

# **Distance Learning**

**A Policy Handbook for  
Schools/Divisions/Districts**

**Manitoba  
Education,  
Training  
and Youth**

**Éducation,  
Formation professionnelle  
et Jeunesse  
Manitoba**



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# ***DISTANCE LEARNING***

*A Policy Handbook for  
Schools/Divisions/Districts*

**2002**

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth

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This document is available on the Manitoba Education, Training and Youth website at <[http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/docs/policy/online\\_learning](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/docs/policy/online_learning)>.

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## **PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT**

The purposes of this document are to

- provide information regarding the role of distance learning within a changing educational environment
- specify the policy for creating and sustaining a distributed model of online distance learning within a managed and cooperative environment
- specify the roles and responsibilities of Manitoba Education, Training and Youth and its partners in developing and implementing a distributed model of online distance learning
- define a peer review process for online distance learning courses

Please refer to the glossary for definitions of terms appearing in this document.

## **INTRODUCTION**

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In a rapidly changing educational environment—as new opportunities and technologies for learning become increasingly available—Manitoba Education, Training and Youth is establishing responsive and comprehensive policy for the development and implementation of distance learning courses. In doing so, the Department is guided by three purposes:

1. To ensure flexible and timely responses to the differing needs and situations of school divisions/districts<sup>1</sup> with respect to distance learning courses.
2. To maintain high and consistent standards for student learning across the province.
3. To promote and support a managed and cooperative distance learning environment (see page 8).

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this document, the term “school divisions/districts” refers to the governing bodies of schools, including school divisions, school districts, Band-operated schools, and funded independent schools and school authorities.

# **POLICY FOR DISTANCE LEARNING**

## **Background**

Many Manitoba school divisions/districts are refocusing the delivery of education in their jurisdictions based on a variety of influencing factors. These factors include

- small schools and small rural populations
- anticipated teacher shortages, particularly in specialty areas
- the rapid evolution of Internet-based technologies that give educational jurisdictions the ability to offer course content in ways that were not possible before

Many school divisions/districts are looking to distance learning and modern information and communication technologies to offer a partial solution to dealing with these factors.

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth acknowledges its responsibility in providing leadership in the area of distance learning. This leadership responsibility includes the ongoing development and delivery of distance learning courses by the Department and the provision of policy that supports the development and delivery of online distance learning courses by school divisions/districts.

## **Summary Statement of Policy Features**

This policy handbook clarifies the following six issues related to distance learning courses:

1. communication and consultation
2. credits for graduation requirements
3. the funding responsibilities of school divisions/districts and students/parents
4. the desire of school divisions/districts to develop and/or deliver online distance learning courses
5. coordination in support of a managed and cooperative distance learning environment
6. peer review of online distance learning courses

## **Main Features of the Policy**

The six main features of Manitoba's policy for distance learning are discussed below.

### **1. Communication and Consultation**

It is important that students' decisions about participating in distance learning courses be guided by a collaborative decision-making process involving the students, their parents,<sup>2</sup> home school division/district officials, and those offering distance learning courses. The purpose of this collaborative process is to ensure that all parties have the information required to foster sound decision making, as well as to ensure open communication.

To facilitate informed decision making, home school division/district officials are required, to the greatest extent possible, to engage in an information-sharing process with students wanting to register for distance learning courses, and with their parents. The information-sharing process might include a discussion about matters such as the following:

- the appropriateness of a particular distance learning course for the student
- the timely completion of the course credits
- the responsibilities of all parties with respect to providing the necessary student accommodation
- the responsibilities of all parties with respect to the payment of fees
- the roles and responsibilities of the distance learning course deliverer(s)
- the recognition of the distance learning course for credit towards Manitoba's graduation requirements

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<sup>2</sup> In this document, the term "parents" refers to both parents and guardians and is used with the recognition that in some cases only one parent may be involved in a child's education.

## **2. Credits for Graduation Requirements**

Distance learning course delivery, particularly online delivery, extends beyond traditional delivery boundaries and raises many questions about how such courses can be recognized for the purpose of attaining credits that satisfy Manitoba's graduation requirements. The following requirements will apply to distance learning courses.

### **Compulsory and Optional Credits**

Students may satisfy a maximum of twenty-eight (28) credits within Manitoba's graduation requirements through distance learning courses.

During the Senior Years, students may complete distance learning courses delivered by a university or college (post-secondary credits) to a maximum of five (5) credits within the 28 credits required for graduation. These credits could be taken from provincial universities or colleges or from out-of-province post-secondary institutions.

### ***Compulsory Credits***

Online distance learning courses delivered by Manitoba school divisions/districts will be recognized by Manitoba Education, Training and Youth as **compulsory** credits that satisfy Manitoba's graduation requirements **only** if the following conditions are met:

- Students secure the approval of their home school division/district prior to registering in the courses. Refusal should be based only on sound educational reasons.
- The courses are based on Manitoba Education, Training and Youth curricula and are recognized for Senior Years credit by the Department subsequent to a required peer review (see page 11).
- Students write the Manitoba Standards Tests for the online distance learning courses they take. Exemptions can be made only in accordance with the Department's current *Policies and Procedures for Standards Tests*, available online at <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/assess/publications/html>.

Schools must offer a minimum of one compulsory credit in a particular subject area, regardless of the number of course credit choices available. For example, schools will have met the requirements if they have offered one of the Applied, Consumer, or Pre-Calculus Mathematics courses at each of the Senior 2, 3, and 4 levels. If a school is unable to offer one of the possible compulsory credits, then the school must make a reasonable effort to find an appropriate alternative means of delivery, pay the associated costs, and provide the necessary student accommodation.

### ***Optional Credits***

- Online distance learning courses delivered by Manitoba school divisions/districts will be recognized as **optional** credits that satisfy Manitoba's graduation requirements if they are based on departmental curricula or curricula that have been registered with Manitoba Education, Training and Youth (i.e., school-initiated courses [SICs]).
- Distance learning courses delivered by a provincially accredited organization will be recognized as optional credits that satisfy Manitoba's graduation requirements.
- The student will consult with the school principal before registering in an optional-credit distance learning course. Refusals should be based only on sound educational reasons, such as potential duplication of content from a previous grade. Schools have no obligation for providing accommodation but would have an interest in the student's progress. The student is responsible for associated costs. However, school divisions/districts may choose to offer some financial support.

### ***Course Codes and Designations***

The following course codes and designations will apply to distance learning courses. (For specific course codes, please refer to the Department's *Subject Table Handbook: Student Records System and Professional School Personnel*, available online at <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/docs/policy/sth>).

<b>Credit Category</b>	<b>Curriculum Type</b>	<b>Course Code and Designation</b>
Compulsory	Developed by Manitoba Education, Training and Youth	Same as for in-class instruction
Optional	Developed by Manitoba Education, Training and Youth	Same as for in-class instruction
Optional	Registered with Manitoba Education, Training and Youth (SIC)	Same as for in-class instruction
Optional	Out-of-province	Externally developed distance learning course

### **3. Funding**

Regular funding, as provided through Manitoba’s funding formula, for in-school students who choose to enroll in distance learning courses will remain with the home school division/district. Any payment of fees on behalf of students enrolled in optional distance learning courses is a local decision. Agreement between the home school division/district and a distance learning course deliverer other than Manitoba Education, Training and Youth must be reached before either party can assume that there will be an exchange of funds.

Home-schooled learners taking distance learning courses are eligible for funding only if they are enrolled in a school and then only for the time in attendance in the school.

### **4. Development and Delivery of Distance Learning Courses**

School divisions/districts may develop and/or acquire distance learning courses. They may also, as a result of local decision making, opt to deliver online distance learning courses to students within and beyond their own boundaries.

### **5. Coordination**

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth will partner with school divisions/districts in creating and sustaining a managed and cooperative environment that supports a distributed model of online distance learning.

## **The Managed and Cooperative Distance Learning Environment**

The managed and cooperative distance learning environment will foster partnerships that reduce duplicate efforts and initiatives and result in the effective use of resources within and across school division/district boundaries. The sustainability of this environment is based on the timely collection and dissemination of information.

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth will collect information pertaining to

- the availability of online courses (e.g., the deliverer and the enrollment capacity)
- peer reviews of online courses
- online course development initiated by school divisions/districts
- online course needs of learners and school divisions/districts

The Department will share this information with all school divisions/districts and thereby enable informed decision making that results in the effective use of resources, all the while addressing the identified needs.

The role of Manitoba Education, Training and Youth in this environment will be the collection and dissemination of information and does not extend to the aggregation of students into classes. This is the responsibility of the school divisions/districts offering online distance learning courses.

## **The Distributed Model of Online Distance Learning**

The distributed model of online distance learning enables students to access course credits from various provincially accredited organizations and to use various delivery models to meet Manitoba's graduation requirements. This model is based on learner needs and tends to integrate traditional school resources, such as the classroom and library, with the delivery of online content. Furthermore, this model offers maximum flexibility to learners and teachers with respect to where and when to enter the learning environment.

Additionally, this model will assist small schools in addressing the challenge of balancing the desire to offer a full range of courses against the financial and human resources that are available. A distributed model of online distance learning, implemented within a managed and cooperative environment, will result in collaboration among school divisions/districts as they aggregate students into classes, which enable teacher assignments.

Implementation of the distributed model of online distance learning will result in a variety of online courses being available for a range of learners located both within and beyond traditional school division/district boundaries.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

Each partner will have specific roles and responsibilities in implementing the distributed model of online distance learning, as outlined below.

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth will

- create and maintain policy pertaining to distance learning courses
- provide information on the managed and cooperative distance learning environment
- continue to develop and/or acquire and deliver distance learning courses
- support school divisions/districts in the development of distance learning courses that meet departmental requirements
- lead or participate in the peer review process (see page 11)
- provide Manitoba school divisions/districts with access to online distance learning courses
- supply codes for reporting student marks to the Professional Certification and Student Records Unit

School divisions/districts will

- ensure divisional/district compliance with departmental policy and procedures
- participate in the peer review process (as outlined on page 11)
- submit information about online distance learning courses and enrollment capacity to Manitoba Education, Training and Youth for inclusion on the Department's website
- assume financial responsibility for the costs of development, acquisition, adaptation, evaluation, and delivery of distance learning courses within the established funding procedures and formulas of Manitoba Education, Training and Youth
- report Senior Years student marks, as percentage marks only, to the Professional Certification and Student Records Unit of Manitoba Education, Training and Youth

In addition, home school divisions/districts, through their officials, will assume responsibility for students wanting to take distance learning courses, and, therefore, will undertake to

- facilitate discussions that lead to informed decision making for students wanting to participate in distance learning courses (see page 4)
- supply on-site facilitators, particularly for online distance learning courses
- provide access to the appropriate information and communication technologies, including the Internet (required only in the case of compulsory courses)
- ensure that any distance learning course for which a student registers is valid for credit towards Manitoba's graduation requirements
- record the marks students receive in distance learning courses on students' transcripts

## 6. Peer Review Requirements

The following chart summarizes the peer review requirements for compulsory and optional courses.

<b>Credit Category</b>	<b>Delivery within School Division/District Boundaries</b>	<b>Delivery beyond School Division/District Boundaries</b>
<b>Compulsory</b> (Based on Manitoba Education, Training and Youth curricula.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peer review is optional. (If undertaken, the review will be led by the school division/district, with optional reporting to and involvement of departmental staff.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peer review, led by Manitoba Education, Training and Youth, is required.</li> </ul>
<b>Optional</b> (Based on Manitoba Education, Training and Youth curricula or SICs.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peer review is optional. (If undertaken, the review will be led by the school division/district, with optional reporting to and involvement of departmental staff.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peer review is optional. (If undertaken, the review will be led by the school division/district, with optional reporting to and involvement of departmental staff.)</li> </ul>

The Manitoba Education, Training and Youth website will include information about all school division/district distance learning courses and indicate whether or not they have been peer reviewed. In order for school division/district-led peer reviews to be included in this information, departmental staff must participate in the peer review and a peer review report must be submitted to the Department.

School divisions/districts may also access distance learning courses from provincially accredited organizations within the limitations set out previously (see page 5). Peer reviews of distance learning courses accessed in this manner are optional. If a peer review is done, it will be school division/district led.

**Suggested Guidelines**

For a list of Formative Peer Review Criteria and a Summative Evaluation and Sign-Off Form, see *Suggested Guidelines for the Development and Peer Review of Online Distance Learning Courses: A Supplement to Distance Learning: A Policy Handbook for Schools/Divisions/Districts* (Manitoba Education, Training and Youth, 2002). This document is also available on the Department's website at <[http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/docs/policy/online\\_learning](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/docs/policy/online_learning)>.

## **GLOSSARY**

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**Distance learning course**—course content for delivery to students using one or more of the following media: print, video, CD-ROM, interactive television, and information and communication technologies (Internet). The student learning materials include

- background content
- guided learning experiences
- assessment tools
- approaches based on the student learning outcomes
- appropriate learning resources

**Distance learning course deliverer**—an entity that delivers distance learning courses in one or more media. Some distance learning course deliverers are Manitoba Education, Training and Youth, Manitoba school divisions/districts, and various provincially accredited organizations in other jurisdictions.

**Distributed learning model**—a learning model that enables learners to access course credits from various provincially accredited organizations and to use various delivery models to meet Manitoba Education, Training and Youth graduation requirements. Learners are not bound by school division/district boundaries for accessing learning experiences.

**Home school division/district**—the school division/district in which a student is registered as of September 30 of a given school year.

**Necessary student accommodation**—refers to counselling, facilitation, encouragement, access to information and communication technologies (including the Internet), technical support, and so on.

**Online course**—a distance learning course delivered to students using information and communication technologies. These types of courses are also referred to as web-based courses.

**Out-of-province course**—a distance learning course that is delivered to students within a Manitoba school division/district by any provincially accredited organization.

**Provincially accredited organization**—an organization that is accredited by Manitoba Education, Training and Youth, by a department or ministry of education in another Canadian jurisdiction from which distance learning courses can be accessed, or by a university or post-secondary institution registered with the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada or the Association of Canadian Community Colleges.