

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Model Student Acceleration Policy for Advanced Learners

General Questions:

Why has the state established the Model Student Acceleration Policy for Advanced Learners?

In April, the State Board of Education adopted “A Model Student Acceleration Policy for Advanced Learners” in response to House Bill 66 requirements. The bill also requires Ohio’s city, local and exempted village school districts to implement the model policy or a similar policy to take effect beginning in the 2006-2007 school year.

How was the Model Acceleration Policy for Advanced Learners developed?

The model policy was based on national research, a 2004 Ohio study commissioned by ODE’s Office for Exceptional Children, and stakeholder input from gifted education specialists as well as teachers, parents and administrators in school districts already using acceleration successfully. The model policy addresses the specific areas required for district policies: early entrance to kindergarten; acceleration in individual subject areas; whole grade acceleration (grade-skipping); and early high school graduation.

Who should (and should not be) accelerated?

While actual decisions about acceleration should always be guided by a thorough evaluation of the student using a research-based evaluation process, most good candidates for acceleration will display some of the following characteristics:

- Demonstrates above average general cognitive ability;
- Achieves academically in one or more subject areas a grade level or more higher than the norm for his or her age;
- Expresses a desire for more challenging instruction;
- Is socially mature enough to adapt to an environment serving older students;
- Responds positively to the possibility of acceleration.

Acceleration may not be a good option for students with some of the following characteristics:

- Has an older sibling in the same school in the grade level to which the student may be accelerated;
- Is sufficiently challenged by the curriculum at his or her current grade level;
- Would be significantly less emotionally mature than typical students at the grade level to which he or she may be accelerated;

- Responds negatively to the possibility of acceleration.

Further, one type of acceleration for a student might be appropriate when another would not be. For example, a student who is very advanced in reading and writing ability but struggles in math and is of average ability in science and social studies might be an excellent candidate for subject acceleration in reading and language arts, but a poor candidate for a whole “grade skip.” Conversely, a student who is strong in several areas might be happier and more successful if accelerated on a full-time basis so she could be with one set of peers all day and travel less back and forth between classrooms than she would if accelerated in only one or two subject areas. Near the end of the K-12 experience, some students may be ready to move on to college on a full-time basis and benefit from the opportunity to graduate high school early. Others may prefer to stay in high school and take advantage of other options, such as Advanced Placement courses and the PSEO program.

What acceleration evaluation processes are approved by the Ohio Department of Education?

The Ohio Department of Education recommends the “Iowa Acceleration Scale” (Second Edition) for evaluating students for possible whole grade acceleration and early admission to school. The IAS is a research-based tool designed to help educators and families evaluate the child on cognitive, academic, social, emotional, and developmental factors that impact whether students are likely to be academically and socially successful in an accelerated setting. [Click here for more information about the IAS.](#)

The “written acceleration plan” (WAP) mentioned in the model acceleration policy sounds similar to the “written education plan” (WEP) required for students receiving gifted education services. Can these two documents be combined?

For some students, yes. If the student has been identified as gifted, and the district considers acceleration one of the forms of gifted services it provides to a particular student, acceleration should be specified on the student’s gifted Written Education Plan. The two documents can reasonably be combined into a single hybrid document as long as the WEP incorporates the key elements of the Written Acceleration Plan described in the Model Acceleration Policy for Advanced Learners. There may be instructional advantages to this approach, as combining the WEP and WAP for accelerated gifted students could help facilitate better communication between district gifted education staff, the students’ regular classroom teachers, and administrators and parents while potentially saving staff time.

However, because acceleration is not an option reserved exclusively for students who have formally been identified as gifted, some accelerated students may need a WAP but would not receive a WEP for gifted education services.

Questions from Parents, Teachers, Gifted Educators and Counselors:

What are the benefits of acceleration for gifted and advanced students?

Research shows that students who are properly accelerated benefit significantly, both academically and emotionally. Research indicates that accelerated gifted and high ability students perform at higher levels on achievement tests and are less likely to become bored and disinterested in school than other similarly able students who are not accelerated.

I understand the academic benefits of acceleration, but isn't skipping grades socially damaging to students?

While "common sense" dictates that children will be most successful emotionally and developmentally in a social environment comprised of their age peers, the research on the social effects of acceleration dramatically contradicts this assumption. Research on acceleration indicates that advanced learners often feel more comfortable with their academic-level peers as opposed to their age-level peers. Furthermore, research indicates that advanced students will often become bored and disengaged in academic settings if not offered the opportunity to perform at higher levels and receive higher-level instruction.

Won't skipping all or part of a grade cause the student's achievement test scores and grades to drop?

In most cases, students accelerated based on the recommendation of a research-based evaluation process will perform well on state achievement tests. First, most students recommended for acceleration are already performing well above grade level prior to their accelerated placement. Second, research on acceleration indicates that students that are properly accelerated are capable of quickly catching up to their academic-level peers and that any gaps in knowledge quickly disappear. Using assessments to identify any significant knowledge gaps prior to the accelerated placement, and building into the acceleration transition plan specific action steps to address any gaps identified, can help ensure success.

Won't having younger students in class be harmful to the self-esteem of older students?

A review of research literature on acceleration found no studies that reported significant negative effects on older students when younger students were accelerated into their classes. Ohio school districts involved in the 2004 ODE-sponsored study of acceleration reported that accelerated students were "short-term novelties" to older students, and that accelerated students were readily accepted by older students. Some educators speculated

that having younger students in the classroom provided older students with informal opportunities to practice mentoring and leadership.

What can parents do to support an accelerated student?

Parental involvement is an important element for ensuring success for accelerated students. Parents should be particularly involved in the development of the Written Acceleration Plan, since they are best situated to monitor the student's growth and adjustment "up close" and over an extended time period. Parents should actively contribute accurate information to the evaluation process so that informed decisions can be made. Parents can also be helpful during the initial transition to an accelerated setting by providing emotional support, providing tutoring at home to help the student "catch up" on critical content that may have been skipped in the acceleration process, and facilitating out-of-school opportunities for additional enrichment and social development.

What can teachers do to support an accelerated student?

Teachers can do a great deal to help ensure a smooth transition for accelerated students. First teachers can use strategies such as "diagnostic-prescriptive" teaching and "curriculum compacting" to help students who can learn quickly but have skipped some curriculum to master important concepts they have missed. Teachers of accelerated students should recognize that most of these students will continue to need differentiated instruction even in the accelerated setting. Teachers who have not received training in instructional strategies for gifted and advanced students may wish to seek out the gifted education staff for support, materials, and professional development opportunities. The teacher in the accelerated setting should be involved in developing the student's written acceleration plan (WAP), since he or she will be most familiar with the concepts and curriculum the accelerated student will encounter. Finally, teachers can help accelerated students socially by helping monitor the student's adjustment, introducing the student to friendly peers, and avoiding "making a big deal" out of the presence of a younger-than-typical student in the classroom. Students generally adapt quickly to the presence of accelerated students, and will accept the arrangement as "normal" if the teacher treats it as being positive but not extraordinary.

Will Ohio school districts honor a transferring student's accelerated placement if he or she was accelerated in another Ohio school district?

Yes. Consistent with the Operating Standards for Ohio's Schools, Ohio Administrative Code 3301-35-04 (F) (4) (b), grade placement and units of credit shall be accepted for students transferring from any school in the state of Ohio that meets the requirements of Chapter 3301-35 of the Administrative Code.

Questions from School District Administrators and School Boards:

Will adopting the model acceleration policy result in a “flood” of students seeking acceleration?

Probably not. The Model Acceleration Policy for Advanced Learners borrowed heavily from local policies in districts that have used acceleration successfully for several years. These districts reported in EMIS a handful of acceleration cases each year. None of the districts studied reported being overwhelmed by referrals for acceleration.

Most parents and teachers will not seek acceleration for students who are appropriately challenged in their current grade levels. If a large number of students at a particular grade level are referred for possible accelerated placement, this may be a sign that the curriculum offered at those grade levels is not engaging or adequately challenging.

What are the financial implications for school districts implementing the model acceleration policy?

The Templeton National Report on Acceleration, “A Nation Deceived” states “Acceleration is the most effective curriculum intervention for gifted children;” and, “Acceleration is a virtually cost-free intervention.”

Ohio’s model acceleration policy was developed collaboratively with school districts to ensure that it is research-based, practical and affordable to implement. Three of the four types of acceleration addressed in the model policy are cost-free to implement. Admitting a child early to kindergarten, “skipping” a child ahead one or more grade levels, or allowing a student to graduate early from high school does not require any special transportation arrangements or the creation of any new programs. These forms of acceleration involve simply allowing students to access learning environments that already exist and are being provided to older students every day.

The only type of acceleration addressed in the model policy that has the potential to create some costs for districts involves “single subject” accelerated placements in which a student might “straddle” grade levels across buildings. (For example, a fifth grade student might study most subjects with his age peers at the elementary level but need access to middle school level math instruction to continue making progress.) Within buildings, (e.g. a third grade student taking fourth grade reading in a school that houses grades 1-5) there is no cost for implementing subject acceleration. However, in cases where straddling grades also means straddling buildings, there are more options than moving the student when transportation is not available or moving the student back and forth between schools is impractical for other reasons.

For example, districts can use the “educational options” provision in the law to devise opportunities for advanced learning without actually having to bus a student across town for a year. In some districts, subject accelerated students are already participating in

higher level classes offered at other buildings via inexpensive “webcams” and free video “chat” software available from AOL, Apple, Microsoft and others. Still another option is to reconsider whether a student who was already accelerated in one or more individual subjects should be “whole grade” accelerated to the higher level building on a full-time basis (eliminating transportation issues) when he or she reaches a level where school-to-school transportation might become an issue. Again, the basic principle of the model acceleration policy is that no student should be denied the opportunity to learn when he or she is ready for higher level curriculum. However, how that opportunity is provided can be tailored to the specific needs of the student and the structure and resources of the individual schools and districts involved.

It should also be noted that most of the formal assessments that are recommended as part of the Iowa Acceleration Scale (IAS), which is the ODE-approved process for evaluating students for early entrance and whole grade acceleration, are already on the list of instruments approved for gifted screening and identification in Ohio. The identification of gifted students has long been mandated in Ohio, and all districts receive funding to help cover costs related to screening students for possible identification. Because of this, many students referred for possible accelerated placement will require no additional testing because scores from assessments they have already taken as part of the gifted screening process can be “plugged in.” In other cases, the same evaluations given for possible accelerated placement can also be used to meet the district’s obligation for gifted identification screening. The Iowa Acceleration Scale itself is inexpensive (less than \$10 per student), and may be purchased using gifted identification supplementary funds.

Finally, in most cases, acceleration will actually save the public education system money in the long run. For example, if a gifted student moves through the K-12 continuum in 11.5 years instead of the typical 13, the cost the public would carry to provide 1.5 years of her education is eliminated. This cost savings can then be reinvested in schools to better meet the needs of other students.

What can school administrators do to support accelerated students?

Administrators have a number of important roles to play. First, they can be very helpful in facilitating instances of subject acceleration by working with teachers at different grade levels to align schedules to allow students to study subjects at the most appropriate grade level based on their learning needs. Second, they can help ensure opportunities for continuous progress as the student moves through the school by creating systems to ensure that teachers that encounter accelerated students are familiar with their written acceleration plans (WAPs) and participate in keeping them relevant and up-to-date as the student grows and changes over time. Third, they can help facilitate communication between classroom teachers, gifted education specialists, guidance counselors, parents, and others so that students will receive the support they need to reach their full potential.

At what level do accelerated students take the Ohio Achievement Tests?

Accelerated students will always take the tests at the level to which they are accelerated and afterwards will continue to take tests at the level consistent with the grade-level content they are receiving. For example, a student accelerated from 3rd grade to 5th grade in reading will take the 5th grade reading test the year they are accelerated, the 6th grade reading test the following year, and so forth.

How will scores for accelerated students be factored into district accountability measures?

For accountability purposes, scores during the first year of a student's acceleration will be compared to the student's original grade-level peers using the "vertical scales" from the test developers designed to allow for comparisons of student achievement across multiple grade levels. On tests for which vertical scales are not available, accelerated students' scores will be reported to the school, but will not be factored into school and district "report card" calculations. After the first year of accelerated placement, the student's scores will be included in accountability measures per standard accountability calculations.

How should accelerated students be reported in EMIS?

The subjects in which students are accelerated should be noted on their student records. A student that is whole grade accelerated should have their grade-level status changed on their student record. Accelerated students that are also identified as gifted will continue to be reported with EMIS program codes for gifted services as well. For more information about reporting services for gifted students, please see the Gifted EMIS Data Guide on the ODE Web site.

Does state law establish an absolute minimum age for admission to kindergarten?

Not exactly. As a general rule, the law requires that students be at least five years old by August 1 or September 30, depending on local school district policy. However, the law requires school districts to screen students for possible early entrance, at a parent's request, if the child will be five years old by January 1 of the school year for which admission is requested. Each district school board is required to establish a screening program and standards for early admission. Individual school districts have discretion regarding whether to screen and potentially admit students to kindergarten who would not yet be five years old by January 1 of the school year for which admission is requested. Districts that adopt the Model Student Acceleration Policy for Advanced Learners will screen students younger than "5 by January 1" if referred by a district educator, licensed psychologist, or pediatrician. All students who would be at least five years old by January 1 would continue to be screened at a parent's request as required by law.

Can school districts award high school credit by examination?

No. Currently, the only two ways Ohio students can attain credits toward graduation are to complete courses based around “Carnegie unit” instructional contact hour requirements, and to complete supervised “educational options” plans approved by a district Superintendent or his or her designee.

What is an “educational option”?

An “educational option” is an individualized learning opportunity provided as an alternative to traditional school courses. Unlike regular courses, educational options have no specific “seat time” requirements, but specify the content the student will cover and the criteria for demonstrating mastery of the content. Therefore, schools may find the educational options provision in the law to be a useful opportunity to develop individualized learning programs for students to earn credit on an accelerated basis. For more information about the educational options provision, please see section 3301-36-06 (G) of the school operating standards, and the educational option template and samples on the main acceleration toolkit Web page.