

# The Newcomer's Guide to Elementary School in Ontario



Information and Suggestions For Your Child's Success in School



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# Introduction

*Welcome!* We are glad that you have discovered this document<sup>1</sup>. Since most children start school as soon as they arrive in Canada, it is important that newcomer families have clear information about the school system. We have created this guide to help make settling in easier. The aim of this guide is to help you and your family understand how schools work in Ontario, what choices there are, what is expected of you, and what rights you have.

The guide provides information about what to expect when your children start school and suggests some practical ways for getting ready. It offers families a chance to learn about what is available and to better understand school life in Ontario. We have re-designed and updated the guide to help make settling in easier.

You will also find ideas for helping your children adjust to and do well at school. Your involvement throughout your children's school life will help ensure their success, both short-term and long-term, during school and in their adult life.

The document is divided into many sections. Feel free to have a look at the parts that seem most important to you. Feel free to **print the whole guide or just parts of it**, and to **share any of this information** with other family members, friends or neighbours.

If you would like more in-depth information, we have provided a variety of website addresses at the end of the guide.

For newcomers, the first few years in Canada can be very difficult. There is so much to adjust to and take care of. Families are busy getting their bearings, establishing their new home and social networks, going to school and retraining, looking for work, often learning a new language and getting used to a new climate and culture.

Fortunately, in Ontario there are a number of people who can offer help to newcomer families. These people work in schools and in community centres, and are mostly funded by the governments of Canada and Ontario.

In some schools in Ontario, there are people called **Settlement Workers In School (SWIS)** who help newcomer families settle into school and their new lives (where they are available). We hope that the SWIS workers' support, combined with the information in this guide will help build healthy relationships with your children, between your children and other young people at school, with other parents<sup>2</sup> and caregivers, and with **all** the adults who are involved in making sure our schools are welcoming learning and social places that run well.

**A French-language version of the guide is also available on the website [teeontario.ca](http://teeontario.ca). The French-language guide (and the website) has more information about the French-language school system in Ontario.**

*This guide has been created and updated with help from many newcomers, as well as different educators and settlement workers in schools. Their ideas have made this guide even better!*

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<sup>1</sup> This updated version was created by COPA (le Centre ontarien de prévention des agressions) in 2012, with contributions from stakeholders, including the Ontario Ministry of Education, and with funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). COPA is the provincial coordinator of the francophone TÉE (Travailleuses et travailleurs d'établissement dans les écoles) program.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'parent' in this Guide refers to all caregivers.

# Important Services in Schools For Newcomers

## Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS)<sup>3</sup>

Some schools have SWIS workers available to help newcomer families and students when they come to live in their new home. SWIS workers understand the problems that students who are newcomers might have when starting at a new school. They are there to help both the student and family adjust.

SWIS workers have information (one-on-one and in groups) about all kinds of things. They can also help you get help from other people.

*Check with the school(s) that your children attend to see if a SWIS worker is available.*

## Reception or Assessment Centres

At some English-language school boards, there are *Reception and Assessment Centres* where newcomer families can go to learn more about schools and to register their children. At the Centre, parents can ask questions about schools, and courses. A teacher will determine what grade your children should be in, or what special classes they might take to help with their studies.

*If possible, bring all report cards from your children's previous schools with you to the Centre. These will help teachers plan for your children's education.*

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<sup>3</sup> The equivalent in Francophone schools are known as TÉE : Travailleuses et travailleurs d'établissement dans les écoles. For more information, visit: [teeontario.ca](http://teeontario.ca). TÉE teams are typically part of Francophone agencies that offer settlement and integration services to newcomers.



# About Ontario's Publicly Funded School Systems: Who's Who and What's What

Education in Ontario's publicly funded schools is paid for by tax dollars, and is made available **free of charge** to **all** children of school age living in Ontario<sup>4</sup>.

The education of our children is the responsibility of the government of our province (Ontario). The government department called the **Ministry of Education** is in charge of deciding what students will learn and the rules that need to be followed by all schools in Ontario.

The *Education Act* spells out the duties and responsibilities of all those who participate in the education system<sup>5</sup>. The *Ontario Human Rights Code*<sup>6</sup> as well as the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*<sup>7</sup>, are also laws that apply, making sure that **our human rights are respected in schools in Ontario**.

## What Are School Boards?

All schools are grouped together by area, and run by school boards (sometimes called boards). Boards are in charge of planning, building and operating the schools in their area, and for, hiring and supervising staff in schools (including teachers<sup>8</sup> and principals).

There are four types of school boards that have schools in most areas of the province: boards that run English-language schools, either Catholic or Public, and boards that run French-language schools in your area, either Catholic or Public. (For more information about the different kinds of school boards, see the section in this guide entitled "How is the School System Organized?")

Some school boards work with community agencies in order to offer additional services in schools, such as the SWIS Program, where settlement workers are available to help newcomer families settle into their new lives.

**Trustees** are also members of the school board, providing a link between the board and local communities. They are elected by voters every four years.

School boards have many different kinds of people working for them. They are managed by superintendents. Some boards have many superintendents, depending on the size of the board.

To locate the school board in your community visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/sbinfo](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/sbinfo).

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<sup>4</sup> Private schools, for which families pay tuition, are also available in Ontario. In Ontario, all private schools that operate in the province are considered businesses or non-profit organizations and are not governed by the Ministry of Education. For more information for parents about private education in Ontario, please visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/privsch](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/privsch).

Opting out of either publicly-funded or private schools is a legal option in Ontario. Parents must provide their children with an education, and those who decide to do so, must notify a school board in their region with a written letter. A sample letter is available on the Ministry of Education's website: [edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/131.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/131.html).

<sup>5</sup> Visit [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/brochure/whosresp.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/brochure/whosresp.html) for a look at the Education Act and related information.

<sup>6</sup> Visit [ohrc.on.ca/en/ontario-human-rights-code](http://ohrc.on.ca/en/ontario-human-rights-code) for a look at the Code and related information.

<sup>7</sup> Visit [laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/charter/page-1.html](http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/charter/page-1.html) for a look at the *Canadian Charter of Human Rights* and related information.

<sup>8</sup> In Ontario, teachers and other school staff, not including principals and vice-principals, are part of a union. There are four main unions (known as affiliates) for school staff in Ontario: AEFO (Francophone school union), ETFO (Anglophone public school elementary union), OECTA (Anglophone elementary school catholic union), OSSTF (Anglophone secondary school union).

## Principals and Vice-Principals

Principals are responsible for the organization and management of the school they work in. They are in charge of making sure that their school is a place where all people (students, staff, parents and caregivers, volunteers, visiting professionals) are respected and made to feel welcome, and are able to participate fully.

They are also responsible for ensuring a high quality of learning for students. Furthermore, they are in charge of student discipline.

One or more Vice-Principals may also be assigned to a school to help the principal with their job.

## Teachers

Teachers are responsible for preparing students' lessons each day and teaching classes. They are responsible for classroom discipline and for encouraging, guiding and evaluating students. They are responsible for making sure that everyone is kind and respectful of each other in the classroom (and hallways and playground), so that **everyone** feels welcome and can participate fully. They are also in charge of communicating and working with other school staff and the principal, as well as with parents to make sure students do well in school.

Some teachers specialize in certain areas while others teach all subjects to their students.

## Other School Staff

Schools have many other staff members that work every day in schools (like the secretary, who often has lots of information for newcomers about schools and services). Other staff members visit schools only on certain days like social workers, or speech therapists.

**In each school, there are people who work there and who play different roles to help students and their families.**

## School Councils

School Councils are a group of people that work together in each school, or sometimes in school boards, on issues affecting courses and programs and how the school runs. The Council is made up of parents and guardians, the principal, a teacher, a non-teaching school staff member, as well as members from the community at large. Parents and guardians must make up the majority of council members. Students may be invited to participate.

School Councils may give advice to the principal or the school board. In most cases, the meetings are open to parents and they are encouraged to attend Council meetings and participate in the discussion. Any parent is welcome and encouraged to become a member of the School Council of the school their children attends.

For more information about School Councils, and ways to get involved, see the section in this guide entitled "Getting Involved in Your Children's Education at School". You can also take a look at these short films and resources (*The Capsule Family Gets Involved*) on the COPA website: [infocopa.com/capen.html](http://infocopa.com/capen.html).



# How Is the School System Organized?

## French- and English-Language School Systems

In Canada, both French and English are recognized as official languages. In Ontario, the *French Language Services Act* is a law that protects the language rights of Francophones (French-speaking people)<sup>9</sup>.

Because of this, there are schools that operate in French, and schools that operate in English in Ontario. The Ontario Ministry of Education operates a complete **French-language school system**, and a complete **English-language school system**. These systems operate separately: the French-language school system is managed by Francophone school boards, and the English-language school system is managed by a variety of Anglophone school boards.

For more information about French or English-language school systems, see the sections that follow below.

## English-Language Schools

The **English-language system** in Ontario is currently managed by 60 school boards – some Public and some Catholic that operate in English.

**Public English-language schools are open to all students residing in Ontario.**

**Catholic English-language schools** are open to all children who have been baptized as Roman Catholic or have Roman Catholic parents.

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<sup>9</sup> There are other laws that do so, including the *Education Act*, *Courts of Justice Act*, and *Child and Family Services Act* at the provincial level and the *Official Languages Act* and *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* at the federal level. **Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms** is the section of the Canadian Constitution that guarantees educational rights to French-speaking communities outside Quebec.



## French-Language Schools

The **French-language education system** in Ontario is managed by 12 Francophone school boards that operate in French. The system includes over 425 elementary and secondary schools located throughout the province. These schools operate in French, and are organized into **Public** and **Catholic schools**.

French-language schools (often known as Francophone schools) in Ontario have a mandate to protect and enhance French-language and culture in Ontario and in Canada. Both Public and Catholic Francophone schools offer an education to students seeking to learn and function in French. **Students learn in French, and all programs and services are provided exclusively in the French-language, with the exception of English-language courses.**

**French-language schools are open to students whose parents are “French-language rights-holders”**, according to **Section 23** of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*<sup>10</sup>. Each school has an Admissions Committee to help identify if your children can go to a Francophone school<sup>11</sup>.

**According to the French Language Education department of the Ontario Ministry of Education, obtaining an Ontario Secondary School Diploma from a French-language school offers students the following benefits:**

- High-level bilingualism and long-term proficiency in both official languages.
- Academic success.
- Increased likelihood of pursuing post-secondary training or academic studies of their choice in a French-language, English-language or bilingual institution, in Ontario or elsewhere.
- A rich and diversified cultural environment that is reflective of Ontario’s Francophone community.
- Excellent prospects for employment at local, provincial, national and international levels<sup>12</sup>.

## Public and Catholic School Systems

In Ontario, students may attend **Public (secular) or Catholic schools in either French-language schools or in English-language schools**<sup>13</sup>. Catholic schools offer the same core curriculum and the same quality of education as public schools, and students graduate from Catholic schools with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.

In Catholic Schools, in order to promote the faith development of students, all aspects of the curriculum reflect Catholic teachings and values. Furthermore, core courses and school life integrate Catholic perspectives and values. For example, students learn hymns as part of the music program.

All students in Catholic schools study religion in each year of school and are often required to wear a school uniform.

For more information about the Public or Catholic school systems, visit the Ministry’s website: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/).

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<sup>10</sup> Visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/FLS.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/FLS.html) to learn more about the requirements and options for students in English-language schools learning French as a Second Language.

<sup>11</sup> For more information about French-language schools in Ontario see the French-language version of this guide at [teeontario.ca](http://teeontario.ca), or visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/fre/amenagement/frenchBoards.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/fre/amenagement/frenchBoards.html) where you will find contact information for French-language school boards.

<sup>12</sup> For more information about the French-language education system in Ontario, visit: [elfontario.ca](http://elfontario.ca).

<sup>13</sup> For a history of religious education in Ontario’s school system, visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/religion/religioe.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/religion/religioe.html).

## Additional Choices For Students in Ontario

All schools offer the same core curriculum and programs. These are determined by the Ministry of Education.

Many school boards offer special programs or a wider choice of courses such as English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development (ELD) (offered in English-language schools), International Languages, or remedial French (ALF, offered in French-language school boards, to help strengthen students' basic ability in French<sup>14</sup>).

Some English-language schools provide a **French Immersion program**. Students in French Immersion do most of their courses in French, and in later years more subjects are offered in English<sup>15, 16</sup>.

Some elementary schools are identified as 'alternative schools'. They offer a unique curriculum, or educational style (for example they may focus on: experiential learning, community involvement, volunteerism, or an Africentric-focused curriculum). Usually, students do not have to live in the neighbourhood of an alternative school. There may be waiting lists, or they may be open to students who meet their admissions criteria. For more information about alternative schools, please contact one of the boards in your area.

Other schools and some other programs specialize in certain subjects or areas, for example: sports, health and wellness, or the arts. To enter these programs, students must show a particular knowledge or skill in the subject or program area and be selected by the school. Each program or school has rules for how to apply, and rules for who may attend.

Some schools offer programs for students who are identified through the system as 'gifted'. Students who are identified as needing special attention, as they demonstrate a higher rate of academic intelligence, need to be tested and identified as 'gifted' before attending a program.

It is useful to contact the principal of the school you are interested in for your children, or the school boards in your area, to inquire about these different options.

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<sup>14</sup> Actualisation linguistique en français (ALF). For more information about this remedial French program, contact your nearest French-language school board. For contact information, visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/fre/amenagement/frenchBoards.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/fre/amenagement/frenchBoards.html).

<sup>15</sup> French is a part of the mandatory core curriculum in Ontario. There are three types of programs in English-language schools in Ontario as described by the Ministry:

- **Core French:** students are taught French as a subject. The program helps students develop a basic command of the language.
- **Extended French:** students are taught French as a subject and French serves as the language of instruction in at least one other subject. At the elementary level, at least 25% of all instruction is provided in French. At the secondary level, students accumulate seven credits in French: four are FSL language courses and three are other subjects in which French is the language of instruction.
- **French Immersion:** students are taught French as a subject and French serves as the language of instruction in two or more other subjects. Elementary schools students receive at least 50% of all instruction in French. Secondary school students accumulate ten credits in French: four are FSL language courses and six in which French is the language of instruction.

<sup>16</sup> For more information about French Immersion programs in English-language schools visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/FLS.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/FLS.html).



## Which School Can My Children Attend?

Usually your home address determines the English-language public school that your children may attend. Each of these schools has an **attendance boundary** (an **area** around the school) that determines the streets and homes that belong to that school. Any child that lives within the area (attendance boundary) of the (English public) school is entitled to attend that school.

*This is not always the case for some other types of schools, such as English-language Catholic schools, and French-language Public and Catholic schools, as well as special or alternative schools.*

If the school nearest to your home is full, your children may be registered and bussed to another school in an area accepting new students.

*In some school boards, schools that are not full **will** enroll students who live outside of their attendance boundary. Speak to the school board or office staff for more information.*

## What Do Students Learn in Ontario Schools?

### The Ontario Curriculum

In Ontario, all publicly funded schools must follow the Ontario Curriculum (which is determined by the Ministry of Education). The Ontario Curriculum describes what students are expected to know and be able to do in each subject area by the end of Junior and Senior Kindergarten, and following the completion of each grade or subject.

**There are curriculum documents for each of the following school subject areas:**

- English and French
- Mathematics
- Science and Technology
- Social Studies
- History and Geography
- Health and Physical Education
- Native Languages
- Arts

Teachers use the Ontario curriculum and program documents to develop their lesson plans, and thus students' learning experiences.

The Ontario curriculum is posted on the following website: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/).

### Learning English

To help students in French- and English-language schools learn English (one of Canada's two official languages, and the language of majority in Ontario), the teacher will develop learning activities that suit your children. Depending on your children's skill in English, the teacher may change what your children are expected to learn or develop a learning activity that helps your children learn what other students are learning. (For more information about students in English-language schools who are learning English as a Second Language, see the section in this guide entitled "Learning a New Language.")

## Learning French

To help students in English-language schools learn French (one of Canada's two official languages) all students study French language and culture. English-language school boards must offer courses in French-language starting in Grade 4.

In some schools in the English-language system, French-language instruction begins before Grade 4 in French Immersion Programs.

For more information about French-language (Francophone) schools in Ontario please see the section above about the French-language school system. Additional information about the French-language school system can be found in the French-language version of this guide, at [teontario.ca](http://teontario.ca), or can speak to a French-language school board.

## Textbooks and Learning Materials

In general, there are no fees charged for day school programs. The costs of materials and activities for elementary and secondary education are provided to schools by the Ministry of Education.

When schools or school boards choose with the support of the school community to offer enhanced or optional programming, parents may be asked to contribute resources in the way of time, money or materials to support these programs or activities.

Students may or may not need textbooks and workbooks for each and every subject. Teachers will likely make use of many different resource materials, such as library books, information on the Internet, newspapers, journals and magazines, educational films and musical recordings, outings (field trips), guest presentations and workshops, games and group exercises, discussion and debate, and other strategies for learning and accessing information.



# Learning a New Language

Families will discover that their children learn new languages at different rates - even two children in the same family.

Children usually learn to **understand and speak** a new language more quickly than they learn to read or write it. Most children are able to speak a new language in one or two years; they may take five to seven years - *or more* - to read, write and understand more complex school subjects as well as their classmates.

For parents whose children are learning English and attending English-language schools, and for those whose children are improving their French while studying at a French-language school, there is much you can do to support your children through the process of learning a language.

**Here are a few suggested strategies:**

- **Continuing to talk with your children in their first language, or in the usual language of communication within your family.** You can provide opportunities for your children to continue learning their first language while learning a new one. Children who express themselves well in their first language find it easier to learn a new language.
- Encouraging your children to continue to **read and write in their first language.** Teachers find that students who read and write well in their first language learn to read and write in their new language more quickly. They also find that students are more able to keep up in science and math. Many public libraries have multi-lingual book, tape and video collections.
- Enrolling your children and encouraging them to **participate in group activities** such as sports, clubs and music programs, as well as summary activities with other children after school where they will be speaking in their language of instruction at school (English or French). This also helps them to meet new people, and make new friends.
- You can talk to the teacher(s) or the SWIS worker at your school about additional ideas.

## Special Courses for Students Learning English in English-Language Schools

When they come to Canada, children may have limited skills in English. For students attending English-language schools, **English as a Second Language (ESL)** programs can help these students catch up to their classmates.

Some children may have missed time in school before coming to Canada or when they first come and they may not have learned the basic rules of reading and writing. **English Literacy Development (ELD)** courses are available in some schools in Ontario, to help these students develop those skills and facilitate their integration.

### More About English as a Second Language (ESL) Programs in English-Language Schools

In English-language schools in Ontario, an English as a Second Language (ESL) program is also available for students who are identified as needing support in learning or improving their English language skills.

The decision about whether a student is placed in this program (or kept in a 'mainstream' classroom) is made by the principal of the school that your children will attend, in consultation with the parents and the school staff.

If the student is placed in an ESL program, the principal will let you know about this, and tell you more about the decision and about the program.

Students are brought in to 'mainstream' classrooms as their language skills improve.

## Options for French-Speaking Children

Children who are proficient in French are more likely to flourish in a French-language school. They may have fewer struggles academically, and studies show that Canadian students with capacity in both French and English have additional opportunities when choosing professional training and pursuing their careers<sup>17, 18, 19</sup>. Students will also learn English in school, as it is part of the curriculum, while gaining proficiency in English in their daily lives outside of school.

An additional advantage is that parents who are proficient in French and not in English, and whose children attend schools within the French-language school system, will more easily be able to participate in school activities and help support their children's academic progress.

French Immersion programs in the English-language school system are another possibility. These programs are housed in English-language schools, in English-language school boards.

For more information, please see the section on the English and French-language school systems earlier in this guide.

## More About ESL and ELD Programs

**In both ESL and ELD Programs, the school may arrange to provide students with:**

- additional assistance from their classroom teacher;
- additional assistance from an ESL/ELD teacher in their regular classroom; **or**,
- structured time to leave the regular classroom to work with the ESL/ELD teacher.

At the Parent-Teacher Interview, the teacher will explain what your children are learning and how their language skills are developing.

For more information about the curriculum, see:  
[edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/).

For more information about ESL programs, visit the following website:  
[edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/esleldprograms/guide.pdf](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/esleldprograms/guide.pdf).

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<sup>17</sup> Labrie, N., Lamoureux, S., et Wilson, D. (2009) *L'accès des francophones aux études postsecondaires en Ontario: Le choix des jeunes*, Centre de recherche en éducation franco-ontarienne.

<sup>18</sup> Cardinal, L., Plante, N., Sauvé, A. (2006) *Les jeunes francophones de l'Ontario: un profil statistique*. Université d'Ottawa.

<sup>19</sup> Negura, L., Samson, A. (2008) 'Jeunes et travail: l'avantage d'être francophone en Ontario', *Travail, jeunesse et intervention*, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 129-153



# Teaching and Learning in Ontario Classrooms

## How Children Are Taught

All students (and all people) are unique and each student may have a slightly different understanding of a subject. For example, some students are more advanced in mathematics and others in writing. Furthermore students may have different personal learning styles, circumstances and needs. The Government of Ontario has made a commitment to ensuring that all schools provide *inclusive education*, and that everyone involved in the education system “work to remove barriers and actively seek to create the conditions needed for student success”

To help each student take the next step in their learning, teachers use individualized methods of instruction for learning activities in class and through homework. This allows students to have more experiences, and to learn in different ways and from different people, of all ages. In this way, teachers can ensure that, by the end of the year, all students have covered the curriculum.

Teachers may also combine different teaching strategies. For example, a teacher might instruct the whole class to introduce the structure of a story and then ask students to work in groups to look at different story examples.

Teachers find that students are more likely to learn concepts when they can “see and experience” the ideas being taught. For example, young students might work with sand and different size cups to learn about volume. Once students have completed their activities, the teacher will talk to the whole class about what they learned.

Language skills are an important part of each subject. For example, in mathematics it is important to get the right answer and to be able to explain how it was calculated.

Teachers design learning activities to help students appreciate the experiences and contributions of all peoples. Teachers present problems for students to discuss and solve rather than emphasize the memorization of facts. Students will be encouraged to learn how to think critically. They learn to sort out facts from assumptions, think logically, ask questions, form opinions about what they learn and express their opinions to the whole class. Teachers also ask students to think about their own performance, evaluate their own work and reflect on how they might improve it.

## Working in Groups

Teachers sometimes organize students’ desks so that students can easily work in groups. Working in groups helps your children learn to co-operate with other students, share responsibility and listen and learn from the opinions of other students. Your children will practice their language skills and develop skills such as how to research, form and test opinions, take initiative, pose questions and take risks.

**You can try the following strategies at home to help your children develop the skills they will need to learn and study at school:**

- Creating opportunities for family conversations so that everyone can participate, for example, at mealtime.
- Encouraging your children to talk about their opinions (for example, to explain what they think and why). This will help your children express themselves at school.
- Helping your children get together with other children when they have a group project.
- Talking to the teacher if you would like more information about how the classroom is organized.

Many brochures for parents are available on the Ministry of Education’s website about parent involvement. In the section entitled “Tips and Tools for Parents” you will find suggestions on how to help your children in school. For more information, visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/abc123/](http://edu.gov.on.ca/abc123/).

## Special Education Programs

Special Education programs and services provide extra support to help children with special education needs. Some children need short term help and others have complex learning needs.

Children may need help due to behavioural, communication, intellectual, physical or multiple learning needs that require support over time.

A lack of French- or English-language skills is not an indication of the need for Special Education programs and services. If your children are having difficulty with their schoolwork or relating to other students, however, it may be a sign of a learning difficulty. Sometimes such problems are a normal part of adjusting to a new language and school. Information about a student's academic skills in her or his first language, like a previous report card, often helps teachers identify the source of the student's difficulties.

If you are concerned that your children may have a learning difficulty, talk to your children's teacher. The teacher has a number of ways to assess your children's strengths and learning needs in the classroom. If necessary, you or the teacher can request a further professional assessment of your children.

The school is required to follow certain procedures in order to assess and determine if your children require special education programs and services. To determine your children's needs, you will be asked to provide written permission and attend meetings including an *Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) meeting*.

If your children are identified as having special education needs by the IPRC, the school board is obliged to provide an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) identifying resources and services, in accordance with this assessment. The school or board will inform you of these resources and services.

If you disagree with the assessment, you are free to ask more questions, and seek additional professional advice.

Each school board has a 'Parent Guide' that describes which Special Education programs and services are available. Feel free to ask the school for a copy or for any information at any point, in order to better understand the process and the plan<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> For more information about Special Education please visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/speced.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/speced.html).



# Health and Learning

## Medical Conditions and Special Needs

When you are registering your children at a school, please also let school staff know of any **medical conditions, allergies or special needs** they might have and the best way to support the child, and address those needs.

Please bring along any medical reports or other records that might help schools understand those needs, and meet the needs of the student.

*If your children need to take medication during the school day, please ask your children's doctor to complete a form with this information. Please bring the form to the school office.*

## Vision and Hearing Health

Vision and hearing problems can make it harder for students to learn and socialize. Many students do not even know they have a vision or a hearing problem. They may think that everyone sees or hears the way they do. Some children find ways to work extra hard to overcome these problems; they may improve their performance at school if their vision or hearing problem is corrected.

Vision and hearing may also change as children grow. That is why regular medical check-ups are so important.

**The following strategies can help maintain your children's vision and hearing health and lead to more success at school:**

- Taking your children to an Optometrist or Ophthalmologist by age three to have his or her eyes checked. It is recommended that children should have their eyes checked every two to three years. The Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) pays for annual visits for children and young people under 20 years of age. (For students in Junior Kindergarten (JK) the government will cover the cost of an eye examination by a doctor and the cost of eyeglasses<sup>21</sup>.)
- Encouraging your children to wear glasses if they need them. If your children are reluctant to wear them, talk to the teacher about it; together you might help your children feel more comfortable.
- Taking your children to a doctor to have your children's hearing checked.

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<sup>21</sup>For more information about these and other forms of financial assistance by the Ontario government, please visit: [ontario.ca/en/initiatives/progressreport2011/ONT06\\_026167.html](http://ontario.ca/en/initiatives/progressreport2011/ONT06_026167.html).

(The Ontario government also covers dental services such as checkups, cleaning, fillings and X-rays.)





## Immunization

Children in Ontario must be immunized against specified diseases in order to attend school.

Your doctor will give you a card listing what immunizations your children have received. Please take the card to school to make sure their records are up to date. The school maintains an immunization record for each student.

If your children have not received all of their immunizations or if the school record is incomplete, a letter will be sent to you from the Public Health Department with this information.

**Choosing not to have your children be immunized:** Parents can opt out of immunization due to medical, religious or conscience reasons. Please contact your local public health unit or school board for immunization exemption forms that must be completed and submitted to the school<sup>22</sup>.

## If Your Child Becomes Sick at School

Most schools have at least one staff member with first aid training. If your child becomes sick or has an accident while at school, someone will contact you as soon as possible using the phone numbers on the school records. You or the emergency contact person will be asked to pick up your child as soon as possible.

If the accident or illness is serious, the school will call an ambulance and a staff member will accompany your child to the hospital.

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<sup>22</sup> For more information, please visit: [toronto.ca/health/immunization\\_children/immunization\\_records\\_faq.htm](https://toronto.ca/health/immunization_children/immunization_records_faq.htm) or [health.gov.on.ca/en/public/publications/pub\\_immun.aspx](https://health.gov.on.ca/en/public/publications/pub_immun.aspx).

# Elementary Schools: How They Are Organized

## Classrooms and Grade Levels in Elementary Schools

In elementary schools, classrooms are organized into classrooms with Junior Kindergarten (JK) and Senior Kindergarten (SK), and Grades 1 through 6.

Some elementary schools do not offer Grade 6, and many elementary schools continue with middle grades, through to Grade 8.

In some areas, however, students who are entering Grade 7 will be changing to a Middle School. These students will complete Grades 7 and 8 in a Middle School, then switch to a secondary school to complete Grades 9 through 12.

*Some schools have child-care facilities that are available before and after the school day. Younger children may use child-care facilities all day and during school breaks. For more information, please see the Child Care section in this Guide.*

### Typical Grade Placement

Grade placement is usually determined by a child's age, and not by the grade they completed in their country of origin. Grade placement may be different with newcomer students to ensure greater academic success.

Below is the typical age and grade placement, from January 1 of that school year:

- JK and SK: 4- and 5-year olds
- Grade 1: 6-year-old children (with students turning 7 years old from January 1 of that school year)
- Grade 2: 7-year-old children (with students turning 8 years old from January 1 of that school year)
- Grade 3: 8-year-old children (with students turning 9 years old from January 1 of that school year)
- Grade 4: 9-year-old children (with students turning 10 years old from January 1 of that school year)
- Grade 5: 10-year-old children (with students turning 11 years old from January 1 of that school year)
- Grade 6: 11-year-old children (with students turning 12 years old from January 1 of that school year)

## Combining Grade Levels in One Classroom

Some schools may combine students from different grades in one class. In these classes, the teacher will ensure that students learn the curriculum that is designed for their grade level. The teacher will also design learning activities for the whole class.

## Moving to the Next Grade Level

When planning which students will be in which class and with which teacher the following year, the school may choose to put students from different classes together. As a result, your children may not be with the same classmates during the next year of school.

## Assigning Teachers to the Classroom

Typically, students will have a different teacher each year. However, sometimes students have the same teacher for two years in a row. This can be an advantage because the teacher already knows the children's learning needs and has established a relationship with their families.

# Early Learning in Schools: Kindergarten

In Ontario, early learning opportunities for 4- and 5-year-old children are offered in publicly funded elementary schools in all four systems. This program is known as Kindergarten and is divided into Junior (JK) and Senior Kindergarten (SK). Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK) is also available in many schools, offering a full day of learning at school to students in this program.

Children in Ontario **are not required to attend school until they are six-years-old**, although most parents in Ontario choose to enrol their children in Kindergarten. (There is much research that shows that the learning experiences children have when they are young are very important in developing the social and academic skills that they will need to become successful and flourishing adults.)

*Kindergarten programs give children a positive start in school and prepare them for the more formal learning that begins in Grade 1.*

In Full-Day Kindergarten, a teacher and an Early Childhood Educator (ECE) work together as a team to provide a variety of learning activities and experiences based on the needs and interests of the children.

For more information on Full-Day Kindergarten, as well as a list of schools that provide it, please visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/kindergarten/](http://edu.gov.on.ca/kindergarten/). (Information is also available in many different languages on this site.)

## Learning in Kindergarten

Play has a very important role in Kindergarten. Through play-based learning, educators provide a variety of learning activities and experiences based on the needs and interests of the children. Children develop skills in language, mathematics, science and technology, health and physical activity, and the arts, as well as personal and social skills.

They also build a solid foundation for future learning and participate in healthy physical activities. During the school day, children benefit from being able to socialize with other children and adults in a safe, caring environment. Children with special needs and children who are learning a new language will be assessed when they start in kindergarten. A special program will be developed, if needed, to support and help them meet the curriculum expectations.





# Getting Registered For School

As you get ready to have your children registered for school, there are a number of things to prepare and to consider.

## Documents to Gather

Please gather the following documents to register your children for school.

- ✓ Proof of child's age - a birth certificate or passport.
- ✓ Proof of address - copy of a bank statement, telephone or electrical bill or apartment lease with your name and address.
- ✓ Proof of guardianship - required if the child is under 18 years of age and is not living with the parent.
- ✓ Immunization record - proof that your children have been immunized, according to the recommended immunization schedule in Ontario, or an exemption from immunization form due to medical, religious or conscience reasons. Contact the Public Health Department in your community or visit the website at [health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/immun/immunization.html](http://health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/immun/immunization.html) for immunization information in many different languages.

## Missing documentation from your Country of Origin? Immigration status unresolved?

For families who cannot produce appropriate documentation, children may still attend school. **ALL children living in Canada, aged 6-18 have the right to a publicly funded education, and may attend (publicly funded) school, regardless of their own or their families' access to documentation normally required upon registration for school. Nor is their own immigration status or the immigration status of their parents grounds for denying access to (publicly-funded) school.**

**This is clearly stated in the Education Act, the law that governs publicly funded schools in Ontario.**

**Canada has signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which means that Canada has agreed to education available to all children aged 6-18, living in Canada.**

***The Ontario Ministry of Education states that the following documents are not required for student registration in publicly-funded schools:***

- proof of immigration status or application for legal immigration status
- work permit
- social insurance number
- Ontario Health Insurance Program (OHIP) coverage
- health documentation that is different from that required of all other children
- other documentation not required of other children seeking admission to school

Each school board may have a different way of managing the question of documentation. Some boards have policies that clearly state that families are not **asked** for documents related to immigration status when registering.

If you are unsure, or experiencing difficulty registering your children, please speak to your Settlement Worker, or contact the (English- or French-language) school board in your area to learn more about their guidelines.

# Starting School: Helping Children Get Ready

Starting school is an exciting time for many children. Some children, especially those who are younger and have never been to school before, might be afraid of being separated from their parents, a new environment, new faces and new routines.

Most children are anxious about the first day of school. This is especially true if they are attending an English-language school and their English is limited – or if they don't know anyone at the school.

There are many things parents can do to help prepare their children during the days leading up to the first day of school, and on the first day.

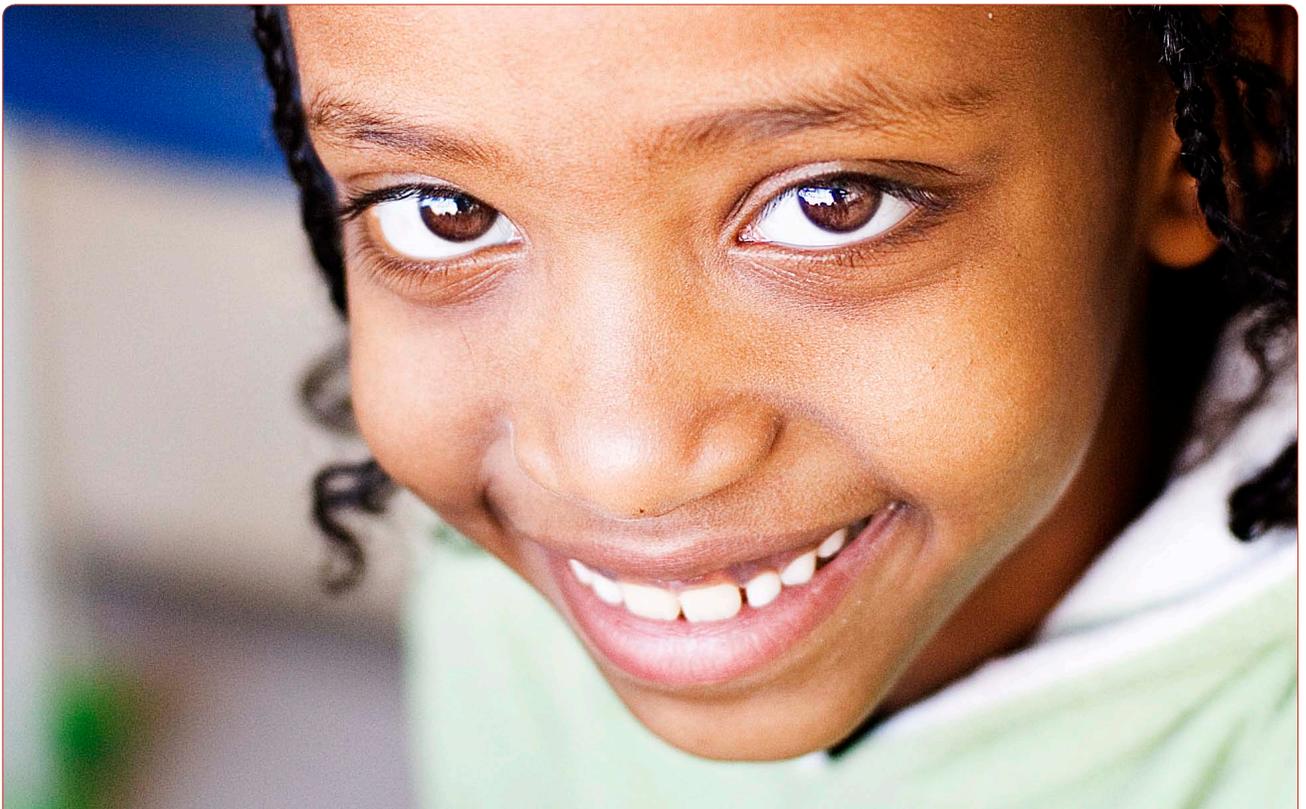
**Here are some ideas for parents during the days before school:**

**Before school starts:**

- A visit to the school with your children so that the route to school, the building, and the school surroundings become familiar.
- Buying some school supplies to take to school on the first day, such as: lined paper, pens, pencils or a dictionary.

**On the first day of school:**

- Spending some time in the morning before school, talking with your children to ease their worries and encourage them (perhaps by going over school information or for little ones what their day might look like).
- Reassuring your children that it is OK to ask for help in class, at school and from you.
- Going to school with your children if they would like you to. (For students who are bussed to school this might not be possible.)
- Seeing if your son or daughter might be paired with another student who is already at the school, who might welcome and help him or her get started.
- Finding out beforehand if there is a SWIS worker in your children's school and speaking to them about offering some support. (If there is not a SWIS worker, it may be helpful to speak to the teacher or principal about ways to help make the first day easier.)
- Taking time at the end of the first day to discuss with your daughter or son how their day went, what went well, what was surprising and what challenges they encountered.





## Ongoing Support For Children at School

As parents, you have an important role to play, not only before and on the first day of school, but throughout your children's school life. Your continued support and involvement in your children's education can have a positive impact on their overall experience and contribute to their well-being and success in school.

There are many ways that you can support your children's learning and education at home. There are also many steps you can take to develop a relationship with your children's teacher and other at school.

**Here are some ideas for parents to help stimulate children's interest in learning and support their adjustment to school, even from a very young age:**

- Talking to your children about school every day. Encouraging them to share their thoughts and feelings about their school day.
- Telling stories and poems, and singing songs in your children's first language and/or in French or English.
- Reading to your children in your home language and/or English or French, and talking about the pictures, ideas, and words.
- Seeking out everyday opportunities to read, by pointing out signs, words and numbers in the home and community.
- Visiting your local public library together.
- Encouraging your children to get dressed independently (e.g., jacket, boots or snow pants).
- Pointing out successes and achievements in your children's work – even the small ones! This helps to build your children's confidence.
- Observing your children's strengths and the areas you feel your children need to develop. Sharing this information with the teacher can make a big difference.

***For more ideas and suggestions about ways to be involved in your children's education and to offer them ongoing support throughout their school years, see the section in this guide entitled "Ways That Parents Can Help".***

**Also:** See the website at [edu.gov.on.ca/abc123/](http://edu.gov.on.ca/abc123/) for some more tips to help parents get children ready for school. These tips are available on the website in several different languages.

## About Local Community Services

All around the province, there are many different services available for children of all ages and for adults. Each community has a different array and many of these are designed to help newcomers adjust, meet others, access job training, learn about things such as parenting in Canada or about holidays celebrated in Canada, or develop language skills or a new social circle.

**Here is a brief description of some of these:**

**Public Libraries:** City-run libraries are wonderful places for newcomers to get information, support and services. Many libraries, especially in larger urban centres, offer a wide range of services to newcomers, and usually free of charge. Many libraries have drop-in activities for young children, including story time, and arts and crafts. Sometimes SWIS workers run programs in libraries (especially in the summertime).

Of course, getting a library card is important – one for each of you and each of your children, so that you can take out books, CDs, films, and toys. Most libraries have computers, and allow members to use the computers and the Internet.

Some libraries have special collections, but you can order materials from other libraries too. Speaking to someone who works at the library closest to you about what they can offer is a great idea. They can also help you get a library card.

Each municipality has a website with information about their library – about hours, locations, services, and more.

Libraries are also a great place where your children can go for a quiet place to do their homework. They will also find many materials, as well as a computer with Internet.

**Recreation Centres:** There are also many services for young and old in city-run recreation centres (such as swimming pools, skating rinks, gymnasiums, lessons of all kinds (arts and crafts, sports, language, etc.)). These services are sometimes free of charge. It might be a fun activity to look at the catalogue of lessons and activities at the recreation centre in your neighbourhood with your children, to see if anything interests you or them. Planning ahead is important, as most activities require that parents sign up ahead of time.

Each recreation centre has a website and a calendar of activities.

## Providing School With Contact Information and Keeping It Up-To-Date

When you registered your children for school, you were asked to provide your home and work phone numbers as well as the name and numbers of a friend or family members in case of emergencies. If you have a cell phone, it is best to give the school that number as well, and your email address as well. Schools are using email more and more to tell parents about special events, school closures, new staff, and other important information.

The school will use this contact information to tell you about your children's schoolwork or in case of an emergency.

If this information changes, please let the school know as soon as possible.



# Information About Daily Life at School

All publicly funded schools in Ontario must follow certain rules set out by the Ministry of Education. They must ensure that these rules are in place to help all students be successful in school and to ensure their **safety and well-being**. Some rules are designed to help the school run more smoothly.

## Getting to School by School Bus

If your children live a distance from the school, school bus transportation may be available. If your children need assistance with transportation because of a special education need or some other kind of need, some kind of transportation would be provided (though not necessarily by bus). Please ask before registering at the school.

School bus and other transportation arrangements and policies vary between school boards, so please ask before registering at the school to find out what kind of transportation exists and if your children are eligible.

Normally, the school bus transportation system is free of charge.

## Supervision of Students in the School Yard

Every school day there will be a school staff member on the school property, in the school yard for at least 15 minutes before school starts and 15 minutes after school ends.

During recess (a break in the child's school day during which students play outside or participate in school-related activities) your children are also supervised in the schoolyard.

If your children stay at school for lunch, the school will supervise them. (During extreme weather conditions, children are kept inside during recess and lunch breaks.)

Students are not supervised at any other time. It is important not to leave young children in the schoolyard early in the morning or late after school – when supervision is not provided by the school.

## Dressing For School

Some schools have a dress code that describes what students may (and may not) wear to school.

If you have questions or concerns about your school's dress code or uniform, you can speak to your children's teacher.

**Gym or Physical Education (Phys Ed) class:** The school may require students to wear particular clothing during Phys Ed classes held in the gymnasium or outside: for example, running shoes, shorts and t-shirts.

**Dressing for outside play:** Students are expected to play outdoors at recess and before and after school, except when the weather makes it unsafe or unpleasant.

Students need clothing that is adequate for outside play in wintertime (for example, a warm coat, hat, scarf, boots and even snowpants.)

It is a good idea for all students to keep an extra pair of socks and shoes at school and for young children to also keep a whole extra set of clothes there.

Kindergarten students can usually dress themselves to go outdoors, although the teacher and classroom staff will help children who are still learning.



## Snacks and Lunch

Your children may eat lunch at school (or at home, if that is possible). Many children eat lunch at school, especially those who take the bus to go to school. Schools typically have a lunch room or arrange for a space for students to eat their lunch at mid-day. Some schools (especially secondary schools) have a cafeteria where students can buy their lunch.

### Packing Lunch: What Can Children Bring?

There are no rules at school about what can be eaten at lunch: lunches can be prepared with the food that your children are accustomed to eating at home although it is likely that they will not be able to heat their lunch. Students will not be provided with plates and cutlery. Because of this, many students bring sandwiches to school for lunch, because these are more easily eaten in these circumstances.

It is important to include juice or water (rather than sugary drinks, like pop). Students in elementary school are given a break (recess) in the morning and in the afternoon, and healthy snacks, one for each break, are usually brought to school by students. Having healthy snacks and beverages during the day helps improve students' concentration and learning.

After lunch, children have playtime (usually outside) until class resumes. School staff members supervise them indoors or outdoors in the schoolyard.

*If you send your children with a lunch box or container, please make sure that their name is clearly written on the container.*

## Food Allergies

More and more schools have rules banning certain food from school property (in school and outside), due to food allergies of students or staff. You might check with the teacher or SWIS Worker, or principal about this.

If your child has a food allergy, please inform the school upon registering, or the teacher.

**Nut Allergies:** More and more students in Canada have severe allergies to nuts and would get very sick if they eat or are even exposed to food or containers or packages containing any amount of this food.

To ensure the safety of these students, many schools have rules that ban all products that might contain or be touched by any nut products. This is called a "nut free" policy.

If your school has this policy, please do not send any food or beverages containing nut products to school with your children.



# School Activities

## School Announcements About Lunch-Time and After-School Activities

Messages about after-school and lunch time activities, clubs, sports events and how to join them are usually made over the school sound system at the beginning of each day.

Students who have questions about an announcement might ask a fellow student, their teacher or another teacher.

## School Outings (Field Trips)

From time to time, the school will arrange for students to leave school and visit a museum, a park or a theatre to see a play. In the days before and afterwards, children work on material related to the trip.

These are called 'Field Trips' and are considered an important part of the classroom program and a student's education.

For some trips a fee may be charged and financial assistance may be available to families. Please speak with the teacher about this.

In order for your children to participate in these Field Trips, the school requires written permission from parents for students under the age of 18.

The student will bring home a permission form for you to sign. Please sign the form so that the student can return to the school with it as soon as possible.

Teachers usually welcome parents who wish to volunteer to accompany children on the field trip. If you would like to volunteer for this, please speak to your children's teachers.

## Fundraising Requests

You may receive a letter from the School Council asking you to donate money to help run a program or activity, or improve the school facility if this is not covered in the school's budget.

All donations of this kind are voluntary and families can give if they are able to and wish to do so.



## Child Care

Many parents require childcare for their children either for the full day, or before and after school, and during school breaks (March Break and during the summer time).

### Formal (Licensed) Child Care Arrangement

In Ontario, parents can send children to a 'licensed' child care program – which means that the government is ensuring that the child care offered meets the needs of the children who participate. Sometimes child care centres are housed in schools and run by another group, and sometimes the school provides and manages a child care centre at the school.

In Ontario, licensed child care can be offered from a caregiver's home (for up to five children younger than 10 years old), or in a special facility. Child care centres are usually located in a school, a community centre or community agency or in another facility.

To learn more about licensed childcare, or to find licensed child care in your area, you can visit the Ministry of Education website: [edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/index.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/index.html).

**You will also find information on this website about how to apply for financial help (subsidies) to help pay for child care.**

### Informal Child Care Arrangements

Informal child care arrangements are made between parents and caregivers. No matter how many adults are in the home, **caregivers without a license are only allowed to look after five or fewer children under 10 years of age in addition to their own children.**

The Ontario government does not evaluate the care these caregivers provide.

### Child Care Tips for Parents

Going to a different setting for childcare before or after school or for the full day is often a new experience for a child. It can be frightening since your children may not know what to expect in a new environment.

**The following strategies can help make this change a little easier for you and your children:**

- Visiting the child care centre and meeting the caregiver(s) several times before starting care and gradually increase the time your children spend in care without you.
- Visiting while the other children are there so that your children can meet the other children and get to know the caregiver and/or Early Childhood Educators (ECEs).
- Touring the home or centre with your children and showing them where they and the other children will eat, play and where the washroom is.
- Explaining to your children who will be bringing them to and from school and at what time. You can explain how they will travel to get there and back (car, bus, school bus etc). If there are any changes in the schedule, it is important to let your children know about these in advance.
- Speaking with your children about the different activities that will take place while in care. Mentioning the caregiver's name often will help your children become familiar with the name before starting care.
- Feel free to ask questions of the people running the child care service, to help your children adjust, and to help them learn more about the special needs of your children.

# Attending School

## The School Year: When Schools Open and Close

**School Year:** School usually runs from the first Tuesday after Labour Day (a Canadian holiday celebrated in September) until the end of June. This is known as the 'school year'<sup>23</sup>.

These dates might change and each school will have a calendar with details for that year.

**Vacations during the School Year:** Each year there is a two-week vacation from school (when school shuts down) near the end of December and a one-week vacation in the middle of March (called March Break). Schools are closed during these periods.

Schools are also shut down for one Monday in **October**, in honour of the Christian holiday known as Thanksgiving.

On the third Monday in the month of February schools are closed for Family Day, which is a day when families are encouraged to spend time together.

In **April**, there is a holiday that takes place in honour of the Christian holiday known as Easter. Normally during Easter, schools shut down on both Friday and Monday, so that there is a four-day weekend. The dates for Easter holiday vary from year to year. (For example, Easter can sometimes take place in March.)

In **May**, schools are also closed on what is known as Queen Victoria Day. This is a legal holiday in Canada, and takes place on the third Monday of May of each year.

**Professional Activity Days:** Schools also close down during Professional Activity (PA) Days. These are scheduled throughout the school year to allow school staff with opportunities to increase their knowledge and upgrade their skills. Students do not attend school on PA Days.

*At the beginning of the school year, students will be given a school schedule with exact dates. Parents can ask the school for this calendar beforehand. It is also usually found on the school or school board's website.*

## Daily Attendance at School

The law in Ontario **requires** that all children **attend school** (publicly-funded or private) on a regular basis from six years of age until 18 years of age or until graduation from high school.

Parents may decide to provide an education for their children away from a school setting, at home (known as home-schooling); if they do so, they must inform a school board in their area each school year that they are doing so. Information about this option, and a sample letter for the board is found on the Ministry of Education's website: [edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/131](http://edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/131).

If a student has been away from school for a long period of time and the school has not been notified, a school board in your region may look into the reasons for their absence. If they feel there is reason to be concerned, they may contact the Children's aid, which is funded and monitored by the Ontario government and serves to protect the safety of children in Ontario and ensure their well-being. (For more information about the Children's Aid Societies, please see the section in this guide entitled "Reporting Possible Harm to Children.")

### Absence From School

If your children are going to be out of school for a long time, please tell the teacher ahead of time. Sometimes the teacher can suggest learning activities for your children while they are away from school. However, if possible, it is a good idea to try to arrange out-of-town travel during school vacation time so your children do not miss school time.

The school has a responsibility to ensure that **all** students arrive safely. If a student does not arrive by 9:00 am and a parent has not phoned the school, someone will call the student's home to inquire into their absence.

***Please call the school when your children will be absent for any reason. It is important to call each day that your children miss school.***

**Absence from school:** Please call the school before 9:00 a.m. if your children must miss school (due to illness, observing religious days, family emergencies, etc.). Some schools have a message machine for recording absences.

Please call each day that your children miss school. Call the school when your children will be absent for any reason.

**Here is a sample telephone message parents can leave on school telephone when a child will miss school:**

"This is < your name >. My child < her or his name > is sick today. She or He is in Grade < ? >. Her/His teacher's name is < teacher's name >."

### **Holy Days and Religious Accommodation**

If your children are observing a religious holy day and will not be attending school, please call the school in advance to let the staff know that your children will be absent.

If requested, the school will make a reasonable effort to accommodate the religious and faith practices of your family, including religious holy days, dress and prayer obligations. It is a good idea to speak to the teacher or the principal ahead of time for more information to discuss the accommodation needed for your children. This helps the school understand the family's needs and discuss the possibilities with you.

For more information about religion and human rights, please visit the section about Religious Rights at the website of the Ontario Human Rights Commission: [ohrc.on.ca/english/guides/religious-rights](http://ohrc.on.ca/english/guides/religious-rights).

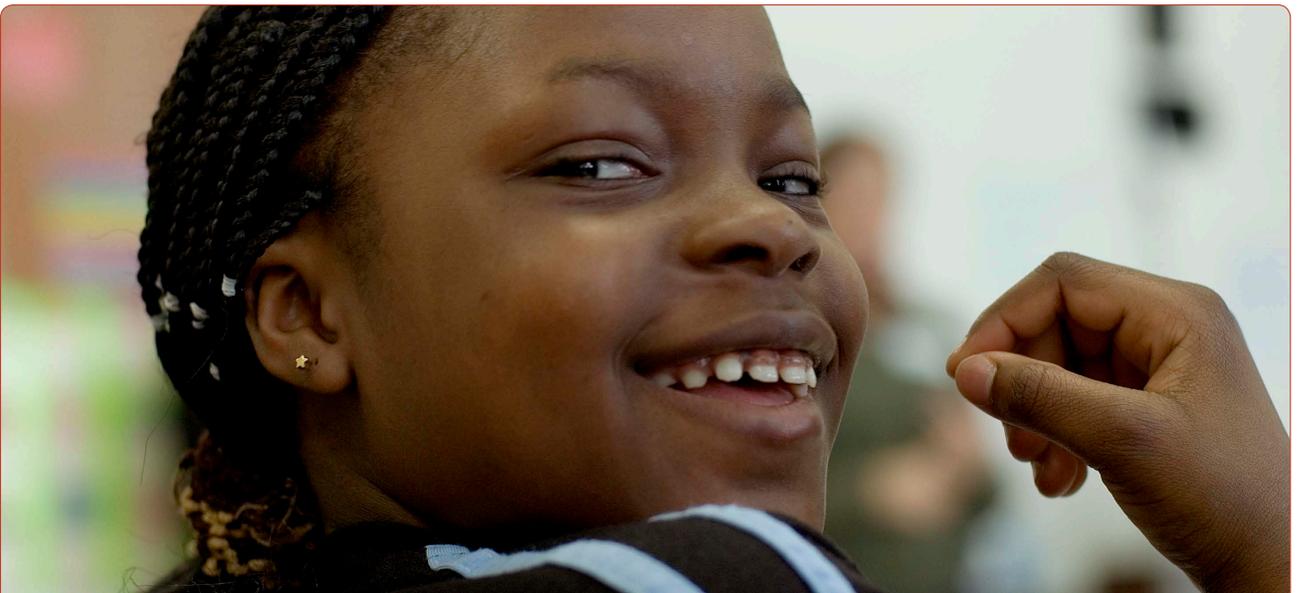
### **Extreme Weather Conditions and School Closures**

Due to extreme weather conditions (for example, a heavy winter snow storm or summer heat), schools may be closed and bus transportation cancelled.

**When there is bad weather there are several ways you can find out about announcements of schools that are closed or buses that are cancelled:**

- listen to the local news on the radio
- watch the local news on television
- telephone the school or school board; they may put a recorded message on for parents phoning in
- check the school or school board website
- check your email account for a message from the school or school board; some schools send out emails to parents to notify them of emergency school closures

*During extreme weather conditions when schools are still open, students are kept indoors at lunchtime and at recess.*



# Evaluating Student Progress

## Your Children's Progress in School

Your children's teacher(s) will communicate with you in many ways throughout the school year. During Parent-Teacher Interviews (see the section in the guide entitled "Parent Teacher Interviews") and on report cards, teachers share information about your children's progress and achievement.

You can contact the teacher to schedule a time to ask questions about your children's studies and progress. Since you know your children best, it is also important for you to share information about your children with the teacher.

If questions or concerns arise, contact the teacher or the principal. The SWIS worker at your school can help out too.

Below is information about evaluating students, provincial exams and meetings with teachers.

## Report Cards for Students in Grades 1 to 8

Students receive three report cards in the school year, allowing students and their family and the school to record students' individual academic progress. These report cards help identify the progress students are making in each subject in relation to the standards set by the government for learning the educational curriculum.

Studies show that students have greater academic success if the adults caring for them are involved in their education. The government believes that students and parents should be kept fully informed about the student's progress<sup>24</sup>. In addition, all boards have policies for sharing information on report cards with parents.

### **There are two types of report cards for students in Grades 1 through 8:**

**Elementary Progress Report Card:** One of these is distributed to each student in the fall of each school year. The Progress Report Card is used to describe how students are managing to fulfill the academic expectations that the school and the government have for each student. (These are based on clear expectations regarding the curriculum that teachers are using in each subject to design their lessons.)

The report cards are presented at a Parent-Teacher Interview offered in the fall. Teachers will use this time to review your children's progress, work habits and learning skills and any challenges that exist, as described in the report card. (For more information about Parent-Teacher Interviews, see the section in this guide entitled "Families and Schools Communicating and Working Together".)

**Elementary Provincial Report Card:** Two of these are distributed to each student during the school year. The first of these will reflect your children's achievement of curriculum expectations from September to January or February of the school year, as well as your children's development of the learning skills and work habits during that period.

The second report card will reflect achievement from January or February to June of the school year, as well as the development of the learning skills and work habits during that period. These report cards are sent home to students for parents to review.

- In Grades 1 to 6, letter grades are used.
- In Grades 7 and 8 percentage marks are used.

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<sup>24</sup> For more information, see *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools* at [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/growSuccess.pdf](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/growSuccess.pdf).

The following chart describes each of the four levels of achievement used to evaluate students' work and what they represent. It shows how each achievement level matches up with whatever result (either the letter grade or the percentage mark) the student may receive, and with the achievement standard established by the province.

Achievement Level	Description	Provincial Standard	Letter Grade	Percentage Mark Grades (7 and 8)
4 + 4 4 -	The student has demonstrated the required knowledge and skills with a <b>high</b> degree of effectiveness. <i>However, this does not mean that the student has achieved expectations beyond those specified for the grade/course.</i>	Achievement <b>exceeds</b> the Provincial standard	A+ A A-	95-100 87-94 80-86
3 + 3 3 -	The student has demonstrated <b>most</b> of the required knowledge and skills. <i>Parents of students achieving at this level can be confident that their children will be prepared for work in subsequent grades/courses.</i>	Achievement <b>meets</b> the Provincial standard	B+ B B-	77-79 73-76 70-72
2 + 2 2 -	The student has demonstrated <b>some</b> of the required knowledge and skills. <i>Students performing at this level need to work on identified learning gaps to ensure future success.</i>	Achievement <b>approaches</b> the Provincial standard	C+ C C-	67-69 63-66 60-62
1 + 1 1 -	The student has demonstrated <b>some</b> of the required knowledge and skills in <b>limited ways</b> . <i>Students must work at significantly improving learning in the specific areas needed, if they are to be successful in the next grade.</i>	Achievement <b>falls below</b> the Provincial standard	D+ D D-	57-59 53-56 50-52
R	The student has <b>not</b> demonstrated the required knowledge and skills.	Extensive extra support is needed	R	Below 50%

When information is missing and therefore it is not possible to identify a letter grade or percentage mark for a student, the teacher will indicate the letter "I" as a code to indicate this.

Sample copies of report cards are posted in **Appendix 2** of the Ontario Ministry of Education document, *Growing Success, Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario schools*, at [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/growsuccess.pdf](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/growsuccess.pdf).

For information in a variety of languages, please visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/reportcard.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/reportcard.html).



## How Teachers Determine Students' Marks

Fairness in assessment and evaluation is grounded in the belief that all students should be able to demonstrate their learning regardless of their socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender, geographic location, learning style, and/or need for special services<sup>25</sup>.

Teachers use clear guidelines set out by the government to review the various aspects of each students' work during the school year. The guidelines are created to foster greater learning as well as academic and overall success while ensuring fairness.

The teacher will refer to what the government expects in each subject and choose the achievement level that best describes your children's achievement of schoolwork. They will then assign what they consider to be the appropriate letter grade or percentage mark.

Teachers will be evaluating different types of work done by students, including: tests, tasks, homework, presentations, projects and assignments. They also base their evaluations on their observations of and interactions with your children.

## Learning Skills

**In the report card, there is also a section on your children's learning skills and work habits. This section gives you information in six categories:**

- Responsibility
- Independent Work
- Initiative
- Organization
- Collaboration
- Self-Regulation

This section of the report card provides the teacher's description of how well your children resolve conflict, set goals, show initiative, complete homework, use information, cooperate with others and work independently. These learning skills may be described by the teacher as; "Excellent", "Good", "Satisfactory", or "Needs Improvement".

Detailed information on learning skills and work habits and their importance is available at [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/success.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/success.html).

For more information by the Ontario government about requirements for teachers' evaluation of student achievement, see the document 'Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools' at [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/success.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/success.html).

You may also ask your school for a copy of this useful pamphlet: 'Supporting Your Children's Learning Through Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting'. This document is also available at [ontario.ca/eduparents](http://ontario.ca/eduparents).

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<sup>25</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) 'Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools' (Internet), p. 8. Available from: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/success.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/success.html). Accessed: 27.02.12.



## Report Cards For Students in Kindergarten

Each school board has its own policies for report cards for Kindergarten students. In all cases, however, teachers will use the curriculum expectations of the government to evaluate your children's progress in Kindergarten.

### Newcomer Students and Report Cards

For children who have recently arrived in Canada, teachers may not give a letter grade or percentage mark on student report cards.

## The ESL/ELD Box (For Students in English-Language Schools)

If your children attend an English-language school, the English as a Second Language (ESL) box that appears in the subject field on the report card is checked for any student receiving ESL support in any subject area, whether from an ESL or English Literacy Development (ELD) teacher, classroom teacher, or other school staff.

Checking the ESL or ELD box indicates that modifications of curriculum expectations are in place for that student. This means that the teacher has changed what the student is expected to learn to suit the student's English language skills, and the mark received by the student on the report card is based on how well the student learned the changed work. In this way, ESL or ELD students are given time to develop their skills in English before their achievement is assessed by the criteria used for other students.

Teachers may also use different teaching methods in order to accommodate the needs of English language learners (the ESL/ELD box is not checked to indicate when these are used).

### Some examples of appropriate accommodations for English language learners include:

- A variety of accommodations related to instructional strategies (e.g., extensive use of visual cues, graphic organizers, peer tutoring; strategic use of students' first languages)
- A variety of learning resources (e.g., use of visual materials, simplified texts, and bilingual dictionaries)
- Extra time for completion of work
- Accommodations related to assessment strategies<sup>26</sup>

Below is a sample:

Student:		OEN:		Grade:	
<b>ESL/ELD</b> - Achievement is based on expectations modified from the curriculum expectations for the grade to support English language learning needs.			<b>IEP</b> - Individual Education Plan <b>NA</b> - No instruction for subject/strand		
<b>Subjects</b>		Progressing With Difficulty	Progressing Well	Strengths/Next Steps for Improvement	
<b>Language</b> Reading, Writing, Oral Communication, Media Literacy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD <input type="checkbox"/> IEP <input type="checkbox"/> NA					
<b>French</b> <input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD <input type="checkbox"/> IEP <input type="checkbox"/> NA <input type="checkbox"/> Core <input type="checkbox"/> Immersion <input type="checkbox"/> Extended					
<b>Native Language</b> <input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD <input type="checkbox"/> IEP <input type="checkbox"/> NA					
<b>Mathematics</b> <input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD <input type="checkbox"/> IEP <input type="checkbox"/> French					

*If the teacher has NOT checked the ESL or ELD box, then the mark on the report card is based on what students are expected to learn in that grade and the student is learning the same school work as the other students.*

(See also the section in this guide on learning a new language, which includes information about report cards for students in language programs.)

<sup>26</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) "English language learners: ESL and ELD programs and services. Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools – Kindergarten to Grade 12.", p. 23 (Internet). Available from: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/eseldprograms/eseldprograms.pdf](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/eseldprograms/eseldprograms.pdf). Accessed: 27.02.12.

## The Parent Response Form

As parents, you have an important role to play in supporting your children's learning and your involvement is valued by the school.

Attached to the report card is the response form. When schools receive this form, they know that parents have reviewed the report card and are aware of its contents.

Parents are asked to sign the report card and return it to the school with your children or bring it to the Parent-Teacher Interview.

There is space on the form for parents to write their own comments and questions, and they are encouraged to do so.

All report cards will be kept in your children's Ontario Student Record (OSR), which is a confidential document available for review by you, your children and your children's teacher(s).

## Following Your Child's Progress Between Report Cards

Hear are some ideas:

- Talking regularly with your children about school. You will get a sense of what is going well and what might be difficult.
- Encouraging their efforts, by pointing out successes and achievements, even small ones. This may also encourage your children to talk with you about school.
- Asking your children to show you samples of their work and test results.
- Reading with your children to observe their reading skills.
- Speaking to the teacher if you have a specific concern.



## Provincial Testing – EQAO

In Ontario, in Grades 3 and 6, schools arrange for students to write province-wide tests to assess their skills in reading, writing and mathematics. These tests are designed and administered by the *Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)*.

The school will send home a letter with the exact dates, which are usually in late May and early June. Each school determines its exact testing dates during this period.

The tests are based on the Ontario Curriculum, and are designed to provide the government with information about student achievement in relation to the provincial standard.

### Examples of EQAO test tasks:

#### Students may have to:

- develop an idea;
- identify the main ideas in a text;
- calculate the time it takes to complete a trip and explain their calculation.

*The EQAO test results **do not** appear on the student's report card; they do **not count towards students' grades**.*

EQAO prepares a report with detailed information on your children's achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. An Individual Student Report summarizing these results is sent home from the school with your children during the next school year.

**Newcomer students:** *If your children have just arrived in Canada, they may be exempt from writing the test or given extra time to complete it.*

The principal will consult with parents about any special accommodation or exempting a student from the test.

Parents may request that their student opt out of writing the test by informing the principal in advance. The school must provide alternative activities for students if they are not writing the test.

For more information about the goals of teaching and the kinds of skills and abilities that are assessed and evaluated, please see the Ministry of Education document:

*Growing Success. Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools:*  
[edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/growSuccess.pdf](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/growSuccess.pdf).

## The Ontario Student Record (OSR)

As students go through school, their report cards, record of courses and other educational documents are stored in the confidential Ontario Student Record (OSR). Teachers may read the documents in the OSR to learn more about students and to plan specialized learning activities.

The parent response form is kept with a copy of the report card in your children's Ontario Student Record (OSR). The OSR is a confidential document with access to the record given only to the student, her or his parents and their teacher(s).

When students change schools within Ontario, the OSR is sent to the new school.

# Families and Schools Communicating and Working Together

When families, teachers and other school staff work together and communicate regularly, this can help to support students' learning and adjustment to a new school system. There are several occasions during the school year when all parents have the opportunity to meet with their children's teachers. As parents, you are also encouraged to contact the school whenever you have a question or concern or to provide information.

## Communicating With the Teacher, the Principal and Other School Staff

Teachers, principals and other school staff are accustomed to receiving calls from parents. They know that some parents who are learning English may find it difficult to talk to them. They appreciate the effort you make to talk to them about your children.

**Here are some ideas to help you contact and communicate with your children's teacher, with the school principal, or with other school staff:**

- Calling the school office and leaving a message for the teacher, the principal or another school staff member. You can give your name and number, your children's names and the best time to call you back.
- Asking if the school can provide an interpreter, if you need one, to help you talk with the teacher, guidance counsellor, principal, or other school staff.
- Talking with the Settlement Worker in School (SWIS) about getting support around communication.
- Asking a friend or family member (not a child) to act as an interpreter, or to offer support. They could accompany you to the school or help you to speak with the teacher, principal or other staff person on the phone. You can make sure everyone is available by arranging and communicating a time in advance that is convenient for all involved.
- For telephone conversations, you might use the feature called 3-way Calling (\*71) on your telephone. It allows you, the teacher, school principal or staff person and the support person or interpreter (or English-speaking friend or family member) to be on the phone all at the same time. There is a small charge for this, normally, from the telephone company. *For more information about this option, please see the special services section in your telephone book.*

## Meet the Teacher Night

Most schools provide an opportunity for parents to meet the teacher and learn about school programs. It may be called *Meet the Teacher Night*, *Curriculum Night* or *Open House*. This usually happens at the beginning of the school year.

Meet the Teacher Night is a general introduction, and **not** the best time to discuss with the teacher how your children are progressing in school, but you may make an appointment or arrange a phone call with the teacher at another time, if needed.

### **Meet the Teacher Night Presentation**

#### **There will be a presentation on:**

- what students will be learning;
- special classroom projects or events;
- homework expectations;
- key rules of behaviour for students; and
- how parents can help their children with studies at home.

#### **Suggested strategies for getting the most out of Meet the Teacher Night:**

- Telling the teacher that you would appreciate a phone call if he or she has any concerns about your children or if your children have any special accomplishments.
- Walking around the school. Visiting the school library and gym. It will help you talk with your children in detail about their various school activities.

## **Parent-Teacher Interviews**

Parent-Teacher Interviews are usually held twice a year at the school, first in November or December and again in March. Parents are expected to attend. Your children will bring home an invitation to these interviews. The dates for these are usually marked on the student's school calendar, and on the school's website, as well.

Parent-Teacher Interviews are conversations between the parent and the teacher about what is best for the child. It is a good opportunity for the parent and the teacher to discuss what each will do to help the child succeed in school. The interviews normally last 10 to 15 minutes.

At the fall interview the teacher will explain the information in the Elementary Progress Report Card and talk about how your children are progressing academically. The teacher will demonstrate what your children have learned by showing you examples of their work. The teacher will also discuss your children's learning skills and work habits. The teacher may suggest how you can help your children at home.

Some teachers encourage students to attend the interview to talk about their work. If there are issues that you want to discuss without your children present, you can arrange another interview with the teacher.

#### **The following strategies can help you get the most out of the Parent-Teacher Interview:**

- Talking to your children before the interview to find out what they enjoy about school and what is difficult.
- Considering in advance what you want to ask the teacher. It is a good idea to keep notes to help you remember your questions.
- Finding out if the school can provide an interpreter, if you need one. If a school interpreter is not available, you may want to bring a friend or family member (not a child).
- Ensuring that you are there at least five minutes early so you can have your full scheduled time with the teacher. (Interviews are usually scheduled every 10 or 15 minutes.) Sometimes parents and teachers need to meet again or talk on the phone to follow up their conversation. You or the teacher can suggest a time for another conversation.
- Afterwards, it is a good idea to discuss the interview with your children. You can emphasize the positive things that were discussed and be specific about any concerns that were raised. You can also explain any plans that were arranged in order to address the concerns.
- It can be helpful to stay in touch with the teacher even if things are going well. This sends a positive message to your children about your interest in their learning.

### Questions parents often ask teachers:

- In general, how is my child adjusting to school?
- How is my child progressing in learning English (or French)?
- In what subjects is my child learning the regular curriculum for the grade?
- In what subjects is my child receiving extra support?
- What kind of support is needed, at home and at school?
- How much time should my child spend on homework?
- How does my child interact with other students?

*Additional meetings may be scheduled at your own or the teacher's request.*

## School Communication With Parents

The school regularly gives information to your children to bring home, such as notices of class and school events, newsletters, permission forms for field trips and announcements about other important issues.

### **The following strategies can help you stay informed about school communications:**

- Asking your children to check their school bag for notices or letters from the school. (Children often forget.)
- Reminding your children that you want to see the information from the school.
- Creating a special place in your home for school information.
- Posting important notices in your home.
- Returning signed forms as quickly as possible with your children.
- Contacting the school office staff or the teacher, if you have a question.
- Checking the school calendar that each student receives at the beginning of each year.
- Checking your email account for notices from the school.
- Checking the school's website for updates.
- Keeping the school up-to-date if you change your phone number, address, or email address.

## Confidentiality

All conversations with teachers are confidential. The teacher will not share information about your children's schoolwork or family situation with other parents or community members. She or he may consult confidentially with appropriate school or board staff in order to ensure that your children receive the best support possible.

The teacher may discuss a situation with other staff and professionals at the school, and the principal of the school, in order to help develop ideas for helping your children at school.



# Ways That Parents Can Help

## Your Involvement Helps Your Children Be Successful

As parents, your contribution to your children's education is very valuable. You can have a positive impact on your children's experience and progress in school. In Ontario schools parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their children's education and to establish regular communication with the teacher. Studies show that parent involvement helps children be more successful in school.

On going communication makes it easier for the teacher to understand your children's needs and helps you understand what is happening in school. It will help make the adjustment to a new school system as smooth as possible, while you offer support to your children.

## Talking With Your Children

Frequent discussions with your children about school help you to know how things are going at school and provide an opportunity to offer advice and support. The discussions also help you know if they are having difficulty and whether a teacher or the guidance counsellor should be contacted.

As with adults, children often find it hard to leave their friends and relatives and move to a new country. It is normal for them to feel a mixture of excitement and curiosity, as well as frustration, sadness and even anger as they adjust to living in a new world.

They may also find it very stressful to adjust to a new school. They may feel they have to dress or act in a way that will fit in with other children but is different for them.

This is a great time for parents to offer support by simply listening, trying to understand what your children are experiencing, sharing ideas (theirs and yours) about adjusting to a new life, and offering support.

**The following strategies can help your children adjust to school life and learning in a new country:**

- Talking regularly about school. You can ask questions about what happens at school and encourage your children to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences. You can listen for what is going well and what might be difficult.
- Taking time when the family is together to talk about making the change to a new culture. You can let your children know that it is normal to be anxious when making big changes in your life.
- Talking about other situations that used to be difficult but are easier now.
- Celebrating small successes like the completion of the first two months in Canada.
- Getting to know your children's friends and making your home a welcome place for them.
- Encouraging your children to tell you about and explain their opinions. This is good practice for students when they need to prepare for classroom discussions and written assignments.

## Ways That Parents Can Offer Ongoing Support For Their Children's Learning

There are many ways you can participate in your children's education and support their learning and wellbeing in school.

**You can support your children's learning at home by:**

- Asking your children about school every day. You can encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings about their school day.
- Offering to help your children with schoolwork.
- Asking different members of the family to help them with their schoolwork.
- Thinking about different skills and talents you and other family members have that might be of benefit to your children at school.
- Taking advantage of everyday moments for discussion and learning.
- Helping your children organize their time and create a positive workspace (in your home, or in a community centre or library).

**You can encourage your children to read by:**

- Encouraging reading among all family members.
- Telling stories, poems, and singing songs in your own language and/or English or French.
- Allowing children to participate in choosing their own reading material.
- Suggesting to children that they read out loud to others.
- Practicing reading in daily life, by pointing out signs, words and numbers in the home and community.
- Visiting the library together. You may want to find out about and participate in reading activities for children at libraries, such as contests, presentations and Story Hour.

**You can recognize and encourage your children’s abilities and strengths by:**

- Pointing out successes and achievements in your children’s work, even small ones. This helps to build their confidence.
- Observing your children’s strengths and the areas you feel they need to develop. You can also share this information with the teacher.
- Maintaining your belief in your children’s capacities – even when there are challenges and obstacles.

**You can seek opportunities to communicate and work with the teacher by:**

- Participating as often as possible in meetings with teachers. You can feel free to ask for another opportunity to talk to your children’s teacher or other school staff as needed – in person or on the phone.
- Contacting the school or the teacher if you have any questions or concerns.
- Asking teachers for help so as to help your children with their homework.

**You can seek opportunities to connect and collaborate with the school by:**

- Consulting the school website and agenda to find out about news and activities.
- Becoming involved in school activities and the School Council.
- Supporting the classroom program by volunteering.

**If You Don’t Speak or Read English or French, You Can Still Support Your Children’s Learning**

**The following strategies offer ways for parents to support their children while they themselves are learning English or French:**

- Providing a quiet place for your children to do homework.
- Helping your children organize their time to do homework.
- Developing a plan with your children for learning English or French.
- Asking your children about what they are learning. Showing interest will encourage your children to open up to you.
- Encouraging your children to read regularly in their first language, as well as in English or French.
- Reading to your children in your first language or asking your children to read to you.
- Involving your children in the library and other enriching community programs.
- Staying in contact with the school by using an interpreter, if possible. You may be able to ask a friend or family member (not a child) to help you by being present and interpreting for you when you have contact with the school.

For additional assistance or ideas, speak with the SWIS worker, teachers or other staff at your children’s school.

*For many ideas about the many ways you can be involved in your children’s education, you can have a look at COPA’s colourful series of short films and guides on getting involved in school life: [infocopa.com/capen.html](http://infocopa.com/capen.html).*

# Helping With Homework

Homework is one way that parents can learn more about what their children are doing in school. The amount of homework that is assigned will depend on which grade your children are in. All students are expected to do some reading each night. Your children’s teacher will explain her or his homework expectations.

### Suggested strategies:

- Encouraging your children when they have difficulty and always reinforcing their efforts by pointing out their successes and accomplishments. This will help your children feel more confident.
- Setting up a study area with your children that is comfortable and quiet, with good light, and away from distractions such as the TV or other noises.
- Providing pens, pencils, erasers, paper and a dictionary.
- Establishing a regular homework time and helping your children plan their work.
- Asking your children about homework assignments. When they are finished, you can discuss the assignments.
- Checking the Student Agenda daily and signing only when homework is complete (Grades 3-8).
- Talking regularly with your children about schoolwork. Even if you aren’t familiar with the topic, you can still be an interested listener.

Each school board will have its own homework policy and suggestions on how much time a child should spend each night on homework (by grade level). Please ask your children’s teacher or principal for those guidelines.

If the homework is too hard, takes too long, or is too easy, please contact the teacher.

### Sample Homework Guide

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Amount of Time</b>
1-8	5 - 10 min. <b>per grade most nights.</b>
	Grade One – 5 to 10 min.
	Grade Two – 10 - 20 min.
	Grade Three – 15 - 30 min.
	Grade Four – 20 - 40 min.
	Grade Five – 25 - 50 min.
	Grade Six – 30 - 60 min.
	Grade Seven – 35 - 70 min.
Grade Eight – 40 - 80 min.	

(Plus Read Aloud or Independent Reading.)

### If Your Children Have No Homework

#### Suggested Strategies:

- Asking your children to show you what they did during the day.
- Reading to your children or having your children read to you.
- Encouraging your children to do a puzzle or playing a game together that encourages thinking and talking.
- Talking to the teacher if your children repeatedly have no homework.

### Resources For Parents: Helping Your Children With Homework

#### **TVO Parents: Helping Parents Help Their Kids Succeed in School and Life**

[tvoparents.tvo.org/special/homework](http://tvoparents.tvo.org/special/homework)

#### **PBS Parents: Helping With Homework**

[pbs.org/parents/goingtoschool/helping\\_homework.html](http://pbs.org/parents/goingtoschool/helping_homework.html)

#### **People For Education: How Can I Help My Child With Homework?**

[peopleforeducation.ca/faq/how-can-i-help-my-childwith-homework/](http://peopleforeducation.ca/faq/how-can-i-help-my-childwith-homework/)

#### **Parent Tool Kit: What Parents Can Do to Help Their Child Succeed in School**

[ontariodirectors.ca/Parent\\_Engagement/Parent\\_Engagement.html](http://ontariodirectors.ca/Parent_Engagement/Parent_Engagement.html)

#### **For information and help with math homework for students in Grades 7 -10, visit:**

[edu.gov.on.ca/elearning/homework.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/elearning/homework.html)

For more suggestions on how to help your children, please see: [edu.gov.on.ca/abc123/](http://edu.gov.on.ca/abc123/).

For resources in French on helping children with their homework, please see the French version of this guide, at [teeontario.ca](http://teeontario.ca).

### Facing Challenges by Learning Together

If your children are having difficulty with their schoolwork, if you want to know how they are doing, or if you have a concern or suggestion, you can talk to the teacher.

The school tries to support students to solve their own problems, but there are times when it is important for parents and teachers to get involved. Here are some ways to support your children as they face and overcome challenges with learning and schoolwork.

#### **Suggested strategies:**

- Asking your children questions to help you understand what is happening.
- Explaining to the teacher or the guidance counsellor what your children have told you.
- Asking the teacher what suggestions they can make for home support and offer suggestions for school support.
- Developing a plan with the teacher so your children receive similar and consistent support from you and the teacher.
- Agreeing to talk again to see if the strategy is working.
- If the problem isn't resolved, you can talk to the vice-principal or the principal. If the problem still isn't resolved you can speak to the school superintendent. The school office will have the superintendent's phone number.

*If your children are having problems with another student, please speak to the guidance counsellor or the vice-principal. For more information about what to do if your children are involved in a conflict or a bullying situation, see the sections in this guide entitled "Bullying and Harassment".*



## Helping Your Child Get Ready For Secondary School

In the middle grades, students begin to plan their secondary school education.

Teachers will assist students to consider their strengths, interests and plans after they graduate. The planning helps students prepare for choosing courses in secondary school.

During Grade 8, your school will organize events for students and parents to help prepare for the transition to secondary school and Grade 9. These events are good opportunities to ask questions and discuss what is best for your children.

**The following strategies can help you prepare your children for the transition to secondary school:**

- Talking to your children about their post-secondary plans. You can discuss their strengths and interests. It is normal for most children to be uncertain about their plans.
- Talking to your children's teacher about what is best for your children. Some schools have guidance counsellors.
- Attending the secondary school information meetings in your school or the meetings for parents of Grade 8 students at the secondary schools.



# Getting Involved in Your Children's Education at School

## Volunteering

Schools encourage parents to volunteer for various activities in the school. Parents may volunteer to accompany children on field trips, work in the library, give presentations, listen to children read and to help in many other useful ways.

You might suggest to the teacher the names of books, newspapers, magazines or videos in your language or about your culture that are suitable for the classroom or the school library.

Speak to your children's teacher about volunteering.

## School Events and Meetings

Your school may organize special events such as student performances and school fairs. From time to time, schools organize presentations about school-related issues such as literacy, mathematics and how to help your children succeed. These events are a great way to spend time with your children, support their education and learn more about the school they attend.

## School Council

Every school has an advisory group of parents, community members and school staff called the School Council. The Council discusses school policies and plans with the Principal.

All parents may attend Council meetings and are encouraged to participate in the discussion. All parents are eligible to be members of the Council. In some schools, members are formally elected to the Council; in other schools, parents simply volunteer.

### Here are some suggestions:

- Asking the school office to give you the name and phone number of the School Council Chair.
- Contacting the School Council Chair to discuss how you wish to become involved in the council.
- Attending School Council meetings to learn how it works. You can ask questions, make suggestions or give your opinions on matters that interest you about the school.
- Talking with the School Council Chair or members about how to help the school staff and parents learn more about your community and the needs of newcomer students.
- Creating a parent network for informing other parents about school events and for welcoming newcomer families.

For more information about School Councils in schools in Ontario, please visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/council/guide.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/council/guide.html).

For more information about School Councils, you can take a look at the short films and resources (*The Capsule Family Get Involved*) on the COPA website: [infocopa.com/capen.html](http://infocopa.com/capen.html).

For more information about parent involvement in general, please visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/policy.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/policy.html).

# Safe and Welcoming Schools

*Inclusive education is central to the achievement of high-quality education for all learners...*<sup>27</sup>

The Ontario government has made a commitment to providing all students with the supports they need to learn, grow and achieve. The Ontario government recognizes that safe, equitable and inclusive schools are essential to student success and academic achievement.

**Equity:** A condition or state of fair, inclusive and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences.

**Inclusive education:** Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected<sup>28</sup>.

Hence, **each and every school in Ontario** is obliged to ensure that the school environment is **safe and welcoming**, a place **where all members of the school community feel respected and have opportunities to participate in school life in a full and satisfying manner**. The school is a place that must be **free from abuse or discrimination of any kind**, such as race, ancestry, place of origin, skin colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, marital or family status.

Schools are obliged to help support students' learning needs, ensure their well-being and help them feel motivated to succeed and reach their full potential. This obligation is derived from a variety of laws – in the province of Ontario and in Canada.

In addition, the Ministry of Education has reinforced this obligation with a number of policies, including the *Safe Schools Strategy* (which focuses on ensuring that schools are free of bullying among students) and its *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, which was designed to promote fundamental human rights as described in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. These are important signs that the Ontario government is actively committed to ensuring a healthy, welcoming and inclusive school environment<sup>29,30</sup>.

If you have any concerns about the safety and well-being of your children at school, it is very important to speak about it as soon as possible, to the teacher or other school staff or principal, or the SWIS worker in your school.

Usually, the first step is to talk to the teacher involved and then the principal or vice-principal. If the problem is not solved you can speak to the School Superintendent.

<sup>27</sup> UNESCO (2009), 'Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy', Ontario Minister of Education (Internet), p. 5. Available from: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.pdf](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.pdf). Accessed: 28.02.12.

<sup>28</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education (2009). 'Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy' (Internet). Available from: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.pdf](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.pdf). Accessed: 28.02.12.

<sup>29</sup> As a result of this Strategy, every Ontario school board has an equity and inclusive education policy and a religious accommodation guideline in place to support student achievement and well-being.

<sup>30</sup> For more information, visit [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/safeKit.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/safeKit.html) and [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.pdf](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.pdf). For information about human rights in Ontario, visit the Ontario Human Rights Commission and its publications at: [ohrc.on.ca/english/publications/index](http://ohrc.on.ca/english/publications/index).



## The School Code of Conduct

Each school has created a *Code of Conduct* that provides guidelines for student behaviour. Typically, the Code of Conduct is designed to encourage peaceful ways of interacting, respect for others, and problem-solving techniques so as to foster a safe and welcoming environment.

The Code of Conduct helps schools become places free of abuse, bullying, harassment, discrimination, intimidation, hateful words and actions and all other forms of aggression and violence.

The school and teacher will develop guidelines and rules to help students follow the Code of Conduct. These rules are explained to students and are usually posted publicly on a wall in the school and on the school website or calendar. Parents may request a copy of the Code of Conduct.

Everyone who is part of the school community, and participates in a school-related activity, including students, parents or guardians, volunteers, teachers and other staff members or SWIS workers, is expected to follow the Code of Conduct. *The Code of Conduct applies even when the activity is not on school property (but is school-related).*

### **The following strategies can help you and your children support and respect the school's Code of Conduct:**

- Asking for a copy of the school's Code of Conduct and reviewing it with your children.
- Discussing with your children that there are serious consequences for fighting, name-calling or harassment and other forms of inappropriate behaviour.
- Discussing with your children the importance of respect for everyone's basic rights, their own and others. This includes the right to live free of abuse and harassment (verbal, emotional, physical and sexual), as well as discrimination<sup>31</sup>.
- Helping your children to develop an attitude of respect for differences among people, including differences based on ethnicity, culture, religion, sex, gender (including gender identity) and sexual orientation<sup>32</sup>.
- Letting them know that if anyone's rights are violated, then everyone is at risk to experience abuse or discrimination.
- Speaking to your children's teacher, or the principal, if you feel that the Code of Conduct or school rules are unfair to your children.
- Telling the teacher that you want to be informed if she or he has a concern about your children's behaviour.
- Talking to the teacher if you are concerned about another student's behaviour.

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<sup>31</sup> For more information about preventing bullying and harassment, and ways to talk about this with children and teens, please see the Professional Learning Module about Bullying Prevention, at: [safeatschool.ca](http://safeatschool.ca).

<sup>32</sup> For more information about discrimination, harassment and bullying based on various social differences, please see the Professional Learning Module about Equity and Inclusive Education, at: [safeatschool.ca](http://safeatschool.ca).



## Children Who Are Feeling Anxious

Children may feel anxious about starting school in their new country. There may be things that are stressful at home, and at school. Becoming anxious is a very normal response to a challenging and unsettling situation. This anxiety can affect the way children think and feel and act. It may be hard for them to pay attention at school if they feel anxious. They may not want to go, preferring to stay home.

Feeling anxious and afraid about starting a new school are normal reactions on the part of your children. As parents, you can help by simply listening, trying to understand what your children are experiencing, sharing your ideas about adjusting to a new life, and offering support.

### Symptoms of anxiety in children:

- stomach aches
- tiring easily
- sadness
- denial of changes
- headaches
- aggressiveness
- silence
- making excuses about not going to school

### Here are some ideas for helping your children deal with anxiety:

- Asking your children what they need for **support**.
- Encouraging your children to talk about what happens at school. **Listening to your children** helps you understand what is going well and what might be difficult. You can start the conversation with a question.
- Gently encouraging your children to **talk about how they feel** in their new life, at school, etc. (This will help them release some of the tension they are feeling, and allow them to know you care.)
- **Sharing your own feelings** about how you are adjusting to a new country. (This will provide them with a positive model for coping with anxiety.)
- Explaining that it is **normal to be anxious** when making big changes in your life.
- Involving your children, whenever possible, in **making decisions**, and **offering them choices**. (This will help them have a greater sense of control and independence.)
- Reminding your children of situations that used to be difficult but are **easier now**.
- **Acknowledging successes (small and big)** in dealing with difficult situations. For example, you can celebrate landmarks, such as the completion of the first month of school.
- Pointing out your children's **successes and achievements** in their schoolwork and learning, even small ones. This helps to build their confidence.
- **Telling the teacher** that your children are feeling a little anxious so that you can work together to help them feel comfortable.
- **Observe your children's strengths** and the areas you feel they need to develop. Share this information with the teacher.



## Helping Your Children Develop Friendships

Making friends and feeling accepted is a big part of adjusting to school, and succeeding. Having friends will help your children feel more comfortable at school, allowing them to focus more easily on their schoolwork.

**The following suggestions can help your children make friends (and help your family to get to know your own neighbourhood):**

- Helping your children **get to know the neighbourhood** and discover places where they can play safely (for example, parks, libraries, community centres, recreation centres).
- For parents who have younger children (up to 6 years old): there are a variety of drop-in centres, known as Early Years' Centres. These services are offered free of charge, and offer time for your children and their caregivers to meet, play and learn together.
- Parents with children of all ages can visit local public libraries and recreation centres. This can help create a sense of connection with the neighbourhood. The school office staff can tell you where these community programs are located. Many community services are found in community centres and local public libraries.
- Accompanying your children to the local park or school playground after school so they can **play with friends**.
- Taking your children to **weekend and after-school and summer-time activities in the community**. Many of these are free of charge. Some of them are offered by an at your children's school, at libraries and various community centres.
- **Talking to your children about their new friends** and learning their names and more about them. When your children want to invite a friend to your home, you could contact their parents to make arrangements.
- Talking to your children's teacher or to a SWIS worker may be useful, to obtain more ideas or support if your children are having difficulty making friends.
- Getting to **know your neighbours** so that your children can see you making friends.



## Behaviour and Discipline at School

The school will discipline students whose behaviour does not correspond to the rules and guidelines set out by the Code of Conduct. Depending on the behaviour, the discipline may simply include verbal or written warnings, or detentions. In some cases, students may face suspension from school (from 1 to 20 school days), or in extreme cases, expulsion.

(For a definition of what is meant by “suspension” and “expulsion,” please see the section at the end of this guide entitled “School-Related Vocabulary”).

When determining whether to suspend a student, a principal will consider if the student understood the consequences of her or his behaviour and other factors. Some behaviour such as robbery and assault that causes bodily harm will result in automatic suspension. While it is the principal who can make a decision to suspend a student, it is the school board that operates your child’s school that makes a decision to expel a student. Parents will be informed or contacted when a student is suspended or expelled.

The school board that makes the decision to expel a student is obliged to identify an alternative setting where the student can pursue her or his education.

### **Examples of behaviour that either might or will result in suspension or expulsion or police involvement:**

- bullying;
- racist, sexist, homophobic or other hateful comments, slurs, jokes or graffiti;
- swearing at a teacher or another person in authority;
- trafficking illegal drugs or weapons or being in possession of them;
- robbery;
- possessing a weapon or use of a weapon to cause bodily harm, or to threaten serious harm;
- physical assault causing bodily harm requiring professional medical treatment;
- vandalism;
- sexual assault;
- providing alcohol to minors or being under the influence of alcohol;
- uttering a threat to inflict serious bodily harm on another person;
- any other activity that is an activity for which a principal may suspend a pupil under a policy of the board.
- For more information, please visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/safeschl/eng/ssa.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/safeschl/eng/ssa.html).



# Bullying and Harassment

We know that sometimes, children experience bullying and harassment at school. Such abuse and aggression are unacceptable in all forms. Bullying and harassment can have serious consequences for the wellbeing and learning of children who experience them. No child (or anyone in any situation) ever deserves or is responsible for aggression and abuse they experience. The Ontario government recognizes this and is committed to providing a safe learning and teaching environment for all students, whatever their ethnicity, culture, religion, sex, gender identity or sexual orientation.

If you suspect that your child is being bullied or harassed by another student, or if your child has witnessed bullying, you can play an important role. Your child needs support from you and the school to stay and feel safe and make sure the problem is stopped.

Children who are bullying or who support others' bullying, also need the support of parents, teachers and the whole school in order to change their attitudes and behaviour and stop the bullying.

**Bullying** is typically a form of repeated, persistent, and aggressive behaviour directed at an individual or individuals that is intended to cause (or should be known to cause) fear and distress and/or harm to another person's body, feelings, self-esteem, or reputation. Bullying occurs in a context where there is a real or perceived power imbalance<sup>33</sup>.

**When bullying occurs, the following elements are present:**

- There is an imbalance of power.
- There is an intent to harm.
- The situation worsens with repetition over time.
- The person who is bullied experiences distress, often including fear or terror.
- The person who bullies enjoys the effects on the person they have targeted.
- There is the threat – implicit or explicit - of further aggression<sup>34</sup>.

Sometimes, children may also experience harassment in school based on their background, their belonging to a particular social group, or their social identity.

**Harassment** is a form of discrimination that may include unwelcome attention and remarks, jokes, threats, name-calling, touching, or other behaviour (including the display of pictures) that is meant to (or should be known to) insult, offend, or demean someone because of his or her identity. Harassment is directed at an individual by someone whose conduct or comments are, or should reasonably be known to be, offensive, inappropriate, intimidating, and hostile<sup>35</sup>.

Some children worry that the person who is bullying or harassing them will seek revenge if they tell the school. You can talk to the school staff about how to make sure your child is safe. All schools are required to have policies against bullying and harassment and want to know if a student is being bullied or harassed, even if it is happening away from school.

For more information about the ministry's Safe Schools Strategy for preventing bullying and harassment in Ontario schools, visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/bullying](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/bullying).

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<sup>33</sup> From the Ontario Ministry of Education, *Bullying Prevention and Intervention, Policy/Program Memorandum No. 144*, at [edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/144.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/144.html).

<sup>34</sup> From *Creating Safe Schools: A Bullying Prevention Guide for Teachers*, created by COPA and OTF in 2012. See also [safeatschool.ca](http://safeatschool.ca).

<sup>35</sup> Adapted from *Promoting Equity and Inclusive Education in Schools: A Teacher's Guide*, p. 119, created by COPA and OTF in 2010. Available online at: [safeatschool.ca](http://safeatschool.ca).

## Understanding Bullying: Is it Conflict or Is it Bullying?

What do we call conflict? **Conflict is understood to be a disagreement or a difference of opinion or interests.** It involves two or more people who share similar levels of power or social status (same grade, same job, same age, same size, same popularity and influence with peers).

Those involved in a conflict may strongly disagree and emotions may run high. When it is badly managed, conflict may result in some form of aggression.

In a conflict, there are *two sides to the story*, and *both parties can influence the situation*.

This is **not** the case with bullying. In a bullying situation, a person (or people) **is targeted by someone** (or several people) **with more power or social status**. When there is bullying, the intention is to harm the other or make them afraid<sup>36</sup>.

**The following strategies can help you work with the teacher and the school to understand and deal with any kind of difficult situation:**

- Encouraging your children to tell you about the situation and asking them questions to help you gather information.
- Explaining to the teacher what your children have told you and how they feel. You can tell the teacher what you did to help your children solve the problem and discuss whether this would work at school.
- Listening to the teacher's point of view and asking what the teacher will do at school. You may want to consider if it would work at home.
- Developing a plan for what you and the teacher will do so your children get the same message from you and the teacher.
- Encouraging your children to tell you about the situation and asking them questions to help you gather information.
- Explaining to the teacher what your children have told you and how they feel. You can tell the teacher what you did to help your children solve the problem and discuss whether this would work at school.
- Listening to the teacher's point of view and asking what the teacher will do at school. You may want to consider if it would work at home.
- Developing a plan for what you and the teacher will do so your children get the same message from you and the teacher.
- Agreeing to talk again to see if the strategies are working.
- Talking to the principal if the problem isn't resolved. If the problem is not resolved by the Principal, you can speak to the School Superintendent. (The school office will have the Superintendent's phone number and the school board will list this on their website.)

## The Role of Parents in Dealing With Behaviour Problems

Some changes in your children's behaviour may be a normal part of adjusting to a new school, language and country. If your children's teacher has a concern about their behaviour or relationship with other students, she or he may contact you.

The teacher will explain what he or she is doing at school to help your children and discuss with you some suggestions about what might be done at home to help manage the situation. Working together, you and the teacher can give your children a consistent message about what behaviour is expected at school.

If you have a concern, please do not hesitate to contact the teacher.

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<sup>36</sup> Adapted from *Creating Safe Schools: A Bullying Prevention Guide for Teachers*, created by COPA and the Ontario Teachers' Federation in 2012. To obtain a copy, please contact COPA or OTF, or visit: [safeatschool.ca](http://safeatschool.ca).

### Parents can support their children when they are bullied or harassed at school by:

- Letting them know that you believe them, that you are glad they told you.
- Reassuring them that they have the right to be safe at school, free from harassment, discrimination, bullying and all other forms of violence
- Encouraging them to speak to you, the teacher or guidance counsellor or another adult at school that they trust about the problem.
- Helping them to identify options to make things better.
- Helping them to practice explaining the problem and trying out strategies to resolve the problem.
- Letting them know that they are not responsible for the problem, and that no one deserves to be bullied or harassed. You can emphasize this by reviewing the school rules that do not allow fighting or aggressive language to solve problems.
- Reassuring them that you are involved in helping to resolve the issue and will continue to support them until the problem is stopped and they are safe.

*For more information and strategies for preventing bullying and harassment at school and for supporting children who are involved in a bullying situation (including children who are bullied or witnesses, and children who are bullying others or supporting the bullying), please visit: [safeatschool.ca](http://safeatschool.ca).*

## Helping Your Child Try to Solve Problems Independently

### Suggested strategies:

- Encouraging your child to speak to the teacher or another adult at school that they trust about the problem.
- Helping your child practice explaining the problem.
- Reminding your child that school rules do not allow fighting or aggressive language to solve problems.
- Reassuring your child that you will get involved if the problem isn't resolved.

*If your child is afraid of another child, or if another child is afraid of your child, then adult involvement is necessary, both at home and at school.*

If your children are involved in a bullying situation (*either* as children who are being bullied, who are bullying others, or seeing others' bullying) you have an important role to play in supporting your children to ensure that the problem is stopped. It is important to remember that in a bullying situation, the priority is always to ensure the safety of the child who is being bullied.

For more information and strategies about bullying, see the section above entitled "Bullying and Harassment". You can also find more information provided by COPA and OTF through the Safe@School project by visiting [safeatschool.ca](http://safeatschool.ca).

## Solving Problems Together

It is important to talk to your children's teacher when you have a suggestion or a concern about your children. If your children are having a conflict with another child, or if your children are involved in a bullying situation (*either because they are being bullied, or because they are bullying others, or they see others bullying someone*), please speak to the teacher or principal.

Wherever possible, the school encourages and assists students to solve their own problems, but there are times when parents need to get involved. As mentioned, if your children are afraid of another child, or if another child is afraid of your children, this is one kind of situation where adult involvement is necessary, both at home and at school.

It is important to remember that conflict is not the same thing as bullying, and that for each situation, adults need to help children in a different way.

# Reporting Possible Harm to Children

If a school board employee (*or any citizen*) worries or suspects that a child (under 16 years old) may be abused or neglected by their caregivers or at home that person **is legally required to report the matter to a local Children's Aid Society**. Proof that abuse or neglect is occurring is not the responsibility of the citizen or school board employee. (If a student reports to an adult that she or his being harmed, the school board employee - and any citizen - is obliged to contact Children's Aid to share this information.)

For more information please see: [oacas.org/childwelfare/](http://oacas.org/childwelfare/).

## About Children's Aid Societies

In Ontario, the government and many organizations work to ensure the wellbeing and safety of children. Ontario's 53 Children's Aid Societies (CAS) and Family and Children's Services are the only child welfare agencies designated by the Ontario Government to protect children from harm. CAS works around the province with others in the community to ensure the safety, wellbeing and stability of children and youth.

Community partners such as hospitals, schools, community agencies and police services work together CAS to help prevent abuse and neglect, improve child safety, maintain children's health and wellness and support and strengthen families to better care for children<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> For more information about Children's Aid Societies, please visit: [oacas.org/childwelfare/](http://oacas.org/childwelfare/).



# Need More Information?

This guide provides a little information on a lot of topics. **Here are some suggestions for getting more information:**

- Approaching your children’s teachers, guidance counsellor, SWIS worker, the principal, vice-principal or the school office staff.
- For more information about settling in Ontario, including learning English, finding a job, finding housing for your family, getting access to health care, and much more, please visit: [settlement.org](http://settlement.org).
- For more information about the Francophone education sector, Francophone culture and life in Ontario, attending French-language schools or accessing services in French, please visit: [teeontario.ca](http://teeontario.ca). This website also offers information about related issues of safety.
- For more information about bullying and prevention, or about equitable and inclusive schools, please visit: [safeatschool.ca](http://safeatschool.ca).
- For more information about supporting young boys in developing healthy, equal relationships and preventing violence against girls and women, please visit: [itstartswithyou.ca](http://itstartswithyou.ca). For information on this topic in French, please visit: [commenceavectoi.ca](http://commenceavectoi.ca).
- For more information about getting involved in your children’s school life, have a look at the *Capsule Family Gets Involved*, a series of short films and guides about parent involvement at school at [infocopa.com/capen.html](http://infocopa.com/capen.html).
- Contact your school board to get more information about their policies and procedures. To locate the school board in your community visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/sbinfo](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/sbinfo).
- For more information about schools, the curriculum, language programs, and the school system, visit the Ministry of Education’s website: [ontario.ca/education](http://ontario.ca/education).
- For information about parent involvement in their children’s education, you can have a look at the resources on the Ministry’s Parents Matter website: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/getinvolved](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/getinvolved). (Information is provided in 27 languages.) You can also visit: [ontario.ca/eduparents](http://ontario.ca/eduparents).
- For Special Education resources, visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/speced.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/speced.html).
- For information about the Ontario Ministry of Education’s commitment to Safe and Accepting Schools, including the Equity and Inclusive Education and Safe Schools Strategies, visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/safeschools.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/safeschools.html).
- For information about the Ontario School Counsellor’s Association, visit: [osca.ca](http://osca.ca).
- To learn more about the ongoing campaigns of No one is illegal-Toronto, visit: [toronto.nooneisillegal.org/](http://toronto.nooneisillegal.org/).
- For more information on the French as a second language program (FSL) visit: [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/FLS.html](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/FLS.html).



# School-Related Vocabulary

- **Assessment** – The process of determining a student’s skills. Many school boards require students to have their mathematics and English- language skills assessed before they start secondary school.
- **Attendance Boundary** – The zone around the school that defines the streets and homes that belong to that school. Your home address determines the school that your child attends.
- **Bullying** – A form of persistent and aggressive behaviour directed at an individual or individuals that is intended to cause (or should be known to cause) fear and distress and/or harm to another person’s body, feelings, self-esteem, or reputation. Bullying occurs in a context where there is a real or perceived power imbalance. Repetition of bullying incidents may exacerbate the power imbalance and the negative impact.
- **Code of Conduct** – The description of the behaviour that is expected of students.
- **Confidentiality** – Refers to the understanding that teachers will not share information about a student’s schoolwork or family situation with other parents or community members.
- **Conflict** – Disagreement that usually starts when someone decides that current conditions are unacceptable and need to be changed. Only one person is needed to start a conflict; others may become involved – whether they wish to or not – in response to this initial drive for change.
- **Curriculum** – The official description of a course and what must be learned.
- **Detention** – Being detained, or kept in school after classes are over. A minor consequence for unacceptable behaviour.
- **Diversity** – The presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.
- **Equity** – A condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences.
- **ELD** – English Literacy Development
- **ESL** – English as a Second Language
- **Expulsion** – Permanently removing (expelling) a student from school. Strictly regulated by Provincial laws, it requires the student to provide commitments (agree to certain requirements) before being allowed to return to school.
- **Francophone** – Persons whose mother tongue is French, plus those whose mother tongue is neither French nor English but have a particular knowledge of French as an Official Language and use French at home.
- **Harassment** – A form of discrimination that may include unwelcome attention and remarks, jokes, threats, name-calling, touching, or other behaviour (including the display of pictures) that is meant to (or should be known to) insult, offend, or demean someone because of his or her identity. Harassment is directed at an individual by someone whose conduct or comments are, or should reasonably be known to be, offensive, inappropriate, intimidating, and hostile.
- **Human Rights** – Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.
- **Kindergarten** – Educational program that is designed to help young children build on their prior knowledge and experiences, form concepts, acquire foundational skills, and form positive attitudes to learning as they begin to develop their goals for lifelong learning.
- **Licensed child care** – Child care programs must meet and maintain specific provincial standards set out in the Day Nurseries Act. These standards provide for the health, safety and developmental needs of the children.
- **Mandatory Consequences** – Actions that, by law, must happen - usually in response to a student’s unacceptable behaviour.

- **Ontario Student Record (OSR)** – As students go through school, their report cards, record of courses and other educational documents are stored in the Ontario Student Record (OSR).
- **Parent** – In this guide, the term also includes guardians, caregivers and other family members.
- **Principal** – A person who has a supervisory, decision-making and leadership role in schools.
- **School Council** – A forum through which parents and other members of school communities can contribute to improving student achievement and school performance.
- **Parent-Teacher Interviews** – Conversations between parents and teachers about how the student is doing at school. Usually interviews take place in the fall and the spring but can be arranged at any time. Many schools can provide an interpreter if you ask ahead of time.
- **Recess** – A break in the child’s learning/instructional day where children play outside or participate in school related activities.
- **Religious Accommodation** – The reasonable steps that schools will make to allow for the religious practices of students.
- **Report Card** – The official summary of a student’s progress in school. Written by the teacher of each subject, it is for the parent and student to review.
- **Report Card Response Form** – The form that is sent to parents with the report card. It should be signed by a parent and returned to the school.
- **School Board** – A regional office that operates/administers a group of schools.
- **School Council** – A forum through which parents and other members of school communities can contribute to improving student achievement and school performance.
- **Superintendent** – A person who is a senior leader in public education and who is responsible for supervising a number of schools in a community.
- **Secondary schools** – Schools for students from Grades 9 to 12, also known as high schools or collegiates.
- **Special Education** – Unique programs designed for students with special needs.
- **Suspension** – The policy of temporarily removing (suspending) a student from all classes for a number of days or weeks (maximum 20 school days). In some cases suspension is mandatory, and it is a serious consequence of unacceptable behaviour.
- **Transcript** – The official record of a student’s studies, courses and grades.
- **Trustee** – Trustees are elected representatives and members of the school board. They provide an important link between local communities and the school board, bringing the issues and concerns of their constituents to board discussions and decision making. Trustees are elected every four years during municipal elections.
- **Vice-Principal** – A person who has a supervisory, decision-making and leadership role in schools. Works closely with the principal.

