



EDUCATION SUPPORT GUIDE

Supporting newcomer children and youth with schooling is one of the most common activities for Welcome Groups.

We made this guide to provide Welcome Group volunteers with basic information about the school system, helpful supports, and ideas for volunteers to further assist students and their parents/guardians.

While parents/guardians should always be in control of the decision-making process, Welcome Group volunteers can show them useful resources, help parents connect with school staff, and assist students as they adjust to a new school system.

CHOOSING A SCHOOL

In Canada, the Education Act states that all children aged 6-18 can and must attend school, regardless of their immigration status or their parents' immigration status.

Registration is often organized by the family's caseworker or settlement staff, but if the family still needs to choose a school, ask them which kind of school would fit their needs: English or French, public or private, religious or non-denominational, etc. This [school systems infographic](#) by Settlement.Org may help them decide.

Note that students do not have to be baptized Catholic to attend publicly-funded Catholic schools, and Catholic students are allowed to attend public schools.

In addition, note that while there may be a local school with many students who share the same cultural background as the newcomer family, they may prefer to enroll their student in a school with different demographics.

Welcome Group volunteers can play an important role in helping newcomer parents choose the right school, but volunteers should always let parents decide what is best for their children.

To help search for the right school, [SchoolQ](#) could be a great place to start!





REGISTERING FOR SCHOOL

If a child is under 14, registration is completed at an elementary or middle school. If the child is 14-20 years old, they must make an appointment for a secondary school English and math assessment before being assigned a school and grade.

Assessments are held year-round and are often held in central locations. To book an assessment, contact the school board. Make sure the child is well-rested before their big assessment day!

SETTLEMENT WORKERS IN SCHOOLS (SWIS / MLO)

Across Canada, thousands of schools have settlement workers to help newcomer children and their parents. They often speak the languages of the school's newcomer communities or are closely connected to colleagues who do.

School Settlement Workers provide orientation regarding the school system and connect newcomers to local resources in health care, employment, housing, leadership, life skills, and more.

In Ottawa, these are called Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs). In schools without MLOs, volunteers can help newcomers complete an [MLO form](#) to request assistance.

Their services are free and confidential, and they are an important bridge between newcomers and school staff. When registering a student, always ask the school if they have the contact information for a school settlement worker!

ENGLISH CLASSES

If a student received regular schooling before arriving in Canada, they might be placed in English as a Second Language (ESL). If their schooling was interrupted, they may be placed in English Literacy Development (ELD).

If a child needs support like special education, they may be evaluated for an [Individual Education Plan](#) (IEP) or an Intensive Support Program (ISP).





In elementary schools, ESL/ELD teachers develop programs based on students' needs. At the secondary level, some schools will have 4-5 levels of ESL courses, and may offer ESL-specific courses in subjects like ESL Drama, ESL Science, and more.

When teachers determine that a student is ready, they will be moved out of ESL and into a “mainstream” classroom.

If a parent sees that a child finds the material either too easy or too difficult, they may advocate for the child to be reassessed in order to study at another level.

ADULT LEARNING

Newcomers aged 21 and up can register at an adult learning centre for free secondary school classes. If they have already completed high school classes, they can apply to have these credited to their diploma. Credits can also be earned for life skills such as leadership and parenting.

Students can attend on a full-time or part-time basis. Adult Learning Centres have support staff like settlement workers, social workers, tutors, and academic counsellors to guide them.

Some adult learning centres may also have specific certificate programs, or special programs for students aged 18-21.

CHILDCARE

Newcomer children aged 0-4 may be able to access childcare programs and could be eligible for subsidies.

Many provinces will have a [childcare locator](#) available online.

For parents interested in before and after-school programs, in Toronto, there is a child care and before/after school [program locator](#). Check your city for the one that fits the newcomer refugees' needs.





LANGUAGE RETENTION

While learning English is important, newcomer children should be encouraged to continue mastering their first language. Classes in other languages might be provided at the local religious institution, community centre, or even after-hours at their school as International Language Classes.

Encourage multilingual materials by showing them how to access free books, videos, movies, and music in their language at the public library. Connect with the teacher, librarian, or settlement worker for additional ideas.

INTERPRETATION

Welcome Group volunteers can support newcomer parent engagement in education by helping with interpretation or translation. They can help parents understand school documents, assist them in appointments and phone calls, and interpret in Parent-Teacher Interviews if the school does not already provide linguistic assistance.

Unless the parent has given them informed consent, volunteers should not communicate with the school without the parent present. Even with a language barrier, parents should remain in control of their child's education.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Newcomer parents may discover some cultural differences regarding their role in their children's schooling in Canada. For some parents, this may be the first time they are getting involved at their child's school.

Let them know that Canadian educators encourage parent engagement, and that this is a way for them to network and meet new friends. Parents can volunteer on Parent Council, supervise field trips, help organize special programs, and join the school board Parent Involvement Committee, and more. If they struggle to communicate, many schools will arrange for an interpreter to assist them.





TUTORING

If newcomer parents want to hire a tutor for their child, find out if there is an existing free homework club at the school, library, community centre, or settlement office.

Some Welcome Groups provide tutoring support. When starting out, asking the child “Is there something you’d like to learn more about?” is a good way to find out about their goals. If the child is interested, volunteers could schedule regular tutoring sessions by saying something like “Let’s review your English homework for half an hour every Sunday afternoon” which would create a routine.

Tutoring sessions can be made fun with games, learning apps, and engaging activities —see links on our Resources page under Child and Youth Resources for inspiration!

For safety reasons, whether in-person or online, volunteers should tutor youth in pairs when possible, and ensure that a parent is present at home as well. It's important to remember that when a child is struggling with studies, sometimes the root cause might not be the difficulty of the material.

If they are having trouble paying attention in class, handing homework in on time, or attending school, the problem could be stress, distraction, trauma, insufficient rest, or a need to access the school’s Student Nutrition Program.

It's important to have parents meet their child’s teachers and school support staff like the School Settlement Worker, guidance counsellor, social worker, and child and youth worker, so that many people will be attuned to the student’s needs.

ADJUSTING TO THE CANADIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

In Canada, students are encouraged to think critically, ask questions, and share opinions aloud. Newcomer students who are accustomed to silently learning by rote may struggle with this teaching style, and often have a hard time speaking in class.

Students who are used to teachers regularly asking to see their work may find it strange that Canadian teachers do not always check homework. Some youth misinterpret this and think that in Canada, homework is not important and teachers are uninterested in their progress. If a student is struggling, talk to them about the different teaching styles and encourage them to ask their teacher for clarification.





ONLINE RESOURCES

Sharing resources can be helpful, but asking parents to review too many materials in English can be overwhelming. Luckily, there are many resources which are available in multiple languages.

We have a full list of relevant links for volunteers on our Resources website under Child and Youth Resources, English and French Language Support, New Parent Support and more.

Here are some links to get you started:

- [City of Toronto – Child Care & Before-After School Program Locator](#) – Portal for Toronto’s licensed child care and before-after school programs
- [Kids Up Front - Free "Kids At Home" Virtual Resources](#) – Virtual resources about arts and crafts, literacy activities, writing prompts and more
- [Ministry of Education – Learn at Home Portal](#) - Free online educational activities for students from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12
- [Ministry of Education - Adult Learning Centres](#) - For individuals aged 21 and up, adult learning centres provide free courses both in-class and online, and on a full-time or part-time basis
- [Ministry of Education – Childcare Locator](#) - Free programs for children aged 0-6 by Ontario’s EarlyON Child and Family Centres
- [SchoolQ – School Finder Portal](#) - Useful data on schools & neighbourhoods
- [Ottawa Multicultural Liaison Officer Request Form](#) – To request free school settlement help in the Ottawa region
- [Settlement.Org – The Newcomer’s Guide to Elementary School in Ontario](#) - Essential resource for newcomer parents with students entering elementary school. Available in many languages





- [Settlement.Org - The Newcomer's Guide to Secondary School in Ontario](#) - For newcomer parents and guardians with students entering secondary school, this essential guide has a wealth of information available in many languages
- [Settlement.Org - Special Education Guide](#) - Guide for parents to understand Individualized Education Plans, special education assessments, and more. Available in many languages
- [Surrey Welcome Centre](#) - School assessment and registration centre in Surrey
- [Welcome to School - Free After School Programs and Tutoring](#) - Comprehensive lists of Toronto's free [after-school](#) and [tutoring](#) programs
- [Welcome to School - Resources for Newcomer Student Success](#) - Resources and programs for Toronto's newcomer parents, children and youth

We hope these tips help your education support for newcomers! Please let us know if you have other tips we can include or if you need more support in your match.

