Kansas Effective Practices
Instructional Toolkit

Implementing Research and Resources Into Action
Research Lesson 3: Subject/Grade-Based Acceleration

From the National Report: A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students

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What is Acceleration?

Acceleration is an educational intervention that moves students through an educational program at a faster than usual rate or younger than typical age.

Acceleration includes single-subject acceleration, whole-grade-skipping, early-entrance to school, and Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Acceleration means matching the level, complexity, and pace of the curriculum with the readiness and motivation of the student. It is important to define what acceleration is not. Acceleration does not mean pushing a child. It does not mean forcing a child to learn advanced material or socialize with older children before he or she is ready. Acceleration is really about letting students soar. Acceleration is a strategy that respects individual differences and acknowledges the fact that some of these differences merit educational flexibility. It provides cumulative educational advantage.

Who should be Accelerated?

Students who would benefit from acceleration are exceptional in terms of academic ability and readiness. Evidence that a student has mastered the current curriculum and is ready for faster-paced and more complex coursework.

Addressing Need not Numbers:

Individual differences in education are most pronounced at the extremes.

The best way to maximize the academic performance of bright students is to maximize the pace and level of the curriculum.

Acceleration is about appropriate educational planning. It is about matching the level, complexity, and pace of the curriculum with the readiness and motivation of the student.

Dr. Brian Start, University of Melbourne, spent 10 years measuring the comparative learning rates of children of varying abilities and has concluded that the learning rate of children above 130 IQ (gifted) is approximately 8 times faster than for children below 70 IQ (mildly mentally impaired) 1995.

- Re-Forming Gifted Education
Matching the Program to the Child
- Karen B. Rogers

Gifted students are significantly more likely to forget or mislearn science and math when they are forced to review or drill with it more than 2 to 3 times. In other words, constant repetition of the regular classroom so necessary for mastery among the general population is actually detrimental to long-term storage and retrieval of technical content for gifted students.

- Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth-Johns Hopkins
- Julian Stanley, 1993

Talent Search Information

Those 7th grade students who take the ACT/SAT and score above the average high school senior - can absorb a whole year's worth of high school in three weeks.

Middle-School Students who are the highest scorers on the SAT can absorb a year's worth of high school in just about a week and a half.

- A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students

The Social-Emotional Effects of Acceleration:

The answer from the research is that almost all bright students who are screened carefully for acceleration are as socially well adjusted as their older classmates.
In fact accelerants are happier with older students who share their interests.

Age is only one indicator of readiness. But age plus advanced skills and maturity is a different equation.

Grade-Skipping

Academic achievement gains of students were positive-1/2 year's additional growth in all academic areas.

Subject Acceleration

Academic gains of students were positive- about 3/5 of a year's additional educational growth for each year that the students were engaged in subject acceleration.

-Colangelo, N., Assouline, S. G., & Gross, M. U. M. (2005). (Eds.).
A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students. Iowa City, IA: Belin/Blank Center for Talent Development,