

# DERRY TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

## GRADE ACCELERATION GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES



### **Definition:**

Grade acceleration allows a student to proceed to an advanced grade level in all subject areas to meet the student's ability and performance needs.

### **Benefits/Concerns:**

Grade acceleration should be preceded by much deliberation. While research supports that, if carefully selected, students do very well academically and socially, this is the most aggressive form of acceleration. The greatest benefit of grade acceleration is that it provides, for some, the greater level of intellectual stimulation that is required to meet their intellectual readiness for challenges and growth. In most cases, students accelerated as a result of a careful formal evaluation process perform well in the advanced setting. Most studies of acceleration consider only students who were recommended for acceleration based on evidence of social, as well as academic, maturity. Therefore, the selection process for this option of service should be certain to include an examination of the total child. Acceleration for well-selected students is likely to succeed, if everyone involved is willing to make necessary adjustments in expectations for classroom behavior and performance.

Grade-skipping for selected students generally appears to be beneficial at all levels. However, the greatest research-supported academic and social effects seem to be in grades 3-6. It appears that if intervention for underachievement is not carried out by the end of the upper elementary grades, it may be more difficult to do so in later years. Yet, there are reports of successful instances of grade acceleration in middle school and high school. Generally, it is recommended that students skip only one grade at a time. However, students may need to skip another grade at a later time.

For some, one area of concern is the issue of lagging physical development. The most common concern that is expressed is for boys who may either lack the ability to sit still in a classroom setting or who may later wish to engage in sports where size and weight are important for success. This same concern should be equally relevant to girls. There is some evidence that gifted boys who are accelerated are less likely than controls to participate in contact sports, but this issue has not been adequately addressed in existing literature. Acceleration may place some students, either at the time of the decision or later, at a competitive disadvantage in their particular sport. Parents and students should be made aware of this and should be encouraged to discuss any concerns that they may have.

Another concern is that the accelerated student might have "gaps" in his or her academic background. Therefore, potential accelerants should be given a curriculum-based assessment. These students would be tested using the curriculum that is offered in their school for the grade that they are planning to skip. The purpose of this testing is to determine what a student knows and doesn't know. If the student then works on "filling the gaps", then the student begins the new grade with the same knowledge base as the other students in the grade.

There are some additional cautions concerning grade acceleration. One relates to its timing. It is easier to skip a grade at the beginning of the year, rather than mid-term. However, there are times when mid-year advancement is desirable. Transition years (the years before a move to a new building) seem to be the logical times for implementing this option. This seems sensible because the accelerant is one of many new students in a new school. However, research indicates that this may not necessarily be true. For some students, a new building plus a new grade/class appears to be too difficult an adjustment.

Another important rule of thumb in acceleration is that a student should not be skipped into the same grade as an older sibling. Such a move will introduce the accelerated child into the social and academic territory of the older sibling. Even if a school offers more than one class at the given grade level or if the accelerated student could be moved to another school, acceleration into the same grade as an older sibling is not recommended.

All grade acceleration should be arranged on a trial basis of six-weeks, with counseling services available to the student.

## **Participation Requirements**

### **Eligibility Criteria:**

Given the aggressiveness of this approach, Derry Township School District requires that a comprehensive psychological evaluation of the student's intellectual functioning, academic skill level, and social-emotional adjustment need be completed prior to any decision for grade acceleration. To be considered for grade acceleration, the following criteria will be considered:

- a. Have already scored in the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile or above on grade level achievement and aptitude tests. Grade level achievement tests to be considered are the following: PSSA, Keystone, DIBELS, STAR
- b. Demonstrate achievement of 130 or above on individual measures of achievement (Example: Woodcock Johnson IV Tests of Achievement)
- c. Have an IQ of 140 or above,
- d. Local assessments,
- e. Would not be accelerated into the same grade as an older sibling,
- f. Appear socially and emotionally mature, based upon observation,
- g. Evidence ability for independent work,
- h. Express a desire to move ahead without undue pressure by parent/guardian, and
- i. Be free of any serious adjustment or physical development issues.

The "receiving teacher" is an essential person in this decision; therefore, the class to which the student will be advanced should be a major part of the decision-making process.

### **Application Process**

#### **Initial Contact:**

The grade acceleration process can be initiated by the student's teacher, parent/guardian, or gifted teacher. A meeting of these three persons, plus the building principal, will be held to discuss the appropriateness of and interest in proceeding. If the process is to proceed, the parent/guardian must complete an application form which includes written consent for the required formal evaluation of the student. (See Grade Acceleration Application)

#### **Reevaluation:**

A comprehensive multidisciplinary reevaluation of the student's intellectual functioning, academic skill level, and social-emotional adjustment will be completed by the Gifted Multidisciplinary Evaluation team. Tests may include cognitive ability and academic achievement measures. In addition, supplemental assessments such as writing samples, reading assessments, out-of-grade year-end inventories and others may be utilized as necessary.

#### **Assessment Outcome:**

At the conclusion of the assessment, a review conference will be scheduled with the parent/guardian, building principal, receiving teacher, and psychologist. Verification of acceptance or rejection will also be made in writing to the parent/guardian via the Notice of Recommended Assignment (NORA).

#### **Trial Period:**

Students eligible for Grade Acceleration are assigned to the advanced classes for a six-week trial period. After this time, the GIEP team will review the child's performance to determine whether he/she should continue in this placement. The determination of final placement is the decision of the GIEP team. Student progress will be reviewed on a marking period basis by the teacher and parent/guardian.

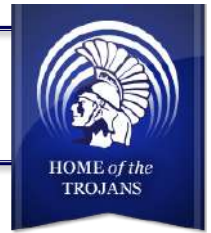
#### **Deadlines:**

Note: If a date falls on a weekend or holiday, the deadline moves to the next school day.

Last day for application for Grade Acceleration: April 1<sup>st</sup>  
Notification of trial approval/denial: June 1<sup>st</sup>  
Notification of formal approval/denial: October 15<sup>th</sup>

# DERRY TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

## GRADE ACCELERATION APPLICATION



### To be completed by the student or parent/guardian:

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I request acceleration from grade \_\_\_\_\_ to grade \_\_\_\_\_.

*\*Please submit a letter explaining how this will benefit you/student.*

### To be completed by parent or guardian:

I grant permission for assessments in application of grade acceleration.

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### To be completed by school staff:

Date of receipt of application: \_\_\_\_\_

Gifted Teacher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Building Principal Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Recommendation of Acceleration Committee:

Acceleration request approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Acceleration request denied: \_\_\_\_\_

Reasons/Notes \_\_\_\_\_

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Building Principal Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Plan for student learning:

Attach the implementation plan including class placement or independent study plans, and any other important considerations.