

State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada

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International Association for K-12 Online Learning



Written by
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Wayne State University



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November 2009

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Acknowledgements

Let me begin by thanking Mickey Revenaugh and Craig Butz of Connections Academy for their sponsorship of this report, along with their guidance, suggestions and feedback that led to the format and information presented. Also, let me thank Susan Patrick, Allison Powell and Wendy Fleming of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning for their editing and publication of this document.

I would also like to thank the following individuals for providing information used in the creation of the profiles for each of the provinces and territories.

Jim Tuff – Director, Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation

Sarah Hainsworth – Coordinator, Distributed Learning, Learning Resources and Technology Services, Nova Scotia Department of Education

Michael Jeffrey – former Director, Learning Resources and Technology Services, Nova Scotia Department of Education

Kevin McCluskey – Project Manager, E-learning, Strategic Initiatives, New Brunswick Department of Education

Donald Girouard – Distance Learning Consultant, Distance Learning Unit, Manitoba Department of Education

Howard Griffith – Senior Years eLearning Development Consultant, Learning Support and Technology Unit, Manitoba Department of Education

Sue Amundrud – Associate Executive Director, Curriculum and E-Learning Branch, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education

Tim Winkelmans – Manager, e-Learning Programs Unit, British Columbia Ministry of Education

Joanne McGrath – Coordinator, Education Operations and Development, Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture and Employment

Brad Chambers – Director of Policy and Planning, Policy and Planning Division, Nunavut Department of Education

Finally, I would like to thank the following individuals for providing information used in each of the vignettes.

Tiffany Stagg and Cassandra Goodyear – graduates of Lumsden School Complex

Guy Aucoin – Consultant, Chignecto Central Virtual School

Robert Saucier – Conseiller en communication, recherche et planification à Société de formation à distance des commissions scolaires du Québec (SOFAD)

Darrin Potter – Principal, Keewatinook Internet High School

Keith Murray – Principal, Wawanesa School

Darren Cannell – Principal, Saskatoon Cyber Catholic School

Sig Jensen – Principal, Argyll Centre

Barry Anderson – Executive Director, Virtual School Society

Randy Pauls – Principal, Northern British Columbia Distance Education School

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Executive Summary

In October 2008, the International Association for K-12 Online Learning released the initial *Snapshot State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report. The authors' intent was to provide a brief outline of the development of K-12 distance education in Canada and to note any significant policy issues. Prior to this report, there had been limited national overviews of K-12 distance education in Canada completed. For example, Wynne (1997) reviewed virtual schooling in North America and European for the Open School in British Columbia. There had also been several external evaluations for K-12 online learning programmes that included some discussion of the national scene (e.g., Ballas & Belyk, 2000; Barker & Wendel, 2001; Barker, Wendall & Richmond, 1999). The Canadian Teachers Federation (2000) described some trends in individual provinces as a part of a brief to examine potential contract issues related to K-12 online learning. Three years later, the Canadian Teachers Federation sponsored a closer examination of the development and major issues arising from K-12 distance education across Canada (O'Haire, Froese-Germain & Lane-De Baie, 2003). However, the *Snapshot State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* was the first systematic effort to examine K-12 distance education policies and activities in each of the provinces and territories. This more complete report continues that examination.

All thirteen provinces and territories have some level of K-12 distance education activity. Two provinces make sole use of a single, province-wide K-12 distance education programme, while four provinces rely primarily upon district-based programmes. Another four provinces have a combination of a strong province-wide programme and several district-based programmes. The three territories and one province rely primarily on distance education services offered from other provinces. British Columbia has the highest number and highest percentage of students participating in distance education, while Prince Edward Island appears to have the fewest.

Regulatory regimes for K-12 distance education in Canada come in a variety of fashions. Few provinces have language in their *Education Act* or *Schools Act* related to distance education, however, most provinces have some form of regulations. In some provinces it is in the form of Ministerial Directives, others use policy documents issued by the Ministry of Education. Some utilise agreements that are signed between the Ministry and the individual school boards, while others have specific items included in the collective bargaining agreement between the government and the teachers' union. British Columbia has the most extensive regulatory regime in Canada, however, several other provinces have consultation and review processes underway to determine new or updated distance education policy.

State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada

1. Introduction

The goal of the initial *Snapshot State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report was to provide an overview of the state of K-12 online learning in Canada. This was accomplished through the use of short commentaries about the state of K-12 distance education for each province and territory, along with more developed case studies for three of the provinces that had very different provincial systems.

The goal of this more complete *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report is to continue that examination of the K-12 distance education policies and activities in each of the provinces and territories. This was done by examining the legislation and regulations that govern K-12 distance education in each jurisdiction and describing the various programmes that provide those K-12 distance education opportunities.

1.1 History of K-12 Distance Education

Canada, similar to many countries that cover a large geographic area but have a relatively small population, has a long history of using distance education at the K-12 level. Dunae (2006) reported that a correspondence school in Canada opened in 1919 in British Columbia. Beginning with a student population of 86 students, 13 of whom were located at lighthouses throughout the province, the correspondence programme grew to over 600 students by 1929. Almost six and one half decades later, the use of K-12 online learning also got its start in British Columbia with the creation of New Directions in Distance Learning and the EBUS Academy, both in 1993 (Dallas, 1999). This was quickly followed by district-based online programmes in Manitoba, Ontario, Alberta, and Newfoundland and Labrador (Barker & Wendel, 2001; Barker, Wendall & Richmond, 1999; Haughey & Fenwich, 1996; Stevens, 1997).

In a review of K-12 online learning, Wynne (1997) described few online learning programmes outside of British Columbia and Alberta, and described even less government regulation in this area. It was estimated by the Canadian Teachers Federation (2000) that there were approximately 25,000 K-12 students enrolled in online courses during the 1999-2000 school year. O'Haire, Froese-Germain and Lane-De Baie (2003) later reported that Alberta had the most students engaged in online learning, but British Columbia also had a significant number of district-based and consortium programmes. Plante and Beattie (2004), in their survey of how schools were using information and communication technologies, found that almost 30% of schools — and almost 40% of secondary schools — in Canada were using the Internet for online learning.

In her discussion of the growth of K-12 online learning in Canada, Haughey (2005) indicated that the growth of virtual schooling in Canada was slower than in the United States. Haughey did describe the progressive legislative and funding structure in British Columbia, put in place in 2002, which seemed to be encouraging growth in that province. In the initial *Snapshot State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report, Barbour and Stewart (2008) reported that British Columbia had the highest number of students engaged in and the most regulations to govern K-12 distance education in Canada. They also indicated that all provinces and territories appeared to have some level of K-12 distance education activity. However, as the Canadian Council on Learning (2009), in their report the *State of e-Learning in Canada*, indicated in their discussion of the barriers to the growth of online learning in Canada, “delivery of resources, however, does not guarantee learning, even when the initial barriers of access have been overcome” (p. 61). Within the Canadian context, where there is little support for the more conservative school choice movement (particularly outside of the province of Alberta), K-12 online learning has often been viewed as a substitute when face-to-face learning is not available.

1.2 Methodology

The methodology focused upon three forms of data collection. The first was a survey that was sent to each of the Ministries of Education (see Appendix A for a copy of this survey). The second was follow-up interviews to clarify or expand on any of the responses contained in the survey. The third was an analysis of documents from the Ministry of Education, often available in online format.

Of the thirteen provinces and territories, only eight responded. Four of the provinces and territories did not respond to the request, while the Senior Policy Coordinator for e-Learning Ontario declined to participate. As such, the profiles for these jurisdictions were constructed based solely on the analysis of documents (and in some instances information provided by others involved in K-12 distance education in that province or territory, but not associated with the Ministry).

For the Ministries of Education that responded, a draft copy of the profile was sent to them for their revisions and approval prior to being included in this report. The various vignettes that have been included were solicited from suggestions made by the Ministry of Education contacts and existing relationships of the researcher.

1.3 Definitions

As with the previous snapshot report, for those familiar with K-12 online learning in the United States most of the terms utilised are consistent with terms used to describe K-12 online learning in Canada. There are some differences. Often in the United States, online charter schools and other full-time programmes are referred to as cyber schools. Charter schools do not exist in most Canadian provinces, and in the sole province where they do exist there are no online charter schools. As such, the terms virtual school and cyber school — along with Internet high school — are used interchangeably in the Canadian context.



Two terms that may be unfamiliar to a non-Canadian audience include:

Anglophone – English-speaking

Francophone – French-speaking

Also, in Canada there is no separation of church and state. As such, several provinces have both a government-funded public school system and a government-funded Catholic school system.

Finally, the author of this report make use of the definitions provided by the Virtual School Glossary project (see <http://virtuelschool.wikispaces.com/glossary/>) in most other areas.

1.4 How to Read This Document

This *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report is organised in a regional fashion. The information begins with a national overview, which is followed by a focus upon each of the four regions of Canada: Atlantic, Central, Western, and Northern. Within each region is a general description and then detailed provincial/territorial profiles based upon the information obtained.

Each profile is designed to look at the level of K-12 distance education activity, with a focus on online learning, along with the specific policies and regulations governing distance education in that province or territory. It should be noted, this information is simply a snapshot in time. As the field of K-12 online learning is rapidly changing, the currency of the information contained in this report is limited to the realities of October 2009. Finally, when possible, there is a vignette included to provide a more personalised perspective of students, teachers, schools, and programmes involved in K-12 distance education in that jurisdiction.

2. National Overview

At present, there is some level of K-12 distance education in all thirteen provinces and territories.



2.1 Atlantic Canada



Atlantic Canada is the smallest geographic region of Canada. Atlantic Canada is also the only region where there are still strong provincial programmes — with New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador having only a province-wide programme and Nova Scotia having a high level of cooperation between the province-wide initiatives and the individual district-based programmes. As the province-wide initiatives in all three province are managed directly by the individual Ministries of Education, there is little legislative or regulatory regime in place to govern K-12 distance education. The exception to this trend is Prince Edward Island, which has no K-12 distance education programme of its own, but the most direct regulatory structure.

2.1.1 Newfoundland and Labrador

Geographically speaking, Canada's most easterly province — Newfoundland and Labrador — is composed of two landmasses: the island of Newfoundland and the mainland portion of Labrador. The province has a total area of just over 400,000 km², two thirds of which is the Labrador portion. As of the 2009 population estimates, the population of the province was 508,990, with approximately 30,000 of those living in the Labrador region (Statistics Canada, 2009). The capital of the province is St. John's, located on the Avalon Peninsula (in the southeastern corner of the province), with a population of approximately 125,000. However, approximately 60% of the entire population of the province resides on the Avalon Peninsula.

K-12 Online Learning

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Province-led programme	Yes	
Other online programmes	No	
Provincial-level policy	No	

Online Programmes

The Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI) came into existence in 2000 based on the recommendation of a ministerial panel (Sparkes & Williams, 2000). The CDLI began its curricular offerings 2001-02, with 10 courses field-tested in 10 districts (i.e., one course per district) and a total of 200 student enrolments from 76 different rural schools. After the initial field test, the CDLI expanded its course offerings so that students from all over the province could access any course. Over the past seven years, the CDLI has increased its offerings to the point where there are approximately 1,500 student enrolments each year from approximately 100 different schools in the approximately 40 online courses it has developed.

The CDLI utilises a combination of synchronous and asynchronous instruction for each of their online courses. For the synchronous instruction, the CDLI has teachers that provide, depending on the subject area, anywhere from 30% to 80% of the students' scheduled time (which is 10-one hour periods over a fourteen day cycle) in synchronous instruction using *Elluminate*®. Participating schools must align their schedule with the specific CDLI schedule for their region to ensure that students class time in their brick-and-mortar schools matches with the CDLI's synchronous class times.

The asynchronous instruction is conducted using a course management system (formerly *WebCT*®, now *Desire2Learn*®). The asynchronous course content is divided up into the units called for in the provincially mandated curriculum guide, further divided into sections which are akin to themes that may flow in each of the units, and finally into lessons which are designed as the items of actual asynchronous instruction that can be completed in usually one to three hours of student time. Each lesson is broken down into five component parts — the objectives; a list of knowledge and skills students are expected to have mastered prior to the lesson; the content of the lesson; a list of additional readings, resources and activities the student is expected to complete to master the

lesson content; and a self-assessment. The asynchronous course content contains material for all of the course outcomes, and in theory students could complete the course entirely asynchronously by following this course content.¹

Provincial Policies

At this time there is no language in the *Education Act* related to K-12 distance education. There are also no policies or regulation specifically related to K-12 distance education within the Ministry of Education, although work is currently being done in this area.

Funding

The CDLI receives a block grant from the provincial Government that funds the administration, overhead and course development activities of the online programme. One of the items included in the CDLI overhead is the placement and maintenance of computers and other support equipment that the CDLI provides to all of the schools that participate in its programme. The CDLI also receives a direct allocation of teaching units from the provincial Government to hire teachers for their online courses.

Governance, Tracking, and Accountability

At present, the CDLI is not a separate school or entity. Rather it operates within the Planning and Educational Programmes Branch of the Ministry of Education.

While there are no specific governance or accountability measure from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry does track the method of delivery that students complete their studies. This allows for comparisons of student performance between the students who take their courses via distance education and those enrolled in the face-to-face environment. Data related to distance education enrolment are available through the *K-12 School Profile System*, while data on student performance are available from the Ministry upon request.

Recent published studies using this data have indicated that there are no differences in the performance of students in these two delivery models (Barbour & Mulcahy, 2008, 2009; Crocker, 2009), although some have expressed concern that the sample distance education students is composed of a higher ability student and/or that some students are electing to enrol in a basic-level curriculum to avoid taking courses online (Mulcahy, Dibbon & Norberg, 2008).

Quality Assurance, Teaching, and Curriculum

The CDLI hires full-time teachers based on the allocation it receives from the provincial Government. In recent years this allocation has been in the range of 16-20 teaching units. In most instances, the CDLI has chosen to second teachers from their positions with one of the province's five school districts. However, there is nothing preventing the CDLI from directly hiring teachers. One of the advantages of seconded teachers from existing positions is that many of these teachers remain in their brick-and-mortar schools. This gives the CDLI a human presence outside of their main offices in the capital city.

1 Barbour (2007) provides an extensive description of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and its rural nature, along with a history of the development distance education, and a detailed description of the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation and its delivery model.

CDLI courses are developed in several stages. First, a request for proposals is issued for individuals (most often teachers) to respond with a basic overview of the structure for the required online course. The winning individual is tasked with creating the course content within the CDLI's own developer's template. The use of a standard template provides a common look and feel, along with navigation for all CDLI courses. After the content has been created, a second individual (again often a teacher) is responsible for providing a thorough review of the content, sequencing, and other pedagogical and design issues. The original course content creator must then revise the content based upon the reviewer's report. The content is then edited and uploaded. Multimedia and other interactive items are often added separately, and the course is generally pilot tested with a smaller group of students before being deployed.

Beyond the CDLI's own systems for quality assurance, the evolution of K-12 distance education programmes in Newfoundland and Labrador are the most studied of any series of initiatives in Canada. For example, Memorial University of Newfoundland has recently established the Killick Centre as a part of a federal grant that "aims to foster innovative research, training and new knowledge in the area of e-learning in the field of education." To date, one of the main partners in this research has been the CDLI.



Lumsden School Complex (now Lumsden Academy) was a rural all grade school with a student body of approximately 125 students and a teaching staff of 15. The students at Lumsden School Complex came from three different communities: Lumsden itself, Cape Freels and Deadman's Bay (approximately 15 kilometers north and south). The three communities combined have a population of approximately 950. The fishery continues to be the main industry, although a seasonal tourism industry has developed over the past decade.

Because of the small enrolment, students at Lumsden School Complex had accessed online courses each year the provincial virtual school, the CDLI, had been in operation. Students at Lumsden School Complex completed their online studies in a distance education room, located less than approximately 5 meters from the school's main office. The room contained computer workstations provided by the CDLI, along with an all-in-one printer and a video-conferencing equipped television. Up to nine students could engage in their online courses in this room, supervised only by an occasional visit from the school's administrator or one of the teachers.

According to Tiffany Stagg, a former student who completed five online courses over a three year period in French, mathematics and physics, her experience quite different than being face-to-face with her teacher in an actual

classroom setting. She described herself as a very dedicated and disciplined student who wanted to excel in her learning, so she put in extra time into her studies to do well in these online courses. She indicated that you needed to put in the extra time and effort in order to get anything from the classes or instructors, and at times it was really hard to concentrate with her fellow classmates around and without being supervised by an actual person. But their online teachers knew the situation and always tried to keep them on our toes during synchronous classes by often asking sudden questions to unsuspecting students. Looking back, Tiffany believes the experience made her more responsible and mature because she knew she had to do the work herself, and there was no teacher physically present to actually help her.

Cassandra Goodyear, another former student who completed three online courses in French and mathematics while she was in high school, found her overall experience with online learning as very positive. Her online courses gave her the opportunity to take courses that were not offered at her school due to the small student enrolment. She felt that her online courses made her more independent and increased her problem solving abilities. The online courses she completed in high school provided her with experience that she feels has helped her with her other online courses she has gone on to complete at university. Cassandra knew what to expect and what was required of her, and feels that her past experience with online learning also helped with the intimidating setting and requirements found at a university level.

The year following their graduation the secondary students began to be bussed to a school located 40 km away. After graduation Tiffany completed an online programme from College of the North Atlantic, while Cassandra is working on a degree from Memorial University.

2.1.2 Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia, one of the four original provinces that formed Canada, has a population of 939,531 (Statistics Canada, 2009). Located in the Atlantic Canada region, the province has a total area of a little more than 55,000 km², giving it a population density of 17.49 people/km² — the second highest in Canada. The capital of the province is Halifax, located in a fairly central location on the province's eastern coast. The capital region accounts for approximately 40% of the province's population.

K-12 Online Learning

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Province-led programme	Yes	
Other online programmes	Yes	
Provincial-level policy	No	Although there is language included in the Provincial Teachers' Agreement

Online Programmes

There is currently one online learning programme in Nova Scotia: the Nova Scotia Virtual School (NSVS). There is also a correspondence study programme (CSP) that began in 1920 and continues to this day — although the Department of Education is currently in the process of transitioning these courses to an online delivery format. At present there are approximately 1,800 students and 2,200 course enrolments in CSP.

The educational television programme (ETV) began in 1960 and is no longer in operation. It was funded by the Department of Education and began as a way of providing competent teachers in high school mathematics, science, and French as a second language to students in rural schools. It consisted of a partnership with the Canadian Broadcasting Company to develop and then broadcast the high school curriculum. By the late 1970's, ETV was changing from direct teaching of individual classes to the creation of broader educational resources that were not otherwise available. The most notable was the Mi'kmaq series that recreated four seasons in pre-European contact Maritimes.

The NSVS is responsible for providing central course management platforms, while the eight school boards in the province are responsible for providing the individual course content and the teachers who teach those courses. Two of these school boards have created their own district-based online programmes (i.e., Strait Regional School Board Virtual School and Chignecto-Central Virtual School), although students from any of the school boards are able to enrol in courses offered by these two board-based programmes.

A third school board, who actually has the longest history in online learning, is Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) — the pan-provincial school board for French first language students. CSAP uses both room-based video conferencing and the two online platforms used by English school boards. CSAP also has a sharing arrangement for online programming from the Province of New Brunswick. Over the past two years there have been approximately 650 students per year enrolled in the NSVS from the eight English-speaking school boards and the CSAP.

Provincial Policies

Learning Resources and Technology Services, a Division of the Public Schools Branch of the Department of Education, manages all distance education programmes in Nova Scotia.

Approximately half the students enrolled in courses offered through the CSP can also be attending a public school; the other half are adult students or live out of the province, while students enrolled in courses from the NSVS are usually also enrolled in a brick-and-mortar school.

Funding

The delivery of CSP courses is mostly self-funded from tuition fees. In many instances these fees may be actually paid by school boards, Department of Community Services, Department of Justice, Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning, or other sources.

The Department funds the online learning platforms (i.e., *Marratech*® and *Moodle*®) used by the school boards through the NSVS. The individual student enrolment fees are typically provided as regular programme seats and are funded from the per student allocation attributed to each school board. In addition, the Department provides additional funding for 250 seats in online courses with a priority on students from small high schools.

Governance, Tracking, and Accountability

There is currently no legislation specifically related to K-12 distance education in Nova Scotia, however, there are 11 provisions of legally binding guidelines included in the agreement between the Government of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. As a contract between the Government and teachers' union, most of the provisions deal with teacher certification and workload issues. For example, all distance education teachers must have provincial certification, their distance teaching load shall be considered part of their teaching assignment, the maximum size of a synchronous section is 22 to 25 students from up to five school sites, school boards shall provide professional development focused on online learning, distance courses must be scheduled during the traditional school day, among others.

Interestingly, the agreement also indicates that school must appoint a distance education coordinator and that these responsibilities shall be included as a part of that teacher's overall teaching assignment (although without outlining the specific responsibilities of this coordinator). There are also specific provisions that must be included in a student supervision plan, which all schools must have.

Finally, one of the provisions relates to the creation of a "standing Distance Education Committee consisting of two representatives from the Department of Education, two representatives from the Nova Scotia School Boards' Association and four representatives from the Union... to address issues surrounding distance education" that meets at least twice a year and provides annual written reports" (p. 100).

The Department of Education does not track student performance for online courses, but does keep this information for those enrolled in the CSP.

Quality Assurance, Teaching, and Curriculum

The CSP courses are developed directly by the Department of Education and course writers are selected in response to a provincial request for proposals. Writers are selected based on their suitable responses to these requests. Course writers must have experience teaching the Nova Scotia Public School Program. The Department hires “markers” on a contractual basis for the CSP. Successful markers are individuals with current teaching experience with the course(s) in question.

The school boards provide online course content and select the teachers responsible for teaching them. These teachers generally have experience teaching the specific course in a face-to-face environment, and online learning experience is also preferred. At present, the Department has an Online Steering Committee that is developing a standard for online courses in Nova Scotia and, with funding; this standard will be the basis to guide evaluation of and creation of online courses.



Chignecto Central Virtual School (CCVS) is a system that allows the Chignecto Central Regional School Board to offer a variety of courses to all their high schools, but in particular to their smaller high schools. The courses at CCVS are designed to have an asynchronous component where the lessons are online for the students to view and work on through *Moodle*®. Additionally, the students and teachers meet synchronously to simulate the classroom experience once a week using the video conferencing software, *Marratech*®. Courses offered through this programme include technology type courses (e.g., Film and Video 12, Multimedia 12), Sciences courses (e.g., CHE 11, 12 and PHYS 11, 12), Math courses (e.g., MAT 12 Adv, PCAL 12 and CALC 12) and others (e.g., African Canadian Studies 11, Entrepreneurship 12). Although Guy Aucoin has taught many of these courses, his main responsibility now is to teach the Math courses.

When Guy first heard that he was becoming an online teacher, he thought that it would really isolate him from his students, just sitting at his desk correcting work. Luckily, Guy was surprised that this wasn't the case. Due to the synchronous component where he meets his students, he feels that he has been able to keep in touch with them. The other thing Guy appreciates about the video conferencing software, *Marratech*®, is that students can come

in when they are struggling and ask questions at almost any time during the school day. This one-on-one contact has allowed Guy to get to know his student better than he usually would in the classroom.

Like other teachers, teaching online involves correcting the students' work and, in CCVS courses, there is generally a greater load than in the classroom since they need this extra student work to use as data to determine where the students are in their learning. Not being in the same location can pose a challenge to get the work from the students at times, but through emails, remote access to the student's computer and the ability to view through *Moodle*® which activities students have been working on, CCVS teachers can often communicate with the students to see why things are late.

For the students, taking an online course through the CCVS it gives them the best of both worlds. They can work independently without having a teacher physically present to tell them what to do all the time. For some senior high students, this is a great way for them to get prepared for a university setting. Yet, they also have the real-time support through *Marratech*® — where they can talk to their teacher during the school day if they run into difficulty. For some subject areas, such as the Math course that Guy teaches, this is often much easier than trying to get explanations through emails. Another comment that is common from CCVS students is that they like the fact that taking these courses online allows them to compare their subject matter knowledge against students from other schools. In many instances, CCVS students have been quite successful in the particular discipline, and taking these courses online often allows them to work with students with the same academic goals and interests.

2.1.3 Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island is the smallest province in Canada, joined to the mainland portion of the country by the Confederation Bridge (a 13 km long span from Borden-Carleton, Prince Edward Island to Cape Jourimain, New Brunswick). The population of the province is only 140,402 (Statistics Canada, 2009), making it Canada's smallest province. With an area of only 5,683.56 km², the population density is 23.9 /km² (making it one of the most densely population provinces). The capital is Charlottetown, known as the birthplace of Canada, which has a population of 58,625.

K-12 Online Learning

There was no response from the Prince Edward Island Ministry of Education, as such this profile has been developed based on a document analysis of the Ministry's website and other published Government documents.

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Province-led programme	No	
Other online programmes	No	It appears that PEI utilises the distance education programmes from one or more provinces
Provincial-level policy	Yes	

Online Programmes

Historically, students could enrol in correspondence courses offered through the New Brunswick Community College system to gain secondary school credit with certain restrictions. At present, students in the province have some ability to access courses offered by the New Brunswick Ministry of Education. For example, there are currently 19 students from Prince Edward Island are enrolled two online courses offered by New Brunswick.

Provincial Policies

There is no mention of distance education in the provincial *Schools Act*. However, in 2001 the Ministry of Education issued Ministerial Directive No. MD 2001-05 established guidelines for the use of distance education within the K-12 system. These provisions were superseded in August 2008 by Ministerial Directive No. MD 2008-05, which reads:

1. Application

This directive applies only to courses delivered within the jurisdiction of the school during the school day.

2. Definition

Distance Education is a mode of instruction in which the student and teacher are separated in either time or space or both, and where two-way communication takes place through non-traditional means for the most part. There is a broad range of both individualised and team instructional approaches and strategies used in distance education. Distance education communication may utilise various technologies and media, including but not limited to print, computers and computer networks, telecommunications, and audio-visual equipment and resources.

Supervision is the act of overseeing the course of study and monitoring student activities.

3. Purpose

Distance Education is seen as a means to provide students with equitable access and/or a diversity of programmes as approved by the P.E.I. Department of Education.

4. Beliefs

1. Regardless of site, personal interaction between teachers and students is fundamental to the teaching and learning process. On-site teaching is the preferred mode of instruction.
2. Distance education programmes must be consistent with the Philosophy of Education for P.E.I. and its curriculum.
3. Distance education must be guided by sound pedagogical principles that support an effective teaching and learning environment.
4. Teacher education programmes in P.E.I. should include instruction in distance education policies, programs, and instructional strategies.

5. Delivery

1. Teachers delivering distance education courses must be certified in a Canadian province or territory or be approved by the Registrar of the Department of Education as being eligible for an instructional license in the Province of Prince Edward Island.
2. Students enrolled in distance education courses will be under teacher supervision at the receiving site.
3. Duties assigned to teachers as a result of their students being involved in a distance education course shall be considered part of their regularly assigned duties.

6. In-Service

The Department of Education will ensure that, where appropriate, teachers participating in the delivery of distance education courses will receive in-service in distance education.

7. Curriculum and Accreditation of Courses

Courses offered by distance education must be authorised by the Department of Education.

8. Student Access

Distance education courses may be offered to students in any grade level.

This directive provides a positive structure for the development of K-12 distance education in Prince Edward Island. However, to date there appears to be no local organisation within the province to utilise this opportunity.

2.1.4 New Brunswick

The only officially bilingual province in Canada, New Brunswick has a population of 748,319 (Statistics Canada, 2009). Approximately a third of the population is Francophone. The province has a total area of just over 72,908 km². This gives New Brunswick a population density of 10.50 /km². The capital is Fredericton, which has a little over 10% of the province's population. New Brunswick has two other main urban areas: Moncton and Saint John; however, these three metropolitan areas still only comprise approximately 45% of the population — making New Brunswick one of the more evenly distributed provincial populations.

K-12 Online Learning

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Province-led programme	Yes	One English / One French
Other online programmes	No	
Provincial-level policy	Yes	Policy documents

Online Programmes

There are two online learning programmes in New Brunswick, one for the Anglophone school system and one for the Francophone school system. The Ministry of Education administers both programmes, although each programme has its own independent staff and structure within the Ministry. Information concerning implementation policies and course load is shared between the two programmes. The online learning programmes for both languages use the same learning management system hosted by the Ministry.

The majority of students are enrolled in a high school in New Brunswick and elect to complete, with school approval, one or more online courses. A registrar in each of the province's high schools enrolls the student in one or more of the online courses available using an on line enrolment system. The Ministry's programme manager then informs the distance teacher of the enrolment information. The online teacher then communicates with the high school student ongoing until the course is completed. Each student has a local facilitator who is a local teacher who helps keep the student on pace in the course and serves as the communications link with the online teacher who provides weekly updates on progress. The school is informed of the final mark and places the mark in the schools' Student Information System where it shows on the student transcript. The Ministry, through this online learning programme, can also accommodate students traveling out of the country or with medical reasons for not attending a regular classroom. Enrolments in the English online learning programme over the past three years have varied from 2,598 in 2006-07 to 2,911 in 2007-08 to 2,010 in 2008-09.

The Ministry also allows classroom teachers to use online courses with their face-to-face students. This is now a much more popular option. It allows the classroom teacher to use all or just parts of the course with their students. It is especially well suited for professional development purposes with teachers who may be teaching the course for the first time. Over the past three years, enrolments in the English programme went from 1,434 in 2006-07 to 1,763 in 2007-08 to 1,933 in 2008-09.

Finally, the Ministry also sells access to online courses to other jurisdictions including private school students in other countries and sometimes in other provinces.

Provincial Policies

At present there are no specific legislation or regulations that govern K-12 online learning in New Brunswick. The system operates based on collaboration between the Ministry of Education and individual school districts.

Funding

The Ministry funds the learning management system, course development and the cost of online teachers centrally through our e-learning Branch. There is no registration fee, so schools and students are able to access the provincial online learning programmes at no direct cost to them.

Governance, Tracking, and Accountability

While there is no legislation or regulation governing K-12 online learning, the Ministry has established a policy handbook that outlines the administrative procedures. It also provides a detailed description of “The Distance Learning Team”, which is designed to include personnel at the Ministry of Education, the school district, and the school. In addition to describing the individual team members at each of these levels, a detailed list of specific responsibilities are provided (and included in the school personnel is both the distance learner and the parent/guardian, with similar lists of responsibilities). Much of this information is provided at the New Brunswick’s Distance Learning programme website (under the “Responsibilities” tab).

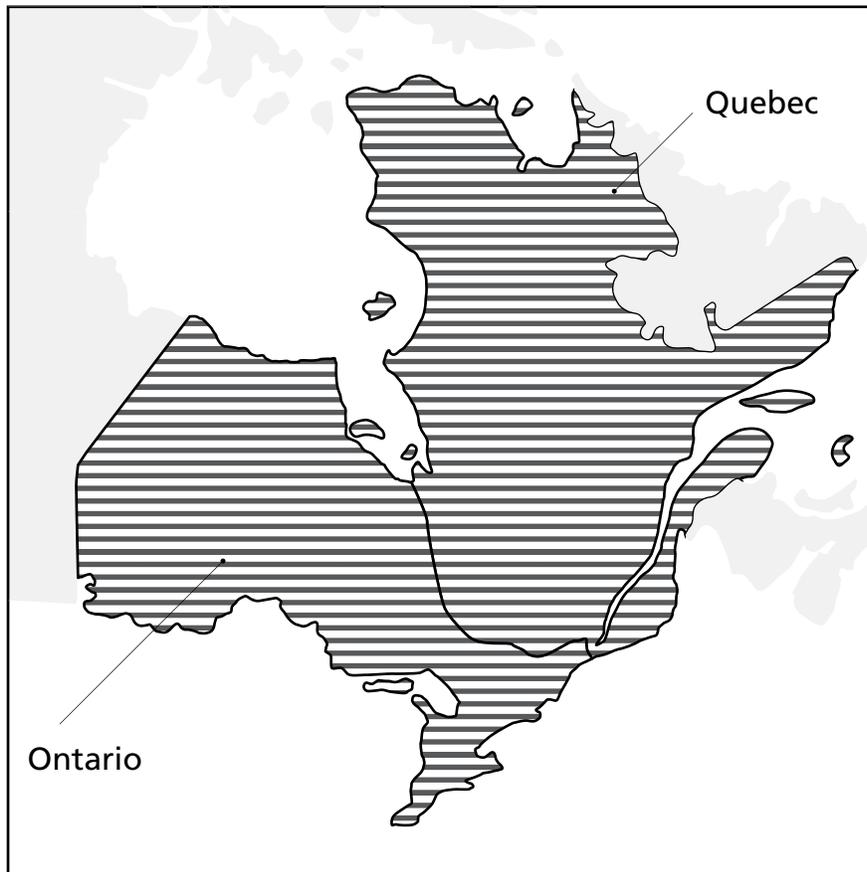
The Ministry has the ability to track the performance of online students, and could make comparisons of students’ performance and retention based on delivery model. However, it appears that these calculations are not made on a regular basis.

Quality Assurance, Teaching, and Curriculum

For the selection of teachers, each language sector manages their own online learning programme. For example, the English distance programme uses classroom teachers who are seconded from school districts to the Ministry. These online teachers work from school or home.

Courses for the English distance programme are developed centrally by using content specialists and the Ministry’s in-house development team. The French programme contracts out to the University of Moncton, who has a development team that provides this development service while the Ministry provides access to the subject specialist and helps to manage the development process. The course content is developed to have a consistent look and feel. Feedback from students after they finish the online course, along with interaction with their online and face-to-face teachers using the course content provide the Ministry with evaluation data for their course development.

2.2 Central Canada



Central Canada is the most populated region of Canada. In fact, Ontario and Quebec comprise almost two thirds of the population of Canada or approximately 20 million people (and only about a quarter of the area of the country). The vast majority of those people, around 17 million, live in the Quebec City to Windsor Corridor — a 1,200km corridor running along the southern portions of both provinces that connects two ends of the Via Rail passenger service. The corridor is the most densely-populated and heavily-industrialised region of Canada. The remainder of both provinces — or the northern portions — are less heavily populated and face many of the educational challenges one would expect in rural areas.

While both Ontario and Quebec have primarily district-based K-12 distance education programmes, their development to that stage was very different. In Ontario there had been a historic association of K-12 distance education, and particularly K-12 online learning, to the district level and it has only been recently that the Ministry has begun to play a more active role. However, in Quebec K-12 distance education had historically been based at the Ministry, and it is only in the past decade and a half that it has been devolved to the district level.

2.2.1 Quebec

The second largest province in Canada — both in terms of size and population, Quebec has a population of 7,782,561 and a total area of 1,542,056 km² (Statistics Canada, 2009). This translates to a population density of 5.63/km². The provincial capital is Quebec City, which has a population of 715,515 (including the metropolitan area). Quebec is also home to Canada's second largest city, Montreal, which has a population of 3,635,571. Quebec is also the only French-speaking province in Canada. At present, approximately 80% of the population report French to be their first language. Unlike the other provinces, secondary school in Quebec is from grade 7 to 11, after which students typically attend a two or three year *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel* (CEGEP) to receive a Diploma of College Studies.

K-12 Online Learning

There was no response from the Quebec Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sport, as such this profile has been developed based on a document analysis of the Ministry's website and other published Government documents.

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Province-led programme	No	SOFAD is a provincial entity, but it does not deliver distance education
Other online programmes	Yes	
Provincial-level policy	No	

Online Programmes

The first distance education programme created by the Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sport was a correspondence school for vocational education in 1946. This was expanded to include general education courses in 1972, and popular education and CEGEP courses in the 1980s. In the early 1990s, a distance education institution was created for those CEGEP courses (Saucier, 2007).

Then in 1994-95 the responsibility for distance education was devolved from the Ministry to the school boards. In January 1996, as the result of a joint effort between the Ministry and the school boards the *Société de formation à distance des commissions scolaires du Québec* (SOFAD) was created. SOFAD is a not-for-profit organisation tasked with the development and production distance-learning materials. Currently, SOFAD has created distance materials for more than 200 courses in a variety of formats (only a small percentage are online courses). School boards throughout Quebec use these materials in their own distance education programmes. At present, there are:

- 38 school boards or consortia that offer only French-language distance education;
- 1 school board that offers only English-language distance education; and
- 1 school board and 1 consortium that offer both French-language and English-language distance education.

These school boards and consortia operate a total of 57 centres.

It should be noted K-12 distance education in Québec is reserved for the adult student (i.e., students who have reached the age of 16 before July 1 of the current school year). Younger students are not eligible to participate in these distance education programmes.

There is also a programme sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sport, *Écoles éloignées en réseau* or Networked Remote Schools, which is designed to connect rural and remote schools via the Internet to allow them to share curricular resources. In most instances it appears this system has been used as a way to engage students in blended learning opportunities based on themed projects, although there are also reports to it being used as a means to deliver online learning.

Provincial Policies

The *Education Act* in Quebec makes no reference to distance education. As the school boards hold the primary responsibility for distance education since 1995, policies and regulations related to K-12 distance education also appear to be at the district level.

Funding

The Government of Quebec provides school boards funding for distance education students based upon enrolment at a rate of 80% of the amount provided for a student enrolled in a brick-and-mortar setting. The Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sport does provide a block grant to SOFAD to support their course development activities. SOFAD also charges a fee for school boards to use their materials, money that is reinvested in the development of other learning materials.

Tracking, and Accountability

The Ministry of Education does track enrolments, but not completions, for K-12 distance education. For example, in 2007-08 there were 38,429 enrolments from 18,760 students in distance education, up from 37,217 enrolments in 2006-07 and 30,038 enrolments in 2005-06. This growth has been consistent over the past decade, as there were only 10,910 enrolments in K-12 distance education in Quebec in 1995-96 (Saucier, 2009).

The Ministry also attempts to collect data on student performance for its distance education students. However, some of the school boards do not forward that data to the Ministry, resulting in a data set representing approximately 50% of the results. The most recent attempt to collect this information was in October 2007 and that incomplete data can be viewed at http://www.sofad.qc.ca/pdf/echecs_et_maths_2007.pdf.

Teaching, and Curriculum

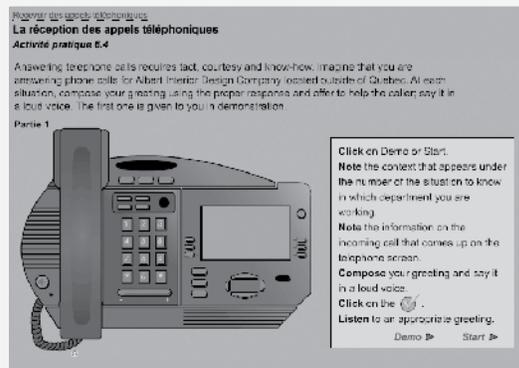
Distance education teachers in Quebec are called tutors, primarily because their role is not necessarily to teach the content but to be able to provide assistance, as the student requires it. The selection, duties, and payment of these tutors are managed by the school boards.

The curriculum materials used in the school board programmes are mainly provided by SOFAD, however, the use of SOFAD's materials in distance education is not compulsory. School boards are able to design their own materials locally or to buy the materials of some other providers.

After the Ministry of Education ended their direct involvement in distance education, and the school boards became responsible for this function, the school boards supported the creation of the *Société de formation à distance des commissions scolaires du Québec* (SOFAD). At present, SOFAD has 27 online courses, which correspond to the programmes of the Ministry of Education, on its e-learning portal — eduSOFAD. Of these 27 courses, 21 are in French and 6 are in English, while 23 of them are considered general education and the other 4 are in vocational education (and are in French only).

A group of these courses are directly related to the ministerial programme of study in Accounting and Secretarial Studies (e.g., communication bilingue or bilingual communication; *outils de télécommunication* or telecommunication tools; *recherche d'information* or researching information; and réunions d'affaires or business meetings. This Accounting and Secretarial Studies programme is based on a new framework for developing vocational education programmes that calls for the participation of experts from the workplace and the field of education. The programme of study was developed in terms of competencies, expressed as objectives and divided into modules. Various factors were kept in mind in developing the programme, such as training needs, the job situation, purposes, goals, and strategies and means used to attain objectives. The programme of study lists the competencies that are the minimum requirements for a Diploma of Vocational Studies. It also provides the basis for organising courses, planning teaching strategies, and designing instructional and evaluation materials.

One of the authors of these vocational education online courses at SOFAD is also a tutor in one of the school boards that offer the



pedagogical support to the students for these courses. She underlines the importance and usefulness of the communication resources. Students are able to e-mail her, and she will respond within 24 hours. Students can also phone during her two periods of availability or leave a message if she is in the classroom. She also uses the students' online course planners to write comments about the student' assignments, which she feels is another useful communication tool. With these varies ways to interact and provide support to the students, she enjoys working in these online courses very much.

The courses are entirely self-paced, asynchronous course. The courses provide the students with all the material, assignments, tools, and resources (e.g., a planner, a learning log, a self-evaluation activity) needed to complete the objectives independently. The material is presented in a multimedia environment that allows interaction, immediate explanations, and feedback. During the online learning, students can check their progress through several methods that are part of the course structure. The time allowed to finish a course can vary based on the school board, but is generally fixed at about six months. There is a required final examination that is supervised at the local level to complete the course.

2.2.2 Ontario

Ontario is the most populated province in Canada, with 12,986,857 people (Statistics Canada, 2009). It is also one of the larger provinces geographically, with a total area of 1,076,395 km². This gives the province a population density of 13.9/km², which also makes it the most densely populated province in Canada. The capital of Ontario is Toronto, which has 2,503,281 — although the metropolitan or Greater Toronto Area has 5,555,912 and the Golden Horseshoe (i.e., a “C” shaped region stretching from Niagara Falls to Oshawa along the shores of Lake Ontario) has 8,102,163. In addition to the Golden Horseshoe, Ontario is also home to Ottawa — the capital of Canada (and the National Capital region has another 1,451,415 people). If these two regions (i.e., the Golden Horseshoe and the National Capital) are removed, the population density of the province falls to only 3.3/km².

K-12 Online Learning

The Senior Policy Coordinator for e-Learning Ontario declined to participate on behalf of the Ministry of Education, as such this profile has been developed based on a document analysis of the Ministry’s website and other published Government documents.

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Province-led programme	No	
Other online programmes	Yes	Both public and private
Provincial-level policy	Yes	

Online Programmes

Ontario was one of the first provinces in Canada to establish district-based online learning programmes — with the Avon Maitland Distance Education Centre being the first in 1994-95. Since that time many of the school boards in the province have established their own programmes, and all of the province’s school boards have signed agreements with the Ministry of Education related to K-12 online learning. At present, 18 of these school boards have come together to form the Ontario eLearning Consortium (OeLC), designed to allow its members to work together to maximise their online offerings.

Along with the English-language school boards, French-language school boards in Ontario have also been active in K-12 distance education. It is believed that this activity has a longer and more extensive history than their English-language counterparts, however, there is little to no information published in English (see <http://www.cforp.on.ca/samfo/> for information in French about their online programmes).

In addition to the public school offerings, there are at least three private K-12 online learning programmes. Virtual High School (Ontario), Ottawa Carleton e-School and Keewaytinook Internet High School have all been issued Ministerial identification numbers, which allows them to grant credits that are recognised by the provincial Government for student transcript purposes.

Provincial Policies

There is no mention of distance education or online learning in the *Education Act* in Ontario. Initially, the Ministry of Education had little or no role in the development of online learning. Since 2003, the Ministry has begun to play a more active role. It began when the Ministry surveyed the existing distance education courses, and consolidated them into a single learning management system (LMS) maintained by the province. Also at this time the Ministry devised a provincial *E-Learning Strategy*, which school boards are required to follow if they wanted to access the free curriculum and technical support provided by the Ministry. The *E-Learning Strategy* includes a policy document that outlines specific requirements for the individual school boards in three areas: policies for board delivery of e-learning programmes under the Service Level Agreement, acceptable use policies, and conditions of use policies.

Beyond the *E-Learning Strategy* and the Service Level Agreements that school boards sign, online learning is not recognised as a separate schooling entity. Students are registered in brick-and-mortar schools, teachers are physically located in school board facilities, and brick-and-mortar schools are still responsible for assigning student grades and granting student credits. The only exception to this is the Avon Maitland Distance Education Centre and the three private online learning programmes (as these entities all have Ministerial identification numbers and are thus allowed to directly enrol students, assign grades, grant credit, etc.).

Funding

The Ministry of Education provides the funding for the development and maintenance of course content, along with the provincial LMS. Under the Service Level Agreement, school boards are permitted to use this content and the LMS free of charge with their own students. However, they are required to charge a fee of \$600 to students from other school boards who enrolled in their courses (n.b., the school boards that participate in the OeLC cooperate with their excess capacity).

Prior to August 2007, students who were enrolled in online courses were not considered “attending” school, and the school board lost a portion of the students’ FTE funding. Memorandum 2007: SB19, amended by Memorandum 2008: SB27, changed this policy to allow students to be considered “attending” school if they were enrolled in online courses. As such, the school boards FTE for both face-to-face and online students is calculated based on the enrolment on the official count day.

Governance, Tracking, and Accountability

The provincial *E-Learning Strategy* and the Service Level Agreements that school board sign with the Ministry govern most aspects of K-12 distance education in Ontario. The *E-Learning Strategy*, along with the accompanying policy document and Service Level Agreement, describes the responsibilities and restrictions placed on school boards. The responsibilities for the Ministry, school boards, individual schools, and online teachers primarily describe who is supposed to provide what services and how those services should be provided. Some of the restrictions include that online teachers must also be regular day school teachers, students cannot do all of their studies online, schools must enforce suspension and expulsion rules on students enrolled in online courses, and students must complete their courses within the school year.

The Ministry of Education does not track the number of students who are registered in K-12 distance education courses or the performance of these students compared to their face-to-face counterparts. While the Ministry does not track these items, some of the online learning programmes have indicated that they do keep these statistics.

Quality Assurance, Teaching, and Curriculum

As the Ministry is responsible for the curriculum and the LMS, it is assumed that they have a specific framework to ensure that the course content and the various tools used to deliver that content is updated on a regular basis.

The individual teachers are hired by their respective online learning programmes, so there is the potential for a wide range in the level of training and professional development provided to these teachers. For those within the public school system, there is a concern among the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation that the job of an online teacher remains equivalent to that of a face-to-face teacher, at least in terms of workload and quality of life issues. These concerns were recently outlined in Working Conditions Bulletin #1.4/07-08, which was circulated to local branches as part of their collective bargaining handbook.



Keewaytinook Internet High School (KiHS) is an online school in Northwestern Ontario serving First Nation communities in the region. KiHS began in 1999 as a pilot project in Grade 8 as a result of a vision of the Chiefs in Council. With the success of the pilot, the school administration was given the go-ahead to begin offering Ministry of Education credits to Grade 9 students the following year in three communities of the Northern Chiefs' Tribal Council. The following year it expanded outside the tribal council to eight communities, and later to 13 communities offering Grade 9 to 12 courses. The school was developed to address some of the social and academic issues of students who were leaving the communities after Grade 8 to attend secondary school in southern locations. The chiefs and community members felt that the students were too young to leave, and needed parental and community influence at this formative age. KiHS works with the whole range of students in terms of academic readiness from the communities partnered with the programme.

KiHS has attracted staff from all areas of Canada and even internationally. Many teachers are attracted to the innovative concept and unique delivery of the online programme. When teachers come to the programme, they are expected to live in a remote community, which has partnered with KiHS. They become active members of the community and work with the

students in a classroom environment. Unlike many online schools, students are required to come to a physical location and work from nine in the morning to four in the afternoon each day while receiving and sending their curriculum and activities via the Internet. The teacher works as an online instructor in a particular subject area, as well as a mentor to the students in their local classroom. The KiHS teachers have a rich experience as they take part in community events and plan traditional and cultural activities in and outside the school environment with local experts and elders. Many KiHS staff have been with the programme for five or more years.

Students choosing to remain in their home community to work toward their high school diploma with KiHS have a unique experience. They are able to access a large variety of quality Ministry of Education courses while having the input of the parents, their community and its elders in their lived day-to-day experience. Many students come to KiHS with little technical experience, but they quickly develop a technical expertise beyond the average student as they take active roles in their education. They can choose to take locally developed courses (e.g., Math, Science, and English in Grade 9 and 10 with a more flexible approach to local inclusion), applied courses (i.e., these are middle-of-the-road courses preparing students for work or college), or an academic stream of courses (i.e., preparing students for university). This choice is not offered in many other First Nation schools in the district, so they have an advantage in their educational journey by attending KiHS. Many students enjoy the local and family culture, which is a big part of their life, and the KiHS experience is flexible enough to allow this to happen while taking their courses. Students at KiHS have the best of both worlds. They are able to obtain a quality education and experience all the benefits of their home community environment.

2.3 Western Canada



The Western Canada region has the second highest population of any region, with larger cities such as Vancouver, Victoria, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, and Winnipeg. The non-urban areas of each of these provinces — particularly the northern portions — face the same geographic challenges that you would expect in any jurisdiction with a low population density. In the past, all four provinces in Western Canada have had strong centralised K-12 distance education initiatives. British Columbia was the first to move to a more decentralised approach, followed by Saskatchewan in the past year. While Alberta and Manitoba still have active province-wide K-12 distance education programmes, both provinces have significant district-based activity. In Alberta’s case this has been through the creation of competing district-based programmes, while in Manitoba the provincial initiatives are administered at the district level.

The Western Canadian provinces have also been the most active in establishing legislative and regulatory regimes to govern K-12 distance education. British Columbia has led the way in this area, with the longest established and most comprehensive system to manage K-12 distance education. Both Manitoba and Alberta are currently engaged in a consultation process designed to establish new policies to govern K-12 distance education in their jurisdictions.

2.3.1 Manitoba

Manitoba is one of three Prairie Provinces. The province has a total area of almost 650,000 km², which is roughly the same as the other two Prairie Provinces. As of the 2009 population estimates, the population of the province was 1,213,815 (Statistics Canada, 2009), with 633,451 of those living in the capital of Winnipeg and approximately another 100,000 living in the surrounding communities (giving the capital region with over 60% of the province's population). In fact, the population density of the capital region is 131/km², while the population density of the province is only 2.14 /km².

K-12 Online Learning

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Province-led programme	Yes	
Other online programmes	Yes	Uses province learning management system and course content
Provincial-level policy	Yes	

Online Programmes

In Manitoba, distance learners are supported with three options: Independent Study Option (ISO), which is print-based delivery; Teacher Mediated Option (TMO), which utilises audio conferencing; and Web-Based Course (WBC) Option or online delivery.

The ISO, which began in 1927, provides the opportunity and flexibility for school-age and adult learners to access a wide range of print-based distance learning courses from grades 8 to 12. Learners complete courses independently and at their own pace while having some access to a tutor/marker via email or phone. The Distance Learning Unit issues the credit to students who successfully complete an ISO course. Students may or may not be registered in Manitoba schools (e.g., home schooled children, students with parents overseas).

The TMO, which began in 1992, provides school-age and adult learners with access to specific distance learning courses scheduled within the school day. TMO learners use print-based distance learning courses supplemented with audio teleconference classes hosted by an instructor. Classes can be recorded and additional communication with the instructor occurs via email and phone, outside of scheduled class time. TMO courses are available to grades 9 through 12 students attending a school or an adult learning centre. Schools and adult learning centres issue the credit to students who successfully complete a TMO course.

The WBC Option, which began in 1997, provides schools and teachers with online distance learning courses using a web-based learning management system. Students participate in WBCs in a variety of ways (i.e., face-to-face in a classroom, at a distance, or as a blend of the two). The most common model involves a teacher structuring the course so that students complete their work independently, at their own pace, but within timelines established by the teacher. The teacher may be a staff member of the school in which the student is registered, or may teach the course at a distance

from another school or school division. In order to access WBCs a student must be registered in a Manitoba high school or adult learning centre that supports web-based course instruction. Students complete WBCs within the regular academic year/semester, and are assessed by their WBC teacher. Participating schools and adult learning centres issue the credit to students who successfully complete a WBC course.

Provincial Policies

Currently, the Ministry is in the process of creating a new policy on distance learning for the province. The distance learning policy is still in draft form and awaiting final approval, but will be released in time to be implemented in 2010-11.

The original policy document was written in 2000 and was accompanied by a document outlining a peer review process as well. Both were out of date, and the Distance Learning Unit (DLU) and the Learning Support & Technology Unit (LSTU) of the Ministry were requested to renew the policy document so it better reflected the current situation in Manitoba, and to address all three distance learning options. The previous policy only addressed web-based delivery (distributed learning was the term used in 2000). In 2008, the Ministry hosted two forums seeking input from educators, school, and division administrators on distance learning in the province. The policy review committee met several times during the past year to work on the draft document and supporting documents and handbooks for each of the three options. All these items are currently under review.

Funding

The ISO is completely funded by the Ministry. The registration fees that are collected based on enrolment are returned to the Manitoba Government's general revenue. The Ministry is responsible for the course development, administration and implementation of the programme including the contracting of 41 tutor/markers.

The TMO is self-funded, where one host school division collects and holds student registration fees that are then used to pay instructors. Schools and school divisions use funds from their per-pupil block grant/direct allocation to pay the registration fee. The Ministry is responsible for the course development, administration and implementation of the programme including the recruitment of 10 instructors.

The Ministry is responsible for the course development and learning management expenses for the WBC option. However, as schools are the ones who offer the courses (i.e., hire or allocate the teacher), these costs are funded through the school's per-pupil block funding.

Governance, Tracking, and Accountability

The only reference in the Public Schools Act regarding distance education is that the Minister of Education can approve courses of study, including correspondence and other courses. The Ministry has issued other regulatory and policy documents, along with handbooks for each of the three delivery options (these handbooks are also being revised currently through the review process described above).

The Ministry maintains partial records on the number of K-12 students who complete distance courses. Completion data for the ISO courses is available, but not for TMO or WBC as they are managed and reported at the school level. The Ministry does maintain enrolment figures for all three options. For example, in the 2008-09 school year there were approximately 3,000 enrolments for ISO, approximately 500 for TMO, and approximately 5,000 students for WBC (i.e., about 8,500 student enrolments overall).

Quality Assurance, Teaching, and Curriculum

After the course writer completes a new ISO course, the distance learning consultants review the content and correct errors and make suggestions. Once released to schools, a survey is attached to the first 30 courses registered by students. The Ministry uses their feedback as information to improve courses and to correct errors. The original course writers are often selected to be the initial tutor-markers. For vacant positions, the Ministry may advertise in the newspaper to create a database and receives recommendations from the Ministry's subject area consultants. Selection is based on subject matter knowledge and teaching experience, phone interview, and reference checks. The tutor-markers work at a distance and are under contract and the supervision of an ISO consultant. There is no formal process for staff evaluation and performance review.

The course content for the TMO comes directly from ISO. These instructors are under shared responsibilities between school divisions and TMO consultant, and are selected from a database of available teachers based on subject matter knowledge and teaching experience. There is no formal process for staff evaluation and performance review.

For the WBC option the Ministry contracts subject matter experts (SME) from the field (i.e., teachers knowledgeable in the subject content, new curriculum directions, current assessment practice, etc, as well as experience with web-based instruction) to be course developers. The course is developed in conjunction with the active participation and feedback from the Ministry's subject area development consultant, and the e-learning development consultant. An instructional designer is contracted to complete the layout and design work in the learning management system. As part of development of new courses the Ministry does a one-semester field validation with 2-3 online teachers, and their students, to get feedback on the course. The course is modified based on feedback before it is released for general school use.

Teachers are provided and supervised by the schools that elect to offer the courses. The Ministry makes a copy of the master course available, free of charge, to any teacher who wishes to have a section created for their use. Typically teachers use WBCs to teach students who are online, for blending with face-to-face instruction in the classroom, or as a professional learning resource.

Should a school or school division develop their own web-based course to meet local needs, the quality of content is the school division's responsibility. Should the school division elect to accept enrolment of students from other divisions there is an expectation that the course will have completed a peer-review process. The Ministry is also reviewing its guidelines for the peer-review process, as part of the policy revision that is under way.



Southwest Horizon School Division (SHSD) is located in rural Manitoba where it includes seven community schools. Schools in this area have met the challenge of providing specialty courses to students in schools where there may only be a few students in each class.

In 1995, SHSD implemented an interactive instructional television (IITV) delivery system with a capacity of three simultaneous sites. The initial system was prone to frequent breakdowns and was supplemented with teleconference service. The Government began to offer *WebCT*[®]-based courses a few years later that further increased the options available to students.

In 2004, several SHSD teachers began to pilot *Moodle*[®]-based courses for both local and distance education courses. The original broadband IITV system was replaced with an IP-based IITV system that resulted in more remote sites being able to participate simultaneously. In order to increase the quality of the student-teacher experience, teachers have blended other messaging and screen sharing utilities with various learning management platforms.

At this time, students are participating in courses using traditional correspondence based courses, online courses, IITV-based courses, and various blends of these delivery methods.

Student participation in the eLearning Campus is limited to students in grades nine to twelve. Most students are enrolled in five courses each semester with at least one of these courses being taken through the eLearning Campus. Students participating in a course from a teacher in a remote site are assigned a local teacher as a facilitator. At this point in time, the data indicates no difference in course results between courses delivered face-to-face and the eLearning Campus.

Alexandra, a grade twelve student, who at the time of her graduation had completed a variety of courses using both IITV and *Moodle*[®]. Her preference in course delivery was the asynchronous *Moodle*[®]-based courses. Her perspective was that the *Moodle*[®]-based course gave her more flexibility in time and effort required than when a teacher was physically in front of her.

Teachers in the eLearning Campus have a teaching load that includes both online courses as well as traditional face-to-face courses. One of the eLearning Campus teachers is Franz, who had many years of teaching experience prior to using IITV and *Moodle*[®] for course delivery. From Franz's perspective, teaching online created an increase in his workload while at the same time allowing him to keep a favorite course in his teaching load that might have been otherwise cut.

A second teacher, Phoebe, also had several years of teaching experience prior to using online delivery. Phoebe found that the time allowed in her teaching load for asynchronous delivery and course development provided her with flexibility in her schedule family commitments.

2.3.2 Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan is the middle of the three prairie provinces. It has a population of 1,023,810 (Statistics Canada, 2009), with the capital Regina having approximately one fifth of that population. It should be noted that Saskatoon is actually the largest city in the province, and also has approximately one fifth of the population. The province has a total area of just over 651,900 km², two thirds of which is the Labrador portion. This represents a population density of 1.67/km².

K-12 Online Learning

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Province-led programme	No	
Other online programmes	Yes	
Provincial-level policy	No	

Online Programmes

Historically, Saskatchewan has had a system of K-12 distance education much like Manitoba where the Ministry was responsible for the delivery of courses through online — asynchronous and synchronous, televised via satellite, and print-based courses. Distance education enrolment in these three methods of delivery was 1,933 students in 2006-07, 2,144 students in 2007-08, and 2,272 students in 2008-09.

Beginning on July 3, 2009 the Ministry devolved the responsibility for distance education to the school divisions. From 2001 to 2007, the Ministry had worked extensively with teachers, schools, and school divisions to build teacher capacity to build websites and to teach online. As such, most school divisions had already built the infrastructure and had the staff capacity to provide their own distance learning. The Ministry provided additional transition funding in 2008-09 to assist school divisions in taking over courses that had been offered by the Ministry. At present, most of the 29 school divisions have some sort of distance education programme going within their own division.

There has been no additional “building capacity” funding since the announcement that the Ministry would no longer be delivering distance education. Having said that, some school divisions were not as far along as others; so there is provision for these school divisions to purchase distance education service from another school division. Those that are willing to provide courses or spaces to students outside of their own school division list that offering at the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Course Repository. At present there are 14 school divisions that have indicated a willingness and capacity to enrol students from other school divisions in one of the 67 courses available.

Provincial Policies

At present there are no specific legislation or regulations that govern K-12 distance education in Saskatchewan. There is one reference “to provide educational courses to all areas of Saskatchewan through the use of distance-education technology” under the Technology Supported Revolving Fund section of the *Education Act*, however, that has become a moot section with the devolution of distance education services from the Ministry.

Funding

The Ministry no longer provides funding for K-12 distance education and school divisions are responsible for funding their own programmes through their per pupil funding allocation they receive from the Government. School divisions that have extra capacity and allow students from other school divisions to enrol in their courses typically charge a registration fee of \$300 to \$500 — depending on the method of distance delivery — which is paid by the student, the student’s school, or their school division.

Governance, Tracking, and Accountability

While there are no specific provincial policies that govern K-12 distance education in Saskatchewan, the provincial student record system does include a field that identifies when a course is being offered by some mode of distance delivery. This would allow the Ministry to make comparisons of student performance based on methods of course delivery.

Quality Assurance, Teaching, and Curriculum

It is the belief of the Ministry of Education that delivery of a course involves an interaction among the student, the teacher, the instructional materials and the curriculum — and the mode of delivery is, or should be, irrelevant. The role of the Ministry of Education is to develop the curriculum; and our expectation is that teachers are delivering it, whether in a face-to-face classroom or at a distance.

Catholic education in Saskatchewan is publicly funded, and available to any student desiring a faith-based education. The academic, physical, social, and spiritual dimensions of a student's life must therefore all be rooted and developed in the Christian conviction. In 2000 the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools System stepped on to the frontier in the development of online education with the creation of the Saskatoon Catholic Cyber School (SCCS). The SCCS, as a Catholic school, emphasises Catholic principles in its curricular and extracurricular programmes.

Any school may provide the opportunity for each person to grow in knowledge and understanding, to express themselves creatively in the arts, to appreciate physical activity and to relate to other people socially. But each person in their own way, at one time or another senses that there is much more to life than meets the eye. This sense of reality beyond one's life and yet within it, is a religious awareness — the mysterious reality we call God. Therefore, as a part of the Catholic community, the SCCS exists to reveal Christ as the answer to these ultimate questions.



The SCCS exists as a concrete acknowledgement of the reality of God, and exists in partnership with

the home and parish to encourage students to grow toward personal maturity in life and to attain their ultimate goal, eternal salvation. The SCCS aims to create "an atmosphere animated by a spirit of liberty and charity based on the Gospel. It enables young people, while developing their own personality, to grow at the same time in that new life which has been given them in baptism." (The Documents of Vatican II, Declaration on Christian Education, p. 8). To this end the school provides an

environment in which religious realities are experienced as a living force in students and staff, are acknowledged in the liturgy, and are understood within all the areas of learning. The many aspects of this experience of the living Christ with us in the school are explained and reflected upon in specific Christian ethics courses, virtual student lounge, the cyber school chapel and our online priest.

According to one teacher, "the best thing about the SCCS is the flexibility it gives me. Having a young family, the format of the SCCS allows me to do my teaching when it works best. I no longer have an 8:00 to 4:00 job; the work gets done when it fits into my schedule." Similarly, a SCCS student reported that the cyber school "offers opportunities to students that in-school courses cannot, such as allowing the student to work at their own pace whatever time they want, and develop self-learning techniques that are applicable to the real world." Another indicated that the "SCCS has already made a great difference in this, and many other communities. Everyone is so positive and fun to be with. Any negativity is unacceptable. That right there is something very special. It's socially unacceptable by our peers to be negative. That's another thing that makes SCCS so unique is the social aspect."

In addition to their online course offerings, the SCCS has further advanced its contributions by developing and launching online learning communities and elementary Cyber Planets that serve as a collection of resources for all grades and subject areas. SCCS also offers hybrid courses, communication hubs, technology tutorials, and student and teacher web resources in the form of an online professional development lounge.

2.3.3 Alberta

The most western of the three prairie provinces, Alberta has a population of 3,632,483 — or more than three times the population of Manitoba and Saskatchewan (Statistics Canada, 2009). The province has a total area of just over 661,848 km², making it approximately the same size as its two prairie counterparts, although its population density is the highest of the four Western provinces at 5.5/km². The two largest cities in the province are Calgary with a population of almost 1,000,000 and the capital city, Edmonton, with over 700,000 people.

K-12 Online Learning

There was no response from the Alberta Ministry of Education, as such this profile has been developed based on a document analysis of the Ministry's website and other published Government documents.

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Province-led programme	Yes	
Other online programmes	Yes	
Provincial-level policy	Yes	More extensive policies are currently being formulated.

Online Programmes

At present there are over 20 K-12 distributed learning programmes in Alberta (n.b., distributed learning is the terms used to encompass all forms of K-12 distance education in Alberta). There is a single province-wide programme, the Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC), which serves 27,000 secondary school students and 3,000 elementary school students. The ADLC offers courses in a variety of formats (e.g., print, online, and blended formats), and it also manages the Vista Virtual School for its online course offerings.

In addition to the province-wide programme, there are also a series of district based programmes supported by the various public and Catholic school districts in the province (and note that Alberta is a province that has publicly funded Catholic school districts). These include Argyll Centre, Aspen View Virtual School, Battle River Online, Buffalo Trail Students Online, Golden Hills Virtual School, Holy Family Cyber High School, Innovative Learning Services, InterEd, Peace Academy of Virtual Education, Revelation Online, Rocky View Virtual School, School of Hope, St. Gabriel Cyber School, St. Paul's Academy Centre for Learning[®]Home, among others.

Finally, there is an aboriginal focused online school — SunChild E-Learning Community. Note that Alberta is the only province in Canada that has charter school legislation — although at this time there are no cyber charter schools in operation.

Provincial Policies

At present, the *School Act* includes the following provisions related to distance education:

Division 4 – Section 39. (3) The Minister may make regulations:

- (e) providing for correspondence courses and the fees to be charged in connection with them;
- (f) governing registration in, the fees to be charged for registration in and the operation of private correspondence courses and private tutoring institutions that offer correspondence courses or tutoring in the same or substantially the same subjects as those offered in schools.

In addition, Alberta has sections in their annual *Guide to Education* related to distance education, blended learning and online delivery that outline some specific requirements primarily related to the amount of required instructional time. It also advises school authorities that wish to undertake online programmes that they will need to consider:

how student attendance is to be defined, the role of parents in instruction, assessment and supervision of student work, staffing levels, time frames for student access to the instructional expertise of teachers, student evaluation practices, requirements for programme access by students living outside Alberta, programme decisions; e.g., self-paced or teacher controlled, how to deliver all outcomes of Alberta programme of study, provision for writing achievement tests and diploma examinations, programme and teacher evaluation, [and] how to provide alternative forms of programme delivery for non-resident students who are experiencing difficulty in the online environment. (Government of Alberta, 2009, p. 67).

This provides individual programmes with much flexibility in creating their K-12 distance education programmes. It is important to note that the Ministry of Education views online education as one of the potential school choice options, along with the public and Catholic school systems, Francophone, charter and private schools, home education and blended programmes, and alternative education programmes.

Governance, Tracking, and Accountability

Beginning in 2007, the Ministry of Education has undertaken a review of K-12 distance education in the province with the goal of developing a Distributed Learning Strategy. To date there has been a broad consultation process that has included 1,774 responses to an online survey, 60 interviews, 28 focus groups, and 21 site visits (some of which has been archived online by the Distributed Learning Forum Online Community). Fournier (2009) indicates that this process will be completed by 2010-11.

There is no indication that the Ministry keeps records of number of K-12 students who complete courses at a distance. It also does not appear that the Ministry tracks the delivery model in which students complete a course to allow for a comparison of student performance between students who complete their courses at a distance with those who complete them in a traditional brick-and-mortar format. While the Ministry does not appear to track student performance based on deliver model, many of the individual programmes do. For example, the ADLC outlines their completion rates and student averages by school in their *Annual Education Results Report*, which is submitted to the Ministry each year.

As a publicly funded part of Edmonton Public Schools, Argyll Centre's key mandate is to serve home-based learners in the city of Edmonton. Over its 12 year history, the demand for Argyll services has led to the enrolment of many students from other parts of the province of Alberta. Today, Argyll's main campus in Edmonton is part of a four campus network including Calgary, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat. Argyll student clientele can generally be categorized as coming from two streams. A significant segment come to Argyll through home schooling, in which parents play a primary role in the education of their children. For this segment Argyll teachers act as facilitators, learning partners, and resource experts to support the home schooling learning environment. Another significant segment come to Argyll for teacher directed learning that is available on the schedule more flexible than is possible in a brick-and-mortar school.



Online learning through Argyll takes one of two different paths: LearnNet

and Live Online. Through LearnNet, Argyll students connect to online lessons based on the *Understanding by Design* model. LearnNet lessons are available to students 24/7 through the Internet so that students can adjust their schooling to fit their own schedules. Students communicate with their teachers through online submission of assignments, e-mail, telephone and synchronous virtual classroom sessions. Through Live Online, students are assigned to teachers in classes similar to how students and teachers are connected in brick-and-mortar schools. Using virtual classroom software, teachers conduct synchronous classes that students attend from their homes. The ability for students to interact and support each other is enhanced by the social constructivist model of the lessons presented through Live

Online. Outside of class, Live Online students can continue to collaborate through various asynchronous tools, including Argyll's unique Social Networking Tool, which is a firewall-protected, parent-and-teacher-accessible, application with similar capabilities to Facebook®.

The role of teachers in the Argyll online environment is in a state of constant development and refinement. In the early days of LearnNet, the teachers' role centred on the management of assignment flow: encouraging students to complete assignments, assessing those assignments online, and returning feedback and assessment to the students. Increasingly, the work of teachers is shifting toward relationship building, supporting assessment for learning between students, and using a variety of technologies to engage students and to appeal to different learning styles.

The student experience at Argyll is a very individual one, which speaks to one of the strengths of the online learning environment. For some students, the online environment provides them with access to lessons on their own terms and on a schedule that they control with minimum external contact. For students, such as a traveling athlete, this highly independent mode is very supportive. For other students, online learning is a tool that connects the parent-teacher-student triumvirate in a highly interactive partnership. A third group of student, operating from a remote or singular setting, use the online environment to build social connections with teachers and other students in support of their learning. It would be hard, and somewhat unwise, to try to homogenize the Argyll online student experience into a single description. To do so would belie the flexibility and individuality available through online learning.

2.3.4 British Columbia

British Columbia is the most westerly province in the country, and the largest and most populous of the Western Canadian provinces. The population of the province is 4,419,974 and a total area of just over 944,735 km² (Statistics Canada, 2009). This provides it with a population density of 4.7/km². The capital of the province is Victoria, and the metropolitan area has approximately 330,000. The largest city in the province is Vancouver, which is also the third largest in Canada, and the greater Vancouver region has approximately 2,300,000. If you exclude these two regions the population density drops to 2.1/km².

K-12 Online Learning

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Province-led programme	Yes	
Other online programmes	Yes	53 public & 12 independent
Provincial-level policy	Yes	School Act, Sections 3.1 & 75 (4.1) Distributed Learning Policy Independent School Act, Section 8.1

Online Programmes

The primary distance education programmes, or distributed learning schools (as they are referred to in the province), are at the district level. At present there are 53 public distributed learning schools and 12 independent (or private) distributed learning schools. LearnNowBC is a web portal and single point of entry to information about distributed (online) learning in British Columbia for students, parents and educators. This one-stop educational portal provides access to choices and free services such as tutoring, advising, homework help, etc. for learners of all ages. There is a searchable course database that lists courses from all 53 distributed learning schools. LearnNowBC.ca has signed-up over 50,000 users and many of the users have registered with one of the distributed learning schools for at least one online course.

Open School, previously supported with Ministry of Education funding and now operated on a cost-recovery model by another Ministry, provides provincial content and online hosting services to Boards without the capacity or desire to manage their own.

Provincial Policies

The legislative language in the *School Act, 1996* allows for a student engaged in distributed learning to enrol in educational programmes falling under multiple jurisdictions (or boards of education — see section 3.1 of the *School Act*), and that any school district wishing to establish a distributed learning school can do so “only with the prior agreement of the minister” (see section 75 (4.1) of the *School Act*). The *Independent School Act, 1996* contains similar language concerning the establishment of distributed learning schools “only with the prior agreement of the minister” (see section 8.1). As such, these agreements between the Ministry and the school districts or independent schools, combined with policy, serve as the main governance documents for distributed learning in British Columbia.

Funding

As was described in last year's report:

Funding for students in these distributed learning programmes comes from the province's allotted full-time enrolment (FTE) allocation. For Grade 10-12 students, each student's FTE is divided into eight components, with each course representing a component. If a student is enrolled in six courses in their brick-and-mortar school and two courses in their district's distributed learning program, then the school would receive six eighths of the FTE and the distributed learning programme would receive two eighths of that FTE. K-9 students, however, can only be enrolled in one school that receives the full FTE allocation. For the distributed learning programs, enrolment is counted three times throughout the year as a way to determine active attendance in the program. (Barbour & Stewart, 2008, p. 27)

This method of dividing the student FTE is combined with an open-borders model — where a student can enrol in any distributed learning programme in the province — as long as space is available if it is not the student's home school district. As such, the distributed learning programme receives the portion of the student's FTE based on their enrolment regardless of school district. There is no policy limit on the number of courses a student can take from a combination of schools, so a student taking eight courses in bricks-and-mortar and two courses through distributed learning would generate 1 FTE for the bricks-and-mortar school and 0.25 FTE for the distributed learning school.

Governance, Tracking, and Accountability

In addition to the distributed learning agreements between the Ministry and the individual school districts, the Ministry also has a series of policy documents that outline the regulations that distributed learning schools must follow. The key features of these regulations are:

- boards of education are responsible for distributed learning;
- boards must use BC certified teachers;
- students taking distributed learning must meet the same course requirements as any other student;
- courses taken through distributed learning are equivalent to the same course taken in a classroom; and
- students enrol at the school of their choice, not through the Ministry.

Links to all of the policy documents, along with the general agreements between the Ministry and school districts are available on the Ministry's website.

The Ministry tracks students enrolled in distributed learning programmes. In 2008-09, there were 59,345 unique students enrolled in one or more courses through distributed learning in British Columbia. In 2007-08 there were 48,941 students, up from 33,022 in 2006-07. The performance of these students — both in terms of individual course performance and graduation rates — is part of the quality reviews that the Ministry undertakes for quality assurance.

Quality Assurance, Teaching, and Curriculum

The responsibility for quality assurance falls upon the Ministry, which is undertaken through the use of compliance audits and quality review site visits that combine a series of quantitative and qualitative measures.

The audit programme checks for compliance with provincial funding rules (e.g., proof of attendance or participation) and other key statutory and policy provisions, such as:

- meeting provincial programme requirements (e.g., curriculum, graduation);
- residency;
- learning resources approved according to provincial policy, including ensuring that religious materials are not part of public programmes;
- teacher-led instruction rather than blatant home-schooling; and
- no financial incentives to parents to enroll.

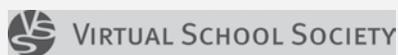
All distributed learning schools in the province are subject to audits of this nature. At present approximately 6 distributed learning schools are audited every year. Poor audits have implications for the conditions of Distributed Learning Agreement renewal, apart from recovering enrolment grants. A detailed documentation of the criteria used for the 2008-09 audits is also available on the Ministry's website.

The quality review process is based on E-Learning Standards for Distributed Learning. The purpose of the Quality Review process is to foster improved quality in distributed learning practice while supporting implementation of Ministry legislation, policy, and DL Agreement requirements in K-12 schools. At its core is critical examination of instructional and leadership practices as reflected in the DL standards, research on practice, as well as new and emerging practices. Evaluative data such as student achievement results and responses to the DL Satisfaction Survey are also given critical consideration and reflection. The quality review model consists of three distinct parts:

1. Internal review conducted by all DL school staff as part of their annual planning,
2. An external review that validates the internal review through site visit by a team of DL practitioners, and
3. Sharing of emerging distributed learning instructional and leadership practices through an online community space and evolving practices document.

Finally, the selection of teachers and the creation of content is the responsibility of each individual distributed learning school, following the regulation set by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry has established digital content standards and through the LearnNowBC portal a learning resource repository for the sharing and exchange of commercially produced, and teacher-created, digital learning resources.

The Virtual School Society was founded in 2006. It is an independent organisation whose main purpose is to enhance the use of distributed learning. The Society's Board of Directors is drawn from the information technology sector and from educational organisations whose members make extensive use of online services. Funding is provided by the Ministry of Education. The Society is one of several organisations working to improve British Columbia's online education services such as Open School and the BC Learning Network. Open School is a school district funded organisation that provides online courses, content, and hosting services. The BC Learning Network is an association of BC School districts that works to improve online content and collaboration between participating districts.



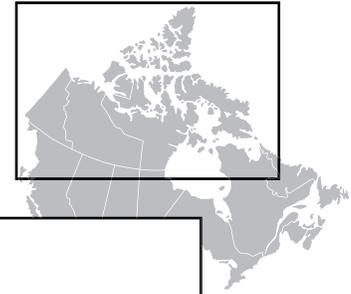
At the time of the Society's creation, significant legislative and regulatory changes were made to improve students' access to online education. A need for province-wide services to reduce costs, create better information for prospective students and their families, and aggregate demand for low enrolment courses and services into financially viable offerings was created by these changes. The Society attempts to meet this need by offering new services to students and educators. It operates a central registry of all 2700 secondary courses and elementary programmes in which anyone in BC might enrol. Free access to online tutoring for 17 secondary school courses such as mathematics, sciences and English is available to all BC students. The Society supports a province-wide license for *Illuminate*®. The license, plus online support and a help desk, save BC's school districts and independent schools the costs of purchasing and supporting this service. Through a learning object repository, the Society offers free access to over 1300 online learning objects, each

connected to at least one of the more than 8,000 intended learning outcomes of the provincial curriculum. Academic and career advising services make service available to those not attending "regular" schools or whose local school may not have comprehensive information about emerging vocational opportunities in the trades. BC requires students to participate in daily physical activity in order to graduate. In support of this requirement, the Society's offers an online activity log that eases record keeping for students and reduces the reporting burden the provincial requirement places on teachers.

The value of the Society's services is best illustrated by their use. Almost 60,000 students, or nearly 10% of the province's student population, took at least one online course or programme last year. This was an increase of over 37% over the preceding year, even though K-12 enrolment declined in the same period. Most students taking online courses also simultaneously attend regular schools; so online courses are helping students overcome timetable problems or gain access to courses not offered locally. In provincially examinable courses, the performance of online students is comparable to that of students in regular classes. Tutoring services were used 110,000 times last year and over 45,000 students took part in *Illuminate*® classes. The Learning Object repository, opened in May 2009, already holds 1300 objects. Finally, the Daily Activity Log was used by 12,000 students.

There is little doubt that open, province-wide, access to online services is meeting a need for large numbers of students and families. Mixed with regular schools, the Internet is offering students a level of choice and flexibility that is unattainable in all but a few "regular" schools

2.4 Northern Canada



The Northern Canada region is geographically the largest in Canada, in fact it includes about 40% of the total land mass of the country. However, less than 1% of the total population of Canada reside in one of these three territories (i.e., 0.3% to be precise). In addition to being a large, sparsely populated region, the three territorial governments do not enjoy the same legislative freedom as the provinces (at least not constitutionally). All three territories utilise the K-12 curriculum of one of the southern provinces (i.e., the Yukon uses the British Columbia curriculum, while the Northwest Territories and Nunavut use the Alberta curriculum), with some additions to reflect their northern status and aboriginal cultures.

As jurisdictions without their own curriculum, it is natural that all three territories make use of K-12 distance education programmes located in the provinces they share a curriculum with. And while all three governments appear to be supportive of the use of these distance education programmes to expand the curricular offerings for many of their rural, and quite remote schools, the success of students in these distance programmes has been less than desired (and all three governments are exploring measures to try to improve this situation). These governments are also dealing with a variety of other social challenges that affect the delivery of K-12 education, and K-12 distance education is simply a small part of this larger obstacle that needs to be overcome.

2.4.1 Yukon

The Yukon, as it has been officially known since 2003 (prior to that it was the Yukon Territory), is the most western of Canada's three territories. It is also the smallest with a total area of 482,443 km². It has a population of 33,442 (Statistics Canada, 2009), giving it a population density of 0.065/km². The capital Whitehorse has a population of 22,898. The Yukon follows the same curriculum as the Province of British Columbia, with some additions to address their distinct language and culture.

K-12 Online Learning

There was no response from the Yukon Ministry of Education, as such this profile has been developed based on a document analysis of the Ministry's website and other published Government documents.

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Territory-led programme	No	
Other online programmes	No	
Territorial-level policy	Yes	Brief language in the <i>Education Act</i> and an inter-provincial agreement with a British Columbia school district

Online Programmes

The main provider of K-12 distance education services in the Yukon is the Northern British Columbia Distance Education School (NBCDES). The NBCDES was part of the 9 regional school distance education consortium until distributed learning programs were opened up to all districts. The school serves about 130 full time elementary students and approximately 1,000 secondary students taking over 2,600 secondary courses in the northern third of British Columbia, as well as the Yukon. According to recent annual reports, in 2006-07 there were 141 students registered in 51 different courses. This was up from 87 students in 49 different courses during the 2005-06 school year.

Territorial Policies

According to the *Education Act, 2002*, the only mention of distance education indicates that:

30 (1) The deputy minister may provide for distance education courses of instruction on conditions prescribed by the guidelines established by the Minister.

(2) The Minister may charge fees for the provision of distance education courses as prescribed by the regulations. S.Y. 1989- 90, c.25, s.30.

At present the Deputy Minister, on behalf of the Government of the Yukon has entered into an understanding with the Peace River North School District in British Columbia to obtain K-12 distance education services from the NBCDES.

Funding

Since the 2003-04 school year, distance education and home school courses were offered at no cost to students from Grade 1 to 12. The Ministry of Education covers the cost for their enrolment for all students up to the age of 21.

Governance

The understanding between the Government and the Peace River North School District outlines specific responsibilities for both the NBCDES and the individual schools in the Yukon that take advantage of their distributed learning offerings. For example, the NBCDES must provide the courses and all resources to students in the Yukon for the period of one year. Other administrative and support items include assigning teacher advisors to students who are using distributed learning courses and issuing report cards. While not part of the actual understanding, the NBCDES also attempts to make two visits a year to each participating school and home learner and to try to see every student (particularly with elementary-aged students). This service is typically well received by the students and families, their schools, and the Yukon Ministry of Education. The understanding also calls on the schools to assign a teacher to look after students taking distributed learning courses.

Northern BC Distance Education School (NBCDES) offers a distance education and distributed learning programme to students both in BC and the Yukon. They belong to both the BC Distance Education Consortium and the Virtual School Society. NBCDES the school serves students in-school, out of school, part and full-time, K-12, adults, and graduates; and has present and past students all over the globe. The print and online courses are provided under the direct supervision of the teacher. Teachers also make home visits to both local and remote areas in BC and the Yukon. Home facilitators also play a vital role in student success.

NBCDES students are wide-ranging in the skills and abilities they bring to the various learning environments. The school is the school of choice for many parents who value flexibility in their child's learning environment, and are fast becoming the school of choice for the students who want to accelerate their learning or whose learning styles aren't been met in other schools. NBCDES is also becoming a school of choice for the gifted and talented as well. The school also enrolls an increasing number of teen and single mothers as well as an increasing number of students on IEPs, along with more and more adult students, both non-graduates and graduates. NBCDES uses a variety of technology in our course delivery, and has a large investment in computer hardware, software, peripherals, networks and maintenance. Space is fast becoming an issue. In addition, a number of their students need a place to belong, work, and seek assistance; the teen mothers need to be able to bring their children.

At present NBCDES has over 1,000 students register each 12-month period, most of whom take one or two courses from NBCDES and the remainder of their schooling from their local school. NBSDES has an allocation of 8.8 FTE for teachers on site, 0.2 teacher-librarian, 0.5

Learning Assistant teacher, 0.5 Inclusion teacher, 21 contract markers working off-site (most certified teachers), a full time network specialist, 8 clerical staff, and one principal and one vice-principal with specific advisement duties.



One short story to describe the uniqueness of this online school. One day last winter the Grade 4 teacher, Ms. Froese, was

conducting an online session with her grade 4/5 classroom. Five students were participating in the class that day. One was at home in Whitehorse, Yukon. One student had moved to Parksville on Vancouver Island earlier in the year and chose to stay with NBCDES. The third student was visiting grandparents in Edmonton and logged on from their home. The fourth student was on vacation in Mexico and logged on from an Internet café while on vacation.

The last student lives on a ranch around Pink Mountain, which is Mile 148 on the Alaska Highway and then 40 kms off the highway. He was visiting his grandparents ranch while his parents were in town. He drove 11 km on a snowmobile, crossing a frozen river to get home, where his computer with satellite Internet was. He fired up the stove to warm the horse as well as starting the generator to run the lights. He then logged onto the *Illuminate*® classroom and participated in the class. When it was over he shut down the power plant and got on his snowmobile and returned to his grandparents place. Just a regular day at NBCDES.

2.4.2 Northwest Territories

Historically, the Northwest Territories referred to all of the land west and north of Ontario. As Canada has grown the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta and the territories of the Yukon and Nunavut — along with the northern two thirds of Quebec and much of western and northern Ontario — have been carved out of this region. The territory currently has a total area of over 1,300,000 km² and a population of 42,940 (Statistics Canada, 2009), giving it a population density of three people for every 100 km². The capital of the territory is Yellowknife, with a population of approximately 18,700. The Northwest Territories follow the same curriculum as the Province of Alberta, with some additions to address their distinct language and culture.

K-12 Online Learning

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Territory-led programme	No	
Other online programmes	No	The Northwest Territories utilise distance offerings from the Alberta Distance Learning Centre
Territorial-level policy	Yes	

Online Programmes

The Northwest Territories do not have any of their own K-12 distance education programmes. However, as the territory utilises curriculum from the Province of Alberta, the Government of the Northwest Territories signed a formal agreement in 2004 with the Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC) to provide distance education services within the territory.

In addition to the courses offered by the ADLC, students also have the option to complete an online Northern Studies 10 course offered during the second semester through Aurora College (a local post-secondary institution in the Northwest Territories).

Territorial Policies

While the only reference to distance education in the *Education Act, 2009* is a provision that allows various educational bodies to “authorise, supervise and evaluate the use of distance learning programmes in the provision of the education programme” (p. 72), there are several policy and regulatory documents that outline specific requirements for K-12 distance education.

Funding

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment has historically paid the registration fees for K-12 students enrolled in distance education courses. This removed the financial responsibility from the school, which resulted in the school being less diligent in following up to withdraw students from the course within 60 days if they were not active (as a withdrawal during their period entitled the Department to a refund, minus administrative costs, of their registration fee). Beginning in the 2008-09, the Department has begun to reimburse schools/students upon successful completion of their distance course — which has resulted in the schools being more selective about which students register in the distance offerings.

Governance, Tracking, and Accountability

The *Memorandum of Understanding* (MOU) between the Government of the Northwest Territories and the ADLC is one of the main documents governing K-12 distance education in the territory. The MOU outlines the specific responsibilities, duties and opportunities for both parties. For example, the ADLC is responsible for the administration of students, the learning management system, the course content, the distance teacher, providing access to the various systems to local school officials, and providing professional development to local school personnel related to their method of distance delivery to name a few. The Government of the Northwest Territories is responsible for the payment of student tuition, along with providing local school officials responsible for the distance education students (and a variety of specific tasks). Those involved on the Northwest Territories side also have the opportunity to be involved in course content development.

Section 17 of the *Senior Secondary School Administrators' Handbook*, a policy document of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, also outlines a series of requirements for distance learning. While the document is primarily descriptive, in terms of the distance learning options available and how to take advantage of them, it does call upon schools to have a dedicated online facilitator to work with the distance education students and outlines the specific responsibilities for that individual.

According to the report *Towards Excellence: A Report on Education in the Northwest Territories*, the Department tracks the completion rates of students enrolled in online courses. In the five school years preceding the report there were a total of 329 enrolments in core courses (i.e., courses other than the orientation course mentioned below). Of those 329 enrolments, 106 or about a third of them passed, 77 or about a quarter of them failed, and 146 or almost 45% withdrew (note that some of the failures should have been withdrawals, as some schools were slow to remove students when the Department was paying the registration fees).

Quality Assurance, Teaching, and Curriculum

Prior to the agreement with the ADLC, the Department required students to complete an *Information Highways 1090* course, which ensured that students acquired the necessary skills to successfully navigate the online learning environment. Since the agreement with ADLC, this course is no longer offered as the ADLC has an orientation module at the beginning of each of their courses.

Presumably the Department's recent policy change to only pay for successful registrations has led to improved figures in the past year. However, the Department indicates that it needs to work with their schools to learn and practice motivational and support strategies for online students in order to foster an environment where online learners can be more successful.

2.4.3 Nunavut

Nunavut is the newest and most easterly of Canada's three territories. Created from the Northwest Territories in 1999, it has a total area of just over 2,093,190km² — making it the largest of Canada's provinces and territories. However, with just over 31,500 people it is also the least populated and, as such, has the lowest population density at 0.015 /km² or 1.5 people for every 100 square kilometers (Statistics Canada, 2009). The capital of the territory is Iqaluit, located on the southeastern portion of Baffin Island at the head of Frobisher Bay. Approximately one fifth of the territories population lives in the capital. Nunavut follows the same curriculum as the Province of Alberta, with some additions to address their distinct language and culture.

K-12 Online Learning

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Territory-led programme	No	
Other online programmes	No	
Territorial-level policy	No	

Online Programmes

When contacted, the Ministry of Education indicated that Nunavut did not have any active K-12 distance education programmes, only that they have piloted programmes in the past and had plans for further pilot project. The Ministry did not respond when contacted for further information on these past and planned projects.

The initial *Education Act, 1996* utilised by Nunavut was a piece of legacy legislation from the Northwest Territories. In this legislature there was a provision that allowed various educational bodies to "authorise, supervise and evaluate the use of distance learning programmes in the provision of the education programme" (p. 58). However, the only reference to distance education in the current *Education Act, 2008* is a statement that a university providing "distance learning programmes by mail or by electronic means from outside Nunavut to persons in Nunavut" was not considered to be operating in the territory (p. 95).

Note that the Alberta Distance Learning Centre indicates on their website that they "serve students and schools throughout Alberta, the Northwest Territories, and *Nunavut*" (emphasis added), but this was not confirmed by the territory's Ministry of Education.

3. Resources

Newfoundland and Labrador

Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation

<http://www.cdli.ca>

K-12 School Profile System

http://www.education.gov.nl.ca/sch_rep/pro_year.htm

Killick Centre

<http://www.mun.ca/killick/home/index.php/>

Nova Scotia

Chignecto-Central Virtual School

<http://ccvs.ednet.ns.ca/ccvs/>

Correspondence Study Program

<http://csp.ednet.ns.ca/>

Nova Scotia Virtual School

<http://nsvs.ednet.ns.ca/>

Strait Regional School Board Virtual School

<http://www.srsb.ca/disted>

Prince Edward Island

Minister's Directive No. MD 2001-05 Distance Education

<http://www.gov.pe.ca/educ/index.php3?number=76712>

Minister's Directive No. MD 2008-05 Distance Education

<http://www.gov.pe.ca/educ/index.php3?number=1023679&lang=E>

New Brunswick

New Brunswick Distance Learning Programme website

<http://nbvhs.nbed.nb.ca>

Quebec

eduSOFAD

<http://edusofad.com/public/en/default.php>

Écoles éloignées en réseau / Networked Remote Schools

<http://www.eer.qc.ca/>

List of French-language school board distance education programmes

http://www.sofad.qc.ca/html/reg_reg.html

List of English-language school board distance education programmes

http://www.sofad.qc.ca/html/reg_reg_A.html

Société de formation à distance des commissions scolaires du Québec (SOFAD)

<http://www.sofad.qc.ca/>

Ontario

e-Learning Ontario, Ministry of Education

<http://www.elearningontario.ca/>

Ontario's *E-Learning Strategy*

<http://www.elearningontario.ca/eng/strategy/Default.aspx>

Memorandum 2007: SB19

http://www.elearningontario.ca/eng/pdf/Memo24_08_07_en.pdf

Memorandum 2008: SB27

http://www.elearningontario.ca/eng/pdf/Memo_Funding_21_10_08.pdf

Policy Document, e-Learning Ontario

http://www.elearningontario.ca/eng/pdf/Policy_document.pdf

Service Level Agreement, e-Learning Ontario

http://www.elearningontario.ca/eng/pdf/SLA_Agreement.pdf

Working Conditions Bulletin #1.4/07-08, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation

<http://basic.osstf.on.ca/Default.aspx?DN=5a1b36a5-24ea-4116-84a0-cf1d340508c2&l=English>

Manitoba

Independent Study Option

<http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/dl/iso/index.html>

Southwest Horizon School Division

<http://www.shsd.mb.ca/>

Teacher Mediated Option

<http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/dl/tmo/index.html>

Web-Based Course Option

<http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/dl/wbc/index.html>

Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan Distance Learning Course Repository

<http://www.skdistancelearning.ca>

Saskatoon Catholic Cyber School

<http://www.scs.sk.ca/Cyber/>

Alberta

Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC)

<http://www.adlc.ca/>

ADLC Annual Education Results Report

http://www.adlc.ca/component/option,com_docman/task,doc_download/gid,410/

Conference Board of Canada – 2005 Community-Based Learning Opportunities for Aboriginals

Winner: The SunChild E-Learning Community Model

<http://www.conferenceboard.ca/documents.aspx?DID=1457>

Distributed Learning

<http://tinyurl.com/ab-distributedlearning>

SunChild E-Learning Community

<http://www.sccyber.net/www/index.php>

British Columbia

2008-09 Ministry of Education Audit Criteria

<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/compliance/0809-dl-audit-program.pdf>

Distributed Learning Policy Documents, Ministry of Education

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/dist_learning/policy.htm

E-Learning Standards for Distributed Learning

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/dist_learning/documents/dl_standards.pdf

LearnNowBC

<http://www.learnnowbc.ca>

Ministry of Education, Distributed Learning

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/dist_learning/

Ministry of Education, Distributed Learning Policy

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/dist_learning/policy.htm

Ministry of Education, Independent School Distributed Learning (DL) Programme

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/independentschools/bc_guide/dl_program.htm

Open School

<http://www.pss.gov.bc.ca/osbc/>

Virtual School Society

<http://www.vssociety.ca/>

Yukon

Northern British Columbia Distance Education School

<http://www.des.prn.bc.ca/>

Northwest Territories

Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC)

<http://www.adlc.ca/>

Senior Secondary School Administrators' Handbook

<http://tinyurl.com/admin-handbook>

Nunavut

Department of Education

<http://www.gov.nu.ca/education/index.htm>

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5. Appendix A

1. Describe the current system of K-12 distance education in your programme.
2. When did the current system begin?
3. Is K-12 distance education managed at the provincial level or at the district level?
4. How many K-12 distance education programmes are there in your province?
5. Does the Ministry of Education maintain a listing of all of these programmes?
 - a. If yes, could this list be made available to the researcher(s)?
6. Does the Ministry of Education keep records on the number of K-12 students who complete courses at a distance?
 - a. If yes, how many K-12 students were enrolled in distance education courses in 2008-09?
 - b. If yes, how many K-12 students were enrolled in distance education courses in 2007-08?
 - c. If yes, how many K-12 students were enrolled in distance education courses in 2006-07?
7. Does the Ministry of Education track the performance of K-12 students who complete courses at a distance separate from students who complete their courses from a traditional brick-and-mortar school?
 - a. If yes, could this data be made available to the researcher(s)?
8. Are portions of the Education Act or any other piece of legislation in your province that are specifically related to K-12 distance education?
 - a. If yes, what sections of which pieces of legislation?
9. Do other regulatory documents from the Ministry of Education exist that govern K-12 distance education in your province?
 - a. If yes, what are they?
10. How is the K-12 distance education programme funded in your province?
11. How are the teachers selected for the three programmes?
12. How are the courses developed for the three programmes?
13. If there are any follow-up questions, who would be the best person for the researchers to contact?

Name:

Title:

E-mail address:

Telephone number:

Call for Sponsors for the 2010 “State of the Nation Study of K-12 Online Learning in Canada” Study

iNACOL is seeking funding for next year’s K-12 online learning study of Canada. If your organization is interested in participating through sponsorship by supporting the third annual “State of the Nation Study: K-12 Online Learning in Canada,” please contact Michael Barbour, principal investigator at mkbarbour@gmail.com, or Susan Patrick, CEO, iNACOL at spatrick@inacol.org.

Your participation as a sponsor helps support more widespread participation from virtual schools across the country in the K-12 Online Learning in Canada project and is an ideal opportunity to demonstrate your organization’s interest in and commitment to supporting online learning. Your company or organization will be recognized for its support of virtual schools seeking to effectively expand educational options for K-12 students across Canada.

iNACOL currently has over 2,900 members and our previous studies are readily available to all members, as well as members of their organizations who enrolled over 1,000,000 students during the 2006-2007 school year. With your support, you will be recognized among educators as an organization committed to helping support online learning and virtual schools around the world.

Please review the sponsor benefits and opportunities for the State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada study:

- Recognition in all post-study press releases, presentations and distribution of information
- Opportunity to provide input into the program survey
- Participate in project conference calls
- Project sponsor name and logo listed on all promotional materials
- Project sponsor name and logo listed on the final report
- Receive 50 copies of the final report
- Receive Executive Summary of the final report for use on company website and for marketing purposes
- Receive recognition as a thought-leader for cutting-edge research of K-12 online learning in Canada for sponsoring the research study
- Sponsor recognition during iNACOL Webinar highlighting the study

The plans for the 2010 study include updating the K-12 policy and activity reports for each of the province, a greater focus on some of the individual programs within each jurisdiction (including more vignettes), and a section that examines specific issues related to K-12 online learning in Canada written by individuals from a variety of sectors.

For-profit and non-profit institutions, organizations, individuals, foundations and companies are welcome to partner with iNACOL for sponsoring the study. Please consider sponsorship of this important survey and report to be conducted annually. Your consideration is deeply appreciated.





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