

INDIGENOUS STUDENT SUCCESS IN HIGH SCHOOL

A practical Canadian guide to getting through Grades 9 to 12, finding support, planning ahead, and preparing for what comes next

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A practical guide for real school years, including the ones that do not go according to plan.

How to use this guide

This guide is for Indigenous students attending high school in Canada, as well as the parents, caregivers, mentors and education workers who support them.

It does not replace advice from your school, school board, provincial or territorial ministry, Nation, community education office, Indigenous education authority, funding office or counsellor. Rules and services vary across Canada and from one community to another.

Use this guide to figure out what to ask, what to keep track of, where problems can come up and what you can do before a manageable problem becomes much harder to fix.

A useful rule for this whole book:

Government and ministry sources explain the rules and funding frameworks. Your Nation or community education office, school board, school and local Indigenous education organizations can tell you how services are actually delivered where you live.

Canada-wide advice and local rules

Graduation requirements, credit rules, course names, attendance policies, online-learning requirements and student supports are set provincially or territorially. This guide gives Canada-wide planning advice and clearly labels examples that apply only to a particular jurisdiction.

Ontario appears in several examples because current public information is readily available and can be verified. An Ontario example should never be read as a Canada-wide rule.

What this guide covers

- graduation requirements and credit planning
- building a support network before you need an emergency
- changing schools and leaving community for school
- attendance, missed work and getting back on track
- course choices and keeping future pathways open
- alternative and flexible ways to earn credits
- Indigenous student supports at school and in community
- transportation, boarding, billeting and living away from home
- academic support, accommodations and well-being
- co-op, trades and apprenticeship pathways
- college, university, Indigenous Institutes, work and undecided pathways
- early funding awareness
- a practical 90-day action plan

Chapter 1: Know what graduation actually requires

There is no single set of high school graduation requirements for all of Canada. Each province and territory sets its own rules, and some requirements depend on the year you entered high school.

Start with the official graduation requirements for your province or territory, then ask your school for your current credit summary or graduation progress report. The official requirements show what you need. Your school record shows what you have completed and what is still missing.

Check compulsory credits, optional credits, literacy or numeracy requirements, community involvement or service requirements, online-learning requirements, career education requirements, and any provincial exams or assessments that apply to your cohort.

Ontario example: current requirements depend partly on when a student began Grade 9. Students who entered Grade 9 in 2024 or later follow a different compulsory-credit structure from students who started earlier, and newer cohorts also have a financial literacy graduation requirement. A checklist used by an older sibling or cousin may therefore be out of date.

Check your graduation progress at least twice each school year. Early in the year, make sure your courses fit the requirements. Around the end of the first semester, check again so there is still time to deal with a missing or failed credit.

Do this next

- Get your current credit summary from your school.
- Find the official graduation requirement page for your province or territory.
- Circle anything you are unsure about and ask guidance or student success staff.
- Recheck after each semester.

Chapter 2: Build your support team before you need one

Your support team is simply the group of people and offices you can turn to for different kinds of help. Knowing who handles what can save a lot of time when a problem comes up.

At school, that may include guidance, a student-success teacher, Indigenous education staff, a graduation coach, a vice-principal, special-education staff, a trusted classroom teacher, a social worker or counsellor, and co-op or trades staff.

Outside school, support might come from your Nation or community education office, a tribal council education service, Friendship Centre, Indigenous education authority, youth worker, parent or caregiver, mentor, postsecondary transition worker, or another person who understands the local education system.

Availability varies. Ontario, for example, says some school boards have Indigenous Graduation Coaches and some Friendship Centres offer alternative secondary programming. Ask what is available in your own area rather than assuming a particular service exists.

Save the names, phone numbers and email addresses of useful contacts before you need them. If attendance, transportation, funding or course problems come up, you will already know where to start.

Do this next

- Identify one school contact you trust.
- Identify one Indigenous or community education contact.
- Ask who handles attendance, credits, accommodations, transportation and funding questions.
- Put the contacts in your phone and in the Support Map worksheet.

Chapter 3: Changing schools or leaving community for school

For some Indigenous students, going to high school means travelling outside their community every day. Others may board, billet, move in with relatives or live away from home. Those arrangements create practical questions that ordinary school-planning advice often overlooks.

Before changing schools, find out which credits will transfer, whether course codes and prerequisites line up, how attendance and student records will be transferred, and whether any Individual Education Plan or accommodations will follow you to the new school.

If you will be attending school away from your community, sort out the practical details early. How will you get to school? What happens when transportation is cancelled? Who do you call if you miss the bus? Are meals or school fees covered? Who helps if a boarding, billeting or other living arrangement stops working? Ask about professional-development days, exams and early dismissals too, because transportation schedules may be different on those days.

A program may be eligible for federal or provincial funding without being delivered the same way in every community. Nations, communities, school boards and education authorities may use different policies, agreements and service arrangements.

Make sure you know who to contact at school and in your home community if something goes wrong. You should not have to explain the entire arrangement from the beginning every time you need help.

Do this next

- Confirm credit transfer before changing schools.
- Write down transportation and emergency-contact rules.
- Ask who is responsible for boarding, billeting or living-away concerns if those apply.
- Keep copies of important school and community education documents.

Chapter 4: Attendance problems are easier to fix early

Students miss school for many reasons, including illness, transportation problems, housing, family responsibilities, work, caregiving, grief, safety concerns, stress or simply becoming overwhelmed and falling behind.

The longer an attendance problem goes on, the harder catching up can become. Missed classes lead to missed work, and once the backlog grows it can be difficult to know where to start.

Ask for help as soon as you can. You do not have to solve the attendance problem first. Start by finding out what work can still be completed and what you need in order to pass the course.

Ask each teacher which assignments matter most, which deadlines can still be met and what support is available. If transportation, housing, health, safety or family circumstances are affecting attendance, tell an appropriate school support person so the situation is understood properly.

Make a short recovery list and start with the work that matters most for the course. When you are behind, completing the most important work first is usually more useful than trying to work through every missed task in date order.

Do this next

- List every course and what is currently missing.
- Ask each teacher what work matters most.
- Tell a school support person if the cause is bigger than homework.
- Use the Missed-Work Recovery Plan in the toolkit.

Chapter 5: Credits, prerequisites and keeping doors open

The courses you choose now can affect which courses, programs and training options are available later. Some Grade 11 and 12 courses require earlier prerequisites, and postsecondary programs and apprenticeships may have specific admission requirements.

Before dropping or changing a course, find out whether it is a prerequisite for something you may want later. A course that does not seem important now may be needed for a Grade 12 course or a future program.

You do not need to take the most academic course available simply to keep up appearances. You do need enough information to understand what each choice may open or close. College, university, Indigenous Institutes, trades, apprenticeships, work and other training routes have different requirements.

If you are still deciding, try to keep more than one realistic pathway open without building a schedule you cannot manage. Guidance staff can help map course sequences, and official program pages can tell you the actual admission requirements.

Use your credit tracker to mark completed compulsory credits, current courses, planned courses and anything that must be repeated or recovered.

Do this next

- Pick two or three possible future pathways.
- Check real admission or training prerequisites.
- Ask guidance which Grade 10 or 11 courses unlock later options.
- Do not drop a course until you know what it affects.

Chapter 6: When regular school is not working

A regular full-time classroom schedule does not work for every student, and struggling in that setting does not mean you have run out of options.

Depending on where you live, other recognized routes may include alternative education, credit recovery, adult or continuing education, online courses, summer school, supervised independent learning, dual credit, co-op, flexible timetables or programs delivered with Indigenous organizations.

Program names and rules differ across the country. Ask which recognized options can still give you the credit or graduation requirement you need.

Ontario, for example, identifies alternative secondary-school programming through some Indigenous Friendship Centres. That is one example of a locally available option, not a program that exists everywhere.

Before leaving your current school or program, try to have the next recognized option arranged. A difficult school situation is easier to recover from when you are moving into another plan instead of leaving without one.

Do this next

- Ask what credit recovery or alternative options your school board offers.
- Ask Indigenous education staff or your community education office about local programs.
- Confirm whether the new option earns recognized credits.
- Get the plan in writing before leaving your current program.

Chapter 7: Indigenous student supports can exist in more than one system

Indigenous students may deal with several education systems at the same time, including school boards, provincial or territorial ministries, Nations or community education offices, tribal councils, Friendship Centres, Indigenous Institutes, student centres and federal funding programs.

These organizations may work together, but they have different responsibilities and eligibility rules. Knowing who runs a service is often the first step in figuring out whether it applies to you.

Ontario, for example, has Indigenous Education Councils, Indigenous Graduation Coaches in some boards and alternative secondary programming through some Friendship Centres. A Nation or community may separately provide transportation, education counselling, advocacy, student fees, tutoring or other supports. The exact mix varies by community.

Whenever you hear about a support or program, ask who runs it and who is eligible. Those two questions can prevent a great deal of confusion.

Eligibility matters. A program for eligible First Nations students ordinarily resident on reserve does not automatically apply to every Indigenous student. Métis-specific, Inuit-specific, Nation-administered and school-board programs may all use different criteria.

Do this next

- Write down who administers each support.
- Write down the eligibility rule.
- Ask your Nation or community education office what they provide directly.
- Ask your school what Indigenous-specific supports are available locally.

Chapter 8: Transportation, boarding, billeting and living away from home

Transportation can have a direct effect on attendance, so it deserves the same attention as courses and credits.

For eligible First Nations students ordinarily resident on reserve, federal elementary and secondary education funding can include transportation, accommodation away from home, liaison, guidance and counselling. That funding framework does not tell you exactly what services your own community provides or how they are arranged.

In British Columbia, for example, FNEESC information for 2026 to 2027 says First Nations and school boards co-develop local transportation plans for eligible on-reserve students attending public schools. That is a BC-specific example, but it shows why local agreements and community policies matter.

Some Nations and communities publicly describe transportation, financial assistance, advocacy, mentoring, student fees or outreach as part of their secondary-school supports. Others organize services differently. Your own education office is the best place to confirm what applies to you.

If you live away from home, ask about the living arrangement as carefully as you ask about school. Find out about meals, travel home, emergency travel, school breaks, household expectations, who handles conflicts and what happens if the placement ends unexpectedly.

Do this next

- Ask your community education office for the current transportation or living-away policy.
- Save the emergency transportation contact.
- Ask who handles failed or unsafe living arrangements.
- Write down what costs are covered and what costs are not.

Chapter 9: Academic support, accommodations and well-being

Getting academic help early can keep a small problem from becoming a failed course.

Academic support may include tutoring, teacher help periods, peer support, study halls, resource rooms, literacy or numeracy support, Indigenous student-support workers, online tutoring, accessibility services or special-education supports.

If you have an Individual Education Plan, accommodation plan or documented learning need, make sure you understand the supports it provides. Ask how those supports apply in each class, and if you change schools, confirm that the new school has received the documentation.

School performance can also be affected by stress, housing instability, grief, family pressure, discrimination, sleep, food, transportation and money. Those issues can affect attendance, concentration and the amount of schoolwork you can reasonably manage.

If something outside the classroom is affecting school, tell a trusted staff member or other appropriate support person. You do not need to repeat private details to every teacher. One contact can often help coordinate what the school needs to know.

Do this next

- Identify where tutoring or academic help is available.
- Review any accommodation plan you have.
- Choose one trusted adult for bigger school problems.
- Ask for support before you are at the point of failing everything at once.

Chapter 10: Co-op, trades and apprenticeship pathways

Trades and apprenticeships are skilled career pathways with their own training, safety, certification and employer requirements. They should be considered on their own merits, not treated as a second-choice route.

High school co-op can give you a chance to try a field before committing to it. Depending on your province or territory, youth apprenticeship, dual-credit, pre-apprenticeship or other school-to-work programs may also be available.

Ask which employers participate, whether transportation is available, what safety equipment you need, whether any placement hours count toward apprenticeship requirements, and what happens if a placement falls through.

Indigenous training organizations, Indigenous Institutes and community employment programs may offer additional trades pathways. Ontario recognizes Indigenous Institutes as part of its postsecondary system, and some offer apprenticeship and skilled-trades programming.

Start by learning how the trade actually works where you live. If you are interested in ironwork, welding, electrical, carpentry, heavy equipment, automotive, culinary work, health trades or another field, check the apprenticeship and certification route in your province or territory.

Do this next

- Ask your school about co-op and youth apprenticeship options.
- Research the trade's certification rules in your province or territory.
- Check Indigenous Institutes and Indigenous training organizations for related programs.
- Ask about transportation, safety gear and placement costs.

Chapter 11: Your pathways after high school

There are several legitimate ways to move forward after high school. The best choice depends on what you want to do, what training it requires and what is realistic for you.

University, college, Indigenous Institutes, apprenticeships, employment and other training routes all lead to different kinds of opportunities. Taking time to decide can also make sense when you use that time to work, gain experience, upgrade courses or explore your options.

Compare pathways by practical factors such as fit, cost, location, admission requirements, program length, employment prospects, available support, housing and transportation. Prestige tells you very little about whether a pathway will work for you.

Ontario currently recognizes nine Indigenous Institutes. Some also provide high school programs, continuing education and other learning routes. Other provinces and territories have different Indigenous postsecondary structures and organizations.

You do not need to plan the rest of your life at once. Choose a few realistic possibilities and find the next concrete step for each one.

Do this next

- Choose three possible post-high-school routes.
- Check admission or entry requirements for each.
- Compare cost, location, length and support.
- Write one next action for each route.

Chapter 12: Start learning about funding before Grade 12 panic season

Paying for education can involve several separate systems, and those systems do not always share information with one another.

Depending on your identity, community, residency, program and jurisdiction, funding may come from a Nation or community education office, Indigenous organization, provincial or territorial student aid, scholarships, bursaries, school awards, apprenticeship or employer supports, or another program.

Do not assume your school knows what your community funds, or that your community education office knows every school deadline. Keep track of the requirements and dates for each office separately.

Start a funding folder before application season. Depending on the program, you may need identification, transcripts, status or membership documents, tax information, acceptance letters, program costs, direct-deposit information and contact details.

For some eligible First Nations students ordinarily resident on reserve, federal postsecondary funding is administered through First Nations or designated organizations rather than paid directly by the federal government to the student. Ask your own education office how its application process works.

Do this next

- Create one funding folder now.
- Ask your community education office what postsecondary process they use.
- Check provincial or territorial student aid.
- Record application dates separately from school admission dates.

Chapter 13: Ask better questions in meetings

Students are often told to talk to guidance without being shown how to make that meeting useful. A little preparation can turn a general conversation into an actual plan.

Before the meeting, write down the problem you need to solve and what you hope will be different when the meeting is over.

Example: 'I am missing two compulsory credits and transportation has caused attendance problems. I want to know the fastest recognized way to get back on track without losing my co-op placement.'

Ask direct questions: What are my options? Which option keeps me on track for graduation? What deadline applies? Who approves it? What documents do I need? What happens if this option does not work? Who should I contact next?

Take notes, especially names, dates and next steps. If the plan affects credits, funding, transportation or another important decision, ask for the details by email so you have a record.

Do this next

- Write the problem in one sentence.
- Write the outcome you want.
- Bring three to five questions.
- Leave with a name, next step and deadline.

Chapter 14: Your next 90 days

You do not need a ten-year plan to make progress. A clear plan for the next ninety days is enough to get moving.

During the next week, get your credit summary, identify a school support contact and a community education contact, and write down the school issue that needs attention first.

During the next month, work on one academic or attendance problem, check your graduation requirements and investigate one possible pathway after high school.

Within ninety days, update your course and credit plan, start a funding folder, compare a few pathways and make sure you know who to contact about transportation, living-away arrangements, attendance and other supports that apply to you.

At the end of the ninety days, review the plan and make another one. Short planning periods make it easier to adjust when courses, circumstances or goals change.

Do this next

- Complete the 90-Day Action Plan.
- Put one review date in your calendar.
- Update your support contacts.
- Choose one problem to solve first.

Student Toolkit

Use these pages in whatever way works for you. You can write on them, type into them, copy the headings into a notes app or recreate them somewhere else. The point is to keep useful information in one place.

1. Graduation Requirement Check

Requirement	Completed	Still Needed	Who confirmed it?

2. My Support Map

Need	Person/Office	Phone or Email	When to contact

3. Meeting Question Sheet

Problem / Goal	Question	Answer	Next step / deadline

Problem / Goal	Question	Answer	Next step / deadline

4. Credit and Course Tracker

Course	Credit status	Prerequisite for	Action needed

5. Missed-Work Recovery Plan

Course	Most important missing work	Due date	Help needed	Done

6. Transportation / Living-Away Checklist

Question	Answer	Contact	Backup plan

7. Pathway Comparison

Pathway	Entry requirements	Cost / location	What I like	Next action

8. 90-Day Action Plan

Action	Who can help	Deadline	Status

Action	Who can help	Deadline	Status

Source notes and current official references

These sources were checked during development in August 2026. Education rules, funding guidelines and program pages can change, so confirm current requirements before making an important decision.

Source	URL	Used for
Ontario, Earning your high school diploma	https://www.ontario.ca/page/earning-your-high-school-diploma	Current Ontario Secondary School Diploma requirements, including cohort-specific requirements and the financial literacy requirement for newer cohorts.
Ontario, Indigenous education in Ontario	https://www.ontario.ca/page/indigenous-education-ontario	Indigenous Education Councils, Indigenous Graduation Coach Program, and Alternative Secondary School Program within some Indigenous Friendship Centres.
Ontario, Indigenous Institutes	https://www.ontario.ca/page/indigenous-institutes	Ontario's nine recognized Indigenous Institutes and examples of programs and pathways.
Indigenous Services Canada, Elementary and Secondary Education Program: National Program Guidelines 2026 to 2027	https://www.isc-sac.gc.ca/eng/1772816409512/1772816446019	Eligibility and funding framework for eligible First Nations students ordinarily resident on reserve, including relevant transportation and accommodation context.
First Nations Education Steering Committee, Transportation, Public Schools	https://www.fnesc.ca/bctea/transportation-public-schools/	BC-specific 2026 to 2027 joint transportation planning between First Nations and boards of education for eligible students.
First Nations Education Steering Committee, Local Education Agreements	https://www.fnesc.ca/lea/	BC-specific information about agreements between First Nations and school boards or independent school authorities.

CJ Light development rule:

For topics involving community-delivered services such as transportation, boarding, billeting, local allowances, advocacy, liaison, fees or tutoring, framework sources should be checked alongside

Indigenous-controlled or community sources whenever practical. A service described by one Nation or community must not be presented as though it applies to all Indigenous students.

Closing note

High school can involve school rules, board policies, provincial or territorial requirements, community programs and funding processes. You do not need to understand every part of every system. You do need to know what applies to you, what your next step is and who can help when something is unclear.

Keep your records. Ask specific questions. Check local rules and policies. Learn who your contacts are before you need urgent help. If your plans change, update the plan and keep moving.