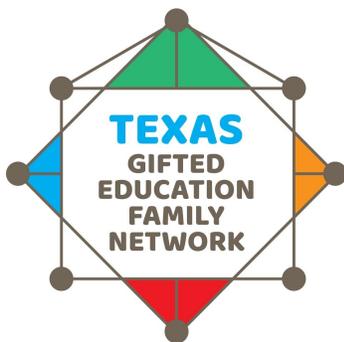


Full Grade Acceleration: Resources for Parents

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During school closures and COVID adjustments, families of academically gifted students may find themselves with unexpected flexibility for advanced learning. If a child seems capable of working at least one year above his or her grade level, parents may wonder what traditional learning can or should look like when students return to school buildings.

Most parents have heard of “skipping grades.” They may not know, however, that research recommendations can help educators and parents determine whether a grade skip – also called full grade acceleration – may be in a student’s best interest.

What does research tell us about this practice, and how does this research address myths and concerns about acceleration?

Myths / Concerns	Research Findings
<p><i>Concern:</i> Skipping a grade can hurt children socially or emotionally</p>	<p>Overall, accelerated students have expressed feeling socially accepted. More than fifty years of research shows that providing acceleration, when appropriate, often makes students happy. Some students feel they “fit in” better because they have more interests in common with older students than with age-mates. Some gifted children experience a “hiccup” when they are not the “smartest ones in the room,” but research shows “this dip is slight and almost always temporary” (Assouline et al., 2015). It remains important to ensure that a student is a good candidate for a grade skip and to carefully monitor acceleration (Assouline et al., 2009).</p>
<p><i>Myth:</i> Students who skip a grade may not be as competitive academically in the future</p>	<p>Researchers found that accelerated students tend to be more ambitious and earn graduate degrees at higher rates than students who were not accelerated (Assouline et al., 2015).</p>
<p><i>Myth:</i> Gifted underachievers should not be considered for a grade skip</p>	<p>Current motivation to perform well in school is one factor experts recommend considering. If a student has remained unchallenged in school, however, experts also recommend looking at the student’s motivation to learn outside of school. Acceleration has been found to reverse underachievement in some gifted students who need more challenge, particularly for students with evidence of exceptionally high ability (Gross, 2000).</p>
<p><i>Myth:</i> Choosing not to skip a grade is the least risky decision for gifted students</p>	<p>Researchers have documented several risks of failing to meet the academic needs of high-ability students. In the words of one researcher, “In my opinion, not allowing academically talented students to move ahead appropriately is educational malpractice, because the evidence is so clear and so positive supporting acceleration” (Lupkowski-Shoplik 2018).</p>
<p><i>Myth:</i> A full grade skip is the only type of acceleration schools can offer</p>	<p>A number of states require districts to offer additional forms of acceleration, including single-subject acceleration, dual or concurrent enrollment, and other options. Experts have identified 20 types of acceleration (Assouline et al., 2015). If a student is not a strong candidate for a full grade skip, it remains important to provide educational opportunities commensurate with the student’s abilities. Single subject acceleration may be an alternative option for some students, including twice-exceptional students.</p>

Educators want what's best for students, though some may not have exposure to current information and practice guidelines for students who demonstrate the potential for advanced performance. Some gifted students, especially those in underserved populations or those with disabilities, may also underperform in the regular classroom. Special care is needed to ensure that these students are challenged in their areas of strengths and that the potential for success in acceleration is not missed.

Should My Child Skip a Grade? Things to Consider

Below are several research-based and practical considerations to help parents evaluate options and prepare for decisions.

Cover your bases (do your homework, research!)

- Does your state have [regulations covering acceleration](#)? If so, what do they say?
- What is the [district's policy](#) on acceleration? Support for academic acceleration can vary significantly between states, districts, and schools. Advocacy from parents or parent groups can sometimes improve local policies. Policy improvements can benefit future students, as well, including those who need acceleration but lack advocacy support.
- Is there a timeline that needs to be followed at the state, district, or school level (deadlines for requesting acceleration, registering for testing, etc.)?
- Are there possible allies or advocates (teachers, counselors, GT specialists, or other families) who have successfully navigated the acceleration process or who could help with advocacy? Can input be gathered from multiple people familiar with the child's history and needs?

Prepare your request – anticipate what the school will need

- What history does the school have regarding acceleration?
- What could demonstrate ability needs in this situation – test scores in the gifted¹ range, portfolio, audition, recommendations? What does that evidence need to look like for local acceleration purposes (specific tests or scores required)?
- When considering your student, what issues might the school raise? Can you anticipate objections in advance, and can you address them head on, or help identify solutions?
- If your student has a learning disability or other disabilities, how might those need to be accommodated in an acceleration placement? (Students cannot be denied acceleration

¹ For full grade acceleration, researchers recommend ability scores at least one standard deviation above the norm, with higher scores increasing the likelihood that acceleration may be recommended (Assouline et al., 2009).

based on disability, and students should not be forced to choose between gifted and disability services.)

- If it is difficult to collect new data² due to COVID-19, what information do you already have, and what communication or learning support can you initiate now? What plans can you make for next steps, when it is possible to move forward?

Beyond academics – it's not just about coursework

- *Extracurricular activities:* What interests does your student have outside of academics - sports, student government, band, drama club, etc.? Would a full grade skip impact those activities now or going forward? Can some of the impact be lessened - i.e., are campus or local sports teams based on grade or age?
- *Social and emotional support:* Can my child meet children in the new grade in advance? Does the teacher in the receiving grade have a positive attitude toward academic acceleration? Will the teacher be prepared to understand and adjust to any differences due to asynchronous development (i.e., executive functioning of younger student)? Will acceleration occur at a natural transition point (i.e., beginning of new school year), or would it require missing a transition year (first/last year at a school)?
- *Family impact:* Are there siblings in school? If so, could changes in grade level spacing between siblings impact their relationships or impact other members of the family?
- *Developmental:* How can a younger student be supported in building leadership skills (at school or elsewhere)?
- *Student feelings about acceleration:* Does your child want to skip a grade? A student's desire to accelerate is an essential part of moving forward.

Looking forward – what's next?

- *Evaluation and review:* Is there a plan in place to review the acceleration placement? Does that plan include a commitment to a discussion about the possibility that additional acceleration might be needed – subject or whole grade? Does the plan provide for campus support for challenges, as needed, and support for any disabilities?
- *Next Steps:* Acceleration may create future situations that require extra monitoring, particularly in transition years. Can the student receive extra planning assistance and support at school and home, as needed?
- *Connecting with other families:* Is there a local support group for families of gifted and/or accelerated students, and if not, can you start one? Does the group actively work to include culturally, economically, and linguistically diverse populations? Local organizations can help educate parents, enabling them to better help their students.

² Some practitioners may offer online assessments during COVID-19, however, parents may wish to consider whether this testing environment would work well for their child, particularly for twice-exceptional or young children.

Parent groups can also advocate for and help protect district policy solutions that benefit advanced learners from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Things for families and students to consider – it is personal

- *Early completion of milestones:* Early college means possibly going away at a younger age than typical for college freshman, choosing from schools nearby, or taking time (sometimes called a “gap year”) between high school and college. It can also mean a need for funds for college earlier than expected.
- *Change in plans:* Undoing a grade skip can be difficult, but it is not impossible. Would there be home and school support for a change, if necessary?
- *Will one grade skip be enough?* Some gifted students find they have the same situation (boredom, lack of engagement and challenge) after an acceleration placement. If this occurs, what strategies could provide challenge until further acceleration can be considered (i.e., flexible pacing, differentiated instruction, personalized learning plan)?

Plan B: If full grade acceleration is not possible

- *Other acceleration options:* If a full grade skip is not appropriate for your student, or if it is not possible in the current school setting, is single subject acceleration an option? For an older student, is dual or concurrent enrollment an option?
- *Advocacy and alternatives:* If your student is a good candidate for full grade acceleration but the school refuses to accelerate, what options might exist (advocacy options in the school/district, other educational settings, etc.)?

When is full grade acceleration recommended?

Ideally, acceleration decisions are made by a team that includes educators and parents, and when appropriate, the student. Educators should be familiar with or willing to learn about current recommendations for academic acceleration, and they may wish to consult resources such as the [Iowa Acceleration Scale](#), information from the [Acceleration Institute](#) at the University of Iowa [Belin-Blank Center](#), and other guidance. The Iowa Acceleration Scale is a tool developed specifically for this purpose, and it “helps families and educators to work together to consider aspects of development that are important in a decision about grade skipping. These include the student’s ability, aptitude, and achievement, as well as developmental factors, physical and social development, and support from school and family” (Lupowski-Shoplik, 2019).

It is important to note that there are no perfect solutions. Factors may need to be weighed and balanced in determining the best solution for the student.

Acceleration in Texas

Laws and regulations governing academic acceleration vary from state to state. In Texas, the Texas Administrative Code ([19 TAC §74.24](#)) lays out requirements that both students and districts must follow in order for a student to test out of courses or full grades. Currently, districts may choose when they offer Credit by Examination tests, provided testing occurs within the quarterly windows in [19 TAC §74.24\(a\)\(1\)](#).

Texas requirements state that districts “must provide” certain opportunities to take Credit by Examination assessments, and further state that students “must be accelerated” and “must be given credit” when students achieve certain scores and seek credit under the statute. To skip grades in grades K – 5, a parent or guardian must give written approval and a school district representative must recommend that the student be accelerated. The statute also provides flexibility to allow districts to give credit in additional circumstances.

Texas districts must also offer opportunities “in areas of student strengths” (single-subject acceleration) to GT-identified students in grades K – 12 (see [Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students §4.5](#); see also [19 TAC §89.3\(4\)](#) and [guidance](#) on the TEA website). It is left to districts to determine how students may qualify for acceleration in “areas of student strengths” and how to facilitate this acceleration. Families of GT students K – 12 who believe their students may need single-subject acceleration will want to contact their districts to inquire about the process for taking acceleration exams and for determining eligibility.

In general, specific decisions regarding gifted services (program design, criteria for identification) vary from district to district within Texas. All districts must follow the [State Plan](#). Parents are encouraged to review the entire State Plan to learn about Texas requirements for districts to offer acceleration, flexible pacing, dual enrollment opportunities, and services that meet the ability needs of GT students. Parents outside of Texas are encouraged to learn about [acceleration policies](#) and [gifted education requirements](#) in their states.

Alternative Types of Acceleration

If the student, their parents, or the decision making team determine that full-grade acceleration may not be successful at a given point in time, it may be appropriate to consider other forms of acceleration. All gifted students should receive instruction commensurate with their abilities. Researchers have identified 20 types of acceleration ranging from curriculum compacting and continuous progress to early graduation or radical acceleration (accelerating two or more years in a subject or grade). Families may wish to explore a summary of this research by downloading [A Nation Empowered](#), published by the Belin-Blank Center at the University of Iowa, or by reviewing some of the parent-friendly resources below.

Sources and Further Reading

To learn more about acceleration and to evaluate a child's specific case in depth, parents and educators may wish to consult the below sources. Many resources are available for free on the web, and others may be available for purchase from the publisher, to borrow from school districts, or to borrow from a local public library, including through Interlibrary Loan (please practice safe borrowing during [COVID-19](#)).

General Information for Parents

National Association for Gifted Children. Acceleration: Parent Tip Sheet. Retrieved Apr. 23, 2020, from <https://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Publication%20PHP/NAGC%20TIP%20Sheet-Acceleration-FINAL.pdf>

Lupkowski-Shoplik, A. (2017). Tips for parents: academic acceleration for students in 8th grade and younger. *Davidson Institute for Talent Development*. Retrieved Apr. 23, 2020, from <https://www.davidsongifted.org/search-database/entry/a10422>

Belin-Blank Center (2018, October 30). Gifted Education Awareness Month: Go-To Resources on Academic Acceleration [Blog post]. *Belin-Blank Center*. Retrieved Apr. 23, 2020, from <https://belinblank.wordpress.com/2018/10/30/gifted-education-awareness-month-go-to-resources-on-academic-acceleration/>

[Acceleration Institute](#) at the University of Iowa Belin-Blank Center

Resources for Educators and Families

Assouline, S., Colangelo, N., Lupkowski-Shoplik, A., Lipscomb, J., and Forstadt, L. (2009). *Iowa acceleration scale manual: A guide for whole-grade acceleration K-8* (3rd ed., pp. 91–95). Great Potential Press.

Assouline, S. G., Colangelo, N., VanTasselBaska, J., and Lupkowski-Shoplik, A. (Eds.) (2015). *A Nation Empowered: Evidence trumps the excuses holding back America's brightest students*. University of Iowa. This resource can be downloaded for free here: http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/nation_empowered/

Belin-Blank Center, College of Education, University of Iowa. *State acceleration policy*. Retrieved Apr. 23, 2020, from https://www.accelerationinstitute.org/Resources/Policy/By_State/Default.aspx

Foley-Nicpon, M. and Cederberg, C. (2015). Acceleration practices with twice-exceptional students. In S.G. Assouline, N. Colangelo, J. VanTassel-Baska, and A. Lupkowski-Shoplik, (Eds.), *A Nation Empowered: evidence trumps the excuses holding back America's brightest students* (Vol. 2, pp. 189–197). University of Iowa.

Gross, M. U. M. (2000). Exceptionally and Profoundly Gifted Students: An Underserved Population (section on "Reversing Underachievement"). Hoagies' Gifted Education Page; originally published in *Understanding Our Gifted*, Winter 2000. Web. <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/underserved.htm>

Lupkowski-Shoplik, A. (2019, October 18). Advocating for acceleration: suggestions for parents [Blog post]. *Belin-Blank Center*. Retrieved May 26, 2020, from <https://belinblank.wordpress.com/2019/10/18/advocating-for-acceleration-suggestions-for-parents/>

Lupkowski-Shoplik, A. (2004). Tips for Parents: Acceleration and the Profoundly Gifted. *Davidson Institute for Talent Development*. Retrieved Apr. 23, 2020, from <http://www.davidsongifted.org/search-database/entry/a10295>

Lupkowski-Shoplik, A. (2019, June 18). I think my child needs to skip a grade [Blog post]. *Belin-Blank Center*. Retrieved May 26, 2020, from <https://belinblank.wordpress.com/tag/iowa-acceleration-scale/>

Lupkowski-Shoplik, A., Behrens, W. A., and Assouline, S. G. (2018). *Developing academic acceleration policies: whole grade, early entrance, and single subject*. National Association for Gifted Children; Belin-Blank Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, The University of Iowa; The Association for the Gifted, Council for Exceptional Children.

Lupkowski-Shoplik, A. (2018, January 28). Responding to the arguments against acceleration (again) [Blog post]. *Belin-Blank Center*. Retrieved from <https://belinblank.wordpress.com/2018/01/28/responding-to-the-arguments-against-acceleration-again/>

Robinson, A., Shore, B. M., & Enerson, D L. (2007). Acceleration. In *Best practices in gifted education: an evidence-based guide*. (pp. 223–234). Waco: Prufrock Press; National Association for Gifted Children.

Villamar-Robbins, E. (2020). Parent perspectives: subject acceleration experiences of twice-exceptional students. *The Gifted Education Review* (5), 9–11. <http://www.giftededucationreview.com/issues/GER005.pdf>

Final Thoughts

Decisions about acceleration can be challenging for both students and families. Even after careful consideration, and even when recommendations are followed, no crystal ball exists to guarantee the future. Families of accelerated students have found it helpful to continue communication about the placement with the accelerated child and their educators, to monitor their students' social and emotional needs, and to maintain a willingness to reevaluate educational plans and settings as needed. As parents, it can be challenging to adjust hopes and plans made based on past expectations. Ultimately, families of accelerated students have found that their best decisions have been made with open minds and a desire to meet both the educational and emotional needs of their children.

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