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Guidelines

for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy

Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration (IRPA) | **National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)** | **Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted (CSDPG)**

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Visit www.nagc.org *or* www.accelerationinstitute.org.

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To State Departments of Education and School District Educators:

Acceleration is one of the most effective and research-based interventions for the academic growth of students who are ready for an advanced or faster-paced curriculum. The Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration (IRPA), the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), and the Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted (CSDPG) collaboratively present guidelines for developing an academic acceleration policy.

The members of the National Work Group on Acceleration provide this document to assist schools in writing and modifying an acceleration policy that is suited to local needs and adheres to research-based best practices. This document can serve as a stand-alone guide or as a companion to existing state and local policies. The goal of the National Work Group on Acceleration is that these guidelines for policy development will encourage the systematic adoption and practice of acceleration in schools across the nation.

The overwhelming research evidence in favor of acceleration makes the intervention a highly valued option for all schools. The evidence is compelling that for highly motivated gifted students acceleration must be an option; therefore, all schools need to have written policies that allow the possibility of the various forms of acceleration as an academic intervention for carefully selected high ability students.

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To the Education Community:

As a national organization that advocates for high-ability learners, NAGC has a "bird's-eye" view into the spectrum of state and local policy and services across the country addressing gifted learners. Unfortunately, these services and policies are uneven at best, and nonexistent at worst. That's why the *Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy*, developed through collaboration among key organizations supporting gifted learners, is both critical and timely. That's why NAGC, together with our national partners, will make every effort to distribute them—at no cost— to individual schools, district leaders and state decision makers to provide guidance on how best to support their talented learners. We know that *Guidelines* will help advocates for gifted children promote acceleration at the federal, state, and local levels and we look forward to seeing the impact of its wide dissemination.

As the plethora of research suggests, gifted children, ahead of their age peers in one or more subject areas, need flexibility in curriculum delivery to meet their needs. Although studies consistently show acceleration benefits our most advanced students, too many school districts continue to match curriculum to a student's age rather than to his or her ability and interests. *Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy* will be an important tool for districts to use in planning and implementing an array of strategies to meet student needs.

State and federal policies and funding should encourage the use of acceleration strategies. Currently, only 8 states have a comprehensive acceleration policy. Thirty-five states leave it up to the school districts to determine its practice, which invites inconsistency and a hesitancy to try the unfamiliar without direction and support. *Guidelines* will help policy makers, administrators, teachers, and parents understand the different types of content and grade-based acceleration and provide guidelines on developing successful acceleration policies.

NAGC is pleased to have the opportunity to collaborate with the Belin-Blank Center at the University of Iowa and the Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted on this project. We strongly believe that the *Guidelines* will support our nation's advanced students by providing an avenue for the academic rigor they deserve.

Sincerely,

Ann Robinson
President

Nancy Green
Executive Director

CSDPG

THE COUNCIL OF STATE DIRECTORS
OF PROGRAMS FOR THE GIFTED

November 2009

The current education environment focuses on student achievement and individualized instruction. The *Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy* provides educators and policy makers with guidance to create a vision grounded in research and to adopt policy to support this vision for the K-12 grade students who require an accelerated learning pace and advanced curriculum that assures student academic success.

From a state perspective, these guidelines are important in supporting students, educators, and school districts on multiple levels. In many states the decisions made for the education of students resides with the local school board of the community school district. These guidelines provide an explanation of acceleration as well as suggested practical adoption of local school board policy to assure appropriate and educationally sound decisions and practices.

In states where decisions for community schools are determined at the state level, the guidelines provide research, explanations, clarifications, and practical suggestions for creating policy to compliment current education legislation or create new legislation specific to academic acceleration.

The Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted has participated in the development and review of the *Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy*. The use of *Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy* is anticipated by state directors and local school administrators. The availability of the research to support the suggested policies, the ease in understanding and using the document, and the timeliness of the content is greatly appreciated.

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Overview of Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy

Although this document has more than 35 pages, the heart of it is pages 1-11, which provides definitions of acceleration options, a summary of the research support for acceleration, and, importantly, a listing of the recommended elements of an acceleration policy. The guidelines are summarized in a checklist on page 9, which can be used to make sure that a district's acceleration policy contains all of the recommended elements.

We provide extensive information and support in the appendices.

Appendix A

Definitions of Acceleration Interventions provides definitions of the categories, forms, and types of acceleration.

Appendix B

Survey of State Acceleration Policies summarizes the acceleration-related results of the *State of the States in Gifted Education 2008-2009* survey from NAGC and CSDPG.

Appendix C

Implementing Acceleration provides educators with guidelines for practicing acceleration. The suggestions we offer for implementing acceleration are based on the *Iowa Acceleration Scale* (3rd ed.) (Assouline et al., 2009). We discuss the three broad areas of how to implement acceleration: referral and screening, assessment and decision making, and planning.

Appendix D

Example Language from State Acceleration Policies represents half of the text in this document. Appendix D gives examples of language from state acceleration policies, state gifted policies that specifically mention acceleration, and state regulatory language.

Appendix E

Example Referral Forms from the Ohio Department of Education offers Ohio's acceleration referral forms as one example of forms that educators may wish to develop to implement acceleration in their district.

Introduction

High-ability students have unique academic, cognitive, and social needs. Many bright students need more academic challenge than they are receiving in their education, and they need more opportunities to develop their talent. Yet many states and school districts have no formal policies that address either the desirability of acceleration or procedures to be followed in making decisions about acceleration for particular students (see Appendix B: Survey of State Acceleration Policies). Absence of a formal policy might invite inconsistent practices that could even discourage acceleration, as is the case when early entrance to kindergarten, early high school graduation, or whole-grade acceleration are explicitly prohibited. The existence of an acceleration policy helps to ensure that students have their academic needs addressed.

Acceleration is "progress through an educational program at rates faster or at ages younger than conventional" (Pressey, 1949). In a position paper, the National Association Gifted Children added nuances to the definition of acceleration: "…allowing a student to move through traditional educational organizations more rapidly, based on readiness and motivation" (NAGC, 2004).

Academic acceleration is an empirically validated educational intervention for high-ability students (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004). The research consistently demonstrates the academic benefits to students and allows the conclusion that students are not negatively affected in the social-emotional domains. (See Research Support for Acceleration, p. 4.)

An acceleration policy is a means to guide individual districts in implementing acceleration practices. A policy must promote awareness and adoption of sound accelerative practices. The research-based guidelines for developing an academic acceleration policy proposed here can serve as a concrete tool to guide policy makers, school administrators, and educators to create or modify policies at the state and/or school district levels.

Many schools have policies relating to gifted education that specify how to identify and serve gifted students and how to evaluate gifted education programs. However, gifted education policies don't necessarily specify how to identify and serve students for acceleration; in fact, some policies inadvertently endorse an enrichment approach to serving gifted students and thus acceleration is not presented as an option. An acceleration policy and recommendations for acceleration are not intended to take the place of enrichment opportunities. Some students will be served best by enrichment, some by acceleration, and some by a mix of the two (Neihart, 2007; Rogers, 2002; Schiever & Maker, 2003). The policy should complement existing gifted and talented programming and services. Acceleration is not a replacement for gifted education services or programs.

Rather, acceleration (and an acceleration policy) contributes to a broad, comprehensive gifted and talented program.

Some schools may not have a gifted and talented program. It is also possible that a student might not qualify for a school's gifted and talented program because he or she did not obtain a qualifying composite score. Students with an uneven profile of achievement scores (significantly advanced in one area but not others) are not likely to obtain a qualifying score but may be served well by content acceleration in their area(s) of strength.

Whether the acceleration policy stands alone or is incorporated into the gifted education policy, it should clearly state that participation in a school's gifted education program is not a prerequisite for consideration of acceleration as an educational intervention.

Categories, Forms, and Types of Acceleration

Acceleration is a broad term that encompasses many accelerative options. To help organize these options and encourage a common vocabulary for discussing them, we have classified the accelerative options into *categories*, *forms*, and *types*. (See Appendix A for a comprehensive list of accelerative options.)

Categories are the broadest and most encompassing level of classification. The two broad categories of acceleration are content-based and grade-based (Colangelo et al., 2004; Rogers, 2004). The primary distinguishing feature between content-based acceleration and grade-based acceleration is whether the accelerative intervention shortens the number of years that a student spends in the K-12 system.

The categories of acceleration have specific *forms*, or ways of varying the level, pace, and complexity of the curriculum. For example, single-subject acceleration, dual enrollment, and Advanced Placement coursework are all forms of content-based acceleration. Whole-grade acceleration and early entrance to school are forms of grade-based acceleration.

Some forms of acceleration have an additional level of specification, which is the *type*. Types are specific variations of practicing a particular form of acceleration. For example, single-subject acceleration (*form*) can be implemented by providing advanced content to an elementary student in a middle school or high school classroom (*types*).

FRAMEWORK FOR ACCELERATION OPTIONS

Content-based Acceleration

These strategies provide students with advanced content, skills, or understandings before the expected age or grade level (Southern & Jones, 2004b). Students typically remain with peers of the same age and grade for most of the school day but receive higher grade level instruction in an advanced grade. Content-based acceleration can also refer to allowing a student to work on higher grade-level instruction in their regular classrooms in lieu of grade-level instruction.

Examples of the forms (and types) of content-based acceleration. The *forms* of content-based acceleration include single-subject acceleration, curriculum compacting, dual enrollment, credit by examination or prior experience, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, and talent search programs.

Single-subject acceleration

Single-subject acceleration includes many *types*, which include:

- A third-grade student performing above grade level in reading and math goes to a fourth-grade teacher every morning for instruction in these subjects and returns to the third-grade classroom for instruction in other subject areas.
- A musically gifted sixth-grade student is enrolled in a high school instrumental music course and returns to the sixth-grade classroom for instruction in other subject areas.
- A group of fifth-grade students performing above grade level in math is transported to a junior high building every morning for a seventh-grade pre-algebra class. The students are transported back to the elementary school building for instruction with their fifth-grade classmates for the remainder of the day.
- A high school math teacher travels to a middle school to provide instruction to a group of middle school students who perform above grade level in math. The students remain with their classmates for the remainder of the day, and the teacher returns to the high school building.

Curriculum compacting

A student is pre-assessed to determine whether grade-level proficiency in a specific academic area has been achieved. The student then engages in advanced content and skills development in that "compacted" or another area, typically while remaining in the regular classroom.

Dual enrollment

The school system allows advanced students to enroll in higher level coursework when proficiency at grade level has been demonstrated. For example, the middle school student takes a high school math course, or the advanced high school history student takes a university history course during the school day.

Credit by examination or prior experience

A student's instruction entails reduced amounts of introductory activities, drill, and practice, based on pre-assessment of the student's mastery of the intended curricular standards. The school allows an advanced student to demonstrate proficiency in a course or year of curriculum in an academic area based on an end-of-unit or end-of-year test or by reviewing the student's portfolio of work in the academic area. The student is then allowed to pursue more advanced coursework in that area.

Advanced Placement® (AP)

The AP program offers college-level coursework for students as early as middle school. AP exams allow students to earn university credit and/or advanced university standing based on the examination score.

International Baccalaureate® (IB)

Advanced students may participate in the IB program, taking the corresponding university-level curricula. At the end of high school, the students complete an international examination, receiving advanced standing and course credits upon matriculation to university.

Grade-based Acceleration

These strategies typically shorten the number of years a student spends in the K-12 system. In practice, a student is placed in 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. Grade-based acceleration is commonly known as "grade skipping," but it can include other means to shorten the number of years a student remains in the K-12 school system (Rogers, 2004; Southern & Jones, 2004b). The exception is early entrance to kindergarten, which does not shorten the number of years the student spends in the K-12 system but shortens the wait time to start school.

Examples of the forms (and types) of grade-based acceleration. The *forms* of grade-based acceleration include early entrance to school, whole-grade acceleration ("grade skipping"), grade telescoping, and early entrance to college.

Early entrance to school

The main *type* of early entrance to school is early entrance to kindergarten. However, in some districts, it is possible for students to skip kindergarten and enter first grade at a younger than typical age.

- A child who can read independently and is socially similar to typical five-year-olds is admitted to kindergarten, even though the child's fifth birthday won't be until the end of the school year. This intervention shortens the waiting time for a student to start school, and in this regard is a similar form of acceleration to early entrance to college.

Whole-grade acceleration

- One *type* of whole-grade acceleration occurs when a first grader, who has completed first grade, is placed in a third grade classroom (rather than a second grade classroom) on a full-time basis at the beginning of the next school year.

- Another *type* occurs when a fifth-grade student completes the fall semester and is placed in the sixth grade at the start of the second semester of the same school year.

Grade telescoping

A group of advanced students is accelerated through more than one year's curriculum in one year in all academic areas, such that three years' curriculum are completed in two years' time, or if at high school, four years are completed in three years' time. Students fulfill credit requirements and graduates early.

Early entrance to college

There are multiple ways that students can be admitted to college early. These *types* of early entrance to college include, but are not limited to:

- An advanced student is granted a diploma after spending only five semesters in high school by accumulating credits on an accelerated basis through "dual credit" coursework taken while in middle school and by satisfying some high school graduation requirements by completing "educational options" rather than traditional courses. The student then enrolls in college as a full-time student.

- An advanced student leaves high school without the traditional diploma, entering a full-time university degree program.

- The student can participate in an early entrance to college program. (See Appendix A.)

Additional details about the forms and types of content-based and grade-based acceleration can be found in Appendix A: Definitions of Acceleration Interventions.

Research Support for Acceleration

As an educational intervention, acceleration is decidedly effective for high-ability students. The research support for acceleration that has accumulated over many decades is robust and consistent and allows us to confidently state that carefully planned acceleration decisions are successful.

Both grade-based and content-based acceleration are effective interventions in academic and social-emotional domains for high-ability students. Grade-accelerated students generally out-perform their chronologically older classmates academically, and both groups show approximately equal levels of social and emotional adjustment (cf., Assouline et al., 2003; Colangelo et al., 2004; Kulik, 2004; Kulik & Kulik, 1992; Lipscomb, 2003; Sayler & Brookshire, 1993; Southern & Jones, 1991). To be clear, there is no evidence that acceleration has a negative effect on a student's social-emotional development.

Some educators are reluctant to accelerate a student because they are concerned about long-term outcomes. However, longitudinal research has demonstrated that accelerants attain advanced degrees, produce scholarly works, and contribute professionally at rates well above societal baselines (Lubinski et al., 2001, 2006). In follow-up interviews, the students indicated they wished they would have had more acceleration opportunities while in the K-12 setting (Lubinski et al., 2001, 2006).

The review of acceleration research presented in *A Nation Deceived* (Colangelo et al., 2004) provides the necessary supporting evidence for our recommendations for developing an acceleration policy. For more information about acceleration research, visit IRPA's website at *http://www.accelerationinstitute.org*.

Recommended Elements of an Acceleration Policy

Each school district should have a written acceleration policy stating that acceleration is an appropriate and effective intervention for select highly able students who have demonstrated high performance in one or more academic areas. In this section, we recommend 17 elements in 5 key areas that can help schools develop a comprehensive, consistent, and research-based policy.

The National Work Group on Acceleration recognizes that inconsistencies may exist between the guidelines we offer for acceleration policy development and existing state or local policies. One salient example is early entrance to kindergarten. The National Work Group on Acceleration suggests that highly able young children be considered for referral for early admission to kindergarten. Yet 13 states (and many local districts) have policies that do not permit this form of acceleration. We recommend that these discrepancies be addressed in conversations between the relevant stakeholders, keeping in mind the best interests of the child and the research evidence. Education policies are malleable, and policy makers should be open to the dynamic evolution of policies to best serve students.

RECOMMENDED ELEMENTS OF AN ACCELERATION POLICY

This section provides guidelines in five key areas for components of an acceleration policy.[1]

The policy is characterized by accessibility, equity, and openness. Specific recommended elements of a policy to meet accessibility, equity, and openness criteria include the following:

Access to referral for consideration of acceleration is open to all students. A policy should not limit access to referral for consideration of accelerative curricular modification based on gender, race, ethnicity, disability status, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, or school building attended. The policy shall be applied equitably and systematically to students referred for acceleration.

All student populations are served. The acceleration policy should be comprehensive in addressing acceleration for all grades, K-12, and all students who demonstrate advanced academic ability in one or more content areas, including students who are English language learners (ELL),[2] at-risk, of low socio-economic status, profoundly gifted, and/or twice exceptional. Profoundly gifted students are those whose ability scores place them at the highest percentiles. Because these students are so rare, they require special attention when discussing appropriate educational interventions. Twice-exceptional students are those who are gifted and who have a cognitive, social, or behavioral disability; they, too, require special attention.

Student evaluation is fair, objective, and systematic. A fair, objective, and systematic evaluation of the student should be conducted using the appropriate instruments for the form of acceleration being considered. When evaluating English language learners, appropriate instruments should include those in the student's heritage language.[3]

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1 For recommendations on how to implement acceleration, refer to Appendix C: Implementing Acceleration. For examples of policy language from current state policies and regulations, see Appendix D: Example Language from State Acceleration Policies.

2 ELL enrollment in the United States has grown by 57 percent over the past 13 years, compared with less than 4 percent for all other student populations (Flannery, 2009). ELLs account for 10 percent of the total student population, representing more than 5 million students. There are students within this linguistically and culturally diverse group who have advanced academic achievement and cognitive abilities that exceed those of grade and age peers. Academic acceleration should be a highly valued program option for the schools these students attend.

3 Some districts use a student evaluation model known as Response to Intervention (RtI), which was developed in the late 1970s as an alternative system for identifying students with learning difficulties. RtI is based upon the premise that all students should be screened to determine whether more intensive interventions are necessary, and is being promoted in some districts as a means to identify students for gifted and talented services such as acceleration.

Parents or guardians are allowed open communication about the policy and procedures. Written consent is required from parents or legal guardian(s) in order to evaluate the referred student for possible acceleration placement. All students who have been referred, and for whom consent has been obtained, should receive an evaluation from professionals in the district. Parents or legal guardians should be informed of the evaluation results in a timely manner (within 10 days recommended). A comprehensive written plan for the acceleration of recommended students should be developed, a copy of which should be provided to the student's parents or legal guardian(s).

The community has ready access to the policy document and procedure guidelines. Community access includes making the policy available in the language(s) served by the school. The acceleration policy and procedures must be easily accessible to the community. The acceleration policy and referral forms should be available upon request in the language(s) served by the school. Parents should receive this information in writing and in their heritage language. The administration and school staff should be instructed on an annual basis to assist the parents and students with the referral process.

The policy provides guidelines for the implementation of acceleration. Specific recommended elements of a policy that provides guidelines for the practice of acceleration include:

The categories, forms, and types (where appropriate) of acceleration are specified. The two *categories* of acceleration, grade-based and content-based, their specific *forms* (e.g., telescoping, curriculum compacting), and *types* (where appropriate) should be part of a school's acceleration policy. (See Appendix A for Definitions of Acceleration Interventions.)[4]

The entire process to obtain acceleration services is detailed in the policy. The process of implementing acceleration includes referral and screening, assessment and decision making, and planning. (See Appendix C: Implementing Acceleration.)

Acceleration decisions should be made by child study teams, not individuals. An acceleration policy should be informed by research-based best practices, not personal opinions or anecdotal evidence. A common impediment to acceleration occurs when acceleration decisions are made by one person, a gatekeeper, who may harbor negative personal views about acceleration (Southern & Jones, 2004a). A child study team, which should include experts in gifted education, should consider individual acceleration cases, and with the use of valid and reliable instruments to guide the discussion, decide on the form of acceleration needed.

The child study team creates a "Written Acceleration Plan." The child study team should appoint a staff member of the school to oversee and aid in the implementation of the "Written Acceleration Plan." (See Appendix E for an example of a Written Acceleration Plan from the Ohio Department of Education.)

The district should retain a copy of the student's plan to help assure that future opportunities specified in the plan are provided and that the student does not run into obstacles in subsequent years of school (such as when a student who is accelerated by continuous progress requires curriculum from two different schools).

The policy specifies that the acceleration process include a monitored transition period within which decisions can be reversed. If a student is recommended for accelerated placement, the child study team should establish an appropriate transition period. We recommend that the student's transition be evaluated no later than 30 days after the placement, and sooner if there are concerns about the placement. A staff member of the school should monitor the student's adjustment during the transition period.

Within the time specified for the transition period, the parent or legal guardian may request in writing an alternative placement. 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 a decision within 10 days) of receiving the request. If the acceleration plan is modified, the written acceleration plan should be updated.

During this time, the parent or legal guardian(s) may request, in writing, the discontinuation of the acceleration program without any repercussions.

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4 The omission of guidelines for content-based acceleration in elementary and middle schools is notable. Many states have guidelines relating to Advanced Placement (AP), dual enrollment, or other forms of acceleration at the secondary level, but these guidelines often lack uniformity and consistency in the opportunities offered to students and ignore the concept of curriculum articulation (i.e., the necessary pre-requisite coursework to enroll in AP courses). Some guidelines have unreasonable age or grade requirements (such as not allowing students in 10th grade or below to enroll in AP courses).

The policy provides guidelines on administrative matters to ensure fair and systematic use of accelerative opportunities and recognition for participation in those accelerative opportunities. Specific recommended elements of a policy that provides guidelines on administrative matters include the following:

Short-term needs are addressed. An acceleration policy should provide guidance for issues in the short term, which include, but are not limited to:

- specifying which grade level state achievement test the student should take, and
- allowing for flexible transportation arrangements should a student need to travel between buildings.

Long-term needs are addressed. An acceleration policy should provide guidance for issues in the long term, which include, but are not limited to:

- providing guidance throughout K-12 to make sure that students will be allowed to maintain their accelerated standing,
- working with the district to discuss distance learning options,
- indicating accelerated coursework on a student's transcript, and
- determining the student's class rank.

The process of awarding credit to students is specified. There are multiple considerations when specifying how students will be awarded credit, including:

- whether a middle school student receives middle school credit for courses taken at the high school (or college level),
- whether a high school student receives high school credit for courses taken at the college level, and
- whether a student receives credit for demonstration of subject area competency outside of or in combination with completing hours of classroom instruction. Alternative credit pathways may include, but are not limited to:
  a. "Testing out" of a course or part of a course by attaining an established minimum score on an approved assessment instrument;
  b. Demonstrating prior mastery through the presentation of a portfolio of relevant student work;
  c. Successfully completing a program of independent study based on an approved learning contract;
  d. Successfully completing a flexibly paced distance learning program addressing content comparable to the traditional course.

The policy provides guidelines for preventing non-academic barriers to the use of acceleration as an educational intervention. Specific recommended elements of a policy that provides guidelines for preventing non-academic barriers to the use of acceleration include the following:

Extracurricular opportunities, especially interscholastic sports opportunities, should not be withheld or denied to students who are accelerated. For example, a middle school student who receives high school credit should not have any reduction of sports eligibility. We recommend that a conversation be initiated between gifted education experts in the area of acceleration and the governing board for interscholastic activities to review the impact of the current rules and policies on students participating in content acceleration.

Use of acceleration should not negatively affect school funding. The appropriate agency should review school funding formulae to identify benefits and disincentives to appropriate use of academic acceleration.

The policy includes features that prevent unintended consequences. Specific desirable elements of a policy that proactively works to prevent unintended consequences include the following:

An appeals process should be specified for decisions made at any step during the process. An appeals process, including procedures for appealing decisions and the time limitations on starting an appeal, should be specified. We recommend that the appeals process is specified in writing and accessible.

The acceleration policy should be regularly evaluated on its effectiveness. The acceleration policy should include recommendations for how to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy itself and its effectiveness in successfully accelerating students. The policy should provide recommendations for the point at which the policy's effectiveness is evaluated (for example, a committee should be convened once a year to review success of the policy as well as unintentional barriers to the use of acceleration). *(Also see Exhibit 1, Evaluation Factors, on page 8.)*

Concluding Comments

The members of the National Work Group on Acceleration developed this document to assist schools in writing and modifying an acceleration policy that adheres to research-based best practices and is suited to local needs. These guidelines for policy development should encourage the systematic adoption and practice of acceleration in schools across the nation.

There are many barriers to acceleration, some of which we have reviewed in this document. For example, some states and local education agencies have absolute age requirements for entering school. Others have curriculum requirements tied to specific grade levels or prerequisites for certain courses/programs that are so specific in policy that they tie educators' hands. Additionally, colleges and universities may present barriers by arbitrarily limiting participation of accelerated students in dual enrollment programs. In some states, students aren't allowed to take a state graduation test until the spring of the sophomore year. In these states, colleges and universities require students to have passed the graduation test before enrolling in their dual enrollment programs. In effect, this locks students out of college-level courses until their junior year. When these barriers can be removed, students are in a better position to receive the educational opportunities and experiences necessary for their personal and academic growth.

Exhibit 1. Acceleration Policy Evaluation Factors

One factor in the evaluation of the policy might include an assessment of the accelerated student's academic performance. Research demonstrates that whole-grade accelerated students typically score above the mean, and often score well above the mean, in the accelerated grade level, meaning that the accelerated student is outperforming older peers (Assouline et al., 2003; Wells, Lohman, & Marron, 2009). The expectation for the student's long-term academic success is discussed by Assouline, et al. (2009):

> "Accelerated students should be expected to achieve, relative to their new grade peers, at a high level that is generally comparable to their performance in the previous grade. Such students are typically among the top 10% in a class, and they should be expected to remain in the top 10% throughout their academic careers. The difference, following acceleration, is that these students will likely find it more of a challenge to attain a similar level of excellence." (p. 5)

A second factor in the evaluation should include the student's social and behavioral adjustment. Acceleration may attenuate social and behavioral issues for some students, but acceleration is not a panacea. Acceleration should either have a positive impact on social and behavioral adjustment or maintain the student's same level of (appropriate) social and behavioral adjustment.

Acceleration should not negatively impact social and behavioral adjustment. Receiving teachers should help identify likely peers for the incoming student, and counselors should provide support in study skills and social coping when necessary.

A third factor to consider is the dosage of acceleration: does the accelerated setting provide enough academic challenge for students? A few students may need an additional year of acceleration. Some students will need content acceleration to provide curriculum beyond what is offered in the accelerated setting. Therefore, if the level of acceleration is not sufficient, the policy needs to allow for the consideration of additional acceleration.

Checklist for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy

An ideal acceleration policy will have a "yes" answer to each question.

Is your acceleration policy characterized by accessibility, equity, and openness?

Is access to referral for consideration of acceleration open to all students regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, disability status, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, and school building attended?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
Are all student populations served, including ELL, at-risk, low socioeconomic status, profoundly gifted, and twice exceptional?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
Is the process of student evaluation fair, objective, and systematic?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
Do parents or legal guardians have open communication with school officials about the policy document?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
Does the community have access to the policy document in the languages served by the school?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure

Does your acceleration policy provide guidelines for implementing acceleration?

Are both categories of acceleration (grade-based and content-based) specified?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
Are the forms of acceleration (e.g., early admission to school, telescoping, AP) and types (where appropriate) specified?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
Is the process of obtaining acceleration services detailed (including referral & screening, assessment & decision making, and planning)?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
Does the policy specify that child study teams, not individuals, consider acceleration cases?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
Does the policy specify the creation of a "Written Acceleration Plan"?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
Does the policy specify a monitored transition period?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure

Does your acceleration policy provide guidelines on administrative matters?

Does the policy address short-term needs, such as…			
• specifying which grade-level achievement test the student should take?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
• clarifying transportation issues for students who need to travel between buildings?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
• determining the student's class rank?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
Does the policy address long-term needs, such as…			
• maintaining accelerated standing?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
• assigning appropriate credit for accelerated coursework?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
• indicating acceleration coursework on a transcript?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
Does the policy specify the process of awarding course credit to students?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure

Does your acceleration policy provide guidelines for preventing non-academic barriers?

Are procedures in place to ensure participation in extracurricular activities, including sports?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
Have funding formulae been reviewed to prevent unintended disincentives?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure

Does your acceleration policy include features that prevent unintended consequences?

Is an appeals process detailed?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure
Will the policy be regularly evaluated for its effectiveness?	❑ Yes	❑ No	❑ Not sure

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Resources

- Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration (IRPA) at the University of Iowa's Belin-Blank Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, www.accelerationinstitute.org

- National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), www.nagc.org, including position papers on acceleration, grouping, and other topics.

- Information on gifted education policies in each state is available from the NAGC website: http://www.nagc.org/index2.aspx?id=976.

- For more information about Advanced Placement classes, see the College Board's website: http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/about.html.

- Information about the *The Iowa Acceleration Scale* (3rd ed.) is available at www.accelerationinstitute.org and www.giftedbooks.com

Additional Readings

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A full copy of this document, including the appendices, is available online at no cost.
Visit www.nagc.org or www.accelerationinstitute.org.

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