

3.7 Manitoba (MB)

Population: 1,272,000

Number of K-12 Schools: 869

Number of K-12 Students: 183,304

Number of K-12 E-Learning Programs: ~38

Number of K-12 E-Learning Students: 8,941



Governance and Regulation

The only reference in the *Public Schools Act* regarding distance education is mention that the Minister of Education can approve courses of study, including correspondence and other courses. Distance Learning is defined by Manitoba Education and Training as:

- a method of accessing courses of study even though learners and their teachers, instructors, or tutor/markers may be in different physical locations; and
- programs that provide flexibility and equitable access to diverse learning opportunities, while at the same time respects local community decisions regarding program implementation.

Manitoba Education and Training has issued other regulatory and policy documents: Independent Study Option (ISO), Teacher Mediated Option (TMO) and Web-Based Course (WBC) Option.

In 2014, Manitoba Education and Training created a framework that allowed for virtual collegiates to operate in Manitoba. The formation of the initial virtual collegiates occurred as part of three-year pilot collaborations with educational entities already recognized and operating distance education programs in the province. A signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the province governs the collaboration. To date, the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre Inc. (MFNERC) and the Pembina Trails and St. James-Assiniboia School Divisions have signed an MOU with the province and have been granted Manitoba school codes for their virtual collegiates. Further, through the MOU, the virtual collegiates report on student enrollment and credit completion annually.

For the most part, distance and learning options are funded in a manner similar to brick-and-mortar education with a few exceptions. Students enrolled in the ISO are required to pay for each course registration, although for students attending a school within Manitoba it is at the school's discretion whether the fees are reimbursed in full, in part, or not at all. There is a fee per seat that is collected for the TMO, and the consortium that operates this option has established a fee structure for both members and non-members. Finally, the InformNet Virtual Collegiate has established a fee structure that depends on the student's residency and status. Students that reside within the governing school divisions are not charged fees, but students from outside of the school division – as well as homeschooling students and adult learners – are charged fees.

K-12 Distance and Online Learning Activity

It should be noted that schools that report to Manitoba Student Records have a mechanism to indicate whether the credit earned was obtained through distance education, but this method of data collection is dependent on the individual schools categorizing and entering the data correctly. By default, most schools report the credit as earned in a traditional manner, regardless of the method of instruction.

Having said that, each school division in the province has participated in one or more of the above distance education program options. However, participation varies from year to year depending on the changing needs of students and schools. The ISO (i.e., print) continued to offer 58 courses in English and 12 courses in French for grades 9-12 students. During the 2016-17 school year, there were approximately 2,000 students, which accounted for 2,331 course enrollments in 90 different sections. The TMO, which is managed by rural school divisions through the TMO Consortium in partnership with Manitoba Education and Training, offered 21 English courses for grades 9-12 students. During the 2016-17 school year, there were approximately 141 students from 26 different schools, which accounted for 477 course enrollments in 25 different sections. Finally, the WBC Option provided access to 44 courses in English and 4 courses in French. During the 2016-17 school year, there were approximately 6,800 course enrollments in this option.

In addition to the options provided by Manitoba Education and Training, in 2014 the MFNERC began operating the Wapaskwa Virtual Collegiate under an MOU with the province. Two years later, the Pembina Trails and St. James-Assiniboia School Divisions entered into a similar MOU to operate the InformNet Virtual Collegiate.

K-12 Blended Learning Activity

Manitoba Education and Training does not have a formal definition of blended learning. However, it is informally recognized as a combination of traditional (i.e., face-to-face) classroom teaching/learning and online teaching/learning.

In an effort to support blended learning throughout the province, Manitoba Education and Training licenses the *Blackboard Learn* learning management system, and makes it available to Manitoba teachers to use for free with both distance or blended learning students and as a resource (provincially developed 9-12 courses). Schools and individual teachers within the province are responsible for their own teaching/learning programs and interpretation of blended learning. Teachers will use online applications that suit the needs of their students and their learning environment/lessons.

Manitoba Education and Training does not formally track participation in blended learning, and there has only been minimal response by e-learning programs in the province to the annual *Individual Program Survey* (i.e., only one program responding with data related to blended learning). The province conducted a provincial survey in summer 2017, but the results are still being organized and analyzed.