



NORTHERN DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAM: MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO THE SUMMATIVE EVALUATION REPORT

August 2025

Management Response to Recommendation(s) in NDL Summative Evaluation Report 2025

Executive Summary

Background

Northern Distance Learning (NDL) is an online learning program that emerged in 2010 as an alternative to traditional brick-and-mortar classes and existing distance learning programs in the NWT. Its primary goal is to provide equitable access to academic programming (dash 1 courses) to students in small community schools. Equitable access means the opportunity to take the academic courses necessary for admission into post-secondary institutions, in a dedicated classroom in a student's home community. The program's secondary goal is to provide an opportunity for NDL students to achieve a level of academic success that would allow them to enroll in post-secondary programs.

Evaluation Design

In response to NDL's widening scope and potential for significant impact, this summative evaluation was intended to render a judgment on the program's success in meeting its goals within the allotted resources.

The evaluation was guided by the following six questions:

1. Was NDL implemented as intended?
2. Did small community schools have equitable access to NDL?
3. To what degree was NDL effective in achieving its planned outcomes?
4. How did NDL student achievement compare with that of non-NDL students enrolled in traditional academic courses?
5. To what degree was NDL efficient in achieving its goals with allotted resources?
6. Were there unanticipated outcomes associated with the NDL program?

Evaluation Methods

Evaluators worked in collaboration with the ECE NDL Program Coordinator and other program area experts. The evaluation used qualitative and quantitative data obtained from program and student records. Additionally, a key informant interview was conducted with an NDL Program Coordinator and NDL Instructional Designer.

Quantitative data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel, generating tables and charts to assess trends and comparisons with the data. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis methods. Comments and statements with similar ideas and topics were grouped in Google Sheets to develop themes.

Results

1. Was NDL implemented as intended?

The criteria assessment for this question was incomplete due to missing performance targets for several evaluation indicators. Out of the eight evaluation indicators for this question, only three had confirmed performance targets for comparison with actual NDL performance data. These indicators were:

- 1a2. Number of schools participating in NDL per year (targets of 11, 15, 20, and 20 schools participating, respectively, for each school year between 2018-2022).
- 1b4. Attendance rates per year (yearly target of 90% attendance rate).
- 1c1. Student satisfaction rates with NDL courses, per year (yearly target of 80% student satisfaction rates).

Based on the assessment of those indicators¹, the program would be assessed as “*not implemented as intended*,” as fewer than 60% of performance targets were met annually. However, the lack of confirmed targets for several indicators prevents a definitive assessment of whether the program was implemented as intended. Performance targets need to be developed for: the number of NDL courses offered per year, enrollment rates per year, the number of students taking NDL courses each year, and attrition rates per year.

Key findings:

1. **Number of schools participating:** The number of schools participating increased from 11 in 2018-2019 to 15 in 2019-2020, meeting the NDL performance targets for those years. Growth continued in the 2020-2021 school year with 19 schools participating. Despite the increase, this was just below the target of 20 schools participating. The following year saw a decrease in participating schools, from 19 in 2020-2021 to 16 in 2021-2022. This number would also be below the performance target (20) for 2021-2022.
2. **Number of NDL courses offered:** As the program continued to expand, so did the number of course offerings. This number steadily increased from 16 in the 2018-2019 school year to 31 in the 2022-2023 school year.
3. **Student enrollment:** Student enrollment in the program steadily increased from 62 students in 2018-2019 to 85 students the following year, then to 92 students in 2020-2021. This number then declined to 60 students in 2021-2022 but rose again to 73 in 2022-2023.

¹ Evaluation criteria assessment for Question 1: Fully implemented as intended = 80%+ of performance targets were met, year to year. Partially implemented as intended = 60-79% performance targets were met, year to year. Not implemented as intended = <60% performance targets were met, year to year.

4. **Student attrition:** The number of early leavers grew significantly from four students in 2018-2019 to 62 in 2020-2021 but decreased to 29 students in both 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. This seems to indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic did not have a negative impact on enrollment. Rather, it might have had an impact on attrition.
5. **Student attendance:** Between 2018-2023, average attendance rates were consistent at around 80%, except in 2019-2020, when attendance dipped to 73%. Attendance rates between 2018-2023 were all below the target of 90%. While attendance rates were comparable to territorial high school averages, it should be highlighted that the program demonstrated a slight upward trend after 2019-2020, contrasting with the territorial averages' slight decline.
6. **Student satisfaction:** An analysis of student satisfaction surveys revealed that students were moderately satisfied with the program overall, with average satisfaction rates at around 66%. These rates, however, did not meet the yearly target of 80% student satisfaction rates.
7. **Promising practices:** When analyzing the promising practices that could have positively impacted the processes and implementation of NDL, the following emerged from an analysis of Education Bodies' contribution agreements and reporting:
 - Promising Practice #1: Invest in In-class Support Persons (ISP).
 - Promising Practice #2: Ongoing communication with parents and teachers.
 - Promising Practice #3: Tutoring and homework clubs.

2. Did small community schools have equitable access to NDL?

The criteria assessment for this question was incomplete due to missing data collected for several evaluation indicators. Only two of the four performance targets were comparable, which include:

- 2a1. Principal/superintendent-perceived impact of school contribution requirements on the school's financial situation (yearly target of contributions not perceived as burdensome by participating schools)
- 2c1. Yearly cost of NDL to participating schools per enrolled student (target: the cost of NDL per enrolled NDL student in schools with similar NDL student counts was similar, within a 10% variance)

Of these, one target was met, and one was not. According to the evaluation criteria², meeting fewer than three performance targets would indicate that "*access was not equitable.*" However, with only two targets available for comparison, a definitive assessment of the program's equitable access could not be fully determined.

² Evaluation criteria assessment for Question 2: Access was Equitable = Three or more of the performance targets were met. Access was Not Equitable = Fewer than three of the performance targets were met.

Key findings:

1. **Perceived impact of school contribution:** There were no comments suggesting that the contributions were perceived as burdensome by participating schools (Appendix C).
2. **NDL contributions:** The average total contributions to all NDL programming decreased over time, from \$43,403.18 in 2018-2019 to \$37,098.75 in 2022-2023, with contributions varying significantly between schools. Few schools received contributions within 10% of the average NDL contributions each year.
3. **Yearly cost of NDL to participating schools per enrolled student:** Comparing costs per student among schools with similar enrollment showed minimal differences initially. For instance, single-student schools had a 0.4% difference in cost per student in 2018-2019, but disparities grew over time, reaching an 8.9% difference by 2021-2022. Schools with 8 or more students exhibited differences exceeding 10% in later years, highlighting that similar student counts do not necessarily equate to similar costs per student.

3. To what degree was NDL effective in achieving its planned outcomes?

The criteria assessment for this question was also incomplete due to incomplete performance targets and missing data collected for several evaluation indicators. Of the eight evaluation indicators, only three had confirmed performance targets with actual NDL performance data for comparison. These indicators were:

- 3a2. Proportion of students (in each course and grade) with a final mark above 65% (yearly target of 65% of students between 2018-2023).
- 3a3a. Yearly credit acquisition rates for NDL students by course, by community, gender, ethnicity and overall (yearly target rates of 60%, 65%, 80%, and 80% respectively, for each school year between 2018-2022).
- 3b1. Percent of NDL students who pass departmental exams by course per year (targets only confirmed for 2018-2019 school year, which was 20% for social studies, 20% for English language arts (ELA), and 10% for math).

Of the eleven comparable targets, only five (45%) were met. According to the evaluation criteria³, with *less than 50% of performance targets met annually*, the NDL program would be deemed as “*low in effectiveness*” in achieving its planned outcomes. However, due to the absence of confirmed targets for several indicators and incomplete data collected, a comprehensive assessment of how well NDL achieved its planned outcomes could not be fully determined.

³ Evaluation criteria assessment for Question 3: Highly Effective = 80%+ of performance targets were met from year to year. Moderately Effective = 50-79% of performance targets were met from year to year. Low in Effectiveness = <50% of performance targets were met from year to year.

Key findings:

1. **Proportion of students with a final mark above 65%:** The proportion of NDL students passing with a final grade above 65% increased steadily from 43% in 2018-2019 to 82% in 2022-2023, with the yearly target (65%) met only in 2022-2023.
2. **Credit acquisition rates:** When looking at credit acquisition rates per year, average rates decreased from 77% in 2018-2019 to 57% in 2019-2020. Average rates then increased to 75% in 2020-2021 and then to 96% in 2021-2022. The average rate would then decrease to 75% in 2022-2023. Overall, the average credit acquisition rate between 2018 to 2023 was 75%.
3. **Diploma exam passing rates:** Diploma exam data was available for only two academic years, with a total of 78% (39 out of 50) of NDL students passing their exams in 2018-2019 and 2021-2022. In 2018-2019, students took exams for three courses, with only Social Studies 30-1 achieving a 100% pass rate. In 2021-2022, exams were taken for seven courses, all of which had at least 50% of students passing. Four courses – English Language Arts (ELA) 30-1, Math 30-1, Physics 30-1, and Chemistry 30-1 – each achieved a 100% pass rate.
4. **Proportion of students who receive student financial assistance (SFA):** SFA data shows that NDL has helped students get into post-secondary programs. From 2019-2020 to 2021-2022, every student with at least 20 NDL credits reported having unconditional acceptance to a post-secondary program. However, SFA data also shows that staying in a post-secondary program may be a challenge. The proportion of NDL graduates who remained in post-secondary for a second year decreased over the years. Additionally, the proportion of graduates who received SFA the year of graduation also decreased, going from 40% in 2019-2020 to less than 20% in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022.

4. How did NDL students' achievement compare with that of non-NDL students enrolled in traditional academic courses?

Based on evaluation criteria⁴, student achievement between NDL and non-NDL students varied over the four years. The number of NDL students enrolled in courses was considerably smaller than the number of non-NDL students. This difference in group size means that passing rates for NDL students were more sensitive to changes in individual performance.

As a result, direct comparisons may not fully reflect the progress made by the NDL students. Therefore, it is difficult to conclude the passing rate comparisons.

⁴ Evaluation criteria assessment for Question 4: Comparable Achievement = The achievements of NDL and non-NDL students were similar. Lower Achievement = The achievements of NDL students were less than the achievements of non-NDL students. Higher Achievement = The achievements of NDL students were greater than the achievements of non-NDL students.

5. To what degree was NDL efficient in achieving its goals with allotted resources?

Based on the evaluation criteria⁵, “actual costs aligned with or were no more than 5% above the budgeted amounts”. As a result, the NDL program was considered “somewhat efficient” in achieving its goals with the resources allocated. Additionally, due to instances of underspending across the program budgets, there are opportunities to redirect funding for better resource utilization.

ECE NDL annual budgets were typically underspent by amounts between \$300,000 and \$1,200,000 over time. Education bodies, on the other hand, were typically within their annual budgets overall. SDEC was the only education body that underspent its budget annually in the last five years. BDDEC had the most overspend overall.

6. Were there unanticipated outcomes associated with the NDL program?

The following unanticipated outcomes emerged from an analysis of Education Body contribution agreements and reporting:

- Improved student confidence and personal growth
- Exposure to broader opportunities
- Peer collaboration and community building

Recommendation #1: Support the implementation of the promising practices.

These promising practices highlight the elements of a supportive environment that contribute to student success in the NDL program.

Agree.

Promising practice 1: In 2024 funding for In-Class Support Persons (ISPs) was removed in direct conflict with the first promising practice. Schools have struggled to adequately support students locally during the 2024-2025 school year without this funding which is directly impacting student success and students’ ability to access equitable education opportunities in small NWT communities.

Promising practice 2: In May 2025 NDL hosted a parent/guardian information night as an opportunity for new or interested students and parents to learn more about the program. This practice will continue along with regular parent/guardian contact with NDL teachers.

Promising practice 3: This practice was often completed by local ISPs. Without adequate funding the opportunity for tutoring and homework clubs is entirely left to local school staff outside of ECE influence.

⁵ Evaluation criteria assessment for Question 5: Efficient = Actual costs align or were below budgeted costs. Somewhat Efficient = Actual costs align or were no more than 5% above budgeted costs. Not Efficient = Actual costs were more than 5% above budgeted costs.

<p>Management Response Planned Management Action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider a Financial Management Board (FMB) application to re-instate funding for in-class support persons at each participating local school. • Connecting with CEAs to promote NDL and support students in choosing available courses. • Host a yearly parent information night. • Update communications plans to promote the program to parents and students.
<p>Timeframe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue monitoring the impact of loss of ISP funding during 25/26 school year to inform potential of a new FMB submission. • Regular contact with CEAs throughout the school 2025/26 school year. • Communication plan updated prior to enrollment period in April 2026.
<p>Responsibility</p>	<p>NDL Manager; Senior Management/Finance</p>
<p>Recommendation #2: Incorporate current and/or former NDL students into current orientation sessions. Incorporating past or current NDL students into the orientation sessions to support those who are new to NDL could better prepare them for the program. In some communities, NDL students have served as role models, inspiring others to succeed; thus, a mentorship role for them could better support new students in the program.</p>	<p><i>Agree. This practice already exists through the Post-Secondary Bridging experience with brings former NDL graduates along with other NWT students who are attending post-secondary programs together to share their experiences with current NDL students.</i></p>
<p>Management Response Planned Management Action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former NDL students currently participate in virtual post-secondary bridging experience. • Develop a social media campaign to include quotes from past students.
<p>Timeframe</p>	<p>Ongoing each academic year.</p>
<p>Responsibility</p>	<p>NDL Manager</p>
<p>Recommendation #3: Explore opportunities to redirect NDL funding. Given the instances of underspending across the NDL program budgets, there are opportunities to redirect funding,</p>	<p><i>Do not agree. The NDL program experienced significant changes to its delivery within the first years of ECE governance as the program grew to meet new realities within the territory. Unused funds were reconsidered and re-allocated within NDL's budget in future years to continuously improve and evolve the program. The program experienced deficit in 2019-20 requiring additional applications to FMB. Surplus amounts in subsequent years were not consistent and largely due to</i></p>

<p>particularly in ways to support communities where their education bodies are overspending.</p>	<p><i>staffing challenges associated with local school’s ability to hire an ISP which was outside of the control of ECE. While not all funds were used in each year, it was important for the program to be able to support each school by offering funding to hire local support as and when needed. During the 22/23 and 23/24 fiscal years additional surplus was related to a change in network availability as the NDL program was able to shift from a dedicated VPN service to local GNWT networks within most schools. In 24/25 NDL’s budget was reduced eliminating the new surplus as well as ECE funding of an in-person support for students and the in-person Post-Secondary Bridging experience. These cuts have already impacted the success of students in the program and in their post-secondary endeavors. An unanticipated spending freeze in January 2025 impacted NDL’s ability to fully utilize its budget and limited the program’s ability to secure necessary technology for students and teachers resulting in the surplus.</i></p> <p><i>The current model of NDL utilizes its budget efficiently to deliver a consistent, reliable and secure online learning experience that allows students to remain in their home communities while preparing for post-secondary studies. Further reductions to NDL’s budget would continue to erode the program’s effectiveness in providing equitable access to education for students in small communities and the GNWT’s efforts to address reconciliation in education.</i></p> <p><i>The NDL program continues to align itself with legislative priorities. Under the 20th Legislative Assembly, NDL expansion supports the vision of a territory “where people are supported in how they want to live, work and grow” and aligns with the fiscal strategy to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the NDL program. NDL also continues to support the 20th Assembly’s mandates related to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action. As well expansion of the NDL program aligns with the mandate’s to grow and enhance the northern workforce, increase the number of students accessing student financial assistance (SFA), support Indigenous and local residents to pursue careers in the health professions and support pathways to employment for NWT youth through the Career and Education Advisor (CEA) program and Schools North Apprenticeship Program (SNAP).</i></p> <p><i>Efficiencies within the budget can be found through expansion of the program to students in regional centers and Yellowknife schools and the establishment of an asynchronous course calendar in addition to NDL’s current synchronous courses rather than further cuts.</i></p> <p><i>Re-envisioning NDL from a small school program to a territory-wide solution for online learning is a viable next step for the growth of the program. This is supported by the Beaufort Delta Divisional</i></p>
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	<p><i>Education Council (BDDEC) as ECE’s partner in delivering the NDL program has been noted by the Northwest Territories Teachers Association (NWTTA) as a viable next step. Expansion can be accomplished within NDL’s existing budget, bringing the program to more students and further increasing the efficiency of the program.</i></p>
<p>Management Response Planned Management Action</p>	<p>The change to BC curriculum has created challenges and opportunities for the NDL program. Implications from the curriculum change include lower enrollment due to de-streamed courses being taught locally and uncertainty of NDL’s role in the territory. There remains, however, a need for NDL to deliver courses which are not typically available in all NWT schools. This provides an opportunity to redesign the program to meet the needs of more students in the territory by expanding the program into regional centers and Yellowknife schools while expanding the type of programming delivered by NDL to include both courses required for entrance to post-secondary programs as well as courses that are interest-based (elective) yet still unlikely to be offered locally. NDL will continue to deliver synchronous (live) programming for the most challenging courses while simultaneously delivering elective courses using a hybrid approach to asynchronous learning that includes dedicated teacher support and it designed to meet the needs of NWT students. Offering a wider range of courses as well as delivery styles will result in more students benefitting from NDL while building student’s capacity to learn online – increasing the ability for a student to engage in post-secondary studies or employment training in a virtual format.</p>
<p>Timeframe</p>	<p>Proposed to ADMs in September 2025</p>
<p>Responsibility</p>	<p>NDL Manager; JK-12 SS Director</p>

<p>Recommendation #4: Continue to strengthen strategies and opportunities that support peer collaboration and community building. With the ability to connect students across the territory, there is an opportunity to strengthen a sense of community and enhance the collaboration skills of students in an online environment.</p>	<p><i>Agree. NDL provides a unique opportunity for students to engage with peers across the territory, sharing experiences and building important relationships in spite of geographic divides. NDL teachers have engaged with collaborative activities in the past with success. Students in classes are already joining peers across the territory, NDL teachers (BDDEC) provide opportunities for collaboration within their classes. This is outside of ECE control as per MOU. Through the Course Development Standards Rubric document ECE continues to encourage this practice and supports teachers to create collaborative opportunities for their students.</i></p> <p><i>Additional collaboration opportunities exist through expansion of the NDL program to regional centers and Yellowknife schools to include all NWT students as part of a territory wide solution to distance learning. Expansion into more communities will increase the number of students participating in each class that bring their unique perspectives, creating the opportunity for richer discussions and increased collaboration and community building with peers across the territory.</i></p> <p><i>Expansion of the program to include Northern developed asynchronous courses provide opportunities for collaboration and community building through the use of digital forums, collaborative projects and synchronous seminars. Development of these courses will increase access to more course areas and provide opportunities for students to learn from each other as they each bring their own experiences to the digital classroom.</i></p>
<p>Management Response Planned Management Action</p>	<p>Propose expansion of program to include regional centers and Yellowknife schools and the development of an asynchronous course delivery option.</p>
<p>Timeframe</p>	<p>Proposal to ADM in September 2025</p>
<p>Responsibility</p>	<p>NDL Manager; JK-12 SS Director</p>
<p>Recommendation #5: Establish Clear and Meaningful Evaluation Indicators. Develop and formalize comprehensive performance targets for all key indicators (e.g., course offerings, enrollment, attrition, credit acquisition, and post-secondary outcomes). Reassess the evaluation framework to ensure</p>	<p><i>Agree. Original performance indicators were based on a model of NDL that existed in 2018. Since then, the program has undergone significant changes including the transition to a new de-streamed curriculum; the effects of which are not yet fully understood.</i></p> <p><i>Re-evaluating the program key indicators will be most valuable after a wholesome online learning solution for NWT students has been developed in response to the new curriculum, demand for online learning in regional centers and Yellowknife and the closure of Aurora College community learning centers.</i></p>

indicators are relevant, measurable, and aligned with program goals and data availability.	
Management Response Planned Management Action	Updated / expanded evaluation indicators will be developed in-line with program redesign
Timeframe	Subject to review of this document by FMB and in line with PRIM’s availability to support.
Responsibility	NDL Manager, JK-12 SS Director, PRIM ADM, DM
Recommendation #6: Revisit data collection methods. Identify a sustainable way to consistently and accurately collect quantitative and qualitative data to support fuller program assessments.	<i>Agree. With the formal evaluation complete, some data may no longer be relevant. NDL in consultation with PRIM will determine which data points are necessary to collect for continuous program monitoring.</i>
Management Response Planned Management Action	Develop a data collection plan in consultation with PRIM in accordance with program redesign and evaluation indicators.
Timeframe	Subject to timelines of recommendation #5
Responsibility	NDL Manager
Recommendation #7: Strengthen the integration of student feedback into program evaluation and monitoring.	<i>Agree. This will be addressed through actions in Recommendation #6.</i>
Management Response Planned Management Action	As per action in Recommendation #6
Timeframe	Subject to timelines of recommendation #5
Responsibility	NDL Manager