



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

2015/16 Distributed Learning Enrolment Audit

AUDIT REPORT

SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 40 (New Westminster)

**ACCESS NEW WEST
and
NEW WESTMINSTER HOME LEARNERS' PROGRAM**

2015/16 DISTRIBUTED LEARNING ENROLMENT AUDIT REPORT SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 40 (New Westminster)

Background

The Ministry of Education funds boards of education based on the number of student full time equivalents (FTEs) reported by the districts on [*Form 1701: Student Data Collection*](#) (Form 1701). The FTEs are calculated by factoring the number of qualifying courses the student takes. A funding formula is used to allocate funds to boards based primarily on the calculated student FTE.

The Ministry of Education annually conducts Distributed Learning (DL) audits, in selected school districts, to verify enrolment reported on Form 1701. School districts are selected for audit based on a variety of factors, including the length of time since their last audit, enrolment size, and changes in enrolment.

Since 2009/10 funding recoveries were expanded to include FTEs outside of the sample where the auditors can make a clear link between the audit findings in the sample and those FTEs outside the sample.

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 (B.C.) 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.

There are 61 centres reported as public Distributed Learning schools in the Province totalling 3,985.9375 FTEs as at February 2016 for the 2015/16 school year. The Access New West and New Westminster Home Learners' programs at School District No. 40 (New Westminster) reported a total of 79.7500 FTEs on their February 2016 enrolment.

Purpose

The purpose of the DL Enrolment audit is to provide assurance to the Ministry of Education and boards of education that Ministry policy, legislation and directions are being followed. The audits are based on *Form 1701: Student Data Collection, Completion Instructions for Public Schools*, current DL Agreements, and related Ministry policies.

Description of the Audit Process

A DL audit was conducted at Access New West and Home Learners in School District No. 40 (New Westminster) during the week of April 11, 2016. The total enrolment for both programs reported at February 12, 2016 was 79.7500 FTEs, of which 180 student files were reviewed.

Entry meetings were held with the Superintendent, assigned district staff and with the DL Centre's Principal, Vice-Principals, Secretary, Department Head and District Administrator 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 the information provided in advance by

the Principal about the procedures and processes followed by the DL programs were discussed. The administrators and the audit team discussed the steps that the auditors would take to ensure effective communication between the auditors and the program's administrative teams for the duration of the audit. The Vice-Principals of the Access New West and New Westminster Home Learners' programs would take the lead for any questions which might arise during the week.

The audit team worked in a large meeting room within the Access New West DL Program Centre. Two computers were provided for use in accessing the program's database, although paper student files were available for all students identified in the audit sample. The auditors sought documentation to determine that the courses claimed met the active criteria by the activation submission date and other related Ministry directives. Throughout the audit, there were ongoing discussions with DL staff to ensure the audit team members had an understanding of all aspects of the programs. All recommended adjustments were discussed with the staff during the course of the audit, providing every opportunity to locate the necessary evidence. Any additional evidence requested was provided in a timely manner throughout the week. No systemic issues were identified.

A combined exit meeting was held with the Superintendent, DL Principal, DL Vice-Principals, Secretary, Department Head and District Administrator. At the exit meeting the auditors presented their preliminary results and clarified any outstanding issues.

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

Description of the Program

The DL programs for SD40 (New Westminster) are located at three different sites. The Kindergarten to Grade 9 (K-9) programs are Island Discovery Learning Community located on Bowen Island and the New Westminster Home Learners' Program located in a former elementary school Hume Park in New Westminster. Access New West located in Columbia Square, a business center, provides courses for Grades 10 to 12 school-age and adult students.

The K-9 programs began 15 years ago with 35 students and are currently serving over 560 students. It is a hybrid program where students attend in person two days a week. In the opinion of the program, this has many advantages for students and parents including allowing for face-to-face communication on a regular basis with parents and opportunities for direct teaching and analysis of student work. It also provides opportunities for a number of field trips each year.

The Access New West program offers over 30 courses including those developed by Cool School, Open School and New Westminster District-developed and adapted courses for online learning. The vast majority of students live in New Westminster and the surrounding lower mainland area. Most register during face-to-face interviews with teaching staff. In addition to online learning, Access New West offers drop-in opportunities for face-to-face tutoring, on-site test/exam writing and some limited support classes. Students with limited personal access to technology can also work on online courses using computers available at the site. Online courses are available throughout the year and teachers are available for support both online and in person on site.

Observations

The auditors found that:

- The programs have a very thorough process to verify that students along with their parent/guardian (where applicable) are ordinarily resident in B.C.
- The teachers lead the educational programs of their students.
- The teachers communicate with students in a variety of ways to support their learning.
- Students who were withdrawn from courses and had not completed the funded course were reclaimed for the same course prior to the elapse of two DL reporting periods.
- A student was claimed in error despite practices in place to mitigate incorrect reporting of funding claims.
- Graduated adult students were claimed for ineligible courses.
- One student was claimed for the same course at the same time at two different schools.
- All members of the teaching staff are currently certified with the Teacher Regulation Branch.
- The programs are in accordance with the [Distributed Learning-General Policy](#) regarding financial reimbursements to third party providers.
- The evidence required verifying funding claims for SSA 11A/B and 12A/B were well organized and accessible through the District Career Coordinator.

Audit Sample Findings

The auditors found that:

- 0.1250 school-age student FTEs were identified by the District during the audit preparation process as being claimed for the same course (SSA 11A) by both the local secondary school and the Access New West program. Students are not allowed to take the same course at the same time at two different schools as per the [DL Funding Policy](#).
- 0.3750 graduated adult FTEs were claimed for courses which were not on the list of tuition free courses for graduated adults. In accordance with Form 1701 Instructions, the DL Funding Policy and the [Adult Funding Policy](#) graduated adults are only funding eligible for those courses listed as [Tuition Free Foundation Courses](#).
- 0.2500 non-graduated adult FTEs were reported in February for re-registration in a course claimed during a previous DL funding period, contrary to the DL Funding Policy which states that: *“For boards to be eligible for funding for the same DL course taken in the same DL school by Grade 10-12 students (including adults) the following conditions must be met:*
 - *The student must have been previously reported as failed (through course completion), or as course completed and wanting to improve their mark, or withdrawn from that course.*
 - *If a student has withdrawn from a course or did not complete a course, there must be a record of student inactivity for two DL enrolment counts, with a corresponding record of attempts made by the DL school to contact the student for that course.”*

It should also be noted that the continuation of learning in the same course may be over a number of registration periods, only one course is undertaken and therefore eligible for only one funding claim (per Form 1701 Instructions P.13).

- 0.1250 graduated adult FTEs were claimed in error. The reporting was for a former student with the same name as a current student, but spelled slightly differently. Had the correct student been reported, the claim would also have been ineligible. The course was not a fundable option for a graduated adult.

Recommendations

The auditors recommend that:

- The District ensure that students are not enrolled in the same course at the same time in two different District schools as per the DL Funding Policy.
- The District ensure that all schools, including the DL program, enrolling adult students are aware of and adhering to the Adult Funding Policy, including only tuition free foundation courses for Graduated Adults.
- The DL program staff report for funding only claims for those students who are active in accordance with the Form 1701 Instructions, and the Distributed Learning Funding and Active Policies.
- The DL program staff ensure effective tracking of student claims from the time of registration until they are reported to ensure the claims are eligible for funding in accordance with the Form 1701 Instructions and related Distributed Learning policies.
- The DL program staff refrain from the practice of reclaiming a course when the student is continuing their learning over a number of registration periods. Only one course is undertaken and eligible only for one funding claim.

Auditors' Comments

The auditors wish to express their appreciation to the District staff for their cooperation during the audit.