



**Newcomers' Guide to
Nova Scotia Schools**

Welcome Messages



Superintendent's Message

Nova Scotians have a proud tradition of opening our homes, hearts and minds to newcomers from all over the world. As the superintendent of the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB), we work hard every day to ensure

all students feel welcome when they attend school.

For more than 30 years, the HRSB has been directly involved in supporting newcomers by providing English language training for parents in the HRSB Adult ESL Programs.

We also deliver EAL/ESL programs to over 800 students in grades Primary through 12.

Newcomers face various challenges and have many questions upon arrival to a new country and province. This guide provides an introduction to the Nova Scotia school system and is meant to be a platform to facilitate communication

between newcomer parents and our schools. Close communication between the home and school will help ensure success for our newcomer students.

The HRSB is pleased to have partnered with the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration and Department of Education on this project for the benefit of newcomer families and schools in HRSB and throughout the province. The guide was written by HRSB English as an Additional/Second Language Specialists in consultation with school principals, guidance counsellors, settlement workers and parents.

Sincerely,

Carole Olsen
Superintendent,
Halifax Regional School Board



Minister's Message

As Minister of Education, it is my pleasure to welcome you to Nova Scotia and to our public education system.

Nova Scotia is a wonderful province in which to live and learn. Our province has a long and proud

tradition of educational excellence. Our education system is respected world-wide for its dynamic, research-based curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Our children are the future of our province and providing them with a good education ensures their success in life.

We work closely with the eight regional school boards across the province to deliver a quality public school education program. Our teachers strive to use modern innovative teaching practices to prepare students for what they will encounter in the 21st century.

We work collaboratively with our education partners including community groups. We provide a learning environment that appreciates and respects diversity.

This guide will give you valuable information about how our education system is structured and the relationships between the Department of Education, school boards and schools.

Sincerely,

Ramona Jennex
Minister of Education



Minister's Message

As a new resident of Nova Scotia it can be difficult adjusting to new surroundings. In true Nova Scotia tradition, we welcome you with open arms.

We are proud to continue this tradition by offering

newcomer parents this valuable resource on Nova Scotia's schools. This guide is part of our commitment to lifelong learning and I hope you find the information useful.

This comprehensive resource takes you through all the steps for selecting a school and registering your children. It continues with information on a wide variety of topics to help you understand our education system and what to expect during a school year.

We are a welcoming, diverse society where everyone is encouraged to build a good life for themselves and become a part of their communities. Our children are the future of this province and our education system prepares students for life and for entry into post-secondary learning.

Nova Scotia's schools, colleges and universities are critical to growing the province's economy. They provide our students with the education and skills to succeed in a technologically advanced, knowledge-driven and globally competitive economy.

Welcome to Nova Scotia and to your new home. You and your children will benefit from this resource.

Sincerely,

Marilyn More
Minister of Labour and Advanced Education
Minister of Immigration

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In the province of Nova Scotia, the term **English as an Additional Language (EAL)** is replacing English as a Second Language (ESL).

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About this Guide

The *Newcomers’ Guide to Nova Scotia Schools* is a project of the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) in partnership with the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration (NSOI) and endorsed by the Nova Scotia Department of Education (DOE). The text was written by EAL/ESL Specialist Teachers in consultation with stakeholders including: school principals, guidance counsellors, YMCA Settlement Workers, parents and staff from the Department of Education and the Office of Immigration.

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Welcome to your new home and school.

This guide presents information to help you understand the Nova Scotia public school system. The information in this guide is to help you and your children better understand the educational journey on which your children are about to start. It provides practical suggestions to support student success and will help with communication between you and your children's school.

The information is a general overview of what you may need to know to better support your children and create a successful beginning in school in Nova Scotia.

We understand that you are new and may have many questions. Please do not hesitate to ask school staff who are always willing to help you with understanding school policies, procedures and expectations. Schools in Nova Scotia work in partnership with parents to ensure success with student learning.

Once again, welcome to your new home and school community. We are here to support you and your family as you begin to call Nova Scotia home.

This guide was made possible through the support and collaboration of the following partners: The Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, The Halifax Regional School Board, and The Nova Scotia Department of Education.



The word 'parent' in this guide also includes guardians and caregivers.



Getting Ready for School

Department of Education and School Boards

In Nova Scotia, the Department of Education and local school boards are responsible for the education of your children. There are 8 public school boards (seven English and one French) in Nova Scotia. The Department of Education funds both English and French public school boards. These schools offer free education for your children. In some English school boards, your child may be enrolled in the English Program or the French Immersion Program. Some schools may have only elementary grades (primary to grade 6). Other schools have only junior high (grades 7 to 9) and other schools have only high school (grades 10 to 12). There are some schools in Nova Scotia that have various combinations of grades.

School Boundaries

Where you live determines the school that your child attends. School boards in Nova Scotia require students to attend specific schools, depending on the boundary around the school. This enables boards to plan for school programming and staffing. Some children may have access to school buses depending on the distance between your home and school. Visit <http://ns-schools.ednet.ns.ca> for further information.

Registration

Children must be five years old by December 31 in the year in which they register to start school in Nova Scotia. Students may only register for high school if they are under the age of twenty-one.

At this time it is important to tell the school of any health concerns your child has or of any medication or special requirements that your child may need during the school day.

Documents

You will be asked to give the school the following documents:

- Proof of child's age** — a birth certificate or passport.
- Proof of address** — an apartment lease, home purchase agreement, an electric or cable bill.
Please note: A driver's license will not be accepted.
- Proof of student's immigration status** — one of the following: birth certificate, record of landing (IMM 1000), confirmation of permanent residence (IMM5292), permanent resident card or Canadian Passport.
- Immunization records** — Medical Card, Health Insurance and Immunization records.
- Translated records of previous education, past transcripts or report cards, if available.**



English as an Additional Language (EAL) Student Profile and Language Survey

At registration, the EAL Student Profile and Language Survey form should be filled out by you, with the help of an interpreter, if you do not speak English. It provides the school with very important background information regarding your child's past learning experiences and offers the school vital information.

Assessment and Grade Placement

In Nova Scotia, children are placed in their age appropriate grade upon arrival at the school. It should be noted that international grade placements often do not correspond with grade equivalency in Nova Scotia.

A newcomer's English language is assessed to determine, if and to what extent, a student requires EAL support. The assessment identifies a student's strengths and needs in the

areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing and assists teachers in appropriate programming. The interpretation and application of the results are done by, or in consultation with, a trained EAL/ESL teacher, where available. Some schools may use other forms of informal assessment to become more aware of your child's abilities in certain academic areas.





School Procedures

The School Year

The school year begins in early September and ends in late June with breaks in December and March. It is important that students attend the full school year to ensure success.

School boards produce a school calendar which is available on the school boards' website during the summer for the upcoming school year. Individual schools have newsletters or calendars highlighting important school dates and events.

In elementary and junior high schools the school year consists of three terms. The first term ends in November, the second term ends in March and the third term ends in June.

In high school, there are only two semesters. Most courses are completed during a semester. The first semester finishes in January and the second in June. Public schools are closed in July and August for summer vacation.

School Schedules and Routines

Every school has its own daily schedule which tells the time school starts and ends. If the day begins with the playing of

Canada's national anthem, students are expected to stand during the playing of O Canada. Children in elementary have a fifteen minute break in the morning called **recess**. Students usually have a small snack brought from home and play outdoors.

All children in Nova Scotia are permitted to stay at school for lunch. In schools where there is no cafeteria from which to purchase a lunch, children are expected to bring their own. Send the kind of food that your child likes to eat at home, although it may not be possible to heat the lunch. To see what kinds of foods should not be brought to school, check the Allergy Section on the next page. After lunch, elementary students usually go outside to play until the afternoon classes begin.

Older children sometimes have extracurricular activities (sports, music, clubs, etc.) during lunch and after school.

Contact Information

As a parent or guardian, you must provide the school with updated contact information so that the school may be able to reach you or someone else that you have chosen as an emergency contact person. **The emergency contact person is necessary when you the parent are unavailable. It may be a relative, neighbour or friend.**

You also should have the telephone number for your children's school, and know the names of your children's teachers, principal and vice principal. You can check the school's website as well. You may receive a school handbook at registration

which includes specific information, policies and procedures. If you move, you are required to call the school with your new address and telephone number. If you move out of the school boundaries your child may have to change schools. See Your Child's School Information at the end of the book.

School Attendance

Students are expected to be at school every school day except if they are ill or have a doctor's appointment. Some schools have a safe arrival program with a direct number that you

must call. If your child will be absent or late, please call before school starts and say:

This is your name. My child, child's name is sick today. My child is in grade grade number. The teacher's name is teacher's name.

In the elementary and junior high schools, if your child becomes sick or has an accident, someone will call you at the phone number on the school records. You or the emergency contact person must pick up your child as soon as possible.

If the accident or illness is serious, schools may call an ambulance and a staff member may accompany your child to the hospital.

If your child is observing a special religious day and will not be attending school, please call the school in advance to let them know that your child will be absent. The school will make reasonable efforts to accommodate the religious and cultural practices of your family.



In some boards, grades primary to two are dismissed earlier than higher grades. These children cannot stay at school until their older brothers and sisters finish for the day.

For children who do not ride the school bus, parents are responsible for picking up their children or for making other arrangements to see that the primary to two children get home safely.

Lateness

It is very important that your child be on time for school every day. If your child is late, he/she must report to the office and check in.

School Closures

Sometimes due to weather, or other unexpected events, school may be closed and bus transportation cancelled. When there is bad weather, listen to the radio that morning or check the school board website for announcements of schools that are closed.

If school is cancelled in the middle of the day, elementary schools will call your home or the emergency contact number. Familiarize yourself with the early dismissal plan at your child's school. Be prepared to pick up your child or make alternate arrangements for your children if school is closed. Your child will not leave the school until contact is made.

Supervision

Teachers will supervise your children in the schoolyard for a scheduled time before school begins in the morning. Students are not supervised before this time or after school. You cannot leave young children in the schoolyard when there is no school staff present. If your child stays at school for lunch, the school will supervise your child.

School Bus Transportation

School bus transportation may be available. Check with the school office for more information if your child is in a special program or if you live a specific distance away from the school.

Breakfast Program

Schools may have free breakfast programs. Check with your school to see if they have one. They provide nutritious food. Every child is welcome to participate in this program.

Allergies or Health Problems

If your child has special medical needs or is allergic to any foods or substances, you or your doctor will have to fill out a form. All teachers and school staff should be made familiar with your child's special medical needs. All medical information is confidential and will only be shared with school staff as appropriate.

“Allergy Awareness”

Some students have severe allergies to nuts and will get very sick if they are exposed to food containing even small amounts of nuts. To ensure the safety of these students, some schools promote allergy awareness. If your school is dealing with allergies to nuts, do not send any food containing nut products to school with your child. Check with your school; there may be other allergies that you need to be aware of.



“Scent Reduced”

Some students have severe allergies to scents or smells such as perfumes, strong soaps, shampoos, body lotions or creams. To ensure the safety of these students, schools may promote a “scent reduced” policy. If your school is “scent aware” do not let your child use the above products. When you, as a parent come into the school please do not wear scented products.



Please note there is a no smoking policy on all school properties.

Homework and Good Study Habits

The amount of homework assigned will depend on your child's grade and teacher. All students are encouraged to read each night. Many students will be asked to keep track of titles and number of pages read. Your child's teacher will explain homework expectations.

Elementary school students often use agendas, or student organizers into which they write their homework assignments.

Some teachers have class websites to help communicate homework expectations. Check your child's school website for the link to his or her classroom website.

Ways parents can help are:

- Set a regular homework time. Encourage your child to follow the schedule.
- Set up a quiet study place in your home. Provide pens, pencils, erasers, paper, a dictionary and other study materials.
- Ask your child about homework each day. When completed, review and discuss together.
- Stay positive even when difficulties occur. Students need to feel good about working at home. Encourage your child and praise his or her efforts.
- Monitor computer use. Students are easily distracted by the Internet when they should be studying.
- Contact the teacher if the homework is too easy, takes too long, or is too hard. Adjustments can be made to help your child feel more successful.
- Talk regularly with your child about school work. Even if the topics are unfamiliar to you, you can still be an enthusiastic listener.

Communicating with your Child's School and Teacher

In Nova Scotia schools, parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their children's education and to



No Homework?

- **Ask your child about his or her day at school. What did he or she do?**
- **Read to your child. Have your child read to you.**
- **Encourage your child to do word puzzles or play games that involve thinking, creativity and talking. Many parents appreciate having this time together with their children to do learning activities of their own choosing.**
- **Talk to the teacher if your child repeatedly does not have homework.**

establish communication with the teacher.

Communication makes it easier for the teacher to better know the needs of your child. Communication also helps you to understand more about what happens at school. Teachers welcome the opportunity to speak with parents.

Teachers also understand that many newcomer parents are learning English. They also understand that many newcomer parents may worry about communication with their child's teacher. Teachers appreciate the efforts you make to talk to them about your child.

If you need extra help in communicating with school and teachers:

- ask if there are interpreters available to help you
- ask a family member or trusted friend to help; they may go with you to the school for appointments; they may also make phone calls for you.
- decide whether it is appropriate to ask older school aged brothers or sisters to interpret
- other kinds of community support may be available.

How to Contact a Teacher

If you have a concern or question, you may send a note with your child or send an email.

You may also make a telephone call to the school. If the teacher is unavailable, leave a message, so the teacher can return your call. Tell the office staff your name, your child's name and grade. Leave your phone number and the best time for the teacher to call you back. Teachers usually return calls as soon as possible.

If it is an emergency, explain the situation to the office staff, he or she will tell the teacher.

If you wish to speak with someone directly, you should make an appointment, rather than just going to the school. This way you can be sure that someone is available to speak with you.

Confidentiality

All conversations with teachers are confidential. The teacher will not share information about your child or family with other parents or community members. If necessary, teachers may share information with other teachers. Discuss any concerns about confidentiality with the teacher.

How Schools Communicate with Parents

All schools regularly send information home with students in the form of newsletters or the school website. This is the best way to stay informed about class and school



events and other important issues.

- Remind your child to always bring any notes or newsletters home to you
- Check his or her school bag for notes or newsletters
- Display important information from school; many parents place it on the refrigerator or a convenient place in the home so everyone in the family can see
- Return any forms requiring signatures to school as quickly as possible
- Contact the school office or your child's teacher, if you have any questions.

Curriculum Night or Open House

Early in the school year, many schools in Nova Scotia host an event for parents to meet the teacher and learn about school programs. Some schools call it "Curriculum Night"; others say "Open House".

Curriculum Night or Open House is not a time to ask about individual student progress. It is a time to find out about:

- what students will be learning
- special projects or events
- homework expectations
- rules of behaviour
- how you can help your child at home.

Curriculum night is a good time to make an appointment with the teacher for a later meeting. The teacher can give you information specific to your child at a separate meeting.

Parent-Teacher Meetings

Parent-teacher meetings usually happen two times a year. Your child will bring home a notice about the meeting times. If you are unable to attend, please call the teacher to schedule another meeting time.

Parent-teacher meetings are discussions about your child's learning. It is a good time to talk about how parents and teachers can best help the student to succeed in school. These meetings usually last 10 minutes.

Teachers may show you examples of your child's work. The teacher will also discuss your child's achievements and work habits. The teacher will often make suggestions about how you can help your child at home.

Some teachers ask students to attend the meeting with their parents. Students can also discuss any issues or concerns they may have. You may also choose to have the meeting without your child present.

Cumulative Record

Schools keep a cumulative record for each student to record progress. It contains past report cards, assessment reports, and other information from a student's educational program.

Cumulative records are confidential and are kept in a secure location. You have the right to see your child's file and have copies of any information contained in it. If you wish to see

your child's file, contact school administration with your request. Your child's school may provide on-line information for parents.

Dress for Weather and Season

Elementary students are expected to dress for the weather and season. They usually play outside at recess and during lunch break, except when it is raining. Students should have a second pair of shoes for inside wear.

Students should have running shoes, t-shirts, and shorts or gym pants to wear for physical education class.

Dress Code

Most schools have a **dress code**, especially for older students. There are rules for what is acceptable to wear at school. The idea is to keep students focused on learning. All students and staff are expected to dress properly, so they are respectful of themselves and others. Consideration is given to cultural and religious practices.

Most dress codes may include:

- The student should wear clothing that covers the chest and shoulders. This means **no** low cut tops or revealing clothing. **No** tops showing the stomach. **No** muscle shirts, **no** spaghetti straps, **no** backless or side-less tops.
- Shorts and skirts must be of appropriate length.



Before the parent-teacher meeting:

- **Talk to your child. Find out what he or she enjoys about school. What is difficult?**
- **Think about questions for the teacher. Write notes to help you remember.**



Parents may be welcome on school trips to help supervise and are called **chaperones**. They can help organize and care for students during the trip. Your child's teacher may ask for volunteers.

Books and Study Materials

Students are expected to provide basic materials such as pencils, erasers, and notepaper. Schools may request a fee for student agendas or work organizers. If you have a concern about a fee please talk with your teacher. All textbooks in Nova Scotia schools are provided. Study resources such as library and reference materials are also provided in Nova Scotia schools. You will be responsible in case of loss or damage to textbooks, library books or other materials.

Cell Phones and Electronic Devices

Cell phones and electronic devices can be a major distraction in the classroom. With the ability to record audio and take photos, cell phones can be an invasion of privacy. **Check school policy regarding student use of personal electronic devices.**

Students who do not follow school policy may have their cell phones and electronic devices temporarily taken away by teachers or administration.

Schools also have computer use policies. Information technology and Internet can be used for educational purposes only.

Personal Belongings

Students are responsible for taking care of all personal belongings. Schools cannot be responsible for lost or stolen items. Most schools keep a **lost and found** box to collect missing items and clothing. Students should not bring large amounts of money or valuables to school.



Learning English as an Additional Language

Every student is a unique learner. Even children from the same family learn in different ways and may progress at different rates as they learn English. Some students learn more quickly than others. The stages of second language development however are common to nearly all students.

In the beginning, students naturally learn social or “survival” English. This is the language used in day to day situations including greetings, basic vocabulary, asking questions and responding to simple instructions. Learning social English usually takes from 1-2 years and is an important part of adjusting to a new language and culture.

Academic language is different. Most subjects in school (science, math, health or social studies) have many new and specialized words. Students may need a total of 5-7 years to fully develop the language skills (understanding, reading and writing) to the same level as their English speaking classmates.

Literacy Development

Newcomer students have different educational backgrounds. Many newcomer students have already developed literacy skills in their first language, but may have limited literacy skills in English. Some students may have little or interrupted schooling before coming to Canada. Other students are born in Canada but do not begin learning English until they start school. Teachers understand these differences and adjust programs to help each student with their reading and writing skills in English.

How Parents Can Help

- Maintain your first language and culture. It is a surprise for some people, but continuing to use and learn the first language is very important for learning English. Speak with your children in your first language especially at

- Students should **not** wear pants or tops that show undergarments (underwear).
- **No** messages or slogans on clothing that may be offensive to others.
- Coats and jackets are usually stored in lockers or on hooks.
- Hats, hoods and sunglasses should not be worn in the school building.

All students and staff are expected to follow the dress code at school and during all school events.

Field Trips

Teachers sometimes arrange for special class visits to museums, parks, theatres, or farms. These field trips are an important part of the classroom program. In the days before and after a field trip, students usually work on activities that are connected to the field trip. Learning about healthy food for example, may involve a trip to a farm to pick fresh vegetables.

Schools need the written permission of parents before students may go on a field trip. Your child will bring home a letter for you to sign. Your child may also be asked for a fee.

A letter home may ask you to prepare a lunch for your child for the day of the field trip.

home. Provide opportunities for continued learning in the first language. Children who speak well in their first language usually find it easier to learn English.

- Encourage your child to continue reading and writing in their first language. Many public libraries have multi-lingual collections including books and videos.
- Encourage your child to participate in after-school and extra-curricular activities such as sports or music. Spending time with other children is one of the most important things that a newcomer student can do. In addition to using English, these activities promote healthy social development.

Helping Your Child Adjust to a New School Community

Making new friends helps children feel accepted. Children who feel good about themselves are better able to adjust to school, focus on schoolwork and learn English. Becoming involved in school and community activities is important for learning English and for social development.

Attention, encouragement, discipline and approval are important for all children. In this way, students feel good about themselves. They enjoy learning, making new friends and becoming involved in new activities.

Some ways that parents can help are:

- Get to know your neighbourhood. Talk to neighbours and other parents about places for your children to interact. Take your child to the local playground so your child can play with other children.
- Visit the local library or other community centers.
- Talk to your child about their new friends. Show that you are interested. If you wish to invite their new friends to your home, contact their parents to make arrangements.

Understanding the Silent Period

When learning a new language and culture, some children experience what is known as a **silent period**. They may feel

uncomfortable about making mistakes and may not take risks in their learning. This does not mean your child is not learning. They may understand what is being presented, but are not yet ready to talk about it.

Students should not be forced to speak before they are ready. They need to spend lots of time listening to others speak; this is an important part of learning English. A silent period should not be a reason for serious concern. At this early stage, language learning activities often emphasize listening as a skill. As your child gains confidence he or she will begin to speak and participate more in school. It is always important to remember that each student is a unique learner.

Dealing with Anxiety

Children naturally feel anxious about beginning at a new school and learning a new language. Many children adjust quickly and begin to speak without fear of making mistakes. Other students have anxiety or nervousness about school and speaking English. They may be experiencing culture shock. They may complain about stomach aches, headaches or feel tired. Your child may also feel anger or sadness about the changes that have happened in their life.

Ways parents can help children deal with anxiety:

- Explain that anxiety is normal when big changes happen in life.
- Encourage your child to talk about their feelings. Share how you are adjusting to life in Nova Scotia.
- Ask your child about what is happening at school. Listen carefully so that you understand the difficulties your child may be having.
- Communicate with your child's teacher or guidance counsellor. Explain that your child is feeling nervous. Teachers can help your child feel more comfortable.
- Understand that your needs as an adult are different than those of your child.
- Celebrate success! Remind your child about past difficulties that became easier.

Educational Practices

Equity for all Students

Your child's school is an environment where all students are treated with respect, dignity and understanding. Equity means there should be no discrimination because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, religion, gender, sexual orientation, exceptionalities and family status. The policy also ensures that education is fair; everyone should have equitable learning opportunities for success in school. If you have a concern, it is very important that you speak to the school staff.

Healthy Living

The Nova Scotia government promotes healthy living. The program is called Health Promoting Schools. This includes healthy eating, physical activity, youth sexual health, tobacco reduction, addiction, and injury prevention. Initiatives include as the *Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools*, the *Provincial Breakfast Program*, and physical activity promotion in Nova Scotia schools. For further information check the Dept. of Health and Wellness or school board websites found in the back of this book.

Safe Schools

It is the belief that all students and staff can learn and work in a safe and supportive environment. They should not have to worry about personal safety.

The goal of Safe Schools is to create peaceful learning environments. Support is offered to schools in several ways:

- presentations to staff and parents relating about student personal safety

- workshops for students and staff on conflict intervention techniques
- providing resources for schools and conducting teacher professional development around promoting positive school environments.

Bullying

Bullying is taken very seriously in school. Bullying happens when a student or group of students target an individual repeatedly over time, using physical or psychological aggression to hurt the victim. This includes use of e-mail or internet to harass and/or intimidate others.

Every reasonable effort is made to protect students from threats of violence or physical harm. If you have questions regarding bullying, please contact your child's teacher, counsellor or other school staff.

Reporting Possible Harm to Children

Any time a teacher or other school staff member sees signs that a child may have been mistreated, neglected or abused, they have a legal obligation to report it to provincial child protection services. Once a report is made, child protection staff will decide if an investigation is necessary.

Everyone has a duty to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. Please contact the child protection services in the area where the child lives. Reports may be made anonymously.

It is best if you contact the agency by telephone or in person. To find the child protection services in your area, please contact the Department of Community Services nearest you for more information (refer to the Contact section of this book).





Teaching and Learning in Nova Scotia Classrooms

Many newcomer parents have questions about how their children are taught in Nova Scotia schools. You may notice that classrooms are very different from classrooms in your home country. Many of these differences can be explained by looking at a general approach to education called **student-centered learning**.

Student-Centered Learning

Student-centred learning focuses on the student's unique needs, abilities, interests, and learning styles. In response, teachers use many different strategies to work with their classes. Differentiated learning means providing students many different ways to learn. Teachers develop a variety of teaching materials so that all students can learn effectively.

Student-centered learning allows students to take greater responsibility for their own learning, and provides opportunities to learn from each other. Student-centered learning asks students to be active, responsible participants in their own education.

Teachers know that students learn best by participating. Teachers encourage students to experience ideas directly. For example, to learn about volume, young students measure sand with different cup sizes; they get to experience the idea rather than just hear about it from the teacher. Older students might be asked to create a product for sale at a student market to learn about business and economics.

A teacher might read a short story to the class, and then have the students work in small groups each with a different task. Later, meeting as a whole class again, students present group findings. A teacher might instruct the whole class on

a mathematical operation, and then work with smaller groups.

Teachers work with students as they complete their activities. Usually students are asked to report back to the class about what they have learned. For EAL students, language skills and communication are an important part of student-centered learning.

Student-centred learning contributes to student success by:

- strengthening student motivation
- promoting communication
- building student-teacher relationships
- promoting discovery and active learning
- creating responsibility for one's own learning.

Student-centered learning is different from teacher-centered instruction. Students are encouraged to think logically, independently and critically. Teachers want students to be able to ask questions and express opinions about what they learn. Student-centered learning helps students understand and appreciate the contributions of others.

Combined Grades

Many schools combine students from different grades into one classroom. Combined classes are more common in

smaller schools and allow more effective management of student enrolment.

In combined classes, the teacher presents learning activities for the whole class as well as for students in each grade. The teacher ensures that your child follows the curriculum for his or her grade.

Text Books and Learning Materials

In Nova Scotia schools, teachers create their own lessons and learning activities for their classes. They use a large variety of resource materials to develop lessons, such as: text books, library and story books, the Internet, magazines, newspapers, videos and many other sources of information. This is a different approach than school systems where students may have textbooks and workbooks for each subject to go through page by page each day.

Ongoing Assessment

Assessment and evaluation are important parts of teaching and learning. Students are assessed formally and informally throughout the year. Tests are not the only tool that teachers use to assess student learning.

Teachers also assess day to day class work including student participation and interaction.



Group Work: Teachers often organize students' desks in different ways for different activities. Sometimes students are seated so that they can work together with their classmates. Working as a group helps your child learn many important skills, such as: co-operation with others, sharing work and responsibility, listening to others and respecting differences of opinion.

Group work provides EAL students a great opportunity to practice English and interact with other students.



Roles and Responsibilities

School Administration:

Principals and Vice Principals

Principals and Vice principals are the leaders in the school. They also:

- direct and monitor the curriculum
- supervise all school staff and students
- plan and implement the daily routine
- provide a link between the school and the community
- schedule students' classes

- order supplies and textbooks
- deal with student behaviour and attendance
- are responsible for health and safety matters
- initiate social and recreational programs
- coordinate transportation.

School Secretaries

School secretaries work in the main office providing support for the school. They provide receptionist services and respond to questions from parents, students and staff.

Guidance Counsellors

Guidance counsellors provide academic, personal, social and career development needs of students. They also:

- design, implement, evaluate and enhance school counselling programs that promote student success
- promote equity and a safe learning environment for students
- work to safeguard the human rights of all members of the school community
- meet with students, parents, school administration and teachers
- make referrals to other support services or community resources.

Teachers:

Classroom Teachers

Classroom teachers plan and deliver curriculum. They teach individual grade levels in elementary (P-6) and have homerooms from grades (7-12) in which they teach specific subjects, such as math, English, science or social studies.

Classroom teachers also manage the day to day routines in their classes.

Elementary and Secondary Subject Area Teachers

Specialty area teachers may include French, Art, Physical Education, and Music. Technology Education and Family Studies teachers teach the junior high and high school levels.

School Support Teachers:

English as an Additional Language (EAL)/ English as a Second Language (ESL) Teachers

These teachers are responsible for providing specialized language instruction and support to students whose English proficiency ranges from beginner to advanced levels.

They also:

- assess newcomers' English language skills—listening and speaking, reading and writing



- recommend grade level placement
- design EAL programs to address individual language needs
- collaborate with classroom teachers to ensure student success
- provide ongoing informal and formal assessment
- work with school staff and community groups.

Resource Teachers

Resource teachers work with students who require support in addition to support provided by the classroom teacher.

They also:

- assist teachers in selecting and adapting teaching strategies to meet students needs
- work with school administrators, teachers, parents, and students in the design , implementation and review of individual program plans
- contribute to the assessment of students by using a variety of formal and informal tests.

Substitute Teachers

Substitute teachers take the place of regular teachers when they are absent. They are expected to carry out all the duties of the absent teacher.

Additional Support Staff:

Teacher Assistants

Teacher Assistants support the teaching and learning of students with special needs by providing support in the areas of personal care and behaviour management, under the supervision of teachers or resource teachers.

Library Technicians

Library Technicians work in the library maintaining the school's book collections.

They also:

- support teachers in the delivery of programs
- maintain the library's data base system
- order new books for the library
- invite visiting authors to come to the school and to do presentations for the children
- help students choose appropriate books for reports, projects, etc.

YMCA Settlement Staff

Where available, this program helps to integrate immigrants and refugees into Canadian society. Newcomer school settlement workers link newcomers with the school and the community by:

- providing settlement services and information and resources about community and schools
- assisting the school staff to identify the needs of newcomer students
- supporting cross cultural competency involving schools, families and community

- bringing newcomer families and schools together
- advocating on client's behalf
- arranging interpretation and limited translation
- help with homework.

Speech Language Pathologists/School Psychologists

Schools have access to other support staff such as speech language pathologists and school psychologists.

Student Support Workers

Some schools have student support workers who serve as cultural role models for students.



The Nova Scotia Curriculum

Outcomes

All schools in Nova Scotia follow the *Public School Programs* set by the Department of Education. These curriculum documents provide outcomes for each grade level and subject area. These outcomes describe what students are expected to know and be able to do in each subject area by the end of each grade.

Information about the Nova Scotia curriculum can be obtained from the Nova Scotia Department of Education's website at the back of the book.

Depending on your child's English language skills, the

teacher will develop activities that support your child's learning.

English Program/French Immersion

Most children in Nova Scotia enter the English program. However, starting in grade four, all children in the English program must take core French. This means that they have a class in French every day. They learn basic communication skills in French as it is one of Canada's two official languages.

Some children may enter the Early French Immersion program in primary or Late French Immersion in Grade 7 if available. Check the school board website for details. These programs teach subjects in the French language.

Program for Students with Special Needs

It may be necessary to develop programs that provide extra support to help children with exceptionalities or special needs. Some children need short term help and others have complex learning and health needs. Some children may require support for physical, intellectual, emotional, behavioural, speech, language, vision or hearing problem difficulties, or medical concerns. Special needs programming is also provided for students who are determined to be intellectually gifted.

If your child is having difficulty, it may be a sign of a more significant issue. However, a lack of English language

skills is not an indication of the need for Special Needs programming. Sometimes problems are a normal part of adjusting to a new language and school. Information about your student's academic skills in his or her first language, like a previous report card, often helps teachers identify the source of the student's difficulties. If you are concerned that your child may have a significant learning difficulty, talk to your child's teacher. The teacher has a number of informal ways to assess your child. If necessary, the teacher may request a formal assessment depending on the level of English ability. You will be required to give written permission in this case.



Meeting the Outcomes

Although all children must meet curriculum outcomes, the teaching strategies used in a classroom must be varied to suit the individual needs of all children.

Outcomes are a series of statements teachers use to describe what knowledge, skills and attitudes students are expected to show at the determined grade and subject level. Parents may refer to the Nova Scotia Department of Education's website for further information for curriculum and learning outcome documents.

Classroom Practice

In order to meet the outcomes, teachers routinely use varied strategies to accommodate some of their students' different learning styles and abilities. These strategies are used in daily practice and serve the individual needs of the student. They are not documented.

Adaptations

When a teacher recognizes that a student cannot meet certain grade or subject outcomes, the teacher must use specific instructional strategies to support the individual student to meet outcomes. These strategies are adaptations



Reporting Student Success

Report Card

Students in grades primary to nine receive at least three report cards each school year. Students in grades ten to twelve receive four report cards each school year. The report card reflects your child's achievement of expected outcomes for each reporting period. Students in grades primary to eight receive letter grades and a written comment to describe achievement. Beginning in grade nine, students receive a number grade and comments for each subject. The report card includes a learner profile. This is a report of the development of your child's learning and study habits.

For grades primary to nine, the first report card is usually for the period of September to the end of November. These reports are usually sent home in the first week of December.

The second report card reflects achievement from December to the end of March. These reports are usually sent home in early April.

The third report card reflects achievement from April to the end of the school year. These reports are sent home on the last day of school.

Except for the last report card, your signature is required to show that you have reviewed your child's report.

If you have any questions or concerns about the report card, please contact your child's teacher.

How Teachers Determine Your Child's Grades

Students do many different kinds of class work. To determine a grade for your child, the teachers review tests, individual and group projects, assigned work, and daily class work.

In each subject area, the teacher looks at descriptions of achievement levels. The teacher then determines the level that best describes your child's work. Your child is then assigned a corresponding letter grade.

that are documented in the student's cumulative record. For example, a student may need extra time in completing daily work. The teacher may adapt by providing a task checklist or offer more time to complete the work.

Individual Program Plan (IPP)

An individual program plan may be necessary if the school team consisting of administration, parents and the student's teachers determines that the student is unable to meet provincial outcomes even with adaptations. With parental permission special assessments may be given to help the school support individual learning needs and determine future program needs.

Behaviour Matrix				
	Respect for Self	Respect for Others	Respect for Learning	Respect for Environment
Cafeteria 	-Make healthy food choices -Use appropriate language and manners -Take the time to eat	-Respect personal space, food, and belongings -Be cooperative and respectful of lunch monitors -Wait your turn -Share the seating -Limit your microwave use	-Be open to new foods and experiences -Take interest in health benefits of what you are being served or bringing to eat.	-Recycle responsibly -Clean up your eating area when you are done -Be helpful and courteous to others -Share the space -Place garbage appropriately

How EAL Students are Evaluated

Many EAL students do the same work as their classmates. In some subjects, the teacher has made small changes as to how the student is expected to learn. These students are evaluated and receive letter grades or percentages in the same way as their classmates.

If your child is a recent arrival to Canada, and it is a reporting period, the teacher may choose not to assign a letter grade in some subjects or areas of the curriculum. It may be too early to properly assess the student's progress. As your child learns more English, he or she will be able to do more of the same work as the other students. The student's work can then be more completely evaluated.

EAL/ESL teachers or resource teachers consult with classroom teachers during the writing of report cards. EAL/ESL teachers or resource teachers will communicate student progress in learning English regarding oral proficiency, literacy skills and adjusting to the new school environment.

Student Behaviour

Positive Effective Behaviour Supports (PEBS)

Each school has strategies to teach students good behaviour. The focus is on positive learning and teaching acceptable behaviours. This approach is called PEBS. PEBS is a school wide approach which supports positive student behaviour.

The school discourages abuse, bullying, discrimination, intimidation, hateful words or any form of physical violence. Schools make many efforts to communicate and ensure that students understand expectations. Expectations are explained to students, displayed on posters throughout the school and in classrooms.

Anyone taking part in a school activity (students, parents, volunteers and school staff) is expected to follow the school's code of conduct. This explains the schools expectations for appropriate behaviour.



Inappropriate Behaviour and Consequences

Depending on the behaviour, discipline may be required. This may be in the form of spoken or written warnings, detentions, in-school suspension, or out-of-school suspension (1-5 days).

For minor issues, the teacher will speak with the student. If there is no change in the behaviour, the school will request a conference with the student and parent.

Disruptive behaviour includes disrespect to staff and students, failure to obey instructions or not attending classes which may result in a meeting with school administration.

See the Provincial Code of Conduct for a list of inappropriate behaviours.

The Role of Parents in Dealing with Inappropriate Student Behaviour

Some behaviour may be a result of adjusting to a new school, language and expectations. The teacher will explain the issue to the student. The teacher may have to contact the parent. Working together, parents and teachers can help the student understand what behaviour is expected at school.

Parents can:

- talk to the teacher
- meet with the guidance counsellor or administration
- attend parent/teacher interviews.



Parent Involvement in School

Volunteering

Schools depend on volunteers to help with their many programs. Talk with the teacher, guidance counsellor, or leave your name and number with the office if you wish to volunteer.

Volunteers may be required for: translating, reading to students, helping teachers, helping with the lunch program, and fundraising.

School Meetings and Special Events

Special school events give you an opportunity to meet other parents and families from the community, learn about your child's school and to meet the school staff.

What can you do?

- attend parent/teacher interviews
- support school socials such as spring fair
- attend special school functions
- join your School Advisory Council (SAC) and Parent/Teacher Association (PTA)/Home and School Association.

School Based Community Groups

PTA/Home and School Association and SAC are school based community groups that provide an opportunity for parents to work collaboratively with school administration and staff to promote a positive learning community for all. These groups ensure everyone has a voice.



Additional Information for High School (Grades 10-12)

School Year

The high school year is made up of two semesters.

Semester 1: Begins early September to late January.

Semester 2: Begins early February to end of the school year in June.

Schools are closed in July and August. Registration dates will be announced the last week of August for new students. Check school board websites.

School Information

Parents can find information about courses and school expectations by consulting:

- the school handbook (agenda)
- the school website
- the class teacher
- the EAL/ESL teacher
- the guidance counsellor.

Meeting the Guidance Counsellor

When you and your child meet with the school's guidance counsellor you will talk about:

- the student's skills, interests and social development
- results of English language assessment
- student's age
- the number of years the student has been in school
- previous report cards
- your child's plans after graduation.

A plan is developed for the student's education.

The teachers and guidance counsellor can help you.

Course Selection

High schools publish a booklet that describes all the courses offered at each high school. It is available free at the school or may be posted on the school website. Some schools now provide on-line course registration. Midway through the school year students and parents with the help of guidance counsellors choose courses for the next school year. The course selection form should be signed by the student and parent. When planning your child's course selection, it is important to know the requirements for the college or university program your student may be considering. Check your school website for further information.

In grade 9, the school guidance counsellor will meet with the students to provide information on grade 10 course selection. The grade 9 students must choose four courses in each semester for a total of eight courses from September to June.

In grade 10, the student will select their grade 11 courses. At this time the student should begin to have an idea of what program they will study after completing high school.

Newcomer students may take more than three years to complete all requirements for a high school diploma.

To ensure student's choice of courses it is always a good idea to register early.



Please note: because of the length of time it takes to learn a new language; older students may not always be eligible to graduate by the age of twenty-one. Much depends on each student's level of English competency at the time of arrival in Canada. Older students can still complete high school and even go on to university. This is common in Canada.

Timetables/Schedule

Each student will get a timetable or schedule. Students move to a new classroom for each class. The school day may be divided into blocks A, B, C, and D. For example, Math may be in block A. Each day's blocks may be at a different time.

Lockers, Identification Cards and Agendas

Each student may be assigned a locker for storing their books and personal belongings. In addition, a photograph will be taken of the student for their student identification (**student ID**) card. This ID allows the student to attend school socials and sporting events.

The student may be given an agenda. The agenda includes school expectations and policies. It is also a planner for the student to write down each day's homework.

For a fee, each student may receive a locker, student ID and/or an agenda.

School Supplies

Students purchase their own school supplies. This may include lined paper, binders, pencils and pens. They may be asked to purchase a calculator and dictionary.

Homework

You should expect your child to have homework almost every night. In high school, studying means many things. Your child may have reading to do or they may have written work. Students may need to look over their notes and review what was done during class. You should talk to the teacher or check the teacher's website, if there is repeatedly no homework.

How Students Should Study

Each school website has a link to the guidance office. Check your school website under the Guidance Department to get some new ideas on how to study.

Nova Scotia Graduation Requirements

The high school system is based on credits. The student will earn a credit for each course they successfully complete.

Each semester the student takes **4 credits (courses)** for a total of **8 credits (courses)** a school year.

Students require a minimum of 18 credits to graduate, however students may take up to a total of 24 credits over their high school years.

There are 13 core subjects each student must take. They are called **compulsory credits**. Students also take other courses that interest them. They are called **electives**.

Previous **school records (transcripts)** will be considered.

Provincial Testing

In order to graduate with a Nova Scotia high school diploma, all eligible students must write the grade 12 Provincial English Exam.

How Parents Can Help

- talk to your son or daughter about the kinds of careers that he or she finds interesting
- review the courses needed for their career plans
- plan activities that can help your son or daughter discover their interests
- participate in opportunities to develop interests, friends, and language
- discuss report cards and teacher's comments during parent/teacher interviews
- talk to other parents about career opportunities after graduation.

Return of School Books and Materials

All students are expected to care for text books and other materials and to return them in good condition at the end of the semester.

After High School

The guidance office or school's website has information on colleges and universities. It is important to check the entry requirements for each career program as they vary for each institution.



References

The Newcomer's Guide to Elementary School in Ontario
retrieved from www.swisontario.ca or www.settlement.org

The Newcomer's Guide to Secondary School in Ontario
retrieved from www.swisontario.ca or www.settlement.org

A Newcomer's Guide to Prince Edward Island's School System
retrieved from www.peianc.com

Nova Scotia Department of Education
retrieved from www.ednet.ns.ca

Nova Scotia Department of Community Services
retrieved from www.gov.ns.ca/coms/index.html

Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness
retrieved from www.gov.ns.ca/health

Halifax Regional School Board
retrieved from www.hrsb.ns.ca

Contacts

Nova Scotia Department of Education

Phone 902-424-5168
Website: www.ednet.ns.ca

Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness
Phone 902-424-5818. Toll-free in Nova Scotia 1-800-387-6665
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/health/about

Nova Scotia Office of Immigration

Phone 902-424-5230. Toll-free in Nova Scotia 1-877-292-9597
Website: www.novascotiainmigration.com

Nova Scotia Department of Community Services

Phone 1-877-424-1177
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/coms

Greater Halifax/Dartmouth YMCA Immigrant Programs

Phone 902-457-9622
Website: www.ymcahrm.ns.ca/dartmouth_family_ymca

Other organizations that provide settlement services to immigrants are listed here:
www.novascotiainmigration.ca/immigrants/living-here/settlement-services

School Board Offices

Annapolis Valley Regional School Board

121 Orchard Street, PO Box 340
Berwick NS B0P 1E0
1-800-850-3887 902-538-4600 Fax: 902-538-4630
Website: www.avrsb.ednet.ns.ca

Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board

275 George Street, Sydney, NS B1P 1J7
902-564-8293 Fax: 902-564-0123
Website: www.cbv.ns.ca

Chignecto-Central Regional School Board

60 Lorne Street, Truro, NS B2N 3K3
1-800-770-0008 902-897-8900 Fax: 902-897-8989
Website: www.ccrsb.ednet.ns.ca

Conseil scolaire acadien provincial

C.P. 88, Saulnierville N.-É. B0W 2Z0
Civic Address: 9248 route 1, La Butte,
Meteghan River N.-É. B0W 2L0
1-888-533-2727 902-769-5460 Fax: 902-769-5461
Website: <http://csap.ednet.ns.ca>

Halifax Regional School Board

33 Spectacle Lake Drive, Dartmouth, NS B3B 1X7
902-464-2000 Fax: 902-464-2420
Website: www.hrsb.ns.ca

South Shore Regional School Board

130 North Park Street, Bridgewater, NS B4V 4G9
1-888-252-2217 902-543-2468
Fax: 902-541-3051
Website: www.srsb.ca

Strait Regional School Board

16 Cemetery Road, Port Hastings, NS B9A 1K6
1-800-650-4448 902-625-2191
Fax: 902-625-2281
Website: www.strait.ednet.ns.ca

Tri-County Regional School Board

79 Water Street, Yarmouth, NS B5A 1L4
1-800-915-0113 902-749-5696
Fax: 902-749-5697
Website: <http://tcrsb.ednet.ns.ca>

Your Child's School Information

The following page is supplied for you to gather important information about your child and their school. School staff can help you if you have any questions.

Child Name _____

Grade _____

School Name _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____

Website _____

Homeroom Teacher _____

Principal _____

Vice Principal _____

Guidance Counsellor _____

School Bus Number _____

Morning _____

Afternoon _____

School Arrival Time _____

Daily Schedule

Lunch _____

Dismissal _____

Emergency Contact _____

Telephone _____

Child Name _____

Grade _____

School Name _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____

Website _____

Homeroom Teacher _____

Principal _____

Vice Principal _____

Guidance Counsellor _____

School Bus Number _____

Morning _____

Afternoon _____

School Arrival Time _____

Daily Schedule

Lunch _____

Dismissal _____

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School Bus Number _____

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Afternoon _____

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Daily Schedule

Lunch _____

Dismissal _____

Emergency Contact _____

Telephone _____

Child Name _____

Grade _____

School Name _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____

Website _____

Homeroom Teacher _____

Principal _____

Vice Principal _____

Guidance Counsellor _____

School Bus Number _____

Morning _____

Afternoon _____

School Arrival Time _____

Daily Schedule

Lunch _____

Dismissal _____

Emergency Contact _____

Telephone _____

Some Commonly Used Terms and Acronyms

Adaptations: Strategies and/or resources to accommodate the learning needs of an individual student. They are planned, implemented and evaluated to enable the student to achieve Nova Scotia's public school program.

Cumulative Record: A cumulative record is a record of past report cards, assessment reports and other information from a student's educational program maintained by the school.

Curriculum: The subjects taught at school set by the Department of Education, or the topics taught within a subject.

English as an Additional Language (EAL)/English as a Second Language (ESL): Developmentally appropriate English language instruction tailored for English language learners' level of English proficiency.

Home Language: First language or language spoken at home (also called mother tongue).

Individual Program Plan (IPP): Written documentation of annual and specific individualized outcomes developed to meet a student's strengths and needs and implemented for every student for whom provincial curriculum outcomes are not applicable or attainable.

Outcomes: Statements identifying what students are expected to know and be able to do at the end of a particular grade-level or a particular course.

Positive and Effective Behaviour Support (PEBS): School wide approach of using strategies that focus on positive learning and teaching acceptable behaviours.



Newcomers' Guide to Nova Scotia Schools

This guide was made possible through the support and collaboration of the following partners: The Halifax Regional School Board, The Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, and The Nova Scotia Department of Education.