



British Columbia (BC)

Population: 5,200,000

Number of K-12 Schools: 1,942

Number of K-12 Students: ~673,000

Number of K-12 E-Learning Programs: 68

Number of K-12 E-Learning Students: ~85,000

Governance and Regulation

Historically, the Ministry of Education had defined 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 been governed by 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*. 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 entered 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 align 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 schools – employ 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
- ensure each public distributed learning school provides 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 2020-21 school year, the basic allocation school-age equivalent (i.e., FTE) for students attending a brick-and-mortar school was \$7,560 (or \$945/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).

However, beginning with a 2018 review of the distributed learning funding, the Ministry of Education has worked with educators to implement a new provincial model for online learning. This process culminated with the passage of *Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2020* or Bill 8 on March 4, 2020. Bill 8 changed distributed learning in the *School Act* and the *Independent School Act* in three key ways:

- changed the term “distributed learning” to “online learning”;
- enabled School Districts and Independent School Authorities to offer online learning courses and programs to their local (or ‘in-district’) students without an agreement with the Minister; and
- required online learning schools to have an agreement with the Minister to enrol students from outside their district boundary (i.e., out-of-district enrolment) or to enrol students simultaneously enrolled with another board or independent school authority (i.e., cross enrolment). (Government of British Columbia, 2020)

The full enactment of Bill 8 was scheduled for July 1, 2021, and will begin with an interim year during the 2021-22 school year with seven interim online learning policies in place and all 68 online learning schools being held interim online learning agreements.

K-12 Distance and Online Learning Activity

The Ministry tracks student enrolment through the 1701 data collections that occur in September, February, and May. These collections show the schools attended along with the demographic characteristics of students, and programs provided to students. In 2020-21 there were 52 district-level public distributed learning schools and 16 independent distributed learning schools that enrolled approximately 85,000 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

As online learning is defined as primarily online and/or at a distance, there is implicit acknowledgement of the existence of blended learning in the province. Both online learning and in-person schools are able to offer blended programs. However, the Ministry of Education does gather data on separate blended learning program enrolment.

Remote Learning

Spring 2020 Closure

Schools in British Columbia (BC) closed on March 17, 2020. The province published the *Continuity of Learning: Planning Guide for Teachers* which provided guidance and links to resource sites and online webinars highlighting the use of technology tools, and the *Keep Learning BC* website which offered activities, resources, and health advice with a focus on literacy, numeracy, core competencies, and the *First Peoples Principles of Learning*. The distribution of physical equipment was left to school districts, however, the Ministry noted that more than 23,000 computers and devices had been loaned out to students. At a minimum teachers were required to contact each student at least weekly with more frequent contact encouraged and attendance requirements for students were left to be determined at the local level. Formal examinations were not required however teachers were required to provide formal weekly reports for each student with summary reports consolidated by each district and sent to the Ministry. In-school learning began June 1, 2020, using a hybrid model of online and classroom learning with alternating cohorts of students to ensure physical distancing. All boards were required to implement strict health and safety protocols as defined and monitored by provincial health authorities and WorkSafeBC.

Fall 2020 Reopening

The start of the 2020-21 school year was delayed by two days and opened with in-school learning however students could choose online or distributed learning options. Added health measures included physical distancing, staggering breaks and transition times, and signage to direct the flow of student traffic. Elementary cohorts were between 20 and 30 students and learning groups were capped at 60 students, which limited the number of students who could interact. Secondary school learning groups were capped at 120 students. Masks were not mandatory and the curriculum included an added focus on mental health and well-being for grades K-12.

2020-21 School Year

The 2020-21 school year proceeded with in-person learning but there remained remote learning options for students across the province in many school districts as well as the online or distributed learning options. Students continued with cohorts or ‘learning groups’ in-school, with

20-30 students in each group with the maximum number per group was 60 in elementary and 120 for secondary. Full curriculum expectations, assessments, and reporting were in place during this school year. The provincial government allocated \$8.2 million to specifically support Indigenous learners to address learning loss, mental health, and technology for remote learning.

References

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