

Teaching with technology: WSU examines status quo, benefits of online learning in Canada

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The Keeywaytinook tribe in northern Ontario, Canada, couldn't afford a high school, and its youth, some as young as 13 years old, had no option but to live in unfamiliar communities to attend school. But this option sparked a culture shock among some students that impeded their ability to learn and was even fatal in some cases. To address the issue, the tribe developed an online high school to provide its youth with distance learning that actually kept them closer to home.

Michael Barbour, Ph.D., assistant professor of instructional technology at Wayne State University's College of Education and a resident of Windsor, Ontario, has spent the past three years conducting an ongoing study to evaluate ways in which Canadian students, like those in northern Ontario, are benefitting from the use of technology as a tool to provide distance [learning](#). The purpose of the study is to examine the legislation, policy and regulations that govern K-12 distance education in Canada. During this three-year period, he has been awarded two grants from the International Association for K-12 Online Learning to support his research.

Using data obtained from surveys, interviews and document analysis with Ministries of Education and key stakeholders, Barbour found in 2009 that all Canadian provinces and territories had instituted some type of K-12 distance education, with British Columbia having the most and Prince Edward Island having the least. In 2010, Barbour observed that

not only is distance education flourishing in Canada, but Alberta has begun the process of incorporating a blended approach of online learning into the traditional [classroom environment](#) to optimize student learning.

"In many instances, distance education is seen as a substitute when face-to-face learning is not feasible or economic," said Barbour, as is the case for such students as those living in rural jurisdictions, requiring specialized studies in a particular language, or those who are unable to succeed in the traditional classroom environment.

Barbour has presented his findings in the annual State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada report that has been published each fall since 2008. The original 2008 report represented the first systematic examination of K-12 distance education policies and activities in each of the thirteen Canadian provinces and territories, and several Ministries of Education have used Barbour's reports as reference documents in their own internal reviews of their K-12 distance education policies.

Provided by Wayne State University

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