

# Appendix C: Implementing Acceleration<sup>1</sup>

The National Work Group on Acceleration recommends that an acceleration policy provides guidance on implementing acceleration and supports the use of objective and comprehensive decision-making instruments. In this appendix, we provide guidelines for *implementing* acceleration from the *Iowa Acceleration Scale* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (*IAS-3*) (Assouline et al., 2009), a guide for making decisions about grade-based acceleration.<sup>2</sup> Many users of the *IAS-3* have offered that it is the most comprehensive and well-researched guide for implementing acceleration. As more instruments and decision-making guides are developed and validated, we will include them on Acceleration Institute's website and update this *Developing Academic Acceleration Policies* document.

Decisions about accelerating an individual student should be based on a thorough, team-based review of the factors relevant to acceleration. Because the decision about acceleration is typically a local (and sometimes a controversial) decision, tools such as the *IAS-3* provide an objective procedure for determining whether acceleration is likely to be appropriate for the student. The *IAS-3* requires a collection of information about the student that facilitates a meaningful discussion about the academic and social aspects of the student to help determine whether the student is likely to benefit from acceleration. Specific information is compiled about the student including academics and interpersonal relationships the student has developed, which then serves as a means for discussing the learning needs of the student. Use of the *IAS-3*, or a similar tool, ensures decisions based on specific information about the child as a learner rather than subjective opinions.

The *IAS-3* allows an appraisal of the factors that enter into determining if a K-8 student is a good candidate for grade-based acceleration. In addition to academic factors, the *IAS-3* helps a child study team review non-academic factors that are relevant to success with acceleration. These non-academic factors include social-emotional maturity, family involvement in the student's schooling, and the student's school attendance history.

The suggestions offered here for implementing acceleration come from or are largely influenced by the *IAS-3 Manual*. The recommended elements of an acceleration policy can be broken down into three broad areas: referral and screening, assessment and decision making, and planning. Implementation procedures shall not disproportionately limit access to accelerative curricular modification based on gender, race, ethnicity, disability status (including twice exceptionality), socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, or school building attended.

## Referral and screening

Referral for acceleration is a separate process from referral to a school's gifted program. Students who are referred for acceleration will not necessarily be part of a school's gifted and talented program because the school may not have a gifted and talented program, or the student may not qualify for the program if the school uses composite test scores for acceptance into a gifted program.

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<sup>1</sup> This appendix appeared in the 2009 *Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy* and was slightly updated for the current publication.

<sup>2</sup> Two authors of the *IAS* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), Nicholas Colangelo and Susan Assouline, were members of the National Work Group on Acceleration. No authors of the *Iowa Acceleration Scale* receive a royalty from the sale of the *IAS*; the royalties go to the Belin-Blank Center to support its services to schools.

- Students who should be considered for evaluation for academic acceleration can be referred to a school administrator by any source, including but not limited to the student, teachers, administrators, school psychologists, school counselors, parents, and other students. Referral should be open to many sources so that one person does not serve as the gatekeeper for referral recommendations.
- Students scoring at or above predetermined levels (e.g., the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile) on regularly administered state norm-referenced tests should be automatically referred for consideration for acceleration. The student's score profile, rather than the composite score, should be considered, so as not to bias the procedure against students who have an uneven pattern of scores and who are likely candidates for subject-matter acceleration.
- The screening procedure should be applied equitably and systematically to all referred students.
- If, after a clear explanation of the advantages and disadvantages of acceleration, the student expresses that he/she is not interested in acceleration, then the process should not proceed further. The possibility of consideration for referral for acceleration should be possible at a later date.
- Candidates for early entrance to kindergarten are typically within one year of the cut-off age recommended by state policy (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Assouline, & Colangelo, 2015). Bright young children who are ready for more academic challenge but are not necessarily ready for success in a school system might consider alternative or non-traditional school settings. A preschool teacher well-informed about gifted education issues might be able to meet the needs of such a student. An assessment by a psychologist may provide useful strategies for the student and family (although not all schools accept results from assessments by independent psychologists). Additional information about early entrance to kindergarten is found at <http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/Resources/kindergarten.aspx>
- Ideally, a student will be assessed for acceleration in the spring, and, if recommended, participate in appropriate transition activities prior to placement in the advanced grade or content at the beginning of the next school year. The needs of the student should dictate when acceleration decisions are considered. Local practices should determine how many days prior to the start of the school year or second semester an acceleration referral and evaluation should be made.

### **Assessment and decision making**

- School districts are expected to conduct a fair, objective, and systematic assessment of the student using the appropriate instruments for the type of acceleration being considered for the student. When assessing English language learners, appropriate instruments may include those in the student's heritage language.
- The district should take care to ensure that assessment instruments are valid and reliable, and that the instruments measure the factors related to success with acceleration.
- Inability to pay for any tests related to the evaluation, such as ability tests conducted by an independent psychologist, should not exclude families or students from consideration. Indeed, it is precisely because some students are at-risk of exclusion for consideration of acceleration that an objective policy should be implemented.
  - A child study team should consider cases of whole-grade acceleration and use valid and reliable instruments to guide the discussion and decide on placement. In an ideal child study team, at least one person is familiar with the research and best practices of gifted education and acceleration. A

representative with expertise in language acquisition should be a team member to guide placement decisions when the student is an English language learner. A representative with expertise in twice exceptionality should be a team member to guide placement decisions when the student is twice exceptional. The issue of assembling a child study team should not become a burden, nor should acceleration decisions be delayed if a team is unable to have all recommended members present, although a process for obtaining input from team members who cannot be present should be in place.

The school administrator should convene the team comprised of the following people, if possible, to discuss whole-grade acceleration for a student:

- Administrator
- Parents or guardians
- Current teacher
- Receiving teacher(s) (the teacher(s) from the next grade)
- Talented and gifted teacher
- School psychologist
- School counselor
- A representative with expertise in language acquisition when the student is an English language learner
- A representative with expertise in twice exceptionality when the student is twice exceptional
- Any other parties who may have knowledge beneficial to the decision making process.

As part of the information gathering stage, the student being considered for acceleration can be consulted, depending on the student's age and willingness to participate. (The student should not participate in the child study team's discussion of the student.)

- A child study team also should be assembled to consider cases of content-based acceleration. Because content-based acceleration does not involve a student's full-time placement with older classmates, there may be fewer concerns about social and emotional development. Because of the less extreme nature of content acceleration, the child study team need not be made up of as many members as the team assembled for discussions of whole-grade acceleration. Members of a child study team for content acceleration should include the current content area teacher, the receiving teacher for the content area, the parent, the students, and possibly other teachers and/or a school counselor to assist with initial adjustment issues.

## Planning

A comprehensive written plan for the decision should be developed and provided to the parent or legal guardian of the student.

- The child study team should appoint a staff member of the school to oversee and aid in the implementation of the written acceleration plan and the transition process.
- The child study team should establish an appropriate transition period for the accelerated placement. We recommend that the student's transition be evaluated no later than 30 days after the placement, and sooner if necessary. During this time, the parent or legal guardian(s) may request, in writing, the discontinuation of the acceleration program without any repercussions.
- Within the time specified for the transition period, the parent or legal guardian may request an alternative placement in writing. 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 10 days) of receiving the request. If the acceleration plan is modified, the written plan should be modified accordingly and a new transition period determined.

- The accelerated placement of the student should become permanent at the end of the transition period. Once the plan becomes permanent it should be entered into the student's permanent record.

## References

Assouline, S. G., Colangelo, N., Lupkowski-Shoplik, A. E., Lipscomb, J., Forstadt (2009). *The Iowa Acceleration Scale Manual* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.

Lupkowski-Shoplik, A., Assouline, S., & Colangelo, N. (2015). Whole-grade acceleration: Grade-skipping and early entrance to kindergarten or first grade. In S. Assouline, N. Colangelo, J. VanTassel-Baska, & A. Lupkowski-Shoplik (Eds.), *A nation empowered: Evidence trumps the excuses holding back America's brightest students* (Vol. 2, pp. 53-71). Iowa City: University of Iowa, The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development.