Model Student Acceleration Policy for Advanced Learners

Model Policy

2006

Ohio Department of Education & Workforce

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Model Student Acceleration Policy for Advanced Learners

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Introduction

The *Model Policy for Academic Acceleration* has been developed to assist districts in meeting the requirements of Section 3324.10 of HB 66:

(A) Prior to June 30, 2006, the state board of education shall adopt a model student acceleration policy addressing recommendations in the Department of Education's 2005 study conducted under the gifted research and demonstration grant program. The policy shall address, but not be limited to, whole grade acceleration, subject area acceleration, and early high school graduation.

(B) The board of education of each city, local, and exempted village school district shall implement a student acceleration policy to take effect beginning in the 2006-2007 school year. The policy shall either be the model adopted by the state board under division (A) of this section or a policy covering similar issues that is adopted by the district board.

As noted in Ohio's Academic Content Standards:

No individual or group should be excluded from the opportunity to learn, and all students are presumed capable of learning. *Every Ohio student, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency, disability or giftedness shall have access to a challenging, standards-based curriculum.*

The knowledge and skills defined in Ohio's academic content standards are within the reach of all students. Students, however, 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.*

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. 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.

Appropriate use of accelerated learning opportunities supports compliance with requirements in Ohio Administrative Code 3301-35-06:

> (A) Educational programs and experiences shall be designed and implemented to provide a general education of high quality to *all students…*
>
> Instruction shall include intervention that is designed to meet student needs. Instruction and instructional activities shall be:
>
> (1) Consistent with educational research and proven practices;
>
> (2) Appropriate to student ages, *developmental needs*, learning styles, *abilities*, and English proficiency;
>
> (3) *Designed to ease the transition of students from one educational environment to another*
>
> Sections (D), (E), and (F) of OAC 3301-35-06 specify that instruction for students in grades K-12 shall be provided in curricular areas identified in sections 3301.07, 3313.60, 3313.602, and 3313.90 of the Revised Code that are "*appropriate for the student's age and ability level…* and that reflect the mission and strategic plan of the district and school."

Research conducted nationally and within Ohio's 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.

However, acceleration is currently severely underutilized in Ohio. It is the hope of the State Board of Education and the Ohio Department of Education that this model policy will assist school districts in increasing their use of accelerated learning strategies to better meet the needs of advanced learners and help them reach their full potential.

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.

Examples:

- After completing the first-grade year, a student is placed in a third grade classroom (rather than a second grade classroom) on a full-time basis at the beginning of the next school year.

- After completing the fall semester of the fifth-grade year, a student is placed in the sixth grade at the start of the second semester 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.

Examples:

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

- A musically gifted sixth grade student is enrolled in a high school instrumental music course and returns to the sixth grade classroom for instruction in other subject areas.

EARLY ADMISSION TO KINDERGARTEN: The practice of admitting a student to kindergarten who has not yet reached the typical age at which students are admitted to kindergarten for the purpose of providing access to appropriately challenging learning opportunities.

Example:

- A child who can read independently and is socially similar to typical five year-olds is admitted to kindergarten, although he will not reach his fifth birthday until the end of the school year.

EARLY HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION: The practice of facilitating completion of the high school program in fewer than four years for the purpose of providing earlier than typical access to post-secondary educational opportunities.

Example:

- An advanced student is granted a diploma after spending only five semesters in high school by accumulating credits on an accelerated basis through "dual-credit" coursework taken while in middle school and by satisfying some high school graduation requirements by completing "educational options" rather than traditional courses. The student then enrolls in college as a full-time student at age 16.

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) conducted a meta-analytic review of the research on the academic, social, and emotional effects of acceleration, and found that gifted students who were admitted early to kindergarten showed approximately ½ year's worth of additional growth in all academic areas compared to age peers of equal ability, and students who were accelerated in a single subject area were the equivalent of 3/5 of a year ahead of similar age peers in that subject area. Kulik (2004) conducted a similar review of research on acceleration dating as far back as 1932 and similarly 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."

Yet, despite the overwhelmingly positive research findings on acceleration, acceleration is an intervention that is severely underused in Ohio's public schools. In a study commissioned by the Ohio Department of Education's Office for Exceptional Children, Southern and Jones (2005) reported that the majority of Ohio school districts did not accelerate a single student by early-admission to Kindergarten or whole grade acceleration ("grade skipping") in the 2004-2005 school year. Yet, in the handful of districts that were employing these strategies, experiences with acceleration were viewed very positively by educators and students. Case study districts, which ranged from small, rural districts to ethnically diverse urban districts, all reported successful use of acceleration as an intervention for high ability students and increasingly positive views toward acceleration among educators as use of acceleration increased and professional development was provided.

Southern and Jones (2005) and ODE gifted education staff have identified a number of barriers to the appropriate and frequent use of acceleration in Ohio. These barriers include:

- A pervasive lack of awareness of the research on acceleration and the pervasive myth among educators that, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary (e.g. Robinson, 2004; Gross, 1992), placing students with older peers is socially and emotionally harmful to bright children.

- District policies that included unreasonable criteria for acceleration or that explicitly discouraged the use of acceleration, sometimes using inaccurate information that is misleading to parents and educators.

- Structural barriers, particularly related to "single-subject" acceleration when acceleration would require a student to move back and forth between two school buildings.

- Confusion amongst educators regarding state and local policies.

The General Assembly's call for the State Board of Education to adopt a model policy on acceleration has created an opportunity to address many of the above barriers and to encourage professional development on this subject. ODE will publish and disseminate a research-based "toolkit" to aid districts in effectively implementing the model policy. ODE will also develop and implement a process for comparing to age peers the score(s) on relevant state accountability measures of any student who is accelerated according to an ODE-approved acceleration policy during the first year of his or her accelerated placement.

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.

This model policy supports the use of research-based criteria for identifying students for accelerated placement (Assouline, Colangelo, et al., 2003), reflects procedures shown to help ensure the success of students in accelerated settings (Southern and Jones, 2005), and incorporates input and feedback on practical issues related to acceleration from educators across Ohio.

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SUGGESTIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR DISTRICT ADOPTION OF MODEL POLICY

1) It is recommended that local boards of education adopt this policy.

2) If the district should revise any section of the model policy, such revisions shall be submitted to the Ohio Department of Education, Office for Exceptional Children, Gifted Services, prior to implementing the changes.

Policy on Academic Acceleration, Early Entrance to Kindergarten, and Early High School Graduation

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) Board of Education 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) Board of Education 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.

This policy describes the process that shall be used for evaluating students for possible accelerated placement and identifying students who should be granted early admission to kindergarten, accelerated in one or more individual subject areas, promoted to a higher grade level than their same-age peers, and granted early graduation from high school.

1) REFERRALS AND EVALUATION

a) Any 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. A student may refer himself or herself or a peer through a district staff member who has knowledge of the referred child's abilities.

b) Copies of this policy and referral forms for evaluation for possible early entrance, whole-grade acceleration, individual subject acceleration, and early high school graduation 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 solicit referrals of students for evaluation for possible accelerated placement annually, and ensure that all staff he or she supervises are 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 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 for evaluation and whose parent(s) or legal guardian(s) have granted permission to evaluate the student for possible accelerated placement.

d) Children who are referred for evaluation for possible accelerated placement sixty or more days prior to the start of the school year shall be evaluated in advance of the start of the school year so that the child may be placed in the accelerated placement on the first day of school. Children who are referred for possible accelerated placement sixty or more days prior to the start of the second semester shall be evaluated for possible accelerated placement at the start of the second semester. 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 Ohio Revised Code 3321.01, all children who will be the proper age for entrance to kindergarten or first grade by the first day of January of the school year for which admission is requested shall be evaluated upon the request of the child's parent or legal guardian. Children who will not yet be the proper age for entrance to kindergarten or first grade by the first day of January of the school year for which admission is requested shall also be evaluated for possible early admittance if referred by an educator within the district, a pre-school educator who knows

the child, or pediatrician or psychologist who knows the child. Children who will not yet be the proper age for entrance to kindergarten or first grade by the first day of January of the school year for which admission is requested may also be evaluated for possible early admittance at the discretion of the principal of the school to which the student may be admitted.

e) A parent or legal guardian of the evaluated student shall be notified in writing of the outcome of the evaluation process within 45 days of the submission of the referral to the referred student's principal. This notification shall include instructions for appealing the outcome of the evaluation process.

f) A parent or legal guardian of the referred student may appeal in writing the decision of the evaluation committee to the local 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. However, the student may be referred and evaluated again at the next available opportunity if he or she is again referred for evaluation by an individual eligible to make referrals as described in this policy.

2) ACCELERATION EVALUATION COMMITTEE

i) Composition

(1) The referred student's principal (or his or her designee) 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:

(a) A principal or assistant principal from the child's current school;

(b) A current teacher of the referred student (with the exception of students referred for possible early admission to kindergarten);

(c) A teacher at the grade level to which the student may be accelerated (with the exception of students referred for possible early graduation from high school);

(d) A parent or legal guardian of the referred student or a representative designated by a parent or legal guardian of the referred student;

(e) A gifted education coordinator or gifted intervention specialist. If a gifted coordinator or gifted intervention specialist is not available in the district, a school psychologist or guidance counselor with expertise in the appropriate use of academic acceleration may be substituted.

(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.

(i) Students considered for whole-grade acceleration and early entrance to kindergarten shall be evaluated using an acceleration assessment process approved by the Ohio Department of Education. The committee shall consider the student's own thoughts on possible accelerated placement in its deliberations.
(ii) Students considered for individual subject acceleration shall be evaluated using 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.

(iii) Students referred for possible early high school graduation shall be evaluated based on past academic performance, measures of achievement based on state academic content standards, and successful completion of state mandated graduation requirements. The committee shall consider the student's own thoughts on possible accelerated placement in its deliberations.

(b) 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.

(c) The acceleration evaluation committee shall develop a written acceleration plan for students who will be admitted early to kindergarten, whole-grade accelerated, 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) requirements and procedures for earning high school credit prior to entering high school (if applicable); and

(iv) an appropriate transition period for accelerated placement for early entrants to kindergarten, grade-level accelerated students, and students accelerated in individual content areas.

(d) For students the acceleration evaluation committee recommends for early high school graduation, the committee shall develop a written acceleration plan designed to allow the student to complete graduation requirements on an accelerated basis. This may include the provision of educational options in accordance with Ohio Administrative Code 3301-35-06 (G), waiving district prerequisite requirements for enrolling in advanced courses, waiving district graduation requirements that exceed those required by the state, and early promotion to sophomore (or higher) status to allow the student to take the Ohio Graduation Test.

(e) The acceleration evaluation 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.

3) ACCELERATED PLACEMENT

(a) The acceleration evaluation committee shall specify an appropriate transition period for accelerated placement for early entrants to kindergarten, grade-level accelerated students, and students accelerated in individual subject areas.

(i) At any time during the transition period, a parent or legal guardian of the student may request in writing that the student be withdrawn from accelerated placement. In such cases, the principal shall remove the student without repercussions from the accelerated placement.

(ii) 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.

b) 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.

Adopted on the _____day of_____ 2006
Signed: _____President of Board
Signed: _____Treasurer of Board