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# ACADEMIC ACCELERATION: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

Kelly Neylon

National-Louis University, kneylon22@gmail.com

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ACADEMIC ACCELERATION: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

Kelly Neylon

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of  
Doctor of Education  
in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education

National Louis University

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## NLU Digital Commons Document Origination Statement

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This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

### Works Cited:

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this advocacy document, written in 2013, is to illustrate the need for a change in policy for gifted students in a suburban school district. The recommended policy change would allow academic acceleration in the form of whole-grade acceleration and/or subject-area acceleration for gifted students. This advocacy document includes a review of the literature related to acceleration and gifted students and an analysis of the educational, economic, social, political, moral, and ethical need for the policy change. Also included is a review of current practices in this district as well as the positive and negative aspects of acceleration. Implementation and assessment plans are also described.

## **PREFACE**

Advocating for a policy has provided me with many leadership lessons, including how to advocate for a practice or policy and, more specifically, how to develop and present an advocacy proposal to the administration and Board of Education. Using a framework for the analysis allowed me to develop a coherent policy advocacy proposal in which I can anticipate and respond to comments and questions.

Advocating for whole-grade acceleration and subject-area acceleration demonstrates my belief in the practice and how it is important enough to have a specific policy in place. My advocacy role was more difficult than I had anticipated as my position on acceleration has opened me up to criticism and questions, often from district leaders who hold different beliefs. I can now answer questions with confidence because I have researched all sides of the issue and examined it from many perspectives: educational, financial, social, political, and moral/ethical.

I have grown because of this experience, and I am now able to contribute as a district leader to the process of strengthening organizational capacity, a positive impact of advocacy (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2007). I was recently appointed District Gifted Coordinator where I can better serve students throughout the entire organization.

Additionally, this policy advocacy gives the Board of Education other options to consider as they support gifted students. In 2011, the Board of Education made it clear they wished to support these students when they hired an outside individual to evaluate the gifted program. Since the Board of Education has a vested interest in gifted education, my advocacy proposal may give them another avenue through which they can accomplish their goals.

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## **SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT**

### **Introduction to the Problem**

Gifted students have special needs that are often unmet by the school system. Having worked with gifted students for six years as a literacy enrichment specialist, and most recently as the gifted coordinator for my school district, I became aware of the need for this policy as I read and researched how to best educate gifted students. I am recommending that a policy of academic acceleration for gifted students be implemented in School District 100.

The school district's current policy, titled "Programs for Gifted Students," was adopted in June 2000, reviewed in March 2005, and amended January 2011. However, this policy is not aligned with the gifted definition, program goals, or mission that was developed by the District's Gifted Task Force in May of 2012 (see Appendix A). Nor does the policy specifically mention academic acceleration as an intervention for gifted students; acceleration could be added to the mission statement of the gifted program and would correspond to the district's Academic Transformation Plan.

For the purposes of this policy advocacy project, academic acceleration is defined as an educational intervention that moves a student through an educational program at a faster rate than experienced by same-age peers (Pressey, 1949, as cited in Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004). There are many forms of acceleration, and this proposed policy includes subject matter or content-area acceleration, as well as grade-skipping or whole-grade acceleration.



## **Critical Need**

There are several issues that make academic acceleration a critical problem including the unmet needs of gifted students, and gifted students' achievement not at the highest levels (Colangelo et al., 2004). Gifted students are often those who score well on standardized state tests; however, their individual academic growth may be less than that of their peers if they are not challenged. In order for students to grow academically, their individual needs must be met. Challenging gifted students with grade-skipping or content-area acceleration increases the possibility of their academic growth.

Another issue is one of educational equity. Gifted students of color and low socioeconomic status are especially in need of academic acceleration in schools. Low-income and minority students do not have the same means to accelerate outside of school as do those in the dominant culture, and they have no chance of "experiencing a challenging curriculum if a school says no" (Colangelo et al., 2004, p. xi). If we are to increase individual student achievement and academic growth, the district should provide academic acceleration as an intervention for those students who are in need of a challenging curriculum.

Advocates for gifted children have noted that there is no mention of gifted children in the 2001 No Child Left Behind legislation (Hargrove, 2012). According to Hargrove (2012), the focus of education since 2001 has been to bring struggling students to a level of mediocrity. A consequence of this legislative focus is that gifted students learn little that they didn't already know (Colangelo et al., 2004).

Additionally, including acceleration in the district policy aligns with the district's Academic Transformation Plan (ATP), which focuses on individual student growth and

college and career readiness. The ATP (see Appendix B), implemented during the 2012-2013 school year, has two goals: to ensure students are college and career ready when they leave the district and that each student demonstrates academic growth. Acceleration as an intervention for gifted students would match both of these goals.

School District 100 evaluated its gifted program in 2011-2012. One recommendation that came out of this evaluation was the development of a Gifted Task Force charged with creating a definition of gifted, establishing program goals, and drafting a mission statement for the program (see Appendix A). The task force completed these tasks in May 2012. The next time the policy is reviewed, the proposed changes should reflect the recommendations in this advocacy proposal, specifically acceleration as an intervention.

### **Recommended Policy and Envisioned Effect**

Though there are many interventions that assist gifted students' academic growth, acceleration, in all its many forms, is well documented for its effectiveness as a low cost option (Southern & Jones, 2004). Acceleration, however, has been negatively stereotyped, and there are myths surrounding it. Many teachers and administrators believe these myths to be true despite the evidence to the contrary (Colangelo et al., 2004). Content-area acceleration allows gifted students to learn the material in a particular subject area at their own pace. Acceleration also includes whole-grade acceleration, i.e., double promotion or grade-skipping. These types of acceleration are cost effective and allow gifted students the opportunity to be challenged and grow academically, something that is sorely lacking in the current era of NCLB. I am

advocating that acceleration, in the form of whole-grade and content-area acceleration, be implemented in School District 100 beginning with the 2014-2015 school year.

## SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED

### Educational Analysis

Implementing an acceleration policy is an appropriate way to educate students to their potential (VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2007). An acceleration policy in School District 100 would be a cost effective way to provide a quality education for gifted students in the district. As indicated in Article X, Section 1 of the Illinois Constitution, the goal of the people of the state is “the educational development of all persons to the limits of their capacities” (Ill. Const. art. X, § 1).

There is a considerable amount of research indicating that acceleration helps students academically; a meta-analysis of studies on acceleration reveals that bright students almost always benefit from acceleration (Kulik, 2003). Additionally, in another meta-analysis, Rogers (2007) determined that whole-grade acceleration and content-area acceleration all had positive mean effect sizes for social adjustment.

Acceleration in the forms of whole-grade acceleration and subject-area acceleration would benefit gifted students academically. They would be able to grow at a rate that is commensurate with their abilities.

Historically, providing gifted students with interventions and services has been unstable, often because of the economic turbulence of the educational environment. In the 1980s and 1990s funds for gifted programs were available (NAGC, 2008). However, once No Child Left Behind was authorized, funds and focus for gifted students suffered, until the publication in 2004 of *A Nation Deceived* (Colangelo et al., 2004), which reported on the advantages of acceleration and illustrated the needs of gifted students. More recently, Response to Intervention (RtI) has provided an avenue for gifted learners

and addressing their needs (NAGC, 2009). The RtI process allows for the recognition of student strengths and provides an opportunity for gifted students to receive an appropriate education. Universal screening, as part of the RtI process, ensures that students receive high-end learning opportunities, should the need be indicated. The RtI process also calls for progress monitoring which would allow students to show mastery in an area and would open advanced or enriched learning opportunities (NAGC, 2009).

### **Economic Analysis**

Economically, this policy would be a cost effective way to provide an equitable education for gifted students. In the national research-based report about acceleration, *A Nation Deceived* (Colangelo et al., 2004), researchers found that acceleration does not cost the school district additional monies and may save the district money when students move more quickly through the system. Furthermore, acceleration does not require the hiring of new teachers for gifted students (Colangelo et al., 2004).

Likewise, there is virtually no cost for content-area acceleration (Vanderkam & Whitmire, 2009); it can be achieved within the school day and allows students to learn at a rate that meets their academic needs. This type of acceleration is easily accomplished by tailoring student schedules.

In the long term, acceleration can save money for both schools and parents. When a student takes Advanced Placement (AP) courses and earns college credit, it saves students and parents college tuition money. It is also beneficial to society; students who take AP courses to progress through college more quickly are able to increase the tax base sooner (Colangelo et al., 2004).

## **Social Analysis**

One myth about acceleration is that it hurts gifted children socially and/or emotionally. However, this myth has not been vetted by the research. Rather, research has shown that there is usually a positive effect for students socially (Rogers, 2007).

Robinson (2004) also evaluated the evidence about the social ramifications surrounding acceleration in its various forms. She found that none of the acceleration options did any psychosocial damage to gifted students and that any effects that were noted were usually positive. This is not to say that the social aspects should not be evaluated before a decision is made for individual students; an evaluation of a student's abilities, skills, and personal characteristics should be completed prior to acceleration (Robinson, 2004).

Students who are accelerated do very well compared to gifted students who are not accelerated (Rogers, 2007). Accelerated students often obtain educational degrees beyond a bachelor's degree and they become ambitious adults and contributing members of society (Colangelo et al., 2004).

As a diverse society, it is important that we remember that gifted students can be found within all ethnicities and from any economic stratum. Acceleration is an effective and inexpensive option that does not increase the disproportion of ethnic or socioeconomic students (Robinson, 2004). Parents of high socioeconomic status have the ability to hire tutors and provide additional challenge for their children outside of school. Parents of minority students from low socioeconomic environments often do not have the same opportunity. For gifted minority students and students from low-income homes,

acceleration is one of the easiest ways to meet their academic needs. The only chance these students have for a challenge is in school.

Acceleration is also positive for society in general. Acceleration experiences are critical for developing world-class scientific leaders (Lubinski, 2004). These individuals contribute to society at an earlier age and society benefits as a result (NAGC, 2004).

### **Political Analysis**

Acceleration, including whole-grade acceleration and content-area acceleration, are not often mentioned when discussing the achievement gap. Since the inception of NCLB in 2001, closing the achievement gap has been a focus for political debate. As a result of this skewed focus, students in the top ten percent of the nation have been left behind and have made minimal gains on test scores compared to students in the bottom ten percent (Loveless, Farkas, & Duckett, 2008).

In the political arena of public education, teachers, school board members, parents and other interested parties want all students to grow academically. However, high-performing students are less likely to receive the necessary resources and attention from their teachers than are struggling students, which decreases their potential for academic growth (Loveless et al., 2008).

Another political issue deals with the allocation of resources. In a democracy, needs almost always outnumber the resources available. Gifted students are not a priority or an immediate need (Gallagher, 2004). Gifted students, however, represent a future need, and it would be wise for politicians to allocate funds to gifted education. As an example, during the first five years of NCLB, funding for gifted education was decreased by one third (Hargrove, 2012).

Additionally, the current economic crisis adds to the political issues surrounding resources for gifted education. School districts in Illinois must decide if programs for gifted education are necessary since the state zeroed out funds for gifted education in response to budget cuts (Lindemann, 2010).

However, there is a political precedent for serving high-achieving and gifted students. Responding to the need for a better educated American populace after World War II, the Ford Foundation created the Fund for Advancement of Education. As a result of the subsequent studies that were funded by the program, the Advanced Placement (AP) program was developed (The College Board, 2003). The AP program allows high school students to take courses for college credit. This is the largest-scale acceleration program in the country (Colangelo et al., 2004).

Little attention is paid to policy focused on high-achieving and gifted students, which may be the result of negative and pervasive attitudes such as the belief that gifted children will make it on their own no matter the educational environment they are placed in (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011). These attitudes need to be changed in order for the policy to be improved for gifted students.

### **Moral and Ethical Analysis**

According to the Illinois Constitution, the state “will provide educational development of all persons to the limits of their capacities” (Ill. Const. art. X, § 1). Education then is considered a moral and ethical obligation to the young of the state, therefore, gifted students require an educational environment that allows them to grow academically.



Additionally, the Illinois School Code (2005) states that gifted students have “the potential to be influential in business, government, health care, the arts, and other critical sectors of our economic and cultural environment” (Section 14A-10, 1, vi). Because of the potential for these students to be influential in so many areas of society, this is another reason we need to be sure gifted students are educated to their fullest potential. If gifted students are accelerated and successful, our ethical obligation is to offer this opportunity to those who are in need of such a policy.

Another ethical and moral issue is servicing minority students in gifted programs. Traditionally, minority students have been underrepresented in gifted programs (Donovan, 2002). Acceleration should be a part of a continuum of services for meeting their needs (Colangelo et al., 2004). If we don’t meet their needs, students will suffer, and as one student exclaims, “school has become increasingly boring without acceleration classes” (Matthiessen, 2013, p.2).

## **SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT**

### **Goals and Objectives**

The goals of this policy statement include increased individual student achievement and equity for gifted students. In Illinois, each student has the right to a quality public education that will help them grow academically to the limits of their capacities (Ill. Const. art. X, § 1). Acceleration in all its forms will give the district additional ways to provide a quality education for gifted students.

Equity is commonly defined as something that is fair and just. When considering students who are gifted, it would be fair and just to provide them with opportunities that allow them to learn something new every day; providing gifted students with material they have already learned would lead to boredom and discontent (Lubinski, 2004). Additionally, the current district policy states that appropriate educational services shall be provided to gifted children. Adding acceleration to the current policy would provide appropriate, fair, and just educational services for the gifted.

One objective of this policy is to develop district-wide procedures that would standardize how the decision for acceleration is made. Currently, the district policy does not address acceleration at all. If acceleration is suggested at one school in the district, another school could decide not to accelerate based on staff biases rather than student need and best practices in the field of gifted education.

Standardization includes determining specific data that need to be gathered and the tools used for data collection. Tools such as the Iowa Acceleration Scale (Assouline, Colangelo, Lupkowski-Shoplik, Lipscomb, & Forstadt, 2009) will provide

administrators, teachers, and parents with data they can use to decide if the acceleration is the best choice for a child.

Finally, standardization also includes determining the effectiveness of the intervention. The following questions would help determine if the intervention is working well: To what extent are students who have been accelerated achieving? Is the intervention working as designed? Are the steps in the process adequate? Is additional professional development needed? Is the student performing as well as grade level peers or outperforming grade level peers?

### **Stakeholders' Needs, Values, and Preferences**

The stakeholders involved in this policy include the students, parents, teachers and the school district. Children come to school eager and excited to learn. If not taught at the level their needs indicate, gifted children's eagerness and excitement quickly begin to wane. When gifted children are accelerated, they often view the experience as positive (Lubinski, 2004). Their excitement and eagerness to learn continues when they receive an education that meets their unique needs. Reforming the current policy to include acceleration will allow gifted students a chance to continue their enthusiasm for school and learning.

All stakeholders want what is best for the student academically, socially, and emotionally. This includes an education that challenges gifted children and allows them to grow and learn something new every day. Acceleration provides this type of education so students can experience new learning on a daily basis.

The district's academic transformation plan includes academic performance as well as individual student growth. In this era of accountability, student performance is

one measure of a district's worth. Acceleration is highly effective for ensuring academic achievement (Colangelo et al., 2004). The performance of students who are accelerated needs to be identified and tracked to evaluate the effectiveness of this intervention.

I believe all stakeholders prefer what is just and equitable for students.

Development of clearly articulated procedures and processes is an important part of this policy. The classroom teacher, parents, gifted specialist administrator, and, when appropriate, the student should be part of a child study team that determines if acceleration is in the best interest of the student (IRPA, 2009). Additionally, all stakeholders value an evaluation system that ensures the acceleration policy is fair, objective, and systematic. A specific outline of procedures, including how the policy is evaluated, would meet the needs of all stakeholders.

## **SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT**

### **Pros**

The reasons to advocate for an acceleration policy include positive educational outcomes for students as well as society. Any student who has been accelerated can enumerate the benefits of acceleration, including the opportunity to be challenged and learn something new every day. Students who are accelerated perform as well as older non-accelerated talented students (Kulik, 2003).

Acceleration is also an equity issue for students. All students deserve the opportunity to learn to their fullest, and providing the intervention of acceleration would increase this opportunity. If gifted students do not experience the challenge they need, it could lead to boredom, frustration, and possibly underachievement (Davidson, Davidson, & Vanderkam, 2004). Students who are accelerated are more likely to be excited about school and reach their academic potential. These students would be working with their intellectual peers to improve their academic performance (Steenbergen-Hu & Moon, 2010).

Another reason to accelerate is that it has been proven effective for students. Acceleration is a cornerstone of exemplary gifted education practices and has more research than any other intervention in the field of gifted education (NAGC, 2004).

### **Cons**

The reasons against an acceleration policy are mostly rooted in misunderstandings and fear. One common misunderstanding about acceleration is the assumption that acceleration is both socially and emotionally damaging for students, but this reason is not supported by any research. While there is not a plethora of research that specifically

targets social or emotional issues of gifted students and acceleration, none of the published research indicates negative implications of acceleration (Gallagher, 2004).

There are many myths about acceleration, most of which are rooted in personal beliefs (Colangelo, et al., 2004). Until people read and understand the research about acceleration, they will continue to rely on those beliefs.

Fear of harming students socially and emotionally is one of the biggest reasons against acceleration. However, the research finds that gifted students are no more socially or emotionally vulnerable than other students when accelerated. As a group, gifted students are typically more mature than their age level peers; placing gifted students with cognitive peers is a better match for maturity (Rogers, 2004). Additionally, acceleration broadens the friendship groups, allowing students opportunities to find friends among a wider group of peers (Colangelo et al., 2004).

There are other myths that people cling to when it comes to acceleration. One such myth is that acceleration is for the wealthy. This myth, however, is counter to the research that gifted students are found in all demographic groups. The reality is that students from modest homes benefit the most from acceleration. Wealthy families are able to provide enrichment opportunities that challenge and accelerate learning; in fact, acceleration “levels the playing field of opportunity” for all students (Colangelo et al., 2004, p. 7).

## **SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

### **Needed Educational Activities**

I am advocating for a policy that includes whole-grade and content-area acceleration. Included in this section are the specific educational activities needed to implement this policy. Professional development and tools for data collection are the two major activities needed to successfully implement this policy.

Whole-grade acceleration, or grade-skipping, is also called double promotion in the district. It is currently available in the district on an as-needed basis but is not standardized throughout the district. This intervention is underutilized and is frowned upon in some schools. To remediate the negativity surrounding whole-grade acceleration, professional development is needed for the classroom teachers and administrators.

Without this professional development, teachers might not be able to recognize the need for acceleration. This should include all teachers, since teachers who are receiving students who have skipped a grade need to understand the reasons behind the acceleration. Additionally, when teachers understand acceleration, they can provide a positive environment for the student (Assouline et al., 2009). The professional development also needs to include administrators as they are the leaders in their respective buildings. Their attitudes toward acceleration will make a difference for gifted students (Southern & Jones, 2004).

When a student is being considered for whole-grade acceleration, a child study team, consisting of teachers, administrators, and parents, should be convened to make decisions about whole-grade acceleration (IRPA, 2009).

Students who are being considered for whole-grade acceleration will be evaluated using the Iowa Acceleration Scale (Assouline et al., 2009) to determine if acceleration is appropriate. The Iowa Acceleration Scale (Assouline et al., 2009) requires that students be administered individual standardized tests to determine current levels of aptitude and achievement. These are best administered by trained professionals such as the school psychologist.

Currently, math is the only content-area that is accelerated on a regular basis in the district, and that is usually done for students in grades 4 and up. This policy would allow any student who demonstrates a need and meets the criteria to accelerate in any subject area. Professional development is necessary for teachers and administrators to help them determine the need and the logistics of content-area acceleration.

Data for content-area acceleration should include the student's current level of performance in the content-area, such as STAR reading and math scores. The district uses common assessments in some content areas. If the student is in need of science or social studies acceleration and they perform above average on the unit pre-assessments, they would be able to advance to another grade level for that specific content area.

### **Staff Development Plan**

There are many staff members who would be affected by this policy: classroom teachers, gifted specialists, administrators, and social workers. The staff development plan would include professional development opportunities for each group, with overlap in most areas.

Classroom teachers would be among the first to recognize when a student may need acceleration, so they may need professional development first. School District 100



currently offers the Gifted Education Seminar (GES) for teachers. This 45-hour course was developed by the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Association for Gifted Children. The course presents a comprehensive overview of gifted education, which includes information on acceleration.

The district has offered the course to 25 teachers in the past and will offer it to another 25 to 30 teachers in subsequent school years. Teachers who have the gifted cluster in their classrooms should be the first to take the Gifted Education Seminar course. The goal, in time, is for the all certified staff in the district to take the course. Once this policy has been adopted, I will add an acceleration component to this course that will include the district procedures.

The gifted specialists will also need further professional development. While these individuals are all trained in gifted education, they will need to learn the procedures within this policy and the Iowa Acceleration Scale (Assouline et al., 2009). Additionally, they will need to be proficient in administering achievement tests such as the Woodcock Johnson Achievement Test. The gifted specialists will work with the school psychologists to attain this proficiency. Attending local, state, and national events related to gifted education will also provide the gifted specialists with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide the content-area acceleration for students.

Providing the gifted specialist with ongoing professional development is important as there are only nine of them within the district—one at each of the six elementary schools and three at the junior high school. The effects of the collaboration with one other will lead to a more cohesive program.

The next group that needs to have additional professional development is the administrators. This group will need to learn about the acceleration policy and the use of the Iowa Acceleration Scale (Assouline et al., 2009). Administrators also need to learn about acceleration and the research that supports it. Providing administrators with an independent version of the GES will assist them in understanding the needs of gifted students and the role of acceleration.

Finally, social workers also need professional development. This group will provide for the social and emotional needs of gifted students. Acceleration has not been shown to negatively affect gifted students; however, they may need social emotional support for other reasons. Providing the social workers with the specific module from the GES, Counseling the Gifted, will allow them to understand students' needs. This six-hour course examines characteristics of gifted learners and will allow the social workers to better address their needs.

### **Time Schedules**

Before this staff development plan can be implemented, this policy will need to be discussed with the district administrative council comprised of five individuals: the Superintendent, the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, the Assistant Superintendent for Personnel, the Assistant Superintendent for Business, and the Director of Community Engagement. This policy would need to be vetted by them and then brought to the Board of Education for approval.

Once the policy has been approved by the Board of Education, the school-level administrators would need to be apprised of the acceleration process. While acceleration will not happen for many students, the administrators will need to know how this will

work. They will need to develop child study teams comprised of gifted specialists, psychologists, social workers, and classroom teachers.

Once the administrators are apprised of the process, the professional development sessions should be planned. The sessions for the social workers could occur before school starts or at the end of the school year as they have an additional five days on their contract. The other sessions could occur at the beginning of the school year. The only exception would be the GES for classroom teachers. This class requires 36 hours during the school year. This could require six days out of the classroom for teachers. However, there could also be the option of after school classes.

The final piece would be for the gifted coordinator to present to staff at each school building an overview and explanation of the acceleration process. This would keep everyone informed and allow them to ask questions.

### **Program Budgets**

Funding the components of this recommended policy will not significantly change the district's overall budget. Currently, there is adequate funding in line items that provide for the professional development of the staff. There are also line items that include outside workshops for the teachers, some of which would be needed for professional development that could not be provided within the district.

The biggest part of the budget will be allocated for professional development. This will include providing the GES for classroom teachers, approximately 30 at a time, until all teachers have successfully completed the GES. The cost of this part of the plan will entail several components, the first of which is the cost of providing the materials to the teachers, approximately \$3,500, which includes two books that are targeted

specifically to gifted education: *Differentiation: Simplified, Realistic & Effective* (Kingore, 2004) and *Achieving Excellence: Educating the Gifted and Talented* (Karnes & Stephens, 2007). Additionally, each teacher will receive a flash drive that includes extra materials and videos for the class. The flash drives are loaded and distributed by the Regional Office of Education and cost approximately \$800, which includes labor and materials. Finally, we would need to budget for the cost of substitute teachers for six days for teachers who would be taking the GES, costing approximately \$18,000 (6 days times 30 teachers at \$100 a day). The approximate total cost for providing the GES would be \$22,300 with the actual amount dependent upon the number of teachers taking the GES. Fortunately, the district does not need to pay for an instructor of the GES as the gifted coordinator, this researcher, is trained in providing it. This proposal for providing the GES to teachers has already been included in the assistant superintendent's professional development budget for the 2014-2015 school year.

Additional modules for the social workers, the administrators, and the gifted specialists also need to be provided. These could not be provided by the gifted coordinator and would cost approximately \$1,600 for each module. This cost includes the flash drives and an instructor. If the modules were provided during the school year, then substitutes for the six gifted specialists, at \$100 a day, would need to be secured. The administrators and social workers do not need substitutes. If provided during the school day, this would cost approximately \$2,200 per module; if provided during institutes or the summer, the cost would be approximately \$1,600. The modules that should be included are: Counseling the Gifted; RTI and the Gifted; Administrator's Academy; and Instructional Models.

Finally, a half-day professional development session would be needed to provide the gifted specialists, administrators, social workers, and psychologists with a better understanding the Iowa Acceleration Scale (Assouline et al., 2009). This session would include reading materials provided within the Iowa Acceleration Scale Manual as well as discussions about the case studies provided within the manual. This session would provide those on the child study team an opportunity to see how the Iowa Acceleration Scale works and type of information needed to make sound educational decisions for the students.

### **Progress Monitoring Activities**

The gifted specialists and the gifted coordinator will be responsible for monitoring the progress of the accelerated students. They will monitor their social and emotional progress as well as their academic progress. The social workers would be involved in the social emotional monitoring as well.

The social workers would be involved in assessing the social and emotional adjustment of students who were accelerated. This might include working with the classroom teacher and the students in a small group. The social workers might also be involved in helping the parents with the adjustment.

The gifted specialists will be responsible for monitoring the students' academic progress. When a student is accelerated, either a whole grade or in a content area, their academic performance needs to remain at a high level to indicate they are being challenged. This monitoring will be done in a collaborative manner by the gifted specialists and the classroom teacher. They need to be sure that there are not any skill or

knowledge deficits that are impairing the student's transition to the next grade level (Assouline et al., 2009).

Monitoring of academic and social emotional progress should be done over the student's entire academic career. If there are gaps, those can be addressed by the gifted specialist, the classroom teacher, and the school social worker.

## **SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN**

### **Evaluation of Outcomes and Results**

The evaluation of this policy will include how well the students are performing and adjusting to their new grade level or to the new academic class. The evaluation will include what is working, what is not working, and if there is a need to change anything for those students who have been accelerated.

One way to evaluate the success of this policy is to follow the students who have experienced acceleration throughout their schooling. Learning whether students who have been accelerated in elementary school have been accepted into honors or AP courses in high school would be part of this evaluation. This indicator would add validity to the acceleration for gifted students. Part of this evaluation would include students who were identified as needing gifted services and having them take the ACT or SAT test administered through the Northwestern University Midwest Academic Talent Search.

Additionally, it would be useful for the district to interview or survey students who have been accelerated before they left the district. Their insights and feedback would be useful in improving the process. This would include asking the parents about the experience. Having parents discuss their views would help improve the process as well.

The anticipated results are that students who are accelerated will continue to perform at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile and above. The district would use the STAR testing, propensity scores, and ISAT results to determine if the student is still performing at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile and above.

### **Responsible Parties**

The gifted coordinator and gifted specialists will be responsible for evaluating the implementation of this policy. Each year, the gifted specialists will be charged with documenting student performance and sending home a narrative report indicating the student's growth. This report will be included in the student's cumulative file to be read by subsequent teachers. When the student is ready to exit the junior high, the gifted coordinator will interview the student and the parents about the experience of acceleration. The results of these interviews will be kept on file at the district office for reference. The results of the acceleration cases, including the interview results, will be shared with the Board of Education on a yearly basis, with names omitted for privacy.



## **SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY AND IMPACT STATEMENT**

The policy for which I am advocating is whole-grade acceleration and content-area acceleration for eligible gifted students. The purpose of this policy is to provide gifted students the opportunity to learn at a level of challenge commensurate to their abilities. Whole-grade acceleration would allow students who qualify to move two grades ahead; traditional schooling moves students one grade each year and groups students together based on age. For gifted students who need a more radical form of modification, whole-grade acceleration is an effective and research-based choice (Assouline et al., 2009).

Deciding if a child needs whole-grade acceleration would be determined by a child study team consisting of the child's classroom teacher, the gifted specialist, the principal, the school psychologist, and the parents. Similar to a special education case study, the team would gather data that would indicate if acceleration is a viable option for the child. The team would use the Iowa Acceleration Scale (Assouline et al., 2009). Additionally, the team psychologist would administer an individual intelligence test, such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children. An individual achievement test, such as the Woodcock Johnson Tests of Achievement, would be individually administered by qualified individuals. These assessments would help the team determine if whole-grade acceleration is appropriate.

Allowing gifted students the opportunity to accelerate in a particular subject area is another part of this policy. Reading and math are typically areas in which students are able to accelerate with ease. Other content areas, such as science and social studies, are more problematic since there may be scheduling issues.

The impact this acceleration policy would have on the district would include many positive effects on the students who need acceleration. These students would benefit from an education that suits their academic needs. Additionally, the district's promise of individual student growth would be fulfilled for these students, and they would be ready for college and career.

While acceleration is a well-researched intervention for gifted students, it is the responsibility of leaders in schools to be thought leaders in providing programming and interventions for gifted students. This would include finding creative ways to provide gifted students with opportunities to succeed.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A**

#### **School District 100 Gifted Definition**

Students who are gifted perform, or show the potential to perform, at remarkably high levels when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These students exhibit high performance capacity in intellectual ability, creativity, leadership, and/or a specific academic field. Gifted students can be identified in any cultural group or within any economic stratum; they require special instruction, services, and/or activities not ordinarily provided by the general education program.

#### **Gifted Program Goals**

The goals of the Gifted Services Program for School District 100 are as follows:

1. Provide direction, time, encouragement, and resources to gifted students to maximize their potential.
2. Provide a coordinated, continuous, district-wide gifted education program.
3. Provide differentiated, enriched instruction and curriculum for identified students that develops high-level thinking skills and problem-solving abilities.
4. Provide appropriate staff development for faculty and administration to identify gifted students and deliver instruction to them.
5. Provide ways to deliver information to parents of students in the gifted program.
6. Systematically evaluate the program.

### **Gifted Mission Statement**

Gifted students in School District 100 will be provided with direction, time, encouragement, and resources to maximize their potential. District staff members will work with parents, students, and community members to identify gifted students from all backgrounds. District 100 will offer these students the differentiated instruction and opportunities they need to thrive and succeed.



## **Appendix B**

### **School District 100 Academic Transformation Plan**

To ensure our students are ready for the 21st century, School District 100 is undergoing an Academic Transformation Plan that will focus on **individual student growth** and preparing students to be **college and career ready**.

Through our district focus, our teachers and staff will:

- **F**orm strong caring relationships with and between students;
- **O**perate with high expectations and clear targets in place;
- **C**reate engagement through meaningful experiences;
- **U**tilize data to inform instructional planning; and
- **S**upply specific and timely feedback to ensure each child achieves his/her personal best.