

3.6 Ontario (ON)

Population: 13,537,994

Number of K-12 Schools: 4,893

Number of K-12 Students: 2,003,253

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: ~81

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: ~559,000



Governance and Regulation

There is no reference to distance education and/or online learning in the *Education Act R.S.O, 1990*. However, the *Education Act, 1990* does make a reference to “equivalent learning,” which is defined as a learning situation that falls outside the instruction traditionally provided by a board, that is approved under paragraph 3.0.1 of subsection 8(1) and for which a pupil’s success can be reasonably evaluated.

Since 2006, the *Ontario e-Learning Strategy* has guided the Ministry of Education to provide school boards with various supports necessary to provide students with online and blended learning opportunities. The francophone version of the strategy, *Apprentissage électronique Ontario*, was released in 2007. Under this policy, the Ministry provides school boards with access to a learning management system and other tools for the delivery of e-learning, asynchronous course content and a variety of multimedia learning objects, and a variety of other technical and human resource supports (including a “Technology Enabled Learning and Teaching Contact” in each school board). School boards delivering either online or blended learning must sign a “Master User Agreement” to access all of these services.

Ontario publicly-funded schools must report student enrollments in e-learning classes to the Ontario Student Information System. Students who are enrolled in e-learning courses as part of their regular day school, continuing education and summer school programs are to be recorded.

Funding for e-learning day school programs in Ontario’s publicly-funded district school boards is the same as the traditional brick-and-mortar education. As part of the provincial strategy, students may enroll in an online course offered by another school board provided they do so through their home school. In such a situation, the applicability of provincially established fees for students taking e-learning courses are worked out locally between the two school boards. The fee for the 2016-17 school year was \$769 per credit course.

Private schools operate as businesses or non-profit organizations independently of the Ministry of Education, and in accordance with the legal requirements established by the *Education Act*. These private schools do not receive any funding or other financial support from the government. While all private schools in Ontario must meet the same general requirements, private schools seeking the

authority to grant credits toward the Ontario Secondary School Diploma must be inspected by the Ministry of Education. Inspectors look for evidence of ongoing interactions between the teacher and students in the online learning environment, and for a direct link between the specific and overall curriculum expectations being taught and assessed in compliance with Ministry policy and observed practices. For any credit course delivered online by a private school, all of the curriculum expectations including hours of instruction, assessment, evaluation, and reporting must be in accordance with the policies outlined in *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools-First Edition, Covering Grades 1 to 12* (2010) and the relevant curriculum documents.

K-12 Distance and Online Learning Activity

Each of the 60 English-speaking and 12 French-speaking school boards have the ability to offer some form of online learning using the Ministry-sponsored learning management system combined with the online curricular materials provided or their own. Many of the school boards also participate in one or more consortia designed to allow its school board members to work together to maximize their online offerings by sharing course offerings, resources and students. During the 2015-16 school year (i.e., most current data available), approximately 61,000 students were involved in online learning programs offered by publicly-funded district school boards. The French-speaking school boards have developed a provincial consortium, Consortium apprentissage virtuel de langue française de l'Ontario (CAVLFO), offering online learning. This is the equivalent of a high school in a virtual environment comprised of principal, counsellors, special education, and all other components found in regular high school. There are usually about 3,000 students per school year taking courses in the CAVLFO.

Additionally, the Independent Learning Centre (ILC), which operates within TVO, delivers secondary school courses to both adolescent and adult learners. ILC count towards the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. Approximately 20,000 students are enrolled in the ILC.

Finally, there are as many as eight different private or independent K-12 distance or online learning programs, some of which have also formed their own consortium. The most recent data available indicated there were approximately 10,000 students enrolled in private online schools.

K-12 Blended Learning Activity

The Ministry of Education defines blended learning as instruction and student learning that incorporates digital resources in the face-to-face classroom. In addition to the various resources provided by the Ministry that were described earlier (e.g., learning management system, digital content and resources, Technology Enabled Learning and Teaching Contact, etc.), the Ministry has also provided funding to school boards through the Technology and Learning Fund from 2014 to 2017 to implement innovative practices to transform learning and teaching. To build upon the work of the

Technology and Learning Fund, in 2017-18 the government launched a new Innovation in Learning Fund, an ongoing investment to support educator professional learning to accelerate innovation in learning and the integration of global competencies.

The Ministry does not track all of the instances of blended learning that take place in Ontario schools. Blended learning takes place in all school boards in some form using a variety of digital tools. In the 2015-16 school year there were approximately 529,000 unique logins in the learning management system, approximately 61,000 of these were students engaged in e-learning.