

ACCELERATION PROCEDURES

Haleyville City Schools adopts the following procedure for the referral, evaluation, and implementation of academic acceleration.

Rationale

The Haleyville School System believes in the philosophy of assisting all students in developing their academic potential. Where potential is concerned, equality resides in providing equally well for the various levels of individual differences. Some of the most cost effective and underutilized interventions to meet the academic needs of high-end learners are the various academic acceleration options such as differentiation, subject acceleration, and grade acceleration. A recent publication entitled, A Nation Deceived, is a compilation of fifty years of research on the effects of acceleration. The authors found that when the decision to accelerate was made based on multiple criteria and was data driven, there were great benefits both academically and socially for high-end learners (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, eds., 2004). The *Alabama Exceptional Child Education Act* (Act 106) mandates that, ".....the State of Alabama and the school district associated therewith shall provide not less than twelve years of appropriate instruction and related services for such exceptional children at public expense ..." and for gifted students that includes the right to progress through course of study objectives at a pace commensurate with their abilities. *The Alabama Administrative Code* lists acceleration as an appropriate service delivery option on page 573.

General Guidelines: Referral for Subject or Grade Acceleration:

- 1) Any student enrolled in the district may be referred for consideration for acceleration by a general education teacher, administrator, gifted specialist, guidance counselor, or parent/guardian.
- 2) The district will follow the written procedures outlined below for any student referred beginning with Level I, which includes differentiation at the current grade level. If at all possible, a student will be subject accelerated (Level II) for a grading period before grade acceleration (Level III) is considered (in most instances subject acceleration coupled with differentiation will be successful in meeting the academic needs of high-end learners). The committee may proceed directly to Level III if the curriculum and instruction has already been differentiated or the committee simply feels that they have enough documentation to consider grade acceleration.
- 3) Principals must ensure that all staff members are aware of the procedures including referral, evaluation, and acceleration options.
- 4) The process of considering acceleration options will take place in a timely and logical fashion. For instance, if subject or grade acceleration is going to be implemented, the best time for the student to make this move is either at the start of school or the beginning of the second semester. Consequently, the process of gathering the necessary information and subsequent committee meetings will be conducted with these dates in mind.
- 5) The referral process for subject/grade acceleration will begin at the school site.
- 6) The principal or special education/gifted coordinator will establish a committee to determine the most appropriate learning environment for the student.
- 7) The committee will include a gifted specialist, the current general education teacher, and at least one other individual. Other appropriate possibilities would be the student's parent(s), a counselor, a school and/or central office administrator, a psychometrist, or another teacher in the building who has a proven track record of working with high-ability students. If the school administrator is not on the committee s/he should be kept informed of the committee's recommendations.

Level I : Differentiation Procedures

- 1) The committee will be charged with conducting a fair and thorough evaluation of the student's educational needs.
- 2) The committee will consider the areas of concern (math, reading, etc.) utilizing pre-existing information such as: (1) achievement test results; (2) grades; (3) work samples/products; and (4) aptitude.
- 3) Based on an analysis of the data collected, the committee will provide the general education teacher with differentiation options/strategies (both individual and grouping strategies) to modify the curriculum and instruction in the present grade placement.
- 4) If the differentiation strategies are successful in meeting the student's academic needs, the student will remain in his/her present placement. The committee (including a teacher from the next grade level) will reconvene at the end of the year to develop a differentiation plan for the upcoming school year. The principal will consider the differentiation needs and ensure that the student is assigned to an appropriate teacher. This teacher will be knowledgeable of gifted learners, trained in differentiation, and demonstrate a willingness to address the needs of diverse learners. (Appropriate professional development will be provided if needed.)
- 5) The committee will waive steps 3 and 4 if the student's curriculum and instruction has already been differentiated or the committee simply feels that they have enough documentation to consider subject acceleration.

Level II: Subject Acceleration Procedures

- 1) If the differentiation strategies are implemented (for a reasonable time such as a grading period) and the student's academic needs are still not being met, the committee will reconvene to consider if subject acceleration is appropriate. The possible receiving teacher (in the next grade level) should be added to the committee at this time.
- 2) Parent permission will be documented on a referral form if one has not already been completed. After parent permission has been obtained any additional individual assessments (particularly subject specific) will be conducted if needed. If the student has never been referred for gifted services, a gifted referral will also be initiated.
- 3) If after considering all collected data and information the committee decides that subject acceleration is appropriate, a consideration of the student's desire for accelerated placement will be considered and parents will be notified and permission obtained. If the student or his/her parents are not in favor of the decision the student will not be subject accelerated.
- 4) The committee will reconvene after a grading period to determine if the student's academic needs are being met. If the student's academic needs are being met the plan will remain in place until the end of the year when the committee will reconvene to develop a plan for the next school year. The principal will consider the differentiation needs and ensure that the student is assigned to an appropriate teacher. This teacher will be knowledgeable of gifted learners, trained in differentiation, and demonstrate a willingness to address the needs of diverse learners. (Appropriate professional development will be provided if needed.)

Level III: Grade Acceleration Procedures

- 1) If the committee determines that subject acceleration has not adequately met the student's academic needs and grade acceleration should be considered, the committee will invite a central office staff member (special education coordinator, gifted supervisor, psychometrist, Director of Instruction, etc.) to participate. This individual will ensure that the appropriate steps have been followed.
- 2) Students being considered for whole grade acceleration will be evaluated using an acceleration assessment process (such as the Iowa Acceleration Scales) approved by the Alabama State Department of Education. The acceleration process should include a review of: (1) all previously collected information listed above (aptitude and achievement test scores, grades, and work samples/products), (2) birth date, (3) physical description, (4) social/emotional maturity, (5) documentation of previous attempts to meet academic needs through differentiated curriculum and instruction and subject acceleration, and (6) input from the student, parents, general education teacher and gifted specialist.
- 3) The committee will submit a written decision to the principal who will determine how the parent/guardian will be notified (unless the parent/guardian was a member of the committee). If the committee cannot reach a consensus recommendation, a decision will be determined by a majority vote. The *Acceleration Determination and Approval Form* will be completed.
- 4) If the committee determines not to grade accelerate the student, the parent/guardian will be given the opportunity to review the information considered. If the parent/guardian wishes to appeal the decision to the local Superintendent it should be in writing and within thirty days of the decision. The Superintendent will review the decision and notify the parent of his/her determination within 30 days of receiving the appeal.
- 5) If the committee determines that the student will be grade accelerated, a written plan will be shared with the parent/guardian. This plan will include the decision, strategies to support a successful transition to the accelerated setting, and parent/guardian permission to implement. This plan will become part of the student's permanent record. If the parent or student is not in favor of the committee's recommendation this will be noted on the *Acceleration Determination and Approval Form* and the student will not be grade accelerated.
- 6) The committee will establish an appropriate transition period for the accelerated placement. At any time before or during the transition period, a parent/guardian of the student may request in writing that the student be withdrawn from the accelerated placement without repercussions. If during the transition period, school personnel decide that the accelerated placement is inappropriate, the committee will be reconvened. The parent/guardian will be included, and a consensus will be obtained before changing the placement.
- 7) At the end of the transition period, the accelerated placement will become permanent, and the student's records will be revised to reflect the new placement. A committee consisting of at least a gifted specialist, general educator, counselor, and school administrator will continue to meet regularly (at least annually) to review the student's progress and social/emotional adjustment.
- 8) At an appropriate time, the committee should meet to discuss and plan for any effects a proposed acceleration may have on the student's social-emotional development and academic progression /programming throughout his/her school career. This will include input from the Gifted/Talented Specialist and/or other appropriate representatives from the next level (i.e. Middle School or High School).

General Information

- I. If your system **does not** have a policy that **prohibits** acceleration options simply adapt the attached procedure to meet your needs. E-mail the procedure (or one you already have in place) to Dr. Nina Pearson at npearson@alsde.edu . She will contact you when your Acceleration Procedure has been approved. It will then become a section in your LEA Plan for Gifted. You will be responsible for sharing it with all administrators in your system. If you do have Board policy prohibiting grade acceleration please contact Dr. Nina Pearson immediately.
- II. The *Referral Form for Considering Acceleration* does not have to be completed unless subject or grade acceleration is being considered. Committees can review pre-existing information to offer differentiation strategies without obtaining parent permission, and general education teachers can implement differentiation strategies without parent permission.
- III. A pre-existing team of school personnel such as the Gifted Referral and Screening Team (GRST) can be used to form the committee as long as a gifted specialist and the current general education teacher are included. If the committee decides that subject/grade acceleration should be considered, a general education teacher in the grade level above the student's present placement must be included.
- IV. The person requesting the referral should be very specific in providing a reason for the request. Avoid statements that are too general and difficult to support with evidence. (Ex. The student should be moved ahead because he never has homework and is bored in class.)
- V. A suggested list of appropriate individual achievement tests for considering subject and grade acceleration:
 - a. Woodcock-Johnson Achievement Scale
- VI. A suggested list of appropriate individual aptitude assessments for considering subject and grade acceleration:
 - a. Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children: Fourth Edition
 - b. Stanford Binet Intelligence Scale: Fifth Edition
 - c. Differential Ability Scales
 - d. Reynolds Intellectual Assessment Scales
- VII. Iowa Acceleration Scale is published by Gifted Psychology Press, Inc.
- VIII. The *Acceleration Determination and Approval Form* should be completed once the committee has made the determination.
- IX. Example transition strategies:
 - a. Teacher will notify gifted specialist/counselor of any signs of stress.
 - b. A classmate will be assigned to the student to assist in learning new procedures etc.
 - c. The receiving teacher will conduct individual conferences with the student periodically until she is sure that the student is comfortable with the new environment and procedures.

Differentiation Strategies

Differentiation strategies that the Acceleration/GRST Committee could suggest before recommending subject or grade acceleration are:

- a. Cluster Grouping
- b. Flexible Skills Grouping
- c. Individualized Programs in Math/Reading such as Accelerated Math
- d. Tiered Centers
- e. Tiered Assignments
- f. Compacting
- g. Learning Contracts
- h. Literature/Socratic Circles
- i. Independent Study Projects
- j. Honors/Advanced Classes
- k. Advanced Placement Classes
- l. Distance Learning
- m. Dual Enrollment Programs

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Acceleration Options

Subject Acceleration – Students remain in their normal grade placement for part of the school day, but are assigned to a higher grade level classroom for particular subjects. This practice helps provide access to appropriately challenging learning opportunities in one or more areas. For instance: A first grade student who is reading well above grade level goes to a second grade class for reading instruction.

Whole Grade Acceleration – Students with exceptional abilities are moved ahead of normal grade placement. For instance, a student who has completed first grade is placed in a third grade classroom full time at the beginning of the next school year. In this case he will have skipped second grade.

Grouping Strategies That Facilitate Differentiation and Do Not Require a Special Process

Clustering- Cluster grouping is an administrative procedure in which gifted students are assigned together in groups of 5-8 in one general education classroom instead of being distributed across all classrooms. Every classroom at the grade level remains heterogeneously grouped (having a low, middle, and high group) since the next highest ability students are divided between the rest of the classes. Cluster grouping simply reduces the number of levels in a classroom. Many systems actually cluster according to the strengths of the students. For instance, the highest ability math students are clustered together with the strongest math/science teacher while the highest ability language arts students may be clustered together with another teacher. Cluster teachers should be provided training in differentiation for high-end learners. Research suggests that cluster grouping combined with differentiation will 1) raise standardized test scores for all student groups, 2) appropriately challenge high-end learners, and 3) reduce the strain on teachers who are trying to meet the needs of a diverse student population.

Flexible Skills Grouping – Flexible skills grouping is an administrative procedure in which students are regularly assessed and grouped for instruction according to demonstrated performance of skills. Students are allowed to progress at a rate more appropriate for their ability level. Research suggests that flexible skills grouping results in substantial achievement gains for all readiness groups.

Differentiation Strategies – (Can be implemented without a special process)

Tiered Centers – Learning centers or stations, which allow the student to work at their readiness level and produce a product commensurate with their ability.

Tiered Assignments – Assignments are given to students based on their ability/readiness levels. All tiers are based on the same standard, but are differentiated according to content, process, or product.

Compacting – Students demonstrate mastery over content through a “pre-test” and are compacted out of the normal lessons to pursue topics more in-depth.

Learning Contract- Student enters into an agreement with a teacher to move through required content at his/her own pace (which is at an accelerated rate). Contracts can also be used to guide students through an independent study.

Literature/Socratic Circles – Students read and discuss text of their choosing (within parameters set by a teacher). Students are not assigned traditional literature circle roles. Analysis and discussion of the text at a conceptual level are the primary goals.

Independent Study Projects – Students study topics in their interest areas with guidance from a general education teacher or gifted specialist.

Acceleration Options for Middle and High School That Do Not Require A Special Process

Honors/Advanced Classes - Academic classes taught at a faster pace, and that focus on developing critical thinking, reading, writing, and problem-solving skills.

Advanced Placement Classes (AP) – An academic program of college level courses, which focus on developing critical thinking, reading, writing, and problem-solving skills. Students have the option of taking the College Board AP Exam, which may earn them college credit and/or advanced standing in college based on their scores on the AP Exam.

Distance Learning – This strategy involves transmitting instructional classes via interactive video conferencing (IVC) equipment or via an on-line e-course. Distance Learning provides an opportunity for students to enroll in courses not offered on their home campuses.

Dual Enrollment/Dual Credit – Students take college courses while still enrolled in high school. If the school system has an agreement with a local post-secondary school the students can earn both high school and college credit.

Dual Enrollment – Students take college courses while still in high school, but the student earns only college credit and not high school credit.