



Alberta (AB)

Population: 4,421,876

Number of K-12 Schools: 2,503

Number of K-12 Students: 741,802

Number of K-12 E-Learning Programs: 34

Number of K-12 E-Learning Students: 82,857

Governance and Regulation

While the Minister does have the authority to make regulations, there are none pertaining to distance education programs at this time. The Ministry defines online learning as:

a structured learning environment in which students engage with their teachers in one or more online courses. Alberta certificated teachers employed by a school authority are responsible for instruction. (Government of Alberta, 2018, p. 85)

Further, the *Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12* defines an online course as:

one in which the majority of instruction and assessment takes place over the Internet, using a learning management system (LMS). The LMS provides students with access to course content, teachers and other students. Students may access the LMS from multiple settings (in school and/or out of school buildings) and engage in both synchronous and asynchronous instruction. (p. 85)

The Ministry also identifies specific distance and online learning programs/schools through the Ministry's online learning directory (see <https://education.alberta.ca/online-learning/online-learning-directory/>).

Enrolment in these programs is tracked through the use of specific codes in the Provincial Approach to Student Information systems. At present, there are currently three specific coding mechanisms for tracking online enrolments.

1. Schools may indicate that they offer an online learning program by entering this information in the Provincial Education Directory.
2. Course and course enrolments may be identified as virtual (online learning) and print based distance education 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 enrolment code.

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 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 1000 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, during the 2017-18 school year Alberta Education changed the terminology for a program that consists of two parts (i.e., where the school-authority is responsible for the student’s education program, and where the parent is responsible for their child’s education program) from blended program to “shared responsibility” program. This change allowed the province to become more aligned with the current e-learning vernacular. At present, Alberta Education does not have an official definition for blended learning.

K-12 Distance and Online Learning Activity

At present, Alberta Education lists 34 different distance and/or online learning programs as a part of their website directory. While most of these are focused at the school division level, there are two programs that are provincial in scope (the Alberta Distance Learning Centre and the *Centre francophone d’éducation à distance*). Based on the information in the provincial student information system, during the 2019-20 school year there were a total of 82,857 students coded as being enrolled in online learning/distance education programs. Alberta Education did not provide a breakdown on the number of students coded as fully online students, full print-based distance education, supplemental print-based distance education students, or supplemental virtual students during this data collection cycle.

To support the practice of K-12 distance and online learning, Alberta Education has published two guides entitled the *Online Learning Guides for Students and Families* and the *Online Learning Guides for Schools and School Leaders*.

K-12 Blended Learning Activity

Blended learning occurs in various forms across the province, but Alberta Education currently does not track this activity. School authorities are flexible in their support of blended teaching and learning to better meet the learning needs of students. There is an Alberta blendedED Symposium, which is a conference focused on fostering the growth of quality blended and online learning opportunities for students in Alberta that had been organized annually since 2015, but was not offered in the 2019-20 school year.

Emergency Remote Teaching

Schools closed on March 16, 2020 and remote teaching began on March 20. Alberta Education launched their online resource website, as well as links to several Albertan School Authorities’

resources. Learning packets were delivered to students with limited access to digital devices and/or the internet. There were attendance expectations and report cards were still distributed.

References

Alberta Education. (2018). *Guide to education: ECS to grade 12, 2018-2019*. Edmonton, AB. Government of Alberta.