



REPORT TO

## STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND WELL BEING, CATHOLIC EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

### FORMS OF ACCELERATION FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? (1 Cor 10:16)*

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March 25, 2019	April 4, 2019	<a href="#">Click here to enter a date.</a>

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### RECOMMENDATION REPORT

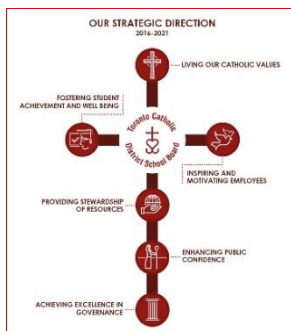
**Vision:**

*At Toronto Catholic we transform the world through witness, faith, innovation and action.*

**Mission:**

*The Toronto Catholic District School Board is an inclusive learning community uniting home, parish and school and rooted in the love of Christ.*

*We educate students to grow in grace and knowledge to lead lives of faith, hope and charity.*



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Director of Education

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Chief Financial Officer

## **A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report outlines a variety of forms of acceleration for gifted and talented students, some benefits and detriments of grade acceleration, and a recommendation for the creation of a committee to establish a TCDSB policy that reflects effective practices in the areas of acceleration and retention.

*The cumulative staff time required to prepare this report was 15 hours*

## **B. PURPOSE**

1. This Recommendation Report is on the Order Paper of the April 4, 2019 Student Achievement Committee Policy as a result of a parent delegation. The parent inquiry pertained to the possibility of grade-level acceleration for qualified students as well as a prospective Board policy on acceleration.
2. Consideration for the development of a policy on acceleration should be accompanied by equal consideration for a policy on retention.

## **C. BACKGROUND**

1. The parent of an elementary school-aged child has advocated for the possibility of grade-level acceleration as the preferred response to his child's motivation to move beyond the current curriculum being covered in the classroom.
2. Trustees made the following motion at the February 7, 2019 Student Achievement and Well Being Committee meeting: *“Received and referred to staff for a report regarding the acceleration process for applicable students in our Board and possible policy development.”*

## **D. EVIDENCE/RESEARCH/ANALYSIS**

1. In this report, the need to address the needs of gifted and talented students is considered from the perspectives of Board protocol as well as, briefly, the provincial and national perspectives.

## **i) Current TCDSB Practice**

The TCDSB endorses the practice of age-appropriate grade placement for all students. It does not currently have a policy on acceleration or retention. In the event that a Parent requests consideration for acceleration, a number of considerations need to be discussed with the Parent and other key stakeholders, and a decision is made in the best interests of the individual child. In most cases, a student's learning needs can be met in the age-appropriate, mainstream classroom. Accommodations to the regular (mainstream) classroom can include: enrichment activities, special peer groupings, or individualized attention.

The term *acceleration* is used to refer to a variety of practices that increase the rate or level of learning for students who learn more quickly or who have more advanced levels of understanding than those expected for students in their grade.<sup>i</sup>

## **ii) Addressing the needs of gifted and talented students in Canada**

Since 1982, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is Part 1 of the repatriated Constitution Act, has afforded every Canadian child his/her fundamental rights and freedoms including an affordable, accessible education.<sup>ii</sup>

Since 2000, various Canadian researchers have noted that there are three key factors to address when creating a meaningful and engaging learning experience for gifted and talented students. They are the following:

- i. An enriched curriculum;
- ii. Social and emotional supports; and
- iii. Access to various categories and forms of acceleration.

If students who are gifted and talented are required to do “routine work at a routine pace,” they run the risk of a significantly reduced level of achievement (Kulik, 1992, p. 7). All forms of acceleration prevent students from becoming bored and/or acting out, and allow them to progress “more rapidly, based on readiness and motivation (NAGC, 2004, p.1).”<sup>iii</sup>

### **iii) Addressing the needs of gifted and talented students in Ontario**

Education is governed provincially. In this realm, many of the education policies of the 1980s have been updated to espouse more inclusive philosophies of education which reflect shifts in understandings about where and how to provide education for all. This education, with a universal design for learning, has evolved to incorporate instructional, learning, assessment, and reporting tools that are necessary for some, but good for all.

It has come to be understood and accepted pedagogically that flexible learning and pacing options are essential tools to accommodate individual differences in students' rates of learning and development. "The goal of all forms of flexible pacing is to provide students with continuous opportunities to enhance their competence at a rate and level responsive to individual readiness."<sup>iv</sup>

Ontario education policies pertaining to the instruction of gifted and talented students do not provide specific mandates regarding the promotion or accelerations of students with this learning profile. Instead, school boards are left to their own discretion with respect to the creation of their own governance and policies regarding gifted programming and categories/types of acceleration. The Ontario Ministry of Education does, however, provide a mandate for the implementation of Special Education programs and services for students identified as Gifted.<sup>v</sup>

Following the completion of an environmental scan of Ontario school boards, it has been determined that only a few boards have a policy on acceleration and/or retention. However, most boards have policies that reference the Growing Success, 2010 document on assessment, evaluation, and reporting. A detailed summary of findings, web links, and key reference documents can be found in **Appendix A**.

## **2. General benefits of acceleration**

In 2016<sup>vi</sup> two meta-analyses of approximately one hundred years of research concluded that students benefited from the following forms of acceleration:

- i) within-class groupings;
- ii) cross-grade subject groupings;

iii) special groupings for the Gifted.

This research also showed that:

i) accelerated students significantly outperformed their non-accelerated same-age peers.

ii) acceleration appeared to have a positive, moderate, and statistically significant impact on students' academic achievement

However, there are considerations to be made when determining what form(s) of acceleration are most beneficial for gifted and talented students.

### 3. **Considerations for When to Accelerate**

There are competency-based and age-based programming acceleration options for gifted and talented learners. "Education programs and curricula can be differentiated in a variety of ways to provide Canada's most capable learners with opportunities to progress at a developmentally appropriate pace, to offer them opportunities to learn 'what they don't already know.' (Stanley, 2000, p. 216)."<sup>vii</sup>

Educators should consider engaging some form of acceleration when the three following considerations hold true:

a) In all aspects of the provincial report card (numeric grade, learning skills, and anecdotal comments), a student consistently demonstrates levels of achievement that are beyond his/her grade-level peers.

b) Achievement assessed includes assignments done independently at home as well as those done in the classroom.

c) Social and emotional development is appropriate for the proposed grade level, and self-esteem is well developed.

Successful acceleration depends on comprehensive assessment, thoughtful decision-making involving all stakeholders, and flexible implementation that is carefully monitored. In these circumstances, educational acceleration appears

to promote social development, reduces boredom, and enhances academic achievement and attitudes toward school (Kanevsky, p.157).<sup>viii</sup>

#### 4. **Categories and Forms of Acceleration**

In 2011, Lannie Kanevsky noted that there were two categories of acceleration which are *content-* and *grade-based* options. More detailed explanations of those can be found in **Appendix B**.

##### **Content-Based:**

- ✓ Advanced placement,
- ✓ concurrent enrolment,
- ✓ e-learning courses,
- ✓ credit by examination,
- ✓ curriculum compacting,
- ✓ co-curricular programs,
- ✓ International Baccalaureate (IB) programs,
- ✓ mentoring,
- ✓ single-subject or subject-matter acceleration.

##### **Grade Based:**

- ✓ Combined classes,
- ✓ continuous progress,
- ✓ early admission to K or Gr.1,
- ✓ early entrance to high school or post-secondary education,
- ✓ early graduation from secondary school,
- ✓ grade-skipping (whole grade acceleration),
- ✓ self-paced instruction,
- ✓ telescoping curriculum

#### 5. **Key Questions to Determine if a Student Will Benefit from Grade-level Acceleration**

The Ontario Psychological Association provides a number of key questions to consider when determining if a student will benefit from acceleration. They are the following:

- i) Is child able to master material at a rapid pace relative to age-mates?

- ii) Does child understand concepts at a deeper level than classmates?
- iii) Does a child demonstrate the emotional maturity to handle the demands of an advanced grade?
- iv) Does child demonstrate the social skills required to handle the demands of an advanced grade?
- v) Are the parent, child and teachers in agreement with an advanced grade placement?

It should be noted that only with a positive response to *all* of these questions should the child be considered for grade-level acceleration.

## 6. **Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiated Instruction is a promising practice of Ontario educators. It is considered to be an excellent means of educating students with a variety of needs and abilities in a shared setting.

According to Karen Hume (2008), the best way to engage students is by offering them choice. By providing differentiated instruction options, this can be made possible. Some key essentials of differentiated instruction are the following (Ontario Ministry of Education Differentiated Instruction (DI) Brochure, October 2008).

- i) Teachers having knowledge of students' readiness to work with concepts, their interests, and their learning preferences, and seeing all preferences as equally valid.
- ii) Teachers use a repertoire of instructional and assessment strategies to meet the needs of different learners.
- iii) All differentiated instruction activities are equally engaging and respectful and take approximately the same amount of time.
- iv) Unless students are on an IEP, all differentiated instruction is based on the same curriculum expectations and all students have opportunities to achieve the same high standards of performance.

v) Students are assessed before, during, and after their learning. Assessments inform next steps for both teacher and student.

vi) Even if students have choices in the ways that they demonstrate their learning, teachers are able to use a common assessment tool (e.g., a rubric) so that all student work is judged against the same assessment criteria.

vii) A defining characteristic of a differentiated classroom is flexibility. Students work in short-term, flexible learning groups and educators are flexible in creating and altering instructional plans in response to learners.

## 7. **Understanding Students' Social-Emotional Needs and Abilities**

Only in extraordinary circumstances should a student be accelerated. If an accommodated or exceptional student is to be considered for acceleration, it should be so only if the student has had opportunities to engage in differentiated learning opportunities in the mainstream classroom and all available Special Education programming supports ex. the Intensive Support Program environment, have been exhausted.

Considerations must be given to all aspects of academic achievement as well as social emotional development

There are some situations where great caution must be exercised in considering a request for advanced placement. Very young children have unique learning needs that must be addressed in a manner that acknowledges their need to be nurtured and respects their developmental level. Accelerated academic learning in early childhood may force the child to rely on lower level processes such as memorization instead of developing higher level cognitive strategies.

In young children the individual needs of each child must be addressed within an environment that is appropriate to the child's interests and abilities. Psychologists and educators have cautioned against the dangers of accelerating learning opportunities (Elkind,1986) or "hothousing" young children (Siegal, 1987).<sup>ix</sup>



Learning opportunities presented at age three through five play a significant role in forming a foundation for learning that builds on confidence and curiosity. Students who may eventually be identified as Gifted might be at a significant disadvantage if they are accelerated.

When programming for gifted students is offered on a withdrawal basis, a child who has been accelerated will be evaluated and admitted to the program based on age norms. However, the placement will be with other gifted students who are one year older. In this setting, the accelerated child will be comparing his/her reasoning abilities and products to those of older gifted students. This may impact negatively on the child's self-esteem and result in a discouraged student who does not attain his/her potential in academic areas.

## 8. **Understanding Students' Cognitive Potential and Academic Achievement**

### **Characteristics of Giftedness<sup>x</sup>**

Educators have recognized that there is a number of typical characteristics that are indicative of Giftedness. However, it should be noted that no student is outstanding in all characteristics. The list of characteristics seen below is neither prescriptive or exhaustive:

#### **Learning Characteristics**

- Has unusually advanced vocabulary for age or grade level
- Has quick mastery and recall of factual information
- Reads a great deal on his or her own; usually prefers adult-level books; does not avoid difficult materials
- Reasons things out for him- or herself

#### **Motivational Characteristics**

- Becomes easily absorbed with and truly involved in certain topics or problems
- Is easily bored with routine tasks
- Needs little external motivation to follow through in work that initially excited him or her
- Strives toward perfection; is self-critical; is not easily satisfied with his or her own speed and products
- Prefers to work independently; requires little direction from teachers

- Stubborn in his or her beliefs
- Concerned with right and wrong, good and bad

### **Creativity Characteristics**

- Constantly asking questions about anything and everything
- Often offers unusual, unique or clever responses
- Is uninhibited in expressions of opinion
- Is a high-risk taker; is adventurous and speculative
- Displays a keen sense of humor
- Shows emotional sensitivity
- Is nonconforming; accepts disorder; is not interested in details; is individualistic; does not fear being different
- Is unwilling to accept authoritarian pronouncements without critical examination

### **Leadership Characteristics**

- Carries responsibility well
- Is self-confident with children his or her own age as well as adults
- Can express him- or herself well
- Adapts readily to new situations
- Generally directs the activity in which he or she is involved

## **9. Consultation with Key Stakeholders**

Successful acceleration depends on comprehensive assessment, thoughtful decision-making involving all stakeholders and flexible implementation that is carefully monitored. In these circumstances, educational acceleration appears to promote social development, reduces boredom, and enhances academic achievement and attitudes toward school.

Psychology staff may assist the principal and parent in this process of determining if this is an appropriate option for a particular student.

## **10. Individual Education Plan Accommodations and Modifications**

An IEP will be prepared for all students with an identification of Giftedness. The Principal of the home school will ensure that an IEP is completed within 30 school days after placement in the program or start of a new school

year/semester. A review of the identification and placement will be determined annually.

## 11. **Academic and Psycho-educational Assessments**

Students with psychological assessments must meet TCDSB criteria for an identification of Giftedness. The assessment must include a measure of intellectual ability that is accepted by TCDSB.

## 12. **Identification and Placement in a (Gifted) Special Education Program**

### **Step 1:**

The OLSAT8 group screening test is administered to **all grade 4 students** as well as to students who are nominated in higher grades but have not previously completed the OLSAT8 test.

### **Step 2:**

Successful candidates who meet the TCDSB criteria will be referred to an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) for possible identification as an Exceptional student with Giftedness and placement in the Gifted Program. Parents are invited to attend this meeting and will obtain information as to the location of the program.

## 13. **Gifted Programs**

Elementary Gifted Intensive Support Programs (ISPs) take the form of *Withdrawal* or *Congregated* Settings.

### **Program Foci:**

- ✓ To broaden the development of the intellectual, emotional, social, cultural, moral and spiritual potential of students
- ✓ To further develop creative thinking, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, problem solving, research, organizational and independence skills

- ✓ To provide students with opportunities to explore multiple perspectives, novel ideas, and to probe topics more deeply
- ✓ To engage students in independent and leadership learning opportunities
- ✓ To provide students with the opportunity to collaborate with like-minded peers

A detailed listing of TCDSB Gifted Congregated and Withdrawal Programs can be found in **Appendix C**.

#### **14. Is Grade-Level Acceleration an Appropriate Response?**

If a student is considered for acceleration, it would be only after all above options, included Gifted Intensive Support programming, have been considered, and it is deemed to be an essential response to promote a student's continued academic, social, and emotional growth.

In order to consider the acceleration of a student, it is recommended that the student have been placed in a TCDSB school for a minimum of one full school (reporting) year.

#### **15. Board Policy on Acceleration and Retention**

Currently, there is no TCDSB policy on acceleration or retention. However, if one were to be created, it should reflect the Board's current practice of endorsing age-appropriate, grade-level placement. Then, within this placement, the appropriate accommodations would continue to be made either for students seeking enrichment or, otherwise, those who might require accommodations either to meet curriculum expectations or to meet those expectations outlined in the Individual Education Plan.

### **E. METRICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

1. The evidence described above highlights potential benefits and drawbacks of acceleration for students.

2. To support consistency of practice in the best interests of students across our board, there need to be clear guidelines for educators regarding accelerating and retaining students.
3. As currently there is no policy in the TCDSB that reflects effective practices regarding acceleration and retention of students, a policy needs to be created.

#### **F. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

There is not currently any policy on acceleration or retention. Therefore, it is recommended that a task force, chaired by the Superintendent of Special Services, be formed to document current TCDSB practices and to develop a policy in the areas of acceleration and retention. Furthermore, it is recommended that staff create a draft policy, and that it be presented to the Governance and Policy (GAP) Committee for consideration.

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Kanevsky, Lannie: *Accelerating Gifted Students in Canada* in Canadian Journal of Education, 36:3 (2013), ©2013 Canadian Society for the Study of Education, p.233.

<sup>ii</sup> Kanevsky, Lannie, (2013), p.231

<sup>iii</sup> Kanevsky, (2013), p. 233

<sup>iv</sup> Kanevsky, (2013), p.232-233

<sup>v</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001.

<sup>vi</sup> Saiying Steenbergen-Hu, Matthew C. Makel, Paula Olszewski-Kubilius. *What One Hundred Years of Research Says About the Effects of Ability Grouping and Acceleration on K–12 Students' Academic Achievement: Findings of Two Second-Order Meta-Analyses* in Review of Educational Research. Vol 86, Issue 4, 2016.

<sup>vii</sup> Kanevski, Lannie, *A Survey of Educational Acceleration Practices in Canada*, in Canadian Journal of Education, 34, 3 (2011), p.155.

<sup>viii</sup> Kanevski (2011), p.157.

<sup>ix</sup> The Association of Chief Psychologists of Ontario School Boards, Learning Challenges: Grade Acceleration, p.2. <http://www.acposb.on.ca/grade-acceleration>

<sup>x</sup> Adapted from: <http://www.us.mensa.org/learn/gifted-youth/insights-into-gifted-youth/gifted-characteristics/>