

Waldron Public Schools Acceleration Guide

The Waldron Public Schools is dedicated to the education of all students.

Our school recognizes that students learn at different rates and need appropriate educational experiences. In keeping with this, the district recognizes that a few students may need to move through the curriculum at a faster rate. This document describes acceleration policies and procedures and provides forms to implement the acceleration process.

Definition and Supporting Evidence:

Acceleration is one of the most well-known practices of educational intervention for highly capable individuals and a policy that is endorsed by the National Association for Gifted Children (2004).

“The practice of educational acceleration has long been used to match high level students’ general ability and specific talent with optimal learning opportunities. The purposes of acceleration as a practice are 1) to adjust the pace of instruction to the students’ capability in order to develop a sound work ethic, 2) to provide an appropriate level of challenge in order to avoid the boredom from repetitious learning, and 3) to reduce the time period necessary for students to complete traditional schooling” (NAGC, 2004).

1) Acceleration is an intervention that moves students through an educational program at rates faster or at younger ages than the typical child. It means matching the level of complexity and pace of curriculum to the readiness and motivation of the student. Examples of acceleration include early entrance to school, grade-skipping, moving ahead in one subject or Advanced Placement (AP). Acceleration is educationally effective, inexpensive, and can help level the playing field between students from rich schools and poor schools” (Colangelo, Assouline, Gross, 2004).

2) Acceleration is any strategy that allows a student to move through traditional educational organizations more rapidly, based on readiness and motivation. The potential academic benefits and positive outcomes of all forms of appropriately implemented acceleration strategies for intellectually and academically talented students are supported by research. These research-based strategies include grade skipping, telescoping, early entrance into kindergarten or college, credit by examination and acceleration in content areas through such program as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate at the high school level. Instructional strategies in the classroom such as compacting, which allows for more economic use of learning time in

a specific subject, are also a desirable and best practice for some academically talented students (NAGC, 2004).

Acceleration decisions should be made carefully with the needs of the whole child in mind. In making decisions about the appropriateness of a particular form of acceleration and the extent of acceleration for a given child at a given time, the Waldron Public Schools and parents will 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 academically talented child.

Consideration: Two major concerns regarding grade-skipping acceleration – the most well known acceleration strategy, include the issues of missing critical basic skills and social adjustment to peers. Many gifted students have acquired knowledge and skills far ahead of their grade levels. A series of diagnostic tests for the grade to be skipped can identify missing skills if any, and the motivated child can learn these quickly. According to recent research (National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, Renzulli, et al, 1993), gains by students engaged in grade skipping, enrichment/pullout, subject acceleration, and curriculum compacting produce academic gains. Parents and teachers express the second concern, social adjustment to peers, most often. The current research-based consensus is that most gifted students are quite comfortable with their *intellectual* peers – older students – and suffer no noticeable maladjustments or neuroses. (Nation Deceived-Colangelo, Assouline, Gross, 2004; Feldhusen, 1992; Rimm 1991a, 1992b)

There are several factors that enhance the success of acceleration which includes 1) positive attitudes of teachers, 2) timelines related to the decision, 3) parental support, and 4) careful monitoring of the implementation. In a few cases it may be appropriate to consider whole grade acceleration, which would allow students to complete the standard K-12 program in fewer than thirteen years. If this course of action is considered, a thorough evaluation and analysis of the needs and abilities of the individual student must be completed before a final decision is made. If there appears to be sufficient evidence based on the evidence evaluated by the "Iowa Acceleration Scale, 3rd Edition", that a change should be made in the student's grade placement, an individual academic plan will be developed to assure that curriculum goals are compacted into a reduced time period. When this design is being considered the procedures outlined in this document will be utilized for a recommendation that will be made by the Waldron Public Schools personnel.

No specific procedures for acceleration are specified for the high school, because acceleration options are already available. Students may select courses to move through the curriculum at a suitable pace with early graduation or a broader range of

coursework as options, or they may be enrolled concurrently in high school and college, either by taking Advanced Placement courses or by taking courses at Rich Mountain Community College or University of Arkansas at Fort Smith while in high school. At the elementary schools and the middle school, however, faculty members evaluate the students' needs and make the acceleration decisions. When this is the case, a specific set of practices, described in the next section, is followed to ascertain the student's readiness for acceleration and to support accelerated students in the transition.

Note: Arkansas law does not allow students to early entrance to kindergarten or first grade, nor is credit by examination allowed at the high school level.

Procedure for Acceleration

Either the parents or school personnel may initiate a referral conference. In either situation, a referral conference between the parent(s) and either the principal or Gifted/Talented Coordinator should be held to explain and discuss the process.

I. Referral

a. Parent-initiated Referral

- i. An Acceleration Request shall be completed and returned to the principal of the school that the student is presently attending. Included in that request shall be:
 1. The parents' reason(s) for seeking the change, including evidence of need. Requests will not be considered if parents do not provide evidence of need.
 2. The parents' commitment to support the change.
 3. The parents recognizing that their request triggers the screening process collected through the Iowa Acceleration Scale. A recommendation will be made by the Acceleration Committee.
- ii. The person who receives the parent request will inform the other staff member of the request.
- iii. The GT Coordinator shall notify the Superintendent of the request.

b. School-initiated Referral

- i. School personnel initiating the referral (classroom teacher, gifted/talented teacher, principal) will notify the GT Coordinator **before** contacting parents.
- ii. The GT Coordinator and/or the principal will meet with the parents to present an explanation of why acceleration is being considered.
- iii. If the parents consent for the process to proceed, their written permission for assessment will be obtained.
- iv. The GT Coordinator shall notify the superintendent.

II. An initial assessment of the student's academic achievement level will be completed using an off-level (at least two years above current grade level) academic instrument with age norms. (e.g. – *Peabody Individual Achievement Tests-Revised*). Scores in multiple content sub-sections are expected in the top 5% range to indicate a need to proceed with the remainder of the assessment battery.

III.

- a. If expected scores are *not* reached, the GT Coordinator and the principal or his designee will meet with parents to explain the results.

- b. If the expected scores are reached, the student's parents will complete the *Parent Inventory* and return to the GT Coordinator.
 - i. The classroom teacher(s) of the student will complete the following and return to the GT Coordinator.
- IV. Additional tests/information will be completed to assess student level/indicators in the following areas:
 - a. Aptitude
 - b. Problem-solving ability
 - i. *Scales for Rating Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students*
 - c. Teacher sections of the *Iowa Acceleration Scale (IAS)*
 - d. Developmental factors
 - e. Interpersonal factors
 - f. Motivation
 - g. Attitude and support
 - h. School/academic factors
- V. All assessment data, parent and teacher input will be compiled by the GT Coordinator on the *IAS*.
- VI. The GT Coordinator will present the data results to the acceleration committee, which will consist of the school principal, classroom teacher, and other school personnel, as appropriate. A decision on whether to recommend acceleration will result from this meeting. The decision relative to acceleration is one made by education professionals. If acceleration is recommended, the GT Coordinator will prepare the *IAS Summary and Planning Record* recommendation form and an Education Plan for Acceleration using the *IAS* and/or the assessment data collected.
- VII. After the acceleration committee's decision, a conference will be held to present the data results to the parents. In addition to the parents, persons in attendance at that conference may include the following:
 - a. GT Coordinator (required)
 - b. Principal or assistant principal (required)
 - c. Receiving classroom teacher (recommended)
 - d. Superintendent or designee
 - e. Current classroom teacher
 - f. Counselor
 - g. Other relevant school personnel
- VIII. At the parent acceleration conference, if the parents agree to the acceleration recommendation, their signed permission is obtained on the *IAS Summary and Planning Record* and the Education Plan for Acceleration. The classroom placement for an accelerated student will be made by the principal.

- IX. The Iowa Acceleration Scale, 3rd Edition Summary and Planning Record, designating the outcome of the conference shall be completed and signed by all parties involved.
- X. The student's acceleration file with all data will be kept in the GT acceleration file. A *Notice of AEP (Accelerated Education Plan)* form will be placed in the student's cumulative record file.
- XI. Evaluation of the implementation for the student will be conducted at several points by the principal, coordinator of the gifted and talented program, classroom teacher, and the parents.
- a. Continued evaluation of the acceleration and academic alternatives used during the first year will be conducted:
 - i. The teacher will schedule a conference with the parents during the first nine weeks.
 1. Options suggested after the first nine weeks evaluation is completed are below:
 - i. If appropriate progress is not made by the fifth week of school, the committee will convene to discuss the issue and determine need for modification. Modification recommendations must be approved by the principal. Returning the student to the previous grade will be an option at this point; however, it should be considered only as a last resort.
 - ii. If appropriate progress is not made, the student may continue in the new grade level, but modifications may be made. Modifications must be approved by the principal.
 2. The second evaluation will occur at the end of the second quarter, conducted by the principal, with parents, teacher, and the coordinator of the gifted and talented program.
 3. After the third nine weeks, a spring evaluation of the acceleration implementation will be conducted. In addition to the parents, persons in attendance may be as follows:
 - i. Principal or designee (chairman)
 - ii. Coordinator of the Gifted and Talented Program
 - iii. Counselor
 - iv. Receiving Principal
 - v. Classroom teacher/s if possible
 - vi. Superintendent (optional)
 - vii. Student (optional)

- b. The classroom teacher will send a copy of the student's grades, along with any supporting data, to the Coordinator of the Gifted and Talented who will monitor the student's progress at the end of each grading period.
- c. Evaluations and needed academic alternatives or adjustments as appropriate will be advised each spring for two years. In addition to the parents, persons in attendance may be as follows:
 - i. Principal or designee (chairman)
 - ii. Coordinator of the Gifted and Talented Program
 - iii. Counselor
 - iv. Receiving Principal
 - v. Classroom teacher/s if possible
 - vi. Superintendent (optional)
 - vii. Student (optional)