Virtual Campus Administrator's Guide

Offering Distance Learning (Online Courses)

Currently, only through a MEQ pilot project, may an educational institution in Quebec offer Distance Learning. Please see:
http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/dossiers-thematiques/plan-daction-numerique/projet-pilote-en-formation-a-distance/

Guiding question:
What does any principal in the network need to know in order to plan for and offer their own distance classes, either within their own school or within their school board?

Why?
The first consideration for administration when planning for distance classes is to examine the reasons why distance courses are needed in their school or school board. The focus is on student need and equity of access.

- Why is the course not available to the student in the school/region/community?
    - Example: The student is enrolled in a small school without the number of students or sufficient personnel to offer the course.
- Why does the student need the course?
    - Example: The course is a prerequisite for or related to the student's future academic goals.
- Why is an online option a viable solution for a particular student or group of students?
    - Example: The students who need the course are highly motivated and able to learn independently.
- Does the same need exist elsewhere in the community/region? Who else should be included in the project?
    - Example: A common need for a course between multiple schools could be identified and the course and organization could be shared.

Who will participate in the distance learning program?
Selection of Students for Online Courses:

Careful thought should be put into the selection of students who will take online courses. Administration should make the demands of online courses clear to parents and students who wish to take advantage of these courses.

- For example, if the courses offered online are academically challenging courses, online delivery may add a level of challenge for some students. Students will need to be able to participate and communicate effectively working with a teacher who may be off-site.

Important Considerations

Costs
Costs will depend on the number of teachers and other staff as well as the technology involved, both hardware and software.

How will the program be funded? It is important to note that families can not be charged for the instruction of courses during the school year in Quebec's public school boards.

To be able to determine the cost for the coming year of distance learning, the number of projected participants should be as accurate as possible.

Platforms, Tools and Resources
After the cost of staffing is covered, technology is the next biggest expense.
Which platforms will be used?
- CMS/LMS (Google Classroom, TEAMS, SAKAI, Moodle, etc.)
- Teaching/learning online platform for live instruction (TEAMS, Zoom, Google Meet, etc.)
- Apps that are recommended for the courses/levels to be taught at a distance

Identify the technical requirements for the platforms to ensure that the hardware available (or that must be purchased) meets the requirements.

Keep in mind the machines the students will be using. For example, Chromebooks are not as powerful or compatible with Zoom but work well with Google for Education and are more affordable.

Even though the courses are offered online, a textbook list may need to be provided. Ebooks may be purchased instead, where possible.

Equity? If students will be working on homework online, do students all have access **at home** to devices suitable for the digital tools used? If not, the homework policy will need to be considered or alternate resouces provided.

Mode of Instruction
How will the courses be taught? Which mode of distance or online learning best suits your students and your program?:

Will they be synchronous, asynchronous, blended, or hybrid?
- Synchronous: Classes occur in a live online environment in real time
- Asynchronous: Classes are completed independently by students (ie. in an online environment like an LMS). The timing during the day does not need to coincide with teacher availability or the schedules of other students.
- Hybrid: Typically, some students are in the class face-to-face while other students connect to the class in real-time but online.
- Blended: Classes include a combination of instructional modes

  Some examples of blended models:
  - Regular synchronous online sessions during the week with asynchronous resources to support learning
  - Asynchronous learning with one live session required every week
  - Students are assigned to work independently in the LMS to allow for small group interventions for some students or due to a student missing class.

Training and Set-up
- After choosing platforms, determine the required information for technical set-up for each student.
- Training and technical support must be provided for the platforms that are selected.
- Teachers will need intensive training first to be able to support their students.

Teachers
"It's not about the tech; it's about the teach!"
Where possible, select online teachers carefully not for technical savvy primarily but based on teaching ability. Teachers can be trained in how to use the technology and will be motivated to do so if they are compelled to connect to students.

Security
Review the features and settings of online platforms to determine the defaults that will keep the online classroom secure.
Determine some rules for online interaction.
Are students required to have their cameras on at all times?

Permissions

Permission forms must be shared with parents for their authorization to have their child take online classes. The forms should include a list of the platforms to be used, expectations for appropriate online behaviour, permissions for the use of technology, and rules for the online classes.

Physical Student Work Space

Where will the students work on their online courses?

It is preferable if each student has his/her own work station. The work station should include a computer and space to place books in order to work. Some schools have set up tables that are set parallel to the computer table so that students have reasonable space to work.

If internet transmission is a problem, students may share a computer, where two headsets (or a speaker) are connected simultaneously to the computer.

Is bandwidth sufficient to support the program? Is wifi strong throughout the school?

Where limited bandwidth is a concern, it can help if other internet use within the school is kept to a minimum during scheduled online classes for larger groups.

Set up students taking online classes in locations where wifi is strong.

Supervision

Selected online students should be cooperative, independent learners who accept that taking an online course is a privilege and a responsibility. Therefore, the online teacher can oversee students' levels of participation and can determine whether a student is off-task or not. The teacher would then communicate any concerns directly to the on-site supervisor.

Some groups of students may require direct supervision for longer periods of time. Proper supervision will provide students with the greatest chance of success by ensuring that online time is effectively and appropriately used.

Some suggestions on how schools can handle supervision:

- Assign supervision to a different teacher for each day of online classes.
- Arrange the work stations so that they are under the view of a teacher or an administrator. Some schools have work stations set up at the back of a classroom, (students' backs to the teacher, computer screens facing the teacher) while the teacher works with a class at the front of the room. Other schools arrange a similar situation where a resource teacher taught one or two students at the front.
- Several schools have located the work station in an area that is visible to many staff members (e.g. right off the administration office, near the secretary, in a library with glass partitions).
- Assign a volunteer or integration aide several minutes of supervision per day.

Seek the support of an organization experienced in distance learning

LEARN (learnquebec.ca) offered online courses in English schools across Quebec from 1999 to 2022. During the pandemic, the organization shared some of their expertise to help schools with shifting to online teaching and learning.

https://educatorstoolbox.learnquebec.ca/teaching-and-learning-online

The Canadian eLearning Network (CANeLearn) is a Canadian registered not-for-profit society with a mission to be the leading voice in Canada for learner success in K-12 online and blended learning by promoting effective practice in e-learning, fostering community and facilitating interaction among online and blended learning educators, and connecting educators to e-learning organizations.

https://canelearn.net/home/learn/