[Education that Works for You – Modernizing Classrooms](#) is a proposed policy from the Ontario government. While the original announcement covers several other changes, specific to e-learning the proposal calls for:

E-learning

The government is committed to modernizing education and supporting students and families in innovative ways that enhance their success. A link to e-learning courses can be found here: www.edu.gov.on.ca/elearning/courses.html.

Starting in 2020-21, the government will centralize the delivery of all e-learning courses to allow students greater access to programming and educational opportunities, no matter where they live in Ontario.

Secondary students will take a minimum of four e-learning credits out of the 30 credits needed to fulfill the requirements for achieving an Ontario Secondary School Diploma. That is equivalent to one credit per year, with exemptions for some students on an individualized basis. These changes will be phased in, starting in 2020-21.

With these additional modernizations, the secondary program enhancement grant will no longer be required.

As you might imagine, the announcement sparked considerable discussion and debate in both main-stream and social media channels. Unfortunately, a lot of the commentary included many discredited myths (see "[Top 10 Myths about Online Learning](#)" for some of the myths), misinformation, and pitted e-learning against classroom-based learning. CANeLearn posted a series of blog entries in relation to the policy announcement, which are summarized below. Also posted was an interview with CANeLearn's CEO, Randy LaBonte, featured on "The Agenda with Steve Paikin" in a segment entitled "How to Learn Online."

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbdQRYXffoI

CANeLearn Responds

As the leading voice in Canada for K-12 online and blended learning, CANeLearn has consolidated research related to the e-learning announcement's reaction in a series of blog posts.

First, CANeLearn believes all students can be successful in an e-learning environment (see https://canelearn.net/repost-ontario-e-learning-graduation-requirement-student-success/ for details), so we wish to dispel the notion that e-learning is inferior to classroom learning. It is simply another learning environment teachers can leverage to support and engage students - just as a makerspace, a library, a metal or wood shop, or any other place where teachers can structure and manage learning opportunities. Structure, support, and teacher presence are the critical ingredients for success in any learning environment, and online is not excluded from this.

Second, the government's announcement of four graduation credits required to be via e-learning amidst per-student funding reductions that boards of education will receive in the next school year could create serious challenges for maintaining the level of quality instruction currently provided through Ontario's e-learning programs. Until the details for implementation of this mandate are clear, it is difficult to speculate the impact of the announcement. However, there are some specific issues that are pertinent to its implementation that CANeLearn has outlined:

1. Ontario already has a highly centralized system with delivery decentralized at the local level for maximum benefit
   - Centralized learning management system (LMS) licensed for use by all teachers and content provided by the Ministry
   - Technology-Enabled Learning Coordinators provided for every board by the Ministry
   - Three provincial consortia to support effective delivery and student access
   - Local teachers in schools provide instruction, in close proximity to local online students
   - Research on centralized and decentralized e-learning indicates both are successful in Canada, but the design, delivery, and support for e-learning determines success (see more at https://canelearn.net/repost-ontario-centralized-e-learning-program/)
   - We are puzzled by what is meant by "*centralize the delivery of all e-learning courses to allow students greater access*" and how that might affect the successful consortium delivery models underway in the province

2. Four course/credit e-learning graduation requirement has not been seen elsewhere
   - None of the other Canadian jurisdictions have any form of e-learning requirement
   - Only six US states have some form of online learning graduation requirement, but typically only for one online course
   - e-Learning is typically used to support students who are not able to complete required courses or those of interest in a regular classroom — not to replace classroom instruction (see more at https://canelearn.net/repost-ontario-modernizing-classrooms/)

- The question is, what is the purpose for the 10-fold increase in e-learning? Is it to save money or to improve access? Which leads to the question of scalability and timing for implementation

3. The scalability challenge is huge and likely to impact quality without significant resourcing
    - A four-course requirement for all secondary students in the province would mean an increase from 50,000-60,000 students in e-learning to over 600,000 taking e-learning courses
    - The existing system would need to scale by more than 10 times requiring a significant investment in technology access and connectivity and a 10-fold increase in local supports (see more at https://canelearn.net/repost-ontario-e-learning-graduation-requirement-scalability/)
    - So, the concern about scalability leads to the question of the quality of the instruction, but more importantly the learning opportunities afforded for all students. How will they be able to access learning opportunities remotely without access to technology or proper internet connectivity? How will they be supported when learning online?

4. The old model of distance education delivery (often referred to as the legacy model), which relied on content delivery, assignment completion, and information recall testing, lacked success. It relied on a centralized teacher with remote students accessing online courses, typically on their own without local support.
    - Legacy distance education models had course completion rates that on average ranged from a high of ~70% and a low of 50% (Winkelmans, Anderson, & Barbour, 2010), with some programs reporting rates as low as 20% (Sweet, 1991)
    - Ontario's existing model has local support and access to courses with completion rates comparable to or better than classroom-based courses (up to 94% completion in some consortium models)
    - Most distance learning programs in Canada have shifted away from a legacy model to community-based programs with active local technology and learning support for students (see more at https://canelearn.net/what-does-online-learning-really-look-like/)
    - The e-Learning Ontario Master User Agreement specifies that local support must be in place for any e-learning (see http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/elearning/MasterUserAgreement.pdf)
    - Successful e-learning models favour a reallocation of resources and funding, not a reduction
    - The concern we have is that should the Ontario government's e-learning course requirement implementation plan rely on earlier models of distance education, the quality and success of e-learning in the province could well be undermined.

We hope to hear more in the future as e-learning educators and leaders consult with the Ministry to share similar concerns and map out a way to address the mandate without loss of quality in the current e-learning programs.

If you have any questions about these, or any other issues, please contact CANeLearn CEO - Randy LaBonte – at rlabonte@canelearn.net

For more information and data about e-learning in Ontario, visit https://k12sotn.ca/on/

References:

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