

West Central C.U.S.D. #235 Acceleration Policy

NOTE: Italicized portions of the document denote the components of the Model Acceleration Policy that are required by the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act, Public Act 100-0421.

The West Central C.U.S.D. #235 Board of Education believes that all students across the achievement spectrum should be challenged and supported to develop their potential. For some students needing a higher level of instruction, this can best be achieved by affording them access to curricula and learning environments more commonly provided to older students. This policy describes the process that shall be used for evaluating students for possible accelerated placement and identifying students who should be granted early admission to kindergarten or first grade, accelerated in one or more individual subject areas, or promoted to a higher grade level than their same-age peers. This policy also includes information about automatic placement for students in grades 9-12 that meet or exceed the state benchmark on assessment for ELA, Math and Science. The policy shall be applied equitably and systematically to all students referred for acceleration regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gifted and talented status, twice/multiple exceptionality, English language proficiency, or socioeconomic background.

1. Definitions

- a. *“Accelerated placement” is the placement of a student at the instructional level that best matches that student’s needs by allowing access to a curriculum that is usually reserved for children who are older or in higher grades than the student. Accelerated placement options must include, but need not be limited to, early entrance to kindergarten and first grade, individual subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration. Accelerated placement is not limited to those students who have been identified as gifted and talented, but rather is open to all students who demonstrate high ability and who may benefit from accelerated placement. Eligibility for accelerated placement shall also be open to all students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, English language proficiency, or socioeconomic status.*
- b. “Early entrance to kindergarten” is the admission of a student to kindergarten who will not yet be five years old by September 1 of that school year.
- c. “Early entrance to first grade” is the admission of a student to first grade who will not yet be six years old by September 1 of that school year and who has not completed kindergarten. Students who are younger than six upon starting first grade but who were admitted early to kindergarten do not need to be reevaluated prior to admission to first grade.
- d. “Whole grade acceleration” is the practice of assigning a student to a higher grade level than is typical given the student’s age on a full-time basis for the purpose of providing access to appropriately challenging learning opportunities.
- e. “Individual subject acceleration” is the practice of assigning a student to specific content at a higher instructional level than is typical given the student’s grade for the purpose of providing access to appropriately challenging learning opportunities in one or more subject areas.

2. Publication of Acceleration Policy and Referral Procedures/Forms

- a. *Copies of this policy and referral forms for evaluation for possible early entrance to kindergarten or first grade, whole grade acceleration, and individual subject acceleration, shall be made available to district staff and parents at each school building and shall be published on the school district website.*
- b. The Principal (or his or her designee) of each school building shall solicit referrals of students for evaluation for possible accelerated placement annually, and ensure that all staff he or she supervises are aware of procedures for referring students for evaluation for possible accelerated placement.

3. Initiation of Evaluation Process

- a. Referral Procedures
 - i. Referrers: Any student residing in the district may be referred by a teacher, administrator, gifted education specialist, guidance counselor, school psychologist, or a parent or legal guardian of the student to the Principal for evaluation for possible accelerated placement. A student may refer himself or herself through a district staff member who has knowledge of the referred student's abilities.
 - ii. Referral Intake Form: The referrer shall complete the appropriate section (parent/teacher/administrator/school counselor, psychologist or gifted education specialist) of the referral form and submit it to the Principal. The Principal shall then forward the referral form to the appropriate individuals so that the remaining sections may be completed within 14 school days. Once written parental permission is obtained, the thirty (30) school day evaluation process clock will start.
- b. *Written Parental Consent: The Principal of the referred student's school shall obtain written permission from the student's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) to evaluate the student for possible accelerated placement. Consent is presumed when the individual referring the student for evaluation is a student's parent or legal guardian. The district shall evaluate all students who are referred for evaluation and whose parent(s) or legal guardian(s) have granted permission to evaluate the student for possible accelerated placement.*
- c. Timeline:
 - i. Students residing in the district who are referred for evaluation for possible accelerated placement during the school year shall receive a determination within thirty (30) school days.
 - ii. Students residing in the district who are referred for evaluation for possible accelerated placement sixty (60) or more calendar days prior to the start of the school year shall be evaluated in advance of the start of the school year such that the student may be placed in the accelerated placement on the first day of school. In all other cases, including but not limited to students transferring into the district, evaluations of a referred student shall be

scheduled at the student's Principal's discretion and placed in the accelerated setting(s) at the time recommended by those involved in determining whether the student should be accelerated.

4. Evaluation Process: *The policy must utilize a fair and equitable decision-making process that involves multiple persons and includes a student's parents or guardians.* This multi-person evaluation team is responsible for gathering relevant, reliable and comprehensive data in order to determine whether and what type of accelerated placement is appropriate for that student.

a. Multiple Evaluators/Decision Makers

- i. *A diverse evaluation team shall consist of multiple participants.* Recommended team members include:
 1. Gifted coordinator or the appointed designee responsible for understanding the needs of an accelerated student
 2. Principal/Assistant Principal from the student's current school
 3. Principal/Assistant Principal from the student's receiving school
 4. Most current teacher of that student
 5. School psychologist and/or school social worker
- ii. *A parent or legal guardian of the student shall be invited to participate in the evaluation process.* The parent/legal guardian shall be allowed to invite an individual who is knowledgeable about the student's academic abilities. Accommodations should be made for parents with disabilities or who are not fluent English speakers to enable them to participate fully in the process.

b. Multiple Evaluation Criteria

- i. The evaluation process shall include multiple valid, reliable indicators. The criteria used to determine whether accelerated placement is appropriate should be reasonable, e.g., helpful in assessing whether a student is ready for the accelerated placement and not whether he or she has already mastered the content at that level. For students referred for possible whole grade acceleration, use of the Iowa Acceleration Scale is recommended. For students referred for possible acceleration in an individual subject area, above-grade-level assessment in that subject area is recommended as part of the evaluation process.
- ii. If any assessments are utilized as part of the evaluation process:
 - A) the instruments shall be appropriate given the needs of the student (e.g., linguistically appropriate instruments should be used with English Learner students);
 - B) any assessment accommodations to which the student may be entitled generally (e.g., by the terms of an IEP) shall be available during the evaluation for accelerated placement; and

- C) parents or guardians shall be notified about any assessments that will be conducted as part of the evaluation at the time that they are asked to consent in writing to the evaluation pursuant to Section 3(b).
- iii. The student's desire to be accelerated shall be considered in the decision-making and transition planning process.
- c. *Procedures for Notifying Parents/Guardians of the Decision is Required**
 - i. A parent or legal guardian of the evaluated student shall be notified in writing of the outcome of the evaluation process within thirty (30) school days of the submission of the referral to the referred student's Principal. This notification shall include instructions for appealing the outcome of the evaluation process. Students residing in the district who are referred for evaluation for possible accelerated placement sixty (60) or more calendar days prior to the start of the school year shall be evaluated in advance of the start of the school year such that the student may be placed in the accelerated placement on the first day of school.
 - ii. A parent or legal guardian of the referred student may appeal in writing the decision of the evaluation team to the local Superintendent within thirty (30) school days of being notified of the committee's decision. The Superintendent shall review the appeal and notify the parent or legal guardian who filed the appeal of his or her final decision within thirty (30) school days of receiving the appeal. The Superintendent's decision shall be final. However, the student may be referred and evaluated again at the next available opportunity if he or she is again referred for evaluation by an individual eligible to make referrals as described in this policy.
- d. Communication of the Decision to Student's Educators: The decision that a student is eligible for accelerated placement shall be communicated to the student's current teacher(s) and to all teachers (including specialists) and relevant administrative personnel at the level to which the student will be accelerated within 2 school days, to ensure that all are informed and prepared to support the placement.

5. Accelerated Placement

- a. The evaluation team shall create a written placement and transition plan for students selected for whole grade acceleration or acceleration in an individual subject area. The written plan will be provided to the student's parents or guardians and will detail the type of acceleration the student will receive and strategies to be used to support the student to facilitate a successful transition to the accelerated setting during a transition period specified in the written plan. Any accommodations or modifications the student is entitled to receive under an IEP or 504 plan shall be available in the accelerated setting.
- b. The policy shall provide guidance regarding how the accelerated student's transition will be monitored and by whom. It is recommended that the accelerated student's transition be evaluated no later than thirty (30) school days after placement. During the transition period specified in the written plan, the accelerated student's parent or guardian may request in writing that the student be returned to the non-accelerated setting without penalty.

- c. At the end of the specified transition period, the student’s records will be updated to reflect the student’s accelerated status. This is designed to facilitate continuous progress in future years in the same district or if the student matriculates or transfers to a different district.

6. Automatic Enrollment – Grades 9 – 12

- a. Students in grades 9 – 12 that meet or exceed state benchmarks on state assessments in ELA, Math or Science will be automatically enrolled in the next most rigorous course for that content area.
- b. Parents/Guardians have the option to opt out of the automatic enrollment for their student in order to enroll the student in alternative coursework that better aligns with his/her post-secondary education or career goals. Parents/Guardians should contact the High School Guidance Department for details.

7. State Requirements

- a. The superintendent or his or her designee shall ensure that accelerated students participate in appropriate state assessments based on guidance from the State Board of Education.
- b. The superintendent or his or her designee shall ensure that data regarding accelerated placement is collected and reported in accordance with rules adopted by the State Board of Education.