

curriculum faq's

Transitioning your child into a new school is one of the most important decisions that you will make as a parent and we are especially pleased that you are considering Mount Saint Agnes Academy (MSA). Not only will your child have access to a curriculum that is internationally recognized, they will be nurtured in a way that is incomparable to any other educational institution in Bermuda.

In 2009, MSA began the process of implementing the Alberta Programs of Study, which places more emphasis on HOW our young people learn rather than having a singular focus on content and process (i.e. memorization of facts). As a result, your child will graduate from MSA with a stronger understanding of the various concepts they have learned. This directly translates into higher levels of learning through critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities, and more importantly, ultimate success in the further education and career paths they choose.

What differentiates MSA's curriculum?

In 2007 it was determined that in order to provide our students with the skills, knowledge and ultimately, the strongest opportunity for success moving into their chosen path for the future, we required a curriculum with a scope and sequence within which outcomes could be properly measured, preferably on an international level. We also heeded the call of employers who were extremely challenged in finding new recruits who were strong in critical thinking, problem-solving and collaborative working skills. A review of several programs throughout the United States, Canada and the UK was completed by a committee comprised of members from the Board of Governors, Administration and Faculty. It was determined that the program offered in Alberta provides students the necessary skill set for life-long learning and was the best choice for our students.

In fact, the methodology we employ is widely recognized as 'cutting edge' on an international level. Recognized globally as being on par with the International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) standards, this methodology is a complete shift from the traditional method of teachers standing in front of the class and talking AT students and uses a much more facilitative approach. We teach from a space of UNDERSTANDING first and then procedure. Gone are the days of large class sizes and teachers lecturing. Here to stay is an inquiry-based method of learning that engages students

in a collaborative and interactive approach to figuring out the desired end result. Our approach promotes critical thinking and problem-solving, which is applicable to all aspects of a student's life.

In addition, the support provided by Alberta Education is unparalleled and the standardization of outcomes and assessments provides our school with the measures necessary to assist students in their post-secondary admissions. For additional information on the Alberta Programs of Study, go to <http://www.education.alberta.ca/parents/resources.aspx>.

Is MSA formally accredited to deliver the Alberta Programs of Study?

Yes. MSA is recognized as an Alberta Accredited International School; we must be in order to deliver the Alberta Programs of Study. The School is evaluated on an annual basis by Alberta Education to ensure we continue to meet its standards focusing on differentiated learning and academic rigor. MSA is continuously developing its teaching staff to ensure a comprehensive curriculum that fosters the intellectual, emotional, physical, social and spiritual development of students. Our parents can have the confidence in knowing that the standard of education delivered to their child will not only be maintained but continually enhanced.

What is different about how students are learning with the Alberta Programs of Study?

Students at all levels are being challenged in a variety of ways. In the elementary programs, our students are introduced to the inquiry process where they approach learning through higher levels of questions and the communication of their understanding. The emphasis is placed first and foremost on understanding the concept in-depth and then applying this knowledge to several applications. Students are encouraged to explore a variety of strategies and then determine which one is best suited to the situation at hand. The inquiry process is embedded in all courses throughout all levels and teachers and students work to answer key questions that encompass the learner outcomes. It is through this process that students may be challenged to dig deeper and apply their knowledge to more sophisticated situations, rather than employ historical 'process driven' techniques such as the memorization of facts.

How does the Alberta Curriculum compare to International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) standards?

The Alberta High School Diploma, which our Graduates receive, is internationally recognized as being rigorous, measurable and on par with the IB and AP certificate programs. It is also highly recognized for further education admission purposes. Therefore, when registering for universities in the UK, Canada or the United States, MSA Graduates have great success in being accepted into their university and program of choice.

What type of early intervention/learning support does MSA have for its students?

We recognize that all young people learn differently and that we must provide support for our students at all stages of their education. An opportunity for assessment is provided to determine learning needs. If we feel a child's learning needs are greater than what we can conclude, we will recommend the student receive a more detailed Psychoeducational assessment through the Reading Clinic or a Psychologist. Once specific learning needs are determined, an Individualized Program Plan (IPP) is prepared and communicated with parents and teachers. The IPP is a resource that provides recommendations on how to assist the student in becoming more aware of how they learn and what they should be doing to achieve success. As they move from elementary into middle school, a Diverse Learning Teacher will work with the teachers using the IPP to monitor and support the student as needed.

Where necessary, students are referred to the Diverse Learning Teachers to receive additional support and tutoring. Once in high school, the course choices are designed to meet the needs of all ability levels and are very much geared toward future goals and employment.

What is the purpose of MSA's Education Enrichment Program?

Introduced in the 2013/14 School Year, the Education Enrichment Program seeks to identify advanced learners who have already mastered their "on grade level" curriculum and provide enhanced educational opportunities above the prescribed curriculum. These differentiated learning experiences occur within the classroom and most importantly, within the framework of the prescribed curriculum. Students and teachers discuss and agree (with parental approval) ways in which the curriculum can be accelerated, streamlined or compacted so that additional enrichment projects can be undertaken to reach each student's level of educational potential. These experiences can be extensions of the prescribed curriculum or pursuits into new areas of interest or aptitude designed to challenge gifted students. In participating in the Education Enrichment Program, our advanced learners remain consistently challenged and engaged in the course at hand.

What is the benefit of the 4-year Education Plan for high school students?

The 4-year Education Plan is a critical component to each student's high school journey. After identifying the career path(s) they are interested in pursuing, students will have the support of the Guidance Counselor to ensure their course selection is appropriate for post-secondary institution acceptance. It will also allow them to identify, where appropriate, suitable 'work study' opportunities where they can get additional exposure and hands on experience within their chosen career path. The 4-year plan is reviewed and modified annually with the student, the parent(s) and the Guidance Counselor. This allows the student to refine their academic plans as they develop their future education and career plans. This also provides our students with a feeling that they are involved in determining the path for their academic life.

What 'hands on' learning does MSA offer?

Our recognition of the varied learning styles of students was one of the reasons the Alberta Programs of Study was selected to be MSA's curriculum. The delivery of content or learning materials is provided by our teachers in multiple ways. Further, the methodology of the Alberta curriculum emphasizes a hands on approach. After a particular concept is delivered by the teacher, students will have the opportunity to apply their knowledge. This ensures each concept is delivered in a variety of ways, thus supporting each student in successfully achieving their highest academic standard possible.

In addition, Grade 11 and 12 students are eligible for work experience opportunities. The importance of MSA's 4-year education planning process for high school students cannot be understated. In developing their 4-year Education Plan with the support of the Guidance Counselor, students can identify and secure relevant work experience opportunities that will provide them with additional hands on experience within their chosen career paths.

What is the difference between the -1, -2 and -3 courses?

As our students enter high school, they will work with the Guidance Counselor to build a 4-year Education Plan that will provide the foundation of course choices. -1, -2 and -3 are parallel course options that directly correlate to the student's overall academic/career aspiration and the future continuing education programs in which they intend to enroll.

More specifically:

- -1 Courses are designed for students planning entry into university or certain programs in college and technical schools.
- -2 Courses are designed for students planning entry into employment, trade schools or further education in certain programs in colleges and technical schools.
- -3 Courses are designed for students planning direct career entry into some area of employment.

Depending on their desired career path, with the support of the Guidance Counselor they will choose the most appropriate courses. Also, the choice of -1, -2 or -3 is related to each individual course and not the entire year of high school in which they are currently enrolled.

What impact, if any, does selecting between the various -1, -2 and -3 courses have on attaining an Alberta Diploma?

None. Regardless of the course selection that a student is working with (-1, -2 or -3), they have the opportunity to achieve an Alberta Diploma. Course options are directly related to the future academic and career path choice for each student. In fact, it would not be uncommon for a student to take one program of English (i.e. -2) and a different one for their Mathematical Studies (i.e. -1). It should be noted that transcripts provide higher learning institutions with full details on all courses that have been taken, in addition to the final grades. The information will assist them in determining into which level or course a student will be accepted. This reflects the importance of MSA's 4-year education planning process, which supports our students in identifying potential career paths and further, making the best choice in course selection to achieve their academic and career goals.

When my child is taking a -1, -2 or -3 course in a specific subject, is it possible for them to move into a different course of the same subject (i.e. language arts)?

Yes. It is possible for students to move from one program to another; however, it is critical to understand that outcomes for -1, -2 and -3 are assessed differently, based on the concepts delivered for that particular program. In order to move into a different course program, students must show that they have mastered the prerequisite required for the course program in which they plan to enter. This may require additional studying on the part of the student outside of scheduled class times. To this end, Alberta offers distance learning support so that if students wish to take another program of study, provided their schedule allows it, they can. Don't forget, the Alberta curriculum is designed to challenge your child and have them attain the highest academic standing based on their capabilities.

What is the advantage of being on a semestered system for our high school courses and why are some courses non-semestered?

We have adopted a semester system that enables our students to take a full year course of study in one semester (Sept-Jan or Feb-June) and focus on fewer courses at one time. Students attend 90 minute classes daily with total learning hours in a single semester equal to that of a course that is spread throughout an entire school year. This allows students a greater opportunity to concentrate their learning on fewer

courses at any given time. It is also consistent with university and college practices, thus providing an easier transition for our students.

It should be noted that Grades 9 and 10 English and Math are full year courses; however Grade 11 and 12 English and Math, and all other courses, remain on the semester system. This provides the students with more opportunities to take a wider selection of courses. Also, our students write a maximum of four final exams per semester rather than eight for the year end. We are pleased to share with you that our students have voiced their strong approval and ease of stress that the semester system provides.

What electives are offered and how is the decision made as to what electives are offered?

The range of electives offered at MSA is determined by available facilities, having sufficient student enrolment, teacher expertise and limitations placed by Immigration Policy. At this time, high school electives offered are: Art, Financial Management, Second Languages (French and Spanish), Music, Enterprise and Innovation, Communications Technology and Work Experience. Middle school electives include: Art, Drama, Second Languages (French and Spanish), Communications Technology and Music.

Are foreign language courses offered in a manner that meets the requirements of overseas colleges/universities?

Students have the opportunity to study foreign language courses (French and Spanish) throughout all four years of high school, provided that enough students sign up for the course each year. In the event that we do not have enough enrolment for a class, we will endeavor to work with the students to ensure they have the opportunity to complete the courses necessary for college/university entrance.

What is the aim of the Physical Education Program at MSA?

The aim of MSA's Physical Education Program is to enable our students to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to lead an active and healthy lifestyle. We focus on children and their ability to achieve their individual potential, creating a positive future for themselves, as well as enhancing their quality of life. The Kindergarten to Grade 12 Physical Education Program contributes to the development of life skills; the personal management of health, the use of physical activity as a strategy for managing life challenges and the

understanding that it can be a setting within which to work with others. The Program provides an equitable opportunity for all students to realize the benefits of physical activity.

What sport programs are offered through MSA's Extracurricular Program?

MSA offers a diverse range of sport programs given our size. Similar to electives, the range of programs offered each year is determined by available facilities, student interest, teacher expertise and finances. A list of our current sport programs can be found on our website, www.msa.bm.

Will receiving final grades from the Alberta standardized final exam in July negatively impact or delay my child's ability to be accepted into the university/college of their choice?

No. Universities and colleges accept students conditionally based on their Grade 11 final marks and Grade 12 January marks. Academic performance throughout high school plays a critical role as it is generally assumed that a student's prior grades will be consistent with their final grades. Upon completing the Grade 12 Diploma exams, the requested transcripts will be forwarded by Alberta Education directly to the post-secondary institute of choice.

After my child graduates from MSA, will he/she have to take preparatory classes before entering college or university?

Upon successful completion of their core courses, there should be no requirement for preparatory classes. Students using the Alberta curriculum continue to rank among the best in Canada and the World, according to the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

We trust that the information above has provided you with the critical information you require. You may also wish to visit our website, www.msa.bm to get an even better sense of the MSA Community. We welcome any further questions you may have as you consider MSA for your child. Please don't hesitate to contact us at 441.292.4134 ext. 1943 or via email at admissions@msa.bm.



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