

Developing Academic Acceleration Policies:

Whole Grade,
Early Entrance &
Single Subject



2018

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Developing Academic Acceleration Policies: Single Subject and Whole Grade updates the 2009 *Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy* publication, which was originally generated by a collaborative national working group.

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Dear Educator,

Throughout this document, you will read about the effectiveness of academic acceleration as an educational intervention for students who require a faster pace and advanced curriculum. The benefits of providing the most appropriate intervention for highly able students are immediate as well as long lasting.

The Belin-Blank Center has been involved in the broad issue of academic acceleration for nearly 30 years. Our work in the realm of academic acceleration began in the early 90s when we introduced the Belin-Blank Exceptional Student Talent Search (BESTS), a large-scale above-level testing program that uses tests designed for older students to discover individuals with high aptitude in specific subject areas and helps them to determine appropriate educational interventions, including acceleration. In the late 90s, we produced the *Iowa Acceleration Scale*, which codifies the decision-making process for whole-grade acceleration. Early in the 21st Century, we published *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* (2004). In 2015, the Belin-Blank Center published an extensive update, *A Nation Empowered: Evidence Trumps the Excuses Holding Back America's Brightest Students*, which included several chapters on topics not originally included in *A Nation Empowered*. Additionally, we host the website, <http://accelerationinstitute.org/>, which gathers research, decision-making tools, and stories about acceleration in one place.

Nearly one decade ago, the Belin-Blank Center administrative team collaborated with the National Association for Gifted Children and the Council of State Directors for Gifted Programs to produce the 2009 *Guidelines for Developing and Academic Policy*. The goals for the current document are similar to those from 2009: to encourage the systematic adoption and practice of acceleration in schools across the nation.

The benefits to implementing academic acceleration when the student is ready and motivated are numerous. A policy guarantees equitability of access to the intervention in its various forms. This updated version of the original 2009 *Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy* ensures that the major considerations are included. Parents, educators, and policymakers owe it to their students to be aware, informed, and empowered so they can ensure this effective intervention is appropriately applied.

Susan G. Assouline, Ph.D.

Director, Belin-Blank Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development

October 2018

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) is pleased to present this important resource to supporters. Research tells us what works to serve gifted and talented students, including how best to identify these students and how to use acceleration strategies appropriately. *Developing Academic Acceleration Policies: Whole Grade, Early Entrance, and Single Subject* will offer direction and clarity to school districts on gifted education practices, guidance many practitioners lack today.

Gifted and talented children need and deserve appropriate levels of challenge and stimulation as they reach for their personal best. Unfortunately, far too many children experience low expectations in their classrooms. Recent research by Dr. Scott Peters and others reveals that up to 10 percent of children perform four or more grade levels above the grade level standards used in their classrooms.

Acceleration strategies – such as advancing students an entire grade level or in specific subjects – are one of the most effective approaches to help ensure all children who demonstrate readiness for more advanced instruction receive quality gifted and talented programming. They allow students to access curriculum content, skills, and understandings before their expected age or grade level. Rather than requiring gifted children to endure repetitive work with content they have already mastered, educators can use a variety of acceleration strategies to challenge these learners with more stimulating and enriched content.

NAGC is pleased to collaborate with the Belin-Blank Center at the University of Iowa, the Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted (CSDPG), and The Association for the Gifted (TAG-CEC) on *Developing Academic Acceleration Policies*; and in promoting a well-researched practice with benefits to cognitive, social, and emotional development when used appropriately. As advocates, we continually seek and encourage use of strategies to help society understand the nature and needs of gifted children, to create supportive environments for their learning, and to implement research-based practices that help high-ability children from all backgrounds reach their full potential. *Developing Academic Acceleration Policies* supports these efforts and shines a light on a strategy that works!



Sally Krisel
NAGC President



M. René Islas
NAGC Executive Director

October 1, 2018

The Association for the Gifted (TAG) fully supports the policy recommendations described by *Developing Academic Acceleration Policies: Whole Grade, Early Entrance, and Single Subject*. We find the compendium of research supporting acceleration as a highly effective strategy to meet the needs of high ability children and children with gifts and talents particularly compelling.

Robust policies are key to ensuring students have equity access to acceleration opportunities. Policies communicate expectations and guidance to help educators appropriately implement educational strategies equitably, consistently, and with fidelity.

Developing Academic Acceleration Policies: Whole Grade, Early Entrance, and Single Subject provides a helpful overview of the varied types of acceleration. It also includes clear guidance as to the important elements that must be addressed in policy, as well as thought-provoking principles to prevent potential unintended negative consequences. The easy-to-use checklists provide policymakers with a well-formatted tool to evaluate their work.

TAG is pleased to join the Belin-Blank Center, The National Association for Gifted Children, and the Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted in their efforts to promote the development, adoption, and implementation of acceleration policies in schools and school districts across the United States and beyond.

Sincerely,



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On behalf of the Council for State Directors of Programs for the Gifted (CSDPG), I would like to extend our support for the revised edition of *Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy*. The updated guidelines reflect current research, take into consideration practical school-based issues, and will guide appropriate decision-making processes focused on the needs of students.

Acceleration remains an effective strategy to meet the advanced learning needs of students. States, districts, and schools continue to work towards developing policies and practices to support meaningful and thoughtful implementation. From a state perspective, having tools and guidance that will support effective implementation for districts and schools is paramount and this guide helps to meet that need. The *Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy* has been a great asset for nearly a decade to practitioners at all education levels as they work to meet the needs of students. This revised edition will continue to be a high quality resource.

With appreciation for this work,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sneha Shah-Coltrane".

Sneha Shah-Coltrane, President of CSDPG
September 12, 2018

OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPING ACADEMIC ACCELERATION POLICIES: SINGLE SUBJECT AND WHOLE GRADE

This document includes a brief discussion about policy, recommended elements of an acceleration policy, corresponding checklists, and an abbreviated summary of research supporting academic acceleration.

It provides extensive information and support in the appendices, which are available on the Acceleration Institute website (<http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/policies>). The appendices are intended to provide additional information that supports the guidelines presented here.

APPENDIX A

Definitions of Acceleration Interventions provides definitions of the categories and types of acceleration.

APPENDIX B

Survey of State Acceleration Policies summarizes the acceleration-related results of the most recently published State of the States in Gifted Education (2014-2015) survey from the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) and the Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted (CSDPG). It is a biennial compilation of data of gifted education services in the United States.

APPENDIX C

Implementing Acceleration provides educators with guidelines for practicing acceleration. The suggestions offered for implementing acceleration are based on the *Iowa Acceleration Scale* (3rd ed.) (Assouline et al., 2009). Three broad areas of how to implement acceleration are discussed: referral and screening, assessment and decision-making, and planning.

APPENDIX D

Example Language from State Acceleration Policies represents a significant portion of this document. Appendix D gives examples of language from state acceleration policies, state gifted policies that specifically mention acceleration, and state regulatory language.

APPENDIX E

Example Referral Forms and Written Acceleration Plans. These are examples of forms that educators might find useful as they implement acceleration in their districts.

INTRODUCTION

The research (See *A Nation Empowered: Evidence Trumps Excuses that Hold Back America's Brightest Students*, Vol. 2) unequivocally supports the positive impact of acceleration on short-term and long-term student development. Although significant progress has been made with respect to implementation, the fact remains that very few schools, districts, or states have an acceleration policy.

WHY HAVE A POLICY?

District-level policy ensures equal application of any appropriate intervention. Educational policy gives voice to those who do not have advocates for their special needs. In this case, the intervention is academic acceleration, which is the most effective intervention for highly able students who are ready for a faster pace at a younger age (Assouline et al., 2015). The existence of policy increases awareness and acknowledges the validity of the intervention.

An acceleration policy guides educators at the state, district, or school level in implementing acceleration practices. A policy simultaneously promotes awareness and adoption of sound accelerative practices. The guidelines for developing an academic acceleration policy serve as a concrete tool to guide policy makers, school administrators, and educators to create or modify policies at the state and/or local levels.

ACCELERATION BRIEFLY DEFINED

Acceleration is “progress through an educational program at rates faster or at ages younger than conventional” (Pressey, 1949, p. 2). The National Association Gifted Children position paper on academic acceleration adds important nuances stating, “Educational acceleration is one of the cornerstones of exemplary gifted education practices, with more research supporting this intervention than any other in the literature on gifted individuals. The practice of educational acceleration has long been used to match high-level student general ability and specific talent with optimal learning opportunities” (NAGC, n.d., from <http://www.nagc.org/about-nagc/nagc-position-statements-white-papers>).

ACADEMIC ACCELERATION AND GIFTED EDUCATION

Although some schools may not have a gifted and talented program, many schools do have policies relating to gifted education that specify how to identify and serve gifted students and how to evaluate gifted education programs. However, gifted education policies do not necessarily specify how to identify and serve students who are ready for academic acceleration; in fact, some policies inadvertently endorse an enrichment approach to serving gifted students and thus whole grade or single subject acceleration are not presented as an option.

It is also possible that a student might not qualify for a school's gifted and talented program because he or she did not obtain a qualifying composite score. As well, students with an uneven profile of achievement scores (significantly advanced in one area but not others) are not likely to obtain a qualifying score for the school's gifted program but may be served well by content acceleration in their area(s) of strength.

An acceleration policy and recommendations for acceleration are not intended to promote acceleration as a substitute for enrichment opportunities. Some students will be served best by enrichment, some by acceleration, and some by a mix of the two (Neihart, 2007; Rogers, 2002; Schiever & Maker, 2003). Acceleration is not a replacement for gifted education services or programs. Rather, acceleration (and an acceleration policy) contributes to a broad, comprehensive gifted and talented program. For that reason, the policy should complement existing gifted and talented programming and services.

The acceleration policy should clearly state that participation in a school's gifted education program is not a prerequisite for consideration of academic acceleration for a student. As well, there should be definite recognition that acceleration options are not intended to replace gifted education programming.

CATEGORIES AND TYPES OF ACCELERATION

Acceleration is a broad term that encompasses many accelerative options. To help organize these options and encourage a common vocabulary for discussing them, we have classified the accelerative options into categories and types. These are briefly described below. Appendix A includes a comprehensive list of accelerative options.

Categories are the broadest and most encompassing level of classification. The two broad categories of acceleration are **grade-based** and **content-based** (Assouline et al., 2015; Rogers, 2015). The primary distinguishing feature between grade-based acceleration and content-based acceleration is whether the accelerative intervention shortens the number of years that a student spends in the K-12 system.

The categories of acceleration have specific *types*, or ways of varying the level, pace, and complexity of the curriculum. For example, single-subject acceleration, dual enrollment, and Advanced Placement coursework are all types of content-based acceleration. Whole-grade acceleration and early entrance to kindergarten or college are types of grade-based acceleration.

GRADE-BASED ACCELERATION

These strategies typically shorten the number of years a student spends in the K-12 system. In practice, a student is placed on a full-time basis in a higher-grade level than is typical given the student's age for the purpose of providing consistent access to appropriately challenging learning opportunities. Grade-based acceleration is commonly known as "grade skipping," but it can include other means to shorten the number of years a student remains in the K-12 school system (Rogers, 2015; Southern & Jones, 2015). The exception is early entrance to kindergarten, which does not shorten the number of years the student spends in the K-12 system but shortens the wait time to start school.

The *types* of grade-based acceleration include early entrance to school, whole-grade acceleration ("grade skipping"), and early entrance to college.

Early entrance to school. The main *process* of early entrance to school is early entrance to kindergarten. However, in some districts, it is possible for students to skip kindergarten and enter first grade at a younger than typical age. One example of early entrance to school is:

- A child who can read independently and is socially similar to typical five-year-olds is admitted to kindergarten, even though the child's fifth birthday will not be until the end of the school year. This intervention shortens the waiting time for a student to start school, and in this regard is a similar type of acceleration to early entrance to college.

Whole-grade acceleration (grade skipping).

Whole grade acceleration examples include:

- A student who has completed first grade is placed in a third grade classroom (rather than a second grade classroom) on a full-time basis at the beginning of the next school year.
- A fifth-grade student completes the fall semester and is placed in the sixth grade at the start of the second semester of the same school year.

Early entrance to college. There are multiple ways that students can be admitted to college early. These types of early entrance to college include, but are not limited to:

- An advanced student is granted a diploma after spending only five semesters in high school by accumulating credits on an accelerated basis through "dual credit" coursework taken while in middle school and by satisfying some high school graduation requirements by completing "educational options" rather than traditional courses. The student then enrolls in college as a full-time student.
- An advanced student leaves high school without the traditional diploma, entering a full-time university degree program.
- A student participates in an early entrance to college program. (See Appendix A.)

CONTENT-BASED ACCELERATION

Content-based acceleration includes a variety of strategies. These strategies provide students with advanced content, skills, or understandings before the expected age or grade level (Southern & Jones, 2015). Students typically remain with peers of the same age and grade for most of the school day but receive higher-grade-level instruction in an advanced grade. Content-based acceleration can also refer to allowing students to work on higher grade-level instruction in their regular classrooms in lieu of grade-level instruction.

Examples of the types of content-based acceleration. Content-based acceleration includes single-subject acceleration, curriculum compacting, dual enrollment, credit by examination or prior experience, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, and talent search programs. More details about these options are found in Appendix A.

Single-subject acceleration. There are many examples of single-subject (also called content) acceleration:

- A third-grade student performing above grade level in reading and math goes to a fourth-grade classroom every morning for instruction in these subjects and returns to the third-grade classroom for instruction in other subject areas.
- A musically gifted sixth-grade student enrolls in a high school instrumental music course and returns to the sixth-grade classroom for instruction in other subject areas.
- A group of fifth-grade students performing above grade level in math is transported to a junior high building every morning for a seventh-grade pre-algebra class. The students are transported back to the elementary school building for instruction with their fifth-grade classmates for the remainder of the day.
- A high school math teacher travels to a middle school to provide instruction to a group of middle school students who perform above grade level in math. The students remain with their classmates for the remainder of the day, and the teacher returns to the high school building.

- A sixth grade student takes an online algebra I course and works on a computer at the same time as the other sixth graders are in math class.
- A ninth grader takes an out-of-school course such as a summer language immersion course or one of the university-based Talent Search programs and receives school credit for a high school course.

Curriculum compacting. This instructional technique allows teachers to pre-assess students to determine whether they have achieved grade-level proficiency in a specific academic area. Teachers then adjust curriculum by providing replacement instruction or activities, which enables a more challenging and productive use of the students' time. More details about curriculum compacting are available at <http://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/gifted-education-practices/curriculum-compacting>.

Concurrent or dual enrollment. The school system allows advanced students to enroll in higher-level coursework when proficiency at grade level has been demonstrated. For example, the middle school student takes a high school math course, or the advanced high school history student takes a university history course during the school day.

Credit by examination or prior experience. A student's instruction entails reduced amounts of introductory activities, drill, and practice, based on pre-assessment of the student's mastery of the intended curricular standards. The school allows an advanced student to demonstrate proficiency in a course or year of curriculum in an academic area based on an end-of-unit or end-of-year test or by reviewing the student's portfolio of work in the academic area. The student is allowed to pursue more advanced coursework in that area.

Advanced Placement® (AP). The AP program offers college-level coursework for students as early as middle school. AP exams allow students to earn university credit and/or advanced university standing based on the examination score.

International Baccalaureate® (IB). Advanced students may participate in the IB program, taking the corresponding university-level curricula. At the end of high school, the students complete an international examination, receiving advanced standing and course credits upon matriculation to university.

RECOMMENDED ELEMENTS OF ACCELERATION POLICIES

Each school district should have written acceleration policy(ies) recognizing that acceleration is an appropriate and effective intervention for select highly able students who have demonstrated high performance in one or more academic areas. Below, we present best-practice principles (based on the research listed at the end of this document) that can help schools develop comprehensive, consistent, and research-based policies. No matter what the specific category or type of acceleration, there are general principles that should be included in every policy.

BEST-PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

The principle that **policy is characterized by accessibility, equity, and openness** is foundational. Specific recommended elements of a policy to meet accessibility, equity, and openness criteria include the following:

- *Access to referral for consideration of acceleration is open to all students.* A policy must not limit access to referral for consideration of accelerative curricular modification based on gender, race, ethnicity, disability status, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, or school building attended. The policy shall be applied equitably and systematically to students referred for acceleration. Students who have been accelerated previously should be considered as well, since some students benefit from multiple accelerations.
- *All student populations are served.* The acceleration policy will be comprehensive in addressing acceleration for all grades, K-12, and all students who demonstrate advanced academic ability in one or more content areas, including students who are

English language learners (ELL),¹ at-risk, of low socio-economic status, profoundly gifted, and/or twice exceptional. Profoundly gifted students are those whose ability scores place them at the 99.9th percentile. Because these students are so rare (1 in 10,000), they require special attention when discussing appropriate educational interventions. Twice-exceptional students are those who are gifted and who have a cognitive, social, or behavioral disability; they, too, require special attention.

- *Student evaluation is fair, objective, and systematic.* A fair, objective, and systematic evaluation of the student should be conducted using the appropriate instruments for the type of acceleration being considered. When evaluating English language learners, appropriate instruments should include those in the student's heritage language. Additional information about appropriate assessments is available on the National Association for Gifted Children website (www.nagc.org).
- *Parents and guardians are allowed open communication about the policy and procedures.* Written consent is required from parents or legal guardian(s) to evaluate the referred student for possible acceleration placement. All students who have been referred, and for whom consent has been obtained, should receive a comprehensive evaluation from professionals in the district. Parents and legal guardians should be informed of the evaluation results in a timely manner (within 10 days is recommended). A comprehensive written plan for the acceleration of recommended students should be developed, a copy of which should be provided to the student's parents or legal guardian(s).

¹The most recent data available (from fall 2015; reported in April of 2018) reveals "The percentage of public school students in the United States who were English language learners (ELLs) was higher in fall 2015 (9.5 percent, or 4.8 million students) than in fall 2000 (8.1 percent, or 3.8 million students). In fall 2015, the percentage of public school students who were ELLs ranged from 1.0 percent in West Virginia to 21.0 percent in California." (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Some students within this linguistically and culturally diverse group demonstrate advanced academic achievement and cognitive abilities that exceed those of grade and age peers. Academic acceleration should be a highly valued program option for the schools these students attend.

- *The policy specifies a comprehensive data-informed student evaluation plan* that uses multiple valid and reliable instruments for the purpose intended to assess cognitive, social- emotional, and developmental domains. This evaluation plan includes feedback from parents and guardians as well as teacher observations of the student's knowledge, skills, abilities, and social and emotional needs.
- *The community has ready access to the policy document and procedure guidelines.* Community access includes making the policy available in the language(s) served by the school. The acceleration policy and procedures must be easily accessible to the community. The acceleration policy and referral forms should be available upon request in the language(s) served by the school. Parents and guardians should receive this information in writing and in their heritage language. The administration and school staff should be instructed on an annual basis to assist the families and students with the referral process.

The policy includes features that prevent unintended consequences. Specific desirable elements of a policy that proactively works to prevent unintended consequences include the following:

An appeals process should be specified for decisions made at any step during the process. An appeals process, including procedures for appealing decisions and the time limitations on starting an appeal, should be specified. The appeals process typically provides an opportunity to raise concerns or provide additional information. We recommend that the appeals process is specified in writing and accessible.

The acceleration policy should be regularly evaluated on its effectiveness. The acceleration policy should include recommendations for how to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy itself and its effectiveness in successfully accelerating students. The policy should provide recommendations for the point at which the

policy's effectiveness is evaluated (for example, a committee should be convened regularly to review success of the policy as well as unintentional barriers to the use of acceleration.

The subsequent sections describe best-practices as identified in *A Nation Empowered* (Assouline et al., 2015) as they relate to (1) whole grade acceleration, (2) early entrance to kindergarten or first grade, and (3) subject acceleration. Each of these types of acceleration has specific implications that require appropriate planning. A specific checklist is included for each type of acceleration. To avoid unnecessary repetition, each section only includes a discussion that relates to new information.

RECOMMENDED ELEMENTS OF A WHOLE-GRADE ACCELERATION POLICY

To a certain extent, whole-grade acceleration represents the most salient type of acceleration because it is the most noticeable. The elements below may also be considered for other types. Specific recommended elements of a policy that provides guidelines for the practice of whole-grade acceleration include:

- *The entire process to obtain acceleration services is detailed in the policy.* The process of implementing acceleration includes awareness, referral and screening, assessment and decision-making, planning, and discussion of alternative options. (See Appendix C: Implementing Acceleration.)
- *Appropriately qualified professionals are involved in all aspects of the process.* In particular, some professionals, e.g., psychologists, require specialized training for the psychosocial assessment and can ensure that the appropriate instruments are used. The gifted education facilitator is typically the expert in understanding the value of acceleration as an intervention.
- *Acceleration decisions should be made by child study teams, not individuals.* An acceleration policy should be informed by research-based best practices, not personal opinions or

anecdotal evidence. A common impediment to acceleration occurs when acceleration decisions are made by one person, a gatekeeper, who may harbor negative personal views about acceleration (Southern & Jones, 2015). One individual should not be able to veto or approve whole-grade, subject, or early entrance acceleration decisions.

- *The child study team creates a “Written Acceleration Plan.”* The child study team should appoint a staff member of the school to oversee and aid in the implementation of the “Written Acceleration Plan.” (See Appendix E for examples of Written Acceleration Plans.)

The district should retain a copy of the student’s plan to help assure that future opportunities specified in the plan are provided and that the student does not run into obstacles in subsequent years of school (such as when a student who is accelerated by continuous progress requires curriculum from two different schools).

- *The policy specifies that the acceleration process includes a monitored transition period within which decisions can be reversed.* If a student is recommended for accelerated placement, the child study team should establish an appropriate transition period. We recommend that the student’s transition be evaluated no later than 30 days after the placement, and sooner if there are concerns about the placement. A staff member of the school should monitor the student’s social-emotional and academic adjustment during the transition period. Although it is not unusual for students to experience a temporary drop in self-confidence or to feel stressed when they are first accelerated because these are typical reactions to a new situation, it is important that a process for monitoring all aspects is included. Monitoring can include a review of the supports that are in place, including some or all of the following: planned check-in meetings with the student and family, support provided by school counselors, and assistance with study skills.

Academically, there might be small gaps in the student’s knowledge that require short-term remediation; students should not be penalized for these gaps.

Within the time specified for the transition period, the parent or legal guardian may request in writing an alternative placement. The administrator should bring such proposals before the decision-making team, who will be responsible for issuing a decision within a specified number of days (we recommend a decision within 10 days) of receiving the request. If the acceleration plan is modified, the written acceleration plan should be updated.

During this time, the parent or legal guardian(s) may request, in writing, the discontinuation of the acceleration program without any repercussions.

The policy provides guidelines on administrative matters to ensure fair and systematic use of accelerative opportunities and recognition for participation in those accelerative opportunities.

Short-term issues are addressed:

- specifying which grade level state achievement test the student should take and
- indicating who is responsible for monitoring the acceleration, including academic and social-emotional aspects.

Long-term needs are addressed.

An acceleration policy should provide guidance for issues in the long term, which include, but are not limited to:

- providing guidance throughout K-12 to make sure that students will be allowed to maintain their accelerated standing, and
- determining the student’s class rank.

The policy provides guidelines for preventing nonacademic barriers to the use of acceleration as an educational intervention. Specific recommended elements of a policy that provides guidelines for preventing non-academic barriers to the use of acceleration include the following:

Extracurricular opportunities, especially interscholastic sports opportunities, should not be withheld or denied to students who are accelerated. For example, a middle school student who accelerated into high school should not have any reduction of sports eligibility. We recommend that a conversation be initiated between gifted education experts in the area of acceleration and the governing board for interscholastic activities to review the impact of the current rules and policies on students participating in acceleration. Decisions also need to be made about how accelerated students will participate in academic competitions and arts events.

Use of acceleration should not negatively affect school funding. The appropriate agency should review school funding formulae to identify benefits and disincentives to appropriate use of academic acceleration. For state-level policies, it is also important to ensure that district and school accountability frameworks and teacher rating systems do not create unintended disincentives to accelerate.

FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION: A FEW ISSUES FOR STATE POLICY MAKERS AND NAGC STATE AFFILIATE GROUPS

- Are the grade-level state achievement tests that the accelerated students will take specified?
- Do school rating systems and teacher evaluation systems create unintended disincentives for acceleration?
- How does acceleration of a few students impact school funding?
- Are extracurricular opportunities, especially interscholastic sports opportunities, withheld or denied to accelerated students?
- Is acceleration tracked in the school district's data systems and (ideally) in the state data system? (Such data sets can be used to support research into best practices and to identify needs to target support to help ensure that students of all backgrounds have equitable access to advanced learning opportunities.)

CHECKLIST FOR A WHOLE-GRADE ACCELERATION POLICY

An ideal acceleration policy will have a “yes” answer to each question.

Is the policy characterized by accessibility, equity, and openness?				Notes
Is access to referral for consideration of acceleration open to all students regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, disability status, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, school building attended, and previous acceleration?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Are all student populations served, including English learners, at-risk, low socioeconomic status, profoundly gifted, and twice exceptional?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Is the process of student evaluation fair, objective, and systematic?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy specify a comprehensive data-informed student evaluation plan that: a. uses multiple valid and reliable instruments to assess cognitive, social-emotional, and developmental domains? b. includes a parent report and teacher observations of the student's knowledge, skills and abilities?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Are channels of communication among parents/legal guardians, school officials, and/or students clearly delineated and available in an accessible format?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the community have access to the policy document? Is the policy accessible in the languages served by the school?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the acceleration policy provide guidelines for implementing whole-grade acceleration?				
Is the process for consideration of acceleration clearly outlined: a. awareness of options b. referral & screening c. assessment & decision making d. planning for acceleration implementation e. alternative options for students who are not good candidates for whole grade acceleration	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Are the appropriately qualified professionals involved in determining the process for referral, screening, assessment, etc., identified?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy specify that child study teams, not individuals, consider acceleration cases?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy specify the creation and long-term record-keeping of a “Written Acceleration Plan”?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy specify a monitored transition period with adequate supports in place to increase the likelihood of success?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the acceleration policy provide guidelines on administrative matters?				
Does the policy address short-term issues, such as: • specifying which grade level achievement test the student should take? • Indicates who is responsible for monitoring the acceleration, including academic and social-emotional aspects.	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy address long-term needs, such as: • Maintaining accelerated standing throughout the K-12 years? • Determining student class rank?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the acceleration policy provide guidelines for preventing non-academic barriers?				
Are procedures in place to ensure participation in extracurricular activities, including sports?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Have funding formulae been reviewed to prevent unintended disincentives?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the acceleration policy include features that prevent unintended consequences?				
Is an appeals process detailed?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Will the policy be regularly evaluated for its effectiveness?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	

RECOMMENDED ELEMENTS OF AN EARLY ENTRANCE TO KINDERGARTEN OR FIRST GRADE POLICY

Many of the elements of an early entrance to kindergarten or first grade policy are similar to those discussed in the whole grade acceleration section. Items specific to early entrance to kindergarten or first grade are included below.

The public is made aware of options for early entrance. For example, the school advertises information about early entrance, provides this information at parent nights, and offers information to local preschool teachers about this option. Information to be made available to families includes:

Referral and screening processes

- Assessment and decision making
- Planning for acceleration implementation
- Planning for alternative options when early entrance is not recommended.
- Written early entrance plan

The policy specifies when, where and how a student may be assessed as well as who is responsible for payment. Because the student is not yet enrolled in the school or district, it is sometimes not clear who is responsible for the cost of the assessment. Some states specify that the school district is required to pay, while others do not specify. It is critical that payment for the assessment is not a barrier for students whose are at risk for being considered underserved.

Does the policy require that early entrance to kindergarten or admission to first grade be based on a comprehensive evaluation to determine the child's ability to meet kindergarten expectations and progress to first grade the following year?

Does the policy specify a comprehensive evaluation plan that:

- Aligns with state kindergarten expectations
- Uses multiple appropriate instruments to assess cognitive, social, and emotional development domains
- Includes a parent report and teacher observations of the child's knowledge, skills, and abilities
- Does the policy specify a timeline, including, for example, a deadline by which parents and guardians should initiate the request for early entrance, a deadline for submitting data, and the date by which families will be informed whether the request for early entrance has been approved?
- Does the policy align with the state minimum age requirement for kindergarten, if there is one? Does this state requirement differ for gifted learners?

CHECKLIST FOR AN EARLY ENTRANCE TO KINDERGARTEN OR FIRST GRADE ACCELERATION POLICY

An ideal acceleration policy will have a “yes” answer to each question.

Is the policy characterized by accessibility, equity, and openness?				Notes
Is access to referral for consideration of early entrance to kindergarten or first grade open to all students regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, disability status, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, and school building attended?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Are all student populations served, including English learners, at-risk, low socioeconomic status, profoundly gifted, and twice exceptional?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Is the process of student assessment comprehensive, fair, objective, and systematic?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Are channels of communication among parents/legal guardians, school officials, and/or students clearly delineated and available in an accessible format?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the community have access to the policy document? Is the policy accessible in the languages served by the school?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the acceleration policy provide guidelines for implementing early entrance to kindergarten or first grade?				
Is the process for consideration of acceleration clearly outlined: a. awareness of options b. referral & screening c. assessment & decision making d. planning for acceleration implementation e. planning for alternative options when early entrance is not recommended	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Are the appropriately qualified professionals involved in determining the process for referral, screening, assessment, etc., identified?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy specify that child study teams, not individuals, consider early entrance to kindergarten or first grade cases?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy specify the creation of a “Written Early Entrance Plan”?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy require that early entrance to kindergarten or admission to first grade be based on a comprehensive evaluation to determine the child’s ability to meet kindergarten expectations and progress to first grade the following year?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy specify when, where and how a student may be assessed as well as who may be responsible for payment?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy specify a comprehensive evaluation plan that: a. aligns with state kindergarten expectations b. uses multiple valid and reliable instruments to assess cognitive, social, and emotional developmental domains c. includes a parent report and teacher observations of the child’s knowledge, skills and abilities	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy specify a monitored transition period?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy specify the timeline for information gathering and review of the decision?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the acceleration policy include features that prevent unintended consequences?				
Is an appeals process detailed?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Will the policy be regularly evaluated for its effectiveness?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	

RECOMMENDED ELEMENTS OF A SUBJECT ACCELERATION POLICY

Many of the elements of a subject acceleration policy are similar to those discussed for whole-grade or early entrance to kindergarten or first grade. Items specific to subject acceleration include:

The policy addresses short-term needs:

- Clarifies grade indicated when a student takes the state's grade-level achievement test.
- Allows for subject acceleration in multiple courses without having whole grade acceleration.
- Allows for independent study or an online or hybrid course.
- Specifies the teacher of record for reporting grades.
- Specifies how subject accelerated classes will be reported on student cumulative files and on transcripts. For example, whether a middle school student receives middle school or high school credit for a course taken at the high school level.
- Clarifies transportation issues for students who need to travel between buildings.
- Specifies whether students may participate in academic competitions and with age-mates or grade-peers.

- Specifies how the student's class rank and/or honors designation will be determined on the transcript. Addresses weighting of grades.
- Specifies a timeline for the review of the decision to determine effectiveness.
- Provides a process for determining placement for students who have completed advanced work outside of school.
- Determines a process for credit and placement decisions. For example, is credit available for students demonstrating mastery? If so, who determines how mastery will be demonstrated? These might include "testing out" of a course, presenting a portfolio of relevant student work, completing independent study, participating in an online learning program, or providing a transcript from an out-of-school program.
- Specifies the timeline for the review of the decision to determine effectiveness.

The policy addresses long-term needs.

Identifies options for students who may run out of advanced content within their building in the future. For example, an advanced second grader in a K-6 building is currently taking fourth grade math. What happens when that student reaches fifth grade?

CHECKLIST FOR A SUBJECT ACCELERATION POLICY

An ideal acceleration policy will have a “yes” answer to each question.

Is the policy characterized by accessibility, equity, and openness?				Notes
Is access to referral for consideration of acceleration open to all students regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, disability status, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, school building attended, and previous acceleration?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Are all student populations served, including English learners, at-risk, low socioeconomic status, profoundly gifted, and twice exceptional?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Is the process of student assessment comprehensive, fair, objective, and systematic?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Are channels of communication among parents/legal guardians, school officials, and/or students clearly delineated and available in an accessible format?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the community have access to the policy document? Is the policy accessible in the languages served by the school?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the acceleration policy provide guidelines for implementing subject acceleration?				
Is the process for consideration of acceleration clearly outlined: a. awareness of options b. referral & screening c. assessment & decision making d. planning for acceleration implementation e. planning for alternative options for students who are not good candidates for subject acceleration	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Are the appropriately qualified professionals involved in determining the process for referral, screening, assessment, etc., identified?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy specify an evaluation plan that: • uses multiple valid and reliable instruments to assess achievement (grade-level testing) and aptitude (above-level testing) in the relevant content area? • includes parent and teacher observations of the child's knowledge, skills and abilities in the content area?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy specify that child study teams, not individuals, consider acceleration cases?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy specify the creation of a “Written Acceleration Plan”?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy specify a monitored transition period?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy address short-term needs?				
Clarify grade indicated when student takes the state's grade-level achievement test?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Allow for subject acceleration in multiple courses without having a whole-grade acceleration?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Allow for independent study or an online or hybrid course?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Specify the teacher of record for reporting grades?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Specify how subject accelerated classes will be reported on student cumulative files and on transcripts?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Clarify transportation issues for students who need to travel between buildings?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Specify whether students may participate in academic competitions and with age-mates or grade-peers?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Specify how the student's class rank and/or honors designation will be determined on the transcript?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Specify a timeline for the review of the decision to determine effectiveness?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Provide a process for determining credit and placement for students who have completed advanced work outside of school?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the policy address long-term needs?				
Identify options for students who may run out of advanced content within their building in the future.	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Does the acceleration policy include features that prevent unintended consequences?				
Is an appeals process detailed?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	
Will the policy be regularly evaluated for its effectiveness?	Yes	No	Under Consideration	

HOW DOES THE RESEARCH SUPPORT ACCELERATION?

The research is abundant and clear on the effectiveness of academic acceleration: Gifted students who accelerate are more successful academically in the short-term and the long-term. Many studies have been produced over the years (see the Selected References section of this publication). Current research findings are also summarized in Volume 2 of *A Nation Empowered* (Assouline et al., 2015). Researchers have found moderate, positive academic effects for accelerated students who skip a grade or who advance in a specific subject area compared to their age peers. In the short term, accelerated students perform well in school, retain what they have learned, and are well-prepared for the next course in a sequence.

Longitudinal studies of 20 years or more indicate that accelerated students attend more prestigious colleges, earn more advanced degrees, produce more patents and academic publications, and earn higher incomes than equally able, non-accelerated students (Lubinski et al., 2001, 2006; Wai, 2015). Many students participating in follow-up interviews have indicated they wished they would have had more opportunities to accelerate in school. They view their experiences with acceleration as providing the gift of time – more time to pursue double majors and advanced degrees, or participate in extensive travel or volunteer opportunities, for example.

As a society, we tend to hesitate to permit or encourage students to accelerate because of the fear of negative social or emotional effects of acceleration. Although the research in this area is less straightforward than the findings for the academic benefits of acceleration, the social and psychological effects are very small, indicating little difference between the accelerated

students and the non-accelerated students. These findings should reassure us. According to the research, acceleration does not create social or psychological problems for the majority of academically talented students who accelerate. Acceleration supports the social and emotional development of gifted students by placing them with other like-minded students (Rogers, 2015).

Acceleration can be tailored to the needs of specific students by using the 20 different types of acceleration. Although grade-skipping may be the option of choice for many gifted students, other types of acceleration, including content acceleration, grouping, and dual enrollment may be the most appropriate options for selected students.

Methods have been developed to evaluate candidates for acceleration systematically and to guide educators through the decision-making process (e.g., Assouline et al., 2009; Assouline & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2012). Decisions about academic acceleration should be made by reviewing objective data, including students' academic abilities, aptitudes, and achievements, as well as their physical, social, and psychological development. The research allows us to conclude that acceleration is appropriate for many academically talented students. Acceleration decisions based on objective data can be made with confidence (Assouline & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2012).

For more information about the research cited here that supports acceleration, see the Selected Resources and Selected References sections in this document, and visit <http://accelerationinstitute.org/>.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Students who have been accelerated should continue to achieve at a high level. They should continue earning high grades in school and to be in the top 10% of their new grade level.
2. A student who is motivated and excited by acceleration is more likely to be successful than a resistant student.
3. Acceleration should not negatively impact academic, social and behavioral adjustment. Receiving teachers should help identify likely peers for the student, and counselors should provide support in study skills and social coping, when necessary.
4. Additional acceleration may be needed, even if the student has already moved ahead one grade or has advanced in a specific subject.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The members of the 2009 National Work Group on Acceleration developed the *Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy* to assist schools in writing and modifying an acceleration policy that adheres to research-based best practices and is suited to local needs. These guidelines for policy development were intended to encourage the systematic adoption and practice of acceleration in schools across the nation.

The current document expands upon the 2009 guidelines and presents two additional checklists, one for early entrance to kindergarten or first grade and one for content acceleration. All of the checklists address the many barriers to acceleration, which may also impede the development of a policy. For example, some states and local education agencies have absolute age

requirements for entering school. Others have curriculum requirements tied to specific grade levels, or prerequisites for certain courses/ programs that are so specific in policy that they tie educators' hands. Additionally, colleges and universities may present barriers by arbitrarily limiting participation of accelerated students in dual enrollment programs. In some states, students are not allowed to take a state graduation test until the spring of the sophomore year. In these states, colleges and universities require students to have passed the graduation test before enrolling in their dual enrollment programs. In effect, this locks students out of college-level courses until their junior year. Effective policy removes barriers, allowing students to receive the educational opportunities and experiences necessary for their personal and academic growth.

SELECTED RESOURCES

Acceleration Institute Website

www.accelerationinstitute.org

This website, hosted by the University of Iowa Belin-Blank Center, offers many resources for educators, parents, policymakers, and researchers. It includes recent research on acceleration, links to state policies, information about advocacy, recommended decision-making tools, and stories of acceleration. The website also includes a PowerPoint presentation on acceleration, which can be downloaded for presentations about acceleration to groups of educators and parents. Additionally, it contains a section on acceleration policies, including the appendices associated with this publication.

A Nation Empowered: Evidence Trumps the Excuses Holding Back America's Brightest Students. Edited by Susan Assouline, Nicholas Colangelo, Joyce VanTassel-Baska, & Ann Lupkowski-Shoplik (2015). Iowa City, IA: Belin-Blank Center.

- **Volume 1** summarizes the research on acceleration and features stories of accelerated students, their families, and teachers. Ideal for administrators, parents, policymakers, and others who need a brief, clear introduction to acceleration.
- **Volume 2** is a thorough investigation of what we have learned from over 50 years of educational research on acceleration and gifted students. Eighteen chapters provide an in-depth, wide-ranging look at this underused intervention. Updated research includes the long-term effects of educational acceleration, acceleration and STEM education, effects of acceleration on the social emotional lives of gifted students, acceleration practices with twice exceptional students, radical acceleration, state residential STEM schools, diverse populations and acceleration, professional development for teachers and counselors, and public policy. Recommended for educators, parents, researchers, and anyone looking for specific information on acceleration's effectiveness.
- For more information, see www.nationempowered.org.

A Nation Deceived: How schools hold back

America's students: Edited by Nicholas Colangelo, Susan G. Assouline, & Miraca U. M. Gross (2004). *Iowa City: The University of Iowa, The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development.*

- **Volume 1** provides an overview of academic acceleration, the history of acceleration in the United States, and responses to the myths associated with acceleration.
- **Volume 2** includes relevant research on acceleration. This research is updated and presented in the follow-up publication, *A Nation Empowered* (see above).

Iowa Acceleration Scale: A Guide for Whole-Grade Acceleration,

by Susan G. Assouline, Nicholas Colangelo, Ann Lupkowski-Shoplik, Leslie Forstadt, & Jonathan Lipscomb (2009). Great Potential Press, Inc. Scottsdale, AZ.

The *Iowa Acceleration Scale, 3rd Edition* is a tool to help educators and families make effective decisions regarding a grade-skip. The IAS guides a child study team (including educators, teachers, parents, and other professionals) through a discussion of the academic and social characteristics of the student. The IAS provides:

- A more objective look at the student;
- An analysis of the major factors to be considered in making acceleration decisions;
- Guidelines for weighting the relative importance of the major factors;
- Documentation of the student's strengths and concerns
- A numerical range to guide the discussion and decision of acceleration; and,
- A standard of comparison with students who have had successful accelerations.

Above-level Testing

Above-level testing is the practice of giving a test designed for older students to young, bright students. This procedure is essential for providing objective evidence for making decisions

about academic acceleration. The young gifted student typically gets everything right or almost everything right on tests designed for his or her age group. What is needed is a more challenging test, so the young student can demonstrate mastery of more advanced content. Examples of above-level tests used in university-based talent searches include the SAT or ACT for talented 7th-9th graders and the I-Excel or PSAT 8/9 for talented 4th-6th graders. Some of the universities providing above-level testing include: Belin-Blank Center at the University of Iowa, Center for Talent Development at Northwestern University, Center for Talented Youth at Johns Hopkins University, the Talent Identification Program at Duke University and the Center for Bright Kids. For more information about above-level testing, see:

- Assouline, S. G., & Lupkowski-Shopluk, A. (2012). The talent search model of gifted identification. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 30(1), 45-59.
- <https://belinblank.wordpress.com/2016/10/06/best-kept-secret-in-gifted-ed/>

Developing Math Talent: A Comprehensive Guide to Math Education for Gifted Students in Elementary and Middle School (2nd ed.). By Susan G. Assouline and Ann Lupkowski-Shopluk. (2011). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

This book is a comprehensive parent and teacher guide for developing math talent among advanced learners of elementary or middle school age. The authors offer a focused look at educating gifted and talented students for success in math. Chapters include information about assessment, Diagnostic Testing->Prescriptive Instruction, case studies of mathematically talented students, curriculum, and research-based recommendations on accelerating students in mathematics.

NAGC Position Paper on Acceleration

A position paper on academic acceleration put forth by the National Association for Gifted Children can be found at: <http://www.nagc.org/about-nagc/nagc-position-statements-white-papers>

Policy Resources

Lord, E. W. & Swanson, J. D. (2016). *A Guide to State Policies in Gifted Education* (2nd Edition). Washington, DC: National Association for Gifted Children.

Additional Websites

- Hoagies Gifted Education Page: <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/acceleration.htm>
- Davidson Institute database: <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/topic/105164/entryType/2>
- Hoagies Gifted Blog Hop: Acceleration (March 2015): http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/blog_hop_acceleration.htm
- Hoagies Gifted Blog Hop: Acceleration, Again (October, 2016): http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/blog_hop_acceleration_2.htm
- Ohio Department of Education: Academic Acceleration for Advanced Learners: <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Other-Resources/Gifted-Education/Resources-for-Parents/Academic-Acceleration-for-Advanced-Learners>. Contains many resources used in Ohio, which requires an academic acceleration policy for each school district.
- Report on the status of acceleration in Illinois: <http://powerup.org/upp-wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ACCELERATE-ILLINOIS-1.pdf>. Data contained in this report were helpful in establishing the Accelerated Placement Act in August 2017, which requires school districts to have acceleration policies in place. See: <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/BillStatus.asp?DocTypeID=SB&DocNum=1223&GAID=14&SessionID=91&LegID=103448>
- NAGC parent tip sheet on acceleration: <http://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Publication%20PHP/NAGC%20TIP%20Sheet-Acceleration-FINAL.pdf>
- Colorado early access (early entrance to kindergarten) information: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/gt/earlyaccess>

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Find this complete publication, including the appendices at:
accelerationinstitute.org/policies.

Educators are welcome to submit their school, district, or state acceleration policies to the website, so others may view them as examples.