



Life at School

Newcomer Family Guide

This guide provides general information about Nova Scotia public schools.

If you have any questions and do not find the answer here, please contact your local school, your Regional Centre for Education (RCE) or Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP).

School year (calendar)

Generally, public school classes in Nova Scotia begin in early September and end in late June. SchoolsPlus continues during the summer.

- The school year for grades primary to 9 is divided into three terms.
- The school year for grades 10 to 12 is divided into two semesters.
- The pre-primary program operates following the school calendar.
- Schools take breaks in December and March.

You will find a calendar for your child's school on your local RCE or CSAP website. The calendar will give you the exact dates when your child's school year starts and ends as well as all school holidays. It will also include other times when the school is closed for students.

For example, schools are closed for "Professional Development" and "Assessment" days, when the school's teachers are engaged in professional learning or are preparing report cards.

School Safety

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development works with RCEs, the CSAP, school staff, and many other partners to make sure Nova Scotia schools are places where students can focus on learning and staff can safely do their jobs.

To learn more about school safety, visit: <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/school-safety>.

Bad weather days

If the weather is bad, your child's school may open late, close early, or remain closed altogether.

You can find out about school closures on bad weather days by

- listening to your local news on the radio or television
- checking the RCE/CSAP website
- checking your school's social media
- checking your email or text messages for notifications from the school

Ask the school early in the year how you can receive automatic notices, such as texts, about school closures.

See “**The school bus**” section below for information about school bus availability in bad weather.

Before and after school

Check your school's website to find out the start and end times of each school day.

Students are supervised in the schoolyard for 20 minutes before school starts in the morning, before the bell, and 20 minutes at the end of the day, after the bell. Make sure your child is not left alone in the schoolyard.

It is your responsibility to make sure your child is cared for before and after school. If you need help finding care for your child, ask your school.

A before- and after-school program may be available in your area. For more information, including a list of program locations by region, see [Before and After Program](#) on our website.

Breaks during the day

- **Recess:** Students in primary to grade 6 have a break in the mid-morning called recess.
- **Lunch:** All schools have a lunch break in the middle of the day.
- **Supervision:** Throughout the school day students are supervised by school personnel during class and breaks (e.g., recess, lunch) and when moving about the school building (e.g., moving between classes).

The school bus

Your child may qualify for free school bus transportation. Eligibility depends on distance from the school and grade level. Contact your local school for additional information about eligibility and registering your child for the school bus.

Find out where your child will catch the bus and ensure they arrive at the stop on time in the morning.

Safety on a school bus is essential, and everyone, including drivers, students, and families, has a role in ensuring school bus safety.

The bus may not be able to pick up your child in bad weather. You may need to be prepared to either drop your child off later, pick them up earlier, or have them home all day on these days. Check with the school to determine the appropriate course of action.

School attendance and lateness

Pre-primary

The pre-primary program is optional, but we encourage children to attend every day. Regular participation helps your child feel comfortable with routines, build friendships, and develop the skills they need for a smooth transition to school.

All other grades

- Students in grades primary to 12 should attend school every day unless they are sick, have a medical appointment, or have your permission. Students need to arrive on time every day.
- Check with your school to confirm the process for reporting absences and late arrivals.
- If your child is going to be out of school for a long time, tell the teacher as soon as possible.
- To earn a course credit in high school, students are expected to be present for at least 80% of class time. See the [Student Attendance and Engagement Policy](#) for more information.

Food at school

Breakfast program

Children who start their day with breakfast are better prepared to engage and learn in school. The breakfast program is available to all children free of charge, and registration is not required. Please check with your school to learn more about what it offers.

Snacks

Pre-primary: Children in pre-primary are provided with two nutritious snacks daily.

Grades primary to 12: All students may bring snacks, in addition to their lunch items, to consume when appropriate.

Lunch

Nutritious lunch is provided to students attending public schools across the province of Nova Scotia. This program is offered to students in elementary, middle, and junior high school.

For more information: Visit the [Nova Scotia School Lunch Program website](#).

Bringing food from home

- If your child is bringing food from home, ensure that it is safe to eat at room temperature or use ice packs to keep food chilled.
- Lunch bags should be labelled with your child's name.

Note: Students in grades primary to 12 are encouraged to bring a water bottle to refill with drinking water throughout the day.

Food and other allergies

- If your child has an allergy, tell the school when you register.

Scent-aware schools

Some people are allergic to smells from ingredients and chemicals in cosmetics (perfume, makeup, shampoo, deodorants, etc.). Most schools are scent-free. That means schools ask students and staff not to use scented products before coming to school. Look for scent-free products for your family and encourage your child not to use scented products before going to school.

Dressing for school and the weather

All students will spend some time outdoors during the school day. This could be before school starts, when school ends, or during recess, lunch, and play times. If the weather is bad, the school may decide to keep students indoors all day.

Ensure your child is dressed appropriately for the weather:

- In summer, your child may need a sun hat and sunscreen.
- On rainy days, your child may need rain boots and a waterproof coat.
- In the winter, your child will need a warm coat, boots, mittens, and a hat.
- Your child's school may also ask that your child have a pair of "indoor" shoes to change into.

Pre-primary: Children in pre-primary spend a minimum of 40% of the day outdoors. They will be out in different weather conditions and will also get wet and messy as they play in the water, mud, sand, leaves, and snow. Please send extra clothes with your child each day so they can change, if needed. The early childhood educator (ECE) at your child's pre-primary will tell you what clothing your child will need.

- "Muddy Buddies" may be available at your child's school. These are one-piece suits that protect children and their clothes. Your ECE will tell you if Muddy Buddies are available for your child.

Health and safety

If your child becomes sick or injured while at school, school staff will call you at the telephone number you provided for emergencies. If the school is unable to reach you, they will contact the emergency contact person you listed on the registration form. If the illness or injury is serious, the school will call 911, and a staff member will accompany your child to the hospital.

Pre-existing medical conditions: When you register your child, please let the school know about any medical conditions. This helps the school connect with the School Health Partnership Nurse, who can work with you, your child, and health care providers to determine the appropriate plan to care for your child at school. Language interpretation services are available if you need them.

Cell phones: The Provincial Directive on Cell Phone Use in Schools was created to support students' learning, safety, and positive interactions. For information on cell phone use during the school day, see the [Provincial Directive on Cell Phone Use in Schools](#) on our website.

School outings or field trips

School outings or field trips are an important part of the school program. Teachers may arrange for students to visit a museum, theatre, or other locations. You will need to give the school written permission to take your child on these trips. Your child will bring home a permission form for you to sign and return to the teacher before the outing or field trip.

School supplies

Pre-primary: Children who attend pre-primary are provided with all school supplies.

Grades primary to 12: Students need to bring their own supplies to school each day. These supplies include pencils, erasers, paper, etc. The school provides most other learning supplies and materials, such as books and technology.

Your child's school will post a list of the supplies you need to buy before the start of school in September.

If you need help purchasing school supplies, please let your school know or contact SchoolsPlus, YMCA School Settlement Program or YREACH, or Immigration Francophone (see last section).

Library: Most schools have a library. Your child can borrow books from the library to read for free and take them home. They have to be returned.

Personal belongings

Your child is responsible for their own personal belongings while they are at school. Some schools may have lockers where your child can keep their belongings safe. It is helpful to put your child's name on all of their belongings.

Your child should not bring large amounts of money or other expensive, valuable items to school. The school is not responsible for items that are lost, damaged, or stolen.

Most schools have a Lost and Found area. If your child loses a personal item, they may find it in the Lost and Found area.

Student-Parent Portal

Student information is managed in an electronic system called PowerSchool, where students and parents/guardians can see real-time information, such as class schedule, assignments, grades, attendance, teacher comments, and various school notices. To access the portal, ask school office staff for a username and password and visit: www.ednet.ns.ca/inschool/students_parents.

GNSPES and Google Workspace for Education

Students will be given a [GNSPES](#) or [SEPNE](#) (in CSAP schools) account with a username and password. The account provides access to a variety of digital learning tools and resources approved for the Nova Scotia public education system.

Students and teachers may also use Google Workspace for Education to create, store, and share documents, and to communicate with each other.

For support with their GNSPES account or in using any of the digital resources, students can ask their classroom teacher or English as an Additional Language (EAL) or French as an Additional Language (FAL) teacher for help.

Homework Hub



The [Nova Scotia Homework Hub](#) is a bilingual (English and French) online platform for students in grades 4 to 12 that offers resources to help improve mathematical understanding including:

- video lessons
- practice questions with instant feedback
- digital versions of mathematics textbooks
- basic, scientific, and graphing calculators
- mathematical vocabulary digital flashcards
- free, anonymous mathematics tutoring with a certified Nova Scotia teacher:
 - For **online tutoring**, students can click on the Tutor icon in the Homework Hub. Online tutoring does not involve cameras; students and tutors share information using a digital whiteboard.
 - For **phone tutoring**, students can call 1-888-444-6607. Students must provide their student ID number when they call.

Students can access the Homework Hub by logging into their [GNSPES](#) account and selecting the Homework Hub icon.

Extracurricular activities

These are activities, such as sports and the school band, that are conducted at the school but outside of regular classroom hours. You may want to consider encouraging your child to join extracurricular activities, which can help your child improve their English/French skills, make friends, and adjust to their new home province.

SchoolsPlus



SchoolsPlus provides a broad range of programs and supports for students, families, and schools. These programs are offered through a wide range of partnerships, bringing services to one location and making school a hub of community supports. The services provided at each school respect and address the unique needs of that particular community.

Programs may include:

- parenting programs and supports
- recreational, social, and arts activities
- skills sharing
- cultural activities
- group programs designed for support (e.g., teen girls and teen boys programs, anxiety and anti-bullying programs)

YMCA

To support your family's transition to a new school community, you and your child may wish to participate in community programs, such as the YMCA.

The [YMCA School Settlement Program](#) is available in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and in communities outside of HRM that have the [YREACH Program](#).

For more information, see Newcomer Programs on the [YMCA website](#).

Immigration Francophone

[Immigration Francophone de la Nouvelle-Écosse](#) (IFNÉ) is a non-profit organization in Halifax that offers free settlement services to Francophone newcomers. The services are available before and after your arrival. IFNÉ's School Settlement Worker assists families **across the province** who are permanent residents and whose children attend CSAP schools. Services are provided in the school.

Contact information

For more information, contact your Regional Centre for Education (RCE) or Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP).

- **Annapolis Valley Regional Centre for Education** (AVRCE)
- **Cape Breton-Victoria Regional Centre for Education** (CBVRCE)
- **Chignecto-Central Regional Centre for Education** (CCRCE)
- **Conseil scolaire acadien provincial** (CSAP)
- **Halifax Regional Centre for Education** (HRCE)
- **South Shore Regional Centre for Education** (SSRCE)
- **Strait Regional Centre for Education** (SRCE)
- **Tri-County Regional Centre for Education** (TCRCE)
- **SchoolsPlus** brings a range of services and supports, and is available in every school in Nova Scotia

For support in your community, contact:

- **YMCA School Settlement** – available province-wide
- **YREACH** – available outside of Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM)
- **Immigration Francophone** – available through your School Settlement Worker