

Whole-Grade Acceleration: A Family Reflection Guide



What Is Whole-Grade Acceleration?

Whole-grade acceleration allows a student to advance to the next grade level full-time when there is substantial evidence that the student is ready – academically, socially, and emotionally. This decision affects various aspects of a student's educational journey, including:

- **Academic pacing**
- **Peer relationships**
- **Extracurricular eligibility**
- **Long-term high school planning**
- **College entrance timeline**

Given its significant impact on a child's entire educational experience, whole-grade acceleration requires careful and thoughtful consideration. Lakota Local Schools employs the Iowa Acceleration Scale, a research-based tool, to guide these decisions.

Important First Consideration

Lakota classrooms are structured to provide differentiation, enrichment, and challenge within the same grade-level setting. Whole-grade acceleration is considered when:

- Differentiation and enrichment fail to meet the student's needs.
- The student demonstrates readiness across multiple domains.

Acceleration is not the first strategy; it is one among several options to ensure appropriate challenge. Lakota's goal is not to move students through school faster, but to ensure they are learning at an appropriate level of challenge.

Questions for Families to Consider

Before requesting whole-grade acceleration, families may wish to reflect on the following:

Academic Readiness

- Does my child consistently demonstrate mastery of current grade-level standards early in the school year?
- Does my child perform well above grade level across multiple subject areas – not just one?
- Does my child require little repetition to retain new material?
- Does my child apply knowledge in flexible and complex ways?

Social & Emotional Readiness

- Is my child comfortable interacting with older students?
- How does my child respond to challenge, correction, or setbacks?
- Does my child demonstrate resilience when work becomes difficult?
- Is my child confident without becoming easily discouraged?

Long-Term Considerations

- How will being younger than classmates impact middle and high school experiences?
- How might earlier access to driving, employment, extracurricular eligibility, or social activities affect my child?
- How will earlier high school graduation impact post-secondary readiness?
- Is my child developmentally prepared for these long-term implications?

Whole-grade acceleration is not just about this year – it influences a student's entire academic journey.

Student Voice

- Does my child express a desire to move ahead?
- Does my child understand what changing grades means?
- Is my child motivated by challenge – or simply by finishing sooner?

A student's perspective is a crucial part of the evaluation process.

When Whole-Grade Acceleration May Not Be Best

Whole-grade acceleration may not be appropriate if:

- Advanced performance is limited to one subject area.
- The student shows academic strength but struggles with organization or emotional regulation.
- Social development is significantly asynchronous.
- The primary goal is early graduation rather than appropriate challenge.

In many cases, subject acceleration, enrichment, advanced coursework, or differentiation may better support growth while maintaining developmental alignment.

How Decisions Are Made

Lakota uses a structured evaluation process that includes:

- Review of academic performance and assessment data
- Consideration of developmental and social-emotional factors
- Use of the Iowa Acceleration Scale
- Input from teachers, administrators, the Gifted Intervention Specialist, the family, and the student (when appropriate)
- A written recommendation from the Acceleration Evaluation Committee

If approved, a transition period is established to ensure appropriate adjustment.

Our Commitment

Lakota Local Schools is dedicated to ensuring that every gifted learner is challenged and supported to thrive, both in the classroom and beyond graduation. Whole-grade acceleration is one pathway among several designed to meet the needs of advanced learners. If you are considering this option, we encourage you to speak with your child's teacher or Gifted Intervention Specialist to explore the full range of options available.