

Did you know that...

- It is **ILLEGAL** for any child between the ages of 6 and 18 NOT to be in school
- It is also **ILLEGAL** to refuse to admit any child under the age of 18 into a school due to the fact that the child, the child's parent or guardian is in Canada without any immigration status

General Information

Attendance at publicly funded elementary (also known as primary) and secondary schools (also known as high schools) is **free**. Individual school boards are responsible for following the provincial education policy and providing qualified teachers, support staff and the appropriate facilities for children attending schools in their areas. Most children attend **public** schools – the Waterloo Region Public School Board. There is also a separate system of **Roman Catholic** schools – the Waterloo Catholic District School Board. **A certificate of Baptism of the child or one parent determines eligibility to attend Catholic elementary school.** However, parents of other faiths who wish their child(ren) to attend a Catholic elementary school may apply for an exemption. Requests for exemptions are handled on a case-by-case basis.

Elementary School: school begins with kindergarten (children age 4 and 5) and is followed by Grades 1 to 8, particularly for the **Catholic** school board. Most elementary schools in the **Public** board start from Junior Kindergarten to grade 6, with a **separate school** for grades 7 & 8 (or junior high). **Secondary** schools offer programs from Grade 9 to Grade 12. The school year generally begins in September and finishes at the end of June. Students usually attend school Monday to Friday, and are at school for about 6 hours. Every elementary school has a zone that represents the school's attendance area. If you live in that area, you can send your child to that school. For specific admission requirements to elementary school, talk to the school principal and refer to the list of documents usually required for registration.

Elementary school students who have recently arrived from other countries register for and begin school immediately, with an assessment following in later months. Secondary school students must have an initial **assessment** before they can enter a school. The purpose of the initial assessment is to gather information about each student's educational background and English skills in order to place him or her in the right grade. The initial assessment covers two key areas: mathematics and language. Most students will require ESL instruction and will be placed in an appropriate language training program. The initial placement is not final. Schools monitor and revise the placement over a period of time.

To meet the needs of Ontario students, many school boards offer special programs, i.e. **English as a Second Language (ESL), heritage or first language classes** (for children whose first language is not English or French), extra help for students with a **learning disability** and programs for **gifted students**. Transportation assistance is provided for special needs children or if a child lives beyond the limits of a particular school board and there is no other school in their area.

Report Cards are standard throughout the province and offer a written evaluation on how your child is progressing. Schools also offer parent-teacher interviews so that teachers and parents can talk about student's progress or difficulties. Parents may contact a teacher, a teacher-adviser or a guidance counselor directly.

The Catholic District School board has its own policies on **school uniforms**, but even the public board without any uniforms, still has a **dress code** - the proper way a student should look when they come to school. Check with your child's school about their dress code policy.

Secondary (High) School: The high school program recognizes that students enter high school with different strengths, interests and goals. Students are able to **select courses** that suit their need and gradually take them towards their goal, through and increasingly specialized **four-year program**. In grades 9 and 10 students choose among academic courses, which draw heavily on theory while applied courses focus more on practical applications and concrete examples. In grades 11 and 12 students choose among workplace preparation or college/university preparation type courses. All Catholic secondary schools are open to students of any religious faith.

The high school program is based on a **credit system**. Students must earn a total of **30 credits** (one for every 110 hour course successfully completed) to get their high school diploma; 18 of the credits are compulsory, a specified number of courses every student must take in order to graduate; 12 are optional courses that the student may select from all the courses offered by the school. Open courses may be taken by all students, i.e. physical education (or gym) class.

Students must also complete 40 hours of community involvement activities and must pass the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, which is taken in grade 10. **Non-semester** secondary schools offer courses that last the whole year, from September to June. The **semester** year is divided into two portions and courses generally last half of the year, with new classes started in the second half for the rest of the year.

If you want your child to learn French, you can send him/her to **French immersion** school, but you may be responsible for providing transportation if the nearest school is not within your school area, and another English school is available.

Other Types of Schools

Private or alternative schools also provide elementary and secondary education, but they are independently operated and do not receive government funding. Independent schools exist as a part of the education system in Ontario. **Students must pay tuition to attend these schools.**

If students wish to pursue religious education, they have several options. Some students attend religious classes after school or on weekends, others attend denominational private schools. Other forms of private schooling include: home schooling (teaching children at home) or specific approaches to education such as Montessori or Waldorf.

School Services for New Canadians

Settlement Education Partnership of Waterloo Region (SEPWR)

SEPWR Head Office - St. Mary's School

77 Young Street, Rm 101 Kitchener, ON N2H 4Y9 Phone: (519) 742-8220

Settlement workers from many cultural and language backgrounds, are placed in schools across the city and play an important role in facilitating easier integration of newcomer children and their families into the school community. Their services include:

- Information and referral for parents and students on issues such as orientation to the educational system
- Assistance in familiarizing family with registration process for children into schools and locating the school nearest to the family home

- Assistance to schools in establishing and maintaining communication between school and newcomer families through explanation and/or interpretation/translation
- Development and promotion of strategies for cross-cultural understanding between newcomer students, families, school staff and host students.

The Catholic School board has a **Newcomer Reception Centre**; a place where families new to Canada can learn all the details required for their children to attend school, register and receive information on what to expect.

Newcomer Reception Centre, 104 Ontario St. North, Kitchener, Telephone: (519) 743-3328

www.newcomer.wcdsb.ca

The District School Board has a **Welcome Centre** which identifies English and Math proficiency level and recommends appropriate programming and prepares a report for the school.

Welcome Centre, Margaret Avenue Public School, 325 Louisa St. West, Kitchener, Telephone: (519) 576-3018

<http://www.wrdsb.ca/campaigns/newcomers-welcome-centre>

International Language Classes

International languages are offered at several schools and locations in the community. If you would like to attend, or have your child attend, please contact schools individually for a list of languages available and location of the program.

- St. Louis Adult & Continuing Education: 80 Young St., Kitchener, 519-620-9658
- Waterloo Region District School Board: Continuing Education, 519-885-0800

Documents usually required for school registration:

- Child's birth certificate/passport
- Child's immigration status documents
- Child's immunization/vaccination documents & health card
- Proof of residency (phone bill, lease agreement)
- Previous school records
- Proof of Catholicism (*for Catholic board only*)
- Emergency contact information
- Information on dietary needs, allergies, medications, health conditions or related to needs of religious observance.

Find other topics of information in our *Fact Sheet series*.

YMCA Immigrant Services Locations:

Kitchener-Waterloo Office

800 King St. West, 3rd Floor
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 1E
Phone: (519) 579-9622

Cambridge Office

258 Hespeler Road

School Settlement

77 Young Street, Rm 101
Kitchener, ON N2H 4Y9
Phone: (519) 742-8220

www.ymcaimmigrantservices.ca

Funded by:

Financé par :



Citizenship and
Immigration Canada

Citoyenneté et
Immigration Canada



United Way
Kitchener Waterloo & Area



Last updated: January 2013



YMCAs of Cambridge and Kitchener- Waterloo

Immigrant Services

Elementary & Secondary Education



Building healthy communities