Quebec (QC)

Population: 8,572,054
Number of K-12 Schools: 3,102
Number of K-12 Students: 1,003,322

Number of K-12 E-Learning Programs: 5+
Number of K-12 E-Learning Students: ~67,000+

Governance and Regulation

Historically, school boards have held the primary responsibility for distance education policies and regulations. In fact, the *Loi sur l'instruction publique* prevents any formal full-time online learning (and relegates supplemental online learning programs to being a provider that must co-operate with the brick-and-mortar schools). A 2017 amendment to the *Loi sur l'instruction publique* (i.e., Bill 144) allowed the Minister to authorize distance learning pilot projects. School service centres, school boards, and private establishments who wish to offer distance education must submit a proposal in which it describes its project, specifies the number of students and teachers. Then there is an analysis of the application to ensure that it meets the established standards and rules. Finally, the Minister decides whether to authorize the institution to offer distance education services. Each pilot project has a maximum duration of three years, which the Minister may extend for a maximum of two years. The Minister also requires an evaluation every two years and a final evaluation for each pilot project.

These changes are consistent with the 2018 *Digital Action Plan for Education and Higher Education*, which was designed to achieve "effective integration and optimal use of digital technologies to foster the success of all Quebecers in order to promote lifelong skills development and maintenance" (Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2018, p. 9). The plan has three stated orientations:

1. support the development of the digital skills of young people and adults;
2. make use of digital technologies to enhance teaching and learning practices; and
3. create an environment conducive to the development of digital technologies in the education system. (p. 1)

Embedded within the second orientation is the specific objective to "foster the development of distance education offerings based on needs at the various levels of education" (p. 46). It was this objective that gave rise to the passage of Bill 144, and brought an increased focus on the *Réseau axé sur le développement des Compétences des élèves par l'Intégration des Technologies de l'information et de la communication* (RÉCIT) services and products.

Private schools are regulated by a different act (i.e., *Loi sur l'enseignement privé*) that does contain provisions pertaining to online education. Essentially a private school can request a "derogation" allowing students to be "virtually attending," which would in theory allow for the

formal creation of a virtual school. To date, the Ministry has yet to receive a request for an online initiative that meets the conditions stated in the *Loi sur l'enseignement privé* for them to approve.

The government provides school boards funding for distance education students based upon enrolment at a rate of 80% of the amount provided for a student enrolled in a brick-and-mortar setting. The *Ministère de l'éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur* does provide a block grant to the *Société de formation à distance des commissions scolaires du Québec* (SOFAD) to support their course development activities. Additionally, SOFAD also charged a fee for school boards to use their materials, money that was reinvested in the development of other learning materials. Similarly, the Leading English Education and Resource Network (LEARN) program is largely funded through the Canada-Quebec Entente on minority language education and second-language instruction, which is a funding program managed by the *Ministère de l'éducation et de l'enseignement supérieur*.

K-12 Distance and Online Learning Activity

There are two pilot projects under the Bill 144 provisions currently underway, one of which focused on distance learning. The first pilot project focused on the training of teachers for online teaching, which originally started in 2018 and continued in the 2020-21 school year. This pilot project involved approximately 2,900 students.

Additionally, there were three known distance learning programs in Quebec. The largest distance education program was SOFAD, which primarily develops and produces correspondence distance learning materials that school boards utilize in their own district-based programs. Based on their 2019 annual report, SOFAD served an estimated 33,000 or more adult students who were 16 years or older. LEARN provided a variety of distance learning opportunities to all nine English-speaking school boards in the province, including approximately 145 students who received direct course credits. Additionally, the Quebec Online School reported an enrollment of 300 students. Finally, it is believed that the Beauce-Etchemin School Board continues to operate the *Centre d'apprentissage en ligne de la CSBE*, and the most recent data indicated that this program served approximately 1,500 students.

K-12 Blended Learning Activity

At present, one of the pilot projects under the Bill 144 provisions is focused on blended or co-modal learning. This second pilot project focused on optional modes of online delivery, in particular a hybrid model that involved broadcasting a teacher in the classroom with a group of students on site, while streaming to students who watch online at distant location. This pilot project involved approximately 1,500 students.

Additionally, there are two known programs that provide blended learning in Quebec. In addition to their distance offerings, LEARN provides its services and resources – such as tutoring, tailored pedagogical content, training, community learning centres' support, academic peer review articles, curated resources, and enrichment activities – to stakeholders across the province in a blended format. During the 2020-21 school year an estimated 28,000 or more students accessed the blended learning content outside of LEARN's content management system, which

is almost twice the number as the previous school year. There were also approximately 60 students enrolled in LEARN as blended learning students. Finally, there has been no recent data submitted on the *Écoles en réseau* (i.e., Networked Schools), although the program appears to remain active.

Remote Learning

Spring 2020 Closure

Schools in Quebec closed on March 16, 2020. The Ministry of Education launched their remote teaching website, *Open School/L'École Ouverte*, as a resource for students, parents, and guardians. The curricular focus was on literacy, numeracy, the arts, and physical and mental health. Education kits were available to students who had limited access to the internet. Anglophone teachers were offered professional learning through the LEARN website and the site offered teachers access to webinars. There was no specified expectation for attendance and report cards were delivered based on the first two reporting periods of the 2019-2020 school year. Provincial standardized exams were also cancelled. On May 11 there was a non-compulsory return to school (with the exception of the Montreal area, which remained closed) but secondary students continued with remote learning (Nagle et al., 2020a).

Fall 2020 Reopening

There were no delays to the start of the 2020-21 school year with all students attending in-class learning. Enhanced health measures included cohort groups while students remained in the same classroom and teachers moved for subject-specific teaching. Masks were mandatory for grades 5-12 but not required to be worn in an elementary classroom. The curriculum included an added focus on assisting students to identify learning gaps from the Spring (Nagle et al., 2020b).

2020-21 School Year

Much of the 2020-21 school year proceeded with in-person learning, but on Dec. 17, 2020, all provincial schools closed and resumed 'virtual teaching'. Regular classes resumed after the winter holiday for elementary students, but secondary students continued virtual learning for one more week and opened on Jan. 11, 2021. The province did not issue a province-wide shutdown of schools, instead, school closures were on a region by region basis. Only children who were at-risk medically were allowed to continue with full-time distance education. Boards were required to offer LTE devices to students to access the internet and each school prepared emergency protocols that included educational services during distance learning and managed them 'locally.' The only alternative for parents who wished their children not to attend in-school learning was to remove them from their school and homeschool (Nagle et al., 2021).

References

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