

# **Acceleration Handbook**

## **Fountain-Fort Carson School District 8 - Gifted Education**

### **The Need for Differentiation**

In the traditional American school system, students are placed in a grade based on their chronological age. As any parent or guardian knows, children reach developmental milestones at different ages and rates. No matter how hard a parent or guardian tries, a child will not take their first steps until the child has developed the gross motor skills and coordination necessary for walking. Some children may walk at ten months, while other children may not walk until they are a year and a half. Toddlers can reach these developmental milestones at very different ages and still be considered “on target” in their growth and development.

However, something happens when a child turns five. The school system says, “Your child is now ready for kindergarten.” We have some kindergarten students who do not know their letters while some students are reading fluently. Some kindergarten students cannot yet count to ten, while others can add and subtract up to ten. As a result, the classroom teacher must develop different teaching strategies to meet the various needs of the children in the classroom. We call this differentiation. Differentiation is a teacher’s response to the learner’s needs.

Sometimes, a very precocious child will demonstrate an academic ability far above their same-age peers. Some students may be able to learn grade-level material at a much faster rate compared to other children in the class. In Fountain-Fort Carson School District, schools provide a numerous set of options to address the needs of students whose assessment data demonstrate a need for advanced academic opportunities beyond the typical grade-level curriculum.

### **Opportunities for Advanced Students**

#### **Grade-level Grouping:**

Classroom teachers may deliver instruction to a whole class of mixed-ability students, or they may create small groups within a class who demonstrate the same learning needs for more individualized learning instruction. Sometimes, within a grade-level, students are grouped together to create a classroom of students who share the same readiness level and work together towards common learning outcomes. One specific teacher may work with those students who are above grade-level in their skills and deliver instruction that is enriched, extended, or compacted.

#### **Enrichment:**

Enrichment is taking a grade-level topic of study and broadening the learning experience by examining its various dimensions. It makes learning more relevant and often has a theme and connects multiple subjects together. We may refer to this as “casting a wider net” for student learning.

### Extension:

Extension is taking grade-level curriculum beyond what is typical or expected. It allows students to think with greater depth and complexity. We may refer to this as “digging deeper” into a content or subject area.

### Compaction:

Compaction is taking grade-level material and allowing students to complete it in less time therefore providing time for enrichment or extension activities. We may refer to this as giving the student the “gifted of time.” The student completes grade-level material in a shorter period of time and then uses their spare time for enrichment or extension learning opportunities.

### Advanced/Accelerated/Honors Classes:

At the middle school and high school level, specific content classes have been designated to provide advanced students a greater level of complexity or a faster pace to challenge and promote their academic growth.

### Advanced Course Placement:

Beginning in middle school, students’ assessment data is examined to determine appropriate course placement. Depending on the readiness level of a student, a student may be recommended for an advanced/accelerated course. An example of this placement is an 8th grade student taking High School Integrated I Math.

### Advanced Placement (AP)/College Classes:

At the high school level, Advanced Placement (AP) and college courses are provided for students who have a desire to participate in a curriculum that is not only rigorous and challenging but may also earn them college level credits prior to high school graduation.

### Content Acceleration:

A student who demonstrates mastery of grade-level content may be provided with a course one or two years earlier than is typical. The student may go to a different grade-level for a specific course and then return to the classroom with their same-age peers for the remainder of the day. It is extremely important that before a student is accelerated to another grade for a content level, the student has demonstrated mastery of the current grade-level content. Sometimes, differences in grade-level scheduling preclude a student from actually attending a class in a different grade-level. In this situation, the student can be provided the accelerated curriculum within their grade-level classroom and work independently on the advanced content with teacher assistance and instruction.

### Grade-level Acceleration:

In very rare instances, a student may demonstrate a profile where grade-skipping is considered in order to meet a highly-advanced student's academic needs. The student must demonstrate a developmentally advanced capacity, readiness, and motivation to move to the next grade level. This option is taken very seriously by school personnel and requires additional assessments to determine if the student is a good candidate for grade-level acceleration. A student must demonstrate an advanced ability in ALL subject areas and display social and emotional skills appropriate for the new placement. This is a decision that will impact the student for the remainder of their school career. Fountain-Fort Carson School District 8 uses the *Iowa Acceleration Scale* to determine if a student is a candidate for grade acceleration. This research-based tool assists the school and the family with this important decision by using a scale to examine a student's intellectual and emotional development, as well as their maturity. This process attempts to take the subjective decision of acceleration and make it more objective by using the scale as a tool to support a recommendation. Although the family is part of this important process, **the final recommendation for or against acceleration will reside with the school team.**

### The Iowa Acceleration Scale

In Fountain-Fort Carson School District, we believe that all students deserve a curriculum that is challenging and promotes individual achievement and growth. We believe that in most cases, it is in the best interest of the student to remain with their age-mate and receive differentiated learning opportunities in order to support student achievement. There are many ways to modify the curriculum for gifted students: enrichment, extension, compaction, or content-level acceleration. There are however, a relatively small number of exceptionally gifted students who need a more radical form of curriculum modification. The *Iowa Acceleration Scale (IAS)* is used in Fountain-Fort Carson School District for whole-grade acceleration recommendations. The IAS is the result of extensive research, as well as consultations with both educators and families who have had experience with whole-grade acceleration, which is also known as grade-skipping. The IAS was developed to provide a systematic, comprehensive structure to guide the decision about acceleration. It looks at many factors in the student's life and educational history, including the student's physical and social/emotional development. The IAS serves as the foundation for discussion between the school and family concerning this important issue.

### Advantages of the Iowa Acceleration Scale:

- An objective look at the student
- An analysis of major factors to be considered when making a decision about whole-grade acceleration
- Guidelines for weighting the relative importance of the major factors
- Documentation of the student's strengths and areas of concern
- A numerical range to guide the discussion and subsequent decisions regarding

acceleration

- A standard of comparison with student who have had successful accelerations
- A standardized procedure for schools to use in considering whole-grade acceleration

### Components of the Iowa Acceleration Scale:

**Ability:** In Fountain-Fort Carson School District, the student's cognitive ability will be assessed using the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), if available, or an individually administered cognitive assessment. If the acceleration team determines that an individually administered cognitive assessment is most appropriate, the assessment will be administered by a school psychologist.

**Aptitude:** A student's achievement in multiple content areas should be examined to determine the depth of knowledge of above grade-level skills. Above-level tests provide information about the student's likelihood of being successful in the accelerated grade. The Iowa Assessments measure a student's national percentile ranking in reading, language, mathematics, social studies, and science. This assessment is administered two grades above the student's current grade.

**Achievement:** Classroom performance, grades, and observations provide additional data on a student's academic ability compared to same-age peers. CMAS and Illuminate assessment data should also be examined to determine how well a student has mastered grade-level standards.

**School Factors:** Will the student's acceleration require a different school location? Will the student now be in the same grade-level as a sibling? Does the student have an issue with school attendance? Is the student motivated to learn? Does the student become frustrated with new learning experiences? Does the student participate in extracurricular activities? Does the student have a positive self-concept?

**Developmental Factors:** What is the student's age compared to their present grade-level? What is the student's physical size compared to same-age peers? How are the student's fine and gross motor skills?

**Interpersonal Skills:** A student's ability to consider feedback and criticism and how they modify inappropriate behavior should be closely considered. Is the student's behavior positive and effective? Does the student demonstrate good interpersonal skills with age-mates, older peers, and adults? Is the student perceived as a leader or role model?

**Attitude and Support:** When considering acceleration, the most important factor is if the student WANTS to be accelerated. If acceleration is going to be successful, the student must be enthusiastic about moving to another grade-level. A second important factor is the level of support from the family and their relationship with the school. Acceleration requires a team that works together for the student's success.

## **Whole-Grade Acceleration Student Profile**

What is the profile of a student who might be a good candidate for acceleration?

Ability Score: Standard age score of 140 or above.

Aptitude: Iowa Assessments (2 years above grade level) - Scores above the 60th percentile in reading, language, math, and science.

Achievement: CMAS English Language Arts and Math scores in the Exceeded range.  
Classroom performance one to two years above grade-level.

School Factors: The student should demonstrate a motivation for learning and seek rigorous and challenging learning experiences. The student should demonstrate a positive and realistic self-concept.

Developmental Factors: It is preferable for the student to have the fine motor coordination necessary to perform more advanced academic tasks. For example, if the student doesn't have the fine motor skills to complete assignments at the new grade level, acceleration would not be favorable. Writing skills should match the requirements of the accelerated grade-level.

Interpersonal Skills: The student should be able to accept feedback and appropriate criticism and modify behavior, when necessary. Their behavior should be socially mature and demonstrate an ability to take on greater responsibilities. Although it is common for advanced students to have some difficulty with age-mates, they should demonstrate an ability to create friendships with older students, younger students, or adults. The student should have strong relationships with teachers.

Attitude and Support: A student **MUST** want to be accelerated and be eager to take on new challenges. The family should be supportive of the student, school, and new grade and not place pressure on the student for "perfect" grades or superior achievement. If acceleration is recommended, an implementation plan should be created to support the student through the process. Teachers, administration, family members, and the student should enthusiastically support a decision for acceleration.

### **Additional Guiding Questions for Whole-Grade Acceleration**

- Does my student want to play high school athletics? How will their younger age impact this goal?
- How will my student feel when they are the youngest in the class and potentially last to

get a driver's license?

- Does my student have the ability to complete the written work required at the new grade level?
- Does my student have the ability to easily make new friends, adapt to new settings, and take on challenges?
- Does my student feel immense pressure to perform and achieve?
- Does my student have the ability to focus for a longer period of instructional time?
- Will grade acceleration have an impact on my student's interests, hobbies, and activities outside of the school setting?