

## **Acceleration Case Study: Grade Accelerating a Fifth Grader in a Small, Rural School**

The student is a female with a quiet, people-pleasing, kind and sensitive personality. The first sign of giftedness was not early reading, since the parents didn't believe in "pushing" her to learn skills early, but rather an unusual vocabulary at an early age and very finely developed small motor skills. At the age of 3, other parents would stare at the child and parents as they walked through the daycare hallways conversing as she used large words in correct context. Writing and artwork were very detailed. The parents inquired at the school she was to attend if she could be evaluated for early entry to Kindergarten. They were discouraged by the principal, who stated it would make the difference in whether the student grew up to be a leader or a follower.

The student enjoyed Kindergarten and was often the teacher's helper. In first grade, she made many trips to the school office "ill" because she couldn't finish assignments in the given timeframe, we later discovered due to perfectionism issues. She immersed herself in books once she learned to read. After that year, the family moved to a small, rural school district due to a job change. In second grade, the parents noticed that she began tearing up assignments if she misspelled a word, and wrote them over again rather than have an erasure on the paper. If she got interested in a topic or author, she wanted to read everything she could find about the topic or every book written by that author. Her grades were always exemplary; teachers enjoyed having her as a student. She read when she finished assignments and helped other students. Essay questions were easy to her (provided she had unlimited time in which to answer); multiple choice disturbed her. She was always organized, never leaving anything "to the last minute."

In third grade, she was recommended for gifted screening in the visual arts. The state-mandated gifted screening later that year identified her as gifted with superior cognitive (all academic areas) and visual arts.

She had a teacher in fourth grade who allowed her to go at her own pace, and used curriculum compacting and differentiated curriculum methodologies. The student flew through her studies and threw herself into independent study projects, both from the classroom teacher and from a gifted pull-out program (a couple hours a week). Although she had always liked school, she now had an enthusiasm the parents hadn't seen before. She was allowed to read as much as she wanted once she finished her assignments, and the teacher brought in extra books for her. The parents believe she progressed through at least two years of learning in that one year. She began to hide her test scores from her classmates.

Within two weeks of the start of fifth grade, the parents and gifted intervention specialist knew something was wrong. She had a dull look in her eyes, she lost all organizational skills, she admitted to boredom at school. The gifted staff suggested she might need acceleration; the parents hesitated, thinking it would get better after the class got done with their beginning-of-the-year review. It only got worse. One morning, a couple of months into the school year, she had a panic-stricken look on her face because she had no

new books to take to school. Upon questioning, the parents discovered that she had been loading her backpack each day with books to read at school (she had outgrown the school library and hadn't gone to the community library that weekend). It became very clear that something needed to change – it was an issue of well being at this point. The parents contacted the gifted education staff for guidance and met with her classroom teacher. Both recommended acceleration.

When the parents asked their daughter if she would want to move to 6th grade (a different building – combined middle school/high school), her eyes brightened for the first time since the beginning of the school year, and she exclaimed, “Could I really do that?”

At the end of the second grading period of fifth grade, six weeks from state proficiencies, the parents met with the middle/high school principal and on Monday morning she began sixth grade “temporarily.” The stipulation was that she would have to show that she could pass the previous year’s state proficiency tests in order to remain in sixth grade and take that year’s upcoming proficiency tests for which the sixth grade class was preparing at that time.

The student entered into sixth grade, readily accepted by almost all of the other students, actively participating, talkative at the lunch table, confident of her success. Overnight, her eyes were no longer dull, her organizational skills returned and, for the first time in her life, she learned how to study (and how to accept less than an “A” on a test). She was caught up and at the top of her class within 6 weeks.

Why not differentiation within the same grade? Her giftedness extended across all academic areas. The student was far ahead of her age peers both academically and emotionally, and was hiding her giftedness in order to try to fit in socially and not be ridiculed by other students; she was becoming disdainful of the lack of maturity of her classmates. The full extent of this was not known by parents or teachers until the acceleration had been accomplished; it was only then that the student began to open up and tell how uncomfortable school had been for most of her school life (she was always the “model student” – nobody knew). It is also noted that the student was not interested in sports. However, after acceleration, she decided to try school sports and, although a bit smaller than her class peers, rose to the challenge and did quite well.

Below is what the student wrote one-and-a-half years after the acceleration:

I really liked being accelerated! The hardest thing was leaving my best friend behind. Also, starting in a new classroom with kids I didn't know as well was a little intimidating. It was a relief to leave my fifth grade class, though. I had more friends in the sixth grade – friends were “long-term” and didn't change every week or so, like they did in my fifth grade class. I also liked the more challenging work. It felt good to learn harder things. I liked the way things were set up at the high school better, such as class scheduling and library resources. Everything felt...right.

It must be noted that some boredom signs began to appear about a year after the acceleration. It has now been a little over two years since the acceleration, and boredom is beginning to take over the school day again. The gifted staff had warned the parents with the first acceleration, that she might be a candidate for radical acceleration. It appears they were correct, but she has adjusted so well socially that the parents are hesitant to “rock the boat.”