

ACCELERATION REGULATIONS

Acceleration is the practice of placing certain students in programs or subjects considered above their grade level because they progress through an educational program more rapidly or at a younger age than is customary. It can take many forms within the classroom instructional program, such as curriculum compacting or telescoping (including curriculum beyond the current year), and self-paced instruction. In some cases, these types of instruction do not provide particular students with a sufficient academic challenge. This may lead to a decision regarding change of placement outside the typical grade level of the student.

Acceleration decisions are best made in the spring prior to the year of entry or as early as possible in the school year, and should be made using the most current research-based practices available.¹ A complete student profile should be created in order to determine appropriate placement. Multiple measures of readiness should be utilized including academic performance, social and emotional development, and language development. Benchmarks should necessitate a high level of achievement across both academic (e.g., student ability, aptitude and achievement) and non-academic measures (e.g., developmental factors such as age, physical size, motor coordination; interpersonal skills, including emotional development, behavior, relationships with peers and teachers; participation in non-school extracurricular activities; attitude and support). A designation for special education services or English Learner (EL) services will not impede a student's consideration for acceleration.

I. Definitions

A. Early Entrance to First Grade

The practice of admitting a student to first grade who has not yet reached the typical entry age by the start of the school year in order to provide access to appropriately challenging instruction.

B. Whole-Grade Acceleration

The practice of placing a student one or more years above the grade level corresponding to their chronological age on a full time basis in order to provide appropriately challenging instruction.

¹ The Institute for Research and Policy (IRPA), an outgrowth from the Templeton Report (2004) entitled "*A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students*," and its 10 year update companion, "*A Nation Empowered*" (2015), offers a continuous and comprehensive update about research and practice related to acceleration. Its findings suggest that acceleration is a significant service delivery model for students whose needs cannot be met within other types of differentiation or enrichment services. Additionally, the Templeton Report concludes that whole-grade acceleration can be an effective tool for students whose academic and social-emotional needs necessitate advanced study that transcends their grade-level assigned curriculum.

C. Single Subject (Content based) Acceleration

The practice of placing a student in an instructional setting for a specific subject above their current grade level by course or with older peers for part of the day in one or more content areas.

D. Early Graduation

A student is awarded an advanced level of instruction at least one year ahead of schedule. This may be accomplished by taking high school credits in middle school, through dual enrollment coursework, or through self-motivated, expedited advancement at the T.C. Satellite Campus.

E. Concurrent/Dual Enrollment

A student takes a course at one level and receives credit at both the high school and community college/university levels.

F. Advanced Placement

A student takes a course in high school that has an accompanying standardized examination that may be awarded college credit by the receiving institutions. The course must incorporate all topics specified by the College Board and Educational Testing Service on its standard syllabus for a given subject area and be approved by the College Board.

II. Acceleration Determination Factors for Elementary and Secondary Students

K-8 Factors:

1. Current research encourages the following factors for consideration for students in grades K-8: (At the high school level, the decision to accelerate a student should include counseling, previous achievement in a subject area, student interest and motivation, and maturity.)
 - Academic ability, aptitude and achievement: Is the student achieving two years above grade level (as measured by ability and on- and above-grade level assessments)? The two-year recommendation will ensure that the student will be successful in the new grade level (i.e., ranking in the top quartile of the new grade level, as determined by a comparison of two grade levels of test performance). A variety of ability tests can be used, including the Cognitive Abilities Test (COGAT), the Naglieri Non-Verbal Aptitude Test, the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, and the Stanford-Binet. On- and above-grade-level tests can include the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the Woodcock/Johnson Test of Achievement, and the Stanford Achievement Test.
 - School and Academic Factors:
 - (a) Grade placement under consideration and timing of such placement (should occur as early in the school year as possible and as early in schooling as possible)

- (b) Current grade level of siblings (i.e., addressing potential issues of introducing the accelerated child into the social and academic territory of older siblings). Research reports strongly recommend against acceleration of siblings into the same grade level.
 - (c) Attendance at school
 - (d) Motivation, attitude toward learning and academic self –concept
(student willingness to try new challenges; demonstrates a positive attitude about the acceleration under consideration)
 - (e) Participation in extracurricular activities (Does the child have outside of school supports and interests?) Research suggests that placement decisions should consider the importance of students’ current extracurricular involvement in a lower grade: Will the acceleration process preclude his or her continuation of that involvement at the higher grade level?
- Developmental Factors:
 - (a) Age - is the student in the upper half of the age range at the current grade level?
 - (b) Physical size/ Motor Coordination
 - Interpersonal Skills:
 - (a) Emotional development / relationships with peers, teacher - can the student handle the stresses of being challenged?
 - (b) Behavior - to what degree is the student self-disciplined and able to work well in the classroom?
 - Attitude and Support
 - (a) Is there support from both the school system and parents for acceleration?
 - (b) How does the student feel about the idea of acceleration/grade-based acceleration? (Grade-based acceleration is commonly referred to as “grade skipping.” Specifically, an elementary student is accelerated into one grade or higher beyond his or her normal placement.)

III. Single Subject Acceleration

In this approach, a student’s strength is in one specific content area, and his or her needs are best met by acceleration into the content presented at the higher grade level.

IV. Underage Placement in First Grade

The Code of Virginia requires that a child must be five years old by September 30th to enter kindergarten for that school year. This date also applies to potential underage placement into first grade. Accordingly, children younger than five years old by September 30th will not be enrolled in ACPS. If a student meets the criteria for consideration for underage grade one placement (including the age criteria discussed above), the parents/guardian of that student may request that their child be considered for underage grade one placement during the spring of the year which precedes the child’s admission for kindergarten. This provides adequate time for the placement process to be completed as follows:

The parent(s)/guardian(s) must:

- a. Complete the Alexandria City Public School (ACPS) registration form;
- b. Provide the following documentation regarding the child's kindergarten experience:
 - If a child has been attending a private or public kindergarten:
 - i. Provide a recommendation from the kindergarten teacher that references the child's intellectual, physical, emotional and social development;
 - ii. Provide a minimum of four samples of the child's work in kindergarten, if available. (Samples should be varied in content);
 - iii. Provide written reports of the child's progress from the school to parents, if available. (This includes any available formal evaluations);
 - iv. Make an appointment for the child's interview with the principal (and any staff designated by the principal); and
 - v. Provide testing/aptitude/IQ test results (if available).
 - If a child has never attended kindergarten:
 - i. Provide a statement from the parent or guardian describing the child's intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development;
 - ii. Provide a minimum of four samples of the child's work demonstrating advanced skills beyond the kindergarten level (samples should be varied in content);
 - iii. Make an appointment for the child's interview with the principal (and any staff designated by the principal); and
 - iv. Provide testing/aptitude/IQ test results (if available).

The principal will:

- a. Arrange for informal testing for the child being considered for underage placement. This may include an ability test administered individually by the school psychologist, end of kindergarten math assessment, a writing sample, appropriate spelling and reading assessments normally given by the Division, and/or the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) Assessment;
- b. Review all gathered information;
- c. Interview the child and make brief observation notes;
- d. Review all gathered information with school team to make placement decision; and
- e. Contact the parent(s)/guardian(s) regarding the decision.

V. The Acceleration Process at the Elementary Level (Whole-Grade or Single-Subject Acceleration)

Decisions concerning the acceleration of an elementary student will be team-based. The decision-making team will include the principal, the Talented and Gifted Program Coordinator, the student's parents/guardians, and the student's educational team. This will include the student's current teacher, a representative gifted and talented educator, school psychologist, school counselor, special education and English Learner (EL) specialists (if appropriate), and the receiving teacher(s) from the next grade.

1. The acceleration process begins with a written request from the parents/guardians or teacher(s) to the principal outlining the reasons for requesting acceleration.
2. The principal will make arrangements for recommended ability and achievement testing, the gathering of information from the current teacher and others familiar with the student regarding school and academic factors, developmental factors, interpersonal skills and the student's attitude and school level support utilizing the *Iowa Acceleration Scale* as a tool to support the decision making process within 45 days of receiving the request.
3. If the student is a good candidate for acceleration (as determined by the total score on the *Iowa Acceleration Scale* and the agreement of the school and parent-based decision-making team), then a written acceleration plan (WAP) should be created and used to oversee the child's educational path. This will ensure that the work of a full grade is not skipped, but areas of mastery compacted. Specifically, a viable pre-assessment/diagnostic assessment process should be written into the plan to ensure that any skills that may have been missed or omitted because of acceleration should be explicitly taught or retaught to ensure student mastery. This plan is to be developed in collaboration with school level administration, grade level teachers and a gifted educator. This plan should be monitored and adjusted annually to ensure the appropriate academic path is available to the student in the future. A signed copy of the WAP is placed in the student's permanent record.
4. A monitored transition period, not to exceed 30 days, should be established. During this period, parents can request a reversal in acceleration if desired.
5. This process should be applied equitably and systematically to all referred students.

VI. Acceleration at the Secondary Level

Acceleration decisions placing secondary students in courses which are commonly taught at grade levels above their current placement will be team-based. The decision-making team will include the Talented and Gifted Program Coordinator, the student's parents/guardians, and the student's educational team. This will include the student's current teacher, school psychologist, school counselor, special education and English Learner specialists (if appropriate), and the receiving teacher(s) from the next grade.

Factors involving student maturity and previous achievement in subject areas aligned with the acceleration request should be considered. Measures to determine maturity might include

sources such as teacher recommendations, teacher and/or counselor observations, and related data involving students' capacity for benefiting from the acceleration process (e.g., participation in extracurricular activities, counseling profiles, and leadership roles).

Dual Enrollment courses require students to apply to NOVA and place at the appropriate level on the Virginia Placement test. Additional prerequisites, if applicable for AP or Dual Enrollment courses, can be found in the ACPS Program of Studies.

VII. Appeal Process

Within 10 instructional days of notification of the decision, an appeal by the parent/guardian can be made in writing to the Executive Director of Elementary or Secondary Education as appropriate. An appeal can be requested for reconsideration of the results of any part of the acceleration process such as:

- 1) The data collection process;
- 2) The proceedings of the convened committee; and
- 3) The written acceleration plan.

Once the parent/guardian has submitted a letter to the school principal outlining the nature of the concern, they will convene a meeting with the parent/guardian, which may include other school personnel to discuss the concern.

The Executive Director of Elementary or Secondary Education as appropriate will issue a written final decision within 30 days of the appeal. This written notice should include the reason for the decision.

Established: June 22, 2017

Legal Refs.: Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended, § 22.1-78
8 VAC 20-131-50
8 VAC 20-131-90
22 VAC 40-180-10

Cross Refs.: IGBB Programs for Gifted Students
IKE Academic Promotion and Retention
IKE-R Academic Promotion and Retention Regulations
IKEB Acceleration
JO Student Records

Academic Ref.: Iowa Acceleration Scale, 3rd Edition Form: A guide for Whole-Grade Acceleration K-8. (2009). The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development.

Using the Iowa Acceleration Scale (IAS) as the guiding tool, the following steps should occur when making out of grade level placement decisions:

