

Franklin Township Public Schools

Kindergarten Acceleration Guidelines

For Gifted and Talented Students

Acceleration Evaluation Committee
1/1/2010 – Updated June 2019

District Acceleration Evaluation Update Committee (2019)

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District Acceleration Evaluation Committee (2010)

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Introduction

The *Kindergarten Acceleration Guidelines* have been developed to guide the appropriate use of accelerated learning opportunities for gifted and talented students in the Franklin Township Public Schools.

The New Jersey Department of Education defines gifted and talented students as:

Those students who possess or demonstrate high levels of ability, in one or more content areas, when compared to their chronological peers in the local district and who require modification of their educational program if they are to achieve in accordance with their capabilities.

The New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS) are intended for all students. This includes students who are college-bound or career-bound, gifted and talented, those whose native language is not English, students with disabilities, and students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. These standards are influenced by national standards, research-based practice, and student needs. The standards are designed to prepare our students for college and careers by emphasizing high-level skills needed for tomorrow's world.

Insistence on the NJSLS means that every student will be involved in experiences addressing all of the expectations set forth in all nine content areas. Different groups of students should address the standards at different levels of depth and should complete the district's core curriculum according to different timetables. Depending on their interests, abilities, and career plan, many students will and should develop knowledge and skills that go beyond the specific indicators on the NJSLS.

In accordance with the standards, we believe that students develop at different rates. All children learn and experience success given time and opportunity, but the degree to which the standards are met and the time it takes to reach the standards will vary from student to student. There are many ways to modify the curriculum for bright, talented students, such as: differentiated instruction, enrichment, gifted and talented pull-out programs, cooperative learning and compacting the curriculum. There are, however, a relatively small number of exceptionally talented students who need a more radical form of curriculum modification, such as: single-subject or whole-grade acceleration.

Students for whom the curriculum has been modified and continue to naturally, consistently and independently exceed the grade-level indicators and benchmarks set forth in the standards must be afforded the opportunity and be encouraged to do so. Students who are gifted may require special services or activities in order to fully develop their intellectual, creative, artistic and academic capabilities or to excel in a specific content area. Again, the point of departure is the standards-based curriculum.

All children should be provided adjustments when necessary in order to address their individual needs. Identifying and nurturing the talents of all students will enable all students to reach the standards.

The appropriate use of accelerated learning opportunities as a strategy to provide curricular and instructional adaptations for advanced and/or gifted and talented students supports the requirements in New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:8-3.1:

- (a) District boards of education shall ensure that curriculum and instruction are designed and delivered in such a way that all students are able to demonstrate the knowledge and skills specified by the NJSLS and shall ensure that appropriate instructional adaptations are designed and delivered for students with disabilities, for students with limited English proficiency, and for students who are gifted and talented.
5. District boards of education shall be responsible for identifying gifted and talented students and shall provide them with appropriate instructional adaptations and services.
- i. District boards of education shall make provisions for an ongoing K-12 identification process for gifted and talented students that include multiple measures.
 - ii. District boards of education shall provide appropriate K-12 educational services for gifted and talented students.
 - iii. District boards of education shall develop appropriate curricular and instructional modifications used for gifted and talented students indicating content, process, products, and learning environment.
 - iv. District boards of education shall take into consideration the Pre-K-Grade-12 Gifted Program Standards of the National Association for Gifted Children in developing programs for gifted and talented students.

Research conducted nationally and within the Franklin Township public schools has demonstrated that academic acceleration can be a powerful and cost-effective strategy for providing appropriately challenging, standards-based instruction for students who are ready to learn above grade-level content. Acceleration has also been shown to increase motivation, reduce boredom, and enhance the social and emotional well-being of appropriately selected students.

Definitions

Whole-Grade Acceleration: The practice of assigning a student to 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.

Example:

- After completing the first trimester of the kindergarten year, a student is placed in the first grade at the start of the second trimester of the same school year.

Individual Subject Acceleration: The practice of assigning a student to a higher grade level than is typical given the student's age for the purpose of providing access to appropriately challenging learning opportunities in one or more subject areas.

Example:

- A kindergarten student performing above grade level in reading and math goes to a first grade teacher every day for instruction in these subjects and returns to the kindergarten classroom for instruction in other subject areas.

Research Summary

Acceleration, when used appropriately, is perhaps the most effective intervention for enhancing the academic growth of advanced students (Kulik & Kulik, 1989.) The landmark report "A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students," published by the University of Iowa and the Templeton Foundation, noted that, "Acceleration is the most effective curriculum intervention for gifted children;" that, "For bright students, acceleration has long-term beneficial effects, both academically and socially;" and, "Acceleration is a virtually cost-free intervention" (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, eds., 2004).

Rogers (2002) and Kulik (2004) conducted a meta-analytic review of the research on the academic, social, and emotional effects of acceleration, and concluded, "The meta-analytic results show that bright students almost always benefit from accelerated programs of instruction. Two major findings support this conclusion. First, on achievement tests, bright accelerated youngsters usually perform like their bright, older non-accelerated classmates. Second, the accelerated youngsters usually score almost one grade-level higher on achievement tests than bright, same-age non-accelerated students do."

Despite the overwhelmingly positive findings on the effects of acceleration, to ensure its successful use, acceleration should involve planning and support of the student in the accelerated setting following the placement of the student.

These acceleration guidelines support the use of research-based criteria for identifying students for accelerated placement (Assouline, Colangelo, et al., 2003), reflect procedures shown to help ensure the success of students in accelerated settings (Southern and Jones, 2005), and incorporate input and feedback on practical issues related to acceleration from educators currently implementing kindergarten acceleration.

References

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- Gross, M.U.M. (1992). The use of radical acceleration in cases of extreme intellectual precocity. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 36(2), 91-99.
- Kulik, J.A., and Kulik, C.-L.C. (1989). Meta-analysis in educational research. *International Journal of Education Research*, 13, 221-340.
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- Rogers, K.B. (2002). *Re-forming gifted education: How parents and teachers can match the program to the child*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.
- Southern, W.T. and Jones, E. (2005.) *Acceleration Policy Study*. Columbus, OH: Ohio Department of Education.

Guidelines on Kindergarten Acceleration

In accordance with the belief that all children are entitled to an education commensurate with their particular needs, students who can exceed the grade-level indicators and benchmarks set forth in the standards must be afforded the opportunity and be encouraged to do so.

The District believes that such students often require access to advanced curriculum in order to realize their potential contribution to themselves and society.

All children learn and experience success given time and opportunity, but the degree to which academic content standards are met and the time it takes to reach the standards will vary from student to student. The District believes that all students, including advanced learners, should be challenged and supported to reach their full potential. For many advanced learners, this can best be achieved by affording them access to curriculum, learning environments, and instructional interventions more commonly provided to older peers.

These guidelines describe the process that shall be used for evaluating kindergarten students for possible accelerated placement into first grade and individual subject acceleration.

Referrals and Evaluation

- a) Any kindergarten student residing in the district may be referred by a teacher, administrator, gifted education specialist, guidance counselor, school psychologist, or a parent or legal guardian of the student to the principal of his or her school for evaluation for possible accelerated placement into first grade.
- b) Copies of these guidelines and referral forms for evaluation for possible whole-grade acceleration and individual subject acceleration shall be made available to district staff and parents at each school building. The principal of each school building (or his or her designee) shall screen referrals of students for evaluation for possible accelerated placement annually, and ensure that all staff he or she supervises is aware of procedures for referring students for evaluation for possible accelerated placement.
- c) The principal (or his or her designee) of the referred student's school shall screen all student referrals. Students meeting the initial guideline criteria for kindergarten acceleration shall be evaluated by the Acceleration Evaluation Committee;
- d) The principal (or his or her designee) of the referred student's school shall obtain written permission from the student's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) to evaluate the student for possible accelerated placement. The district shall evaluate all students who are referred by the principal for evaluation and whose parent(s) or legal guardian(s) have granted permission to evaluate the student for possible accelerated placement.

- e) Children who are referred for possible accelerated placement sixty or more days prior to the start of the second trimester shall be evaluated for possible accelerated placement at the start of the third trimester. In all other cases, evaluations of a referred child shall be scheduled at the student's principal's discretion and placed in the accelerated setting(s) at the time recommended by the acceleration evaluation committee – if the committee determines the child should be accelerated.

Pursuant to District Policy 5112, all children who will be the proper age for entrance to kindergarten or first grade by the thirty-first day of October of the school year for which admission is requested shall not be granted early admission to kindergarten.

- f) A parent or legal guardian of the evaluated student shall be notified in writing of the outcome of the evaluation process within 45 calendar days of the submission of the referral to the referred student's principal, excluding holidays. This notification shall include instructions for appealing the outcome of the evaluation process.
- g) A parent or legal guardian of the referred student may appeal in writing the decision of the evaluation committee to the Superintendent within thirty days of being notified of the committee's decision. The Superintendent shall review the appeal and notify the parent or legal guardian who filed the appeal of his or her final decision within thirty days of receiving the appeal. The Superintendent's decision shall be final.

Kindergarten Acceleration Evaluation Committee

1) Composition

- a) The referred student's principal shall convene an evaluation committee to determine the most appropriate available learning environment for the referred student. This committee shall be comprised of the following:
 - i) The principal from the child's current school;
 - ii) A current teacher of the referred student;
 - iii) A teacher at the grade level to which the student may be accelerated;
 - iv) A parent or legal guardian of the referred student or a representative designated by a parent or legal guardian of the referred student;
 - v) A gifted education teacher;

- vi) A school psychologist or district learning consultant with expertise in the administration of identified assessments for when considering academic acceleration.

2) The acceleration evaluation committee shall be charged with the following responsibilities:

- a) The acceleration evaluation committee shall conduct a fair and thorough evaluation of the student.
- b) Students considered for whole-grade acceleration shall be evaluated using the acceleration assessment process as described in the *Kindergarten Acceleration Assessment Process* section of these guidelines. The committee shall consider the student's own thoughts on possible accelerated placement in its deliberations.
- c) Students considered for individual subject acceleration shall be evaluated using the acceleration assessment process as described in the *Kindergarten Acceleration Assessment Process* section of these guidelines, to include a variety of data sources, including measures of achievement based on state academic content standards (in subjects for which the state had approved content standards) and consideration of the student's maturity and desire for accelerated placement. The committee shall consider the student's own thoughts on possible accelerated placement in its deliberations.
- d) The acceleration evaluation committee shall issue a written decision to the principal and the student's parent or legal guardian based on the outcome of the evaluation process. If a consensus recommendation cannot be reached by the committee, a decision regarding whether or not to accelerate the student will be determined by a majority vote of the committee membership.
- e) The acceleration evaluation committee shall develop a written acceleration plan for students who will be accelerated from kindergarten to first grade, or accelerated in one or more individual subject areas. The parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of the student shall be provided with a copy of the written acceleration plan. The written acceleration plan shall specify:
 - i) Placement of the student in an accelerated setting;
 - ii) Strategies to support a successful transition to the accelerated setting;
 - iii) An appropriate transition period for accelerated placement for students accelerated from kindergarten to first grade and kindergarten students accelerated in individual content areas.

- f) The acceleration committee shall designate a school staff member to ensure successful implementation of the written acceleration plan and to monitor the adjustment of the student to the accelerated setting.

Accelerated Placement

1. The acceleration evaluation committee shall specify an appropriate transition period for accelerated placement for students accelerated from kindergarten to first grade and kindergarten students accelerated in individual subject areas.
 - a. At any time during the transition period, a parent or legal guardian of the student may request in writing an alternative accelerated placement. In such cases, the principal shall direct the acceleration committee to consider other accelerative options and issue a decision within 30 days of receiving the request from the parent or legal guardian. If the student will be placed in an accelerated setting different from that initially recommended by the acceleration evaluation committee, the student's written acceleration plan shall be revised accordingly, and a new transition period shall be specified.
2. At the end of the transition period, the accelerated placement shall become permanent. The student's records shall be modified accordingly, and the acceleration implementation plan shall become part of the student's permanent record to facilitate continuous progress through the curriculum.

Kindergarten Acceleration Assessment Process

The kindergarten acceleration assessment process guidelines have been established to ensure equity across the schools regarding the practice of evaluating students being considered for kindergarten acceleration and kindergarten acceleration in individual subject areas. As such, the rules below apply only to students accelerated under the Kindergarten Acceleration Guidelines.

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. Substantial evidence supports whole-grade acceleration as an effective intervention for many advanced students when determined by an instrument that assists educators to consider all of the necessary and critical conditions and circumstances that will factor into the ultimate decision.

The *Kindergarten Acceleration Evaluation Committee* will use the objective assessment tools that are aligned to grade-level standards as the primary instrument to comprehensively guide discussions, assessment requirements and subsequent decisions regarding a student's whole-grade acceleration. These assessment tools are used by a team of school professionals when whole-grade acceleration is being considered. These tools serve as a guide for the assessment evaluation committee to discuss strengths and potential difficulties for a child being considered for acceleration in order to arrive at the most appropriate decision. The committee uses

information from many sources, including ability, aptitude, and achievement test scores, school history, observed adult and peer relationships, attitudes toward learning, and other factors that have bearing in the decision to accelerate. The systematic guidance provided by the tool brings objective data to the discussion and thus minimizes any potential bias for or against whole-grade acceleration.

The team approach ensures that all who have relevant knowledge of the child will have input in rating the child on various questions about important factors such as ability, attendance, motivation, attitude toward learning, etc. Input from the student is also required, although the student does not sit in on the team meeting, but rather gives his or her opinion about acceleration to an instructional member of the team.

The assessment evaluation guidelines emphasize the need to have processes for intervention, implementation, and transition planning for the student, as well as monitoring of the student's progress in the new grade.

The major factors considered during the acceleration assessment process are composed in 10 sections:

1. General information
2. School History
3. Critical Items
4. Assessment of Ability
5. Assessment of Aptitude
6. Assessment of Achievement
7. School and Academic Factors
8. Developmental Factors
9. Interpersonal Skills
10. Attitude and Support

Within each area, item scores are derived and weighted based on the responses value. The team must reach consensus on the most appropriate rating scale response. The final score becomes a primary guideline for predicting how successful the student will be as a candidate for whole-grade acceleration. In some cases, the student will not score high enough to be an “excellent” or “good” candidate for kindergarten acceleration, but will instead be a “marginal” or “poor” candidate. In such cases, the team will continue the discussion and determine whether other appropriate accommodations might be made for the student. These could include single-subject acceleration, enrichment, mentoring, or perhaps no special accommodation for the immediate time.

Section 1: General Information

The General Information section is intended to provide background information about the student, his or her family, and the acceleration evaluation team.

Section 2: School History

The School History section requires that the student's records, including previous evaluations, be available. A student's school history includes consideration of his or her academic pathway, beginning with formal schooling and extending through extracurricular activities and non-academic areas of potential talent. This section asks for information about the student's achievement in school and participation in extracurricular activities, particularly those in which he or she may have demonstrated exceptional skill. In addition, an evaluation of the student by the school psychologist, social worker or learning specialist will be attached. These reports will provide data that will help determine the student's social and emotional readiness for acceleration or if there are any special needs or accommodations that must be addressed.

Section 3: Critical Items

Critical items that indicate acceleration as *not* being the optimal choice for a student include, the student's ability, acceleration into a grade higher than a sibling, having a sibling in the same grade, and a student indicating he/she does not want to be accelerated. If any of the critical items apply to a student, whole-grade acceleration is *not* recommended.

Section 4: Assessment of Ability

Ability tests are designed to measure a student's general intelligence and ability to succeed in a school setting. They are most effective in determining the pacing of curricular material. The most reliable measure of general ability is obtained by administering an individual ability test. Individual administration provides detailed information and requires extensive interactions between the examiner and student. These interactions provide the examiner an opportunity to make behavioral observations, which are important when making placement decisions such as those about whole-grade acceleration. This testing also provides the most accurate data for assessment of ability.

An objective assessment will be administered, individually, to the student being considered for whole-grade acceleration by the school psychologist or district learning consultant. The assessment yields four separate composites: the Verbal Comprehension Index, the Perceptual Reasoning Index, the Working Memory Index, and the Processing Speed Index. The results will be reported in a written report format that objectively interprets the scores and provides feedback about the student's experience taking the test. This report will be a useful tool for the committee in discussing the student's general ability when being considered for whole-grade acceleration.

Section 5: Assessment of Aptitude

Aptitude tests indicate a student's potential to learn new material in a specific subject, the content of which typically has not been taught in school. Aptitude tests are different from achievement tests, which are highly dependent on mastery of specific content to which the student was exposed in the past. Instead, the aptitude tests measure a student's potential for *future* performance.

Aptitude tests can be general or subject-specific. Measuring both the general and specific aptitude of a child is important because the goal of acceleration is to place the student in an academic setting that is challenging and in which the student will continue to perform excellently.

Results from above-level achievement assessment are an excellent indicator of aptitude in a specific content area. Assessing a kindergarten student is challenging because the primary curriculum is less oriented to norm-referenced assessments. When considering kindergarten acceleration, an above-level test *must* be administered to evaluate aptitude and to obtain diagnostic information about the student's likelihood of being successful in the accelerated grade. A gap of two grade levels is necessary to ensure that the items on the test are far enough removed from the typical level of instruction to indicate that it is a measure of aptitude, not direct instruction.

As such, objective assessment tools aligned to grade-level standards will be used, individually, to assess the kindergarten student being considered for whole-grade acceleration by the Gifted and Talented teacher. Student's achievement of basic skills on the content areas taught in school will be assessed and measured. Each grade level assessment is representative of the skills taught at that grade level. Above grade level assessments will be used to measure aptitude to determine readiness for whole-grade acceleration.

Section 6: Assessment of Achievement

Achievement tests represent the degree to which students have learned specific subject matter content as reflected by the times and norms on the achievement tests. Measuring a student's level of achievement is important when making a decision about acceleration. Students who demonstrate very high general ability and equally high achievement are good candidates to consider for acceleration as a program option. If a student has not demonstrated achievement commensurate to his or her ability, it is important to determine why the student is underachieving. It may be due to lack of challenging curriculum; however, it may also be due to some other exceptionality (e.g., a specific learning disability or a behavior disorder) that may need to be addressed prior to considering acceleration.

When using achievement test results for consideration of acceleration, the student's performance is compared to the grade level for which the test was developed because the purpose is to determine mastery relative to students at grade level. Students being considered for whole-grade acceleration must demonstrate exceptional performance, as it is an indicator of readiness for more advanced work, whereas high achievement indicates mastery of grade-level work and does not ensure the success of whole-grade acceleration.

It is also important to consider whether or not the student has exceptional achievement in one or two areas or is exceptional in all areas. Whole-grade acceleration suggests that the student needs to have exceptional achievement in all areas. There may also be students who demonstrate extreme talent in specific subjects, such as reading. If these students' exceptional achievement is limited to just one or two subject areas, however, then whole-grade

acceleration is probably not recommended, and an alternative option for challenging work, such as single-subject acceleration, may be more appropriate and recommended by the committee.

The objective assessment tools will be used, individually, with the student being considered for whole-grade acceleration by the school psychologist or the Gifted and Talented teacher to measure the general content areas of reading, language, writing and mathematics. Student performance can be used to identify a student's strengths and weaknesses and to plan and target instruction.

Section 7: School and Academic Factors

The School and Academic Factors section identifies potential problems that an accelerated student may have by examining school-related issues such as attendance and the student's attitude toward learning. Problems in these areas may indicate potential difficulties or obstacles that could hamper the success of whole-grade acceleration.

Section 8: Developmental Factors

The Developmental Factors section considers relevant information regarding the student's physical makeup and abilities. These items are objective in nature (e.g., age, physical size, motor coordination) and influence the success of whole-grade acceleration.

Section 9: Interpersonal Skills

The Interpersonal Skills section assesses how effectively a student interacts with others, as well as how others interact with the student. A child with strong overall interpersonal skills has the tools to negotiate effectively within the school environment and to feel accepted by others. Students who feel accepted and satisfied with school have a better capability to interact successfully with others. Since a grade skip is an "exception," it demands greater interpersonal skill for a child to normalize the exception and to make it acceptable to the mainstream of the school. Effective interpersonal skills are thus an important component for a successful acceleration.

Section 10: Attitude and Support

The Attitude and Support section assesses how the individuals primarily involved in considering the grade skip feel about the process, and it takes into account how their views might impact the planning and preparation required in changing the student's academic program. This includes: student's attitude regarding whole-grade acceleration, parent attitude and support, school system attitude and support, and planning for acceleration prior to completing the final evaluation form.

Summary and Planning Report

At the conclusion of the *Acceleration Evaluation* the committee will summarize all of the important and relevant information and test scores for the student being considered for kindergarten acceleration. Guidelines are repeated in order to ensure a thorough and accurate assessment. Each team member must individually indicate in writing his or her agreement or disagreement with the team's conclusion, and then he or she must sign the report. The report will be used to facilitate discussion during the implementation of the agreed upon intervention plan. The principal is responsible for the ultimate decision and must sign the report before the plan can officially go into effect.

Once completed, multiple copies of the Summary and Planning Report will be made and distributed to the receiving teacher (s), the gifted and talented teacher, the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the child and one will be placed in the student's cumulative file.

The whole-grade acceleration or other agreed programming change will be divided into a) an implementation plan (a step-by-step plan of the program change), (b) a transition plan (the steps that will be taken to see that the student's adjustment to the program change is as easy as possible), and (c) a monitoring plan (the people who will monitor the student, and those who will convene a team meeting if circumstances demand). In addition, measures of student progress will be identified and monitored.

The written acceleration plan shall specify:

- a. placement of the student in an accelerated setting;
- b. strategies to support a successful transition to the accelerated setting;
- c. an appropriate transition period for accelerated placement for students accelerated from kindergarten to first grade and kindergarten students accelerated in individual content areas.