



## Ontario (ON)

Population: 15,109,416

Number of K-12 Schools: 4832

Number of K-12 Students: 2,028,688

Number of K-12 Distance Learning Programs: 527

Number of K-12 Distance Learning Students: ~130,000

## Governance and Regulation

There is no reference to distance education and/or online learning in the *Education Act R.S.O., 1990*. However, the *Education Act, 1990* does make a reference to “equivalent learning,” which is defined as a learning situation that falls outside the instruction traditionally provided by a board, that is approved under paragraph 3.0.1 of subsection 8(1) and for which a pupil’s success can be reasonably evaluated.

Since 2006, the Ontario e-Learning Strategy has guided the Ministry of Education to afford school boards with various supports necessary to provide students with online and blended learning opportunities. The Francophone version of the strategy, *Apprentissage électronique Ontario*, was released in 2007. Under this policy, the Ministry provides school boards with access to a learning management system and other tools for the delivery of e-learning, asynchronous course content for a wide range of English- and French-language courses and a variety of multimedia learning objects, along with a variety of other technical and human resource supports (including a “Technology Enabled Learning and Teaching Contact” or “*Personne-ressource en apprentissage et enseignement par la technologie*” in each school board). School boards delivering either online or blended learning must sign a “Master User Agreement” to access all of these services.

Ontario publicly-funded schools must report student enrollments in elearning classes to the Ontario Student Information System This includes students who are enrolled in elearning courses as part of their regular day school, continuing education, and summer school programs.

In 2022-23, funding for day school students taking e-learning in Ontario’s publicly-funded district school boards was the same as the traditional brick-and-mortar education. In English-language schools, students may enroll in an online course offered by another school board provided they do so through their home school. In such a situation, the applicability of provincially established fees for students taking e-learning courses are worked out locally between the two school boards. The fee for the 2022-23 school year was \$590 per credit course. In French-language schools, students remain with their home school board and take online courses offered by the *Consortium d’apprentissage virtuel de langue française de l’Ontario* (CAVLFO), a consortium funded and managed by all twelve francophone school boards.

Private schools operate as businesses or non-profit organizations in accordance with the legal requirements established by the *Education Act* and receive no public funding or other financial support from the Ministry. The Ministry only inspects the standard of instruction at private

schools seeking to grant credits toward the Ontario Secondary School Diploma to determine whether they can be granted this authority. In the case of online private schools, Ministry inspectors look for evidence of ongoing interactions between the teacher and students in the online learning environment, and for a direct link between the specific and overall curriculum expectations being taught and assessed in compliance with Ministry policy and observed practices. Teachers in the private school are also subject to a classroom inspection by the Ministry. Inspectors review online courses, public website, school course calendar, and community involvement along with attendance policies, assignment timelines, student learning logs, examination procedures, etc.. The Ministry does not regulate, license, accredit or otherwise oversee the operation of private schools. Private schools in Ontario can operate onsite, online or offer a combination of online and onsite classes/instruction.

On November 21, 2019 the Ministry of Education announced that Ontario students would be required to earn two online credits to graduate from secondary school beginning with students graduating in 2023-24, and that courses began counting toward this requirement beginning in September 2020 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2019). With this announcement, Ontario became the only jurisdiction in Canada with an online learning graduation requirement. However, as a part of Policy/Program Memorandum 167, the Ministry of Education (2022a) stated that:

The Ministry recognizes the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, this Policy/Program Memorandum recognizes up to one secondary school credit completed by Grade 9 students in the 2020-21 school year during the province-wide school closures (from April 2021 to June 2021) may be counted towards the graduation requirement. Schools should select one of these credits and record it in the system they use locally for tracking the requirement and reflect the completion of the selected credit when reporting through the Ontario School Information System (OnSIS) towards the student's online learning graduation requirement. The course itself does not need to be flagged as an "online course". It will be counted under the "Diploma Requirements" "Online Learning Graduation Requirement" section of the provincial report card template. (para. 15)

It is important to note that, at present, the most recent data that the Ministry of Education was able to provide was from the 2020-21 school year (even though that data was received in November 2023). This is an important reference point, as students graduating in the 2023-24 school year will be held to the requirement of having completed two online courses in order to graduate in June 2024. However, with less than eight months until this milestone the Ministry of Education can only provide data on students engaged in online learning from the 2020-21 school year (but not the 2021-22 school year or the 2022-23 school year).

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

Each of the publicly-funded 60 English-speaking and 12 French-speaking school boards have the ability to offer some form of online learning using the provincial learning management system combined with the online curricular materials provided or their own. Many of the school boards also participate in one or more consortia designed to allow its school board members to work together to maximize their online offerings by sharing course offerings, resources and students

(e.g., Ontario eLearning Consortium, Catholic Virtual Ontario, etc.). During the 2020-21 school year (most recent school year for which data are available), approximately 90,000 students participated in online learning programs offered by publicly-funded district school boards.

Additionally, TVO's Independent Learning Centre (ILC) serves Ontario youth 14+ and adults seeking to earn high school credits or an Ontario Secondary School Diploma. The reporting year for the TVO ILC runs from April 1 of one year to March 31 of the following year, the same as the government of Ontario's fiscal year. Again, based on the most recent data available, there were more than 22,000 students enrolled in distance courses offered by the ILC during the 2020-21 school year.

Finally, in 2020-21 (again, most recent year for which data are available) 454 private schools offered online learning. Of these schools, 69 were fully online. In that year approximately 30,000 e-learning credits were earned in private online schools.

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

The Ministry of Education describes blended learning as instruction and student learning that incorporates digital resources within the face-to-face classroom.

The Ministry does not track the wide variety of digital tools that may be used to support blended learning that take place in Ontario schools. The Ministry does provide licenses for a provincial learning management system, and digital tools for school boards to use for blended and e-learning opportunities with their students. As such, all educators in Ontario have the opportunity to use digital tools to provide a blended learning experience that meets their student needs. In the 2021-22 school year there were approximately 1,306,497 unique student logins in the learning management system.

## **Remote Learning**

### *2022-23 School Year*

During the 2022-23 school year, school boards were required to continue offering remote learning in alignment with the requirements outlined in *Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 164 – Requirements for Remote Learning* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023). These requirements include minimum synchronous learning time, protocols for communicating with parents and the provision of access to technology.

As outlined in the annual *2022-23 Grants for Student Needs Funding* communication, school boards were required to provide the option for remote learning in the 2022-23 school year (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2022b). School boards were permitted to establish one virtual school per elementary and secondary panel based on local demand.

While the Ministry is responsible for developing policy, the implementation of policy, allocation of funding and the delivery of education programs and services to students is the responsibility

of district school boards and local schools. This gives boards and schools the flexibility to make decisions about program delivery to best serve their students.

For the 2022-23 school year, the ministry provided school boards with funding supports including:

- \$20M in connectivity infrastructure-related projects to ensure that students and teachers can continue to participate in secure, online and remote learning.
- \$304M in time-limited support through the COVID-19 Learning Recovery Fund for temporary additional staffing to support a variety of initiatives, including the delivery of remote learning.
- \$488M for resources such as student technological devices, learning materials, classroom supplies, classroom computers, and educational software.

To support instructional approaches to online/remote learning, the Ministry continued to host webinars, teleconferences, and self-guided learning modules to build teacher capacity, and to support boards and educators with various elements of remote learning. The Ministry continues to provide customizable slide decks to support school boards in delivering this professional learning.

## References

- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2019). *Ontario brings learning into the digital age: Province announces plan to enhance online learning, become global leader*. Queen's Printer for Ontario. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/54695/ontario-brings-learning-into-the-digital-age>
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2022a). *Policy/Program Memorandum 167 – Online learning graduation requirement*. <https://www.ontario.ca/document/education-ontario-policy-and-program-direction/policyprogram-memorandum-167>
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2022b). *2022-23 grants for student needs funding*. [https://efis.fma.csc.gov.on.ca/faab/Memos/B2022/B03\\_EN.pdf](https://efis.fma.csc.gov.on.ca/faab/Memos/B2022/B03_EN.pdf)
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2023). *Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 164 – Requirements for remote learning*. <https://www.ontario.ca/document/education-ontario-policy-and-program-direction/policyprogram-memorandum-164>