



Ontario (ON)

Population: 14,723,497

Number of K-12 Schools: 4844

Number of K-12 Students: 2,056,055

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: ~81

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: ~850,000

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 afford 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 for 122 English-language and 109 French-language courses and a variety of multimedia learning objects, along with a variety of other technical and human resource supports (including a “Technology Enabled Learning and Teaching Contact” or “*personne-ressource en apprentissage et enseignement par la technologies*” 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 elearning classes to the Ontario Student Information System. Students who are enrolled in elearning 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. In English-language schools, 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 2019-20 school year was \$585 per credit course. In French-language schools, students remain with their home school board and take online courses offered by the *Consortium d’apprentissage virtuel de langue française de l’Ontario* (CAVLFO), a consortium funded and managed by all twelve francophone school boards.

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.

On November 21, 2019 the Minister of Education announced that Ontario students would be required to take two online credits to graduate from secondary school beginning with students graduating in 2023-24, and that courses could count toward this requirement beginning in September 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2019). Additionally, the *Ontario Educational Communications Authority Act* and the *Ontario French-language Educational Communications Authority Act, 2008* were amended in July 2020 to:

provide that its objects include supporting the establishment, administration and coordination of distance education programs by or with prescribed persons or entities and discharging any prescribed duties. Related regulation-making powers are added.

This change broadened the mandates of both Television Ontario (TVO) and Télévision française de l'Ontario (TFO) to position them to provide centralized administration, coordination and support for teacher-led online learning in the English-language and French-language publicly-funded education systems.

K-12 Distance and Online Learning Activity

Each of the publicly-funded 60 English-speaking and 12 French-speaking school boards have the ability to offer some form of online learning using the Ministry-provided 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 (e.g., Ontario eLearning Consortium, Ontario Catholic eLearning Consortium, etc.). During the 2018-19 school year (i.e., preliminary as of March 1, 2020), approximately 72,000 elearning courses were completed by more than 61,000 students in online learning programs offered by English-language publicly-funded district school boards. The French-language school boards had between 2,500 and 3,000 students per school year taking courses through the CAVLFO.

Additionally, the Independent Learning Centre (ILC), which operates within TVO, serves Ontario youth 14+ and adults seeking to earn high school credits or an Ontario Secondary School Diploma. The reporting year for the TVO ILC runs from April 1 of one year to March 31 of the following year, as such April 1, 2018 to March 31, 2019 there were 18, 932 students enrolled in the TVO 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 that approximately 15,000 elearning credits were earned 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.

The Ministry does not track the wide variety of digital tools that may be used to support blended learning that take place in Ontario schools. The Ministry does provide licenses for a provincial learning management system, and digital tools for school boards to use for blended and e-learning opportunities with their students. As such, all educators in Ontario have the opportunity to use digital tools to provide a blended learning experience that meets their student needs. In the 2019-20 school year there were approximately 849,000 unique student logins in the learning management system (and, as stated above, more than 61,000 of these were students engaged in completing eLearning courses).

Emergency Remote Teaching

Schools closed on March 23, 2020 and remote teaching began on April 6. The Ministry of Education launched their remote teaching resource website, and partnered with the publicly-funded educational television network to provide access to learning tools and resources. School boards distributed available digital devices to students and the Ministry partnered with Rogers Communications and Apple to include internet for those families without access. There were attendance expectations, and report cards were delivered with grades frozen from March 13 with the option to improve.

References

Government of Ontario (2020). *Bill 197, COVID-19 economic recovery act, 2020*. Queen's Printer for Ontario. <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-42/session-1/bill-197>

Ministry of Education. (2019). *Ontario brings learning into the digital age: Province announces plan to enhance online learning, become global leader*. Queen's Printer for Ontario. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/54695/ontario-brings-learning-into-the-digital-age>