

Challenge Program Frequently Asked Questions

Q: *How is the Challenge Program different from regular programs?*

A: In order to best meet the learning needs of gifted students, the Challenge Program groups students with similar aptitude together. Research consistently suggests this grouping promotes maximum engagement of students, and hence maximizes the potential of achieving or exceeding mandated learning outcomes. The instruction is modified to address the specific learning needs of gifted students using a variety of techniques and alternative assignments.

Q: *What curriculum is delivered by the Challenge Program?*

A: The Ministry mandated curriculum is delivered by the Challenge Program. However, it is delivered in such a way as to focus on higher-level understanding, concepts within knowledge, and creativity within the curriculum. There is an increased emphasis on broadening the curriculum, applying concepts, and developing problem-solving skills.

Q: *How is the Challenge Program different from Honours?*

A: There are several differences between Challenge and Honours. First, the Challenge Program has a different application process because the program caters specifically to students identified as gifted, creative and talented. Students are typically accepted into Honours courses based on output and letter grade in a particular course. The Challenge Program will look at these performance indicators, but will also look at numerous other factors to determine aptitude including evaluation of aptitude testing, analysis of written samples, examination of creativity, and investigation of personal characteristics to name a few. Once this process is complete, the student receives a Special Needs designation as Gifted, Creative, and Talented. Students are then grouped for each of their academic courses rather than just for an individual course. This grouping allows the students to get to know their peers very well, thereby creating the ideal learning environment. In terms of instruction, teaching techniques are tailored to the specific aptitude of these students, including coordination of learning between courses and grades.

Q: *What courses are included in the Challenge Program?*

A: In grades 9 and 10, students are grouped together in their English, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science courses. In grade 11, students select the science of their choice. In grade 12, the number of electives increases to reflect the post secondary plans of the students such that English 12 is the only Challenge course. However, students typically select Interdisciplinary Studies in grade 11 or 12.

Q: *How is the Challenge Program different from other programs, such as self-paced programs?*

A: In addition to the unique aspects of Challenge already mentioned, there are several differences between Challenge and self-paced programs. Research on gifted education strongly supports a model of instruction involving significant mentoring and teacher-student interaction. In fact, the research suggests that the student-teacher connection is even more important for gifted individuals versus other students - because gifted students may have the ability to recognize complex concepts within knowledge if it is pointed out to them. Hence, the Challenge Program uses a variety of techniques including compacting at times, but not at the expense of depth of knowledge or understanding/integration of concepts. The pace of learning is regulated by a teaching professional in response to student development. Moreover, the research also recognizes significant benefits of student-student interaction among gifted peers.

Q: *Is the Challenge Program elitist?*

A: Gifted education is internationally recognized as a category of special needs. Hence, the Challenge Program is no more elitist than any other special needs program. It simply addresses the unique learning styles of these particular students.

Q: *Is Challenge more work?*

A: No... with a caveat. Challenge is not more work, but it is different work. Elementary concepts or vocabulary may be glossed over so that more time and effort can be spent on application and synthesis of knowledge and concepts. The caveat is that many students choose to work in greater depth and breadth than what is required to satiate their desire to learn and express themselves.

Q: *Do students get lower grades in Challenge than what they would receive in the regular program?*

A: No. Students' grades reflect to what level they have met the Ministry mandated learning objectives. In fact, students in Challenge tend to earn higher marks as their knowledge and understanding become more complete.

Q: *Are the Challenge classes filled with nerds?*

A: Challenge classes are filled with students of all stripes. Some are gregarious, some are introverts, and some are athletes, or dancers, or musicians or models. The only common thread is that all of these students have a high aptitude for learning. Of special note, this common thread consistently creates intense friendships that last into adulthood.

Q: *What is the entrance procedure?*

A: Application forms are available that describe this process in detail, and may be picked up at the respective schools, or are available online at www.mtdoug.sd61.bc.ca. Students should fill out the student information form #1 ASAP that provides us with the demographics so that we can arrange for a testing session. Students submit a portfolio of information including school work, report card information, interests and achievements, letters to the selection committee, etc. on the day of the testing. Once we gather all of our information, a selection committee meets to determine the results.

Q: *Is it possible to study for the aptitude tests?*

A: No. Instructions and practice problems will occur as a demonstration immediately before the test begins however.

Q: *What percent on the aptitude test is required to get into the Challenge program?*

A: The aptitude tests are not evaluated in terms of percent. The results are actually calculated in terms of relative aptitude to the general population for a one-time sitting. Moreover, these tests are not intended to determine whether or not an individual meets the criteria for Gifted, Creative, and Talented; they are just one tool that is used to supplement the overall student profile.

Q: *Are students required to be gifted, creative, and talented in all areas to get in?*

A: No. Occasionally a student has exceptional abilities in all areas, but usually they show varying abilities in different subject areas. The Challenge Selection Committee focuses on a student's overall aptitude and abilities to see if Challenge is the right place for them.

Q: *Can a student with a learning disability be accepted into Challenge?*

A: A learning disability may have nothing to do with a student's aptitude for learning. Some students in the Challenge Program have a learning disability in conjunction with their significant learning abilities.

Q: *Is a Cross Boundary transfer required once a student is admitted into the Challenge Program?*

A: No. Challenge is a district program. Hence students who are accepted require no transfer.

Q: *What is the ratio of males to females in the Challenge program?*

A: It varies a little from year to year. However, the ratio usually comes in very close to 50% boys and 50% girls.

Q: *Can a student who is accepted into the Challenge Program but chooses to go elsewhere, reapply next year?*

A: Every year, a few students choose to go elsewhere for a variety of reasons. This is understandable as many students are nervous enough about attending a new school, never mind a new program with new kids. Unfortunately, however, there are no guarantees for gaining acceptance into the program after grade 9 due to space limitations. This holds true even for students previously identified as gifted. A significant number of students, including those from private schools, reapply in the later grades. Typically about half of the qualified applicants are successful.