Feeling Overwhelmed?  
Acceleration for Beginners

Texas Association for Gifted and Talented, December 2019

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Academic Acceleration …

• moves high-ability students at a faster rate or at a younger age than typical.
• matches a curriculum to a student’s academic abilities
• is an appropriate developmental placement, matching complexity and pace to the rate of student learning
• Is supported by 60 years of research
Academic Acceleration Is Not...

• Pushing a child.
• Forcing a child to learn advanced material or socialize with older children before he or she is ready.
• A “one-size-fits-all” approach.
  – It should be carefully considered.
  – It acknowledges the fact that some individual differences merit educational flexibility.
  – It is not “the answer” for all gifted students.
Acceleration works. An extensive research base supports acceleration for gifted students.

#NationEmpowered
Using research to inform practice
Resources for Acceleration

• A Nation Empowered
• www.accelerationinstitute.org
From Deception to Empowerment

Evidence Trumps the Excuses Holding Back America’s Brightest Students

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Discount: EMPOWERED
www.nationempowered.org
Big picture: What can we learn from *A Nation Empowered*?

- **Acceleration works.** An extensive research base supports acceleration.
- Methods have been developed to evaluate candidates for acceleration systematically and guide educators through the process.
- Acceleration can be provided in many ways, including content acceleration, grade-skipping, and dual enrollment. Acceleration can be tailored to individual students’ needs.
What can we learn from *A Nation Empowered*? (Continued)

• Acceleration supports the **social/emotional** development of gifted students by placing them with other like-minded students

• Acceleration is an **inexpensive** option

• Acceleration supports the **continuous academic development** of students by providing academic challenges & stimulation
Acceleration Options: Two Broad Categories

Grade-based acceleration

Do not remain with same-age peers

Shortens amount of time in K-12 schooling

Social and emotional aspects *may* need more consideration than with content-based acceleration

Content-based acceleration

Stay with same-grade peers for most of the day

Receive advanced content in one or more subjects before expected grade level

Social and emotional aspects may need more consideration than with content-based acceleration.
Acceleration: Content-Based Forms

- Subject acceleration
- Distance learning courses
- Combined classes
- Credit by exam
- Self-paced instruction
- Acceleration in college
- Concurrent/dual enrollment
- Continuous progress
- Advanced Placement
- Telescoping
- Extracurricular programs
- Mentorships
- International Baccalaureate
- Computer-based classes
- Accelerated high school or high school on a college campus

Nurturing Potential | Inspiring Excellence
## Effect Sizes (from Rogers’ chapter in *A Nation Empowered*)

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<th>Grade-Based Acceleration</th>
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*These students gained an additional 5.1 months over comparison group.
**Effect Sizes (from Rogers chapter in A Nation Empowered)**

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Determining Readiness for Whole-Grade Acceleration

- Available from Great Potential Press
- Proceeds from the purchase of the IAS are fully returned to Belin-Blank Center student and teacher programs. No authors of the IAS benefit financially from sales of the book.
Using the IAS

• Not a standardized “test”
• Conservative instrument (e.g., biased against under-achievers)
• Designed for K-8 (not high school)
• Designed for single skips in K-8 (not 2-3 years in one “skip,” early graduation or early-entrance to college)
Using the IAS (2)

- Can help initiate conversations about alternatives to grade skipping – it’s a guidance tool
- Guide discussion of the academic and social characteristics of the student
- Help avoid making a decision based upon selected biased recall of past events
- Can guide discussion about early entrance to kindergarten
Who Participates in the Child Study Team? (5-10 members)

- Administrator
- Parents/guardians
- Current teacher
- Receiving teacher
- G/T teacher
- School psychologist
- School counselor
- A representative with expertise in language acquisition if student is an English language learner
- A representative with expertise in twice exceptionality if student is twice exceptional
- Any other parties who may have knowledge beneficial to the decision-making process
The IAS Form: 10 Sections

- General Information
- Critical Items
- School History
- Assessment of Ability, Aptitude, and Achievement
- School and Academic Factors
- Developmental Factors
- Interpersonal Skills
- Attitude and Support
Acceleration Supports Students’ Social Development

- It puts them in classes with academic peers, who are similar in terms of interests & intellectual level.
- Some studies show that highly gifted students are better accepted by older students than by their age peers.
- Overall, in terms of research on social development and academic acceleration, the picture is quite positive.
Above-Level Testing

Administer an *achievement* test designed for *older* students to *younger* students. This is called an “above-level test.” We are now measuring:

- Reasoning abilities
- Aptitude
Imagine you are working with two students:

Both of them have scored at the 99th percentile on the mathematics subtest of the Iowa Assessments when compared to other 5th graders.
Above-level testing “lengthens the yardstick”

- A 3-foot yardstick measures many things accurately, but
- Talented students are “taller” than 3 feet.
- “Taller” students need a longer yardstick.
What can we learn about the students from above-level testing?
Jessica scores at the 85th percentile when compared to 8th graders.

Mary scores at the 20th percentile when compared to 8th graders.

Jessica is ready for much more challenge (like acceleration) in math than Mary, even though both students have shown they are very good at math compared to typical students in their 5th grade regular classroom.
1. Above-level testing is useful for decisions about grade acceleration

• Above-level testing is needed to complete the *Iowa Acceleration Scale*, a tool that helps us make informed decisions about grade-skipping.
2. Above-level testing is useful for decisions about subject acceleration

- Subject acceleration is useful for students who:
  - Demonstrated high ability in one or more academic areas
  - Are not recommended for whole-grade acceleration
  - Have uneven academic profiles and need acceleration in the area of their strength
  - May have already skipped a grade but need additional acceleration in extreme strength area
Who is recommended for acceleration in the content area?

• THIS IS THE BIG QUESTION
• We do not expect perfection (do not demand 100% on the above-level test)
• Students scoring at the 50th percentile when compared to the older students in the comparison group are demonstrating readiness to learn advanced material.
• If the student scored at the 95th percentile on the above-level test, what would that tell you?
The Talent Search Model: How You Can Complete the Process in Your School

- Two steps:
  - Initial screening: grade-level standardized test (e.g., Iowa Assessments). Students at certain level (e.g., 95th percentile or above) go on to step 2.
  - Above-level test (ACT, I-Excel, or other above-level standardized test)
Using Results to Tailor Curriculum

• Higher scores ➔ more acceleration
• Adjust the content: Supplement the curriculum with adjustments to projects, more advanced activities, etc.
• Based on ability range of students in the group, determine whether the class will have more of an enrichment or acceleration tilt
Educators Might Consider…

• Grouping similarly talented students together for some activities or courses
• Adjusting the level and pace of the curriculum for students
• Presenting more advanced content to students based on their readiness
• Subject acceleration
• Grade-skipping for students with high aptitude in multiple areas
• Adjusting the types of enrichment offered in school
For more information

• www.belinblank.org/testing
• www.i-excel.org
• www.accelerationinstitute.org
What Happens if We Don’t Accelerate?

- Not only should we consider what the research tells us (acceleration is highly successful for carefully selected students), but we should also understand the consequences of inaction.
- “Doing nothing” is still a decision.
- If we don’t accelerate now, we can still consider this option in the future.
If the decision is made to accelerate...

- Need a plan for transition
- Monitor progress in the new grade
  - Consider a “trial period”
  - Have a formal check-in after about 6 weeks to determine progress
If the decision is made **not** to accelerate...

- Need a plan to meet the needs of the student
- Meaningful differentiation is essential so that the student will have the opportunity to learn something new each day
Early Entrance to Kindergarten or First Grade

• Decision must be made when child is quite young, before much experience with schooling or with peers.
• Difficult to change our minds.
• Research is positive for carefully-selected early entrants
Indicators a Child Might Be Ready for Early Entrance to Kindergarten

- Early verbal ability (excellent vocabulary, early reading)
- Early mathematical ability
- Long attention span
- Abstract reasoning ability (ability to generalize & make connections between areas of learning)

- Extraordinary memory
- An early interest in time
- **Parent anecdotes:** Reading the back of a shampoo bottle at age 3; adding problems like 15,921 + 40,857 correctly in preschool
- Individual intelligence, aptitude, & achievement assessments (more on this later)
Advantages of Early Entrance to Kindergarten

- Minimizes social disruptions
- Minimizes gaps in knowledge that might occur if grade-skipping might occur later
- Issues of academic credit are not a concern (unlike grade-skipping)
- Bright children who enter school early are less likely to be bored with school and to “breeze through” school
Drawbacks of Early Entrance to Kindergarten

- Decision must be made when child is quite young
- Child’s lack of experience and limited information about the child make decisions difficult
- Long-term consequences
- It is difficult to change our minds
Resources for Families

- [www.accelerationinstitute.org/parents.aspx](http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/parents.aspx)

- NAGC Tip Sheet for Parents on acceleration: [https://tinyurl.com/NAGCaccel](https://tinyurl.com/NAGCaccel)
Resources provided by the Belin-Blank Center, Univ of Iowa

• In-School Testing (new online test for 4th-6th graders, I-Excel, www.I-Excel.org)
• Talent Search using ACT and I-Excel
• Bucksbaum Early Entrance Academy (early entrance to college) www.belinblank.org/academy
• Online Advanced Placement courses plus other courses for middle school students (IOAPA). Available to students outside Iowa
• Acceleration Institute (www.accelerationinstitute.org)
Professional Development

• An online graduate course on academic acceleration is offered through the University of Iowa College of Education. This 3-credit course is typically offered each fall.
  – www.belinblank.org/courses (Follow links to see the list of courses)

• See www.belinblank.org/webinar for a list of webinars

• Many other opportunities are also available for educators: www.belinblank.org/educators
Conclusions

• Acceleration is appropriate for many academically talented students.
• Decisions can be affected by politics or personal bias and may not be in the best interest of the student.
• We recommend an objective, formal decision-making process.
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