

Etobicoke School of the Arts

Toronto, Ontario, Canada



Canada's oldest freestanding arts high school pairs audition-only majors in dance, film and music with a full OSSD academic load.

RANKING DIMENSIONS

Overall	41/100
Academic outcomes	62/100
University placement	58/100
Prestige & heritage	44/100
Alumni network	1/100
Facilities	43/100
Transparency	55/100

EDITOR'S VERDICT

Etobicoke School of the Arts occupies a rare niche in Canada’s school landscape. Founded in **1981** and housed since **1983** in the former Royal York Collegiate Institute, it is Canada’s oldest freestanding arts high school. That matters. ESA is not a general secondary school with a strong drama department bolted on; the arts sit at the centre of the institution. Students pursue an Ontario Secondary School Diploma alongside specialist arts training, and the school’s age range of **14–18** places it squarely in the years when serious young performers, musicians and makers need both discipline and time. The draw is clear: *serious artistic training* inside the public system, without giving up a full academic programme.

What puts ESA on a shortlist is the combination of focus and structure. The school serves students who do not want arts enrichment after hours, but an education organised around it. For families weighing specialist schools, that distinction is decisive. ESA’s appeal lies in intensity: *an arts-first timetable*, *a clear sense of purpose*, and a peer group built around commitment rather than casual interest. It is a day school, secular, and teaches in English. There is no boarding offer and no claim here of broad, all-things-to-all-students provision. ESA is for students ready to commit early to an arts pathway while still completing the OSSD.

That clarity also defines the school’s limits. ESA will not suit teenagers who want a conventional comprehensive experience, a broad co-curricular menu detached from the arts, or the flexibility to drift between priorities. A specialist school asks for a specialist mindset. The right student for ESA is talented, audition-ready, and comfortable in an environment where artistic standards matter. They need stamina for the dual demand of academic study and sustained practice. For a young person who thrives on *creative pressure*, wants *daily immersion in the arts*, and values *a focused, ambitious peer culture*, ESA earns its place on the shortlist.

STRENGTHS	TRADE-OFFS
• As a Toronto District School Board institution, ESA charges no tuition for Ontario resident day students under the publicly funded OSSD system. • Offers seven specialized arts majors, including Dance, Drama, Film, Broadcasting, Music, Visual Arts and Writing, alongside the full academic OSSD curriculum. • Admission is competitive and audition or portfolio based, drawing serious arts-focused applicants from across the Greater Toronto Area rather than a fixed catchment. • Central Toronto location gives students proximity to the city's professional film, theatre and broadcasting industries for auditions and mentorship opportunities. • Counts working actors and musicians among its alumni, including actress Nina Dobrev, reflecting a track record of graduates entering creative professions.	• As a day school with no residential option, ESA is not workable for relocating international families who require boarding. • Admission is effectively restricted to Ontario residents under standard TDSB rules; international applicants face separate, more complex fee and visa arrangements. • Facilities and enrichment budgets reflect public school funding levels rather than the resources typical of private specialist arts conservatories. • High demand relative to available places means class sizes and arts-specific facilities can be stretched despite the school's reputation.

ADMISSIONS

Entry is through a competitive application requiring an audition or portfolio submission in the chosen arts major (Dance, Drama, Film, Broadcasting, Music, Visual Arts or Writing), alongside standard academic transcripts. Applications are typically submitted in the winter preceding Grade 9 entry, coordinated annually through TDSB timelines. As a public school, Ontario residents attend tuition-free, though demand consistently exceeds places, making admission selective. International students may apply through TDSB's international student program, which involves separate fees, study permits and a distinct application track.

WTS RATING 

This profile summarises editorial research by World's Top Schools. Verify all admissions dates directly with the school before submitting. Sources are cited in the full online profile at WorldsTopSchools.com/schools/sch_5cbee54ef8.