

Home Schooling and High School Graduation

A Guide for Families: Earning the NWT Secondary School Diploma

This guide is in two parts. Part One explains how the NWT high school graduation program works and what your child needs to earn a diploma. Part Two explains how home schooled students can earn senior secondary course credits by challenging courses — and how that process works step by step.

PART ONE

Earning the NWT Secondary School Diploma

The NWT Graduation Program

The NWT now follows the British Columbia graduation program, adapted for the Northwest Territories. To earn an NWT Secondary School Diploma, your child must do three things:

①

Earn 80 credits

Across required subjects and electives, at least 16 of which must be at the Grade 12 level.

②

Write three assessments

Grade 10 Literacy, Grade 10 Numeracy, and Grade 12 Literacy — all must be written, but there is no pass/fail.

The 80 Credits: What Your Child Needs to Complete

Credits are earned by successfully completing approved courses with a final mark of at least 50%. The 80 credits fall into three groups.

Group 1 — Required Core Courses (40 credits)

Every student must complete one course in each of these subjects at Grades 10, 11, and 12 (or 10 and 11/12 as shown):

Subject Area	Credits	What This Means
Language Arts	12 credits	One 4-credit course at each of Grades 10, 11, and 12. Includes English Studies, English Indigenous Peoples, and other options.
Social Studies	8 credits	Social Studies 10 (4 credits) plus one Social Studies course at Grade 11 or 12 (4 credits). Northern Studies 12 counts as a Social Studies option.
Mathematics	8 credits	Mathematics 10 (4 credits) plus one Mathematics course at Grade 11 or 12 (4 credits).
Science	8 credits	Science 10 (4 credits) plus one Science course at Grade 11 or 12 (4 credits).
Northern Studies	4 credits	Northern Studies 11 (a 4-credit course).

Group 2 — Additional Required Courses (16 credits)

These courses must also be completed, but offer more flexibility in when and how they are taken:

Subject Area	Credits	What This Means
Career Life Education	4 credits	Exploration of career and life planning. Must be completed before or alongside Career Life Connections.
Career Life Connections	4 credits	Includes 30 hours of paid or unpaid work experience, volunteerism, or community service, plus a capstone project. Counts toward the Grade 12 credit minimum.
Physical and Health Education 10	4 credits	Required at the Grade 10 level.
Arts Education and/or Applied Design, Skills & Technologies	4 credits	One 4-credit course from Arts Education or Applied Design, Skills & Technologies (ADST) at Grade 10, 11, or 12.

Group 3 — Elective Credits (24 credits)

The remaining 24 credits can come from any approved NWT courses at any grade level, including Locally Developed Courses and approved dual-credit post-secondary courses. Once a student has met the required credits in a subject area, any further courses in that area count as electives.

The Grade 12 Minimum

Of the 80 total credits, **at least 16 must be earned at the Grade 12 level**. This includes the required Grade 12 Language Arts course and Career Life Connections. The remaining Grade 12 credits can come from electives, Independent Directed Study, or dual-credit post-secondary courses.

Planning tip: The Grade 12 credit minimum means your child will need to take several courses at the Grade 12 level beyond Language Arts and Career Life Connections. It is worth building this into your planning from Grade 10 so that the final year is not overloaded.

The Three Graduation Assessments

All students must write three provincial Graduation Assessments. These are developed by the BC Ministry of Education and are used across the NWT. They are aligned with the curriculum but not tied to any specific course — they measure broad literacy and numeracy skills, not subject knowledge.

Assessment	Timing	How It Appears on the Transcript
Grade 10 Literacy	Around Grade 10	Transcript records “requirement met” — no score reported
Grade 10 Numeracy	Around Grade 10	Proficiency scale score recorded on transcript
Grade 12 Literacy	Around Grade 12	Proficiency scale score recorded on transcript

What You Need to Know About the Assessments

- **Writing is mandatory.** All three assessments must be written to graduate.
- **There is no pass or fail.** Your child must write each assessment, but graduation does not depend on achieving any particular score.
- **Multiple opportunities.** Students have up to three chances to write each assessment: one initial write (required) and up to two rewrites (optional). Additional opportunities may be granted in special cases.
- **Available in English and French.** Students may write in the language they feel most comfortable with, regardless of their language program.
- **Accommodations are available.** Students with a Student Support Plan (SSP) or Individual Education Plan (IEP) will be provided with the supports listed in their plan.

Important change from the old program: Under the previous Alberta program, some Grade 12 courses required a Diploma Examination that counted toward the final course mark. Under the new BC program, there are no course-linked exams. The three Graduation Assessments stand alone on the transcript and do not affect any course mark.

Earning Course Credits Through the Challenge Process

How Home Schooled Students Can Earn Senior Secondary Credits

Home schooled students do not earn course credits through home-based instruction alone. However, if your child has mastered the outcomes of a senior secondary course through their home program — or through any other learning experience — they may be able to earn formal course credits by challenging that course.

A course challenge is a formal summative assessment that gives the student the opportunity to demonstrate they have already acquired the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required by the course curriculum. If successful, the credit is recorded on the student's official NWT transcript, just as it would be for a student who completed the course in school.

The course challenge process is set out in Section 5.4 of the NWT School Handbook. This section of the guide explains how that process works for home schooled students registered with YK1.

Eligibility

To be eligible to challenge a course for credit, your child must:

- Be registered at an NWT senior secondary school with a notation of home schooled status on the school register.
- Be formally enrolled in the course they intend to challenge within the first five school days of the semester in which the challenge will take place.
- Not have previously attempted a challenge of the same course.

No fee will be charged to home schooled students or their families for the administration of course challenges.

How the Process Works: Three Steps

The course challenge process has three distinct stages. Each must be completed in sequence.

Step 1 — Declare Your Intent and Enroll

Must be completed within the first five school days of the semester

At the start of the semester in which you plan to challenge a course, you must:

- **Submit a written declaration of intent** to the school principal, identifying the specific course(s) your child intends to challenge.
- **Formally enroll your child** in each declared course within the same five school day window.

Both the declaration and the enrollment must be in place before the five-day deadline passes. Declarations or enrollments submitted after this deadline will not be accepted, and the course challenge cannot proceed in that semester.

This declaration is an expression of intent only. It does not start the assessment process. It simply puts the course on the record so that the challenge can proceed when your child is ready. A copy is filed in the student's cumulative record.

Step 2 — Initiate the Readiness Determination

Student-initiated, at any point during the semester

The readiness determination is a separate process from the declaration. Your child initiates it — at whatever point in the semester they feel confident they are prepared — by submitting evidence of readiness to the school principal.

Evidence of readiness may include:

- A portfolio of relevant work or learning
- Documentation of relevant experience
- A recommendation from an instructor or other qualified individual

What happens next: the readiness consultation

Once the principal receives your child's evidence, they will arrange a readiness consultation. This meeting will include:

- Your child
- You, as the parent or guardian
- A teacher with subject expertise in the course being challenged
- A school counsellor, where available

The consultation will consider whether your child is likely to meet the course standard and whether they have the foundation to succeed in subsequent courses in the sequence. The principal makes the final decision on whether to proceed to assessment.

Timing matters: Initiate this step early enough to allow time for the consultation and for all assessment components to be completed before the course's scheduled end date. If the readiness determination is left too late, the principal may defer the challenge to the following semester.

Step 3 — Complete the Challenge Assessment

Scheduled and administered once the principal confirms readiness

Once the principal has confirmed your child is ready, the formal challenge assessment will be scheduled. Before the assessment takes place, the Course Challenge Application – Part A (Appendix B9) must be completed and signed by your child, you, and the principal.

The assessment must:

- **Include at least two components** — which may be a portfolio of learning, a written examination, an oral examination, or a practical examination.
- **Cover all knowledge, skills, and attitudes** defined by the course curriculum.
- **Be fully completed** by the scheduled end of the course. No extensions beyond the course end date will be granted.

The principal may assign a teacher with subject expertise to administer and evaluate the assessment.

If the Challenge Is Successful

On successful completion, the principal submits the Course Challenge Application – Part B (Appendix B10) to Student Records before the mark submission deadline. The credit is then forwarded to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment and recorded on your child's official transcript.

Retroactive Credits for Prerequisites

If your child challenges and passes a higher-level course in a subject sequence (for example, a Grade 11 course), the principal may also award retroactive credits for the lower-level prerequisite course (for example, the Grade 10 course in the same subject), without your child needing to complete that course separately.

The NWT School Handbook (Section 5.7) explicitly recognizes that retroactive credits may be applicable to home schooled students. The following conditions apply:

- Retroactive credits apply to core courses only. Experiential Science courses are not eligible.
- Retroactive credits will not be awarded if credits have already been granted at the prerequisite level.
- These decisions are made on an individual basis and are not automatic.

- Where retroactive credits are awarded, the principal submits a Retroactive Credit Request Form (Appendix B15). No percentage mark is assigned — the course is recorded with an “R” on the transcript.

Why this matters for home schoolers: If your child has been learning at an advanced level in a subject area, a successful course challenge at a higher level can unlock credit for lower-level prerequisites as well — helping to build a transcript that accurately reflects their learning without requiring them to formally complete each course in sequence.

If the Challenge Is Unsuccessful

A student may attempt a course challenge only once. A second challenge of the same course is not permitted.

If the challenge is unsuccessful, or if your child later wishes to improve their mark, they will need to enroll in and complete the course through regular instruction. A student who has been unsuccessful in a challenge may subsequently enroll in that course without any penalty.

Required Forms at a Glance

Form	Appendix	When Completed
Course Challenge Application – Part A	B9	Before the assessment. Completed and signed by student, parent/guardian, and principal. Filed in the student's cumulative record.
Course Challenge Application – Part B	B10	After successful completion. Submitted by the principal to Student Records before the mark submission deadline.
Retroactive Credit Request Form	B15	Where retroactive prerequisite credits are awarded following a successful challenge.

Further Information

Families wishing to pursue course credits through the challenge process are encouraged to contact their registered school's principal well in advance of the semester start date. Early contact allows time for planning and for ensuring your child is enrolled in the right courses before the semester begins.

The course challenge provisions are set out in Section 5.4 of the NWT School Handbook, available at:

https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/section_5_senior_high_processes.pdf

The NWT Graduation Program requirements are set out in the NWT Graduation Program Implementation Guide, available from the Department of Education, Culture and Employment at ece.gov.nt.ca.