



### **Nova Scotia (NS)**

Population: 1,002,586

Number of K-12 Schools: 370

Number of K-12 Students: 129,121

Number of K-12 Distance Learning Programs: 2

Number of K-12 Distance Learning Students: 2,761

## **Governance and Regulation**

The provision of distributed learning (i.e., distance education and online learning) through the Nova Scotia Virtual School (NSVS) is governed by provisions included in the agreement between the Government of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. This collective agreement defines distributed learning as:

a method of instruction that relies primarily on communication between students and teachers through the internet or other electronic-based delivery, teleconferencing, video conferencing or e-correspondence. It allows teachers, students, and content to be located in different, non-centralized locations so that instruction and learning can occur independent of time and place. (Government of Nova Scotia, 2020, p. 54)

In addition to defining distributed learning, there are several clauses related to distributed learning teacher working conditions (e.g., requirement that the teacher be certified; requirement that distributed learning be considered part of the teacher's formal workload; maximum distributed learning class size; mandated professional development for distributed learning teachers; and distributed learning school day can be different, but must be equivalent).

Further, the collective agreement outlines a number of responsibilities for the schools and/or school boards that choose to operate distributed learning programs:

- schools must have student supervision at the local level when students are engaged in distributed learning;
- schools must have a local distributed learning coordinator; and
- if the course exists in the student's local school, they must receive approval from the school in order to take the course in a distributed learning environment.

Finally, there is a clause that creates a formal mechanism to allow for consultations between distributed learning program operators and the union through a provincial advisory committee.

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

The Learning Resources and Technology Services division of the Education Innovation, Programs and Services branch of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development manages distance education programs in Nova Scotia and works cooperatively

with a Management Board representing all Regional Centres for Education and *Conseil scolaire acadien provincial*.

There are two distance education programs in the province. First, the NSVS provided online courses to approximately 2,061 students from the seven English-speaking regional centres and the *Conseil scolaire acadien provincial* during the 2021-22 school year.

Second, the Correspondence Studies Program (CSP) provided course enrollments to over 700 students during the 2021-22 school year. After more than a century offering various forms of correspondence learning, the CSP ended in July 2022. In recent years, the CSP had been shifting its focus to a fully updated system and content designed for asynchronous eLearning pedagogy by dedicated developers and content experts. This new Nova Scotia Independent Online Learning program will open for registration during the 2022-23 school year, offering a small course catalogue of self-paced online high school courses to school-aged students in Nova Scotia, beginning with students currently enrolled in Nova Scotia public schools.

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

A number of eLearning initiatives have also been implemented in the school system for students enrolled in traditionally in-person courses. For example, *Google Workspace for Education (G-Suite)* is available to all students, teachers, and administrators province-wide, and ~129 000 students (including primary and returning graduates) have active accounts. Most in-person classes continued to use Google Classroom as their eLearning hub in 2020-21, allowing organization of digital materials used in class, communication, and the ability to transition to learning from home as needed. In addition, all grade 9 students participate in a blended learning component on financial literacy as part of the Citizenship Education 9 course through a blended eLearning platform provided by the Department. Finally, the *Moodle* learning management system is extensively used in classes around the province to share resources, support instruction, and to support professional learning communities for teachers.

### **Remote Learning**

#### *Fall 2021 Reopening*

All public schools returned to in-person learning for the 2021-22 school year, with full capacity class sizes and no cohort grouping. Extracurricular activities, school assemblies, and music continued as normal, with an emphasis on learning outdoors as much as possible. In the case of rising COVID-19 cases, schools could return to 'at-home' learning consisting of a blend of synchronous and asynchronous learning, with the amount dependent on grade level. For example, the pre-primary grade packages would focus on play-based learning materials; primary to grade 3 would include two hours of work per day with one hour online; grades 4-6 would include three hours of work daily with one and half hours online; grades 7-9 would include four hours of work daily with two hours online; and grades 10-12 would have 50% of their time online. Reporting and provincial assessments would continue (LaBonte et al., 2021).

## 2021-22 School Year

Schools remained open to in-person learning until the return to school from December holidays when, due to increasing community spread of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, schools were closed and students returned to remote learning with students and parents relying on the resources posted at the government's *Learning from Home 2021-22* website (see <https://backtoschool.ednet.ns.ca/learning-from-home> ). School reopening was delayed until January 10, 2022 “to build confidence by purchasing HEPA filtration systems for schools and classrooms with passive ventilation systems, and by ensuring a good supply of 3-ply masks for all children and staff, including medical masks for staff.” However, on January 10 in-person learning was further delayed until January 17 with students returning to remote learning using the province's model of ‘at-home’ learning consisting of a blend of synchronous and asynchronous learning, with the amount dependent on grade level. As February saw the gradual release of community restrictions across Canada, the Nova Scotia government began Phase 2 of its gradual release March 7, 2022 that included increasing gathering and capacity limits combined with the use of rapid tests. Mask requirements were lifted in public spaces March 21, but not in schools until May 24 (LaBonte et al., 2022).

## References

LaBonte, R., Barbour, M. K., & Mongrain, J. (2022). *Teaching during times of turmoil: Ensuring Continuity of learning during school closures*. Canadian eLearning Network.

<https://canelearn.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Teaching-During-Times-of-Turmoil.pdf>

LaBonte, R., Barbour, M. K., & Nagle, J. (2021). *Pandemic pedagogy in Canada: Lessons from the first 18 months*. Canadian eLearning Network.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gaNFXDCt44W9DaAC9iRAf33pDTKup2C8/view>