East Middle School

Challenge Program

Policies and Expectations

The mission of the Challenge Program.....

is to meet the needs of gifted middle school students by pursuing high academic and ethical standards in a rigorous, creative environment. Our focus is to provide challenging, higher level curriculum, as well as support for social and emotional needs.

Research indicates that intellectually and/or academically gifted children have special needs, and these educational needs cannot be met in a regular classroom. The Challenge Program has been created in order to provide full-time, appropriate educational opportunities and programming for these children.

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"The World Awaits What EMS Creates!"

Challenge Program Policies: Instruction

The Challenge Program is designed to be a rigorous, academic program for highly motivated students. Your child may experience more intense competition among his/her peers of similar ability. It may even be the first time in the educational career of your child that he/she is feeling frustrated or may not be able to comprehend a concept immediately. Hence, your child may struggle with attaining top grades. He/she should be challenged beyond their previous instruction. Please support your child if he or she feels frustrated. A call to the classroom teacher for clarification and support is always appropriate.

High quality work and timeliness in turning in assignments will yield high grades. If your child misses due dates or fails to turn in assignments without previous arrangements, you can expect that the grade will be lowered. Please contact the teacher if you have any concerns.

Quality homework is required. Your child should be expected to complete an average of 60 – 90 minutes of homework a night, depending on grade level. How your child uses class time will determine how much homework he/she will need to complete that evening. If your child is consistently spending more that 90 minutes a night doing homework, please contact your student's teachers.

Each student is expected to demonstrate high academic achievement. Student reviews will take place at the end of each academic year or earlier, if needed. If the student is not demonstrating the high achievement expected, interventions (counseling, additional academic assistance after school, meeting with parents, working with program coordinator, etc.) would be put in place to help the student succeed. If after appropriate interventions the child is still not succeeding, a placement review will be held.

Attendance is important. Your child is expected to miss as little school as possible. If you know of an absence in advance, please notify the teachers so he/she can work with you.

There will be a waiting list created for situations where a space in the program may come available. In such case, the same criteria for enrollment will be used.

Goals and Purposes of the Challenge Program at East Middle School

- Promote academic rigor
- Exceed district content standards
- Foster each student's ability to think critically and creatively in order to develop productive, complex, abstract and higher level thinking
- Communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and in various situations
- Meet academic, emotional and social needs and foster self-motivation, responsibility and self confidence
- Have an understanding of the natural world and global society
- Build a balanced sense of self, to contribute to society, and effect a positive change in the environment
- Move each child from an extrinsic to an intrinsic learner and thinker
- Incorporate open-ended tasks into a student's repertoire of skills
- Develop independent or self directed study skills including organization, time management, goal setting and learning styles
- Develop research skills and methods

Procedure for Addressing Concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about work in the classroom, please utilize the following procedure:

1. Most concerns should be addressed with the teacher of the class where the concern originated.

2. If further assistance is needed, please contact the program coordinator.

3. The teacher, program coordinator and the parent will utilize administration if the concern remains unresolved.

The Enriched and Distinguished Curriculum

Gifted and talented students have many unique cognitive and affective characteristics that should be accommodated by differentiated curriculum. For example, gifted students may have an unusual capacity to manipulate information, see unusual and diverse relationships, and use and form conceptual frameworks. They may also have advanced language development, a sophisticated thought process and advanced problem solving abilities. Gifted students may also have a keen sense of humor, a strong sense of justice, and an early development of an inner sense of control.

The major objectives to be accomplished by an enriched and distinguished curriculum delivery process at the Challenge Program are to:

- Move the individual student through the standard curriculum and beyond at a pace suitable to his/her abilities.
- Offer complexity commensurate with the individual's capacity
- Offer the opportunity for unique talent development

Among a variety of delivery strategies that distinguish its curriculum, the Challenge Program features the following:

Integrated or Interdisciplinary Curriculum

The Challenge Program curriculum often combines concepts and skills from different curricular areas through the use of academically rigorous conceptual themes. For example, the theme of diversity can be used to teach appropriate and relevant language arts, math, social studies and science concepts and skills. Integrated curriculum delivery often provides gifted and talented students with an interesting and organizational framework by which they can find meaning and application. Research skills are often taught and implemented during integrated units.

Curriculum Compacting

Challenge Program students may well be able to learn curriculum content faster and in more depth. "Curriculum compacting" compresses the required curriculum (content standards) into a shorter period of time, which provides more learning time for in depth study and advancement in the curriculum. Pretesting of students and using flexible group instruction based on the results of pretesting, and post testing for desired learning are critical components of curriculum compacting.

Higher Level Questioning of Students

Questioning students is the most common and efficacious instructional tool that teachers use. Asking students questions keeps them involved in their learning and more importantly stimulates their thinking and creative minds. Teachers enhance the Challenge Program curriculum asking three different categorical types of questions. Students are asking information questions so teachers can check their understanding of the content of their courses and their ability to share their perspectives about that information. Teachers also ask processing questions which are a catalyst for having students analyze, draw conclusions, evaluate issues, and compare and contrast concepts. And, teachers ask imaginative questions, which cause students to use metaphors, formulate hypotheses, and organize data and project conclusions. Questions are the hallmark of inquiring minds and the Challenge Program indeed challenges students' thinking through this curriculum delivery strategy.

Multiple Intelligences

Dr. Howard Gardner, educational psychologist at Harvard University, has taught us that students vary in intelligence preferences or strengths. For example, a middle school student who is strong "spatially" may take in information, solve problems, and express learning differently than a student whose strength is "verbal-linguistic." Challenge Program teachers facilitate the learning process by attending to students' differing intelligence strength areas.

Tiered Activities and Assignments

Tiered activities in the Challenge Program curriculum are used by teachers to provide differentiated routes of learning access at varying degrees of difficulty for students to meet their varying ability levels. The essential ideas (content) and the skills (processes) are the same for all students in tiered activities. However, varying materials and activities are used with different groups of students to customize learning for students' different learning levels.

Tiered assignments differentiate what is taught or studied based on students interests and ability levels. For example, different content may be studied using varying reference materials at different readability levels. Products of tiered assignments are customized to allow students alternate forms of expressing what they learn. Tiered activities and assignments are unique to the Challenge Program curriculum and promote individualized learning and study for its students.

Advanced Use of Textual Materials

All textbooks for the major curricular areas have advanced application of the content and skills built into the use of the textbook. Teachers of the Challenge Program use these various enrichment applications provided by the textbook manual and guide students to higher-level application and more in-depth coverage of course content. Higher level thinking skills, application of current events, use of extended and additional resources, higher level questioning of students, and application to real life situations of textbook content are among various extended textbook strategies that are used.

Mentoring Students

An important aspect of programs that deal with intellectually gifted or artistically talented students is providing these young people with challenging experiences and stimulating personal interactions. Because of the unusual potential for gifted and talented students, working with them is at times complex. A wide variety of assistance and expertise is needed and this year we will draw on resources of the math, science, and language departments at Mesa State College. Mentors will be sought if a need arises.

The Socratic Seminar

This learning experience enables students to collectively explore an article, test, or piece of literature that they have read or a topic of previously presented content. The seminar experience involves both "content" and "process" learning and enables students to come together to express their opinions and gain insights from others on issues, questions, problems or topics. The teacher (facilitator) leads students through the processes of exploring topics, clarifying information, hypothesizing, comparing and contrasting, and proposing solutions.

Potential for High School Credit

Students have the option to receive high school credit if they successfully complete Math I, Math II and a Geophysical Science course that meets the high school standards. Assessment data and staff recommendations will be used to place students in these courses.

Center for Gifted Education

The Language Arts program will be using the series of language arts curriculum units for high-ability learners from the *Center for Gifted Education* at the College of William and Mary in addition to the regular texts. The goals of each unit are to develop students' skills in literature interpretation and analysis, persuasive writing, linguistic competency, and oral communication, as well as to strengthen students' reasoning skills and understanding of the concept of change. The units engage students in exploring carefully selected, challenging works of literature from various times, cultures, and genres. They encourage students to reflect on their readings through writing and discussion. The units also provide numerous opportunities for students to explore interdisciplinary connections to the language arts and to conduct research around issues relevant to their own lives. A guide to using the curriculum is also available.

Experiential Learning

The Challenge Program values the importance of making connections through real experiences. Therefore, we provide the students with opportunities to participate in learning activities that occur during field trips. We offer one extended field trip in each grade level. Each trip provides instruction based on content standards with real life applications. They help give students a global perspective and important sense of who they are in relation to the Earth and society. They also provide valuable social and emotional development opportunities and they are just plain fun!

Extra Curricular activities

The students in the Challenge Program as well as all students at East Middle School are encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities. These vary year to year depending on coaches/volunteers but the following will give you a sense of what we have to offer: volleyball, basketball, wrestling, track (sports are for seventh and eighth grades), Geography Bee, Spelling Bee, Mathcounts, Science Olympiad, Fitness Club, National Jr. Honor Society, Cheetah Leadership team, Chess Club, Craft/Knitting Clubs, Pride Crew, Yearbook, various choir, band, & orchestra opportunities.