



## **Manitoba (MB)**

Population: 1,380,000

Number of K-12 Schools: 914

Number of K-12 Students: 186,372

Number of K-12 E-Learning Programs: ~38

Number of K-12 E-Learning Students: ~8,173

### **Governance and Regulation**

The only reference in the Public Schools Act regarding distance education is mention that the Minister of Education can approve courses of study, including correspondence and other courses. Distance Learning is defined by Manitoba Education as:

- a method of accessing courses of study even though learners and their teachers, instructors, or tutor/markers may be in different physical locations; and
- programs that provide flexibility and equitable access to diverse learning opportunities, while at the same time respects local community decisions regarding program implementation.

Manitoba Education has issued other regulatory and policy documents. In 2014, Manitoba Education created a framework that allowed for virtual collegiates to operate in the province. To date, the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre and the Pembina Trails and St. James-Assiniboia School Divisions have signed an Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with the Province and have been granted school codes for their virtual collegiates.

The Manitoba Student Records system does have a mechanism to indicate whether the credit earned was obtained through some form of distance education, but this method of data collection is dependent on the individual schools categorizing and entering the data correctly. By default, most schools report the credit as earned in a traditional manner, regardless of the method of instruction. As such, the data reported here may be significantly lower than the actual involvement in distance or online learning.

For the most part, distance and learning options are funded in a manner similar to brick-and-mortar education with a few exceptions. There is a fee per seat that is collected for the Teacher Mediated Option (TMO), and the consortium that operates this option has established a fee structure for both members and non-members. Finally, the InformNet Virtual Collegiate has established a fee structure that depends on the student's residency and status. Students that reside within the governing school divisions are not charged fees, but students from outside of the school division – as well as homeschooling students and adult learners – are charged fees.

## **K-12 Distance and Online Learning Activity**

Each school division in the province has participated in one or more of the above distance education program options. However, participation varies from year to year depending on the changing needs of students and schools. The Independent Study Option (ISO) (i.e., print-based) continued during the 2020-21 school year, but was discontinued as of June 30th, 2021. The TMO, which is managed by rural school divisions through the TMO Consortium in partnership with Manitoba Education and Training. Additionally, the Web-based Course (WBC) Option offerings were delivered using the *Brightspace by Desire2Learn* (D2L) learning management system as of April 6, 2020, with *Blackboard Learn* continued to be available for delivery of existing courses until June 30, 2020 (at which point it would be discontinued).

TMO, WBC, InformNet, and the Manitoba Remote Learning Support Centre (K-8) collectively provided distance learning to ~8,173 students.

## **K-12 Blended Learning Activity**

Beginning with the 2019-20 school year, Manitoba Education adopted a formal definition of blended learning. “Blended Learning is a combination of traditional face-to-face classroom learning and online/remote learning” (Manitoba Education, 2020, para 1).

In an effort to further support blended learning throughout the province, Manitoba Education added a “Blended Learning” page to the traditional “Distance Learning” section of the Manitoba Education website. This new resource provides teachers and school leaders with advantages, tips, examples, useful tools, and resources. Manitoba teachers were still able to use the learning management system for free with both distance or blended learning students and its provincially developed grade 9-12 courses as a resource.

Manitoba Education still does not formally track participation in blended learning. The Province did conduct a survey in summer 2017 that found schools were using a variety of implementation methods to support students within a blended classroom environment and from a distance, but there was no accounting or estimate of the actual blended learning activity.

## **Remote Learning**

### *Spring 2020 Closure*

Schools in Manitoba closed on March 20, 2020. The Ministry of Education launched their remote teaching website, *My Learning at Home*, which offered connections to curriculum activities for each grade with a focus on literacy and numeracy as well as mental and physical health to support students, parents, and guardians. For those students who had limited access to online learning, printed materials were provided and outreach for at-risk students was encouraged. Teachers were asked to provide daily communication with students via telephone, online platforms, email, or regular post. The attendance expectation for students included grades K-4 with five hours of engagement in remote teaching per week, grades 5-8 ten hours per week, and grades 9-12 a minimum of three hours per course per week. Report cards were delivered and

reflected at minimum the progress of the student before March 23, 2020, however, students were provided the opportunity to improve their marks. All provincial standardized testing was cancelled (Nagle et al., 2020a).

### *Fall 2020 Reopening*

Cohort grouping for students as a class was implemented with a cap at 75 students maximum for other activities, with physical distancing (i.e., two meters) between groups, staggering lunch and breaks, entry, and exits. Learning from home could be an option where physical distancing was not a challenge and schools could engage in a blended model of learning, both synchronous and asynchronous. Full attendance was required for the in-school or blended learning model. Grade 12 provincial assessments continued for the 2020-21 school year. School divisions and teachers were responsible for identifying student needs regarding technology, and Manitoba Education supported the availability of devices as well as access to alternative options for students with limited access to the internet (Nagle et al., 2020b).

### *2020-21 School Year*

The 2020-21 school year proceeded with in-person learning, but on January 4, 2021, students in grades seven to 12 were required to return to remote learning for two weeks which was optional for students in kindergarten to grade six. The province did not issue a province-wide shutdown of schools, instead, it was on a region by region basis. Depending on the level of risk due to COVID-19, there were three stages offered: level one in school, level two a blended model, and level three fully remote. Blended learning prioritized students with special needs for in-school learning. Fully remote students were still expected to engage in full participation during the day with regular assessments. Parents who wanted their child to remain at home were required to decide by January 30, 2021, which then remained in effect for the rest of the 2020-21 school year. Students in grades one to four within the remote learning model were expected to engage in five to six hours of synchronous learning per week and two and a half hours of asynchronous work each week, grades five to eight seven to eight hours of synchronous learning per week with three hours of asynchronous work per day. A further requirement was for teachers to meet individually with their students for at least 20 minutes per week and each school division and individual schools were responsible for students having access to digital devices (Nagle et al., 2021).

### **References**

Manitoba Education. (2020). *Distance learning: Blended learning*.

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