

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

September 16, 2003

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Programming for Intellectually Gifted Students

ORIGINATOR: B. Holt, Executive Director, Instructional and Curricular Support Services

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INFORMATION

Background Information

District programming for gifted students began in 1970, and expanded in the early 1980's with initiatives such as the International Baccalaureate Program, writing of curriculum materials, development of a resource centre, and in-service and consultation provided by two full time consultants. In 1984 the Academic Challenge program for academically gifted students was established. Since the mid 1980's, gifted and talented students have benefited from the establishment of a number of alternative programs such as the visual and performing arts program, and second language programs.

Declining Academic Challenge enrollments precipitated a review of the Academic Challenge program in 1997. The goal of the review was to promote exemplary programming for academically and intellectually gifted students.

The Academic Challenge Findings and Review Process

From 1997 to 2000, a comprehensive review of the Academic Challenge program was conducted. Staff, parent and student feedback suggested a number of issues for resolution.

In the fall of 2001, the findings of the review were discussed with all Academic Challenge principals and related to the current status of the program at their schools. Subsequently, the Academic Challenge Review Committee was established to consider next steps. The committee, made up of experts in gifted education, included two Academic Challenge principals, one principal from a school without an Academic Challenge Program, a Faculty of Education professor from the University of Alberta, and a district psychologist, teacher, and consultant. Three panel members held Doctorate degrees in gifted education. The panel met throughout 2001 – 2002 to develop recommendations to refine and ensure excellent programming.

In fall 2002, visits were made to all Academic Challenge Program principals to share these recommendations and to obtain feedback. The majority of principals are supportive of the programming as outlined in this report. Academic Challenge principals or designates

discussed identification procedures and entrance criteria at a meeting in late 2002. Communication with principals of Academic Challenge Programs is ongoing.

In the past, school jurisdictions established criteria to identify students with mild moderate needs, including those who are gifted and talented. Alberta Learning is now taking the lead, creating provincial definitions and criteria for these students. To ensure compatibility with provincial requirements, the district's work related to identification of intellectually gifted students has been suspended until Alberta Learning guidelines are announced. Alberta Learning has welcomed district input in the process of creating definitions and criteria for students who are gifted and talented.

Description of Proposed Programs

The district is proposing that the Academic Challenge Program (AC) be phased out and be replaced with two programs in 2004 – 2005. A proposed description of an Extensions Program and a Challenge Program are listed below and will be modified as needed to correspond with Alberta Learning's definitions and criteria.

The Challenge Program would provide bright, high achieving students from kindergarten to grade 9 with enriched, challenging, appropriately paced educational programming. Emphasis is placed on exemplary academic achievement for all students. At district centres, Challenge Program teachers would differentiate programming at a class level to provide for a range of high ability learners. Some aspects of Challenge programming may be provided in community schools. Staff at district centres and community schools would have access to Consulting Services expertise and the new draft resource *The Challenge Programming Guide*. This resource identifies key elements of programming and appropriate instructional strategies.

The Extensions Program would provide students of extremely high intellectual ability with a highly differentiated learning environment including compacting, acceleration, extension beyond the curriculum in areas of strength, interdisciplinary learning, and modifications in expectations. Many of these students have uneven academic profiles and require highly specialized, individualized programming. Staff who work with these students would have access to Consulting Services expertise and a new draft resource *The Extensions Program Guide*. This resource identifies key elements of programming and appropriate instructional strategies.

Transition Plan

The Academic Challenge program will remain mainly unchanged in 2003 – 2004 providing a transition period to incorporate the Alberta Learning requirements into the proposed programs. Principals of Academic Challenge district centres have indicated a preference to communicate directly with their parent communities to facilitate smooth transition. Most principals predict minimal levels of parent concerns.

A plan to promote a smooth transition from the Academic Challenge program to the Challenge program and Extensions program is being developed and will be modified based on Alberta Learning's work and the feedback from district staff. It is the intention of the district that students who are coded as Academic Challenge will be grandfathered into the Challenge program. Academic Challenge programs and community schools may access no-

cost inservice sessions on programming for intellectually gifted students in spring, 2003 and throughout 2003-2004.

The Basis of Allocation committee has provided unanimous support for the proposed programs' mandates and organization and will discuss the allocations in 2003 – 2004. If the programs remain substantially the same, the proposal would phase out the allocation for Academic Challenge programming and to reallocate the funds to the proposed programs. The proposed plan is that students in the Extension Program be identified as students with special needs and access a level 5 allocation. Students in the Challenge Program would access a level 1 allocation.

Summary

The Academic Challenge Program Review identified key issues, which have been addressed by recommendations of a review committee. The proposed Challenge Program and Extensions Program will be modified if required, to meet Alberta Learning requirements as they are established. The District has provided input into Alberta Learning's work to develop provincial definitions and criteria of gifted students. Implementation of recommendations, targeted for 2004 – 2005, will address issues and bring a new look and focus to programming for students who are academically and intellectually gifted.

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