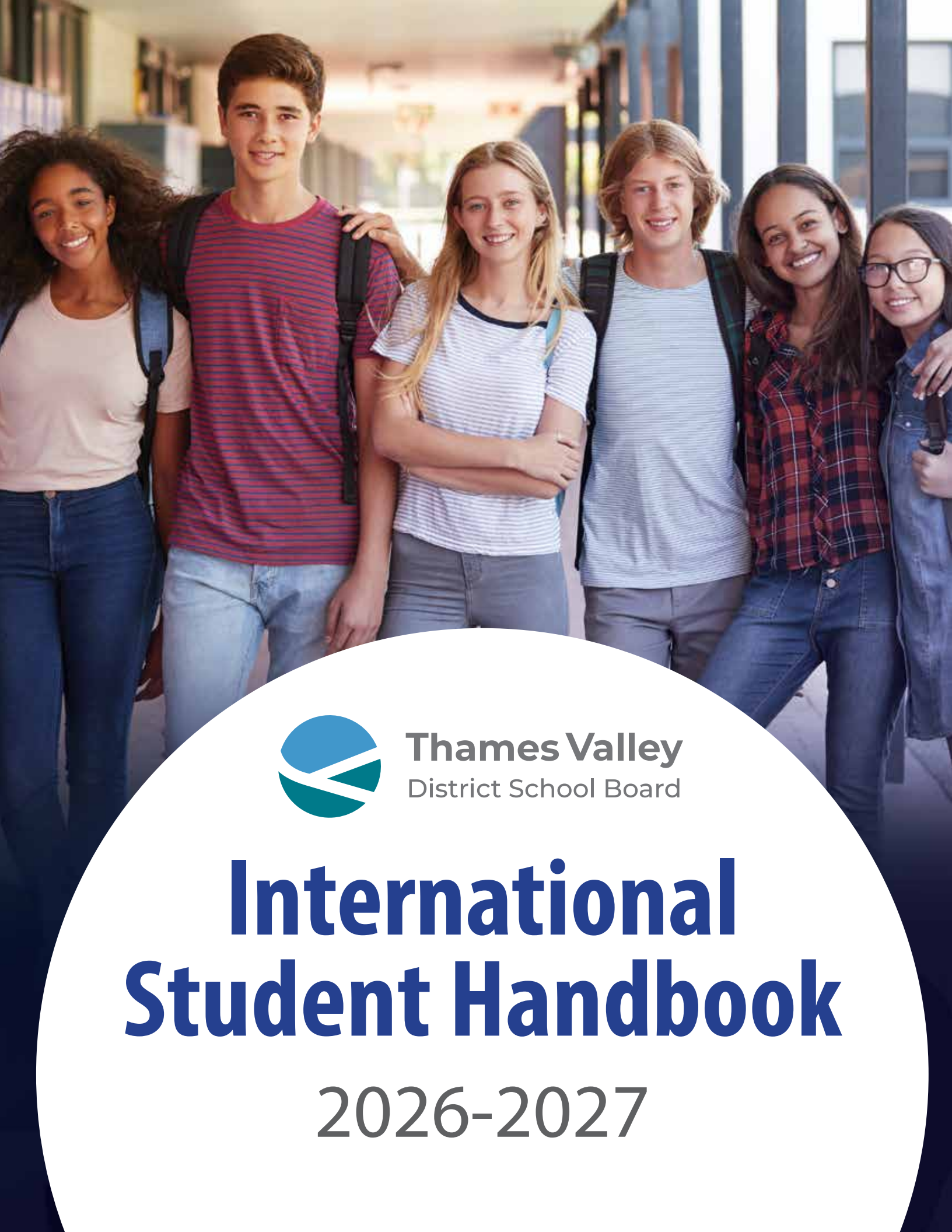




Thames Valley
District School Board

International Student Handbook

2026-2027

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Welcome!

On behalf of my colleagues from the International Education department, I would like to offer you a warm welcome to the Thames Valley District School Board. We are so happy you have chosen to study with us in London, Canada.

Choosing to study abroad is a courageous decision and one that we are proud of you for making. With study abroad come exciting opportunities for growth and self-discovery. Living in Canada will also allow you to learn about a new culture and meet new people. It is our hope that some of the people you meet will become lifelong friends.

There are also challenges with moving to another country. You may encounter new customs and traditions, and school life may be different than that in your country. Living with a Canadian family will likely also be different than living with your family. To help you adjust to some of these differences, we have created this handbook. Please rest assured you will be well supported by the staff in your school, by your homestay family, and by the staff from the International Education department. We are all here to make sure your time in Canada is enjoyable and successful.

The Thames Valley District School Board's motto is **"We build each student's tomorrow, every day"** and this is our commitment to you. We are here to support you in reaching your goals.

Whether you are here with us for a short time or are staying to graduate from our schools, we are thrilled to have you as a part of the Thames Valley District School Board community.

Sarah Leeming

International Education Lead
Thames Valley District School Board



3.

Before you come to Canada

We recommend that students arrive **1-2 weeks** before the first day of school, to complete the registration and assessment (if required).

Packing and important items:

Remember to keep with you in your carry-on bag:

- ☐ Your passport;
 - ☐ Your study permit letter from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC);
 - ☐ The full name and contact information of your host family;
 - ☐ Your Custodian Declaration documents;
 - ☐ Your medical insurance card.
-
- ☐ Make sure your phone battery is charged;
 - ☐ Bring snacks or money to purchase food and drinks in the airport.





4.

Post Arrival After your arrival

You made it to Canada!

We are so happy you are here to join us at the Thames Valley District School Board.

1) Have your passport and study permit letter ready to show the airport official

2) **VERY IMPORTANT** – don't forget to get your study permit from the Immigration Officer

Once you have arrived in London, our office should be contacted by your Custodian by e-mail at international@tvdsb.ca to start the registration process. At that time, we will require:

- ☐ Your passport;
- ☐ Your study permit issued at the airport;
- ☐ Proof of local address;
- ☐ A copy of your medical insurance policy.

one
world
Thames Valley

International Welcome Centre

Once the registration is complete, we will then provide the appropriate documents to the school and notify the school of your attendance.

Orientation:

We recommend all new secondary students attend an orientation session prior to the start of classes. Orientation dates will be made available after acceptance into our international program. We encourage you to attend the orientation so you can connect with other students and receive information about your schools, life in London, and ask any questions you have.

Student Conduct:

If you are found in violation of the Code of Conduct, policies, procedures, rules and guidelines of the school or the Board, you may be removed from the international program. If you are asked to leave the homestay program as a result of a violation of the terms and conditions of your homestay provider, you may be removed from the international program and there will be no refund of tuition fees.



Post Arrival Student Visas

Study Permit Renewal

From the day you arrive in Canada, check and **REMEMBER** when your Study Permit expires! It is your responsibility to ensure you have a valid study permit. The Study Permit renewal forms can be found at www.cic.gc.ca/english/study/study-extend.asp. Your host family or a staff member in our office can help with any questions you may have.

Note: Any student who lets his/her Study Permit expire, without having applied for renewal, will be removed from our program.

You may have to wait 6 to 8 weeks to get a new Study Permit once you have applied. Please remember this when you are making travel plans in the summer. Graduating students who are planning to attend university or college will have to get their new letter of acceptance from the university or college.

Temporary Resident Visa (TRV)

Canada requires citizens of some countries to have a Temporary Resident Visa (TRV) to enter the country. Often, the TRV and the Study Permit expire at the same time, but not always. If you have both documents, be sure to check to see when these documents expire.





4.

Post Arrival Culture Shock

Definition of culture shock
(Webster dictionary): a sense of confusion and uncertainty sometimes with feelings of anxiety that may affect people exposed to an alien culture or environment without adequate preparation

Stages of culture shock

Culture Shock or the Adjustment Process

As a newcomer to Canada, you will likely go through a predictable sequence of stages in adjusting to your new circumstances

1. Arrival and first impressions:

You will be excited to be in a new environment and everything will seem new and wonderful.

2. Culture Shock:

You may become less optimistic as you might find it difficult to make new friends and learn English. You will miss your friends, family and long for home.

3. Recovery and optimism:

You feel better because you are experiencing success at school and making friends. You feel more confident about fitting in at school.

4. Acculturation:

You become more comfortable in your new surroundings and can balance the new culture with your own culture. You can appreciate what the new experience is bringing to you.



When experiencing culture shock, or any feelings of homesickness or loneliness, try not to isolate yourself.

Stay involved with your host family; join activities and school clubs and teams; find a volunteer opportunity in the community.

*Do not hesitate to reach out to the staff of the international office, **we are here to support you.***





5.

Schools Introduction

Introduction to a TVDSB Secondary School

A school year consists of two semesters, September to January then February to June. Students study four courses each semester to make a total of eight courses each year. A two-week winter break is in December and a one-week spring break is in March.

An average school day has five periods, including a lunch period. Each period is approximately one hour. Students move from classroom to classroom throughout the day for different classes. You will be given a personal timetable of classes at the beginning of each semester. Please refer to the daily schedule of your individual schools to find out the time of your classes, lunches and assemblies.

Each school has a wide range of activities such as sports, clubs, music programs, etc. These extracurricular activities are a great way to make friends and to get involved in Canadian culture.

Community involvement is another important aspect of your Canadian study. All students must complete a minimum of forty hours of community involvement in order to graduate.





SEPTEMBER				
MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI
31	1	2	3	4
7	Classes Begin 8	9	10	11
14	15	16	17	18
21	22	23	24	25
28	29	30		

OCTOBER				
MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI
			1	2
5	6	7	8	9
12	13	14	15	16
19	20	21	22	23
26	27	28	29	30

NOVEMBER				
MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI
2	3	4	5	6
9	10	11	12	13
16	17	18	19	20
23	24	25	26	27
30				

DECEMBER				
MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI
	1	2	3	4
7	8	9	10	11
14	15	16	17	18
21	22	23	24	25
28	29	30	31	

JANUARY				
MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI
				1
4	5	6	7	8
11	12	13	14	15
18	19	20	21	22
25	Classes End 26	27	28	29

FEBRUARY				
MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI
1	2	3	Classes Begin 4	5
8	9	10	11	12
15	16	17	18	19
22	23	24	25	26

MARCH				
MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI
1	2	3	4	5
8	9	10	11	12
15	16	17	18	19
22	23	24	25	26
29	30	31		

APRIL				
MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI
			1	2
5	6	7	8	9
12	13	14	15	16
19	20	21	22	23
26	27	28	29	30

MAY				
MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI
3	4	5	6	7
10	11	12	13	14
17	18	19	20	21
24	25	26	27	28
31				

JUNE				
MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI
	Ontario Day 1	2	3	4
7	8	9	10	11
14	15	16	17	18
21	Classes End 22	23	24	25
28	29	30		

LEGEND				
Classes Begin Sept. 8, 2026 Last Day June 22, 2027 194 School Days Including PA Days		PA DAYS September 2 & 3, 2026 October 26, 2026 February 3, 2027 April 16, 2027 May 7, 2027 June 30, 2027	HOLIDAYS	
		EXAM DAYS January 27- February 2, 2027 June 23-29, 2027	Sept 4, 2026 Sept 7, 2026 Oct 12, 2026 Dec 21 - Jan 1, 2027 Feb 15, 2027 March 15 - 19, 2027 March 26, 2027 March 29, 2027 May 24, 2027	Summer Labour Day Thanksgiving Winter Break Family Day March Break Good Friday Easter Monday Victoria Day

Visit Us Online: www.tvdsb.ca

5.

Schools Who should I Contact?

Who should I contact?

TVDSB is happy to welcome you into its **community of students!** All our teachers and our staff are here to help. Here is a list of people you will interact with in your new school.

- **Teachers** provide classroom instruction. You will have different teachers for different subjects. You can address them using their preferred salutation and their surname. For example, Mrs. Kent or Mr. Smith.
- **ML (Multilingual) Teachers** provide classroom instruction. They help students learn English and strategies for success in their other classes
There may be school specialists who work with teachers and help students learn.
- **Teacher-Librarians** are here to help students access resources on the internet and support student learning.
- **Guidance** are Teachers who assist in planning students' timetables and applying to university. They can refer you to other school and community supports and activities.
- **Office Secretaries** assist in registering students, do the school's office work and answer calls.
- **Teaching Assistants** help teachers in the classroom.
- **Resource Teachers** help students who require additional assistance with their coursework.
- **Custodians** keep schools clean and make sure the building is operating safely and properly.
- **Principals and Vice-Principals** oversee the school operations and supervise the staff in the school.



Thames Valley District School Board wants to provide every student with a safe and welcoming environment. We encourage you to always communicate with staff from the school or the international education office if you have questions or concerns.



5.

Schools Learning English

Learning English

Canada is one of the best countries for students to learn and improve their English. You have taken a significant step by coming to Thames Valley District School Board, now it is time to learn and grow!

Here are some tips for our students trying to improve their English.

1. Immerse yourself in the English language environment. Students find comfort in their first language, but too much of it can be counterproductive to your English learning. Join English conversations with your schoolmates and your homestay family. Most likely, they will appreciate your participation and your input.
2. Do not be afraid of making mistakes when you speak English. Many Canadians have experience interacting with people who use English as a second language. Most likely they are happy to accommodate if they know you are trying to learn English. You will also start realizing that you know and understand more than you thought.
3. Expand your social circle and make friends from other cultures. Take advantage of your time in Canada and make friends because people from all over the world come to Canada. Not only will you improve your English, but you will also discover fascinating things about other cultures.





5.

Schools Graduation Requirements

Graduation Requirements

Secondary schools, also known as “high schools,” operate from Grades 9 to 12. In Ontario, all publicly funded schools must follow the Ontario curriculum, that is determined by the Ministry of Education. The Ontario curriculum describes what students are expected to know and be able to do in each subject area following the completion of each grade or subject. In order to graduate, students must meet the provincial high school requirements. Upon graduation, students will receive an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.





Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD)

OSSD Requirements

Your high school journey is an exciting time full of change, growth, and possibility!

30

CREDITS
IN TOTAL



COMPLETION OF THE
LITERACY REQUIREMENT
(OSSLT OR OSSLC)

40

HOURS of
COMMUNITY
INVOLVEMENT

2

ONLINE
COURSES^f

Entering Grade 9 in
2023 or Earlier

18 Compulsory Credits

- 4 credits in English (1 per grade)^a ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- 3 credits in Mathematics (1 Senior) ☐ ☐ ☐
- 2 credits in Science ☐ ☐
- 1 credit in Canadian Geography ☐
- 1 credit in Canadian History ☐
- 1 credit in the Arts^b ☐
- 1 credit in Health and Physical Education ☐
- 1 credit in French as a Second Language^g ☐
- 0.5 credit in Career Studies ☐
- 0.5 credit in Civics and Citizenship ☐
- 3 credits from each of Group 1, 2, and 3 ☐ ☐ ☐
- 12 optional credits^e ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Group 1: Additional English, French as a Second Language^c, a Native, Classical, or International Language, Social Science, FNMI Studies, Humanities, Canadian and World Studies, Guidance And Career Education, Cooperative Education^d

Group 2: Health and Physical Education, Art, Business, French as a Second Language^c, Cooperative Education^d

Group 3: Science, Technological Education, Computer Studies, French as a Second Language^c, Cooperative Education^d

Certificate of Accomplishment

Students who leave school before fulfilling the requirements for the Ontario Secondary School Certificate may be granted a Certificate of Accomplishment. This certificate may be a useful means of recognizing achievement for students who plan to take certain vocational programs or other kinds of further training, or who plan to find employment after leaving secondary school.

Entering Grade 9 in
2024 or Later

17 Compulsory Credits

- 4 credits in English (1 per grade)^a ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- 3 credits in Mathematics (grade 9, grade 10, 1 credit in either grade 11 or 12) ☐ ☐ ☐
- 2 credits in Science ☐ ☐
- 1 credit in Canadian Geography ☐
- 1 credit in Canadian History ☐
- 1 credit in the Arts^b ☐
- 1 credit in Health and Physical Education ☐
- 1 credit in French as a Second Language^g ☐
- 1 credit in Technological Education (grade 9 or 10) ☐
- 0.5 credit in Career Studies ☐
- 0.5 credit in Civics and Citizenship ☐
- 1 credit from the STEM-related course group ☐
- 13 optional credits^e ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

STEM-related Course Group

- Business Studies • Mathematics • Cooperative Education
- Science • Computer Studies • Technological Education

Ontario Secondary School Certificate (OSSC)

On request, students will be granted the OSSC when they leave school before earning the OSSD, provided that they have earned a minimum of 14 credits.

7 Compulsory Credits:

2 English, 1 Canadian Geography or Canadian History, 1 Mathematics, 1 Health and Physical Education, 1 Science, 1 Arts, Computer Studies or Technological Education

7 Elective Credits:

Selected by the student from available courses

^a A maximum of 3 credits in ESL/ELD can count towards the 4 compulsory English; the fourth must be a grade 12 compulsory English course

^a Grade 11 English: Understanding Contemporary FNMI Voices can meet the grade 11 English requirement.

^b Grade 9 Expressions of FNMI Cultures course can meet the credit requirement in the arts.

^c A maximum of 2 FSL credits can count towards compulsory groups

^d A maximum of 2 coop credits can count towards compulsory credits

^e May include up to 4 Dual Credit Courses

^f Parents/guardians can request to opt out of this requirement through the Parent Portal

^g Students who have taken Native languages in place of French as a second language in elementary school may use a Level 1 or 2 Native languages course as the compulsory credit for French as a second language

6.

Homestay Experiences, Food

How to make sure you have an enjoyable homestay experience

Homestay is an important part of most of our students' life. Every host is different just like every student. What our hosts have in common is that they want to provide a safe, caring environment for you. Homestays want to provide a comfortable, healthy, and supportive home. To achieve that, they will need your cooperation. After all, your homestay experience will largely depend on your own attitude and friendliness.

- Have an open mind. Embrace the ways in which Canada and the people you will meet here might be different and unique. Your host family will be eager to help you adapt to their family and Canada. The more you get involved in your new life the happier you will be.
- Be patient. The first few weeks living in a new country with a new family can be difficult. You may feel homesick and frustrated with your new environment and the language. This is natural. Give yourself time to adjust to your new surroundings. Please remember that you are not alone. Your host family, your school, and our international education department are here to help.
- Respect your host family and remember that every home is different. Your host family will show you around the house, and you want to make sure you understand the different areas and functions of your new home. Every household has their set of rules and you should follow them.



- Communication is key. Check with your host family if you are unsure of anything. Speak with your host family immediately if you are upset by something. Families will be happy to talk to you and to find out what can be done to resolve the problem. We've found that most problems can be resolved when we listen to one another's feelings and thoughts.
- If you are having difficulty adjusting to your homestay, please contact your homestay coordinator or the international education department.

Meals in a Canadian home

A typical Canadian household have 3 meals a day including breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

- **Breakfast.** Each host family has its own unique morning schedule, so it is important to decide on a routine that will work best for everyone. Breakfast is usually a quick, light meal in the morning. Some families eat a hot breakfast, but more families prefer having something cold, such as cereal and milk, toast, coffee or juice.
- **Lunch.** During the week, you will be able to bring a packed lunch to school from your homestay. It is usually a light main course such as a soup, a salad, or a sandwich. You might also want to bring a drink and snacks.
- **Dinner.** Dinners are usually eaten sometime between 5:00 and 7:00 pm. It is usually the largest meal of the day. Families try to gather as often as possible for this meal. It is very important that you communicate with your family when you will be home for dinner. To be considerate, phone your family and tell them before dinnertime if you will not be home for dinner. This way, they will not expect you, they will not worry, and they will leave some food for you in the fridge.

Everybody likes different foods. Part of the fun of homestay is learning what Canadian families like to eat and teaching your host family what you like to eat. Your host family will always provide you food, but this does not mean that your meals will be served to you. Sometimes your hosts will not be at home for every meal, and sometimes they will have different customs from you for certain meals. It is also a fun idea to prepare a traditional meal from your home country so you and your host family can enjoy it together!



Homestay

House Routines, General Considerations

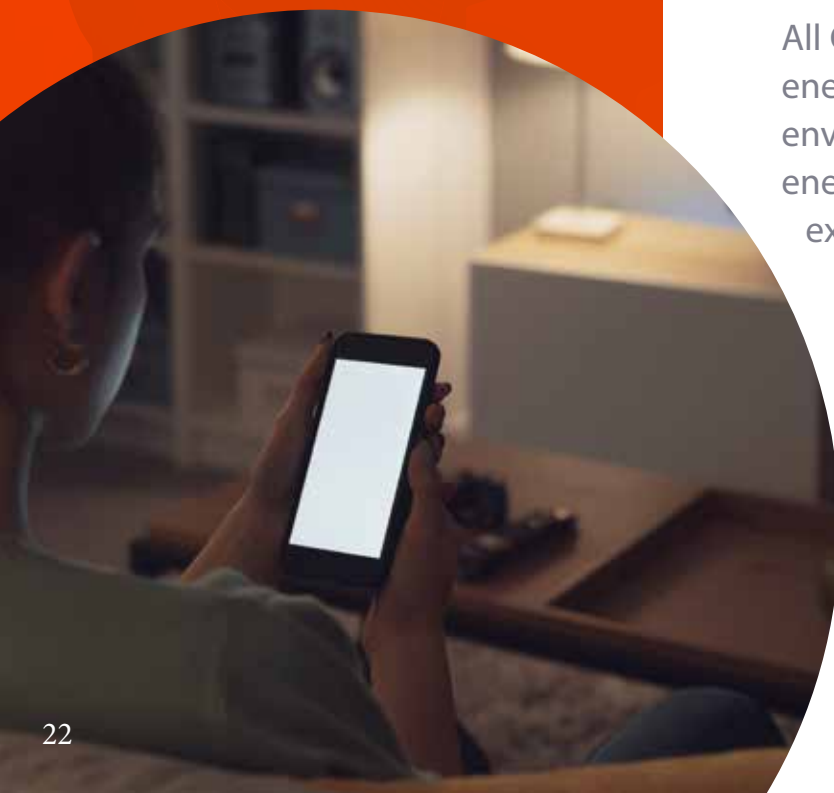
Other house routines

- **Laundry.** Please check with your host at the beginning of your stay to learn how and when to do your laundry. The host might do your laundry or might ask you to do your own laundry.
- **Bedrooms.** You are expected to keep your room clean and tidy. Check with your host family before making changes to the room.
- **Bathrooms.** You may need to share a bathroom with others. Please make sure you keep the bathroom clean and dry. Most Canadian households use water tanks for hot water, meaning you should avoid taking long showers frequently.
- **Telephone and the internet.** Check with your host family about the usage of phones and internet services.
- **Household chores.** You may be asked to participate in household chores like emptying the dishwasher or setting the table for meals.

Some general considerations

All Canadians are careful with water and energy consumption because of its cost and environmental impact. Avoiding wasting energy is a common practice you need to exercise. Do not let water run unnecessarily, turn off lights when you are not using them and close doors behind you.

For your safety, let your homestay family know where you will be when you leave the house.





7.

Life in London About London, Transportation

London Ontario

London, Ontario, Canada is a city that offers so much to the people who live here. Located in the heart of Southwestern Ontario, it's a mid-sized city that has all the amenities of larger locations, but still has the natural beauty that has led it to be known as The Forest City.

London has a lot going for it, but its best feature is its people. You'll find that the vast majority of Londoners are caring, welcoming, and supportive. And we look forward to you becoming a part of our community and helping it grow.

London benefits from a diverse community both in terms of ethnocultural background and religious diversity. As more newcomers join the city, that diversity will only grow. Now you are a part of the city, we encourage you to connect with individuals from other cultural backgrounds. After all, the world is yours to discover through London Ontario.

Transportation

While London may be a mid-sized city in terms of population, it's very large when it comes to actual space. As a result, there are a number of ways that students can choose to get around town.

Buses

The London Transit Commission (LTC) offers a variety of public transportation options, the largest of which is its fleet of buses. There are dozens of buses that connect all points of the city. Schedules change in the



evenings and on weekends, so we encourage you to visit the LTC website for updated information.

The LTC also offers specialized transit options for those who have accessibility challenges, including physical disabilities.

Bikes & Cycling

On a nice day, there are few things better than getting on your bike and riding around London. The City has increased its commitment to providing dedicated bike lanes throughout the city, and there is an incredible system of connected pathways known as the Thames Valley Parkway, which is part of a system of over 190 kilometres of pathways that connect all corners of London.

Many businesses and community centres throughout the city also provide places to park and lock bikes.

Walking

The City of London is a walk-friendly community for overall walkability. This differs from community to community, but most of our neighbourhoods offer convenient walking opportunities whether you're looking to go for a stroll with your friends, or you need to pick up some groceries. Please be mindful of your safety and stay on sidewalks and cross a road at designated intersections with stop signs, traffic lights, or pedestrian crossovers.



Life in London

Health and Safety, Mental Health, Drugs and Alcohol, Police, Fire and Emergency Medical Services

Health and Safety

Health Care

You must have private medical coverage to study as an international student at Thames Valley District School Board. Please make sure you always take your medical coverage card with you. If you do not have a copy of your medical coverage card, please contact the international education department. London has some of the best medical resources in Canada should you need medical attention.

For medical emergency, please dial 911, be sure to tell the operator your location.

- **Emergency Room.** If you're in a serious or life-threatening condition, you need to visit your nearest emergency room. There are three hospitals within the city of London, and they are London Health Sciences Centre, Victoria Hospital and Children's Hospital, and St. Joseph's Health Care (Urgent Care).

- **Walk-in Clinic.** These are offices where you can see medical professionals for illnesses that are not life threatening.

Mental Health

- It is not uncommon for students to experience mental health struggles when adapting to a new environment and a new culture.

- Mental health is just as important as physical health. Your mental health will impact your ability to study and enjoy life. It could even lead to physical problems.

- Canadians have worked for years to reduce the stigma of mental illness



and to expand access to mental health services. You will not be judged for sharing your struggles or for seeking medical help for mental health.

- Besides talking to your homestay or your school staff, you can also call the 24-hour mental health support hotline, provided by your insurance.

Smoking, Alcohol, and Drugs

- **Smoking.** In Ontario, a person must be 19 years of age to legally buy, be provided with, or smoke tobacco, cannabis or vapour products.
- **Drinking.** In Ontario, a person must be 19 years of age to legally buy, be provided with, or use alcohol.
- **Drugs.** Drugs refer to illegal substances. Students should not possess, or be under the influence of, or provide others with drugs.

Violating these laws and/or any Thames Valley code of conduct expectation will result in you being immediately removed from the international education program

Police, Fire and Emergency Medical Service

If you need immediate and urgent help from the police, fire service or ambulance, **dial 911 and provide the operator with your location.**





For more information, contact us at:

international@tvdsb.ca

www.tvdsb.ca