



FAQs

Is this the first year this program has been offered?

This is a brand new program for Waco ISD; however, the Early College program (after which ACCELERATE is modeled) is active all over the country, with the highest progression rate to a four-year degree for all students of any current program.

What is the purpose of the ACCELERATE program?

The Early Degree program allows Waco ISD students to complete a college degree while in high school to streamline the time spent in post-secondary schooling as well as cut the expense of a four-year degree, increasing the likelihood of four-year degree completion. While some students in Waco ISD have both the financial means and the desire to attend a four-year college, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board statistics show that this is not the common path for the majority of Waco ISD graduates. Therefore, this program serves to meet the needs of our Waco ISD students and parents, providing a pathway to four-year degree completion. Even if the entire degree is not completed, students will more easily matriculate into college by possessing background knowledge of college processes and rigor. If students choose not to complete a four-year degree, ACCELERATE graduates will have college experience and hours that can be used to get better jobs upon graduation.

For those Waco ISD students who can afford to attend college and do have the motivation to move forward toward a post-secondary four-year degree, ACCELERATE can open many new opportunities. Completing a degree while in high school allows a student to finish his or her Bachelor's degree in only two additional years. If he or she still wishes to attend college for four years after high school, the student can complete a Bachelor's degree with multiple minors, a double Bachelor's degree program, or finish both his or her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in the same time it would have taken to complete one Bachelor's degree alone.

What are the different degree plan offerings, and how were they chosen?

The degree plan offerings for ACCELERATE parallel the academies offered at both University High School and Waco High School. This allows a student to choose both an academy in which to participate and to pursue a degree within that area. The four-year plans were closely scrutinized by administrators within Waco ISD and at McLennan Community College. The plans are the products of five months' worth of collaboration between the two organizations. Degrees are offered in Allied Health, General Science, Business, Criminal Justice, Information Systems and Technology, and Liberal Arts (current freshman cannot participate in the Information Systems program as they would not have time to complete the missing dual credit courses).

Are the dual credit courses always transferable?

Credit from Texas junior colleges is transferrable as long as the institutions receiving the courses offer comparable classes. The majority of the ACCELERATE plans say "Core Complete." This means that students have met the requirements of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board that governs all Texas public institutions that reward higher education degrees. Students declared "Core Complete" at one Texas public school must be accepted at any other Texas public institution of higher education as "Core Complete," even if the second institution has added classes to its core. A student who graduates with a degree would also have an added admissions benefit because he or she has proven the ability to succeed in college coursework; some colleges will also allow degreed students to apply as a TRANSFER student rather than as a FRESHMAN applicant or provide special applications for Early Degree freshman applicants.

How do we know what classes will be accepted by universities, particularly out of state? Who would help us navigate that?

The advisors at MCC, our partner school, are extremely knowledgeable about transfer credits and acceptance of classes; however, to verify transfer policies for any college, a call to the transfer coordinator (whose name can be found on the college's website) can determine how coursework will be accepted once the student is admitted to the University. These transfer coordinators are the best resources for a student in the ACCELERATE program, since even MCC acknowledges that colleges set their own course transfer policies.

Will this program allow my child to have the full college experience?

This program would not limit a student from having the full college experience in any way. He or she would simply enter college at the grade level determined by his or her number of credits, allowing movement into major classes and faster graduation--saving both time and money. For gifted students, acceleration is the only proven research strategy that addresses giftedness appropriately. While 20 different methods of acceleration exist, at the high school level, Dual Credit is one of the most recognized. This type of acceleration has shown positive short-term and long-term impacts on students, academically, socio-emotionally, and psychologically. Gifted students who accelerated in high school and who moved into the work force sooner have reported higher productivity, higher job satisfaction, and increased upward movement in their professions in national studies.

What if a student chooses a degree path and then decides his/her interest is elsewhere?

A great degree of flexibility exists within ACCELERATE, as the majority of the pathways share the first two years of dual credit courses, providing students the opportunity to change pathways while still remaining on track for a degree by the time of high school graduation.

How will this affect my child's ability to maintain the highest possible GPA?

All Dual Credit classes carry the highest GPA weight assigned in Waco ISD. Since these classes affect both the student's high school and college GPAs, we will closely monitor the students' performance to ensure success. Four-year degree-granting institutions seek to admit those students who have shown the effort to enroll in the highest level of classes offered and complete them with success. ACCELERATE will be the most rigorous plan offered in Waco ISD (or that can be offered in any school district in the nation).

What are the alternatives to ACCELERATE?

Alternatives to ACCELERATE include taking fewer (but at least 18 hours total) Dual Credit courses to qualify for MCC's "+1 Program," where MCC will guarantee a student an Associate's Degree within one calendar year of high school graduation (as long as the correct Dual Credit courses are taken in high school). Students can also choose to complete a four-year plan composed of Dual Credit courses combined with Advanced Placement courses.

Who is the best resource to which we should turn to find the answers to any questions we encounter?

The department of Advanced Academics will oversee the ACCELERATE plan (as it does with all academic Dual Credit). Therefore, if any problems arise, students or parents could ultimately contact that office. However, on each campus, a College and Career Readiness counselor can answer queries and provide guidance.

What is the downside of participation in ACCELERATE?

Because students are accelerating their instruction by up to four grade levels, they must consider limiting their participation in some activities. Students should also remember that these are classes for college credit, and college professors do not care that a student had a baseball game or UIL activity on the day an assignment is due—when an assignment is due, it is due. Typically, our students overload themselves with activities and sports that avert their focus from academics (or cause them to have tremendous worry about those academics), causing their performance in all to suffer. However, if students plan to complete this aggressive program successfully, then they should stay focused mainly on their academic performance. This does not mean giving up all extra-curricular activities, but it does mean that they should make wise choices when investing their time. While the work may increase and students will need increasingly more self-motivation to finish the degree by high school graduation, the result will be two years of college savings—time and money.

What if a student decides she/he does not want to participate after entering the program?

This is not a program that students must mandatorily complete during their four years of high school; however, it is a program that cannot be entered late. If a student decides to leave his or her degree track, the student's high school counselor will ensure that the student will still meet all graduation requirements with his or her remaining classes. Fortunately, the student will retain the earned college hours to use at a post-secondary institution of his or her choosing.

Is the June orientation mandatory for all students?

*The summer orientation for **incoming freshman**, scheduled for June 6-17, 2016, is mandatory and serves a two-pronged purpose. First, the orientation allows us to acquaint students with those pieces of information that are unique to Dual Credit, such as how to log into the college online resources, how to communicate with professors, what a credit is, how to read a syllabus, how to submit assignments, and the differences between their regular HS classes and college classes. Second, the two weeks will allow us to prepare and test students on the TSI (Texas Success Initiative assessment). A passing TSI score is required for every student enrolled in a credit-earning college course. The earlier in the two weeks those students pass the TSI, the earlier they will be released from the orientation. Therefore, while the orientation is mandatory, students will stay for the period of time that is necessary for them to pass the TSI. Students that have already taken the Algebra I EOC in 8th grade and passed with a score of 4000 or higher will earn an exemption from the TSI math test. Students who have not already passed the Writing TSI by the time they complete sophomore year can also earn an exemption from the TSI Writing test if they score 4000 or higher on the English II End-of-Course exam in the spring of sophomore year. We would hope, however, that all students would have passed all parts of the TSI by this point and not require the exemption.*

Will ACCELERATE students be given a preference when registering for Dual Credit classes?

Most definitely. The Dual Credit classes that the district will add in the next three years are designed specifically to meet the needs of this program. However, once ACCELERATE students have been placed in the courses required for their degree plans, other students who are interested and qualified to take Dual Credit courses may also enroll for the classes if they have decided not to participate in ACCELERATE.

If a student chooses to take an Advanced Placement section of a class and makes a 3, 4, or 5 on the exam, will that meet the requirements for that course within the ACCELERATE plan?

This answer would depend upon the AP class taken, when it is taken, and whether MCC accepts the score earned as a replacement for the course (this is the same policy with most colleges). If the course for replacement is taken over a yearlong period and will replace a course that is a prerequisite for another class, then participating in the Advanced Placement class could delay completion of the degree or force the student to complete a course over the summer to stay on his or her timeline. However, students do not have to be in the AP course to take the AP exam. If a student wished to take an AP exam after completing the comparable DC course or for an AP course that is completed online, then the student has that ability as long as he or she can prove that preparation for the exam has occurred.

Nothing on the ACCELERATE plans that includes traditional requirements for graduation, such as Physical Education. Is that requirement eliminated for ACCELERATE students?

Since the majority of high school students enroll in PE in 8th grade to fulfill their high school PE requirement, the course has not been included on the plans. If, however, this course was not completed in middle school, then the student's high school counselor will ensure that course is included in his or her four-year plan as one of the ELECTIVES available in each semester. All other graduation requirements (as well as requirements for the endorsements listed at the top of each plan) have been cross-walked with Dual Credit courses that fulfill both high school diploma and college degree requirements.