



British Columbia (BC)

Population: 5,100,000

Number of K-12 Schools: 1,569

Number of K-12 Students: 548,702

Number of K-12 E-Learning Programs: 69

Number of K-12 E-Learning Students: ~59,000

Governance and Regulation

The Ministry of Education 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” and ensuring that students may exercise their rights under legislation to choose distributed learning instruction within a coordinated province-wide distributed learning system. Districts and independent school authorities that enter into an agreement with the Ministry are required to:

- commit to meet or exceed the Distributed Learning Standards;
- for public distributed learning schools, agree to participate in the Quality Assurance Review process and aligns its website to meet Ministry requirements; for independent distributed learning schools this quality assurance function is conducted through scheduled inspections as set out in the Independent School Act;
- ensure it has supports in place to comply with the Ministry policy and standards;
- provide training and professional development for teachers, and – for public distributed learning school – employs 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 from a public distributed learning school 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

- each public distributed learning school 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. For full time students in kindergarten to grade 9 in traditional bricks and mortar schools, school districts are funded one time for a program of studies as at September 30th (students in seats), while students in grades 10-12 are funded per enrolled course. K-9 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 2018-19 school year, the basic allocation school-age equivalent (i.e., FTE) for students attending a brick-and-mortar school was \$7,468 (or \$933.50/course), while only \$6,100 (or \$762.50/course) for a student attending a distributed learning school. Further, Group 1 independent schools receive 63% of the public distributed learning per pupil amount (all independent distributed learning schools in the province have Group 1 Certification).

In 2018 an Independent Review Panel that included four working groups was launched to consult with school districts and independent schools to examine how K-12 education, including distributed learning, was funded. One of the items this Panel was tasked with was assisting the Ministry in determining the best approach to implementing this recommendation.

With the shift to a per-student-based funding model, the Ministry should develop a new policy and program delivery model for Distributed Learning to ensure consistent access to quality programming for all students in the province.

The process is still on-going. However, funding for distributed learning in independent schools was changed at the end of the 2019-20 school year – although those changes will not take effect until the 2020-21 school year.

K-12 Distance and Online Learning Activity

The Ministry tracks student enrolment 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 2019-20 there were 69 district-level public distributed learning schools and independent distributed learning schools that enrolled approximately 59,000 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 Western Canadian Learning Network is a

consortium of school districts providing online courses and digital resources for use by distributed learning schools in British Columbia, as well as Alberta and the Yukon.

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. However, in the 2017-18 school year the Ministry did administer a survey to all 74 distributed learning schools in the province and through this survey learned that 39 of the 58 public distributed learning schools offered some form of blended learning and 13 of the 16 independent distributed learning schools offered some form of blended learning.

Emergency Remote Teaching

Schools closed on March 17, 2020 and remote teaching began on March 27. The Ministry of Education created a resource document and an online learning website, which offered professional learning for teachers. School districts distributed digital devices for families in need of support. No attendance expectations were specified, however, synchronous sessions were encouraged for younger grades and inquiry-based projects for older students. On June 1, the *K-12 Education Restart Plan* was initiated with enhanced health and safety protocols, smaller class sizes or alternating days for grades K-5, and hybrid models for grades 6-12, who attended one day per week in-class.