Lewis-Palmer School District #38

Academic Acceleration Philosophy
What is Acceleration?

The Colorado Department of Education defines acceleration as the appropriate movement of a student and/or curriculum by pace or place which matches learning opportunities with student’s demonstrated readiness and needs.

Strategies for differentiating instruction for gifted students generally fall into two categories: enrichment and acceleration. Enrichment refers to the presentation of curriculum content with more depth, breadth, complexity, or abstractness than the general curriculum. Acceleration refers to the practice of presenting curriculum content earlier or at a faster pace.

There are many different ways to accelerate the curriculum. These options offer the flexibility needed to help meet the individual needs of gifted students:

- Acceleration in one or more subject areas
- Grade skipping
- Advanced Placement programs
- College courses offered in high school
- Early graduation from high school
- Early entrance into college. (Brody and Benbow, 1987)
- Telescoping – Student learns two years of curriculum in one year

For many gifted students, acceleration is fulfilling both academically and socially. However, to be successful, acceleration must be understood as a program decision, not a placement decision. The curriculum must continue to be challenging for the accelerated student. In case studies of successfully accelerated students, subject matter was carefully planned and monitored, and it addressed the students’ social and emotional maturity as well as academic achievement. (Gross, 1992)

Why Accelerate?

A brief review of literature on why acceleration is beneficial follows:

“Precocious students, by definition, demonstrate accelerated development and learning compared with their same-age peers. What we provide in the name of acceleration are curricula and services that are appropriately paced and/or at an appropriate level to meet the needs of children who have demonstrated, compared with their peers, advanced learning and development.”

“According to the usual distinction between acceleration and enrichment, acceleration gives precocious students the chance to proceed through the curriculum at a more rapid pace than age-level peers of more average aptitude, whereas enrichment provides elaborated instructional experiences, but not at either a more rapid pace or a higher level.”

Research shows the following benefits of acceleration:

- When gifted students were accelerated, there was an increase in their academic achievement. (Kulik and Kulik, 1984B; Vialle, 2001)
- Accelerated students tended to “outperform students of the same age and ability who are not accelerated.” (Kulik and Kulik, 1984B, p. 87)
- Accelerated students achieved “as well as equally gifted older students in the higher grades.” (Kulik and Kulik, 1984B, p. 87)
- Accelerated gifted students reported satisfaction emotionally and academically when the curriculum was challenging, provided them with options, and allowed for their input in the design and implementation. (Vialle, 2001)
- When course instruction and content was tailored to the individual gifted student’s ability, acceleration was more fulfilling for the student. (Vialle, 2001)

Who Should Be Accelerated?

The Lewis-Palmer School District #38 has accepted an identification process for gifted students based on a body of evidence. Gifted students can differ from each other just as dramatically as they can from age and grade level peers. In general the following characteristics may signal consideration for acceleration.

- Learners who are able to manipulate abstract symbol systems
- Learners who are able to learn complex new skills
- Learners who can process large amounts of information at faster rates
- Early readers who are achieving two to six years above their age-level peers
- Students in the upper 2% of the general population of measured intelligence (140 IQ or above)
- Students scoring at the 97th percentile national norms or above on the standardized mental ability or achievement
- Students demonstrating motivation and commitment to acceleration
- Learners demonstrating comprehensive understanding of skills and concepts on documented academic assessments
- Students with exceptional ability who are underachieving
How Does Acceleration Impact Social and Emotional Development?

Few studies have investigated how acceleration affects the social and emotional development of gifted children. However, the studies that have been published do not support the common belief that acceleration has negative effects on children's social or emotional development. (Kulik and Kulik, 1984A; Southern, Jones, and Fiscus, 1989)

- Case studies of individual accelerated children who had skipped at least one grade reported that the children were happier socially and emotionally and reported greater self-confidence and fulfillment after their acceleration. These students tended to socialize with older students before they skipped the grade(s). (Vialle, 2001)

- A group survey of non-accelerated gifted students and gifted students who had grade-skipped, graduated early, or entered college early did not reveal any harmful effects of acceleration. There was no evidence of negative social and emotional adjustment as a result of acceleration. (Brody & Benbow, 1987)

What Practices Support Successful Acceleration?

“Acceleration decisions should be made thoughtfully with the needs of the whole child in mind. In decision-making about the appropriateness of a particular form of acceleration and the extent of acceleration for a given child at a given time, educators and parents should consider the child’s intellectual and academic profile, socio-emotional and physical development, and preferences and dispositions of the child relative to the decision since acceleration may not always be the appropriate option for every gifted child.” Factors that enhance the success of acceleration practices include:

- Positive attitudes of teachers
- Timelines related to the decision
- Parental support
- Careful monitoring of the implementation (NAGC, 2004)

In addition:

- Schools must have clear procedures and criteria for identifying students for acceleration. (Vialle, 2001)
- The classroom teacher should be knowledgeable about the needs of gifted students and must be supportive of the student’s placement. (Vialle, 2001)
- Course content must be carefully planned, differentiated, and monitored to meet the student’s needs. (Gross, 1992; Vialle, 2001)

What are Family Considerations?

When the Gifted Facilitator meets with parents, the following consideration should be discussed that will impact the programming decision:

- Does the child usually choose older friends or intellectual peers to be with?
- Is the child comfortable leaving friends who are age-mates in a given classroom?
- Has the child been counseled about what it means to have more challenging work?
- Is the child ready for the time commitment?
- Is the child heavily involved in competitive sports?
- How will the child feel when everyone else can drive in high school and she/he cannot?
- How will family approach late (compared to classmates) puberty development?
- If accelerated, will the child have a sibling in the same grade level?
- Has the child been included in the conversations about acceleration and how does he/she feel?
What are the Types of Acceleration?

- **Early Access:**
  - Early entrance to kindergarten or first grade for highly advanced gifted children under the age of six

- **Early Entrance:**
  - Formally identified gifted student that meets requirements for accelerated placement
  - Student is placed in a grade level above other same aged peers

- **Accelerated Content:**
  - Student advances in a particular discipline.

- **Accelerated Grade:**
  - Student skips all or part of an entire grade level.

- **Telescoping:**
  - Student covers two years of curricula in one.

- **Advanced Placement (High School):**
  - Student prepares for specific content area examination to receive college credit.

- **Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act (C.R.S. 22-35-101):**
  - High school students have the opportunity to earn both high school and college credit for college courses successfully completed.

- **Early Exit:**
  - Student graduates high school earlier than standard year of exit.