



WHOLE GRADE ADVANCEMENT (Grade Skipping)

Whole grade advancement is determined on an individual basis in accordance with needs assessments. The School-Based Committee for Gifted Education (SBC-GE) should request evidence and advice of regular education teacher/s, the Academically Gifted Resource Teacher, the psychologist serving the Academically Gifted Program, and Central Services Academically Gifted Program administrators. It is recommended that principals and the SBC-GE review the *Guidelines for Whole Grade Advancement (see the Academically Gifted Program Plan 2007-2010, Appendix 5, pages 110-118)*. These guidelines are summarized here. Building-level administrators, upon review of the recommendations of the School Based Committee for Gifted Education, make the final decisions regarding grade advancement.

Grade advancement considerations:

A portfolio of student work collected over time that demonstrates a solid depth of conceptual understanding of the *NC Standard Course of Study* for the current grade level is needed.

- Has the child been producing above grade level work in previous years?
- In which academic areas is the child performing above grade level?
- Is the child performing above grade level in all subjects or in just a particular subject? If the child's strength is with one particular subject, could the child work in another grade level for that area?
- Has the any of the work in the portfolio been evaluated using reading, writing, or math scoring rubrics to be sure the work is consistently high level 4 and beyond?
- What evidence from the literacy profile shows advanced performance?
- Is the child currently working in a cluster group with other high performing children for specific activities?
- What forms of differentiated instruction is the classroom teacher providing?
- Has the AG teacher been involved by consulting and planning lessons with the classroom teacher to identify and meet the child's needs?

These questions would need to be answered with evidence and the case should be carefully reviewed by the School-Based Committee for Gifted Education before a recommendation is made. The social and emotional needs of the child must also be taken into consideration.



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Students who are being considered for whole grade advancement should be exhibiting characteristics consistent with the **very strong level** of need for differentiation. These characteristics are:

Profile of a <i>Very Strong</i> Need for Differentiation	Cognitive Demands of a <i>Very Strong</i> Program Level
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Academic performance exceeds 98th percentile of student population OR 2 (or more) standard deviations above the mean in core subject areas (reading, mathematics, and written language) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Current information from norm referenced achievement tests should be gathered. b) If norm referenced data are unavailable, a referral should be made to the AG psychologist. 2) Aptitude is at or above the 98th percentile <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) If norm referenced aptitude data are unavailable, a referral should be made to the AG psychologist. 3) Consistently <u>generates</u> and applies abstract reasoning ability. 4) Demonstrates mastery of standard course of study 2-3 years beyond his/her age peers. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Data from K-5 Literacy Profile Card: Receptive and Expressive b) Data from Elementary Mathematics Profile Cards showing mastery of objectives at the current grade level and beyond c) Data from 6-8 Language Arts Standard Course of Study objectives and writing folder grade level requirements d) Data from 6-8 Math Profile Cards showing mastery of objectives at the current grade level and beyond 5) Routinely produces independent work consistent with above indicators. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Consider any special projects demonstrating student proficiency and interest (These projects may or may not be school related.) b) Consider areas of independent study that student has completed or is currently pursuing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for rapid pace of instruction • Includes very difficult learning materials and tasks • Emphasizes flexibility and fluency in problem solving and problem generation • Builds on a student’s well-organized funds of acquired knowledge to transfer previous experience to accomplish complex cognitive tasks • Allows opportunity for student’s quick comprehension of abstract concepts • Incorporates a less structured learning environment • Includes independent learning on regular basis

Wake County Public School System, Academically Gifted Program School Reference Copy, Wake County Public School System AG Program Model, 2002 Edition, Supplementary Section, page 6.



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Procedure for Consideration by Principals and School-Based Committees for Gifted Education

Students may be identified as academically gifted if there is clear demonstration of extreme need for differentiated services; these students perform a minimum of two or more grade levels above age peers. Students who fall within this category may be considered for whole grade advancement. The student may be nominated to the School-Based Committee for Gifted Education (SBC-GE). This process should be initiated at the beginning of the semester and completed during the same semester. If student is recommended for whole grade advancement, placement should occur at the beginning of the next semester.

The SBC-GE will employ the following procedure upon receiving the nomination for students who are not identified as academically gifted in Wake County Public Schools. **If a student is currently identified as an academically gifted student in the Wake County Public Schools, steps 5, 11, 13, and 14 may be omitted.**

1. The principal informs the Academically Gifted Program, Central Services that a student may be considered for whole grade advancement.
2. The principal and SBC-GE review the Considerations for Whole Grade Advancement. There are many issues to consider -- especially social emotional needs and how this will impact the student later in his/her academic career.
3. The SBC-GE collects work samples in English Language Arts and Mathematics that demonstrate level of performance.
4. The SBC-GE reviews Literacy Profiles, Mathematics Profiles, portfolios, writing samples, available norm referenced test data, End-of-Grade scores, End-of-Course percentiles, special projects, etc.
5. The SBC-GE makes the decision to refer or not to refer student for evaluation by the AG Program. (If student is not referred for evaluation, this is a nomination only. Refer to the Nomination Only procedure in the AG Resource Guide.)
6. The AG Resource Teacher completes the Prior Notice and Parent/Guardian Consent for Evaluation (Form 01017).
7. The AG Resource Teacher completes Referral to AG Program psychologist and submits to AG Program, Central Services (Forms 01011, 01012 A and B, 01014, 01017).
8. The AG Program psychologist schedules the evaluation.
9. Once the evaluation is completed, the report will be returned to the SBC-GE.
10. The SBC-GE completes the *Iowa Acceleration Scale* with assistance of AG Program psychologist, parents/guardians and counselors. Where possible, representatives (teachers and counselors) from the receiving grade level are included.
11. The AG Resource Teacher completes evaluation documents (Forms 01010, 01011, 01021).



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12. The SBC-GE reviews all documentation and data on the student.
13. The SBC-GE makes a decision to identify or not to identify student for additional differentiation.
14. The Central Services Record Review Team reviews identification documentation for final approval.
15. The SBC-GE makes a recommendation to the principal on whole grade advancement.
16. The SBC-GE shares the identification recommendation with the parents/guardians.
17. The principal makes the **final determination** on whole grade advancement.
18. The principal shares the decision with parents/guardians.
19. The SBC-GE assists with preparations for whole grade advancement to the assigned grade level and/or receiving school, if needed.

***CAUTION:** A student whose needs can be met by going to the next grade level for instruction in Reading/English Language Arts and/or Mathematics is not necessarily a candidate for whole grade advancement. The AG Program identifies highly gifted students who are functioning at a minimum of 2 years or more above age peers in K-3.*



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POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. *How important are academic ability and achievement in considering whether or not to accelerate?*

To answer this question, two aspects must be considered:

- Expected level of the student's achievement in the new setting
So long as the student's performance is monitored and a plan is in place to address knowledge gaps not covered by review material in the existing curriculum, the transition to the new grade should not be difficult with respect to expected level of achievement.
- Expected long-term level of achievement in future settings
Grade advanced students should be expected to achieve, relative to their new grade peers, at a high level that is generally comparable to their performance in their previous grade.

2. *When is the best time to grade advance a student?*

Two separate time periods need to be considered before deciding upon grade advancement:

- The best time within the total span of the student's academic career
Clinical experience suggests that the younger the student is when accelerated, the better he or she is able to make the adjustment. For these early decisions, it is important that a student has experienced a structured classroom, interacted with peers, and learned the challenges of sharing adult attention with other children. Earlier decisions allow the child to experience a minimum amount of social disruption and generate more time for developing bonds of friendship and mutual interest before the complications of the adolescent years emerge.
- The best time during a specific academic year
The years just before a move to another building, especially between elementary school and middle school, are difficult time for grade advancement. In the best-case scenario, whole grade advancement is implemented at the start of an academic year, following an assessment and planning process that has occurred the previous spring. An alternative is to assess, plan, and accelerate at the very beginning of a school year, such that the student is in the new grade placement prior to the winter break. This approach allows the student to take advantage of the review material in the curriculum, which is typically covered after the break.



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3. *How important is the age and school grade of siblings in considering grade advancement?*

- An absolute rule in grade advancement is that students not be “skipped” into the same grade as an older sibling. Such a move introduces the grade advanced student into the social and academic territory of the older sibling. Even if a school offers more than one class at the given grade level or if the accelerated student could be moved to school acceleration into the same grade as an older sibling is not recommended.
- Students who are not advanced due to a sibling’s age or grade still need to be challenged, however. Alternative methods for increasing their academic challenge must be identified and implemented.

4. *How important are non-academic, developmental characteristics such as age and physical size?*

- Issues of age, size, and coordination need to be examined for every student when considering grade advancement. However, these issues are often given too much emphasis.
- Generally, physical characteristics are a minor issue and should be considered as such.

5. *What about acceleration for the student who is advanced academically but not socially-emotionally?*

- For most students who are considered for grade advancement, social-emotional development is not a concern. Most of these students will have demonstrated the skills to interact well with a number of teachers, groups of students, and friends of different ages, and good social skills will continue to develop following a new grade placement.
- Academically gifted students who are perceived as socially isolated sometimes merely need some intellectual peers with whom they can establish meaningful relationships. Typically, with whole grade advancement, social-emotional issues will either improve or stay the same, but will not worsen.



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6. *What constitutes appropriate school support for a whole grade advancement to proceed?*

- Planning and implementing successful whole-grade advancement requires the coordinated efforts of the student, parents, current and receiving teachers, administrators, and support personnel, such as the AG teacher.
- If the decision is made to whole-grade advance a student, an *Instructional Support Plan* is needed. The plan should contain recommendations for addressing minor knowledge gaps that the student has, setting criteria to measure the student's successful adjustment in the new grade, and designating particular team members who will be responsible for monitoring the student's performance in the new grade until criteria measures are met.
- It is essential that the receiving teacher be included in writing the implementation plan, as his or her attitude and support are critical in creating a supportive and welcoming environment for the whole grade advanced student. While the possible support of all staff is very important, the receiving teacher plays the most critical role.

7. *What is the role of the parent?*

- Parents of academically gifted students are generally appropriately and effectively involved with their children.
- Parents who initiate requests for consideration of curriculum changes for their children should be viewed as advocating for them, and their requests and views should be given serious consideration.

8. *What if the student is involved in competitive school athletics?*

- Whole-grade advancement may place some students, either at the time of the decision or later, at a competitive disadvantage in their particular sport. Parents and students should be made aware of this and encouraged to discuss any concerns, which they may have.
- Whole-grade advancement should never be perceived by a student as punishment. There are situations in which a student being sufficiently involved in and dedicated to athletics is enough reason to decide against grade advancement. If a student who is ready for greater academic challenge is not advanced, then alternative programs, such as mentoring or advancement in specific subject areas, should be implemented.



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9. *What might happen if we leave well enough alone and keep students who appear ready for acceleration at their current grade level?*
- Whole-grade advancement is a positive step for those students who are ready for the academic and social gains that it provides.
 - It is important to remember, too, that no educational placement decision is irrevocable. Sometimes situations warrant reconsideration.
 - Having a designated monitor who maintains positive ongoing communication with the student, parents, and receiving teacher will go far toward preventing unsuccessful whole-grade advancement or at least in recognizing problems at an early stage. The staff member responsible for monitoring the student should be designated in the *Instructional Support Plan*.

Susan Assouline, Ph.D. et al (1998). Iowa Acceleration Scale: A Guide for Whole-Grade Acceleration K-8 Scottsdale, AZ: Gifted Psychology Press.