

3.2 Nova Scotia (NS)

Population: 942,926

Number of K-12 Schools: 395

Number of K-12 Students: 119,383

Number of K-12 E-Learning Programs: 2

Number of K-12 E-Learning Students: ~54,000



Governance and Regulation

The provision of distributed learning (i.e., distance education and online learning) through the Nova Scotia Virtual School (NSVS) is governed by the 11 provisions included in the agreement between the Government of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. This collective agreement defines distributed learning as:

a method of instruction that relies primarily on communication between students and teachers through the internet or other electronic-based delivery, teleconferencing, videoconferencing or e-correspondence. It allows teachers, students, and content to be located in different, non-centralized locations so that instruction and learning can occur independent of time and place. (Government of Nova Scotia, 2017, p. 56)

In addition to defining distributed learning, there are several clauses related to distributed-learning teacher working conditions (e.g., requirement that the teacher be certified; requirement that distributed learning be considered part of the teacher's formal workload; maximum distributed learning class size; mandated professional development for distributed learning teachers; and distributed learning school day can be different, must be equivalent). Further, the collective agreement outlines a number of responsibilities for the schools and/or school boards that choose to operate distributed learning programs:

- schools must have student supervision at the local level when students are engaged in distributed learning;
- schools must have a local distributed learning coordinator; and
- if the course exists in the student's local school, they must receive approval from the school in order to take the course in a distributed learning environment. (p. 57)
- Finally, there is a clause that creates a formal mechanism to allow for consultations between distributed learning program operators and the union through a provincial advisory committee.

In 2015, the *Nova Scotia Action Plan for Education* made additional commitments to the growth of online and blended learning. Specifically, the plan indicates that the Department will:

- continue to improve program delivery in the NSVS to provide students with even more flexible options and teaching support;
- provide students with varied learning opportunities with school technology, including the use of digital learning resources, completion of online courses offered by the Nova Scotia Virtual School, participation in bring-your-own-device learning activities, and completion of blended learning projects; and
- offer online learning opportunities to middle school students to prepare them for online courses in high school.

Since 2015, curriculum has been revised in kindergarten through grade 6; grades 7 and 8 are being revised currently and 10 to 12 will be completed over the next number of years. These revisions will lead to increased opportunities for students to take part in online and virtual learning either through NSVS or through blended learning in a brick and mortar school. A new course, Citizenship Education 9, was implemented in selected schools in September 2017; it has a blended learning component built into the design of the course.

K-12 Distance and Online Learning Activity

The Learning Resources and Technology Services division of the Education Innovation, Programs and Services branch of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development manages distance education programs in Nova Scotia, and works cooperatively with a Management Board representing all school boards in the province.

There are two distance education programs in the province. First, the NSVS provided online courses to approximately 1,400 students from the seven English-speaking school boards and the *Conseil scolaire acadien provincial* during the 2016-17 school year. Second, the correspondence studies program provided courses to approximately 1,200 students enrolled in courses through the correspondence study program. Close to half of these 1,200 students attend a public school, while the other half are adult students, home-schooled students or students living outside of Nova Scotia. Currently, work is ongoing to transition these correspondence courses to an online delivery format.

K-12 Blended Learning Activity

There were also a number of blended learning initiatives that are being implemented in the school system. There are increasing expectations that students at all grade levels will utilize technology and online resources to demonstrate achievement of curriculum outcomes. For example, *Google Apps for Education (G-Suite)* is now available to all students, teachers, and administrators province-wide (i.e., approximately 54,000 students). Further, the Department provides a blended learning platform through the *Moodle* learning management system that was extensively used in classrooms around the province to support instruction as well as to support professional learning communities for teachers. Digital resources to support the curriculum have been acquired to make it easier for teachers to use blended models in their classrooms.