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October 2012


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

iNACOL
International Association for K-12 Online Learning



Written by
Michael K. Barbour,
Wayne State University

Published by
Open School BC



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The views expressed in this book are solely the
opinions of the authors, not necessarily iNACOL.

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Foreword

This, the fifth edition of the *State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada* report continues the strong tradition of incisive analysis of the situation and context of K–12 online education in Canada.

Canada was one of the first countries to use the Internet to deliver distance learning courses to students. Though the amount of K–12 online education is far larger in the United States, in many ways Canada is a more interesting exemplar for the rest of the world. This is in part due to its division into 13 provinces and territories of widely varying population, leading to a wealth of relevant comparisons with other countries/regions of similar population, without being overwhelmed by the sheer number of entities involved. It is also in part due to Canada being not only a strong member of the Commonwealth of Nations, leading naturally to comparisons with other English-speaking countries, but also via in particular (but not only) Quebec being linked to la Francophonie, leading to relevant role models for two major linguistic regions. And finally, via its offerings to indigenous communities, it provides a role model for other countries who arguably may not always take the same care with provision of education to their indigenes and minority populations, especially those with different lifestyles to the majority. The vignette on Credenda is particularly compelling.

The "issues" papers in this edition make particularly topical reading: not only those which deal with the eternal problem of training and staff development for teachers in virtual schools, but also the papers approaching these challenges and others with a new twist. I was particularly interested to read about the efforts of Canadian online schools to recruit and teach overseas students, as this is a highly relevant point of contact with many of the virtual schools in Europe, often set up in the first instance to service the educational needs of children of diplomats and other expatriates.

Another feature that served to "ground" the document in the realities of distance education was letting some of the personalities of the online educators shine through. Perhaps we do not sufficiently celebrate the long, hard and often unsung labours of our online educators—less seen by parents than classroom teachers but doubtless no less admired and valued.

There are many points of commonality emerging between Canadian (indeed, North American) K–12 online traditions and those in the rest of the world. Now that many of the formerly little-known initiatives have surfaced in Europe, analysts can begin to cross-correlate approaches in North America, Europe and Australasia—to the great advantage of online education in each continental region.

One point of commonality between Canada (less so, the United States) and the rest of the world (with one exception in Australia) that is surprising is the lack—or apparent lack—of use or development of open educational resources (OER) in service of online schooling. I say "apparent lack" because there is evidence that teachers conceptualize this area differently from university faculty—and indeed differently in different continents. It is also likely due to less obsession with "content" in online schools than we find in universities. However, in the sixth edition—which I look forward to—I am confident that we shall see more about OER, especially as the publishers, or state/region/province government instead of or in collaboration with the publishers, begin to focus more on free textbooks in jurisdictions beyond the US. At the time of writing, this is only just beginning to happen in Europe and the initial skirmishes (as in Poland) are not edifying.

Paul Bacsich

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(The EU study project for Virtual School and College Education for Teenagers and Young Adults)

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Executive Summary

This is the fifth edition of the *State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada* report. The purpose of this annual investigation is to describe the policies and regulations that govern K–12 distance education in each of the thirteen Canadian provinces and territories. The study is also designed to survey the level of K–12 distance education activity across the country.

Over the past year there have been few changes to the regulation of K–12 distance education in Canada. Some provinces and territories still have little to no regulation. There are other provinces and territories that have passing references to distance education in their *Education Act* or *Schools Act*—often language that is no longer relevant due to changes with distance education delivery or the nature of K–12 distance education programs in operation. Further, there are several provinces and territories that use policy documents issued by the Ministry of Education. Finally, there is one province that has articles included in the collective bargaining agreement between the Government and teachers’ union, with one province that has an extensive legislative regime. British Columbia continues to have the most structured regulatory regime, while Quebec and Saskatchewan continue to have no regulation at all for K–12 distance education. Finally, there are several provinces that are in the process of reviewing their distance education policies (e.g., New Brunswick, Manitoba and Alberta).

The level of K–12 distance education activity in Canada continues to grow, although that growth is uneven and only experienced in certain jurisdictions. There also continues to be some level of K–12 distance education activity in all thirteen provinces and territories, with British Columbia having the highest number and highest percentage of student participation and Nunavut having the lowest. Further, the total number and proportion of K–12 students enrolled in distance education has increased from 2010–11 to 2011–12. However, that growth was isolated to a few jurisdictions—namely British Columbia, Quebec, Ontario, and Alberta. Provinces that have had longstanding distance education programs, particularly those in Eastern Canada, have seen more consistent levels of K–12 distance education participation. Finally, there also continues to be a reliance on print-based methods of distance education delivery in some jurisdictions.

1. Introduction

This is the fifth annual *State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada* report. In 2008, the first edition of this study stated that “most of what is known about K–12 online learning from the media and literature is focused upon experiences in the United States” and that the “report [was] the first of many steps that researchers and NACOL [now iNACOL] [were] taking to begin to address the lack of information about K–12 online learning in Canada” (Barbour & Stewart, 2008, p. 5). At the time, most of the literature related to K–12 online learning in Canada focused on Alberta, British Columbia, and Newfoundland and Labrador. While each of these three provinces were certainly at the forefront of activity when it came to K–12 online learning, this coverage did not represent the full story of K–12 online learning in Canada. Manitoba and Ontario also had early K–12 online learning initiatives, and the Francophone school systems in many provinces were among the first to adopt online learning as a regular delivery model for the K–12 environment. Alberta and British Columbia were simply jurisdictions where the government allocated funding to examine the potential of K–12 online learning and/or the evaluation of existing K–12 online learning programs; whereas Newfoundland and Labrador was a jurisdiction where university-based researchers had a history of studying and securing external funds to study a variety of forms of K–12 distance education.

In the five years since the publication of the first *State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada*, many steps have been taken by researchers and iNACOL to address the lack of information about K–12 distance education and online learning in the country. In this fifth edition of the study, we provide a national overview of the development of K–12 distance education and K–12 online learning. We also update the provincial and territorial profiles that describe the governance and activity of K–12 distance education in each jurisdiction, along with providing additional vignettes to illustrate a variety of those individuals and programs that provide these innovative learning opportunities. As with previous reports, we continue to examine a variety of issues related to the provision of K–12 distance education in Canada. Finally, we have begun the process of conducting a coast-to-coast survey of each of the K–12 distance education programs across the country.

1.1 Methodology

The methodology utilized for the 2012 study included a survey that was sent to each of the Ministries of Education (see Appendix A for a copy of this survey), follow-up interviews to clarify or expand on any of the responses contained in the survey, and an analysis of documents from each Ministry of Education, often available in an online format. During that data collection process, officials from the Ministries of Education in all thirteen provinces and territories responded.

The profiles were constructed based on these survey responses, along with information provided by key stakeholders involved in K–12 distance education in each respective province or territory, and in some instances the analysis of documents. As noted in Table 1 (which presents a summary of the data sources for the past five years), this is the first time that all thirteen provinces and territories have responded to the survey and provided additional information.

Table 1. Data collection sources for the *State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada* over the past five years

Province/Territory	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Newfoundland & Labrador	KS / DA	MoE / DA	DA	MoE	DA
Nova Scotia	DA	MoE / DA	MoE / DA	MoE / DA	MoE
Prince Edward Island	DA	KS / DA	MoE	MoE	MoE
New Brunswick	DA	MoE / DA	MoE	MoE / DA	MoE
Quebec	KS	KS / DA	MoE / KS	MoE / KS	MoE / KS
Ontario	KS / DA	KS / DA	KS / DA	MoE / DA	MoE / KS
Manitoba	KS	MoE / DA	MoE	MoE	MoE
Saskatchewan	KS / DA	MoE	MoE	MoE / KS	MoE
Alberta	DA	KS / DA	KS / DA	MoE	MoE / KS / DA
British Columbia	MoE / DA	MoE / DA	MoE	MoE	MoE
Yukon	DA	KS / DA	MoE / DA	MoE	MoE / KS
Northwest Territories	DA	MoE / DA	DA	MoE	MoE / KS
Nunavut	DA	MoE	MoE	MoE	MoE / KS

MoE – Ministry of Education, KS – Key stakeholders, DA – Document analysis

Drafts of each profile were provided to the Ministries prior to publication, along with any key stakeholders that provided information for the profiles. These individuals were given the opportunity to suggest revisions, most of which were accepted by the author (and all of which were seriously considered).

1.2 Definitions

As with the previous reports, for those familiar with K–12 online learning in the United States, most of the terms utilized 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 programs 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.

In many Canadian jurisdictions, online learning is often only a portion of the overall K–12 distance education offerings. Many provinces use the term “distributed learning” to describe all modes of delivery for K–12 distance education (i.e., print-based, video conferencing, and online learning). Additionally, two other terms that may also be unfamiliar to a non-Canadian audience are:

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 makes use of the definitions provided by the Virtual School Glossary project (see <http://virtuelschool.wikispaces.com/glossary/>) in most other areas.

1.3 How to Read This Document

This *State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada* report begins with an overview of the development of K–12 distance education and K–12 online learning in Canada. This overview starts with the history of K–12 distance education, with a distinct focus on the early stages of K–12 online learning. This history is followed by a discussion of the trends of K–12 online learning over the past five years (i.e., since this study first began), with particular attention paid to the significant changes that have occurred. Finally, this overview concludes with a description of some of the major reports that have examined K–12 online learning over the past two decades.

The next section contains a discussion of several issues related to the design, delivery and support of K–12 distance education in Canada. The first of these brief issue papers outlines how one public school district created a distributed learning program that is being exported internationally through collaboration with a school in that other country. The second brief issue paper explores the Additional Qualification for Teaching and Learning Through e-Learning in Ontario, the only province to have a teacher certification specialization for e-learning. The third brief issue paper discusses how one private K–12 online learning program has been able to enrol a high proportion of international students who receive Canadian credit without stepping foot on Canadian soil. The fourth brief issue paper describes the activities of an internationally known K–12 online learning program here in Canada. Finally, the fifth brief issue paper examines one university’s effort to prepare those individuals who teach in an online environment.

The next section begins with a national overview of K–12 distance education in Canada, which is followed by a discussion of the nature of regulation and the level of activity in each province and territory. This report provides a more condensed examination of each province and territory, with more detailed profiles being reserved to those jurisdictions that have not had official Ministry of Education participation prior to this year. In most instances, information that has not changed from previous years has simply been summarized. It should also be noted that this information is simply a snapshot in time, and the currency of the information is limited to the realities of September 2012. Following the provincial and territorial profiles, there are some vignettes designed to provide a more personalized perspective of those involved in K–12 distance education in that jurisdiction. This year these vignettes focus on individual course designers and teachers, along with specific programs where there is less published information.

Finally, the remainder of the report is organized in a regional fashion. Information about the specific programs located in each of the four regions of Canada (i.e., Atlantic, Central, Western, and Northern) were provided based on the individual program survey that was conducted. As with previous editions, the report concludes with a listing of specific resources.

2. Trends in Canadian K–12 Distance Education

The second *State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada* report described a brief 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 the 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 program grew to over 600 students by 1929. Almost six and a 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 programs 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 programs 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 programs. 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.

After five years of increased exposure to and focus on K–12 online learning, what we know of the history of K–12 distance education has remained fairly consistent and accurate.

However, as was indicated in the introduction, “most of what is known about K-12 online learning from the media and literature is focused upon experiences in the United States” (Barbour & Stewart, 2008, p. 5). While these annual reports have begun to address the lack of information about K-12 distance education and online learning in Canada, even those involved in Canadian K-12 distance education often have a better understanding of the American context than what is happening in their own country. K-12 distance education, and specifically K-12 online learning, experienced similar beginnings in both Canada and the United States. Yet recently the development of the field has diverged significantly in these two countries.

Over the past five years four trends have been evident within the field of K–12 distance education in Canada. First, K–12 distance education continues to grow each year. Second, the more traditional, print-based correspondence education continues to be prevalent within K–12 distance education offerings. Third, blended learning continues to be seen simply as a more effective use of information communications technology (ICT). Finally, unions remain cautiously supportive of K–12 online learning.

2.1 K–12 Distance Education Continues to Grow

As indicated in the original *State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada* report, in 1999–2000 it was estimated that there were approximately 25,000 K–12 students enrolled in distance education courses (Canadian Teachers Federation, 2000). This figure of 25,000 distance education students represented approximately ½% of all K–12 students involved in distance education. The first reporting provided by the *State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada* study was in the second edition in 2009, when it was recorded that there were approximately 140,000 students participating in distance education.

Table 2. K–12 distance education student enrolment in Canada

Year (Source)	Estimated # of distance education students
1999–2000 (Canadian Teachers Federation, 2000)	~ 25,000
2008–09 (<i>State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada</i>)	~ 140,000
2009–10 (<i>State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada</i>)	150,000–175,000
2010–11 (<i>State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada</i>)	207,096
2011–12 (<i>State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada</i>)	245,252

While the growth in recent years has been steady, it should be noted that there are still some jurisdictions where the Ministry does not collect data related to distance education enrolment. Depending on the level of cooperation with the annual *State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning*

in Canada study, the enrolment figures are sometimes accurate estimates and in other instances they are simply a best guess. For example, e-Learning Ontario does not track distance education enrolments and very few of the individual K–12 online learning programs provide information to this study. Conversely, while the Government of Alberta does not track distance education enrolment, there was a high level of co-operation between K–12 online learning programs in Alberta and this study. It is also possible that some of the growth has been a byproduct of simply more accurate data collection.

Regardless of some of the limitations of these figures, the growth in K–12 distance education participation across Canada remains uneven. Many of the provinces with smaller populations, particularly those with long histories of involvement in K–12 distance education, have seen a relatively stable level of distance education participation (and some have even experienced a slight decrease). For example, Newfoundland and Labrador has been using distance education at the K–12 level since 1988–89 and the current province-wide online learning program has been in place since 2000–01. For most of the past five years, the level of participation in distance education in Newfoundland and Labrador has remained around 1000 students who enrol in between 1500–1700 courses. Conversely, there are other provinces where K–12 distance education participation has grown significantly. A favourable funding regime in British Columbia has seen that province's participation increase from approximately 17,000 students in 2005–06 to almost 80,000 in 2011–12. In provinces where growth has occurred, the growth has been due to a variety of different reasons. The favourable funding model in British Columbia is simply one example.

2.2 Correspondence Education Continues to be Prevalent

While K–12 online learning is on the rise in general, the use of a more traditional, print-based correspondence education delivery model is still quite common in the K–12 distance education environment in Canada. This is one of the ways in which the Canadian and American experiences have diverged, as there are very few programs in the United States that still use print-based correspondence education. Several Canadian provinces continue to maintain a primarily print-based correspondence delivery model for their adult students engaged in K–12 studies. For example, the Independent Learning Centre in Ontario and the *Société de formation à distance des commissions scolaires du Québec* are both programs specifically designed for students that have reached the age where they are legally permitted to drop out of school. In these instances, either directly or working with individual school boards, these two programs provide correspondence distance education to allow these adult students to obtain a traditional high school diploma. Similarly, both Manitoba and Nova Scotia still maintain a correspondence study option at the Ministry level for adult students.

There are two other areas where correspondence education is still quite common. The first is for programs focused on elementary school students. This pattern is most common in British Columbia, where there are numerous programs that provide full-time K–12 distance education studies for elementary school students. While not all of these programs are correspondence-based, the vast majority uses a correspondence model; many use solely a correspondence model for these elementary offerings. The second area where correspondence education is quite common is within the Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC). In operation since 1923, each year the ADLC offers more courses and has more enrolments in its online offerings. However, ADLC still delivers a significant portion of its courses using a correspondence delivery model.

2.3 Blended Learning is Seen as Effective ICT

The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) defines blended learning as:

...any time a student learns at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home and at least in part through online delivery with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace; often used synonymously with Hybrid Learning. (iNACOL, 2011, p. 3)

In the United States, blended learning has been adopted by some as an extension or type of K-12 online learning—often by those pursuing a corporate-driven, educational reform agenda, which often serves to inflate the levels of participation in K-12 online and blended learning reported by most US organizations (Barbour, in press; Glass, 2010; Glass & Welner, 2011). This makes direct comparisons between the two countries limited, when analyzing levels of involvement in these activities.

While blended learning is occurring across Canada, practitioners do not always consider it part of the distance education or online learning movement. Within the Canadian context blended learning is largely considered an extension of effective ICT, or *effective technology integration*—to use more of an American phraseology. Many teachers not directly involved with K-12 distance education may not realize they are practicing blended learning according to the iNACOL definition. As such, their involvement is not included when policy analysts and school district administrators calculate student participation in blended learning.

The view of blended learning as effective ICT or a part of a broader definition of e-learning is a trend first reported by iNACOL in their 2006 publication of the *International Perspective of K-12 Online Learning* (Powell & Patrick, 2006). This pattern is consistent with many countries (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, several European countries), where blended learning is confounded with a more general understanding of ICT or e-learning, or where it has emerged from earlier SchoolNet initiatives (Barbour, Brown, Hasler Waters, Hoey, Hunt, Kennedy, Ounsworth, Powell, & Trimm, 2011; Barbour, Hasler Waters, & Hunt, 2011; Powell & Barbour, 2011; Powell & Patrick, 2006). To further compound this issue, in some Canadian jurisdictions the meaning of the term “blended learning” is inconsistent with the iNACOL definition. For example, in Alberta the term “blended learning” is associated with home education.

Even though it isn't necessarily seen as a part of or an extension to K-12 online learning, blended learning is often advanced through K-12 online learning initiatives. For example, in Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick and Ontario the asynchronous course content developed for their online learning programs has been made available to classroom teachers to use with their own students. In Ontario, 2011-12 was the first year classroom teachers have been able to use the asynchronous course content in the provincial learning management system. As such, the level of activity these classroom users represented is still unknown. However, in New Brunswick more than a third of the enrollments in the provincial learning management system are from classroom teachers and students using the content in a blended fashion. Similarly, while the Learn program in Quebec serves approximately 5300 students engaged in its distance education programs, it has more than 150,000 enrollments from classroom teachers and students using asynchronous course content.¹ Due to the fact that blended learning is generally not seen as part of K-12 distance education, the *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* study has continued to exclude these numbers from the participation statistics.

¹ This report attempts to highlight some of the examples of blended learning consistent with the iNACOL definition in the provincial and territorial profiles, as well as the featured vignettes.

2.4 Unions Remain Cautiously Supportive

Teachers unions in Canada have remained generally supportive of K-12 online learning—although that support has been guarded, at least in comparison to the union response to K-12 online learning as represented within the American media. In many jurisdictions in the United States, K-12 online learning has been positioned by corporate reformers as a way to remove the involvement of unions and unionized teachers from the public education system (Barbour & Adelstein, in press; Moe & Chubb, 2009; Peterson, 2010). Initially, teachers unions urged policymakers to create frameworks that allowed online learning to be fostered in managed ways with specific oversight (National Education Association [NEA], 2006). However, as many K-12 online learning proponents have begun to pursue a neo-liberal agenda of educational reform, which focuses on applying free market principles on a public system (Apple, 2001; Barbour, 2012; Ravitch, 2010), the position of American unions has shifted over the past half decade. For example, the Wisconsin Education Association launched a lawsuit to prevent full-time online learning, while the California division of the American Federation of Teachers called for the complete ban of online education in 2011. Interestingly, the NEA, which is the largest teachers union in the United States, continues to be supportive of blended learning when directed by a licensed teacher (NEA, 2011).

However, within the Canadian context the supporters of K-12 online learning have not positioned it in such an ideological manner. As such, teacher unions have not reacted with the same negative position that we have seen south of the border. In Canada, unions have actually been quite supportive of K-12 distance education. For example, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers Association partnered with the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (i.e., the province's K-12 online learning program) to create a Virtual Teachers Centre to use the infrastructure and expertise of the K-12 online learning program to deliver online professional development. Further, at their 2010 annual meeting the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (one of the four main unions representing teachers in the province) adopted a policy regarding distance education that states, among other things, they believe that "the Ministry of Education should ensure that all students in publicly-funded schools should have equal access to online credit courses, including but not limited to covering the cost of online credit courses for low-income students and making available computers, modems and Internet access" (p. 29).

This is not to say that unions have not also been cautious in their approach to K-12 distance education. As the number of K-12 online learning programs has increased, the need for distance education teachers has also increased. Teaching in a distance education environment is different from teaching in a classroom environment. Students aren't limited to traditional school hours. Technology makes some tasks more efficient, but also makes other tasks more time-intensive (particularly the individual communications with students). Several teacher unions have invested in research into how teaching at a distance differs from teaching in the classroom (in particular the Alberta Teachers Association and the British Columbia Teachers Federation), and what impact that has on the workload and quality of life of their members who teach at a distance (e.g., Alberta Teachers' Association, 2011; Hawkey & Kuehn, 2007; Kuehn, 2002; 2003; 2004; 2006; 2011). To date, the only union that has included distance education in its collective agreement is the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. The contract between the Government of Nova Scotia and its teachers union contains 11 provisions related to distance education that include:

- teacher certification
- workload issues
- definition of a school day for distance education
- school-based supervision and administration of distance education students
- distance education class size
- professional development, and
- governance of distance education programs.

In each instance, it appears fair to describe the unions' response to K–12 distance education as wanting to protect its members from potentially significant changes to workload and quality of life. However, at the same time unions appear reluctant to argue in favour of restrictions that may limit the ability of K–12 online learning programs to be innovative and creative in how they provide learning opportunities for students.

3. Brief Issue Papers

The brief issue papers are designed to examine a range of issues that are current and relevant to either the regulation or implementation of K–12 distance education. In the 2012 *State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada* report there are five brief issue papers. The first of these brief issue papers focuses on the international efforts of the SD73 (Kamloops) Business Company to bring Canadian K–12 online learning to students in China. The second brief issue paper is from the Ontario College of Teachers and describes their Additional Qualification for Teaching and Learning Through e-Learning that is available to teachers in Ontario. The third brief issue paper explores the reasons for the increasing international enrolment in the Virtual High School—a private virtual school located in Ontario. The fourth brief issue paper describes the activities of the Florida Virtual School within Canada and the various partnerships that organization has entered into with different educational authorities. Finally, the fifth brief issue paper examines the Graduate Certificate in Online Teaching and Learning at Thompson Rivers University.

3.1 British Columbia’s International Online Learning Initiative



**Dean Coder,
Vice President—SD73
(Kamloops) Business
Company**



**Randy LaBonte,
Acting Executive
Director—International
Online Learning
Association of BC**

British Columbia, with one of the highest rates of K–12 participation in online and distance education domestically, has begun to explore how its success in local distance education can be leveraged to support international students who are either studying in British Columbia International Offshore Schools (i.e., schools managed by British Columbia public education institutions that are located outside of Canada) or planning to study in British Columbia local schools. A pilot program has been launched, and school district business companies and independent schools interested in offering distance education services internationally have formed an association to coordinate and support their efforts.

The philosophy of the International Online Learning Association of British Columbia (IOLA) can be summarized by Ford Motor Company's slogan of "Quality is job one." In the context of online learning abroad, this sentiment is a key purpose behind the formation of IOLA. In many areas of the world online education is equated more with a digital correspondence course than a high quality learning experience mediated through education technologies and the Internet by education technologies. IOLA is interested in providing high quality international online education, and has faced many challenges along with opportunities—but quality in educational services has been a critical focus of its initial endeavours.

British Columbia legislation provides the opportunity for provincial boards of education (i.e., school districts) to form business companies in order to pursue independent operations beyond funded education services for students residing in the province. These school district business companies exist at an arm's-length from public education and funding. Several of these business companies have begun to explore offering educational services internationally. One such company, SD73 Business Company, has begun a pilot program for international students through agreement with the British Columbia Ministry of Education. Others interested in participating in the pilot are doing so through the SD73 Business Company.

British Columbia's Pilot Program—SD73 (Kamloops) Business Company

School districts in British Columbia initially began to establish International Offshore Schools, but one district, Kamloops, chose to offer online courses to international students attending a British Columbia Offshore School rather than establishing its own international school. Initially, as a proof of concept, Kamloops worked with a school in Chukyo, Japan to provide English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction through video conferencing. In setting up the technology several challenges were overcome and it was demonstrated that an educational program could be delivered at a distance.

After the agreement with Chukyo was completed, Kamloops secured a three year pilot agreement with the British Columbia Ministry of Education that included the ability to offer all British Columbia courses online (at a distance) with the exception of Social Studies 11 and English 12—both required to be completed in a registered British Columbia campus-based school in British Columbia or at a British Columbia Offshore School. In the first year of the three-year pilot two Business Education courses were offered to students in British Columbia Offshore Schools. Of the 52 students that were enrolled in the two courses, 49 successfully completed the course. In the second year the pilot the program was expanded to more schools, and an online ESL component was also added.

The course delivery used a blended cohort-learner model consisting of synchronous and asynchronous instructional delivery. The synchronous sessions were held via web conferencing using Blackboard Collaborate twice a week and students used a learning management system, Moodle, for the asynchronous sessions. All lessons took place in a computer lab with a teaching assistant present. The intent of the course design was such that the teachers could pick and choose which units they wanted students to do asynchronously (with feedback provided through forums and threaded conversation), and which units students were to do in a synchronous session. Kamloops has also been working on an authentic assessment practice where students post a video reflection or meet one-on-one with their teacher for assessment.

One initial challenge for the program within the international context was its uniqueness—many of the international families were not familiar with online learning. Many schools needed to see a demonstration of how online learning could work on a small scale prior to committing to a larger program. In particular, online learning in Asia is often seen as low quality correspondence and people are reluctant to pay the higher price that it takes for a high degree of teacher engagement.

Working Together—International Online Learning Association of British Columbia (IOLA)

The Kamloops business company pilot met with modest success. With the small number of students involved, scalability of British Columbia online international opportunities led to the formation of an independent association to represent the collective interests of British Columbia independent schools and school district business companies looking to provide international educational opportunities. This coordinated approach led to the formation of the not-for-profit society, whose purpose is to:

- (1) Enable a co-ordinated approach and single point for discussions with education stakeholders;
- (2) Lead a British Columbia-branded international marketing strategy for online learning;
- (3) Support the development and delivery of British Columbia curriculum and educational services through online learning;
- (4) Uphold the quality of international online learning program content and services;
- (5) Be independent and inclusive, with a governing board drawn from school district business companies, independent schools, business, government, and international representatives; and
- (6) Have a mandate to assist in improving online content and services to meet quality standards and support distributed learning operational activities in British Columbia.

The vision of the organization is to provide high quality learning opportunities while improving access and quality of educational opportunities throughout the world through the use of online learning. The organization was founded to improve the quality of British Columbia online learning content and delivery, while attracting new students to post-secondary and K–12 schools in the province and to international British Columbia Offshore Schools. Membership in the association includes representatives from British Columbia registered school district business companies, and registered independent distributed learning schools.

International online learning, both at the secondary level and the post secondary level, is undergoing tremendous growth but there remains a significant amount of work to ensure a quality experience for students. Just as the Internet represents a new frontier for our global society with both great rewards and dangers, online learning has its share of poor quality schools. IOLA's mandate is the same as Ford's—quality is job number one.



3.2 Teaching and Learning through e-Learning: A New Additional Qualification Course for the Teaching Profession

Deirdre Smith, Manager, Standards of Practice and Education, Ontario College of Teachers

Distance learning is about equity—it is imperative, expected and promotes province-wide accessibility to the courses.

*Participant, Supervisory Officer's Qualification Program Focus Group,
December 15, 2009*

This paper will discuss the new additional qualification course guideline for *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* in Ontario. This innovative new teaching qualification course provides a foundation for teachers interested in supporting the development of professional knowledge, skills, dispositions and instructional practices that support teachers facilitating e-learning within various educational contexts across a highly diverse province.

Background

E-learning has been identified by both the Ontario teaching profession and the public as a significant and evolving area of professional knowledge for Ontario educators. E-learning provides additional flexibility in response to diverse learning needs, supports increased accessibility to learning opportunities and explores new forms of communication information technology in support of collaborative teaching and learning. E-learning has the potential to transform educational practices. Recommendations received from the profession and the public for increased information communication technology (ICT) education for teachers in the area of online learning precipitated the Ontario College of Teachers to introduce a new additional qualification course for teachers entitled Teaching and Learning Through e-Learning. This new teaching qualification supports public confidence and trust in educators' evolving pedagogical and instructional practices. It also reflects the rapidly changing advancements related to ICT and online trends within society and education.

Ontario Context

The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), as the self-regulatory body for members of the teaching profession, has responsibilities related to additional qualifications. These responsibilities include the development and accreditation of programs leading to certificates of qualification that are additional to the certificate required for initial OCT membership. These additional professional learning and certification courses are available to the 235,000 members of the Ontario teaching profession. The courses are 125 hours in length. Successful completion of an additional qualification course is recorded on the member's Certificate of Qualification and Registration. The course expectations, content and learning experiences for *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* course are outlined in the additional qualification course policy guideline that was developed with input from the teaching profession, educational stakeholders and the public.

The OCT is committed to developing a new additional qualification (AQ) course related to Teaching and Learning Through e-Learning as a result of the review of O. *Regulation 176/10, Teachers' Qualifications* (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006). This regulation identifies the 370 additional qualification courses in English and the 370 additional qualification courses in French that are available for teachers in Ontario. New teacher education courses are added based upon identified needs by the teaching profession, educational policy and curriculum changes and the evolving nature of teaching and learning.

The teaching profession and the public strongly endorsed the importance of the establishment of a new additional qualification course that would help to enhance educators' abilities to support teaching and learning through online modes. In 2010, five additional qualification course providers implemented this new course across the province for the first time. One hundred and forty teachers have been awarded the new *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* additional qualification. This additional teacher education course is unique and distinctive. It is one-of-a-kind in Canada. As well, only three other jurisdictions in North America offer certification to teachers related to e-learning.

The new *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* qualification course guideline provides the conceptual framework for this course. The guideline identifies the core learning expectations and the essential content for supporting the professional knowledge and practices related to e-learning for teachers in Ontario. Course providers and instructors use the guideline to frame and guide their e-learning courses. Accreditation of this course is based upon the level of congruence of the course outlines with the provincial policy guideline.

A variety of research data-gathering activities were employed as part of the formal development process for this new policy guideline that directs the preparation and professional certification of teachers related to e-learning. These varied development processes for the e-learning AQ course guideline involved data collection from members of the educational community and the public. This input informed the identification of key course expectations and essential content for the new e-learning qualification guideline. The OCT acknowledges that practices related to e-learning continue to evolve and grow in response to the ever-changing Ontario educational and societal landscape. The e-learning guideline for *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* must continue to reflect these changes and advances. To support relevancy and currency of the course, it will be refined and updated through a formal seven-year AQ course review process.

Relevance for the Teaching Profession

E-learning is highly relevant and applicable to the current and future work of the Ontario College of Teachers. The College presently accredits fully online additional qualification courses. The College's regulatory objects related to standards and ongoing professional education align with and support the new "teaching e-learning" additional teacher qualification. This qualification is intended to enhance the professional knowledge and practices of educators involved in diverse modes of distance education.

Commencing in 2006, the Ontario Ministry of Education issued a policy document related to e-learning for all school boards in the province (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). The purpose of this policy is to meet the needs of a wide range of learners from diverse geographical regions of

the province by ensuring that e-learning was made available to all learners. To support the adoption and implementation of this policy, a range of professional learning webinars were offered by the Ministry to teachers from 2008 to 2012. The new *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* additional qualification course provides another level of support for the recent e-learning focus in school boards across the province.

The *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* additional qualification course is a timely and highly applicable professional education course for teachers. It helps to support the evolving need of members of the teaching profession to continue to refine their professional knowledge and skills in the application of ICT within online learning environments. It also communicates to the public the deep commitment of the teaching profession to continually engage in ongoing professional learning in response to student needs, learning styles and interests. Members of the teaching profession viewed the College's support and involvement in this initiative as extremely relevant to both individual educators and the collective teaching profession. This new additional qualification course serves the public interest and inspires public trust. The College's professional advisory on the *Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media* (Ontario College of Teachers, 2011) also highlights the importance of educators' evolving professional knowledge related to emergent social media technology, which will certainly influence e-learning strategies.

Provincial Writing Team

Educational partners with extensive knowledge and experience related to e-learning were invited to nominate a representative to participate in a provincial writing team responsible for the development of the content and learning expectations for the *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* additional qualification course guideline. The responsibility of this group of educators was to analyze the data collected from the field, along with reviewing relevant research regarding e-learning teaching qualifications. The writers brought a significant diversity of perspectives and experiences to the dialogic writing sessions. They participated in rich exchanges regarding the data gleaned from both the field and the public through consultations and discussions. These experienced and passionate expert e-learning educators were deeply committed to innovation, differentiated instruction and universal design. The professional responsibility that this group of educators embraced in developing the additional qualification course guideline related to *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* was a living example of self-regulation in action. The profession was entrusted to identify the necessary knowledge, skills and practices for professional certification in e-learning, which ultimately benefits learners within an ever-changing democratic society.

Course Overview

The additional qualification course *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* is open to all teachers. Candidates come to the *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* course with an interest or background in this area and a desire to extend and apply knowledge, skills and practices in the design, implementation, and assessment of e-learning programs.

Critical to the implementation of this course is the creation of positive learning experiences that reflect care, professional knowledge, ethical practice, leadership and ongoing learning. The Ontario College of Teachers recognizes that candidates working in the publicly funded school system,

independent/private institutions or First Nations Schools will have a need to explore, in an integrated delivery model, topics and issues of particular relevance to the context in which they work or may work. Key course expectations for the e-learning course provide a guide to inform the practices, learning experiences and leadership practices of course providers and instructors. Several of these course expectations include:

- Accessing and exploring a variety of resources, including technological resources, within and beyond the education system to enhance professional knowledge in support of student e-learning; and district school board policies and guidelines, particularly in the area of e-learning.
- Having and applying the theoretical understanding necessary to design, implement and assess e-learning programs and practices.
- Modeling and adapting expectations, strategies and assessment practices in response to the individual needs of students in the e-learning environment.
- Facilitating the creation of e-learning environments conducive to the intellectual, social, emotional, physical, linguistic, cultural, spiritual and moral development of the student.
- Accessing and exploring a variety of resources, including technological resources, within and beyond the educational system to enhance professional knowledge in support of student e-learning.
- Understanding how to create and sustain professional e-learning communities.

(Ontario College of Teachers, 2009, p. 3)

Theoretical Foundations for e-Learning

The theoretical foundations for the *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* course guidelines provide a common platform from which this teacher education course can be adapted to meet the individual interests, needs and contexts of educators enrolled in the course. The foundational theoretical underpinnings include:

- Understanding the context of the e-learner and relevant theories of e-learning.
- Exploring a variety of conceptual frameworks for e-learning both from a historical perspective and from an inquiry perspective.
- Exploring a variety of instructional processes to support online collaborative learning.
- Understanding the communication process in e-learning approaches.
- Using the Ministry curricula documents as the underpinnings of the e-learning approaches.
- Reflecting on personal teaching practices and engaging in professional dialogue on the relationships of theory and practice in the use of technology to foster e-learning.
- Having awareness of policy and/or legislation relevant to the *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* guideline.
- Knowing and understanding policies and procedures that are relevant to e-learning.
- Integrating the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* and the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* as the foundation for teacher professionalism within the additional qualification course, *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning*.

(Ontario College of Teachers, 2009, p. 5)

Course Content

The course content for *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* includes five core and additional interrelated sections. These sections include:

- Program Planning
- Development and Implementation
- Pedagogical Principles
- Learners and Community
- Assessment and Evaluation
- Shared Support for Learners

The course content in the pedagogy section is designed to address unique pedagogical considerations and dimensions related to e-learning that educators need to reflect upon and integrate within their professional practices. These pedagogical elements include:

- Integrating information and communication technology to support student e-learning.
- Adapting, modifying and accommodating instruction to meet the needs of all e-learners.
- Creating, modifying, and maintaining e-learning resources, content, courses, and environments based on appropriate principles of instructional design.
- Applying appropriate methods, media and strategies based on principles of instructional design that support high levels of student engagement, achievement, and motivation.
- Developing strategies that enable teachers to provide effective tutoring, monitoring, supervision, feedback, support, facilitation and demonstrate social presence in e-learning environments.
- Developing an awareness of and strategies to resolve issues related to virtual classroom management including:
 - Flaming, cyber bullying
 - Plagiarism
 - Time management (attendance, pacing)
 - Content management (copyright)
 - Information management (privacy, grades, file storage)
- Demonstrating an awareness of existing electronic educational resources that support implementation of the Ontario curriculum by searching for, evaluating and integrating them into practice to support student learning.
- Building an awareness and the application of various educational technologies such as learning management system (LMS) software and web conferencing tools that support e-learning.
- Developing skills and competencies required to support learning in electronic environments.
- Employing a variety of instructional strategies to support e-learning environments.

(Ontario College of Teachers, 2009, p. 6–7)

The “Learners and Community” section of the course content identifies e-learning concepts that educators need to be cognizant of and need to consider when teaching learners through distance learning modes:

- understanding the social context of student learners (Net Generation) and their socialization in the 21st Century
- fostering a collaborative and interactive community of e-learners, teachers and supporters
- identifying factors that impact students in a diverse and changing society
- providing for differentiated instruction in the e-learning environment
- providing support for success based on the e-learner profile
- creating a learning environment that reflects effective e-learning practices that exemplify the ethical standards and the standards of practice.

(Ontario College of Teachers, 2009, p. 8)

The other three sections of the e-learning course content integrate to offer rich, dynamic and innovative learning environments for all e-learning candidates.

Final Reflections

Online learning within teacher education is a powerful inclusive tool for expanding learning opportunities and for fostering knowledge creation and mobilization. Supporting educators’ professional knowledge, skills and practices related to information computer technology through e-learning holds tremendous promise for re-shaping teacher education. When teacher education supports the practice of e-learning, which fosters equitable, accessible and inclusive learning communities, it has the remarkable power to transform society through supporting and embodying these principles as essential to living in an authentic, just and diverse community.

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3.3 Waves Across the Oceans

Steve Baker, Principal—Virtual High School

In 2012, Virtual High School (VHS) had 66 distinct high school online courses with almost 300 course sections. All 18 full-time administrative staff work in an office in the small, rural village of Bayfield on the shore of Lake Huron (CTV, 2012). VHS contracts the teaching to approximately 70 certified teachers working from their home offices. More than 4600 student credit registrations are expected in 2012, which means that VHS, against all odds, has become one of Canada's largest private online high schools (Bennett, 2012).

History of Virtual High School

In the fall of 1995, a grade 11 biology course written in HTML on Notepad became the first Canadian high school course I developed while working as a staff member at Goderich District Collegiate Institute within the Huron County Board of Education—now the Avon-Maitland District School Board in Ontario (Avon-Maitland District School Board [AMDSB], 2012). A second course, Canadian Literature, written by John Smallwood in 1996, won a North American award for course development (Hall, 1997). On January 2, 1997, the VirtualHighSchool.com domain was purchased and used to situate these two online courses on the Web (WHOis.com, n.d.). Working with the local Internet service provider Odyssey.com, operating at the time from the backroom of a jewelry store in Clinton, we built a very rudimentary learning management system to run the two online courses.

Two years later, the AMDSB claimed full ownership of the four online courses at VHS and dissolved the fledgling business arrangement. As the VirtualHighSchool.com domain had been personally purchased, it was retained as the uniform resource locator along with the content of the two original courses. Using this domain and content, attempts were made to revive the school. However, not having the ability to grant credits meant that success was less than assured. New online courses continued to be written, developed, and offered largely on a volunteer basis for the next four years. In 2001, VHS still had only six courses and one single student.

In 2002, VHS applied to the Ontario Ministry of Education for permission to exist as an accredited private school (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012a). Private schools in Ontario have the ability to grant Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) credits (Education Act, 1990). Following a number of in-depth inspections by the Ministry of Education, in April 2003 VHS became a fully accredited, inspected private school in Ontario. This action meant that VHS could now offer its six online courses to students for OSSD credits. VHS has remained an accredited private school offering online OSSD credits ever since.

Growing International Audience

An interesting development at the VHS is that 17% of the credits issued by the school are earned by students who are not residents of Ontario. Students from every other Canadian province and 63 other countries (Antigua to Zimbabwe) are discovering that they may now receive a world-recognized Ontario education in their own communities, far-removed from Bayfield, Ontario. All of this raises a significant question:

Why are international students beginning to move outside their own school systems towards VHS to take a single course or the whole OSSD program?

Personal Responsibility

VHS places tremendous personal responsibility on its students. Students choose when to come to class, when to study, what to study, when to submit assignments, when to write tests, and when to write the final exam. Giving students the personal responsibility to manage their own education is quite rare in any school. Typically, if the student is five minutes late for class in a bricks-and-mortar school, only a late slip from the office will allow access to the ongoing class. VHS takes the attitude that students are young adults and if treated as such, will respond accordingly. Attending classes at VHS promotes independence, maturity, and self-motivation within the learner. VHS has given students personal responsibility for their own education, and the students have responded in a very positive manner to this opportunity for growth.

OSSD Appeal

Canada currently enjoys an enviable position on the world stage with respect to its educational system. *The Human Development Index* (HDI) of the United Nations considers Canada to be “highly developed” in all of its dimensions, but especially in “education.” According to 2011 data, Canada’s Education HDI of 0.927 compares favourably to other countries such as Hong Kong (0.837), the United Kingdom (0.815), China (0.623) and Nigeria (0.442) to list a few (United Nations Development Programme, 2011). Canada’s provincial education systems are extremely attractive to students from many countries. The World Wide Web has broken down nearly all of the physical barriers that have prevented such students from attending a Canadian school in the past,. Allowing international students to pay the same tuition rate as Ontario students is just another example of the equality afforded to all students by VHS.

Flexibility

One of the attractions for students attending VHS is the tremendous flexibility afforded to the student. After students register and pay their tuition, they may begin their course(s) on any day and work through the course at their own pace. The only limitation applied is that they must complete the course within 18 months. There are no set deadlines for assignments or tests. The students decide when their school year starts, when their day starts, and even when they do their work. Teenagers especially appreciate this flexibility, most notably when it concerns matters early in the day. The asynchronous nature of the entire school is desirable because students often have busy social lives. When students are in entirely different time zones, a synchronous online course is exactly what they would want to avoid. The geographical and chronological flexibility of online courses equally allows any student in the world with an Internet connection the ability to attend the VHS.

Empowerment and Self-Advocacy

In addition to the personal responsibility granted to VHS students, they are encouraged to set educational goals for themselves. In this regard, the students can easily contact key people within the organizational structure of VHS in order to address any problem, which may prevent them from attaining their goals (Virtual High School, 1996–2012). Students are encouraged to take a position, to stand up for themselves, to disagree with any statement by a teacher or administrative person, or to request special circumstance if warranted. Having open access to all administrative staff members and advocating for themselves, the VHS student can effect change in the existing school procedures and even in the content of the courses. Empowering the student and encouraging self-advocacy allows them to take ownership of the issues in their lives and makes them better students.

Course Content Design

The quality of the content is another reason for the success of VHS. All content is written and developed by VHS curriculum writers and is designed to meet and frequently to exceed the curriculum expectations established by the Ontario Ministry of Education. The curriculum coordinators and instructional designers then present this content in online lessons to students using Desire2Learn's learning management system (Desire2Learn, 1999–2012). VHS consistently receives positive feedback from students, parents, universities, and colleges on the quality of its courses. The online course content is written as a hybrid between the textbook and what happens inside a typical classroom. The content has to be informative, interactive, pleasant, connected to prior learning, and engaging for the student—everything that a great teacher would do inside a bricks-and-mortar classroom. The litmus test of the online content is that it has to motivate the student to want to learn. VHS's success indicates a positive result.

University Acceptance

The OSSD credits issued by VHS are fully recognized by universities around the world. International students consistently express that they view the Canadian provincial educational systems in very high regard. VHS has an impressive reputation with universities. It is not uncommon for a student in a second or third year university program to register with VHS for a particular grade 12 course that he or she needs in order to change university programs. Admissions personnel at their university often recommend VHS to the student in such cases (Ryerson University, n.d.). International students conditionally accepted into a Canadian university are often sent to VHS by the university to upgrade or to take additional grade 12 credits in order to gain acceptance into the university program. VHS students attending university will not have their admissions downgraded because they have taken a course or their entire high school at VHS. Learning occurring in a well-constructed online course is as good as the learning that takes place within physical classrooms (Ary & Brune, 2011). Universities, having their own courses and whole programs fully online, know the value of a well-run online program. Online delivery of the education does not diminish its capacity.

Teacher Quality

The most important aspect of education, from the perspective of the VHS student, is the quality of the teaching in the online course. VHS teachers make considerable effort to establish a personal connection with each of their students. Online teaching affords the teacher and student a new and exciting opportunity to interact as never before. VHS teachers make every attempt to routinely—that is, daily—answer emails and discuss their courses with students. Such communication must be of an extremely high quality as online correspondence is the only way for students and instructors to interact. Interestingly, teachers at VHS find that the relationships they establish with students are often more open and more educationally positive than relationships are in conventional classrooms, because unfortunate biases that may stigmatize students no longer exist. Protocols for email messages are established with the student at the beginning of the course. Learning such skills sets a precedent for students who will be emailing professors or teaching assistants in regards to college or university course work. Thus, online education deals with both the “soft skills” required of students today as well as the more traditional academic skills required of all graduates. Students attending VHS respond to the quality teaching by either returning for additional courses or spreading the word to other potential students either directly or through their social media contacts.

Assessment and Evaluation

The content of each VHS course covers the specific curriculum expectations, organized in various strands, as published by the Ontario Ministry of Education for every course in grades 9 to 12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012b). Each online course is designed to properly implement the curriculum expectations using a variety of instructional strategies to help the online students achieve the curriculum expectations. Assessment is the process of gathering information from a variety of sources that accurately reflects how well the student is achieving the curriculum expectations. As part of the assessment process, VHS teachers provide students with descriptive feedback that guides their efforts towards improvement. Evaluation refers to the process of judging the quality of student work on the basis of established criteria, and assigning a value to represent that quality. Assessment and evaluation is based on the provincial curriculum expectations and the achievement levels outlined in the curriculum policy document for each discipline (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). A variety of instructional, assessment and evaluation strategies provide students with numerous and varied ways to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding while developing their thinking skills, their communication skills, and the skills to make connections with and among the various educational contexts in each course. The primary purpose of the assessment and evaluation in each online course is to improve student learning. VHS teachers realize the potential they have in the context of online education to establish good learning practices and to foster superior performance in their students. Students recognize this instinctively and often return for additional courses.

Assignments are returned to students within three to five days, more quickly than they are in secondary schools in most cases and unquestionably much faster than is the case in university settings. Students submit files, usually as Word documents, with the work being graded with “track changes.” VHS teachers are strongly encouraged to include fully detailed, comprehensive notes in their marking and to end with a concluding paragraph that begins with positive feedback and ends with recommendations on how the work might be improved. The comments must at all times be respectful and constructive. In the Desire2Learn feedback box, teachers mention a particular part of the work in the attached file to draw the student’s attention to an element of the work and

how it might be improved, which causes the student to pay attention to the instructors' suggested amendments. Student testimonials always reflect positively on the quality of the assessment and evaluation offered by VHS teachers. The days of "Good work – 85%" or "Keep trying– 55%" have never dawned on the VHS online classroom.

Conclusion

Simply replicating the elements found in conventional education into an online program—the courses, the textbooks, the office administration, and the OSSD program—pose a significant challenge for online educators. This challenge can be met by educators who are committed to involving their students in the process and practice of new methods of instruction. Creating an educational environment that allows students to feel that they are in control of their own education is, agreed, a much more challenging endeavor. Attempting to treat all students as individuals, placing them at the center of their learning experience, and allowing them full control of all aspects of their schooling deviates radically from the historical "batch" manner of handling students in bricks-and-mortar schools. Innovative thinking among teachers, subject coordinators, forward-thinking administrators and design personnel makes this approach entirely feasible and enjoyable for students who have already adopted the new technologies which deliver concepts in innovative ways. With this new, wider approach to student-centered learning, VHS course activities provide a high quality learning experience for international students. By focusing on the specific educational needs of international students and students closer to home as well, effective online education provides direct intervention to meet students' needs in meaningful ways. Judging from the increasing number of registrations of international and North American students, VHS is succeeding in its goal of reaching out to national and international students and in providing learning that is as new and as creative as the technologies that are integral to the lives of younger learners around the world today.

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3.4 Importing K–12 Online Learning into Canada

Claudine Townley—Florida Virtual School

Florida Virtual School (FLVS®) is an established leader in developing and providing virtual Kindergarten–12th grade education solutions to students across the globe. A nationally recognized e-learning model in the United States, FLVS was founded in 1997 and was the country's first statewide Internet-based public high school. In 2000, the Florida Legislature established FLVS as an independent educational entity with a gubernatorial-appointed board.

A fully accredited, award-winning program, FLVS provides virtual solutions to all 67 Florida school districts, 50 states, and 57 countries. FLVS serves Kindergarten–12 public, private, charter and home school students and offers more than 110 online courses, including core academics, Learning Recovery®, electives, world languages, honors and Advanced Placement®. The core course curriculum is approved by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and all courses meet or exceed Florida Sunshine State and National Standards. Within the state of Florida, FLVS is funded only when a student successfully completes a course, and all courses are provided without a cost to the student.

Recognized as a national leader and pioneer for quality online learning and education reforms, FLVS sets itself apart from other schools and online providers through its instructional model and course content. FLVS delivers flexibility and personalized instruction to all FLVS students and is able to present a variety of custom solutions for schools and districts to meet students' needs. Courses feature integrated game-based content and mobile applications and include learning experiences away from the computer as well as online. Students exercise 21st century skills as they collaborate with one another and communicate with teachers regularly via phone, email, online chats, instant messaging, discussion forums, webcams, texting, and social networking sites.

All FLVS instructors are certified in the subject matter they teach. Instructors work one-on-one to personalize each student's learning experience. Although instructors' office times vary, they are accessible to students and parents daily from 8 am to 8 pm, seven days a week. Instructors receive ongoing training and professional development by the country's online learning experts. FLVS's instructional staff includes more than 125 National Board Certified teachers.

Florida Virtual Global Services was also created in the 2000 Florida state legislative session, answering a call for a separate division within Florida Virtual School to serve needs outside of Florida. As a not-for-profit institution now known as FLVS Global, these revenues are reinvested in FLVS, earmarked for research and development, in order to maintain the highest quality courses and products available to benefit students everywhere. FLVS Global maintains clients in many different

states and countries around the world, including Canada. Within Canada specifically, there has been a fair amount of interest in FLVS products and services over the last ten years, but not much of the interest has actually converted to sales.

Although much of the international business for FLVS Global has centered on tuition, Canada has enrolled fewer than ten students over the past six years in Global School, FLVS's tuition school for students outside of Florida. All of the students enrolled from Canada have come from either private schools (e.g., St. Mildred's Lightbourn and Southridge) or have been homeschooled students.

FLVS's work in Canada has been primarily in two areas—content sales and professional development. Although the number of sales has not been high, the relationships have been positive and rewarding. Most of the sales have been to distance learning groups and consortia. Back in 2007, BCEd Online purchased FLVS's Teaching Online 101 professional development course. This was one of FLVS's first Canadian sales. Most recently, FLVS Global has worked with Alberta Distance Learning Centre, in partnership with Pearson Canada, on a purchase of three high school Spanish courses. However, Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre in Winnipeg has, by far, been FLVS's biggest Canadian customer. Manitoba has purchased nine courses over the past three years for use in their own learning management system. The Manitoba team also traveled to Orlando to the FLVS headquarters to attend Virtual Leadership Training, a two-day intensive workshop on best practices in setting up and maintaining a virtual or blended program. The *Conseil Des Ecoles Fransaskoises* also attended Virtual Leadership Training and purchased a follow up webinar for their school. Finally, *Consortium d'apprentissage virtuel de langue française de l'Ontario* also purchased a professional development training webinar.

In summary, FLVS's experiences with Canada may seem somewhat limited, but all of the interactions have been positive, and there has been a great working relationship for more than a decade. As far back as May of 2000, FLVS received the Canadian Association for Distance Education (CADE²) Award of Excellence; this was the first time a CADE award was presented to an organization outside of Canada. Most recently, FLVS has been partnering with the Calgary-based eDynamic Learning to bring more electives and more choices to students both inside and outside of Florida. FLVS is looking forward to continued partnerships with the various schools, consortia, education groups, and businesses within Canada in order to share the FLVS vision of transforming education worldwide—one student at a time.

2 In 2007, CADE joined with the Association for Media and Technology in Education in Canada (AMTEC) to form the Canadian Network for Innovation in Education (CNIE).



3.5 The Development of Graduate Certificate in Online Teaching and Learning

**Michelle Harrison, Instructional Designer and Instructor,
Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning Division**

The Graduate Certificate in Online Teaching and Learning (EDDL) at Thompson Rivers University (TRU), Open Learning is designed to provide K–12 teachers, post-secondary instructors and trainers with the technical and pedagogical expertise needed to effectively use educational technology in the classroom and in online and distributed learning environments. The “Distributed Learning Standards” for K–12 in British Columbia were first developed in 2006 in response to the growth of distributed learning programs in British Columbia, and from the recognition that teachers moving to distributed learning and online environments needed to develop new skills and become aware of best practices in order to successfully make the transition from face-to-face to distributed learning environments.

In response, School District 73 approached TRU Open Learning, (formerly the British Columbia Open University) to jointly develop a professional development program for teachers at the Kamloops Open Online Learning school (@KOOL). The team at the new Open Learning division at TRU had proven expertise in developing distributed learning courses and programs. A collaborative project emerged that saw members of the Instructional Design Group (IDG) at TRU Open Learning work with colleagues from @KOOL to develop a pilot course that included both face-to-face and online learning components. The course was launched through a two-day institute called “Tech It Up” that included both K–12 and post-secondary teachers from around the province of British Columbia. Participants were then invited to participate in the pilot course, which continued throughout the fall semester. Because of the success of this pilot course and the encouragement of its participants, further collaboration was encouraged. An advisory group, including K–12 teachers, TRU faculty and administration was established to develop four more courses to create a post-baccalaureate certificate in online teaching and learning.

The initial course was titled “Introduction to Distributed Learning.” Participants explored the realm of distributed learning through discussion about learning theory and pedagogy in online environments, consideration and application of technological tools to enhance the learning environment, and examination and design of assessment strategies. The course format was an online seminar, supplemented with face-to-face meetings that modeled the development of learning communities and social learning practices. Participants were directed to readings about current issues, best practices and theories around distributed learning and were also encouraged to explore areas of their own interest that applied to their practice. When a revised version of the course was subsequently offered online through TRU’s Open Learning Division, the audience widened to include post-secondary instructors, instructional designers and other educators in addition to the K–12 teachers.

The spirit of this initial course was carried over into the development of the certificate program. To encourage a wide audience, the courses were designed for learners who were or would be teaching in an online environment or who wanted to more effectively use educational technologies in their face-to-face or blended classrooms. The overall program planning ensured that the criteria and standards identified by the International Society for Technology in Education³, International Association for K–12 Online Learning⁴, and the *Standards for K–12 Distributed Learning in British Columbia*⁵ (2006 version, updated in 2010) were met and covered in the curriculum.

The delivery method moved from a blended version to fully online, to ensure flexible and broad access to educators from across the country. Open, accessible and widely available technological tools were chosen that could then be used within a broad context. A traditional learning management system was not adopted, as it was expected that learners would want continued access to their course materials and projects once they were no longer TRU-OL students. This also provided an opportunity to model best practices in the utilization of these tools for students' use in their own respective contexts.

In the course, a variety of Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, wikis and others (synchronous and asynchronous) are used to organize course materials. Students are encouraged to explore and use a variety of technologies as they complete activities and projects. Each course culminates in a major project that requires learners to create a relevant, personalized teaching unit and multi-media development or plan, underpinned by the theories and tools explored in the course.

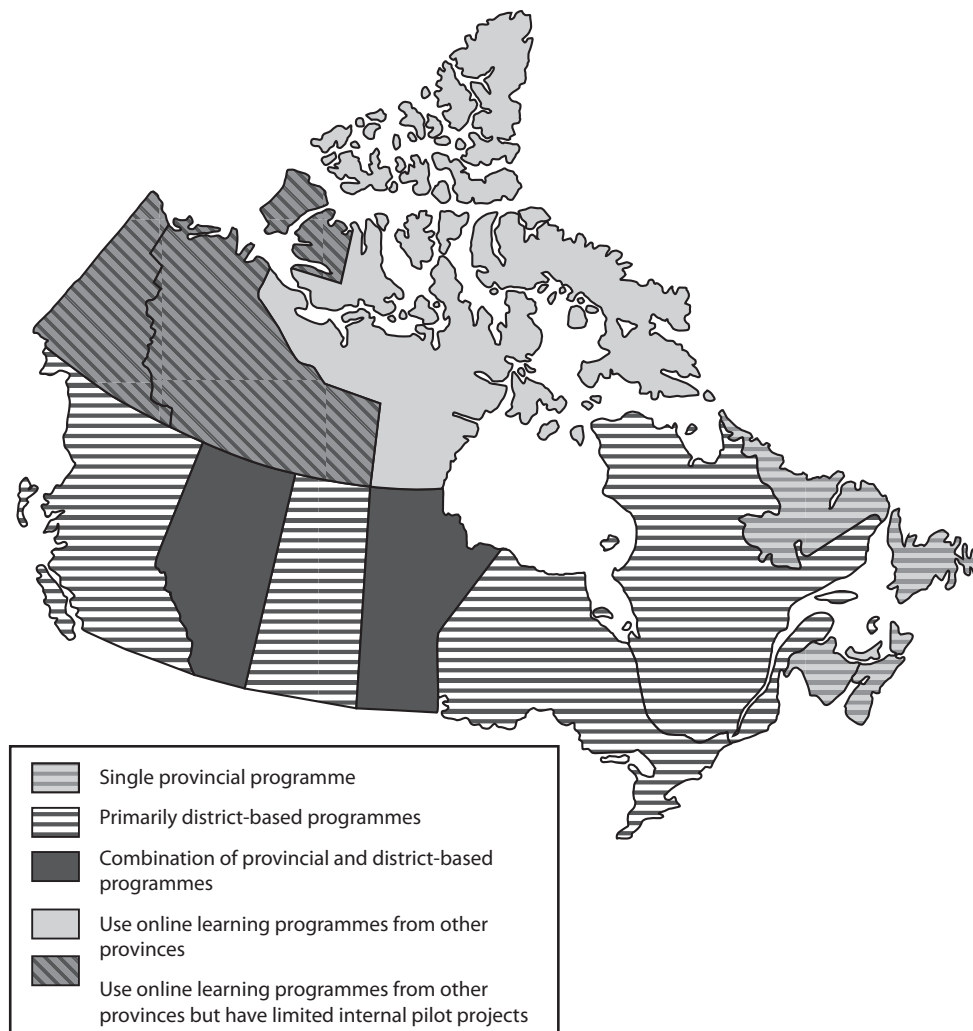
There are currently five courses in the certificate. In the initial planning, approval for the Category Five Plus designation from the British Columbia Teacher Qualification Service (TQS) for a planned 10 course (i.e., 30 credits) diploma was sought and gained from the British Columbia College of Teachers. This option isn't currently available, but with the development of five further courses, teachers in British Columbia could attain a 5+ designation. Current students are both from the K–12 and post-secondary sectors, and are participating from all regions in Canada. The course design has been successful in integrating and building on the expertise that each of these specialists contribute and the resulting learning environment is rich and diverse. The certificate can be completed in a year and continues to provide participants with expanded instructional skills, hands-on experience using current technological tools, modeled best practices, and experience learning and sharing in a community focused online environment.

3 <http://www.iste.org>

4 <http://inacol.org>

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

4. National Overview



At present, there is some level of K–12 distance education in all thirteen provinces and territories. The highest level of activity continues to be in British Columbia, where there is a substantial number of district-based and regional-based public programs, along with a significant number of independent or private programs. Ontario and Saskatchewan have similar arrangements where the majority of programs are district-based (although there appears to be a high level of cooperation between these programs in both provinces). The only jurisdictions that continue to maintain single province-wide systems are Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia; while

Quebec, Manitoba, and Alberta all continue to operate both district-based and province-wide programs. The only jurisdictions that do not have their own K–12 distance education programs are Prince Edward Island and Nunavut, both of which rely upon programs from other provinces. The Yukon and the Northwest Territories also rely upon distance education programs in other provinces. However, these jurisdictions also have small distance education initiatives of their own.

At present, the total K–12 population in Canada for 2011–12 was just over five million students. Based on actual and estimated enrolment data, the number of student engaged in K–12 distance education was 245,252.

Table 3. Summary of the K–12 distance education regulation by province and territory

Province/Territory	# of K–12 students	# enrolled in distance education	Percent involvement
Newfoundland & Labrador	67,933	~1,000	1.5%
Nova Scotia	125,540	~2,550	2.0%
Prince Edward Island	21,037	71	<1%
New Brunswick	102,579	2,235	2.1%
Quebec	1,003,138	~30,000	3.0%
Ontario	2,061,390	~49,500	2.6%
Manitoba	195,152	9,126	4.7%
Saskatchewan	159,465	2,516	1.6%
Alberta	614,757	69,126	11.2%
British Columbia	641,592	78,650	12.3%
Yukon	5,230	82	1.6%
Northwest Territories	8,509	367	4.3%
Nunavut	8,902	29	<1%
Total	5,015,224	245,252	4.9%

It is interesting to note that the level of participation in only one province and one territory actually decreased during the 2011–12 school year from the previous 2010–11 school year. However, because of the substantial levels of growth in some provinces, such as Alberta, the overall proportion of K–12 students involved in distance education actually grew from an estimated range of 4.2% in 2010–11 to 4.9% in 2011–12.

Beyond the level of K–12 distance education activity in each province and territory, a wide range of variability continues in the source and nature of regulation in K–12 distance education across Canada.

Table 4. Summary of the K–12 distance education regulation by province and territory

Province/Territory	Type of Regulation	Nature of Regulation
Newfoundland & Labrador	None	
Nova Scotia	Collective agreement	Provisions related to workload, professional development, and quality of life issues
Prince Edward Island	Ministerial directive	Guidelines for the use of distance education
New Brunswick	Ministerial handbook	Outlines responsibilities for distance education stakeholders at all levels
Quebec	None	
Ontario	Ministerial contract	District school boards agree to follow the policies outlined in the <i>Provincial E-Learning Strategy</i>
Manitoba	Legislation and Ministerial handbooks	Minister of Education can approve distance education / Regulations related to the use of the Ministry distance education options
Saskatchewan	None	
Alberta	Legislation and annual policy document	Minister of Education can make regulations related to distance education / Regulations primarily focus on amount of instructional time
British Columbia	Legislation and Ministerial contracts	Substantial regulations related to funding, quality, and almost all other aspects of the delivery of distributed learning
Yukon	Legislation and memorandums of understanding	Minister of Education can approve distance education and charge student fees for such courses / Individual agreements between the territorial government and individual distance learning providers
Northwest Territories	Legislation, policy handbook and memorandums of understanding	Allows education authorities to create or engage in distance education programs / Provides series of requirements for distance education programs / Individual agreements between the territorial government and individual distance learning providers
Nunavut	Legislation and memorandums of understanding	Defines what constitutes distance education / Individual agreements between the territorial government and individual distance learning providers

While many provinces and territories have some reference to distance education in the *Education Act* or *Schools Act* in most instances this reference simply defines distance education or gives the Minister of Education in that province or territory the ability to create, approve or regulate K–12 distance education. In many of the jurisdictions where this occurs there are no additional regulations. The other common trend with the regulation of K–12 distance education is the use of contracts or policy handbooks. These tools tend to be used in jurisdictions where schools or school districts are participating in some form of province-wide program offered, administered or paid for by a specific government department or agency. It is also worth noting that much of the regulation of distance education in Canada’s three territories can be found in the specific memorandums of understanding that the territorial governments have signed with individual distance education programs in British Columbia or Alberta.

The two exceptions to these general trends are Nova Scotia and British Columbia. In Nova Scotia the main regulation of distance education can be found in the collective agreement signed between the Government of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. As was described in greater detail in the Nova Scotia profile found in the 2010 *State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada* report, the contract between the Government and teachers’ union contains 11 provisions that focus on teacher certification, workload issues, definition of a school day for distance education, school-based supervision and administration of distance education students, distance education class size, professional development, and governance (see Barbour, 2010, pp. 31–32). British Columbia continues to have the highest level of regulation for K–12 distance education of any Canadian jurisdiction. Some of the key features of this regulation include—but aren’t limited to—the devolution for the responsibility of distance education to the schools and school boards, a system that allows students to freely choose any distance education option and a funding model where the funding follows that student’s choice (as described by a brief issue paper in Barbour [2011], see pages 25–27), and both a quantitative and qualitative system for quality assurance (as described by a brief issue paper in Barbour [2010], see pages 20–24). Whether it is the amount or the nature of regulation in British Columbia, the specific regulations in place likely speak to the fact that British Columbia also continues to have the most students and the highest proportion of K–12 students engaged in distance education.



4.1 Newfoundland and Labrador

Population – 514,536

Total Area – 405,212 km²

Population Density – 1.26 people/km²

Capital (Population) – St. John's (106,172)

Number of K–12 Schools – 268 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Students – 67,933 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Distance Education Programmes – 1

Number of K–12 Distance Education Students – ~1,000

K–12 Distance Education Policy – None

Distance Programs

K–12 distance education was introduced to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador with a province-wide audiographics program in 1988–89. Beginning in 2000–01, this program was replaced by the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI). The CDLI offers approximately 38 courses (including six courses delivered in French to the province's French-first language students); during 2011–12 there were 1658 enrolments.

Governance and Regulation

There is no language in the *Education Act* related to K–12 distance education. There are also no policies or regulations specifically related to K–12 distance education within the Ministry of Education beyond those utilized by the CDLI itself. The CDLI is not a separate school or entity; rather it operates within the Primary, Elementary and Secondary Branch of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry continues to track the method of delivery that students use to complete their studies and these data are available through the *K–12 School Profile System*.

Interprovincial and International

The CDLI, as the e-learning unit for the Ministry of Education, failed to respond to repeated requests for the information to complete this section.



4.2 Nova Scotia

Population – 921,727

Total Area – 55,283 km²

Population Density – 16.67 people/km²

Capital (Population) – Halifax (390,096)

Number of K–12 Schools – 414 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Students – 125,540 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Distance Education Programs – 2

Number of K–12 Distance Education Students – ~2550

K–12 Distance Education Policy – Teachers’ Provincial Agreement

Distance Programs

Since April 2011, and effective for the September 2011–12 academic year, the structure of offering online high school courses in Nova Scotia has changed significantly to a provincial level program. At present, the Department of Education—through a co-operative management board structure—is offering online courses through the Nova Scotia Virtual School (NSVS). Formerly, the NSVS was a registration portal, whereas now it provides a full range of services including:

- A centralized learning content management system
- Video conferencing
- Interactive objects, video streaming/downloading and other multimedia resources
- Training and support for online teachers
- Professional development and resources for classroom teachers, technical support, etc.

Beginning with the 2011–12 school year, if a student wishes to enrol in a course through the NSVS, that student should be registered in a high school in Nova Scotia and should also have space in his or her schedule for the course(s) in question.

Prior to this change, individual school boards around the province offered online courses, with some funding provided to support students from one school board enrolled in courses in another school board. With this change, the online courses are offered by the NSVS with teachers employed by individual school boards, but working within a co-operative structure. This updated model is fully funded through the Department of Education to support approximately 650 students in their learning regardless of their geographic location within Nova Scotia. Additionally, the *Conseil scolaire acadien provincial* (CSAP)—the pan-provincial school board for French first language students—is using a range of resources now available to them in the province (e.g., the provincial Moodle platform, are an active member of the NSVS Management Board, etc.); as well as having a sharing arrangement for online programming from the Province of New Brunswick.

The Department of Education also continues to maintain a correspondence study program (CSP) with approximately 1800 students enrolled, approximately half of whom attend a public school; the other half are adult students or live outside of the province.

Governance and Regulation

Distance education continues to be governed by the agreement between the Government of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. In particular, there are 11 provisions that focus on teacher certification and quality of life issues (e.g., defining the work day, professional development requirements, program oversight, and class size) related to the unique environment of distance education teaching.

Interprovincial and International

Any online course from an online program outside of the province taken by a student in Nova Scotia would be reviewed at the school or board level, to determine if an equivalent course exists.

Unless a student is registered in a public school in Nova Scotia, that student is not eligible to take an online course through the NSVS. If an adult student within the province or a student from outside of Nova Scotia were interested in taking a distance education course from a program located in Nova Scotia, the student would be directed to the province's CSP. For out-of-province students who successfully complete courses through the CSP, the Ministry will issue a completion certificate and send a transcript to schools as requested.

Vignette: Guy Aucoin, Nova Scotia Virtual School

Guy Aucoin has been the Instructional Lead of the Nova Scotia Virtual School (NSVS) for the last two years. NSVS is a common provincial online learning platform created as a joint project between provincial school boards and the Department of Education in Nova Scotia. It currently offers 45 different courses to students across the province of Nova Scotia.

As Instructional Lead, Guy works closely with the online teachers in NSVS to ensure that the courses delivered through this system follow the Online Standards approved by the NSVS Management Board in cooperation with the Nova Scotia Department of Education. He also encourages teachers to ensure that students are actively engaged and that they use a variety of media, to allow them to demonstrate their understanding of the concepts in their courses. Developing fair and accurate assessment plans for these courses is also part of what Guy discusses with the online teachers.

Guy has been teaching online courses for the last seven years. Math courses (i.e., Calculus, Pre-Calculus), Film and Video and Entrepreneurship are some of the courses that Guy has taught online. He has also been involved in developing courses to be taught through NSVS.

The courses at NSVS provide students with the opportunity to work in an environment that has both synchronous and asynchronous components. Through *Moodle*, the students have access to their lessons. *Moodle* also allows them to submit their work and participate in different learning activities (e.g., quiz, forum, wiki, etc.). For the synchronous component, the online teacher meets with the students at least once a week through an online video-conferencing system. The online teachers also offer office hours throughout the week using the video-



conferencing system. Students drop in to the virtual office to share work, get feedback and ask questions.

As an online teacher, Guy has been able to see students work with course content in a way similar to a classroom setting, but at times in a unique fashion. Self-motivated students seem to thrive in an online environment, as they are able to work at a pace that suits their needs and ability.

Taking an online course can also help solve some of the issues that might arise because of different circumstances. For example, last year Guy had a Calculus student who had been chosen to participate in the National Science Fair. This student would have missed one week of school to partake in this activity. Because the student knew well in advance that she would be involved in this activity, the flexibility of online learning allowed her to complete her work and still participate in this national event. Guy strongly believes that online courses help develop skills such as communication, personal development, problem solving and technological competencies. These skills will aid students as they continue their studies at the post secondary level, or as they venture into the job market.



4.3 Prince Edward Island

Population – 140,204

Total Area – 5684 km²

Population Density – 24.67 people/km²

Capital (Population) – Charlottetown (34,562)

Number of K–12 Schools – 63 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Students – 21,037 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Distance Education Programs – 0

Number of K–12 Distance Education Students – 71

K–12 Distance Education Policy – Ministerial directives

Distance Programs

K–12 distance education in Prince Edward Island is provided through an inter-provincial agreement with the New Brunswick Ministry of Education. During the 2011–12 school year there were 29 French first language students and 42 English-language students enrolled in 13 online courses through this program. Since the inception of the *State of the Nation* reports, the Prince Edward Island video conferencing distance education program has been declining. For example, during the 2010–11 school year there were two students enrolled in a single course offered through this system. There was no video conferencing activity in 2011–12.

Governance and Regulation

There is no mention of distance education in the provincial *Schools Act*. Internal regulation continues to be driven by Ministerial Directives No. MD 2001–05 and No. MD 2008–05, which apply to courses delivered during the regular school day, broadly define distance education, and outline a series of beliefs about the nature of distance education instruction. Individual schools and districts that participate in distance education programs must adhere to guidelines found in the provincial *Roles and Responsibilities for Distance Education* document.

Interprovincial and International

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development approves distance courses by correlating outcomes found in online programs to those found in the Prince Edward Island authorized curriculum documents. Students must apply to enrol in approved courses, in advance, through their school principal. Students completing online programs are awarded the Prince Edward Island equivalent course on their school mark transcripts.

As Prince Edward Island does not offer any distance education programs of its own, students from other jurisdictions are unable to enrol in their courses to receive credit.



4.4 New Brunswick

Population – 751,171
Total Area – 72,908 km²
Population Density – 10.30 people/km²
Capital (Population) – Fredericton (56,224)
Number of K–12 Schools – 317 (2011–12)
Number of K–12 Students – 102,579 (2011–12)
Number of K–12 Distance Education Programs – 2
Number of K–12 Distance Education Students – 2235⁵
K–12 Distance Education Policy – Distributed Learning Policy Handbook

Distance Programs

New Brunswick continues to operate two distance education programmes out of the Ministry of Education: one for the Anglophone school system and one for the Francophone school system. Both programs utilize the Ministry-hosted learning management system (LMS). The majority of distance education enrolments in the province are from supplemental students (i.e., students enrolled in a bricks-and-mortar school who are taking one or more courses at a distance), with fewer than 10 students enrolled in distance education on a full-time basis. During the 2011–12 school year there were 2235 enrolments in distance education, 650 of which were in the Francophone system. The Ministry also allows classroom teachers to use online courses with their face-to-face students. These students comprise approximately 45% of the enrolments in the provincial LMS, and are not included in the official distance education enrolment figure.

Governance and Regulation

The K–12 distance education system in New Brunswick operates based on collaboration between the Ministry of Education and individual school districts, and a Ministry published policy handbook (i.e., *Login to e-Learning: Distributed Learning Policy Handbook*). The policy handbook outlines in a very specific fashion the responsibilities of a variety of individuals at the Ministry, district and school level to ensure the orderly implementation of the distance education program. Like many provinces, New Brunswick is currently revising the Ministry’s policy handbook to reflect changes in technology and delivery models, as well as to clarify the roles and responsibilities for each group in its target audience.

While not a specific regulation, the Ministry has begun to encourage teachers of mandatory courses (i.e., courses required for graduation) to enrol in an online professional development version of the course when an online option exists for that course. The goal of this program is to provide these teachers with additional support materials, as well as to provide the Ministry with additional feedback on those specific online courses.

⁶ This represents the number of student enrolments and not necessarily the number of students.

Interprovincial and International

While the graduation requirements for the province are currently under review, in order for a student in New Brunswick to receive credit for a course taken from an online program in another province or territory the student would first have had to enrol in the course in New Brunswick and have been unsuccessful. In these instances, this online course would be considered an independent study course. Students can only have one independent study course count towards their graduation requirements. To date, approval to apply outside credit for a single course is infrequently sought or approved. The same process applies for a student seeking to obtain credit for a course from an online program in another country. In both cases, the curriculum for the course in question would need to be reviewed and approved (generally in advance of the student beginning the course).

In instances where a student living in another province or territory—or even another country—took a course from an online program located in New Brunswick, a transcript would be issued by the Ministry and sent to the district or school-based coordinator working with the distance education program (as outlined in the *Login to e-Learning: Distributed Learning Policy Handbook*). Whether the student receives credit for the course is determined by the individual jurisdiction where the student resides. At present, both Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island have agreements in place to allow students to receive credit for courses taken through New Brunswick’s French language distance education program. Usually, the individual group interested in this kind of arrangement examines the New Brunswick curriculum in advance to ensure that the student would get credit if the student ended up taking the course (in much the same fashion that New Brunswick reviews the curriculum of other programs before granting credit to the students who wish to take courses from other jurisdictions).



4.5 Quebec

Population – 7,903,001

Total Area – 1,542,056 km²

Population Density – 5.13 people/km²

Capital (Population) – Quebec City (516,622)

Number of K–12 Schools – 3105 (2010–11⁶)

Number of K–12 Students – 1,003,138 (2010–2011)

Number of K–12 Distance Education Programmes – 3

Number of K–12 Distance Education Students – ~30,000

K–12 Distance Education Policy – None

Distance Programs

The use of correspondence distance education has been in place in Quebec since 1946. By 1996 this program had evolved into the *Société de formation à distance des commissions scolaires du Québec* (SOFAD), a not-for-profit organization tasked with the development and production of distance learning materials that school boards utilize in their own district-based programs for adult students. During the 2010–11 school year, 25,171 students took one or more distance education courses using SOFAD materials. A second distance education program began in 1999, which expanded to include all nine English-speaking school boards in 2006. Learn provided a variety of distance learning opportunities to approximately 5300 English-language students during the 2010–11 school year. Finally, in 2002 the *Écoles éloignées en réseau* or Remote Networked Schools initiative began focusing on teacher professional development and technology integration projects (e.g., linking two or more small rural classes together through electronic means). Since June 2012, this initiative has been rebranded as simply *Écoles en réseau* or Networked Schools. Between 2010 and 2012, 218 teachers in 162 schools have connected 3000 students through using *Knowledge Forum* and other electronic tools (e.g., video conferencing and synchronous online tools).

It appears there may be other K-12 distance education programs operating in the province. For example, the Eastern Township School Board ran an online program with students who were associated with the *Cirque du Soleil* schools located in various parts of the globe (e.g., Tokyo, Rio de Janeiro, etc.). Essentially, a teacher in Quebec would connect synchronously with a teaching aide in the remote locations where the *Cirque du Soleil* were performing, and the teaching aide would assist the small number of students who were taking courses (primarily at the elementary school level). It appears that the scope of this program may be diminishing at present. Further, the *Commission scolaire Beauce-Étchemin* has developed some distance education courses to service the adult and vocational education sectors. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Education, Recreation and Sports does not collect information on any of these distance education programs, and no contact was established with representatives from either of these two initiatives.

Governance and Regulation

The Education Act in Quebec makes no reference to distance education. Since 1995 school boards have held the primary responsibility for distance education policies and regulations. In Fall 2011,

7 The statistics for the 2011–12 school year have yet to be released.

the Deputy Minister of Education tasked *Le centre facilitant la recherche et l'innovation dans les organisations, à l'aide des technologies de l'information et de la communication* (CEFRIO) with examining issues related the use of digital content and tools in K–12 schools. CEFRIO created an advisory committee, which submitted its report in June 2012 outlining recommendations on the management of digital content, the integration of digital resources, and the delivery of digital materials (including e-learning). However, late in the summer Premier Jean Charest triggered an election that was held in early September. The election of a minority *Parti Québécois* government will mean a change to the Minister of Education, which will likely have an impact on how the recommendations from this group are received and the potential course of action for the future.

Interprovincial and International

If a student living in Quebec completes a distance education course from a program located in another province or territory, provided the student has an official document (e.g., transcript) issued from the jurisdiction in question attesting to the student's successful course completion, the process is the same as for a student transferring from another jurisdiction. The student contacts the *Service d'accueil et de référence* in order to have his or her online course evaluated for equivalent units from the Quebec high school diploma. If the distance education course is from a program in another country, the process is the same but the Department of Immigration and Cultural Communities conducts the evaluation of the course.

In instances where a student living in another province or territory—or even another country—takes a course from an online program located in Quebec, the Ministry of Education does not fund the student. Distance education programs are free to charge tuition to these students. Further, in order to obtain credit for their distance education courses, non-resident students must still write in-person ministerial examinations available only in the schools of Quebec.

Vignette: LEARN

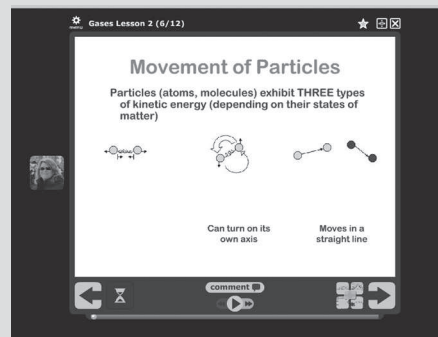


LEARN, a non-profit educational organization located in Laval, just north of Montreal, was created to address the particular needs of English Quebec and to support the educational reform in our schools. As part of its mandate, LEARN had to create new resources and design an effective way to deliver these resources to a population spread out over an immense geographical expanse. Over the past seven years, LEARN has gone on to develop asynchronous resources, along with supplementary

materials that cover the entire range of the curriculum. LEARN's website acts as the repository for over 300,000 files of educational material and licensed content that serves approximately 150,000 students and teachers.

The asynchronous course material developed by LEARN is utilized in a variety of ways which could loosely be termed blended learning. In certain cases, teachers who do not have access to print resources use online course materials in much the same way as others normally use a textbook.


Since the material is aligned with the curriculum, teachers can rely on course content, evaluation tools, and related projects for the entire course. LEARN has seen over the years that new teachers rely heavily on these resources—however, teachers who have been re-assigned to a new discipline access them as well. In other cases, there are schools that reach out to students within their jurisdiction and enrol them in courses that they are expected to complete on their own with support from the school.



Frequently, these are students anxious to complete their high school studies and who require credit recovery. All students in Quebec English schools also have direct access to the resources at home by logging into the site with a username and password provided by LEARN through their school.



In addition to the asynchronous courses and blended learning, LEARN provides daily online classes to over 300 students. These courses rely primarily on real-time delivery and incorporate exemplary pedagogy. Students access the asynchronous course material on the LEARN site and use online collaborative tools such as Voicethread to learn content at their own pace. Then, they work in their web-conferenced classrooms the next day in a collaborative fashion to apply the concepts they have learned.

	<h2 style="margin: 0;">4.6 Ontario</h2> <p>Population – 12,851,821 Total Area – 1,076,395 km² Population Density – 11.94 people/km² Capital (Population) – Toronto (2,615,060) Number of K–12 Schools – 4931 (2009–10)⁷ Number of K–12 Students – 2,061,390 (2009–10) Number of K–12 Distance Education Programs – up to 75 Number of K–12 Distance Education Students – ~49,500 K–12 Distance Education Policy – Provincial E-Learning Strategy</p>
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Distance Programs

At present, all 60 English-speaking and 12 French-speaking school boards have the ability to offer some form of K–12 distance education. Many of the school boards with more active programs have joined one or more of four consortiums:

- The Ontario eLearning Consortium (formed in 2001 and currently has 20 member school boards)
- The *Consortium d'apprentissage virtuel de langue française de l'Ontario* (created in 2009 and includes all 12 French-language schools)
- The Ontario Catholic eLearning Consortium (formed around 2009–2010 and includes all 29 Catholic school boards)
- The Northern e-Learning Consortium (formed around 2010 and currently has four members).

Additionally, TVO has the mandate from the Government of Ontario to manage the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) to provide high school credit courses, high school diploma and GED High School Equivalency Certificate opportunities to adolescent and adult students throughout the province. Finally, there are three private K–12 online learning programs: Virtual High School-Ontario, Ottawa Carleton e-School/Canada eSchool, and Keewaytinook Internet High School.

The Ministry of Education does not collect data on enrolment or completion for any of these programs. It is estimated there are approximately 25,000 students enrolled in one or more courses offered by the various distance education programs managed by the individual school boards. It is also estimated the ILC has 19,484 students enrolled in their correspondence courses. Finally, the most recent data available indicated there were approximately 5000 students enrolled in private online schools.

Governance and Regulation

There is no mention of distance education or online learning in the *Education Act* in Ontario. However, based on the feedback that the Ontario Ministry of Education received from school boards, the *Provincial E-Learning Strategy* was launched in February 2006. The French component of the *Stratégie, d'apprentissage électronique Ontario*, was launched in September 2007. As part of

⁸ Data on the total number of K–12 schools and K–12 students for the past two school years is unavailable.

this vision, the Ministry is responsible for providing school boards with various supports necessary to provide students with e-learning opportunities, as well as providing e-learning leadership within the provincially funded school system. School boards are responsible for the delivery of e-learning, including program direction, hiring staff, registering students, teaching students and granting credits. School boards participating in the provincial e-learning strategy have access to a provincially licensed learning management system (LMS), Ontario Educational Resource Bank, E-Community Ontario, and Seat Reservation System. In June 2011 the Ministry announced further supports for the provincial e-learning strategy, including the ability of school boards to use the LMS tools for blended learning. It is anticipated that over the next three years 500,000 students from kindergarten to grade 12 will be able to access the LMS.

To support school boards with the implementation of e-learning programs, as well as the use of Ministry-provided digital resources, the Ministry has provided funding for one e-Learning Contact (eLC) per board for the 2011–12 and 2012–13 school year school year. The purpose of the eLC position will be to ensure that there is coordination and leadership in boards for the implementation of the provincial e-learning strategy.

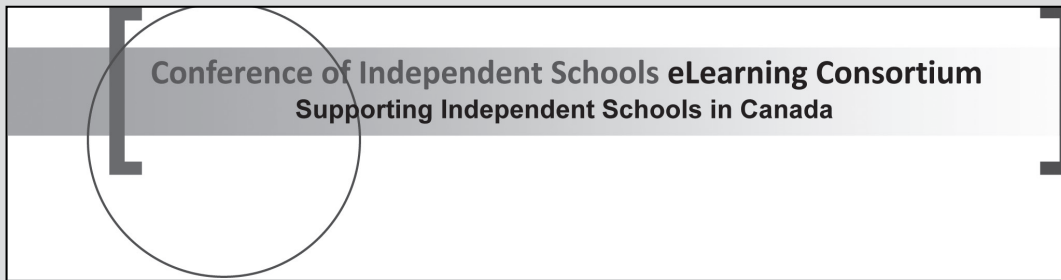
As part of the provincial e-learning strategy, students may enrol in an e-learning course that is offered by another board provided they do so through their home school. In such a situation, the applicability of provincially established fees for students taking e-learning courses from a school of another school board shall be worked out locally between the two boards. Where it is agreed that fees are appropriate, the fee is the amount established by the Ministry. For 2012–13 the fee is \$720. Students enrolled in e-learning courses will not be charged any fees, including fees for registration, materials, or administration. The Ministry covers the students' costs when the board places these students on the appropriate funding register.

Interprovincial and International

A student registered in an Ontario school who takes a course from an online program in another province, territory or country, is able to receive recognition for the learning through the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) challenge process. Under this policy, students have their skills and knowledge evaluated against the overall expectations outlined in the appropriate provincial curriculum policy document in order to earn a credit towards their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). PLAR procedures are carried out under the direction of the school principal, who grants the credit. Students may be granted a maximum of four credits through the PLAR challenge process.

Ontario's publicly funded school boards may offer online programs to students living outside of Ontario provided they do not use the provincial LMS. A credit is granted in recognition for the successful completion of a course that has been scheduled for a minimum of 110 hours. Credits are granted by a principal on behalf of the Minister of Education for courses that have been developed or approved by the ministry. For the purpose of granting a credit, scheduled time is defined as the time during which students participate in planned learning activities designed to lead to the achievement of the curriculum expectations of a course.

Vignette: The Conference of Independent Schools eLearning Consortium (CISELC)



The Conference of Independent Schools eLearning Consortium (CISELC) is a cooperative not-for-profit organization in Canada mandated to deliver quality online curriculum for the benefit of students in K–12 member independent schools. Beginning in 2008, as an offshoot of the Conference of Independent Schools Ontario, the CISELC is now an independent organization with a Board of Directors and 16 member schools, who have worked together to formulate this model. Our schools recognize that eLearning must be embedded in our learning environment to continue to maintain our innovative edge in teaching and learning, and to provide our students with the experience and skills they need to be successful today and in the future.

The CISELC uses the Blackboard Learning Management System 9.1 and Blackboard Collaborate Virtual Classroom, Instant Messaging and Voice Tools. Courses are group paced, highly interactive with many group activities, and actively use synchronous tools as well as asynchronous course material. One unique component is that each school provides the teachers who create and deliver the courses that are managed through the central organization. In addition, each school provides a site administrator, the “feet on the ground” so to speak, who supports students and provides a liaison between students, teachers and the Director. In this way, there is a unique “culture of care” in supporting students as they learn to use the new technology and pedagogies.

Partnerships are at the core of our organization, and an important partner is the University of Ontario Institute of Technology. All CISELC teachers must take a 125-hour Ontario College of Teacher Additional Qualifications course (AQ): Teaching and Learning with E-Learning, in conjunction with the Faculty of Education at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology,

where they learn to both develop and deliver exemplary online curriculum. Presently offering more than 27 Ontario Credit, Advanced Placement and summer school courses, the CISELC is also actively developing online modules (blended course components) for students in grades 4–8.



Collaboration is key to the success of CISELC, with member school academic heads, teachers, site administrators and information technology support staff meeting virtually and regularly throughout the school year on Blackboard to set policy, define curriculum and structure support networks for students and teachers.



4.7 Manitoba

Population – 1,208,268

Total Area – 649,950 km²

Population Density – 1.876 people/km²

Capital (Population) – Winnipeg (663,617)

Number of K–12 Schools – 746 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Students – 195,152 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Distance Education Programs – 38⁸

Number of K–12 Distance Education Students – ~9126⁹

K–12 Distance Education Policy – None

Distance Programs

Distance learners in Manitoba continue to be supported with three options: Independent Study Option (ISO); Teacher Mediated Option (TMO); and Web-Based Course (WBC) Option. The Ministry of Education is directly responsible for the ISO distance education option, which provides school-age and adult learners access to print-based distance learning courses from grades 9 to 12. Approximately 130 schools registered students in one or more ISO course throughout the school year. The Ministry works with a consortium of school divisions to offer the TMO program, which provides school-age and adult learners access to grades 9 through 12 print-based distance learning courses supplemented with audio teleconference classes hosted by a teacher at scheduled times during the school day. The WBC Option provides schools and teachers access to the online courses developed by Manitoba Education, along with use of the provincial LMS, to manage their own online or blended learning programs. During the 2011–12 school year there were 2710 enrolments for ISO, 416 for TMO, and approximately 6000 students for WBC. Overall, there were about 9126 distance education enrolments.

Governance and Regulation

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. Manitoba Education has issued other regulatory and policy documents, along with handbooks for each of the three distance learning options. The Ministry has been in the process of reviewing policies related to distance learning that were originally written in 2000 for the past three years to ensure they better reflect the current situation in Manitoba. Finally, the Ministry has also been exploring options to support the formation of a virtual collegiate(s) in the province.

Interprovincial and International

If a student in Manitoba enrolls in a course offered by an online program in another province or territory, it is up to the individual school administrators to assign “Out-of-Province” credits for the course(s) that have an equivalent in Manitoba or courses that have no Manitoba equivalent (for example, locally developed curricula). This is the same process used for students who attend

⁹ In theory, each school division is participating in one or more of the Ministry’s options.

¹⁰ This represents the number of student enrolments and not necessarily the number of students..

a bricks-and-mortar school out of province and then move to Manitoba. Where the school administrator accepts the transfer, they use the designation “S” for “Standing” to report credits granted in the place of a percentage mark. In other words, achievement in Out of Province courses cannot be used to calculate an average, etc. Any transfer of credit is at the school administrator’s discretion. This process applies to any out-of-province courses—regardless if it is another jurisdiction in Canada or internationally.

Under current regulations Manitoba schools cannot deliver any online courses to students in other jurisdictions for credit. Schools can offer a course to an out-of-province or out-of-country student, but cannot issue Manitoba standing (i.e., credit) to an out-of-province or out-of-country student. Students must be registered in a Manitoba school to earn Manitoba credit(s).



4.8 Saskatchewan

Population – 1,033,381

Total Area – 651,900 km²

Population Density – 1.59 people/km²

Capital (Population) – Regina (193,100)

Number of K–12 Schools – 861¹⁰ (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Students – 184,828 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Distance Education Programmes – up to 28

Number of K–12 Distance Education Students – 2516

K–12 Distance Education Policy – None

Distance Programs

In 2009-10 the Ministry of Education devolved the responsibility for distance education to the school divisions. It is not known how many of the 28 school divisions operate and/or participate in some sort of distance education program. The Saskatchewan Distance Learning Course Repository lists 16 participating programs as offering courses or spaces to students outside of their own program. However, at least one of the programs listed did not provide any distance education during the 2011–12 school year, so it is unknown how accurate that information. During the 2011–12 school year there were 3293 course enrolments from 2516 distinct students.

While the Ministry of Education still tracks the number of students and enrolments in courses offered at a distance as a part of their provincial data collection strategy, the Ministry failed to respond to repeated requests for information for this study. During the 2010–11 school year there were 4497 course enrolments from 3285 distinct students.

Governance and Regulation

The only reference to distance education in the *Education Act* is related to the Technology Supported Revolving Fund, which indicates that it is to be used “to provide educational courses to all areas of Saskatchewan through the use of distance-education technology.” This section is no longer relevant with the devolution of distance education services from the Ministry.

Interprovincial and International

If a student in Saskatchewan were to enrol in an online course from another province or country, the credits would be assessed for equivalency. If there was an equivalency with a Saskatchewan course, the student would be given a Standing Granted credit on their Saskatchewan Transcript for the purpose of enabling completion of grade 12, but no mark would be given. The Standing Granted designation is only given for courses that have been completed and successfully passed. The specific content of the course is not examined. The Credit Transfer Guide outlines equivalencies that have been recognized for courses in other Canadian jurisdictions.

It is Government policy that Saskatchewan schools are not permitted to offer distance courses to students outside the province except in specific situations. For example, where students have lived in Saskatchewan but are now temporarily out of the province, those students are able to register for distance courses while they are away.

¹¹ This includes 771 provincial schools and an additional 90 First Nations schools.

Vignette: Credenda Virtual High School



Credenda Virtual High School is a First Nations online school that uses *Blackboard Collaborate* to deliver primarily synchronous learning. In 2005 Credenda had a modest start with 55 students; it has since grown to accommodate approximately 500 eStudents over the school year. Our school is projecting in excess of 670 students from around the Province of Saskatchewan for 2012–2013, both First Nations and Non-First Nations. Credenda’s approach to online learning involves a team effort that provides built-in supports for eStudents in such areas as:

- eTeacher daily instruction and encouragement
- Easy access to technical support and help desk personnel
- Guidance counseling services, and
- Administrative supports combined with the on-site teacher interaction for moral support and accountability.

eStudents have regularly scheduled classes daily in an online classroom setting with their eTeacher. Each course is structured with a common template for achieving learning outcomes, which is hosted on our servers with our learning management system, *Desire2Learn*®.

Each individual teacher’s experiences are unique and will vary depending on the level of interaction teachers insist upon with their eStudents. However, it should be said that it takes a very special teacher to teach online. It is not a matter of transferring regular bricks-and-mortar pedagogy into an online setting. Credenda eTeachers say this is the hardest they have worked in years, because it requires so much more preparation for their daily classes. The challenge is engagement. In the face-to-face setting, a teacher can observe whether a student has his or her head on the desk and is taking a snooze, but online a student may log on and be doing other things. That is why the on-site teacher is so critical to ensure students are on task. Credenda requires participating First Nations schools to have a site teacher, who is a qualified teacher that supervises or monitors students when they are taking their online courses from Credenda. Additionally, eTeachers ask more questions of their eStudents to determine whether an eStudent is listening and involved in the class. They use a lot of online Web 2.0 resources for student assignments. eTeachers spend a great deal of time following up with students. If an eStudent is absent, he or she is referred to the Principal and Guidance Counselor, who follow up with the eStudent and on-site eTeacher.

In 2012–2013 Credenda is expanding to offer the Credenda Online Extension Program (C.O.E.P.) to First Nations schools. This program will allow the schools to use their own teachers, on their schedules, to deliver Credenda programming. Credenda will provide licences, resources, materials, professional development and on-site training for community-based teachers. Credenda ‘lead teachers’ will provide ongoing support and students will have full access to all the Credenda resources.

Many eStudents have commented that Credenda is a school that cares for students. The school motto is “Be the Change You Want to See” and, as such, Credenda organizes charity drives and offers a Social Responsibility course for free, as well as a Leadership course. The school feels that equipping students academically is very important, but equally as important is equipping them for life. So Credenda gets involved in their lives and reaches out to students struggling with personal issues and tries to provide the supports they need. Academically, Credenda has high expectations that are outcome-driven. To achieve these outcomes, Credenda utilizes a mastery learning approach. The school also has monthly eStudent Assemblies where they feature a career opportunity and connect it with online learning outcomes. The intent is to make learning meaningful.



4.9 Alberta

Population – 3,645,257

Total Area – 661,848 km²

Population Density – 5.51 people/km²

Capital (Population) – Edmonton (812,201)

Number of K–12 Schools – 2166 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Students – 614,757 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Distance Education Programs – 21

Number of K–12 Distance Education Students – 69,126

K–12 Distance Education Policy – None

Distance Programs

At present there is a single province-wide program administered by the Pembina Hills Regional School Division, the Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC). ADLC offers courses in a variety of formats (e.g., print, online, and blended formats), and also manages the Vista Virtual School and partners with *Centre francophone d'éducation à distance*. In 2011–12, the ADLC had 46,424 secondary students, 5111 elementary/junior high, and approximately 2700 fee-paying adult learners enrol in one or more distance courses.

In addition to this province-wide program, there are also 19 district-based programs supported by the various public and Catholic school districts in the province. These district-based programs accounted for an additional 14,341 students. Finally, there is an Aboriginal focused online school—SunChild E-Learning Community, which enrolled 550 students.

Governance and Regulation

At present, the School Act grants the Minister of Education the authority to make regulations with respect to public and private distance education program. The Ministry has yet to exert that authority beyond outlining some specific requirements primarily related to the amount of required instructional time as a part of their annual *Guide to Education*. Over the past five years, there have been several consultation initiatives with respect to distance learning in the province. The first began in 2007 when the Ministry of Education reviewed K–12 distance education with the goal of developing a *Distributed Learning Strategy*. While there was a broad consultation process (including 1774 responses to an online survey, 60 interviews, 28 focus groups, and 21 site visits), that initiative appeared to be subsumed into a subsequent larger initiative.

The *Inspiring Action on Education* initiative began in June 2010, with the release outlining the policy directions within the broader context of provincial government strategies and initiatives aimed at building a stronger future for Alberta. The report aimed to provide a framework for systematic discussion of the vision, values, principles and policy directions for transforming Alberta's education system. Public feedback occurred from June to October, followed by a series of Ministry-generated reports in December summarizing the responses.

This past April (2012) the Government introduced *Bill 2: Education Act* that did not specifically mention distance or distributed learning programs, but included in its preamble:

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta recognizes the importance of enabling high quality and socially engaging learning opportunities with flexible timing and pacing through a range of learning environments to meet diverse student needs and to maximize student success;

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta is committed to providing choice to students in education programs and methods of learning. (p. 12)

While this was not an indication that the Government plans to increase the amount of online and blended learning that is occurring in the province, Alberta is the only province to have legislation that authorizes the operation of charter schools and the only province where K–12 distance education is growing in the absence of any real regulation or governance of the delivery model.

Earlier this year, Alberta Education contracted Schmidt and Carbol Consulting Group to conduct a province-wide review of distance education programs and services. The review, which was initiated because of a pending renewal of the educational services agreement concerning the ADLC between the Ministry and Pembina Hills Regional Division, will examine various service, governance and funding models for distance education and provide recommendations to ensure that distance education in the future reflects the vision set out in *Inspiring Action on Education*.

The review began in April 2012 and will conclude in January 2014.

Interprovincial and International

If a student takes a course from another province, territory, or country the student will receive a report card from the school authority providing the course. If the student wishes to receive credit for the course the process for applying to receive transfer credit is described in the “Awarding Course Credits” section of the *Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12*.

It is the expectation of the Ministry of Education that school authorities will focus on providing programming to Alberta students and out-of-province students who physically come to Alberta to learn. Alberta Education does not provide funding for out-of-province students unless they are residents of Alberta and maintain a home in Alberta with the intention of returning to the province. It is the practice of the Ministry to not provide services to students in other countries without a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two governments. Alberta has established a number of MOUs, enabling the establishment of accredited out-of-province schools that use Alberta’s programs of study and have Alberta certificated teachers. In examining the list of international schools currently approved, none appear to provide distance education service.

Vignette: Sunchild E-learning Community



The Sunchild E-learning Community program has seen course completion rates for Aboriginal students of greater than 70% and graduation rates of greater than 80% in each of its 12 years of operations—this compared to graduation rates of less than 4% and course completion rates of less than 20% in northern Alberta public school divisions. The Sunchild E-learning

Community program was developed from a “passion to dramatically improve education through Aboriginal people’s inclusion and participation into Alberta’s and Canada’s economy.”

Sunchild was started in 2000 to address the inexcusable graduation rates of Aboriginal students exposed to the traditional “colonial school” model of education. Utilizing the “Sunchild Model” of education delivery, Sunchild delivers educational services to over 20 First Nation community programs from Inuvik in the North West Territories to Piikani First Nation in southern Alberta and many nations between these two locations. Sunchild has been recognized by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) for graduating more First Nation on reserve students than all other First Nation programs in Alberta combined.



The Sunchild program began with some 10 courses in the year 2000 to now offering over 80 academic and co-curricular programs, all of which are accredited with Alberta Education towards a high school diploma. Additionally, Sunchild offers post-secondary options through partnering with a variety of post-secondary institutions.

Sunchild is an Alberta-approved private school led by a team of educators with proven leadership skills and driven by a pedagogically

successful model of education. The Sunchild program has been recognized provincially, nationally and internationally for its value to society. Recently, it has been recognized as a ‘Changemaker’ with the Ashoka foundation as the “*top project or for student retention from across Canada*” for the Changemakers Initiative. Also, Martin Sacher, CEO of Sunchild, was awarded by SITE for his outstanding service to ‘Digital Equity.’



We provide 100% live student–teacher interactive teaching sessions, all of which are recorded for easy access and to replay and review concepts. Mount Royal University studied our e-learning model and has determined several key elements in our design and model of e-learning that make the Sunchild model a gold standard for Aboriginal education.



4.10 British Columbia

Population – 4,400,057

Total Area – 944,735 km²

Population Density – 4.66 people/km²

Capital (Population) – Victoria (80,017)

Number of K–12 Schools – 1949 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Students – 641,592 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Distance Education Programmes – 73

Number of K–12 Distance Education Students – 78,650¹¹

K–12 Distance Education Policy – School Act, Independent School Act, Distributed Learning Policy

Distance Programs

In 2011–12 there were 55 district level public distributed learning schools and 18 independent (or private) distributed learning schools that enrolled approximately 78,000 unique students in one or more courses in British Columbia. LearnNowBC continues to serve as a web portal and single point of entry to information about distributed learning for students, parents and educators in the province. Additionally, Open School BC provides provincial content and online hosting services on a cost-recovery model to Boards without the capacity or desire to manage their own.

Governance and Regulation

The distributed learning landscape in British Columbia has remained relatively stable over the past year. The legislative language in section 3.1 and section 75 (4.1) of the *School Act, 2006*, as well as section 8.1 of the *Independent School Act, 2006*, still govern the operation of distributed learning programs. Both pieces of legislation contain similar language concerning the establishment of distributed learning schools “only with the prior agreement of the minister.” As such, these agreements between the Ministry and the school districts or independent schools serve as the main governance documents for distributed learning in British Columbia. In addition to these agreements, the Ministry also has a series of policy documents that outline the regulations that distributed learning schools must follow (for public school regulations see:

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/dist_learning/ and for independent school regulations see:

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

One regulatory change that has occurred focuses on altering the way that graduated adults are provided services under the province’s Education Guarantee (see http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/graduation/adult_courses.htm). Graduated adults enrolled in distance education after May 2012 may select courses from a specified list of funded courses. As well, the enrolling district receives a portion of the funding upon enrolment and the remainder upon completion of the course. Prior to May 2012, distributed learning schools received full enrolment funding for graduated adults taking any provincial or approved local course.

¹¹ Due to a mid-year recalculation of distributed learning enrolments, the 2010–11 enrolment figure reported last year (88,000) has been revised. The actual number of students enrolled was 77,053 students.

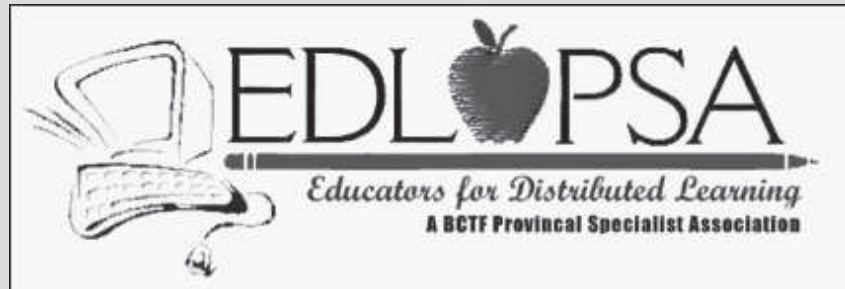
Another legislative change that may take effect during the 2012–13 school year is a provision in Bill 36 (see http://www.leg.bc.ca/39th4th/1st_read/gov36-1.htm) that provides flexible learning choices for all students. One issue that will still need to be resolved is whether this will provide flexibility to the extent that any student may enrol in any course from any provider (including interprovincial and international offerings), and this issue will be part of the consultation the Ministry will be undertaking in the coming year.

Interprovincial and International

If a student in British Columbia took a course from an online program in another province or territory, or even in another country, the student would present him/herself at a neighbourhood or distributed learning school and request either equivalency for a credential earned in another jurisdiction, or permission to challenge a course for credit based on prior learning or experience. The Ministry's policy is to allow each school to have their own procedures to guide this process.

At present, there is only one school district business company (i.e., SD73 Business Company) that has an agreement with the Ministry to offer distributed learning content to non-resident students. The Business Company, is owned by the district but operates at an arms-length and is not able to grant British Columbia credits at this time. A non-resident student who completes a course through the SD73 Business Company would have to go through the process of receiving credit for the student's course based on the guidelines established in the student's own jurisdiction. Additionally, there are a few distributed learning programs that have specific agreements in place to serve students in a given jurisdiction. For example, the Northern British Columbia Distance Education School can serve students in the Yukon by special arrangement. The Yukon Department of Education is responsible for recognizing those credits (although the Yukon does follow the British Columbia K–12 curriculum).

Vignette: Educators for Distributed Learning (Provincial Specialists Association of the British Columbia Teachers Federation)



Within the British Columbia K–12 educational system, Provincial Specialist Associations (PSAs) are designed to represent the interests of teachers in the public educational system. These PSAs are supported by the British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF) through providing grants and administrative support to run conferences and publish PSA journals. The British Columbia Educators for Distributed Learning (EDL) PSA supports the professional development of educators working in the challenging field of online learning. The EDL PSA is one of 32 Provincial Specialists Associations.

Teachers working in the new and ever-changing teaching environment of distributed learning face challenges that were not recognized a decade ago. “Working conditions” and “class size” are terms best reserved for the regular classroom teacher. As the number of students taking online courses continues to increase, the question of what constitutes an appropriate class size for a distributed learning teacher needs to be answered. This is but one example of an issue that the EDL PSA might choose to address with its members.

The EDL PSA is working closely with the research department at the BCTF to try and resolve issues related to student composition for distributed learning educators. Through surveys, focus groups and the analysis of data, two particular trends have been identified to date.

First, the online course delivery model has an impact on the way that teacher-student interaction occurs. Second, the experience and training of the online teacher plays an important role in the teaching of the course. On this second trend, there are some who hold the opinion that any teacher can teach an online course, while others will argue a distributed learning teacher should have advanced training in some aspect of distributed learning. There is also the rise of blended learning, which further confounds the issue.

To assist our colleagues in the distributed learning environment, the EDL PSA provides distributed learning teachers with the opportunity to dialogue with their peers through its website. There are links to other discussion groups in the “Virtual World of Education.” As another example of the services provided by the EDL PSA, this fall the association is planning to provide a mentorship program for teachers new to teaching online courses. Additionally, there is financial support available for teachers wanting to attend distributed learning conferences and workshops.

The British Columbia EDL PSA is open to all educators, largely based on the belief that within the next decade teaching an online course or supporting students enrolled in an online course will be the norm and not the exception.



4.11 Yukon

Population – 33,897

Total Area – 482,443 km²

Population Density – 0.07 people/km²

Capital (Population) – Whitehorse (23,276)

Number of K–12 Schools – 28 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Students – 5230 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Distance Education Programmes – 1

Number of K–12 Distance Education Students – 82

K–12 Distance Education Policy – Memorandums of Understanding

Distance Programs

The Yukon Territory has maintained a territory-wide video conferencing program since 2004. During the 2011–12 school year, there was one Physics 12 course offered through this video conferencing program for two students from one community school. This was a decrease from the previous year, when there were 15 students enrolled. In addition, the Government of the Yukon continues to maintain agreements with a variety of course content providers in British Columbia and Alberta. During the 2011–12 school year there were 80 students enrolled in one or more of 48 different courses for a total of 113 course enrolments in authorized programs.

Governance and Regulation

The *Education Act, 2002* authorizes the Minister of Education to provide distance education courses and charge fees for students to access those courses. However, since 2003 a Ministry regulation has provided these distributed learning courses at no cost to students up to the age of 21. In instances where students are enrolled in distributed learning courses from programs outside of the Yukon Territory, those programs continue to be governed by the individual Memorandums of Understanding signed by the Government and the specific distributed learning program.

Interprovincial and International

Students in the Yukon are able to take distance education courses from other jurisdictions. However, the territorial government will only fund those courses offered by authorized providers. Students who take courses from non-authorized providers can have the course evaluated for equivalent courses in the Yukon (i.e., British Columbia) program of study. If the academic requirements were met an equivalent credit would be assigned to the student. This process is the same one that is followed when a student transfers from another province or territory.

Students from outside of the Yukon are not eligible to enrol in the territory's video conferencing distance education program.



4.12 Northwest Territories

Population – 41,462
Total Area – 1,346,106 km²
Population Density – 0.03 people/km²
Capital (Population) – Yellowknife (19,234)
Number of K–12 Schools – 49 (2011–12)
Number of K–12 Students – 8509 (2011–12)
Number of K–12 Distance Education Programmes – 1
Number of K–12 Distance Education Students – 367
K–12 Distance Education Policy – Senior Secondary School Administrators’ Handbook and Memorandums of Understanding

Distance Programs

Traditionally, the Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC) has been the distance education program authorized by the Northwest Territories. Since 2010, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment does not require district education authorities to report specific data on distance education course enrolments or completions. In examining the ADLC enrolment data, 285 students from the Northwest Territories enrolled in 404 distinct distance education courses offered through the ADLC. The ADLC also partners with *Centre francophone d'éducation à distance*; through this partnership an additional 57 students have access to distance education.

Some of the individual education councils representing more remote communities have begun to create their own distance education programs. For example, the Beaufort-Delta Education Council offered 18 courses to 25 students. In its second year of operation during the 2010–11 school year, the Beaufort-Delta Education Council offered seven courses to 36 students.

Governance and Regulation

In 2004, the Department signed a *Memorandum of Understanding* (MOU) with the ADLC to establish a partnership to provide print-based and online courses to students in the territory. The MOU outlines the specific responsibilities, duties and opportunities for both parties. However, the *Education Act, 2009* allows various educational bodies to “authorize, supervise and evaluate the use of distance learning programs in the provision of the education program” (p. 72). Further, there was a departmental decision in 2010 to cease funding ADLC enrolments or successful completions. Finally, Section 17 of the Senior Secondary School Administrators’ Handbook outlines a series of requirements for distance learning.

Interprovincial and International

If a student in the Northwest Territories were to take a distance education course from other any provider in the Province of Alberta it would be accepted by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, as the territories follow the Alberta curriculum. However, if the student were to complete a distance education course from any other jurisdiction, it would have to be evaluated by a “Special Cases” committee before credit could be granted.

Students from outside of the Northwest Territories are not eligible to enrol in the territories’ distance education programs.

Vignette: The Beaufort Delta Education Council Distance Education Program

Andrew Samoil, IT Teacher Consultant, Beaufort Delta Education Council

Like many workers here in the north I wear many hats and this is but one. We are excited about our new \$110 million dollar high school and it is taking a great deal of my time to get ready for Monday classes.

During the 2009–10 school year, the Beaufort Delta Education Council began offering distance education to students under the age of 21 who live in the Beaufort Delta administrative district of the Northwest Territories. By 2010–11, the program had grown to include seven courses that were offered to 36 students in three different communities. This past year the number of available courses has more than doubled to 18 individual courses, with 25 students enrolled in those courses—keeping our three full-time distance education teachers busy.



The Beaufort Delta Education Council will continue with a newly revised online learning program for the 2012–13 school year. The e-Learning Program will now be administered and taught from the new East Three High School in Inuvik. In partnership with the Ministry of

Education and Northwest Telephones, the Beaufort Delta Education Council Centre for Distance Education Excellence will serve the remote communities of Aklavik, Tuktoyaktuk and Fort McPherson with planned capacity for expansion to other schools in the district, and in the future to other school districts in the NWT.

Focusing on academic Sciences, Mathematics and English Language Arts the Centre will offer synchronous hybrid (face-to-face and online) courses along with asynchronous online-only courses to high school students. Enhanced Internet connections provided by NorthwTel has expanded the capacity and quality of experience students expect in online, synchronous courses. Telephone and videoconferencing equipment will be used in conjunction with the Moodle (Learning Management System), Mahara (electronic portfolios), and Kaltura (streaming media) servers depending on bandwidth restrictions to the remote communities. Teachers will use Blackboard Collaborate for web presentations.

Three full-time teachers and a computer technician are provided for the program along with part-time administration from Central Office.



4.13 Nunavut

Population – 31,906

Total Area – 2,093,190 km²

Population Density – 0.015 people/km²

Capital (Population) – Iqaluit (6,699)

Number of K–12 Schools – 43 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Students – 8902 (2011–12)

Number of K–12 Distance Education Programmes – 0

Number of K–12 Distance Education Students – Estimated at 29¹²

K–12 Distance Education Policy – None

Distance Programs

Nunavut does not have any active K–12 distance education programs. However, the territory has conducted pilot projects in the past and has plans for future projects at the high school level. For example, the Curriculum and School Services division has the capability through a Media Centre connected to high school classrooms to offer videoconferencing when bandwidth services are sufficient. Staffing of a position to coordinate distance education is currently underway. Further, a new K–6 Information Communication Technology Curriculum, which integrates learning technology skills into regular curricula is being completed. Finally, a new senior high options program in Information Technology, Communications and Media is also being implemented in 2013–14, which should prepare graduates for work in technology-related careers.

The Alberta Distance Learning Center (ADLC) continues to provide the majority of distance learning (i.e., primarily print-based) courses to Nunavut secondary students. In examining the ADLC enrolment data, 29 students from Nunavut were enrolled in distance education courses, at least through ADLC—suggesting that there are most likely no Nunavut students involved in distance education at all. At present, the monitoring of such enrolments occurs at the school and regional level, so that data may simply not be reported. The Department is currently working on a new information system that would capture this kind of enrolment information.

Governance and Regulation

Initially, Nunavut continued to use the *Education Act, 1996*; a piece of legacy legislation from the Northwest Territories. This was updated when the Nunavut legislative body passed the *Education Act, 2008*. The only reference to distance education is a statement that a university providing “distance learning programs by mail or by electronic means from outside Nunavut to persons in Nunavut” was not considered to be operating in the territory (p. 95). All other regulation is based on the territorial agreements signed with individual distance education programs authorized to operate in Nunavut.

¹² This figure represents the number of enrolments and not the number of students enrolled (as some students may have registered for more than one course).

Interprovincial and International

If a student in Nunavut wished to receive credit for a course taken from an online program in another province or territory, the process would vary depending on where the online program is located. If the online program is located in Alberta, the list of specific transfer credits is available in advance and specific equivalencies are automatically granted (i.e., due to the fact that the Nunavut senior secondary core program is linked to the Alberta course curriculum). If the online program is located in another province or territory, the school principal would request the curricular information from the jurisdiction from which the course originates. Where the online course can be shown to be equivalent to an existing credit course contained in the *CMEC Student Transfer Guide*, this guide can facilitate credit transfer. Finally, using online programs from a jurisdiction other than Alberta would require Ministerial approval. The same process would occur if the online program was located in another country.

As Nunavut does not offer any distance education programs of its own, students from other jurisdictions are unable to enrol in their courses to receive credit.

5. Individual Programs

In addition to the provincial and territorial profiles, this year the *State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada* study sought to undertake a comprehensive survey of all of the K–12 distance education programs in Canada. After an exhaustive web-based search and discussions with Ministry of Education officials and other key stakeholders, a list of 240 individual programs or jurisdictions offering K–12 distance education was compiled (see Table 5 for a summary of the programs/ jurisdictions by province and territory).

Table 5. Summary of the number of K–12 distance education programs/jurisdictions

Province/Territory	Number of Programs	Response(s)	Response Rate
Newfoundland & Labrador	1	0	0%
Nova Scotia	3	2	66%
Prince Edward Island	0	-	-
New Brunswick	2	2	100%
Quebec	3	3	100%
Ontario	77*	8	10%
Manitoba	38*	3	8%
Saskatchewan	16*	2	13%
Alberta	23	3	13%
British Columbia	75	9	12%
Yukon	1	1	100%
Northwest Territories	1	1	100%
Nunavut	0	-	-
<i>Total</i>	240	34	14%

* Estimated number of programs

Contact individuals for these programs were sent a survey to obtain some general information about each program and its level of activity for the 2010–11 and 2011–12 school years (see Appendix B for a copy of this survey). The survey was initially sent during the month of July and re-sent several times in August and early September. This was followed by telephone calls on one to three occasions to try and elicit a response. As Table 2 indicates, the overall response rate was quite low.

There are several challenges with the data collection for the individual program survey. The first of these challenges is the time of year. Once sponsors for this study are in place and ethics approval has been received, schools have already closed for the summer. Furthermore, the first weeks of a new school year are not an ideal time for data collection within the K–12 environment.

The second challenge is focused on the ability to actually contact individuals in many of these programs. While there are 16 different programs that offer K–12 distance education courses through the Saskatchewan Distance Education Course Repository, only four of those programs offer any means to contact them electronically on their websites. All 70 educational authorities in Ontario have the ability to offer distance education through e-Learning Ontario, and e-Learning Ontario provides funding to hire one eLearning Contact (eLC) per board. However, when asked for the names and contact information of these eLCs, e-Learning Ontario did not respond to the request. Further, none of the four consortiums representing e-learning programs in Ontario were willing to share these contacts. The Ministry of Education in Manitoba provides a list of names and e-mails for those responsible for implementing the province’s web-based course option in each of the 38 school divisions. Unfortunately, 10% of these e-mail addresses were invalid.

A third challenge is simply determining what jurisdictions are actually offering K–12 distance education. If there is inconclusive information on distance education offerings that has not been included in this study, then the reported response results may be skewed. As noted above, all 70 educational authorities in Ontario have the ability to offer distance education. However, of the 36 educational authorities that responded to this survey in 2011, nine of these 36 authorities reported having no e-learning activity at all. Similarly, while the Ministry of Education in Manitoba lists contacts for 38 school divisions, there is no guarantee that all 38 are utilizing distance education or that districts aren’t co-operating on distance education initiatives. For example, both the Pembina Trails School Division and St. James-Assiniboia School Division receive distance education courses from InformNet.

Acknowledging these limitations, the following sections provide some basic information about each of the K–12 distance education programs that responded. These sections are divided into the various Canadian regions, and include a small commentary about each region.

5.1 Atlantic Canada



Atlantic Canada is the smallest geographic region of Canada, with each of the four provinces being among the smallest in the country. Atlantic Canada is also the only region where there are still strong provincial programs—with New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador having only a province-wide program; and Prince Edward Island utilizing the province-wide distance education program from New Brunswick.

As the province-wide initiatives in these provinces are managed directly by the individual Ministries of Education, there is little legislative oversight in place to govern K–12 distance education. However, three of these four provinces have some form of regulatory regime in place (with Newfoundland and Labrador being the only province without significant regulations).

With the exception of the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation and the *École virtuelle du Conseil scolaire acadien provincial*, all of the distance education programs in Atlantic Canada participated in this individual program survey.

Table 6. Description of the K–12 distance education programs in Atlantic Canada for 2010–11

Programs	Medium	Students	Teachers	Courses
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR				
No programs participated				
NOVA SCOTIA				
Nova Scotia Virtual School (http://nsvs.ednet.ns.ca/)	Online	547	7 ¹	26
Nova Scotia Correspondence Study Program (http://csp.ednet.ns.ca)	Correspondence	1623 ²	3 ³	41
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND				
No distance education program				
NEW BRUNSWICK				
New Brunswick – Anglophone (http://nbvhs.nbed.nb.ca)	Online	1585	12 full time 3 part time	38 / ~50 ⁴
New Brunswick – Francophone	Online	650	9	21

¹ While the Nova Scotia Department of Education funded seven full-time teaching positions, the individual school boards employed those teachers.

² As the Nova Scotia Correspondence Study Program utilizes an open enrolment policy, this represents the enrolments from June 30, 2011 to September 1, 2012.

³ The Nova Scotia Correspondence Study Program utilizes markers on an as-needed basis.

⁴ There were 38 courses offered at a distance. However, there were approximately 50 courses that had online content available for face-to-face teachers to use in a blended fashion.

5.2 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—approximately 20 million people, or roughly 60% of the country’s population (in only about one 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 1200km corridor running along the southern portions of both provinces, which connects two ends of one of the main routes of the Via Rail passenger service. The corridor is the most densely populated and heavily industrialized region of Canada. The remainder of both provinces—the northern portions—are less populated and face many of the educational challenges one would expect in rural areas.

While Quebec has three distance education programs that are all provincial in scope, Ontario is comprised of district-based initiatives (although most of the districts have joined one or more consortiums to allow for regional or provincial cooperation). All three of the distance education programs in Quebec participated in the individual program study, while very few programs in Ontario responded to the survey.

Table 7. Description of the K–12 distance education programs in Central Canada for 2010–11

Programs	Medium	Students	Teachers	Courses
QUEBEC				
Écoles en réseau / Networked Schools (http://www.eer.qc.ca)	Online	~3000 ¹	218	Complete QC curriculum
Société de formation à distance des commissions scolaires du Québec (http://www.sofad.qc.ca)	Correspondence	25,171 ²	³	365
Learn Virtual School (http://www.learnquebec.ca)	Online	300 DE ~5000 tutoring ⁴	9 full-time 8 part-time	11 DE 17 tutoring
ONTARIO				
Avon Maitland District eLearning Centre (http://www.amdec.ca)	Online	1645	24	76
Independent Learning Centre (http://www.ilc.org)	Online Audio-graphics Correspondence	19,484	36 developers 55 markers	125
Keewaytinook Internet High School (http://www.kihs.knet.ca)	Online	221	18 full-time	57
Nimbus Christian Education	Online	⁵		
Quinte Adult Education eLearning Program (http://www.quinteadulteducation.ca)	Online	1041	10 part-time	45
Virtual High School (http://www.virtualhighschool.com)	Online	3836	60	68
Virtual Learning Centre (http://www.virtuallearning.ca) / OpenSchool (http://www.openschoolontario.ca)	Online	2800	60	150
Waterloo Region District School Board – E-Learning Program (http://www.wrdsb.ca/programs/secondary-school-information/e-learning)	Online	2061	35 part-time (mainly)	60 offered 38 ran

¹ This data represents both the 2010–11 and 2011–12 school years.

² This is data for the 2010–11 school year. Data for the 2011–12 will not be available until late autumn or early winter.

³ There is no program-wide data available because individual participating school boards hire teachers.

⁴ There are also 130,000 enrolments in the LMS for the asynchronous resources.

⁵ Their online program only began September 2012

5.3 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. However, 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 have had strong centralized K–12 distance education initiatives. However, both British Columbia and Saskatchewan have moved to a decentralized approach, while Alberta and Manitoba also have significant district-based activity.

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 most comprehensive system to manage K–12 distance education. Both Manitoba and Alberta are currently engaged in consultation processes designed to establish new policies to govern K–12 distance education in their jurisdictions. Since the devolution of distance education to the districts, Saskatchewan has not been involved in regulating distance education.

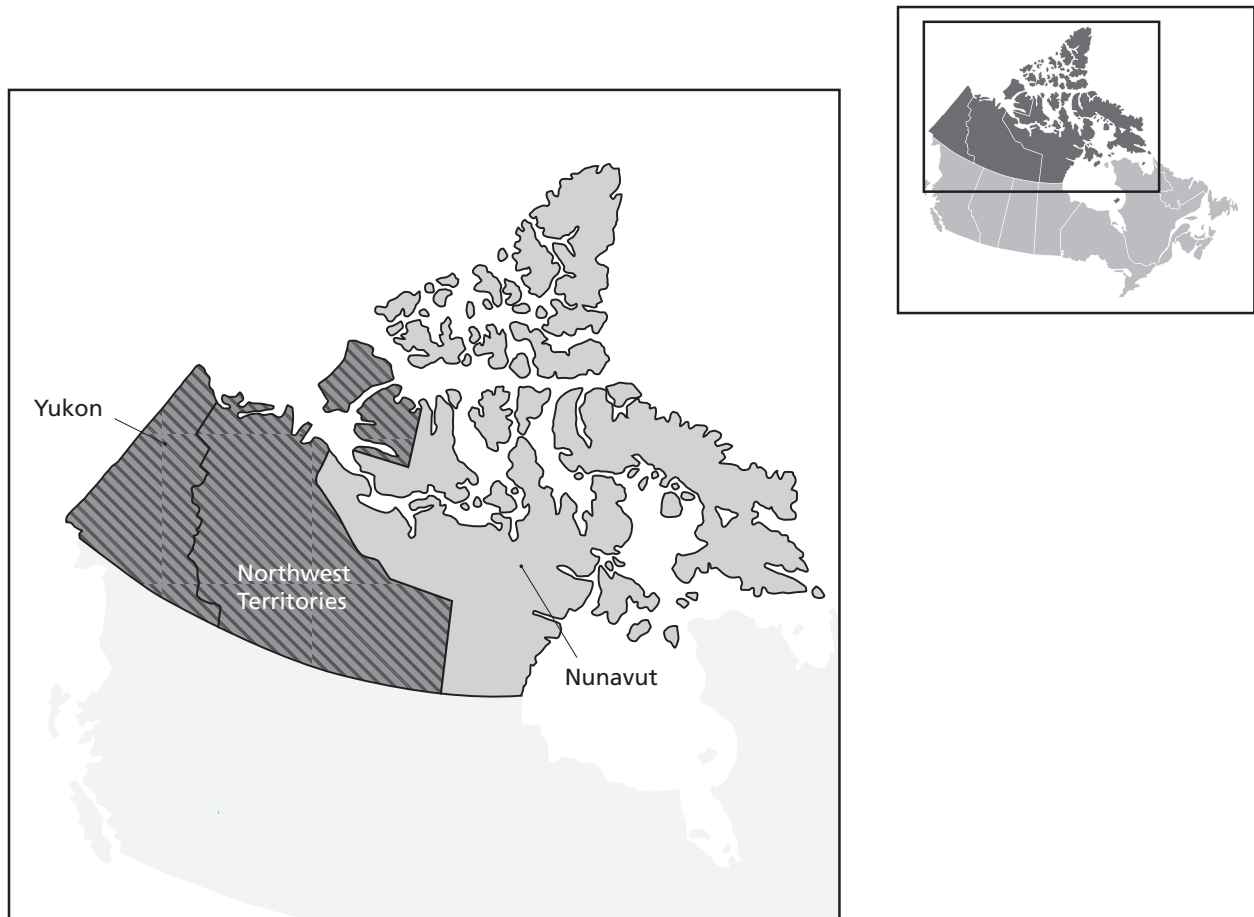
The response rate from distance education programs in all four Western Canadian provinces was quite low. The response rate from British Columbia is particularly disappointing, as it has both the highest proportion of K–12 distance education programs and participation levels. Last year it was acknowledged that the low response rate from the public programs was likely due to a teacher job action occurring in British Columbia where teachers were electing not to perform some non-contract duties, which placed an additional workload on administrators. However, that does not explain the lack of participation in this year's survey.

Table 8. Description of the K–12 distance education programs in Western Canada for 2010–11

Programs	Medium	Students	Teachers	Courses
MANITOBA				
Garden Valley School Division	Correspondence	5	0	2
InForm Net (http://www.informnet.mb.ca/)	Online	2500	24 part-time	40
Southwest Horizon Video Conference (http://moodle.shmb.ca:8888/moodle22/)	Video Conference Online	150	12	12
SASKATCHEWAN				
Saskatoon Catholic Cyber School (http://www.scs.sk.ca/cyber)	Online	1631	26 part-time 3 full-time	49
Sun West Distance Learning Centre (http://www.sunwestsd.ca/distancelearning)	Online Correspondence Instructional TV	850	7	36
ALBERTA				
Alberta Distance Learning Centre (http://www.adlc.ca)	Online Correspondence Blended	46,242, secondary 5111 elementary ~2700 adults	71 secondary 16 elementary	217 secondary 35 junior high 30 elementary
NorthStar Academy Canada (http://www.northstaracademycanada.org/index.html)	Online	127	9	87
Sunchild E-Learning Community (http://www.sccyber.net)	Online	550	8	80
BRITISH COLUMBIA				
Abbotsford Virtual School (http://www.avs34.com/)	Online Correspondence	1800	14 full time 9 part-time additional contract teachers	48 secondary (online) 14 secondary (correspondence) 8 elementary (correspondence)
Burnaby Online Program (http://on-line.sd41.bc.ca)	Online Correspondence	1400 supplemental 225 full time	16	55 secondary 8 elementary
EBUS Academy (http://www.ebus.ca)	Online Correspondence	2500	25	45 secondary 8 elementary
Fraser Valley Distance Education School (http://www.fvdes.com)	Online Correspondence Instructional TV	3500 (~1000 FTE)	32	~70

Programs	Medium	Students	Teachers	Courses
BRITISH COLUMBIA				
Heritage Christian Schools (http://www.onlineschool.ca ; http://www.bconlineschool.ca ; http://www.icos.ca)	Online Correspondence Blended	3699 supplemental 1865 full time 1500 international	130	120
Northern BC Distance Education School (http://www.des.prn.bc.ca)	Online Correspondence	800-1000	9	110 secondary full K-7 program
Rocky Mountain Distributed Learning School (http://getsmartbc.ca)	Online Blended	450	8	47
South Island Distance Education School (http://www.sides.ca)	Online Correspondence	1087	41	104 secondary 20 junior high full K-7 program
Traditional Learning Academy Online (http://www.schoolathome.ca)	Online Correspondence	914	52	100+

5.4 Northern Canada



The Northern Canada region is geographically the largest in Canada; in fact, it includes about 40% of the total landmass of the country. However, less than 1% of the total population of Canada resides 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 utilize 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 for all three territories to make use of K–12 distance education programs located in the provinces with which they share a curriculum. All three territorial governments possess or have attempted their own home grown distance education programs. In the map above, the striped colouring of both the Yukon and the Northwest Territories denotes that home grown programs are currently operating in those jurisdictions.

Additionally, it is important to note that the territorial governments are 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.

All of the distance education programs based in Northern Canada participated in this individual program survey.

Table 9. Description of the K–12 distance education programs in Northern Canada for 2010–11

Programs	Medium	Students	Teachers	Courses
YUKON				
Yukon Education Video Conference Program	Video Conference	2	1	1
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES				
Beaufort-Delta Education Council E-Learning (http://moodle.bdec.nt.ca)	Online	25	3 full-time	18
NUNAVUT				
No distance education program				

6. Resources

Newfoundland and Labrador

Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation
<http://www.cdli.ca>

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia Virtual School
<http://nsvs.ednet.ns.ca/>

Correspondence Study Program
<http://csp.ednet.ns.ca/>

New Brunswick

New Brunswick Distributed Learning Programme
<http://nbvhs.nbed.nb.ca>

Quebec

Learn
<http://www.learnquebec.ca/en/index.html>

Société de formation à distance des commissions scolaires du Québec (SOFAD)
<http://www.sofad.qc.ca/>

Écoles en réseau / Networked Schools
<http://www.eer.qc.ca/>

Ontario

e-Learning Ontario – Ministry of Education
<http://www.elearningontario.ca/>

Ontario Education Resource Bank
<http://resources.elearningontario.ca/>

Ontario eLearning Consortium
<http://oelc.ca/>

Ontario Catholic e-Learning Consortium
<http://sites.google.com/site/ontariocatholicelc/home>

Northern eLearning Consortium
<http://sites.google.com/site/2010nelc/>

Consortium d'apprentissage virtuel de langue française de l'Ontario
<http://www.apprentissageenligne.org/>

Virtual High School (Ontario)
<https://www.virtualhighschool.com/>

Keewaytinook Internet High School

<http://www.kihs.knet.ca/>

Conference of Independent Schools eLearning Consortium

<http://www.cisclc.com/>

Manitoba

Independent Study Option

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

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>

Alberta

Alberta Education – Online Learning Programs

<http://education.alberta.ca/resources/onlineprograms.aspx>

British Columbia

Ministry of Education, Distributed Learning

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

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

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

LearnNowBC

<http://www.learnnowbc.ca>

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8. Appendix A: Ministry of Education Survey

Please review the provincial or territorial profile from the 2011 edition of the *State of the Nation: K–12 Online Learning in Canada* report.

1. Have there been any changes in the legislative regime related to K–12 distance education?
2. Have there been any changes in the regulatory regime related to K–12 distance education?
3. Are there additional programs, not mentioned in the 2011 report that should be included in an updated report?
4. How many students were involved in K–12 distance education during the 2011–12 school year?
5. Are there any additional issues related to K–12 distance education, not mentioned in the 2011 report that should be included in an updated report?
6. Is there any information in the 2011 report that you feel should be updated or revised?
7. (a) If a student in your province took a course from an online program in another province or territory, what is the policy in terms of transfer credit for that student?

(b) If a student in your province took a course from an online program in another country, what is the policy in terms of transfer credit for that student?
8. (a) If a student living in another province or territory took a course from an online program located in your province or territory, what is the policy in terms of granting credit for that student?

(b) If a student living in another country took a course from an online program located in your province or territory, what is the policy in terms of granting credit for that student?

9. Appendix B: K–12 Distance Education Program Survey

1. What is the name of your K–12 distance education program?

2. Describe the methods of delivery your K–12 distance education program uses. Check all that apply.
 - Print materials
 - Audio graphics
 - Instructional television
 - Web-based/Online
 - Other: _____

3. When did your K–12 distance education program begin?

4. (a) How many students were enrolled in your K–12 distance education program in 2011–12?

(b) How many K–12 students were enrolled in your K–12 distance education program in 2010–11?

5. (a) How many different courses did your K–12 distance education program offer in 2011–12?

(b) How many different courses did your K–12 distance education program offer in 2010–11?

6. (a) How many teacher were employed by your K–12 distance education program in 2011–12?

(b) How many teacher were employed by your K–12 distance education program in 2010–11?

7. Are your teachers part-time or full-time?
 - Part-time
 - Full-time
 - Both

8. (a) Does your K–12 distance education program have a geographic region or does it serve students from all around the province?

Geographic region

Province-wide

(b) If you selected “geographic region”, what is that region?

9. What is the website address for your K–12 distance education program?

10. (a) Does your K–12 distance education program offer asynchronous or synchronous instruction?

Asynchronous

Synchronous

Both

(b) If you selected “asynchronous”, what tools do you use?

(c) If you selected “synchronous”, what tools do you use?

11. (a) Does your K–12 distance education program offer or partner to offer blended learning opportunities?

Yes

No

(b) If yes, please describe your blended learning program?

12. If there are any follow-up questions, who would be the best person for the researcher to contact?

Name: _____

Title: _____

E-mail address: _____

Telephone number: _____

10. Call for Sponsors for the 2013 “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 fifth 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 4200 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 2013 study include updating the K–12 policy and activity reports for each of the provinces, a greater focus on some of the individual programs within each jurisdiction (including more vignettes), and more issue papers examining specific issues in K–12 online learning in Canada written by individuals from a variety of sectors. Finally, the individual program survey will be updated and expanded.

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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