



Unlocking Potential: A Guide to the YMCA Academy

Introduction

The YMCA Academy is a Ministry of Education-inspected, alternative school that meets the needs of students who require a safer and more supportive learning environment compared with the traditional educational system.

By offering students an individualized learning approach, our school caters to youth who learn differently. Some of the key attributes that set the YMCA Academy apart include:

- An educational space that nurtures unique talents
- A supportive environment that leads to personal and educational growth
- An accessible location in the heart of downtown Toronto



Understanding Alternative Education

To get a better idea of how the YMCA Academy is unique, it's important to understand its approach to alternative education. Our school offers personalized learning, hands-on experiences, and fosters a sense of community and belonging. If you're considering an alternative education for your child's academic journey, the following are some of the key benefits the Academy offers:

- **Dedicated Support and Guidance:** We support and guide our students socially and emotionally as they pursue career pathways that resonate with their interests and aspirations.
- **Modern Facilities:** Our downtown campus features bright classrooms, fully-equipped labs with advanced technologies, and access to state-of-the-art health and fitness facilities at the YMCA.
- **Different Learning Styles:** Our staff caters to learners who are neurodivergent and/or experience anxiety and attention issues, unlike other schools in the private and public education systems.





A Unique Approach to Learning

The YMCA Academy offers a flexible learning environment that includes an Individualized Education Program (IEP) implementation, assistive technologies, and other resources. Our unique approach to learning allows students to:

- Learn in the style that best suits them, including extra time to finish an assignment and advance information about lesson plans to prepare
- Receive accommodations like alternative seating on a yoga ball to avoid feeling restless
- Thrive in smaller class sizes (average of 9 students per class; max 13) and receive socio-emotional support and counselling
- Learn in a fully wireless environment with advanced technologies, including Apple MacBook Airs and iPads, for every student and use of text-to-speech or speech-to-text and audio e-books
- Learn experientially, including workplace internships and co-op programs that lay the foundation for future careers.

“We have a community where every student feels visible, heard and valued. Most of the staff would be able to name every single student.”

~ Tim Seabrook, Head of School, YMCA Academy

Supporting Children So They Can Thrive

The YMCA Academy offers an immersive approach to socio-emotional support, which includes:

- **Student Life Counsellor:** Students have access to personal and responsive counselling to help them make informed decisions by assisting them with problem solving, emotional regulation, self-advocacy, and impulse control.
- **Staff Collaboration and Communication:** Academy teachers and staff attend regularly scheduled and informal meetings to receive and provide updates on new and ongoing challenges students are facing both in and beyond the classroom.
- **Community Connections:** We work with advocacy organizations across the Greater Toronto Area as well as practitioners, including mental health professionals, occupational therapists, and tutors, to support students and their parents.

Events

The Academy hosts many spirit days throughout the school year, which in the past have included lunchtime dance parties, Halloween costume contests, and Twin Day, to name a few.

Extracurricular Activities

The YMCA Academy offers a broad range of extracurricular opportunities, including clubs, events, and a cross-Canada exchange. These opportunities encourage students to collaborate with peers and make new friendships.

Clubs

Some of the more popular clubs and activities with past students have included:

- **Astronomy Club**
- **Basketball Club**
- **Cooking Club**
- **Drama Club**
- **Dungeons & Dragons**
- **Guitar Club**
- **Open Studio drop-in art program**
- **Queer-Straight Alliance**

Cross-Canada Exchange

Since its inception, the YMCA Academy has offered students the chance to participate in the **YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada program**. By pairing young people with their peers from another province or territory, the program aims to build connections between their own communities and those elsewhere in Canada.

Past exchanges have seen Academy students travel to (and host students from) communities across Canada, including: Winnipeg, Manitoba; Oujé-Bougoumou, Quebec; Arviat, Nunavut; Medicine Hat, Alberta; Cornerbrook, Newfoundland; and Cumberland House, Saskatchewan.

Student Success Stories

So what's it like to be a student at the YMCA Academy? We invite you to witness the experience first-hand through two student success stories. Both students struggled in the traditional classroom setting before blooming academically and socially at the YMCA Academy.

Meet Chloe and her mother Jane

Chloe transferred to the Middle School Program after she was diagnosed with clinical ADHD around the time she was in Grade Six. She was attending a Montessori school at the time but her mother Jane felt that her needs weren't being addressed.

Once she was at the Academy, Chloe found the teachers very attentive – they noticed she was struggling and addressed issues before they became bigger. Another big benefit for Chloe is the accessibility of the school counsellor.

Meet Lucas and his father Jon

After struggling in his traditional elementary school, Lucas was diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia. The diagnoses contribute to the way he learns—while he's very creative, he has slower processing skills.

When he made the switch to the Academy in middle school, the family immediately loved the environment of small class sizes and experiential learning. The counselling services were also helpful to Lucas adjusting to his new school.

Lucas is in the Film Club and is working on a short film about a student who is struggling with the anxieties of writing their first exam, turning his personal experience into a learning moment for his peers.

“ The Y Academy recognizes that each student has their own set of ways in which they are engaged. The small number of students means the staff knows everybody and their particular way of learning. ”

~ **Jane**, parent to a YMCA Academy student

“ The experiential learning environment and small class sizes allow the teachers to focus on the individual needs of the kids. Even though they have diverse needs, they are able to shift and understand what each individual kid needs. ”

~ **Jon**, parent to a YMCA Academy student

See Transformative Learning in Action

We invite you to take a tour of the school campus, where you'll get a glimpse of our state-of-the-art facilities and vibrant learning spaces. Meet our team of experienced educators and staff members who are committed to providing a nurturing and enriching educational experience for every student.

Book a tour now!

www.ymcaacademy.org/bookatour



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