



**Ministry of Education
Knowledge Management & Accountability Division**

2015/16 Distributed Learning Enrolment Audit

AUDIT REPORT

**ASCEND Online
(073 96838)**

**2015/16 DISTRIBUTED LEARNING ENROLMENT AUDIT REPORT:
ASCEND Online
(073 96838)**

Background

Distributed Learning (DL) programs and courses are alternatives to regular classroom-based instruction for students in Kindergarten to Grade 12 providing a method of instruction that relies primarily on indirect communication between learners and British Columbia certified educators, including internet, other electronic-based delivery, teleconferencing, and correspondence. DL takes place when a student is primarily at a distance from the teacher.

The Ministry of Education funds Independent School Authorities based on the Authorities' reported DL enrolment in September, February and May each year. Independent School Authorities report students undertaking DL programs or courses to the Ministry on [Form 1701: Student Data Collection Completion Instructions for Independent Schools](#) (Form 1701).

The Knowledge Management and Accountability Division conducts DL Enrolment audits to verify enrolment reported on Form 1701. The outcomes of these audits could result in funding implications if adjustments are recommended. Funding recoveries are expanded to include full-time equivalents (FTEs) outside the audit sample where the auditors can make a clear link between the audit findings in the sample and those FTEs outside the sample.

Purpose

The purpose of the DL Enrolment audit is to provide assurance to the Ministry of Education and Independent School Authorities that Ministry directives and policies are being followed. The audits are based on *Form 1701: Student Data Collection, Completion Instructions for Independent Schools*, current Distributed Learning requirements and standards as well as related Ministry policies.

Description of the Audit Process

A Distributed Learning audit was conducted at ASCEND Online School May 25 to May 26, 2016. The total enrolment reported at February 12, 2016 was 18.0000 FTEs, of which 30 student files were reviewed.

An entry meeting was held with the Principal and the Superintendent to review the purpose of the audit and the criteria for funding as outlined in the Form 1701 Instructions. The process of the audit was reviewed and information about the program offered by the Distributed Learning Department was provided. The administrators and the auditor discussed the procedures that would be followed to undertake the audit.

The auditor worked out of the administrative offices at 365A Tranquille Road in Kamloops, British Columbia. The auditor sought documentation to determine that the courses claimed met the [DL Active Policy](#) criteria by the activation submission date and other related Ministry directives. Throughout the audit there were ongoing discussions with DL staff to ensure the auditor had an understanding of all aspects of the program. Ongoing discussions were held with

the staff during the course of the audit, providing them with every opportunity to locate the necessary documentation.

An exit meetings was held with the Principal and Superintendent where the auditor presented the preliminary results and clarified any outstanding issues.

Prior to the audit visit, the auditor undertook a verification of the school-assigned teachers' status with the Teacher Regulation Branch.

Description of the Program

ASCEND Online School is a Catholic faith-based distributed learning school that has been operating for the past five years in Kamloops, British Columbia (B.C.). The school accommodates both registered homeschoolers and enrolled DL students from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

Enrolled DL students are different from those students registered as home schoolers. For the DL students, parents have chosen to follow the B.C. Ministry of Education Educational Plan and learning standards. The school hires B.C. certified teachers (called Educational Coaches) who teach students enrolled in the ASCEND Online School.

The school uses three data platforms to store student data. The Cloud is used to store student contact information and proof of residency. Moodle stores course information, learning outcomes, course content and student progress as well as teacher and student communication. The Genius platform stores the student learning plan, the course selection form, specific student data, report cards, substantive course activity, as well as archived information about the student and his/her program.

ASCEND Online requires that the student be registered with the school and in the course as per the student learning plan and have completed 10% of the learning outcomes before being claimed as an active DL student.

The Kindergarten to Grade 9 DL Program:

When students enroll with ASCEND Online they are assigned to an Educational Coach who oversees and guides their program. Students are assigned based on families and geography because Educational Coaches are required by the school to make a minimum of three in-person visits per year.

In communication with the family, the teacher writes a Student Learning Plan (SLP) for each student, based on a face-to-face visit and discussion with the family and student about their learning goals. Teachers are in communication with their students on a weekly basis in a variety of formats (Skype, email threads, phone calls, face-to-face, group webinars and field trips). Students submit assignments regularly and get feedback from their teacher.

Special Education:

The requirements are similar for students with special education designations, but the in-person communication with students is monthly. The IEP reflects the student's goals and progress and becomes the student learning plan.

The Grade 10 to 12 DL Program:

The Grade 10 to 12 educational coaches are required to have a minimum of one weekly webinar with the students. In addition, the educational coaches are required to be available on Zoom (the school's meeting software) at least once a week for tutorials. Educational coaches are also required to be in communication weekly with each student. Course selection is done online, by the student/parent through their account in the student information system and in conjunction with the High School Coordinator.

Observations

The auditor found that:

- All members of the teaching staff of the ASCEND School are currently certified with the Teacher Regulation Branch.
- The teachers lead the educational programs of their students. The teachers communicate with students in a variety of ways to support their learning. They use Skype, Zoom, phone, face-to-face home visits, emails. Webinars, workshops, texting and if geographically possible group field trips to accomplish this.
- The teachers evaluate and assess their students on an on-going basis and for all progress reports and interim reports.
- The school is in accordance with the Distributed Learning-Independent Schools and Distributed Learning-General Policy regarding financial reimbursements to third party providers.
- The school follows the Distributed Learning-BC Residency Policy.
- The school follows the District's policy and procedures for 'ordinarily' resident in B.C.
- The school follows the Distributed Learning Active Policy.
- The school has a system for tracking students from the time they register until they meet all the funding requirements including those found in the Distributed Learning-Active Policy.
- The staff know their students very well and are able to articulate their progress and to identify their unique needs.
- Kindergarten to Grade 9 student learning plans included all areas of study for the appropriate grade, but students did not have evidence of learning activities in each of those subjects.
- Evidence of substantive course activity was not immediately available for six courses in Grade 10 to 12.
- In some instances dates were missing on IEPS, assignments, SLPs and Course Selection/Registration forms.

Audit Sample Findings

There were no recommended FTE adjustments during the review of the audit sample.

Recommendations

The auditor recommends that:

- The School ensure that for Grade 10-12 student claims, the substantive course activity for each course is uploaded and in evidence either in hard copy or electronically in accordance with the directives of the DL Active Policy.
- The School staff ensure dates are recorded on all IEPs, course selection/enrolment forms, SLPs, and substantive student course activity in accordance with the directives of the DL Active Policy.

Auditors' Comments

The auditor expresses appreciation to the school staff for their cooperation and hospitality during the audit.