

New Canaan Public Schools

Special Education



The Challenge Program recognizes that all children develop intellectually on a continuum. As part of the identification process, we screen every student in grades three, four, five, and seven. Those students who emerge as potential candidates are further evaluated with parent permission. Once all data on each candidate is collected, it is reviewed by a district-wide identification team. Those children who meet eligibility criteria are then identified. An individual can be evaluated at any time or grade level from kindergarten through eighth grade, whenever compelling information indicates potential identification as a gifted student.

If a student ultimately becomes eligible for the Challenge Program, a formal meeting will be held with school personnel and parents to review the findings and program. At that time a student will be invited to participate in Challenge for the duration of the program.

FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Do all identified gifted students participate in the Challenge Program?

Participation in the Challenge Program is optional for identified students. Once enrolled in the Program, however, students are expected to attend classes unless there is a formal withdrawal from the Program.

2. What happens if a child does not meet the requirements for identification after the assessment process?

If a child does not meet the criteria for identification, parents will receive a letter stating that the child is not identified as gifted at this time and a summary of the information gathered. In addition, this information will also be shared with the child's teacher(s).

3. What is the curriculum?

Integral to all grade levels is a systematic approach to the meta-cognition thinking strategy of connections. Students are asked to make connections throughout content and are asked to categorize the type of connections they make. Students move from concrete personal connections to more global

conceptual connections. They share these connections in class discussions, in learning logs, in assignments and on exams in the upper grades.

At the elementary level, students are involved in Systems Thinking investigations which include above grade level content. The theme in grade three is *Systems Thinking Introduction and Sustainability* which includes defining, analyzing and creating systems. The theme in grade four is *Change and Change Agents*, and students work toward understanding change, evaluating causes of change, and creating change. Additionally, these areas of investigation offer a variety of multidisciplinary activities which tap the students' strengths, creativity, and thinking skills. The Systems Thinking theme for grade five is *The Ripple Effects of Change*; students engage in group problem based simulations which focus on group dynamics and the systems thinking concepts of patterns and trends, feedback, and change over time. Content activities include simulations, higher level reading selections, and presentation skills.

The Challenge Program in grades six through eight uses Social Studies content to further explore Systems Thinking. Students have a thematic lens with which to understand and interact with that content. These themes include *History's Big Picture* in grade six, *The Common Good* in grade seven and *Truth and Justice* in grade eight. In all of these grades, students develop habits of systems thinkers and use systems thinking tools to tell the story of history. There is direct instruction of critical, creative, and higher order thinking skills, as well as class discussions, simulations, independent inquiry-based experiences, research-based learning projects, and public speaking and debate activities.

4. How does the Challenge Program fit into a child's schedule?

At the elementary schools, students are scheduled for approximately 3 hours of Challenge classes per six day rotation in a pull-out program. These classes are scheduled by grade, making every effort to minimize the disruption to each student's overall academic program.

Grade five students attend Challenge classes approximately 2 hours per week, during Homeroom Workshop.

In grades six through eight, classes take the place of Social Studies, becoming part of the daily schedule.

5. What communication can parents expect?

Parents of students in elementary grades receive a *Student Performance Evaluation* included in their child's report card packet, which is sent home three times during the school year.

Parents of students in grade six through eight will see their child's progress under the Challenge section of the report card, which is available on the parent portal of PowerSchool.

Meetings for parents of Challenge students are held periodically throughout the year. Notice of these meetings is sent home by the Challenge teacher.

6. Are there exit criteria for the program?

Every attempt will be made to make the program a challenging and rewarding experience for each student. However, there are times when it becomes evident by a student's performance or behavior that he/she should be exited from the program. Challenge staff and school administrators may question a student's continued participation in the Challenge Program for the following reasons:

- Program goals and objectives do not align with student's current learning needs
- Student does not maintain satisfactory progress/grade in his/her overall academic program
- Student is consistently unprepared for Challenge classes
- Student behaves in such a way as to interfere with the learning of others in the Challenge Program

A parent may withdraw a child from the program at any time.

7. What are ways parents can be involved in their child's gifted education?

Throughout the year, Challenge parent meetings are offered. Meetings are designed to share experiences and concerns, and to learn more about raising a gifted child. In addition, a member of the Challenge Partnership, a committee of school and parent representatives working together for the benefit of gifted students, may report on its activities.

The following websites provide information and opportunities for gifted students and their parents including:

- Connecticut Association of Gifted (CAG) @ www.ctgifted.org
- Center for Talented Youth (CTY) @ www.jhu.edu/gifted
- The National Association for Gifted Children @ www.nagc.org
- The National Research Center for Gifted Education @ www.gifted.uconn.edu

Who to call for additional questions:

For additional information contact the school psychologist or Challenge teacher.

East School 594-4200

South School 594-4300

West School 594-4400

Saxe Middle School 594-4500