

# Education

## Pathways to long-term success



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Ah, high school. It begins in grade nine and ends in grade twelve. It's four years of progressive learning, a bit like steps, culminating in entrance into a post-secondary education or the workforce, Sounds simple enough. In reality, leaving grade eight for the excitement of secondary school is not as simple as choosing grade nine courses a few weeks before the deadline. In fact, there are vital periods of transition, between grades six and ten, that may just determine your child's long-term success at the secondary level and beyond. These are known as the "Transition Years".

But, you gasp, I've never heard of this planning stage in my child's education. Why is it so important?

In Ontario all secondary schools deliver identical curriculum according to the programs prepared by the Ministry of Education for the province. The expectations, the course curricula and the evaluation systems are the same, and all subjects have common course codes.

That said, the variety of courses and different streams offered are enough to overwhelm most parents--nevermind students. Starting in grade six, parents and children need to start looking at secondary school programs and learn the difference in course levels offered in grade nine. You'll be bombarded with terms you've never heard of: academic, applied, locally developed course credits, university, college, college/university, workplace, open, special education support, alternative education, advanced placement, international baccalaureate, English Language Learners programs, community service, EQAO test and more. Parents and students must understand all of the above in order to make the correct choices.

For example, an applied-level course sets up a pathway that is not going to be appropriate for attending university, while in an academic-level course prepares the student for the university pathway in grades eleven and twelve. That said, if your grade-six child is operating at 65%, she is not going to be prepared for a grade nine academic course. By identifying this challenge as early as sixth grade, teachers, parents and students have two years to improve grades and study habits. Then in eighth grade the student can make a better decision as to the appropriate level. Those two years also give you, the parent, lots of time to understand the system your child is about to enter.

And choice extends beyond grade nine courses. At the end of grade ten, the academic and applied courses change to university, college, university/college combo, workplace and open courses. Parents and students should be familiar with the entire secondary school curriculum, with the end goal in mind. If your child plans to go to university, check prerequisites. Be realistic. Most kids and parents automatically think university is the best choice when often college or the workplace may be more suitable, based on the student's past performance. The high school course load can be tough and impractical goals may be setting your child up

for failure if you don't fully understand the system and the options.

In addition, high school moves fast. Most schools are semestered with four subjects taken every five months. The frame of learning accelerates exponentially from middle school to high school, with the intensity of four subjects every day for 100 days. By the fifth week of school, students are 25% of the way through a course. Kids can flounder quickly. In grade nine, it's especially important to keep on top of your child and know where they are at in their courses. And be prepared for another transition in grade eleven when the stream changes yet again to pre-university/ pre-college courses, preparing your child for post-secondary education.

### Some pathway tips

Every student will follow a different pathway but all can take you to your post secondary destination, as long as the route is carefully planned. Here are some tips:

- Understand subjects, course curricula and the evaluation systems .
- Talk to your children's teachers, they are experts.
- Visit the Ministry of Education website.
- Use the Internet: research universities, colleges, apprenticeship programs etc.
- Discuss choices with experts: teachers, guidance counselors, professionals.
- Visit [www.myblueprint.ca](http://www.myblueprint.ca) education planner.
- Do not use guess work—gather the correct data.
- Ignore rumours and gossip.
- Never choose because that is what your friends are doing. Course selection is a personal decision.
- In Grade 11 try a cooperative education program for first-hand workplace experience.

Information is the key to success....  
Make a choice that is right for you!

Tony works with *Qualified Tutors* interviewing tutors and consulting. Sharyn Lewis is the owner/general manager ([www.qualifiedtutors.com](http://www.qualifiedtutors.com)). A "hand-selected" team of tutors has helped over 5,000 students.

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