

Davis School District

Elementary: TAG: News

18 Variables to Consider For Whole-Grade Acceleration

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Though whole-grade acceleration is not as common as it used to be, it can still be an effective way to challenge and enrich a read and gifted student. There are many issues to consider during the decision making process, and most (if not all) are outlined in the third edition of the “Iowa Acceleration Scale Manual” written by educators from the Belin-Blank Center in Iowa City. The “Iowa Acceleration Scale” (IAS) is a form for educators, administrators, and parents to fill out about the potentially-accelerated student.

Though the IAS might have suggestions, it is also a personalizing tool, because the decisions should be made with the specific people and situation in mind. This is not a one-size-fits-all!

1. **Grade Placement under consideration**

The time in the student’s academic career is an important factor to consider. The IAS states: “it is most desirable to skip a grade as early in life as possible to avoid greater social and emotional disruptions that might occur after the child has established secure friendships and classmates.” Another consideration is the time during the school year the student should be advanced. Advancement at the winter break might mean that the student has time to attain some of the skills necessary to move on to the next grade. Acceleration at the beginning of the year seems to be the most popular option with the IAS.

2. **Current Grade Level of Sibling**

The IAS is adamant that if the student in question has siblings in the same grade or grade above that other forms of acceleration be considered. By altering the grade of a sibling is close proximity to another, the family dynamic could be altered as well.

3. **Attendance at School**

Though irregular attendance could be a coping mechanism or avoidance for not being challenged in school – the better the attendance, the better chance for success in whole-grade acceleration. The more the student is at school, the more time to work with that student and the more time to adjust to new surroundings.

4. **Motivation**

If the student has the motivation and loves school, that will make the potentially tougher workload easier to work with. Along with the next consideration, if the student is ready and willing to do the work the higher grades are working on then why stop him/her?

5. **Attitude Toward Learning**

A positive attitude toward learning would help an accelerated student to persevere and attempt harder work. Many think that whole-grade acceleration is a prevention of turning willing learners into bored and dejected zombies.

6. **Participation in School-Sponsored or Community-Sponsored Extracurricular Activities**

This factor is about support and social interaction. Activities outside of school might give a gifted child some time to befriend “both intellectual peers and age-peers.” Not only could observing adults see if the student in question is more socially outgoing with older students, but they could gauge the support the student gets outside of school.

7. **Academic Self-Concept**

A healthy self-concept of academic abilities would help a student to be realistic about what they can achieve while maintaining an “I can,” and “I will try,” attitude. Acceleration might bring about challenges they haven’t encountered thus far, therefore understanding and encouraging one’s own abilities is important.

8. **Age**

There are other considerations in this run of “Developmental Factors” considerations. The LAS states “This issue is more easily dealt with if the student is in the upper half of the age range at the current grade level. Acceleration will simply mean that the student will be in the lower half of the age range of the proposed grade level and therefore similar in many ways to new classmates.”

9. **Physical Size**

Students around the age of puberty might see a difference in height and other developmental factors, as younger or older peers. The biggest issue for some students and parents is that physical size could influence their participation (and success) in school sports. If acceleration is needed, the greater loss might be in not acceleration based solely on extracurricular activities.

10. **Motor Coordination**

This mostly affects students who are entering school or lower grades early. The most important thing is that the student’s teachers (receiving teacher, specials teachers, gifted teacher, etc.) all know that his/her motor coordination might not be as developed as his/her peers.

11. **Emotional Development**

Gifted students (like anyone) can sometimes be overly sensitive and highly emotional. This consideration seems to be the most popular reservation in moving a student ahead in a grade. The most important thing would be that the student could handle the stresses of being challenged.

12. **Behavior**

The goal for acceleration and any classes is that a student can be self-disciplined and work well in any classroom. Disruptive behavior can be a sign of frustration with “slow” instruction, “easy” work, “below-average” peers, etc. This could be the same disruptive behavior that is a deterrent for teacher’s placing them in TACG classes

13. Relationships with Peers

Oftentimes TAG students are most comfortable around older students and adults, because they find those people to be intellectual peers. It is not uncommon for younger students to feel like they are different because they are gifted. Sometimes this feeling of being "different" means that one can't relate to his/her age-peers.

14. Relationships with Teachers

The support that a teacher gives this student in acceleration is crucial. Sometimes, a TAG student can feel that teachers have not done all that they could to challenge them, and so builds distrust. Ideally a student would trust teachers around them, and therefore, go into this new experience with hope for another enriching experience!

15. Participation in Non-School Extracurricular Activities

If the student gets support from places outside of school, some of the big changes or setbacks at school might not be as bad. This also gives students an outlet and a stress release, should it be needed.

16. Student's Attitude Regarding Whole-Grade Acceleration

At some point in the process of considering these factors and filling out the IAS form someone will need to talk to the student and see what they think about advancing a grade. If the student does not feel positive about whole-grade acceleration other types of enrichment and acceleration could be possible.

17. Parent Attitude and Support

A parent's support is necessary for the student and teachers to all feel like a cohesive and supportive team. It is important that parents do not push too hard, but are advocates who provide a healthy level of encouragement.