



Alberta (AB)

Population: 4,436,258

Number of K-12 Schools: 2,518

Number of K-12 Students: 733,599

Number of K-12 E-Learning Programs: 36

Number of K-12 E-Learning Students: 97,527

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://www.alberta.ca/online-learning.aspx>).

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 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 nomenclature. 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 36 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 (ADLC) and the *Centre francophone d’éducation à distance* (CFED). The larger ADLC program closed at the end of the 2020-21 school year (officially September 1, 2021). Only the francophone program CFED continued to operate at a provincial level for the four francophone school authorities in the province. Based on the information in the provincial student information system, during the 2020-21 school year there were a total of 97,527 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.

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 it was not offered during the 2019-20 school year. It did return in the spring of 2021 with virtual workshop sessions.

Remote Learning

Spring 2020 Closure

Schools in Alberta closed on March 16, 2020. The province launched its *LearnAlberta* website to support remote teaching for students and parents with a curricular focus on literacy and

numeracy. Teachers were mandated to continue evaluating student learning while focusing on learning standards that were not yet covered and those that could be covered in a manageable way. While there were no specifications for particular digital tools used by teachers or details regarding the deployment of technology for students to access remote teaching online, accommodations included the delivery of learning packets and telephone check-ins by teachers. Attendance expectations for students outlined by the Ministry included grades K-6 to engage in five hours of remote teaching per week, grades 7-9 with 10 hours per week, and grades 10-12 with three hours per course per week. The expectation was that students would work with their parents to complete assigned work. Report cards were distributed and all provincial standardized tests were cancelled (Nagle et al., 2020a).

Fall 2020 Reopening

There were no delays to the start of the Fall 2020-21 school year. Alberta returned to school under scenario one, which included full in-class learning with near-normal operations within the school for grades K-12. The inclusion of added health measures, cohorts, and physical distancing (i.e., two meters where possible) were added. Staggered lunch and breaks were also included to assist with physical distancing. Masks were mandatory for grades 4-12 where physical distancing was not possible, but masks were not mandatory while children were sitting at their desks or where physical distancing was possible. Class sizes were not limited with the exception of a 20-student cap in Kindergarten. Distance learning was an option for students (Nagle et al., 2020b).

2020-21 School Year

The 2020-21 school year proceeded with in-person learning, however, parents had the option to keep their students in remote learning for the 2020-21 school year while some district schools used a blended model of learning with cohorts for in-school students. In a remote learning model, a minimum number of hours per day online was required: kindergarten five hours per week, grades 1-3 ten hours, grades 4-6 12.5 hours, grades 7-9 fifteen hours, and grades 10-12 three hours per course per week. Students were expected to attend most of these hours synchronously. On November 30, 2020, junior and high schools (grades 7-12) moved to remote learning with elementary schools closing shortly after as well. All schools returned to in-school learning on January 11, 2021, only to shift back to remote learning sometime between April 21 and May 3, 2021. In-school learning resumed in late May but schools and/or specific classes required to quarantine for two weeks continued learning remotely. Platforms used for remote learning included *Google Meet* and *Zoom*. Assessment, evaluation, and reporting continued as usual, but the provincial achievement tests were optional for school authorities (Nagle et al., 2021).

References

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