



NWT EDUCATION BULLETIN

March 30, 2020

Due to the significant health concerns posed by COVID-19 and the importance of following direction from the Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) on physical distancing as a way to keep students, staff and communities safe, Northwest Territories (NWT) schools will be closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE), Education Bodies and the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association (NWTTA) recognize the serious impact school closures will have on students, parents (including guardians and caregivers), staff and communities, and are committed to working together to find options to provide continued learning for all NWT students.

Education Bodies include: Beaufort Delta Divisional Education Council (BDDEC), Sahtu Divisional Education Council (SDEC), Tlicho Community Services Agency (TCSA), Dehcho Divisional Education Council (DDEC), South Slave Divisional Education Council (SSDEC), Yellowknife Public Board (YK1), Yellowknife Catholic Board (YCS), Commission Scolaire Francophone (CSF), Dettah District Education Authority (Dettah DEA) and Ndilo District Education Authority (Ndilo DEA).

This bulletin explains how Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 (JK-12) students' academic results and high school course completion will be captured for the 2019-2020 school year. It also describes an approach to providing continued learning opportunities for JK-12 students including flexible, home-based resources. Flexibility is essential because every NWT community, school and household is unique so approaches taken by Education Bodies and schools will vary based on factors such as the reliability and quality of community internet bandwidth, location of teachers and whether students have access to the internet. Every Education Body and school will be required to adapt how continued student learning will look in their regions and within their communities. Some schools may be able to rely to a greater degree on internet based solutions to communicate with families and deliver services. Other schools will need to rely on other approaches such as mailing or arranging for pickup of paper-based handouts.

Parents will be contacted by their child's school to discuss or share what continued learning options will look like for their child. They will also be provided with specific instructions about how they will be able to retrieve their child's personal items from the school.

The ECE website will contain a frequently asked questions or FAQ page which will be updated regularly to address questions that arise from parents/guardians and communities about continued learning opportunities.

JK-12 Grade Progressions and Reporting on Learning

Every JK-12 NWT student will receive final grades and a report card for this 2019-2020 school year. Teachers will be responsible for assessing a student's progress to-date, leaving opportunities for including assessment of their continued learning where possible, and assigning a final grade for the end of the current year/semester. All schools will be asked to have final report cards printed and mailed to parents no later than June 30, 2020.

JK-9 students will be promoted, placed or retained, as per the usual process of assessment by the teacher(s) in collaboration with parents. Teachers will contact the parents of students that they believe should be retained in the same grade for the upcoming 2020-2021 school year no later than early May to discuss this option. Students can only be retained if the parents/guardians in consultation with the child's teacher and school principal feel it is in the best interest of their child.

All JK-12 Student Support Plans (SSPs) and Individual Education Programs (IEPs) will be reviewed, updated and finalized, as per regular processes, and a copy will be sent to parents with report cards. Each school will outline the process for parent engagement in order to work with parents/guardians to develop student SSP or IEP plans for the 2020-2021 school year. This work must be completed no later than mid-June 2020.



High School Courses (Grades 10-12)

School staff will make every effort to work with their Grade 10, 11 and 12 students to complete their current core subject courses, providing a final mark and awarding credits.

In circumstances where students are unable to fully complete their current courses as intended, schools can provide students with other work (such as alternate assignments or projects) so that they can finish the course in order to receive credit.

Grade 12 students on track to meet graduation requirements will still be eligible to graduate and receive a NWT High School Diploma in June 2020. If a student is unable to meet specific graduation requirements, such as completion of non-core subject courses like Career and Technology Studies (CTS) courses, Physical Education 10 or completion of Community Service hours, schools will be able to request a course waiver for those students.

Grades 6 and 9 Alberta Achievement Tests (AATs)

- All Grade 6 and 9 AATs are cancelled for May and June 2020.
- AATs already completed by Grade 9 students in January 2020 will not be centrally marked this summer, and reports will not be available for schools.

Grade 12 Diploma Exams

- Due to classes being cancelled and current measures prohibiting gatherings, the administration of diploma exams will be cancelled for April and June 2020.
- Students currently registered to write diploma exams during the April and June sessions will receive exemptions, without the need to apply for one. **The school-awarded mark will be their final course mark.**

Continued Learning Opportunities

ECE, in partnership with Education Bodies and the NWTTA, is developing an approach to offering continued learning opportunities during the closure of NWT schools. This will be unique to every school based on the unique circumstances of the community such as staff availability and internet access.

It is important to note that the need to support broader community and territorial efforts to respond to the COVID-19 crisis means that some NWT educators may be reassigned to support other efforts to fight the spread of the virus. This could involve being re-deployed to other roles, providing child care or working within communities to support delivery of meal programs.

Further, it is important to understand that technology in the North is limited, especially in small communities, and therefore the expectations for learning online must reflect these limitations. Teachers and families should consider that a significant draw on internet and technology resources will cause delays and concerns across the territory for families, businesses and essential services like health care. Care should be taken to ensure continued learning does not rely entirely on online access.

To identify what educational activities to offer, teachers will be asked to consider outcomes of the curriculum that have not been covered in their classes to date, taking into consideration what is possible for students to accomplish at home. A focus on Literacy and Numeracy and on Health and Wellness are being recommended for all JK-9 students.



Teachers are asked to consider household projects and activities that can allow families to learn together, such as reading together, journal writing and shared numeracy activities.

These projects and activities can incorporate more than one subject, learning on the land, experiential activities, physical fitness and communicating with other people while still respecting physical distancing guidelines. Teachers will be asked to check in with families regularly using the most efficient means available (phone, email, etc.) to see how they are doing and if they need any extra support or resources.

The following guidelines for continued learning by grade level are being put in place:

Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten (JK/K)

- Education content will focus on learning through play, natural curiosity and hands-on experiences.
- Children in JK/K have spent a lot of time playing and learning with their peers. They can continue doing this at home with their family!
- Teachers will recommend different opportunities for children to learn through play, to inquire, explore and discover for **an average of 3 hours per week** for most students at these grade levels.

Grades 1-3

- Education content will focus on language/literacy and mathematics/numeracy and health and wellness outcomes of the territorial curriculum.
- Learning and using language (reading, writing, presenting) as well as numeracy (patterns, numbers, distances, navigating) are important areas to focus on.
- Teachers will recommend ideas for learning together, including both assignments and time required for students to complete that work, for **an average of 3 hours per week**, for most students at these grade levels.

Grades 4-6

- Education content will focus on language/literacy and mathematics/numeracy and health & wellness, outcomes of the territorial curriculum, with opportunities to incorporate science and social studies outcomes through cross-curricular learning.
- As much as possible, students should be involved in shaping the learning activity to explore questions that touch their lives, as and when possible.
- Teachers will recommend ideas for learning together, including both assignments and time required for students to complete that work, for **an average of 5 hours per week**, for most students at these grade levels.

Grades 7-9

- Education content will focus on communication/literacy concepts as well as numeracy, science and social studies curriculum outcomes.
- As much as possible, students should be involved in shaping the learning activity to explore questions that touch their lives, including opportunities to work virtually with other students, as and when possible.
- Teachers will recommend ideas for learning together, including both assignments and time required for students to complete that work, for **an average of 7 hours per week**, for most students at these grade levels.



High School (Grade 10-12)

- Teachers will assist students to complete the core subject courses (language arts, mathematics, science, social studies) in which they are currently enrolled.
- It is anticipated that students will need to dedicate **an average of 3 hours of work per course per week**, and will be expected to work with their teachers, parents and others on these learning outcomes and materials.

Support for Continued Learning Online and Offline

During this time, teachers, parents and students are encouraged to communicate with each other using various technologies and tools that best suit their situations. It is important to remember that every family and every school will be in a different situation, meaning it is important to be flexible, open-minded and understanding during this time of uncertainties.

For homes that do not have internet access, schools will work to provide paper-based assignments and supporting resources. Any materials distributed will follow the guidelines of the NWT Chief Public Health Officer. Ideas include, but are not limited to:

- Local radio stations could be asked to provide information about accessing materials or to share lessons through story with the entire community (this would be a way to connect the Indigenous language and culture of your community with everyone);
- Telephones and teleconferences could be used to check in with students and provide support throughout the week;
- Indigenous Government and Hamlet offices can be asked to help when possible;
- Completed assignments could be dropped off at agreed upon locations; and
- Where possible, teachers will be asked to put together packages for students and families that include school supplies, blank journals, art supplies and age appropriate books.

For homes that have internet access, email or online tools such as *Google Classroom* or *Moodle* can be used to send lessons, links, assessment expectations, feedback, and completed assignments. Teachers and students can also communicate through web-conferencing tools such as *Facebook Live*, *GoToMeeting*, *Skype*, *Zoom*, etc. Please remember, care should be taken to ensure continued learning does not rely entirely on online access.

Resources for Parents to Support Learning at Home

Parents are children's first teachers, and many parents are now in that position – literally. Below are some suggestions for how parents can support the learning of their children while at home. First and foremost, valuable learning does not have to be in a 'classroom' and students don't have to be in a 'school' to be taught important skills.

Children with complex needs may have a particularly difficult time coping with this sudden change, and that also asks a lot of parents. The focus for learning will need to be different for everyone and, for some, that learning may focus on simply adjusting to the new normal, following simple routines, managing emotions, learning self-regulation strategies, or practicing a life skill such as tying shoes, cooking, or simple household chores. This is all important learning, so parents should embrace what they can and take it one step at a time.



Here are some suggestions to help make learning at home easier for everyone:

1. **Make a schedule/Have a routine:** Routine is helpful for most people. Children will be more likely to feel safe and secure in these uncertain times if there is a consistent plan for their learning that they have helped to create. Parents are encouraged to make a schedule with their children and post it in a visible area; this way everyone has the same expectations. However, parents should not feel that their entire schedule has to be focused only on school work. Parents should also plan for relaxation and family time.
2. **Make space for learning:** All homes are different and each have challenges when trying to organize learning activities. When and where possible, parents should identify areas where children can learn in the best possible way, such as using a kitchen for cooking, a table for drawing or writing, a garage for exploring mechanics, a comfy chair/floor for reading, and the yard or land for exploring outdoors. If possible, parents should try to set up any available technology such as Wi-Fi access, email addresses to communicate with teachers, and set reasonable rules around screen time, instant messaging, video calls and online games.
3. **Internet Safety:** Parents should understand that it is okay for children to have increased screen time during this unprecedented time; however, they should still be aware of what their children are doing online and ensure they understand basic internet safety rules.
4. **Each child and youth are unique and need different things:** For children in Grades JK-6, play is very important. For children in Grades 7-9, building and sorting out friendships is key, so if technology is available, video-calling, Facetime, texting and communicating online is likely a very important part of their day. For young adults in Grades 10-12, accessing a quiet space to complete assignments is going to be important. Parents should be mindful of the different needs of students and do their best to be flexible and open to different learning options. Remember to read, laugh, share stories, explore new things, and get outside while following social distancing guidelines. Being on the land, taking in fresh air and sunshine can do wonders for everyone.

On-the-land Learning

With the current situation of education now outside of schools and classrooms, this is an ideal opportunity for many families to take time to be on the land, recognizing the value of land-based learning and experiencing the many lessons the land has to offer. This is also a way of encouraging physical distance.

Traditional skills are important and valuable in these unexpected times. Families are encouraged to go into the bush or to a cabin and teach the art of packing, arranging gear, setting snares, chopping wood, starting cooking fires, setting a net, and other traditional or survival skills.

Parents can use time on the land together to learn the traditions, knowledge, values and skills of their Elders and Ancestors. Land-based literacy can include sharing the oral stories of families, friends and community. Children can record and write down these stories or work on survival skills, such as knowing how to 'read' the land and listen to the animals. For older children, parents or guardians can show them how to read through equipment maintenance guides and do hands-on learning in the process. Numeracy skills can also be taught on the land, including estimation skills, map reading or measurement.

Families are encouraged to have their children bring other suggested materials from teachers out on the land with them so they can make connections between subject-based learning and land-based concepts.

Students may be able to apply for credit based on their experience and time on the land. Special projects credits may be available based on learning experiences.



Remote Counselling Services for Students

Many students may be quite stressed right now, especially those eligible to graduate this year. Parents can support their child's mental health by making time to listen to and validate their concerns and feelings. If children do not share their feelings openly, parents can have conversations around how they feel, especially about changes to how they can or cannot connect with their friends, graduation ceremonies being cancelled and traditions and special events being postponed.

Mental wellness counselling services via virtual care technology and telephone services will be available for all students. Child and Youth Care Counsellors and counsellors from Northern Counselling and Therapeutic Services (NCTS) are in the process of reaching out to students that they have been working with to make arrangements with them individually.

In addition, counselling staff are working on virtual workshops and educational materials about mental health for parents, children and youth. Further information about where students can call for support will be posted to the ECE website which will be updated regularly as new information about supports and services become available. All students will be eligible to access counselling services, regardless of whether or not they were already receiving counselling.

Kids' Help Phone

Children and youth who are under 25 years old, who need someone to talk to can text, call or chat with a trained professional at the Kids' Help Phone 24/7:

- Text CONNECT to 686868
- Call 1-800-668-6868
- Download the **'Always There'** app

For more resources and information you can visit the website at: <https://kidshelpphone.ca/>

Healthy Food Programming

Education Bodies receive funding to provide healthy food to students at school, such as breakfast, snacks, lunch and care-packages. In the coming days and weeks, each school will be providing community and school-specific instructions about what programs will be offered and how to access them.

Assistive Technology

Assistive technologies reduce or remove barriers to learning for students as documented on their Student Support Plans (SSPs) and Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Each school will give community and school-specific instruction as to how students' existing assistive technology will be accessed during this period of social distancing.



Directory of Northwest Territories Education Bodies

BEAUFORT-DELTA DIVISIONAL EDUCATION COUNCIL

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