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

Michael K. Barbour
Sacred Heart University

Randy LaBonte
Canadian eLearning Network

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State of the Nation:

K-12 Online Learning in Canada

2014 Abbreviated Edition

Michael K. Barbour
Sacred Heart University

Randy LaBonte
Canadian eLearning Network

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Michael K. Barbour

Founding Researcher, State of the Nation Report

Foreword

It is my pleasure to write the forward to this seventh edition of the *State of the Nation: K –12 Online Learning in Canada* report on behalf of the Canadian eLearning Network (CANeLearn). This year's report is slightly abbreviated as we transition CANeLearn's involvement and develop an active data set that will be launched live on our website upon publication of this report (http://canelearn.net).

The *State of the Nation: K –12 Online Learning in Canada* report continues to be a benchmark for the expanding use of technology-supported blended and online learning in Canada. CANeLearn has become a key sponsor for this report and will continue to do so into the future. This 2014 report does not include separate issue papers, these will be included in the 2015 report. We have focused our work on the creation of the online site where the data collected that informs this report will be hosted.

This past academic year we have seen continued expansion of technology-supported education in online programs, and in particular in blended learning programs and environments (a mix of classroom and online methodologies where students have some control over their own learning). Blended learning methods have been used to increase education access, quality and student engagement. Several provinces in Canada continue to boast the highest per capita student enrolment in online courses and programs of any jurisdiction in the world, largely through blended learning approaches. Blended learning has emerged as a cost-effective alternative to supplement or replace traditional education programming.

This past year the number of students in Canada taking one or more online courses continued to grow in Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba. Canada continues to lead in online and blended learning and many jurisdictions are exploring how to leverage open education practices, including the use and creation of open education resources (OER) and Creative Commons licensing.

The *State of the Nation: K –12 Online Learning in Canada* report provides critical information and insight into how Canadian educational authorities and governments are integrating technology-supported approaches to prepare students for today's economy and a future society in which the use of technology will be ubiquitous. It is intended to offer background, guidance and ideas for the improvement of policy and practice in order to provide access to high quality educational opportunities for all students through online and blended learning. CANeLearn is a proud supporter of this research, its publication and dissemination.

Michael Canuel

Chair, Canadian eLearning Network

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Executive Summary

The seventh edition of the *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report marks a milestone in the development and execution of this annual study. Beginning in 2014 and continuing into the future, the Canadian eLearning Network (CANeLearn) will take a lead role in supporting the annual *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* study. Due to this transition, the 2014 *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report is an abbreviated study that examines the nature of the governance and level of activity of K-12 distance, online and blended education in each province and territory, as well as First Nations, Metis and Inuit. As such it will not include the description of national trends in K-12 distance, online and blended learning; additional vignettes to illustrate a variety of the individuals and programs providing those learning opportunities; brief issues related to the provision of K-12 distance, online and blended education in Canada; or the coast-to-coast-to-coast survey of each of the K-12 distance, online and blended education programs across the country. These features will return in the 2015 *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report. The abbreviated seventh edition of the *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report also includes an accompanying online repository for the study, which is available at:

http://canelearn.net/state-of-the-nation-k-12-online-learning-in-canada/

The 2014 *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report found a great deal of consistency in the field of K-12 distance, online and blended learning over the past year. The practice of K-12 distance, online and blended learning continues to grow across Canada, although that growth remains uneven. During the 2013-14 school year there were approximately 332,000 or 6.2% K-12 students enrolled in one or more distance or online education courses. This figure represented an increase of approximately 50,000 students from the previous school year. Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta and Quebec continue to lead the country in terms of the raw number of students participating in K-12 distance and online education. While there are participating students in every province and territory, there are no active distance education programs in Prince Edward Island or Nunavut.

The *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report still does not formally track participation in blended learning opportunities across Canada. However, based on information collected through past Ministry and program surveys, as well as anecdotal evidence from CANeLearn and its member organizations, the use of blended learning in Canada is on the rise. For example, this annual study regularly reports that a third of the activity in the New Brunswick provincial learning management system is by teachers using the curriculum in a blended format. While the Learn program in Quebec reports distance education enrollments of less than 10,000 students, they also indicate tens of thousands of students using their materials in a blended fashion. Finally, from 2011 to 2014 the Ontario Ministry of Education coordinated an initiative to roll out access to blended learning for all K-12 students, which resulted in almost 240,000 blended learning enrollments in the provincial learning management system during the 2013-14 school year. While Ministries of Education rarely keep data on the level of blended learning that occurs in their jurisdiction, it is safe to conclude that it has grown significantly.

In most jurisdictions there have been no or only minor changes to the regulation of K-12 distance, online and blended education in Canada. The most common forms of regulation continue to be language in the *Education Act or Schools Act*, policy documents and contracts issued by the Ministry of Education, and articles included in the collective bargaining agreement between the government and teachers' unions. British Columbia and Nova Scotia continue to have the most structured regulatory regimes, while Quebec, Saskatchewan and Alberta continue to have little to no regulation at all for K-12 distance education. Interestingly, this continues a trend that the nature and amount of regulation appears to have little impact on the level of K-12 distance, online and blended learning activity.

One jurisdiction where significant regulatory changes did occur was federally. Prior to 2013-14, e-learning programs (i.e., distance, online and blended programs) were able to enter into direct service agreements with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC). Beginning in 2013-14, AANDC made the decision to no longer enter into these agreements directly with e-learning programs, but to fund regional authorities who would make decisions on the nature of educational opportunities that should be funded within their jurisdiction. This change has resulted in the closure of at least one of the five First Nations, Metis and Inuit programs.

The 2014 *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report marks the beginning of a new era for the report as the Canadian eLearning Network takes a lead role in the research and its publication on the CANeLearn.net website. As CANeLearn assumes a management role of this project there will be a period of transition, including the delay of this print report. While the focus of this report is on the quantitative aspects of distance, blended and online learning, the 2015 report will see the return of the qualitative stories and featured programs.

1. Introduction

This is the seventh annual *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report. The first edition of this study stated that the goal of these annual reports was "to address the lack of information about K-12 online learning in Canada" (Barbour & Stewart, 2008, p. 5). In past reports we indicated that some positive steps have been taken to address this lack of information, and it is undeniable these annual publications have improved the state of affairs in this respect. Yet there still remains a lack of data related to K-12 distance education in Canada.

This seventh edition of the *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report is different from previous reports. Over the past two years, the Canadian eLearning Network (CANeLearn) has become a Canadian registered not-for-profit society with a mission to provide leadership that champions student success in online and blended learning. CANeLearn provides its members from across Canada with networking, collaboration, and research opportunities, stitching together like-minded leaders in blended and online learning from across the country.

One of the key initiatives for CANeLearn is to consolidate research into K-12 distance education, online and blended learning in Canada. Central to this work has been the research and publication of the annual *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* reports. As CANeLearn assumes a management role of this project, there has been a period of transition. This transition included the delay of this print report, as well as the development of an online resource to house this project. This online resource is available at:

<div align="center">http://canelearn.net/state-of-the-nation-k-12-online-learning-in-canada/</div>

Finally, the seventh edition of the *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning* in Canada report is an abbreviated study. This abbreviated study focuses solely on updating the provincial, territorial and federal profiles that describe the governance and activity of K-12 distance education in each jurisdiction. The 2015 *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report will resume the additional features that describe the national trends in K-12 distance, online and blended learning; provide additional vignettes to illustrate a variety of the individuals and programs providing those learning opportunities; examine a variety of brief issues related to the provision of K-12 distance, online and blended education in Canada; and conduct a coast-to-coast-to-coast survey of each of the K-12 distance education programs across the country.

1.1 Methodology

The methodology utilized for the 2014 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;
- An analysis of documents from the Ministry of Education, often available in 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 an analysis of available documents. Table 1 indicates the history of data collection for the *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada study*.

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

Province/ Territory	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
NL	KS / DA	MoE / DA	DA	MoE	DA	MoE / DA	**MoE / DA**
NS	DA	MoE / DA	MoE / DA	MoE / DA	MoE / DA	MoE	**MoE**
PE	DA	KS / DA	MoE	MoE	MoE	MoE	**MoE**
NB	DA	MoE / DA	MoE	MoE / DA	MoE	MoE	**MoE**
QC	KS	KS / DA	MoE / KS	MoE / KS	MoE / KS	MoE / KS	**MoE**
ON	KS / DA	KS / DA	KS / DA	MoE / DA	MoE / DA	MoE / KS	**MoE / KS**
MB	KS	MoE / DA	MoE	MoE	MoE	MoE	**MoE**
SK	KS / DA	MoE	MoE	MoE / KS	MoE / KS	MoE / KS	**MoE**
AB	DA	KS / DA	KS / DA	MoE	MoE / DA	MoE / DA	**MoE / KS**
BC	MoE / DA	MoE / DA	MoE	MoE	MoE	MoE	**MoE**
YT	DA	KS / DA	MoE / DA	MoE	MoE	MoE	**MoE**
NT	DA	MoE / DA	DA	MoE	MoE	MoE	**MoE**
NU	DA	MoE	MoE	MoE	MoE	MoE	**MoE / KS**
Federal	-	-	-	-	-	AANDC / KS / DA	**AANDC / KS**

MoE – Ministry of Education, KS – Key stakeholders, DA – Document analysis, AANDC – Aboriginal Affairs & Northern Development Canada

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. In the sole province where they do exist, Alberta, 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 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 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 authors of this report make use of the definitions provided by the Virtual School Glossary project (see http://virtualschool.wikispaces.com/glossary/) in most other areas.

1.3 How to Read This Document

The goal of the *2014 State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report is to provide an overview of the state of K-12 distance education in Canada. The report begins with a couple of brief observations about K-12 distance education over the past year. These trends are followed by a national overview of K-12 distance education in Canada and a discussion of the nature of regulation and level of activity in each provincial, territorial, and federal jurisdiction. Each profile includes:

- A description of the K-12 distance education programs and their level of activity; and
- The nature of regulation (with a focus on any updates from the 2013 report).

Finally, the report concludes with any references that are used, a copy of the ministerial survey, and a call for sponsors for the 2015 *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* study.

2. Observations in Canadian K–12 Distance Education

Over the past two *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* reports, we have discussed major trends that are present within the Canadian K-12 distance, online, and blended education context. In this abbreviated edition we will instead offer some brief, but relevant, observations about the state of the field in Canada.

The use of K-12 distance, online and blended learning continues to increase in Canada. The first estimate of the level of K-12 distance education activity in Canada was presented by the Canadian Teachers Federation (2000) who estimated that there were approximately 25,000 K-12 students enrolled in distance education courses during the 1999-2000 school year. The second *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report estimated that during the 2008-09 school year this number had grown to approximately 140,000 K-12 students participating in distance education in Canada. These annual reports have found an increase in this participation in each successive year.

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

Year	# of distance education students	% of students engaged in distance education
1999–2000	~25,000	0.5%
2008–09	~140,000	2.7%
2009–10	150,000–175,000	2.9%–3.4%
2010–11	207,096	4.2%
2011–12	245,252	4.9%
2012–13	284,963	5.%
2013-14	**332,077**	**6.2%**

As has been indicated in the previous reports, while growth has been reported it is difficult to ascertain if the growth is actual growth or a combination of better reporting measures that Ministries of Education have implemented to track participation and estimates of activity.

This fact is indicative that better data are needed. As was described in detail in the 2013 *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report, some jurisdictions have always maintained reliable data on the number of K-12 distance education programs that were operating and the number of K-12 students learning in those programs. However, there are other jurisdictions that are only able to provide data concerning Ministry-operated programs or dated information (i.e, one or two school year's old data), or that simply do not track this information. It is unfortunate that the majority of jurisdictions fall into the latter category. Additionally, individual K-12 distance education programs are often unresponsive to requests for information. From 2011 to 2013, *State of the*

Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada contacted 252 individual K-12 distance education programs and received an annual response rate between 14% and 26%, which represented 32% of the total programs contacted during that period.

It is hoped that with the creation of CANeLearn, this situation may improve in future years. As the network grows across Canada there will be a closer involvement of these programs in the affairs of the organization, including this type of research. Prior to this publication it has been one sole researcher who has driven this work. Having a Canadian, national non-profit back the research and promote publication and sharing, can only heighten awareness and involvement.

While it can easily be argued there has been an overall increase in the use of online learning environments in K-12 education, most of that increase has not been isolated to the traditional distance learning programs as it has in the past. Emerging blended learning programs across Canada take advantage of both online and onsite live and asynchronous learning options, and include elements of individualization and student choice. Edmonton Argyll Centre's Bridges to Achievement program[1] is one example where students who require additional support to succeed are offered an individualized learning program with onsite, online and home-based instruction. Students attend virtual classroom sessions, connect by e-mail, phone and instant messaging and also attend weekly onsite sessions. Similarly, British Columbia's Navigate Program in the Courtenay/Comox school district offers diverse innovative programs developed over the past years including its ENTER program, Fine Arts eCademy, iClass K-12, Leadership Program, VEX Robotics and our Independent Learning Centres in the three secondary schools. Their blended programs received iNACOL's 2014 Innovative Practice of the year award. [2]

Of note, as an aside to the growth of blended learning approaches from traditional classroom teachers, in an effort to improve distance education course completions and engage students more actively in their learning, many traditional distance programs have modified instructional practices to include more synchronous, live events and meetings. While many live events use technology to connect teacher and students at a distance, others use structured onsite individual and group events to foster improved outcomes. As part of this approach we are now seeing many programs shift from being exclusively "any time, any place, any pace" to a structured cohort intake enrollment model coupled with required live events and group work.

As can be seen by some of these emerging examples, more research into the design, delivery and support of K-12 distance, online and blended learning is needed, and that research needs to be available to practitioners. To date there has only been sparse research conducted in the field within the Canadian context (see pages 16-17 of the 2013 *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report for a detailed discussion of the exact research that has been published to date). The bottom line is that beyond a small number of descriptive, overview pieces, the British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF) and Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) have conducted most of the existing research. The research by the BCTF has been exploratory in nature, an effort to understand what K-12 distance, online and blended learning means for its members (i.e., BC

teachers) and the nature of their work life. The research conducted by faculty at MUN has primarily centred around two federally funded initiatives: the Centre for TeleLearning and Rural Education, and the Killick Centre for E-Learning Research (see pages 14-21 of the 2011 *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada* report for an overview of this initiative and its eight individual projects). However, much of this research is simply not available to the average distance, online, and blended practitioner.
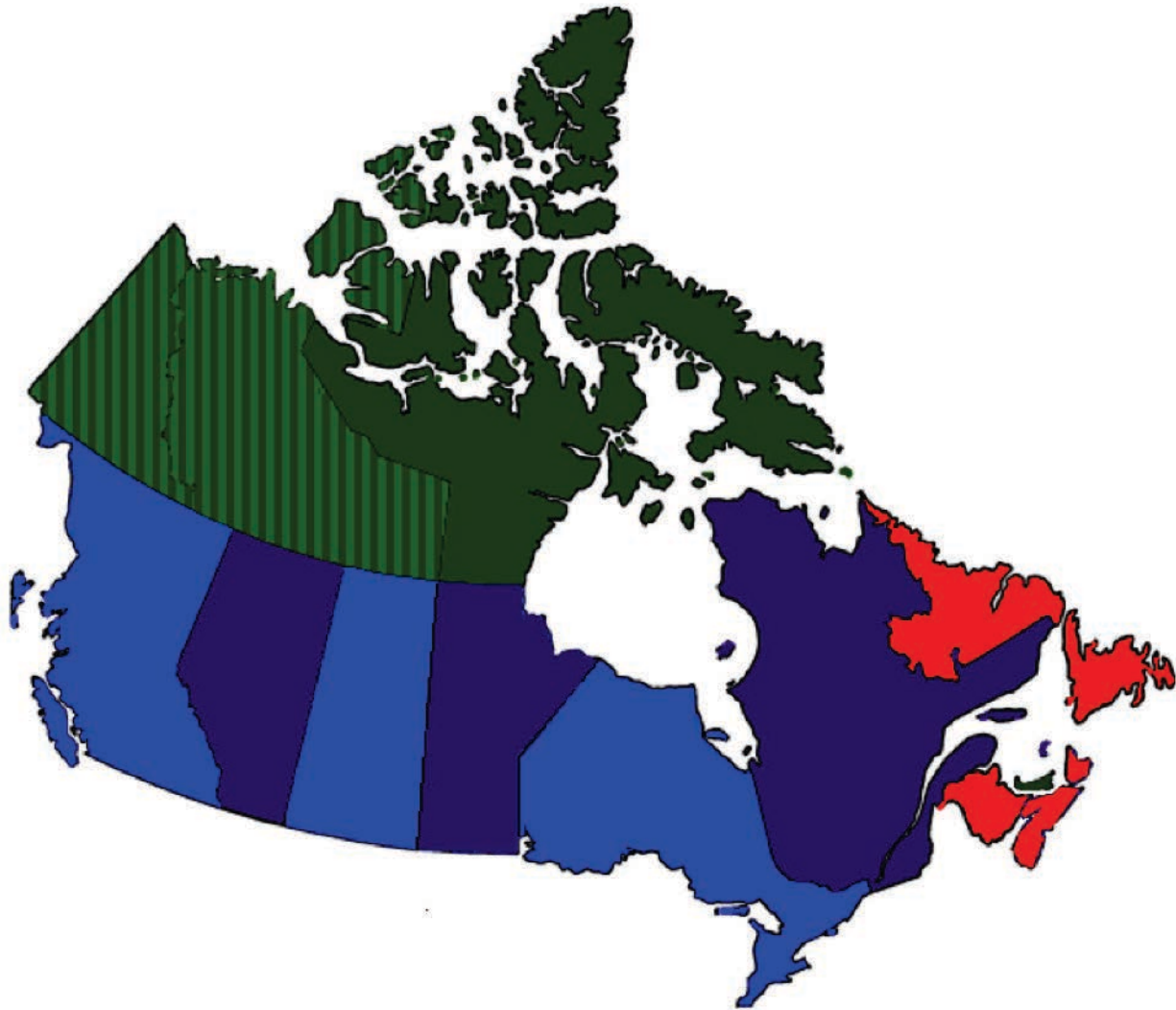
The *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning* in Canada's "Annotated Bibliography of Canadian K-12 Distance Education Research" project provided citations and descriptions of literature that explored K-12 distance education in Canada from 1996 to 2010, but the vast majority of that literature was not available online. Similarly, CANeLearn's participation in the "Research Clearinghouse for K-12 Online and Blended Learning"[3] is another effort to provide practitioners with information about, and access to, research in the field. However, with institutions like MUN removing the websites for both the Centre for TeleLearning and Rural Education, and the Killick Centre for E-Learning Research – along with all of the research that was provided open access on those websites – it seems that there is an increasing deficit of readily available research into K-12 distance, online and blended learning in Canada.

[1]See http://argyll.epsb.ca/learning-supports/bridges-to-achievement
[2]See http://www.inacol.org/about/press-media/press-releases/press-release/2014-inacol-innovator-awards-celebrate-blended-and-online-learning-leaders/ or http://canelearn.net/2014/11/12/canadian-educators-recognized-for-inacol-innovation-award/
[3] See http://k12onlineresearch.org/

3. National Overview

Single provincial program
Primarily district-based programs
Combination of provincial and district-based programs
Use online learning programs from other provinces

Students from all thirteen provinces and territories continue to participate in K-12 distance, online, and blended learning opportunities. This is not to say that all thirteen jurisdictions have individual programs in operation, as there are no programs in Prince Edward Island or Nunavut. The landscape of Canadian K-12 distance, online, and blended learning continues to change – but only in slight ways. The highest level of activity continues to be in British Columbia where there are a substantial number of district-based and regional-based public programs, along with a significant number of independent or private programs. Estimates indicate that Alberta also has a higher than average

level of participation in K-12 distance education, but with a lack of any reliable data this may be an exaggeration. Significant growth appears to have occurred in Quebec, as well as the Yukon. The growth in the Yukon is likely due to the continued development of its own K-12 distance, online, and blended learning programs – a trend that is occurring in several of the territories. Other jurisdictions remain relatively consistent with their level of participation.

The total K-12 population in Canada for 2013-14 was approximately 5.4 million students. Based on actual and estimated enrollment data, the number of students engaged in K-12 distance education was approximately 332,000.

Table 2. Summary of the K-12 distance education regulation by province and territory

Province/Territory	# of K-12 students	# enrolled in distance education	Percent involvement
NL	67,436	884	1.3%
NS	122,643	~2,720	2.2%
PE	20,131	108	0.5%
NB	101,079	2615	2.6%
QC	1,307,026	~70,5000	5.4%
ON	2,015,411	78,095	3.9%
MB	200,807	~12,000	6.0%
SK	172,205	~10,000 [1]	5.8%
AB	616,375	~75,000	12.2%
BC	635,057	77,912	12.3%
YT	5,122	182	3.5%
NT	8,204	228	2.8%
NU	9,728	33	<0.1%
Federal	106,500	~1,800	0.1%
Total	5,387,724	332,077	6.2%

[1] The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education provided the figure of 2,611 students. However, based on previous editions of this study, the Ministry figure often represents between 30%-35% of the total activity.

Many provinces and territories continue to have some reference to distance education in the *Education Act or Schools Act*. In most instances these references simply define distance education or give the Minister of Education in that province or territory the ability to create, approve or regulate K-12 distance education. Many of these references have also become antiquated, given the present realities of K-12 distance, online, and blended learning.

In many jurisdictions there exists no additional regulations beyond those contained in the *Education Act or Schools Act*. In jurisdictions where regulation does exist, one trend is the use of contracts or policy handbooks to regulate K-12 distance, online, and blended learning. In most instances these handbooks are in jurisdictions where schools participate in some form of province-wide program and the handbook outlines the requirements for participation in that program. Finally, the two exceptions to these general trends continue to be Nova Scotia (e.g., collective agreement signed between the Government of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union) and British Columbia (e.g., 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).

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

Province/Territory	Type of Regulation	Nature of Regulation
NL	None	
NS	Collective agreement	• Provisions related to workload, professional development and quality of life issues
PE	Ministerial directive	• Guidelines for the use of distance education
NB	Policy handbook	• Outlines responsibilities for distance education stakeholders at all levels
QC	None	
ON	Ministerial contracts and policy handbook	• District school boards agree to follow the policies outlined in the Provincial E-Learning Strategy
MB	Legislation and policy handbook	• Minister of Education can approve distance education • Regulations are related to the use of the Ministry distance education options
SK	None	
AB	Legislation and policy handbook	• Minister of Education can make regulations related to distance education • Regulations primarily focus on amount of instructional time
BC	Legislation and Ministerial contracts	• Substantial regulations related to funding, quality and almost all other aspects of the delivery of distributed learning
YT	Legislation and memorandums of understanding	• Minister of Education can approve distance education and charge student fees for such courses • Individual agreements are between the territorial government and individual distance learning providers
NT	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 are between the territorial government and individual distance learning providers
NU	Legislation and memorandums of understanding	• Defines what constitutes distance education • Individual agreements are between the territorial government and individual distance learning providers
Federal	Contracts	• Agreements between some of the individual FNMI distance learning programs (will cease at the end of the 2014-15 school year)

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

3.1 Newfoundland and Labrador (NL)

Population: 526,702

Number of K-12 Schools: 264

Number of K-12 Students: 67,436

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: 1

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: 884

K-12 Distance Programs

The Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI) is the sole provider of K-12 distance education in the province. During the 2013-2014 school year 884 students accounted for 1,576 course registrations in 39 different courses—including courses delivered in French to the province's French-first language students.

The CDLI also offered online course reviews for students specific to 14 public examinable courses. The reviews utilized recorded instruction and solutions to sample questions related to provincial learning outcomes.

Governance and Regulation

At present the CDLI operates within the Primary, Elementary and Secondary Branch of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. It receives a block funding allocation from the provincial government that funds the administration, all teacher and staff salaries, course development activities, Internet/network connectivity costs for over 110 schools, K-12 technology integration and some provision learning for the provincial K-12 school system. The CDLI also purchases and deploys all hardware and software required for the delivery of its online learning program, including all required computer equipment, videoconferencing equipment and other learning resources that enhance the distance learning experience.

At this time 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 Ministry of Education continues to track the method of delivery that students complete their studies and this data is available through the *K-12 School Profile System*.

3.2 Nova Scotia (NS)

Population: 940,789

Number of K-12 Schools: 407

Number of K-12 Students: 122,643

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: 2

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: ~2,720

K-12 Distance Programs

Nova Scotia Virtual School (NSVS) provides K-12 distance education to public school students in Nova Scotia. During the 2013-14 school year approximately 970 students from the eight English-speaking school boards and the *Conseil scolaire acadien provincial* were enrolled in online courses through the NSVS.

The correspondence studies program is the other K-12 distance education program. Work is ongoing to transition these courses to an online delivery format. At present there are approximately 1,750 students enrolled in courses through the correspondence study program. Close to half of these students attend a public school while the other half are adult students, home-schooled students or students living outside of Nova Scotia.

Governance and Regulation

The Learning Resources and Technology Services division of the Public Schools Branch of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development manages distance education programs in Nova Scotia.

The provision of distance education through the Nova Scotia Virtual School continues to be governed by the eleven provisions included in the agreement between the government of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. As a contract between the government and teachers' union, most of the provisions deal with teacher certification and quality of life issues. For example, there are provisions related to defining the workday, professional development requirements, program oversight, class size and the management of the distance programs.

3.3 Prince Edward Island (PE)

Population: 145,211

Number of K-12 Schools: 63

Number of K-12 Students: 20,131

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: 0

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: 108

K-12 Distance Programs

At present there are no K-12 distance education programs in Prince Edward Island. Through an inter-provincial agreement students in Prince Edward Island have the ability to access online courses offered by the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's distance education program. During the 2013-14 school year there were 15 French-first language students and 93 English language students enrolled in online courses through this program.

Governance and Regulation

Internal regulation continues to be driven by Ministerial Directives No. MD 2008–05 which applies to courses delivered during the regular school day. The directive broadly defines distance education and outlines a series of beliefs about the nature of distance education instruction. Further, individual schools and districts that participate in distance education programs must adhere to guidelines found in the provincial *Distance Education Handbook* document. The updated document specifies the use of distance education for students in particular circumstances.

3.4 New Brunswick (NB)

Population: 145,211

Number of K-12 Schools: 63

Number of K-12 Students: 101,079

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: 2

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: 2615

K-12 Distance Programs

Both the Anglophone and Francophone sectors of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development manage K –12 online learning programs. These programs service secondary students in New Brunswick in either of the province's two official languages. During the 2013–14 school year, there were approximately 1,782 students enrolled in the Anglophone program and 839 students enrolled in the Francophone program. In addition to these distance students, there were also 943 English and 1511 French face-to-face students registered in the learning management system using online courses under the direction of their local school's classroom teachers.

The Department reported that student mental health and anxiety issues have caused an increase in the number of students taking online courses outside of their physical school setting. The Anglophone system added a second First Nations Language course and now offers Mi'kmaw 110 and Wolastoqey 110 (more commonly known as Maliseet). The Department is also continuing to examine areas for expansion (e.g., more French Immersion courses, adding grade 10 courses, summer school, etc.) in the Anglophone sector, but this examination is still in the exploration phase. The Francophone sector offers a program for gifted children in Grade 8.

Additionally, the Department has extended its online teacher professional development offerings to include teaching assistants and other adults within the K –12 system along with teachers. For example, the majority of educational assistants in the province have received Autism training through an online course. The Department is continuing to develop educator courses around inclusive education and offers a number of Autism Spectrum Disorder online courses.

Finally, access for mature and upgrading students (aged 19+) continues to be a challenge. The existing distance education program is too limited in capacity to support the number of inquiries that are received. The Anglophone sector is currently working with outside partners to develop additional supports for these learners.

Governance and Regulation

There remains no specific legislation that governs K –12 distance education in New Brunswick. The system continues to operate based on collaboration between the Ministry of Education and individual school districts. The Ministry has published a policy handbook, different for both the English and French systems, that outlines the responsibilities of a variety of individuals at the Ministry, district and school level to ensure the orderly implementation of the distance education program. Interestingly, in addition to school officials such as a registrar and local site facilitator, there are specific responsibilities outlined for both distance education students and the parents of students who are enrolled in distance education programs.

3.5 Quebec (QC)

Population: 8,214,672

Number of K-12 Schools: 3,130

Number of K-12 Students: 1,307,026

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: 4

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: ~70,500

K-12 Distance Program

During the 2013-14 school year, *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, served 56,608 students. It is estimated that SOFAD materials represent about 60% of the materials used in distance general education (i.e., adult students who are 16 years or older in the school year). The Leading English Education and Resource Network (LEARN) is a not-for-profit organization that provides a variety of distance learning opportunities to approximately 8,500 English-language students from all nine English-speaking school boards in the province. In addition close to 36,500 students from across the province benefit from blended learning asynchronous services provided by LEARN.

The *Écoles éloignées en réseau* (ÉER) has 392 teachers in 214 schools, and connected more than 4,600 students through use of Knowledge Forum and various synchronous tools. The Beauce-Etchemin School Board offered 16 remedial online courses, as well as nine full-time online courses. During the 2013-14 school year more than 700 students registered for the services (remedial and full-time).

Governance and Regulation

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

However, private schools are regulated by a different Act (i.e., *Loi sur les établissements privés*), that contains provisions pertaining to online education. The Ministry has yet to approve an online initiative that meets the conditions stated in the *Loi sur les établissements privés*.

3.6 Ontario (ON)

Population: 13,537,994

Number of K-12 Schools: 4,897

Number of K-12 Students: 2,015,411

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: ~81

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: 78,095

K-12 Distance Programs

Districts are responsible for the operation of their own online learning program, however they are able to choose whether to use a Ministry-sponsored learning management system and online curricular materials, or their own. As such, all 60 English-speaking and 12 French-speaking school boards should offer some form of K-12 online learning. Many of these school boards also participate in one or more consortiums designed to allow its school board members to work together to maximize their online programs by sharing course offerings, resources and students.

Along with the online learning offered by these public school boards, the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) continues to provide high school credit courses, high school diploma and GED High School Equivalency Certificate distance education opportunities to adolescent and adult students throughout the province. Finally, there are as many as eight different private or independent K-12 online learning programs. Some of these programs are also members of the e-Learning Consortium.

It is estimated that in 2013-14 there were approximately 52,095 students taking e-learning courses, including summer school, from school boards through the Ministry of Education's virtual learning environment, and approximately 237,930 unique blended learning logins. It is also estimated the ILC has approximately 20,000 students enrolled in their correspondence courses. Finally, the most recent data available indicated there were approximately 6,000 students enrolled in private online schools.

Governance and Regulation

Since 2006, the Provincial e-Learning Strategy has guided the Ministry in providing school districts with various supports necessary to provide students with online and blended learning opportunities, as well as providing e-learning leadership within the provincially funded school system. These supports have included a provincially licensed learning management system, Ontario Educational Resource Bank, E-Community Ontario, Seat Reservation System, and an e-Learning Contact per district funded by the Ministry of Education. School districts are responsible for the delivery of online learning (e.g., program direction, hiring staff, registering students, course delivery and granting credits).

As part of the *Provincial e-Learning Strategy*, students may enroll in an online course offered by another district provided they do so through their home school. In such a situation, the applicability of provincially established fees for students taking e-learning courses are worked out locally between the two boards.

Private online schools operate as a business in Ontario, independent of the Ministry of Education. Those schools offering credits towards the Ontario Secondary School Diploma require an inspection. The Ministry of Education's inspection of an online private school is based on a review of posted online content, a review of asynchronous conferencing between teachers and students, interview with the principal and other school staff, visits to synchronous online sessions and an examination of school documents and records of students' work. Inspectors look for evidence of ongoing interactions between the teacher and students in the online learning environment, and for a direct link between the specific and overall curriculum expectations being taught and assessed in compliance with Ministry policy and observed practices. Inspectors review online courses for compliance with *Growing Success*, 2010; including the presence of learning goals and success criteria as well as peer and self-assessment.

3.7 Manitoba (MB)

Population: 1,272,000

Number of K-12 Schools: 794

Number of K-12 Students: 200,807

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: ~38

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: ~12,000

K-12 Distance Programs

The Ministry of Education continued to support three distance learning options in 2013-2014: Independent Study Option (ISO), Teacher Mediated Option (TMO) and Web-Based Course (WBC) Option. Each school division in the province has participated in one or more of the Ministry's distance education program options, however participation varies from year to year depending on the changing needs of students and schools. Locally managed programs also exist outside of those directly supported or managed by the Ministry.

Ministry numbers for the 2013–14 school year indicate approximately 2,960 enrollments in the ISO, 379 in the TMO and 8,600 student enrollments in the WBC Option. Overall, there were about 12,000 distance education enrollments in programs directly supported by the Ministry, and students could be enrolled in more than one program.

Governance and Regulation

The only reference in the *Public Schools Act* regarding distance education is mention that the Minister of Education can approve courses of study, including correspondence and other courses. Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning has issued other regulatory and policy documents, along with handbooks for each of the three distance learning options.

The Ministry has created a framework that allows for a virtual collegiate to operate in Manitoba. It is anticipated that the creation of this virtual collegiate will provide greater educational opportunities and more equitable access to students from across the province.

The formation of the virtual collegiate occurred as part of a three-year pilot collaboration among educational entities already recognized and operating distance education programs in the province. A signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Province governs the collaboration. To date, the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC) has signed an MOU with the Province and was granted a Manitoba school code for Wapaskwa Virtual Collegiate effective September 2014. Discussions are still underway with another entity that has shown a similar interest.

3.8 Saskatchewan (SK)

Population: 1,132,640

Number of K-12 Schools: 762

Number of K-12 Students: 172,205

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: 16

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: ~10,000

K-12 Distance Programs

Currently 16 of the 28 school divisions in Saskatchewan operate or participate in some sort of distance education program. School divisions that do not offer their own distance learning courses work with other school divisions to provide their students with online learning options. During the 2013-14 school year there were 4,728 course enrollments involving 3,221 students. A total of 4,541 secondary credits were earned.

However, it should be noted that during the 2012-13 school year the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education indicated there were 2,611 students enrolled in one or more courses from the 14 programs listed in the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Course Repository. Yet research for that report found there were at least 21 programs or jurisdictions providing K-12 distance education opportunities. Further, based on the responses of only five of these 21 programs there appeared to be at least 5,665 students who had taken at least one distance education course in the Province of Saskatchewan. Researchers estimated there to be about 8,000 students engaged in K-12 distance education in Saskatchewan during the 2012-13 school year. As such, researchers estimate there were approximately 10,000 students engaged in K-12 distance education during the 2013-14 school year.

Governance and Regulation

The delivery of distance education in the province is guided by the *Saskatchewan Technology in Education Framework* (TEF). The TEF outlines the roles and responsibilities of the education sector with regards to the use of technology in education. It contains a number of outcomes and indicators that guide the use of technology in the province in the areas of teaching and learning, administrative operations and infrastructure.

One outcome speaks directly to the use of distance education to support teaching and learning in the province:

> TEF Outcome TL (TSL)1: Students have equitable access to high quality instruction through flexible approaches using technology that meet the diverse needs of students and teachers within their school division.

Indicators:

    a) Distance and online learning opportunities are available to students, as required.

    b) Intra- and inter-school division learning opportunities are available to students with local support provided.

    c) Distance learners have success rates that are equivalent to students in traditional classroom environments.

    d) Assistive technology and technical support is available to students with intensive needs and/or school personnel.

Currently, the Ministry is engaged in the process of developing a strategic plan on a number of education issues, including a plan to address graduation rates that speaks to the need for more learning options to students to ensure they graduate from Grade 12. These discussions have highlighted differences among school divisions and the Ministry as to how online learning should be delivered.

Finally, the adoption of *Saskatchewan's Action Plan to Address Bullying and Cyberbullying* in 2013 supported the implementation of digital citizenship education for all K-12 students. This has given Saskatchewan the opportunity to host online professional development opportunities for educators and other professionals in the form of a massive open online course (i.e., DCMOOC), modeling for everyone how to effectively deliver online learning opportunities. It has also created the opportunity to ensure all students develop and practice appropriate and responsible online behaviour supported by a policy guide and continuum scheduled for release in 2015.

3.9 Alberta (AB)

Population: 4,025,074

Number of K-12 Schools: 2,152

Number of K-12 Students: 616,375

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: ~23

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: ~75,000

K-12 Distance Programs

It is believed that approximately 23 school divisions in the province offer an assortment of online programs, catering mostly to students in their own geographic jurisdiction. Some manage students in other regions of the province, but at present there is only one single province-wide program (the Alberta Distance Learning Centre [ADLC]) that offers courses to any student in the province. Courses are provided in print, online and in blended formats in partnership with local schools and authorities. The ADLC also manages the Vista Virtual School, a school and not a provincial program, and ADLC partners with *Centre francophone d'éducation à distance* that provides distance education services to the province's Francophone students.

As the Ministry of Education does not collect distance education enrollment data, instead collecting data on students regardless of program delivery, there is no centralized data source to provide overall numbers for these district-based programs.

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 programs. 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 its their annual *Guide to Education*.

Over the past several years there have been several consultation initiatives with respect to distance, online and blended learning in the province. The most recent began in April 2012 when Alberta Education contracted Schmidt and Carbol Consulting Ltd. to conduct a review of distance education programs and services offered in the province and to provide recommendations for a provincial model for distance education delivery. To date the results of that review have not been made public.

3.10 British Columbia (BC)

Population: 4,631,302

Number of K-12 Schools: 3,878

Number of K-12 Students: 635,057

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: 76

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: 77,912

K-12 Distance Programs

In 2013-14 there were 60 district-level, public distributed learning schools (distance education providers) and 16 independent (or private) distributed learning schools that enrolled approximately 78,000 unique students in one or more courses. LearnNowBC continues to serve as a Web portal and single point of entry to information about public distributed learning schools 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 school districts lacking 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 years. 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.

3.11 Yukon (YT)

Population: 36,700

Number of K-12 Schools: 28

Number of K-12 Students: 5,122

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: 1

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: 182

K-12 Distance Programs

Yukon Education supports a Distributed Learning program that is managed by the Aurora Virtual School (AVS). In 2013-13 AVS managed courses for 42 home-educated students and 140 in-school students taking at least one online course. Some of the courses were led by AVS teachers using a combination of approaches including the use of Moodle as a learning management system, Blackboard Collaborate for live interaction, and various other online tools. Other students were enrolled with distributed learning schools in British Columbia.

In the 2013-14 school year there were eight blended learning programs in Yukon schools. The Watson Lake Secondary School blended learning project (as described in the vignette in the 2013 report) was in its first full year, while other small-scale blended learning programs started up during the year in Dawson City, Carmacks, Faro, Mayo, Ross River, Teslin and Whitehorse. Overall there were 132 students enrolled in at least one blended learning course and 18 teachers leading those courses.

In addition to distance education programs, Yukon Education also supports and tracks blended learning programs that fall under Staker and Horn's (2012) "flex" model. Yukon Education believes that blended learning and distance or distributed learning are the same only in that they are both facilitated by online content and learning management, but differ in two key components: in distance learning courses the student and teacher are always in separate locations and often working asynchronously, whereas in blended learning situations the teacher and student are together in the same place at the same time. It is the physical and temporal separation factors that lead us to make a clear distinction between distance learning and blended learning. However, many Yukon teachers use informal blended learning approaches for which Yukon Education does not keep data. For example the "rotation" model is very common in many schools but is not centrally tracked as to how teachers are "blending" computer lab use into their classroom programs.

Governance and Regulation

There have been no recent changes to the governance and regulation of K-12 distance education in the Yukon. The *Education Act*, 2002 still allows the Minister of Education to provide distance education

courses and charge fees for students to access those courses. However, the 2003 decision to provide these distributed learning courses at no cost to students up to the age of 21 continues to be followed.

The Department of Education also continues to govern the operation of individual distance education programs in the Yukon through individual Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) that it signs with each individual program. For example, the territory is in the process of finalizing additional MOUs with five new school districts in British Columbia to create partnerships with their respective distributed learning schools to provide course access to Yukon students. Finally, Yukon Education was granted associate membership in the British Columbia Learning Network (BCLN)[4] consortium.

[4] See http://bclearningnetwork.com/

3.12 Northwest Territories (NT)

Population: 43,672

Number of K-12 Schools: 49

Number of K-12 Students: 8,204

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: 2

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: 228

K-12 Distance Programs

Currently a distance learning pilot is being conducted that involves five small Northwest Territories community high schools located across three regional boards of education. The teachers are based in Inuvik and each class also includes a few Inuvik students. Support personnel for the pilot include volunteers, educational assistants and teachers who, as part of their teaching assignment, are located in each high school that has a distance learning student group.

During the 2013-14 school year 200 students were enrolled in courses offered through the Alberta Distance Learning Center (ADLC). These courses will continue to be a viable solution for some Northwest Territories students in the future. Francophone students regularly take print-based, self-paced ADLC courses through *Centre francophone d'éducation à distance* (CFED) in Alberta. Support for these courses is coordinated through the school principal, and parents are closely involved.

Governance and Regulation

The Education Act, 2009 allows various educational bodies to "authorize, supervise and evaluate the use of distance learning programs in the provision of the education program" (p. 72).

Since 2004 the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) has had a Memorandum of Understanding with the ADLC for Northwest Territories students to use their courses. In 2010 the regional boards of education took on the funding of these courses.

Additionally, Section 3.3 of the *Northwest Territories School Handbook* outlines a series of requirements for distance learning that schools must compile with.

Finally, the Northwest Territories are currently renewing its system of education through a process called Education Renewal and Innovation (ERI). One commitment under ERI is to improve the learning experience of students in its smallest communities, regardless of geographical location. Distance learning is one way to do so by providing equitable learning opportunities to small community high schools that cannot offer a wide-range of courses.

3.13 Nunavut (NU)

Population: 35,591

Number of K-12 Schools: 42

Number of K-12 Students: 9,728

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: 0

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: 33

K-12 Distance Programs

At present, Nunavut does not have its own K-12 distance education program. During the 2013-14 school year there were 33 students enrolled in courses offered through the Alberta Distance Learning Center (ADLC). However, information for students enrolled in distance education courses beyond the ADLC is maintained at the school and Regional School Operations levels, and was not available at the time of this update.

Governance and Regulation

The *Education Act*, 1999 allows various educational bodies to "authorize, supervise and evaluate the use of distance learning programs in the provision of the education program" (p. 75). Additionally there are territorial agreements signed with individual distance education programs authorized to provide services to Nunavut students in the K-12 system. At present students wishing to enroll in distance education courses contact their school principal.

The development of a ministerial directive regarding access to and delivery of distance education has been underway since 2012.

3.41 Federal

Population: 1,400,685 (2011 Census)

Number of K-12 Schools: 414

Number of K-12 Students: 106,500

Number of K-12 Distance Education Programs: 4

Number of K-12 Distance Education Students: ~1,800

K-12 Distance Programs

At present there are four K-12 distance education programs designated as First Nations, Metis and/or Inuit programs. Two of these are located in Ontario (Keewaytinook Internet High School and Gai hon nya ni: the Amos Key Jr. E~Learning Institute), one in Manitoba (Wapaskwa Virtual Collegiate), and one in Alberta (SCcyber E-learning Community). There are other First Nations, Metis and Inuit organizations that have been exploring the adoption of K-12 distance education. However, for a variety of reasons – lack of bandwidth or connectivity, lack of community buy-in, lack of expertise for implementation and others—they have not yet established distance education programs. It should be noted that one program, Credenda Virtual High School in Saskatchewan, ceased operations following the 2012-13 school year due to a lack of funding.

Governance and Regulation

Approximately 60% of First Nations students attend schools on reserve. In support of these students Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) provides funding support directly to Band Councils and First Nations education organizations. First Nations or their respective regional organizations have the responsibility for managing and delivering education programs and services in band-operated schools on reserve. For students who live on reserve but attend provincial schools off-reserve AANDC pays the tuition that the applicable province charges for non-Aboriginal students. This is paid to the First Nation in question or directly to the provincial Ministry of Education depending on the agreement in place.

In 2013 the decision was made to no longer enter into service agreements directly with e-learning programs. Instead funding would be provided to the regional authorities (i.e., First Nations) to make the decisions on the nature of educational opportunities that should be funded within their jurisdiction. This change, which began to be phased in over the 2013-14 school year, will come into full effect following the 2014-15 school year.

Regardless of the funding agreement, AANDC requires that each of the K-12 distance education programs work with the individual Ministry of Education in the province or territory in which they operate in order to gain accreditation. The accreditation process involves a validation that the K-12

distance education program is using provincial curriculum, which allows the program to grant provincial credit. As Ministries cannot fund enrolment in federal education programs, the First Nations K-12 distance education programs must also enter into agreements with individual school districts/divisions to serve off-reserve students.

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5. Appendix A

Ministry of Education Survey

Please review the provincial or territorial profile from the 2013 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 2013 report that should be included in an updated report?

4. How many students were involved in K-12 distance education during the 2013-14 school year?

5. Are there any additional issues related to K-12 distance education, not mentioned in the 2013 report that should be included in an updated report?

6. Is there any information in the 2013 report that you feel should be updated or revised?

6. Call for Sponsors – 2015 State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada Study

Canadian eLearning Network (CANeLearn) is seeking funding for the 2015 K-12 online learning study of Canada. If your organization is interested in participating through sponsorship by supporting the eighth annual *State of the Nation Study: K-12 Online Learning in Canada*, please contact Michael Barbour, principal investigator at mkbarbour@gmail.com, or Randy LaBonte, Chief Executive Officer of CANeLearn at rlabonte@CANeLearn.net.

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 and blended 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.

CANeLearn is a new Canadian registered not-for-profit society. CANeLearn's mission is to provide leadership that champions student success by supporting organizations and educators involved in online and blended learning through networking, collaboration and research opportunities. CANeLearn provides members with networking, collaboration and research opportunities.

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 hard 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; and
- Sponsor recognition during CANeLearn events highlighting the study.

The plans for the 2015 study include an updating of the K-12 policy and activity reports for each of the provinces. Also, the 2015 study will feature a return to the more detailed format that includes brief issue papers and vignettes from a variety of K-12 distance education programs across the different

province and territories. Further, the individual program survey will return. Finally, there will be a greater development of the new online version of the report.

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