

Starting School



Starting school is an exciting time for students and their parents, but some students have first-day jitters. The following information will help make starting school easier.

What will my child learn in Junior and Senior Kindergarten?

- Kindergarten is an introduction to the more formal learning that begins in Grade 1. It might seem as if kindergarten students just spend their time playing, but they are actually learning about letters, numbers, reading, the arts, physical education and science through many different kinds of activities.
- Teachers set up educational toys and games in 'activity centres' around the classroom which children visit during the class.
- The Kindergarten program is set out by the provincial Ministry of Education and includes six main areas: Personal and Social Development, Language, Math, Science and Technology, Health and Physical Activity, and the Arts. Kindergarten students do not usually get homework, but they often bring books home to read with their parents. Reading with your child – in any language – is one of the best ways to help them succeed in school.

What's the difference between Kindergarten and Grade 1?

- Students go to school all day every day in Grade 1, and the teaching and learning is more formal. Children still play and spend time learning social skills, but they are also taught in a more structured way about reading, writing, math, science, social studies and the arts.
- By the end of Grade 1, children should be able to read simple words and books and understand basic math skills like addition and subtraction and measurement.

- For some students the transition to Grade 1 is just as big as the transition to Kindergarten. It may take them a few weeks to get used to the new structure and the new rules.

How can I help my child settle in?

- Some children cry on their first day of school, but they often calm down shortly after their parents leave. The teacher will let you know if your child is having problems adjusting so that you and the teacher can work together to help your child.
- When parents show an interest in their children's school, students are more likely to be successful. Talk about school with enthusiasm, and ask your child specific questions about their day, like "What songs did you sing today? What book did the teacher read?" or "Did you visit the library?"
- Participate in school activities as much as you can. Attending school concerts, sports and community events will help you feel comfortable in the school and give you a chance to get to know the other members of the school community.

Can I spend time in the classroom with my child?

- It's important to ask the teacher about visiting the classroom. Most teachers welcome visitors, but they may ask parents to visit at specific times so that they don't disrupt the learning activities.

How can I find out how my child is doing in school?

- Teachers use different ways to report on your child's progress. They may talk to you informally or send a note home.
- Students receive report cards at least twice a year with information on their progress in all





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the subject areas, and there are scheduled parent teacher interviews at least once a year (you can ask for an interpreter if you need one).

What if I want to speak to the teacher?

- If you have questions or concerns, you can ask the teacher for an appointment or phone the school. By making an appointment, you will ensure that the teacher can set aside enough time to talk and prepare for the meeting. That way, the meeting will be much more helpful for you, your child, and the teacher.

Can I volunteer in my child's class?

- Ask the teacher about volunteer opportunities in the classroom. Most teachers appreciate the help, but may need to schedule volunteer visits to coordinate them with planned classroom activities.
- If you are not available during the day, find out if there are things you can do from home, or if there are evening or weekend activities that you can help with. Many schools have events like movie nights, fun fairs, or other community events, and they always need volunteers.

What is Curriculum Night and why should I go?

- This is an evening, usually held in September, for parents to meet the teachers and find out more about the programs offered at the school. It is sometimes called an "Open House" or "Meet the Teacher Night".
- At Curriculum Night you will meet the teacher and find out about the class schedule, homework expectations, and plans for the year. You will also have the chance to meet other parents and staff members.

When will my child learn French?

- In some school boards, students start to learn French in grade 1, while in others, students start in grade 4.
- French Immersion is a program where students study in French for most of the school day. French Immersion programs can start either in Senior Kindergarten or in grade four. You can ask your principal for more details.

What is a School Council?

- The school council is the parent organization at the school. Contact the school council if you have questions about how to get involved at the school, or if you are looking for information from a parent perspective.
- Council meetings are open to everyone in the community, so you do not have to be a member to attend. It is a great way to keep up with what is happening in the school.

Where can I go if I need help?

- You should feel free to ask for help or information whenever you need it. School secretaries know almost everything that goes on in the school, so the school office is a good place to start. There you can find out about things like interpreters, special education, daycare and lunchroom programs, or make an appointment to talk to the principal or your child's teacher.
- Some schools have settlement workers to help families new to the country, and most schools have access to specialists who can help if your child is having difficulty.
- Community centres, libraries and Ontario Early Years Centres have many helpful programs and resources for parents and children.
- The People for Education website has information available in several languages. Visit us at www.peopleforeducation.com.