



Honors Level Course Guide

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STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Honors Level Course Guide

Overview & Background

In response to the field requesting updated guidance and to address current standards and instructional best practices, NCDPI developed the Honors Level Course Guide and amended SBE Course for Credit ([CCRE-001](#)) in July of 2023 to include honors level courses. The Honors Level Course Guide will better support Public School Units (PSUs) in the development, implementation, and evaluation of honors level courses.

Audience

This document is intended to provide guidance for creating, implementing, and evaluating high quality honors level courses. It is recommended that personnel within each PSU who are responsible for managing honors courses be familiar with this guide and use it as a reference for honors courses. The Honors Level Course Criteria should be used internally to evaluate individual honors courses and provide feedback where needed. The accompanying Self Monitoring Tool should also be used internally to ensure fidelity and transparency among all stakeholders.

Importance of Honors Level Courses

Honors level courses in high school are critical in a school's schedule to offer a range of programming. Honors level courses offer opportunities for students to work at an increased pace, depth and complexity. Students who participate in honors level courses develop critical-thinking skills, take ownership for their learning, and become creative problem-solvers and collaborators. Data consistently shows that approximately 84% of all high school graduates in North Carolina successfully complete at least one honors level course.

Definition of Honors Level Courses

Honors level courses are distinguishable from standard level courses in depth and scope. These courses must be designed and implemented to:

- Meet the needs of students with advanced learning needs by providing a differentiated course of study and opportunities based on their aptitudes, achievement, and interests.
- Provide depth in rigor, complexity, challenge, and creativity beyond the standard level course.

- Adjust pacing to increase depth and scope.
- Foster growth and achievement for students with advanced learning needs.

Inherently honors courses are developed at rigorous, advanced levels which follow the best practices of this guide. The Honors Level Course Guide development and evaluation tool may be used to ensure these inherently honors courses are held to the same standard. Please see the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCoS) for the available inherently honors courses. Inherently honors courses vary in expectations according to content area. These courses are outlined in [GRAD-009](#).

It is critical that students, families, and all school personnel are informed and understand that honors level courses are designed to be more challenging for the student with advanced learning needs. Honors level courses are developed as an integral component of a differentiated program of study that provides an array of opportunities for all students based on their aptitudes, achievement, and interests. A well developed academic program will have standard, honors, and other advanced learning opportunities.

What makes an honors level course <i>Honors</i>?	
<p>What it <i>is</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • independent investigation • intentional differentiation • inquiry and connections • depth and complexity • collaboration • increased pace 	<p>What it <i>is not</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • additional assessments • one size fits all • longer papers • only more work

Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders

Teacher's Role (includes but not limited to)

Teachers of honors level courses will:

- Possess the skills, knowledge, and disposition to facilitate an honors level course with advanced curriculum content.

- Develop and implement a differentiated curriculum based on current innovations and research in the subject area in order to deliver an honors level course to support the growth of students with advanced learning needs.
- Utilize a variety of instructional strategies to engage students with advanced learning needs.
- Communicate with students, parents, and administrators to maximize student success.

Student's Role (includes but not limited to)

Students enrolled in honors level courses will:

- Demonstrate the interest, ability, and motivation and/or the potential to interact with the honors level content.
- Exhibit personal responsibility for learning.
- Engage in an advanced level of learning through high quality work.
- Complete any prerequisite course(s) leading to the honors level course.
- Communicate with the teacher if additional support or challenge is needed to support achievement and growth.

Parent's/Guardian's Role (includes but not limited to)

Parents/Guardians of the student in an honors level course will:

- Recognize the requirements and expectations of an honors level course.
- Support students to perform at an advanced level of learning.
- Communicate with teachers as needed to maximize their student's success.

School/District's Role (includes but not limited to)

To support honors level course instruction, administrators will:

- Assign honors level courses to teachers who possess the skills, knowledge and dispositions to facilitate an honors level course with advanced curriculum content.
- Ensure teachers are using the Honors Level Course Guide to inform the development of honors level course instruction.

- Support teachers through a variety of professional learning experiences focused on honors level coursework. Consider reflecting on courses by analyzing sample student work and unit plans.
- Guarantee school counselors, along with others who assist students with developing course sequencing plans to be career and college ready, are informing students in an equitable way about the options available to access and pursue advanced coursework, including honors courses.
- Work with facilities personnel and other administrators to provide any special equipment, technology, or materials that are necessary to facilitate the honors level course.
- Utilize the Honors Level Course Development and Evaluation Tool to ensure fidelity of implementation across honors level courses.

Related Policies

[NC State Board of Education Policy Manual](#)

Policy ID/#	Title
CCRE-001	Course for Credit
GRAD-003	NC Academic Scholars Program
GRAD-006	Ninth Grade Students Accelerated Preparation for College Entry
GRAD-007	High School Diploma Endorsements
GRAD-008	Advanced Courses Satisfying Graduation Requirements
GRAD-009	High School Transcript Standards <i>All honors level courses, based on GRAD-009 receive additional weighting with a value of 0.5 toward grade point average.</i>
ACIG-000	Local Academically or Intellectually Gifted Programs Guidelines
Article 9B	Academically or Intellectually Gifted Students
GCS-L-004	Globally Competitive Students

Teachers and designated instructional leaders within each PSU should work collaboratively to ensure the requirements within the *Honors Level Course Development and Evaluation Tool* are consistently, equitably, and upheld for each honors level course.

See the *Honors Level Course Development and Evaluation Tool*.

Updated April 2026

Developed by the Office of Advanced Learning and Gifted Education,
in collaboration with the Offices of Academic Standards and Career and Technical Education

DEFINITIONS

Differentiation: is adapting the curriculum, instruction, and learning environment to address a range of student needs. Differentiating the curriculum, instruction, and learning environment includes:

- Using preassessments and various other data to identify student abilities, readiness, and interests. This data may include both qualitative and quantitative sources.
- Adapting the content by creating experiences that accelerate, enrich, and extend the North Carolina Standard Course of Study and other applicable experiences.
- Modifying the process and product by incorporating multiple instructional practices, including strategic grouping, intentional scaffolding, and using a variety of resources and materials.
- Organizing the physical classroom and learning activities in ways that maximize student learning and respond to student needs.
- Developing processes and procedures to manage student and teacher interactions during a variety of learning activities.

Acceleration: Progress through an educational program at rates faster or at ages younger than conventional. Accelerate learning for students who are mastering/ or could master the content standard(s) at a faster pace.

Extension: Instruction designed to broaden the understanding of a particular standard by adding rigor, depth and complexity. Extend a curriculum standard in a subject area by providing a task that delves deeper and is more complex.

Enrichment: Learning opportunities that enhance a student's interests and talents through creative and academic exploration. Enrich a content standard by providing activities that appeal to student interests and social/emotional well-being.

Honors Level Course Guide: PSU Attestation Statement

*To be implemented at the end of December 2025

Honors-level courses are developed as an integral component of a differentiated program of study. It is critical that efforts are made to maintain the integrity of honors-level programming and ensure all stakeholders are fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.

This form should be completed by the Chief Academic Officer or designee, [submitted](#) to NCDPI, and kept on file with the Chief Academic Officer.

- Students have been informed of, educated, and supported in their roles and responsibilities.
 - In progress. Comments (*not required*):
 - Complete
- Teachers have been informed of, educated, and supported in their roles and responsibilities.
 - In progress. Comments (*not required*):
 - Complete
- Parents/Guardians have been informed of and educated on how they can support their students.
 - In progress. Comments (*not required*):
 - Complete
- School-level administrators have been informed of, educated, and supported in their roles and responsibilities.
 - In progress. Comments (*not required*):
 - Complete
- District-level administrators have been informed of, educated, and supported in their roles and responsibilities.
 - In progress. Comments (*not required*):
 - Complete
- The components of the Honors Level Course Development and Evaluation Tool have been reviewed for each Honors Level course and meet criteria.
 - In progress. Comments (*not required*):
 - Complete

By checking YES below, I assert that all items listed above have been evaluated and are in place for continued improvement, will be consistently monitored, and reviewed at a minimum of every three years to maintain the quality and integrity of honors-level courses. To the best of my knowledge, all information provided on this reporting form is accurate at the time of submission.

- Yes