

For More Information

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School District of Cheltenham Township
Office of Education

Programs & Services for Gifted Students 2011–2012



www.cheltenham.org/gifted
sdctchallenge.edublogs.org

Cheltenham's Challenge Program & Gifted Services

The Mission of the School District of Cheltenham Township is to nurture each child through a wealth of academic endeavors and community partnerships, and our Vision is to strive for excellence. In keeping with these goals, the District provides screenings and evaluations of all students thought to be eligible for gifted services under Chapter 16 of the Pennsylvania School Code. In addition, we provide appropriate programs and services to all students identified as gifted who are in need of specially designed instruction. All of these programs and services are available at no cost to parents.

Programs and services are developed based on each child's identified areas of strength and the need for specially designed instruction and related services.

The District has recently completed a yearlong comprehensive review and analysis of our gifted program and services. As a result of this review, many aspects of our program are currently being updated and revised to maintain the high standard of excellence we have traditionally held. Information about the plans for revision and progress towards completing the update will be posted at the district website.

Acceleration

The second method of meeting gifted needs is **acceleration**, when we increase the pace of instruction for rapid learners.

Acceleration may be incorporated into curriculum compacting, described above. Students who have already mastered a unit of study may in some cases be given the chance to move ahead into later units.

Some other ways the district has built acceleration options into our program are:

◆ **Accelerated coursework.** Certain classes, such as accelerated math at Elkins park, and honors and AP courses at the high school, have an accelerated pace

built in. We also offer dual enrollment for students who wish to take college courses while still in high school.

◆ **Single-subject acceleration.** Some students may be able to move a full year ahead of the regular curriculum pace. These students may study with a higher grade level, or use independent study or online instruction.

◆ **Whole-grade acceleration.** In rare cases a child may "skip a grade." We use the research-based Iowa Acceleration Scale to inform our team decisions in these cases.

Our Core Values

Enrichment

There are two broad methods for meeting the needs of gifted learners. The first, **Enrichment**, generally refers to learning that extends the depth of understanding of a topic, skill, or concept.

We design enrichment activities around Joseph Renzulli's idea that deep learning happens best in the context of a "real and present problem." We place less emphasis on formal instruction and rote learning and more on problem solving and independent learning.

Enrichment activities may take many forms. Each of these will be individually de-

signed or selected for the needs of the student and the structures in place in the school and classroom. Some options we may consider are:

- ◆ hands-on projects
- ◆ interest development centers
- ◆ independent research opportunities
- ◆ small group special topic seminars
- ◆ problem solving clusters
- ◆ Socratic discussion groups
- ◆ assignments focusing on thinking skills
- ◆ apprenticeships, internships, or mentorships

Vision

The Challenge Program of the Cheltenham School District strives to ensure that gifted students become lifelong learners who actively pursue intellectual challenge; who think critically, creatively, and compassionately; and who value themselves and the diversity of their communities.

Mission

In order to accomplish this Vision, the faculty, staff, and administration of the Cheltenham School District will work collaboratively to:

- ◆ design instruction and learning experiences through which students can build a foundation of critical and creative thinking skills
- ◆ enable students with abilities beyond the norm to realize their potential by identifying and developing their strengths
- ◆ foster individual academic talents while simultaneously nurturing the whole child
- ◆ create a safe educational space in which students are encouraged to take intelligent risks, explore their interests, and express their gifts
- ◆ promote academic rigor by incorporating both enrichment and acceleration throughout all learning environments
- ◆ address students' individual needs by providing learning options and by teaching with a variety of appropriate methods
- ◆ encourage students to develop their leadership and collaboration skills in order to positively influence and productively contribute to the greater community

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Giftedness?

The term *gifted student* in Cheltenham School District refers to children who give evidence of higher performance capability in such areas as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school district in order to develop such capabilities.

The unique needs and characteristics of gifted students manifest in many ways.

Gifted children often:

- ◆ Learn new materials faster and retain them longer
- ◆ Comprehend in-depth, complex ideas
- ◆ Deal with complex, abstract concepts
- ◆ Infer and connect concepts
- ◆ Operate on higher levels of thinking
- ◆ Ponder with depth and multiple perspectives
- ◆ Develop asynchronously
- ◆ Display intense emotions, passions, and interests

Curriculum Compacting

The pace and content of the general curriculum are designed for the typical student's needs. There are always students who already know some of the skills and content of a unit of study. For these students we compact the curriculum.

The process begins with an assessment to determine what the student already knows and is capable of doing. This could take many forms, including a pretest, an interview, or a writing sample.

Next the teacher, often in collaboration with the Challenge Consultant, will analyze the assessment and determine which lessons and assign-

ments from the upcoming unit the student must participate in to fill any important gaps in learning.

Other unit activities will then be replaced with alternatives. Often the student and teacher develop an individual contract outlining what the student will work on during the unit. Enrichment activities are typically chosen to allow the student to develop skills and concepts at a greater depth. Sometimes students will have the opportunity to pursue topics of interest that they would not otherwise be able to explore.

Services & Accommodations for Gifted Students

Differentiated Instruction

Our services for gifted learners begin with understanding that every child has unique abilities, needs, and interests. All of our teachers differentiate the instruction in their classrooms in a variety of ways to take these differences into account.

One or more elements of the curriculum may be modified for a given lesson or activity:

Content. The knowledge, understanding, and skills we want students to learn. Content modifications may be enrichment or acceleration, described in more detail later.

Process. How students interact with the content and

make sense of it. This could include different kinds of flexible grouping, learning contracts, options for accessing information, and so on.

Product. How students demonstrate what they have learned. Student might have multiple project options, choices about media (written, visual, oral), or learning contracts to compile a portfolio.

Teachers and students consider a child's readiness, interests, and learning profile when planning for differentiated instruction for all learners.

Is My Child Eligible for Gifted Support?

The District screens all second and fourth grade students for gifted potential. However, screenings can be requested at any other time by a parent or teacher. If you suspect that your school age child is gifted, you may submit a written request to your building principal. A *Request for Gifted Screening* form for this purpose is available on our web site. Gifted screening is a three-stage process that looks at multiple criteria to determine whether a child is gifted.

Level 1: Aptitude and Achievement testing

Level 2: Individual test of gifted potential

Level 3: Gifted multidisciplinary evaluation (GMDE) by a certified school psychologist

To be eligible for gifted support services, the GMDE must determine that the student is both gifted *and* in need of specially-designed instruction. If this is the case, the Challenge Consultant will then develop a Gifted Individualized Education Plan (GIEP) in collaboration with the parents and general education teachers.

What Does the Challenge Program Look Like?

While each gifted student has an individualized plan with specific goals designed for his or her needs, some needs are common to many gifted students, and the District has established specialized programs with such common needs in mind.

Full-time Challenge Consultants in each of our seven schools are dedicated solely to serving the needs of our gifted and high-ability students. They create extension activities and compacted curriculum and work in partnership with the general edu-

cation teachers to provide enrichment opportunities.

In grades K-6, for example, students with advanced reading ability have access to the SYNC Curriculum. In math, we provide accelerated classes beginning in grade 5.

At Cedarbrook, students have a broad menu of options from which to choose in pursuing topics of personal interest.

Our high school Challenge Consultants provide individual support and counseling and also offer regular small group seminars.

What Cannot Be Addressed in a GIEP?

Team members often want to take advantage of the annual meeting and goal setting process to include additional items in the GIEP. While such planning and discussion are important, certain things may not be addressed in a GIEP.

Weaknesses or remediation. Gifted students develop asynchronously, and may have areas of significant weakness. If these require intense intervention or accommodations, the team should consider special education or a 504 agreement.

Modifications to school organization or structure. We are not permitted to include

statements about teacher assignments, classroom placement, other students, schedules, or similar organizational issues.

Anything the school cannot deliver. Though we always strive for excellence, a GIEP does not need to define, and the school is not obligated to provide, the *ideal* gifted learning environment; the plan needs only to be *appropriate* to the child's needs. The administrator on the team is responsible for making sure that what is planned is both feasible and responsible.

Who is Responsible for the GIEP?

Each team member has certain responsibilities in implementing and monitoring the GIEP.

The **Challenge Consultant** is the child's case manager. She or he oversees implementation of the goals, outcomes, and instruction by providing support, advice, and resources to the classroom teacher.

The **classroom teacher** is responsible for knowing the students individualized goals and outcomes, and for implementing the specially designed instruction and accommodations daily.

The **parent** should provide support and feedback to both the student and teacher about how the goals are working out over the course of the year.

Depending on his or her age and maturity, the **student** may be a member of the GIEP team, and should be aware of the goals in the plan. Students may self-assess their own progress during the year and monitor their own growth.

What Services are Available to My Gifted Child?

The District provides a range of services to gifted students both within the general education environment and through pull-out and enrichment opportunities. Classroom teachers at all grade levels have received and continue to receive professional development in differentiating instruction and flexible grouping within the classroom.

As such, we make a wide range of options available for the education of gifted students.

Programming to be considered by the GIEP team may include one or more of the following:

- ◆Curriculum Compacting
- ◆Flexible Grouping
- ◆Subject-Matter or Whole Grade Acceleration
- ◆Independent Study
- ◆Small Group Seminars
- ◆Mentoring
- ◆Extracurricular Programs
- ◆Dual Enrollment
- ◆Early Entry to First Grade

Program Offerings

Elementary Schools (Grades K-4)

Regular Curriculum Enhancements

- ◆ SYNC Curriculum reading enrichment
- ◆ Enriched math available in Grades 3 and 4

Gifted Seminars

- ◆ Stock Market Game
- ◆ Philadelphia Young Playwrights
- ◆ Research
- ◆ Math enrichment/ Problem solving

Academic competitions

- ◆ Future Problem Solvers
- ◆ Spelling Bee

Other Services Available

- ◆ In-classroom differentiation with support from Challenge consultants
- ◆ Course Compaction
- ◆ Subject Acceleration and Whole Grade Acceleration
- ◆ Independent research projects
- ◆ Cultural enrichment and research-related field trips
- ◆ Other activities developed by building consultants to meet individual and community needs

How is the GIEP Developed?

The GIEP is developed annually by the GIEP team. This team always includes the gifted teacher (Challenge Consultant), a classroom teacher, a parent, and an administrator.

The Challenge Consultant will typically write a draft GIEP based on the Present Levels (PLEP) data. At the GIEP meeting, the team will review this data and discuss the draft goals, outcomes, and specially designed instruction.

Each team member brings an important and unique perspective to the process, and developing a GIEP can be a

very fulfilling, collaborative process when everyone works with the child's needs and interests in mind.

Although a GIEP is usually designed to span a full calendar year, any team member may request a GIEP meeting at any time to discuss or revise the plan if circumstances warrant.

Students often have many strengths and needs. A GIEP works best when it focuses on one or two areas of greatest need. Attempting to address too many areas at once results in a cumbersome plan that is difficult to implement.

Gifted Individualized Education Plan (GIEP)

What Is a GIEP?

If your child's team determines that he or she is eligible for gifted support, the next step is to develop a one-year Gifted Individualized Education Plan (GIEP).

This plan has several sections, each of which provides detailed information about your child and his or her educational program.

Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEP).

This section summarizes recent performance data about your child, including district and classroom assessments, anecdotal reports from teachers and parents, and any other information helpful in determin-

ing how your child is currently doing in school.

Annual Goal. Your child will have one or more annual goals. This broad goal outlines what areas of strength your child will work to improve over the year.

Short Term Learning Outcomes. Each goal will have one or more outcomes. These are more targeted, describing specifically what your child will be able to do at the end of the plan.

Specially Designed Instruction. This is a description of what the school and teachers will do in order to help your child accomplish his or her goals and outcomes.

Elkins Park School (Grades 5 & 6)

Regular Curriculum Enhancements

- ◆ SYNC Curriculum reading enrichment
- ◆ Advanced Courses
- ◆ Course Compaction
- ◆ Single- and Double-Accelerated math
- ◆ In-classroom differentiation with support from Challenge consultants

Enrichment trips and projects (e.g. Pocono Environmental Education Center)

Independent Study

Art and music enrichment

- ◆ Artist-in-residence program
- ◆ Arts for Anyone
- ◆ Young Playwrights
- ◆ Shakespeare Festival

Cultural enrichment trips

- ◆ Philadelphia Orchestra
- ◆ Opera
- ◆ Franklin Institute
- ◆ Theater

Academic bowls and competitions

- ◆ Science Fair
- ◆ Math Olympiad
- ◆ Robotics

Program Offerings

Cedarbrook Middle School (Grades 7 & 8)

Gifted Seminars (sample)

- ◆ Interest Inventories
- ◆ Social Issues of Gifted Identification
- ◆ Leadership II
- ◆ Goal Setting and Defining Priorities
- ◆ Current Events Seminar

Regular Curriculum Enhancements

- ◆ Advanced Courses and Electives
- ◆ “A With Distinction” program
- ◆ Course Compaction
- ◆ Independent Study

- ◆ In-classroom differentiation with support from Challenge consultants

Academic bowls, contests, and competitions

- ◆ Carpita Verba
- ◆ Johns Hopkins CTY Talent Search
- ◆ Robotics
- ◆ Solar Car Competition
- ◆ Future City
- ◆ North American Computational Linguistics Olympiad (NACLO)
- ◆ Philadelphia Young Playwrights

Eligibility Criteria

No one indicator can or should be used to make educational decisions about any child, and we use multiple criteria to determine whether a child is in need of gifted support.

General intellectual functioning, or IQ, is, however, a significant indicator of school ability. An IQ of 100 indicates average ability. Most students have an IQ between 80 and 120. The general education curriculum, with differentiation, is sufficient to meet their needs. A student with an IQ of 130 can be considered gifted.

To be eligible for gifted support, a student must meet two general criteria: he or she must

be *both* gifted *and* in need of specially designed instruction. We consider several factors in determining giftedness:

- ◆ IQ score
- ◆ School performance (grades, test scores, etc.)
- ◆ Unique or exceptional talents and abilities in a particular academic area
- ◆ Leadership capacity
- ◆ Critical and creative thinking skills

In some cases, eligibility is clear. In others, a team meeting may be held to review all the information and decide together whether a student is gifted and in need of support.

Gifted Multidisciplinary Evaluation (GMDE)

Students who meet criteria for Level 2 screening will be referred for a full GMDE. This evaluation is, by law, performed by a certified school psychologist. The psychologist will consider all data already collected during screening, and will also administer additional tests as needed to determine the child's strengths, needs, and abilities.

At minimum, the psychologist will administer a test of intellectual functioning, commonly known as an IQ test. This test has multiple sections assessing a variety of mental abili-

ties, including verbal comprehension, perceptual reasoning (problem solving), working memory, and processing speed. These sections are combined to provide a composite IQ score.

Certain students with specific needs or demonstrated abilities may also be given additional tests.

The psychologist summarizes his or her professional findings in the Gifted Written Report (GWR). This report contains all evaluation data as well as a recommendation of eligibility based on the criteria described in the next section.

Cheltenham High School (Grades 9-12)

Gifted Education Seminars

- ◆ Interest Surveys
- ◆ Goals and Priorities
- ◆ Planning for the Future
- ◆ Special Topics ("In School Field Trips")

Mentoring/Shadowing/ Internship Opportunities

- ◆ KYW NewsStudies Program
- ◆ WHY Learning Lab partnership
- ◆ Representative Larry Curry and State Senator LeAnna Washington

Volunteer/Service

Dual Enrollment

- ◆ Arcadia University
- ◆ Manor Junior College
- ◆ Penn State Abington

Independent Study

- ◆ For Academic Credit by contract or APEX Online
- ◆ MIT and Yale OpenCourseWare (auditing)
- ◆ Mango Languages online language learning

Academic competitions

- ◆ Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership Conference
- ◆ FIRST Robotics Team
- ◆ Model UN

Screening & Evaluation

Referral

One goal of our Challenge program is to provide enrichment and acceleration options to any students who need those services. A small percentage of our population has more intense needs that require a team effort and an annual plan.

Because these students fit no single profile, we cast a wide net in seeking out students who are potentially in need of this more intense support. Students can be referred for gifted screening in several ways:

Universal Screening. Every second and fourth grade student takes a standardized test in the spring. Students

who score highly on this test are added to the referral list.

Parent Request. A parent may initiate screening at any time by submitting a request in writing to the school principal.

Teacher/Administrator Request. Teachers are often the first to notice when a child is performing well above grade-level expectations, and they may refer a child for screening.

Student Self-referral. Sometimes a student is aware of his or her own needs and wishes to be screened. This is rare in the elementary grades.

Screening Process and Criteria

Because a full multidisciplinary evaluation is complex and time-consuming, the district has a 3-stage screening process. If the screening determines that a student is likely to meet gifted eligibility criteria, we will continue with the more thorough evaluation.

Level 1 Screening involves a review of existing records, school performance, assessment data, and surveys of parents and teachers.

Level 2 Screening, for students who show strong ability in Level 1, is a brief, individual test of gifted potential, administered by the Challenge Consultant.

Students who demonstrate strong potential in this test are then referred for **Level 3 Evaluation**. This evaluation, described more fully in the next section, is administered by the school psychologist.

It is worth noting that although the screening process is designed to help us weigh the benefits of doing the more intense evaluation, it is not intended to be a “weed-out” process. The decision to move to the next level in all cases rests ultimately with the child’s team, which includes the teacher, principal, and parents.