



Frequently Asked Questions

Peer Group Placement/Grade Transitions

What is peer group placement?

At the end of the school year, each teacher reports on how students have progressed. If a student meets or exceeds the grade level curricular expectations, they are promoted (“passed”) to the next grade. If a student has not met the majority of the grade level requirements, a decision must be made about whether the student should be placed in the next grade level or retained (“repeat”) in the current grade.

The placement of a student in the next grade level is called peer group placement. That means the student stays with their age group and progresses to the next grade. An education program plan is developed outlining how the student’s needs will be met in the next grade level.

Is peer group placement the same as social passing?

No. The term “social passing” is used to describe a practice that neither challenges nor supports students. It allows for the passing of students regardless of whether they meet the majority of grade level expectations, **without** appropriate programming or support, and **without** the option of consideration for retention in the current grade.

The NWT does **not** practice social passing and it is not an accurate reflection of current policy in the NWT. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) endorses peer group placement in NWT schools, which is not unique to the territory; it is reflected as a promising practice in a large body of research and is used in many jurisdictions across Canada and worldwide.

Who decides if a student will repeat a grade, or be placed in the next grade?

When a student does not meet the majority of grade level curricular expectations, the classroom teacher with support from the School-based Support Team (SBST) first meets to review the student’s evidence of learning, strengths, and needs and then prepares a recommendation for parents/guardians.

The classroom teacher and the SBST will then meet with parents/guardians and outline the pros and cons of each choice, discussing appropriate programming, supports, and interventions for the student. The team will provide their reasoning, including supporting evidence.



Parents/guardians then use that information to make an informed decision on whether to place their child in the next grade or retain them in the current grade.

If students are placed in the next grade, is it a 'free pass'? Will they still be challenged?

A student's placement in the next grade level with their peers does not imply that they've reached all or none of the previous grade's expectations. Teachers must meet students where they are. Teachers must build upon what the students already know to help them achieve the next level of skill and competency development. This can mean reaching back to learn missed skills or concepts or reaching forward to build upon mastered skills and knowledge.

The classroom teacher assesses all students and makes a plan to meet the needs and abilities of each student, as documented in education program plans.

Parents, students, teachers, schools – and the education system as a whole – should still hold appropriate expectations for students to challenge them to grow as NWT capable people.

Is being retained (repeating a grade) a 'bad' thing?

When appropriate, retention of a student can be, and has been, successful with the involvement and agreement of parents and school staff, and sometimes even the student themselves.

However, the decision to retain a student is rarely made when parents/guardians fully understand the possible impacts of retention.

Research shows that most students experience success in school if they stay with students of their own age, rather than repeating a grade with a different group of younger students.

Repeating a grade often results in higher rates of school dropout than when students progress to the next grade with their age group.

Every situation is unique, and some students may find success with retention if it is in their best interest.

If students are placed in the next grade, will they be prepared for life after high school?

Peer group placement is practiced in the NWT up to Grade 9; it is not utilized in High School. Peer group placement does not negatively impact a student's preparation for life after high school.

To graduate with a high school diploma in the NWT, a student [must meet the minimum diploma requirements](#). Progressing through grades 10 to 12 can take up to three or more years, depending on the student.

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When a student first registers for high school classes, they are designated a **grade 10** student.

A student will be designated as a **grade 11** student when the student has:

- completed a minimum of 35 credits, which must include the following:
 - English 10-1 or 10-2
 - Social Studies 10-1 or 10-2
 - Mathematics 10C or Mathematics 10-3
 - Science 10 or Experiential Science 10

Or:

- completed the stated short-term goals for the first year of an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

A student will be designated as a **grade 12** student when the student has:

- completed a minimum of 70 credits, which must include the following:
 - English 20-1 or 20-2
 - Social Studies 20-1 or 20-2
 - Pre-Calculus 20-1, Mathematics 20-2, or Mathematics 20-3
 - Experiential Science 20 or Biology 20 or Physics 20 or Chemistry 20

Or:

- completed the stated short-term goals for the second year of an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Meeting or not meeting entrance requirements for post-secondary schooling is **not** related to peer group placement. Even when a student meets the minimum requirements to achieve a high school diploma, this does not guarantee admission into their desired post-secondary program.

Students must take the courses they need to be accepted into their preferred post-secondary programs and maintain the marks those programs require.

[Career and Education Advisors \(CEAs\)](#) work with students in grades 9-12 to provide career and education advising services, and help them identify skills, strengths, and possibilities for their future. They also help students plan their course selections throughout Grades 10 – 12.

What is a School Based Support Team?

School Based Support Team (SBST): is an ongoing, collaborative, solution-focused team led by the principal with meetings facilitated by the Program Support Teacher (PST) to provide support to classroom teachers with strategy development and implementation. The team coordinates the utilization of school personnel and other resources to support teachers and students. The school-based team may seek the assistance of other professionals or community supports, as appropriate.

What is a Program Support Teacher?

Program Support Teacher (PST): an experienced and skilled teacher who provides direct collaborative support to classroom teachers as they develop instructional strategies to meet the needs of students.

What is a Modified Education Program?

Modified Education Program: is an education program developed for students who are documented by evidence as working significantly above or below grade level in one or more core subjects yet retain the learning outcomes articulated in NWT curricula. A Modified Education Program may or may not contain regular programming elements of NWT curriculum. The Modified Education Program is based on student strengths, needs and interests and includes modified learning goals and evaluation procedures consistent with the principles of differentiated instruction. The Modified Education Program is recorded in a Student Support Plan (SSP).

What is an Individual Education Plan?

Individual Education Plan (IEP): An Individual Education Program is a uniquely tailored student-specific program designed with growth-oriented, asset-based, flexible, and adaptive programming. The Individual Education Program is documented in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This plan is a comprehensive written education plan with individualized goals and objectives determined through a collaborative process, based on the specific strengths and needs of the student and may or may not contain regular or modified programming elements of NWT curriculum.

More information

Department of Education, Culture and Employment
www.ece.gov.nt.ca