta Distance Learning Centre, which is operated under a service agreement between Alberta Education and the Pembina Hills School Division (which is set to expire on August 31, 2018). The second is the *Centre francophone d'éducation à distance*, an online service provider for the four Francophone school boards in the province, which operates under an annual conditional grant from the Alberta Education with other operational funds secured from the francophone boards and adult education service provision.

K-12 Blended Learning Activity

A blended program in Alberta has historically been defined as a student's education program that consists of two parts: where the school-authority is responsible for the student's education program, and where the parent is responsible for their child's education program. In 2017-18, Alberta Education will be transitioning this terminology to "shared responsibility" in order to identify programs where the school authority and parent share responsibility for the child's program. This change will allow Alberta to become more aligned with the current e-learning vernacular.

Alberta Education does not collect enrollment data for blended learning, and there was only one program that completed the annual *Individual Program Survey* that provided blended learning data. It can be reported that in October 2017 the third annual Alberta BlendED Symposium was held, a conference organized by Alberta's BlendED Learning Society and focused on fostering the growth of quality blended learning opportunities for student in Alberta.