



Elementary School District 159

Excellence in Education Since 1869

“To Educate, Empower and Inspire the Whole-Child”

Accelerated Academic Programming Handbook

This handbook is provided for parents, guardians and members of our community as a resource guide for academic acceleration programs in Elementary School District 159.

Serving the Communities of Matteson, Richton Park and Tinley Park

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Elementary School District 159 Acceleration Policy

Note: Italicized portions of the document denote the components of the Model Acceleration Policy that are required by the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act, Public Act 100-0421.

The Elementary School District 159 Board of Education believes that all students across the achievement spectrum should be challenged and supported to develop their potential. For some students needing a higher level of instruction, this can best be achieved by affording them access to curricula and learning environments more commonly provided to older students. This policy describes the process that shall be used for evaluating students for possible accelerated placement and identifying students who should be granted early admission to kindergarten or first grade, accelerated in one or more individual subject areas, or promoted to a higher grade level than their same-age peers. The policy shall be applied equitably and systematically to all students referred for acceleration regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gifted and talented status, twice/multiple exceptionality, English language proficiency, or socio-economic background.

1. Definitions

- a. *“Accelerated placement” is the placement of a student at the instructional level that best matches that student’s needs by allowing access to a curriculum that is usually reserved for children who are older or in higher grades than the student. Accelerated placement options must include, but not be limited to, early entrance to kindergarten and first grade, individual subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration. Accelerated placement is not limited to those students who have been identified as gifted and talented, but rather is open to all students who demonstrate high ability and who may benefit from accelerated placement. Eligibility for accelerated placement shall also be open to all students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, English language proficiency, or socioeconomic status.*
- b. *“Early entrance to kindergarten” is the admission of a student to kindergarten who will not yet be five years old by September 1 of that school year; however, a student must have had his/her fourth birthday by September 1 of that school year.*
- c. *“Early entrance to first grade” is the admission of a student to first grade who will not yet be six years old by September 1 of that school year and who has not completed kindergarten; however, a student must have had his/her fifth birthday by September 1 of that school year. Students who are younger than six upon starting first grade but who were admitted early to kindergarten do not need to be reevaluated prior to admission to first grade.*
- d. *“Whole grade acceleration” is the practice of assigning a student to a higher grade level than is typical given the student’s age on a full-time basis for the purpose of providing access to appropriately challenging learning opportunities.*
- e. *“Individual subject acceleration” is the practice of assigning a student to specific content at a higher instructional level than is typical given the student’s grade for the purpose of providing access to appropriately challenging learning opportunities in one or more subject areas.*

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2. Publication of Acceleration Policy and Referral Procedures/Forms

- a. *Copies of this policy and referral forms of evaluation for possible early entrance to kindergarten or first grade, whole grade acceleration, and individual subject acceleration, shall be made available to district staff and parents at each school building and shall be published on the school district website.*
- b. The Principal and Gifted Coordinator/Gifted Coach of each school building shall solicit referrals of students for evaluation for possible accelerated placement annually, and ensure that all staff he or she supervises are aware of procedures for referring students for evaluation for possible accelerated placement.

3. Initiation of Evaluation Process

- a. Referral Procedures
 - I. Referrers: Any student residing in the district may be referred by a teacher, school or district administrator, gifted coordinator/gifted coach, school psychologist, school social worker, or a parent or legal guardian of the student to the Principal for evaluation for possible accelerated placement. A student may refer himself or herself through a district staff member who has knowledge of the referred student’s abilities.
 - II. Referral Intake Form: The referrer shall complete the appropriate section of the referral form and submit it to the Principal. The submission of the referral intake form by the initial referrer starts the clock on the sixty (60) school day evaluation process.
- b. *Written Parental Consent: The Principal of the referred student’s school shall obtain written permission from the student’s parent(s) or legal guardian(s) to evaluate the student for possible accelerated placement. Consent is presumed when the individual referring the student for evaluation is a student’s parent or legal guardian. The district shall evaluate all students who are referred for evaluation and whose parent(s) or legal guardian(s) have granted permission to evaluate the student for possible accelerated placement.*
- c. Timeline:
 - I. Students residing in the district who are referred for evaluation for possible accelerated placement during the school year shall receive a determination within sixty (60) school days.
 - II. Students residing in the district who are referred for evaluation for possible accelerated placement sixty (60) or more school days prior to the start of the school year shall be evaluated in advance of the start of the school year such that the student may be placed in the accelerated placement on the first day of school.

4. Evaluation Process

I. *The policy must utilize a fair and equitable decision-making process that involves multiple persons and includes a student’s parents or guardians. This multi-person evaluation team is responsible for gathering relevant, reliable*

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and comprehensive data in order to determine whether and what type of accelerated placement is appropriate for that student.

a. Multiple Evaluators/Decision Makers

I. *A diverse evaluation team shall consist of multiple participants.* Recommended team members may include:

- i. Gifted coordinator/coach or the appointed designee responsible for understanding the needs of an accelerated student
- ii. Principal or designee from the student’s current school
- iii. District Administrator(s)/Coordinator(s)
- iv. School psychologist
- v. School social worker
- vi. Speech pathologist
- vii. School nurse

III. *A parent or legal guardian of the student shall be invited to participate in the evaluation process.* The parent/legal guardian shall be allowed to invite an individual who is knowledgeable about the student’s academic abilities to meetings. Accommodations should be made for parents with disabilities or who are not fluent English speakers to enable them to participate fully in the process.

b. Multiple Evaluation Criteria

I. *The evaluation process shall include multiple valid, reliable indicators.* The criteria used to determine whether accelerated placement is appropriate should be reasonable, e.g., helpful in assessing whether a student is ready for the accelerated placement and not whether he or she has already mastered the content at that level. For students referred for possible whole grade acceleration, use of the Iowa Acceleration Scale is recommended. For students referred for possible acceleration in an individual subject area, above-grade-level assessment in that subject area is recommended as part of the evaluation process.

II. If any assessments are utilized as part of the evaluation process: A) the instruments shall be appropriate given the needs of the student (e.g., linguistically appropriate instruments should be used with English Learner students); B) any assessment accommodations to which the student may be entitled generally (e.g., by the terms of an IEP) shall be available during the evaluation for accelerated placement; and C) The student’s desire to be accelerated shall be considered in the decision-making and transition planning process.

c. Procedures for Notifying Parents/Guardians of the Decision is Required

I. A parent or legal guardian of the evaluated student shall be notified in writing of the outcome of the evaluation process within ten (10) school days of the completion of the evaluation process. This notification shall include instructions for appealing the outcome of the evaluation process.

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- II. A parent or legal guardian of the referred student may appeal in writing the decision of the evaluation team to the local Superintendent within ten (10) school days of being notified of the committee’s decision. The Superintendent shall review the appeal and notify the parent or legal guardian who filed the appeal of his or her final decision within ten (10) school days of receiving the appeal. The Superintendent’s decision shall be final. However, the student may be referred and evaluated again at the next available opportunity if he or she is again referred for evaluation by an individual eligible to make referrals as described in this policy.
- d. Communication of the Decision to the Student’s Educators
- a. The decision that a student is eligible for accelerated placement shall be communicated to the student’s current teacher(s) and to all teachers (including specialists) and relevant administrative personnel at the level to which the student will be accelerated, to ensure that all are informed and prepared to support the placement.

5. Accelerated Placement

- a. The evaluation team shall create a written placement and transition plan for students selected for whole grade acceleration. The written plan will be provided to the student’s parents or guardians.
- b. The accelerated student’s transition will be evaluated no later than thirty (30) school days after placement to assess its level of effectiveness. During the transition period specified in the written plan, the accelerated student’s parent or guardian may request in writing that the student be returned to the non-accelerated setting without penalty.
- c. At the end of the specified transition period, the student’s records will be updated to reflect the student’s accelerated status.

6. State Requirements

- a. The Superintendent or his or her designee shall ensure that the accelerated students participate in appropriate state assessments based on guidance from the State Board of Education.
- b. The Superintendent or his or her designee shall ensure that data regarding accelerated placement is collected and reported in accordance with rules adopted by the State Board of Education.

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The Acceleration Programs involve students who are placed either an entire grade level or single subject grade level ahead of their chronological-aged peers to meet their academic needs.

Criteria for Identification

The Elementary School District 159 Acceleration Committee utilizes the *Iowa Acceleration Scale* 3rd Edition (Great Potential Pr., Inc.; 3rd Edition, February 1, 2009) to collect and organize data pertaining to general information, school history, ability, aptitude, achievement, school and academic factors, developmental factors, interpersonal skills and attitude and support. The *Iowa Acceleration Scale* (Great Potential Pr., Inc.; 3rd Edition, February 1, 2009) comprises a decision making process that includes multiple valid indicators and assessments.

Data Summary

In order to be formally identified, a student must have a majority of qualifying evidence in the 95th percentile or above-from the following categories:

- Cognitive ability (Aptitude)
- Achievement

Re-Testing for Identification

To maintain assessment validity, students may have to wait two years for specific re-testing via the Cognitive Abilities Test Form 8 (CogAT) (Riverside Publishing, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; 2018). In addition, parents/guardians and students may not view the testing materials described above. Results of these tests will be shared with parents/guardians during recommendation meetings.

Elementary to Middle School Programming

Students who are identified for academic acceleration programs in elementary school may be re-evaluated based on progress at the end of 5th grade for possible middle school programming.

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Early Entrance to Kindergarten or First Grade

Illinois Accelerated Placement Act, Public Act 100-0421 allows public school districts to provide early access to educational services for kindergarten and first grade students to meet the needs of the highly advanced gifted child.

Children are admitted to kindergarten if their 5th birthday is on or before September 1st of that school year and to first grade if their 6th birthday is on or before September 1st of that school year.

Elementary School District 159 recognizes some children may benefit academically, socially and/or emotionally from accelerating and/or grade skipping. Highly advanced gifted students may be granted early entrance to kindergarten or first grade. Applications for early entrance to kindergarten or first grade are accepted during March of the preceding attendance year thru the 1st quarter.

The Process

Step 1:

- Elementary School District 159 residency must be established by the parent/guardian. Parent/guardian may also be requested to provide the child's birth certificate.

Step 2:

- Parent/guardian fills out the acceleration/grade skipping intake form.
- Appointment is scheduled by the Gifted and Talented Education Coach for screening (60-90 minutes).
- If the child scored above the 95th percentile in both Reading and Math on the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment, further screening is scheduled.

Step 3:

- An appointment is scheduled for alternate assessments that may include:
 - Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI)
 - Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC)
 - Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT)
 - Preschool Language Scales (PLS)
 - Goldman-Fristoe Test of Articulation (GFTA)
 - Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-Screening Test (Self-Screen)

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Step 4:

- Placement is determined from data results with a majority of results falling at or above the 95th percentile.
- Parent/guardian meeting is set up with the evaluation team to discuss results and possible placement options.

Step 5:

- Parent/guardian registers the student at District Office to officially start.

Grade Level Acceleration/Grade Skip or Single Subject Acceleration

Step 1: Screening

All students in grades K-8 undergo the initial screening process via the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment every school year. Students are tested in two areas; Reading and Math during the fall, winter, and spring. Students who score at the 99th percentile on one or more of the assessments are considered for the second identification step. Elementary School District 159 also recognizes the referrals of parents/guardians, teachers, and outside professionals for consideration of further screening (Referral Intake Form).

Step 2: Collect Body of Evidence

Parent/guardians will be sent a letter to request permission for further assessment, collection of data and review. Information is collected on students from a variety of sources, which may include:

- Teacher Recommendation forms
- Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) Assessment- Measure of Reasonable and Problem Solving Skills
- Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) Assessment for Reading and Math (historical locally-normed achievement scores)
- State standardized test scores (if available)

Step 3: The district’s academic acceleration committee reviews the body of evidence.

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Step 4: A parent/guardian meeting is scheduled to share results.

If the body of evidence suggests academic acceleration is the best programming option for the student’s learning, a parent/guardian meeting is held to share results and to create an academic acceleration plan.

If the body of evidence does not suggest academic acceleration, a parent/guardian meeting is held to discuss findings.

Step 5: Develop the academic acceleration plan.

The acceleration committee will create an academic acceleration plan that identifies programming goals(s). A plan will include strategies and success indicators related to each goal. A progress meeting will be scheduled with parent/guardian and the team.

Exit Procedure

Students placed in the accelerated program may be exited when it is determined that it would be in the best interest of the student to discontinue acceleration. A parent/guardian meeting will be held to discuss findings.

In order for a student to be exited, one of the following conditions must be met:

- A parent/guardian requests that the student be removed from the program.
- The teacher, principal or school team recommends the student exit the program following a parent/guardian meeting.

Transfer Procedure

Transfer students who have been identified and served previously in an accelerated program will automatically be referred for eligibility screening in Elementary School District 159. Scores provided from required assessments from the student’s previous school will be used for possible placement in addition to assessments administered by the ESD 159 team. For students that have completed a grade level in another country or private school earlier than the recommended age of our students, acceleration application protocols will apply.

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