



Tips for Parents

High School Courses and Choices

Entering high school is an important time in your child's education. The courses that students choose will have an impact on their ability to be successful in high school and in their future lives and careers. Ontario's high schools offer a wide variety of programs to meet the needs of all students. This tip sheet is a first step to understanding those choices.



How can parents help their children make the move from grade 8 to grade 9?

The transition from grade 8 to 9 is a significant one. Students will likely change schools, may move into a semester program (4 courses per term), and have to make decisions about what courses to take. They will also have more opportunities to join school clubs, sports teams, and other extracurricular activities. Encourage your child to get involved in extra-curricular programs and pick courses that interest them. Research shows that students who succeed in grade 9 are more likely to graduate with the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

What can parents do to help their children make good choices?

- Pick up or download the course lists from schools in your area or read the school profile on the school board's website.
- Go to high school information nights and Open Houses *with your child*. Call ahead if you need an interpreter as some schools provide them. You can also make an appointment for a school tour.

What should parents and students ask when choosing a high school?

- What subjects do you offer in each grade?
- What extra-curricular activities, clubs and sports teams are available for students?
- What optional courses or programs do you offer? (e.g. SHSM, Focus courses, Co-op, Dual Credit)
- For students with special needs or English language learners: What special education or English as a Second Language support is provided?

Who decides which courses my child will take?

Your child's grade 8 teacher may make suggestions about course choices, but it is your responsibility to approve them. Your child will bring home a course selection form. It is important to go over the options with your child and make sure that they are

taking courses that suit their interests and abilities, before signing the form to the school.

If you need help, talk to your school guidance counselor, teacher or principal. School settlement workers can provide support to newcomers to Canada.

What course choices do students have in grades 9 and 10?

In grades 9 and 10, students must take English, mathematics, science, geography, history, physical education, art, civics, careers and at least one year of French. There are four types of courses:

- **Applied** – focus on practical applications and concrete examples;
- **Academic** – focus on theory and abstract problems;
- **Locally Developed** (also called Essentials) - compulsory credit courses for students who need more flexibility and support or, in some cases, who are in special education programs; and
- **Open** – optional courses that prepare students for further study and enrich their education.

Students can mix different types of courses. For example, a student can take Applied English and French courses and Academic math.

Do students' course choices have an impact on future options?

Yes. The type of courses students take in grades 9 and 10 (academic or applied) affect their choices in grades 11 and 12; and those choices affect students' post-secondary options. Many students take applied courses because they think they will be easier, but data from Ontario's Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) suggests that students in applied courses are less likely to succeed on the grade 9 math assessment, regardless of their prior academic performance.

Choosing between Academic and Applied courses is a very important decision and should be considered very carefully by students and their parents.

Students who want to keep all post-secondary options open should choose academic courses in grades 9 and 10.

Can students transfer from one type of course to another?

In some circumstances, students can change from one type of course to another (eg. applied math to academic math). In order to do so, they may need to take a 'transfer' course. Very few schools offer transfer courses during the regular school day, so students may have to repeat the subject or take an on-line or summer school course, unless exempted by the principal. It is usually easier to transfer from academic to applied courses.

What course choices do students have in grades 11 and 12?

In grades 11 and 12, students choose courses based on their destination after high school: *Workplace, College, University, College/university or Open* (any destination).

What kinds of programs are available for high school students?

There are many ways for students to earn high school credits. Check individual schools for information on programs such as:

- **Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM)** are for students who want to explore specific career goals and make informed choices about their next steps after secondary school. Students complete 8-10 courses in the student's selected field (eg. Health Care, Business, Information Technology).
- **Cooperative Education:** Students learn in a workplace setting. They can use up to two co-op credits towards compulsory diploma requirements.
- **Dual Credit Programs:** available in some schools, students can earn a maximum of 4 credits towards both a high school and college diploma or apprenticeship certification.
- **Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP):** students in grades 11 and 12 can become registered apprentices in a skilled trade while completing their secondary school diplomas.

What happens if my child fails a course?

Students can enrol in a *Credit Recovery Program* which allows them to repeat only the parts of the course they failed.

Do students receive special education support in high school?

It's important to ask what kinds of special education support a high school offers.

For example a *Learning Strategies Course* in grade 9 may be used as one compulsory credit and may help students adjust to high school and access extra support. Some schools have separate courses for students with special needs, others have a high number of Locally Developed or Essentials courses.

Every high school has a Student Success Team –the principal, student success teacher, a guidance counsellor and a special education teacher who can provide extra support for students who need it.

What are the requirements for graduating from high school with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD)?

- Students must pass 30 credit courses between grades 9 and 12:
 - 18 are compulsory: 4 credits in English, 3 credits in mathematics, 2 credits in science, 1 credit in Canadian history, 1 credit in Canadian geography, 1 credit in the arts, 1 credit in health and physical education, 1 credit in French as a second language, 0.5 credit in career studies, 0.5 credit in civics, plus 3 additional credits from each of three different subject groups, including arts, technology, languages, health and physical education or co-operative education
 - 12 credits can be chosen from optional credit courses.
- Students must complete 40 hours of community service
- Students must pass the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test or a Literacy Course.

Most students finish high school in four years, but some stay for five years. Students can take more than 30 credits, but school boards are only funded up to a maximum of 34 credits per student.

For more information:

Visit your school board's website or phone your child's school.

Newcomers: http://www.settlement.org/sys/library_detail.asp?doc_id=1004939

Ministry of Education:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/secondary.html>

People for Education Report on Course Choices:

<http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/trouble-with-course-choices-in-high-school-2013.pdf>

For copies of this tip sheet go to the People for Education website at www.peopleforeducation.ca