



2019-2020

# Guidance for Academic Acceleration



## Introduction

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE), in partnership with various stakeholders, has created this Guidance for Academic Acceleration for districts to ensure that all students are supported in reaching their highest academic potential. It may be necessary, in some cases, to accelerate the academic offerings to individual students. This document provides a framework that a district may choose to utilize in providing the most appropriate environment for students that may benefit from increased rigor in their individual academic offerings. This document is intended to serve as guidance or as an example for the development of local policy and supports for acceleration of students to personalize their learning experience.

The MDE's Guidance for Academic Acceleration has been developed in an effort to support MDE's [Top Ten in Ten initiative](#). This guidance is intended to align with the **Learner-Centered Supports Focus Area**, as illustrated below.

This guidance specifically supports **Goal 2** of the Top Ten in Ten initiative:

Implement, with strong district and building leadership, high-quality instruction in every classroom through a highly coherent, child-centered instructional model where students meet their self-determined academic and personal goals to their highest potential.

Within Goal 2 of the Top Ten in Ten, this guidance supports several specific strategies, including:

### Strategy 2.1:

Develop and implement a collaborative, integrated, and transparent P-20 personalized learning system for each student in districts and schools.

- A. Align the system to the Michigan Merit Curriculum, Michigan's Career- and College-Ready standards, and relevant and appropriate personalized learning policy.
- B. Provide guidance so that students, in conjunction with teachers, counselors, and parents, develop individualized goals aligned to their strengths, challenges, and interests.
- C. Develop a coherent assessment system to support the personalization of learning for all students.

### **Strategy 2.2(c):**

Develop and implement evidence-based, results-driven programs to meet the needs of all students, including differentiated services and instruction for special populations (with particular focus on English learners, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and African-American students).

### **Strategy 2.8:**

Provide an integrated system of guidance to develop and support district and school leadership competencies, to accelerate student achievement, including:

- A. Operations, systems, and infrastructure.
- B. A culture and climate of productive learning.
- C. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment supported by technology with necessary classroom level resources provided.

This guidance also aligns with the considerations for gifted learners that are present in the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#). The National Association for Gifted Children [outlines these considerations in this document](#).

This guidance was created in coordination with multiple stakeholders across Michigan, including students, parents, teachers, central office administrators, intermediate school district (ISD) representatives, Michigan Association for Gifted Children (MAGC) representatives and MDE staff (see last page for list of committee members).

## **Definitions:**

### **Personalized Learning (MI)**

Personalized learning occurs when the student has a degree of choice over his or her education in terms of delivery, context, and pacing. Individual outcomes and how proficiency will be demonstrated is collaboratively defined. The student's interests, experiences, and abilities guide his or her learning, making new information more relevant and meaningful. This approach has the potential to build the student's capacity and desire to learn beyond the scope of the curriculum and the confines of the classroom.

### **Personalized Teaching (MI)**

Personalized teaching is the continual collaboration between the teacher and the student with the teacher facilitating, mentoring, and monitoring student choices about personal learning plans. It incorporates flexibility within the learning

environment to allow student needs to drive instructional strategies, assessments, use of time, and materials. By connecting a student's instruction to his or her personal interests, experiences, and abilities, a greater sense of ownership and efficacy is fostered in the student.

### **Competency-Based Education (MI)**

Competency-Based Education can help all students through flexible systems that support student success and allow for reporting of student competency that reflects student learning. Students advance upon demonstrated mastery of content reflected in the competencies that include relevant content. Competency-based education includes rapid and differentiated support based on individual needs; allowing students to attain the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in careers, college, and citizenship. According to the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) the primary components of Competency-Based Education include:

- Students advance upon demonstrated mastery;
- Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students;
- Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students;
- Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs;
- Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge, along with the development of important skills and dispositions.

### **Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)**

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a comprehensive framework comprised of a collection of research-based strategies designed to meet the individual needs and assets of the whole child. MTSS intentionally interconnects the education, health, and human service systems in support of successful learners, schools, centers, and community outcomes. The five essential components of MTSS are inter-related and complementary. The MTSS framework provides schools and districts with an efficient way to organize resources to support educators in the implementation of effective practices with fidelity so that all learners succeed.

The MDE Essential Components of MTSS include:

- Team-Based Leadership
- Tiered Delivery System
- Selection and Implementation of Instruction, Interventions and Supports
- Comprehensive Screening and Assessment System
- Continuous Data-Based Decision Making

## **Acceleration Definitions from the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)**

The definitions below, from the National Association for Gifted Children, are commonly used in this document.

### **Whole-Grade Acceleration**

A student is considered to have been whole-grade accelerated if he or she is given a grade-level placement ahead of chronological-age peers. Whole-grade acceleration may be done at the beginning of or during the school year.

### **Individual Subject Acceleration**

This practice allows students to be placed in classes with older peers for a part of the day (or with materials from higher grade placements) in one or more content areas. Subject-matter acceleration or partial acceleration may be accomplished by the student either physically moving to a higher-level class for instruction (e.g., a second-grade student going to a fifth-grade reading group) or using higher-level curricular or study materials in the current classroom. Subject-matter acceleration may also be accomplished outside of the general instructional schedule (e.g., summer school or after school) or by using higher-level instructional activities on a continuous progress basis without leaving the placement with chronological-age peers.

### **Early Admission to Kindergarten**

Students enter kindergarten prior to achieving the minimum age for school entry as set by [state policy](#).

### **Early High School Graduation**

The student graduates from high school or college in three-and-a-half years or less. Generally, this is accomplished by increasing the amount of coursework undertaken each year in high school or college, but it may also be accomplished through dual/concurrent enrollment or extracurricular and correspondence coursework.

Additional resources that may be useful include:

- NAGC's [Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy](#)
- [The Acceleration Institute's Developing Academic Acceleration Policies document](#)
- [Additional MAGC References to Updated Research on Academic Acceleration](#)

## **Guidance for Academic Acceleration, Early Entrance to Kindergarten, and Early High School Graduation**

Districts interested in accelerating students for possible early entrance, whole-grade acceleration, individual subject acceleration, and early high school graduation may consider using the guidelines included in this document. Overall, special attention needs to be paid to equity and cultural relevance for all students. This requires that schools and districts thoughtfully engage parents and include student voice and the perspectives of their students and communities in their decisions. The use of this guidance will assist in supporting local policies that are research-based and aligned to related initiatives.

Content that is developmentally appropriate and includes social emotional learning opportunities are paramount for student success. Local policies and practices should be based on applicable research and other relevant information related to gifted and talented education, competency-based education, equitable opportunities for students, and MTSS. Literature specifically related to gifted and talented education can be found on the [Michigan Association for Gifted Children \(MAGC\)](#) or [National Association for Gifted Children \(NAGC\)](#) websites.

There are three primary components to developing a local policy including the referral process, accelerated placement implementation, and student transitions related to programming and interventions. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) may include additional components in their local policies. These three components are outlined in more detail below.

### **1) Referrals for Potential Acceleration**

- a) Students may be referred for acceleration by a teacher, administrator, gifted education specialist, guidance counselor, school psychologist, designee of the superintendent or parent or legal guardian of the student to the principal of his or her school for evaluation for possible accelerated placement. Students may also refer themselves or a peer through a district staff member who has knowledge of the referred child's abilities. Examples of mechanisms for

**identifying and referring** students are decided locally and may include the following:

- Grades and achievement
- Local/State assessment data
- Multi-faceted approaches such as performance-based assessments and teacher evaluations of ability to succeed
- Gifted characteristic checklists ([example from NAGC](#))

b) Referral forms and copies of local policy/guidance should be available and included in student handbooks where applicable. Types of acceleration such as early entrance, whole-grade acceleration, individual subject acceleration, and early high school graduation may be included as part of the referral process and may be made available to district staff and parents at each school building. The principal of each school building (or designee) should ensure that appropriate staff are made aware of procedures for referring students for evaluation for possible accelerated placement.

c) Written permission from the student's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) to evaluate the student for possible accelerated placement should be obtained. Some key considerations for evaluating referred students include the following:

- Who will evaluate the student's readiness for acceleration?
- What tools will be used (examples listed below)?
- What is the timeline for evaluating students?

Items to consider when conducting an **evaluation** of a student for potential acceleration may include the following:

- Local and State Assessments
- Past Academic Performance
- Consideration of student maturity and preparedness for accelerated placement
- Social/emotional considerations
- Gifted characteristic checklists ([example from NAGC](#))

A district should cite the evidence used to make these decisions and have an identified process in place for the evaluation of placement as well as additional student support measures based on student needs.

d) The parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of the evaluated student should be notified in writing of the outcome of the evaluation process within a time frame decided by local district policy.

e) Additionally, the district may have an identified appeal process that allows a parent or legal guardian of the referred student to appeal in writing the decision of the evaluation to the local Superintendent. The Superintendent should review the appeal and notify the parent or legal guardian of his or her final decision. However, the student may be referred and evaluated again at the next available opportunity if student data suggests that acceleration is appropriate. In the case that an evaluation does not strongly show support for a specific type of acceleration, other forms of acceleration (as identified in the definition section above) may be considered.

## **2) Accelerated Placement Implementation**

Once a student is deemed to be prepared for acceleration, the referred student's principal (or his or her designee) may convene an acceleration placement committee to determine the most appropriate available learning environment for the referred student. Examples of committee members may include the following:

- A principal or assistant principal at the school where the student is currently enrolled
- A current teacher of the referred student (where applicable)
- A teacher at the grade level to which the student may be accelerated (where applicable)
- A parent or legal guardian of the referred student or a representative designated by a parent or legal guardian of the referred student
- A gifted education coordinator (where applicable). This role may be fulfilled by a designee of the principal or designee. It is possible that this role may be fulfilled by an ISD representative or a designee from another district who has experience in working with students who are being considered for acceleration.
- An advocate that may have formal training or education related to student acceleration or interventions

In some cases, all of the committee members listed above may not be available. In this situation, the committee may include as many of the members listed above as possible.

The acceleration placement committee may develop a written acceleration plan for students who will be admitted early to kindergarten, whole-grade accelerated, accelerated in one or more individual subject areas or candidates for early graduation. The parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of the student should be provided with a copy of the written acceleration plan. Components of the written acceleration plan may include:



- Placement of the student in an accelerated setting (how the student was referred)
- A multi-year plan with opportunity for yearly review and re-evaluation as deemed necessary by the acceleration committee
- What evaluations were used to guide the process of recommending accelerated placement
- Strategies to support a successful transition to the accelerated setting, including:
  - Available support from administration
  - Utilization of MTSS best practices
  - Leveraging flexibility within the [Michigan Merit Curriculum \(MMC\)](#)
- Requirements and procedures for earning high school credit prior to entering high school including the use of [testing out](#) where applicable
- What [flexible learning options](#) will be utilized (may include [dual enrollment](#), [advanced placement](#), [personal curriculum](#), [virtual learning options](#))

### **3) Accelerated Placement Transitions**

Upon placement into an accelerated educational setting, a school staff member as designated by the district should ensure successful implementation of the written acceleration plan and to monitor the adjustment of the student to the accelerated setting. An agreement for regular communication between the designated staff member and parent/legal guardian should be agreed upon within the written acceleration plan. It is recommended that the district identify communication protocols to allow for regular two-way communication between staff, parents, and students. Transition periods may be decided on an individual student basis and should include sufficient transition time for acclimation.

When it is deemed that a student is experiencing extreme difficulty in adapting to the accelerated placement, the school staff along with the student and parent or legal guardian should convene to discuss options for transitioning out of accelerated programming or adjusting the services provided to ensure student success.

## **List of Committee Members**

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