



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

2015/16 Distributed Learning Enrolment Audit

AUDIT REPORT

SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 60 (Peace River North)

**NORTHERN BC DISTANCE EDUCATION SCHOOL
(NBCDES)**

2015/16 DISTRIBUTED LEARNING ENROLMENT AUDIT REPORT SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 60 (Peace River North)

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.

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 BC 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.

Since 2009/10 funding recoveries are 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.

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 Northern BC Distance Education School at School District No. 60 (Peace River North) reported a total of 75.1875 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 Distributed Learning Agreements, and related Ministry policies.

Description of the Audit Process

A DL audit was conducted at Northern B.C. Distance Education School (NBCDES) in School District No. 60 (Peace River North) during the week of February 9, 2016. The total enrolment reported at February 12, 2016 was 75.1875 FTEs, of which 144 student files were reviewed.

Entry meetings were held with the Superintendent, Secretary Treasurer and Assistant Secretary Treasurer and with the Distributed Learning Centre's Principal and the Computer Support Worker 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 School were discussed. The Principal and the audit team discussed the steps which the auditors would take to ensure effective communication between the auditors and the School's administrative team. Any issues that required additional clarification would be discussed with the Principal and/or appropriate staff. Any evidence that was not available initially to the auditors would be requested on a Clarification Sheet and discussed prior to a determination being made.

The audit team worked out of a large classroom within the School and were provided with computers to access the School's data. After a short tutorial by the Computer Support Worker, the auditors were able to access the data required to conduct the audit. 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 program. All recommended adjustments were discussed with the staff during the course of the audit, providing every opportunity to locate the necessary documentation..

Exit meetings were held with the DL Principal, Computer Support Worker, Clerical Support and five teachers; and, the Superintendent, Secretary Treasurer and Assistant Secretary Treasurer. At each 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 school-assigned teachers' status with the Teacher Regulation Branch.

Description of the Program

NBCDES is a Public Distributed Learning School in the Peace River North School District. The School is located in the City of Fort St John. The programs offered are: Elementary Kindergarten to Grade 5, Middle School-Intermediate Grade 6 to 9, and the Secondary Program for students in Grades 10 to 12 including non-graduated Adults. The School is currently developing a virtual community of Support for Early Learners in Pre-Kindergarten.

Students have the opportunity to take courses through Internet access or use paper-based programs if preferred. Students are able to contact instructors online or through other virtual communications or email. When paper-based courses are received by the School these are scanned and stored digitally ensuring all student work has a digital record at the faculty. Students can also receive assistance and instruction through face-to-face communication on site

NBCDES has a stated mission "to provide access to, and support for, personalized educational opportunities designed to encourage and assist each student to develop to his/her maximum potential". This mission is evident when reviewing the history and the transitions since the early 1900s as a correspondence school to the virtual offerings the DL School supports today. As the NBCDES is responsible for a vast geographical area, technology has proven to be a very viable tool. The DL staff make personal visits several times a year to the Yukon, other school districts and the outskirts of the District, where their registered students reside. The Principal and teachers travel to visit both the homes and the other learning facilities where students are cross enrolled.

Observations

The auditors found that:

- All student learning plans were dated and signed.
- All student assignments were marked with appropriate feedback from teachers.
- Documents were dated enabling auditors to verify the date substantive course activity was submitted and the date the course was activated.
- Clarification requests were responded to in a timely manner providing the auditors with the required evidence.
- The School followed the District policy to verify that students along with their parent/guardian (where applicable) are ordinarily resident in British Columbia. The School has a process in place to review at every claim period that the student is ordinarily resident.
- Teacher-developed student learning plans for Kindergarten to Grade 9 students claimed for FTE funding were complete and contained detail about the program to be followed. These plans, with a corroboration by the parent, are the documentation of the parents' commitment to the student learning plan. The plans contained dates and documented commitment by the parent. There was evidence of work submitted by the student to the teacher and the work which was provided as evidence of the student's active participation in the program was dated.
- The courses listed on the Student Learning Plan differed at times from the courses claimed. The auditors were able to obtain clarification from the DL staff which courses were claimed and verified these with assignments found in the "Marked Work" folder for each student.
- There were several instances where student activity in a course had met the attendance requirements one to two data collection periods prior to being claimed. In most instances this was undertaken to ensure the students did more work than the minimum five percent requirement. There was evidence of considerable work undertaken by students and marked by the teachers confirming considerable commitment to the educational services for these students.
- All members of the teaching staff are currently certified with the Teacher Regulation Branch.
- The evidence required to verify funding claims for Work Experience 12A and 12B as well as other Career Program options was very well organized and accessible, indicating valuable educational services are being provided to students.
- The District offers students a three course program called Green Certificate Agricultural Training. Students can choose from Beekeeping, Equine, Sheep, Cattle, or Field Crop. This program of courses is purchased from the Government of Alberta each time a student enrolls in an area of interest. The auditors sought verification that this program of courses met the eligibility requirements for a Board/Authority Approved educational option.
- There were a number of school-aged Grade 10-12 students and non-graduated adults who were reported in February and did not meet the requirements of the DL Active Policy or Form 1701 Reporting Instructions. As part of the registration process for the February claim period, students were asked to complete an assignment that was submitted when the student registered at the school. There must be evidence the student is eligible prior to assigning the student any tasks. To align with Ministry directives regarding student claim eligibility, the DL staff were asked to provide evidence of student work after the registration process was undertaken. While the process of gathering relevant data and entering the information on or before the data collection date may be undertaken, this information must be assembled prior to assigning the student tasks related to the funded education session. The auditors were able

to find evidence of substantive course activity after the student registered and prior to the course claim for a number of these student claims.

Audit Sample Findings

The auditors found that:

- 0.8750 Kindergarten to Grade 9 FTEs was claimed for a 17 year old reported as a Grade 8 student taking three learning foundation courses and PE 10. The parent lives in Winnipeg and the student lives with a family who were given “educational guardianship” by the mother but were not legal guardians. In accordance with the [K-12 Funding General](#) and [DL BC Residency](#) policies to be eligible for provincial funding, Boards of Education must ensure that students are ordinarily resident in B.C. (and where applicable for school-age students) with their parent/legal guardian.
- 3.0000 Grade 10-12 school-age FTEs did not meet the requirements of the DL Active Policy and in accordance with Form 1701 Instructions.
- 0.2500 non-graduated adult FTEs did not meet the requirements of the DL Active Policy and in accordance with Form 1701 Instructions.
- 0.1875 Grade 10-12 school-age FTEs reported for funding was not an eligible claim. An international fee paying student was incorrectly reported by the District. The District staff advised the audit team of this reporting error prior to the audit.
- 0.8750 graduated adult FTEs were claimed for courses which were not on the list of tuition free courses. 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](#). Additionally it was verified by the District staff that these students were charged a tuition fee for these course claims.
- 0.1250 graduated adult FTE was reported for a graduated adult who had withdrawn in the previous 2014/15 school year and had not enrolled in the current school. The District staff verified that this was a claim made in error.

Recommendations

The auditors recommend that:

- The DL staff ensure that courses are claimed for the funding period during which they meet the Distributed Learning Active criteria and in accordance with the reporting claim directives of the Form 1701 Instructions. In instances where the timelines are not followed, there must be documentation to verify the course was not previously claimed along with an explanation of why Form 1701 directives were not followed.
- The DL staff ensure that students are enrolled and have the required course selection/enrolment form prior to assigning any portion of a funded education program. In accordance with Sec.82 of the School Act, boards are required to provide an educational program free of charge for those student enrolled in an educational program in a school operated by the board. The Form 1701 Instructions requires students to be enrolled and in attendance to be eligible FTE claims. The [K-12 Funding General Policy](#) requires that boards ensure students are enrolled to be eligible for provincial funding.
- 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 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 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 District ensure that all students are ordinarily resident in B.C. prior to submission of related funding claims.
- The District ensure only eligible ‘ordinarily resident’ students are claimed for funding. International and Out-of-Province individuals are non-resident, ineligible for a provincially funded education, and are not to be claimed for funding.

Auditors’ Comments

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