

3.10 British Columbia (BC)

Population: 4,683,139

Number of K-12 Schools: 1930

Number of K-12 Students: 635,037

Number of K-12 E-Learning Programs: 74

Number of K-12 E-Learning Students: ~63,350



Governance and Regulation

The Ministry of Education and Training defines distributed learning (i.e., a term used to include both distance and online learning) as a method of instruction that relies primarily on indirect communication between students and teachers, including Internet or other electronic-based delivery, teleconferencing, or correspondence.

The distributed learning landscape has remained relatively stable over the past years. 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.” Districts and independent schools that enter into an agreement with the Ministry are required to:

- ensure that students may exercise their rights under legislation to choose distributed learning instruction within a coordinated province-wide distributed learning system;
- commit to meet or exceed the Distributed Learning Standards;
- agree to participate in the Quality Assurance Review process and align its website to meet Ministry requirements;
- ensure it has supports in place to comply with the Ministry policy and standards, including resource investment;
- provide training and professional development for teachers, and employ only teachers who have experience and/or training in distributed learning methodology;
- meet policy requirements related to funds for designated resources to parents and learners;
- ensure that all learners in the board’s catchment area who are receiving distributed learning instruction from anywhere in the province are receiving appropriate support;
- provide records and reports on student achievement as specified by the Ministry;
- work to achieve a 100 percent participation rate in Foundation Skills Assessments and Satisfaction Surveys;
- provide current and accurate distributed learning contact information to the Ministry; and
- provide accurate information regarding its Distributed Learning website, courses offered, and contact information to the Ministry by July 31 of each year, updating the information as required.

Finally, the funding for distributed learning is somewhat different than traditional brick-and-mortar schools. Distributed learning funding is provided to the public school district or the independent authority providing the distributed learning program. For full-time students in kindergarten to grade 9, traditional brick-and-mortar schools, school districts are funded one time, as at September 30th (students in seats), while students in grades 10-12 are funded per course. Distributed learning schools have three funding opportunities depending on when the students meet eligibility requirements:

- September (30th) distributed learning schools receive 100% of per pupil funding;
- February distributed learning schools receive 50% of per pupil funding; and
- May distributed learning schools receive 33% of per pupil funding.

During the 2016-17 school year, the basic allocation school-age equivalent (i.e., FTE) for students attending a brick-and-mortar school was \$7,218 (or \$902.25/course), while only \$6,030 (or \$753.75/course) for a student attending a distributed learning school.

K-12 Distance and Online Learning Activity

The Ministry tracks student enrollment through the Student Achievement Data Exchange (SADE). SADE collects course level data for every student for all distributed learning schools offering kindergarten through grade 12. School districts and authorities operating distributed learning schools are required to submit this information annually.

In 2016-17 there were 58 district-level public distributed learning schools and 16 independent distributed learning schools that enrolled approximately 57,046 unique students in one or more courses. Additionally, Open School BC also provided provincial content and online hosting services on a cost-recovery model to school districts lacking the capacity or desire to manage their own distributed learning program. Finally, the BC Learning Network, a consortium of school districts providing online courses for use by distributed learning schools, has entered the final year of its content development plan, to create online content and digital resources that can be used in all learning environments.

K-12 Blended Learning Activity

Under the current policy, the delivery method is considered distributed learning as long as the student is at a distance from the teacher for the “majority of the time,” which is not explicitly defined. The current funding model in British Columbia does not differentiate between distributed learning and blended learning or between face-to-face and blended learning. However, there are different funding amounts for face-to-face courses and programs, as compared to distributed learning courses.

At present, the Ministry of Education has also not yet begun to gather data on blended learning programs. Based on recent responses to the annual *Individual Program Survey*, approximately half of all districts and authorities offering distributed learning provide a blended learning program, for a total of approximately 6,300 students. Most of these programs appear to be small, pilot initiatives that serve less than 50 students each. However, there are also three programs that serve more than 1,200 students each.