

Section Six

Speech and Language in High School

In high school, students are expected to be more independent as they must manage a number of different classes and teachers. To graduate from high school with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), students are required to obtain 30 credits, complete 40 hours of community involvement activities and pass the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) or the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC). Most students complete these requirements in 4 years.

Although very few students know what they want to do after high school, it is important to understand that course selection in high school can impact the student's future. For example, some university courses may require specific academic credits. Fortunately, the high school program is flexible and students can make changes in their program as their interests and skills evolve.

In recent years high school has been changing to meet the needs of a wide range of learners. As a result, students have many choices to make as they progress through high school (see Appendix 1).

Options for Student Success

- **Dual Credits** - Students participate in apprenticeship training and post secondary courses, earning dual credits that count towards both their high school diploma and their post secondary diploma, degree or apprenticeship certificate.
- **E-learning and Technological Education Courses** - On-line courses that may not be available at the local high school, or that provide a more in-depth module to existing technological education courses.
- **Locally Developed Courses (Compulsory and Optional)** - Courses that are developed by the school board and intended to meet needs that are not met by courses provided in the curriculum policy.
- **The Ontario Skills Passport** - Provides clear descriptions of the essential skills and work habits important for work, learning and life. High school students can document the development of their skills using common language, resources and tools that help build competence, confidence and connections.
- **Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program** - Students in Grades 11 and 12 can complete their high school diploma while starting their apprenticeship training. Students earn credits for their workplace experience in the apprenticeship program, and the time they spend in the placement counts towards their apprenticeship training requirement.
- **Specialist High Skills Majors** - Students focus on a career path that matches their skills and interests. Each major is a bundle of 8 - 10 courses in the student's selected field.
- **Specialist Cooperative Education** - Allows students to apply two co-op credits towards their compulsory high school graduation requirements, with no limit on earning optional co-op credits.
- **Student Success Teams** - For students who are struggling, who need extra attention to help them graduate, or who are looking for new challenges in high school. Student Success Teams provide extra attention and support for individual students.

OAFCCD Parent Tip

Ask at your local high school for more information about Student Success teams and to find out if these options would be right for your child (see Appendix 1). Also check the Ministry of Education Brochure, 'More Ways to Succeed in High School, A Guide For Parents and Students (2009).'

6.1 Home and School Partnerships

Parents continue to have an important role to play in supporting student success in high school. Adolescents are seeking to be more independent and peer relationships become very significant. It remains important for parents to communicate with all of their child's teachers in high school. Parents can demonstrate their interest and involvement by attending school events and parent-teacher conferences.

OAFCCD Parent Tip

As in elementary school, find out about any 'meet the teacher' event and try to attend conferencing times set up each term to discuss your child's progress. Depending on the situation, you may or may not wish to have your child accompany you to these meetings. Be prepared to briefly outline your child's strengths and needs and how you can be reached by the teacher if there are concerns. Check to see if the teacher uses the school website for information about homework, assignments, and what you can do to support your child.

6.2 How Do Speech and Language Impairments Impact Students in High School?

Speech and language impairments in adolescence take a different form and may be less obvious. For example, students with speech and language impairments may have difficulty with organizational skills. High school students are expected to operate independently, getting themselves to school on time, arriving to each class with the correct materials, and completing assignments by certain deadlines. Students with language impairments often have difficulty following verbal instructions, setting priorities, grasping the sequence for completing tasks, and recognizing important details. These students will require help to develop their organizational skills and independence.

Many students with language impairments fail to recognize social cues and may speak or behave inappropriately. This can be a serious problem for teens. Peer relationships are very important and there is a lot of pressure on teens to conform to certain standards of appearance and behaviour. Teens who are struggling to find their identity may be more judgmental and less tolerant of differences. As a result, friends from elementary school who overlooked social mistakes may cool the friendship or ignore the student. Parents of children with speech and language impairments often report that their child has 'no friends' or social life. For parents it can be heart breaking to see a child who is excluded from the 'fun' or who spends their free time at home alone.

Students with special educational needs are especially vulnerable to bullying and violence. Many high schools are working hard to address safety issues and offer courses or programs that deal with social skills through a focus on relationships or behaviour. The school counsellor, or special education department should have information about programs or resources available through the school or in the community.

OAFCCD Parent Tip

High schools have many extra-curricular activities that can help students make friends with others who have similar interests and skills. Find out about social opportunities (such as clubs, teams, interest groups, etc.) as a way for your child to participate in a more structured social scene in high school. The special education staff at your child's school may be able to suggest certain activities or programs that would be appropriate for your child, and to provide support by introducing them to key people.

Modifications in High School

Modifications are changes made to the grade-level curriculum expectations for a subject or course in order to meet the needs of the student. In high school, significant modifications of course expectations may prevent the student from being awarded a credit. Failure to obtain credits may impact the student's ability to graduate from high school. The Principal determines whether the modifications to learning expectations will still permit the student to obtain a course credit.

Talk to the subject teacher, special education staff or the Principal to find out whether the modifications to meet your child's needs will impact the awarding of credits.

6.3 Grade 10 Literacy Test

All students are expected to participate in provincial testing, and the Grade 10 Literacy Test must be completed and passed to obtain the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. Students are allowed the same *accommodations* for provincial testing as they would have in a regular classroom setting, as long as the accommodations are documented in the Individual Education Plan (IEP). *Modification* of the expectations in the provincial testing is usually not permitted.

OAFCCD Parent Tip

It is helpful to connect with the special education or resource teacher when preparing for the Literacy Test. The resource teacher can help your child prepare for the test, ensure that all the needed accommodations are documented, and may be able to arrange for your child to take the test in a smaller, quieter room. Most schools are preparing students in Grade 9 with sample tests. There are also sample questions on the Ministry of Education or EQAO website at: www.eqao.com

Students who have failed the Grade 10 Literacy test, or have had two opportunities to write the test, may complete the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course as a credit course. This course is usually offered in Grade 12, and meets the graduation requirement for literacy competency.

6.4 Looking Ahead: Planning for Life After High School

Students who have a severe speech or language impairment are likely to have communication challenges in employment or at post secondary institutions. It is, therefore, important to start planning for the future early. Students who are over 14 years of age, and who have been identified through an IPRC, or who have an IEP must have a Transition Plan included in their IEP. Transition plans will likely be integrated with the annual IPRC, and regular IEP review processes. These processes usually involve the special education teacher as a leader or team member, as well as the Principal or a designate.

When the student has a speech or language impairment as part of another exceptionality, for example, developmental disabilities, or autism/PDD, consideration of transition planning for independent or supported community living may be considered.

Transition planning will require the team to consider the listening, speaking, reading and writing demands of post secondary or workplace setting. The team will need to identify the student's strengths and needs, and the compensatory strategies that the student will need to function in the workplace or in a post secondary institution. Most of these strategies should already be part of the student's IEP.

The need for maintaining an 'Exceptional Student Identification' at the post-secondary level should be discussed at the transition planning meeting. Factors to be taken into consideration include:

- impact of secondary school credit substitutions or curriculum modifications on post secondary course prerequisites
- assessments or documentation required by the post secondary institution
- availability of human and other resources at the post secondary institution (e.g., tutoring, note takers, readers, audio or visual tape recordings of course materials and lectures, alternative formats for tests and exams, financial assistance, bursaries, etc.)
- student and parent preferences and professional recommendations.

OAFCCD Parent Tip

Services to support students with language learning disabilities are available at college and university. A recent Psychological Assessment may be required by the university. Talk to the guidance department at high school and at prospective colleges and universities to find out what documentation may be required.

Additional Sources of Information:

Ontario Prospects 2009 Ontario's Guide to Career Planning, Ministry of Education

More Ways to Succeed in High School, A Guide for Parents and Students (Brochure) Ministry of Education

Annual Education Plan, Grades 7 to 12, (Brochure) Ministry of Education

Transition Planning, A Resource Guide (2002) Ministry of Education

Policy/Program Memorandum No. 127 (October 5, 2001): *Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test in English Language Secondary Schools-Accommodations, Deferrals and Exceptions*, Ministry of Education