



## **Northwest Territories (NT)**

Population: 44,826

Number of K-12 Schools: 49

Number of K-12 Students: 8,700

Number of K-12 Distance Learning Programs: 1

Number of K-12 Distance Learning Students: 120

### **Governance and Regulation**

The *Education Act, 2009* allows various educational bodies to “authorize, supervise and evaluate the use of distance learning programs in the provision of the education program” (p. 72). The Department of Education, Culture and Employment defines distance learning as the deliberate use of the Internet, the world wide web, and landlines to leverage communication tools, learning management systems, and resources to overcome geographic obstacles to accessing brick and mortar courses, disciplinary expertise, and student cohort formation. The Department had a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Alberta Distance Learning Centre (formerly operated by Pembina Hills School Division), which the Department used as a non-territorial distance learning provider from 2004 until it closed in 2021. Upon its closure, the Department informed school boards about the willingness of the Vista Virtual School (also operated by Pembina Hills) to serve students from the Northwest Territories.

Additionally, section 3.3 of the *Northwest Territories School Handbook* outlines a series of requirements that schools must adhere to in order to participate in distance learning. While the document is primarily focused on describing distance learning and specific operational items related to schools participation in the ADLC, it does recommend that schools have a dedicated online facilitator, scheduled distance learning time in student timetables, a plan for students to complete courses in a timely manner, and access to additional relevant resources.

Finally, the Northwest Territories is nearing the end of its 10 year education renewal process (called *Education Renewal and Innovation*), which was originally launched in 2013. The territorial government has made the development of and support for building its internal distance learning capacity a priority, along with the achievement of student outcomes to the same level as the rest of Canada. The Northern Distance Learning (NDL), which is a partnership with the Beaufort Delta Divisional Education Council and the Government of the Northwest Territories, is expected to play a significant part in achieving those priorities. NDL will undergo a formal evaluation in 2023-2025.

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

NDL teachers are based in Inuvik, with students in 19 other schools access the course material online from their respective schools with the help of a local support person, and interact with the teacher and classmates through videoconferencing. During the 2021-22 school year 60 students were enrolled in NDL courses.

Additionally, during the 2021-22 school year there were approximately 60 students enrolled in distance learning courses offered through the Vista Virtual School.

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

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment defines blended learning as a formal education program where students learn in part through online delivery of content and instruction, and in part in a brick and mortar setting. This definition is consistent with the study's description of online distance learning, and, accordingly, consistent with the NDL as discussed in the previous section. There were no additional data related to blended learning provided.

## **Remote Learning**

### *Fall 2021 Reopening*

Schools opened for in-person learning for the 2021-22 school year with masks required on school buses and no drama, music, physical education programs, high contact extra-curricular activities, or school assemblies. Only students with medical exemptions continued with remote learning. Safety measures, such as physical distancing remained in place for Kindergarten to grade 6, with cohort 'bubbles' and outdoor learning as much as possible (i.e., no indoor activities such as choir, drama, assemblies, or sports continued). Any student that needed to self-isolate or was sick with COVID-19 returned to remote learning, while healthy students who did not want to attend in-person learning had to follow the Home Schooling Regulations. All student assessments returned to normal pre-pandemic practices (LaBonte et al., 2021).

### *2021-22 School Year*

As the new school year progressed, and community spread of the virus increased causing school closures, the Department of Education launched a COVID-19 at-home screening program, conducting random sampling of 10% of classroom students. Schools remained open to in-person learning and, unlike in most provinces, school reopening in January after December holidays continued as planned. However, due to rapid community spread of the Omicron variant, on January 6 a public health advisory was issued urging schools to return to remote learning for two weeks and school closures caused many students to return to remote learning. The Government of the Northwest Territories began to ease restrictions March 1 beginning with the release of self-isolation requirements after travel and finally ending all restrictions April 1 (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>