

Common Questions Re: the Challenge Program

Q: What is the Greater Victoria School District's Challenge Program at Esquimalt High?

A: The Challenge Program is a district program that serves the unique needs of gifted, talented, and creative students. It was established at Esquimalt High School in 1979.

Q: Who are the students who typically thrive within the Challenge Program?

A: These are gifted, talented, and creative students who see the world around them in unique ways. They have a true love for deep learning. Often, our challenge students are imaginative, insightful, and have excellent memories. They may be emotionally intense and may question authority. They typically seek out new and interesting material and knowledge. When asked a question, these students will think carefully and provide in-depth answers. Most of our challenge students have the capacity to learn quickly – they process information quickly and apply their learning easily. Usually these students are or have been avid readers.

Q: Why use the cohort model for classes?

A: The research shows that for gifted, talented, and creative students, the cohort model of grouping like-minded thinkers together increases success. Sometimes our students within the Challenge Program have struggled to connect with their peers in their past – they may have felt different or out of place. Sometimes, they haven't sought to achieve their full potential for fear of standing out or of being labelled. Within a cohort model, students are given the opportunity to build both their academic success and their social – emotional well-being. The cohort can become a safe and supportive environment for students and often these are peers who form close and lasting friendships. As students move through their grades, they spend less time with their cohorts and the intention is that they have the social skills they need to be successful in other classes.

Q: Are Challenge students always high achieving students?

A: No, not always. We have very diverse cohorts of students who excel in different areas. For example, sometimes a student in the Challenge Program may be incredibly talented in music but struggle in social studies. We find that our cohorts are filled with like-minded students who have a passion for learning – but that area of passion is not the same for every student. Furthermore, some students who enter our Challenge Program have been underachievers and / or disruptive students in the past due to being in learning situations where their educational needs have not been met. The intention of our program is to maximize the opportunity to enrich students learning and support their social and emotional growth. The curriculum is enriched and, sometimes, accelerated. The intention is not to give harder work or more work but rather to provide depth and breadth in their learning process.

Q: What does the application process entail?

A: Student will submit Part One of the application, submit a portfolio, sit a session of testing, which includes a written portion, and sit an interview. The Challenge Coordinator will work with a team of educators, including counsellors and administration, to select a cohort.