

The Newcomer's Guide to Secondary 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 document¹. Since most young people start school as soon as they arrive in Canada, it is important that newcomer families have clear information about the school system. 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 provides 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.

For example, your children will need to choose which courses they will take in secondary school. This is not always easy as there are many different types of courses and the choices can greatly affect working and learning opportunities after graduating. This guide has information that will make it easier for you to help your children choose these courses wisely.

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 short-term and long-term success, during school and in 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 number 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 Ontario schools, there are people called **Settlement Workers In Schools (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 parents² 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. 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!

¹ 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.

² The term 'parent' in this Guide refers to all caregivers.

Important Services in Schools For Newcomers

Special Services For Newcomers

Some schools have services that are adapted to assist newcomers with the special needs they may have related to their settlement in Canada.

Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS)³

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 a new school. They are there to help both the student and family adjust.

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

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 are asked to go in order 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, it is useful to 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.

Information gathered will be sent to the school your children will attend in order to help the school plan learning activities for them.

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



Other People Who Can Help You

You or your children may have questions and worries that mostly have to do with school. In this case, it is best to talk to the teacher involved. Here are some other people that you might speak to:

The ESL Teacher

Many English-language schools have classes where students can learn English. These are called ESL (English as a Second Language) Programs and the teachers are called ESL teachers. They know about teaching English, and they can help with other decisions to do with choosing courses and making plans for later. These teachers have worked a lot with newcomer students and they can help with many things.

(For more information about ESL programs, please see the section in this guide entitled “Learning a New Language.”)

For information about remedial French-language programs for students in French-language schools, please see the French-language version of this guide, at teeontario.ca.)

The Guidance Counsellor

In secondary schools, a person called **the guidance counsellor** can help students and their parents learn more about what choices there are, and help make decisions about courses and work after graduation.

The guidance counsellor also can help students with other things, such as personal problems. Parents can also contact the guidance counsellor for advice about their children. The counsellor’s experience and understanding can be a great help. If the counsellor is unable to offer the kind of help you need, they might be able to find someone else in the school, or outside in the community, to help.

The Chaplain (in Catholic Schools)

A person called the school chaplain works with staff in Catholic schools and with the priest in the local parish. They are at the school to help students celebrate their faith and help with spiritual and personal problems.



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** young people of school age living in Ontario⁴.

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 system⁵. The *Ontario Human Rights Code*⁶ as well as the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*⁷ are laws that apply, ensuring **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 **all** staff in schools (including teachers⁸ and principals).

There are four types of school boards that may have schools in your area: boards that run English-language schools, either Catholic or Public, and boards that run French-language schools, 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 school boards have many superintendents, depending on the size of the board.

To locate the school boards in your community visit: edu.gov.on.ca/eng/sbinfo.

⁴ 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/privschr.

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.

⁵ Visit edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/brochure/whosresp for a look at the Education Act and related information.

⁶ Visit ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/code for a look at the Code and related information.

⁷ Visit laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/charter/page-1 for a look at the *Canadian Charter of Human Rights* and related information.

⁸ In Ontario, teachers and other school staff, not including principals and vice-principals, are part of a union. There are four main teachers' 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 make sure the school runs smoothly.

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 may teach a number of different subjects to students.

Other School Staff

Schools have many other staff members that work every day in schools (like the **secretary**, who often has plenty of information for newcomers about schools and services, or the guidance counsellor (see above)). other staff members who visit schools only on certain days, such as **social workers**, or **speech therapists**.

In each school, there are many 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.



How Is the School System Organized?

French- and English-Language School Systems

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

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 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 young people who have been baptized as Roman Catholic or have Roman Catholic parents.

⁹ 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 twelve 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*¹⁰. Each school has an Admissions Committee to help identify if your children can go to a Francophone school¹¹.

According to the French Language Education branch 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 levels¹².

For more information about Francophone schools, see the French-language version of this Guide on the following website: teeontario.ca.

Public and Catholic School Systems

In Ontario, students may attend Public (secular) or Catholic schools in either French-language schools or in English-language schools¹³. 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: ontario.ca/education.

¹⁰ Visit edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/FLS to learn more about the requirements and options for students in English-language schools learning French as a Second Language.

¹¹ For more information about French-language schools in Ontario see the French-language version of this guide at teeontario.ca, or visit edu.gov.on.ca/fre/amenagement/frenchBoards where you will find contact information for French-language school boards.

¹² For more information about the French-language education system in Ontario, visit: elfontario.ca.

¹³ For a history of religious education in Ontario’s school system, visit: edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/religion/religioe.

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)¹⁴.

Some English-language schools provide a **French Immersion program**¹⁵. Students in French Immersion do most of their courses in French, and in later years more subjects are offered in English¹⁶.

Some secondary schools are identified as alternative schools. They offer a unique curriculum or educational style, or they cater to a special needs population (for example, students in conflict with the law, newcomer students who require a Canadian high school diploma, or mature students returning to complete a diploma). 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 specific subjects or areas, like computers, the arts, science, or sports. 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 by the school board as 'gifted'. These students tend to demonstrate an increased academic proficiency. School Boards will test and identify students before admitting them to a 'gifted' program¹⁷.

Which School Can My Children Attend?

Usually your home address determines the 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 school is entitled to attend that school.

This is not always the case for some other types of schools, such 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 **may** enrol students who live outside of their attendance boundary. Speak to the school board or office staff for more information.*

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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 school 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.

¹⁶ For more information about French Immersion programs in English-language schools visit: edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/FLS.

¹⁷ For more information, visit: abcontario.ca/faqs/98/182-how-do-the-ontario-ministry-of-education-and-school-boards-define-giftedness.

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 following the completion of each grade or subject.

The Ministry of Education publishes curriculum documents that cover all of the courses for each of the following school subject areas:

- English
- Guidance and Career Education
- Health and Physical Education
- Interdisciplinary Studies
- Native Studies
- Technological Education
- Social Sciences and Humanities
- The Arts
- French
- Mathematics
- Science
- Business Studies
- Canadian and World Studies
- Classical Studies and International Languages
- Computer Studies

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

(Students in the Catholic school system are required to choose one religious education course each year or have successfully completed four courses prior to graduation.)

The Ontario curriculum documents are posted at edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/s/subjects.html.

Sample from the Ontario Curriculum for Grade 9

Principles of Mathematics (Academic):

"By the end of this course, students will determine the slope of a line segment, using various formulas."



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 child's skill-level in English, the teacher may accommodate his or her learning experience as well as expectations set for that child regarding the material being studied. (For more information about students in English-language schools that 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. All students in English-language secondary schools are required to take at least one French as a Second Language course in order to graduate. In special cases, the school can substitute another course for the French credit. In some cases, students find that knowing their first language helps them to learn French.

For more information about French-language (Francophone) schools in Ontario, please see the section above about the French-language school system.

For additional information about French-language (Francophone) schools in Ontario, and about the French-language school system, please see the French-language version of this guide, at teeontario.ca, or you can contact a French-language school board.

Textbooks and Learning Materials

Textbooks and learning materials for courses which are required to graduate are provided to the student free of charge by the school at the beginning of the school year or semester. Occasionally, the school may request fees for enhanced or supplementary activities beyond the core curriculum. If payment and this is a difficulty, please speak to your children's teacher or the principal.

Unless the student has purchased them, textbooks are the property of the school and students are expected to return them to the school when the course is over, in good condition. If a textbook is lost or damaged, the student will be asked to pay for it.



Learning a New Language

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

Young people usually learn to **understand and speak** a new language more quickly than they learn to read or write it. Most young people 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. For example, you can go to community events where your first language is spoken, or enrol your child in an International Languages program (see below) in your language, if one is available. 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 multilingual book, tape and video collections. You can also get community newspapers in your language and discuss the stories together.
- 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 young people 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.
- Encouraging your children to **participate in discussions in class.** This may be hard or confusing at first but it will help the student learn English (if they are studying in an English-language school) or strengthen their French (if they are studying in a French-language school) more quickly.
- 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, young people 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 young people 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.

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 into 'mainstream' classrooms as their language skills improve.

Options For French-Speaking Students

Young people 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^{18, 19, 20}. 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.

Parents who are proficient in French and not in English, and whose children attend schools within the French-language school system, will be able to participate in school activities and more easily 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 and 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

Students in English-language secondary schools who are learning English take ESL or ELD courses in addition to regular courses. Schools can offer up to five ESL and five ELD courses, each one at a different skill level. Students attend these ESL and ELD courses according to their English-language skills, and not according to their age or grade.

Some schools offer courses that have been especially adapted for ESL students, such as ESL History, ESL Geography, ESL Science, and ESL Careers.

For more information about the curriculum, see: edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary.

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

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ Cardinal, L., Plante, N., Sauvé, A. (2006) *Les jeunes francophones de l'Ontario: un profil statistique*. Université d'Ottawa.

²⁰ 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



Brief Explanation of ESL and ELD Courses

Course Code	What It Teaches
English as a Second Language	
ESL AO Level 1	Introduces the English language and helps students adjust to their new life.
ESL BO Level 2	Expands students' basic English and introduces the language of the classroom.
ESL CO Level 3	Improves students' ability to use English for all subjects in the classroom.
ESL DO Level 4	Prepares students for Academic and Applied English Courses.
ESL EO Level 5	Prepares students for secondary school English and other courses at the university and university/ college preparation levels.
English Literacy Development	
ELD AO Level 1	Introduces basic literacy skills and helps students adjust to their new life.
ELD BO Level 2	Helps students to develop basic literacy skills.
ELD CO Level 3	Helps students' growing language and literacy skills; extends their ability to communicate in English, study skills and personal management strategies.
ELD DO Level 4	Helps students' literacy skills and ability to apply learning strategies effectively and teaches how to use community resources to enhance lifelong, critical learning.
ELD EO Level 5	Prepares students for secondary school English and other courses at the university and university/college preparation level.

For more information, see Ministry of Education Ontario Curriculum Grades 9-12, English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development (2007) edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/esl912currb.pdf.

International Language Classes

Some schools offer courses in newcomer languages called "International Languages". These classes help students maintain and improve their first language skills, which can also help them learn English more effectively. Many school boards offer a variety of weekend or evening classes in International Languages for students, which also allow students to earn credits toward their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

When there are enough students within a community who request a course in a particular language, school boards are sometimes able to add classes for that language. They may also be able to introduce new classes to teach that language. Some of these new classes may qualify for high school credits. For more information, please speak to the ESL teacher, the SWIS worker, the guidance counsellor or the school board staff in the Continuing Education department.



Teaching and Learning in Ontario Classrooms

How Young People Are Taught

All students (and all people) are unique and 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”²¹. (For more information about the Government of Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, please visit: edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity).

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, for example: lectures, discussions, question and answer sessions, research assignments, field trips, projects and team assignments with other students. 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 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. They learn how to interpret, analyze and evaluate information.

Students have many opportunities to put these skills into practice through a variety of learning activities. Teachers ask students to participate in classroom discussions and to speak to the whole class or to groups of other students. For example, students might be asked to prepare and deliver a presentation, or in mathematics a student might be asked to explain how an answer was calculated. Teachers also ask students to think about their own performance, evaluate their own work and reflect on how they might improve it.

Students are also asked to research a topic in the library or on the Internet, to write about what they have learned and to present and explain their point of view. Following this, students summarize their work in a project.

²¹ Ontario Minister of Education (2009), *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, p. 5 (Internet). Available from: edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.pdf. Accessed: 27.02.2012.

Working on Projects

In many courses, students are asked to prepare a project. When working on a project, students decide on a topic, research it and then write a report or make a presentation to the class about what they have found. Sometimes, students are asked to work together on a group project. Teachers can provide assistance to students, offering guidance to help them organize their projects.

Teachers design learning activities to help students appreciate, understand, value and learn about the experiences and contributions of all peoples around the world.

Catholic students will participate in retreats. A retreat is a learning activity that is part of the religious education program. It is held away from the school, usually for the entire school day. In some cases there may be overnight programs and written permission from parents will be required to allow students' participation.

Learning Responsibility For Schoolwork

Secondary school students are young adults and within a few years many will be moving into a new phase of their life, making decisions on their own and starting to work. An important role of the school system is to help prepare them to take on these adult responsibilities.

An important aspect of the role of teachers is to help prepare students for these future responsibilities by giving them opportunities to learn self-discipline and take responsibility for school assignments and homework. For example, students are expected to complete their homework assignments, but teachers don't always check students' notebooks to see if it is completed. As students mature and move through the grades, teachers expect them to become increasingly self-reliant.

Learning and practicing skills and habits that develop autonomy, self-direction and responsibility for one's work can be very beneficial to secondary school students. Students who learn these skills and habits are then better prepared to succeed in the workplace, in apprenticeships, at university, at college and in many other programs where they are responsible for their own work.

Ways Parents Can Help Their Children Adapt to Teaching and Learning in Ontario Classrooms

Some of these teaching styles and methods, as well as these expectations for studying and learning, may be different than those found in schools in many students' country of origin.

The following strategies may help you prepare your children for learning in the Ontario school system:

- Talking to your children about the differences in teaching styles and methods between schools in Ontario and those in their country of origin. You can let them know that it is normal to feel confused or overwhelmed, and explain that it may take time to adjust.
- Encouraging your children to talk to the teachers about how they are doing. This will give them an opportunity to receive more individualized guidance and assistance for their learning.
- Letting your children know that it is appropriate for them to ask for help from teachers. Students can be encouraged to ask questions when they don't understand something or need help. They can either put their hands up during class to signal that they have a question, or they can approach the teacher at the end of the class.
- Creating opportunities for family conversations so that everyone can participate, for example, at mealtime.
- Encouraging your children to tell you about their opinions and to explain them. When these kinds of discussions take place at home it is good practice for classroom discussions and written assignments.

For more information about ways that parents can support their children's learning, please see the section in this guide entitled "Ways that Parents Can Help."

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/eng.

Special Education Programs

Special Education programs and services provide extra support to help young people with special education needs. Some young people need short term help and others have complex learning needs that require support over time.

Young people may need help due to behavioural, communication, intellectual, physical or multiple learning needs.

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 plan²².

Most universities and colleges also have support programs for students with special needs. For more information, please check the website of the postsecondary institution(s) where your children will apply.

²² For more information about Special Education please visit: edu.gov.on.ca/parents/speced.



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 young person, 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 young people 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 young people 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 and teenagers 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 age²³.
- 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 their hearing checked.

²³ For information about financial assistance by the Ontario government, please visit: 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 and teenagers 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 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 school²⁴.

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.

²⁴ For more information, please visit: toronto.ca/health/immunization_children/immunization_records_faq.htm or health.gov.on.ca/en/public/publications/pub_immun.aspx.



Secondary (High) Schools: How They Are Organized

Secondary schools are open to all students under the age of 21 years. In many school boards, there are also programs for adult students. There are some differences in the ways secondary schools are organized, as presented below.

Semestered and Non-Semestered Schools

Secondary schools organize the school year differently, depending on whether they are semestered or non-semestered.

Semestered schools: Students usually study one set of four courses from September to January (1st semester), and then a different set of four courses from February to June (2nd semester).

Report cards are given in the middle and at the end of each semester. Final exams are at the end of each semester.

Non-semestered schools: Students study the same eight courses all year, from September to June.

The year is divided into three terms. Report cards are given at the end of each term and final exams are held at the end of the year. Some schools also have exams at the end of each term.

Required and Optional Courses

Overall, students in secondary school take required courses and have choices for optional courses to achieve the course requirements for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

School boards publish a booklet that describes all the courses offered in the board. It may be posted at the school or board website.

For more information about requirements for graduation and for the OSSD, about planning ahead for your children's education, and about course selection and placement, see the sections below.

Student Timetables and Periods

Each student is given a personal timetable of classes at the beginning of each school year or semester. There may be different classmates and a different teacher in each class.

Schools divide the day into blocks of time called periods. Depending on the school, a period may be 40 to 90 minutes long.

In many schools, students move from classroom to classroom throughout the day as the period and their courses change.





Planning For the Future - From the Start!

Helping Your Children Develop Their Education Plan

When students begin secondary school, they are presented with a wide range of choices in course selection. These choices will have a real impact on their post-secondary options, and on their career options.

Early planning is important, since some decisions are necessary during secondary school to allow students to follow their chosen direction later on. For example, in order to enter some university or college courses, as well as some apprenticeship programs, students need to take specific secondary school courses.

Making these decisions can be overwhelming for many students, and especially for newcomers to Canada, who are adjusting to so much that is new and unknown. We hope that the information provided in this section will help to make it a little easier for you and your children to make some of the decisions that are needed at this stage. (For more information, please see the sections in this guide entitled “What Do Your Children Need to Graduate?”, and “Helping Your Children Choose Their Courses”.)

Developing a Plan Together

Your child’s input and your support and guidance are **both** crucial in helping navigate this challenging process. Their interests and talents matter, as do your wisdom and experience. Allowing your children to contribute to decision-making will have a positive impact on their academic and personal success, in the short-term and in the long run. In this way, young people can begin to take responsibility for their own decisions and develop self-reliance. Students who learn these skills are better prepared for an apprenticeship, for university and for college where they are completely responsible for their own work. They are also more eager to achieve the goals they have set themselves.

At the same time, your participation will enable your children to think of options they may not have considered, or the impact of the choices they prefer. Elders, especially those who care so deeply about their children’s future, can make a precious contribution by sharing their opinions and perspectives. By doing so, they help to expand young people’s horizons.

It can also be a good idea to discuss your children’s choices and future plans with someone at the school, such as a SWIS worker, a teacher or a guidance counsellor. They can tell you and your children about many learning and training and career opportunities available.

For more information about these different options, please see the section in this guide entitled “Next Steps: Working, Training or Studying”.

Why Is an Education Plan Important?

An education plan for your children is a helpful tool for thinking through and coming to an agreement about what courses your children will study in secondary school. This is a good basis upon which to prepare for what they will do after graduation.

After graduation from secondary school, young people may pursue a number of different paths. Some might choose to go to work, to gain experience, or to save money for their education; they may also go to work for a year or two and then return to post-secondary studies.

Others might study immediately following graduation, entering an apprenticeship program, attending a trade school, a private college, a college or a university.

An education plan will help you and your children think about and select a secondary school and courses that match their interests, talents, abilities and ambitions. It will also help students take the courses needed to graduate and work in a particular field or be accepted to a program of study toward their career.

Rethinking and updating the plan is a good idea, since children are continually exposed to new areas of learning at school, and learn more about their interests as they mature.

An education plan is particularly important for students who are also learning English. Their plans need to include a way to develop their reading, writing and spoken English-language skills in addition to all the other courses they must take to reach their goals.

The First Year in Canada

For most young people, deciding what to do with their future is challenging and often stressful. During their first year in a new country, this can be especially hard for students who are newcomers. Many students need time to adjust and consider what to do.

During the first year, you and your children will receive a lot of information that will be important to consider when developing your child's education plan.

For example:

- You will have a better sense of what schools and programs exist, and which courses might be needed or interesting.
- You will be given information from teachers about the student's reading, writing and speaking skills in English.
- You will learn how your children are adjusting to life at school.
- You will have a chance to talk to other parents about the choice of courses and opportunities for students after graduation.
- The school will confirm how many school credits the student will be given for previous learning.

As you and your children gather information, adjust to your new surroundings and learn more about the school system in Ontario, you may find that you and your children's sense of possible directions for the future become clearer.



How Teachers Help Students Develop a Plan

Teachers can make a positive contribution to the development of students' education plan in many ways and especially through Guidance and Career Education courses. In Gr. 10 **Career Studies** course, which is compulsory for to all students, the teacher guides students through a planning process to help them think about their future plans.

Teachers will not choose courses for students or tell them what they should do after graduation. Teachers will, however, help students make decisions to reach their goals.

How Parents Can Help Their Children Develop a Plan

Participation in the Careers Studies course does not provide most young people with all the support they need. Parents play a crucial role in the development of their children's education plan, helping them to consider how their present choices and decisions may affect their options after graduation. Your involvement in the development of your children's education plan remains important and necessary.

There are a number of things parents can do to help their children develop a plan.

The following strategies can help you guide your children through the planning process:

- Choosing quiet, relaxed moments to **discuss your children's interests, abilities and plans after graduating from secondary school**. Positive discussions often grow out of casual, everyday conversations. For example, when you notice your children's interests or point out their strengths and abilities, this can lead to discussions about the future.
- Asking your children about the kinds of **careers they find interesting**. You may notice that their plans change many times; it can be helpful to know that this is a normal part of the process of making choices.
- Identifying what kind of **education or training is needed after graduation**, to enable your children to follow their career plans. The guidance counsellor can offer information in this area.
- **Reviewing the courses that are needed now** in order to be eligible to pursue the education or training that is needed after graduation. The guidance counsellor can help in this regard as well. (For more information about course selection, see the next section in this guide entitled "Helping Your Children Choose Their Courses".)
- Taking advantage of the many **activities** available in secondary school. These can provide opportunities to help your children **explore their interests and abilities**. For example, after-school or lunchtime activities offered by the school can help your children discover their true interests and learn about other careers.
- **Attending career information events** taking place at the school to learn about various career options.
- Considering what **courses and after-school activities help students learn English** (reading, writing and speaking), as well as making friends and adjusting to school as quickly as possible. You may want to encourage your children to choose courses that put emphasis on speaking in the class. For example, in Drama class, students learn how to speak comfortably to groups of people.
- **Consulting with the guidance counsellor** at the school. Many parents find it helpful to talk with the guidance counsellor about their children's career and education plans.
- **Staying involved with your children's education and aware of their progress** can help you identify their interests and abilities. For example, your children's **report cards** and the teacher's comments during the **Parent-Teacher Interviews** can provide insight as to where your children might be headed. These key moments can also be opportunities to discuss the future with your children.
- **Talking to other parents and students** about their plans and about career opportunities after graduation.

For additional information, see Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities at edu.gov.on.ca/eng/tcu/ and Canadian Guidance Services at careerwinning.com.

What Do Your Children Need to Graduate?

The Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD)

All students who graduate from secondary school receive an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.

All graduating students receive the same diploma regardless of what they studied. For example, a student who completes courses for entering university, college or an apprenticeship program will get the same diploma as a student who completes courses for going directly to work after graduation. Additionally, students who successfully complete a Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) program as part of the requirements for their OSSD will receive a diploma with an SHSM red seal.

The diploma is usually one of several requirements for further education or training. Apprenticeship, college and university programs each have their own entrance requirements. For more information about the requirements of a post-secondary program, please speak to the guidance counsellor.

Earning 30 Credits

In secondary school, students advance towards obtaining their diploma and graduating by earning credits each time they complete a course. A student earns a credit when she or he completes a course with a mark of 50% or more.

Students need to earn a total of 30 credits in order to graduate. They can earn either one credit or a half credit for each course they successfully complete. Therefore they will have taken at least 30 courses by the time they complete their secondary school education. The duration of a full credit course is 110 hours, and for a half credit course the duration is 55 hours.

Compulsory VS Optional Courses

Of the 30 credits required, 18 of these are called *compulsory credits*; that is, **students must take them and successfully complete** them in order to graduate from secondary school.

The remaining 12 that students take to receive their diploma are called *optional credits*. They must be successfully completed in order to graduate, however they are selected by each student, from a range of *optional* courses available to them at their school. Their school will provide a list or a booklet describing these options for each grade level.

For information about choices of compulsory French-language courses within the French-language school system, please see the French-language version of this guide, at teeontario.ca.

Language Learning and Compulsory Language Courses

Of the 18 credits that are compulsory in order to graduate, four (4) must be in English for students within the English-language school system, and four (4) must be in French for students within the French-language school system.

Students learning English as a second language within the English-language school system earn one credit when they successfully complete an ESL or ELD course. In addition, three (3) of the four (4) compulsory English credits may be ESL or ELD courses. At least one (1) of the four (4) must be a compulsory Grade 12 English course. (Additional ESL or ELD credits can be counted as optional credits.)

Substitutions for Compulsory Language Courses

In some situations, a student may be allowed to substitute one compulsory language course for another compulsory language course.

For example, a student in the English-language system may be allowed to:

- take an additional English credit in place of a French credit, or
- substitute for up to three (3) compulsory credits

For more information about which compulsory courses can be substituted, please speak to the guidance counsellor.



Note: In September 2013, the Ministry of Education will be putting in place a cap that would allow students to take up to 34 credits. Thirty credits are required to graduate, so this would only allow for an additional four credits which is equivalent to a semester. Students who want to take more than 34 credits could do so, but the ministry would fund the school board at a reduced rate for those credits.

Each board will determine how this will be implemented for students taking their 35th credit and beyond. Options may include enrolling students in part-time studies, e-learning, night school or summer school.

Students should contact their school board for more information about the board's policy.

Extended Studies

Although many students take eight credits per year and complete secondary school in four years, students sometimes take an extra year or semester. (Students call this the 'Victory Lap'.)

There can be many reasons for choosing this option. For example, students may extend their studies by taking more courses than are required, allowing them to explore their interest in other school subjects.

Other students may choose to take fewer courses each year. Studying over a longer period allows students to reduce the pressure while adjusting to a new home, studying a language, or working part-time while studying.

Students can continue their studies in a regular secondary school program until the year they turn 21 years of age. For those over 21 who wish to pursue their secondary school education, it would be useful to explore options for Adult Education programming. *Please consult your local school board for more information about these programs.*

Repeating a Course

For students who are not able to complete a course, or who fail a subject, they may repeat the whole course. The student would then take the course while taking other subjects at the next grade level.

If eligible, students may be able to participate in a **credit recovery program**, which allows them to repeat only the parts of the course in which they were not successful. For more information about the credit recovery program, please speak to the teacher or guidance counsellor.

Credits For Previous School Learning

Students who are new to Canada may be given some credits for their previous learning in their country of origin.

Usually the school waits to confirm how many credits to give for previous learning so that students have a chance to demonstrate what they know. For more information, please speak to the guidance counsellor.

The following strategies can help you, your children and the school determine whether your children may earn credits for their previous studies:

- Bringing report cards, textbooks and other information that will help the school understand what your children have already learned.
- Helping your children prepare to discuss with the teacher what they have already learned and their plans after graduation.
- Calling the guidance counsellor if you have any questions.

Secondary School Graduates From Other Countries

Some students who have already graduated from secondary school in their country of origin may wish to attend secondary school to improve their English or study other subjects. Others may wish to work towards obtaining an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), perhaps in order to meet the entrance requirements of a particular postsecondary institution.

Differences in school systems may make it difficult for the school to give students one credit for each of the subjects they studied previously.

Suggested strategies:

- Talking with the guidance counsellor to find out approximately how many credits your children will get for their previous education and what courses must be taken to graduate with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.
- Finding out if the student's previous studies make her or him eligible for admission to college or university programs. It can also be a good idea to find out if ESL support is offered at the college or university the student is planning to attend.
- Reviewing the English and mathematics skills assessment (if available) with the guidance counsellor. Through discussion with the guidance counsellor, you and your children will be able to find out how the school can help.

40 Hours Community Involvement

In order to help young people develop a sense of responsibility for their community, students are asked to participate as volunteers in some kind of community activity. In most communities, there is a wide range of organizations and institutions where students can engage in such activities. This component of graduation requirements is known as community involvement.

In addition to earning 30 credits, all students must complete a minimum of forty (40) hours of community involvement before graduation. The 40 hours may be earned any time during secondary school but they must be completed outside of classroom time. Students may start accumulating community involvement hours in the summer before they enter Grade 9.

Making arrangements for the 40 hours is the responsibility of students and parents and it will be necessary to have your plan for community involvement approved. For families that are new to Canada and to their local community, it may be difficult to know how to begin this process. The guidance counsellor or other school personnel will explain how to find the right kind of community involvement activity and how to submit it for approval.

Examples of Community Involvement

- Volunteering at a community centre, library or faith institution.
- Helping coach a sports team.
- Participating in a fundraising activity.



The Literacy Requirement

In order to graduate, students will need to demonstrate that they have the English or French literacy skills that students are expected to have learned by the end of Grade 9.

For students who are newcomers to Canada and who are learning English as a second language, or who are improving their French-language skills within the French-language school system, gaining the necessary literacy skills can take time. For this reason, both the French-Language and the English-Language school systems offer many opportunities for students to gain and demonstrate their literacy skills. It is important to view language learning as a gradual process, with results that can be expected to improve over time.

In English-language schools, the standard way to demonstrate these skills is through the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). Students who have been unsuccessful on the OSSLT will have an opportunity to demonstrate their literacy skills by earning a credit in the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC).

In the French-language school system, there are equivalent testing and learning mechanisms and procedures for French literacy (known as the *Test provincial de compétences linguistiques* (TPCL) and the *Cours de compétences linguistiques des écoles secondaires de l'Ontario* (CCLESO)).

The Literacy Test (OSSLT)

In Grade 10, students in English-language schools will have their first opportunity to write the OSSLT or if in a French-language school, the TPCL. These tests are administered once each year, usually in the spring, and are run on the same day in all secondary schools. Students will usually take the OSSLT in their second year of secondary school.

Each student will receive an **Individual Student Report (ISR)** that indicates whether or not he or she has successfully completed the OSSLT. Students who do not pass will receive detailed information that will help them understand what they have to learn in order to pass the test. These students will also have the opportunity to write the test again.

The results of the OSSLT are not used to determine a student's grades on their report card.

What About Students With Special Needs?

The standard and content of these tests cannot be modified, but the test conditions can be changed to help students with special learning needs. Students will be provided with what are called 'accommodations' when these special needs have been identified and documented by the school board in an **Individual Education Plan (IEP)**. An IEP is an individualized education plan developed for students with special needs).

For more information about the IEP, please visit:
edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/guide/resource/index.

What About English-Language Learners in the English-Language School System?

In some cases, the school or the board will make special arrangements for students (in English-language schools) who have just arrived in Canada and are in the early stages of learning English. Please speak to the guidance counsellor for more information.

The Literacy Course (OSSLC)

Students whose results on the OSSLT did not meet the necessary requirements may take the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC), or in French-language schools, the *Cours de compétences linguistiques des écoles secondaires de l'Ontario* (CCLESO). This course provides students with intensive support to help them gain the literacy skills in either French (within the French-language school system) or English (within the English-language school system) that students are expected to have learned by the end of Grade 9. Students will receive a credit for successfully completing the course.

The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (or the *Cours de compétences linguistiques des écoles secondaires de l'Ontario*) credit counts as one of the 30 credits required for graduation and may also be used to meet either the Grade 11 or Grade 12 English or French compulsory credit requirement.

A student's transcript will only indicate if the student met the literacy requirement or not. It will **not indicate** the number of times the students attempted the Literacy Test **nor that** the student met the literacy requirement by passing the Literacy Test or the Literacy Course.

Credits Required For Graduation

The following chart presents the combinations of credits that a student will need to take in order to graduate and receive an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.

<p>All Students must take:</p> <p>4 English (three can be ESL or ELD credits) 3 Mathematics (at least one in grade 11 or 12) 2 Science 1 French as a second language 1 Canadian History</p>		<p>1 Canadian Geography 1 Arts 1 Health and Physical Education .5 Civics .5 Career Studies</p>
<p>and choose one of:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> an additional English <input type="checkbox"/> a language other than English or French <input type="checkbox"/> a Social Science/Humanities <input type="checkbox"/> additional Canadian and World Studies Native Studies <input type="checkbox"/> Guidance and Career Education <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative</p>	<p>and choose one of:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Business Studies <input type="checkbox"/> an additional Health and Physical Education <input type="checkbox"/> an additional Arts <input type="checkbox"/> French as a Second Language <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative Education</p>	<p>and choose one of:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> an additional Science (grade 11 or 12) <input type="checkbox"/> Technological Education <input type="checkbox"/> French as a Second Language <input type="checkbox"/> Computer Studies <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative Education</p> <p><i>Note: A maximum of two may be French as a Second Language and a maximum of two may be Cooperative Education.</i></p>
<p>and 12 optional credits – the available courses may be slightly different in each school</p>		
<p>and pass the Literacy Requirement</p>		
<p>and complete 40 hours of community involvement</p>		

(For information about the different categories of courses available to students, please see the section in this guide entitled "Helping Your Children Choose Their Courses".)



Leaving School Before Graduation

Students who leave school upon reaching the age of 18, and have not complete the 30 credits required for an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) may however earn two types of certificates:

- Students who have completed 14 credits will be granted an **Ontario Secondary School Certificate**.
- Students who leave school but have not completed 14 credits may be granted, upon request a Certificate of Accomplishment.

In Ontario, it is compulsory for young people to stay in school until 18 years of age.

For more information about the Ontario Secondary School Certificate or the Certificate of Accomplishment, please contact the guidance counsellor.

After High School: Getting Into an Apprenticeship, College, Private Career College

Post-secondary training and educational institutions have different entrance requirements. Furthermore, each program in each institution may have different entrance requirements.

As children grow, and their interests and plans and goals become clearer, it is important to become informed about these various entrance requirements. This way students will be well prepared, with adequate time to meet these requirements. The guidance counsellor can provide information about what is required to enter each of these institutions and programs.

Although pre-planning is important when preparing for the future, it is difficult to plan everything in advance, especially as young people are growing and changing all the time. In reality, students can usually switch tracks, and do additional courses and programs to meet school admission requirements.

For more information about postsecondary education in Ontario, please visit: tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/postsecondary.



Helping Your Children Choose Their Courses

In secondary school, there will be a variety of courses available to students. Faced with so many choices, however, newcomers may find it hard to decide which courses to take.

For those learning English, it is important to consider interests and career plans while their English skills are developing. It is important to choose courses that keep their options open as much as possible but are also realistic. Furthermore, depending upon what students learned previously, their needs might vary. Together with the ESL teacher and the guidance counsellor, parents can help their children make choices that bring them closer to the goals they set in their education plan.

This section provides information that will help you and your children make sense of the many different kinds of courses available to students. Of course, as with all aspects of their education and learning, your involvement in this process is valuable and will be helpful to your children.

When and How to Select Courses

Typically, students and their parents choose courses mid-way through the school year, either for the next school year, or for the next semesters (depending upon whether a school is semestered, or non-semestered). This usually takes place in February.

Choices are made on a form called a **Course Selection Form**. The Course Selection Form needs to be signed by the student and by a parent or guardian (if the student is under the age of 18). The parent or guardian's signature indicates your approval of the courses selected.

Placing Students in Courses in the First Year

Students who are new to a school, or who did not attend secondary school in Canada during the previous year, will not have had the opportunity to select their courses in advance in this way. These students will be assisted in choosing appropriate courses by the school guidance counsellor during the registration process.

The guidance counsellor will talk to new students about their previous schooling, interests and goals for after graduation. The counsellor will then help them choose the appropriate courses. In some school boards, students may also go to a reception or assessment centre to help determine which programs match the student's educational background and experience.

The school will consider:

- the match between what has already been learned and what the student is expected to learn in secondary school in Ontario;
- the student's skills, abilities and interests;
- report cards and other documents you provide that describe what the student learned previously;
- the results of the mathematics and English language assessments, if available;
- the number of years the student has been in school and;
- the student's age.

The school will temporarily place the student in a grade and in various courses. Then, when the student has shown what he or she knows and can do, the school will change the placement, if necessary. Later in the school year, usually in February, students choose courses for the next school year.

This is when parents and students together, with the help of teachers and guidance counsellors, can begin to develop the student's education plan with the information they have gathered. The plan will help to guide students and their parents through the choices presented below. (For more information about developing an education plan, please see the previous section entitled "Planning For the Future From the Start! Helping Your Children Develop Their Education Plan.")

Please contact your local school board for further information on its registration process. For information about an English-language school board, please visit: edu.gov.on.ca/eng/sbinfo/boardList.

To find your local French-language school board, please visit: edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/frenchBoards.

Different Categories of Secondary School Courses

Different categories of courses: In secondary school, students need to choose between several different categories of courses. Each category has a different focus and can orient students in a particular future direction. Before beginning to select which courses your children will take, it is important to understand the different categories of courses that are available. This is something parents and students can consider from the beginning, when they are developing an education plan. (For more information about developing an education plan, see the section in this guide entitled “Planning for the Future: Helping Your Children Develop Their Education Plan.”)

Courses within each category: Within each category, there are also many different courses from which to choose. Students learn different things in each course, and each course is designed to correspond to the student’s previous learning.

All courses offered by a publicly funded secondary school are recognized by the Ministry of Education, and will lead your children toward a graduation diploma.

The different categories of courses students may choose from are:

- Academic
- Applied
- Essential or Locally Developed
- Open
- University Preparation
- University/College Preparation
- College Preparation
- Workplace Preparation
- Transfer

You will find information about these categories below.

For more information, see Ministry of Education Ontario Curriculum Grades 9-12 Course Descriptions and Prerequisites 2011: edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/secondary/descript/descri9e.pdf.

Academic or Applied Courses: Important Choices in Grades 9 and 10

In Grades 9 and 10, students choose whether to study **Academic** or **Applied** courses in a variety of subjects, including English, French, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography.

Students may take a mixture of Academic and Applied courses or take all their courses in one or the other category.

What Are Academic Courses?

Academic courses orient students in the direction of postsecondary studies at university and some college programs.

Grades 9 and 10 Academic courses prepare students for Grades 11 and 12 University Preparation courses and for some Grade 11 and 12 University/College Preparation courses.

What Are Applied Courses?

Applied courses may also prepare students to enter some University/College Preparation courses, as well as all College Preparation and Workplace Preparation courses in Grades 11 and 12.

These courses lead students more directly to college or to apprenticeship programs. They also prepare students to go directly to work after high school.

Changing Between Academic and Applied

Students who want to change from an **Applied course** to an **Academic course** or the reverse may have to learn additional material. For example, students who complete an Applied course in Grade 9 but switch to an Academic course in the same subject in Grade 10 will be encouraged by the school to do up to 30 hours of additional work on their own. This extra work is called a **crossover course**.

Open Courses

Open courses are credit courses that teach general skills and knowledge such as art, physical education and drama. Open courses are offered at all grades in different subject areas, and accommodate various academic levels.

All ESL and ELD courses offered in English-language schools are Open courses.

Essential or Locally Developed Courses

Schools may also offer special courses in English, Mathematics and Science for Grades 9 and 10 students who are having more difficulty in these subjects.

Students can earn a credit for each course. For more information about essential or locally developed courses that may be offered by your school, speak to the guidance counsellor.

Specialty Courses

Some courses are specially developed to combine different types of learning and experiences.

For example:

Specialist High Skills Majors: This program allows students to focus on a particular subject area. A select number of classroom courses, workplace placements and a certification process are typically part of these programs.

A Specialist High Skills Major program may be useful for students who are heading toward an apprenticeship, to college, to university or to the workplace, after graduating.

Dual Credit Program: In this program, students participate in apprenticeship training and postsecondary courses, earning what are called *dual credits*. These credits will count toward both their secondary school diploma and a postsecondary diploma, degree or apprenticeship certification.

The Dual Credit Program may be useful for students who need learning opportunities outside of the classroom, and who would benefit from a college or apprenticeship experience in the workplace.

Academic VS Applied Courses - Grades 9 and 10	
What Students Learn	
Academic	Applied
• essential concepts and additional material	• essential concepts
• more theoretical learning of concepts	• more practical learning of concepts
• work will require more reading skills and self-directed learning	• less emphasis on learning independently
• the normal route to all University and some University/College courses in grades 11 and 12	• the normal route to College and Workplace Preparation courses in grades 11 and 12

For more information, please visit edu.gov.on.ca/studentsuccess/index.html.



Work Experience Programs: Co-op and Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP)

Work experience programs provide students with an opportunity to earn credits while they have a real-life work experience. In these programs, students spend all or part of the school day in a workplace that is related to their career goals.

In a **Cooperative Education Program (Co-op)**, the school places the student with an employer for portions of the school day. A Co-op program lets students practice their skills and knowledge in real-life situations. For example, a student who is interested in working as a lawyer might spend several half days a week in a law office.

The **Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP)** offers apprenticeships or workplace training for students in Grade 11 or 12 who are age 16 or older, who have at least 16 credits and are enrolled as full-time students. These students earn further credits to complete their high school diploma, while starting their apprenticeship training.

Expanded Co-op is a program that allows students to apply two co-op credits towards their compulsory high school graduation requirements, with no limit on earning optional co-op credits. This program is intended for students who are heading to university, to college, or to the workplace, as well as for students who will do an apprenticeship.

For more information about these programs, speak to the guidance counsellor or the Co-op teacher.

Mei Lin's Plan

Mei Lin has always loved working with animals. In Grades 7 and 8 Sciences she particularly enjoyed learning about Biology and Ecology. In Grades 9 and 10, she chose a mix of **Applied** and **Academic** courses.

After discussing her options with her parents and guidance counsellor, she hopes to enrol in the animal science program at a college. In order to help prepare for this program, Mei Lin will participate in a Cooperative Education Program (Co-op) in Grade 11, giving her some practical experience. Her placement is at the local zoo, and together with zoo staff she helps look after the animals.

Mei Lin is learning more about the work she hopes to pursue later in life, while earning two credits, and completing her secondary school education and preparing for postsecondary education.

Night School and Summer School

Most school boards offer summer courses as well as night school (evening) courses.

Summer school usually runs in the daytime, during the month of July. Those who attend may be students who need to make up a course (because they did not receive a passing grade for a course they took during the regular school year). Others who attend may be students who are changing between different types of programs (for example, from workplace to college/university preparation courses).

Night school classes are held during the school year, and in the summertime, in the evening. Those who attend are often students who are completing their studies part-time.

Many International Language classes are also held in the evening and on weekends.

Summer and night school classes are often held at one central location in a school board. For more information about the availability and location of summer and night school classes in your community, please contact your school board.

ESL and ELD Courses

In addition to regular courses, students in English-language schools who are learning English may take ESL (English as Second Language) or ELD (English-Language Development) courses.

In some boards, some schools offer special courses for ESL students in a variety of subjects, such as history, science, career studies, civics. This allows students to move forward in their studies, while enhancing their English-language skills. These courses are usually listed on the student’s transcript by their subject title, and not as ESL courses.

All ESL and ELD courses are Open courses.

(For more information about ESL and ELD courses, see the section in this guide entitled “Learning a New Language.”)

Grades 11 and 12 – Four Preparation Levels

By Grades 11 and 12, a student’s education plan will usually be very focused and courses are offered according to what students plan to do after graduation.

Grade 11 & 12 Preparation Courses
<p>University Preparation (U) courses meet the entrance requirements of university programs. Many can also be used to enter college, apprenticeship and work programs.</p> <p>University/College Preparation (M) courses meet the entrance requirements for some universities and most college programs. Many can also be used to enter apprenticeship programs.</p> <p>College Preparation (C) courses meet the entrance requirements for most college programs. Many can be used to enter apprenticeship programs.</p> <p>Workplace Preparation (E) courses prepare students for starting work or for entering some apprenticeships or other training programs.</p>

Course Codes

In order to follow your children’s progress in school and to remain informed about their education, it is important to understand course codes.

On school documents, each course has a code with six figures, a combination of letters and numbers. This code indicates the name, grade level and category of the course. Some Boards have codes that use a sixth number as well.

The following table provides examples of codes that are used in Grades 9 and 10, and in Grades 11 and 12.

Grade 9 and 10 Example:	Grade 11 and 12 Example:
MFM1P - Foundations of Mathematics, Grade 9	MDM4U - Mathematics of Data Management
MFM refers to the name of the course. 1 is the grade level (grade 9 = 1, grade 10 = 2...). P indicates that it is an applied course.	MDM refers to the name of the course. 4 is the grade level (grade 12 = 4). U indicates that it is a university preparation course.

Prerequisite Courses

To take some courses, students must first successfully complete a course in the same subject, or in a related subject, at a lower grade level. The course in the lower grade is called a prerequisite. For example, in order to enrol in the Grade 12 Mathematics for College Technology, students must have taken and received credits for the Grade 11 Functions course. Grade 11 Functions would be called a prerequisite course for the Grade 12 Mathematics course.

And, in order to take the Grade 11 Functions course, students must have taken and received credits for the Grade 10 academic mathematics. In this example, the Grade 10 academic mathematics course would be called a prerequisite course for Grade 11 Functions.

(Prerequisites are one of the most important examples of why it is important to create an Education Plan with your children.)

John's Education Plan

John plans to study music at college when he graduates from secondary school.

He knows that he needs to have taken and received credits for Grade 12 University/College Music to qualify for music at college. And, in order to take that Grade 12 course, he must have taken and received credits for a Grade 11 Music course (the *prerequisite* for the Grade 12 course).

Transfer or Crossover Courses

Throughout their school years, young people often change their minds about their plans for the future as they discover new information, interests and talents. Transfer courses (if available) may be a useful option for students who decide they want to pursue a different path.

For example, most Grade 11 University Preparation, or University/College Preparation courses require the completion of Grade 10 **Academic** courses as prerequisites. To enter those courses, a student who successfully completed Grade 10 Applied Mathematics would be able to take a transfer course or a Grade 10 Academic Mathematics course.

Transfer courses are available in limited situations: in the evening (evening courses), during the summer (summer courses), or by distance, on the Internet.

For more information about transfer courses, speak to the guidance counsellor.



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 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
- 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.

Visa Students

Newcomer students who pay a fee to attend secondary school are called “visa students,” or “foreign-born fee paying students.” Parents who are not living with them (for example, who are living in a different country or a different city) must name an official guardian who lives in the school community. The guardian is expected to assume the responsibilities of the student’s parent.

For more information about visa student or international student programs and fees, please see the web site of each school board.



Starting School: Helping Your Children Get Ready

Starting school is an exciting time for many young people. Some teenagers might be afraid of being in a new environment, seeing new faces and having new routines.

Most young people are somewhat 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).
- 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 to 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 Young People 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 others at school.

For 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".

Here are some ideas for parents to help stimulate children's interest in learning and support their adjustment to school:

- Talking to your children about school every day. Encouraging them to share their thoughts and feelings about their school day.
- Finding ways to continue using your children's first language at home, for example, through discussions, or by sharing books or poems in that language.
- Encouraging your children to read in their first language and/or in English or French, and then practicing their oral skills by talking with them about what they have read.
- Visiting your local public library together.
- 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 interests, as well as 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/eng/tips 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 young people 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. 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, CD's and films. 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 and 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, the school should have that number, 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 attend a school that is outside of your attendance boundary or they live a certain 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).

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.

Dressing For School

Many schools have a dress code that describes what students may (and may not) wear to school. In some public schools, and Catholic schools, students are required to wear a uniform and will be provided with information on where to purchase it.

If purchasing a uniform is a difficulty, please speak to your children's teacher or the principal. If you have other questions or concerns about your school's dress code or uniform, you can speak to your child's teacher.

Gym or Physical Education (Phys Ed) class: The school may require students to wear particular clothing during Phys Ed classes, for example: running shoes, shorts and t-shirts). In some instances, students may be required to purchase a Phys Ed uniform. If purchasing a uniform is a difficulty, please speak to your children's teacher or the principal.

Phys Ed classes are held either in the gymnasium or outside, and each school has separate change rooms for boys and girls.

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



Resources For Students

General Information

Students and their parents can find various kinds of information about courses, about the school's policies and procedures, and about other aspects of school life, by looking in:

- the school handbook (school agenda) (see below)
- the school's web site
- the school board's web site and printed materials

At any time, if there is information you need but do not know where to find you can speak to a teacher.

Student Handbook/School Agenda

Some schools have a handbook that describes different aspects of daily life of the school, including school rules, policies and other important information. This resource usually has space for students to keep track of their schedule and their homework. The handbook is given out to students at the beginning of the school year.

Some schools may charge a fee for them.

Lockers

Each student will be assigned a locker that they can use to store their school supplies and clothing throughout the school year. In some schools, students will share a locker with another student.

The lockers are the property of the school and the student will be expected to clean it out at the end of the term or semester. Schools usually sell students the lock that they want them to use.

It is a good idea to avoid using the locker to store valuables, and the school is not responsible for any damage or theft of locker contents that may occur.

School Supplies

Students may be expected to purchase supplies that will be used during some or all of their courses. Teachers will explain what kinds of supplies are needed for each course. For most subjects, students will need a notebook or binder. Other necessary supplies may include lined paper, pencils, and pens and possibly art and math supplies.

If needed, teachers will give you specific instructions about other school supplies, how and where to find them and what they are, for example, the kind of calculator to buy.

Access to Computers

Using a computer is an important part of going to high school. For example, many school assignments require access to a computer for Internet research in order to complete them.

All schools have computers that students can use during the day, as well as just before school begins, and just after school ends. All students will receive an account and password to use the computers at school.

School access to computers is somewhat limited, and students may need more time on a computer than their school can provide. Students who do not have a computer at home may need to use other community services in order to be able to continue or complete their schoolwork outside of school hours.

Public libraries and some community centres have computers that are available to students, and free of charge. There may be a limit to the amount of time each person can spend on them.



Snacks and Lunch

Your children may eat lunch at school (or at home, if that is possible). Many students 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. Many secondary schools have a cafeteria where students can buy their lunch.

Packing Lunch: What Can Students 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). Also, having healthy snacks and beverages during the day helps improve students' concentration and learning.

Students' lunch boxes or containers should have their name clearly written on them.

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 the school 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

After-School and Lunchtime Programs

Each secondary school has after-school and/or lunchtime activities such as sports, student council, clubs and music programs. The programs are usually free of charge, and open to all students and are supervised by a teacher.

These programs are an excellent way for newcomer students to make new friends, to learn more about their new home, and to practice their English. These programs usually operate once a week, for one hour after school or at lunchtime.

For more information, please speak to a SWIS worker, the ESL teacher or the guidance counsellor.

School Announcements About Lunch-Time and After-School Activities: Messages about after-school and lunchtime 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, or the guidance counsellor.



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, or to attend a community event. In the days before and afterwards, students work on material related to the trip.

These outings 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.

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.

School Activity Fees

Many schools charge an activity fee to cover the costs of the various school activities that will take place throughout the year. For information, please inquire with the administration of the school where your children have registered. If payment is required and this is a difficulty, please speak to your children's teacher or to the principal.



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'²⁵.

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**, on Thanksgiving, which is a legal holiday in Canada.

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 (PA) Days: Schools also close down during 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 and in the student handbook.

Daily Attendance at School

The law in Ontario **requires** that all young people **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.

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 Society, which is part of 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.")

²⁵ The 'calendar' year starts on January 1 and ends on December 31.



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. *(Some schools use a recorded message to call parents. If you are not home and do not have a voice mail system, you may not get the message.)*

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. In addition to phone calls, many schools also require a signed note from parents when a student returns to school.

Sample message

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. He or She is in Grade < ? >. Her/His Home-room 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, the vice-principal or the principal ahead of time 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.

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, and;
- 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.

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 this guide entitled "Parent-Teacher Interviews") and on report cards, teachers share information about students' 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.

Students Who Are 18 years of Age or Older

Students who are 18 years of age or older are legally adults. This means that information about their schoolwork is given to the student, not the parents. In order for parents to receive information from the school, such as the report card or a phone call from a teacher, students must sign a permission form in the school office.

The Provincial Report Card

Students receive report cards during the school year, allowing students, 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 progress²⁶. In addition, all boards have policies for sharing information on report cards with parents.

The report cards may be discussed 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".)

²⁶ For more information, see *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools* at edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/growSuccess.pdf



Secondary Provincial Report Cards: Grades 9 to 12

The Secondary Provincial Report Card is based on the Ontario Curriculum and tells how well students are learning what they are expected to learn in each subject. It also reflects students' development of the learning skills and work habits that are expected at their level.

Report cards are sent to parents several times during the school year. The timing will depend on whether the school is semestered or non-semestered. (See the section in this guide entitled "Secondary (High) Schools: How They Are Organized", and the School Words box at the end of the guide for more information.)

In a non-semestered school, parents receive the Report Card three times a year.

In a semestered school, parents receive the Report Card four times a year, in the middle and at the end of each semester.

For Grades 9 to 12, a student's achievement of the overall curriculum expectations will be evaluated in accordance with the achievement charts in the provincial curriculum (see below). The student's results are then reported using percentage marks.

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 (represented by the percentage mark) the student may receive, and with the achievement standard established by the province.

Description	Provincial Standard	Achievement Level	Percentage Mark
The student demonstrates the specified knowledge and skills with a high degree of effectiveness.	High to outstanding level of achievement. Credit given.	4+ 4 4-	95-100 87-94 80-86
The student demonstrates the specified knowledge and skills with considerable effectiveness. Parents of students achieving at level 3 can be confident that their children will be prepared for work in subsequent grades/courses.	Represents the provincial standard for achievement. Credit given.	3+ 3 3-	77-79 73-76 70-72
The student demonstrates the specified knowledge and skills with some effectiveness. Students performing at this level need to work on identified learning gaps to ensure future success.	Achievement approaches the provincial standard. Credit given.	2+ 2 2-	67-69 63-66 60-62
The student demonstrates the specified knowledge and skills with limited effectiveness. Students must work at significantly improving learning in specific areas, as necessary, if they are to be successful in the next grade.	Achievement falls much below the provincial standard. Credit given.	1+ 1 1-	57-59 53-56 50-52
The student has not demonstrated the specified knowledge and skills.	Insufficient achievement No credit given.	N/A	Below 50%

In Grades 9 and 10, when information is missing and therefore it is not possible to identify an achievement level or percentage mark for a student, the teacher will indicate the letter "I" as a code to indicate this.

Understanding Your Children's Results

Level 3 (70 -79%): Level 3 is the provincial standard. A student who achieves Level 3 or 4 is well prepared for work in the next grade or course. The goal of the school system is to help all students reach level 3.

A Result Below 50%: When a student receives a result that is below 50%, it means that the student will not pass the course and therefore will not earn a credit. The student will need to either all or part of the course again or change courses. This result is an indication that the student could benefit from extra support and students and parents are entitled to request such support. For more information, you can talk to the teacher or the guidance counsellor.

Students who have a failing mark on their first report card will still have an opportunity to pass the course if they improve their work sufficiently over the rest of the school year or semester.

Learning Skills and Work Habits: Results for these aspects of the student's achievement are reported on as "Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, (or) Needs Improvement"

Additional Comments: It is expected that teachers will provide personalized comments that focus on what your child has learned, her or his significant strengths, and next steps the student can take in order to improve. Comments should be clear, precise and meaningful and help parents to understand how they can support their children at home.

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.

For information in a variety of languages, please visit: ww.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/reportCard.

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 services²⁷.

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 achievement letter 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.

For religious courses in Catholic schools, percentage marks are based on what students are expected to learn in that course. They are not an indication of faith development.

²⁷ 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.

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

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.

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.

Newcomer Students and Report Cards

For students 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, from a classroom teacher, or from 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 in English-language schools 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, and;
- accommodations related to assessment strategies²⁸.

²⁸ 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/esl Eldprograms/esl Eldprograms.pdf. Accessed: 27.02.12.

Below is a sample:

Student:	OEN:	Grade:		
ESL/ELD - Achievement is based on expectations modified from the curriculum expectations for the grade to support English language learning needs. IEP - Individual Education Plan NA - No instruction for subject/strand				
Subjects	Progressing With Difficulty	Progressing Well	Progressing Very Well	Strengths/Next Steps for Improvement
Language Reading, Writing, Oral Communication, Media Literacy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD <input type="checkbox"/> IEP <input type="checkbox"/> NA				
French <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				
Native Language <input type="checkbox"/> ESL/ELD <input type="checkbox"/> IEP <input type="checkbox"/> NA				
Mathematics <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 entitled “Learning a New Language”, which includes information about report cards for students in language programs.)

The Parent and Student 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.

Sample comment by a parent on the response form:

We are very pleased to see that the mathematics marks have improved. Our son/daughter reads most nights in English or Spanish.

Students are also encouraged to write comments on the response form as this helps them take responsibility for their own learning. Space and comment stems are provided for student comments in a tear-off section on all provincial report cards for Grades 9–12 except the final report.

Sample of student comments stems:

- My best work is:
- My goal for improvement is:

Parents, even if their child does not write comments, must sign the tear-off section and return it to the school to indicate that they have seen the report card. It is a good idea for parents to keep the other parts of the report card for their own records. Parents who wish to keep a copy of their child's comments can be provided with a copy of the tear-off section by the school.

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 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

The tests are based on the Ontario Curriculum, and are designed to provide the principals, teachers, parents, the public, school district staff, and the government with information about student achievement in relation to the provincial standard.

The Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics is written in January for first-semester students and in June for second-semester or full-year students. The school will determine the exact date and will send a letter home with the student.

The OSSLT is written in late March on a date determined by EQAO - all secondary schools in Ontario write the test on the same day.

At the discretion of the school or school board, some or all of the Grade 9 Assessments of Mathematics may be counted toward students' grades. The OSSLT does not count toward students' grades, but successful completion is a requirement for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma.

Individual results for the Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics are released in September of the following school year. Individual results for the OSSLT are released in June of the same school year as the test was written.

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

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

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

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.

The Ontario Student Record (OSR)

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

The OSR is a confidential document with access to the record given only to the student, her or his parents and their teachers.

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

Ontario Student Transcript

The official record of the student's secondary school studies is called the Ontario Student Transcript. If a student transfers schools, the transcript is sent to the new school so teachers can see what the student has already learned and also record further progress. It is also used by colleges and universities to determine whether your child has met the admission requirements. For more information, please see edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/ost/ost2010.pdf



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 School Staff Members

Teachers, guidance counsellors, chaplains, vice-principals, 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 a school staff member:

- Calling the school office and leaving a message for the teacher, guidance counsellor, vice-principal, chaplain or principal. 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 school staff member.
- Talking with the Settlement Worker in School (SWIS) about getting support around communication.
- Asking a friend or family member (not a child, and preferably not a student) to act as an interpreter, or to offer support. They could accompany you to the school or help you to speak with the staff member 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 the fall and again in the spring. 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 how the student is doing in school and what is best for her or him. It is a good opportunity for the parent and the teacher to discuss what each will do to help the student succeed in school. The interviews normally last 5 to 10 minutes and are usually in the classroom, gym or cafeteria. Many schools can provide an interpreter if you ask ahead of time.

At the interview the teacher can discuss the report card, talk about how your child is progressing academically, and explain how the student's marks were determined. The teacher can also discuss how she or he is helping the student and how you can help at home.

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. You can also take this opportunity to discuss how the report card results affect your child's plan for choosing courses and her or his later plans for after graduation.
- 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. You can let the teacher know that you want to be called if she or he has any concerns, or if your child has done especially 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?
- Does my child show any special interests?
- Are there any courses you would suggest that my child consider for next year?

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. (They may 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 child'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.

Students Who Are 18 Years of Age or Older

Students who are 18 or older are legally adults. This means that information about their schoolwork is given to the student, not the parents. In order for parents to receive information from the school, such as the report card or a phone call from a teacher, students must sign a permission form in the school office.



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.

Ongoing 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, young people 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 teenagers 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. These discussions also help you know if your children are having difficulty. If so, you and your children may decide that it is a good idea to contact a teacher or the guidance counsellor.
- Encouraging your children to ask questions and answering them whenever you can; in this way, you are helping your children to build a foundation for success at school.
- 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 try new activities and to seek out new experiences that interest them. Schools offer a wide range of after-school activities that can provide opportunities for young people to learn new skills, develop new interests, and make new friends. You can follow up with your children and talk about their experiences together.
- 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 well-being 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 homework.
- Asking different members of the family to help them with their homework.
- 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).
- Discussing your children's choice of courses, finding out what they are learning and how they are enjoying their courses. These discussions can help you and your children continually rethink and update their education plan.

You can encourage your children to read by:

- Encouraging reading among all family members.
- Sharing books, poems, and songs in your own language and/or English or French.
- Making time to discuss what your children have read with them.

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.
- 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.

Also: 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.



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. Grade 9 students should expect at least 45 minutes to one hour of homework. By Grade 12, they should expect up to two hours of homework per night.

Generally, all students will have homework almost every night, and will be expected to do some reading each night as well. Your children's teachers will explain what homework they expect to be done.

Suggested strategies:

- Encouraging your children when they have difficulty and always reinforcing their efforts by pointing out their successes and accomplishments. Encouragement from a parent is a powerful incentive for young people, and 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.
- Considering whether doing homework with another student would help. Some students do better when studying with a friend. Furthermore, on some school assignments, students are expected to work together.
- Encouraging your children to join a homework club in your school or community if one exists, and if you think they would benefit from this additional support.
- Asking your children about their homework assignments. When they are finished, you can discuss the assignments.
- 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 student should spend each night on homework (by grade level). Please ask your children's teacher, vice-principal 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

Grade	Amount of Time
9-10	6 to 10 hours per week (depending on type of assignment, course, or program). For some students, including those with special needs, there may have more of an in-class focus for their learning.
11-12	An average of 10 to 20 hours per week (depending on grade and courses).

If Your Children Have No Homework

Suggested strategies:

- Asking your children to show you what they did at school.
- Encouraging your children to spend time reviewing what has been covered in the past few days and to plan ahead for future assignments and tests.
- Ensuring that your children take responsibility for nightly reading in English or in their first language.
- Talking to the teacher if your children repeatedly have no homework.

Resources For Parents: Helping Your Children With Homework

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

peopleforeducation.ca/faq/how-can-i-help-my-child-with-homework/

ParentTool Kit: What Parents Can Do To Help Their Child Succeed in School

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.

For more suggestions on how to help your children, please see edu.gov.on.ca/abc123/eng.

For resources in French on helping children with their homework, please see the French version of this guide, at teeontario.ca.

Facing Challenges by Learning Together

If your children are having difficulty with a course, if you want to know how they are doing, or if you have a concern or suggestion, you can talk to the teacher. If you want to know how your children are doing in a number of subjects, you can ask the guidance counsellor to assist you by speaking to the different teachers involved in those courses for you.

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 son or daughter questions to help you understand what is happening.
- Explaining to the teacher or the guidance counsellor what your daughter or son has told you.
- Asking the teacher or the guidance counsellor what suggestions they can make for home support and offer suggestions for school support.
- Developing a plan with the teacher so your son or daughter receives similar and consistent support and guidance 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.")



Getting Involved in Your Children's Education at School

Volunteering

Schools encourage parents to volunteer for various activities in the school. You might suggest 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.

Please speak to the School Council or Parent Council for more information 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.

In most cases, Council meetings are open to parents and they are encouraged to attend and 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, you can take a look at the short films and resources (*The Capsule Family Get Involved*) on the COPA website: infocopa.com/capen.

For more information about parent involvement in general, please visit: edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/policy.

Safe and Welcoming Schools

*Inclusive education is central to the achievement of high-quality education for all learners...*²⁹

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 respected³⁰.

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^{31, 32}.

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.

²⁹ UNESCO (2009), *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, Ontario Minister of Education, p. 5 (Internet). Available from: edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.pdf.

³⁰ UNESCO (2009), in *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, Ontario Minister of Education, p. 4 (Internet). Available from: edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.pdf.

³¹ 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.

³² For more information, visit edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/safeKit and 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.

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 them 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 discrimination³³.
- 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 orientation³⁴.
- 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 vice-principal or 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.

³³ 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.

³⁴ 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.



Young People Who Are Feeling Anxious

Young people 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 young people 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 young people:

- Stomach aches
- Headaches
- Tiring easily
- Aggressiveness
- Sadness
- Silence
- Denial of changes
- 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, as much as 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. This is especially true during adolescence, when your children's relationships with people their own age becomes very important, and part of growing into an adult. 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 you support your children in making friends:

- Helping your children **get to know the neighbourhood** and discover places where they can get together safely with their friends (for example, parks, libraries, community centres, recreation centres).
- Parents can make sure their teenagers know where to find various community programs and services, for example, by accompanying them to 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.
- Encouraging your children to participate in after-school activities offered by schools. These can provide opportunities for young people to meet others who share their interests.
- **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 can make sure your home is a welcoming place for them. For younger teens, 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.



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.



Bullying and Harassment

We know that sometimes, young people experience bullying and harassment at school. Such abuse and aggression are unacceptable in all forms. Bullying and harassment can have serious consequences for the well-being and learning of young people who experience them. No young person (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.

Young people 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 imbalance³⁵.

When bullying occurs, the following elements are present:

- There is an imbalance of power.
- There is 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 aggression³⁶.

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

³⁵ From the Ontario Ministry of Education, *Bullying Prevention and Intervention, Policy/Program Memorandum No. 144*, at edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/144.

³⁶ From *Creating Safe Schools: A Bullying Prevention Guide for Teachers*, created by COPA and OTF in 2012. See also safeatschool.ca.



Shafia

Shafia recently decided to begin to wear a hijab. Some of the girls she is friends with make fun of her hijab. Whenever she sees them, they make comments about it and tell her they don't want to hang around with her if she is going to wear it because it isn't "cool". More and more they spend time together talking loudly about her, laughing and pointing at her, while she sits apart from them. When she goes to join them, they all fall silent. Shafia feels upset and angry with her friends. She feels comfortable with her guidance counsellor and goes to speak with her about the situation. As she talks it through with the guidance counsellor, she becomes clearer that these girls are bullying her and breaking school rules with their behaviour. This helps her find the courage to speak to them. One day she tells the other girls that she doesn't like the way they are talking to her and asks them to stop. The girls do stop the bullying, although Shafia decides not to continue being friends with them. With the help of her guidance counsellor, she finds out about different clubs at the school. She joins one and eventually makes friends with whom she has more in common.

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 hostile³⁷.

Nadia's Story

In the hallway between classes, Nadia was bumped again and again by some boys. Although she wasn't hurt, she felt the boys were bothering her and she wanted them to stop. She told them so but that didn't work, so she asked her ESL teacher for support by intervening. The teacher warned the boys to stop and consider the impact on Nadia. The boys did stop and although she heard the boys were initially mad at her, she had made it clear she would stand up for herself.

Some young people 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.

Carlos' Story

Carlos recently told his parents and many of his friends that he is gay. He feels relieved and happy because finally the people he is closest to know something very important about him. Lately, some boys in his grade who found out that he is gay have been taunting him and making fun of him. They have also started to threaten to beat him up. Carlos has become more and more depressed and anxious. He is becoming afraid of the boys. He speaks to a teacher he really trusts, and asks him for help. The teacher talks with Carlos and together they explore different possible strategies for stopping the bullying. Carlos decides that he wants the teacher to intervene. The teacher speaks to the boys and explains how their behaviour contravenes the school's Code of Conduct, as well as Ontario and Canada's laws. He names their behaviour as bullying, and helps them understand the harm they are doing to Carlos. As a consequence, and in order to help them learn respectful attitudes, he asks the boys to do a project: to research how human rights in Canada apply to all people, including people of different sexual orientations and gender identities. He also follows up with the boys and with Carlos, to ensure that the bullying has not started up again. Afterwards, the boys keep their distance from Carlos, and Carlos does the same. He begins to feel comfortable again going to 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.

³⁷ 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.

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 afraid³⁸.

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.
- Agreeing to talk again to see if the strategies are working.
- Talking to the Vice-Principal or the Principal if the problem isn't resolved. If the problem is not resolved by the Vice-Principal or 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.

³⁸ 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: safe@school.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, the 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 young people who are involved in a bullying situation (including young people who are bullied or witnesses, and young people who are bullying others or supporting the bullying), please visit: 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 student, or if another student 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 young people who are being bullied, who are bullying others, or seeing others' bullying) you have an important role to play in supporting them 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 young person 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.

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 student, or if another student 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 young people 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.)

About Children's Aid Societies

In Ontario, the government and many organizations work to ensure the well-being and safety of children. Ontario's 47 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, well-being 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 children³⁹.

For more information please see ocas.org/childwelfare.

If school staff has concerns about a student who is 16 years of age or older, they may seek the services and involvement of school support staff, such as a social worker. In some cases, if a student who is 16 years of age or older is being abused or harmed in some way, they may report it to the police.

³⁹ For more information about Children's Aid Societies, please visit: ocas.org/childwelfare/.



Next Steps: Planning For the Future

As you accompany your children through their secondary school experience, you will most likely want to gather information about what they can expect after graduating, should they decide to pursue further training or education.

Gaining Access to Post-Secondary Education

How Students Are Selected by Universities, Colleges and Trade Schools

Each postsecondary learning institution (university, college or trade school) has clearly laid out requirements for admission. These requirements may vary according to the school, and perhaps the program. Students will need to know this information when they are choosing their secondary school courses, what these requirements are when applying to schools or programs that interest them.

Requirements related to students' marks also vary. For example, to enter some university programs, students must have grades that average 85 to 90%, whereas for others, 65 to 70% may be sufficient. Universities look primarily at students' Grade 12 marks.

When spaces are limited, those students with higher marks and other qualifications are accepted first, even though others may have marks that fall within the required range.

English Requirements For English-Language Universities and College Admissions

English-language universities and some colleges require students who have been in Canada for less than four (or five) years to take the **TOEFL English test (Test of English as a Foreign Language)** or a similar language test. Most university programs also require students to take specific English courses in secondary school before admission.

For more information, please check the admission requirements for each university or college where your children may be interested in applying.

For some sample tests to practice as well as more information about TOEFL, please visit: toefl.org/.

Meeting Students' Language Needs

Many English-language universities and colleges offer help for students who are learning English. Specific information is listed on their individual web sites.

For French-speaking students, Ontario offers postsecondary training in French in different parts of the province, and in a number of programs in colleges and universities.

Mature Students

In some cases, colleges and universities will accept students without their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), once they have reached a certain age. Students may enter the school as 'Mature Students'. The age of acceptance under the category of mature student is determined by each college and university. Please ask the school in question about the age, and any other requirements needed.



Scholarships, Bursaries, and Loans

Some students can reduce or delay the cost of university, college or training with special scholarships, bursaries, grants and loans. Each of these kinds of financial aid has different terms and obligations, and it is important to understand what is involved in receiving this kind of help, before accepting it.

Some funding is awarded based on financial need and may be a loan only (such as a student loan), while other funding (such as a scholarship) is awarded based on student merit. Loans are typically to be repaid and with 'interest', upon completion of the student's studies.

Each application is evaluated, and not everyone who applies for such funding is successful in receiving it.

Student loans are available from both the provincial and federal governments. Financial help may vary from one province to another and from one school to another. For more information, see osap.gov.on.ca.

The guidance counsellor at your children's school will have information about the different kinds of financial aid available to students, their terms and conditions, as well as information about who can apply and how to do it. Students and their parents are responsible for applying for this assistance, and it is best to apply at the same time that the university or college application is made.

For more information about available scholarships, see scholarshipscanada.com.

Different Kinds of Post-Secondary Institutions

Colleges

Colleges offer programs ranging from one-year certificates to two- or three-year diplomas. Some colleges offer four-year degree programs called *Applied Degrees*. Applied Degrees are recognized by some university graduate schools, allowing students to enter graduate studies.

To be admitted to most college programs, the student must have an Ontario Secondary School Diploma. Admission to some programs is very competitive and when space is limited, students may need high marks to get into them.

You can learn more about the admissions requirements and policies for colleges, including the courses that are required and the marks that are needed, in the Ontario College Guide, available in Guidance offices and online at ontariocolleges.ca.

Example of Requirements For a College Course

The following is based on the admission requirements for the Police Foundations course:

- Ontario Secondary School Diploma.
- Grade 12 English (C = college) or (U = university) (ENG4C, ENG4U).
- Recommended subjects include: Mathematics: any Grade 12 College level Mathematics (MAP 4C or MCT 4C); or any Grade 12 University level Mathematics
- Keyboarding ability, basic computer literacy and word processing skills are recommended.

Apprenticeship Programs

Apprenticeship programs provide full-time, on-the-job training for people who learn best by practicing what they learn.

This type of training equips people for well-paying jobs that demand a high level of skill, judgment and creativity. Apprentices are paid while they gain work experience, and their wages increase with their skills.

In Apprenticeship programs, students receive a much higher proportion of training through practical experience and a much lower proportion of classroom learning. About 90% of apprenticeship training is provided in the workplace by an employer. About 10% of apprenticeship training is classroom instruction on theory, usually at a local college or another approved training organization.

For more information about apprenticeship programs, see tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/employmentontario/training.

Universities

In universities, undergraduate degrees are the first step for students, followed by what is known as 'graduate studies'. The first step students take when pursuing this level of studies, is completing a Masters Degree. Students may continue to the next, and highest level of studies, receiving a Doctorate.

Upon completion of each step, students must apply to become a Masters or Doctoral student in the area of study, and in the institution of their choice. Admission requirements for each of these levels, in different programs, at different universities, varies significantly.

Most university programs have their own requirements for admission. However, the typical minimum requirement for applying for admission to an undergraduate program at a university is a combination of six (6) Grade 12 academic courses (university courses and university/college preparation courses).

When spaces are limited, most universities will give preference to students who have taken university preparation courses and who have higher marks and other relevant qualifications.

You can find out which courses are needed for specific university programs and the marks required at the Ontario Universities' Application Centre: ouac.on.ca.

Some universities and colleges work together to provide programs in which students spend two years studying in that college, followed by two years in that university. Nursing programs are often organized in this fashion.

Private Career Colleges

Registered private career colleges offer practical training and usually shorter programs. Since career colleges are privately owned and receive no funding from the government, tuition fees are often higher. Usually, an Ontario Secondary School Diploma is required for admission, but requirements will vary.

For additional information about postsecondary studies and training, please visit the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities website at: edu.gov.on.ca/eng/tcu.



Need More Information?

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

- Approaching your children’s teachers, guidance counsellor, SWIS worker, ESL teacher, the principal, vice-principal, support staff (such as a social worker), 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.
- 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. 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.
- For more information about supporting young boys in developing healthy, equal relationships and preventing violence against girls and women, please visit: itstartswithyou.ca. For information on this topic in French, please visit: 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.
- 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.
- For more information about schools, the curriculum, language programs, and the school system, visit the Ministry of Education’s website: 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.html. (Information is provided in 27 languages). You can also visit: ontario.ca/eduparents.
- For Special Education resources, visit: 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/safeschools/index.html.
- For information about the Ontario School Counsellor’s Association, visit: osca.ca.
- For information about Ontario School Councils, visit: schoolcouncils.net.
- For information about the Parent Involvement Centre, visit: parentinvolvement.ca.
- To learn more about the ongoing campaigns of No one is Illegal-Toronto, visit: toronto.nooneisillegal.org.
- For more information on the French as a second language program (FSL) visit: edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/FLS.html.



School-Related Vocabulary

- **Academic Courses** – Courses in Grades 9 and 10 that lead to university, college, apprenticeship, training or directly to work.
- **Admission Requirements** – A description of what is required in order to enter university, college or an apprenticeship program.
- **Applied Courses** – Courses in Grades 9 and 10 that lead to college, apprenticeship, training, or directly to work.
- **Apprenticeship** – A program for people who want to work in a skilled trade and who learn best through direct practice. Apprenticeship provides real-life work experience and training for students during school and/or after they graduate.
- **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 building that defines the streets and homes that belong to that school. Your home address usually 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.
- **Career Path** – The series of steps that must be taken to enter a particular career or occupation.
- **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.
- **Co-op** – A program that places the student with an employer for portions of the day so that the student can practice their skills and knowledge in real-life situations.
- **Credits** – Students earn one credit when they successfully complete a school subject or course (110 hours). A minimum of thirty (30) credits are needed to graduate. Some courses are compulsory and others are optional.
- **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.
- **ELD** – English Literacy Development courses offered to children who have missed time in school before coming to Canada or when they first arrive. These courses help them develop basic rules of reading and writing and facilitate their integration.
- **ESL** – English as a Second Language courses offered in English-language schools to students who are learning English.
- **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.
- **Essential Courses** – Grades 9 and 10 Mathematics, Science and English courses that have been adapted to focus on the most essential concepts of a subject.

- **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.
- **Graduation Requirements** – A description of what students must do in order to qualify for an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.
- **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.
- **Non-Semestered** – Refers to a school where students study the same courses from the beginning of the school year to the end.
- **Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD)** – The diploma that is given to students who graduate from secondary school.
- **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).
- **Open Courses** – Credit courses teach general skills and knowledge such as Art, Music and Physical Education.
- **Parent** – In this guide, the term also includes guardians, caregivers and other family members.
- **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.
- **Prerequisite** – Refers to a specific course or subject students must complete before they can take another course at the next grade level. For example, the prerequisite for Grade 11 University Preparation Physics is Grade 10 Academic Science.
- **Provincial Code of Conduct** – The description of the behaviour that is expected of students.
- **Provincial Standard** – The percentage mark (70 - 79%) that indicates that students are well prepared for work in the next grade or course.
- **Principal** – A person who has a supervisory, decision-making and leadership role in schools.
- **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 take in consideration of 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 body 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 collegiate institutes.
- **Semestered** – Refers to a school where students usually study one set of four courses in the first half of the year and a different set of four courses in the second half.
- **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. It is sent to colleges, universities and training programs when a student applies to enter those programs.
- **Trustee** – Elected representative that make decisions concerning the supervision and management of a local school board.
- **Vice-Principal** – A person who has a supervisory, decision-making and leadership role in schools. Works closely with the principal.

