

Whole Grade Acceleration for Students**

The general expectation for student progress within the K-12 program is promotion to the next grade level with their same-age peers. A decision to whole-grade accelerate a student must be approached thoughtfully and systematically.

There are many ways to modify the curriculum for bright, talented students - enrichment, pullout programs, cooperative learning, compacting the curriculum, and single-subject acceleration. Each of these has a place within the current educational system - that is, each has been shown to be effective for some students in some instances. There are, however, a relatively small number of exceptionally talented students who need a more radical form of curriculum modification, Research studies indicate that skipping a whole grade is clearly the most effective form of intervention for these students.

The younger a student is when accelerated, the easier the adjustment. The best case-scenario is to implement whole grade acceleration at the start of the academic year, following an assessment and planning process that has occurred the previous spring. The years just before a move to another building, especially between elementary school and middle school, are difficult times for acceleration (i.e. from 4th to 6th grade). It is better to accelerate during the year prior to the transition year so that the student can participate fully in transition activities.

For these reasons, any discussion of student whole-grade acceleration will be conducted after documented modification strategies

Whole-Grade Acceleration Review Process

Decisions to whole-grade accelerate a student are made on a case-by-case basis. The process may be initiated by the child's parent/guardian, by staff, or by the student. The whole-grade acceleration review process will consider all dimensions of student development. The parent/guardian will first discuss concerns with the classroom teachers, who will then discuss concerns with the principal. A teacher shall not initiate discussion of potential acceleration with a parent/legal guardian until authorized to do so by the principal.

Timeline for Process

The parent/guardian, staff member, or student must submit the whole-grade acceleration request in writing to the principal by February 1 of the school year.

By May 15, a conference will be conducted so members of the school team can meet directly with the parent/guardian and make a whole-grade acceleration determination.

Iowa Acceleration Scale, 3rd Edition

Because whole-grade acceleration is such an important and potentially complex issue, established guidelines are needed to help parents and educators make appropriate decisions about whether or not to accelerate a particular child. The *Iowa Acceleration Scale, 3rd Edition (IAS-3)* is the result of extensive research, as well as consultations with both educators and parents who have dealt with the issue of whole grade acceleration for their gifted children. The IAS-3 was developed to provide a systematic, comprehensive structure that will guide the decision about acceleration. It looks at many factors in the child's life and education history, including the child's physical and social/emotional development. The IAS-3 Form should serve as the foundation for discussion and consensus.

Step 1: Prior to completing the IAS Form

1. Have the child tested for ability, aptitude and achievement (see below)
2. Schedule the child study team meeting (1.5 - 2 hours)
3. Gather any additional school records that will assist the decision-making process

Results of achievement, ability and aptitude tests, evidence of classroom work (grades, teacher comments, portfolio work), any relevant prior psychological or medical evaluations.

Suggested Team Members: Child's parent(s)/guardian(s), two or more teachers (current teacher and receiving teacher), counselor or school psychologist, administrator, TAG Coordinator.

Assessment of Ability

1. Recommended: an individually administered intelligence test administered by the school psychologist, however the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) is an appropriate source of information about a student's general academic ability
2. The overall score is the best predictor of overall success in school. However, when there are significant differences among the subtest scores, the overall score may not offer the kind of information needed to make a valid decision. In these cases, a verbal score may be substituted for the overall score, as that is the score that most closely predicts school success.

Assessment of Aptitude (potential to learn new information)

1. Recommended: An above-level test at least two grades above the student's current grade. Scores earned are compared to the grade level for which the test was developed.
2. Recommended: Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement (WJ-ACH)

Assessment of Achievement

1. Recommended: Wechsler Individual achievement Test (WIAT), Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement (WJ-ACH), California Achievement Test (CAT), Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)

Use national norms

Step 2: Team meets to complete the IAS-3 Form

IAS-3 Sections:

1. Section I: General Information
2. Section II: School History
3. Section III: Critical Items*
4. Section IV: Assessment of Ability
5. Section V: Assessment of Aptitude
6. Section VI: Assessment of Achievement
7. Section VII: School and Academic Factors
8. Section VIII: Developmental Factors
9. Section IX: Interpersonal Skills

*Four critical items (ability, grade level of siblings, student's attitude about acceleration) must be addressed before a student can even be considered for acceleration. If one or more of those items indicates that the student should not be considered for a grade skip, it may still be advisable to continue going through the Form in order to determine what other interventions might work for the student.

Step 3: Determine Recommendation for Whole-Grade Acceleration

Working with the recommendation of the school team, the final decision to whole-grade accelerate a student is made by the principal or designee. If the acceleration moves a student to another school, the principals of each site must be in agreement for student placement to occur.

There are two indicators that immediately suggest that whole-grade acceleration is not warranted: If any one of the critical items applies, or if the student's Academic Ability, Aptitude and Achievement (AAAA) Subscale Score is less than 10.

Copies of the IAS-3 Summary and Planning Report should be made and distributed to the receiving teacher(s), the TAG Coordinator, the parent(s)/guardians(s), and one should be placed in the student's cumulative file.

If the parent/guardian disputes the recommendation, he/she may appeal to the superintendent or designee.

If whole-grade acceleration is recommended, a transition plan is made in cooperation with school and home to assist with transition to the new grade level. The transition plan will include the designation of a person to monitor the student's plan, a timeline for implementation of the transition plan, strategies to monitor the student's progress, and a home and school communications plan. A review meeting will be scheduled four to six weeks after the whole-grade acceleration is implemented.