It is difficult to understand the hostility of many educators to this acceleration strategy. —James Gallagher

The June issue of PHP focuses on the topic of acceleration. I am a product of acceleration. Early admission to first grade was my school district’s solution to the precocious 5-year-old who showed up with her mother to the district offices. In fact, my mother sought out the district’s help because she wasn’t sure what to do with me at home anymore. I could read, had a large vocabulary, and far more enjoyed the company of adults than my same-aged peers. It seemed like a logical next step—off to first grade I went, and by third grade I had been placed in the district’s new gifted program. There are certainly some things I would have changed about my educational history but skipping kindergarten would not be one of them (even though this meant that as I got older there were arguments with my parents about why I couldn’t do the things some of my older friends were doing!). Graduating early from high school gave me time after college to go to graduate school, which then planted the seed for me to pursue a doctoral degree. After working with gifted children and their families for nearly two decades, I rarely see the option to accelerate offered or even considered by schools despite the large body of literature supporting its use. This issue provides background information and practical advice regarding acceleration to share with other parents, caregivers, and school personnel.

Dr. Jennifer L. Jolly, Editor-in-Chief
jollyphp@gmail.com
“What I Should Have Said ...”

By Dr. Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, NAGC President

When I began to write my column for this issue of *PHP* on acceleration, I realized that I could not take my usual approach of sharing my personal experience with the topical theme because I do not have any. I was never accelerated and neither were either of my daughters. Nevertheless, I have spoken to parents about acceleration often and counseled them on how to work with their school officials to secure accelerative options for their gifted child. From my experience, parents are generally very open to learning more about acceleration but also thoughtful and cautious. However, even when armed with information about the efficacy of acceleration, parents often receive active discouragement from principals and teachers and experience negative reactions from family members and friends. They are frequently made to feel embarrassed for even proposing acceleration, as if they are doing something harmful to their child. Here are some of my recommendations for answers to the typical questions that parents confront when they pursue accelerative options for their gifted child.

Question: Why are you pushing your child so much? Kids grow up too fast. You should just leave him alone.

Response: We are not pushing our child. Our child is already working above his current grade level. We just want his placement in school to match where he is at in his learning and achievement. We want what every parent wants for their child—to be challenged and to learn something new every day at school. For our child that means he needs to be placed in a different grade for math. Acceleration is routinely used in sports. In fact, we applaud and support the practice of letting children play at the level that matches their skills in sports. This is a similar situation but in an academic area.

Question: Aren’t you afraid if you accelerate your daughter, she won’t have friends?

Response: Of course we worry if we are doing the right thing for our daughter. We can only try and see if this works for her. But, you know, adults do not make friends on the basis of age, and neither do children. Friendships result from shared interests. We think there is a good chance our child can make new friends in her accelerated class, as well as keep her friends from her current grade in school and from the other activities in which she participates.

Question: Aren’t you concerned that if you accelerate your child, she will “burn out”?

Response: Individuals can “burn out” when the level of challenge is too high, but they can also lose motivation and interest when the level of challenge is too low. We are working with our school administrators to find the right level of challenge for our child, and this accelerative placement is one way to do that.
As you will learn in this issue of *PHP*, there is a great deal of research that supports the efficacy of accelerative options such as early entrance to school, early college entrance, dual enrollment, subject-area acceleration, and grade skipping. Armed with this knowledge, parents should feel confident in pursuing these options for their gifted children.

**Question:** Are you worried that other kids will make fun of your child and call him a “nerd” or “geek”?

**Response:** Just as we would not want to see any child bullied or made fun of because he or she is different in some way or has special learning needs, we hope that our child’s acceleration is presented and viewed simply as the best way to make school interesting and fun for him. We emphasize to our child that learning and achievement is “cool” and not something to hide.

**Question:** What if the acceleration doesn’t work out? Won’t it be hard on your child to return to her regular grade?

**Response:** We hope this accelerative placement will work out, but if it doesn’t for some reason, we will be there to support our child. We will emphasize that there is no shame in returning to her original classroom and that we will continue to work to find the right placement for her and to give her appropriately challenging educational experiences in supportive environments.

**Question:** Aren’t you afraid that if you accelerate your child now, she won’t have anything more to study in high school?

**Response:** We recognize that our child may finish all of the content in math that the school district has to offer before her senior year. But, we do not think that is a good reason to delay her learning and progress now, because that might result in loss of interest and motivation to study math. If a child is very good at playing an instrument, his music teacher doesn’t stop giving him increasingly challenging pieces to play for fear of running out of material. To do so would likely result in the child choosing not to continue with lessons at all. We realize that we may have to consider other types of accelerative options for our child if she needs them later on.

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As the parent of a highly able child, your role is crucial in your child’s education. Experience and research repeatedly illustrate the need for and value of parent advocates—as you know your child best. Be prepared to take a positive, proactive, and focused role with teachers and administrators in your child’s school to find the best programming for your child. Academic acceleration should be considered as a differentiation intervention or strategy set in a solid research foundation that allows for fit, challenge, and the development of student potential throughout the K–12 process.

As the parent of a gifted child, you know your child’s unique needs best. You know how your child actively responded to your actions and words as a very young infant; communicated, learned, and demon-
ated advanced talents at a younger than typical age; and read letters and words from a car seat as you traveled around town. You know your child is sensitive, caring, and fair-minded. You may even have heard family and/or friends comment on how your child seems to grasp so much so quickly. Truly you know your child best, and you are your child’s best advocate, and one strategy to consider is academic acceleration.

Academic acceleration is an individual, educational intervention that allows a learner to progress through the educational system at a faster rate or younger age than typical learners based on appropriate level of challenge. Many forms of academic acceleration address academic needs, provide academic challenge, and allow students to complete traditional schooling tailored to each child’s academic and social and emotional readiness. Grade-based acceleration strategies shorten the number of years a learner remains in the K–12 system before entering a college, university, or other postsecondary training (Rogers, 2004). Subject-based acceleration exposes the learner to advanced content, skills, and understanding before the expected grade level in specific content area or areas (Rogers, 2004).

### Acceleration Strategies

Academic acceleration can be by grade or by subject. The following strategies can be woven together over time to serve the needs of a student and family (NAGC, n.d.; Southern & Jones, 2004).

- **Acceleration in college**—is employed with dual enrollment or credit by examination. A university professor or instructor can also determine advanced instruction.
- **Advanced Placement (AP)**—designed by the College Board, it allows high schools to offer courses that meet criteria established by institutions of higher education. College credit may be earned with the successful completion of an AP exam in specific content areas. (Check with individual colleges and universities regarding their policies on AP courses.)
- **Combined classes**—consists of two grades. For example, a second/third grade split class can offer younger students the opportunity to interact with older peers and be exposed to advanced content.
- **Concurrent/dual enrollment**—typically involves high school students taking college courses, often for college credit. The term can also be applied to middle-school grades students taking high school courses and earning credit toward high school graduation.
- **Continuous progress**—refers to students who complete and master content and then are given further work at an accelerated pace in comparison to their classmates.
- **Correspondence courses**—allow students to participate in instruction outside of school. These courses are typically delivered online.
- **Credit by examination**—permits a student to receive credit for a course by completing a test of mastery or an activity.
- **Curriculum compacting**—considers a student’s proficiency in the basic curriculum, and allows him or her to exchange instructional time for other learning experiences.
- **Early admission to kindergarten**—is allowed depending on the school district or state. A child may enter kindergarten prior to the minimum age for entrance.
- **Early admission to first grade**—can result from skipping kindergarten or accelerating a child through kindergarten and into first grade.
- **Early graduation**—includes graduation from high school or college in less than 3½ years. This is achieved through additional coursework, dual enrollment, or Advanced Placement courses.
- **Extracurricular programs**—encompass a variety of programming options that result in advanced instruction or credit toward graduation.
- **Grade-skipping**—permits a child to skip a grade or grades at the beginning or during the school year.
- **Mentoring**—allows a community member to share his or her expertise with a student who has similar interests in a particular field or career.
- **Telescoping curriculum**—covers the same amount of materials or activities in less time, thereby allowing more time for enrichment activities and projects that better suit the interests, needs, and readiness levels of gifted students.

### Research to Guide Your Decision and Advocacy

Decades of research demonstrate the need for, and benefits of, gifted education strategies and programs. These include the use of acceleration, enrichment, curriculum enhancement, and differentiated curriculum and instruction, which all have been shown to increase the achievement of high-ability learners. Despite the large corpus of research supporting
acceleration practices, there still remains reluctance to institute these practices. Borland stated:

Acceleration is one of the most curious phenomena in the field of education. I can think of no other issue in which there is such a gulf between what research has revealed and what practitioners believe. The research on acceleration is so uniformly positive, the benefits of appropriate acceleration so unequivocal, that it is difficult to see how an educator can oppose it. (as cited in Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004, p. 16)

Rogers (1999) offered evidence that supports acceleration, specifically in science and mathematics:

- Gifted students are significantly more likely to retain science and mathematics content accurately when taught 2–3 times faster than the “normal” class pace.
- Gifted students are significantly more likely to forget or mislearn science and mathematics content when they must drill and review it more than 2–3 times.

Colangelo, et al. (2004) further synthesized decades of research on the topic of academic acceleration. Their findings are summarized as follows:

- Acceleration has been well researched and documented.
- Acceleration is the best educational intervention for high-ability (gifted) students.
- Acceleration is consistently effective with gifted students.
- Acceleration is highly effective for academic achievement.
- Acceleration is usually effective in terms of social-emotional adjustment. (p. 2)

With a keen focus on the socioaffective impact of acceleration supports, Neihart (2007) recommended the following best practices in support of highly able learners:

- Acceleration should be routine for highly gifted children. All highly gifted children should be evaluated for grade skipping, in particular.
- Acceleration options should be available for capable students. No school district or school administrator should have a policy that prohibits accelerative options for students, including grade skipping.
- All school districts should have written policies and procedures in place to ensure that acceleration options are available in all schools and to guide parents and teachers in the steps to follow for referral and evaluation of students.
- Students who are being considered for acceleration should be screened for social readiness, emotional maturity, and motivation for acceleration. A tool, such as the Iowa Acceleration Scale, may help to select candidates for acceleration.
- When possible, students who are grade skipping or making an early entrance to college should do so as part of a cohort. There appear to be benefits to cohort acceleration that are more difficult to replicate when students go it alone. (p. 336)

Advocating for Your Child

Your role as an educational advocate is to foster the academic and social-emotional development of your child using available resources for academic acceleration. The great news is that while the road may not be smooth, there are a range of tools, guides, individuals, educators, and programs to help you along the way. Your task is to find the right information, people, and programs to parent your high-potential child.

Although you cannot control the educational system or the minds of teachers or administrators, you can be guided by more than 30 years of solid research, best practice, and amazingly passionate individuals in the field of gifted and talented education. Begin the process today by thoughtfully considering these 10 guiding points:

- You know your unique child. Observe and listen.
- Advocate clearly for your child based on each year's needs, and as necessary.
- Empower your child to believe, self-advocate, and share with someone her needs and feelings.
- Every learner has the right to learn something new and be challenged.
- Get involved in the school to build knowledge, trust, contacts, and credibility.
- Do your homework. Educate yourself about gifted education, gifted learners, and best practice.
- Research school districts, policies, online programs, Talent Search opportunities, schools, and teachers to find the best fit for your child.
- Present trusted and well-researched information and be prepared when you meet with teachers, administrators, and policy makers.
- Talk and communicate about acceleration and support others. Pay it forward.
- Intervene when you know there's a problem. Think and problem solve outside the box each year and as necessary.
- Create safe environments for your child. Empower, but do not enable.

It is never too early nor too late to support your child's educational growth. Although early intervention is preferred, begin right now today to do what is best for your child. Make a commitment today to listen to your heart, your gut, your child, and other wise parents, and become an active, informed decision maker in the educational process for your child's growth and well-being. Start today.

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Author’s Note:
Susan Scheibel, Ed.D., is the parent of three, a passionate gifted education advocate, and the past president of the Colorado Association for Gifted and Talented (CAGT). She completed her graduate studies at the University of Northern Colorado. She is a member of the Colorado Coalition for Gifted; the Colorado Educational Success Task Force; the State Advisory Committee for Gifted Student Education; and the Colorado Academy of Educators for the Gifted, Talented, and Creative.

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Northwestern University’s Midwest Academic Talent Search (NUMATS): Above-grade-level testing can identify gifted students’ strengths and track growth. Follow-up resources and programs help parents and educators chart a customized academic plan.

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meeting the needs of gifted children
We All Want the Same Thing

By Dr. Karen E. Rambo & Dr. Janette Boazman, Research & Evaluation Network

Researchers, parents, counselors, and teachers share a common desire to ensure personal growth and academic development for children. At a very foundational level, we desire health and happiness for all children, as well as an education with quality schools and good teachers. We want all children to be in programs that appropriately address their educational needs. We desire places where children can develop their natural abilities and form and maintain good and lasting friendships. We want each child to be successful, academically and personally, and to move toward a happy, thriving life (Sayer & Boazman, 2006). To achieve this common goal, a collaborative effort between parents, counselors, teachers, and researchers is important.

The primary mission of the Research and Evaluation (R&E) Network is to ensure a spirit of inquiry among all NAGC members, including parent members. The efforts of the R&E Network are focused on promoting and sustaining high-quality research related to gifted children. Additionally, we serve to support the NAGC community through outreach, the dissemination of information about research needs and methodologies, and by encouraging and supporting NAGC members in their research efforts.

Both the R&E Network and the parent community within NAGC have a common central motivation: meeting the needs of gifted children. The R&E Network contributes to this understanding in multiple ways by: (a) advocating for appropriate study, evaluation, and presentation of key topics in the field of gifted education; (b) encouraging appropriate research methodology; (c) highlighting research topics; (d) determining appropriate funding sources for research; (e) promoting ethical standards for conducting and reporting research within the field of gifted education; (f) supporting the establishment of professional networks within and outside of NAGC; and (g) aiding in the development of guidelines for graduate programs that train researchers for the field of gifted education (NAGC, 2012).

Beyond the Ceiling, the Sky Is the Limit

Doing research in the field of gifted education is fundamentally complicated. The very nature of giftedness implies that the sample size (population being studied) is inherently small. Also, true comparison groups are hard to find, which makes knowing what would have happened in the absence of treatment virtually unattainable (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011). Even when appropriate comparison groups can be located, the assessments that are available to evaluate the impact of treatment often come with their own set of problems. Many times the assessments that are used have potential measurement issues. For example, most assessments are designed to measure more precisely the achievement of average students. Therefore, the ceiling of the test is often too low to accurately measure gifted students’ achievement (Subotnik et al., 2011). Fortunately, assessments are improving (e.g., computer adaptive tests typically have higher ceilings than traditional paper-pencil tests, and off-grade-level testing is another viable option), and new statistical techniques make the lack of a true control group less problematic. It is getting even easier for parents of gifted children to know how their child is performing relative to standards and to know what types of programming for the gifted are most likely to impact their student positively. All of these advances make this an exciting time to be working with and doing research related to gifted children.

As the field of gifted education research advances, leading researchers reiterate the importance of supporting, conducting, and publishing theory-driven research (Ambrose, VanTassel-Baska, Coleman, & Cross, 2010; Dai, Swanson, & Chen, 2011; Gallagher, 2011) that maintains high ethical standards (Moon, 2011), as well as research that includes collaboration between theorists, researchers, and practitioners (Dai, 2011). In an effort to unify research in...
Meeting the Needs of Gifted Children

We both want gifted students to be successful in academics and experience personal growth.

gifted education, Subotnik et al. (2011) recommended a focused purpose for gifted education and the research that impacts gifted individuals. They proposed the full realization of ability and the development of high ability into eminent talent as the true focus and purpose of gifted education. The development of eminence is most likely to occur when children are exposed to rich opportunities and are optimally motivated, which is where Subotnik et al. see the most need for research in gifted education.

Often research findings guide parents in decision making and the education policies that impact the personal and academic development of gifted children. With the goal of ability development to eminence at the forefront, the R&E Network works to establish strong principles for conducting research and publication of research. The guiding principles set forth by the R&E Network include rigorous methodology in data collection and analysis and defined ethical standards and procedures. Without high standards, a strong ethical framework, and appropriate methodology in gifted education research, the reporting of results has little meaning and offers misguided direction for parents and practitioners.

Joining the Research and Evaluation Network’s Efforts

The R&E Network strives to make current research accessible to its members. Be sure to check out the “Did You Know?” series available on the R&E Network section of the NAGC website (http://www.nagc.org/ResearchEvaluationNetwork.aspx). This series provides one-page documents with up-to-date information about the current state of research in gifted education as well as where to go for more information. This is a great place for parents to get a quick overview of what the research says about gifted education. Some of the topics include: identification, underrepresentation, pedagogy and curriculum, and homework.

The R&E Network also produces a biannual newsletter, the SIREN (Significant Information for the Research and Evaluation Network). In the SIREN, we highlight events at the annual NAGC conference directly related to the R&E Network, share work being done by the committees, and provide updates from the network chair. In the next edition of the SIREN, we will get to see the conference and how it has evolved through the eyes of a veteran researcher in gifted education, Karen Rogers. Parents may be interested in seeing how gifted education and research about gifted children has changed over the years.

The R&E Network has recognized the need to build strong new researchers in gifted education. To that end, the network has invested a tremendous amount of energy in connecting new researchers with established ones and providing the new researchers opportunities to have their work critiqued and honored. This intentional investment in young researchers has directly benefited gifted education by ensuring high-quality work and publication for parental and educational use.

An Invitation

Researchers and parents of gifted children have a great deal in common. We both want gifted students to be successful in academics and experience personal growth. The researchers in the R&E Network want to connect with parents of gifted children and would like to formally invite you to join the R&E Network through both NAGC and on Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/groups/NAGC.RE/). Let the research community know what you are thinking and what questions you have. The R&E Network would love to see these conversations turn into ideas for research and sharing of good practices in gifted education. We are both deeply committed to meeting the needs of the gifted. Let’s join our efforts and continue the conversation as we move forward in our commitment to the education of gifted individuals.

References


Authors’ Note:
Karen E. Rambo, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at Colorado State University in the School of Education and School of Teacher Education and Principal Preparation. Her areas of research include assessment, academic growth, and acceleration of academically gifted students. Her methodological areas of research include factor analysis, instrument design, and multi-level growth modeling. Janette Boazman, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of education at the University of Dallas. She specializes in gifted education. Her research in gifted education focuses on psychological constructs that contribute to personal well-being and success in academic settings.
The “Ifs” and “Buts” of Acceleration

By Dr. Christy McGee, Chair, Parent & Community Network

I was pondering the parent perspective of acceleration, and I realized that we are always hearing “ifs” and “but”s when discussing this topic. There are many “ifs” and “but” questions. I chose to focus this column on the following three:

- If my child is complaining of being bored in class, does that mean he or she needs to be accelerated?
- I know my child needs to be accelerated, but what will happen later on when my child wants to play sports and isn’t physically as strong as the other children?
- If my child is accelerated, are there any social and emotional situations of which I should be aware?
- What should I do if my child seems to be significantly ahead of his or her peers?

Here is what I know. Gifted children need to be challenged. They need to use their critical thinking skills. Children with creative gifts need to be able to explore those gifts and apply them in their classroom work. They need to be able to delve into subject content more deeply. They need to use their talents to the fullest. They do not need to have their learning constrained by artificial grade delineations. They do not need to face worksheet after worksheet or—even worse—do more of the same type of work because they finish early.

Let’s look at those “ifs” and “but” questions. The answers here are certainly not definitive, but they are real situations that I have encountered over the years working with gifted children and parenting my own.

If my child is complaining of being bored in class, does that mean he or she needs to be accelerated?

Let me start off with what not to do. Please do not go to school and repeat what your child has said about being bored. Why would I say that? Perhaps it is because I made that mistake with my own child and spent the rest of the year trying to win back the teacher’s trust. Think about what those words indicate to a teacher. In a roundabout way, I told the teacher she was not a doing a good job. I told her that she did not use productive strategies with my child. Thinking back on it, maybe that is exactly what I thought, but it was not productive for my child. I wanted the teacher to be aware that my kindergarten child did not need to be working on letter recognition and phonemes because she was already reading the Laura Ingalls Wilder series. I wanted her to realize that my child was quiet and patient and would never outwardly complain about sitting and waiting on other students; inside, however, she was so frustrated because all she really wanted to do was read, write stories, and work on her double-digit subtraction with regrouping.

What I needed to do was to sit down with the teacher and let my daughter demonstrate what she was capable of doing. I needed to quietly ask what I should do with her at home to support her learning. I needed to explain that my daughter could read, had advanced understandings of mathematical concepts, and request that we work as a team to fulfill her needs—but I didn’t do any of those things. I made the insulting statement that my child was bored with the work she was doing in kindergarten.

Fortunately, my daughter, with all of her 5-year-old wisdom, resolved her own situation by insisting on reading a book off the shelf that she had never read before to her classmates at story time. The teacher was hesitant for fear my daughter would be embarrassed, but finally relented. It wasn’t long after that incident that my daughter was moved to a second-grade reading group. Soon after that, my daughter was also moved to a first-grade math group. She benefitted from subject acceleration, and I learned a valuable lesson about working with teachers.

I know my child needs to be accelerated, but what will happen later on when my child wants to play sports and isn’t physically as strong as the other children?

Physical prowess is a factor that can make grade-skipping an issue. In middle and high school, physical maturity can present a problem because many sports are indeed grade-based. Parents and students may ask themselves what is more important to them, playing sports or being academically challenged. The other side of this coin is that many high schools now offer advanced courses that are not age-specific thus allowing the student to maintain his or her grade classification for sports, yet
still be academically challenged. If the student is accelerated in just one or two subjects, then subject acceleration may be the appropriate strategy. It is certainly important for parents to carefully examine all aspects of their child’s giftedness and then carefully choose the best path to take.

Not all physical activities in which a child could partake are affected by the possibility of acceleration. I placed my daughter in a dance class at age 3. I wanted her to have a chance to interact with other young children and begin to learn to follow directions. By the time she was 5, she decided that she loved to dance and wanted to add ballet to her dance schedule. She was placed in a class with 6- and 7-year-olds because the teacher felt that she followed directions well and would fit in. At first, she was very behind and was intimidated by the other children, but within 6 months she had caught up with her class. She was moved to a more advanced class of even older girls when she was 6 and, again, she caught up. She was determined to be as “good” as the other girls so she practiced at home until she could compete with them.

My daughter was also taking piano lessons. She loved to play and quickly learned how to read music. Her fine motor skills were exceptional. She began racing through the beginner books. Fortunately for us, her teacher didn’t let her age hold her back. She was an avid music student. By the time she was 9, she was playing eight-hand pieces with three other adults. She thrived in the competition of playing with adults and continued to excel in her music studies.

If my child is accelerated, are there any social and emotional situations of which I should be aware?
Social and emotional issues are always a worry for parents and ones that are often generated by school personnel. The answer to this question is that it depends on the child. If the child is gregarious and able to make friends easily, then acceleration should not be a problem. The gifted child will appreciate being able to converse with older children who think on a more advanced level. Gifted children often have more sophisticated language, may be concerned with moral and ethical issues, and can read advanced materials to which their peers do not relate. For children who think and reason like their older peers, acceleration can be exactly what they need.

My son was caught in the middle of this particular issue. He was accelerated in second grade (students in the “advanced program” were still classified as second graders, but they followed the third-grade curriculum). Academically, he was excelling in the expectations of his grade level, but he was very sensitive and excitable (two characteristics that can be related to giftedness). School was not a safe place for him. His vocabulary and his ethical and moral sense were significantly beyond his peers. He still found the type of work he was doing (worksheets) irrelevant because they did not allow him to use his fairly high reasoning skills. So, even though he technically experienced acceleration, the curriculum and teaching strategies used did not motivate him. He spent a great deal of time daydreaming and, when he could, reading about animals. Children called him “McGeek” because of his sophisticated language and reasoning.

What Should I Do if My Child Seems to Be Significantly Ahead of His or Her Peers?
I recommend that parents become very familiar with the literature on giftedness. The National Association for Gifted Children does an outstanding job of presenting important and relevant topics on its website (http://www.nagc.org). Having a basic understanding of giftedness before seeking out assessment will help parents communicate with a psychologist or psychometrician about their child’s strengths and weaknesses.

I also hope that parents will try to understand and support their gifted child. Sometimes it is difficult to understand a child whose intellect, creativity, or talent is extraordinary. My daughter was not only academically talented, she was also a gifted pianist and dancer. Her determined focus on her piano studies and her dance was sometimes overwhelming, and I worried that she was going to miss out on other areas of her life, but that was not the case. She had a wonderful group of friends from school and dance. She learned to balance her many interests well. My son was the complete opposite of my daughter: She blithely aced tests and completed all assignments without question; he aced tests, but he also daydreamed and brooded on complex topics for days at a time. He thought totally out of the box, and she thought totally within it. Both children are a joy, but they thoroughly support what we all know to be true—each child is an individual and must be supported as such. Acceleration may seem like a frightening concept, but when done appropriately, the gifted child can blossom. Do not be afraid—be prepared.

Author’s Note
Christy D. McGee, Ed.D., is a faculty member at Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY. An active member of the National Association for Gifted Children, she currently serves as Chair of the Parent and Community Network.

opportunities to learn something new every day

**Acceleration: It’s Elementary**

*By Mariam Willis, NAGC Parent Outreach Specialist*

Oprah Winfrey skipped kindergarten and second grade. Michelle Obama and her oldest daughter, Malia, both skipped second grade. Sally Ride, Ronald Reagan, and his daughter, Patti, skipped third grade. Warren Buffet skipped half of fourth grade. Steve Jobs skipped fifth grade. Although acceleration in elementary school won’t necessarily lead your child to becoming a popular television personality, a celebrated philanthropist, or a political leader, it can be an important intervention to ensure your child is engaged and inspired by learning in the school environment (Westburg, Imbeau, Leppien, & Paris, 2011).

Acceleration is one tool for providing high-ability students the opportunity to learn something new every day. “Some people talk about acceleration as taking a student out of step. In actuality, what you’re doing is putting a student in step with the right curriculum,” remarked Nick Colangelo (Marron, Colangelo, & Assouline, 2011), Director and cofounder of the Belin-Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development and coauthor of *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America’s Brightest Students*.

Whole-grade acceleration, also called grade-skipping, usually happens between kindergarten and eighth grade. Highly and profoundly gifted learners may need several grade-skips or a combination of grade-skipping and single-subject acceleration before the curriculum is in step with their intellectual ability. Early identification and intervention for young gifted learners is critical. Research indicates that the earlier whole-grade acceleration takes place, the easier the child can adjust. Therefore, early entrance to kindergarten or skipping kindergarten can be ideal for a gifted learner who shows capability and motivation in the school setting.

“There are a number of interventions on behalf of highly talented and intellectual youth, but acceleration has the strongest research basis,” said Colangelo (Marron et al., 2011). “However, just because something is available, because something works, is not a good reason to use it. There should be a profound reason why it fits the kinds of students we call intellectually gifted.” How do you know when acceleration is the best option for your child? By doing your homework, seeking appropriate testing, and keeping a long-term perspective, you can achieve an engaging educational experience for your gifted learner in traditional settings.

Because there are many misconceptions about acceleration, it is critical for you to do your homework prior to approaching your child’s school about acceleration. All decisions about gifted education are local decisions. Even in states like Maryland, which recently adopted legislation that enables school districts to identify gifted learners as early as age 3, implementation remains a district decision. Often there are district or state guidelines for or against acceleration. Contact your state gifted association or your school’s administrator for gifted programs to learn about your district’s policies. Remain open to solutions. There may be magnet programs, charter schools, or other supplementary programs available in your school district that can meet your child’s needs effectively.

Peruse online resources about acceleration. Research-based best practices for acceleration include: grade-skipping, telescoping, early entrance into kindergarten or college, credit by examination, content-based acceleration, and single-subject acceleration. Further instructional practices, such as compacting and differentiation, allow for more economic use of learning time in a specific subject. For example, my children, ages 5 and 10, attend a magnet school for gifted children where differentiation, telescoping, and acceleration are commonplace. Telescoping, usually found in schools for the gifted, is a process where a group of high-ability students engage in several years of curriculum over a shorter period of time. Kindergarten, first, second, and third grades may be completed in 3 years. Notice that even in programs where content and whole-grade acceleration is commonplace, other tools and instructional excellence remains necessary to engage gifted learners. Know what you want for your child, and know what is available prior to contacting your school district.

Next, any intervention should go well beyond subjective observations of your child. Decisions should be based on appropriate...
ate testing with professionals trained in gifted education. Seek testing with an educational psychologist with training in gifted education. Request the Iowa Acceleration Scale (IAS), which provides a comprehensive picture of the academic and social readiness of a learner and can be used when considering early kindergarten entrance. The IAS guides educators and parents through this discussion, protecting both against biased recall.

Other tests may also indicate acceleration readiness. Profile scores on Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) and other proficiency-based tests, such as end-of-chapter tests and end-of-year tests, can indicate readiness. In addition, teacher ratings, observations, and support are important to the decision-making process, especially in districts where acceleration is not common practice. Make sure your child is an active part of the conversation and decision-making process.

Lastly, if you meet roadblocks, think long-term. Keep in mind that you were moved to pursue acceleration as a solution. Susan Assouline, Associate Director of the Belin-Blank Center and coauthor of A Nation Deceived, commented, “Doing nothing is worse than doing something. The risk of doing nothing is disengagement” (Marron et al., 2011). Why acceleration is not recommended should be clearly indicated. Even if acceleration is not the chosen course of action, intervention and support is needed. Further discussion should pursue intervention that ensures your learner is challenged. Engagement of bright students is critical in shaping a thirst for lifelong learning and achievement.

If acceleration is not an option now, your gifted child will likely participate in traditional acceleration programs in the future. Keep your child engaged through inspiring extracurricular programs, online and community courses, Talent Search programs, and summer camps. As Linda Silverman, founder of the Gifted Development Center, noted, “Giftedness is not what you do or how hard you work. It is who you are. You think differently” (Silverman, 2012). Who your child is does not change; giftedness is an orientation toward the world. By doing your homework, seeking appropriate testing, and keeping a long-term perspective, you will have your child “in step with the right curriculum” and always putting his best foot forward. ☀

References

Resources
• Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration: http://www.accelerationinstitute.org
• A Nation Deceived: How School’s Hold Back America’s Brightest Students: http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/nation_deceived
• Genius Denied: How to Stop Wasting Our Brightest Young Minds: http://www.geniusdenied.com
• IDEAL Solutions for Math Acceleration: http://www.idealssolutionsmath.com
The National Beta Club: academic achievement is only the beginning...

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