



Modern learners,  
modern learning

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**A guide for parents**

Today's students will need to solve complex problems that may not exist yet. Many of our students will have careers that don't exist today either.

We need to prepare students for this reality. Families and schools can work together to help our students succeed now and in the future.

## **A shift from knowledge to skills and competencies**

Education is changing. Our focus is on developing the skills and competencies students need to thrive in our changing society.

### **The lines between subjects are blurred**

Students have more projects that blend subject areas. You may hear the term STEAM from your child or school. It stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math. Through STEAM, students take on problems that need skills from various subject areas.

### **Students have more choice**

When students have a say in what and how they're learning, they're more interested and more likely to remember information. Choice starts in kindergarten.

### **We focus on thinking rather than memorizing**

Students need to know how to find and use information. We want them to ask questions and make connections between topics. We still teach the building blocks of knowledge—like math formulas, spelling and grammar. But the 21st Century Competencies are the focus of our learning and teaching.

### **Assistive Technology (AT) is mainstream technology**

All students have access to technology that supports reading, organization, written expression, communication and collaboration. Students use speech recognition software, text-to-speech software, concept map creating tools, and much more.

### **Teachers and other staff are learners too**

Learning doesn't stop when we graduate school. We're all learners and we want our students to know that. We need to continue to learn so we can adapt to our world. Teachers learn alongside their classes as they guide them through projects and lessons.

## **21st Century Competencies**

Education researchers around the world have identified key competencies for today's learners.

### **Citizenship**

- getting involved in local and global initiatives to make a difference
- contributing to society in a positive way
- interacting safely and responsibly in the community, including online

### **Collaboration**

- the ability to work with others and contribute to a shared knowledge base
- collaboration happens in person and online

### **Communication**

- the ability to speak, read, write and listen well
- understanding of digital tools and how they're used for communication

### **Creativity and Innovation**

- exploring new ideas and developing unique solutions for complex challenges

### **Critical Thinking and Problem Solving**

- the ability to find, question and analyze large amounts of information

### **Learning to Learn**

- knowing and believing we can learn and grow (growth mindset)
- understanding how to overcome challenges and adapt to change

### **We're showing students what's possible**

We have 3D printers in our secondary schools. Many elementary and secondary teachers have introduced robotics and coding. And we have one device (computer, laptop or tablet) for every three students. We're giving students access to a range of technology so they can build skills they'll need for their futures and imagine what's possible. Educators design learning spaces based on the students' interests.



# How parents can help:

## **Be a learner too**

Unleash your own curiosity and learn with your children. Here are some ideas:

- Talk about your own learning with your children. Share something new you learned at work or through research. Discuss articles you've read.
- Find topics to research as a family. Look for documentaries or other videos. Talk about the different points of view on the topic.
- Talk to your children about the technology they're using at home and school. Get them to teach you how things work. Be curious. Ask questions.
- Model the use of assistive technology and show your children. Voice commands, using reminders and calendars, grammar and spell check are all examples of assistive technology.

## **Reinforce school projects at home**

Find out what your children are learning at school and try to make connections at home too. Here are some ideas:

- Ask your children what they are passionate about at school. What are they working on that interests them?
- Ask the teacher for suggestions on how you can reinforce learning at home.
- Follow the school or class Twitter account or blog to stay current on what is happening at school. This information can help you start conversations with your children.



## Helping students become positive, global citizens

We make a deliberate effort to help students become kind and engaged global citizens—online and offline. Here's what's happening in schools:

### Character education

We have 10 character attributes we focus on and teach in our schools: integrity, cooperation, optimism, honesty, inclusiveness, responsibility, empathy, respect, caring and courage. These values are integrated in our lessons and throughout our days. The focus on these values is the same whether we're interacting offline or online.

### Digital leadership lessons

We teach students how to use the online tools available to them for good. For example, we may ask students to blog about their learning. This authentic audience and purpose helps students build a positive online reputation—it's like a digital resume. This can serve them well in the future.

### Collaborating beyond the classroom

Social media and blogging give students access to a much broader audience. Some teachers set up projects that allow students to collaborate with their peers from other schools, including around the world. Students are also able to communicate/collaborate with experts in any field. These opportunities help to broaden our students' awareness and skills.

### Online safety

Online safety is part of the health and physical education curriculum. Students learn about:

- safe and respectful use of technology
- social, emotional and legal consequences of online behaviours
- the potential negative impact of online activity on relationships and future employment

We teach about privacy and the importance of protecting personal information online (photos, names and other items that can be used to identify someone). Parents must provide consent before student information is shared online (including photos shared on social media).

You'll receive a request from the school if your child's teacher plans to have students share information publicly. An alternate activity will be provided for your child if you don't want them to participate.

# How parents can help:

## **Learn about social media tools**

Talk to your children about the social media tools they use. Schools offer workshops for parents on social media. Attending these sessions is one way to build your own knowledge. Here are some tips to help you have conversations with your children:

- What's put online can be permanent. Many post-secondary schools and employers now look at the online presence of applicants.
- If you wouldn't say it to someone's face, don't say it online!
- Talk to your child about the possible social, academic and legal consequences of sexting. Sexting is the sharing of sexually explicit photos, images, text messages or emails using a phone or other electronic device. This includes forwarding messages received from others. They could face humiliation, lose educational opportunities and get in trouble with the law.
- Maintain open lines of communication with your children. Make sure they know they can talk to you or a trusted adult about social media.

## **Take action to prevent and stop cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying can lead to discipline at school or police involvement. It can also have lasting mental health impacts for the people involved. Parents, students and school staff need to work together to prevent and stop cyberbullying. Here are some ways you can help:

- Consider keeping the family computer in a common area at your home. Ask your children to use mobile technology (phones, tablets) out in the open too.
- Know short forms and chat lingo children and teens use to text and talk online - great resources include [transl8it.com](http://transl8it.com) and [texted.ca/app/en](http://texted.ca/app/en).
- Ask your child to tell you about inappropriate messages they receive. Tell them not to respond to or forward rude emails, messages and comments.
- Save evidence, such as email and text messages, and take screenshots of comments and images. This can be shared with the school or police if necessary.
- If harassment is through email, social networking sites, instant messaging and chat rooms, instruct your child to block the individuals involved, or delete your child's current account and open a new one.
- If harassment occurs through text and phone messages, change the phone number and instruct your child to only share the new number with trustworthy people.
- Submit a report to [www.cybertip.ca/app/en/report](http://www.cybertip.ca/app/en/report), and if you feel something illegal has occurred, inform law enforcement.
- If you're concerned about your child being involved in bullying, or being bullied, contact school staff.

## **Protect your family's equipment and personal information**

There are ways to prevent identity theft, computer viruses and online harassment. Teaching these skills to your children now will help them throughout their life. Here are some tips:

- Tell your child not to share their passwords and to change them regularly.
- Check your child's social media privacy settings. Make sure only friends can see your child's profile info.
- Tell your child that if they do not recognize the name of a sender, they shouldn't open or answer the message.

## Assistive and inclusive technology

Assistive technology is a range of specialized technology to support students in the areas of reading, writing, numeracy, organization and/or communication. Assistive technology can be low, medium or high-tech.

Do you use SIRI or speech recognition to help you create text? Do you take notes or use a highlighter for key information? These are all types of assistive technology. Technology is always evolving. Depending on the device you are using there are assistive technologies available.

The Ontario Software Acquisition Program Advisory Committee (OSAPAC) makes recommendations to the Ministry of Education on the programs to purchase for Ontario public board use. Sometimes the purchase also includes student take-home opportunities. Find out if there are assistive technologies for home use by contacting your child's school.

Examples of high-tech assistive technologies are those that provide text-to-speech, word prediction, speech-to-text, screen readers, communication software and augmentative communication devices. Concept mapping programs, and literacy and numeracy tools may also be considered assistive technologies to support concept formation, organization and understanding.

- Students may access assistive technology on their personal devices or computers.
- Assistive technology may help with reading, writing, spelling, organization, math, communication, etc.
- Students who use assistive technology may need help in one particular area.
- Assistive technologies are also available for students in college and university.

### Find out more about assistive technology or accessibility features on your own device:

#### iOS Devices (iPhones, iPads, iPods)

Go to Settings and check out the Accessibility features.

#### Google Chrome (Using Google Chrome, Google Drive, Google Docs, etc.)

Go to the Chrome Store and search accessibility, text to speech, speech recognition, etc.

#### PCs/Macs

Search Windows accessibility features (Speech Recognition, Speak in Word, etc.) Go to the settings of the Mac/Apple operating system and browse the accessibility features.

#### Android Devices

Go to Android Accessibility Help Centre and browse through the list.



## Ministry-funded equipment and technology available for students

Ministry of Education funding is available for students who need assistive technology to access the curriculum and who qualify according to Special Education Amount (SEA) Funding Guidelines. Students using SEA equipment will have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that includes how the technology will be used and what areas of learning it supports.

Parents whose children use assistive technology (as per the IEP accommodation) should consider the following:

- Teachers and other school staff have received general training on assistive technology to support academic skills like reading and writing. More individualized training is available at the school upon request. If your child has SEA equipment, the school may invite you to attend an initial training session for your child. If you don't recall the invitation, just ask for one.
- Your child may have to use the technology for a little while before it is easy to use and begins to help. Work with the school to determine your child's strengths and needs. Help your child start with one tool and work toward knowing it well.
- Not all children need the same technology. There are many different types of assistive technology to help in different areas. Talk to the school staff to see what has been recommended.

Contact your child's school to find out what resources are available. Ask teachers what technologies are being used in the classroom and how you can help support your child. Some assistive technologies are available for all students to use at home. These may have been purchased by the Ministry of Education or board for use at home.

For tutorials on assistive technology and how to use it, visit [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and search Special Education SCDSB.

## Resources:

### **Kids Help Phone:**

[www.kidshelpphone.ca/Teens/InfoBooth/The-Internet/Staying-Safe.aspx](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca/Teens/InfoBooth/The-Internet/Staying-Safe.aspx)

### **CODE Parent Toolkit:**

[www.ontariodirectors.ca/Parent\\_Engagement/2014\\_PE\\_Docs/40714\\_Code\\_ParentToolkit\\_E.pdf](http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/Parent_Engagement/2014_PE_Docs/40714_Code_ParentToolkit_E.pdf)

### **ISTE:**

[www.iste.org](http://www.iste.org)

### **Real Life Online:**

[www.reallifeonline.ca/Parents-Guardians/Overview.aspx](http://www.reallifeonline.ca/Parents-Guardians/Overview.aspx)

### **NetSmartz:**

[www.netsmartz.org/Parents](http://www.netsmartz.org/Parents)

### **MediaSmarts:**

[www.mediasmarts.ca](http://www.mediasmarts.ca)

### **COPA:**

[www.copahabitat.ca/en/bullying](http://www.copahabitat.ca/en/bullying)

### **Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO):**

[www.ldatschool.ca/technology/information-tools-and-resources](http://www.ldatschool.ca/technology/information-tools-and-resources)

### **SNOW: Education, Access and You:**

[www.snow.idrc.ocad.ca](http://www.snow.idrc.ocad.ca)

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