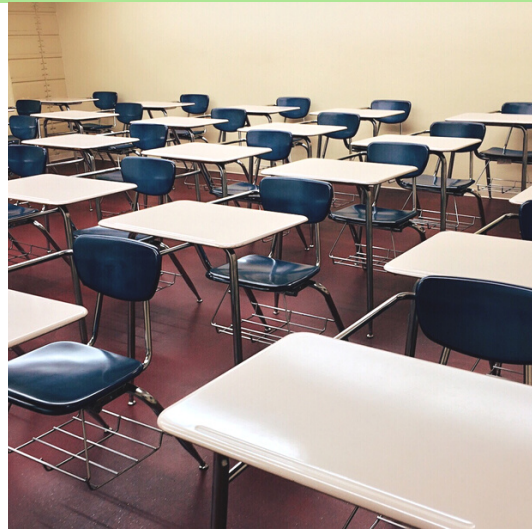


# THE NEWCOMER'S GUIDE TO THE CANADIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM



## Welcome to Canada and Your New School

This guide will present newcomer families and students with important information about the public school system in Canada. The following information will provide parents/guardians with a better understanding of what to expect during their child's education. It will also provide tips for student success and help parents/guardians communicate with their child's school.

This guide is intended to provide newcomers with an overview of school policies and procedures in order to assist the settlement process.

**SAISIA**

Saskatchewan Association of  
Immigrant Settlement and  
Integration Agencies



Association des agences  
d'établissement et d'intégration  
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# The Canadian School System

In Canada, there is no federal department of education; each province/territory is responsible for its own school system, Ministry of Education, and Education Act. An Education Act is a piece of legislation which outlines the powers and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, School Boards, and School Principals and Teachers. A Minister of Education is an elected member of the provincial government, and each province has its own Minister who is appointed by the Premier of the province. The school system in Canada includes public and private schools.

## Public Schools

Public schools offer free education which is provided by the government. In addition to schools taught in English, the public school system includes:

- French Immersion Schools
  - For students whose first language is not French

- French Language Schools
  - For children with at least one parent who is a Native French speaker

In Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario, Catholic Schools are also included in the public school system.

## Private Schools

Private schools are schools that are not funded (or fully funded) by the government. As a result, they charge tuition fees for students who wish to attend.

# Grades in the School System

## Preschool

Preschool is an optional educational opportunity for children ages 3-5, before they begin their mandatory education. Preschools focus more on early learning and academics than daycares and can prepare children for their school years.

## (Primary) Elementary School

Elementary school includes kindergarten and Grades 1 through 6. In Canada, it is mandatory for children to begin attending school at the age of 6, or Grade 1. The only exceptions to this are British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick, where it is mandatory for children to start school at age 5, or Kindergarten. While kindergarten is optional in the other

provinces, parents are encouraged to enroll their children in kindergarten as it helps children develop problem-solving skills and interpersonal skills.

## Middle School and (Secondary) High School

In some provinces/territories, middle (or junior high) school includes grades 7 and 8, while high school includes

grades 9-12. In Quebec, high school includes grades 7-12.

## School Procedures

### School Year

The school year runs from late August or early September until late May or early June. Students then have summer vacation from June through August. Schools are closed for all statutory holidays, a winter break at the end of December, and a spring break in March



*In Canada, it is required by law that children attend school from the age of 6-16 (18 in some provinces)*

or April. There may also be some days throughout the year where students do not have school because teachers have professional development or planning days. Each school will have a calendar available which will outline which days are holidays or days off for the school year.

## School Day

Schools run from Monday to Friday and typically start between 8:00 and 9:00 am and finish between 3:00 and 4:00 pm. At least two 15-minute breaks, or recess in elementary school, and an hour lunch break are provided during the day. Parents are responsible for providing their child with a packed lunch if they are unable to go home during the lunch hour. Some schools have cafeterias where lunch can be purchased.

## Attendance

Students are expected to attend, and be on time for, all classes. If a student is going to be absent, the parent/guardian is responsible for calling the school and letting them know the reason for their child's absence. Acceptable reasons for absences include:

- Illness
- Compassionate reasons
- Medical/dental appointments
- Court/legal reasons

If a student is absent for more than two days, parents/guardians should contact

the school's office and request any homework their child may have missed during their absence.

## School Closures

In the event of extreme weather (ex. blizzard conditions) schools may close



## Dress for the Weather

Elementary students often play outside during recess and lunch, except during extreme weather conditions. Parents/guardians must make sure their child is dressed properly for the weather. A winter jacket, mittens, toque, and boots are necessary during the cold winter months.

or dismiss students early for the safety of the students and the staff. Parents/guardians will be made aware of any school closures or early dismissals and will be responsible for picking their child up from the school if they are unable to take the bus home. School

bus services may also be cancelled during extreme weather. Parents/guardians are responsible for monitoring the bus service and planning alternate transportation if buses are cancelled so their children get to school safely.

## Dress Code

Each school will have its own policy outlining what students are/are not allowed to wear to school. Students are expected to follow their school's dress code.

## Grading

Teachers will evaluate each student's assigned work and learning, and provide a letter grade in the course, based on their evaluation. Some of the ways that teachers evaluate students include:

- Quizzes and Exams
- Written or Oral Reports
- Homework
- Student Projects
- Class participation
- Daily assignments

## Report Cards

Students will receive report cards throughout the school year with their grades in each course based on the teacher's evaluation. They will often include comments and feedback from the teachers on the student's progress.

**Grading Systems will differ slightly among provinces, but generally follow this format:**

**A=80-100% (Excellent)**

**B=70-79% (Good)**

**C=60-69% (Average/Fair)**

**D=50-59% (Poor)**

**F=0-49% (Fail)**

Report cards are expected to be reviewed and signed by parents/guardians and returned to the school.

## Parent-Teacher Interviews

Parent-teacher interviews are scheduled meetings between parents/guardians and their child's teachers. They will happen at different points

throughout the school year and allow parents/guardians to discuss their child's learning and educational progress. During these meetings, teachers may share the child's work and discuss their achievement with parents/guardians. Teachers may also discuss



concerns that they have and work with parents to find solutions.

## School Supplies

Parents/guardians are responsible for providing basic school supplies for their children. Most schools will provide a list of school supplies that students will need to bring with them.

Textbooks are provided by the school, and students can access other reading material from their school's library. Students may be required to have a separate pair of shoes appropriate for physical education classes.

## Field Trips

Field trips are special class visits to places like museums, theatres, science centers or farms in order to provide an educational experience outside of the classroom. Field trips are organized by teachers, and a letter will be sent home with students informing parents/guardians of the field trip. A signature from the parent/guardian will be required to provide permission for the student to attend the field trip. There might be opportunities for

parents to volunteer to assist the teacher on the field trip.

## Student Discipline

Disruptive and disrespectful behavior, or failure to follow school policies (ex. attendance or dress code policies) may result in disciplinary

### Disciplinary Action for Absences

- First, a phone call will go out to the parent/guardian from the teacher.
  - After multiple absences, a phone call will go out to the parent/guardian from a guidance counsellor or school administrator.
  - If absences continue, a meeting with the student, parent/guardian, and counsellor or administrator may be scheduled.
    - If the problem persists, the student may be removed from the course.
- \*Parents and students should be familiar with their school's specific attendance policy, as school procedures may differ between schools

action. Teachers will often address minor instances with the student, but if inappropriate behavior persists, a meeting with the parents/guardians may be required. School administration may also be involved. Disciplinary action may include written warnings, detention, or suspension.

Parents/guardians should work together with teachers when issues of disruptive behavior or failure to follow



school policies are raised by teachers. Parents/guardians can speak with the teacher about their child's behavior and work together to find solutions. Parents/guardians can also speak with school counsellors.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### Minister of Education

A Minister of Education is responsible for developing education policies and curriculums, setting guidelines for school principals and school boards, and preparing lists of approved learning material. They are also responsible for administering funds to school boards.

### School Boards

School Boards are made up of Trustees who are elected in municipal elections. School boards are responsible for allocating funds given to them by the Minister of Education. They are also

responsible for overseeing schools' operations, hiring staff, and teacher performance. School boards ensure high quality teaching programs that reflect the needs and values of the community.

### School Councils

School councils are made up of parents, community members, principals, teachers, and secondary students. School councils provide recommendations to the principal or school board on curriculum, school performance, and learning needs. They can also advise on the selection of principals, community use of the school, and school board policy.

*School boards hold regular meetings that are open to the public. This provides constituents with the opportunity to voice concerns over education in their community.*

### Principals

Principals are responsible for overseeing the organization and management of their schools. Principals administer the school budget, supervise school staff, and make recommendations to the school board on promotion or dismissal of teachers.

## Teachers

Teachers are responsible for creating lesson plans and teaching classes. Teachers evaluate student progress and assist students with education plans and career goals. Teachers are also responsible for supervising students and maintaining discipline in their classrooms.

## School Counsellors

School counsellors are responsible for promoting mental health and assisting students who are experiencing a crisis. They will work with individuals and groups on various issues such as substance abuse, bullying, anger management, and stress and anxiety. School counsellors can connect students and families to other supports in the community. School counsellors also offer counselling on course selection and career planning.

## School Social Workers

School Social Workers provide individual, family, and group counselling and connect students and families to community resources as needed. They encourage parental

involvement in school life and provide educational programs for parents and school staff. School Social Workers also provide support to students dealing with family conflict, low self-esteem, relationships, sexuality, learning difficulties, and mental health issues.

## English as a Second Language (ESL) Teachers

ESL Teachers provide specialized language instruction to students who do not speak English as their first language. They assess newcomer students' language skills and design programs to meet individual language needs. ESL Teachers may design lesson plans around activities involved in daily life in Canada, and Canadian culture.

### *Language Assessment*

*Your child's level of English will be assessed when they are registered for school. This language assessment will help the school determine how much additional ESL support they require.*

## Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) Program

The SWIS program is a school-based settlement service funded by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada and is available in every province. Settlement Service Providers place settlement workers in school with high numbers of newcomer students.

SWIS workers collaborate with schools, community organizations,

and settlement service providers to assist newcomer students and their families settle in their school. The goals of the SWIS program are to meet the needs of newcomer students and families and support them in receiving the services required to be successful.

Some of the objectives of the program are that students and families are knowledgeable about and connected to their school, that they are successful in their school, and that they feel supported and empowered.

### *How SWIS Workers Can Assist You*

- Help with school registration, orientation, and parent-teacher interviews*
- Provide important information to parents/guardians and students about school policies, expectations, rules, and extracurricular activities*
- Assess needs and provide referrals and connections to community resources*
- Increase families' involvement in the community by referring them to affordable community programs*
- Increase parental involvement in education and promote communication between parents and school staff*
- Ensure parents/guardians and students are aware of their rights and responsibilities and advocate for the students and families*
- Provide culturally sensitive services and promote respect for cultural diversity within the school and community through education sessions*
- Collaborate with school staff and school counsellors to provide culturally competent interventions in times of crisis*
- Provide interpretation and translation*

# Parental Involvement: Why is it Important?

## It Improves Student Achievement

When parents/guardians are involved in their child's education it instills a positive value on education and encourages students to be more motivated.

## It Promotes Communication

Parental involvement in education includes getting to know the school staff at the child's school. When parents and school staff get to know each other, it allows for more effective two-way communication.

Better communication can make it more comfortable for parents/guardians to approach school staff with concerns or needs.

## It Promotes Relationship Building

Parental involvement also includes a presence in the child's school. Parents/guardians can develop relationships with school staff, connect with other parents and support each other, and have the opportunity to meet community members or neighbors.

## Ways Parents Can Get Involved

### *How Parents Can Stay Informed*

- *Remind your child you want to see information from the school, and ask them regularly to check their backpack for notices or letters*
- *Check the school's website for new information*
- *Check the school's calendar for a list of important days or events*
- *Contact the school's office and leave a message for your child's teacher if you have questions*

## Join the School Council

As members of the school council, parents/guardians have the opportunity to be involved in school decision making. It also allows parents/guardians to advise on school programming and learning opportunities.

school or school council. Parents/guardians should also attend all parent-teacher interviews and are encouraged to attend school board meetings in order to stay informed about their child's education.

## Volunteer

Another way for parents/guardians

### *How Parents/Guardians can Promote a Positive Attitude Towards Education*

- *Encourage persistence, the creation of goals/plans, and the importance of requesting help when needed*
- *Provide a quiet space for homework*
- *Show enthusiasm for school programs and activities*
- *Read with your children*
- *Ask specific questions about your child's day, school activities, and what they are learning*

## Be Involved in School Activities

Parents/guardians can get involved by attending school plays, concerts, and sporting events, and by going to/participating in community events and meetings hosted by the

to get involved in their child's education is to volunteer with the school. Some elementary school teachers have parent volunteers assist in their classrooms.

Parents/guardians can also volunteer to assist teachers with class field trips, or help with school fundraising events.

# Student Expectations

## Attendance & Class Participation

Students are expected to attend all classes. If a student is going to be absent from a class, they must obtain permission from their parents/guardians. Students are also responsible for any work or tests missed during their absence. Not only are students to attend classes regularly, but they are also expected to be active

participants in their classes. This means that teachers encourage and expect students to ask questions, think critically, and express their opinions on topics presented in class. Class participation may include group work, where students are divided into smaller groups to discuss specific topics and then present their discussion to the rest of the class. Students may also be assigned to a group to complete a project or homework assignment. Each student is expected to contribute equally to



## *Why is Attendance Important?*

- Students who are chronically absent are more likely to drop out of school*
- It teaches students the skills they need to be successful after graduation*
- Absences may cause students to miss key lessons in the course content and important information about assignments and exams*
- Too many absences can cause students to fall behind and have difficulty staying on track to graduate*
- It is crucial for building relationships with other students and creating a sense of belonging*

the assignment. Group work is important for teaching students to cooperate with each other. Students are expected to complete all assigned homework on time and to the best of their ability. Students may lose marks for handing in

## Be on Time

It is important for students to be on time for all their classes. Arriving late for class can be very disruptive for teachers and other students. If a student is late for a class, they will be expected to check in with their school's office. Some schools may require a student to get a late slip signed by their teacher and return it to the office. If a student is consistently late for classes, disciplinary action may result. Parents/guardians should make sure their children get enough sleep to ensure that they can wake up with enough time to get ready for school.

## Homework

Students are expected to complete all assigned homework on time and to the best of their ability. Students may lose marks for handing in

homework assignments late. Teachers may assign a specific number of pages in a novel or textbook to be read prior to their next class. Students may also be



## Homework/Study Tips

- *Find a quiet place to work, with minimal distractions*
- *Listening and taking notes in class will help you when you study*
- *Use a planner to write down all assignments and exams and to schedule time to study/do homework*
- *Do not procrastinate; review notes regularly to avoid cramming for an exam the night before*

expected to complete written assignments or prepare for oral presentations by a specific date. Students should write down all assignments and due dates in a day planner to keep track of homework and ensure work is completed on time.

## Cell Phones/ Internet Use

The use of cell phones during class time can distract students from learning, and be very disruptive for other students. Most schools expect

students to refrain from using their cell phones during class time, and teachers may confiscate phones temporarily if students are not following the school's expectations. If a student is expecting an important phone call, they should let their teacher know ahead of time. Most schools will also expect students to use their computers and internet for education purposes only. Students who violate internet use policies or access inappropriate material may be disciplined. Each school will have its own policy regarding cell phone and internet use and students, as well as

parents/guardians, should familiarize themselves with their school's policy.

## Cyber Bullying

*The use of cell phones, computers, or other electronic devices to harass, threaten, make fun of, or be mean to someone online.*

*Students should report any emails, texts, photos, or other messages that make them feel intimidated or*

*uncomfortable to a trusted adult or school staff member.*

*Parents/guardians should be aware of apps that their children are using, talk with their children about online*

*bullying, and make sure their children know they are there to listen if they need help.*



## Behavioral Guidelines

Schools are to be safe places free from all forms of discrimination, bullying, and harassment. Each school will have its own code of conduct and behavioral guidelines outlining the expectations of all students to encourage and promote a safe and accepting environment.



Bullying happens when a student, or group of students intimidates, or coerces a targeted individual. This can include physical, psychological, social, and emotional harm. Students, as well as parents/guardians, are encouraged to report any concerns about bullying, harassment, or discrimination to a member of the school staff. School administration takes harassment and discrimination seriously. Students who engage in discriminatory and disrespectful behavior towards fellow students will be expected to meet with school counsellors or other school staff to resolve the conflict. If inappropriate behavior persists, the student may be suspended or expelled.

## Other Information

### Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities include sports, art, theatre, music, and clubs that take place outside of school hours. Students are encouraged to join a team, activity, or club that interests them. There

may be fees involved with some activities. If parents/ guardians have any concerns over fees, they should speak with the school.

### High School Course Selection

High schools will have booklets available for free which outline all



Getting involved in extracurricular activities is a good way for students to be more involved in their school, meet new people, learn how to cooperate with others, and build new skills.

the courses that are offered at the school. To graduate, students will need to complete the required number of credits, as per their provincial standards. Some of these credits will be earned from passing compulsory courses, and the rest will be earned from passing elective courses, which the student chooses. Post-secondary programs often require certain high school classes to be completed (also called prerequisites) for students to enroll

in those programs. High school students who wish to apply to post-secondary education need to be familiar with the courses they will need to take. It is important for students to meet with a school guidance counsellor who can help them with their course selection.

## Allergies

Some children have severe allergies to nuts and will become very sick if they are exposed to food containing nuts (even very small amounts).

Parents/guardians will be made aware if the school has students with nut allergies and provided with information on how the school is addressing the issue. Parents/guardians may be asked not to send any food containing nuts with their children. If your child has a severe allergy or other health problem, you should make sure the school is aware of the issue.

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