



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 Distance Learning Programs: 44+

Number of K-12 Distance Learning Students: ~55,000+

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 cooperate 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 project 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.

As part of measure 19 of the 2018 *Digital Action Plan for Education and Higher Education* and as provided for in section 459.3 of the Education Act, the innovation component of the distance learning pilot project was implemented at the start of the 2021 school year and continues until June 2024. The objectives of the pilot project are to experiment or innovate in distance learning and to document the process in order to enrich practices. Thus, authorized educational bodies can offer distance education services and projects must comply with the standards and rules established by the Minister.

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 permit allowing students to be “virtually attending.” 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 *Ministère de l'éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur* provides 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

During the 2021-22 school year there were 56 distance learning pilot projects, spread over 39 educational establishments and organizations. The delivery model for these pilot projects is described as:

Comodal – This mode involves one or more students face-to-face and at a distance. The remote student follows the course simultaneously with the students of the class with the consent of all persons concerned, if applicable.

Comodal asynchronous alternation – This mode offers the possibility of following online courses offline (asynchronous) and sometimes take lessons simultaneously with their class (comodal) with the consent of all persons concerned, if applicable. (Education Quebec, 2021, p. 63)

The data for the number of students involved in these projects was not available. However, documents released in July 2021 from a request to the Access to Information and Complaints Directorate suggested that at the time there were at least 1650 students involved in some of these pilot projects.

Beyond this pilot projects, 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. As SOFAD does not deliver distance learning themselves, but creates the course materials for their 72 partnering school boards to use in the delivery of their adult distance learning programs, it is difficult to determine the number of students associated in this distance learning initiative. Recent reports indicate that during the 2018-19 school year their partner school districts had 35,633 pupils representing 78,812 enrollments, which was an increase of 2.5% from the previous year. Further, following the deployment of training or test platforms for school or non-school organizations that began in January 2020, these organizations reported over 140,000 users who took almost 57,000 exams. Based on the data from 2018-19 it could be argued that the January 2020 training deployment reflects a continued growth trend in online content delivery and assessment with likely approximately 50,000 adult students engaged in online learning.

Additionally, LEARN provided a variety of distance learning opportunities to all nine English-speaking school boards in the province, including approximately 190 students in their virtual high school and another 305 students in the Quebec Online Alliance. Additionally, the Quebec Online School reported an enrollment of 250 students. Finally, it is believed that the Beauce-Etchemin School Board continues to operate the *Centre d'apprentissage en ligne de la CSBE*, but the most recent data indicated that this program served approximately 1,500 students.

K-12 Blended Learning Activity

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 2021-22 school year an estimated 35,300 or more students accessed LEARN’s tutorial content. 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

Fall 2021 Reopening

Quebec schools returned to in-person learning for the 2021-22 school year and all extracurricular activities resumed with secondary students required to have a vaccine passport to play in some sporting events, such as competitions. To ‘avoid’ online learning, masks in schools was made mandatory. Students with medical exemptions in the six English school boards were allowed the option to attend remote learning via LEARN Québec – a distance learning non-profit educational service that was established before the pandemic. As of the Fall 2021, when schools closed due to a COVID-19 outbreak, a ‘virtual-classwork system’ had not been fully implemented. However, students who needed learning devices were able to receive them from their schools (LaBonte et al., 2021).

2021-22 School Year

On October 1, 2021 the government increased masking requirements in some regions for students in elementary grades, but schools remained open to in-person learning with only local closures based on COVID case numbers. On December 31, 2021 the Quebec government put new measures in place to curb the spread of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 that included curfews between 10:00 pm and 5 am. Scheduled school return January 5, 2022 saw schools closed for face-to-face instruction until January 17, 2022 without specific mention of remote learning options by the government, only that “if possible, online learning will continue until face-to-face instruction resumes.” The January 17 return included mandatory masking requirements for staff and students, which were later lifted March 7. Many educators and parents reported increasing concern for in-person learning as cases of the Omicron variant continued to rise, however, the government remained adamant that schools were safe and additional closure would lead to greater consequences with loss of learning for students. As an additional measure, on May 5 the government announced additional funding for tutoring services to mitigate the loss of learning due to school closure (LaBonte et al., 2022).

References

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