INTERPRETATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACCELERATED PLACEMENT ACT BY ILLINOIS SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADERS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Understanding how Illinois school district leaders craft acceleration policy and procedures in compliance of the Accelerated Placement Act has not been studied yet. The Accelerated Placement Act was adopted into law by former Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner on August 25, 2017. The Accelerated Placement Act had a mandatory implementation date for all Illinois public schools on July 1, 2018. The goal of this phenomenological study is to contribute to the literature on acceleration by providing research on how Illinois central office administrators make sense and give sense on the Accelerated Placement Act. The focus of this study is on how the attitudes of Illinois school administrators regarding acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act affects the policy and procedures they are crafting for their school districts. In other words, this study examines if Illinois school administrators' beliefs and perceptions about acceleration influence their interpretation and implementation of the new law as they write acceleration policy as well as procedures to meet the legal mandates.

There are three critical areas to explore when examining the policy and the procedures written by Illinois school administrators in compliance with the Accelerated Placement Act. First, there is an examination of the policy agenda, setting, and adoption of the Accelerated Placement Act at the state legislative level. Second, there is a critical analysis on how Illinois school district leaders make sense of acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act. Of importance in making sense of the Accelerated Placement Act is the discussion and comparison of the varying acceleration procedures written by school district leaders in this study based on their interpretation, beliefs, and attitudes of the requirements in the new educational law. Third, there is an investigation into how the school district leaders in this study give sense to internal

and external stakeholders in their school district on acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act.

Data was gathered from qualitative interviews with Illinois central office administrators who currently work in public school districts located in three regions of Cook County, Illinois: South, West, and North. The data gathered from the qualitative interviews provide findings and themes that show how Illinois school leaders have approached acceleration since the adoption of the Accelerated Placement Act.

The findings from this phenomenological study reveal the following:

1. The school district administrators do not share a common definition for acceleration.
2. The school district administrators do not have a collective understanding for the purpose of acceleration.
3. Most school administrators are not in favor of acceleration due to bias, negative past experiences, and misconceptions.
4. There is no additional state funding as well as no additional rules and regulations from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to help support and provide guidance to school administrators.
5. District acceleration procedures are not aligned or correlated to the legal requirements in the Accelerated Placement Act as well as district policies on acceleration.

Five recommendations are suggested based upon the study's findings to help current central office school administrators make sense and give sense on acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act to aid in the policy implementation process of the new law. The recommendations are the following:

1. Current central office school administrators need to be part of the educational policy making process at the legislative level.
2. More detailed rules and regulations are needed from ISBE on how to implement the Accelerated Placement Act with fidelity to help guide Illinois school district leaders.
3. Professional development in acceleration and Accelerated Placement Act are needed to counteract bias and misconceptions on behalf of the Illinois school district leaders.
4 Oversight from ISBE is needed to ensure compliance with the law at the local level.
5. Central office school administrators need to be more transparent with all stakeholders about acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act.

For Eric, Victoria & Johnathan - "A Chuisle Mo Chroí"
and
For Victor - We carried the ball over the finish line.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

Chapter 2: Review of Literature 15

Chapter 3: Methodology 46

Chapter 4: Findings on Policy Agenda Setting and Adoption of the Accelerated Placement Act 73

Chapter 5: Findings on Sensemaking of Acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act 97

Chapter 6: Findings on Sensegiving of the Accelerated Placement Act 288

Chapter 7: Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Future Educational Policy Adoption as Well as District Level Implementation 320

References 352

Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Notice of Determination 365

Appendix B: Illinois Association of Gifted Children's Model Acceleration Policy 366

Appendix C: Parent Inventory for Finding Potential (PIP) by Dr. Karen B. Rogers 371

Appendix D: Georgetown School District's Referral and Consent Form for Early Entrance and Acceleration 375

Appendix E: Georgetown School District's Acceleration Procedures for Early Entrance 377

Appendix F: Riverbend School District's Acceleration Request Form 379

Appendix G: Riverbend School District's Acceleration Procedures for Early Entrance ... 382

Appendix H: Hunter Wood School District's Early Entrance to Kindergarten or First Grade Request Form 383

Appendix I: Hunter Woods School District's Acceleration Procedures for Early Entrance Into Kindergarten 384

Appendix J: Hunter Woods School District's Acceleration Procedures for Early Entrance Into First Grade for a Child Who Attended a Public School for Kindergarten 385

Appendix K: Hunter Woods School District's First Grade Early Entrance Request Form (Students Who Completed Non-Public Kindergarten) 386

Appendix L: Hunter Woods School District's Acceleration Procedures for Early Entrance Into First Grade For A Child Who Attended A Non-Public School For Kindergarten.....388

Appendix M: Georgetown School District's Subject and Whole Grade Acceleration Procedures 389

Appendix N: Riverbend School District's Kindergarten–Second Grade Subject and Whole Grade Acceleration Procedures.....391

Appendix O: Riverbend School District's Grades 3–8 Subject and Whole Grade Acceleration Procedures.....393

Appendix P: Hunter Woods School District's Enrichment/Accelerated Placement Request Form 395

Appendix Q: Hunter Woods School District's Subject Acceleration Procedures in ELA or Math 396

Appendix R: Hunter Wood School District's Whole Grade Acceleration Request Form ..397

Appendix S: Hunter Woods School District's Whole Grade Acceleration Procedures.....398

Appendix T: Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Participants.....399

Appendix U: Krusemark School District's Parent Consideration Form for Early Entrance into Kindergarten.....406

Chapter 1

Introduction

On April 2, 2019, CBS Chicago news reporter Dorothy Tucker interviewed a precocious 3-year old girl named Lila. According to Lila's mother, Ariel, Lila has been reading since the month before her second birthday and now is "reading entire books on her own" (Tucker, 2019). Lila is currently mastering the math concepts of addition and subtraction that are usually taught as part of the general education curriculum in first grade math classes. As residents of Chicago, Ariel reached out to Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to see how she can enroll Lila into kindergarten as a 4-year-old. In other words, Ariel wanted to know CPS's policy for accelerating Lila into kindergarten was early. Ariel wanted Lila to be in kindergarten when she is 4 years old instead of waiting for the legally required age of 5 years old as stated in Illinois school law (105 ILCS 5/10-20.12). To Ariel's surprise, she learned that CPS does not have a policy for accelerating students. Furthermore, when Ariel pressed CPS for a timeline on when it will have an acceleration policy in place, Ms. Karen Burroughs Hansberry from the Office of Access and Enrollment, stated that "I regret that [CPS] do[es] not have timeline" (Tucker, 2019). Even CPS's Chief Education Officer, Ms. LaTonya McDade, stated that she asked the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) for more time to create a policy "because of the sheer size of our district" (Tucker, 2019).

This is problematic for CPS and similarly situated school districts in Illinois that do not have an acceleration policy or acceleration procedures. On August 25, 2017, the Accelerated Placement Act (Public Act 100-0421) was signed into law with a mandated implementation date of July 1, 2018. The purpose of the Accelerated Placement Act "is to provide encouragement, assistance, and guidance to school districts in the development and improvement of educational

programs for gifted and talented children and *children eligible for accelerated placement*" (Illinois General Assembly, 2019). In other words, the Accelerated Placement Act requires all Illinois school districts to create and to implement acceleration policy and procedures as an academic intervention for all students who seek it. The intent of the new law is to prevent Illinois school district leaders from denying to any interested child the access to acceleration based on a mistaken belief that it would be harmful to the child. Furthermore, the Accelerated Placement Act breaks down the subjective gatekeeping barriers school district leaders have employed over the years to make acceleration extremely difficult to obtain for any interested Illinois public student (Matthews, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 10). The Accelerated Placement Act requires Illinois public schools to meet the instructional needs of all their students at their current level of academic achievement and not the grade level they are placed in because of their age. The new Illinois law legally ends the practice of having children who academically, socially, and emotionally need the benefits of acceleration from languishing in classrooms by repeating curricular material they already know. In other words, the Accelerated Placement Act mandates all Illinois public school districts to equitably meet the needs of the whole child for every student seeking acceleration.

The focus of this case study is three-fold. First, there is an examination of the policy agenda, setting, and adoption of the Accelerated Placement Act at the state legislative level. Second, there is a critical analysis on how Illinois school district leaders make sense of acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act. Of importance in making sense of the Accelerated Placement Act is the discussion and comparison of the varying acceleration procedures written by school district leaders in this study based on their interpretation, beliefs, and attitudes of the requirements in the new educational law. Third, there is an investigation into

how the school district leaders in this study give sense to the internal and external stakeholders in their school district on acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act.

Problem Statement

In 2004, a groundbreaking report titled *A Nation Deceived: How America Holds Back its Brightest Students* exposed how school districts across the United States failed in addressing the academic, social, and emotional needs of higher ability students. The report details actionable steps any school leader can implement in order to meet the needs of children who require instructional enrichment. One step is for school administrators to implement acceleration in their curricular programming that would be available for all students to access and not just the identified gifted students.

Acceleration is a means of moving a student through an educational program at a faster rate or at an earlier age than typical (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004, p. 5). Acceleration is an equitable instructional practice because it matches the student's readiness and motivation to the level, complexity, and pace of the curriculum where the student needs to be at to continue learning (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004, p. 5). By accelerating a student to progress and to learn new things at their readiness level, school districts can have such students avoid the unnecessary repetition of curricular material that they have already mastered. Another major benefit of acceleration to school districts is that it is an inexpensive method of providing appropriate educational opportunities for students who might not otherwise reach their potential and/or who might become disengaged from school to the point of dropping out of the school system in entirety due to boredom (Friswold, 2014, p. 48). It is considered an inexpensive academic intervention because many school districts already possess the curricular materials of a higher grade level that an accelerated student needs to continue their educational growth. Also,

many school districts have the extra desk or table to place in a higher grade level classroom for an accelerated student to keep learning.

There are 24 types of acceleration that fall into two broad categories: subject acceleration (also known as content-based acceleration) and whole grade acceleration (also known as grade-based acceleration). According to Southern and Jones (2014), the 24 types of acceleration interventions that school leaders can implement are as follows:

Figure 1

Twenty-four Types of Acceleration Interventions

Subject acceleration	Whole grade acceleration
• Continuous progress • Self-paced instruction • Subject-matter acceleration • Combined classes • Curriculum compacting • Telescoping curriculum • Mentoring/Tutoring • Extracurricular programs • Distance learning • Concurrent/Dual Enrollment • Advanced Placement • Credit by Examination • International Baccalaureate Program • Accelerated/Honors High School or STEM High Schools	• Early admission to kindergarten • Early entrance to first grade • Whole-grade acceleration (also known as grade skipping) • Radical Acceleration (skipping multiple grades at once) • Early Entrance to Middle School • Early Entrance to High School • Early Graduation from High School • Early Entrance to College • Acceleration in College • Early Graduation from College

Even though acceleration is an empirically validated instructional practice for over 80 years, it is still often one of the most underused interventions by school leaders across the United States to address the needs of those students who require enriched instruction (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004, p. 53; Assouline, Colangelo, & VanTassel-Baska, 2014, p. 9). A 2014 report titled *National Surveys of Gifted Programs: Executive Summary* documented that of the 1,566 school districts across the United States surveyed for the study (765 elementary schools, 486 middle schools, and 315 high schools), most of the school districts did not provide acceleration. For example, only 1.7% of elementary school districts and 2.4% of middle schools provide subject acceleration to their students (Matthew, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 3). With whole grade acceleration, only .2% of elementary school districts and .3% of middle schools offer such an acceleration (Matthew, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 3). In terms of high school districts, 6.6% offer dual enrollment classes, 2.2% offer International Baccalaureate programs, and 40.4% offer Advanced Placement courses (Matthew, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 3). School districts in Illinois were not exempt from this trend. In 2016, researchers with the Untapped Potential Project and the Illinois Association of Gifted Children examined how many Illinois public school districts utilized acceleration as an academic intervention to help their higher ability students. The researchers found that almost 90% of Illinois' 852 school districts did not provide acceleration as an intervention for their students (Matthew, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 22).

The failure of the majority of Illinois public schools to address the academic needs of students who would benefit the most from acceleration was recognized by the Illinois General Assembly. On August 25, 2017, the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act (Public Act 100-0421) was signed into law with a mandated implementation date of July 1, 2018. The purpose of the

Accelerated Placement Act is to require all Illinois public school districts to implement acceleration as an intervention for all students and not just the gifted and talented students (Illinois State Board of Education, 2020). In particular, the Accelerated Placement Act highlights the importance of school districts to establish criteria for the creation of an acceleration program with equitable practices in the identification, referral, and consideration of students for acceleration (Illinois State Board of Education, 2020). For example, prior to the Accelerated Placement Act, most public school districts throughout Illinois did not have a formal acceleration policy and/or procedures for families to seek out if they wanted to have their child considered for acceleration (Matthew, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 11). Often such a process for acceleration was a decision that solely rested in the hands of one school district leader: either the affected school principal or the superintendent. With the affected school principal or the superintendent as sole decision maker regarding acceleration, the answer was often "no" to any form of acceleration without any formal decision making process.

As Illinois school district leaders work to comply with the mandates in the Accelerated Placement Act, current acceleration procedures vary widely from district to district in terms of acceleration options available to students as well as the process for identification, referral, screening, and decision making. Due to the newness of the Illinois law, there has been no research exploring why there are variations in acceleration procedures. Furthermore, there had been little research exploring if Illinois school district leaders even have a solid understanding of the concept of acceleration. The problem is that the lack of understanding by school district leaders on the concept of acceleration may play a significant role in the massive variations in current acceleration procedures among Illinois school districts. These variations in acceleration procedures may prevent children who are ready for acceleration from having their academic

needs met, such as the students who are ready for kindergarten before 5 years old like Lila. Instead, students who need to be accelerated face the fact that their needs are delayed or are still not being met at all. This defeats the intent of the new law and irreparably harms the child who is ready academically, socially, and emotionally for the rigors that acceleration can provide.

Purpose Statement

School district leaders can either nurture or inhibit the whole child development of their students by the curricular decisions they make on behalf of a school district. This is especially true for children who are academically ahead of their chronologically aged peers. School district leaders' attitudes, philosophical beliefs, and perceptions about student learning and acceleration can impact any decision made in terms of students having their academic needs met at the current level of their academic, social, and emotional readiness. If school district leaders tie any decision regarding academics to a student being the right legal age for a corresponding grade level, then it would be difficult to view acceleration as a viable academic intervention. The purpose of this study is to conduct a qualitative case study on how Illinois school district administrators' make sense and give sense on the Accelerated Placement Act through the acceleration policy and procedures they have created to comply with the Accelerated Placement Act. This study will determine if Illinois school district leaders are positively or negatively shaping the acceleration policy and procedures in their school districts, especially regarding early entrance, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration. Using sensemaking and sensegiving as the conceptual frameworks, one will explore how 13 Illinois central office administrators (a) define acceleration based on their understanding of the concept; (b) explain the purpose of acceleration; (c) feel about acceleration as an academic intervention for students; (d) implement the acceleration policy and procedures they wrote to comply with the law; and (e) give sense on acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act to district stakeholders.

Overview

This qualitative study will be presented in the following chapters. Chapter 2 will review the literature on the historical development of acceleration within the U.S. educational system. Furthermore, there is a review on the current education trend of acceleration as an academic intervention in school districts across the United States. Lastly, there is a discussion about the Accelerated Placement Act from its beginning as a bill to its impact on Illinois public school districts as a local control issue. Chapter 3 covers the conceptual frameworks guiding this study; the methodology used in this study; the research questions framing this study; and how the collection of data ensures the validity as well as reliability of this case study. Chapter 4 delves into the policy agenda, policy setting, and policy adoption of the Accelerated Placement Act. Chapter 5 explores the sensemaking of the Illinois school district leaders interviewed in this study in regard to acceleration, the Accelerated Placement Act, and the acceleration policy and procedures they created for their school districts. Chapter 6 explains how the school administrators in this study gave sense on the acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act to their school board, fellow administrative colleagues, teachers, students, parents, and the community at large.

Key Terms

The following key terms are used throughout this case study and are defined as follows:

Ability Grouping

Students of like ability or interest are grouped together on a regular basis during the school day for pursuit of advanced knowledge in a specific content area (Rogers, 2002).

Acceleration

An academic intervention of moving a student through an educational program at a faster rate or at an earlier age than is typical (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004, p. 5).

Accelerated Placement

The placement of a child in an educational setting with curriculum that is usually reserved for children who are older or in higher grades (Illinois General Assembly, 2018).

Accelerant

A student who has received some form of academic acceleration (Guilbault, 2009, p. 11).

Attitudes

Attitudes are beliefs or opinions about people, objects, and ideas. Attitudes are formed through a process of affect, behavior, and cognition. Attitudes are implicitly and explicitly affected by internal and external experiences and the beliefs held about those experiences (Santrock, 2005, p. 653).

Beliefs

Beliefs are the cognitive acts or states in which a proposition is taken to be true (Egan, 1986, p. 315).

Cluster Grouping

A small group of students (usually 3 to 10) who have similar academic abilities are placed in the same classroom or in the same grade level to work together under the guidance of a qualified teacher (Rogers, 2002).

Continuous Progress

More rigorous coursework is provided as soon as the prior content is completed and mastered (Colangelo et al., 2004).

Curriculum Compacting

The curriculum for the student is reduced based on pre-assessment of the concepts prior to instruction. If the student shows mastery of concepts prior to instruction, the teacher can

provide to the student the option of deeper instruction of the content or move the student ahead in the curriculum to material the student has not yet learned (Reis, Burns, & Renzulli, 1992).

Differentiation

Differentiation is the practice of adjusting the curriculum, teaching strategies, and classroom environment to meet the needs of all students (Tomlinson, 1999, pp. 48-49).

Early Entrance to Kindergarten

A student enters kindergarten prior to achieving the minimum legal age for school entry as set by district policy or state law. Illinois law (105 ILCS 5/10-20.12) requires that entry to kindergarten is allowed for prospective students who will achieve the age of 5 years on or before September 1 of their entry year (Illinois General Assembly, 2020; Southern & Jones, 2004, p. 5).

Early Entrance to First Grade

A student enters first grade prior to achieving the minimum legal age for school entry as set by district policy or state law. Illinois law (105 ILCS 5/10-20.12) requires that entry to first grade is allowed for prospective students who will achieve the age of 6 years on or before September 1 of their entry year (Illinois General Assembly, 2020; Southern & Jones, 2004, p. 5).

Enrichment

The ability of a school district to offer instruction or activities that challenges a student's full academic ability by broadening their knowledge base and deepening their understanding through the use of new methods of learning, thinking, and sharing (Jolly, 2018, p. 118).

Gatekeeping

Actions of an individual known as a gatekeeper to allow or to prevent a person access to a desired resource(s) (Knotek, Foley-Nicpon, Kozbelt, Olszewski-Kubilius, Protenga, Subotnik, & Worrell, 2020).

Gifted and Talented Children

According to the Illinois School Code, children and youth with outstanding talent who perform or show the potential for performing at remarkable elevated levels of accomplishment when compared with other children and youth of their age, experience, and environment. A child shall be considered gifted and talented in any area of aptitude, especially in language arts and mathematics, by scoring in the top 5% locally in that area of aptitude (Illinois General Assembly, 2018).

General Education

Regular education classrooms that are not considered part of a special education program or a program reserved for the gifted and talented students (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000, p. 3).

Independent Study

A self-directed learning strategy where the teacher acts as a guide or facilitator while the student oversees designing and managing his or her own learning (NAGC, 2000).

Mentoring

A student is paired with a personal instructor or tutor who provides expert guidance as well as instruction in a specific topic, area, subject, or career (Rogers, 2002).

Perceptions

The processes of understanding something using one or more senses through one's daily experiences. Perception is the process of organizing and interpreting sensory information to give it meaning (Santrock, 2005, p. 177).

Policy

An adopted plan of action composed of a set of rules. School policy is influenced by state policies, professional leadership, public attitudes, school-based attitudes, bureaucracy,

rules, regulations, personal relationships, economics, court actions, reforms, and projects (Smutny, Walker, & Meckstroth, 2007, p. 125).

Procedures

A set of steps to implement a policy or to reach an outcome.

Pull-Out Programming

A group of similar ability students are removed from the general education classroom and receive specific instruction in a different educational setting catered to the students' needs from a qualified teacher (Rogers, 2002).

Referrer

An individual who refers a child to a school for consideration as a possible candidate for acceleration.

Referee

A child who has been referred by another individual to be considered for acceleration as an academic intervention.

Self-Paced Instruction

A student proceeds through the curriculum at their own instructional speed (Colangelo et al., 2004).

Special Education

This method of instruction is free and appropriately designed to meet the needs of exceptional students in the least restrictive environment (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000, p. 3).

Subject Acceleration

Also known as subject matter acceleration, partial acceleration, or content-based acceleration, this practice allows a student to be placed in a class with older peers for a part of

the day in one or more content areas or provides a student with materials from higher grades. Subject acceleration may be accomplished by the student either physically moving to a higher level class for instruction (e.g., a second grade student going to a third grade class for reading instruction) or using a higher level curriculum brought into the student's current classroom setting. Subject acceleration may also be accomplished outside of the general instructional schedule such as during summer school or in an after school program (Southern & Jones, 2004, p. 5).

School Administrators

Also known as school district leaders, these individuals in a school district are charged with the creation or revision of school district policy and/or procedures on curriculum, instruction, assessment, finances, maintenance, legal matters, and operations.

Telescoping of the Curriculum

A student completes the curriculum in a shorter time frame than is typical such as finishing a year-long course in one semester in order for the student to move forward in their learning (Rogers, 2002).

Tier 1 Instruction

Based upon the Response to Intervention (RTI) model, Tier 1 is the core curriculum a school district provides to all students in the general education setting.

Tier 2 Instruction

Based upon the RTI model, Tier 2 instruction is designed for students that are not making progress in the core curriculum Tier 1 instruction. Tier 2 practices and systems provide targeted support for students who are not successful with Tier 1 supports alone (PBIS, 2020). The focus

is on supporting students who are at risk for developing more serious academic and/or behavior problems. Often, Tier 2 instruction is delivered to a small group of students (PBIS, 2020).

Tier 3 Instruction

Based upon the RTI model, Tier 3 instruction is designed for students that are not making progress in Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction. Students in Tier 3 instruction receive more intensive, individualized support to improve their behavioral and/or academic outcomes (PBIS, 2020). Tier 3 strategies target students with developmental delays and/or disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders, and students with no current diagnostic label or identification (PBIS, 2020).

Whole Grade Acceleration

Also known as grade level acceleration, grade skipping, or grade-based acceleration, whole grade acceleration is when a student is placed in a grade level ahead of his or her chronologically aged peers. Whole grade acceleration may be done at the beginning of the school year or anytime during the school year (Southern & Jones, 2004, p. 5).

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The purpose of every public school in America is reflected in the mission statement of the U.S. Department of Education: "[T]o promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2017). However, as long as public education has existed, there has been a segment of students that have not been given a consistent excellent education, nor have they received equal access to federal, state, and district resources. This segment of students are the advanced learners. Even today, there is a lack of federal and state legislation that protects the rights of higher ability students versus the laws that protect special education students. As a result, advanced learners are sitting in classrooms across the country dependent upon the district they live in for any potential gifted program, gifted and/or enrichment mandate, or enrichment intervention. Too often, needed academic interventions for advanced learners, such as acceleration, are dismissed by policy makers, school administrators, and teachers for their lack of understanding of the benefits that enrichment interventions provide. With regard to acceleration, over 80 years of research has shown how acceleration helps students succeed academically, socially, and emotionally because they are being challenged at the level they are ready to learn at (Assouline, Colangelo & VanTassel-Baska, 2014, p. 9). However, the truth about the benefits of acceleration has been kept from the decision makers who set the educational policy for our children (Colangelo, Assouline & Gross, 2004, p. 5). School administrators and teachers still do not utilize acceleration as an academic intervention because of personal biases or incomplete and incorrect information regarding the benefits of acceleration (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004, p. 5).

The purpose of this review of the literature is four-fold. First, the nature of acceleration as an academic intervention is explained. There is a discussion of the different forms of acceleration that can be incorporated today within the curricular structure of school districts by administrators and teachers. There is also a focused discussion about the relevance and benefits of one particular acceleration method that benefits the earliest learners in the educational system: early entrance into kindergarten. Second, there is a review of the history of gifted education in the United States with a concentrated focus on the role of acceleration in the educational landscape. Third, there is an examination of the current status of gifted education as well as acceleration in public schools in the U.S. Lastly, the Accelerated Placement Act is examined from its origins as a bill to its current status as an education mandate for all Illinois public schools.

The Nature of Acceleration

Acceleration is an academic intervention to help all students, not just the gifted learners. According to Colangelo, Assouline, and Gross (2014), acceleration is the process of moving students through an educational program at rates faster, or at younger ages, than is typical (p. 5). The goal of acceleration is to challenge a student at the grade level or with the curriculum he or she is ready to learn at, regardless of age. In other words, acceleration helps students obtain the academic, social, and emotional rigor in an educational system needed to succeed in life. When a student is accelerated, the level, complexity, and pace of the curriculum is matched to the readiness and motivation of the student (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2014, p. 5). Students who are accelerated are not stuck or kept in a grade level based on their chronological age. It is important to note here that acceleration is often discussed with gifted education because

acceleration is one of the best practice instruction tools that educators and administrators use with gifted and talented students.

Acceleration is a valued intervention for enrichment because it accounts for and respects individual differences among students' ability levels as well as acknowledges the fact that some of these differences merit educational flexibility (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2014, p. 5). Acceleration is for the student who is ready for the next grade level or for more advanced curriculum in a subject area. Acceleration does not mean forcing a child to learn advanced materials or socialize with older children before they are ready (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2014, p. 5).

Types of Acceleration

Students can be accelerated in two main ways: (a) whole grade acceleration and (b) subject acceleration.

Whole Grade Acceleration

In whole grade acceleration, a student spends a shorter number of years in the K–12 educational system due to entering a grade early and/or skipping an entire grade level (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Behrens, & Assouline, 2018, p. 9). In practice, a student is placed full-time in a higher grade than is typical given the student's age for the purpose of providing consistent access to appropriately challenging learning opportunities (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Behrens, & Assouline, 2018, p. 9). Assouline, Colangelo, VanTassel-Baska, and Lupkowski-Shoplik (2014) detailed the following types of whole grade accelerations that can be implemented today by school district leaders in the K–12 educational system for any child that needs extra support:

- **Early entrance to kindergarten:** A student enters kindergarten prior to achieving the minimum legal age necessary for school entry as set by school district policy or by state law.
- **Early entrance to first grade:** A student enters first grade early by either skipping kindergarten in entirety or moving the child while in kindergarten into first grade.
- **Whole grade acceleration:** This is also known as grade level acceleration or grade skipping. A student is put in a grade level ahead of his or her chronological-aged peers. Whole grade acceleration can be done at any time before the start of the school year or during a school year.
- **Radical acceleration:** In radical acceleration, a student skips multiple grade levels at once. Typically, a child who is radically accelerated is two or more grade levels above his or her chronologically aged peers.
- **Early entrance to middle school:** A student enters middle school ahead of his or her chronologically aged peers in order to partake in the advanced level of instruction needed to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.
- **Early entrance to high school:** A student enters high school ahead of his or her chronologically aged peers in order to partake in the advanced level of instruction needed to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.
- **Early graduation from high school:** A student finishes high school ahead of his or her chronologically aged peers because he or she has earned the number of credits needed to graduate earlier than the typical pathway completion of 4 years. It also means that a determination to graduate early is made by teachers and administrators that the student

has completed the high school curricula and graduation requirements needed in less than the typical 4 years.

- **Early entrance into college:** A student enters college ahead of chronologically aged peers in order to partake in the advanced level of instruction needed to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. A student who enters college early may have already earned college credit in high school through advanced placement courses, dual credit courses, and/or passing exams that award college credit such as the CLEP exam or AP exam. The CLEP exam and AP exam are both offered through the College Board.

Subject Acceleration

In subject acceleration, students are provided with advanced content, skills, concepts, or understandings in a specific content area before the expected age or the expected grade level (Southern & Jones, 2014, p. 10). Subject acceleration is also known as content-based acceleration, subject matter acceleration, or partial acceleration because students may be placed in classes with older peers for a part of the day to receive instruction in one or more content areas. In other words, subject acceleration may be accomplished by the student physically moving into a higher grade level class for instruction for some time during the school day. It also can mean that the student is instructed with instructional materials from a higher grade within his or her current grade level classroom setting. For example, a kindergarten student uses first grade reading instructional materials while remaining in their kindergarten classroom. Instruction in that first grade reading curriculum is conducted by a gifted teacher, a resource teacher, or the general education classroom teacher. Southern and Jones (2014) detailed the following types of subject acceleration that can be implemented today by school district leaders in the K–12 educational system for any child that needs extra support:

- **Continuous progress:** A student is given content progressively as prior content is completed and mastered beyond the instructional level and/or instructional rate of what his or her chronologically aged peers are learning in the same classroom. In other words, the student's learning is not tied to the normal pacing or scope and sequence of a given curriculum.
- **Self-paced instruction:** A student proceeds through learning the instructional activities at a self-selected pace in which the student is in control over all pacing decisions.
- **Subject matter acceleration:** A student is placed in a higher-grade level for one or more subject areas such as a fourth grade student attending a fifth grade class for math instruction. The student may also receive higher grade level instructional materials to learn from while staying in his or her own grade level classroom.
- **Combined classes:** Students in two different grade levels such as students in fourth grade and fifth grade are combined to allow younger students to interact academically and socially with older peers.
- **Curriculum compacting:** The curriculum is adjusted to reduce the amount of time the student spends on content that they already know and starts learning content that they do not know yet. This causes instructional time to be saved for such students because they are engaging in enriching materials or learning advanced content ahead of the normal curriculum pacing.
- **Telescoping curriculum:** A student is provided less time than normal to complete a course in order to advance to the next grade level more quickly. For example, a yearlong math course would be completed in one semester.

- **Mentoring/tutoring:** A student is paired with a mentor or expert tutor who provides advanced or more rapid pacing of instruction.
- **Extracurricular programs:** A student elects to enroll in coursework, after-school programs, or summer programs that provide advanced instruction and/or offer the ability to earn credit.
- **Distance learning:** A student enrolls in coursework offered by an outside organization such as a virtual school or through a correspondence course. The distance learning can be done at home or at the school site.
- **Concurrent/dual enrollment:** A student takes a course at one level and receives concurrent credit for a parallel course at a higher level. Dual credit classes between high schools and community colleges are an example of concurrent/dual enrollment. Another example is what is occurring at Orland School District 135 in Orland Park, Illinois. Orland School District 135 offers Integrated Math I in eighth grade. Not only does the course satisfy the elementary requirement to complete a math course but it satisfies the freshman math requirement at the local high school (Snyder, 2018). Therefore, these students can start as freshmen in Integrated Math II which is typically a math course for sophomores.
- **Advanced Placement (AP):** A student takes a course that confers college credit or placement upon successful completion of a standardized exam. AP courses are commonly found in high schools.
- **Credit by examination:** A student is awarded advanced standing credit in high school or college by successfully completing some form of a mastery test or activity. An example of credit by examination is the College Board's CLEP tests.

- **International Baccalaureate program:** Schools are authorized by the International Baccalaureate (IB) program to offer a specialized educational program that will give students an advanced standing at select universities around the world upon passage of the IB exams.
- **Accelerated/honors high school or STEM high schools:** A student attends a selective high school program designed specifically for advanced learners. For example, the Illinois Math and Science Academy in Aurora, Illinois is a selective high school for students seeking advanced coursework in science, technology, engineering, and math. The Chicago Public Schools have approximately ten accelerated/honors high schools such as Whitney Young Magnet High School and Lane Tech College Prep High School that offer advanced coursework for high school students who are ready for the rigor such classes can provide.

Benefits of Acceleration

With the many forms of acceleration that school district leaders can utilize on behalf of their students, there is an immeasurable amount of benefits acceleration offers to students who are accelerated. The research on the academic benefits of acceleration date back to the 1930s (Matthews, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 5). When children are accelerated appropriately, research shows that they take advantage of the opportunity to be challenged. In 2016, Steenbergen-Hu, Makel, and Olszewski-Kubilius conducted a meta-analysis on 100 years of research on the academic effects of acceleration. What they found was that when high ability students were accelerated, they academically outperformed their non-accelerated, but similarly situated high ability peers by .7 standard deviation, or nearly 1 year ahead (p. 849). Other studies have found that students who are accelerated academically accomplish more in their lives

than their non-accelerated peers. In 2014, Lubinski, Benbow, and Kell conducted a four-decade longitudinal study of two cohorts of intellectually talented 13-year-olds who were identified in the 1970s (1972–1974 and 1976–1978) as being in the top 1% of mathematical reasoning ability in the United States (p. 217). The results of the study showed that the accelerated students in the 1970s far exceeded the academic accomplishments of their non-accelerated peers. Across the two cohorts, 4.1% had earned tenure at a major research university, 2.3% were top executives at "name brand" or Fortune 500 companies, and 2.4% were attorneys at major firms or organizations (Lubinski, Benbow, & Kell, 2014, p. 2217). The accelerated participants had also published 85 books and 7,572 articles, secured 681 patents, and amassed $358 million dollars in grants (Lubinski, Benbow, & Kell, 2014, p. 2217).

The benefits for accelerating students are not just academic. Acceleration benefits students socially and emotionally. Research shows that children who are candidates for acceleration are not only academically ahead of their chronologically aged peers but are also socially and emotionally ahead as well. Accelerated students often seek out the companionship of older students and adults to relate to on their advanced level. In 2006, Gross completed her 20-year study on the long-term effects of acceleration. Gross (2016) found that the students who were accelerated reported having higher self-esteem and being more comfortable in school because they were surrounded by older peers who shared their same intellectual ability (p. 404). The results from the Gross study were similar to the results from a study conducted by Robinson in 2004. Robinson (2004) also found that there was not psychosocial damage to students who were accelerated. Instead, students who were accelerated were positive about themselves and about school because they were able to be in programs with older aged peers that they could relate to and interact with daily (p. 64).

Lastly, there are financial cost saving benefits associated with acceleration. For example, when a student earns college credit while in high school such as through AP exams, dual credit classes, or the CLEP exams, that shortens the time the student spends in college. This shortened time results in less college tuition that needs to be paid. Also, it is a more cost-effective way to obtain college credit because students are paying for classes at the cost of high school tuition rather than taking the same class in college and paying college tuition. By finishing college earlier than the traditional four-year pathway, students enter the workforce earlier to start a career and contributing to society.

In general, the costs of accelerating a child is relatively low because many of the acceleration options that can be utilized by school district leaders already exist within the school district. For example, when grade skipping a student, he or she may be placed in a class that already exists. When accelerating a student by content, the student may be using curricular materials that already exist in the school district for a higher grade level.

The key to acceleration is to make sure that it is an appropriate developmental placement for the child (Wai, 2014, p. 81). Each student is different. Decisions on whether a student should be accelerated must be made thoughtfully based on evidence and data. Evidence to be collected when considering accelerating a child can be the student's level of cognitive functioning, learning strengths, learning preferences, interests, and involvements inside and outside of school (Rogers, 2004, p. 56). Data to evaluate when considering acceleration can come from standardized state assessments, districtwide universal progress monitoring assessments, classroom grades, a portfolio of student work product, and grade-level common assessments. Furthermore, the selection of an acceleration option must be tailored to a student's academic needs as well as social and emotional needs (Wai, 2014, p. 81). The school district

administrators should consider not simply whether the individual student would benefit from acceleration, but which form or forms of acceleration would be most responsive to advancing the student's learning needs (Rogers, 2004, p. 56).

Early Entrance into Kindergarten

Early entrance into kindergarten is one of the most popular acceleration options that parents seek for their child. It also happens to be the most impactful acceleration academically, socially, and emotionally on a child because of how early it occurs in a child's life. Early entrance into kindergarten is often sought if a child is already reading independently; able to do basic addition and/or subtraction; and/or is socially and emotionally at the level of a typical kindergarten student (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Behrens, & Assouline, 2018, p. 9). Early entrance into kindergarten allows a child to start kindergarten prior to being the requisite age established by the state or by the district. In Illinois, state law requires that a child be 5 years old before or on September 1 of the year the parent(s)/guardian(s) seeks to enroll the child in kindergarten (Matthews, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 11).

School districts that allow for early entrance into kindergarten may establish certain criteria prior to admittance such as assessment criteria, age criteria, and/or application fees that the child needs to meet before being accepted. For example, Orland School District 135 in Orland Park, Illinois, requires a child seeking early entrance into kindergarten to complete the Northwest Evaluation Association's Measures of Academic Progress assessment (NWEA MAP) and the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (Snyder, 2018). There is also a teacher checklist of observed behaviors that needs to be completed by a qualified teacher in the district (Snyder, 2018). Brookwood School District 167 in Brookwood, Illinois requires a child seeking early entrance into kindergarten to be:

1. Screened with the Dial 4 Kindergarten Screener;
2. Screened with the Iowa Acceleration Scale;
3. Complete a Parent Survey; and
4. Complete a Preschool Teacher Survey if the child attended preschool (Hatczel, 2019).

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) in Chicago, Illinois requires a child seeking early admission into kindergarten to have complete the following:

1. Completed a year of preschool;
2. Score in the top 2% on an IQ test;
3. Score 91% and above academically amongst one's peers;
4. Submit to testing by CPS psychologists;
5. Complete a parent developmental survey;
6. Must be turning 5 years old between September 2 and October 31 of the year they can enter kindergarten; and
7. Pay a $25 fee (Midwest Academy for Gifted Education, 2019).

Northbrook School District 28 in Northbrook, Illinois only allows early entrance into kindergarten for a child if he or she is turning 5 between September 1 and November 1 of the year they are enrolling (Matthews, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius & Plucker, 2016, p. 11). The child also needs to score at the 98% on a district administered cognitive test and pay a $450 non-refundable fee to initiate the acceleration screening process (Matthews, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 11).

Students who are admitted to kindergarten early experience many academic benefits. By admitting a student into kindergarten early, school leaders are minimizing any gaps in knowledge that might occur by placing the child in the educational system at the start of their academic

career (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Assouline, & Colangelo, 2014, p. 61). If there are gaps in learning, it can be addressed early in kindergarten versus in later grades. Also, early entrance into kindergarten thwarts any tendency toward boredom or behavioral issues by providing a student the ability to learn a curriculum that matches his or her intellectual level (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Assouline, & Colangelo, 2014, p. 61). In other words, the biggest payoff is creating an engaged learner starting from kindergarten (Assouline, Colangelo, & VanTassel-Baska, 2014, p. 48). Lastly, school leaders can equitably address the individual needs of the child by providing them an environment that will help them academically flourish right at the start of their academic careers.

Students who are admitted to kindergarten early experience social and emotional benefits as well as academic. Coss, Andersen, and Mammadov (2016) conducted a study to see the social and emotional impact of early entrance into kindergarten on accelerated students. Coss, Andersen, and Mammadov (2016) found that children who were accelerated into kindergarten were better situated socially and emotionally than their older classmates (p. 39). Furthermore, the researchers discovered that the accelerated students were more likely to engage in extracurricular activities (Coss, Andersen, & Mammadov, 2016, p. 39). This study confirmed the results of an earlier study by Gagne and Gagnier (2004) who found that teachers reported social and emotional benefits to children who entered kindergarten early. Gagne and Gagnier (2004) saw that the earlier a student is accelerated, the better they are socially and emotionally in adjusting to the school environment and in their interactions with the older students.

Though school leaders and teachers worry about allowing a child before the age of 5 years old into kindergarten, the research has shown that acceleration into kindergarten is a positive intervention if it addresses the child's academic, social, and emotional needs to be with

older peers and engage in advance curriculum. It is one of the least disruptive forms of acceleration academically because the child is starting his or her educational career with similar ability peers who are also starting their educational career. It is one of the least disruptive forms of acceleration socially and emotionally because young children have not yet had the time to form close friendships with their classmates due to the fact that they are at the start of the educational careers (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Assouline, & Colangelo, 2014, p. 61). By allowing children who are ready into kindergarten early, these children can start to build the relationships with older peers they so often crave.

The History of Gifted Education and Acceleration in the U.S.

In 1972, a watershed report brought a sobering, yet eye-opening look at the status of advanced learners in the United States. U.S. Commissioner of Education Sidney Marland issued a report to Congress stating that the educational needs of gifted children were being purposely overlooked in America's public schools. Marland had a vested interest in educational opportunities for advanced learners after setting up gifted programs to meet the needs of advanced learners when he was superintendent of Darien Public Schools in Connecticut, Winnetka Public Schools in Illinois, and Pittsburgh Public Schools in Pennsylvania. Titled the *Marland Report*, Marland noted that many school leaders did not know how to identify gifted students in their schools. As a result, he found that "a majority of school administrators stated that they had no gifted children in their schools" (Cooper, Cibulka, & Fusarelli, 2015, p. 372). Worst of all, Marland cited evidence that "identification of gifted students was impeded by cost, apathy, and hostility on the part of school personnel" (Cooper, Cibulka, & Fusarelli, 2015, p. 372). Marland urged Congress to provide ongoing support and leadership at the federal level and state level for the development and maintenance of professional development in the best

practices in gifted education (Cahoon, 2015, p. 28). Furthermore, he stated that the curriculum for advanced learners needs to go beyond the general education curriculum (Cahoon, 2015, p. 28). In particular, Marland appealed to school district leaders across the United States to provide advanced learners differentiated educational programs and services such as acceleration.

In response to the Marland Report, Congress sought to help advanced learners receive a more equitable educational experience in United States public schools. Therefore, Congress appropriated $290,000 for professional development of teachers and school administrators on gifted education; research on gifted students; and the development of a national office for gifted education (Cooper, Cibulka, & Fusarelli, 2015, p. 372). Congress also established the following educational objectives for gifted education:

1. Increase the number and capability of staff responsible for gifted and talented education in the regional offices and the state education agencies.
2. Expand the availability of improved instruments and procedures to identify gifted and talented students.
3. Evaluate appropriate educational programs to address their unique academic needs.
4. Equitably increase the number of gifted and talented students who can be served by high quality programs (Cahoon, 2015, p. 29).

President Ford also responded to the Marland Report by signing a law that resulted in the creation of the Office of Gifted and Talented within the U.S. Department of Education. He also made federal funds available to state and local education agencies for training and research into gifted education.

However, federal attention for gifted education was short-lived. In 1975, federal attention left gifted education and was instead directed toward the passage of Public Law 94-142.

Public Law 94-142 (what later came to be known as *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*) mandated that all children with a disability be given a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Gifted students were intentionally not mentioned in this law because the supporters of the law did not feel that giftedness was a disability. As a result, advanced learners did not receive the federal protection and accountability that Public Law 94-142 offers.

In 1977, the *Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth* was released. The study found advanced learners were still not having their academic needs met in school districts across the United States. The results of the study showed that only about 25,000 students in each age group across the United States had the ability to reason well enough in order to become engineers, mathematicians, physical scientists, or quantitative social scientists (Cahoon, 2015, p. 30). The researchers of the study noticed that high ability students were languishing in classrooms with repeated relearning of content they already knew because schools refused to accelerate them. The results from the *Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth* made Congress act again to protect advanced learners. In 1978, Congress passed the *Gifted and Talented Children's Act*. The new law allocated more federal funding to the states for them to provide gifted educational services for their students. Federal funding was also directed toward professional development, especially in acceleration, for teachers and school administrators.

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released a report on the state of American public schools (Cooper, Cibulka, & Fusarelli, 2015, p. 374). The report was called *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. Just like the Marland Report, *A Nation at Risk* provided a sobering look at the state of gifted education in our nation. According to *A Nation at Risk*, 50% of advanced learners were not performing to their potential due to lack

of federal funding, education, and resources directly for gifted students (Cooper, Cibulka, & Fusarelli, 2015, p. 374). The results of the report also found that U.S. public schools approached student learning with a one-size fits all model. In other words, all students are treated to the same academic experience except if they qualified for special education services. The National Commission of Excellence also saw that only few public schools in the United States had a staff member responsible for gifted identification and programming. In response to such findings, the federal government passed the *Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act* in 1988.

The goal of the *Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act* was to continue federal funding for gifted research, gifted services, and professional development for teachers and administrators (Guilbault, 2009, p. 27). The problem with the *Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act* is that it had several serious drawbacks that hampered the efforts of advocates for gifted education in the United States. First, the act provided "limited monetary initiatives" (Cooper, Cibulka, & Fusarelli, 2015, p. 374). Second, it did not mandate that each state must provide gifted services for its children. Third, the act did not provide enough assistance to create gifted programs in the United States. Lastly, it did not include substantive or procedural due process safeguards similar to those available to students with disabilities under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (Guilbault, 2009, p. 27).

In 2001, President Bush signed the *No Child Left Behind Act* as one of his first pieces of legislation when taking office. The goal of the *No Child Left Behind Act* was to ensure that all students will be grade level proficient in reading and math by 2014. The law purposely did not provide any provisions for advanced learners (Cahoon, 2015, p. 34). The carrot stick of the law was that U.S. public school districts were financially penalized if all their students were not

making adequate yearly academic progress in their reading skills and math skills. To avoid the financial penalty as well as the public stigma of not making annual yearly progress, public school districts in the United States focused their energies and resources on helping struggling students with reading and math. Enriched instruction and interventions for advanced learners such as acceleration was sacrificed since these students were always scoring high on the state achievement tests used to determine adequate yearly progress.

Since 2004, Congress has steadily decreased funding for the *Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act* (Cooper, Cibulka, & Fusarelli, 2015, p. 374). This decrease in funding still occurred even though a 2004 report called *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* charged that the federal government ignores gifted students by not investing in the educational benefits, research, and practices to accelerate and to challenge advanced learners.

A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students was a groundbreaking collection of studies that summarized more than 80 years of research in the field of acceleration (Cahoon, 2015, p. 22). The authors of the report, Colangelo, Assouline, and Gross, provide a collection of meta-analyses of research on the diverse types of acceleration as well as the academic and socio-emotional benefits when students are accelerated. The authors of the report stated that *A Nation Deceived* is a "wake-up to America about the enormous loss of potential to students, families, and the nation when academically precocious students are denied access to opportunities for academic advancement through the use of acceleration" (Guilbault, 2009, p. 29). The results of the report detailed all the benefits of acceleration as a way to maximize learning not just for gifted students but for all students who needed that academic enrichment to survive and succeed in school. Acceleration is invaluable as an academic

intervention because it can motivate students to learn more through the rigor of more challenging coursework. Acceleration helps students complete their education sooner, so they have the ability to contribute to society at an earlier age (Cahoon, 2015, pp. 22-23).

Colangelo, Assouline, and Gross found that many school administrators and teachers in the United States do not use acceleration as an academic intervention because of their lack of knowledge of the benefits of acceleration; through misguided personal biases against accelerating students; and/or beliefs that acceleration is financially too costly for a school district to implement.

The authors stressed the importance of acceleration as an academic intervention for high ability students from all socioeconomic, geographical, and racial backgrounds. The report found that acceleration is most beneficial to students who come from low income to modest income homes because parents who are wealthy are able to provide extra opportunities for their children to challenge them and accelerate them outside of the school setting (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004, p. 7). Acceleration offered in the public school setting can level the playing field of opportunity because students can obtain acceleration services through their local school district. Furthermore, the cost to implement acceleration is often minimal because school districts already have the classroom if a child is going to be whole grade accelerated or school districts already have the curricular materials from a higher grade level to provide to a child that is going to be subject accelerated (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004, p. 7).

Colangelo, Assouline, and Gross were clear that having a schoolwide or districtwide gifted education program was not a perquisite for the implementation of acceleration as an educational intervention (Cahoon, 2015, p. 22). School districts just need to embrace an acceleration process that is truly equitable in addressing the needs of all their students.

Furthermore, parents need to be involved in the discussion regarding the acceleration of their child. Lastly, the individual needs of the student must be carefully investigated to see if acceleration is the right option and which type of acceleration best fits the child's learning needs. According to Colangelo, Assouline, and Gross (2004), "Acceleration is a powerful educational ally, but it is a strategy that requires participation of parents as well as sensitivity to individual needs and circumstances" (p. xi).

By 2011, under pressure to address the growing federal budget deficit, Congress eliminated the *Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act.* As a result, the federal contributions for gifted education dropped to $0 (Cooper, Cibulka, & Fusarelli, 2015, p. 374).

Current Status of Gifted Education and Acceleration in the United States

The current inability of the federal government and state legislatures to provide guidance and accountability on how schools districts can individually and uniquely meet the needs of the advanced learners has direct ties to the way the U.S. educational system has dealt with gifted education and acceleration in the past. Today, the federal government has pushed the equity and accountability of gifted education and acceleration to the states. In other words, instructional and assessment decisions about gifted education and acceleration are deemed a state control issue. Gifted education policy at the state level directs what local school districts decide in regard to meeting or not meeting the needs of their advanced learners (Smutny, Walker, & Meckstroth, 2007, p. 125). Without a federal mandate, funding and resources for gifted education and acceleration has been applied like a patchwork quilt across the United States. For example, only 4 out of the 50 states in the United States fully fund gifted education and protect the rights of gifted students. These states are Florida, Oklahoma, Iowa, and Georgia (Davidson Institute,

2017). Even in our nation's largest school districts, gifted education is given a fraction of the annual school district budget for gifted service funding, resources, and professional development. For example, Stanley and Baines reported in 2002 that of Chicago Public Schools' annual budget of 2 billion dollars, only 3 million (or one-tenth of one percent) covered gifted education (Zabloski, 2010, p. 51). Yet, Chicago Public Schools' budget for special education was 177 times greater than the amount spent on gifted education (Zabloski, 2010, p. 51). Moreover, Stanley and Baines reported that cities like Houston, New York, Los Angeles, Dallas, and Philadelphia also spent less than 1% of their school district's budgets on gifted education (Zabloski, 2010, p. 51).

At the state level, gifted educational policy and funding is tied to rules and regulations that the state legislatures have passed (Smutny, Walker, & Meckstroth, 2007, p. 125). When it comes to acceleration legislation passed by states to be implemented by local public school districts, nine states have explicit laws guaranteeing acceleration for the students in their states. These states are Illinois, Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Minnesota, Ohio, North Carolina, and Texas (Plucker, Giancola, Healy, Adrant & Wang, 2015). Nineteen states ask school districts to develop a formal acceleration policy and/or procedures to help their students but it is not mandatory (Plucker, Giancola, Healy, Adrant, & Wang, 2015). Twenty-one states have made no statement and do not offer guidance on acceleration. These states leave it up to the local school districts to decide for themselves if they will implement an acceleration policy and/or procedures (Plucker, Giancola, Healy, Adrant, & Wang, 2015). Louisiana is the only state to outlaw acceleration as an academic intervention for any student in their state (Plucker, Giancola, Healy, Adrant, & Wang, 2015). Due to the great variation in how the states manage

acceleration, many school districts in the United States do not have policies and/or procedures that support acceleration. The chart below displays state action in regard to acceleration:

Figure 2

State Action on Acceleration

States have mandated legislation on acceleration.	States ask their school districts to develop acceleration policy and/or procedures but it is not mandatory.	States have no statement or guidance on acceleration for their school districts.	States do not permit acceleration.
• Illinois • Alabama • Arizona • Colorado • Kansas • Ohio • Minnesota • Texas • North Carolina	• Arkansas • Connecticut • Georgia • Hawaii • Idaho • Indiana • Iowa • Massachusetts • Michigan • Montana • Nebraska • Nevada • New Mexico • New York • North Dakota • Tennessee • Utah • Vermont • Virginia	• Alaska • California • Delaware • Florida • Kentucky • Maine • Maryland • Mississippi • Missouri • New Hampshire • New Jersey • Oklahoma • Oregon • Pennsylvania • Rhode Island • South Carolina • South Dakota • Washington • West Virginia • Wisconsin • Wyoming	Louisiana

A 2014 report from the National Center of the Gifted and Talented surveyed 1,566 school districts in the United States: 765 elementary school districts, 486 middle school districts, and 315 high school districts (Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2014, p. 2). The survey revealed that schools are not utilizing acceleration as an academic intervention. Of the elementary school districts, the report found that only 1.7% provide subject acceleration and only .2% allow students to skip

grades (Matthews, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 3). Of the middle school districts, 2.4% provide subject acceleration and only .3% allow students to skip grades (Matthews, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 3). At the high school level, 6.6% provide dual enrollment courses, 2.2% offer IB courses, and 40.4% offer Advanced Placement courses (Matthews, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 3).

It should be noted here that the 2016 reauthorization of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* dedicated some attention towards gifted education. The federal government brought back portions of the *Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act* to require that schools identify gifted students if they receive Title I funds (National Gifted Child Association, 2017). Moreover, if schools receive Title II funds, they must provide professional development in gifted education (National Gifted Child Association, 2017).

It is important to note here that gifted education suffers from the stigma of preventing certain groups of children from receiving the educational benefits of gifted services such as acceleration. Since there is not national uniformity in the way to identify children for gifted services, local school districts are left to determine access criteria for their students. Often the access criteria chosen disproportionally filters out the following student groups from consideration for gifted services such as acceleration: Black, Hispanic, Native American, special education, rural, English learners (EL), and students from poverty. For example, Dreilinger (2020) analyzed data from the Office of Civil Rights to find that Black students made up 9% of students in gifted programs across the United States, although they are 15% of the overall student population in U.S. public schools (Dreilinger, 2020). Black and Latino children make up 65% of New York City's public schools student population but just 22% are in the gifted program (Dreilinger, 2020). In Cincinnati Public Schools, Black students make up 63% of the student

body but just 16% are in the gifted program (Dreilinger, 2020). In a 2019 study titled *System Failure: Access Denied,* Gentry, Gray, Whiting, Meadea, and Pereira researched the data from the Office of Civil Rights to find that in South Dakota and Alaska, the two states have a combined student population of 46,000 Native American children in their public schools (Gentry, Gray, Whiting, Meadea, & Pereira, 2019, p. 2). However, only .6% or a little less than 300 students were considered gifted and qualified for services in 2015–2016 (Gentry, Gray, Whiting, Meadea, & Pereira, 2019, p. 2). On the other hand, Asian, White, and higher-income students are disproportionately likely to be classified as gifted (Dreilinger, 2020). Dreilinger (2020) found in the recent data from the Office of Civil Rights that nearly 60% of students in gifted education programs are White as compared to the 50% of White children making up the overall total public school enrollment in the United States.

In terms of students who attend Title I schools (schools that have at least 40% of its student population classified as low income), students in Title I schools were 42% less likely to be identified as gifted and talented as compared to their peers in non-Title I schools (Gentry, Gray, Whiting, Meadea, & Pereira, 2019, p. 88). When it comes to living in rural parts of the United States, Gentry, Gray, Whiting, Meadea, and Pereira (2019) found that 25 states routinely do not identify rural students for gifted services (p. 2). In other words, in half of the United States, rural students in kindergarten–12th grade have less access to identification for gifted services such as acceleration than do students who attend schools in urban and suburban areas (Gentry, Gray, Whiting, Meadea, & Pereira, 2019, p. 3). Lastly, in 2017, the National Association of Gifted Children found that only 2% of English learners (EL) were enrolled in gifted programs (Sanchez, 2017). Researchers learned that even when EL students are identified as gifted, the impulse of school administrators is often to keep them out of accelerated programs

despite evidence that they would benefit from more challenging work while they are learning English (Sanchez, 2017).

Focusing more locally on Chicago and Chicago Public Schools, a 2016 study titled *The Untapped Potential Report,* found that White students, who made up 10% of the district, occupied one in four spots in the gifted program (Kunichoff, 2018). On the other hand, Hispanic students made up 46% of district's student body, but only 25% of those students were in the gifted program (Kunichoff, 2018).

This lack of access and opportunity for gifted services for certain groups of students causes school districts to have an issue with missingness. Missingness is when children are missing from gifted programs who should have been qualified to receive gifted services such as acceleration (Gentry, Gray, Whiting, Meadea, & Pereira, 2019, p. 4). Many factors contribute to the missingness disparity. One factor is that gifted education has some of its roots traceable to racism. For example, Lewis Terman, the educational psychologist who in the 1910s popularized the concept of intelligence quotient (IQ) that became the foundation of gifted education, believed in eugenics (Dreilinger, 2020). A second factor is that identification for gifted education is heavily dependent on multiple achievement and cognitive assessments given at once to students being identified for gifted services such as MAP, STAR 360, CogAT, OLSAT, and Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement (KTEA). Often, these tests may yield disparate results that negatively impact minority students (Gentry, Gray, Whiting, Meadea, & Pereira, 2019, p. 5). Furthermore, test results may not be normed by school administrators to their local student population but to national normative cut-off scores, which may be much higher than what their local student body achieved or can ever achieve (Gentry, Gray, Whiting, Meadea, & Pereira, 2019, p. 5). A third factor is that admissions in gifted programs tend to favor children with

wealthy, educated parents who are more likely to be White as well as have the resources to provide their children with enriching experiences outside of the school setting (Dreilinger, 2020). This causes gifted education to be seen as a negative tool that economically, geographical, and/or racially segregates students (Gentry, Gray, Whiting, Meadea, & Pereira, 2019, p. 5).

Today, many school administrators view gifted education and acceleration as an option or luxury instead of being an educational requirement. The COVID-19 pandemic forced many school districts to reallocate resources toward online learning and technology, such as making sure that every student in the district has a laptop in order to access their classroom virtually as well as their textbooks digitally. Therefore, gifted education and acceleration have been pushed to the bottom of the priority list by many school district leaders. New York City Public School and Seattle Public Schools are considering eliminating gifted education altogether from their programming options (Blustain, 2020). This trend of eliminating access to gifted education was documented by Gentry, Gray, Whiting, Meadea, and Pereira in their 2019 study. Comparing Office of Civil Rights data from 2000 to 2016, there has been a 6% decrease nationally in the number of students having access to gifted education and a 4% decrease nationally in the number of students who attend schools which offer gifted services such as acceleration. Though the percentiles many seem small, one must remember that there are so few gifted educational programs to start with across the United States. Therefore, any loss of gifted services in any state has an immeasurable negative effect on children who need gifted education to continue their learning at their readiness level.

One must not forget that gifted services such as acceleration have untold positive effects for those students who are able to access them. For example, in 2010, Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Peternel studied 30 children in Grades 4–9. Most of them had been accelerated in math at

either Evanston High School District 202 or Evanston/Skokie School District 65 (p. 192). For 1 year to 6 years, these accelerated students participated in an after school accelerated math and science program at Northwestern University's Center for Talent Development called Project EXCITE. The majority of the students in the study were African American (70.6%), followed by 17.6% of the students being multi-racial and 11.8% of the students being Hispanic/Latino (Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Peternel, 2010, p. 192). After participation in Project EXCITE, the students stated that the accelerated academic challenges helped them learn more at their readiness level, kept them excited about learning math, and reduced boredom because they were learning new concepts (Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Peternel, 2010, p. 192). According to one of the participants of the study, she was grateful to participate in Project EXICTE because the accelerated math and science classes challenging her at her learning level, "[T]here's an additional motivation, like finally I can do what I'd like to do, what I'm capable of doing" (Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Peternel, 2010, p. 201).

School districts and school district leaders need to embrace acceleration as a needed academic intervention for students. Acceleration is not hurrying a student through the curriculum but having the curriculum finally catch up to where a child is academically, socially, and emotionally. The work for school district leaders is finding equitable ways to identify students for gifted services such as acceleration. For example, school district leaders can examine a child through multiple pathways such as through Renzulli's Three Ring Conception of Giftedness. The Three Rings of Conception of Giftedness are ability, creativity, and task commitment. By examining multiple pathways, school districts are not heavily dependent on achievement and cognitive assessments as the sole criteria or major criteria to identify a child for gifted services such as acceleration. Seeing the student as a whole child through child, parent,

and teacher interviews as well as examining a portfolio of past student work products will help school administrators determine if gifted services such as acceleration can help the child further their learning for future success.

Illinois Accelerated Placement Act

Prior to the passage of the Accelerated Placement Act by the Illinois General Assembly and Governor Bruce Rauner in 2017, less than half of school districts in Illinois had a written policy on acceleration to help their students. For example, the Illinois Association of Gifted Children and the Untapped Potential Project conducted a study in 2016 to see how many Illinois school districts had an acceleration policy for early entrance into kindergarten. The results showed less than half of all the Illinois school districts, 43.35%, had a policy on early entrance into kindergarten (Matthews, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 11). When it came to having a policy for whole grade acceleration, only 9.19% of all Illinois school districts had a policy on grade level acceleration (Matthews, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 15).

Lack of a state mandate on acceleration meant that Illinois school districts had the unfettered discretion to offer acceleration or to not offer acceleration. As a result, more than half of school districts in Illinois chose not to offer acceleration, especially if it covered whole grade acceleration and early entrance into kindergarten. The reasons given for the lack of acceleration policies by school administrators and teachers across Illinois were their concerns about its academic impact on the affected students; possible negative social and emotional effects on the affected students; and that acceleration is not a focus or needed in districts with a high proportion of low-income students (Matthews, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 11). Another complicating factor was that the Illinois General Assembly ended funding for gifted

education programs in 2003. According to Carolyn Welch, the former policy and advocacy committee co-chair for the Illinois Association of Gifted Children, the lack of state funding for gifted education caused "the number of elementary and middle school districts providing [enrichment] opportunities [to drop] from 80% to 27% in 2016" (Vickroy, 2018, para. 17).

Since leaving the discretion up to each Illinois school district as to whether to offer any form of acceleration for their students led to inequitable results across the state, the Illinois General Assembly and Governor Rauner stepped in to pass the Accelerated Placement Act. The Accelerated Placement Act (Public Act 100-0421) was signed into law on August 25, 2017 and took effect on July 1, 2018. The new law requires all Illinois public school districts to adopt a policy on acceleration as well as craft implementation procedures for acceleration.

At this time, Illinois school districts do not have to provide their acceleration policy to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) unless specifically asked for by ISBE. The new law does require ISBE to collect and to disseminate data on academic acceleration to the general public (105 ILCS5/14A-55, Section 227.20–227.60; Illinois Association for Gifted Children, 2019).

Since July 1, 2018, most Illinois school districts have been creating acceleration policies and procedures to comply with Accelerated Placement Act. Some school district leaders are starting to see that the new law is prompting conversations internally about acceleration in their school districts that may not have occurred before. Moreover, conversations externally with interested stakeholders such as parents are now occurring with some school districts. Prior to the law, parents seeking acceleration for their child found many Illinois school districts unwilling partners in discussing acceleration options for their child. According to Dr. Dave Snyder, the Director of Curriculum for Orland School District 135:

> What the law does now is open the door for more conversations about acceleration. The new law calls for schools and districts to work with families. It caused us to take a team approach through our school-family partnership model to identify students who are maybe a little bit ahead in terms of development and who may have some needs in terms of enriching their academic experience. (Snyder, 2018, para. 4)

Conclusion of Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Gifted education in the United States has never been given equal and equitable status by the federal government, by many states' governments, and by many school districts across this nation. The norm of public education in the United States has been about raising all students to the same minimal level of academic competency at each grade level from kindergarten through 12th grade as was codified in the *No Child Left Behind* law. Unfortunately, this type of educational structure and educational focus leaves out advanced students who have already mastered the grade level skills and content on their first day of school. Yet, they are required to come to class every day for an entire year relearning concepts that they already know.

With little guidance from the federal government, any hope for advanced learners to receive an equitable education is left to the states. Because advanced learners do not enjoy the same level of statutory protection as students with disabilities, it has taken time and effort for states to recognize and to assist gifted children in their education with best practices such as acceleration (Smutny, Walker, & Meckstroth, 2007, p. 125). In many states and school districts, gifted education and acceleration are still viewed as a luxury or an extra service. It is not viewed as a necessity for certain children in their schools to continue their growth in learning. Despite years of research and volumes of statistically reliable information, the mistaken notion that "bright kids don't need anything extra because they'll do fine on their own" continues to be the perceived dogma (Smutny, Walker, & Meckstroth, 2007, p. 125). As a result, one finds a patchwork quilt of gifted or enrichment services in school districts across the United States,

especially when it comes to acceleration. Depending upon the state a child lives in, they may or may not receive enrichment services such as acceleration. This has caused school administrators and teachers across the United States to be at a loss of how to deal with advanced learners when they present themselves to the front door of school districts. As a result, many school leaders allow teachers to still teach the same curriculum to advanced learners as to the rest of the class. According to Spielhagen, Brown, and Hughes, "the very structure of our public school system has created groups of students whose needs have been ill served because they are different from what would be considered the norm" (Cooper, Cibulka & Fusarelli, 2015, p. 365).

The Accelerated Placement Act is causing Illinois school administrators to approach and/or to think about acceleration for their school districts. Acceleration is a proven, research based academic intervention to help the whole child be academically challenged with the right curriculum or be placed in the right grade level. However, the relationship between school districts and acceleration has been a bumpy road. Throughout most of the history of the U.S. public educational system, acceleration has been underutilized as an academic intervention by public schools. With the plethora of acceleration types available to school districts today, one of most important consideration for school district leaders should be equitably identifying students from all backgrounds and experiences that would benefit academically, socially, and emotionally from being accelerated. Furthermore, the discussion of acceleration between the family, the student, and the school district creates true partners in education. With a law mandating that acceleration must occur in Illinois public schools, all children are now given an equitable chance to succeed by having their academic needs met at where they are ready to learn at.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Acceleration cannot occur unless the two major parties affected by it, school district leaders and families, work together for the benefit of the child seeking to be accelerated. Both school administrators and families bring to the table two important perspectives that can be each explored in order to determine if acceleration is the best academic intervention for the student in question.

Central office school administrators are charged with leading a school district as instructional leaders. All decisions they make in terms of curriculum, instruction, and assessment are to be made in the best interests of the children they serve. Often, academic interventions are required to address the needs of individual children. Acceleration is one of the most important academic interventions that can be used for children who require more challenging curricula at their level of academic readiness. As much as school district leaders can be the ones who bring innovative instructional methods and best practices to their school district, they can also be the ones who are gatekeepers to needed curricular changes. A 2016 report from the Illinois Gifted Children Association and the Untapped Potential Project documented that less than half (only 43.35%) of Illinois school districts have an acceleration policy for early entrance into kindergarten and only 9.19% have a policy for grade skipping (Matthew, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 11). In 2017, the Illinois General Assembly tried to remedy this by creating the Accelerated Placement Act to mandate that all Illinois public schools have a written acceleration policy and procedures in place by July 1, 2018.

Examining how the Accelerated Placement Act has impacted Illinois school district leaders and their views about acceleration is critical not only for the field of gifted education but

for the field of education generally. Since the passage of the law, there are vital issues that have been brought up by school district leaders throughout Illinois. The issues are the following:

1. How are school district leaders becoming more informed and/or informing others about acceleration since the passage of the new law?
2. How are school district leaders writing acceleration policies and procedures?
3. How are the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about acceleration held by Illinois school administrators affecting the interpretation and implementation of the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act?
4. Did mandating that acceleration must be offered by every Illinois public school district create an environment of acceptance or rejection for acceleration?
5. Did the new law help change the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of acceleration held by Illinois school administrators?

It is important to view acceleration from the lens of the school district leaders because understanding how they think about acceleration can help others understand how they crafted their districts' acceleration policy and procedures. For example, did the school administrators write equitable policies and procedures to benefit the children who need acceleration the most or did they write policies and procedures to gatekeep families from seeking acceleration?

Research Questions

One of the most important perspectives to research regarding the impact of the Accelerated Placement Act on Illinois public schools is how the new law is affecting public school administrators. Public school administrators such as central office school administrators are the ones charged with writing the acceleration policy and procedures for their district to comply with the new law. The research questions for this case study delve into the attitudinal

beliefs Illinois school district leaders hold regarding acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act as they wrote their district's acceleration policy and procedures. It is imperative to research how school district leaders make sense and give sense on acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act because their decisions lead not only how a district will address the needs of their students but how the community at large will view the district's efforts toward meeting the needs of their children. If school district leaders do not understand the concept of acceleration and/or hold negative attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about acceleration, then the written policy and/or procedures (or lack of a written policy and/or procedures) will function as a gatekeeping measure preventing students who would benefit from being accelerated accessing the needed intervention. Therefore, looking at this case study from the perspective of school district leaders will help one determine how the intent and spirit of the Accelerated Placement Act is being followed by the individuals charged to implement the law on the ground level. The three primary research questions for this study are the following:

1. How do Illinois school district leaders make sense of the Accelerated Placement Act?
2. How do Illinois school district leaders give sense on Accelerated Placement Act?
3. What is the association between Illinois school district leaders' attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives about acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act in terms of the acceleration policy and/or procedures they wrote for their school districts?

Conceptual Frameworks

This study is based upon the conceptual frameworks of sensemaking and sensegiving.

Sensemaking

The sensemaking framework was introduced by Karl Weick. Sensemaking refers to how individuals structure the unknown, so they are able act or make a decision in their present reality.

Sensemaking involves coming up with a plausible understanding—a map—of a shifting world; assessing this map with others through data collection, action, and conversation; and then, refining, or abandoning the map depending on how credible it is (Ancona, 2019). To engage in sensemaking is to construct an understanding of a new concept and render the new concept into something more tangible so action can spring forth. Sensemaking is an ongoing process that may occur at either the conscious or subconscious level as an individual attempts to interpret and to assign meaning to that which is occurring in the environment around them (Davis, 2016). According to Weick (1995), sensemaking is an automatic process of people constantly engaged in the interpretation and the assignment of meaning to what they experience.

Weick (1995) stated that there are seven elements to the sensemaking process:

1. Grounded in identity construction;
2. Retrospective;
3. Enactive or establishment of sensible environments;
4. Social;
5. Ongoing;
6. Focused on and by extracted cues; and
7. Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. (p. 17)

Grounded in Identity Construction. Sensemaking begins with the sense maker grounding their understanding of a new concept in identity construction. Identity construction in sensemaking helps the sense maker understand who he or she is in relation to others and the greater world around them. According to Weick (1995), sensemaking processes derive from the need within individuals to have a sense of identity—that is, a general orientation in situations that maintain esteem and consistency of one's self-conceptions (p. 22). When confronted with a

new concept, the sense maker must determine if the new concept aligns with the sense maker's current identity or causes the sense maker to have to change their identity to comport with the new concept. In other words, the sense maker is asking, "What does this new concept mean to me?"

For school district leaders, new laws in education directly confront their identity not only as a school administrator but also as a school educator. For example, Coburn studied two school principals at urban elementary schools in California as they made sense of new laws on reading instruction. Since 1995, the state of California has been moving away from an earlier state policy on a "literature-based" approach to reading and moving toward a "balanced approach" to reading statewide (Colburn, 2005). From 1995 to 1999, the California legislature passed 12 bills allocating nearly a half a billion dollars to the California State Board of Education to promote the balanced approach to reading instruction through professional development, curricular materials, and assessment (Colburn, 2005).

One of the principals in Colburn's study, Ms. Bernadette Moore, had been a successful reading teacher at the elementary and intermediate grades prior to becoming a principal. The new law on a "balanced approach" to reading instruction differed from her constructed identity of reading instruction being rooted in teaching basic reading skills. Teaching of basic reading skills was a popular approach to teaching reading from the late 1960s until the mid-1980s (Colburn, 2005). Not only did Ms. Moore believe that reading is best learned by breaking up the reading process into small discrete chunks, but that reading instruction needs to follow the textbook from beginning to end (Colburn, 2005). Ms. Moore advocated such an approach to reading to her staff. The balanced approach to reading ran contrary to the identity Ms. Moore constructed as a former reading teacher. Ms. Moore was confronted with trying to make sense of

how this new law fit within her identity. She struggled to determine if she needed to abandon the identity she created about herself as a reading teacher or solidify her identity as to what she felt were the best practices in reading based upon her experience.

Retrospective. The second element of sensemaking is retrospective. For the sense maker to understand a new concept, they refer to the habits or memories of the past to guide their understanding of their current reality. In other words, the sense maker shapes their current reality based on meaningful patterns of past memory or past experiences (McNamara 2015). According to Weick (1995), "the creation of meaning is an attentional process, but it is attentional to that which has already occurred" (pp. 25–26). Because the text of the event to be interpreted has elapsed and is only a memory, anything that affects remembering will affect the sense that is made of those memories today (Weick, 1995). In other words, the sense maker's ability to make sense of an event is only as good as his or her memory.

Retrospection is especially powerful when school district leaders are faced with new laws targeting instructional practices. Ms. Moore, one of the principals in Colburn's study of sensemaking of California's new laws in reading, relied heavily on retrospection to make sense of the new California laws on the balanced approach to reading. Ms. Moore experienced success in increasing standardized test scores in reading with her past instructional reading strategies focusing on having students master a sequence of skills in reading (Colburn, 2005). Her successful experience of breaking up the complex reading process into small, discrete chunks and delivering them to students in the proper sequence so students understood how to read made her a respected authority among her administrative colleagues and the teaching staff she supervised (Colburn, 2005). Furthermore, Ms. Moore stressed the importance of having teachers instruct students in "homogeneous reading groups" or within "learning centers" to reinforce

basic reading skills because this is what worked for her when she was a reading teacher (Colburn, 2005, p. 486). Ms. Moore often referred to her experience as a reading teacher in trying to make sense of California's new reading law.

Enactive or Establishment of Sensible Environments. The third element in sensemaking is the enactive or establishment of sensible environments. The sense maker can create his or her own environment and this created environment can affect how one understands a new concept (Weick, 1995). The created environment can expand one's actions or constrain them. Weick uses the analogy of legislators when describing the enactive or establishment of sensible environments. Legislators construct their reality and the reality of those who are governed by them through authoritative acts (Weick, 1995). When legislators enact laws, they take undefined space, time, and action to draw distinct lines that establish categories and coin labels to create new features of the environment that did not exist before (Weick, 1995). This type of conceptual environment helps the sense maker understand the nuances of a new concept. For example, when the Illinois General Assembly passed the Accelerated Placement Act, they created for the first time legal protections for families seeking acceleration options for their children in public school districts throughout the state. The new law mandated that school districts create policies and procedures on the implementation of acceleration in their school district by July 1, 2018. Prior to the law's passage, 90.19% of Illinois school districts did not have a policy on acceleration (Illinois Association of Gifted Children, 2019). The Illinois General Assembly through the Accelerated Placement Act created a statewide sensible environment for acceleration to be a viable academic intervention for students who need that type of academic rigor to succeed in the K–12 educational setting.

School district leaders often activate or establish a sensible environment when trying to understand new educational laws. The other principal in Colburn's study, Ms. Catherine Tanaka, created an environment of learning about the balanced reading approach in the school she governed. Ms. Tanaka, by training, was a former math teacher with strong experience in improving school climate (Colburn, 2005). Reading instruction was not a strong point in her educator profile. However, even though Ms. Tanaka did not consider herself an expert in reading instruction, she did consider herself an expert in understanding that learners learn best when they are actively constructing their own understanding on any new topic (Colburn, 2005). As a result, Ms. Tanaka created a sensible learning environment in her school for everyone to learn the balanced approach to reading. Ms. Tanaka provided her staff constant professional development in the balanced reading approach so that she "saw herself learning about reading instruction alongside her teachers" (Colburn, 2005, p. 487).

Social. The fourth element of sensemaking is that it is social. The sense maker understands a new concept through the interactions of others. The thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the sense maker are created by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others throughout one's life (Weick, 1995). How a new concept becomes sensible to the sense maker directly depends on his or her past and current socialization. For example, sensemaking occurs based upon the people one interacted with within the world one grew up in; the people who instructed a person throughout their lives; and the people with whom one is currently interacting with daily. The sense maker constructs his or her understanding of a new concept through the talk, the discourse, and/or the conversation with others (Weick, 1995). In education, Gronn (1983) describes this social element of sensemaking as "talk as the work" (p. 1).

School district leaders rely on the social aspect of sensemaking to construct their understanding of new educational laws. In Spillane's study of school district leaders' sensemaking of new math and science standards in Michigan during the late 1990s, Spillane noted the importance of these school leaders using the social factor of sensemaking to understand the new standards. According to Spillane (2004), "social resources such as network ties, both within and beyond an organization, can facilitate the transfer and development of knowledge" (p. 98). The social factor of sensemaking has school district leaders discussing their understanding of new laws with other stakeholders, especially fellow administrators and teachers. This dialogue "can aid sense-making because they bring to the surface insights and perspectives that otherwise might not be known" to the school district leaders (Spillane, 2004, p. 101). Furthermore, the dialogue causes school district leaders to "explicate tacit beliefs as they are prompted to summarize and articulate their interpretations" (Spillane, 2004, p. 101). By explaining their current understanding of the law, school district leaders may come to refine their sensemaking based upon others pointing out "inconsistencies in one's argument . . . [and] revealing flaws that were not apparent before" (Spillane, 2004, p. 101). This is what occurred with one of the Directors of Curriculum in Spillane's study, Ms. Linda Burton. Ms. Burton was the Director of Curriculum at Riverville Public Schools in Michigan. To help her make sense of the new Michigan math standards, Ms. Burton put together a team of lead teachers to discuss how the new math standards are changing math instruction as well as how they are to implement the new standards at Riverville. The dialogue that took place repeatedly among the committee helped Ms. Burton refine her understanding of the pedagogy shift in the math standards. The pedagogy shift was the moving away from teaching math as procedural processes to one of math instruction being focused on student conceptual understanding about the nature of mathematics.

Ms. Burton also expanded her social network to include local university professors and the experts at the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (Spillane, 2004). Seeking social connections outside of the school district environment helped Ms. Burton strengthen her sensemaking of the new math standards.

Ongoing. The fifth element of sensemaking is that it is ongoing. According to Weick (1995), sensemaking never starts or stops. A new concept comes in the middle of a sense maker's reality. As a result, the new concept disrupts the sense maker's current reality and forces the sense maker to integrate the new concept within one's current understanding. Sensemaking is a continuous flow or ongoing because the world, one's interactions with the world, and one's understanding of the world are constantly changing (McNamara, 2015). Ongoing sensemaking causes a sense maker to be perpetually aware and constantly making meaning of new concepts.

For school district leaders, new educational laws coming from the federal and/or state governments often disrupt how school districts function. School leaders must be adept at handling these potentially disruptive events in order to successfully complete the task of educating students (Callan, 2009). However, since the expectation of new laws are part of the environment of education, many school district leaders understand it is the nature of their positions to make sense of these new laws for all their stakeholders. Hence, the process of receiving new educational laws and making sense of them is ongoing. In Spillane's study of school district leaders making sense of new math and science standards, all three school district leaders interviewed for the study stated that the new math and science standards that Michigan passed into law came on the heels of the federal government's standards-based reform movement (Spillane, 2004). One of the Directors of Curriculum interviewed for Spillane's study, Mr.

Sonny Naughton, stated that the new laws on the math and science standards were a part of the larger standards-based reform movement happening in education across the country for the last decade (Spillane, 2004). Mr. Naughton sees the constant passage of educational laws in general as assets, not impositions, in education (Spillane, 2004). For Mr. Naughton, he makes sense of the continual or ongoing passage of educational laws as "hammer[s] to drive change in classroom instruction" (Spillane, 2004, p. 43).

Focused on and by Extracted Cues. The sixth element of sensemaking is that the sense maker is focused on and by extracted cues. Cues are a point of reference that directs a person's attention. When a sense maker is constructing their understanding of a new event, what he or she chooses to focus on will directly affect the direction of their interpretation of the new event. These focused cues, also known as extracted cues, dictate how the sense maker will respond to any new event. It is also important to note that the cues that are ignored by the sense maker will also have a direct impact on how a new concept will be understood by the sense maker. According to Weick (1995), the cues extracted by a sense maker binds people to actions that they then must justify because the extracted cues provide saliency of information, norms, and expectations that constrains one's understanding of the new concept (p. 51). In other words, the cues extracted by the sense maker provides the sense maker a justification for what they choose to believe with a new concept and how they choose to act as a result of their beliefs.

School district leaders often focus on and extract cues from the school environment in order to make sense of new laws. In Colburn's study of California's new laws on a balanced approach to reading, Principal Tanaka often extracted cues from the environment to construct her understanding of the new law. For example, the extracted cues came from professional development, observations of strong reading teachers in the district, and conversations with her

colleagues about what is a balanced approach to reading. As a result of the extracted cues, Ms. Tanaka was able to make sense of the balanced reading approach to include having students "create . . . meaning from text" using inference and critical thinking skills (Spillane, 2014, p. 487). Ms. Tanaka also extracted the cues that a balanced reading approach has teachers "modeling, facilitating, and guiding" students to share their thinking about reading through "think alouds" (Spillane, 2014, p. 487).

Driven by Plausibility Rather Than Accuracy. The last element of sensemaking is that the sense maker is driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. One of the most important aspects of sensemaking is that the sense maker takes action. Many new concepts that a sense maker faces comes when decisions are time sensitive. As a result, if the sense maker waits to gather all the information necessary to make a decision, it may result in inertia of action. Therefore, Weick (1995) stated that the sense maker's ability to use minimal cues quickly in categorizing the events of the environment is what gives the sense maker lead time to adjust to current and future events (p. 58). In other words, the issue is not so much accuracy as it is the continuation of action within ongoing projects or events. Sensemaking is less a matter of accuracy and completeness than it is of plausibility and sufficiency (McNamara, 2015). The sense maker has neither the perceptual nor cognitive resources to know everything exhaustively, so he or she moves forward the best one can with the limited information they have at that moment in time (McNamara, 2015).

For school district leaders, many educational laws come with a time frame where implementation of the law must occur. For example, the Accelerated Placement Act was signed into law by Governor Bruce Rauner on August 25, 2017. Public school districts throughout Illinois were required to implement the new law on July 1, 2018. As a result, school district

leaders were given almost a year to make sense of the law. However, some educational laws require immediate enactment. This causes school district leaders to make sense of large and often confusing amounts of information. This also causes school district leaders to make a tradeoff between accuracy in their work to the timeliness of task completion (Callan, 2009). In Spillane's study of school district leaders making sense of new math and science standards, the Michigan legislature moved from a local control of curriculum to a state-controlled core curriculum as a model for school districts from 1990 through 1996. The school district leaders in the study spent those 6 years trying to make sense of the new standards. The school district leaders from Spillane's study admitted that they did not fully understand the pedagogy changes in the new math and science standards (Spillane, 2004). However, they kept moving forward in making sense of the standards so that their school districts kept on the path of changing their math and science instruction and curriculum (Spillane, 2004). These school district leaders did not stop to fully understand the new standards before changing the math and science curricula in their school districts.

Sensegiving

Once a sense maker makes sense of a new concept, he or she shares that understanding of the new concept with others through sensegiving. In other words, once an individual has made sense of a new concept, he or she engages in telling others about how he or she understands what has occurred or what is going on. The goal in sharing such information is to influence others to adopt a specific understanding or interpretation of the new concept (Davis, 2016). Sensegiving, therefore, is an intentional, strategic act with the goal of influencing the perception of others (Davis, 2016). It is important to note here that sensegiving can only occur if sensemaking is conducted first.

In terms of school district leadership, school district leaders often are faced with making sense of a new law and providing the stakeholders of a school district with their impressions of what the new law is asking the school district to do next. Stakeholders to a school district who look to school district leaders for guidance on a new law include the school board, fellow administrators, parents, teachers, students, and the community at large. It must be noted here that sensegiving goes further than just providing impressions by school district leaders. School administrators are in the role of influencing how all stakeholders understand the new law. Therefore, school administrators must craft deliberate impressions for the stakeholders to internalize (Davis 2016). This deliberate crafting of impressions takes the form of policy creation. In other words, school administrators engage in the sensegiving process by creating policy that embodies their understanding or impressions of a new law. The policy created affects not only those individuals with direct ties to the school district such as students, parents, teachers, fellow administrators, and school board members. The policy created also affects the community at large which may have indirect ties to the school district.

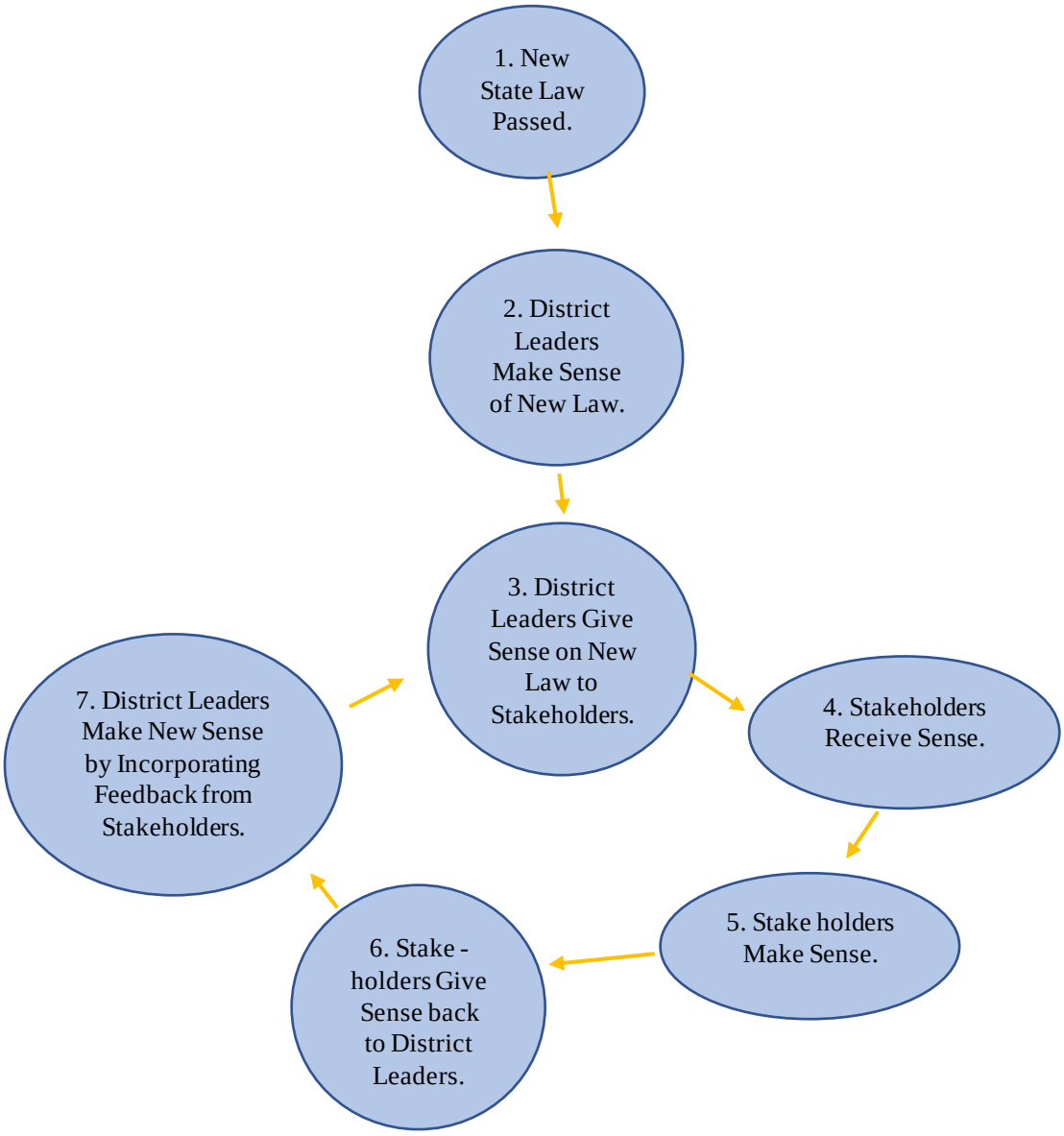
This sensegiving through policy creation causes school district leaders to be what Kingdon (1995) refers to as policy entrepreneurs. The sensegiving process causes school administrators to become policy entrepreneurs because they impact policy through their ability to focus organizational attention on specific issues that they believe to be important (Davis, 2016). The ultimate goal of the policy entrepreneur is to establish a sense of urgency about the issue (Davis 2016). School district leaders create this sense of urgency through sensegiving by influencing stakeholders in the shared belief that implementation of the new law is critical to the functioning of the school district. Therefore, understanding and implementation of the new law is brought to the forefront in the agenda of a school district. It is important to note here that

sensegiving employed by school administrators can flow either vertically or horizontally in the organization (Davis, 2016). Sensegiving by school district leaders flows vertically upward to the school board and vertically downward to the teachers, the students, the parents, and the community at large. Sensegiving also flows horizontally among the school district leaders' fellow administrative colleagues.

Lastly, sensegiving by school administrators can cause them to either become further entrenched in their understanding of a new law or change their understanding. Sensegiving is not a one-way street from school district leaders to stakeholders. Instead, sensegiving is a feedback loop. Through sensegiving, the school administrators may hear opinions, suggestions, and questions from stakeholders about the policy after they have made sense of it. Such opinions, suggestions, and questions may change how school district leaders understand a new law or it may further validate the school district leader's sensemaking of the new law. As aforementioned, sensegiving cannot occur without sensemaking but sensemaking may also be heavily dependent on sensegiving as well for school district leaders to create valid, reliable policy for a school district to act upon. The interplay between sensemaking and sensegiving by school district leaders is addressed in the flow chart (Figure 3) below:

Figure 3

Sensemaking and Sensegiving Flowchart



- A new law is passed by the state or federal government.
- School district leaders make sense of the new law.
- School district leaders give sense on their understanding of the new law through policy creation.

- District stakeholders (school board, fellow administrators, students, parents, teachers, and the community at large) hear the school district leaders' sensemaking and sensegiving of the new law and policy.
- District stakeholders make sense of the law and policy.
- District stakeholders give sense back to the school district leaders.
- School district leaders may recommit or change their sensemaking of the new law based on the district stakeholders' feedback.

The school district leaders in Spillane's study engaged in sensegiving by creating policy on how to implement the new math and science standards. However, Spillane stated that the school district leaders in the study are not merely "viewed as doers of higher-lever policy" implementation (Spillane, 2004, p. 48). The school administrators' sensegiving made them interactive policy makers because "[h]aving access to various sources for ideas about addressing [the new standards], they assessed the merits of these ideas through deliberations with colleagues [to] craft these ideas into policy proposals, and work to get teachers and school administrators to adopt them" (Spillane, 2004, p. 48).

The sensegiving does not stop at policy creation. The sensegiving continues with all the instruments created to implement the policy. All the school district leaders in Spillane's study "deployed various combinations of policy instruments to support the implementation of their policies, including curricular frameworks, curricular materials, student assessments, instructional monitoring, and professional development" (Spillane, 2004, p. 57). These individuals were actively sensegiving beyond the creation of policy through the development of procedures that helped the policy be enacted on the ground in the classroom setting. As the school district leaders worked on the creation of policy instruments or procedures, they received feedback from

their stakeholders regarding the workability of the documents. Therefore, the school district leaders had to further engage in sensemaking and sensegiving while crafting and recrafting policy instruments or procedures that would aid teachers and fellow administrators in implementing the new standards for the benefit of their students.

Methodology

This is a qualitative research study that uses the conceptual frameworks of sensemaking and sensegiving in the examination of school district leaders and their understanding of acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act. I chose to conduct a qualitative research study because I am examining what Hatch (2002) called "the lived experiences of real people in real settings . . . [to understand] how individuals make sense of their everyday lives" (pp. 6–7). In particular, this qualitative research study is a phenomenological study. According to Creswell (2013), "a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (p. 76). Creswell identifies a phenomenon as a "human experience . . . such as insomnia, being left out, anger, grief, or undergoing coronary artery bypass surgery" (p. 76). For this study, the phenomenon all the participants experienced was having to implement an acceleration policy and procedures to comply with the legal mandates in the Accelerated Placement Act. Having a law on acceleration is unique in Illinois since no such legislation had existed before to guarantee an academic intervention for advanced learners.

In a phenomenological study, the researcher "collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). To this end, there are two purposes

to this phenomenological study. The first purpose is to describe the shared experience by all participants in a study (Creswell, 2013). All the participants in this study are central office school district leaders in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois that have been impacted by the mandates of the Accelerated Placement Act. As a result, the participants all experienced the implementation of the Accelerated Placement Act at their local school districts. Data on their shared lived experiences was collected in the form of personal interviews of the participants explaining "what" they experienced and "how" they experienced the phenomena (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). In other words, through the interviews, I gathered what Hatch (2002) termed "experiential narrative materials through conversations" (p. 30). Data was also collected on the written acceleration policy and procedure documents created by 12 of the 13 school district administrators participating in this study. One of the school districts has an acceleration policy but has not written acceleration procedures to implement the policy.

The second purpose of this phenomenological study was to seek out patterns in the data to derive a common theme from the shared experiences. In this case, the interviews as well as the acceleration policy and procedure documents were examined to find the commonality of lived experiences between the 13 central office school administrators. Through the data collection and analysis from the interviews and examination of the documents, a theory developed on how the school district leaders made sense and gave sense on acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act to the district's major stakeholders.

Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy for this study was a representational sample. Representational sampling is "a sample that can be argued on the grounds of mathematical probability to be not too different from the population in which we are interested [in studying]" (Weiss, 1994, p. 21).

The participants for this study are 13 Directors of Curriculum or Assistant Superintendents for Teaching and Learning from the suburbs of Cook County, Illinois. They are a representative sample of the curriculum administrators from this region of Illinois. It is important to note here that the Illinois State Board of Education divided Cook County into three regions due to its large population size. Each region is serviced by a regional education office called an Intermediate Service Center stationed in north, west, and south Cook County (Illinois State Board of Education, 2019). The administrators chosen for this study lie within one of the three regions.

The Directors of Curriculum or the Assistant Superintendents of Teaching and Learning were chosen by a random selection. According to Weiss (1994), "Random selection is not the same as haphazard selection. Random means, rather, that the members of the sample were selected by a procedure that could equally well have selected absolutely anybody in the population" (p. 22). Maxwell (2013) further describes random sampling as "deliberately selecting cases, individuals, or situations that are known to be typical provides far more confidence that the conclusions adequately represent the average members of the population than does a sample of the same size that incorporates substantial random or accidental variation" (p. 98). One such procedure to ensure random selection is to choose names from a list (Weiss, 1994, p. 22). I obtained from the respective Intermediate Service Centers of North Cook, West Cook, and South Cook a list of the names of the individuals in positions of Director of Curriculum or the Assistant Superintendents of Teaching and Learning for every school district the regional office serves. The Directors of Curriculum or Assistant Superintendents for Teaching and Learning were a purposely chosen sample set following the guidelines established by Creswell (2013) and Maxwell (2013) for these reasons:

1. The main responsibility of these administrators is to make all the decisions regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment for their district. They are the lead instructional leaders that the district relies on to push instruction and assessment forward for the benefit of all stakeholders. Writing policy and procedures for acceleration that guide the district forward in compliance of the law as lead curriculum decision makers for acceleration falls within their job responsibilities. Superintendents were not chosen for this study since curriculum, instruction, and assessment is only one part of their positions. Furthermore, many superintendents have delegated any decision making with curriculum, instruction, and assessments to a Director of Curriculum or an Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning if they have that position in their district.
2. The sample size reflects the diversity of suburban Cook County. The socioeconomic populations of students vary greatly in Cook County. Therefore, it is important to have administrative representatives from all three areas to compare and to contrast how they understand the purpose of acceleration as well as implement the precepts of the Accelerated Placement Act.
3. The central office administrators are part of an ISBE Intermediate Service Center that consists of one county (Cook County) instead of being affiliated with an Illinois regional office that encompasses multiple counties.
4. All the administrators chosen for the study are directly impacted with mandates of the Accelerated Placement Act by being the first employee in their districts tasked by their superintendents to set the direction for their districts to make sense and give sense on acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act to all district stakeholders.

After focusing on the Directors of Curriculum or Assistant Superintendents of Teaching and Learning who work at the elementary level (grades kindergarten–eighth grade), the potential pool of candidates was narrowed to about 40 individuals in each of the three regions. I sent the potential candidates an email asking if they would be interested in participating in this study. Any interested candidate needed to email me that they were interested. Of the 120 school district leaders sent emails, 18 responded that they were interested in participating in the study. I called each of the 18 respondents to screen them to see if they would be a fit for this study. After determining who would be a suitable candidate from the initial screening phone call, I invited 13 candidates to participate in the study. I also explained the purpose of this study and how they were to be interviewed. In the end, I obtained 13 participants with 12 being female and 1 being male for this qualitative study. All interviews were conducted by Zoom due to the COVID-19 restrictions in Illinois in regard to physical gatherings. The participants were interviewed with a set of interview questions that focused on the school administrator's understanding of acceleration, as well as how they made sense and gave sense on the Accelerated Placement Act through their newly written policy and procedures. The interviews lasted between 60 minutes to 180 minutes. After the interview, the participants provided their written acceleration policy and procedures. All the participants were interviewed once. However, a few of the participants were emailed after the interview to clarify their answers in regard to some of the interview questions.

Data Analysis/Data Collection

The data obtained in this qualitative research study was examined using analytic memos, descriptive coding, categorizing, and connecting strategies. According to Maxwell (2013), "analytic memo writing documents reflections on: your coding processes and code choices; how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and the emergent patterns, categories and sub-categories,

themes, and concepts in your data—all possibly leading toward theory" (p. 44). Analytic memos were written when I partook in the semi-structured interviews as well as when I examined the acceleration policy and procedures documents provided to me from the participants. The analytic memos captured my analytic thinking and analysis about the data (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105). I categorized the data from the interviews as well as the acceleration policy and procedure documents after it was descriptively coded. The data was categorized into three meaningful units of (a) policy creation and adoption of the Accelerated Placement Act; (b) Illinois central office administrators making sense of the acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act; and (c) Illinois central office administrators giving sense on acceleration and the Acceleration Placement Act to their district's stakeholders. All the coded data was put in a matrix to organize the data into the three observable categories (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107). Lastly, all of the qualitative data was analyzed to find connections between the coded categories. From here, themes and patterns emerged on how the policy agenda, setting, and adoption of the Accelerated Placement Act had a direct effect on how Illinois central office school administrators made sense and gave sense of the law and acceleration in general. The themes and patterns in this study are important since no one has yet studied how the Accelerated Placement Act affects school administrators in Illinois.

Quality Control

The execution of this study follows the protocols of validity and generalizability. According to Krathwohl and Smith (2005), validity is evidence that forms the basis for an intended score interpretation and serves as a unifying framework for other validity evidence (p. 93). Validity correlates measures that ought to be related and does not correlate with those it should not (Krathwohl & Smith, 2005, p. 93). I ensured the validity of this study by

triangulating the data. The data was triangulated in this research study of Illinois school district leaders by using three main forms of data: (a) the answers from the semi-structured qualitative interviews, (b) acceleration policy documents, and (c) acceleration procedures documents. Therefore, the multiple and diverse sources of data provided a corroboration of the data (Maxwell, 2013, p. 102; Creswell, 2013, p. 251).

Threats to validity such as bias were controlled for in this study. Maxwell (2013) describes validity threat as:

> Alternative explanations or interpretations . . . for example, that the people you interviewed are net presenting their actual views, or that you have ignored data that does not fit your interpretation, or that there is a different theoretical way of making sense of your data. (p. 123)

It is important to note that I was mindful of any bias I may have toward any of the participants in the study, especially the Directors of Curriculum or the Assistant Superintendents of Teaching and Learning, by being reflexive. According to Hatch (2002),

> Being reflexive places qualitative researchers in a distinctly different position than that of the "objective scientist" usually prescribed in more traditional research activities. The capacities to be reflexive, to keep track of one's influence on a setting, to bracket one's biases, to monitor one's emotional responses are in the same capacities that allow researchers to get close enough to human action to understand what is going on. Reflexivity, "the process of personally and academically reflecting on lived experiences in ways that reveal deep connections between the writer and his or her subject" is essential to the integrity of qualitative research. (pp. 10–11)

Several of the school administrators in this study I have worked with in the past as a colleague through the Cook County curriculum network. Therefore, I needed to constantly vigilant in my reflexiveness to make sure that my familiarity with them did not taint the interview questions as well as how I coded and/or understood the data. Lastly, I needed to be mindful of my own experiences writing acceleration policy and procedures to comply with Accelerated Placement as an administrator. I had to be reflexive by divorcing my experiences

from the experiences of the participants in order to effectively interview them and analyze their acceleration documents.

Lastly, generalizability relates to the findings in a study. According to Krathwohl and Smith (2005), generalizable findings apply to (and therefore could be replicated with) other persons, situations or contexts, treatments, observations or measures, study methods or designs, and times (p. 32). The findings of this study on how acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act impacts school district leaders can be generalized to see how school administrators react to the implementation of new laws in general such as to the LGBTQ Inclusive Curriculum Bill signed into law by Illinois Governor J. B. Pritzker in 2019. Also, the findings can be generalized to see how the Illinois General Assembly passes educational policy laws that have mandates which directly affect school districts.

Limitations

There are five limitations to this study. The first limitation is the newness of the Accelerated Placement Act. Due to the mandatory implementation starting on July 1, 2018, school administrators are still trying to understand the policy implications behind the new law. Even the attorneys that they consult for guidance on how to write acceleration procedures are also trying to understand what is expected of school districts in terms of acceleration in order to be compliant with the law. Currently, there is a 2-page guidance document put forth by ISBE to aid school district leaders in creating acceleration policies and procedures (see Accelerated Placement Act Guidance at https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Accelerated_Placement_Act_Guidance.pdf). Detailed regulations and rules to further help school districts in crafting their acceleration policies and procedures is pending with the Illinois State Board of Education according to Carolyn Welch, the

former policy and advocacy committee co-chair for the Illinois Association of Gifted Children and one of the co-writers of the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act. The initial set of rules and regulations from ISBE in regard to the Accelerated Placement Act can be found on the ISBE website at: https://www.isbe.net/Documents/227ARK.pdf.

The second limitation comes in the number of school administrators available to be interviewed as well as their location. All the school administrators chosen from this study are from the suburban Chicagoland area. As a result of being in the most densely populated region of Illinois, the school districts the participants in my study represent have a different student body population versus the rest of the state of Illinois which is more rural. Also, the suburban Chicagoland school districts have school administrators connected with an intermediate service center instead of a larger regional office.

The third limitation is that the study is not focusing on the perspectives of families now seeking acceleration since the new law was enacted. For the scope of this study, the focus is on school administrators. However, focusing on families is another avenue where this study can evolve into for future research.

The fourth limitation is that I am not focusing on how the Accelerated Placement Act affects internal district stakeholders such as building principals, superintendents, teachers, and students. However, the perspective of the aforementioned stakeholders are key areas to study in the future to contribute to the research of acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act.

The fifth limitation is that this study was done during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially during the summer of 2020. As willing as the participants were in this study to discuss how they made sense and gave sense on acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act, their main priority was trying to decide how their school district was going to open in the Fall of

2020. As a result, they were all very forthcoming in stating that acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act was a low priority in their district's agenda as compared to figuring out how to open schools safely or if they were going to open at all.

Conclusion of Chapter 3: Methodology

Central office school administrators hold a lot of power when it comes to deciding the direction of a school district's agenda with curriculum, instruction, and assessment. They can choose how a district is going to move as well as follow in terms of the best instructional practices and academic interventions. Acceleration, as an academic intervention, has over 80 years of research showing it to be an effective intervention, especially for advanced learners (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004, p. 2). However, it is the most underutilized intervention by school administrators (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004, p. 2). This fact was recognized by Illinois legislators and Governor Bruce Rauner when passing the Accelerated Placement Act in 2017. In education, the goal is to constantly strive for continual improvement. Understanding how school district leaders can help all students succeed through the Accelerated Placement Act and using acceleration as an academic intervention is needed to help children obtain the successful academic careers that they deserve. Therefore, it is important to study how the Illinois school district leaders perceive acceleration and Accelerated Placement Act as they wrote policy and procedures not only for their district but for their communities.

Chapter 4

Findings on Policy Agenda Setting and Adoption of the Accelerated Placement Act

Illinois school districts are governed by laws and policies not only made at the federal level but also made at the state level. The Accelerated Placement Act is an example of a state law that mandates all Illinois public school districts implement a policy on acceleration. This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section explains the policy agenda setting for the Acceleration Placement Act. This second section describes the adoption of the Accelerated Placement Act in the Illinois General Assembly. The third section describes the issues surrounding adoption of the new law. The fourth section explains the current legal requirements in the law that Illinois school districts are mandated to implement. The last section analyzes the current status of the law with ISBE, Illinois school districts, and families seeking acceleration post adoption.

Policy Agenda Setting of the Accelerated Placement Act

The Accelerated Placement Act was brought into existence by Ms. Carolyn Welch and her colleague, Dr. Eric Calvert. Ms. Carolyn Welch is an education attorney in Illinois and is currently the Chief Executive Officer for the Midwest Center for the Gifted. Ms. Welch also serves on the Legislative and Advocacy Committee for the National Association for Gifted Children (hereinafter NAGC). She is the former Policy and Advocacy Co-Chair for the Illinois Association for Gifted Children (hereinafter IAGC). Dr. Eric Calvert is the Associate Director for the Center of Talent Development at Northwestern University. Formerly, Dr. Calvert was the Director for Gifted Education at the Ohio Department of Education and co-chair with Ms. Welch on IAGC's Policy and Advocacy Committee. It was Ms. Welch and Dr. Calvert's capacities as

co-chairs of IAGC's Policy and Advocacy Committee that they proposed the Accelerated Placement Act to Illinois Senator Kimberly Lightford and Illinois Representative Camille Lilly.

According to Ms. Welch, the reason she sought to have an acceleration law in place in Illinois was because "there are so many students throughout the state that have not had access to any advanced coursework or any process for determining whether they would benefit from it." Therefore, Ms. Welch felt that all Illinois students would benefit from being able to obtain an enriched educational experience. One way she sought for Illinois students to have access to enriching, advanced coursework is through the use of acceleration. For Ms. Welch, acceleration is "taking that kid and finding a way to put them at the right level class." In other words, the purpose of acceleration is to match a school district's curriculum to a student's academic readiness level. Ms. Welch was clear to point out that acceleration would not just be an opportunity available to students who have been identified as gifted and/or talented. This was an opportunity available to all students in any Illinois public school district who qualifies for acceleration. As Ms. Welch stated,

> I think you can say we have at least successfully made the argument in our law that schools have to provide acceleration and that it can't be limited to just those students that have hit that threshold for giftedness. [School districts are] now providing opportunities to accelerate for those who do not meet the overall [gifted] threshold but do need acceleration in certain [academic] areas.

That matching of the curriculum to a student's academic readiness would occur through a thoughtful, organized decision-making process at the school district. One of the main requirements in the Accelerated Placement Act is that the decision-making process utilizes multiple assessment instruments. These assessment instruments must contain valid and reliable indicators when considering a student for acceleration. For Ms. Welch, she was clear that the

intention for the use of assessments in the Accelerated Placement Act is that there needed to be more than one.

> You can't have a test and . . . one factor considered to determine if a student would benefit from accelerated placement. You don't say that you didn't hit this score on this test; . . . the idea behind it (the Accelerated Placement Act), in the best practices, there had to be multiple pathways for students to demonstrate that they would benefit from accelerated placement. They (school districts) should look at multiple factors.

Which assessment instruments to use to determine acceleration, how many assessments to use, the assessments' cut-off scores for qualification for acceleration, and how the assessment instruments are to be implemented was left to local school districts to decide for themselves. As Ms. Welch put it,

> It is going to be a work in progress at the district level [because] the law is pretty flexible. It says a lot of the decision-making has been left to the local school district because you are making [decisions] for the population that you have.

However, Ms. Welch stated that one of the goals of the Accelerated Placement Act is for collaboration between families, educators, and the school administrators. One area for collaboration is the acceleration decision-making process. According to Ms. Welch,

> What this (the Accelerated Placement Act) does is that it gives educators who care about it (acceleration) and parents who care about it and are concerned about their kids leverage to go in and get involved and have a collaborative process at the district level to try and to create the best [process] that they can. It (the law) gives leverage for this discussion.

In addition to having a thoughtful, organized decision-making process, Ms. Welch stated that another main goal of the Accelerated Placement Act was to guarantee that students have access to the process of acceleration as an academic intervention. "The non-negotiables [of the law] are the process [of acceleration] that has to be open to all students . . . .We want all students to have access to the [acceleration] process." Guaranteeing access to acceleration for all students in Illinois was paramount in the law. Prior to the passage of the Illinois Acceleration Placement Act, Ms. Welsh stated that not all students in Illinois had access to curriculum at their readiness

level. For example, Ms. Welch highlighted that students from families in high-poverty school districts are hurt the most academically because their school districts provide the least opportunities for more advanced coursework. According to Ms. Welch,

> There is a lot more awareness about the fact that when we don't provide [acceleration] policy support for advanced students. The ones that are the most hurt by that are the ones that don't have . . . schools with the resources to supplement . . . to keep them challenged.

Ms. Welch brings her own personal experience when discussing why she wrote the Accelerated Placement Act. Ms. Welch's daughter was not being academically challenged while she was in early elementary school. She asked the school district to start a process to see if her daughter was a candidate for whole grade acceleration. Unfortunately, the school district did not have a process in place to consider her acceleration request. Therefore, Ms. Welch started the process by providing the school district with academic data to show that her daughter was academically ready for the curriculum of a higher grade level. She also provided the school district a copy of *A Nation Deceived* showing the research of how acceleration benefits all stakeholders, especially students. Instead of using the academic data and/or the research of acceleration as a starting point to begin the discussion about whole grade acceleration, the school district instead focused on the social and emotional maturity of Ms. Welch's daughter to be in a higher grade level. Therefore, the school district had the school psychologist observe Ms. Welch's daughter during recess one time. The school psychologist noted that Ms. Welch's daughter liked to play by herself.

> I come at this (acceleration) from both my legal perspective and a passion for equity and civil rights, but also my personal experiences with my kids. When my daughter was in second or third grade after not being challenged and switching school districts, we did approach the school district . . . with whole grade acceleration. There is this built-in bias. Everything became about social and emotional readiness, and she was a very socially mature and emotionally mature kid. As a lot of high ability students are, she was on the introverted side so when they would send a psychologist, who knew nothing about giftedness, out to observe her on the

> playground, she wasn't in the middle of a gigantic group sometimes. She would do her own thing on the fringes of the playground.

When the school psychologist told the school district that they observed that Ms. Welch's daughter likes to play by herself during recess, the school district decided that Ms. Welch's daughter was not socially and emotionally ready for whole grade acceleration. In other words, because there was no process in place at the school district to consider acceleration requests, one observation was enough evidence for the school district to deny the request for acceleration. The evidence the school district based their denial of acceleration on was the fact that a child independently played by herself.

> I just remember sitting there, after having brought in *A Nation Deceived* and talking to them, knowing that there was no question about her academic readiness, it was all about whether she was playing all the time in gigantic groups on the playground. It wasn't about being concerned about classes. . . . It wasn't a process where they evaluated all of her scores and had a systematic approach. It was just them coming in and saying we don't think she is ready because we observed her on the playground, and she does her own thing sometimes. . . . This was before the law passed so it was the classic example of the single gatekeeper.

With this personal experience, Ms. Welch sought to write a law to guarantee that school districts in Illinois have a process in place for acceleration requests. According to Ms. Welch, "You are just asking that there is a process where you decide if the curriculum level they (the students) are receiving is aligned with their ability level or not." More importantly, Ms. Welch wanted to have school districts break down their gatekeeping methods to open their doors to having open conversations with families seeking acceleration. Therefore, Ms. Welch and her colleague, Dr. Calvert, wrote the Accelerated Placement Act on behalf of the IAGC to ensure that school districts throughout Illinois create a system for considering if a child is ready for acceleration. The system includes multiple professionals as well as data points to truly see if acceleration is the proper academic intervention for a child. According to Ms. Welch, "It has to

be multiple people reviewing multiple data points to see whether you are ready [for acceleration]."

Adoption of the Accelerated Placement Act in the Illinois General Assembly

Ms. Welch and her colleague, Dr. Calvert, wrote the Accelerated Placement Act as a draft bill for the Illinois General Assembly. In Illinois, after a bill has been properly drafted, a congressional representative from either the House of Representatives or the Senate sponsors the bill and introduces it into their chamber (Actconnetcengage.com, 2021). In the case of the Accelerated Placement Act, Senator Kimberly Lightford (Democrat) became the chief sponsor of the bill and introduced it to the Illinois Senate on February 7, 2017. After the bill was introduced, Senator Chuck Weaver (Republican) joined as a co-chief sponsor on the same day the bill was introduced as a show of bi-partisan support. Through the law's passage in the Senate, eight more Illinois senators became sponsors of the bill: Senator David Koehler (Democrat), Senator Dan McConchie (Republican), Senator Sue Rezin (Republican), Senator Melinda Bush (Democrat), Senator Karen McCannaughay (Republican), Senator Iris Martinez (Democrat), Senator Don Harmon (Democrat), and Senator Mattie Hunter (Democrat).

In Illinois, after the bill is introduced in one of the chambers, it is assigned a number and assigned to a committee. In the case of the Accelerated Placement Act, it was numbered Senate Bill 1223, and it was assigned to the Senate's Education Committee on February 15, 2017. During the first committee hearing, the bill's sponsor explains the purpose of the bill to the committee members. This is called the "first reading" of a proposed bill (Actconnetcengage.com, 2021). Also present are individuals for or against the bill such as an individual representing an interest group, a member of a government agency, or a private citizen. They are present when the bill is introduced to the committee to also explain their reason for or

against the bill (Actconnetcengage.com, 2021). In other words, lobbyists, interest group representatives, and private citizens all have a chance at this time to voice support or opposition to a bill (Actconnetcengage.com, 2021). Ms. Welch and Dr. Calvert represented IAGC and explained the need for Senate Bill 1223 to the education committee. Also present when the bill was introduced to the Senate's education committee was a young 9-year-old Illinois public school student named Oliver. Oliver also told the committee that Senate Bill 1223 was needed to help students like him legally obtain acceleration in any public school in Illinois (State of Illinois 100Th General Assembly, 2017). He testified to the education committee that he was bored in school, and his school refused to accelerate him so he could have the curriculum actually match his learning level (State of Illinois 100Th General Assembly, 2017). Oliver's purpose in speaking to the committee was to have them understand the importance of passing the law. The two other groups that were present at the first committee hearing but neutral to the bill were ISBE and the School Management Alliance. The School Management Alliance is the lobbying group which represents the Illinois Association of School Boards.

When a bill is in committee, it is discussed and debated among the legislators. After all of the testimony is heard, the legislators on the committee vote to either recommend or not recommend a bill to be discussed and debated by legislators in the full chamber (Actconnetcengage.com, 2021). A simple majority vote is required in order to recommend a bill and pass it out of committee. For example, if a Senate bill is "voted out of committee," it goes before the full Senate. If the bill does not receive the required votes, it remains with the committee where it can either be voted on at a later date or it may remain in the committee level with no further action taken (Actconnetcengage.com, 2021). After a bill is approved by the committee to be sent to the full chamber, it is said to be on its "second reading."

For the Senate Bill 1223, it passed the Senate's education committee on April 5, 2017, and it was sent to the full Senate for a second reading. The second reading occurred on April 6, 2017. During the second reading, the full chamber must vote to pass the bill to keep it alive and under consideration (Actconnetcengage.com, 2021). If that happens, the bill next moves to a "third reading." At the third reading, the affected chamber can take two courses of action. The first course of action is that the legislators can vote to pass the bill and send it to the next chamber for a concurrent vote. The second course of action is that the legislators can deny passage of the bill. Any denied bill is passed back to the committee to redraft the bill or to have it "die" in the affected chamber. Senate Bill 1223 passed its second reading on April 6, 2017, and then, passed its third reading on May 3, 2017. At this point, Senate Bill 1223 was sent to the House of Representative for a concurrent vote where Representative Camille Lilly (Democrat) became the chief sponsor of the bill.

In the House of Representatives, Senate Bill 1223 went through the same process as in the Senate of being signed to a committee and having three readings of the bill. It is important to note here that while in the first reading stage in the Elementary and Secondary Education: School Curriculum and Policy Committee, an amendment was made to the Senate Bill 1223 at the request of the School Management Alliance. The amendment contained the following changes to the original bill:

1. The mandatory appeals process if a child is denied acceleration by a public school was made optional for school districts to include in their policy.
2. Compacting curriculum, grade telescoping, and early high school graduation were removed from the definition of "accelerated placement."

3. It is optional, not mandatory, for school districts to provide an individual education plan for an accelerated student.
4. ISBE is required to adopt rules to determine how to collect data on accelerated placement from Illinois public schools as well as communicate that data to the public. (State of Illinois 100Th General Assembly, 2017)

On May 28, 2017, the third reading of the amended Senate Bill 1223 was held in the House of Representatives. Representative Lilly introduced the amended senate bill to the chamber stating that "this bill is for young people who are brilliant and need the support that they need to be successful citizens in our great state" (State of Illinois 100Th General Assembly, 2017). Representative Litesa Wallace (Democrat) voiced her support for Senate Bill 1223 as a way to make sure Illinois public schools are addressing the academic needs of higher ability learners. As an educational psychologist, Representative Wallace was concerned that not meeting the academic needs of higher ability learners would lead to disengagement from schooling and learning. She also viewed gifted learners in terms of special education in the fact that these students need to have their needs also recognized and accommodated in the public school setting. According to Representative Wallace (2017):

> As an educational psychologist, I wholeheartedly am behind this particular Act. What we understand is that gifted is also a form of special education in that some students are so able . . . to grasp concepts quickly and move on a lot faster than others that when they are in a learning environment that does not keep up with that, they actually lose gains in their educational progress. . . . I think it is incumbent upon us to make sure that we're tapping into that. Because by the time a child reaches fourth grade if they're not engaged, and that's academically engaged, invested in their own education, we know that there's a drop off in terms of how far they'll be willing to progress. (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly—House of Representatives, 2017, pp. 29–30)

Not all the representatives shared Representative Lilly and Representative Wallace's feelings about Senate Bill 1223. Representative Jeanne Ives (Republican) questioned the

characterization of the bill. Representative Ives stated that she understood the bill to be for all students who may not be classified as gifted and talented but could benefit from acceleration to further their learning. According to Representative Ives (2017),

> Representative Lilly, I understand the intention of this Bill. The intention of this Bill is basically to catch people that are . . . or students rather that are actually not identified as gifted or talented, correct? It's not those who are way off the charts in terms of ability. It's basically those who fall in the middle ground that should have the propensity to move ahead. Is that correct? (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly—House of Representatives, 2017, p. 25)

Representative Lilly did confirm the bill was for all students and not just the identified gifted and talented.

Representative Ives also questioned Representative Lilly as to why this bill was needed at all. She wanted to know if school districts in Illinois are or are not offering acceleration to their students. According to Representative Ives (2017),

> Okay. So, we have a gifted and talented program, many school districts have that. Are you then saying then that essentially school districts are disregarding the acceleration of students? . . . [B]asically you're insinuating that superintendents and principals from around the 862 school districts that we have [in Illinois] are absolutely negligent in accelerating kids? (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly—House of Representatives, 2017, p. 26)

Representative Lilly denied this was the case in Illinois public schools. This caused Representative Ives to further question the necessity of Senate Bill 1223. As stated by Representative Ives (2017),

> So, then why are we having this Bill? I thought this was what the responsibility of superintendents, their huge administrative staffs, principals, their staff [are supposed to do]? I thought they should identify students and accelerate them through. Are you saying that schools are not doing this? That they're not accelerating . . . students when necessary and when available? . . . [H]ow widespread is the problem that principals and superintendents are denying children the ability to move beyond their grade? (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly—House of Representatives, 2017, p. 26)

Representative Lilly stated that "it's happening" and that the denial of acceleration to one student "is far too many" (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly—House of Representatives, 2017, p. 26).

Representative Ives questioned the expectations and logistics for Illinois school districts to implement Senate Bill 1223. According to Representative Ives (2017),

> [S]o what's the intention of this program? How will it really work? What will the program look like? What will be required of schools? What will parents eventually be able to sue over because they think they're child should be accelerated and the school says, no? How is this really going to operate? . . . [W]e're going to set in state statute that everybody must do this, but we're not going to put in the provisions which qualify for acceleration? (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly—House of Representatives, 2017, p. 26)

Representative Lilly responded to Representative Ives' concerns stating that it will be left up to each Illinois public school district as to how they plan to accelerate students. In other words, Representative Lilly wanted each school district in Illinois to have the freedom locally to decide the best way to comply with Senate Bill 1223. According to Representative Lilly (2017),

> Each school may be different but this Act . . . this Accelerated Placement Act will be put in place where the principals, the superintendents can work together with the school district and the board to make sure that . . . these individual[s] . . . these gifted individuals as you have mentioned have that opportunity to accelerate if need be. (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly—House of Representatives, 2017, p. 27)

Representative Ives was not fully accepting of the rationale of Representative Lilly for why Senate Bill 1223 was needed. Her parting words on the floor of the House of Representatives is proving prophetic for the current implementation of the bill within Illinois school districts, "You're putting in an unfunded mandate on schools [and] you're possible going to cause them a lot of angst in terms of battering against parents on where their child should be placed" (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly—House of Representatives, 2017, p. 28).

Representative Mary Flowers (Democrat) also questioned what school districts were expected to do under Senate Bill 1223. As stated by Representative Flowers (2017),

> I'm trying to understand the purpose of this Bill. . . . [W]ho makes the decision now as to if this child will be placed in this accelerated program? . . . Also, Senate Bill 1223 requires all school districts to adopt a policy, . . . not this policy, a policy on accelerated placement of students. So, will they be able to adopt any policy? (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly—House of Representatives, 2017, p. 30)

Representative Lilly (2017) replied,

> [T]he school district currently has that responsibility. This policy or this Act creates the guidelines for the districts to do just that. . . . [W]e make sure that we have the best guidelines for the district to follow. . . . In the guidelines of this legislation as written they (school districts) will be utilizing that guidelines to move forth with the parents, with the teachers, with the counselors with a policy that's really, really addressing this gifted population. . . . Again, the school district currently makes those decisions, and they will continue to make those decisions with the support of the parents, teachers, counselors, all of those entities to help them make the best, best policy for this gifted population. But the school district will make those determinations. (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly—House of Representatives, 2017, pp. 30 - 32)

For Representative Lilly, all decision making would be a local decision left up to each school district to decide for themselves how a child would be accelerated. All that Senate Bill 1223 does is provide mandatory and optional guidelines when a school district is creating their acceleration policy and procedures to comply with the new law. However, Representative Lilly keeps her focus on the law helping the gifted population without stating that the law is being pushed by proponents of the bill such as Ms. Welch and Dr. Calvert to help all students.

Representative Flowers was also not happy that the appeal process to children who were denied acceleration by a school district was downgraded from being mandatory to being optional. According to Representative Flowers (2017), "You're removing the appeal process. If I was a parent and I wanted my child placed in this program and I want to appeal the decision, that's being removed." Representative Lilly stated that the appeal language was being removed at the behest of the School Management Alliance. In other words, the School Management

Alliance would not support the bill unless certain provisions were removed. The mandatory appeals process for families to appeal a negative decision was removed as a result of the lobbying group's objection.

Before the vote was taken, Representative Mike Fortner (Republican) was the last to speak on behalf of the bill. Admitting that the new bill was a mandate on Illinois public school districts, he did not feel that the requirements in the mandate were too onerous on school districts. To Representative Fortner, making acceleration a legal requirement to meet the needs of students who would benefit from the academic intervention outweighed the burden school districts may feel in writing a policy and procedures to comply with the requirements in the mandate. According to Representative Fortner (2017),

> I just want to make sure that everyone understands what we're trying to do here. What it does, what it doesn't do. Is this a mandate on schools? Well, yes. But it's a mandate in the sense that they need to make sure they have a policy, because there are talented and gifted students for whom some school districts might not have thought about the problem in advance. And left to that and faced with a child who has needs because of their talents and gifts, the school district may not always have the time to make a well-considered decision that they would be able to do it had they had a policy. So, we're saying put together a policy. So, what else is in this mandate? Really nothing more than outlining some of the things that have to be in the policy. And it's a pretty simple list. It basically says, you have to have a process that involves the child's parents as well as licensed educational professionals. You have to have the written consent of the parent or guardian to go through this process. There has to be a clear and transparent mechanism for informing the parents what the process is. That's what we're talking about. It's just to make sure that the policy is adequate and doesn't limit to just the things in here. If the school district wishes to go beyond that in their policy, this legislation would let them do that. If they feel that it's helpful for their decision making to go into greater detail, they're not required to do that. They're just required to do this minimum of things to make sure that they are prepared in a way that when a child who is gifted and talented and has the needs to be assessed to determine whether or not some type of advanced placement is required, the district is ready for it. I urge an 'aye' vote. (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly—House of Representatives, 2017, pp. 33 - 34)

At the end of Representative Fortner's speech, the full House of Representatives voted on Senate Bill 1223. Ninety-nine representatives voted in favor of the bill and 11 representatives voted against the bill.

With Senate Bill 1223 passing the House of Representatives with an amendment, it needed to go back to the Senate to have a third reading on the amendment. On May 31, 2017, the Senate held the third reading on the amended Senate Bill 1223. Senator Lightford introduced the amended bill to the full Senate and explained the changes that were made to the bill by the House of Representatives. Senator Kyle McCarter was the only senator to question the amended bill. His concern was if Senate Bill 1223 was a mandate on Illinois public schools. Senator McCarter asked Senator Lightford, "Senator, . . . would you consider this a—a new mandate in any way?" (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly—Senate, 2017, p. 66). Senator Lightford, replied, "No" (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly—Senate, 2017, p. 66). Senator McCarter was still incredulous and asked, "I mean, . . . I'm looking at—it has a list of requirements . . . and why would that not be some additional burden on schools?" (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly - Senate, 2017, p. 66). Senator Lightford explained that the School Management Alliance opposes any and all mandates on schools. Since they did not oppose this amended bill, it is not a mandate to her. As stated by Senator Lightford (2017),

> I believe that with the amendment that was made, it satisfied the opposition, and therefore the School Management Alliance. [The School Management Alliance] have been opposed to all mandates [on public schools] and I guess with this amendment, by them removing their opposition, I would argue that it's no longer a mandate. (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly—Senate, 2017, p. 66)

Senator McCarthy was still not satisfied with Senator Lightford's explanation. To him, Senate Bill 1223 is a mandate that did not have representatives such as school administrators and teachers who were currently working in school districts to testify for or against Senate Bill 1223.

As a result, Senator McCarthy was concerned about adding another educational mandate to Illinois school districts on top of the many mandates they already need to comply with. Furthermore, he did not feel that Senate Bill 1223 was needed because he believed that the school districts in the area he represents are implementing acceleration for their students. According to Senator McCarthy (2017),

> I'll tell you what, when I have to go home and talk to the actual schools that have to actually implement these things, they're not sitting here to—to—to oppose it. . . . [W]hen it comes down to the local schools, they're the ones that have to do the work, and I walked into one of my schools years ago and saw a complete wall full of mandates and it wasn't just to impress me. It wasn't just to—to, you know, put 'em on display. They literally had a white board, planning how they were going to implement all the rules that we had put in place. So, I'm sure it's a good thing, but I will trust that the schools in my district can do this because they care about the kids and they're smart enough to do it. So, I'm going—I'm going to be a No vote. (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly—Senate, 2017, p. 67)

When Senator McCarthy finished speaking, Senator Lightford quickly reminded the entire Senate that Senate Bill 1223 is continuing Illinois' commitment to promoting and furthering gifted education. As stated by Senator Lightford (2017),

> I just want to remind the Body that this bill was on the Agreed Bill list. It's actually the gifted program and we've spent a lot of time promoting gifted education in the State collectively as a Body. I think that 77% of our school districts have a gifted program. We're just trying to implement a statewide policy to go along with the gifted programs that the school districts already have. It would allow students to enter school early. They can take classes above grade level. It allows them to skip grades and graduate early if they are gifted students, if they've been tested and if the school district is in support of that. So, this is just to bring it all to make sense across the board for all school districts. I ask for an Aye vote. (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly—Senate, 2017, pp. 67–68)

On May 31, 2017, fifty-three senators voted in favor of the amended Senate Bill 1223. Senator McCarthy was the only senator to vote against the bill.

Senate Bill 1223 was sent to Governor Rauner for his approval on June 29, 2017. He signed Senate Bill 1223 into law on August 25, 2017, where it became known as the Accelerated Placement Act.

Issues with the Adoption of the Accelerated Placement Act

Ms. Welch felt that the Accelerated Placement Act had such strong bi-partisan support because acceleration is a way to develop the academic talent of the students in all parts of the state. The position Ms. Welch heard from legislators from both houses as well as both parties is that we have to do more to create a highly skilled workforce in Illinois. According to Ms. Welch,

> At the end of the day, [the legislators realized] it makes sense from a commonsense perspective that we would want to develop all our talent throughout our state better and do so, so that we have a highly skilled workforce that looks like the population of the state. . . . We want to attract [families to the state] because we have a good education system that is going to be capable of challenging and educating [students]. I think [with the Accelerated Placement Act] we were well-positioned to have bi-partisan support.

Even though the Accelerated Placement Act had broad bi-partisan support and was enacted into law 7 months from its introduction as a bill, there was opposition to portions of the bill from the School Management Alliance. Ms. Welch stated that the

> law we ended up with was not the law we started with. We started with something a lot more comprehensive, something based on Ohio's [acceleration] law and based on other [acceleration] laws throughout the country, and best practices from the National Association of Gifted Children. We had to give some of [the items] in order to not have large-scale opposition when we got to the floor vote.

With the negotiations, one of the critical aspects of the law that Ms. Welch and Dr. Calvert did not negotiate away was the fact that acceleration was going to be available to all students and not just to students whose school district happened to have a gifted educational program:

> That was one thing that was really critical was definitely making sure [that the law covered all students] because if it is just gifted students, then 30% of our districts even have gifted programs. I think that is something when you are talking to people that you

> know, districts within 30 miles of Chicago basically, you are going to hit a lot higher percentage of districts that offer some sort of gifted programming that is really [not] representative of what is going on throughout our state. This [law] is really significant for students in more rural areas throughout our state and other areas outside of Chicago that really don't have any access to advanced coursework or gifted programs. This [law] is saying that there has to be an opportunity to evaluate whether a student would benefit from going up a level, either in a single subject or a whole grade level.

Another aspect of the Accelerated Placement Act that Ms. Welch and Dr. Calvert ensured was in the law was early entrance into kindergarten and early entrance into first grade. Currently, within Illinois School Code 105 ILCS 5/10-20.12, a child must be 5 years old before or on September 1 of the year that child will start kindergarten. To start first grade, the child must be 6 years old on or before September 1 of the year the child seeks to start school. However, one of the main aspects about acceleration is that there are children who will not meet 5 years old age or 6 years old age requirements but are academically as well as socially and emotionally ready to start kindergarten or first grade. During the various readings of the Accelerated Placement Act, the School Management Alliance tried to restrict access to acceleration by requiring a child must be 6 years old on or before December 31 to enter first grade and to be considered for acceleration. Ms. Welch, Dr. Calvert, and another colleague from the Illinois Gifted Children Association, Ms. Michelle Castlebaum, lobbied the Illinois General Assembly to remove any age requirement seeking to be put in the Accelerated Placement Act because it would negatively affect families seeking to access the acceleration process for their child. According to Ms. Welch,

> What is in these final rules [for the law] is no age [requirement] for kindergarten or early entrance into first grade. If you are taking the law at face value, schools are supposed to allow this process for assessing whether a student would benefit from acceleration in the first place. It is supposed to be regardless of age. That's the whole point.

From the standpoint of understanding if the Accelerated Placement Act is an educational mandate, there was confusion between the two houses of the General Assembly. The

Representatives led by the chief sponsor of the bill, Representative Lilly, understood the Accelerated Placement Act to be a mandate on school districts. However, in the Senate, the chief sponsor of the Accelerated Placement Act, Senator Lightford, stated that it was not a mandate. Furthermore, Ms. Welch stated that the Accelerated Placement Act applies to all students, not just those identified as gifted and talented. Yet, in the transcripts for the third readings of the Accelerated Placement Act in both houses, most of the legislators stated that the law was for and to help the gifted and talented students. Lastly, there were misconceptions that legislators had about what was occurring in school districts in regard to acceleration. Prior to the passage of the Accelerated Placement Act, only a handful of Illinois school districts whose superintendents and teachers believed in the power of acceleration had an acceleration policy (Matthew, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 10). Most districts statewide did not have a formal acceleration policy (Matthew, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius & Plucker, 2016, p. 10). For example, before the law passed, about 55% of Illinois districts lacked policies on early entrance to kindergarten and first grade, and 46% lacked policies on accelerating students in specific subjects (Matthew, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 10). The reasons given for the lack of such a policy ran the gamut: concerns about its academic impact; its possible negative social and emotional effects on accelerated children; and the fact that such a policy is not needed in a district with a high proportion of low-income students (Matthew, Peters, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Plucker, 2016, p. 10). The confusion that legislators had in regard to the Accelerated Placement Act has a direct tie to the confusion that Illinois school districts currently have trying to implement the law.

Legal Requirements for Illinois School Districts Under the Accelerated Placement Act

Under the Accelerated Placement Act, accelerated placement is defined as "the placement of a child in an education setting with curriculum that is usually reserved for children who are older or in higher grades than" the child's current chronological age (105 ILCS 5/14A-17). Specific examples of accelerated placement programs that school districts must offer "but need not be limited to" are early entrance to kindergarten, early entrance to first grade, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration (105 ILCS 5/14A-17).

The Accelerated Placement Act requires every school district in Illinois to have an acceleration policy. Elements that **must** be present in acceleration policy are the following:

1. A provision that states that participation in accelerated placement is not limited to those children who have been identified as gifted and talented, but rather is open to all children who demonstrate high ability and who may benefit from accelerated placement.
2. A fair and equitable decision-making process that involves multiple persons and includes the student's parent(s) or guardian(s).
3. Procedures for notifying parent(s) or guardian(s) of a decision affecting that child's participation in an accelerated placement program.
4. Use of multiple assessment instruments which include multiple valid and reliable indicators when considering a student for acceleration. (105 ILCS 5/14A-32(a)(1-4))

A school district's acceleration policy **may** include more elements such as the following:

1. Procedures for annually informing the community at-large, including parents or guardians, about accelerated placement opportunities and the methods used for the identification of children eligible for accelerated placement.

2. A process for an individual to recommend a child for acceleration at the public school. The referral process can allow for multiple referrers, including a child's parents or guardians. Other referrers may include licensed educational professionals who have knowledge of the referred child's abilities. For early entrance, the referrers can be a preschool educator, pediatrician, or psychologist who knows the child.
3. A provision that provides for children participating in an accelerated placement program and their parent(s) or guardian(s) to be given a written plan specifying the type of acceleration that child will receive and strategies to support the child. (105 ILCS 5/14A-32(b)(1-3); Illinois Association for Gifted Children, 2019)

The last requirement in the act requires ISBE to collect data from school districts on accelerated placement and communicate that information to the public (105 ILCS 5/14A-32(c)).

Current Status of the Accelerated Placement Act in Illinois

Families' Reaction to the Accelerated Placement Act

When the Accelerated Placement Act became law in 2017, families throughout Illinois reached out to Ms. Welch. Their reactions fell in two camps. The first camp are families who were happy that their school districts now had a process in place to consider acceleration. Some of these families had sought acceleration for their child in the past but were denied because the school district did not have a process in place to fairly evaluate if their child was ready for acceleration. According to Ms. Welch,

> [A]lot of [families] are in districts where it (Accelerated Placement Act) has been implemented and they have said that before this they weren't getting anywhere. But, now their district implemented it and their students have been accelerated, it's great and they have expressed gratitude. Whether it has worked out or whether they have been granted that accelerated placement or not, they got the process that they were initially being denied access to.

The second camp of families are not happy because their local school districts still had not complied with the law. There is still no acceleration process in place for families to access or for families to even start to have the conversation about acceleration with their local school district. As Ms. Welch noted,

> There are others that have reached out to say that the district is still dragging its feet on it and still isn't providing [a process for acceleration]. Some of them are angry about it because they are worried about their students.

Ms. Welch advises families in this situation to try and work with their local school district since the law is fairly new. She urges families to become a collaborative partner with the school district to help create an acceleration process that not only complies with the law but benefits every child in the school district. According to Ms. Welch,

> What I am reminding them continually across the board is that we are in a transition period here. This is an opportunity for you to go and provide some resources. Offer to be a part of the team. Ask if there can be a work group or team working on this. Try the collaborative approach because everyone is learning here. They (the school district) may not know what to do.

Another barrier that families in this second camp are facing is that school districts have not implemented an acceleration process because they state that they have a gifted program. In other words, certain school districts feel that having a gifted program addresses the needs of high ability students. However, what such school districts do not understand is that the Accelerated Placement Act requires all public school districts in Illinois to have an acceleration process that is available for all students, not just gifted students, to access. Furthermore, the law specifies school districts to consider all forms of acceleration such as subject acceleration or whole grade acceleration. Gifted programs usually provide telescoped curriculum or compacted curriculum while the students stay in their grade level. Ms. Welch is finding that this situation is most prevalent in school districts in northern Cook County. As noted by Ms. Welch,

> Of the parents that I have spoken to, the ones that have faced the most resistance are in these more affluent North Shore districts—like we are already doing this, so we don't have to worry about it. They are going to need to work through that, and they can't say that because we have a gifted program we have implemented acceleration. That doesn't work.

In the end, Ms. Welch reminds families that the Accelerated Placement Act forces school districts in Illinois to consider the needs of their higher ability students. School districts need to determine if they are providing instruction at the level that is continuing the academic growth of their higher ability students. According to Ms. Welch,

> Now, we at least have something that the school district has to do related to high ability students. Let's use that and try to make the most of it that we can. We don't need to neglect students about proficiency like we had been in Illinois. Let's try to work together to do this right.

Follow-up Work After the Passage of the Accelerated Placement Act

Ms. Welch stated that the requirements in the Accelerated Placement Act is just the start to help school districts understand what they need to do to comply with the law. To help school districts create an acceleration policy as well as procedures, Ms. Welch and Dr. Calvert wrote a model acceleration policy and procedures that could be readily adapted or modified by any Illinois school district (see Appendix B for the IAGC Model Acceleration Policy). As noted by Ms. Welch,

> The law is not enough. It needs more . . . procedures indicating how you should do the different steps of it. [W]e have the model acceleration policy which is more like procedures. That model policy, Eric and I worked on that together. [We] based it off the IAGC and NAGC guidelines about best practices. [We] then aligned it to our legislation to indicate which parts are required by the law and which ones are supplemental things that you should definitely do as well in order to have a policy that is in line with the research and in line with best practices.

In addition to the model policy, Welch and Dr. Calvert wrote rulemaking and guidance documents for the Illinois State Board of Education (hereinafter ISBE) to adopt. The purpose of the rulemaking and guidance documents was to help ISBE advise school districts around Illinois

as to how to comply with the Accelerated Placement Act. According to Ms. Welch (2019), "[W]e put together really comprehensive, like eight pages, of proposed recommended guidance and rule-making around the law. [We] submitted [it] to ISBE so that they could fill in some of the blanks around the law." Ms. Welch and Dr. Calvert submitted the rulemaking and guidance documents to ISBE's Gifted Advisory Council for review in the spring of 2018. They met with the Gifted Advisory Council and reviewed the rulemaking and guidance documents with everyone at the meeting. After the meeting, Ms. Welch and Dr. Calvert followed up repeatedly with ISBE to see if the rulemaking and guidance documents were to be adopted and/or shared with Illinois school districts. Unfortunately, ISBE did not adopt their rulemaking and guidance documents. Instead, in May of 2018, ISBE created their own guidance document that only restated the requirements of the law. As Ms. Welch recounted,

> [W]e sent the Gifted Advisory Council proposed rule-making and guidance. It was right at the beginning of February 2018. Then, followed up, followed up, followed up. Then, guidance was issued to districts by ISBE, and it was very, very bare bones. That was in May or June of 2018, so it didn't really reflect all of the things that we did. If they had been issued the form that we recommended, there would have been a lot more guidance to districts already.

Currently, Ms. Welch is aware that some school districts are struggling to implement the Accelerated Placement Act without more guidance from ISBE. Furthermore, she is aware that there are some school districts opposed to the law. However, Ms. Welch always remembers the purpose of the Accelerated Placement Act: to provide children the right instruction to continue to grow academically, socially, and emotionally. According to Ms. Welch,

> What I get concerned about, I am more of a big picture person looking at arguments for the whole state. I think about this from a civil rights perspective, and I get concerned when I hear the well-heeled districts mounting the largest opposition to this. If they have voices and they don't understand this, they are saying we don't want to do this. [I]f you don't manage that, it could lead to some very skewed perspectives about acceleration [that it] isn't needed or isn't wanted in our state. We need to be thinking about all of the students and how much this benefitting the vast majority of districts. It is benefitting

> students. There are definitely students who need more challenge than what they are getting in the schools. I think acceleration is really important and critical.

Conclusion of Chapter 4: Findings on Policy Agenda Setting and Adoption of the Accelerated Placement Act

The Accelerated Placement Act addresses an under-utilized academic intervention needed to meet the academic needs of students where there is a mismatch between where they are ready to learn at and the curriculum the school district is providing. By mandating Illinois school districts to have a written policy in place for acceleration, families can now approach school districts and utilized their acceleration policy if they feel that their child would benefit from acceleration. Ms. Welch and Dr. Calvert brought forth the Accelerated Placement Act so that every student, regardless of if the school district has a gifted program, can access a more rigorous curriculum to keep them advancing their learning. The majority of the General Assembly felt the same way with the Accelerated Placement Act going from bill to law within 7 months. Those legislators who did vote against the Accelerated Placement Act raised serious concerns about its impact on school districts. Issues surrounding it being another unfunded educational mandate passed with unclear guidelines as to what school districts are being asked to do since school district leaders were not part of the policy adoption phase plagued the law's passage. Unfortunately, as will be seen in Chapter 5, those issues are exactly what the Illinois school districts interviewed for this study are suffering from as they try to follow the conscripts of the law with fidelity.

Chapter 5

Findings on Sensemaking of Acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act

Starting on August 25, 2017, Illinois school districts were faced with implementing a new mandate by July 1, 2018. From the date the Accelerated Placement Act was signed into law, central office administrators scrambled to try and make sense of what they needed to do on behalf of their school districts to be in compliance of the new law. For this study, 13 Illinois central office school district administrators were interviewed about how they interpret the Accelerated Placement Act to implement policy and procedures to comply with the new law. Furthermore, the 13 Illinois central office school district administrators were interviewed in regard to the attitudes and feelings about acceleration as an academic intervention for their district.

The administrators in this case study work in elementary (preschool–eighth grade) school districts. They are the lead decision makers for their school district with curriculum, instruction, and assessments. They are also the lead school leader to implement the requirements of the Accelerated Placement Act as well as create acceleration policy and procedures.

All 13 Illinois school district leaders interviewed for this case study work in school districts in the suburbs around Chicago. The demographics of each district reflect the suburb or suburbs that compromise the school district. All the school districts that participated in this study reflect the racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity of the Chicago suburbs. The chart below shows the school district administrator interviewed for this case study and the details about the school district they represent. Please note: the names of the school administrators and their districts are pseudonyms, but their position titles are accurate. Also, demographic details about the districts are approximations to protect the identities of the districts.

Table 1

List of Participants in This Study and Their District's Demographic Data

Title & position	District	Total student population (approxi-mation)	State assessment proficiency - 2019 (approxi-mation)	Race	Languages spoken by student population	Sub populations
1. Dr. Cathy Bakersfield - Director of Curriculum	Walnut Creek School District	3,000	ELA—50% Math—30% Science—50%	White—60% Black—20% Hispanic—20% Asian—1% 2 or more races—1%	Arabic, Spanish & Polish	SPED—20% EL –30% FRE—70%
2. Ms. Diane Nakoma - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Limestone School District	2,000	ELA—20% Math—20% Science—30%	White—0% Black—60% Hispanic—30% Asian—2% 2 or more races -1%	Spanish	SPED—10% EL—20% FRE—100%
3. Dr. Liz Canfield - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Krusemark School District	2,000	ELA—40% Math—30% Science—60%	White—40% Black—10% Hispanic—40% Asian—2% 2 or more races—3%	Arabic, Spanish & Polish	SPED—20% EL—20% FRE—60%
4. Ms. Kylie Smith - Director of Curriculum	Ashton Meadows School District	2,000	ELA—40% Math—40% Science—50%	White—30% Black—50% Hispanic—10% Asian—0% 2 or more races—10%	Spanish	SPED—20% EL—5% FRE - 30%
5. Ms. Katrin Paulson - Director of Curriculum	Georgetow n School District	2,000	ELA—40% Math—30% Science—60%	White—40% Black—30% Hispanic—30% Asian—0% 2 or more races—4%	Spanish	SPED—20% EL—10% FRE—40%
6. Dr. Doug Sonnenberg - Director of Curriculum	Lawndale School District	5,000	ELA—50% Math—40% Science—70%	White—70% Black—5% Hispanic—20% Asian—6% 2 or more races—%	Spanish, Polish, Arabic, Guajarati, Hindi, Chinese, Tagalog	SPED—20% EL—10% FRE—20%
7. Ms. Cathy Drost - Director of Curriculum	Heritage Hills School District	3,000	ELA—70% Math—60% Science—70%	White—70% Black—5% Hispanic—20% Asian—3% 2 or more races—3%	Arabic, Spanish & Polish	SPED—10% EL—40% FRE -60%

Table 1 (cont.)

Title & position	District	Total student population (approxi-mation)	State assessment proficiency - 2019 (approxi-mation)	Race	Languages spoken by student population	Sub populations
8. Dr. Violet Young - Director of Curriculum	Suttondale School District	3,000	ELA—10% Math—10% Science—30%	White—0% Black—50% Hispanic—50% Asian—0% 2 or more races - 0%	Spanish	SPED—20% EL—30% FRE—100%
9. Dr. Maggie Saylor - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Windsor School District	3,000	ELA—20% Math—20% Science—40%	White—4% Black—20% Hispanic—70% Asian—1% 2 or more races—1%	Spanish	SPED—20% EL—40% FRE—80%
10. Dr. Michelle Grant - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Hunter Woods School District	2,000	ELA—50% Math—50% Science—80%	White—80% Black—0% Hispanic—6% Asian—8% 2 or more races—6%	Spanish	SPED—10% EL—10% FRE - 10%
11. Dr. Barb Morgana - Director of Curriculum	Prestwick School District	1,000	ELA—60% Math—60% Science—70%	White—40% Black—8% Hispanic—13% Asian—30% 2 or more races—8%	Over 50 different languages such as Assyrian, Gujarati, Spanish, and Urdu	SPED—20% EL—20% FRE—30%
12. Dr. Sue Banks - Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction	Riverbend School District	8,000	ELA—40% Math—50% Science—60%	White—40% Black—3% Hispanic—20% Asian—5% 2 or more races—10%	Over 50 different languages	SPED—10% EL—20% FRE—40%
13. Dr. Anne LeBaron - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Meadows School District	2,000	ELA—50% Math—50% Science—70%	White—70% Black—2% Hispanic—20% Asian—11% Two or more races—2%	Over 42 different languages such as Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, and Spanish	SPED—10% EL—30% FRE—30%

Note. The names of the school administrators and their districts are pseudonyms.

The findings from the interviews on how Illinois school administrators make sense of acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act fall in the following five categories:

1. The Illinois elementary school district administrators do not share a common definition for acceleration.
2. The Illinois elementary school district administrators do not have a collective understanding for the purpose of acceleration.
3. Most Illinois school administrators are not in favor of acceleration.
4. The Illinois school administrators are having issues with the implementation of the Accelerated Placement Act because of lack of funding as well as the lack of further rules and guidance.
5. Acceleration procedures written by school district leaders are not aligned or correlated to their district's acceleration policy and the Accelerated Placement Act.

Findings

Finding 1: The Illinois Elementary School District Administrators Do Not Share a Common Definition for Acceleration

According to the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC), the definition of acceleration is that students move through the traditional curriculum at rates faster than typical through the use of academic interventions such as whole grade acceleration, subject acceleration, early entrance, or dual-credit courses such as Advanced Placement (NAGC.org, 2020). Seven of the 13 administrators interviewed for this study had defined acceleration similarly to the definition from NAGC. The following chart shows their definitions of acceleration:

Table 2

Definition of Acceleration

Name & position	School district	How the school administrator defined acceleration?
1. Ms. Diane Nakoma - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Limestone School District	"It (acceleration) may be a particular subject area where a student is performing at a higher level and they need more enrichment opportunities to just develop and further accelerate their progress."
2. Dr. Liz Canfield - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Krusemark School District	"Acceleration, I feel like, is it takes somebody where they are at, focuses on their strengths, and builds on those strengths to accelerate or almost gets their learning to a fast pace in terms of moving them beyond what they know and into higher levels of application of those skills and that knowledge."
3. Ms. Kylie Smith - Director of Curriculum	Ashton Meadows School District	"My definition of acceleration is students working above grade level, such as students that are ahead either in a single subject or multi-subjects."
4. Ms. Katrin Paulson - Director of Curriculum	Georgetown School District	"The term acceleration, what the term means to me is just moving them (students) faster through content."
5. Dr. Violet Young - Director of Curriculum	Suttondale School District	"I would define it as . . . you think about accelerating in a car like you're speeding up. When you put it into the context of kids learning, it is sort of accelerating their learning. It is giving them that push that they need, giving them the opportunity to be challenged. Really making sure that programming is meeting their needs."
6. Dr. Michelle Grant - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Hunter Woods School District	"Acceleration is when children are able to cover or learn the curriculum at a faster pace than what is typical in their grade level. They are covering grade level curriculum much faster, and because of that, they are able to cover off-level curriculum typically too, if it is accelerated fast enough."

Table 2 (cont.)

Name & position	School district	How the school administrator defined acceleration?
7. Dr. Anne LeBaron - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Meadows School District	"I think of it (acceleration) as moving faster. These are advanced students who are moving faster through the curriculum because they have the concepts down already and so they are able to move faster through the curriculum."

Even with the generally accepted definition of acceleration from NAGC that students move through traditional curriculum at rates faster than typical through the use of multiple academic interventions, several of the Illinois central office administrators interviewed for this study defined acceleration differently. For example, Ms. Cathy Drost is the Director of Curriculum for a higher performing medium size district which is predominately White. Ms. Drost defines acceleration as "a situation that occurs when a child needs to be challenged academically, so they are then placed in a grade level that is higher than the one that they are age appropriate for." Even though Ms. Drost recognizes that acceleration is needed to academically engage higher ability students, she limits her definition of acceleration to only whole grade acceleration. The other forms of acceleration such as subject acceleration or early entrance into kindergarten do not factor into Ms. Drost's definition of acceleration.

Dr. Cathy Bakersfield had a similar definition for acceleration as Ms. Drost. Dr. Bakersfield's school district is a medium-size, multilingual school district that focuses on dual language programming as a way to meet their students' instructional needs. For Dr. Bakersfield, acceleration is "differentiating the curriculum to meet the needs of the child who may already be exceeding the content that you are giving the rest of the class." However, the definition of acceleration is narrowed to only two options: subject acceleration and whole grade acceleration. As stated by Dr. Bakersfield,

> When I think about . . . acceleration, it makes me think of the act of accelerating a whole grade level, or in some cases, a particular subject. I think about that first, what subject would need to be accelerated and, then, could it potentially be a whole grade level.

Similar to Ms. Drost's definition of acceleration, Dr. Bakersfield's definition of acceleration is limited to only two forms of acceleration and does not include the multiple other options for acceleration such as curriculum compacting or telescoping of the curriculum.

Dr. Sue Banks is another school administrator who also defines acceleration differently than NAGC. Dr. Sue Banks is the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction for a large, diverse school district where families are heavily invested in making sure their children have opportunities in the school district to enrich their learning. In particular, Dr. Banks describes the families in her school district as "math crazy" because they are hyper focused on getting their children into the district's math acceleration program. As a result, Dr. Banks' definition of acceleration is colored by what is happening in her school district. When Dr. Sue Banks was asked to define acceleration, she stated:

> Acceleration in our district is defined as one of two things. Predominantly, when we evaluate for acceleration, since we do not have a Gifted and Talented program, we are assessing if a student is significantly above grade level, which we really define as about a year and a half [academically above their current grade level], and they do not have a cohort of students with which they can be receiving academic services within their current grade level. When we accelerate, it is generally either single subject or grade level advancement. We look at achievement, cognition, and social/emotional [factors].

When Dr. Banks defines acceleration, she narrowly defines acceleration through the lens of how acceleration is operating at her district instead of looking at defining acceleration generally. Dr. Banks first defines acceleration as an evaluation process. She explains that acceleration is an assessment given to students who are "significantly above grade level." By first thinking of acceleration as an assessment, she is referring to the first step in her district's screening process to determine if a student qualifies for the math acceleration program. The

second part of Dr. Banks' definition of acceleration refers to the two forms of acceleration offered at her district: "single subject or grade level advancement." As with Ms. Drost and Dr. Bakersfield, Dr. Banks narrows the definition of acceleration to only subject acceleration and grade level acceleration. These are the only two forms of acceleration offered at Dr. Banks' school district.

Dr. Barb Morgana is the Director of Curriculum of a medium-sized, higher performing school district that has a near equal student population of White and Asian students. When asked to define acceleration, Dr. Morgana did not view acceleration in terms of traditional curriculum. Instead, Dr. Morgana defines acceleration in terms of learning standards. For Dr. Morgana, "[A]cceleration is going to the next grade level of standards." This definition focuses on the skills and concepts delineated in the Illinois Learning Standards that a student needs to master within an academic year. For an accelerated student, they are not working with the learning standards of their current grade level. Instead, they are learning and mastering the learning standards above their current grade level.

Dr. Maggie Saylor is the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning in a medium sized school district with a majority Hispanic student population. Dr. Saylor defined acceleration in terms of how quickly a student can absorb curricular content. If a student quickly learns material in one curricular area, they are a candidate for subject acceleration. At Dr. Saylor's school district, the only two subjects that are considered for content acceleration is English language arts and/or math. If a student quickly learns academic material in multiple curricular areas, they are a candidate for whole grade acceleration. As Dr. Saylor states,

> I look at acceleration in two ways: we look at acceleration as whole-grade acceleration where we look at a child who really has the content knowledge and the ability to absorb the content very quickly in a generalized way where it is kind of pervasive through how

> they learn. Then, we also look at content area acceleration. We only look at that right now in ELA and math.

What is notable about how Dr. Saylor defines acceleration is that she was explicit in stating that acceleration is not just for students who have been identified as gifted. She consciously includes students who are high achievers and/or students who are learning content quicker than their peers. Dr. Saylor is aware that students in these two categories need acceleration as an academic intervention to continue their learning progress. She even offers examples in her definition of acceleration of how acceleration can reach high achievers and/or advanced learners through curriculum compacting or telescoping the curriculum to learn at a deeper level than their grade level peers. As stated by Dr. Saylor,

> Now, I also look at acceleration as well for students that are not necessarily gifted but are high achievers and look at students who learn quickly but maybe not quickly enough to accelerate by an entire grade. But, then, you can compact the curriculum and expand and extend [the curriculum] to give them some additional deeper learnings.

The varied definitions of acceleration may be attributed to the fact that the school administrators have different professional backgrounds in gifted education and acceleration. Only one of the administrators in this study had taken undergraduate and graduate classes in gifted education. The other 12 school administrators interviewed for this study did not have formal professional development or collegiate coursework in gifted education and acceleration. Seven of the 13 administrators took a one-day workshop on the Accelerated Placement Act when Illinois first passed the law in 2017 to learn about acceleration and the requirements of the law. The workshop was offered by the Illinois Association of Gifted Children (IAGC) or their local Illinois State Board of Education Service Center. Three administrators who had not taken classes in gifted education or the acceleration workshop sought to just conduct independent research. Individually, they researched acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act by

looking up information online about acceleration and accelerated programming, especially from the IAGC's website. The following chart shows each administrator's professional development with gifted education, acceleration, and the Accelerated Placement Act who were interviewed for this study:

Table 3

The Type of Professional Development Participants in This Study Took on Acceleration and/or the Accelerated Placement Act

Name & position	District	Took professional development or collegiate coursework on gifted education	Took professional development workshop on acceleration and the accelerated placement act	Researched acceleration independently
1. Dr. Cathy Bakersfield—Director of Curriculum	Walnut Creek School District	No	Yes	Yes
2. Ms. Diane Nakoma—Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Limestone School District	No	Yes	No
3. Dr. Liz Canfield—Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Krusemark School District	No	No	Yes
4. Ms. Kylie Smith—Director of Curriculum	Ashton Meadows School District	No	Yes	Yes,
5. Ms. Katrin Paulson—Director of Curriculum	Georgetown School District	No	Yes	No

Table 3 (cont.)

Name & position	District	Took professional development or collegiate coursework on gifted education	Took professional development workshop on acceleration and the accelerated placement act	Researched acceleration independently
6. Dr. Doug Sonnenberg—Director of Curriculum	Lawndale School District	No	Yes	No
7. Ms. Cathy Drost—Director of Curriculum	Heritage Hills School District	No	No	Yes
8. Dr. Violet Young—Director of Curriculum	Suttondale School District	No	No	No
9. Dr. Maggie Saylor—Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Windsor School District	Yes	Yes	No
10. Dr. Michelle Grant—Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Hunter Woods School District	No	No	No
11. Dr. Barb Morgana—Director of Curriculum	Prestwick School District	No	No	Yes
12. Dr. Sue Banks—Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction	Riverbend School District	No	No	Yes
13. Dr. Anne LeBaron—Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Meadows School District	No	Yes	No

Finding 2: The Illinois Elementary School District Administrators Do Not Have a Collective Understanding of the Purpose for Acceleration

Similar to the defining acceleration, the Illinois school administrators interviewed for this study did not all have shared collective understanding about the purpose of acceleration. According to NAGC, the purpose of acceleration is matching the level and complexity of the curriculum with the readiness and motivation of the student (NAGC, 2020). By providing a curriculum at the academic level a student is ready to learn at, a student can continue their growth in learning as well as feel there is a meaning to their schooling. This avoids having a student repeat or relearn academic content they already know which can lead to boredom and disengagement from schooling.

Four of the 13 central office administrators interviewed for this study had a description of the purpose of acceleration aligned with the purpose definition from NAGC:

Table 4

Explanation of the Purpose of Acceleration in Education

Name & position	District	Explanation of the purpose of acceleration
1. Ms. Kylie Smith - Director of Curriculum	Ashton Meadows School District	"The intent is to meet the needs of students that are able to work academically above grade level, to not hold them back, to keep them progressing forward. I think that is the purpose."
2. Ms. Katrin Paulson - Director of Curriculum	Georgetown School District	""I think [the purpose of acceleration] is to make sure that we are meeting the academic needs of the students and not just letting them meet the standard but to actually exceed past that standard. Giving them opportunities to move more at their pace and not at the pace of the curriculum."

Table 4 (cont.)

Name & position	District	Explanation of the purpose of acceleration
3. Dr. Sue Banks - Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction	Riverbend School District	"[T]he purpose of acceleration, in my mind, is to make sure that every student has the opportunity to be cognitively engaged and growing in school."
4. Dr. Anne LeBaron - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Meadows School District	"To try and provide them (students) more advanced concepts so that they are more prepared to take classes, perhaps prior to high school, and while in high school they are able to take college level classes."

Ms. Nakoma is the Director of Curriculum and Instruction at a medium size, predominately African American school district. For her, the purpose of acceleration is two-fold. The first purpose of acceleration is to provide instruction at the curriculum level the student is ready to learn at. The second purpose of acceleration is to prevent boredom and stagnation in learning. In other words, Ms. Nakoma stresses that the importance of acceleration is to keep students engaged in learning. This two-fold purpose of acceleration is shaped by Ms. Nakoma's current experience with her own higher ability son. Her son is not receiving accelerated instructional content at his school district. Without it, Ms. Nakoma sees that her son is becoming disinterested and disengaged from his school. According to Ms. Nakoma,

> [The purpose of acceleration is] mainly so that kids are provided with the proper tools, with adequate enrichment activities so that they don't become stagnant. I think that's probably one of the biggest issues that I deal with my son, on a personal level, is that he is not provided with acceleration activities or opportunities [at his school]. As a result, he is not growing and he is not developing, I believe, at a pace that I think he should be. He is not engaged. The primary purpose should be to keep the student engaged and to kind of help build their capacity to help them reach their maximum potential. It is two-fold, but I really feel like that engagement piece is so important, so powerful, and so meaningful because when they are not engaged . . . because they are bored . . . they are going to get off into other things, and that is what I see happening with my child unfortunately.

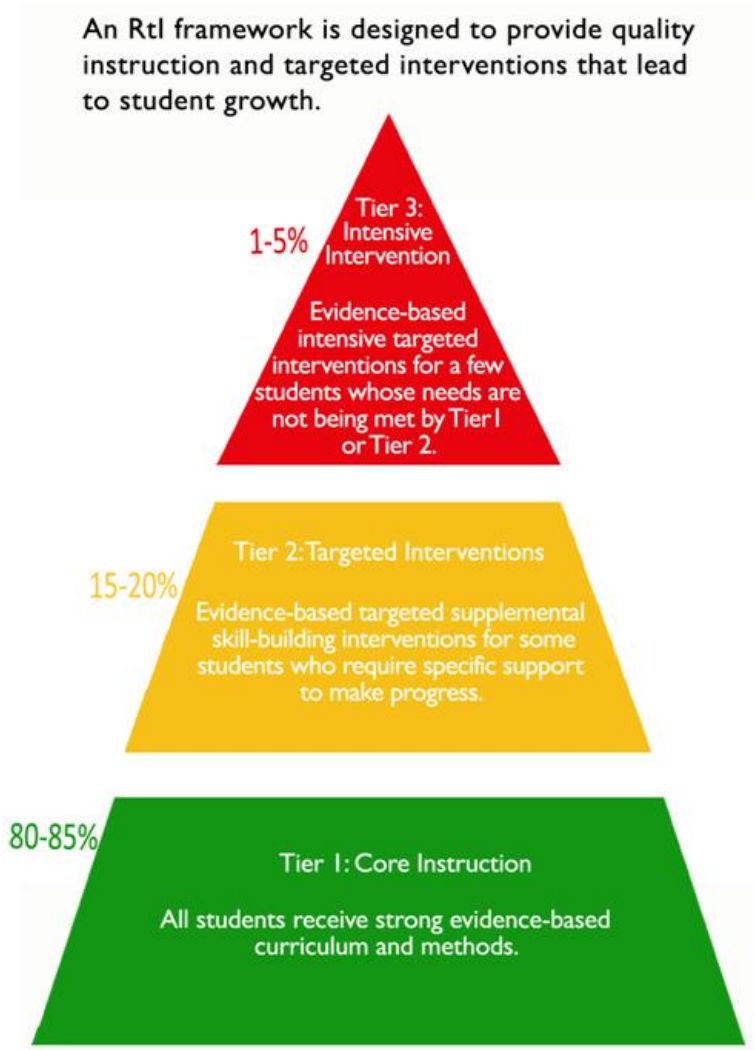
Other school administrators interviewed for this study added to the purpose of acceleration by incorporating the role of Response to Intervention (RTI), the role of assessments, and the role of teachers. Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tier approach to identify and to support the learning needs of all students. The multi-tier approach to instruction occurs in three tiers to effectively differentiate the curriculum for all students. This is known as the RTI Framework Model. The RTI Framework Model incorporates increasing intensities of instruction offering specific, research-based interventions matched to a student's needs (RTI Action Network, 2021). RTI begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom (RTI Action Network, 2021). This is known as Tier 1. Within Tier 1, all students receive high-quality, scientifically based instruction provided by qualified personnel in the general education setting (RTI Action Network, 2021). Eighty percent to 85% of the students at a grade level should be classified as Tier 1. Progress is closely monitored to assess both the learning rate and level of performance of individual students (RTI Action Network, 2021). In other words, RTI creates a well-integrated system of instruction and intervention guided by individual student data (RTI Action Network, 2021).

If students are not making adequate academic progress in Tier 1 instruction, they qualify for Tier 2 instruction. Instruction in Tier 2 is intensive instruction matched to their needs of a small group of students based on levels of performance and rates of progress (RTI Action Network, 2021). Fifteen percent to 20% of the students at a grade level should qualify for Tier 2 instruction. Educational decisions about the intensity and duration of interventions are based on an individual student's response to instruction (RTI Action Network, 2021). If Tier 2 instruction is not working, students would qualify for Tier 3 instruction. At this level, a student receives individualized, intensive interventions that target the student's skill deficits (RTI Action

Network, 2021). No more than 5% of the student body population should be in Tier 3 instruction. Below is an example of an RTI Framework Model:

Figure 4

RTI Framework Model



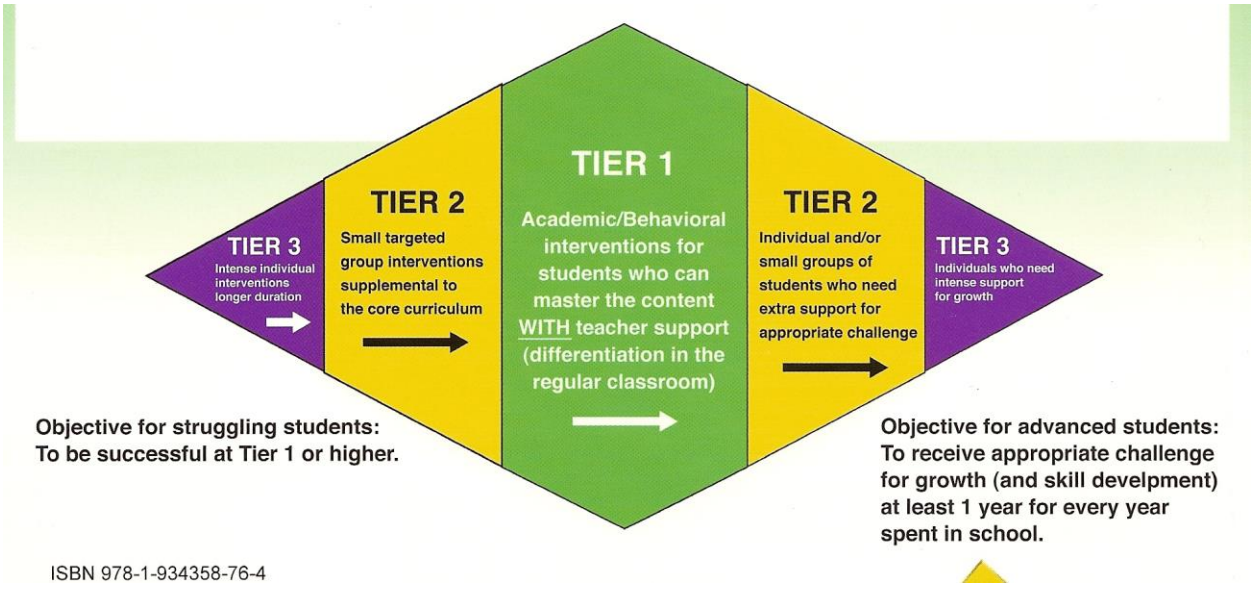
Note. Lowndes Middle School, 2021.

When using RTI with advanced learners, the RTI Framework Model goes from a triangle shape to a diamond shape. Tier 1 stays the same in offering a strong, high quality general education curriculum to all students. For Tier 2, enriching curricular resources and more in-depth instructional strategies are used with a small group of students who show they are

mastering the Tier 1 curriculum quicker than the majority of students. In other words, advanced learners are provided with interventions at increasing levels of intensity to accelerate their rate of learning (RTI Action Network, 2021). These enrichment services may be provided in and out of the general educational setting by general education teachers and/or specialists. Acceleration options such as compacting or telescoping the curriculum as well as subject acceleration are tools often used to address the needs of advanced learners in Tier 2 at the elementary level. For Tier 3, strong intensive intervention resources are needed to match the curriculum to the level these students are learning at. Students in Tier 3 may have already mastered the concepts and skills before the majority of students in Tier 1 have been taught the curriculum and learning standards. Acceleration options for students in Tier 3 is subject acceleration or whole grade acceleration at the elementary level. Below is an example of an RTI Framework Model including advanced learners:

Figure 5

RTI Model That Includes Consideration of Advanced Learners



Note. PB Works.org, 2021.

Using RTI, Dr. Cathy Bakersfield defines the purpose of acceleration is to meet the needs of the high ability learners who are at the top 5% of the entire grade level. As stated by Dr. Bakersfield,

> [W]e spend an awful lot of time trying to, I guess, service those students who struggle and sometimes acceleration or differentiation on the high-end kind of seems to be forgotten. I think that part of the purpose [of acceleration] is that we don't forget that the other 5% of the RTI model of kids who deserve their curriculum accelerated.

Dr. Michelle Grant is Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning for a medium sized, linguistically diverse, higher-performing school district. Dr. Grant's explanation for the purpose of acceleration is aligned with NAGC, "Acceleration is, in its purest sense, not limiting kids' access to content they are ready for." However, Dr. Grant extends the purpose of acceleration to include a continual assessment to ensure that an accelerated student is receiving the correct instruction at the right instructional level. As stated by Dr. Grant, "If the [acceleration] design is correct, there is constant assessment that's informing the appropriate instruction, and that if the child can master it and demonstrate proficiency, then they should be hitting things quicker than a pace that is designed by a pacing guide."

Dr. Barb Morgana, Ms. Drost, and Dr. Saylor incorporate the role of teachers into defining the purpose of acceleration. Dr. Morgana first states that the purpose of acceleration is to "help meet students where they are" in their learning. However, Dr. Morgana extends the purpose of acceleration to teachers. For educators, Dr. Morgana sees acceleration as helping educators in crafting instruction for higher ability students. She states that acceleration for teachers "allows them to stay very focused on that next grade level curriculum so that they can play on engaging lessons for the students and accurately assess them."

Ms. Drost also sees teachers as an integral part of the purpose for acceleration. Ms. Drost first explains that the purpose of acceleration is to "ensure that gifted students' needs be met just

like everyone else." However, Ms. Drost realizes that the purpose of acceleration cannot be fulfilled without teachers who are willing as well as able to accelerate curriculum. She feels that teachers are more willing to work with students who are struggling with the curriculum because (a) teachers are better trained to remediate than enrich, and (b) teachers do not have to address the needs of the higher ability students because of the misconception that these students will figure it out since they already know or have mastered the grade level curriculum. Ms. Drost states that neither reason is an excuse for teachers to not meet the purpose of acceleration for students in her school district. According to Ms. Drost,

> I would say that the purpose [of acceleration] is to ensure that gifted students' needs be met just like everyone else's. I know that from conversations with teachers often times the high-level learners and the gifted students are some of the hardest and most challenging students for the teacher to work with. A lot of times, too, they also have trouble because they have students who are reading so far below grade level or who are struggling so much that, in their eyes, that the high-level learner or the gifted child is going to be okay. They are going to be fine, and they will figure it out on their own, but this (acceleration) ensures that they get the attention that they deserve as well.

Dr. Maggie Saylor understands that the purpose of acceleration is to provide instruction to children at the readiness level they are at in order for them to continue to grow academically. As stated by Dr. Saylor, "I think the whole purpose of acceleration is to give students the teaching, the learning, the instruction they (students) need in order to continue to grow and learn at the appropriate pace." However, she qualifies the purpose of acceleration when she considers the teachers that are responsible for administering accelerated content. Dr. Saylor feels that teachers are not very well trained in the best practices for instruction for higher ability students. To Dr. Saylor, the purpose of acceleration is to not move students out of the classroom to a higher grade. Dr. Saylor states that subject acceleration and grade level acceleration out of the current grade level is having teachers minimize their responsibilities to address the needs of the higher ability students currently sitting in their classrooms. Instead, accelerated content should

be an integrated part of any classroom that is truly differentiated. In other words, the purpose of acceleration is to provide differentiated instruction within the current grade level classroom. According to Dr. Saylor:

> I think that when we start to look at why we accelerate, I think it was a way of trying to address the areas that we had been missing for a long time. I think acceleration certainly has its place. I think that teachers are not very well trained in supporting students that are Gifted and Talented. It seems to me that acceleration seems to be something that allows this to be one less piece of differentiation that a teacher has to be responsible for. I never want it to sound like I am being overly critical of teachers because there is a lot on their plates; however, every child in your classroom is your responsibility and so to simply move them to another grade or another class for content instruction sometimes seems like a better choice for the teacher instead of helping the student directly.

Similar to defining acceleration, the central office school leaders interviewed for this study varied in what they see the purpose of acceleration is in academic settings. This variation may be attributable to the fact that the administrators all have varied backgrounds in professional development with gifted education and acceleration. Because many of the administrators for this study did not take a collegiate course or coursework in gifted education and/or acceleration, their idea about the purpose of acceleration is being informed through the following pathways: (a) a one-day professional development workshop on the Accelerated Placement Act, (b) independent research, and/or (c) firsthand experience of what is occurring in their district in regard to acceleration.

Finding 3: Most Illinois School Administrators Are Not in Favor of Acceleration

On the whole, the school district administrators interviewed for this study personally were not in favor of acceleration being used in school districts as a tool for academic intervention for higher ability students. The school leaders' negative feelings about acceleration are attributed to misconceptions they hold deeply about acceleration, such as that acceleration is not appropriate socially and emotionally for children or that children will be hurt academically in the

long run from being accelerated. For example, Ms. Kylie Smith is Director of Curriculum for a predominately Black school district. She is hesitant to employ acceleration as an academic intervention for children, especially in the early elementary grades. Ms. Smith feels that students who shine early in their academic careers may plateau later if accelerated. Ms. Smith also questions if children in early elementary grades are socially and emotionally ready for the rigors that acceleration provides. According to Ms. Smith,

> I personally feel that we need to be cautious about accelerating kids too early. I think the concern is the kids at the early grades: kindergarten and first grade. They may not be emotionally ready [for acceleration] and, then, they plateau [if accelerated]. I'm not sure that is the best thing for the child in the long run.

Dr. Sue Banks shares Ms. Smith's feelings about acceleration. For Dr. Banks, acceleration is great in theory. Yet, she feels that the push to move students quicker through the general education curriculum may hurt children in the end socially and emotionally. She is also concerned that accelerating students by subject or by grade level can create possible learning gaps due to missing content knowledge at their current grade level. According to Dr. Banks,

> I want every child to be cognitively engaged and to feel like they are challenged in school without a doubt. I generally feel, in some of these cases, the push to grade skip and the push to get fast hurts kids in the long term both relationally and socially/emotionally and create gaps in learning.

Overall, Dr. Banks questions the efficacy of acceleration because she is not sure what the end is for students who are accelerated. As Dr. Banks states, "Sometimes I feel like it's a little bit of a race to nowhere."

Several of the other school district leaders interviewed for this study felt that a law requiring acceleration is not needed since teachers should be differentiating for the needs of all students in the general education classroom setting. For example, Dr. Liz Canfield is the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning of a medium-size, multilingual school

district. Dr. Canfield states that she takes offense to administrators and educators using the word "acceleration" in education. To her, acceleration is not just reserved for students who have been labeled as gifted and talented. Instead, Dr. Canfield feels that all children should be accelerated. As stated by Dr. Canfield,

> I think it is offensive . . . to say that certain children . . . are going to be accelerated. I just think that it is very detrimental to all of the children because it sets some of them up, like I am at this place here and I am scoring in the 99th percentile. I also feel that it sets kids up that are on the lower scale [thinking] that, "If I am under the 99th percentile, I am not worthy of acceleration? What are you talking about?" I think all kids should be accelerated, period.

For Dr. Canfield, separating children based on a test score to receive accelerated academic services harms all children socially and emotionally. Instead, Dr. Canfield argues that all children should be given opportunities to be accelerated within the general education setting.

Dr. Bakersfield shares Dr. Canfield's sentiments about acceleration. Dr. Bakersfield is conflicted about the role of acceleration in schools. On the one hand, she wishes everyone would remember that the goal of acceleration is that it is an academic intervention to meet the needs of students that need the challenge of a higher level curriculum. However, she states that most people forget that acceleration is an academic intervention. Instead, Dr. Bakersfield feels that acceleration is a status symbol that students and parents in her school district try to obtain without understanding that acceleration is for those students who really need it to stay engaged and make academic progress. As stated by Dr. Bakersfield,

> I guess it's tough because sometimes it has a stigma or a connotation attached to it like people strive for that title, most often as gifted. It would be nice to just forget about that part and just really realize that all kids deserve differentiated curriculum, whether it is for those who struggle or those who need to be accelerated. I think it is great when we think

> about it (acceleration) in its purest sense. It is just differentiating to meet the needs of kids who are on that side of the spectrum of the continuum.

Dr. Barb Morgana personally feels that there is a place for acceleration as an academic intervention within the Tier 1 general education curriculum. However, Dr. Morgana believes that teachers who are skilled with differentiated instruction can provide enrichment within the general education classrooms. In other words, through differentiation, children will not need to be accelerated because their academic needs will be met in their classroom with their age level peers. As stated by Dr. Morgana,

> I have seen in my career students where they absolutely needed to have a different curriculum. I see some situations where, if the teacher were more skilled in the area of differentiation and truly implemented it, . . . that it may not always be necessary [to accelerate] because they can accelerate within the classroom.

In addition to educators differentiating curriculum for their students, Dr. Morgana argues that a strong Tier 1 curriculum that has differentiation options embedded in it also negates the need for acceleration. This is especially important if a teacher is not equipped with the knowledge and skills of differentiation. According to Dr. Morgana,

> Going back to what I view as the purpose of education [and that] is meeting the needs of the student. If we are not able to do that quickly through instructional methods, I think having strategized programming at the Tier 1 general education level is the way to do it.

Dr. Young is also not in favor of acceleration as an academic intervention for students in her school district. As Director of Curriculum of a predominately Black elementary school district, she feels that acceleration is pushing students too soon through the general education curriculum. In her view, this rush through the curriculum is hurting students, especially young students, in the long run socially and emotionally. According to Dr. Young,

> I personally am not a fan of acceleration. I always look at it from a developmental standpoint. I feel like we rush things with kids, especially in the primary grades. When I think about young kids, like I said, pre-k to third grade, pushing them too soon they could miss out on some of those development milestones like some social/emotional development with peer relationships.

Dr. Young's disclination towards acceleration is shaped by the parents in her district actively seeking acceleration, particularly early entrance into kindergarten. Though parents are pushing for acceleration for their child, she is not sure that parents understand what acceleration is and how a child qualifies for it in her school district. According to Dr. Young,

> Parents, they play a big role in this. I've had some parents that just didn't understand. They are not professional educators, so they don't understand certain things. They push and push and push, and I'm saying, "But, look at where your child is compared to kids in the district locally but also kids across [the nation]. Yes, they have high aptitude in one area, but they are struggling in others." While we need to challenge a child more in this particular subject area and make sure that they are not missing out on something that could prevent them from being where they need to be in other areas.

For Dr. Young, acceleration is complicated to implement because there are many factors to consider on behalf of the child and on behalf of the school district. Therefore, she is hesitant to seek acceleration as an academic intervention without considering all possible consequences of acceleration. As stated by Dr. Young, "There are so many different factors that I feel personally go into deciding if a kid should be bumped up or should be accelerated. [S]o, I am very cautious when it comes to accelerating a child." As with Dr. Morgana, Dr. Young argues that acceleration may not be needed as an academic intervention if teachers were differentiating for the needs of all their students in the general education classrooms. As Dr. Young stated, "You also have to put things into context. It could be the teacher not challenging the child enough. Is there an appropriate amount of rigor in the classroom?" Though Dr. Young is generally not in favor of acceleration as an

academic intervention, she does feel that acceleration, if implemented correctly, may be better suited for older students because they have the maturity to manage the additional rigor. According to Dr. Young, "Now, if the kid is older and can handle some of the nuances [of acceleration], then I think it could be more appropriate."

Dr. LeBaron shares a viewpoint about acceleration similar to Dr. Young, Dr. Morgana, and Dr. Bakersfield. Dr. LeBaron is the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning at a linguistically diverse, higher performing elementary school district. She is a staunch supporter of finding ways to differentiate the curriculum to meet the needs of all students, not just the higher ability students. To Dr. LeBaron, acceleration as an academic intervention should be used when truly needed. The focus of instruction for teachers should be first on differentiating the curriculum for the multiple needs of the students in their classrooms. As stated by Dr. LeBaron,

> I personally like the fact that we need to differentiate and challenge students. I am really big on making sure that all of our students are challenged. Everyone needs to face a challenge. No matter where you are, whether you are a higher performing student or not, I feel there should be challenge involved through differentiation and sometimes through acceleration.

Though Dr. LeBaron attests that she can see a role for acceleration in instruction, she shares Dr. Young's opinion that the push for acceleration by parents in her school district is counterproductive to a child's education. In Dr. LeBaron's school district, some parents are pushing for their children to be subject accelerated in math. These families want their child to be taking high school geometry in eighth grade. However, she is not sure parents understand why they are pushing for math subject acceleration or what the end goal is for their child if it happens. When their child is accelerated in math, she have seen several students fail when they take Algebra I in seventh grade. Dr. LeBaron equates the math subject acceleration in her district as a "race to nowhere." According to Dr. LeBaron,

> I do feel there is such a pressure and a push to accelerate kids into this ladder of curriculum that we spoke to, and it is becoming a road to nowhere because the high schools are telling us that you can't keep up moving these students. In my district, I only have . . . three 8th grade students who are in geometry but . . . [o]ne of our other colleagues has whole classroom of people taking geometry in eighth grade. We are moving our kids way too fast, especially through math, without [the students] getting these [math] concepts. Therefore, they are going to Algebra 1 in seventh grade, and they are failing. I think there is such a pressure, and parents are pressured, or parents are giving us pressure to put their kids in more accelerated classes when they might not have developed those really necessary [math] concepts in time.

Dr. LeBaron proposes having students learn the current grade level's curriculum skills and concepts more deeply than what is currently provided in the Tier 1 general education curriculum before considering acceleration. Acceleration should only be employed as an alternative when students have mastered the differentiated Tier 1 curriculum. As stated by Dr. LeBaron,

> My huge personal opinion is to really focus deeply on the standards and getting to know the standards for that grade level inside-out and, if they are able to do that, then we should provide these accelerated or telescoping ways to provide them (students) more challenge.

Dr. Nakoma possesses mixed feelings about acceleration. Dr. Nakoma personally feels that acceleration should be implemented in a school district. However, the reality for her is that she feels it is too difficult for some school districts to do with fidelity due to lack of structure, resources, and personnel. She compares trying to implement acceleration as compared to implementing special education or Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). She feels that the amount of time and resources needed to have an acceleration program as structured as a special education program or as a MTSS program is too daunting. Therefore, for her and her school district, they are not going to implement acceleration regardless of what is required by law. She is aware that this will hurt the students who

need acceleration in her district, but the school district is not in a position right now to provide acceleration. As Dr. Nakoma stated,

> Personally and professionally . . . I know that it is difficult to implement properly. I know that. Knowing that, from a personal point of view, I can understand when there are no clear-cut procedures in place. But, I also feel like there should be some type of effort made and there should be some type of support provided to those kids that have been identified that they need that additional enrichment. I feel like we are dropping the ball there. There is more focus on the other end. When you think about MTSS, we have procedures, and manuals, and protocols, and specific steps in place to support Tier 2 kids and Tier 3 kids. . . . [B]ut when you look at the opposite end of that spectrum, those same procedures and guidelines are missing. It is really a generic plan [we have]. Usually, in place like in my district, we say, "We got those five kids and we're putting them in an honors class." I think it is limited and it stops there. It is very demanding because it (acceleration) is a separate program in itself and you just don't have enough personnel to really monitor that program. That is why it (acceleration) doesn't get the attention that special education or MTSS get, because they have the personnel and they have the staff to really monitor that program to make sure the curriculum is in place and the curriculum is in line to meet those students' needs, to monitor those goals. It is really, really clear but I would love to be able to do that for my high performing students but there is no way I can do it and I don't have the staff to help me do it, to be honest.

Dr. Michelle Grant's school district has a system in place to evaluate the acceleration of students. However, even with an acceleration evaluation system, Dr. Grant is personally not in favor of accelerating students. She first questions that the acceleration evaluation system her school district uses truly identifies the right students who need acceleration as an academic intervention. Dr. Grant does not feel that scoring high on the district's chosen acceleration screeners of NWEA MAP and CogAT qualifies students for acceleration. According to Dr. Grant,

> I think we tell ourselves that we have this program and that there are these special kids who are deserving of it because they test well. I don't know how much those indicators on the MAP test and CogAT indicate that those kids are ready [for acceleration]. I think we become entranced that these magical kids can handle acceleration and that other kids can't based on their test scores If you talk about a kid that can't, you're like, "This is ridiculous that not every kid could handle acceleration to a certain degree."

Besides questioning the assessments used to screen students for acceleration, Dr. Grant questions if the teachers in her school district are qualified to instruct accelerated students. She is not sure that if a student is accelerated, then that child's instructional needs are truly going to be met by another teacher. As stated by Dr. Grant, "I think it's great if, across your system, you have teachers that can handle the practices that it (acceleration) requires. I don't think we do a good job of it." Dr. Grant is unsure if teachers are truly differentiating for the needs of higher ability students. She feels that if teachers truly knew how to differentiate, then acceleration would be a positive asset in her school district. However, for Dr. Grant, she feels that acceleration is creating more problems for the district than positively addressing the needs of the students who need the enrichment. According to Dr. Grant,

> Who doesn't want that (acceleration) for their kids? Who doesn't want their kids to have a pace that is appropriate for their proficiency level that's not the pacing guide for the grade level? I think it's good, but I think it causes a lot of problems in our system because we don't know how to adapt to our kids. It causes major inconveniences.

One of the few administrators in this study that supports acceleration is Ms. Drost. Ms. Drost has the benefit of personally seeing firsthand how acceleration successfully addressed the needs of her higher ability students as an administrator and as a teacher. With her personal experience in recommending students for acceleration as teacher, Ms. Drost saw those students thrived academically when they were placed at the right level of academic rigor. According to Ms. Drost,

> I have seen really, really great things in our district in terms of acceleration. I have taught a lot of students who have been accelerated or I was the teacher involved with encouraging the child to be accelerated because they were just so academically gifted. Personally, I think it's great.

Ms. Drost is quick to qualify her support of acceleration by stating that acceleration only works when there is a system in place within the school district to truly screen students for

acceleration. Due to the importance and impact of acceleration, a valid and reliable system to refer, assess, decide, and track accelerated students is critical to the acceleration process. As stated by Ms. Drost,

> I think that acceleration is great as long as you have a system in place that ensures that it is the right decision, because it is a very serious decision and has a long term impact on the child. As long as the system is in place to ensure that the appropriate children are being accelerated and getting support for their acceleration, I think it has been wonderful.

Like Ms. Drost, Dr. Saylor supports acceleration because of her positive firsthand experiences with accelerating students. Dr. Saylor favors acceleration because she views it as an educational intervention required to address the academic, social, and emotional needs of students. According to Dr. Saylor, "Personally, I am a strong believer in the continuum of services for all students. I do think acceleration is a choice for some students. I support using acceleration." As with Ms. Drost, Dr. Saylor has had personal positive experiences with acceleration. During her tenure as Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning for Windsor School District, she accelerated a seventh grade student into eighth grade Algebra 1. Dr. Saylor states that this student needed subject acceleration in math to continue his learning. According to Dr. Saylor:

> I have a child right now who is so incredibly gifted in Math. We offer our eighth grade students the option of taking the Algebra 1 for high school credit in eighth grade. This student is so incredibly gifted in Math that he took that eighth grade Algebra 1 class in seventh grade and he flew through it. Highest scores in the class. This was the right thing for him. It was absolutely the right thing for him.

Though Dr. Saylor is in favor of acceleration as an academic intervention, she qualifies her support to make sure there is a system in place to evaluate students to see if acceleration will truly benefit them. In Dr. Saylor's experience, she feels that acceleration has been used too frequently and given to students who may not have needed it. According to Dr. Saylor, "We

have to analyze why we want to accelerate and really do it for the right reason. I think it tends to be over-applied and not always for the right reasons, but I do fully support using acceleration." Dr. Saylor points out that acceleration works when there is a system in place for evaluating students effectively for the academic intervention. As stated by Dr. Saylor,

> I think it (acceleration) has to be done strategically and done well in order for it to be effective. . . . I included my own personal thinking around [acceleration] because I think it can be applied maybe not for all the appropriate reasons for the actual student placement.

This evaluation system for acceleration needs to truly assess students objectively and fairly to make sure that they are candidates in need of more rigorous instruction.

In conclusion, the Illinois central office school district administrators interviewed for this study have mixed feelings about acceleration. Some favor acceleration as an academic intervention because they have seen it work firsthand to meet the needs of students they either taught or recommended as a teacher or as an administrator. However, their support for acceleration is tempered with making sure there is a valid and reliable system in place at the district level to equitably refer, assess, decide, and track students for acceleration. Other administrators are hesitant to support acceleration as an academic intervention. They question if acceleration is truly academically, socially, and emotionally appropriate for students, especially early elementary students. They also question what the end purpose is for acceleration if students have taken all the available accelerated courses by high school. Lastly, some of the administrators in this study wonder if the acceleration evaluation system their districts have in place are truly determining if acceleration is appropriate for their students.

Another area of acceleration that gives administrators for this study pause are parents. Some school district leaders' feelings about acceleration are influenced by the

way that parents are reacting to acceleration in their districts. The administrators are not sure if parents understand that acceleration is an academic tool utilized to meet the needs of children who need the enrichment. They also wonder about parental intent for acceleration because some of the school leaders feel that parents seek out acceleration as a status symbol instead of an academic necessity to challenge their child with the right curriculum.

Lastly, the administrators' emotions about acceleration are influenced by the educators in their district. Some of the school leaders interviewed for this study are unsure if teachers are truly capacitated with the skills and knowledge to instruct accelerated students. In the end, most of the administrators agreed that acceleration would not be necessary in schools if teachers just knew how to differentiate the Tier 1 general education curriculum for higher ability students. In that way, higher ability students would have their academic needs as well as the social and emotional needs met within the general education classroom.

Finding 4: Illinois School Administrators Are Having Issues With the Implementation With the Accelerated Placement Act Because of Lack of Funding as Well as Lack of Further Rules and Regulations to Provide Needed Guidance

When Governor Rauner signed the Accelerated Placement Act into law in 2017, all the school administrators interviewed for this study sought advice and information for professionals in the gifted education field to help them understand the requirements of the new law. Once the Accelerated Placement Law took full effect on July 1, 2018, the school district leaders found themselves faced with making sense and giving sense on a law they themselves were struggling to understand how to implement with fidelity. Three common experiences the district level leaders in this study have with implementing the Accelerated Placement Act are the following:

1. There are a lot of parents requesting acceleration for their children.

2. It is an unfunded mandate from the Illinois General Assembly and the Illinois State Board of Education.
3. There is a lack of guidance in terms of rules and regulations from the Illinois General Assembly and the Illinois State Board of Education on how to implement the Accelerated Placement Act with fidelity.

Parents and Acceleration Requests. One of the main goals for Carolyn Welch and the Illinois General Assembly in pushing for legal protection for acceleration was for families, like hers, to be able to access an acceleration evaluation process at any public school district in Illinois. All of the participants in this study did state that there are more families now than in the past seeking acceleration for their children. However, for some school districts in this study, the passage of the Accelerated Placement Act opened the floodgates to parent requests for acceleration. The concern with the central office administrators is that the families seeking acceleration may not understand that the purpose of acceleration is an academic intervention to match a child's academic ability to the right curricular level. For example, Ms. Kylie Smith is Director of Curriculum and Instruction of Ashton School District. Ashton School District is an elementary school district in the suburbs of Chicago. It is a predominately Black school district with a student body population of about 2,000 students. Collaborating with a team of teachers and a building principal, Ms. Smith created four sets of acceleration procedures reflecting the four types of acceleration options offered by the school district: (a) early entrance into kindergarten; (b) early entrance into first grade; (c) subject acceleration; and (d) grade level acceleration. Ms. Smith states that the largest number of referrals she has received since the passage of the Accelerated Placement Act is for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade. As stated by Ms. Smith,

> The biggest one is early entrance into kindergarten or first grade. I get a lot of that. And, then I get, "My kids went to a preschool where they had a kindergarten room and they were in kindergarten there, so I think they should start as a 5 year old in first grade." Or, I get that they went to a Montessori school and they let them go into kindergarten at 4 years old, so now they should come as a 5 year old to first grade." I get a lot of that too.

The frustration for Ms. Smith comes from the fact that families do not understand that just because a child may have participated in a private school's kindergarten program does not automatically mean that the child has the academic background as well as the social-emotional maturity to be accelerated into kindergarten or first grade. Ms. Smith views acceleration as an academic intervention to meet the needs of a child who is functioning at a higher level as compared to their grade level peers. As Ms. Smith states, "The intent [of the Accelerated Placement Act] is to meet the needs of students that are able to work academically above grade level, to not hold them back, to keep them progressing forward."

Dr. Banks from Riverbend Elementary School also faced an onslaught of parents trying to have their child placed in the district's Accelerated math program. Dr. Banks believes that the number of requests are coming from a misguided belief that some parents in the community possess about the accelerated math program. For some parents, they view the district's accelerated math program as a golden ticket to enter an Ivy league college or a collegiate engineering program. According to Dr. Banks,

> There is a lot of push in town [for acceleration]. [I] and our high school say ultimately that more kids get accelerated than should get accelerated. Our high school offers Multi-Variable AP Calc, so it's MV Calc. The Holy Grail is Math in our town. . . . The Holy Grail is the kids that take MV Calc. There is a perception that you can't get into an Ivy League or you can't get into this or that if you don't take MV Calc or you can't pursue an engineering degree if you don't take MV Calc, which is not true. There is this competitiveness that gets fed in, particularly on the Math side, to get kids to take the accelerated track [at the elementary to get] to MV Calc. A very small percentage of them actually end up taking it. I think, in some ways, there is this pressure.

Dr. Violet Young of Suttondale School District is also facing a lot of parent requests for acceleration since the passage of the Accelerated Placement Act. Similar to Ms. Smith, Dr. Young is Director of Curriculum and Instruction of an elementary school district in the suburbs of Chicago that is predominantly Black. Suttondale School District has a student body population of about 2,500 students. When the Accelerated Placement Act passed in 2017, Dr. Young was immediately contacted by a group of parents wanting to accelerate their children into early entrance into kindergarten. This group of parents learned about the new law from the news. Dr. Young had not even created any acceleration evaluation procedures before she was contacted by this group of parents. She believes that the parents were eager to have their children accelerated into kindergarten early not because these children needed acceleration as an academic intervention. Dr. Young stated that the reason that these parents sought the acceleration is because the district offers full-day kindergarten. Dr. Young saw that their requests for early entrance into kindergarten was a financial cost saving move so that these families did not have to pay for daycare services if the child attended the district half-day preschool program or pay for another year's tuition for a private preschool. According to Dr. Young,

> I had already had some parents that had heard about it, a group of pre-k parents that had heard about it. They were calling up to the district office because they were trying to get their kids in kindergarten. Here is another thing too: we offer full-day kindergarten. If you have a pre-k kid in our district, it's a half-day program. So, parents, for their own selfish reasons, wanted to get their kids in this program or [have us] give them access to kindergarten so that they could have a full-time babysitter. I know it's terrible for me to say it like that, but that is the reality.

Dr. LeBaron at Meadows School District also had parents calling about acceleration before the district even had their acceleration procedures in place. The issue for Dr. LeBaron is that parents knew who the teachers were who taught predominantly gifted children in the past.

The parents assumed that these same teachers would also have the accelerated students. Parents called the district office seeking for their child to be accelerated into these teachers' classrooms. As stated by Dr. LeBaron,

> It was a parent-driven thing. [T]here were parents who requested it (acceleration). Before this act was in place, we were starting to prepare for the act. There weren't forms on the website like there are now and things like that. However, we did have parents that reached out to the [district and say], "Why isn't my child is Ms. So-and-So's class because we know that she is the Gifted teacher." There was not a formal process to take their acceleration requests yet.

For Ms. Paulson at Georgetown School District, her frustration is not with how many parents are seeking acceleration for their children. Her frustration is with parents not seeing that not all children are not qualified to be accelerated. She blames the Illinois General Assembly for passing a law that opened the floodgates in her district to parents seeking acceleration, especially early entrance into kindergarten. Ms. Paulson tried to limit the amount of parent requests by putting the information about their district's acceleration procedures on the district website and not making any other communication to the community that there were now acceleration procedures in place. Even though Ms. Welch stated that one of the main purposes of the law was to open access to acceleration for families, the referral requests that Georgetown School District received went beyond what their resources and financial capacity could handle given that the law is an unfunded mandate. According to Ms. Paulson,

> I think this is probably one of my biggest frustrations with this Act. How did they (the legislators) not know that this was going to happen? If you wanted us to look at children who are Gifted and needed to start school before they turn five, then make that part of the Act. Don't just make it open to anyone can refer their child. In this district and this area, I have an onslaught of people wanting their kids to start kindergarten early. We put it out there (the acceleration procedures), it's on our website but it's not like we published "Hey, guess what? Your kid can start early." The people who came were mostly people who were familiar with the Acceleration Act. We tested one kid whose dad came in with him doing all of the talking because his mom is a teacher, and she didn't want to be part

> of it all. I said, "I would be more than happy to talk to your wife." Maybe she was a school psych or something. The data did not support at all that his child was ready for kindergarten. This is typical for me to face something like this.

One of the main purposes in passing the Accelerated Placement Act was to have parents and school districts work together with acceleration requests. However, some school districts in this study were bombarded with acceleration requests. These districts were not ready to process the multiple requests. Moreover, some school district administrators in this study questioned if parents understood the purpose of acceleration. For example, several of the central office administrators interviewed for this study felt that parents were seeking early entrance into kindergarten, so they did not have to pay for another year of private preschool or daycare. Other administrators felt that parents possessed a belief that accelerating their child would open more opportunities in high school, college, and beyond. The best way that some of the administrators in this study have dealt with the multiple requests is to try to talk with families first before testing to try to have them understand what acceleration is and how it can be used as a valuable academic intervention for children who qualify for it. By informing parents, the school administrators found this helped everyone understand that acceleration is to be used when truly needed.

Unfunded Mandate. When the Accelerated Placement Act was passed in August of 2017, public schools throughout Illinois were given 11 months to prepare themselves for the act to be implemented on July 1 of 2018. One of the biggest problems that the administrators interviewed for this study had with the act is that is an unfunded mandate. This was noted by Representative Ives and Senator McCarthy as a problem school districts were going to face during the third reading of the Accelerated Placement Act. The current expectation from the Illinois General Assembly and the Illinois State Board of Education is that all Illinois public

school districts have to spend their own district funds to comply with the law. For some school districts in this study, they did not have the requisite funds to implement the Accelerated Placement Act. Dr. Young at Suttondale School District is one such school district. All of the students at Suttondale School District qualify for either free or reduced lunch. It is also a low-academically performing school district. During the 2019 administration of the Illinois Assessment of Readiness, around 10% of the students in grades 3–8 were proficient in English language arts and math. During the 2019 administration of the Illinois Science Assessment, around 30% of the students in grade 5 and 8 were proficient in science. For Dr. Young, her focus is on supporting the students in the Tier 1 general education curriculum through resources and personnel. She is also focused on remediation to have students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 learn the skills and concepts needed to access the Tier 1 curriculum with support. According to Dr. Young,

> The Accelerated Placement Act is another unfunded mandate. On top of that, you have a lot of minority students. [T]hey suffer the most from stuff like this. Again, I don't have the resources right now to put a dynamic acceleration program in place. I just don't have the resources. I don't have the personnel or the resources to do it. It's frustrating. But, again, I don't want to minimize the talent that I do have locally.

Without funding from the state, Dr. Young is prioritizing where the district's limited funds for curriculum, instruction, and assessment can be best well-spent to address the needs for the maximum number of students.

Dr. Grant from Hunter Woods School District is also frustrated that the Accelerated Placement Act is another unfunded mandate requiring school districts to spend their resources to comply with the law. As stated by Dr. Grant,

> These things, they just come in the form of really well-scripted [laws]. Who is going to be against this (acceleration)? Who doesn't want this (acceleration)? That's now what this is. These are mandates that are dictating what school districts are supposedly to

> spend their precious financial resources on. The Accelerated Placement Act is not giving us more funding! It's not doing anything for us.

For Dr. Grant, without additional funding to help implement acceleration in her school district, she is also faced with prioritizing where limited district funds in her district are spent in order to best meet the needs of all the students in her school district.

Dr. Canfield from Krusemark School District is faced with having to choose to spend district funds on acceleration versus district funds to address her school district's educational needs due to the pandemic. Krusemark School District, like many school districts across the nation, are spending district funds to create a high-quality remote learning environment to continue educating students. This requires school districts to purchase online curriculum as well as hardware such as Chromebooks for every student. Without additional funding for the Accelerated Placement Act, Dr. Canfield is forced to choose if district's funds go to complying with the law or to preparing to educate all students remotely. As stated by Dr. Canfield,

> I think that became clearly evident during this pandemic where there were districts that didn't have the resources to be able to provide a remote learning quality instruction that they wanted to provide. Without more funding from the state, especially for initiatives like acceleration, we are forced to choose where to best spend our money. Like me, it is not that I don't want acceleration here. I just can't focus on it right now financially. It is all of us (school districts). It isn't because we don't want to, we just don't have the means to do it.

For the Accelerated Placement Act to be successfully implemented in Illinois public schools, the Illinois General Assembly cannot leave this law as an unfunded mandate. School districts in Illinois do not have unlimited funding to spend, especially given the current condition of educating students in a pandemic. Public school districts across Illinois are reallocating resources to ensure that all students are receiving the best education possible either remotely or safely at school. This requires school districts to purchase new software such as online curriculum, new hardware such as Chrome books for every student, and personal protective

equipment such as face masks for in-person learning. Until there is more funding put toward the Accelerated Placement Act, implementing the law will be a low priority for Illinois school districts.

Lack of Guidance in the Law. At the time that the school district leaders were interviewed for this study, they were not aware that ISBE released one page of rules and regulations on the Accelerated Placement Act. The one page of rules and regulations was released June 7, 2019 to help guide Illinois school administrators in understanding how best to implement acceleration in their school districts. Without knowledge of the released rules and regulations, seven district leaders in this study sought information on the law through a one-day professional development workshop offered by the Illinois Association of Gifted Children (IAGC) or by their local ISBE intermediate service center. All the school district administrators stated that they learned more information through curriculum meetings with fellow administrators from other school districts. Representative Ives, Representative Flowers, and Senator McCarthy warned their colleagues that school districts were going to need more guidance on what is articulated in the law. Even Ms. Welch stated that the law was not enough guidance, which is why her and Dr. Calvert wrote an 8-page draft document of rules and regulations for ISBE to adopt. When asked what the Accelerated Placement Act requires school districts to do, Dr. Young summarized the basic outlines of the law. First, she understood that school districts had to offer acceleration, but she limited the options to early entrance to kindergarten or first grade, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration. Second, Dr. Young also knew that a school district now needs a system to allow individuals to refer children for acceleration. Lastly, she understood that any decision to accelerate or to not accelerate had to be based on data. Outside of these aforementioned requirements, Dr. Young is unsure of what

else is expected of her to do to comply with the Accelerated Placement Act. Without more guidance from either the Illinois General Assembly and/or the Illinois State Board of Education, she feels unsure about how to make sense of the law and give sense to others to help her district implement the law for the benefit of all the stakeholders in her school district. According to Dr. Young,

> What I understand of the law is to basically offer up this [acceleration] program. Offer up Early Entrance to Kindergarten. Offer up Early Entrance to first Grade. Offer up Whole Grade Acceleration and Single Subject Acceleration. Yet, again like I said, no rhyme or reason on how to do this. Put some measures in place. Make sure it's data-informed decision making. Make sure you have a referral process. But again, outside of what is written in the law, nothing to really give us guidance on what that could look like within each individual school context. Every school is different.

Dr. Canfield from Krusemark School District feels that the reason why Illinois school districts have not been given any guidance from the Illinois General Assembly or the Illinois State Board of Education is because of the deference for local control. In Dr. Canfield's opinion, since the Illinois General Assembly failed to provide funding to help school districts implement the Accelerated Placement Act, they allowed school districts wide discretion on how the law would look at each school district. Even Mrs. Carolyn Welch stated in her interview that one of the most flexible parts about the Accelerated Placement Act was the fact that school districts were given a large leeway to determine how best to apply the law for their students and their community. As stated by Dr. Canfield, "I think it (the Accelerated Placement Act) is about local control. I think that you can't put too much regulation on something and tie a district's hands if they don't have the resources to provide for it (acceleration)."

Even though the law provides an outline of the requirements that school districts need to have in order to comply with the Accelerated Placement Act, some of the school district leaders in this study feel that more guidance is still needed to help administrators

understand what is truly required of them in terms of acceleration. For example, Ms. Nakoma of Limestone School District has yet to write acceleration procedures for her school district. The issue is that when Ms. Nakoma and members of her district's acceleration committee came together to write procedures, they were confused as to what is acceleration programming and what is gifted programming. They kept reading the law and knew that the law required acceleration to be offered to all students. But, they could not come to an understanding of the difference between acceleration and gifted education. As a result, when they tried to write acceleration procedures, they found themselves writing a gifted program and not an acceleration program. Without clear guidance from the Illinois General Assembly or the Illinois State Board of Education, Ms. Nakoma wonders how many other school districts in Illinois are confusing acceleration and gifted education. She also wonders if other school districts are really writing gifted programming procedures instead of acceleration procedures that comply with the requirements of the Accelerated Placement Act. According to Ms. Nakoma,

> Lack of guidance as to what an accelerated program looks like in the law itself is leading to confusion with gifted programming. So, another thing in terms of my understanding of my position on what acceleration is is that it is not necessarily gifted. We had a lot of conversation about that amongst our district team because we were looking at a lot of guidance from gifted programs and gifted support systems. But, it seems like we were focusing on writing a gifted plan or developing a gifted program. I am wondering how often or how many districts are utilizing this or referring to their plan as an acceleration plan, but it is really a gifted plan? That is actually one of the reasons why it took so long for us to get the work done because just the discourse around it. I mean, it was getting exhausting with everyone's interpretation and understanding of what it is and how to transform that into a plan or what it should look like. Like I said, we just didn't make a lot of progress because we kept leaning toward that gifted program - developing and establishing a gifted program. Of course, me and others are pulling away from that, trying to get everyone to understand that that is not what this is. It's easier to put a gifted program in place or it's easier to put an honors program in place like we have because we have concrete guidelines. We have clear procedures. That doesn't exist in this case with acceleration.

Dr. Banks of Riverbend School District understood that the Accelerated Placement Act requires multiple assessments to obtain valid data to see if a child qualifies for acceleration. She also understood that the law allows for school districts to determine which assessments to use, how many to use, and determine the benchmark thresholds for qualifying for acceleration. Furthermore, Dr. Banks knew that the acceleration procedures she developed for her school district would look vastly different from another school district because the procedures were tailored to meet the needs of the stakeholders her district. However, to make sure that she was on the right path, she contacted Dr. Calvert at the Center for Talent Development. She asked for more guidance in regard to the Accelerated Placement Act. She was disappointed when he stated that she would have to wait for more guidance because he was in the process of helping ISBE develop the rules and regulations regarding the law that would provide her the information she sought. According to Dr. Banks,

> You are allowed to define your own cut scores or thresholds to determine what acceleration is in your district with some understanding and recognition of the fact that potentially being accelerated in one district might be different from another based on what the distribution of students looks like. Then, I also did call the person from the Center of Talent Development who had done the webinar I saw on the law to get more advice on what I was doing. Based on the webinar, it was clear they had had a strong advocacy role in getting the law created. I kind of followed up and said, "What is your guidance with assessment and ways to implement this?" He frankly said, "That's next year's project." I kind of felt like saying, "Then, why did you push for the law this year?"

For Dr. Banks, one of the biggest areas of the Acceleration Placement Act where more information is needed is in regard to early entrance into kindergarten. Since school districts are making a critical decision at the start of a child's educational career, Dr. Banks stated that her and her fellow curriculum administrative colleagues are truly uncertain of the acceleration procedures to create for early entrance into kindergarten that will accurately assess if a child is ready to be accelerated. According to Dr. Banks, "Everybody is kind of paralyzed because how

do we do this with 4-year-olds? Everybody noticed the lack of any guidance from the state on how to deal with this in this situation." Without more guidance from the Illinois General Assembly and/or the Illinois State Board of Education, Dr. Banks feels that the implementation being done in school districts across the state are not going to have the desired effect that the law attended—easier access to acceleration in school districts by interested families. As stated by Dr. Banks,

> We forced to move along here, and they are not providing any guidance on dealing with this. It reads and feels like it's a situation where another advocacy group that didn't have enough traction to get regulations passed at ISBE. It's not what they wanted but ultimately it's not going to satisfy anybody for any kind of change that they want.

Dr. Saylor from Windsor School District is one of the few administrators in this study who is actually in favor of the Accelerated Placement Act. She recognizes that acceleration is ignored and underutilized in school districts. She feels that having a law mandating that school districts have acceleration procedures in their schools brings acceleration into the forefront of school district priorities. According to Dr. Saylor, "I am pleased that it happened because I think it is an incredible thing that we do because it (acceleration) is a neglected area. Acceleration hasn't been taken seriously. Legislation makes us take it seriously, so I think that's important."

Even though Dr. Saylor supports the Accelerated Placement Act, she does have two issues with the law. The first issue is with how the law was written and passed. Dr. Saylor feels that there is so little buy-in with her administrative colleagues and teachers because neither group was consulted prior to passage of the law. For Dr. Saylor, this was a critical misstep by the lobbyists like Ms. Welch and Dr. Calvert because they did not obtain the perspective of those who have to implement the law in practice. According to Dr. Saylor,

> My take is that it is like any other legislation. It's very much a political effort to try to provide quality education to advanced students that occasionally misses the mark with certain things. I can't specifically say which areas are missing the mark, that doesn't

> seem fair to say that. I think that if done legislatively, it needed to be done with full consultation with the administrators and teachers that are actually doing that work.

Besides lack of consultation from administrators and teachers, Dr. Saylor is concerned with the lack of rules and regulations to help school districts figure out how to implement the Accelerated Placement Act with fidelity. She knows that the lack of guidance is going to have a lot of local interpretation of what a school district thinks they are being asked of it to do to comply with the law. As stated by Dr. Saylor, "I think there has to be a lot of local interpretation if there is no guidance and support. We (school administrators) are all trying to figure that out."

In conclusion, Illinois school administrators interviewed in this study are having issues with the adoption, interpretation, and implementation of the Accelerated Placement Act. The three areas where the school district leaders are struggling: (a) the number of parents requesting acceleration; (b) no financial funding from the state to help implement the law; and (c) lack of instructional guidance from the Illinois General Assembly and ISBE on how to implement acceleration in school districts. The lack of clarity, support, and guidance have left school district leaders to interpret the law and implement acceleration procedures that are best for their individual school district. This is leading to a patchwork quilt of procedures across the districts interviewed in this study. The current problem can best be summed up by Ms. Paulson from Georgetown School District,

> How do I make sense of the Accelerated Placement Act? I haven't yet. I am trying to decide what are the right assessments to even know who is ready for acceleration and who is not. Right now, the way I make sense of this is probably there are more questions than answers."

Finding 5: District Acceleration Procedures Are Not Aligned or Correlated to the Legal Requirements in the Accelerated Placement Act as Well as District Policy on Acceleration

Acceleration Policy. All 13 elementary school districts in this study have an acceleration policy adopted by their respective school boards. However, no one in the 13 elementary school districts wrote the policy. Instead, all the school districts subscribe to a service called Policy Reference Educational Subscription Service (PRESS) through the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB). PRESS provides school districts and school boards with "sample policies, exhibits, and procedures, plus the legal rationale and legal references supporting them policies" (IASB.org, 2020). Most, if not all, public school districts in Illinois subscribe to PRESS because they are receiving policies that have been written by lawyers from the Illinois Association of School Boards. The sample policies written by the lawyers comply with the requirements of any new law, rule, or regulations that public schools need to implement. The school leaders interviewed for this study stated that their superintendents and school boards adopted the acceleration policy written by PRESS. PRESS references the actual Accelerated Placement Law (105 ILCS 5/14A) as the baseline for their written policy on acceleration.

The current acceleration policy for the 13 elementary school districts is Section 6:135 and titled "Accelerated Placement Program." The acceleration policy first outlines the purpose and goal of why the district has an acceleration program:

> The District provides an Accelerated Placement Program (APP). The APP advances the District's goal of providing educational programs with opportunities for each student to develop to their maximum potential. The APP provides an educational setting with curriculum options usually reserved for students who are older or in higher grades than the student participating in the APP. (Anna Jonesboro Community Unit High School District, 2020)

After stating the purpose and goal of a district's accelerated placement program, the policy details the several types of acceleration options available to students interested in seeking acceleration. According to the PRESS policy, "APP options include, but may not be limited to: (a) accelerating a student in a single subject; (b) other grade-level acceleration; and (c) early

entrance to kindergarten or first grade." (Anna Jonesboro Community Unit High School District, 2020). It is important to note here that the PRESS policy delineates four examples of acceleration that school districts can implement. However, the policy also clearly states that acceleration options were not limited to these four examples.

The next part of the PRESS acceleration policy explains that a district's acceleration policy is open to all students. Furthermore, the policy states that school districts will not discriminate against any student who is in a legally protected class and are seeking acceleration. According to the PRESS policy,

> Participation in the APP is open to all students who demonstrate high ability and who may benefit from accelerated placement. It is not limited to students who have been identified as gifted and talented. Eligibility to participate in the District's APP shall not be conditioned upon the protected classification identified in School Board policy 7:10, *Equal Educational Opportunities*, or any factor other than the student's identification as an accelerated learner. (Anna Jonesboro Community Unit High School District, 2020)

The last section of the PRESS acceleration policy outlines how an accelerated placement program will be implemented in the district and who is responsible for ensuring legal implementation of acceleration. According to the PRESS policy,

> The Superintendent of designee shall implement an Accelerated Placement Program (APP) that includes:
>
> 1. Decision-making processes that are fair, equitable, and involve multiple individuals, e.g., District administrators, teachers, and school support personnel, and a student's parent(s)/guardian(s);
> 2. Notification process that notify a student's parent(s)/guardian(s) of a decision affecting a student's participation in the APP; and
> 3. Assessment processes that include multiple, valid reliable indicators. (Anna Jonesboro Community Unit High School District, 2020)

This last section of the PRESS acceleration policy stresses four important aspects of the Accelerated Placement Act. First, the decision-making process on accelerating students must be fair and equitable. Second, there needs to be a team of educational professionals as part of the

decision-making process. This team must include an interested student's parent(s) or legal guardian(s). Third, there is a process for notifying an interested student's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) regarding the decision for or against acceleration as recommended by the decision-making team. Lastly, the assessment screeners used to determine if a student is a candidate for any form of acceleration must have multiple valid and reliable measures to make a data-informed decision if a child is a candidate for the type of acceleration sought by the one who referred the child.

It is important to note here that missing from the PRESS acceleration policy are the three optional provisions in the Accelerated Placement Act. The PRESS acceleration policy does not mention that school districts may also include in their policy procedures to inform the community about their accelerated placement program; a process for referring a child for acceleration; and providing an individualized written plan for an accelerated student.

Acceleration Procedures. In practice, any procedure written by school administrators must be aligned with the policy adopted by the school board. In the case of acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act, 12 of the elementary school districts in this study have acceleration procedures written and implemented in their school districts. Only Ms. Nakoma's school district has not yet written their acceleration procedures. As stated in Finding 3, Ms. Nakoma does not have the staff or resources to write acceleration procedures at this time. Of the 12 elementary school districts that have acceleration procedures, the acceleration procedures that were written by the school district leaders interviewed for this study show that there is a high correlation between the written acceleration procedures and the attitudes, feelings, and beliefs that the school administrators hold toward acceleration as an academic intervention. The influence of the school leaders' attitudes, feelings, and beliefs about acceleration and the Accelerated Placement

Act caused the written acceleration procedures to not be fully aligned with the districts' acceleration policies adopted by their respective school boards. The written procedures for the 12 school districts show that (a) acceleration is narrowed to only three or four options that a school district considers and offers to families, and (b) multiple gatekeeping measures such as time limits, age requirements, and parental questionnaires have been put into place to deter acceleration. It is important to note here that the school districts in this study have been using their acceleration procedures in a systematic way to accelerate children since passage of the new law. However, to date, less than 10 children for all the districts in this study have been accelerated using their new procedures.

In addition to the written acceleration procedures not being fully aligned to the school board policies, none of the 12 school districts have accelerations procedures that are similar in nature. Without more detailed rules and regulations from ISBE, each school district exercised local control and wrote acceleration procedures distinct for their school community. The following section provides an overview of themes and trends across the acceleration procedures from the 12 school district administrators who wrote them for their school districts.

Theme 1: Acceleration is Narrowed to Only Three or Four Options

According to 105 ILS 5/14A-17 of the Accelerated Placement Act, accelerated placement "*shall include, but need not be limited to,* the following types of acceleration: early entrance into kindergarten, early entrance into first grade, single subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration" (105 ILS 5/14A-17). The PRESS acceleration policy that all school boards of the 13 school districts in this study adopted states that acceleration "*options include but may not be limited to*: (a) accelerating a student in a single subject; (b) other grade-level acceleration; and (c) early entrance to kindergarten or first grade" (Anna Jonesboro Community Unit High School

District, 2020). The PRESS acceleration policy dropped the word "shall" before "include." However, the deletion of the word "shall" does not absolve Illinois school districts of their legal responsibility to offer multiple forms of acceleration. Furthermore, the addition of the word "may" in the PRESS policy may seem to school districts that they have a loophole to offer only three or four types of acceleration. In actuality, both the law and the PRESS policy state that acceleration options "*need not be limited to*" the most common four sought in elementary schools: early entrance into kindergarten and first grade; subject acceleration; and whole grade acceleration. Language in the Accelerated Placement Act and the school board policy encourage an expanded consideration by Illinois school districts into multiple forms of acceleration in order for all stakeholders to consider the right acceleration form that will meet the academic needs of the child. In other words, using acceleration as a true academic intervention, the Accelerated Placement Act and PRESS policy desire stakeholders to truly differentiate which acceleration option available can help a child continue to learn and to grow academically as well as socially and emotionally. Lastly, Ms. Welch stated the purpose of seeking the Accelerated Placement Act was to make sure that students are having their needs meet with the form of acceleration that is right for them. Once a school district can match the right form of acceleration to the need of the child, the child will feel a sense of purpose in their education. According to Ms. Welch, "When they (students) are finally being challenged with the right form of acceleration, it doesn't matter what age the child is or kids they are with. It's whether they feel if it makes sense to them and doing what they should be doing."

With the law and school board policy stating that Illinois school districts must consider multiple forms of acceleration to address the needs of a child, the school district leaders interviewed for this study wrote acceleration procedures that limited acceleration offerings at the

school districts to only offer three or four types of acceleration: early entrance into kindergarten; early entrance into first grade; single subject acceleration; and/or whole grade acceleration. The reasons offered by the school leaders as to the limiting acceleration vary. For Dr. Grant at Hunter Woods School District, she did not extend acceleration beyond the four options because she is seeing students miss critical instructional concepts with the four types of acceleration that is currently being offered. Dr. Grant calls accelerated students "gap kids." For example, Dr. Grant stated that three students were subject accelerated this past summer of 2020 from fourth grade math to sixth grade math. She advised their parents to cover the fifth grade level math curricula over the summer that they were going to miss due to their acceleration. The hope is that these three students start their acceleration in sixth grade math with the best chance possible for them to succeed. The parents of these three students and Dr. Grant were not happy about these children having to teach themselves an entire grade level curriculum over a summer. Dr. Grant feels that the current four acceleration options the district offers to families creates gaps in their learning since these students are missing an entire grade level curriculum to be accelerated. As a result, the fear is that this will create a 'gap' in learning. Because of this fear in learning loss on behalf of accelerated students, the district will not offer other forms of acceleration in order to prevent the possibility of more "gap kids". According to Dr. Grant,

> There are some kids who qualified to get in sixth grade higher level math classes but then they miss almost a year of (fifth grade) curriculum. So, they are punished then when they jump forward. We try to give them optional work in the summer. We try to make sure they are having [acceleration] opportunities. For the most part those kids are really, really smart and they are able to do that, but I think it's a load that falls on them. . . . For the three [accelerated students and their families] that I talked to, I said to go home and teach themselves everything on Kahn Academy. . . . They (the accelerated students) are being savvy, and they are . . . basically teaching themselves studying videos. They (the parents) were not pleased that their child had to, even though the work was optional. They were like, "I really didn't love that." It was kind of on them (the accelerated students) to learn this content that they missed just to get into a class that they qualified for. . . . They're gap kids.

Dr. Grant holds an implicit bias that accelerated students either cannot learn the missed curriculum in a higher grade level and/or that they miss content that may impact their future learning. The accelerated students are not given the deference that they may already know the curriculum they are skipping. Besides assuming that accelerated students miss critical academic content if accelerated, Dr. Grant is struggling to overcome the bias shared by the district's teachers and administrators that students who are accelerated with any of the four options that the district offers may struggle in the higher classes because the students did not follow the district's proscribed pacing guides for learning. Moreover, Dr. Grant's administrative colleagues and teachers question if accelerated students have the executive functioning skills needed to succeed in their new accelerated placement by moving ahead faster than their age level peers. According to Dr. Grant,

> I think there are probably sometimes when people (teachers and administrators) have concerns about the child's ability to handle the pace being in an accelerated program. It's about covering curriculum and getting your homework done and being prepared, so all those other success factors play into it. It also probably affects sometimes how kids can perform when they don't have those skills or that organization. I've heard of conversations coming up like that, especially with middle school.

Lastly, with accelerated students, Dr. Grant and the building principals are working to ensure that the accelerated classes have an even distribution of students as compared to the non-accelerated classes. At Hunter Woods School District, the two subject acceleration classes that are offered are an accelerated reading class and an accelerated math class starting in fourth grade. Students qualify for the accelerated classes based on an aggregate academic and cognitive score called a z-score. In order to ensure that there are enough students in the class, Dr. Grant and her administrative colleagues need to fluctuate the z-score yearly in order to guarantee that they have enough students to fill an accelerated class in reading and in math. This yearly movement of the

z-score up and down causes teachers in the district to question if students truly qualify for the accelerated program. According to Dr. Grant,

> [T]he other big, big issue is that there are political problems with the teachers and the administration because they have to fill staffing . . . to make sure that this person doesn't have 12 kids and the others have 50 in the grade level. It's not so pure so sometimes they play around with the cut-off scores because this year they were like this year the cut-off is a 1.0 and next year it will be different because it will all be variable to the group of kids and staffing. It's quick to be pointed out by teachers, like "Well, is this really kids that should qualify because it seems kind of low." They (the administration) were like "Yes, you're going to teach all these kids because you need 30 kids." The perception is interesting because teachers are sometimes like "I can't differentiate for this group of kids." Really, like high kids and really high kids—you really can't do it?

Due to the perceived loss of instruction, lack of executive functioning skills, and the perception that some students do not have the ability to be in an accelerated class, Dr. Grant is leaving only four acceleration options open in her school district at this time.

Dr. Banks from Riverbend School District also only offers four types of acceleration: early entrance into kindergarten, early entrance into first grade, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration. For Dr. Banks, she does not believe that the district should even be offering the four options. Based on her interpretation of the Common Core State Standards, Dr. Banks does not believe that Riverbend School District should be offering whole grade acceleration. Dr. Banks states that compacting a curriculum to offer a subject acceleration pathway is the better option for students in her district than whole grade acceleration. For her, subject acceleration, especially in math, is addressing a need she saw happening in the community. Parents were seeking outside tutors to provide enrichment math instruction to their children. Dr. Banks created an accelerated math pathway in sixth and seventh grades to meet the acceleration needs of all students and not just the students whose parents could afford to pay for it outside of the school setting. According to Dr. Banks,

> Oddly, the compacted class in sixth and seventh was an attempt to make it more equitable. What we saw was there were a lot of people in town that really value math, so they were buying tutors out of the school day and learning how to do a year ahead of math outside of school. So, we were like let's figure out how to do the accelerated pathway in the building and not do the grade-skipping because Common Core would suggest three years of compaction instead of two years. Let's get that done, so it was two [years] in one [year]. Common Core also suggests that you don't grade skip early, so we decided to really squeeze the numbers in K-5 to have kids qualify for accelerated math in sixth and seventh grades.

It is important to note here that Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards does provide school districts examples of different forms of middle school math acceleration pathways they could implement in order to offer a compacted middle school math curriculum for grade 7 and 8. However, the Common Core State Standards do not discourage whole grade acceleration within their acceleration pathway examples.

Ms. Paulson at Georgetown School District offers the four types of acceleration that Dr. Grant and Dr. Banks offer as well at their school districts. For Ms. Paulson, she will not offer any more than early entrance into kindergarten or first grade, subject acceleration, or whole grade acceleration because of difficulty in scheduling. Ms. Paulson states that prior to the Accelerated Placement Act, Georgetown School District offered more acceleration than just the four options. However, the placement of students in their various acceleration options plus providing a differentiated curriculum was too much for the district. Therefore, they actually disbanded acceleration. However, when the Accelerated Placement Act was passed, Ms. Paulson was forced to bring back acceleration. As stated by Ms. Paulson,

> Everything the Acceleration Act said that we had to do, we had moved away from it because it caused so many scheduling problems and curriculum problems. It was just kids were all over the place and it didn't make any sense. We tried to streamline the acceleration/gifted program that the advanced kids were getting and then the Acceleration Act came into play. We used to do a lot more.

With the passage of the Accelerated Placement Act, Ms. Paulson has worked hard to prevent the scheduling challenges of the past and still provide at least four acceleration options. One solution for math subject acceleration at the middle school is to have high school teachers come to the middle school before the middle school students started official classes for the day. The high school teachers teach Algebra I to eighth grade students who qualify. As stated by Ms. Paulson,

> We also have grade-skippers that could test out at the end of seventh grade, skip eighth grade Math and go into Algebra I at the high school. Our seventh grade Math Gifted program does set them up to, hopefully, go right into Algebra I as an eighth grader. Two years ago, we started having it taught here at our school just because of the kids' schedules. We started it as an early period because they were coming back [from the high school] missing two periods here. They were always missing Social Studies or some other subject. Neither was a good choice, so we brought it back for them here. It is still the same course with collaboration with the high school. We use their textbook; we use their testing and all that for the high school course.

Ms. Paulson is still working on the scheduling logistics for any student if they qualify for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration. The idea of adding another form of acceleration is beyond Ms. Paulson's current focus.

Dr. Canfield at Krusemark School District will not offer more than early entrance into kindergarten or first grade, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration. For Dr. Canfield, the question of offering more acceleration is not the issue. For Dr. Canfield, the question is why she has to offer acceleration at all. Dr. Canfield finds that children may be more advanced in a certain concept or subject area because they are enthusiastic to learn it. However, their passion to learn a certain academic content should not be confused with the need for the child to be accelerated. According to Dr. Canfield,

> My view is that I think there are a lot of people who think offering more than the four acceleration options is needed. I am going to use a broad brush when I say this. For

> example, when we talk about kindergarten readiness, [parents say] "[M]y kid knows all their ABC's and knows how to spell their name" and that is wonderful! I am a mom of 3 kids and that's great, but it doesn't mean that they are gifted or that they are ready for accelerated learning. I think that there is such a range of developmental abilities and developmental span for learners, it is quite complex and huge. So, while people have talents in many different things, I think you need to take into consideration what those talents and interests are. That doesn't necessarily mean that they are a gifted person. That just means that they have focused on something and really loved it and dove into it and then become passionate about it, and that is why they have acquired the skills that they have. So, I think it goes back to, we are here, we can check this all off, but it is very complex. I think that is kind of a disconnect between educators and other stakeholders that don't have that that depth of understanding of how children learn, if that makes sense.

Instead of adding acceleration options, Dr. Canfield is pushing for teachers to differentiate instruction in the general education classroom to address the multivariate needs of the variety of students. She also feels that having a variety of students with different learning abilities learning from each other is the best course educationally than segregating advanced students away from other students. She also stresses that teachers need to view every student as needing to be accelerated in order to help them reach their potential. As stated by Dr. Canfield,

> The way that we looked at it was this: We do acceleration for all students no matter where they fall. We will take them where they are, and we will accelerate learning at the pace that they need to be accelerated at through differentiation. While it is complex and challenging at times, depending on what it is, keeping them as part of the class and applying that knowledge so that everyone can learn from one another is what is best. I think there is far greater power in transformed learning delving into a greater skill in the general classroom setting than saying "I'm leaving for my accelerated program and now we do a vocabulary book." What does that mean? Or "Oh, you are just working on different texts." Well, you are still needing to learn and apply all of the skills that you learn from the classroom. I just think that there is a far greater impact for all learners when you are cohesive and together, and everybody is getting what they need to learn from each other.

Ms. Smith at Ashton School District feels that offering more than early entrance into kindergarten or first grade, subject acceleration, or whole grade acceleration is too much at this point in time for her school district. Ms. Smith feels that the current four acceleration options are "a burden" because the process of trying to evaluate students in just those four acceleration

options alone is taking up too much district time and financial resources. In addition to spending district time and financial resources to evaluate a child for acceleration, they are finding that the child is not qualified at the end of the process. According to Ms. Smith,

> I feel like it's a lot in that it is a burden. Number wise, it's not huge. We had, for example, last year we had about a dozen. This year, we have only had a handful, a half dozen maybe. But it tends to be very time consuming and a lot of work for that, and often for very little. I mean, the child in the end didn't even qualify for acceleration. All that to find that was the answer. It is all too much right now to even think of adding more [types of] acceleration.

Dr. Young at Suttondale School District does not even offer all four options for acceleration, in contradiction to the Accelerated Placement Act and the district's school board policy. Suttondale School District only offers early entrance in kindergarten, early entrance into first grade, and single subject acceleration. Dr. Young felt that the 11 months given to school districts between when the Accelerated Placement Act was signed into law and when it was mandated to be enacted by all Illinois public school districts was not enough time for her to put acceleration procedures together for more than three options because she is still in the process of making sense of the Accelerated Placement Act. According to Dr. Young,

> Right now, I feel that we are adhering to the law as best as we can. We really only have three options right now: single subject promotion, early entrance into first grade, or early entrance into kindergarten. That's kind of where we are at right now. I would say we don't have an optimal program right now because, again, I got bum-rushed with the law. I'm trying to make sense of it, put something in place but then I also really need to sit down, really digest it, learn more about gifted and then put a true program in place that will help nurture some of our high performing students because we definitely have some.

At Windsor School District, Dr. Saylor wrote acceleration procedures to offer early entrance into kindergarten or first grade, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration. Similar to the other school district leaders interviewed for this study, Dr. Saylor at Windsor School District is not interested in offering more academic acceleration options at this time. Her focus is on developing the four acceleration options her district offers now so that they truly meet

the needs of students who require enriched learning. In other words, Dr. Saylor is putting her effort towards fine-tuning the district's acceleration procedures to truly meet the needs of advanced learners. She is especially concerned for the acceleration procedures in subject acceleration in math and whole grade acceleration. According to Dr. Saylor,

> For high achieving students, again, we've got some small things in place but nothing that really meets the needs of those high achieving students except that possibility for taking in eighth grade the Algebra I class for [high school] credit. Those are the areas that are of most concern to me next, outside of whole grade acceleration.

Dr. Saylor is also trying to expand the focus of acceleration at Windsor School District to more than just academic acceleration. She would like to offer more accelerated options to address the needs of the students in the district who are talented creatively. Dr. Saylor wants to create a more rounded acceleration program that addresses the needs of all students who need enrichment. Her fear is if she just focuses on academic acceleration options, her school district will only be known in the community for that. As stated by Dr. Saylor,

> We are not offering more academic acceleration options at this time. When we were doing our program review of our acceleration, there were a lot of things we were looking at. We read a lot of meta-analyses of different gifted programs because, again, that whole continuum of services is really important. When it comes to acceleration in particular, really that's where we are right now. . . . We are not providing anything of value, or of consistent meaning I should say, to our creative students. That is a whole area that is in our program guide we have nothing structured in place to address.

In the end, Dr. Saylor would prefer that teachers learn how to differentiate for the needs of all students, especially students who are advanced in their learning. Her fear with the Accelerated Placement Act mandate is that teachers will run first to push for students to be accelerated versus differentiating for their needs in the Tier 1 general education classroom. For Dr. Saylor, this is one of the main reasons she will not bring in anymore forms of academic acceleration for fear it will cause teachers to want to push out students whose needs are different from the average student in a general education setting. According to Dr. Saylor,

> Again, academic acceleration is going to meet the needs of some kids, but there are so many students who have other needs and there are so many ways to meet those other needs, that I don't want acceleration to be that one-trick pony but that is what we do.

In conclusion, there is a disconnect between the acceleration procedures written by the school district leaders interviewed for this study and the acceleration policies passed by their respective school boards. Furthermore, there is a disconnect between the acceleration procedures written and the legal requirements of the Accelerated Placement Act. One of the areas of disconnect is in the types of accelerations to offer to students. Though the law and the school board policies stress that all forms of acceleration should be considered to address the needs of advanced students, the school district leaders interviewed for this study are only offering three or four types: early entrance into kindergarten, early entrance into first grade, subject acceleration, or whole grade acceleration. The district curriculum leaders have stated a variety of reasons why they cannot go beyond the three or four acceleration options at this time. However, the reasons reflect their beliefs, perceptions, and feelings about acceleration. Such beliefs, perceptions, and feelings are that (a) accelerated students miss academic content; (b) it is too hard on building schedules; (c) it is not allowed based in the Common Core State Standards; or (d) differentiation in the general education setting is better than acceleration to meet the needs of advanced learners. All of these reasons run contrary to the purpose of the Accelerated Place Act. In the end, the school district leaders in this study are still trying to make sense of the law and revise acceleration procedures as their understanding of Accelerated Placement Act grows. Until then, the mission, vision, and spirit behind the Accelerated Placement Act will not be realized within Illinois public school districts.

Theme 2: Gatekeeping Measures Are Embedded in the Acceleration Procedures

Gatekeeping is the ability of an individual or a group to control the access to benefits sought out by another party. In other words, at its most basic level, gatekeeping can be conceived of as the actions of a gatekeeper to allow or to disallow a person access to a desired resource (Knotek, Foley-Nicpon, Kozbelt, Olszewski-Kubilius, Protenga, Subotnik, & Worrell, 2020). All the central office curriculum leaders in this study found ways to restrict access to interested families in seeking acceleration as an academic intervention. Many of the restrictions are codified in the acceleration procedures written to comply with the Accelerated Placement Act. Without regulatory guidance from Illinois General Assembly or ISBE, the district leaders in this study relied heavily on their ability to exercise local control to find ways to embed hurdles or gates that interested families needed to complete in every stage of the acceleration process, especially at the beginning with the referral. Gatekeeping is found in the four main types of acceleration the districts in this study offer: early entrance into kindergarten or first grade, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration.

Gatekeeping in Early Entrance Into Kindergarten or First Grade. The 12 school districts interviewed for this study who have written procedures require the acceleration application process for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade to start with a completion of a referral form. However, built into the referral form are time restrictions on when the form can be submitted as well as age limits for the interested child. Several of the school districts in this study go farther than completion of a referral form to include additional documentation such as parental and/or teacher behavioral checklists as well as parental questionnaires. Two school districts require a pre-interview with the family before starting the acceleration process. All of these measures which are part of the application process for early entrance are meant to gatekeep

families from seeking acceleration. This section describes the multiple gatekeeping measures districts implemented in the early entrance acceleration process.

Time Restrictions. With the power of local control, the school district leaders created multiple gatekeeping measures to make the acceleration of a child into kindergarten or first grade difficult for interested families. One of the most common gatekeeping criteria is placing time limits on when one could refer a child for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade. Nine of the 12 school districts interviewed in this study placed a time restriction on when referrals and corresponding application documents would be accepted for consideration for early entrance. The other three school districts (Prestwick, Lawndale, and Heritage Hills) allow referrals for early entrance any time of the year. Below is a chart highlighting the districts that have time limit restrictions for referrals for early entrance:

Table 5

Acceleration Time Limit Requirements Created by School Districts in This Study for Families Seeking Early Entrance Into Kindergarten or First Grade

School district	Time limit requirement for early entrance in kindergarten or first grade
1. Walnut Creek School District	Application deadline is March 31 for consideration for the next school year.
2. Krusemark School District	Application deadline is April 1 for consideration for the next school year.
3. Ashton School district	Application deadline is May 1 for consideration for the next school year.
4. Georgetown School District	Application can only be filed between March 1–April 15 for consideration for the next school year.
5. Suttondale School District	Application must be submitted no later than 60 days before the start of the next school year.

Table 5 (cont.)

6. Windsor School District	Application deadline is April 1 for consideration for the next school year.
7. Hunter Woods School District	Application deadline is April 15 for consideration for the next school year.
8. Riverbend School District	Application deadline is May 1 for consideration for the next school year.
9. Meadows School District	Application can only be filed between Feb. 1–April 1.

For the aforementioned nine school districts, one of the main reasons stated by the central office administrators for the time limits is logistics. According to school leaders interviewed for this study, the deadlines are placed toward the end of an academic school year because spring and summer is an easier time to allocate district resources and staff members toward acceleration testing than at any other point in the school year. In particular, the school leaders find it easiest to assess over the summer when children are not in attendance and staff members are not teaching classes. Furthermore, scheduling is easier for the next school year if a child passes the acceleration testing during the summer. In that way, the child can start the next school year in their new placement versus moving them in the middle of a school year when classroom routines and procedures are already in place. The belief among the school district leaders interviewed for this study is that transitioning a child is easier at the start of the school year than at any another point.

For interested families or those interested in referring a child for early entrance, there is a conflict between the logistical needs of the school district versus the academic and social-emotional needs of the child. The time limit restriction on the referral and application process causes interested parties to make sure that they are aware of the deadlines and plan ahead for it. Especially for school districts such as Georgetown or Meadows, the school district leaders

created a 6–8 week window when referrals and the supporting application documents will be accepted by the district. If the interested parties are not aware of the time limit restrictions or do not follow them, the affected child may need to wait another school year in order to have their needs met. In practical terms, this means that the affected child may be participating in another year of preschool or will attend kindergarten with already having curricular concepts and skills mastered on Day 1 of school. Though there is nothing in the Accelerated Placement Act or the school board policy that prohibits time limits in the acceleration procedures, it is contrary to the spirit of the Acceleration Placement Act as stated by Ms. Welch for school districts to be more open to families seeking early entrance.

Age Limits. In addition to time limits, the acceleration process for the early entrance into kindergarten or first grade at Hunter Woods School District and Windsor School District applies an age limit for the interested child seeking acceleration. At Windsor School District, "a child must be 5 years old on or before October 31 to apply for early entrance into kindergarten." For early entrance into first grade, "the child must be 6 years on or before October 31." At Hunter Woods School District, those interested families seeking early entrance into first grade must complete a district form titled *First Grade Early Entrance Request Form.* The *First Grade Early Entrance Request Form* is in Appendix K. On the form, it states that the district will only consider children "who will be six years old between September 2 and December 31 or is in their first grade year for acceleration into first grade." According to Dr. Grant, the age limit was a compromise for families whose children have a late birthday. In other words, these children turn 6 years old past the Illinois law cutoff of September 1 of the year one seeks entrance into first grade. Dr. Grant admits that the age limit is not necessarily put in place to address the ability of

a child to handle more advanced curriculum. The age limit was put in place "to accept children who are ready for first grade but happen to be born shortly after the September 1 deadline."

There is nothing in the Accelerated Placement Act or in the adopted school board policies that prevents school district leaders from putting in age limitations to those children seeking early entrance. However, it does defeat the spirit and mission of the Accelerated Placement Act to have school districts be more open to families seeking acceleration. According to Ms. Welch, the purpose of seeking legal protection for acceleration is because many Illinois public school districts refused to have a conversation with interested families about acceleration as an academic intervention for their child. Furthermore, she fought hard at the policy setting stage to make sure that the School Management Alliance did not put age limit language in the law as they wished to do. With an age limit in place at Hunter Woods School District and Windsor School District, the two school districts added a gatekeeping measure that blocked interested families from seeking early entrance into kindergarten or first grade.

Pre-Interviews. In addition to time limits and age restrictions, two districts in this study have created a pre-interview process for families to undergo before the early entrance acceleration process will begin. For example, at Riverbend School District, all requests for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade start with a parent, legal guardian, a licensed educational professional, pediatrician, or psychologist who knows the child to complete the district's *Acceleration Request Form*. The *Acceleration Request Form* is in Appendix F. The *Acceleration Request Form* gathers basic demographic information on the child such as if the child speaks another language at home or has an IEP. All *Acceleration Request Forms* must be submitted by May 1 of the year prior to the start of the next school year. In addition to the *Acceleration Request Form,* Dr. Banks encourages the referring party to provide previous

psychological evaluations, academic artifacts, and other data that provide evidence to support the request for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade.

Once the *Acceleration Request Form* is received by Dr. Banks, she contacts the family of the interested student to conduct a pre-interview. Her goal during this initial conversation with the family is to discuss the research on acceleration and ask why the family is seeking acceleration. Her hope during this pre-interview is to deter families from seeking early entrance. As stated by Dr. Banks, "Right now, I'm doing my best to discourage people from any of this." If the interested family insists on proceeding with the acceleration process, Dr. Banks will try to get them to just start school at the child's current grade level and wait 30 days to see if early entrance is still what the family seeks. According to Dr. Banks, "My stand is let's get them in school. Let's get them going for 30 days and then come back to me and let's see what we are thinking [about acceleration]."

Dr. Canfield from Krusemark School District also conducts a pre-interview with any family interested in early entrance. The pre-interview requirement was written in a district procedural document given to families interested in early entrance called *Parent Considerations for Early Entrance.* The *Parent Considerations for Early Entrance* is in Appendix U. The purpose of *Parent Considerations for Early Entrance,* as stated by Dr. Canfield, is to help facilitate the pre-interview to be more of "a discussion about what is acceleration and how a child qualifies for it." For Dr. Canfield, she wants to make sure that interested families learn that early entrance is "designed for the exceptional child who is both academically ready as well as developmentally mature when compared to others in his/her chronological age group." Her goal is to help the interested family understand the difference between natural ability versus high achievement. According to Dr. Canfield, a child who is a candidate for early entrance "has a

high ability to easily achieve when presented with new material." A child who is not a candidate for early entrance is one who "may appear exceptional simply because of their access to opportunities (i.e., attended preschool programs, have parent(s)/guardian(s) working with them on academic contents and skills, or have access to high quality learning materials outside of school)."

The pre-interviews have the veneer of helping families understand what early entrance means and what it entails. In reality, the pre-interviews are a gatekeeping measure to discourage families from seeking early entrance as an academic intervention by dissuading them through research or through discussion.

Behavioral Checklists. As part of the early entrance application process, several school districts created behavioral checklists for parents and teachers to complete. The behavioral checklists ask parents and teachers to rate how frequently they observe certain characteristics the interested child exhibits academically, socially-emotionally, and physically. The stated purpose of the behavioral checklists by the school leaders in this study who use them are that the checklists help obtain a picture "if the child is ready for the rigors of kindergarten or first grade" (Canfield, 2020). In other words, the behavioral checklists may provide a perspective of the whole child inside the school setting and outside in the home setting. For example, Dr. Canfield from Krusemark School District requires the family to complete a district form called *Early Entrance Parent Questionnaire*. The *Early Entrance Parent Questionnaire* consists of three parts: (a) evidence of preschool or kindergarten experience; (b) a parent behavioral checklist; and (c) a parent questionnaire. In Part 2, the parent or legal guardian is asked to rate the behavioral characteristics of the interested child in five categories: physical well-being; personal and social development; language and literacy; mathematical thinking; and the arts. Each of the five

categories contains behavioral descriptors that the parent or legal guardian rates on a Likert scale of "frequently," "sometimes," and "rarely." The following chart is the parent behavioral checklist used by Krusemark School District as part of the early entrance process:

Figure 6

Parent Behavioral Checklist Used by Krusemark School District as Part of the Application Process for Early Entrance

Parent Checklist: This checklist will help in determining your child's readiness for our kindergarten/first grade program. Please read each statement and indicate your child's abilities as listed below checking the appropriate column.

Physical Well-Being	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Rarely**
Performs self-help tasks independently (dressing; zipping; typing).			
Uses eye/hand coordination to perform fine motor tasks (drawing, writing, and cutting).			
Uses balance and control to perform large motor tasks (walking, jumping, and skipping).			
Personal and Social Development	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Shows eagerness to learn (is curious, likes to investigate).			
Follows rules and routines (cleans up at play time).			
Follows multiple step directions (2–3 part directions).			
Handles change and transition (dinner time to bedtime).			
Interacts easily with one or more children.			
Knows how to ask for help appropriately.			
Literacy and Language Arts	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Listens for meaning in stories, discussions, and conversations.			

Figure 6 (cont.)

Speaks clearly to share ideas and thoughts.			
Can identify letters.			
Can identify beginning sounds.			
Uses letters and words to write.			
Writes name.			
Looks at books with pictures and pretends to read.			
Reads without help.			
Mathematical Thinking	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Can recognize numbers 0–50.			
Can orally count forward to 50.			
Can recognize, duplicate, and extend simple patterns (circle-triangle, circle-triangle, circle-triangle).			
Can recognize and describe attributes of shapes.			
The Arts	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Likes to paint and draw.			
Likes to sing and dance.			
Can share ideas about a drawing/painting.			

Dr. LeBaron at Meadows School District and Dr. Saylor at Windsor School District require interested families to complete a similar parent behavioral checklist. However, instead of having a category for the arts, Dr. LeBaron and Dr. Saylor ask their parents to rate the academic behavioral characteristics the child exhibits in science. Below is the science category in parent behavioral checklists for Meadow and Windsor School Districts:

Figure 7

Parent Behavioral Checklist That Includes Science as a Category for Parents To Rate

Scientific Thinking	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Can classify objects into categories.			
Identifies, describes, and compares properties of objects.			
Describe characteristics of basic needs of living things (food, water, shelter).			

Ms. Katrin Paulson at Georgetown School District also requires a completed parent behavioral checklist as part of the early entrance application process. Similar to Dr. Canfield, Dr. LeBaron, and Dr. Saylor, the Parent Behavioral Checklist asks a parent or legal guardian to rate the academic, social-emotional, and gross motor behaviors a child currently exhibits according to the three ratings of "frequently," "sometimes," or "never." Georgetown School District's Parent Behavioral Checklist is listed below:

Figure 8

Parent Behavioral Checklist Used at Georgetown School District as Part of the Acceleration Process for Early Entrance

Social Emotional Development	**Frequently**	**Sometime**	**Never**
Shows eagerness to learn (curious, likes to investigate).			
Follows rules and routines.			
Solves problems by talking.			
Handles change and transitions (dinner time, bedtime).			
Interacts easily with one or more children.			
Recognizes self and others have different feelings.			
Shows pride in doing something well.			

Figure 8 (cont.)

Self Help and Motor Development	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Performs self-help tasks independently (dressing, undressing, zipping).			
Follow safety rules.			
Picks up after self without being asked.			
Uses eye/hand coordination to perform fine motor tasks (drawing, writing, cutting).			
Uses balance and control to perform large gross motor tasks (walking, jumping).			
Literacy and Language Arts	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Listens for meaning in stories, discussions, and conversations.			
Speaks clearly to share ideas and thoughts.			
Recites the alphabet.			
Recognizes upper case letters (20+).			
Recognizes lower case letters (20+).			
Knows letter sounds (20+).			
Can read simple words.			
Recognize and produce rhyming sounds in words.			
Uses letters and words to write.			
Track printed words from left to right and recognize symbols from the environment.			
Recognizes own name in print.			
Mathematical Thinking	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Can recognize numbers 0–20.			
Can orally count forward to 20.			
Can recognize, duplicate, and extend patterns (i.e., circle, square).			

Figure 8 (cont.)

Can recognize and describe attributes of shapes (color, size, shape).			

In addition to the Parent Behavioral Checklist, Ms. Paulson requires interested families to find a certified teacher to complete a Teacher Behavioral Checklist if they are seeking early entrance. The Teacher Behavioral Checklist asks a teacher who is familiar with the interested child to complete a behavioral checklist on the interested student in four categories: (a) social emotional development; (b) self-help and motor development; (c) literacy and language arts; and (d) mathematical thinking. Each of the four categories have behavioral indicators that a teacher is to rate as "frequently," "sometimes," or "never." The following is the Teacher Behavioral Checklist used by Georgetown School District:

Figure 9

Teacher Behavioral Checklist Used at Georgetown School District as Part of the Acceleration Process for Early Entrance

Social Emotional Development	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Uses words to solve problems.			
Keeps hands, feet, and objects to self.			
Accepts direction and redirection.			
Able to function independently (separate from parent).			
Waits patiently for others in turn taking.			
Can sit and listen quietly for 15 minutes.			
Considerate and respectful to others.			
Self Help and Motor Development	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**

Figure 9 (cont.)

Able to put on a coat, backpack, and get own papers unassisted.			
Able to tie shoes.			
Able to interact appropriately as part of a large group during structured and unstructured times (recess, snack, lunch).			
Able to transition and self-monitor during transitions.			
Use classroom materials appropriately.			
Holds and uses scissors correctly.			
Holds and uses pencil correctly.			
Writes first name.			
Writes last name.			
Writes letters and numbers.			
Accurately draws a circle, square, triangle, rectangle, oval, and diamond.			
Literacy and Language Arts	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Recites the alphabet.			
Recognizes upper case letters (20+).			
Recognizes lower case letters (20+).			
Tells whether words and sounds are the same.			
Identifies which word is different.			
Identified whether words rhyme.			
Produces rhyming words.			
Identifies first sound in one syllable words.			

Figure 9 (cont.)

Holds book correctly.			
Knows left to right progression.			
Knows what a title is.			
Has some words memorized in familiar books.			
Mathematical Thinking	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Names shapes of circle, square, triangle, rectangle, and oval.			
Identifies a pattern.			
Creates a pattern.			
Classifies and sorts by color, size, and shape.			
Counts objects to 20.			
Rote counts to 20.			
Compares amounts (more/less).			

The Teacher Behavioral Checklist that Dr. Saylor at Windsor School District requires for the early entrance application process is more detailed than the teacher behavioral checklist asked for by Ms. Paulson. At Windsor School District, a teacher who has knowledge of the interested child is asked to rate that child on eight categories. The categories are analytical thinking; motivation or task commitment; learning ability; mathematical concepts; writing and language development; social emotional development; personal-social development; and fine motor skills. A certified teacher is required to complete the behavioral checklist. Below is the Teacher Behavioral Checklist for Windsor School District:

Figure 10

Teacher Behavioral Checklist Used at Windsor School District as Part of the Acceleration Process for Early Entrance

Analytical Thinking	Not yet evidenced	Developing	Age-Appropriate	Outstanding
Analyzes tasks.				
Sees cause and effect relationships.				
Is able to take apart and reassemble things.				
Expresses relationships between past/present experiences.				
Makes up stories, songs and plays about experiences.				
Organizes collections.				

Motivation or Task Commitment	Not yet evidenced	Developing	Age-Appropriate	Outstanding
Keeps at task until it makes sense.				
Asks penetrating questions.				
Is curious.				
Displays unexpected depth of knowledge in one or more areas.				
Remembers.				
Displays energy and excitement when learning.				
Wants to do things on own; shows independence.				

Learning Ability	Not yet evidenced	Developing	Age-Appropriate	Outstanding

Figure 10 (cont.)

Needs 5 or less repetitions to learn.				
Categorizes by more than one attribute.				
Is able to read and explain meaning of what was read.				
Comprehends symbols (letters).				
Comprehends symbols (numbers).				
Comprehends symbols (maps).				

Mathematical Concepts (Note all that apply)	
❑ One-to-one correspondence	❑ Division
❑ Addition	❑ Making change
❑ Subtraction	❑ Telling time
❑ Regrouping	❑ Measurement
❑ Multiplication	❑ Graphs and charts

Writing and Language Development	Not yet evidenced	Developing	Age-Appropriate	Outstanding
Writes sentences.				
Includes details in writing.				
Predicts.				
Shows comprehension.				

Language Development (Note all that apply)	
❑ Uses multisyllabic words.	❑ Expresses similarities and differences among unrelated objects.
❑ Uses similes, metaphors, and analogies.	❑ Uses language to teach other children.

Figure 10 (cont.)

❑ Modifies language for less mature children.	❑ Uses time concepts.

Social and Emotional Development	Not yet evidenced	Developing	Age-Appropriate	Outstanding
Takes action to help someone in need.				
Shows non-verbal awareness of others' needs.				
Shows sensitivity in one or more of these ways: ● Uses empathetic statements. ● Has a sense of justice. ● Has high expectations of self. ● Has high expectations of others.				
Catches on to subtle humor.				
Likes to "play" with language.				

Personal-Social Development (Note all that apply)	
❑ Expresses feelings in words.	❑ Works and plays cooperatively with other children.
❑ Participates with others in small groups.	❑ Takes turns and shares.
❑ Shows concern for others and their property.	❑ Takes initiative in learning.
❑ Pays attention and concentrates on a task.	❑ Consistently completes a task.
❑ Works cooperatively with adults.	❑ Resolves peer conflicts with language.
❑ Feels good about self.	❑ Can separate from parent and engage in activity.
❑ Is courteous to others.	❑ Reunites well with parent.

Figure 10 (cont.)

Fine Motor Skills	Not yet evidenced	Developing	Age-Appropriate	Outstanding
Follows top-to-bottom progression.				
Follows left-to-right progression.				
Folds paper into halves.				
Folds paper into quarters.				
Folds paper into diagonals.				
Uses crayon or pencil with control within a confined area.				
Controls brush and paint.				
Uses scissors with control to cut a straight line.				
Uses scissors with control to cut a curved line.				
Connects a dotted outline to make a shape.				
Pastes using one finger.				
Holds a pencil correctly.				
Works a previously unseen puzzle of ten or more pieces.				
In drawing a person, includes a major body part and features.				
Traces objects.				
Copies a pattern from board or screen to paper.				
Writes basic strokes.				

The behavioral checklists that parents and teachers must complete as part of the early entrance application process are quite detailed. Not only are behavioral observations of

academic capability being noted but observations of behavior based on fine and gross motor skills as well as social-emotional skills are being rated as well. None of the school leaders that incorporate the checklists as part of the early entrance application process would say if there was a requisite amount of "frequently" observed or "outstanding" ratings needed to help determine if a child is ready for early entrance. All the school leaders who incorporate checklists would say is that it is one piece of data to help determine if a child is ready for early entrance. Also, the school leaders who use checklists stated that the parent and/or teacher checklists are a required document to start the acceleration process. This is best summarized by Ms. Paulson, "If they (parent or legal guardian and interested student) have met the criteria with . . . all of the paperwork and everything, then we move into bringing a[n acceleration] committee together."

In the end, the parent and teacher behavioral checklists are functioning as a gatekeeping measure in the acceleration process. The checklists are additional paperwork that interested families need to complete if they happen to be in a certain school district. The teacher checklist, in particular, functions as a gatekeeping measure because a currently certified or qualified educator who has knowledge of the child in multiple settings is required to complete the form. At face value, the checklists seem to be a qualitative data point to help members of the acceleration committee learn more about the child seeking early entrance. In actuality, the checklists symbolically function as a procedural hurdle to deter a family from seeking acceleration or can be used later on in the process to deny acceleration.

Parent Questionnaires. With behavioral checklists, several of the school leaders interviewed for the study require parents to complete a detailed questionnaire about their child who is seeking early entrance either into kindergarten or first grade. The questionnaires are extended response answers to questions about the child's academic capabilities but also the

child's intrinsic motivation in school and at home. For example, Dr. Grant at Hunter Woods School District requires interested families to first complete the district's *Early Entrance to Kindergarten or First Grade Request Form*. This form is in Appendix H. The *Early Entrance to Kindergarten or First Grade Request Form* asks basic demographic information about the child such as gender, date of birth, and current school they are attending. However, on a separate sheet of paper, the parent or legal guardian must write an extended response to eight categories describing how their child is significantly more advanced than a typical kindergarten or first grade student on the following academic, social-emotional, and executive functioning characteristics:

1. Overall academic performance;
2. Ability to apply, analyze, and evaluate ideas at an advanced level;
3. Ability to work independently and advocate for himself or herself;
4. Ability to think creatively;
5. Motivation to work on advanced material;
6. Oral and written communication skills;
7. Ability to persist in the face of difficulty or failure; and
8. Social/emotional development

The extended responses must be submitted to the district along with all other required paperwork by April 15 of the year prior to enrollment in the district.

Dr. Canfield requires any interested family for early entrance to complete a parent questionnaire called "*Early Entrance Parent Questionnaire*." The *Early Entrance Parent Questionnaire* consists of three parts: (a) evidence of preschool or kindergarten experience; (b) a parent behavioral checklist; and (c) a parent questionnaire. In Part C, the interested family must

answer six questions about their child's readiness for early entrance, how their child behaves when engaged in an activity, and how a child behaves when faced with a challenge or a new situation. The six questions on *Early Entrance Parent Questionnaire* for a parent or legal guardian to answer are the following:

1. Why do you feel your child is ready for early entrance into kindergarten/first grade and why do you think the experience will be a successful one?
2. How long does your child maintain interest in a play activity or game?
3. How does your child respond when he/she tries but cannot do something?
4. What responsibilities does your child have at home? What do you do when your child does not follow through?
5. How does your child handle transitions and new situations?
6. Anything else that you would like us to know about your child?

Dr. Canfield requires all three parts of the *Early Entrance Parent Questionnaire* to be completed as well as the actual referral form prior to sitting for a pre-interview before starting the acceleration process.

Dr. LeBaron at Meadows School District requires a parent questionnaire to be completed in addition to a parent behavioral checklist. The parent questionnaire asks four questions about an interested child's academic and social-emotional readiness for early entrance. The extended response questions on Meadows School District's parent questionnaire are the following:

1. Why do you feel our child should be considered for early entrance into kindergarten/first grade?
2. How does your child respond when he/she tries but cannot do something?
3. How does your child interact with other children?

4. What do you see as possible advantages and disadvantages of your child entering kindergarten/first grade a year early?

The parent questionnaire along with the parent behavioral checklist and the referral form are to be completed prior to any consideration for early entrance.

Dr. Saylor at Windsor School District requires a parent questionnaire to be completed by any interested family in addition to the parent and teacher behavioral checklists before the acceleration process begins. The parent questionnaire asks parents to answer 10 extended response questions about their child. The questions not only gauge their child's academic readiness for early entrance but also seeks to learn how a child maintains their attention, interacts with peers, and manages challenges. The following are the questions on the district's parent questionnaire for early entrance:

1. Why do you feel your child should be considered for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade?
2. What responsibilities does your child have at home? What do you do when your child does not follow through?
3. How long does your child maintain interest in a play activity or game at a given time?
4. How does your child respond when he/she cannot do something?
5. What does your child know about numbers, shapes, and patterns?
6. What type of reading activities does your child engage in at home?
7. What kinds of experiences has your child had with writing and writing tools?
8. How does your child handle transitions and new situations?
9. How does your child interact with other children? Please explain and consider whether or not your child shares, takes turns, and cooperates with peers.

10. What do you see as possible advantages and disadvantages of entering kindergarten/first grade early?

At Ashton School District, Ms. Smith uses a parent questionnaire as part of the early entrance process. However, her district's parent questionnaire consists of five characteristic statements where a parent or legal guardian needs "to provide specific examples, details, and observations of things that illustrate how your child functions at a significantly high level." The five characteristic statements are:

1. He/she has above average fine and large motor coordination (writing with pen/pencil, skipping).
2. He/she can follow multi-step directions/instructions.
3. He/she can read independently and comprehend grade level material.
4. He/she understands the meanings and use of words better than other children his/her age.
5. Describe your child's social/emotional maturity/functioning.

For interested families at Ashton School District, completing the parent questionnaire requires for them to figure out what functioning "at significantly high level" means. Moreover, Ms. Smith does not define what functioning "at significantly high level" means or give examples to interested families so they understand what is expected of a child seeking early entrance into kindergarten or first grade. The only help for the parent or legal guardian completing the parent questionnaire is a one sentence direction of "Children who would benefit from acceleration may not exhibit all of the [five] characteristics; however, strong candidates will exhibit many more of the characteristics than other children their age." If the parent or legal guardian is not an educator or does not have counsel from an educator when completing the parent questionnaire, their frame of reference for functioning "at significantly high level" for each of the five characteristic

statements may be different than the expectations of Ms. Smith and the Ashton School District. In this case, the ambiguity of the parent questionnaire functions more as a gatekeeping measure than as a data point to help the school district assess if a child is ready for early entrance.

As with the parent behavioral checklists, parent questionnaires seem to be a good faith effort on behalf of school districts to learn more about a child who is seeking early entrance into kindergarten or first grade. In reality, the parent questionnaires are being used by school districts as an additional gatekeeping measure for interested families to unlock in their desire to seek early entrance. The school district leaders in this study did not reveal how the answers to questionnaires are being used in the acceleration application process. The only thing revealed by the administrators about the parent questionnaires is that it is a required document in order to start the acceleration process.

The Accelerated Placement Act was signed into law with the hopes that families will have an easier time seeking acceleration for their child in any Illinois public school. However, some families are learning that this is not the case. In this study, several school districts have complicated the acceleration process for early entrance by placing gatekeeping measures to either slow down or prevent altogether acceleration from occurring in their district. For interested families seeking early entrance, they are faced with time restrictions, age limits, pre-interviews, parental behavioral checklist, teacher behavioral checklist, and/or parent questionnaires. None of these measures are specifically prohibited by the Accelerated Placement Act and/or school board policy. However, these gatekeeping measures countermand the purpose of the new law to help families seeking acceleration to find a supportive school district willing to have a conversation about acceleration.

Gatekeeping in Subject Acceleration and Whole Grade Acceleration. Under the Accelerated Placement Act and school board policy, subject and whole grade acceleration are acceleration options available to interested families seeking either option as a form of academic intervention. Both subject acceleration and whole grade acceleration start with a referral to the school district on behalf of the interested student. According to the Accelerated Placement Act and school board policy, the referral starts the acceleration process. In reality, there are multiple gatekeeping measures put in place currently by several of the Illinois school districts in this study that either prevent families from seeking acceleration or significantly slow down the acceleration process. Often, these gatekeeping measures are in direct violation of the Accelerated Placement Act and/or school board policy. The most common gatekeeping measure a school district in this study imposed is time restrictions. Time restrictions limit when an interested family can file the referral and supporting documentation to start the acceleration process. The school districts in this study that have time restrictions for when to file the referral for early entrance use the exact same time restrictions when filing a referral for subject or whole grade acceleration. Consequently, here are the nine school districts in this study that have time restrictions for filing a referral for subject acceleration or whole grade acceleration:

Table 6

Time Limit Requirements for Families Seeking Subject or Whole Grade Acceleration

School district	Time limit requirement for subject or whole grade acceleration
1. Walnut Creek School District	Application deadline is March 31 for consideration for the next school year.
2. Krusemark School District	Application deadline is April 1 for consideration for the next school year.
3. Ashton School district	Application deadline is May 1 for consideration for the next school year.

Table 6 (cont.)

School district	Time limit requirement for subject or whole grade acceleration
4. Georgetown School District	Application can only be filed between March 1–April 15 for consideration for the next school year.
5. Suttondale School District	Application must be submitted no later than 60 days before the start of the next school year.
6. Windsor School District	Application deadline is April 1 for consideration for the next school year.
7. Hunter Woods School District	Application deadline is April 15 for consideration for the next school year.
8. Riverbend School District	Application deadline is May 1 for consideration for the next school year.
9. Meadows School District	Application can only be filed between Feb. 1–April 1

Besides time restrictions, the school districts in this study created special gatekeeping measures that are used specifically for subject acceleration and whole grade acceleration. The special gatekeeping measures for subject and whole grade acceleration are the following: (a) not offering whole grade acceleration as an academic intervention; (b) limiting the individuals who can refer a child for subject and whole grade acceleration; (c) limiting when a referral can be made; (d) limiting who qualifies for a referral; and (e) requiring the completion additional documentation such as parental behavioral checklists, parent questionnaires, and student portfolios.

Whole Grade Acceleration Is Not Offered as an Academic Intervention. Lawndale School District is a large suburban elementary school district around Chicago. With over 5,000 students in grades kindergarten–eighth grade, this predominantly White but multi-linguistic school district scored in the 2019 Illinois Assessment of Readiness with 54% of their students proficient in English language arts and 40% of the students proficient in mathematics. With the

2019 administration of the Illinois Science Assessment, 65% of the students who took the test in grades 5 and 8 were proficient. Lawndale School District is unique in this study because it was the only school district that explicitly refuses to offer whole grade acceleration at this time. Not offering whole grade acceleration is in violation of the Accelerated Placement Act and Lawndale School District's school board policy on acceleration.

In 105 ILCS 5/14A-17 of the Accelerated Placement Act, acceleration placement options "**shall include**, but need not be limited to, the following types of acceleration: early entrance to kindergarten or first grade, accelerating a child in a single subject, and **grade acceleration**" (2020). Furthermore, Lawndale School District's school board policy on acceleration states, "APP [Accelerated Placement Program] options include, but may not be limited to: (a) accelerating a student in a single subject; (b) **other grade-level acceleration**; and (c) early entrance to kindergarten or first grade" (2020). With the law and the school board policy requiring acceleration, Lawndale School District's referral form for acceleration only offers families interested in acceleration the following options to choose from:

- Early entry into kindergarten
- Early entry into first grade
- Acceleration (subject acceleration)
- Enrichment cluster (grades 3–5)
- High math (grades 3–5)
- Self-contained enrichment for all subjects (grades 3–5)
- Honors for ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies (grades 6–8)
- Integrated honors math 1 (eighth grade only)

Dr. Doug Sonenberg is the Director of Curriculum at Lawndale School District. For Dr. Sonenberg, the reason that the school district is purposely not offering whole grade acceleration at this time is because he wants to keep the students in their current grade level corresponding to their age. His focus is making sure that all students have their academic needs met by the grade level teachers through differentiated instruction. Dr. Sonenberg states that this can only happen if he enhances the Tier 1 general education curriculum. According to Dr. Sonenberg,

> [M]y focus is really enhancing the curriculum. That is something that this year and into the next couple years is where acceleration needs to start at. My focus is going to be on how we can enhance that general education curriculum for everyone.

The other reason that Dr. Sonenberg states for not offering whole grade acceleration is that he hired and is still continuing to hire interventionists who work specifically with advanced learners. Right now, he hired Enrichment Interventionists to teach all advanced learners in grades kindergarten–second grade. According to Dr. Sonenberg,

> We actually did put a position in place in this district that was prompted by this law (Accelerated Placement Act) and by this policy (Lawndale's school board policy on acceleration), which is an interventionist position at the K–2 level. It is an Interventionist/Enrichment teaching job. These teachers do provide intervention throughout the day, but they are also providing enrichment throughout the day for K–2 students that are getting some subject area acceleration and not just being grade level accelerated.

When asked if whole grade acceleration will be offered as an acceleration option at Lawndale, Dr. Sonenberg replied, "We don't have a concrete plan for doing that in terms of number of years, but what we need to do is make some updates and make some improvements."

For Dr. Sonenberg, he is echoing the sentiments of several other school district leaders interviewed for this study who believe that acceleration is not the best option for addressing the academic needs of the advanced learners. Instead of acceleration, their primary focus is on strengthening the Tier 1 general education curriculum so that it can be differentiated by

educators to meet the academic needs of the advanced learners. Dr. Sonenberg is willing to forgo the conscripts of the law and school board policy requiring that the school district to offer whole grade acceleration as an acceleration option. Dr. Sonenberg wants to make sure that he can provide alternatives to whole grade acceleration such as through hiring teachers who can directly work with advanced learners in their current grade level. Without enforcement of the law and school board policy requiring whole grade acceleration to be offered at Lawndale School District to interested families, whole grade acceleration will continue to not be a viable option for students who may best have their academic needs served by skipping a grade.

Limits Are Placed on Who Can Refer a Child for Subject or Whole Grade Acceleration. In 105 ILCS 5/14A-32 of the Accelerated Placement Act, school districts can specify in their acceleration policy a process for referring a child for acceleration that goes beyond the parent or legal guardian as the main referrers. If a school district chooses to include a process for referral, the Accelerated Placement Act enumerates the following individuals as additional possible referrers for a child for subject or whole grade acceleration: (a) any licensed educational professional; (b) any peer of the interested child with help from an educational professional who has knowledge of the referred child's abilities; and (c) the child themselves can refer himself or herself for acceleration so long as they have the written consent of their parent or legal guardian.

At Lawndale School District and Heritage Hills School District, the individuals who can refer a child for subject and whole acceleration is limited to only adults. The ability of a child to refer themselves or for a peer to be a referrer was not written in the acceleration procedures. For example, at Lawndale School District, the individuals who are allowed to refer a child for acceleration are the parent or legal guardian, teacher, administrator, school counselor or a

psychologist. For Dr. Sonenberg, the referrers were limited to adults who best have knowledge of a child's academic abilities. However, Dr. Sonenberg does not feel that the district's acceleration procedures are limiting referrers because any adult in the school district who is familiar with the child's academic abilities can recommend that child for acceleration. According to Dr. Sonenberg,

> Anybody that would be included in the child's educational team so that could be a parent, that could be a school certified person who can refer a student for acceleration. It doesn't even really have to be a school certified person. It could be a staff member from many levels. It's pretty wide in terms of anyone that child is associated with on a school level to who might refer that child.

At Heritage Hills School District, a teacher, administrator, and parent or legal guardian are the only individuals allowed to file a referral for acceleration on behalf of an interested child. For Ms. Drost as Director of Curriculum of Heritage Hills, the rationale she gave as to why the referrers were restricted to mainly school personnel and a parent or legal guardian has to do with data. At Heritage Hills, the teachers and school administrators are constantly evaluating MAP data and iReady data in math and ELA. As a result, the teachers and the administrators are the first individuals to recommend a child for acceleration before anyone else because they are the first to recognize the need based on the data. As stated by Ms. Drost,

> I would say most of our referrals do come probably from the principals and teacher leaders. It's interesting because some schools [in the district] promote acceleration more than others. There are some schools where they monitor it (data) constantly and they are recommending [acceleration] a lot. Others are just starting to do the same. Principals do a lot of recommendations for acceleration because we do a lot of data tracking and will notice that this child has been in the 99th percentile [nationally] for the last six assessments that they took. When this happens, we screen them for acceleration or need to look closer at this type of intervention.

The act of referring a child for acceleration is the first step in determining if acceleration is the appropriate intervention to meet a child's academic needs. The process of being able to refer a child subject or whole grade acceleration should be open to not only adults familiar with a

child's academic abilities. The process of being able to refer for subject and whole grade acceleration should be allowed to be done by a peer of the interested child or the child themselves. By limiting who can refer a child for subject and whole grade acceleration, school districts are setting up an unnecessary gate to prevent access to acceleration.

Limits as to When Subject and Whole Grade Acceleration Can Occur. One of the stated purposes of the Accelerated Placement Act by Ms. Welch and the Illinois General Assembly is that any family or student interested in acceleration will now have access to the academic intervention in any Illinois public schools. With the goal of having Illinois public schools be more open to considering acceleration as an academic intervention, the school district leaders interviewed for this study know that they need to be the district's role models for opening the acceleration process to families. However, several school districts in this study are not ready to make that move. As a result, they have established several gatekeeping measures in their acceleration procedures to still restrict how and when subject and grade level acceleration is supposed to occur. For example, at Heritage Hills School District, subject and whole grade acceleration will be denied or postponed if placement occurs in the last year before the child moves to another school building. According to Ms. Drost, "Subject and whole grade acceleration works best at the start of an academic year and not when it is a transitional year before a move to another building." For Ms. Drost, it is too much for students to be accelerated and also to prepare to transfer to a new school building the next year.

At Krusemark School District, subject and whole grade acceleration will not be considered unless the student has been in the school district for one full academic year. For Dr. Canfield, subject and whole grade acceleration would be done after the child received differentiated instruction in the current grade level classroom setting for at least a year. It is

viewed as the least disrupted option not only for the child but for the school district as well. As stated by Dr. Canfield,

> We would move a child up if it was deemed necessary for ELA or math to another grade level. Again, that would have to be a team decision. We have brought in multiple resources that we can use for support within the classroom for differentiation for at least a year. . . . We have a Math Instruction Coach [who] works with me in identifying resources that support student learning, whether it is for acceleration or for remediation. She will also coach and work with teachers to help make that [instruction] comes alive in their classroom if it is determined that they (accelerated students) should stay in the classroom for a year's worth of differentiation.

Dr. Banks at Riverbend School District shares Dr. Canfield's sentiments of having the child wait in the general education classroom before being subject accelerated or whole grade accelerated. According to the acceleration procedures written by Dr. Banks, she is aware that the "Accelerated Placement Act requires Illinois public school district to adopt and to implement policies on acceleration that, at a minimum, provides opportunities for . . . accelerating a student in a single subject area, and opportunities for 'whole grade' acceleration." Even though the Riverbend School District acceleration procedures state that Illinois school districts must offer subject and whole grade acceleration, Dr. Banks placed two gatekeeping measures in the district's acceleration procedures. The first gatekeeping measure is that before any referral for subject or whole grade acceleration will be issued, the interested family and student must hold a meeting with the classroom teacher and the affected building principal. The goal of the meeting is to "engage with the classroom teacher and principal to see how learning needs can be met within the school prior to submitting an acceleration request." As aforementioned in a previous section, Dr. Banks is trying to prevent any form of acceleration from occurring at Riverbend School District. Her wish is that advanced learners stay in their current grade level placement and receive tailored differentiated instruction to meet their needs. This starts with a meeting with the classroom teacher and the principal to determine those academic needs. If an interested

family does not feel that the meeting addresses their current needs and still wants to complete the referral form, they can complete the referral form after the meeting with the teacher and the principal. The referral form, then, goes to Dr. Banks for the pre-interview meeting before starting the acceleration process. This pre-interview meeting is the second gatekeeping measure. According to Dr. Banks,

> Frankly, this is where I get a little strict. We try to run through a little kind of meeting of the minds. We'll call a family meeting at the school to go through the evidence that we've got. We may say, "Hey, the need is here. Let's try to do this [strategy] prior to going through the acceleration process." Most families when we do that will take that guidance. Some will say no, "I still want my child tested for acceleration."

Dr. Banks admits that if a family seeks to have the acceleration process move forward, the law is on the side of the family to have that happen. As stated by Dr. Banks, "The way I read the law is that they are entitled to have their kid tested and go through the whole [acceleration] process." However, she is trying to use the district resources to her best ability to keep the child first in their grade level classroom and having their needs met through rigorous differentiated instruction. Dr. Banks knows that the multiple meetings may just slow down but not stop the acceleration process. But, as Dr. Banks stated about the acceleration procedures she wrote,

> It's certainly not the proudest thing I've done in my work, but we are trying to find the right balance of doing it (acceleration), honoring the law, doing right by kids that deserve it and, then, balancing what we need to be spending our time on.

The school leaders interviewed for this study know that one of the most fundamental changes to their daily practice is the knowledge that acceleration must be made accessible to all families in their school district. Yet, without guidance from the Illinois General Assembly and ISBE on what exactly Illinois school districts need to do to comply with the Accelerated Placement Act, school administrators will write procedures that fit their district's needs. In some cases, they will write acceleration procedures with gatekeeping measures to limit acceleration

from occurring. For example, Ms. Drost, Dr. Canfield, and Dr. Banks wrote procedures limiting when subject and whole grade acceleration can happen in order to best serve the needs of the district and not necessarily the child. As stated by Dr. Banks, the Accelerated Placement Act forces school leaders to weigh the interests of the district against the interests of what is best for a child in terms of acceleration. In most cases, the child's interests and needs are outweighed by the district's needs and interest.

Limits on Who Can Qualify for Subject and Whole Grade Acceleration. Section 105 ILCS 5/14A-32 of the Accelerated Placement Act requires Illinois school districts to create acceleration procedures that are open to all students and not just students who have been identified as gifted and talented. Section 105 ILCS 5/14A-32(a)(1) of the Accelerated Placement Act states that:

> A provision that provides that participation in accelerated placement is not limited to those children who have been identified as gifted and talented, but rather is open to those children who demonstrate high ability and who may benefit from accelerated placement [must be part of the acceleration policy].

With the language of the law clear on acceleration participation being available to all students who need that academic intervention, two of the school districts in this study wrote acceleration procedures limiting who can qualify for subject and whole grade acceleration. Lawndale School District and Georgetown School District require students to first be identified as gifted and talented prior to qualifying for subject and whole grade acceleration in contradiction to the Accelerated Placement Act. For example, in the introduction to the acceleration procedures for Lawndale School District, it is written:

> Gifted and talented students in [Lawndale School District] have the opportunity to deepen their levels of knowledge and demonstrate their learning through the use of curricular resources, instructional practices, and modes of communication. While a gifted and talented curriculum starts with the core curricula and standards to avoid learning gaps,

> gifted and talented students may benefit from accelerated educational experiences designed to further extend their thinking.

Dr. Sonenberg understands that he limited acceleration opportunities to just the students that have been identified as gifted and talented in his district. As explained by him, those students are the easiest to identify right now for subject or whole grade acceleration because his district collects a lot of data from multiple assessments to qualify students first as gifted and talented. It is important to note here that the Lawndale School District screens all their students yearly to qualify for their gifted and talented program. Once a student qualifies for the gifted and talented program, Dr. Sonenberg and his acceleration team can easily recommend a student for subject or whole grade acceleration based on the multiple data points collected. They will make the recommendation prior to a family seeking it. According to Dr. Sonenberg,

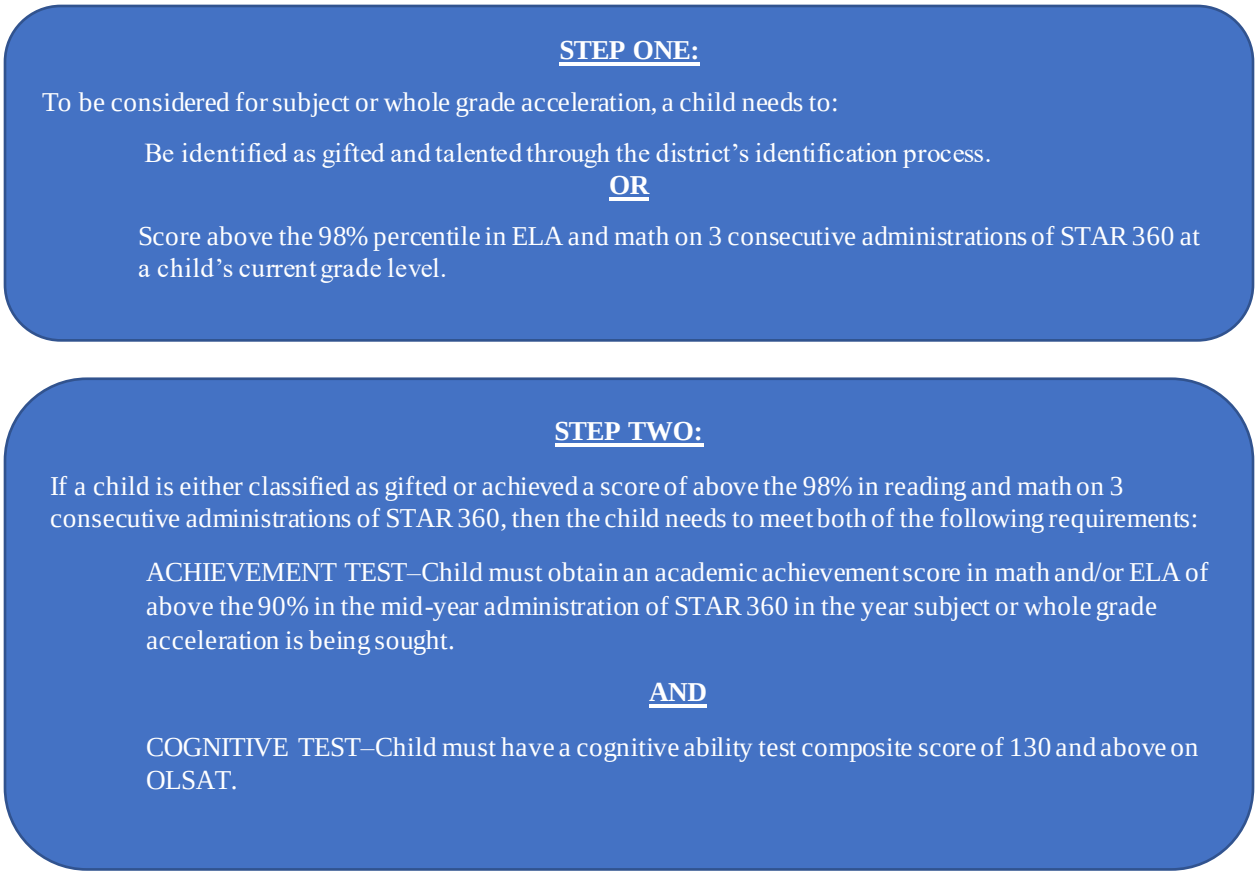
> We start our universal screening for enrollment in our gifted and talented program really around the 90th percentile . . . range and above. We are really cautious in our district to say that any one percentile would automatically give a placement. We look at that data. If it's MAP data and it gives us that percentile, we definitely take that into consideration. But, we are also careful to say that one data point never determines a child's placement. If a child gets a 99%, we are not saying put that kid in the gifted program or accelerate them. It would need to be not only a series of some consistency in the data, but it would also have to be triangulated data. We put a big emphasis in this district on triangulated data. In other words, it has to be from more than one source. We look at what MAP is saying to us. We look at what the, we give the Naglieri Assessment, we look at what that tells us. We have the Teacher Observation Checklists that are adapted from Renzulli. We look at what those tell us. We use Fountas and Pinnell. We use Easy CBM. We go through all of the data to make sure that any gifted and talented placement is substantiated with enough data. Then, we can look to see if acceleration, be it subject or grade skipping, is now an option to help these kids.

Ms. Paulson at Georgetown School District also requires being identified as gifted and talented as one of the ways for a child to be subject accelerated or whole grade accelerated. In the acceleration procedures written by Ms. Paulson, a child must meet the following requirements before filling out a referral request for subject or whole grade acceleration. Below

is a flow chart showing the requirements a child needs to meet in order to be subject or whole grade accelerated:

Figure 11

Flow Chart Explaining the Process of Subject or Whole Grade Acceleration at Georgetown School District



Georgetown School District's procedures to qualify students for the gifted program is similar to how Lawndale School District's screens students for their gifted program. At Georgetown School District, all students in the district are screened for the gifted program at the end of second grade. According to Ms. Paulson,

> We start screening at the end of second grade. The gifted program starts in third grade officially. . . . Students are screened again in fifth grade to ensure that they can stay in the gifted program in middle school or pick up more kids that did not qualify at the end of second grade.

Unlike Dr. Sonenberg, Ms. Paulson is clear that qualifying as gifted first is used to restrict who can be subject accelerated or whole grade accelerated at Georgetown School District. She is afraid that interested families will flood the district with acceleration requests and they are not qualified to even be considered for subject or whole grade acceleration. As stated by Ms. Paulson,

> We need to have some kind of limit to let them in. I think this is probably one of my biggest frustrations with [the Accelerated Placement] Act. . . . If you wanted us to look at children who are gifted . . . then make that part of the Act. Don't just make it open to anyone who can refer to their child.

The language in the Accelerated Placement Act is clear that acceleration is an option open to every student in the state of Illinois who is interested in it. Illinois public schools are supposed to make it easier for interested families and their children to discuss acceleration options such as subject or whole grade acceleration with district administrators. By law, being classified as a gifted and talented student is not a requirement for a child seeking acceleration. However, two school districts in this study added a gatekeeping measure of having an interested student be first identified as gifted and talented as a requirement prior to seeking acceleration. This gatekeeping measure of first being identified as gifted and talented is used to restrict access to families seeking subject and whole grade acceleration in contradiction to the Accelerated Placement Act.

Behavioral Checklists and Pre-interviews Are Gatekeeping Measures to Deter Subject and Whole Grade Acceleration. As with early entrance procedures, several school districts in this study use behavioral checklists and pre-interviews as gatekeeping measures for subject and whole grade acceleration. For example, at Ashton School District, Ms. Smith requires a parent or legal guardian to complete the *Parent Behavioral Checklist* if they are interested in subject or

whole grade acceleration for their child. The *Parent Behavioral Checklist* has 11 behavioral characteristic statements that a parent or legal guardian needs to provide "specific examples, details, and observations" of how their child is functioning "at a significantly high level" with each statement. The following is the *Parent Behavioral Checklist* used at Ashton School District:

1. He/she is curious about many things and asks questions often.
2. He/she has a good memory and remembers details of conversation and stories.
3. He/she is interested in difficult concepts such as time and space.
4. He/she has the ability to apply, analyze, and evaluate ideas at an advanced level.
5. He/she has the ability to think creatively and solve complex problems.
6. He/she is able to use technology to find information.
7. He/she is highly motivated for new challenges/advances.
8. He/she has a great sense of humor and understands jokes more than other children his/her age.
9. He/she thoughtfully considers feedback and criticism and modifies behavior appropriately.
10. He/she has good interpersonal skills with age-mates, as well as with both older and younger children.
11. He/she has excellent interpersonal relationships with adults in a teaching role.

A parent or legal guardian needs to complete the *Parent Behavioral Checklist* as part of the acceleration referral process at Ashton School District. However, the issue with the *Parent Behavioral Checklist* for subject and whole grade acceleration is that it does not define what functioning "at significantly high level" means. Moreover, Ms. Smith does not provide

examples of what a student functioning "at significantly high level" looks like if they are interested in subject and/or whole grade acceleration as compared to age-leveled peers.

At Georgetown School District, Ms. Paulson uses the *Parent Inventory for Finding Potential* (PIP) by Dr. Karen B. Rogers as part of the acceleration referral process. Dr. Rogers developed the PIP to help a parent or legal guardian collect data to determine the strengths and weaknesses of their gifted child (Gifted Unlimited.com, 2020). Dr. Rogers encourages parents to use the data from the PIP when requesting an educational service from a school (Gifted Unlimited.com, 2020). Ms. Paulson requires families interested in subject or whole grade acceleration for their child to complete the PIP. The PIP has 50 behavioral characteristics that a parent or legal guardian ranks according to four levels: "seldom," "sometimes," "regularly," and "almost always." The PIP from Dr. Karen Rogers is in Appendix C.

The PIP and the district's referral and consent form must be completed and sent to Ms. Paulson by April 15 to start the process for subject and/or whole grade acceleration. Ms. Paulson does not specify how many "almost always" are needed for a child to be accelerated. She stated that the PIP is one data point to provide evidence if a child is ready for subject or whole grade acceleration. According to Ms. Paulson, "For whole grade and individual subject acceleration, we are asking for at least three data points: the PIP, the Iowa Acceleration Scale, and the OLSAT."

At Windsor School District, Dr. Saylor requires a parent or legal guardian to complete a parent behavioral checklist called the *Parent/Guardian Observation* as part of the application process for subject acceleration or whole grade acceleration. The *Parent/Guardian Observation* form requires parents to rate the behavioral characteristics a child may exhibit in four categories: "performance," "motivational," "creativity," and "leadership." There are four rating indicators

for a parent or legal guardian to choose from: (a) "almost all the time," (b) "to a considerable degree," (c) "occasionally," and (d) "seldom or not observed." Below is Windsor School District's Parent/Guardian Observation form:

Figure 12

Parent/Guardian Observation Form Used at Windsor School District as Part of the Application Process for Subject Acceleration or Whole Grade Acceleration

Please read the statements carefully and rate according to how often the behavior is observed. (Mark one box per each behavior.)	Seldom or Not Observed	Occasionally	To a Considerable Degree	Almost all the time
Performance Characteristics				
Understands complex processes and abstract mathematical concepts.				
Uses advanced language in daily conversation.				
Thinks critically; demonstrates a variety of strategies for problem solving.				
Has quick mastery and recall of information.				
Demonstrates an interest in why things happen.				
Verbalizes math concepts, processes, and solutions.				

Figure 12 (cont.)

Solves problems intuitively; cannot always explain why a solution is correct.				
Observes patterns and relationships.				
Shows interest in a wide variety of topics.				
Reads for enjoyment.				
Recognizes other points of view.				
Exhibits intense concerns for social issues (grade 5 and above).				
Motivational Characteristics				
Enjoys challenges.				
Demonstrates curiosity.				
Needs little external motivation to follow through on work that initially excites him/her.				
Is self-directed, shows initiative.				
Becomes absorbed and deeply involved in certain topics or problems; is persistent in seeking task completion.				
Creativity Characteristics				
Generates new ideas and unique solutions.				

Figure 12 (cont.)

Offers unusual, unique, clever responses.				
Leadership Characteristics				
Carries individual responsibility well; can be counted on to do what he/she promises and do it well.				
Suggests alternate ways of doing an activity.				
Is able to develop and maintain friendships.				

In addition to the *Parent/Guardian Observation* form, Dr. Saylor requires a teacher behavioral checklist to be completed on any child interested in subject acceleration or whole grade acceleration. The teacher behavioral checklist is called the *Teacher Observation*. The *Teacher Observation* form is similar to the *Parent/Guardian Observation* form in that a teacher needs to rate the behavioral characteristics a child exhibits in three categories: "performance," "motivational," and "creativity." The same rating system used by the parent in the *Parent/Guardian Observation* form is used by the teacher in the *Teacher Observation* form. It is (a) "almost all the time," (b) "to a considerable degree," (c) "occasionally," and (d) "seldom or not observed." Below is Windsor School District's *Teacher Observation* form:

Figure 13

The Teacher Observation Form Used at Windsor School District as Part of the Application Process for Subject Acceleration or Whole Grade Acceleration

Please read the statements carefully and rate according to how often the behavior is observed. (Mark one box per each behavior.)	Seldom or Not Observed	Occasionally	To a Considerable Degree	Almost all the time
Performance Characteristics				
Demonstrates verbal proficiency as evidenced by advanced language.				
Thinks critically.				
Processes and retains information and ideas about a wide variety of topics.				
Exhibits intense concerns for human issues and justice.				
Recognizes relationships between diverse ideas.				
Reads above grade level with complex interpretations.				
Recognizes complex perspectives and other points of view.				
Requires minimum repetitions for mastery.				

Figure 13 (cont.)

Motivational Characteristics				
Demonstrates curiosity.				
Wants to do things independently with age appropriate guidance.				
Shows energy and commitment pursuing his/her own interests.				
Demonstrates intensity in interpersonal exchanges.				
Inquisitive in nature (questions).				
Creativity Characteristics				
Generates new ideas and unique solutions.				
Offers unusual, unique, clever responses.				
Sees and makes unusual connections.				
Interprets symbolic representations.				
Carries individual responsibility well; can be counted on to do what he/she promises and do it well..				

Both the *Parent/Guardian Observation* form and the *Teacher Observation* form must be turned in with the actual referral form to the affected building principal by April 1.

For Dr. Saylor, the two behavioral checklists are needed as data points to support the reason an interested family or referrer gives for recommending a child for subject or whole grade

acceleration. Also, the two behavioral checklists are needed as data by the building principals at Windsor School District who first receive the acceleration requests. After the Accelerated Placement Act passed, the principals at this district have been inundated with requests for acceleration, especially subject and whole grade acceleration. The building principals felt that many of the students being referred for acceleration were not qualified to be considered for the subject or whole grade acceleration. Currently, the checklists have been used by the building principals to have a pre-interview conversation with families when they file for acceleration to discuss if subject or whole grade acceleration is really an appropriate course of action for their child. According to Dr. Saylor,

> Our principals weren't in the mindset of thinking that this was an appropriate this to do (acceleration). . . . Our primary school principals, they do get a lot of requests for acceleration, especially single subject and grade skipping. They (the principals) are a little skeptical around that because they feel that the majority of people that are asking don't understand what acceleration is. They feel that parents think that their child is gifted without real proof, particularly if it's a first child or an only child. These parents aren't comparing to anybody else, and we all want to truly believe that our children are gifted. . . . I think it's really important to honor that, but I think our principals become a little bit frustrated with some of those acceleration requests because it is just one more thing on their busy schedule they have to deal with. You have to listen to these parents and honor and understand what they are trying to accomplish with their children. The checklists help the principals talk with families to show them what we are looking for when we are talking about acceleration.

The parent and teacher behavioral checklists function as a double-edge sword. For the district's building principals, the checklists are providing data to see if a child has the characteristics needed to meet the district's expectation for acceleration. For the interested family, the checklists are gatekeeping measures to possibly prevent a child from being subject accelerated or whole grade accelerated. Dr. Saylor could not say how many of the characteristics needed to be rated as "almost all the time" to meet the district's and/or the building principals' expectations for subject and/or whole grade acceleration. All she stated is that the checklists

help the principals understand that a child may need acceleration to continue their learning. She also stated that the checklists are one data point to be used in the acceleration process. According to Dr. Saylor, "I think when the principals saw how well the checklists work to gather data and how well we created an acceleration process that uses that data . . . that helped them get to a better place of understanding it (acceleration)."

At Meadows School District and Hunter Woods School District, they use the same referral form for a referrer to complete. There is a section on the referral form that requires a parent or legal guardian to "provide specific observations on how your child functions at a significantly higher level than his [or her] age-based peers". This is the same section that is on the early entrance referral form that Dr. Grant uses at Hunter Woods School District. There are six categories that a parent or legal guardian must address in an extended response narrative. The categories are the following:

1. Overall academic performance;
2. Ability to apply, analyze, and evaluate ideas at an advanced level;
3. Ability to work independently and advocate for him or herself;
4. Ability to think;
5. Ability to persist in the face of difficulty or failure (motivation); and
6. Social/Emotional Development

The issue with this extended response narrative is that a parent or legal guardian is left to decide what "significantly higher level than his [or her] age-based peers" means. Both school districts do not provide examples of what being "significantly higher level than his [or her] age-based peers" looks like for any of the categories. If the parent or legal guardian is not an educator or if they do not have access to consult with an educational professional, the extended

responsive narrative is difficult to complete. The parent or legal guardian are guessing as to how their child compares to other children of the same age academically as well as socially and emotionally. In this way, this extended response narrative becomes a gatekeeping hurdle for interested families to jump across unguided and without aid from the school district.

When the parent or legal guardian's extended response narrative and the entire referral form is complete, all required documentation is submitted to the affected building principal. According to the acceleration procedures for subject and whole grade acceleration at both school districts, building principals will arrange a pre-interview meeting with the interested family. This meeting is to explain to the interested family "the district's process and procedures" for subject or whole grade acceleration. The meeting is also to discuss the data that the interested family has provided. At the end of the pre-interview, the affected building principal is given unfettered discretion to determine if there is enough data for the acceleration process to continue. As stated in the acceleration procedures for Hunter Woods School District and Meadows School District, "The rationale for subject or grade acceleration must be determined to be sufficient by the principal for the case to continue." If the building principal determines that the data does not support the continuation of the acceleration process, the process will end here. The interested family in both school districts do not have the right to appeal the building principal's decision. Appeals to the superintendent can only be done if the child goes through the entire acceleration process which includes testing.

Both Meadows School District and Hunter Woods Schools place a large gatekeeping measure in the hands of the affected building principal. The building principal alone has the sole authority and ability to stop the process for subject and/or whole grade acceleration based upon their decision at the end of one meeting with the interested family. This is contrary to the

Accelerated Placement Act which states that any acceleration process within any Illinois public school district must legally be "a fair and equitable decision-making process that involves multiple persons" (105 ILCS 5/14-32(a)(2)). With the sole decision of the continuation of the acceleration process resting in the hands of one individual, the acceleration procedures at Meadows School District and Hunter Woods School District does not involve "multiple persons." It is only involving one person: the principal. Furthermore, if a building principal stops the acceleration process after the pe-interview, the child is not even given a chance to prove their academic and social-emotional capabilities through testing. In this case, the decision to open or close the gate to the acceleration process is dictated by the building principal.

Behavioral checklists and pre-interviews are strict gatekeeping measures to deter and ultimately prevent a child from seeking subject or whole grade acceleration. Regardless of what interested families provide in terms of documentation of their child's strengths, weaknesses, interests, and preferred learning styles, the behavioral checklists and the pre-interviews trump the parental evidence. The behavioral checklists and pre-interviews for subject and whole grade acceleration are meant to be large gatekeeping barriers in the acceleration process.

Student Work Samples, Assessment Scores, and Report Cards are Gatekeeping Measures to Deter Subject and Whole Grade Acceleration. If an interested family is considering asking for subject or whole grade acceleration for their child from their local public school district, many families in Illinois can find that the acceleration process starts with district referral forms, behavioral checklists, and pre-interviews. In addition to these requirements, interested families are asked by school districts to provide proof of their child's advanced learning through the use of student portfolios. The student portfolios must contain examples of how the child is academically performing at a level well-above their grade level peers. For

example, at Suttondale School District, Dr. Young asks applicants for subject or whole grade acceleration for a sample of student work product that shows the child is operating academically above their current grade level. According to the acceleration procedures written by Dr. Young, any interested student needs to "attach sample work or specific examples that demonstrate that the student is working above grade level at this time." In particular, Dr. Young is hoping that a parent or legal guardian can provide student work products showing above grade level thinking in "mathematics, language/reading, science, social studies/history, and/or foreign language."

At Lawndale School District, Dr. Sonenberg requires a parent or legal guardian to provide student work samples showing that a child is working above their current grade level. If the interested family is seeking subject acceleration, the work samples are a requirement in English language arts *or* math. If the interested family is seeking whole grade acceleration, the work samples are a requirement in English language arts ***and*** math. According to Lawndale School District's acceleration procedures, the student's portfolio of work in English language arts must demonstrate "application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation skills; evidence of advanced vocabulary; sophisticated syntax; unusual or novel language; and/or interpretive analysis of complex literary or non-fiction texts." For math, the student's portfolio must demonstrate "ability to apply ideas from one mathematical problem to another; use of creative or unusual strategies to solve mathematical problems; success with advanced level math concepts and/or knowledge about a variety of mathematical topics."

Dr. Saylor at Windsor School District requires a parent or legal guardian to provide evidence of scores from assessments and report cards as part of the acceleration process for subject or whole grade acceleration. According to Windsor School District's acceleration procedures, a parent or legal guardian "must submit the following records as follows:

achievement scores (NWEA [MAP] Math or Reading; Illinois Assessment of Readiness); report cards for the previous 2 years; any other assessments or reports relevant to the child's academic standing."

Asking a parent or legal guardian to provide prior student work product, assessment scores, and report cards is a gatekeeping hurdle for anyone seeking subject and/or whole grade acceleration. In terms of student work product samples, a parent or legal guardian has to judge for themselves if the sample shows how their child is above grade level. For the interested families at Suttondale School District, they are not given any guidance or examples of above grade level student work product. At Lawndale School District, the guidance to interested families is complicated and framed in a language that only educational professionals understand. In other words, the guidance is not parent friendly or child friendly. At Windsor School District, the school district has access to obtain the prior MAP assessment scores and report cards if the interested child has been a student in their school district for the last 2 years. Asking a parent or legal guardian to obtain the scores and report cards that the district easily has access to while the interested families do not is an undue barrier and burden.

For families at Suttondale, Lawndale, and Windsor School Districts, the extra documentation is a gatekeeping measure. If interested families do not provide the required student work samples, assessment scores, and prior report cards, the acceleration process for subject and/or whole grade acceleration will not move forward. Much of this additional documentation can be obtained by the school district, especially from the current classroom teacher. Asking families to obtain the documentation is an unnecessary hurdle to overcome in order for them to access the legal right to acceleration.

Theme 3: The Number of Students Accelerated Depends on the School District Leaders' Attitude Toward Acceleration

For the 12 school districts in this study that have written acceleration procedures, the number of students who are accelerated depends upon the attitudes of the school district leaders toward acceleration. For example, since 2018, Dr. Young at Suttondale School District has accelerated one student. The accelerated child was a 4-year-old boy from the district's preschool program into kindergarten. The parents of the boy sought early entrance into kindergarten. When the referral was filed with Dr. Young, the preschool teachers and the preschool administrator were against the family filing the referral for acceleration. The preschool is funded through the Preschool for All grant. As a result, the preschool must have a certain number of students to sustain the grant. If parents are seeking to accelerate their children early into kindergarten, this is viewed by the preschool teachers and the preschool administrator as possibly jeopardizing the grant. According to Dr. Young,

> [B]ecause we have that Preschool for All, the preschool grant, . . . they have to have certain numbers [of children]. If parents are trying to get their kids out of the pre-k program, that jeopardizes the funding for our pre-k program. I had a lot of resistance from the pre-k teachers and the pre-k administrator. They really did not want to see some of these [early entrance into kindergarten] cases come before my committee and/or they did not want me to promote the kids who were referred [for early entrance into kindergarten].

Faced with resistance from the entire preschool department at Suttondale School District, Ms. Young moved forward with the acceleration process according to the law, the school board policy, and the district's acceleration procedures. With the aid of her acceleration team, the young boy was evaluated by the school psychologist with the Early Learning Scales Assessment for Preschool and other types of achievement assessments assessing learning skills in ELA and math. Based upon the outcome of the assessments, the recommendation from Dr. Young and the

acceleration evaluation team was to allow the 4-year-old boy to start kindergarten early. According to Dr. Young,

> I actually ended up promoting him because he really deserved it. That was the one case where I was like, "Oh my god. I can't believe this. This child is truly gifted." He was reading at almost the fourth grade level in pre-k. His case fundamentally went against what I believe in, yet, I know this was the right decision [to accelerate him].

When Dr. Young and her team voted to accelerate the young boy, her bias against acceleration was challenged. Dr. Young realized that she needed to temper her bias against acceleration by viewing each acceleration request she receives on a "case by case." Furthermore, Dr. Young found that her bias against accelerating children faded when she was able to undergo the entire acceleration process with a supportive, collaborative family that was willing for the district to do what it took to meet the needs of their child. As stated by Dr. Young,

> Let me tell you, the process works because we follow up with the kid. I also give the parents a disclaimer. I sit down and meet with them, me, and my team, and we go over the results together. I give my spiel to the parents that I just hope that the child is fundamentally socially/emotionally ready, and we are not jumping the gun on this. But, in this case, this 4-year-old was so advanced I had to say yes. I said, "If he gets to kindergarten and he is struggling, we're going to make some adjustments." They (the parents) were for it. To tell you the truth, he excelled in kindergarten. . . . He was high-flying! He was doing better than all of the kindergarteners.

To date, Dr. Young has turned down more students than accelerated them. Dr. Young and her evaluation team granted another preschool student early entrance into kindergarten and whole grade accelerated a child from fourth grade to fifth grade. These are all the students that have been accelerated since the mandated implementation date of July 1, 2018 for the Accelerated Placement Act. The issue for Dr. Young is that many parents at Suttondale School District do not understand the criteria needed for acceleration. For example, one of the criteria for subject acceleration and whole grade acceleration is that the affected student is scoring at the 95th percentile and above on MAP for ELA and/or math. However, parents are seeking

acceleration with their child's scores well below the MAP criteria threshold. As stated by Dr. Young,

> Looking locally at our data, we use MAP as one of our indicators [for acceleration]. They (interested children) should be at the 95th or above. I have parents that want their kids accelerated and they are at the 70th percentile. I'm like, "Yes, they are above that 50th percentile. They are above where most of our kids lie but they are not at the 95th or above percentile." Those battles, where you are saying, "Listen, your child definitely shows strong aptitude in this area but not to the level that we feel confident that they are going to be able to take on this challenge of this new curricula and be able to perform at the same level that someone who has background knowledge from the prior grade and went through some of those milestones and is prepared." We had one seventh grader but just looking at her MAP scores we knew it was a no [to acceleration].

For the 2020–2021 school year, Dr. Young has stopped all acceleration requests from being processed due to the change and the challenge of learning for the school district with regard to COVID-19. For Dr. Young, dealing with acceleration is too much as she navigates the district on how children are to learn within the COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines issued from the Illinois Department of Public Health and ISBE. As stated by Dr. Young,

> I did put a moratorium on accelerated placement for this upcoming year. I had two in the hopper and I just told the parents no. One was really mad at me. I said, "Listen, I cannot guarantee that your child will see a quality education during COVID-19." That was moving a kid to middle school so they would have virtually had no fifth grade. The kid was in fourth grade, we bumped him up to fifth. Now you want me to put this kid in sixth grade in a brand new school? It's too much, so I said no. That's it. I told them we will re-evaluate this in the fall of 2021 when we take the MAP Assessment. We'll reevaluate and if he's still scoring high and the family is still wanting it, I'll do it at that point but right now I'm not going to do it.

Ms. Smith at Ashton School District shares Dr. Young's opinion in not being in favor of acceleration. Though the district receives a dozen or more acceleration referrals each year since the new law passed, Ms. Smith has been able to dismiss most of the requests. To date, Ms. Smith has undergone the full acceleration process only two or three times since the passage of the Accelerated Placement Act. The requests that underwent the full acceleration process were for subject and whole grade acceleration.

After Ms. Smith and her acceleration team underwent the full acceleration process for the two to three requests, only one child qualified for whole grade acceleration from fourth grade to sixth grade. For one of the students that was denied subject acceleration from fifth grade math to seventh grade math, Ms. Smith provided that child with enrichment math curricular materials that he could work on over the summer. If the child did the work, Ms. Smith offered to reassess him in the fall to see if he would qualify for subject acceleration in math at that point. According to Ms. Smith,

> There was a fifth grade boy ready to go to sixth grade. His parents wanted him moved up to a seventh grade math class. So, he would skip sixth grade math. These requests happen more often [in the district] for a single subject like math. We gave the boy the end of year sixth grade math assessment. Afterwards, we met with the parents and the student went over the results of the [acceleration] testing. We said, "Here are some of the things he struggled with that he is going to miss the learning on if he skips sixth grade. We'll relook at him again if he works on these things over the summer." If he does that, then I think he is okay to go ahead with the acceleration. If not, it will be too much of a challenge. I think there has only been one time a parent said, "No, you're right. He's not up for the challenge." Instead, these parents said, "Give us the work. We'll work on it and he'll be ready by the end of the summer. Give me some stuff for him to work on."

For the child that was subject accelerated from fourth grade to sixth grade, there was no transition period. Once the child was recommended to be grade skipped and the parents accepted the decision, that child was permanently accelerated. Ms. Smith removed herself from the acceleration process at this point. It is important to note here that Ms. Smith did arrange for the parents and the student to work with the middle school administrators on scheduling logistics. According to Ms. Smith,

> After the decision was made [to grade skip], I had the parents meet the principal and assistant principal [of the middle school]. They could talk to the parents about who the teacher would be and then give them any work the student could do over the summer to make sure that he was prepared.

Ms. Smith leaves it to the teachers and the building administration to aid the family with any issues in relation to the whole grade acceleration as well as to monitor the child's progress. As stated by Ms. Smith,

> During the school year, at each benchmark, the RTI Coordinator, the teacher, and the Assistant Principal [at the middle school] will touch base with the parents. It's fairly informal through email. The Assistant Principal and the teacher will make adjustments to the child's schedule to make sure he is okay and continuing down the right track. As for me, I was done the minute the parents accepted the committee's decision to [whole grade] accelerate.

For Ms. Smith, the acceleration process is arduous enough that she divests all responsibility for acceleration the minute a committee decision is made. As stated by Ms. Smith, "There are more important priorities I have right now that need my time and attention like this remote learning thing. I hate to say it, but acceleration is a low priority for me right now."

Dr. Saylor at Windsor School District states that she is in favor of acceleration, but her actions show otherwise. Dr. Saylor has only accelerated one student since the passage of the Accelerated Placement Act. This student was subject accelerated in math from seventh grade to eighth grade during the 2019–2020 school year. Since this student, there has been one more request made by a teacher for subject acceleration in math on another student. However, this child was rejected from being subject accelerated without going through the district's acceleration procedures. Dr. Saylor held an informal meeting with her acceleration evaluation team on this student. They looked at the child's assessment data in math and spoke with the child's previous teachers. Based on this informal process, it was determined that the child did not qualify for acceleration because he did not qualify as gifted student according to the district's gifted identification procedures. According to Dr. Saylor,

> We have had one request from a teacher to do a content acceleration with one of her students. It wasn't the other one I was sharing with you earlier. It was a different one. We just did a quick review of all of the scores and all of the experiences of previous

> teachers just to get a kind of sense of where we were with this. It was very clear that while this child floated above the rest of the class in what he was doing in math, it wasn't anywhere near any kind of a gifted range. He just looked different from the rest of the students in her class, so she wanted to make sure that she was meeting his needs. We haven't had any more of those acceleration requests.

At Suttondale School District, Dr. Saylor is not always following the acceleration procedures that the school district wrote to comply with the Accelerated Placement Act. Instead, they are selective in deciding when to apply the procedures. Furthermore, Dr. Saylor and her acceleration team is looking for a child to qualify as gifted before acceleration will be done as an academic intervention. However, the Accelerated Placement Act is clear that acceleration is for all children, not just those who have been identified as gifted.

Ms. Drost at Heritage Hills School District has accelerated one student since the passage of the Accelerated Placement Act. As a proponent of acceleration, Ms. Drost made sure that the district's acceleration procedures were fully complied with in order to grade skip a student. The child was in kindergarten when her teacher noticed that she was reading well above her grade level. The teacher recommended the child for subject acceleration in reading. Ms. Drost employed the district's acceleration procedures. After evaluating the child, she was recommended for whole grade acceleration instead of subject acceleration. Her family had concerns about the child skipping a grade, so she first started with subject acceleration in ELA and, then, moved into first grade fully. According to Ms. Drost,

> This past year, we had a kindergartner who started the school year reading well above the second grade level. The teacher indicated that the child does not belong in my kindergarten class and referred her for subject acceleration. With the family's consent, we started the acceleration process by reaching out to the principal and reviewing her data. She met the criteria not only for subject acceleration in reading but whole grade acceleration. Everything she was doing was well beyond our placement exams for acceleration. We did administer different assessments for acceleration, and she passed all of them. . . . [B]ecause of some family concerns, she started with subject acceleration and eventually did whole grade acceleration to the next grade level.

Heritage Hills School District is unique among the school districts in this study because they have openly embraced acceleration as an academic intervention since 2009. Acceleration started in 2009 with a female student who was academically performing in math well above grade level and her peers. The district subject accelerated her in math to meet her academic needs. After she was subject accelerated, it was determined by the district that she should be grade skipped because she was doing so well with the subject acceleration. Ms. Drost still keeps in contact with this student, and she is doing well academically as well as socially and emotionally in high school. She is considered by Ms. Drost as the founding student who helped the district view acceleration in a favorable light as well as spark acceleration as a routinely used academic intervention within the district. As stated by Ms. Drost,

> Prior to the law, [we] did actually do acceleration, starting with whole grade acceleration. We have been accelerating students since, I believe, 2009. There was one student who demonstrated superior ability in math. Conversations started about having her go to an above-grade level math class. She did that, and from there they realized that she needed to be a whole grade ahead. The really great thing about that is the child, the first one who was accelerated that way, she graduated from eighth grade a year or two ago. She is doing so well, and it is just a great success story. She was the one that started it all. We have been accelerating for quite some time. It has grown significantly since that one case. Our subject acceleration has a very large population.

Dr. Canfield of Krusemark School District is not in favor of acceleration as an academic intervention. It is no surprise that at Krusemark School District they have not accelerated any students yet. When the acceleration requests are received by Dr. Canfield, she admits that she does not employ the district's acceleration procedures. Instead, Dr. Canfield meets with the child's teachers to plan how best to address their needs in the general education classroom setting. Also, if Dr. Canfield feels that an acceleration request is too much for the school district to manage such as skipping two or more grades at one time, it will be denied right away without any consideration. According to Dr. Canfield,

> I just want to clarify that we have had [acceleration requests]. I don't want to say that nobody's been accelerated because I don't want to come across that way. But, if anybody had said this kid needs to be promoted two grade levels, the answer would be no. Most of the conversations have been, "I have this student, he is off the charts in math. How do I help him? What can we do?" There was almost like a team problem-solving meeting in terms of how we best support this student. . . . We continue to have those kinds of conversations on an as-needed basis.

The reason that Ms. Welch sought legal protection for any student seeking acceleration as an academic intervention in any Illinois public school is because of the resistance she experienced when she tried to start a conversation about acceleration with her local school district leaders. When she tried to have her daughter's public school consider whole grade acceleration, Ms. Welch realized that she needed to overcome the negative bias the school leaders held toward acceleration. The purpose in passing the Accelerated Placement Act was to remove administrators' feelings and attitudes toward acceleration and make it a mandatory educational practice. However, mandating that acceleration is offered by Illinois public schools does not remove or change the attitudes of the school district leaders interviewed for this study toward acceleration. If a school leader supports acceleration such as Ms. Drost, they will try to find ways to follow their district's acceleration procedures to best see if the child's needs are satisfied with using acceleration as an academic intervention. If a school leader does not support acceleration, they will not implement acceleration as an academic intervention. Instead, gatekeeping hurdles or selective application of acceleration procedures are used often to the detriment of the interested child. Without oversight from the Illinois General Assembly or ISBE to ensure the law is being followed, the conscripts of the Accelerated Placement Act are hollow words.

Theme 4: Due to Lack of Governmental Rules and Regulations, Each School District in This Study Wrote Acceleration Procedures Drastically Different From Each Other

Twelve of the 13 school districts in this study wrote acceleration procedures in compliance with the Accelerated Placement Act. However, the 12 school districts that wrote the acceleration procedures did so without knowledge of any rules and regulations from ISBE. Since the school district leaders were unaware of the June 7, 2019 rule making and the two-page guidance document from ISBE, the only guidance the school district leaders in this study had to write the acceleration procedures was the guidelines in the actual law. As a result, each school district leader interviewed for this study wrote their district's acceleration procedures to the best of their ability with their individual sensemaking and perspective of the law. They crafted acceleration procedures balancing the needs of their school district against the legal mandates embedded in the Accelerated Placement Act. However, it is important to note here that one can still see the school district leaders' attitudes and feelings about acceleration are ever present in the acceleration procedures.

In this section, three school districts' procedures for early entrance into kindergarten, early entrance into first grade, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration are highlighted. The three school districts were chosen not only for the vast difference in procedures but also for the vast difference in the communities they represent. The three chosen school districts typify the racial, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity found in today's Chicago suburban communities and school districts. The first school district is Georgetown School District. Ms. Katrin Paulson is the Director of Curriculum at Georgetown School District. The student body of Georgetown School District is racially dominated by three groups: White (around 40%); Hispanic (around 27%); and Black (around 26%). The school district has about 2,000 students in

grades kindergarten–eighth grade. During the 2019 administration of the Illinois Assessment of Readiness, the school district academically scored around 40% proficiency in English language arts and around 30% proficiency in mathematics. On the 2019 administration of the Illinois Science Assessment, the school district scored around 60% proficiency in science.

Ms. Paulson and her Acceleration Evaluation Committee (AEC) wrote the district's acceleration procedures. The other members of the district's Acceleration Evaluation Committee are the school psychologist, all five building principals, the district's gifted teacher, and one teacher from every grade level from kindergarten–eighth grade.

The written acceleration procedures limit acceleration options for parents and students to only early entrance into kindergarten, early entrance into first grade, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration. This is contrary to the law and the school board policy of not limiting acceleration options for consideration to just these four. The requirements for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade are different than the requirements for subject acceleration and whole grade acceleration.

The second school district highlighted in this section is Riverbend School District. Dr. Sue Banks is the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction at Riverbend School District. Riverbend School District is one of the largest elementary school districts in the suburbs of Chicago. Riverbend School District has about 8,000 students from kindergarten–eighth grade. This multi-racial district has over 40 different languages spoken by the student body as their home language or first language. During the 2019 administration of the Illinois Assessment of Readiness, the school district academically scored around 40% proficiency in English language arts and around 50% proficiency in mathematics. On the 2019 administration of the Illinois Science Assessment, the school district scored around 60% proficiency in science.

The community that Riverbend School District serves is highly invested in acceleration, especially the district's math acceleration program. Therefore, Riverbend School District established acceleration procedures to try to support the school board's acceleration policy. For example, the district's acceleration procedures specifies that multiple forms of acceleration need to be considered for students "such as advanced courses, grade telescoping, AP courses, dual enrollment programs." Also, the district has a strong commitment to equitable practices. Dr. Banks made sure that equity extended into the district's acceleration procedures by writing, "[S]chools are asked to consider this [acceleration procedure] with the lens of those that have been traditionally marginalized. If a highly talented student is identified and needs support navigating this process, the school is asked to assist in that process." No other school district in this study had explicitly stated equitable norms in their acceleration procedures. Dr. Banks stated that it is important to look at equity with acceleration because of the opportunity gap by race in Riverbend's school community. According to Dr. Banks,

> We have a really significant opportunity gap by race in our community. When you look at our student performance by race, it's a very different story between White and Black students and White and Latinx students. We are really trying to invest our time and energy in resources to accelerate learning in Black and Latinx kids.

Dr. Banks and the school psychologist wrote the district's acceleration procedures. Even though the procedures start with norms claiming that all forms of acceleration will be considered, Riverbend School District's acceleration procedures limit acceleration options to only early entrance into kindergarten, early entrance into first grade, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration. This is contrary to the law and the school board's policy of not limiting acceleration options for consideration to just these four. The requirements for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade are different than the requirements for subject acceleration and whole grade acceleration. Riverbend School District further creates different acceleration procedures

between subject acceleration and whole grade acceleration for interested students in grades kindergarten through second grade versus interested students in third grade through eighth grade.

The third school district whose acceleration procedures are highlighted in this section is Hunter Woods School District. Dr. Michelle Grant is the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning at Hunter Woods School District. Dr. Grant is in her second year as Assistant Superintendent. She was promoted after being one of the building principals in the district for almost a decade.

Hunter Woods School District is a predominately White school district (around 80%) with about 2,300 students in grades kindergarten–eighth grade. During the 2019 administration of the Illinois Assessment of Readiness, the school district academically scored around 50% proficiency in English language arts and around 50% proficiency in mathematics. On the 2019 administration of the Illinois Science Assessment, the school district scored around 80% proficiency in science.

As building principal, Dr. Grant dealt with requests from parents for early entrance into kindergarten prior to the passage of the Accelerated Placement Act. The district had created oral, not written, procedures for early entrance into kindergarten prior to the legal mandate. Dr. Grant was one of the few district employees who knew of the oral procedures and tried to implement them with fidelity and consistency. With the passage of the Accelerated Placement Act, the oral procedures for early entrance into kindergarten was written down and formalized for the entire district to know and follow by July of 2018. Dr. Grant was part of the team that wrote the district acceleration procedures not only for early entrance into kindergarten but for early entrance into first grade, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration. According to Dr. Grant,

> At the time I was a building principal, . . . [w]e had procedures in place that were created prior to when I started in the district for early entrance into kindergarten requests. The people who knew those procedures were me as the building principal and the person nine years ago who was the Assistant Superintendent. We just kept to them and tried to stay persistent. What's good about this (the Accelerated Placement Act) is that I think it made it formal and it made it a place where it wasn't just oral history that we passed down to each other. Yes, I think it was probably a healthy thing for there to be a revision and making sure it is consistent with our entire district's process. We created forms and we created our communication plan so that when a parent reached out or someone reached out to initiate [the acceleration process], we had very clear procedures and a process that we would follow and be consistent with, which was really nice.

With written acceleration procedures now in place at Hunter Woods School District, there are three important distinctions to note. The first is that the newly written acceleration procedures limit acceleration options for parents and students to seek only early entrance into kindergarten, early entrance into first grade, whole grade acceleration, and subject acceleration starting in fourth grade. Subject acceleration at Hunter Woods Schools is grouped in four categories by grade level:

- Accelerated Math (grades 4–5)
- Accelerated Math Plus (graded 6–8)
- Reading Enrichment (grades 4–5)
- Accelerated English Language Arts (grades 6–8)

The limitation of the acceleration options is contrary to the law and school board's policy of not limiting acceleration options for consideration to just these four. Second, the district wrote within the acceleration procedures a qualifying clause. The qualifying clause stated that the district reserves the right to place children where they feel is best regardless of the outcome of the acceleration process and/or regardless of the decision made by the acceleration evaluation committee. According to the district's procedures, "The District reserves the right to make all student placement decisions, including the reversal of prior decisions, and to determine the

weight given to any individual factor favoring or disfavoring accelerated placement of a particular student." Lastly, the acceleration process for early entrance is managed by the Director of Student Services, and Dr. Grant manages the acceleration process for subject and whole grade acceleration. It is interesting that Dr. Grant is not managing the procedures for early entrance, since she is one of the individuals in the district who has the most knowledge about how early entrance requests were overseen in the past.

The different acceleration procedures for early entrance, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration among the three aforementioned school districts are summarized and compared the sections below.

Early Entrance Acceleration Procedures

Georgetown School District's Early Entrance Acceleration Procedures. A parent or legal guardian on behalf of an interested child must first complete the following district required forms as well as submit additional requested documentation:

1. Referral and Consent Form;
2. A Teacher Questionnaire;
3. A Parent Questionnaire;
4. Provide a copy of a Birth Certificate of the Child Seeking Acceleration; and
5. Provide Proof of Residency in Georgetown School District.

It is important to note here that the only referrer that the district allows for early entrance requests is the parent or legal guardian.

The *Referral and Consent Form* for early entrance asks basic demographic information about the child such as gender, date of birth, current school they are attending, and if they are receiving special education services. The *Referral and Consent Form* is in Appendix D. The

parent or legal guardian completing the form must also list any sibling(s) and the sibling(s)'s age, grade, and school they are attending. The last two questions on the *Referral and Consent Form* ask the following from a parent or legal guardian to complete and provide:

1. "List any previous school, educational opportunity, and/or groups in which your child has participated. Please attach any documentation from previous schools or educational opportunities such as progress reports or teacher recommendations."
2. "Provide a brief narrative as to why you think Early Entrance/Acceleration would benefit this student."

The *Teacher Questionnaire* asks a teacher to complete a behavioral checklist on the interested student in four categories: (a) social emotional development; (b) self-help and motor development; (c) literacy and language arts; and (d) mathematical thinking. Each of the four categories have behavioral indicators that a teacher is to rate as "frequently," "sometimes," or "never." The following are the categories with their indicators:

Figure 14

Teacher Questionnaire used by Georgetown School District in the Application Process of Early Entrance

Social Emotional Development	Frequently	Sometimes	Never
Uses words to solve problems.			
Keeps hands, feet, and objects to self.			
Accepts direction and redirection.			
Able to function independently (separate from parent).			
Waits patiently for others in turn taking.			
Can sit and listen quietly for 15 minutes.			
Considerate and respectful to others.			

Figure 14 (cont.)

Self Help and Motor Development	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Able to put on a coat, backpack, and get own papers unassisted.			
Able to tie shoes.			
Able to interact appropriately as part of a large group during structured and unstructured times (recess, snack, lunch).			
Able to transition and self-monitor during transitions.			
Use classroom materials appropriately.			
Holds and uses scissors correctly.			
Holds and uses pencil correctly.			
Writes first name.			
Writes last name.			
Writes letters and numbers.			
Accurately draws a circle, square, triangle, rectangle, oval, and diamond.			
Literacy and Language Arts	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Recites the alphabet.			
Recognizes upper case letters (20+).			
Recognizes lower case letters (20+).			
Tells whether words and sounds are the same.			
Identifies which word is different.			
Identified whether words rhyme.			
Produces rhyming words.			
Identifies first sound in one syllable words.			
Holds book correctly.			
Knows left to right progression.			
Knows what a title is.			

Figure 14 (cont.)

Has some words memorized in familiar books.			
Mathematical Thinking	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Names shapes of circle, square, triangle, rectangle, and oval.			
Identifies a pattern.			
Creates a pattern.			
Classifies and sorts by color, size, and shape.			
Counts objects to 20.			
Rote counts to 20.			
Compares amounts (more/less).			

The *Parent Questionnaire* asks a parent or legal guardian to complete a behavioral checklist on their child in four categories: (a) personal and social emotional development; (b) self-help and motor development; (c) literacy and language arts; and (d) mathematical thinking. Each of the four categories have behavioral indicators that a teacher is to rate as "frequently," "sometimes," or "never." The behavioral indicators asked in the *Parent Questionnaire* are similar to the *Teacher Questionnaire* with slight variations adapted to what would be observed at home.

Figure 15

Parent Questionnaire Used by Georgetown School District in The Application Process for Early Entrance

Social Emotional Development	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Shows eagerness to learn (curious, likes to investigate).			
Follows rules and routines.			

Figure 15 (cont.)

Solves problems by talking.			
Handles change and transitions (dinner time, bedtime).			
Interacts easily with one or more children.			
Recognizes self and others have different feelings.			
Shows pride in doing something well.			
Self Help and Motor Development	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Performs self-help tasks independently (dressing, undressing, zipping).			
Follows safety rules.			
Picks up after self without being asked.			
Uses eye/hand coordination to perform fine motor tasks (drawing, writing, cutting).			
Uses balance and control to perform large gross motor tasks (walking, jumping).			
Literacy and Language Arts	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Listens for meaning in stories, discussions, and conversations.			
Speaks clearly to share ideas and thoughts.			
Recites the alphabet.			
Recognizes upper case letters (20+).			
Recognizes lower case letters (20+).			
Knows letter sounds (20+).			
Can read simple words.			
Recognize and produces rhyming sounds in words.			
Uses letters and words to write.			
Track printed words from left to right and recognize symbols from the environment.			

Figure 15 (cont.)

Recognizes own name in print.			
Mathematical Thinking	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Can recognize numbers 0 – 20.			
Can orally count forward to 20.			
Can recognize, duplicate, and extend patterns (i.e., circle, square).			
Can recognize and describe attributes of shapes (color, size, shape).			

All five required forms must be submitted to Ms. Paulson as Director of Curriculum between the window of March 1–April 15 of the year prior to enrollment in the district. Once all five required forms are completed and turned into Ms. Paulson by April 15, the initial screening of the interested student for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade occurs between April 15–May 1.

During the initial screening, Ms. Paulson makes sure that all the paperwork is completed. If it is complete, Ms. Paulson brings together the Acceleration Evaluation Committee (AEC). As stated by Ms. Paulson, "If they (parent or legal guardian and interested student) have met the criteria with . . . all of the paperwork and everything, then we move into bringing a committee together to choose the data collection." According to Ms. Paulson, members of the committee are the following individuals:

> The members of the committee are me, the school psychologist, parent or legal guardian, principal (of the affected building), gifted teacher, a teacher from the grade level they would be accelerated into, current teacher if applicable, and, then, the student if it is appropriate for the student to be there.

When the Acceleration Evaluation Committee convenes, they determine the best acceleration assessment screeners to use to determine if the interested child is ready for early

entrance into kindergarten or first grade. The district's early entrance procedures delineates the following possible acceleration assessment screeners which can be used for the evaluation:

1. Cognitive Assessments
2. Districts Assessments (i.e., STAR 360, Aimsweb, Fountas and Pinnell)
3. Achievement test(s) and/or content area aptitude assessment(s)
4. Teacher and parent questionnaires and/or rating scales
5. Observations and student interviews
6. District Pre-School Screener if the request if for early entrance into kindergarten.

The acceleration assessment screeners will be administered by a school psychologist and/or designated staff member. The district's acceleration procedures outlines the benchmarks that a child needs to score in order to be eligible for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade. Below are the benchmarks:

Criteria for Eligibility for Early Entrance to Kindergarten or First Grade:

1. The child demonstrates attention, gross and fine motor skills, cooperative play, and expressive language skills in the very superior range.
2. Evidence of social emotional maturity, academic motivation, and persistence.
3. The child attains a score at or above the 75th percentile on an assessment of learning (DIAL 4) administered by the district.
4. The child attains scores at or above the 50^{th} percentile of the mid-year kindergarten or first grade district assessments (i.e., STAR 360, Aimsweb, Fountas and Pinnell).

Once the acceleration assessment screeners are chosen, Ms. Paulson or the school psychologist will contact the parent or legal guardian to inform them of the assessment procedures and criteria as well as set up a time for testing of the child.

All data from the chosen acceleration screeners must be submitted to Ms. Paulson by mid-June. Ms. Paulson convenes the Acceleration Evaluation Committee to review the data gathered. At the end of the meeting, a determination is made to either grant or deny the early entrance acceleration sought by the child and their parent or legal guardian. According to Ms. Paulson, "Then, we make a determination. . . . By mid-June we want to do that. . . . We have a meeting to discuss the outcome [of the acceleration evaluation screeners]. Then, we either recommend or we don't recommend [for acceleration]."

If a child is recommended for early entrance into either kindergarten or first grade, the child is placed in the kindergarten or first grade class at the start of the next school year. However, the placement is only for a 4–6 week transition or probationary period. To help facilitate a successful probationary period, the Acceleration Evaluation Committee completes a *Summary and Planning Record*. According to the district's acceleration procedures, the *Summary and Planning Record* details the following:

1. Specific academic and social-emotional strategies to help the child;
2. Any accommodations and modifications under that child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan;
3. The district staff members that will monitor the child's progress during the probationary period; and
4. What will be considered acceptable progress at the end of the probationary period to permanently accelerate the child.

At the end of the transition or probationary period, the Acceleration Evaluation Committee meets to discuss the child's academic and social-emotional progress during the 4–6 week transitional period. Evidence of student progress is gathered and evaluated during the

committee meeting. At the end of the committee meeting, the Acceleration Evaluation Committee recommends to either grant or deny permanent acceleration.

If a child is denied acceleration at any point during the evaluation process, the parent or legal guardian of that child may appeal in writing to the district's Superintendent. The appeal must be made within 30 days of the decision rendered by the Acceleration Evaluation Committee. After receipt of the written appeal, the Superintendent has 30 days to review the appeal and render a decision. All decisions made by the Superintendent are final and there is no further district recourse available to that parent or legal guardian. A flow chart explaining the acceleration decision making process at Georgetown School District for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade can be found in Appendix E.

Riverbend School District's Early Entrance Acceleration Procedures. All requests for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade start with a parent, legal guardian, a licensed educational professional, pediatrician, or psychologist who knows the child to complete the district's *Acceleration Request Form*. The *Acceleration Request Form* is in Appendix F. The *Acceleration Request Form* gathers basic demographic information on the child such as if the child speaks another language at home or has an IEP. All *Acceleration Request Forms* must be submitted by May 1 of the year prior to the start of the next school year. In addition to the *Acceleration Request Form*, Dr. Banks encourages the referring party to provide previous psychological evaluations, academic artifacts, and other data that provide evidence to support the request for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade.

Once the *Acceleration Request Form* is received by Dr. Banks, she contacts the family of the interested student. Her goal during this initial conversation with the family is to discuss the following:

1. The research on acceleration;
2. Ask why the family is seeking acceleration; and
3. Confirm if the family wants to move forward with the acceleration evaluation process.

If the family consents to proceeding with the acceleration evaluation process, Dr. Banks targets completing the acceleration evaluation process within a 6-week time frame. At this point, Dr. Banks tasks the school psychologist as well as the district's reading and math specialists to evaluate the interested student in five categories: reading ability, writing ability, math ability, cognitive ability, and social-emotional/executive functioning skills. The assessments used to assess these five categories are the following:

Figure 16

All the Assessments Riverbend School District Uses to Assess Children for Early Entrance

Reading assessment	Writing assessment	Math assessment	Cognitive assessment	Social-emotional/ executive functioning skills assessment
1. Illinois Snapshot of Early Literacy Assessment K/1 (ISEL) 2. Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA) 3. If an assessment in Spanish is needed, use DRA 2's Spanish version called Evaluación del desarrollo de la lectura (EDL2)	Write one's name, family members' names, favorite food, or pet.	1. Everyday Math Placement Assessment (mid-year unit 4 assessment only) 2. Kaufman Test for Educational Achievement (KTEA) - Math assessment only	One-on-One evaluation as well as a review of any previously completed private psychological evaluations	Behavior and Emotional Screening System (BESS) - administer teacher and parent rating scales. Can be given in English and Spanish.

When the assessments are completed, Dr. Banks brings together the Acceleration Committee to review the data from the five tested categories. The Acceleration Committee

consists of the following individuals: school psychologist; the district reading specialist; the district math specialist; the STEM Director; the Literacy Director, and Dr. Banks herself as the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. The committee will examine the data according to the following criteria:

1. The combination of multiple data sources for each academic subject area (2 or more) that demonstrate academic functioning at least 1.5 years above current grade level and/or above 98th percentile.
2. Social-emotional and/or executive functioning assessment indicates results reflective of readiness for grade level or subject advancement. For example, the child shows that they have the organizational skills, planning skills, and adaptive skills to be accelerated.
3. Cognitive abilities scores above the 98th percentile or 130 scaled score.

Dr. Banks is clear that she is cautious about having hard benchmarks for each of the assessments. Generally, Dr. Banks feels that a child needs to be "at least a year to a year and a half ahead" of their peers to be considered for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade. However, she states the importance of looking at all data from all the assessments given to provide a holistic picture of a child that either needs or does not need acceleration as an academic intervention. The final decision for placement needs to be based upon the evaluation across all domains. As a result, a student with an IQ score lower than 130 may be eligible for acceleration when other educational criteria in the profile of the person strongly indicate above average ability. According to Dr. Banks,

> What we are doing is using our early literacy and our early numeracy assessments to examine a child academically for acceleration. We've made some different passes with this. We are essentially doing the ISEL screeners [because they] do have the letters and do have the sounds and all those basic [literacy] things. Then, we drop them into a DRA which we are asking kids to be reading at late in kindergarten [level]. We are looking for children who can read higher level text at an accuracy level of 90%-95%.

> Next, we give them kind of a late kindergarten math screener that says can you add, can you count, can you identify numbers, can you do these things. That is what we are using. We've chosen these assessments because of the [academic] range of kids that we do have in our grades. We're choosing to say that you've got to be at least a year to a year and a half ahead [to be considered for acceleration]. What we don't want is set scores because kids develop differently. We also don't want some kid who's been almost primed landing [for acceleration] and kind of flattening out and not ultimately being in the right place later on.

At the end of the committee meeting, a decision is made to either grant or deny early entrance into kindergarten or first grade. The child and their parent or legal guardian is not part of the committee meeting. Instead, they are notified after the meeting of the committee's decision. In other words, a family is notified in writing of the acceleration decision within 2 weeks after the completion of assessments and within 6 weeks of the initial intake meeting. A family has 1 week from receipt of the committee's decision to accept the acceleration placement if it is granted. The acceptance of the acceleration goes to Dr. Banks as head of the Acceleration Committee.

There is no formal appeal process written in Riverbend School District's acceleration procedures. However, Dr. Banks did state that a parent or legal guardian can appeal a decision denying acceleration to the Superintendent. If they are unhappy with the Superintendent's decision, a family can appeal to the school board. According to Dr. Banks,

> The appeal process. I kind of laughed because I had a couple of people appeal last summer [of 2019]. We happened to be between superintendents, so I was the Interim Superintendent. I think the families thought it was not really satisfying because I would tell them they were not getting accelerated, and they would want to appeal. I said, "You can come back and meet with me. I am the appeal process." That was a little frustrating for them. Yes, if they don't like my decision they can appeal to the Superintendent. Ultimately, if they don't like the Superintendent's answer, they can appeal to the school board. We haven't gone that far. We've had a couple that have gone up to the Superintendent, but it's generally stopped there. Ultimately, if they don't like something the Superintendent does, they are entitled to take it to the School Board.

If the decision is made to accelerate the student, a written decision with a supporting assessments report is sent to the district's Research Accountability and Data team with directions on how to register the child for the next school year. The family is provided a written plan specifying the type of acceleration the child will receive and strategies to support the child's transition. Prior to the school year starting, an introductory meeting is held between the family and the new classroom teacher to ease the transition into the higher grade level. There is no probationary period. The child's accelerated placement is permanent upon acceptance by the family.

It is important to note here that the student and their parent or legal guardian are only involved during two parts of the acceleration process. They participate in the initial conversation with Dr. Banks to understand the district's acceleration process as well as to give consent for evaluation for acceleration. The other time is at the end of the process when the decision is communicated to the family. The student and the parent or legal guardian are not invited to participate anywhere else in the acceleration evaluation process.

A flow chart explaining the acceleration procedure for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade at Riverbend School District is in Appendix G.

Hunter Woods School District's Acceleration Procedures for Early Entrance into Kindergarten. A referrer must first complete the district's *Early Entrance to Kindergarten or First Grade Request Form*. The *Early Entrance to Kindergarten or First Grade Request Form* is in Appendix H. A referrer can be the parent or guardian, licensed educational professional, pediatrician, and psychologist who know the child personally. It must be submitted to any building principal by April 15 of the year prior to enrollment in the district.

The *Early Entrance to Kindergarten or First Grade Request Form* asks basic demographic information about the child such as gender, date of birth, and current school they are attending. On a separate sheet of paper, the parent or legal guardian must describe and explain how their child is significantly higher level than a typical kindergarten student on the following academic and behavioral characteristics:

1. Overall academic performance;
2. Ability to apply, analyze, and evaluate ideas at an advanced level;
3. Ability to work independently and advocate for himself or herself;
4. Ability to think creatively;
5. Motivation to work on advanced material;
6. Oral and written communication skills;
7. Ability to persist in the face of difficulty or failure; and
8. Social/emotional development.

Besides the aforementioned criteria, the parent or guardian must also explain why they feel their child needs early entrance as an academic intervention. Lastly, the parent or legal guardian also are encouraged to submit any academic data they possess for consideration by the Acceleration Evaluation Team (AET).

Once the Director of Student Services receives the request form, the parent or legal guardian's written observations, and any additional data from the family, they bring together the Acceleration Evaluation Team to start collecting academic data on the child. The Acceleration Evaluation Team consists of the Director of Student Services, a building principal, and the school psychologist. The first assessment the interested child takes is the district's early literacy and early numeracy screeners through NWEA's MAP. The target benchmark score on both

assessments is above the 90% percentile as compared to the district's MAP spring kindergarten local norms. If a child meets this benchmark, the school psychologist will formally assess the child's cognitive abilities using CogAT. The target benchmark score is at least 3 standard deviations above the national mean average on CogAT's overall score in the areas of verbal, quantitative, and non-verbal reasoning. If the child passes the cognitive assessment, the final assessment is evaluating the child's developmental competencies and academic skills using the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS). The last step in the acceleration evaluation process is for the Acceleration Evaluation Team to review all the data.

At the end of the acceleration review process, a recommendation is made by the Acceleration Evaluation Team to either grant or deny the request for early entrance into kindergarten. If recommendation is to grant the request for early entrance into kindergarten, the family will receive written notification from the committee that explains the type of acceleration the child will receive as well as the strategies to support the child's acceleration into kindergarten. There is not a probationary period for the child to transition into the acceleration. The decision to accelerate at this point is permanent and will take effect the following school year.

If the committee denies the request for early entrance into kindergarten, the family will receive the denial in writing with the reasons for the decision. At this point, the acceleration evaluation process is over and there is no appeal process for the family.

A flow chart summarizing Hunter Woods School District's acceleration procedure for early entrance into kindergarten can be found in the Appendices as Appendix I.

Hunter Woods School District's Acceleration Procedures for Early Entrance to First Grade if a Child Attended a Public School for Kindergarten. The acceleration procedures for

early entrance to 1st grade are different than the procedures for early entrance into kindergarten. Early entrance into 1st grade depending upon if the child attended a public school for kindergarten or a non-public school for kindergarten. If the child attended a public school for kindergarten, a parent or legal guardian needs to complete the district's *Early Entrance to Kindergarten or First Grade Request Form*. Besides the parent or legal guardian, the *Early Entrance to Kindergarten or First Grade Request Form* can be completed by a licensed educational professional, pediatrician, or psychologist who knows the interested student. This form must be submitted to any building principal by April 15 of the year prior to enrollment in the district.

Similar to the procedure for early entrance into kindergarten, the *Early Entrance to Kindergarten or First Grade Request Form* asks basic demographic information about the child such as gender, date of birth, and current school they are attending. On a separate sheet of paper, the parent or legal guardian must describe and explain how their child is significantly higher level than a typical first grade student on the following academic and behavioral characteristics:

1. Overall academic performance;
2. Ability to apply, analyze, and evaluate ideas at an advanced level;
3. Ability to work independently and advocate for himself or herself;
4. Ability to think creatively;
5. Motivation to work on advanced material;
6. Oral and written communication skills;
7. Ability to persist in the face of difficulty or failure; and
8. Social/emotional development

Besides the aforementioned criteria, the parent or guardian must also explain why they feel their child needs early entrance as an academic intervention. Lastly, the parent or legal guardian also are encouraged to submit any academic data they possess for consideration by the Acceleration Evaluation Team.

Once the Director of Student Services receives the request form, the parent or legal guardian's written observations, and any additional data from the family, they bring together the Acceleration Evaluation Team to start collecting academic data on the child. The Acceleration Evaluation Team consists of the Director of Student Services, a building principal, and the school psychologist. The first assessment the interested child takes is the district's MAP assessments in English language arts and math. The target benchmark score on both assessments is above the 90% percentile as compared to the district's spring 1st grade local norms benchmarks. If a child meets these benchmarks, the school psychologist will formally assess the child's cognitive abilities using CogAT. The target benchmark score is at least 3 standard deviations above the national mean average on CogAT's overall score in the areas of verbal, quantitative, and non-verbal reasoning. If the child passes the cognitive assessment, the last assessment is evaluating the child's developmental competencies using the Iowa Acceleration Scale. The last step in the acceleration evaluation process is for the Acceleration Evaluation Team to review all the data and solicit input from the parent or legal guardian as to why they feel their child needs early entrance into 1st grade as an academic intervention.

At the end of the acceleration review process, a recommendation is made by the Acceleration Evaluation Team to either grant or deny the request for early entrance into 1st grade. If recommendation is to grant the request for early entrance into 1st grade, the family will receive written notification from the committee that explains the type of acceleration the child will

receive as well as the strategies to support the child's acceleration into 1st grade. There is not a probationary period for the child to transition into the acceleration. The decision to accelerate at this point is permanent and will take effect the following school year.

If the committee denies the request for early entrance into 1st grade, the family will receive the denial in writing with the reasons for the decision. At this point, the acceleration evaluation process is over and there is no appeal process for the family.

A flow chart summarizing the Hunter Woods School District's acceleration policy for early entrance into 1st grade if the child attended a public school for kindergarten can be found in Appendix J.

Acceleration Procedures for Early Entrance to First Grade if a Child Attended a Non-Public School for Kindergarten. If the interested student attended a non-public school for kindergarten, any referee for the child must complete the *Early Entrance to Kindergarten or First Grade Request Form* plus an additional district form. The referee can be a parent or legal guardian, a licensed educational professional, pediatrician, or psychologist who knows the interested student. The additional district form is called *First Grade Early Entrance Request Form*. The *First Grade Early Entrance Request Form* requires a family to attach a current progress report/report card from the private school. The *First Grade Early Entrance Form* is in Appendix K. Other requirements listed on the *First Grade Early Entrance Request Form* are the following:

1. The interested child must be turning 6 years old between September 2 and December 31 of their first grade year.
2. The child must have attended a non-public preschool and continued their education through kindergarten at that same school.

3. The kindergarten instruction the child received was done by an appropriately licensed teacher.

Both forms plus any additional data from the family must be submitted to a building principal at Hunter Woods School District by April 15 before the next school year. The child's final report card must be submitted to a building principal by June 20 before the next school year.

Once the Director of Student Services receives the district forms and the report card, they will convene the Acceleration Evaluation Team (AET) to evaluate the child's academic record. The committee will also interview the kindergarten teacher to gain insight into the whole child. At this point, the committee may decide to accept the child for early entrance into 1st grade or ask the child to take additional assessments chosen at the discretion of the district. If the child passes the required benchmarks on the assessments, the child will be accepted for early entrance into 1st grade. If the child did not pass the assessments, they will be denied acceleration. There is not an appeal process from the decision of the committee.

If the child is accepted to accelerate early into 1st grade, the family will receive written notification from the committee that explains the type of acceleration the child will receive as well as the strategies to support the child's transition. There is not a probationary period for the child to transition into the acceleration. The decision to accelerate at this point is permanent and will take effect the following school year. It is important to note here that the district may make the acceptance conditional upon receipt of the child's final report card showing that they successfully completed kindergarten.

If the committee denies the request for early entrance into 1st grade, the family will receive the denial in writing with the reasons for the decision. At this point, the acceleration evaluation process is over and there is no appeal process for the family.

A flow chart summarizes Hunter Woods School District's acceleration policy for early entrance into 1st grade if the child attended a non-public school for kindergarten is in Appendix L.

Comparative Analysis of the Districts' Implementation of Their Early Entrance Procedures

On the whole, the three exemplar school districts have more differences than similarities in their early entrance acceleration procedures. What is common between the three school districts with their early entrance procedures is that they all offer early entrance into kindergarten and first grade as acceleration options to interested families. They also all have the basic scheduling logistics to their procedures as follows:

1. They have delineated who can refer a child for early entrance.
2. There is a deadline for the application for early entrance.
3. There is an acceleration evaluation committee that decides acceleration requests.
4. Parties interested in early entrance must complete multiple application forms.
5. The interested child must take multiple assessment measures to be assessed for early entrance.
6. A decision on early entrance will be communicated to the families.

The differences occur in what happens in each of the aforementioned steps of the early entrance process.

Differences in the Districts' Acceleration Procedures for Early Entrance.

Georgetown School District and Riverbend School District use the same acceleration procedures for early entrance into kindergarten as they do for early entrance into first grade. Hunter Woods School District created separate acceleration procedures for early entrance into first grade depending upon if a child attended a public school or private school for kindergarten.

If the child attended a public school for kindergarten, the acceleration procedures are the same as for early entrance into kindergarten. If the child attended a non-public/private kindergarten, the acceleration procedures for early entrance into first grade have added gatekeeping measures in place. For example, before a referrer can complete the application forms, the interested child must meet the following qualifications:

1. The child must be turning 6 years old between 9/2 and 12/31 of the year they would be in first grade.
2. Where the child attended the private kindergarten, they also needed to have attended that same educational facility for preschool.
3. The kindergarten teacher from the private school must be available to be interviewed by the district's acceleration committee.
4. The kindergarten teacher must prove that they are a licensed educational professional by ISBE.

If the child meets the aforementioned criteria, the referrer can then apply for the child to be considered for early entrance into first grade. Dr. Grant at Hunter Woods School District is not quite sure why there is a difference in procedure for students who attended a private school for kindergarten. However, she does admit that the school district will bend the acceleration rules to consider such a child. According to Dr. Grant,

> The other thing is we ask for, this is kind of goofy, as a public school we have a separate acceleration procedure for kids who want to go to first grade early if they went to a private kindergarten. Technically, I think that is . . . because their age isn't quite the same as the kids that went to our [public] kindergarten. And, we have a lot of private kindergartens in the area. But, we will review it. We have the principal, or we have the director of that private school certify that they are certified through ISBE, they use Illinois curriculum, and that the teachers have certification to teach. We laugh that there is really no ability to hold anyone to that. In fact, we had a private school sign it and the parents said we don't have any of those things. The Principal signed it and I was like, "What are we going to do at that point?" You have to make a decision and

> you are not going to hold a kid out of being assessed. We give assessments. We try to have conversations with the parents at that point and talk about readiness but it's tricky. You have to make good judgements about how long you are going to go crazy on a family, especially when they are new to your district.

For Dr. Grant, the separate procedures for a child who attended a private kindergarten will not stop the district from assessing the child to see if they have the academic, cognitive, and social-emotional abilities to enter first grade early. The fact that the family is new to the district and having the district making a good first impression on them are important factors in the decision making process to consider a child for early entrance into first grade. However, the gatekeeping measures are in place because it reflects the bias of whoever wrote these separate procedures about the quality of a private kindergarten education. The separate acceleration procedures ensure that the private school is teaching and licensed to the same state required credentials as the kindergarten teachers and kindergarten program at Hunter Woods School District. There is an underlying assumption in the additional requirements that the private school is somehow providing less rigorous instruction and, therefore, the child is not qualified to skip Hunter Woods's kindergarten program. Also, by having an age limit for the children who attended a private kindergarten, this is forcing these children to attend kindergarten again at Hunter Woods. Below is a chart comparing the early entrance procedures at the three school districts:

Figure 17

Comparison of Early Entrance Procedures Between Georgetown School District, Riverbend School District, and Hunter Woods School District

Georgetown School District	*Riverbend School District*	*Hunter Woods School District*
Has the same procedures for early entrance into kindergarten and early entrance into 1st grade.	Has the same procedures for early entrance into kindergarten and early entrance into 1st grade.	• There are separate acceleration procedures for a child who is interested in early entrance into first grade but attended a private school for kindergarten. • The acceleration procedures for a child that attended a public kindergarten for first grade and is seeking early entrance into first grade is the same as the acceleration procedures for early entrance into kindergarten.

Differences in Who can Refer a Child for Acceleration. Section 105 ILCS 5/14A-32(b)(2) of the Accelerated Placement Act states that school district's acceleration policy and procedures can include:

> A process for referral that allows for multiple referrers, including a child's parents or guardians; other referrers may include licensed education professionals, the child, with the written consent of a parent or guardian, a peer, through a licensed education professional who has knowledge of the referred child's abilities, or, in case of possible early entrance, a preschool educator, pediatrician, or psychologist who knows the child.

All three school districts highlighted in this section require a referrer to complete multiple referral forms as part of the process for early entrance to kindergarten and first grade. However, with the language of the law clear as to who can refer a child for acceleration, the three school districts took a restrictive view of the law and severely narrowed the different options for their district as to who can be referrer. Below is a chart highlighting the individuals who are allowed to refer a child for early entrance consideration:

Figure 18

Referrers for Early Entrance at Georgetown School District, Riverbend School District, and Hunter Woods School District.

Georgetown School District	*Riverbend School District*	*Hunter Woods School District*
1. Parent or legal guardian	1. Parent or Legal Guardian 2. Licensed Educational Professional 3. Pediatrician 4. Psychologist	1. Parent or Legal Guardian 2. Licensed Educational Professional 3. Pediatrician 4. Psychologist that personally know the interested child.

All three school districts restricted the pipeline of who could refer a child for early entrance contrary to the Accelerated Placement Act. In particular, all three school districts do not allow the student to recommend themselves through a parent or legal guardian. Furthermore, all three school districts do not allow a peer through a licensed educational professional to recommend a fellow student. Georgetown School District, in particular, limited any referral for early entrance to only a child's parent or legal guardian. As stated by Ms. Paulson, "To be honest, the only ones who care about early entrance are the parents." Therefore, based on this belief, she wrote in the district's acceleration procedures on who can refer for early entrance to reflect that point of view. This restriction of referrers for early entrance reflects all three school leaders' implicit or explicit bias against opening access in their districts to acceleration.

Difference in Referral Forms and Documentation to Start the Early Entrance Acceleration Process. Each district requires a referrer to complete an application form for early entrance. The three school districts each have their own version of an application form for early entrance crafted to their district's interests and needs. This is where the commonality in applications ends. After the application form, all three districts vary in the additional forms and

documentation that need to be submitted in order to start the early entrance process. Below is a chart showing the required forms at each school district:

Figure 19

Application forms for early entrance used by Georgetown School District, Riverbend School District, and Hunter Woods School District.

Georgetown School District	*Riverbend School District*	*Hunter Woods School District*
1. Referral Form for Early Entrance 2. Teacher Behavioral Checklist 3. Parent Behavioral Checklist 4. Birth Certificate 5. Proof of Residency 6. Any additional documentation to support the case for early entrance	1. Acceleration Request Form 2. Previous psychological evaluations 3. Academic artifacts 4. Any other data that provides evidence to support the request for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade.	1. Early Entrance Request Form 2. Parent Questionnaire with extended responses 3. If the child went to a private school for kindergarten, the referrer must complete the First Grade Early Entrance Request Form. 4. Kindergarten report cards, including the final report card, must be submitted for a child who attended a private school for kindergarten and is seeking early entrance into first grade. 5. Any additional documentation to support the case for early entrance.

Georgetown School District requires the most documentation needed in order to consider an application complete for early entrance. In particular, the referrer must ensure that a child's current or prior teacher is willing to complete a behavioral checklist on the child. Also, a birth certificate and proof of residency seems redundant to supply if the child is a current student in the district because the family provides such documentation every year when registering for school. For Hunter Woods School District, there is an additional gatekeeping measure for a child who attended a private school for kindergarten. The referrer has an additional application

form to complete plus must have access to a child's kindergarten report cards in order to submit them as part of the process for early entrance into first grade. The question to consider is if any of these forms help the school district consider whether a child is ready for early entrance or is it just paperwork meant to discourage the process for early entrance to even begin.

Difference in Timelines for the Early Entrance Decision Making. All three school districts have a deadline on when all the completed paperwork is due into the school district to have the early entrance evaluation process start. Below are the deadlines for when the completed applications and supporting documentation is due for submission:

Figure 20

Deadlines for Applications for Early Entrance at Georgetown School District, Riverbend School District, and Hunter Woods School District

Georgetown School District	*Riverbend School District*	*Hunter Woods School District*
All documentation must be turned in between April 15 and–May 1.	All documentation must be turned in by May 1.	All documentation must be turned in by April 15.

The three school districts have their deadlines all ending in the spring of a school year. The goal for Georgetown School District and Riverbend School District is that the evaluation process would finish prior to the start of the next school. Therefore, if a child is accelerated early into kindergarten or first grade, the decision can be implemented at the start of the next school year. Georgetown School District is the only school district who stated in their procedures that all evaluations will be completed by a definite date: June 15. Riverbend School District stated in their procedures that all referrals will be concluded "within 6 weeks since the receipt of the referral." Hunter Woods School District is the only school district that did not have a specified time on when the evaluation process would be complete.

Differences as to Who is On the Acceleration Evaluation Committee. Section 105 ILCS 5/14A-32(a)(2) of the Accelerated Placement Act states that a school district's acceleration policy and procedures must have "a fair and equitable decision-making process that involves multiple persons and includes a student's parents or guardians." Not all school districts highlighted in this section have allowed the child's parent or legal guardian to be part of the district's acceleration evaluation committee. Below is a chart showing which individuals on are on the district's acceleration evaluation team:

Figure 21

Members of the acceleration evaluation committee for early entrance at Georgetown School District, Riverbend School District, and Hunter Woods School District

Georgetown School District	*Riverbend School District*	*Hunter Woods School District*
1. Director of Curriculum 2. School Psychologist 3. Affected Building Principal 4. District's Gifted Teacher 5. Current Teacher 6. Receiving Teacher 7. Parent or Guardian	1. Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning 2. District's Reading Specialist 3. District's Math Specialist 4. Director of STEM 5. Director of Literacy 6. School Psychologist	1. Director of Student Services 2. Affected Building Principal 3. School Psychologist

When one examines who is on the three district's acceleration evaluation committees for early entrance, only Georgetown School District allows a parent or guardian as a member. Riverbend School District and Hunter Woods School District do not have a parent or guardian on the committee in direct violation of the Accelerated Placement Act. Furthermore, Riverbend School District and Hunter Woods School District do not have an educator on the committee. In

other words, not even a teacher who is familiar with the child's academic and social-emotional abilities on a daily basis is on the acceleration committee to share their knowledge of the child. By excluding key individuals in the interested child's life who can speak on behalf of the child, the evaluation process is meant to keep out principal factors that bear light as to a child's ability. One of the main components of the law that Ms. Welch fought for was for a parent or a legal guardian to have the right to be part of the decision making process. This is because a parent or a guardian has valuable knowledge of a child that a school employee may not see. However, without a legal challenge to the school districts, they will continue to use their acceleration procedures to gatekeep parents or guardians as well as educators from having a seat at the table when making important educational decisions about accelerating a child.

Differences in Assessments Use for Early Entrance. Section 105 ILCS 5/14A-32(a)(4) of the Accelerated Placement Act states that a school district's acceleration policy and procedures must have "an assessment process that includes multiple valid, reliable indicators." All three school districts in this section incorporated at least three different assessment measures reflective of the distinct aspects of a child be it achievement, cognitive, and social-emotional. Below is a chart showing the different assessments used by each school district and the target benchmark scores a child needs to achieve to be accelerated:

Table 7

Assessments and Target Benchmark Scores Used for Deciding Placement in Early Entrance by Georgetown School District, Riverbend School District, and Hunter Woods School District

School	Assessments	Target benchmark scores
Georgetown School District	1. Cognitive Assessments. 2. Districts Assessments (i.e., STAR 360, Aimsweb, Fountas and Pinnell). 3. Achievement test(s) and/or content area aptitude assessment(s). 4. Teacher and parent questionnaires and/or rating scales. 5. Observations and student interviews. 6. District Pre-School Screener if the request if for early entrance into kindergarten.	1. Demonstrates attention, gross and fine motor skills, cooperative play, and expressive language skills in the very superior range. 2. Evidence of social emotional maturity, academic motivation, and persistence. 3. Attains a score at or above the 75th percentile on an assessment of learning (DIAL 4) administered by the district. 4. Attains scores at or above the 50th percentile of the mid-year screener for Kindergarten or first grade (i.e., STAR 360, Aimsweb, Fountas and Pinnell).
Riverbend School District	STEP 1–PRE-INTERVIEW: The first step is a pre-interview after the application is received. If the parents want to continue with the process after the pre-interview, here are the assessments the child must take: STEP 2–ASSESSMENTS 1. Reading Assessment–ISEL & DRA 2. Writing prompt	1. The combination of multiple data sources for each academic subject area (2 or more) that demonstrate academic functioning at least 1.5 years above current grade level and/or above 98th percentile.

Table 7 (cont.)

School	Assessments	Target benchmark scores
	3. Math Assessment–Everyday Math Mid-Year Unit 4 Assessment & KTEA for math only 4. Private evaluation by School Psychologist 5. SEL Assessment–BESS	2. Social-emotional and/or executive functioning assessment indicates results reflective of readiness for grade level or subject advancement. For example, the child shows that they have the organizational skills, planning skills, and adaptive skills to be accelerated. 3. Cognitive abilities scores above 98th percentile or 130 scaled score.
Hunter Woods School District	1. MAP for achievement–early literacy & early numeracy 2. CogAT for cognitive 3. KIDS *If the child is applying for early entrance into first grade and attended a private kindergarten, the district has the right to choose what assessments to give. Which assessments to be chosen are not specified in the district's written procedures.	STEP 1. The child needs to score 90% and above on MAP's early literacy & early numeracy. If the child achieves this score, they can take CogAT. STEP 2. The child needs to score 3 standard deviations above the national norm. If the child obtains the target CogAT score, they take the KIDS assessment. STEP 3. KIDS assessment

The area of assessments between the three school districts shows the starkest differences between the early entrance acceleration procedures. The three districts do not share one assessment in common when faced with an evaluation for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade. It can be argued that the assessments reflect the district's local control by choosing assessments for their student population. However, this argument holds little water to the fact that the number of assessments a child takes; the order in which the assessments are given; the different thresholds of target benchmark scores the child is to achieve; and a pre-interview

process at one of the school districts prior to even sitting for the assessments reveals that the diversity is truly gatekeeping. Furthermore, it is a classic case of inequity. Which assessments a child make take and the score to be achieve is wholly dependent on where a child lives. The only way this can be resolved is through rules and regulations from ISBE dictating consistency across the state as to which assessments are to be used for early entrance as well as what the target benchmark scores for acceptance into an accelerated early entrance program shall be.

Differences as to Acceleration Decisions: Appeals and Placement. Section 105 ILCS 5/14A-32(a)(3) of the Accelerated Placement Act states that school districts must have "procedures for notifying parents or guardians of a child of a decision affecting that child's participation in an accelerated placement program" (2020). Section 105 ILCS 5/14A-32(b)(3) states that school districts can include in their acceleration procedures "a provision that provides that children participating in an accelerated placement program and their parents or guardians will be provided a written plan detailing the type of acceleration that child will receive and strategies to support the child" (2020).

All three school districts highlighted in this section have stated in their written procedures that they will notify families about the acceleration evaluation committee's decision. The differences arises as to what happens after the decision is rendered. If the decision from the acceleration evaluation committee is to deny early entrance, all three school districts have a different approach as to what happens next. For example, at Georgetown School District, a family has the right within 30 days after receipt of the denial letter to appeal the committee's decision to the Superintendent. Whatever the Superintendent decides at that point, their decision is final. At Riverbend School District, there is no formal appeal process written in the

procedures. The family can informally appeal to the Superintendent and/or the school board. For Hunter Woods School District, there is no appeal process. The committee's decision is final.

If the committee grants the acceleration request, only Riverbend School District gives families one week to accept the decision. If a decision by the family is not made in one week, the committee's decision is rescinded. All three school districts create a written plan to support the accelerated child. However, only Georgetown School District has a transition period of 4–6 weeks at the start of a child's acceleration to monitor their progress. For Riverbend and Hunter Woods School Districts, there is no transition period. Upon acceptance of the committee's decision to accelerate, the child is permanently accelerated into kindergarten or first grade.

Conclusion of the Comparison of the Three Districts' Early Entrance Procedures

Section 105 ILCS 5/14A-32(a)(2) of the Accelerated Placement Act states that the school district's acceleration policy and procedures must have "a fair and equitable decision-making process" (2020). As the early entrance procedures for Georgetown, Riverbend, and Hunter Woods School Districts show, the acceleration procedures developed by the different school districts to comply with law is not "fair and equitable." These three school districts are all within the suburban Chicago area and are barely 50 miles apart from each other, but they might as well be across the nation in how they manage early entrance acceleration requests. With early entrance processes being drastically different from beginning to end, the current procedures in place are guaranteeing an inequitable outcome for the children who need the academic intervention the most. Without ISBE's guidance through rules and regulations, a child will obtain a vastly dissimilar experience and possible different acceleration decision when applying to be considered for early entrance based upon the school district they happen to live in. The varying experience is not in any child's best educational interest.

Subject and Whole Grade Acceleration Procedures

Georgetown School District's Subject Acceleration and Whole Grade Acceleration Procedures. Georgetown School District's acceleration procedures for subject acceleration and whole grade acceleration are different from the procedures for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade. To start the process for subject acceleration and whole grade acceleration, the child must currently be a student in grades 1–8 at Georgetown School District. Two district forms need to be completed to be considered for subject acceleration or whole grade acceleration:

1. Referral and Consent Form
2. Parent Inventory of Finding Potential (PIP)

The two district forms can be completed by any of the following individuals: (a) a principal in the district; (b) a district staff member; (c) the interested student; or (d) the parent or legal guardian of the interested student.

The *Referral and Consent Form* is the same form that is used for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade. The *Parent Inventory of Finding Potential* (PIP) is unique for subject or whole grade acceleration. The PIP asks parents to rate 51 different behavioral indicators according to four levels: (a) "seldom or never"; (b) "sometimes"; (c) "regularly"; or (d) "almost always". A copy of the PIP is in Appendix C. Both the *Referral and Consent Form* and the PIP must be turned into Ms. Paulson by April 15 for consideration of acceleration in the following school year.

Between April 15–May 1, Ms. Paulson convenes the Acceleration Evaluation Committee (AEC) to review all the requests for subject and whole grade acceleration. The members of the Acceleration Evaluation Committee are the following individuals:

- Ms. Paulson as Director of Curriculum;

- school psychologist;
- parent or legal guardian;
- affected building principal;
- district's gifted teacher;
- current grade level teacher; and
- receiving teacher

The requests are first compared to the most recent mid-year STAR 360 assessment data. If the student is interested in subject acceleration, they must score above the 90% percentile on the math or English language arts mid-year STAR 360 screener. If the student is interested in whole grade acceleration, they must score above the 98% percentile on both the math and English language arts mid-year STAR 360 screener. If the interested student has met these criteria, they are then evaluated using the Iowa Acceleration Scale. Other assessments the committee may considered using at this point in addition of Iowa Acceleration Scale are the following:

1. Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children
2. Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale
3. District End of Year of Assessments for reading, math, or another curricular subject
4. Social Skills Rating System
5. Current Grades
6. Portfolio of student work from district staff or parents
7. Classroom Observation
8. Additional Academic Achievement or Aptitude tests as needed

Ms. Paulson will contact the parent or legal guardian to explain the next steps in the evaluation process as well as set up a time for testing of the interested student. The testing will be the Iowa Acceleration Scale plus any other assessment the district chooses.

All data from mid-year STAR 360 assessment, the Iowa Acceleration Scale, and the additional chosen acceleration screeners must be submitted to Ms. Paulson by mid-June. At that time, Ms. Paulson convenes the Acceleration Evaluation Committee to review the data gathered. In order to be recommended for subject or whole grade acceleration, the interested student must satisfy the following requirements:

1. Score 46–80 points on the Iowa Acceleration Scale;
2. Exhibit high achievement in the current grade level in all academic areas;
3. Score on the STAR 360 mid-year assessment in math and English language arts above 90% for subject acceleration or above 98% for whole grade acceleration;
4. Evidence of social emotional maturity, academic motivation, and persistence; and
5. A desire to accelerate without pressure from parents or guardians.

At the end of the data meeting, a determination is made to either grant or deny the subject acceleration or whole grade acceleration. If the interested student is recommended for either subject or whole grade acceleration, the placement will occur during the following school year. However, the placement is probationary for 4–6 weeks. To help facilitate a successful probationary period, the Acceleration Evaluation Committee completes a *Summary and Planning Record*.

At the end of the transition or probationary period, the Acceleration Evaluation Committee meets to discuss the child's academic and social-emotional progress during the 4–6 week transitional period. Evidence of student progress is gathered and evaluated during the

committee meeting. At the end of the committee meeting, the Acceleration Evaluation Committee recommends to either grant or deny permanent acceleration.

If a child is denied acceleration at any point during the evaluation process, the parent or legal guardian of that child may appeal in writing to the district's Superintendent. The appeal must be made within 30 days of a decision rendered by the Acceleration Evaluation Committee. After receipt of the written appeal, the Superintendent has 30 days to review the appeal and render a decision. All decisions by the Superintendent are final and there is no further district recourse available to that parent or legal guardian.

A flow chart explaining the acceleration decision making process at Georgetown School District for subject and whole grade acceleration can be found in Appendix M.

Riverbend School District's Acceleration Procedures for Subject Acceleration and Whole Grade Acceleration. At Riverbend School District, subject acceleration and whole grade acceleration is divided into two different categories depending upon the grade the interested child is in. There are acceleration procedures for grades kindergarten–second grade and, then, there are different acceleration procedures for third grade–eighth grade. Prior to seeking subject acceleration or whole grade acceleration, there is a district requirement is that the interested student and their parent or legal guardian first consult with the building principal and the affected teacher(s) to collaborate on ways that the child's needs can be met in the current general education classroom setting or current grade level through differentiated instruction. "The family should engage with the classroom teacher and principal to see how learning needs can be met within the current classroom setting prior to submitting an acceleration request." According to Dr. Banks, the goal of this requirement is to have a family, the principal, and

teacher(s) finds ways to meet a child's academic needs in the most practical way first. As stated by Dr. Banks,

> We'll call a family meeting at the school to go through the evidence that we've got. We may say, "Hey, the need is here [to accelerate], let's try to do this prior to going to an evaluation assessment." Most families when we do that will take that guidance. Some will say no, "I still want to be tested."

Acceleration Procedures for K-2 Single Subject or Whole Grade Acceleration. To be considered for subject acceleration or whole grade acceleration in kindergarten–second grade at Riverbend School District, the interested child must first be enrolled as a student in the district. Then, the family needs to meet with the classroom teacher(s) and principal to see how learning needs can be met within the current general education classroom or grade level prior to submitting an acceleration request. If the family still feels that either subject or whole grade acceleration is the preferable option, they need to complete the district's *Acceleration Request Form*. The *Acceleration Request Form* is in Appendix F. It is important to note here that a teacher or an advocate for the family may complete the *Acceleration Request Form* on behalf of the interested student. The *Acceleration Request Form* must be sent to Dr. Banks as Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. The *Acceleration Request Form* asks background information which may include previous psychological evaluations, standardized test performance, grades, and other data or artifacts that provide evidence to support the request for subject or whole grade acceleration. It is important to note here that there is not a time limit or deadline to submit the *Acceleration Request Form*.

Dr. Banks confirms receipt of the request by contacting the family to set up a conference call with her. The purpose of the conference call is to discuss the following:

a. The research on acceleration;

b. Ask why the family is seeking acceleration; and

c. Confirm if the family wants to move forward with the acceleration evaluation process.

If the family wants to continue with the acceleration evaluation process, an initial meeting is set up by Dr. Banks with the district's Acceleration Evaluation Team (AET). The Acceleration Evaluation Team consists of the following individuals: parent or legal guardian; any advocate on behalf of the family, the affected school principal, the affected classroom teacher(s); the school psychologist; and the district's reading specialist (if reading is the subject of interest). In the initial meeting, the following five questions will be asked:

1. Does the student have a peer group in the classroom or grade level at a similar academic level?
2. Are there strategies that can be put in place to meet the students' academic needs in the current grade level?
3. Is the student demonstrating academic performance and knowledge a minimum of 1.5 years ahead of one's grade level peers?
4. Does the student demonstrate the social-emotional skills needed to navigate the demands of grade skipping?
5. Does the student demonstrate the executive functions that are necessary to be successful in an accelerated grade placement?

In order to answer the aforementioned questions, the family will be asked about the academic ability and social-emotional skills of the student. Furthermore, data that the school district already has on the student through district assessments given to all students such as Northwest Evaluation Association's Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) will be examined. At the end of the initial meeting, Dr. Banks will make one of the following decisions:

1. Recommend submitting the student for the evaluation acceleration process.

Or

2. Notify the family that the team will not move forward with acceleration evaluation and provide the reason why the student does not qualify for further acceleration review.

If the decision is made to move forward with evaluation for acceleration, the parent or legal guardian must grant consent for testing. If consent is given, Dr. Banks has the district's school psychologist and reading specialist conduct a battery of assessments evaluating the interested student in four categories: reading/writing ability, math ability, cognitive ability, and social-emotional/executive functioning skills. The assessments used to assess these four categories are the following:

Figure 22

All the Assessments Riverbend School District Uses to Assess Children for Subject or Whole Grade Acceleration in Kindergarten–Second Grade

Reading/Writing assessment	Math assessment	Cognitive assessment	Social-emotional/ Executive functioning skills assessment
1. Observation Survey normed to a 1st grade reading level 2. Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA) 3. If an assessment in Spanish is needed, use DRA 2's Spanish version called Evaluación del desarrollo de la lectura (EDL2)	1. Everyday Math Placement Assessment (beginning of the year, mid-year, and end of year assessments as well as all unit assessments) 2. Kaufman Test for Educational Achievement (KTEA) - Math assessment only	1. Review of any previously completed private psychological evaluations. 2. Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI Test)– 2nd edition 3. Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test – 2nd Edition	Behavior and Emotional Screening System (BESS) - administer teacher and parent rating scales. Can be given in English and Spanish

Figure 22 (cont.)

4. Woodcock-Johnson IV Achievement Standard 5. Kaufman Test for Educational Achievement (KTEA)–Reading assessment only 6. Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) 7. Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress for Literacy (STEP)	3. Woodcock-Johnson IV Achievement Standard	(KBIT-2) * One chooses either the WASI-II or KBIT-2 to administer (not both).	

When the assessments are completed, Dr. Banks brings together the Acceleration Evaluation Team to review the data from the four tested categories. As with the acceleration procedures for early entrance, the committee will examine the data according to the following criteria:

1. The combination of multiple data sources for each academic subject area (2 or more) that demonstrate academic functioning at least 1.5 years above current grade level and/or above 98th percentile.
2. Social-emotional and/or executive functioning assessment indicates results reflective of readiness for grade level or subject advancement. For example, the child shows that they have the organizational skills, planning skills, and adaptive skills to be accelerated.
3. Cognitive abilities scores above 98th percentile or 130 scaled score.

All the data is examined by the committee to create a picture of the whole child. Therefore, not meeting one of the stated benchmarks will not necessarily rule out a child for

subject or whole grade acceleration. At the end of the meeting, a decision is made by the committee to either grant or deny subject acceleration or whole grade acceleration. The child and their parent or legal guardian is not part of the committee meeting or part of the decision process. Instead, they are notified after the meeting of the committee's decision. In other words, a family is notified in writing of the acceleration decision within 2 weeks after the completion of assessments and within 6 weeks from the initial intake meeting. A family has 1 week from receipt of the committee's decision to accept the acceleration placement if it is granted. The acceptance of the acceleration goes to Dr. Banks as head of the AET. If the decision is not accepted within the week after receipt of the decision letter, the offer to accelerate is rescinded.

If the decision is made to accelerate the student, a written decision with supporting assessments report is sent to the affected building principal. The family is provided a written plan specifying the type of acceleration the child will receive and strategies to support the child's transition. Lastly, an introductory meeting is held between the family and the new classroom teacher to ease the transition into the higher grade level. There is no probationary period. The child's accelerated placement is permanent upon acceptance by the family.

Similar to the procedures for early entrance, there is no formal appeal process written in Riverbend School District's acceleration procedures. However, a parent or legal guardian can appeal a decision denying acceleration to the Superintendent. If they are unhappy with the Superintendent's decision, a family can appeal to the school board. The school board will be the final decision maker as to the acceleration.

A flow chart summarizing Riverbend School District's subject or whole grade acceleration procedures for kindergarten–second grade can be found in Appendix N.

Acceleration Procedures for Third–Eighth Grades Whole Grade or Single Subject. The subject or whole grade acceleration procedures for students in grades 3–8 are remarkably similar to the subject or whole grade acceleration procedures for students in kindergarten–second grade. However, there are three critical differences between the processes to note. The first difference is that there is a heavy focus on providing work samples from the current grade level to show evidence of above grade level thinking. The second difference is that the interested student must pass the Cognitive Ability Test (CogAT) prior to sitting for the full battery of acceleration assessments. The third difference is in the district's choice of assessments given during the full battery of acceleration assessments.

If a student is recommended to be evaluated for acceleration by the Acceleration Evaluation Team (AET), the first assessment given to the student is Cognitive Ability Test (CogAT). As stated in the procedures, "CogAT is administered as an initial assessment screener before the decision is made whether to administer the fully battery of assessments." CogAT assesses a student's cognitive or ability to reason in three areas: verbal ability, quantitative ability, and non-verbal ability. To be a candidate for the full battery of acceleration assessments, the interested student must have the following scores after taking CogAT:

- If seeking single subject acceleration in math, the student must be in the 9th Stanine and the 98% percentile or higher on the quantitative section and non-verbal section of CogAT.
- If seeking single subject acceleration in reading, the student must be in the ninth Stanine and the 98% percentile or higher on the verbal section and non-verbal section of CogAT.
- If seeking full grade acceleration, the student must be in the ninth Stanine and the 98% percentile or higher on all three sections of CogAT (verbal, non-verbal, and quantitative).

If the interested student has not met the CogAT requirements, the AET will recommend that the student does not move forward with acceleration evaluation and the evaluation process ends. It is important to note here that this is the only time in any of the acceleration procedures at Riverbend School District where the achievement benchmarks scores will be strictly enforced to continue with the acceleration process.

If the interested student has met the CogAT benchmarks, the following battery of assessments will be administered to assess the student's skills in reading, writing, math, cognitive reasoning, and social-emotional/executive functioning skills.

Figure 23

All the Assessments Riverbend School District Uses to Assess Children for Subject or Whole Grade Acceleration in Third Grade–Eighth Grade

Reading/writing assessment	Math assessment	Cognitive assessment	Social-emotional/ executive functioning skills assessment
1. Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA)–for third grade only 2. If an assessment in Spanish is needed, use DRA 2's Spanish version called Evaluación del desarrollo de la lectura (EDL2)–for third grade only 3. Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS)–for third grade only	1. Everyday Math Placement Assessment (beginning of the year, mid-year, and end of year assessments as well as all unit assessments) 2. Open Up Resources math unit assessments 3. Kaufman Test for Educational Achievement (KTEA) - Math assessment only	1. Review of any previously completed private psychological evaluations 2. Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI Test)–2nd edition 3. Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test-2nd Edition (KBIT-2)	Behavior and Emotional Screening System (BESS) - administer teacher and parent rating scales. Can be given in English and Spanish.

Figure 23 (cont.)

4. Sample Unit Assessments from the next grade level's English language arts curriculum 5. Student writing sample from an independent writing assessment.	4. Woodcock-Johnson IV Achievement Standard 5. Student portfolio of math work	* One chooses either the WASI-II or KBIT-2 to administer (not both).	

A flow chart summarizing Riverbend School District's subject and whole grade acceleration process for grades 3–8 can be found in Appendix O.

Subject Acceleration Procedures at Hunter Woods School District. Hunter Woods School District offers subject acceleration in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. However, the acceleration procedures for subject acceleration in ELA are different than those for mathematics.

Subject Acceleration for Reading Enrichment (Grades 4–5)/Accelerated ELA (Grades 6–8). Reading Enrichment is the subject acceleration in English language arts for students at Hunter Woods School District who are in fourth and fifth grades. Subject acceleration only starts in fourth grade. The goal of Reaching Enrichment is to accelerate and enhance what these students learn in the general core ELA curriculum by going deeper into the ELA concepts of literature, informational text, vocabulary instruction, and foundational skills. This is accomplished by grouping the fourth and fifth grade accelerated students in their own reading groups in the Tier 1 general education setting as well as specifically clustering the students in certain grade level classrooms. In addition, an enrichment teacher will work with the accelerated students in and out of the general education classroom.

To qualify for Reading Enrichment, all students in the district are identified for reading enrichment at the end of third grade using two administrations of the MAP assessment such as the administration of the screeners in the winter and in the spring. They are also identified using the CogAT score from when the students took the cognitive assessment in second grade. The two MAP scores from third grade and the CogAT score from second grade are placed in a matrix to come up with a z-score. The purpose of the z-score is to determine how many standard deviations a student's academic and cognitive performance is from the mean of the local norm. To qualify for Reading Enrichment, the student needs a z-score of at least 3 standard deviations and above the local norm.

Once all the scores are tallied, the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning convenes the Acceleration Evaluation Committee (AEC). This committee is different from the one for early entrance to kindergarten or first grade. The Acceleration Evaluation Committee for subject acceleration and whole grade acceleration consists of the following individuals: the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, one of the building principals, and one of the district's enrichment teachers. The committee reviews the scores for all the students and determine which students have a z-score of at least 3 standard deviations and above the local norm. The students that meet that score will placed in Reading Enrichment starting in fourth grade.

In fifth grade, all the students are again screened for subject acceleration placement for English language arts in sixth grade–eighth grade. At sixth grade–eighth grade, subject acceleration in English language arts is called Accelerated English language arts (Accelerated ELA). Similar to qualifying for Accelerated English language arts, students are identified using two administrations of the MAP assessment such as the winter universal screener and the spring

universal screener. They are also identified using the CogAT score from when the students took the cognitive assessment in fourth grade. The two MAP scores from fifth grade and the CogAT score from fourth grade are placed in a matrix to come up with a z-score. The purpose of the z-score is to determine how many standard deviations a student's academic and cognitive performance is from the mean of the local norm. To qualify for Accelerated ELA, a student needs a z-score of at least 3 standard deviations and above the local norm.

Once all the scores are tallied, the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning convenes the AEC. The committee reviews the scores for all the students at the end of fifth grade and determine which students have a z-score of at least 3 standard deviations and above the local norm. The students who possess a z-score of at least 3 standard deviations and above qualifies for Accelerated ELA starting in sixth grade.

Subject Acceleration for Accelerated Math (Grades 4–5)/Accelerated Plus Math (Grades 6–8). At Hunter Woods School District, subject acceleration for math is called Accelerated Math in grades 4–5 and Accelerated Plus Math in grades 6–8. It is important to note here that subject acceleration in math does not start until 4th grade. Students who are in Accelerated Math learn the general education math curriculum of the next grade level. For example, 4th grade students in Accelerated Math learn the 5th grade math curriculum. In Accelerated Plus Math, the students are learning the general education math curriculum two grade levels above their current grade. For example, the 8th grade students in Accelerated Plus Math are learning sophomore level geometry. Similar to subject acceleration for English language arts, there are two times all students in the district are screened: at the end of third grade and at the end of fifth grade. The same assessments and benchmark requirements that are used to qualify for subject acceleration in ELA are used for subject acceleration in math.

However, there is one notable difference for qualifying for accelerated math in grades 6–8. If a student is in Accelerated Math at the end of fifth grade, that student automatically continues into the Accelerated Plus Math in sixth grade. In other words, such a student does not need to be rescreened because they are grandfathered in the subject acceleration for math at the middle school level. If a student was not in Accelerated Math in fifth grade, they need a z-score of at least 3 standard deviations above the local norm to qualify.

Alternative Process for Subject Acceleration into ELA and Math. There is a third way a student can enter subject acceleration for reading and/or math at Hunter Woods School District. A parent or legal guardian, a licensed educational professional, or the student themselves (with written consent from the parent or legal guardian) can request to be considered for subject acceleration if they did not meet the district's z-score requirement. The referrer contacts a building principal in the district and expresses the desire for a child who did not meet the district's criteria for subject acceleration to be considered. The building principal will have a conversation with the affected family to discuss the student's current academic performance as compared to the eligibility requirements for subject acceleration in ELA and/or math. If the building principal feels that the student may qualify for subject acceleration in ELA and/or math, the parent or guardian must complete the *Enrichment/Accelerated Placement Request Form*. A copy of the *Enrichment/Accelerated Placement Request Form* is in Appendix P. The form requires the referrer to explain why the district's placement criteria for subject acceleration is not relevant to the child and should be waived as well as why the child should be considered for accelerated placement.

The completed form will go to the AEC for them to consider the request for subject acceleration based upon the information on the *Enrichment/Accelerated Placement Request*

Form as well as the data of the two most recent MAP scores and most recent CogAT score. At the end of the meeting, the committee decides to grant or deny the subject acceleration. If the student is granted acceleration, the student is permanently accelerated in either ELA or math. If the student is denied subject acceleration, there is no appeal process. The committee's decision is final.

A flow chart summarizing the procedures for subject acceleration in ELA and math at Hunter Woods School District is in Appendix Q.

Whole Grade Acceleration Procedures of Hunter Woods School District. At Hunter Woods School District, no consideration of whole grade acceleration will be made until the child has been enrolled in the school district for a continuous 16 weeks. After 16 weeks as an enrolled student in the district, whole grade acceleration starts with referral made by a parent or guardian in writing to the affected building principal. The written referral is a completed district *Whole Grade Acceleration Request Form* that is accompanied with a completed parent behavioral questionnaire. A copy of the *Whole Grade Acceleration Request Form* is in Appendix R. Also, any supporting documentation of a student portfolio of work product showing how the student is performing academically above grade level is required as part of the whole grade acceleration process.

Besides the interested family providing documentation, the affected building principal must also provide documentation from the school district to the interested family when the referral is received. The documentation provided by the affected building principal must show all the attempts made by the school district "to enrich the child's learning experience using an instructional planning form or similar document, to include a start date and revision date and the outcomes of this enrichment." The procedures do not state any penalty on the school district if it

does not provide documentation of prior enrichment attempts to the family. Dr. Grant states that "the process will continue regardless of what we do." In other words, the school district views this step of providing documentation to families as optional for them.

With the referral and accompanying documentation from the family and from the school district, the affected building principal calls a pre-interview meeting with the interested family. The goal of the meeting is two-fold: (a) explain the district's procedures and process for whole grade acceleration, and (b) discuss the data submitted in the documentation. At the end of the meeting, the principal will decide if the acceleration process will proceed or it will end. If the principal determines that the data is insufficient to support whole grade acceleration, the process will stop here and there is no right of appeal on behalf of the interested family. If the principal determines that the acceleration process is to continue, the district's Acceleration Evaluation Team (AET) is convened, and the child will be tested with the Iowa Acceleration Scale. The district's AET consists of at least the following individuals: (a) the child; (b) the parent or legal guardian; (c) two or more educators (especially the current grade level teacher and the possible receiving teacher); (d) the school psychologist; (e) the affected building principal; and (f) a district administrator (preferably the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning).

After the child is tested using the Iowa Acceleration Scale by the district's school psychologist, the results of the assessment are discussed with the AET. A recommendation is made to either accelerate the child or deny acceleration. If the decision is to deny acceleration, the process stops here and there is no right of appeal. If the decision is to grant the whole grade acceleration, the child is automatically accelerated without a transition period. However, regardless of the results, the district stated in their written acceleration procedures that, "The District reserved the right to make all student placement decisions, including the reversal of prior

decisions, and to determine the weight given to any individual factor favoring or disfavoring accelerated placement of a particular student."

A flow chart summarizing the whole grade acceleration procedures at Hunter Woods School District is in Appendix S.

Comparative Results of Districts' Implementation of Subject Acceleration

Georgetown, Riverbend, and Hunter Woods School Districts all offer subject acceleration for the students in their districts. However, there is wide variation between the three districts in the types of subject acceleration offered as well the procedures students must undergo if seeking subject grade acceleration.

Differences in Types of Subject Acceleration and Corresponding Procedures. Even though Georgetown, Riverbend, and Hunter Woods School Districts have subject acceleration as an option for academic intervention, it looks vastly different at each school district. For example, at Riverbend School District, subject acceleration procedures are divided into two categories. There are subject acceleration procedures for kindergarten–second grades and a separate set of procedures for grades 3–8. At Hunter Woods School District, the subject acceleration procedures are divided not only by grade level but by content area as well. There are ELA subject acceleration procedures for grades 4–5 and different ELA subject acceleration procedures for grades 6–8. There are also separate math subject acceleration procedures for grade 4–5 and another set of math subject acceleration procedures for grades 6–8.

Both Dr. Grant and Dr. Banks stated that the reason that they have multiple procedures for subject acceleration is because they tied their acceleration procedures to their existing gifted/enrichment programs. For example, Dr. Banks tied the acceleration procedures she created to the way the district identified students for enrichment services in her district. At

Riverbend School District, there are enrichment services for students in grades K–2 and different enrichment services for students in grades 3–8. By tying the acceleration procedures to the district's current enrichment programming, Dr. Banks is not creating a tailor acceleration academic intervention for students who qualify. Students who pass the requirement for subject acceleration are just entering the district's enrichment program that existed prior to the passage of the Accelerated Placement Act.

At Hunter Woods School District, they already had gifted ELA and math programs for grades 4–5 as well as for grades 6–8 prior to the passage of the Accelerated Placement Act. Instead of seeing acceleration as a separate academic intervention for all students from kindergarten–eighth grade, it was conflated with the district's gifted programming. Therefore, if a child is accelerated at Hunter Woods School District, they are truly just entering the district's gifted program. In other words, the acceleration procedures are being used as another way to identify children for gifted programming and not necessarily for a tailored accelerated academic intervention. According to Dr. Grant, "Our acceleration programming really didn't change for students. I've been in the district for 10 years now and I think we are just using these new procedures to qualify our students for gifted classes." It is also important to note here that students in grades kindergarten–third grade do not have the option to seek subject acceleration at Hunter Woods School District. Any consideration for subject acceleration starts at the end of third grade for acceleration to occur as a fourth grade student.

Below is a chart showing the different types of subject acceleration procedures offered at the three school districts:

Figure 24

Differences in Subject Acceleration Procedures Among Georgetown School District, Riverbend School District, and Hunter Woods School District

Georgetown School District	*Riverbend School District*	*Hunter Woods School District*
One set of subject acceleration procedures for kindergarten–eighth grade to be considered for all subject areas.	• One set of subject acceleration procedures is for students in kindergarten–second grade. • Second set of subject acceleration procedures is for students in third–eighth grades. • The two sets of acceleration procedures cover only ELA and math.	• There is no subject acceleration allowed for students in kindergarten–third grade. • The first set of subject acceleration procedures is for ELA (Reading Enrichment) in grades 4 -5 . • The second set of subject acceleration procedures is for ELA (Accelerated ELA) in grades 6–8. • The third set of subject acceleration procedures is for math (Accelerated Math) in grades 4–5. • The fourth set of subject acceleration procedures is for math (Accelerated Math Plus) in grades 6–8.

Just between the three school districts, there is a great variance in how subject acceleration is offered to Illinois public school students. For instance, the acceleration procedures in two of the school districts did not really address the one of the main requirements in the Acceleration Placement Act which is that acceleration is open to all students. Instead, Riverbend School District and Hunter Woods School District morphed their subject acceleration procedures to be an identification pipeline toward their gifted/enrichment programs. Without true understanding by district leaders on the difference between gifted education and

acceleration, we will see more of this confusion and misunderstanding throughout the state of Illinois as predicted by Ms. Nakoma.

Differences in Referrers for Subject Acceleration. As stated in Section 105 ILCS 5/14A-32(b)(2) of the Accelerated Placement Act, an Illinois school district's acceleration policy and procedures can include:

> A process for referral that allows for multiple referrers, including a child's parents or guardians; other referrers may include licensed education professionals, the child, with the written consent of a parent or guardian, a peer, through a licensed education professional who has knowledge of the referred child's abilities, or, in case of possible early entrance, a preschool educator, pediatrician, or psychologist who knows the child.

Georgetown School District expands their list of referrers for subject acceleration versus what they allow for early entrance consideration. Under their early entrance procedures, Georgetown School District only allows a parent or guardian to be a referrer. Under subject acceleration, Georgetown School District also allows a principal, any district staff member, and the interested student themselves to be referrers. Riverbend School District has the same list of four referrers from their early entrance procedures as it does for both forms of its subject acceleration procedures. Hunter Woods School District is the only school district that limits the referrer for all forms of its subject acceleration to only an interested parent or guardian as a referrer. It is important to note here that a parent or guardian only refers for subject acceleration after their child did not qualify for subject acceleration through the district's procedures of screening all students for subject acceleration in grades 3 and 5. Below is a chart explaining who a referrer for subject acceleration in the three school districts can be:

Figure 25

Referrers for subject acceleration in Georgetown School District, Riverbend School District, and Hunter Woods School District.

Georgetown School District	*Riverbend School District*	*Hunter Woods School District*
1. Parent or legal guardian 2. Principal 3, Any district staff member 4. The interested child themselves	1. Parent or Legal Guardian 2. Licensed Educational Professional 3, Pediatrician 4. Psychologist	1. Parent or Legal Guardian only after the child failed to qualify for subject acceleration through the district screening of all students for subject acceleration in grades 3 and 5.

As seen in the procedures of who can refer for subject acceleration, the three highlighted school districts in this study have erected gatekeeping roadblocks to limit the ability of interested parties to refer for acceleration. For example, a peer of the student cannot recommend a fellow student for subject acceleration in any of the three school districts. More importantly, a current teacher of a child who may believe subject acceleration could be a valuable academic intervention cannot be a referrer at Hunter Woods School District. The subject acceleration procedures of the three school districts reveal that the goal is not to open access to subject acceleration but to limit it for any interested student and their family.

Differences in Applications for Subject Acceleration. The application process for subject acceleration varies greatly from the application process for early entrance. All three districts require that a child must be currently enrolled as a student prior to being able to apply for subject acceleration. After meeting the qualification of being a currently enrolled student, Georgetown School District requires a referrer to complete the district's *Referral and Consent*

Form as well as the parent or guardian to complete the *Parent Inventory for Finding Potential* (PIP) developed by Dr. Karen B. Rogers. Both required forms must be submitted to Ms. Paulson by April 15.

After meeting the qualification of being a current student at Riverbend School District, the interested family needs to first meet with the building principal and current teacher(s) prior to being allowed to complete any application form for both types of subject acceleration offered by the school district. The goal of this meeting from the point of view of the school district is to find ways to differentiate the curriculum to meet the enriched needs of the interested student. However, the true purpose of the meeting is to deter subject acceleration by trying to find ways to keep the child in their current grade level. If the interested family is not satisfied with the differentiation options offered at the building level meeting, they can then apply for subject acceleration. The application process requires a parent or guardian to complete the district's *Acceleration Request Form* as well as submit supporting documentation showing the child's ability to work above grade level. There is no deadline for these forms to be submitted to Dr. Banks. Once Dr. Banks receives the completed documentation, the family sits through another interview with Dr. Banks. This second pre-interview with the family is to determine why they are seeking subject acceleration. If Dr. Banks feels that the interested family makes a compelling case for subject acceleration, she will allow the family to proceed with the process. If the family has not made a compelling case, Dr. Banks will end the subject acceleration process at this point. In other words, any family seeking subject acceleration at Riverbend School District needs to jump over two gatekeeping hurdles of a mandatory building level meeting and a mandatory district level meeting before a committee will start to consider a child's application for acceleration.

Hunter Woods School District's subject acceleration process does not first start with a referrer. Instead, the district screens all third grade students for their gifted/acceleration programs in ELA and math offered in grades 4–5. The students are all re-screened at the end of fifth grade for the middle school gifted/acceleration programs in ELA and math if the students did not qualify for math acceleration in 3rd grade. If a child does not qualify for the gifted/acceleration program through the districtwide screening process, the parent or guardian has the option to file with the affected building principal a written statement asking for their child to be considered for the gifted/acceleration program. When the building principal receives the written statement, they will meet with the interested family. After the meeting, the building principal can decide to allow the family to continue with the acceleration process by having the family complete the *Enrichment/Acceleration Placement Request Form*. The affected building principal may also decide that the child does not have the academic qualification for the gifted program. If the decision is to deny the family from continuing with their acceleration request, the acceleration process stops here without a right of appeal. Though it may seem that the district is being flexible in offering this alternative pathway for subject acceleration, it is a gatekeeping measure because the decision to consider a child for subject acceleration does not rest in the hands of a committee of multiple people but in the hands of one person: the building principal. One of the tenants of the Accelerated Placement Act is that any policy must have "a fair and equitable decision making process that involves multiple persons" (105 ILCS 5/14A-32(a)(2). This is not the case with the Hunter Woods School District's alternative pathway for subject acceleration.

Below is a chart showing the differences in the subject acceleration procedures between the three school districts:

Figure 26

Differences in Implementation of Subject Acceleration Procedures Among Georgetown School District, Riverbend School District, and Hunter Woods School District

Georgetown School District	*Riverbend School District*	*Hunter Woods School District*
*Prior to being allowed to apply for subject acceleration, the child must be a currently enrolled student. This is a requirement for all three school districts.		
1. To start the subject acceleration process, a referrer must complete the following forms: • Referral & Consent Form • Parent Inventory for Finding Potential (PIP) 2. Both forms are due by April 15 for an acceleration committee to be brought together to review the data and start the assessments.	1. The interested family must first meet with the affected building principal and teacher(s) to craft differentiation strategies to keep the child in current grade level. 2. If the interested family does not like or want the differentiation strategies, the Acceleration Request Form is completed and supported with documentation showing how the child is academically performing above grade level is submitted to Dr. Banks. 3. Upon receipt of the Acceleration Request Form and supporting documentation, the family must have a pre-interview with Dr. Banks for her to decide if the child is a candidate for subject acceleration. 4. At the end of the interview with Dr. Banks, she will decide if the child is a possible candidate for subject acceleration. If she feels that the child may be a candidate for subject acceleration, the evaluation process will start. If she does not feel the child would be a good candidate for subject acceleration, the process stops here.	1. All students in the district are screened for subject acceleration in ELA and math. 2. If a child does not qualify for subject acceleration through the district wide screening process, the interested family can file a written request for consideration for subject acceleration with the affected building principal. 3. When the principal receives the written request, they meet with the family to decide if the child should be considered for subject acceleration. 4. If the building principal thinks that the child may be a candidate for subject acceleration, the interested family is allowed to complete the Enrichment/Acceleration Placement Request Form to start the acceleration process.

Figure 26 (cont.)

Georgetown School District	*Riverbend School District*	*Hunter Woods School District*
	5. There is no deadline for a family to apply for subject acceleration.	5. If the building principal does not feel that the child would be a candidate for subject acceleration, the process stops here. 6. There is no deadline for a family to apply for subject acceleration.

Subject acceleration looks vastly different depending upon the school district a child attends for school. These three school districts are relatively geographically close but could not be more disparate in how they approach subject acceleration. Riverbend and Hunter Woods School Districts put the decision of subject acceleration in the hands of one individual—be it the building principal or district level administrator. The Accelerated Placement Act requires that multiple individuals be involved in the decision making process for acceleration and not just one person. Furthermore, the law states that the decision making process must be equitable and not capricious. What one can see is that the two of the three school districts narrowed the decision making process to exclude multiple individuals from evaluating a student for subject acceleration. This is due to the school district leaders' bias against subject accelerating a child. The bias manifests itself in the multiple gatekeeping measures used to prevent an interested family from starting the subject acceleration process. This creates a flawed acceleration process.

Differences on Acceleration Team Members. Section 105 ILCS 5/14A-32(a)(2) of the Accelerated Placement Act states that a school district's acceleration policy and procedures must have "a fair and equitable decision-making process that involves multiple persons and includes a student's parents or guardians" (2020). At Georgetown School District, the individuals on the

acceleration evaluation team for early entrance are the same members on the acceleration evaluation team for subject acceleration. For Riverbend School District, the parent or guardian as well as a parent advocate are encouraged to be part of the subject acceleration evaluation team only after the family has met the first two gate keeping hurdles of having a meeting at the building level and, then, a second meeting at the district level. At Hunter Woods School District, the parent or guardian and/or teacher are still not members of the subject acceleration evaluation team. The evaluation team is still just administrators and the district's school psychologist. Below is a chart showing which individuals on are on the district's acceleration evaluation team:

Figure 27

Members of the Acceleration Evaluation Committee for Subject Acceleration at Georgetown School District, Riverbend School District, and Hunter Woods School District.

Georgetown School District	*Riverbend School District*	*Hunter Woods School District*
1. Director of Curriculum 2. School Psychologist 3. Affected Building Principal 4. District's Gifted Teacher 5. Current Teacher 6. Receiving Teacher 7. Parent or Guardian	1. Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning 2. Parent or Guardian 3. Family Advocate 4. Affected School Principal 5. District's Reading Specialist 6. School Psychologist	1. Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning 2. Affected Building Principal 3. School Psychologist

When one examines who is on the three district's acceleration evaluation committees for subject acceleration, only Georgetown School District allows a parent or guardian to be a member of the evaluation committee without having to meet gatekeeping criteria. Riverbend School District does allow a parent or guardian in after trying to deter them from seeking subject

acceleration with two pre-meetings at the building level and district level. Hunter Woods School District still prevents a parent or guardian from being a part of the subject acceleration evaluation team as it did for their early entrance procedures. What is notable about all three procedures is that the children themselves are not invited to be a member of the evaluation team. Furthermore, the evaluation teams are dominated by district employees. Riverbend School District and Hunter Woods School District do not have a parent or guardian on the committee in direct violation of the Accelerated Placement Act. Furthermore, Riverbend School District and Hunter Woods School District do not have an educator on the committee. In other words, not even a teacher who is the most familiar with the child's academic and social-emotional abilities can speak for or against acceleration. By excluding key individuals in the interested child's life who can speak on behalf of the child, the evaluation process is meant to keep out crucial factors that bear light as to a child's ability. One of the main components of the law that Ms. Welch fought for was for parents or legal guardians to have the right to be a part of the decision making process. This is because a parent or guardian has invaluable knowledge of their child that a school employee may not see. However, without a legal challenge to the school districts, they will continue to use their acceleration procedures to gatekeep parents or guardians as well as educators from having a seat at the table when making important educational decisions about a child.

Differences in Assessments Used to Qualify for Subject Acceleration. Section 105 ILCS 5/14A-32(a)(4) of the Accelerated Placement Act states that the school district's acceleration policy and procedures must have "an assessment process that includes multiple valid, reliable indicators" (2020). All three school districts in this section incorporate at least three different assessment measures reflective of the different aspects of a child be it achievement, cognitive, and social-emotional. Below is a chart showing the different

assessments used by each school district and the target benchmarks a child needs to achieve to be accelerated:

Table 8

Differences in Assessments and Target Benchmark Scores for Subject Acceleration at Georgetown School District, Riverbend School District, and Hunter Woods School District

Schools	Assessments	Target benchmark scores
Georgetown School District	*Mandatory Assessments:* • Mid-Year STAR 360 Assessment in ELA or math • Iowa Acceleration Scale *Additional Assessments:* ● Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children ● Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale ● District End of Year of Assessments for reading, math, or another curricular subject ● Social Skills Rating System	1. For STAR 360, the student needs a score of 90% and above in ELA or Math. AND 2. For the Iowa Acceleration Scale, the student needs 46–80 points. Also considered: ● Evidence of social emotional maturity, academic motivation, and persistence; And ● A desire to accelerate without pressure from parents or guardians.
Riverbend School District	STEP 1–FIRST PRE-INTERVIEW: The first step is a pre-interview with affected building principal and teacher(s) after the application is received. If the parents want to continue with the process after the pre-interview, they have a second pre-interview.	*Kindergarten–2nd Grade Procedures* Passing Score Consist of the following:

Table 8 (cont.)

Schools	Assessments	Target benchmark scores
	STEP 2–SECOND PRE-INTERVIEW: The second step is a pre-interview with Dr. Banks. If she feels that the student could benefit from acceleration, the student will be evaluated by the Acceleration Evaluation Committee as well as take the district's chosen assessments for either grades kindergarten–second grade or grades 3–8. Kindergarten–2nd Grade Assessments: 1. Reading & Writing Assessments for those being considered for ELA subject acceleration: ● Observation Survey ● DRA ● Woodcock-Johnson IV Achievement Standard ● KTEA for Reading ● PALS ● STEP 2. Math Assessments for those being considered for Math subject acceleration: ● Everyday Math Placement Assessment ● KTEA for Math ● Woodcock-Johnson IV Achievement Standard 3. Cognitive Assessment for both ELA or math subject acceleration: WASI or KBIT-2 4. SEL Assessment for both ELA and math subject acceleration: BESS	1. The combination of multiple data sources for each academic subject area (2 or more) that demonstrate academic functioning at least 1.5 years above current grade level and/or above 98th percentile. 2. Social-emotional and/or executive functioning assessment indicates results reflective of readiness for grade level or subject advancement. For example, the child shows that they have the organizational skills, planning skills, and adaptive skills to be accelerated. 3. Cognitive abilities scores above 98th percentile or 130 scaled score or higher. *Grades 3–8 Procedures*: 1. The first passing score is for CogAT. a. If seeking single subject acceleration in math, the student must be in the 9th Stanine and the 98% percentile or higher on the quantitative section and non-verbal section of CogAT. b. If seeking single subject acceleration in reading, the student must be in the 9th Stanine and the 98% percentile or higher on the verbal section and non-verbal section of CogAT.

Table 8 (cont.)

	Grades 3–8: The first assessment to pass is CogAT. If the student passes CogAT, they will take the following assessments: 1. Reading & Writing Assessments for those being considered for ELA subject acceleration: • DRA (third Grade only) • Sample Unit Assessment from the next grade level • Writing Sample • PALS 2. Math for those being considered for Math subject acceleration: ● Everyday Math Placement Assessment ● Open Up Resources Math Unit Assessment ● KTEA for Math ● Woodcock-Johnson IV Achievement Standard 3. Cognitive Assessment for both ELA or math subject acceleration: WASI or KBIT-2 4. SEL Assessment for both ELA and math subject acceleration: BESS	2. If the student achieve the target CogAT score, then the following combination of scores are needed for the other assessments: a. The combination of multiple data sources for each academic subject area (2 or more) that demonstrate academic functioning at least 1.5 years above current grade level and/or above 98th percentile. b. Social-emotional and/or executive functioning assessment indicates results reflective of readiness for grade level or subject advancement. For example, the child shows that they have the organizational skills, planning skills, and adaptive skills to be accelerated. c. Cognitive abilities scores above 98th percentile or 130 scaled score
Hunter Woods School District	For all four types of subject acceleration, the assessments given to all students in the district are: 1. CogAT in second and fourth grade 2. MAP–taken 3 times a year. Scores are taken from MAP administration in third and fifth grade.	1. The CogAT score and 2 MAP scores are converted to a Z-Score. The Z-score must be 3 standard deviations above the local norm. *Alternate path: written letter by parent or guardian to building principal for reconsideration if not obtain the requisite Z-score. Decision rests with principal.

As with the early entrance procedures, the area of assessments between the three school districts shows the starkest differences in the acceleration procedures. The only assessment two of the school districts share in common is the universal screener for achievement: MAP. For Riverbend School District, a child needs to take between five to nine assessments during the 6-week evaluation period to be considered subject acceleration. Even though the districts complied with the Accelerated Placement Act's requirement of having "an assessment process that includes multiple valid, reliable indicators," they mixed into the assessment process intangible measures to make the subject acceleration decision making process vaguer and more subjective. For example, regardless of the scores a student achieves in Georgetown School District, the Acceleration Evaluation Committee can still deny subject acceleration if they feel that the student does not have the social emotional maturity, academic motivation, and persistence needed for acceleration. Furthermore, the Acceleration Evaluation Committee can deny subject acceleration if they feel that a student was pressured by a parent or guardian to seek out acceleration. At Riverbend School District, the pre-interviews at the building and district levels are meant to dissuade a family from seeking subject acceleration. At Hunter Woods School District, the district established an alternative acceleration procedure that gave one building principal the power to decide the course of a student's academic future with subject acceleration. Furthermore, the district's procedures start with a disclaimer clause that states: "The District reserves the right to make all student placement decisions, including the reversal of prior decisions and to determine the weight given to any individual factor favoring or disfavoring accelerated placement of a particular student."

Assessments are an integral part of education. They provide data to help make informed decisions about the academic progress and placement of a child. This is one of the reasons the

requirement of multiple assessments was placed in the Accelerated Placement Act. The three aforementioned school districts all complied with the law by incorporating multiple assessments in their acceleration procedures. However, although all three school districts are all using different assessments, the one thing that ties the three school districts together is that they embedded non-assessment measures as part of the decision making process. Pre-interviews, readiness factors, and disclaimer clauses are meant to invalidate the various assessment measures that would provide multiple valid and reliable quantitative data points. There needs to be rules and regulations from ISBE clarifying if such non-assessment measures can be used as part of the decision making process.

Differences in Appeals and Placement. All three school districts highlighted in this section have stated in their written procedures that they will notify families about the acceleration evaluation committee's decision. The difference arises as to what happens after the decision is rendered. If the decision from the Acceleration Evaluation Committee is to deny subject acceleration, all three school districts have a different approach as to what happens next. For example, at Georgetown School District, a family has the right within 30 days after receipt of the denial letter to appeal the committee's decision to the Superintendent. Whatever the Superintendent decides at that point, their decision is final. At Riverbend School District, there is no formal appeal process written in the procedures. The family can informally appeal to the Superintendent and/or the school board. For Hunter Woods School District, there is no appeal process. The committee's decision is final.

If the committee grants the acceleration request, only Riverbend School District gives families one week to accept the decision. If a decision by the family is not made in one week, the committee's decision is rescinded. All three school districts create a written plan to support

the accelerated child. However, only Georgetown School District has a probationary period of 4–6 weeks at the start of a child's acceleration to monitor their transition and progress. If the acceleration is not working, the child can go back to their original placement without penalty. For Riverbend and Hunter Woods School Districts, there is no probationary or transition period. Upon acceptance of the committee's decision to accelerate, the child is permanently accelerated. If the child is floundering in their accelerated placement, they cannot go back to their original grade level. They will need to stick it out in their new higher placement.

Conclusion to Districts Comparison of Subject Acceleration Procedures

Georgetown School District, Riverbend School District, and Hunter Woods School District all offer their students some form of subject acceleration. However, how to qualify a student for subject acceleration varies drastically between all three school districts. Using the Accelerated Placement Act as a guideline, the school district leaders wrote acceleration procedures which they believed complied with the law. However, the acceleration procedures were really written to reinforce and to codify their bias against subject acceleration. For example, Georgetown School District and Riverbend School District state in their acceleration procedures that a parent or guardian are involved as members of the evaluation team. However, when one examines how a parent or guardian are involved, their involvement is extremely limited in scope. They participate in the beginning of the acceleration process to give consent to testing and at the end to accept the decision. Hunter Woods School District purposely does not have the parent or guardian as part of the decision making process in violation of the Accelerated Placement Act.

Riverbend and Hunter Wood School Districts wrote subject acceleration procedures that just identify students to become part of their existing gifted/enrichment programs. The Illinois

General Assembly did state that they wanted each school district to create their own acceleration policy and procedures. However, they did not foresee how the differences in acceleration procedures creates inequalities in the suburbs of Chicago for acceleration attainment.

Comparative Results to Districts' Whole Grade Acceleration Procedures

Georgetown School District, Riverbend School District, and Hunter Woods School District offer whole grade acceleration. However, similar to early entrance and subject acceleration, the procedures of how one applies to be considered for whole grade acceleration are different depending on the school district one attends school.

Differences in Whole Grade Acceleration Procedures

Georgetown School District uses the same timeline, referrers, procedures, assessments, placement process, appeals process, and acceleration evaluation team members for whole grade acceleration as they do for subject acceleration. Riverbend School District uses the same timeline, referrers, procedures, placement process, appeals process, and acceleration evaluation team members for whole grade acceleration as they do for subject acceleration. The only difference between the two forms of acceleration is in the assessments. If a student is being considered for whole grade acceleration, they must take all the acceleration screening assessments that were chosen for the kindergarten–second grade procedures and those that were chosen for the grades 3–8 procedures. Therefore, a student will be taking 11 assessments if they are seeking to skip a grade in kindergarten–second grade. If the student is seeking to skip a grade in grades 3–8, they will need to take 10 assessments plus submit a writing sample for grades 3–8. All of this is done with the district's 6-week acceleration process timeline.

Hunter Woods School District is the only school district that created a different set of procedures for whole grade acceleration. Unlike Georgetown School District and Riverbend

School District, Hunter Woods School District placed a residency requirement on any student seeking whole grade acceleration. They need to be a student for a continuous 16 weeks or half a school year prior to seeking whole grade acceleration. Residency requirements are an additional gatekeeping measure that are not mentioned as part of the mandatory or optional requirements in the Accelerated Placement Act.

Hunter Woods School District also requires a pre-interview with the building principal and the affected family prior to the acceleration process moving forward. It is similar to the pre-interview that Riverwoods School District does on at the building level. The difference between the pre-interviews is that at Riverwoods School District, the pre-interview includes the current teacher of the affected student because the purpose of the meeting is to brainstorm differentiation strategies to use in the current classroom setting. Hunter Woods School District uses the pre-interview meeting with the principal as a gatekeeping measure for the affected family to prove to one administrator that their child is worthy of going through the acceleration evaluation process. In other words, the decision making power of being able to pursue whole grade acceleration is left in the hands of one person: the affected building principal. This is in direct contradiction to the Acceleration Placement Act's requirement of a fair and equitable decision making process that includes multiple people. If the affected building at Hunter Woods School District grants a family's request to be allowed to move forward in the acceleration evaluation process, there is only one assessment the child takes: the Iowa Acceleration Scale. Again, this is in direct violation of the law which requires multiple, valid assessment measures to be used.

There is another critical difference in Hunter Woods School District's whole grade acceleration procedure from Georgetown School District and Riverwoods School District that needs to be noted here. In Hunter Woods School District, when a family files a written request

for their child to be considered for whole grade acceleration, the district must provide the family with documentation showing all the different ways that the current teacher and prior teachers differentiated the curriculum to meet the needs of the affected child. This is a unique, transparent procedure that gives families concrete evidence of the steps Hunter Woods School District did or did not do to meet the needs of the student. It is also evidence a family can use to argue for an evaluation for whole grade acceleration if the different differentiation methods did not work to enrich or to challenge the child at their instructional level in the past.

Conclusion to Districts Comparison of Whole Grade Acceleration Procedures

The three exemplar school districts used as a comparison for acceleration procedures shows how different their whole grade acceleration procedures are from one another. Again, though the Illinois General Assembly pushed for the development of acceleration procedures to be a local control issue, it actually creates an inequity for Illinois public school children. Depending upon where a child may reside, their path to seek whole grade acceleration may be filled with gatekeeping measures such as pre-interviews and residency requirements. The only solution to this issue is to have ISBE provide rules and regulations to help school district administrators understand what they are supposed to have in their acceleration procedures to help comply with the letter of the law as well as the spirit of the law.

Conclusion of Chapter 5: Sensemaking

The Illinois General Assembly envisioned each school district would create their own acceleration policy and procedures using the law as a guideline. With the passage of the Accelerated Placement Act, school districts across Illinois have created or are in the process creating acceleration policy and procedures. As shown with the three exemplar school districts of Georgetown School District, Riverwoods School District, and Hunter Woods School District,

the acceleration procedures developed by each school district are vastly different from each other. The difference in procedures is directly traced back to the district administrators' sensemaking on their interpretation and understanding of acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act. Furthermore, the sensemaking reflects the feelings and biases the central office administrators hold toward the concept of acceleration. Legislation in this case did not erase the biases that the candidates interviewed for this study hold toward accelerating students. With lack of understanding and a premeditated bias against acceleration, the main theme that cuts across the Illinois school leaders' sensemaking is that they are gatekeepers for the district toward any parent or staff member seeking acceleration for their child or student. The fact that school leaders have become gatekeepers to restricting the access to acceleration in a school district is contrary to the purpose of the Accelerated Placement Act as envisioned by the Illinois General Assembly, Ms. Welch, and Dr. Calvert.

Lastly, it is important to address here where acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act sits as a priority of the school district leaders interviewed for this study. Acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act are at the bottom of the priority list for most of the candidates in this study. Given that the interviews were conducted over the summer of 2020, the main priority consuming the candidates was how their school districts were going to reopen in the fall of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Questions the school leaders were grappling with were if they going to be in-person, remote, or a mix of the two environments. They also wondered if schools could even open safely during a pandemic given they were shut down in March of 2020. For the exemplar school districts, Ms. Paulson, Dr. Banks, and Dr. Grant all stated that this is not the time to be looking at acceleration given their district priorities focusing on re-shifting curriculum, instruction, and assessment in light of COVID-19. As stated by Dr. Grant,

> I feel terrible because it's not that I don't understand that kids need to be challenged but we're going to hobble through this one (acceleration). This is not going to be easy. I am worried about if people understand how little time we have to prepare for learning this Fall and make it better than last spring.

With the curricular focus on the learning environment in a time of pandemic, academic interventions for higher ability students are taking a back seat in order to meet the needs of all students in a pandemic.

Chapter 6

Findings on Sensegiving of the Accelerated Placement Act

As central office administrators in charge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment for an entire school district, the candidates interviewed for this study are no strangers to making sense of new laws that affect education at the local level. However, making sense of any new educational law is just one piece of the equation. The other piece is giving sense on the new law to district stakeholders. With giving sense, school districts leaders often share their understanding of a new educational law with all the stakeholders connected to the school district. The purpose in giving sense is twofold. The first purpose is that the school administrators set the baseline understanding of the law for all stakeholders. The second purpose is that the school administrators set the direction of any course of action needed to comply with the law. In this study, all the candidates gave sense on the Accelerated Placement Act to their main internal and external stakeholder groups. The internal stakeholder groups are the school board; fellow district administrators and teachers; and parents and students. The external stakeholder groups are the community at large. How the central office administrators in this study gave sense set the tone of understanding the Accelerated Placement Act as well as set the course of action in terms of acceleration procedures that the districts currently follow.

Giving Sense to the School Board

The school board in any school district is a powerful stakeholder. The elected members of the school board represent the community and speak on behalf of the community. For central office administrators, part of their job responsibility entails keeping the school board abreast of educational laws that affect curriculum, instruction, and assessment. For the school leaders interviewed for this study, most of them had done one presentation to the school board in regard

to the legalities of the Accelerated Placement Act. Furthermore, the school administrators gave sense to their school board on how the law affects the district and what they did to comply with the mandates in the law. For example, Ms. Smith of Ashton School conducted a board presentation on the Accelerated Placement Act. After the presentation, the school board expressed to Ms. Smith that their greatest concern was the effect of the law on the community in terms of an increased number of acceleration requests the district would face. They feared that the Accelerated Placement Act removed the de facto controls the district had in place to deal with acceleration requests in the past, especially early entrance into kindergarten. In other words, the Ashton school board viewed the new law as removing any gatekeeping measure the district had to restrict acceleration. As a result, the school board did not want the knowledge of the new law actively distributed to the community at large. Ms. Smith assured the school board that the new acceleration procedures she and her acceleration committee wrote for the district made sure that only the uniquely qualified students will be accelerated. According to Ms. Smith,

> They (the school board) were concerned about the number of kids that would want to come in as early entrance and that we would be opening the floodgates once word got out in the community that we had this law. Everyone and their brother would want their kid to start kindergarten early. . . . because they (parents) hear from others in the community, "I heard that I can get my kids tested to get into kindergarten now." Some of the parents want their child tested and they know they are not qualified for acceleration!

Ms. Paulson at Georgetown School District had a similar reaction from her school board. When Ms. Paulson conducted her presentation to her school board on the Accelerated Placement Act, they shared the same concerns as the Ashton school board about the possibility of opening floodgates to the barrage of acceleration requests, particularly for early entrance into kindergarten. They wanted to make sure that the procedures that Ms. Paulson wrote instilled gatekeeping measures to manage and, possibly, to deter a mass application of referrals for

acceleration. Also, Ms. Paulson stated that the school board reacted with a bit of fatigue knowing that it is another mandate the district needed a policy on. According to Ms. Paulson,

> Their (school board) first reaction was, "Here is another thing from ISBE that we'll need to get a policy in place for." Then, I got, "We can't just allow any kid to come in." I was questioned on what I was doing to stop this. I reassured them that this is not what we're doing. I explained that they (interested children) would have to meet all these criteria and they would have to score it a certain way. I think they were fine when I presented it (the law) with the procedures and policy we put in place. They were fine with it in the end.

Dr. Young at Suttondale School District was forced to present to her school board earlier than she had planned. There were a group of parents pushing for the presentation to the board on the Accelerated Placement Act. These parents learned of the law ahead of Dr. Young and they wanted to make sure that the district put procedures in place right away so they could refer their children for early entrance into kindergarten since the district only has a half-day preschool program. When Dr. Young presented to her school board on the mandates of the Accelerated Placement Act and the procedures that the district wrote to comply with the law, the school board had no questions as to the law or the acceleration procedures. According to Dr. Young,

> I had the group of [preschool] parents pushing me to tell the board about the law. I wrote those [acceleration] procedures with my team and, then, I had to present it to the Board. Basically, I flat out told them this is the new law that took effect; here is how we are responding to it; here is the procedures that we've written and put in place; here is how we are going to screen and assess students for accelerated placement. I virtually had no questions on it.

Ms. Nakoma at Limestone School District presented to a subset of her school board. Ms. Nakoma presented the new law to the school board's policy committee. She made the policy committee aware of the legal nuances of the Accelerated Placement Act. She also informed the policy committee that the district's Literacy Team Committee was working on writing the district's procedures for acceleration. As stated by Ms. Nakoma,

> We did have a presentation to the policy committee explaining what the act entailed and what the district's next steps were. That was the only Board interaction that we have had

> so far with this. So, the Board was left with we are working on procedures and implementing the policy.

It is important to note here that the school board member in charge of the policy committee gave Ms. Nakoma and her fellow administrators one year to have the acceleration procedures completed and put in place at the district. As of the time of Ms. Nakoma's interview for this study, the district adopted the PRESS policy on acceleration but was still working on writing acceleration procedures. Ms. Nakoma's time and attention has been diverted to figuring out how the district is going to implement remote learning for the fall of 2020 with the COVID-19 restrictions from ISBE and the Illinois Department of Public Health. According to Ms. Nakoma,

> The Board member that chairs the Policy Committee, she in fact brought this up and she said one of the things that she still wanted completed was those procedures to support our acceleration policy. She is not letting this go. She was very clear, and she was very firm with her words that she gave the Special Ed Director, me, and the Superintendent. We have one year to do this. She obviously knew that this was the Special Ed Director's first year, and it may not have been a priority with her adjusting to the demands of the new job. She made it very clear that she wants this to be a priority next year (2020–2021) and she wants those procedures established. I am thinking at the same time, "Wow, that this is a fine time to throw that layer in the mix, with all of this COVID stuff."

Dr. Canfield from Krusemark School District presented to her school board on the Accelerated Placement Act. The goal in her presentation was to make sure that the school board understood how the district was going to comply with the law as well as still meet the academic needs of all learners in the district. According to Dr. Canfield,

> They (the school board) were fine with it. There wasn't any debate about it. They understood that it was the law and that we were required to do it. It was explained to them what we are doing and that we would continue to address parent and student concerns to the best of our ability. We would still work with families to ensure that we were providing the education that their child is entitled to.

Dr. Saylor from Windsor School District also found no resistance to the Accelerated Placement Act from her school board. However, Dr. Saylor did not present to the school board all the details about the procedures and mandates in the law. Instead, she provided a brief but

general overview of the Accelerated Placement Act and what is in the PRESS acceleration policy that the board was preparing to adopt. For her, she has what she termed as a "seasoned board." They do not want to know all the details about the acceleration law and its accompanying procedures. They just want to make sure that Dr. Saylor and the district are staying on top of educational mandates. According to Dr. Saylor,

> What we communicated to the School Board was the PRESS policy and basics of the law - what was changed and why it was changed. We did not share procedures with them because . . . they are not interested in that. But, we did tell them that if they wanted to take a look at them they would be on the district webpage and if questions come up they can ask us. We have a very, very seasoned School Board and they tend to trust us on things like that. No one has ever come to any School Board member yet with an accelerated issue or concern. They are pretty hands-off on those things. I did communicate to the Board at that board meeting we are working on the procedures.

Dr. Saylor's experience in presenting the Accelerated Placement Act to the school board is similar to what Dr. Sonenberg, Dr. Banks, Dr. Bakersfield, and Dr. Morgana experienced. Their school boards trust their sensegiving on the Accelerated Placement Act as well as the course of action they have taken to comply with the law. Only three school district leaders in this study did not present to their school boards on the Accelerated Placement Act. Because Dr. Grant, Dr. LeBaron, and Ms. Drost are relatively new in their positions as of the last couple years, they are working under the assumption that since their predecessors who wrote the acceleration procedures must have also presented it to the school board. All three are unsure if the presentation on the Accelerated Placement Act happened but they themselves have not presented to the school board on the Accelerated Placement Act. Furthermore, they have not checked with their superintendents or look back at prior board minutes to see if such as a presentation has been done. The lack of initiative in determining if the school board is aware of the Accelerated Placement Act and the district's acceleration procedures is due to the competing priorities the school district leaders in this study face on a daily basis. In the current educational

environment of trying to determine how to provide instruction to all students in one's district during a pandemic has taken precedent in the minds of all curriculum leaders interviewed for this study.

Table 9

Sensegiving on Acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act by the Study's Participants to Their Respective School Boards

Name & position	District	Did the district's curriculum leader give sense on the Accelerated Placement Act and district's acceleration procedures to their respective school boards?	If yes, how was the giving sense done with the school board?	If yes, how many times was sense giving done with the school board?
1. Dr. Cathy Bakersfield - Director of Curriculum	Walnut Creek School District	Yes	Board Presentation at a School Board Meeting	1x
2. Ms. Diana Nakoma Nichols - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Limestone School District	Yes but only to the school board's policy committee.	Formal Presentation to the school board's policy committee.	1x
3. Dr. Liz Canfield - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Krusemark School District	Yes	Board Presentation at a School Board Meeting	1x
4. Ms. Kylie Smith - Director of Curriculum	Ashton School district	Yes	Board Presentation at a School Board Meeting	1x

Table 9 (cont.)

Name & position	District	Did the district's curriculum leader give sense on the Accelerated Placement Act and district's acceleration procedures to their respective school boards?	If yes, how was the giving sense done with the school board?	If yes, how many times was sense giving done with the school board?
5. Ms. Katrin Paulson - Director of Curriculum	Georgetown School District	Yes	Board Presentation at a School Board Meeting	1x
6. Dr. Doug Sonenberg - Director of Curriculum	Lawndale School District	Yes	Board Presentation at a School Board Meeting	1x
7. Ms. Cathy Drost - Director of Curriculum	Heritage Hills School District	No	n/a	n/a
8. Dr. Violet Young - Director of Curriculum	Suttondale School District	Yes	Board Presentation at a School Board Meeting	1x
9. Dr. Maggie Saylor - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Windsor School District	Yes	Board Presentation at a School Board Meeting	1x
10. Dr. Michelle Grant - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Hunter Woods School District	No	n/a	n/a

Table 9 (cont.)

Name & position	District	Did the district's curriculum leader give sense on the Accelerated Placement Act and district's acceleration procedures to their respective school boards?	If yes, how was the giving sense done with the school board?	If yes, how many times was sense giving done with the school board?
11. Dr. Barb Morgana - Director of Curriculum	Prestwick School District	Yes	Told the information to the Superintendent who conveyed the information at a board meeting in his superintendent report.	1x
12. Dr. Sue Banks - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Riverbend School District	Yes	n/a	n/a
13. Dr. Anne LeBaron - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Meadows School District	No	n/a	n/a

In conclusion, the majority of the candidates for this study gave sense to their school board about the Accelerated Placement Act through one school board presentation. A few of the school boards reacted negatively to the passage of the new law for fear it would cause an avalanche of acceleration requests, especially for early entrance to kindergarten. All of the school boards that received a presentation were informed of the basic mandates of the law and what the district was doing to comply with the Accelerated Placement Act. Only Ms. Nakoma was faced with a school board member demanding that the district write acceleration procedures

to comply with the law. In the end, most of the school boards in this study heard how the school district leaders made sense of the law by still trying to keep their pre-law gatekeeping measures in place. The only difference is now those pre-law gatekeeping measures have been codified into the district's current acceleration procedures. This sensegiving of keeping access to acceleration still restrictive for families is the current course of action for the districts in this study.

Giving Sense to Fellow District Administrators and Teachers

Similar to giving sense to the school board, most of the school leaders in this study told their fellow administrators and teachers about the law just once. Of the school leaders that gave sense on the law to their administrative colleagues, they stated that the other administrators heard about the Accelerated Placement Act independently of the candidates in this study telling them. A few districts had their fellow administrative colleagues asked about how the law would affect them at the building level. It is important to note that several of the school districts had principals serve as active participants in creating the district's acceleration procedures. Furthermore, some of the school districts in this study charged the building principals with the primary role in informing their staff the district's acceleration policy and procedures.

When giving sense to teachers, most of the school administrators in this study shared the information about the law in the following ways: (a) the information was shared at a curriculum meeting; (b) the information conveyed to building principals in the hopes that they would share the pertinent information with their staff; or (c) the information was given to a select group of teachers during a curriculum committee meeting for them to go back and share the information with other teachers. The information was only shared once unless the teachers were on the committee that either developed the acceleration procedures or are on the district's acceleration evaluation committee. If the teachers wanted to learn more information about the district's

acceleration policy and procedures, the curriculum leaders in this study directed the teachers to find the information on the district's website.

Ms. Kylie Smith at Ashton School District gave sense on the Accelerated Placement Act at one of her monthly districtwide curriculum meetings to administrators and teachers. On the whole, the administrators and teachers were not necessarily excited about having a law mandating acceleration. According to Ms. Smith,

> I have curriculum meetings once a month at each building with all the certified staff and building admin so that's how I shared it all with them at the meeting. I shared a couple of slides–here's the law, here's what we have, here are the requirements. They accepted it. I wouldn't say embraced it.

On the positive side, Ms. Smith noted that the administrators and the teachers were happy that there were acceleration procedures in place for the district to utilize as needed. As stated by Ms. Smith (2020),

> I think they found it was good to have a clear process to make those (acceleration) decisions because there are always going to be parents that want to push their child ahead. Now, it is spelled out pretty clearly what you need to do to qualify. That is the positive about it.

However, the general feeling among the teaching staff at Ashton School District is that the Accelerated Placement Act is pushing students too quickly through the curriculum to their possible detriment. According to Ms. Smith, "They (the teachers) were like 'Seriously? Why do we push kids?' There was a little negativity. There was skepticism about why we would push kids so fast and what they would miss by being pushed ahead."

The administrators at Ashton School District were concerned that the Accelerated Placement Act is asking school districts to treat acceleration similar to special education. In other words, the administrators felt that the acceleration mandates in the law are echoing the

mandates in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). They fear that this will create an increase in their current workload. According to Ms. Smith,

> I think there was a lot of concern about how the law was written and how this may become an IEP (individualized education plan) for students at the upper end of the spectrum. Individual plans for every student. Work intensive. That was their concern.

Ms. Paulson at Georgetown School District gave sense to fellow administrators and teachers on the Acceleration Placement Act at a districtwide curriculum council meeting. According to Ms. Paulson,

> I updated them (the administrators and the teachers) with any information that I had on the Accelerated Placement Act. We had to share the information at one of our Council meetings. We went through the whole thing and this is what the paperwork looked like, and here is the process if you wanted to refer someone.

After Ms. Paulson presented the facts on the Accelerated Placement Act, the general feeling among the district employees was twofold. The first feeling was that this is just another law from ISBE that everyone has to follow. The second feeling was a fear that there were going to be a rush of acceleration requests from parents for early entrance into kindergarten. In other words, the administrators and the teachers were afraid that the Accelerated Placement Act is opening the gatekeeping measures that the district has informally in place for years to stifle any acceleration request for a child to start kindergarten early. As stated by Ms. Paulson, "I think everyone was on pins and needles a little bit in the beginning just thinking is this going to open up the floodgates for these parents who want their kindergarteners in early but that didn't happen." Ms. Paulson assured the district staff that the newly written acceleration procedures would make sure that only students who needed acceleration as an academic intervention to further their learning would qualify for early entrance. This reassurance seemed to pacify the staff at Ashton School District. According to Ms. Paulson,

> I think they took it okay probably because of how I presented it to them. I think they took it fine knowing that this was just another thing that the state was requiring us to do. Again, I didn't say that we have to open up another section of kindergarten because we're going to have all these kids to come in. I said we put formal guidelines into place now because of the law. We always had an early entrance into first grade policy in our district. Even that, in my eight years here, maybe twice did we even have anyone that wanted to skip kindergarten to go into first grade. I think it was probably just the way I explained it. I said, "Here is what it is. Here the procedure we will follow. Beyond that, I don't really know how this is going to turn out." I think they handled it okay. Like I said, as far as acceleration in subject and grade, we already did some of that, so it wasn't totally new. The new part was anyone could refer, and we had to have this formal process to acceleration. Outside of that, I think they took it fine.

Once the administrators and teachers heard that the gatekeeping measures are still in place but now in formal, written procedures, the district staff at Georgetown School District were content knowing that there was going to be very little change to how acceleration impacted the school district.

Dr. Canfield at Krusemark School District gave sense on the Accelerated Placement Act separately to the administrators and teachers. Dr. Canfield informed her fellow administrators at a leadership meeting. The administrators main concern was how the new law will impact the district and change what they currently do with acceleration requests. According to Dr. Canfield,

> I think they were okay. "What does it mean?" I think that was their main concern. "We have to do this but what does it mean compared to what we are already doing? How does this look different? What does this mean for the district?" That is where we started those conversations about acceleration.

For the teachers, they were more secure in the sensegiving that Dr. Canfield provided on the Accelerated Placement Act at a districtwide curriculum meeting. Because the teachers at Krusemark School District routinely use differentiation in their instruction to address all students' academic needs, they just wanted to know how the district's acceleration procedures impact what they do. As stated by Dr. Canfield,

> It really wasn't much of a concern because I feel like the staff had a lot of confidence in terms of differentiation for the most part. So, again, I think they were thinking "What does this mean? How is the different for me?"

What Dr. Canfield did through her sensegiving was reassure administrators and teachers that the new acceleration procedures would not drastically impact how the district addresses every child's academic needs through differentiation.

Dr. Bakersfield at Walnut Creek School District gave sense on the Accelerated Placement Act at two separate curriculum meetings: one meeting was with fellow administrators and the other meeting was with the district's teacher leaders. The teacher leaders are chosen by their team members to be their representative at district level curriculum meetings. The teacher leaders bring back all the curriculum related information from the meetings to their grade levels and share the information with their colleagues. According to Dr. Bakersfield,

> We have what are called Team Leaders. It is basically one teacher from every grade level from every school. I meet with them every other month during a typical school year. . . . [T]heir responsibility is to be the liaison between teachers in the team and administration.

When Dr. Bakersfield gave sense on the Accelerated Placement Act to her fellow administrators and the teacher leaders, she assured them that the procedures they use yearly to identify all the students in the district for the gifted program covers them for acceleration. In other words, Dr. Bakersfield did not create separate procedures to comply with the Accelerated Placement Act. As stated by Dr. Bakersfield,

> We use the same procedures for identifying gifted students as we do for acceleration because it is basically the same thing. So, I told the groups (administrators and teacher leaders) that for acceleration, we are doing what we do for gifted. We look at three measures of data: an achievement score, cognitive score, and teacher recommendation. It is basically a matrix where each of those things has a different weight assigned to it. Depending on the score that you got on the IAR as the achievement score, you would receive a certain amount of points for that. Depending on your CogAT score for the cognitive, you would receive a certain amount of points for that. And we use the Teacher Rating Scale, those are 33 statements that the teacher answers "Always," "Sometimes" or

> "Never" in the recommendation. Depending on how the child did on that, there is a certain amount of points you could get for that. Basically, if you are talking about all of the fifth graders at one of our schools, they are all dropped into this matrix. They have a certain amount of points they have earned on those three things (IAR, CogAT, teacher recommendation). Then, those students are ranked from the most points to the least. Then, we identify, if you will, the top 5% of that group. Those kids are placed in the same accelerated or gifted classroom.

For Dr. Bakersfield, her goal was for the administrators and teacher leaders to really understand the process of how acceleration/gifted identification works because they would be the first to respond to any question from a parent or guardian. According to Dr. Bakersfield,

> I can't have a variety of understandings in our principals and teacher leaders. They all need to make sure that they understand the (acceleration) process because they would be the ones to get questions from a parent such as "My child has been identified, what does that mean? How did that happen? What are you going to do? What does the CogAT mean? What is that test all about?" They really need to understand the identification process and how to field questions.

Dr. Bakersfield's sensemaking on the Accelerated Placement Act is that the requirements in the new law are no different than what the district currently does to identify and meet the needs of their gifted students. She, then, gave sense to the district staff that the new law's requirements are being met by the district's current gifted identification procedures. The top 5% of students in each grade level yearly is not only considered gifted but accelerated. Their needs are met in a separate class where differentiated instructional techniques are employed by the educators who teach such classes. As stated by Dr. Bakersfield, "For those kids who are in the top 5% of their class, we use the differentiation strategies that were presented in the Gifted Seminar from IAGC."

With Dr. Bakersfield telling the district staff that the acceleration procedures are really the district's gifted procedures that they have been utilizing for several years, it was not a surprise to hear Dr. Bakersfield say, "It seems that everyone was okay with acceleration. I mean, they had no questions, and they did not see this law as a big deal." By giving sense with a

flawed understanding of acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act, Dr. Bakersfield set the course of action in her district for the administrators and teacher leaders to confuse acceleration procedures with the district's procedures to identify for giftedness.

Ms. Nakoma at Limestone School District only gave sense to the members of the district's Literacy Committee which consists of all the building principals and select teachers who signed up for this committee. The Literacy Committee is currently responsible for writing the district's acceleration procedures. According to Ms. Nakoma,

> The teachers who are on the Literary Team and the principals were presented the (acceleration) policy and the information in a formal fashion. They are working to develop the procedures. But the full body, the staff body, no, they have not been briefed on anything.

Ms. Nakoma is not eager to give sense to the entire teaching staff yet until the acceleration procedures are written. She feels that the Accelerated Placement Act will make more sense once the district's acceleration procedures are in place. As stated by Ms. Nakoma, "I don't want to give a formal presentation to the full staff yet without those procedures. It won't make sense to anyone without those procedures."

Currently, as aforementioned in a prior section, Ms. Nakoma is trying to give sense on the Accelerated Placement Act that creating acceleration procedures is not creating a gifted program. She is trying to steer the committee away from creating a gifted program and calling it acceleration. According to Ms. Nakoma,

> Some people on the committee think we are creating a gifted program. I keep hearing, "We are just going to identify smart kids and put them in one group and call it accelerated." I feel like saying, "Hey teachers—we'll just celebrate your curriculum and we'll put these kids in a special program and we're done. That's it." This is not at all what that law is asking us to do. It is more than gifted. It is for all kids. I got to have them understand this.

For now, Ms. Nakoma is struggling with her sensegiving on the Accelerated Placement Act to the Literacy Committee. As they work on creating the district's procedures, Ms. Nakoma's sensegiving efforts are stopping the committee from confusing gifted programming with acceleration programming. Her goal is that her district's acceleration procedures meet all the mandates in the Accelerated Placement Act.

Dr. Saylor at Windsor School District limited her sensegiving on the Accelerated Placement Act. For the district's administrators, she made the conscious decision to not provide all the details about the mandates of the law upfront. Instead, she decided to constantly keep the administrators updated as to mandates of the law and how the district was complying with the Accelerated Placement Act at multiple administrative meetings. If the principals had questions in between the meeting times, they knew to go to Dr. Saylor so she could answer them. According to Dr. Saylor,

> What I think is really, really important is that you communicate along the way and you get feedback. They (the administrators) didn't see it the first time as a done deal. I sat with them and asked them what they thought was important to know about the law. I did not go through all the details of the law with them at one shot. I spread it out over a couple meetings, so they understood the importance of the law and they made their own sense of it. When they asked questions, I would just explain things to them: "No, we do have to offer Early Kindergarten Entrance."; "We do have control over what some of that looks like, but we do have to offer it (acceleration)."; "We do have to offer grade level acceleration, that is something that we have to do." They had good questions that kept coming up at our admin meetings.

By spacing out the sensegiving over several meetings, Dr. Saylor gave time for her administrative colleagues to process or make sense of the information on the Accelerated Placement Act in their own time frame.

For the teaching staff, Dr. Saylor made the conscious decision to do one brief meeting on the mandates of the Accelerated Placement Act. She read the attitudes of the teaching staff on the new law, and they were viewing it as one more thing added to their plate. To prevent the

negative view of the Accelerated Placement Act from continuing, Dr. Saylor kept her remarks about the law short and told teachers that she would give more details to those educators who were facing an acceleration referral, or they were wanting to do an acceleration referral themselves. According to Dr. Saylor,

> This became one of those ISBE mandates that looked like it was one more thing they needed to do. One more form they had to fill out. Very honestly, we did a very quick overview and basically said, "We'll go over this in more detail if we get that request from you." It really won't have meaning to them until there is a request on a student that they have. I did not go through anything with them in detail, it was more we really need you to understand that this is in place and that this is required. We are going to walk you through every step of the way should a request come your way.

Dr. Saylor gave sense on the Accelerated Placement Act very differently to the district's administrators versus district's the teaching staff. For the administrators, she delivered information about the new law over several administrative meetings in order to address all the questions that they had. Moreover, she allowed the administrators time between the meetings to make sense of the information they heard on the Accelerated Placement Act so they, in turn, could give sense on it to other district stakeholders such as parents. The teachers, however, had a vastly different treatment in terms of sensegiving. To prevent teachers from rejecting the mandates of the law as additional and unnecessary work, Dr. Saylor truncated her sensegiving to the highlights of the Accelerated Placement Act. She knew that the mandates of the law and the district's acceleration procedures would not make sense to the teachers until they needed to deal with an acceleration request firsthand. At that point, Dr. Saylor would give more detailed sensegiving on the law and procedures to help the teachers in such a situation make sense of the acceleration process.

Dr. Morgana at Prestwick School District gave sense on the Accelerated Placement Act only to the district's administrators. Dr. Morgana chose to give sense in a top down approach

with the directive that the building principals would communicate the information about the Accelerated Placement Act to their respective teaching staffs through their building newsletters. According to Dr. Morgana, "The principals have newsletters that they send out to staff each week. Each building has it set up a little bit differently, but there is a portion of the newsletter that might include what is going on at the Board meeting or what is new in the district. There was a little blurb in there about the new law along with a link to the acceleration procedures so teachers could see those details."

The sensegiving that Dr. Morgana provided to the administrators is that the acceleration procedures are a continuation of the district's MTSS (multi-tiered systems of support) process. Instead of following an RTI (Response to Intervention) model of a triangle where the 5% at the top of the triangle are identified as students who mastered the curriculum, the MTSS model is the shape of a diamond. In this case, the top 15% - 20% of the diamond are students who may need enrichment services such as acceleration to further their learning. The identification of such students occurs during the weekly team meetings held by the teachers. As stated by Dr. Morgana,

> Instead of writing separate acceleration protocols, we embedded the acceleration procedures as part of our district MTSS programming. Our teachers meet every week as a grade level as problem-solving teams. They can bring up students that they have concerns or questions about. This wouldn't just be students that need remediation or being brought up to grade level, but also students that are working beyond the standards. We've worked hard in our district to promote and help people understand that MTSS is not a triangle, it is a diamond shape. We have ways for teachers to bring up students that need something different. The teachers meet each week as a team to identify students who need remediation as well as enrichment.

For Dr. Morgana, she made sense of the mandates in the Accelerated Placement Act by determining how it can fit with the district's current MTSS process. When she gave sense on her interpretation on acceleration, the principals easily understood her reasoning because it is

extending what the district already does to meet the needs of students. Furthermore, Dr. Morgana only gave sense to her fellow administrators with the hopes of empowering them to make sense of the new law so they could turn around and give sense to their staff. As stated by Dr. Morgana, "The best way to understand this law is for the principals to first get it. When they do, they can tell their staff and make sure it is happening because they see the teachers every day. I don't." To date, Dr. Morgana's sensegiving has helped teachers refer students for whole grade acceleration. As it stands, four students since 2018 have been whole grade accelerated at Prestwick School District.

Dr. Young at Suttondale School District has only given sense on the school board policy on the Acceleration Placement Act to the district's principals. She is not comfortable yet with the acceleration procedures that she has developed to give sense to the entire district staff. She still feels that she is making sense of the law and, as a result, knows that she will have to change the procedures as her understanding increases. As stated by Dr. Young,

> I've met with the principals only. They know that the policy is in place and what it says. I know that we are still in the development phase of our procedures, so I did not feel comfortable sharing that yet. What this could potentially look like in the future as I learn more about the law, I can't really say whether I did a good job or not of what we currently have. It's so new and there are so many moving parts, and we are trying to grapple with what this could potentially look like for us. We want to move in the right direction with acceleration for our kids.

For Dr. Young, she stated that her priority right now is establishing a rigorous and culturally relevant curriculum for all students in the district. To her, if she can fix the Tier 1 general education curriculum to be challenging and culturally relevant, then providing acceleration opportunities for students will flow naturally as a differentiation method. As stated by Dr. Young, "The number one thing I am doing is putting in place culturally relevant curricula

and making sure that I have rigorous curricula in place to meet the needs of all. I am starting there, and I think that will indirectly give kids access to potentially being accelerated."

Table 10

Sensegiving on Acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act by the Study's Participants to Fellow Administrators and Teachers

Name & position	District	Did the district's curriculum leader give sense on the Accelerated Placement Act and district's acceleration procedures to fellow administrators and teachers in their school district?	If yes, how was the giving sense done with fellow administrators and teachers?	If yes, how many times was sense giving done with fellow administrators and teachers?
1. Dr. Cathy Bakersfield - Director of Curriculum	Walnut Creek School District	Yes	District Level Curriculum Meeting	1x
2. Ms. Diana Nakoma Nichols - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Limestone School District	Yes	To all principals and a select group of teachers on the district's Literacy Committee	1x
3. Dr. Liz Canfield - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Krusemark School District	Yes	The administrators received the information at leadership meeting and the teachers received the information at a districtwide curriculum meeting.	1x

Table 10 (cont.)

Name & position	District	Did the district's curriculum leader give sense on the Accelerated Placement Act and district's acceleration procedures to fellow administrators and teachers in their school district?	If yes, how was the giving sense done with fellow administrators and teachers?	If yes, how many times was sense giving done with fellow administrators and teachers?
4. Ms. Kylie Smith - Director of Curriculum	Ashton School district	Yes	Districtwide Curriculum Meeting	1x
5. Ms. Katrin Paulson - Director of Curriculum	Georgetown School District	Yes	Districtwide Curriculum Meeting	1x
6. Dr. Doug Sonenberg - Director of Curriculum	Lawndale School District	Yes	Districtwide Curriculum Meeting for teachers and administrators meeting for administrators.	1x
7. Ms. Cathy Drost - Director of Curriculum	Heritage Hills School District	No	n/a	n/a
8. Dr. Violet Young - Director of Curriculum	Suttondale School District	Only to fellow administrators and only on the school board policy on acceleration.	Administrator's Meeting	1x

Table 10 (cont.)

Name & position	District	Did the district's curriculum leader give sense on the Accelerated Placement Act and district's acceleration procedures to fellow administrators and teachers in their school district?	If yes, how was the giving sense done with fellow administrators and teachers?	If yes, how many times was sense giving done with fellow administrators and teachers?
9. Dr. Maggie Saylor - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Windsor School District	Yes	For the administrators, the meeting was conveyed at several administrators' meetings. For the teachers, it was told just once at a districtwide curriculum meeting.	1x to teachers and multiple times to administrators
10. Dr. Michelle Grant - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Hunter Woods School District	No	n/a	n/a
11. Dr. Barb Morgana - Director of Curriculum	Prestwick School District	Only to fellow administrators (Administrators directed to convey information to teachers.)	Administrator's Meeting	1x

Table 10 (cont.)

Name & position	District	Did the district's curriculum leader give sense on the Accelerated Placement Act and district's acceleration procedures to fellow administrators and teachers in their school district?	If yes, how was the giving sense done with fellow administrators and teachers?	If yes, how many times was sense giving done with fellow administrators and teachers?
13. Dr. Anne LeBaron - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Meadows School District	No	n/a	n/a

In conclusion, one of the most important stakeholders to give sense to on the Accelerated Placement Act are the administrators and teachers. The administrators and teachers are the ones to implement any acceleration procedures written by the school district leaders interviewed in this study. For the most part, the curriculum leaders made sense by making sure that the edicts in the Acceleration Placement Act did not significantly disrupt the existing educational delivery. Several of the school district leaders in this study tied their sense giving to educational practices the district was already doing such as MTSS. Other school administrators ensured that gatekeeping measures used prior to the law were kept in place after the law passed. Still other school district leaders did not feel comfortable yet giving sense because their own understanding of the law is currently being developed. Whichever way a school district leader chose to give sense to their district, it set the course of action that the district currently follows with acceleration. And, this path the district is following with regard to acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act, it may or may not follow the law.

Giving Sense to Parents and Students

Section 105 ILCS 5/14A-32(1)(b) of the Acceleration Placement Act states that all Illinois public school districts need to develop "procedures for annually informing the community at-large, including parents or guardians, about the accelerated placement program and the methods used for the identification of children eligible for accelerated placement" (2020). As major stakeholders in any school district, parents and students are to be informed yearly about the acceleration procedures and processes their local school district utilizes to comply with the Accelerated Placement Act. Knowing the rights that parents and students have under the new law, the school district leaders interviewed for the study purposely chose to limit alerting parents and students what they are doing to comply with the Accelerated Placement Act. The answer the school leader districts in this study gave on how they gave sense to parents and students on the Accelerated Placement Act and the district's acceleration procedures was routinely that the information is on the website. The participants in this study did not do anything extra to inform parents or students. For example, Dr. Morgana stated that the district's acceleration procedures are "posted on our website but we haven't put anything out in an email or anything like that. I would say we more passively communicated anything on the new law to families." Ms. Smith shared Dr. Morgana's sentiment about passively communicating to parents and students. Ms. Smith stated that she did not want to let parents and students know about the acceleration procedures. Therefore, she did the bare minimum in sensegiving to parents and students by posting any information on the Accelerated Placement Act and the district's acceleration procedures on the district website and presenting the information at a public board meeting. According to Ms. Smith,

> It (information on acceleration) is on our website. It is a link to "Curriculum" and then there is an acceleration document one can view. We did not send out a big blast or

> advertise it, but word got out. We followed the rules that we had to include it and it was at the board meeting and it is on our website and that's what we did. We did not go above and beyond to advertise but word got out.

Dr. Canfield echoed the sensegiving actions of Ms. Smith and Dr. Morgana. She also did not want parents and students to be actively aware of the district's acceleration procedures. Dr. Canfield was concerned that parents would view the acceleration procedures as a way to deal with some kind of district's failure on how to address the needs of the higher ability students. As stated by Dr. Canfield, "We have it (information about acceleration) posted on our website. It is going to sound terrible, but I don't think we advertised it very much with blaring alarms because we didn't want parents to suddenly think we weren't meeting needs of students and causing alarms."

Dr. Saylor has not communicated anything to parents and students yet about the Accelerated Placement Act and the district's acceleration procedures. She does not feel that the teachers are in a position to answer parents' questions about acceleration. Furthermore, Dr. Saylor does not feel that the district's acceleration procedures are refined enough yet to be communicated to parents and students. According to Dr. Saylor,

> I always struggle with going into too much detail with parents [with acceleration] when it puts our teachers into a position where they are not yet able to do that. . . . Right now, it's such a one-off special thing (the Accelerated Placement Act). . . . [W]e haven't done great communication yet because we do need to make sure that we are getting into a better place [with the acceleration procedures]. We are just not in a place to feel comfortable in doing all this yet. . . . We need to work some of the bugs out first before we tell families.

The rest of the school administrators in this study either stated that they gave sense to parents and students by (a) posting the information on the Accelerated Placement Act and the district's acceleration procedures on the district's website or (b) that they have not told parents or students yet about the Accelerated Placement Act or the district's acceleration procedures.

Below is a chart summarizing the sensegiving the school leaders in this study did with the parents and students in their school district:

Table 11

Sensegiving on Acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act by the Study's Participants to Parents and Students

Name & position	District	Did the district's curriculum leader give sense on the Accelerated Placement Act and district's acceleration procedures to parents and students in their school district?	If yes, how was the giving sense done with fellow parents and students?
1. Dr. Cathy Bakersfield - Director of Curriculum	Walnut Creek School District	Yes	Information is posted on the website.
2. Ms. Diana Nakoma Nichols - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Limestone School District	No	n/a
3. Dr. Liz Canfield - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Krusemark School District	Yes	Information is posted on the website.
4. Ms. Kylie Smith - Director of Curriculum	Ashton School district	Yes	Information is posted on the website.
5. Ms. Katrin Paulson - Director of Curriculum	Georgetown School District	Yes	Information is posted on the website.
6. Dr. Doug Sonenberg - Director of Curriculum	Lawndale School District	Yes	Information is posted on the website.

Table 11 (cont.)

Name & position	District	Did the district's curriculum leader give sense on the Accelerated Placement Act and district's acceleration procedures to parents and students in their school district?	If yes, how was the giving sense done with fellow parents and students?
7. Ms. Cathy Drost - Director of Curriculum	Heritage Hills School District	Yes	Information is posted on the website.
8. Dr. Violet Young - Director of Curriculum	Suttondale School District	No	n/a
9. Dr. Maggie Saylor - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Windsor School District	No	n/a
10. Dr. Michelle Grant - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Hunter Woods School District	Yes	Information is posted on the website.
11. Dr. Barb Morgana - Director of Curriculum	Prestwick School District	Yes	Information is posted on the website.
12. Dr. Sue Banks - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Riverbend School District	No	n/a
13. Dr. Anne LeBaron - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Meadows School District	Yes	Information is posted on the website.

The common refrain from the school administrators in this study is that their sense giving to parents and students consists of posting the information on the Accelerated Placement Act and the district's acceleration procedures on the district's website. In other words, the school administrators in this study put forth little to no effort in giving sense on the Accelerated Placement Act and the district's acceleration procedures to parents and students. If families are interested in learning more about the Accelerated Placement Act and/or the district's acceleration procedures, the school leaders made a conscious decision that they were not going to explicitly tell families the information or even where to necessarily find the information they seek. By not actively giving sense to parents and students on the Accelerated Placement Act and the district's acceleration procedures, the school leaders in this study are purposely gatekeeping families from their legal right access acceleration. A few of the school leaders in this study did state that they were gatekeeping parents and students because they did not want to receive a massive amount of acceleration requests from families, especially for early entrance into kindergarten. In the end, the gatekeeping conducted by the school administrators in this study reflects their explicit or implicit bias against acceleration as an academic intervention for any student in their district.

Giving Sense to the Community at Large

The largest stakeholder group in any school district is the community at large. Even though it is the largest stakeholder group, it is also the group most overlooked in terms of a school district's communications plan. All of the school district leaders in this study admitted to not informing the community at large about the Accelerated Placement Act and/or the district's acceleration procedures. Several of the participants in this study stated that anyone interested in learning more about the law or what the district is doing to comply with the law can find the information on the district's website. However, as the district's only external stakeholder in this

study, placing the information on the district's website as the only form of communication is a veiled way to hide the information. When the school leaders in this study made the conscious decision to not share information about the Accelerated Placement Act and the district's acceleration procedures to the community at large, they created a gatekeeping measure to keep out the community from learning about the new rights families have to access acceleration. Furthermore, by causing the community at large to actively have to hunt for the information on the district website, the central office administrators abdicated their responsibilities to give sense to this important stakeholder. Instead, the school district leaders' attitudes against acceleration manifested in making sure that anyone in the community that wants to know about the Accelerated Placement Act and/or the district's acceleration procedures were going to have a challenging time in finding and in learning the information they seek. Below is a chart summarizing the school district leaders sensegiving efforts to the community at large:

Table 12

Sensegiving on Acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act by the Study's Participants to Their Communities at Large

Name & position	District	Did the district's curriculum leader give sense on the Accelerated Placement Act and district's acceleration procedures to the community at large?	Can information on acceleration be found on the district's website?
1. Dr. Cathy Bakersfield - Director of Curriculum	Walnut Creek School District	No	Information is posted on the website.
2. Ms. Diana Nakoma Nichols - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Limestone School District	No	n/a

Table 12 (cont.)

Name & position	District	Did the district's curriculum leader give sense on the Accelerated Placement Act and district's acceleration procedures to the community at large?	Can information on acceleration be found on the district's website?
3. Dr. Liz Canfield - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Krusemark School District	No	Information is posted on the website.
4. Ms. Kylie Smith - Director of Curriculum	Ashton School district	No	Information is posted on the website.
5. Ms. Katrin Paulson - Director of Curriculum	Georgetown School District	No	Information is posted on the website.
6. Dr. Doug Sonenberg - Director of Curriculum	Lawndale School District	No	Information is posted on the website.
7. Ms. Cathy Drost - Director of Curriculum	Heritage Hills School District	No	Information is posted on the website.
8. Dr. Violet Young - Director of Curriculum	Suttondale School District	No	n/a
9. Dr. Maggie Saylor - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Windsor School District	No	n/a
10. Dr. Michelle Grant - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Hunter Woods School District	No	Information is posted on the website.
11. Dr. Barb Morgana - Director of Curriculum	Prestwick School District	No	Information is posted on the website.

Table 12 (cont.)

Name & position	District	Did the district's curriculum leader give sense on the Accelerated Placement Act and district's acceleration procedures to the community at large?	Can information on acceleration be found on the district's website?
12. Dr. Sue Banks - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Riverbend School District	No	n/a
13. Dr. Anne LeBaron - Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning	Meadows School District	No	Information is posted on the website.

Conclusion to Chapter 6: Sensegiving

When an administrator gives sense in a school district, he or she is sharing to stakeholders how they make sense on an educational issue, concept, or law. The goal of giving sense is to convince others to adopt one's understanding as well as follow any course of action as a result of sensemaking. In regard to the school district leaders in this study giving sense on the acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act, the general theme is one of gatekeeping. When giving sense to school boards, the message was that access to acceleration by families would be restricted. When giving sense to administrators and teachers, the message was that the new law and its corresponding procedures were not going to drastically change the way the district addresses instruction with their advanced learners. When giving sense to parents, students, and the community at large, the message was passively communicated through the posting of the information on the Accelerated Placement Act and acceleration on the district's website. The way that the school district leaders in this study gave sense is the opposite of what Ms. Welch stated was the mission of the new law. The mission of the Accelerated Placement Act is to open

access to families seeking acceleration in any Illinois public school. In reality, the school district leaders in this study doubled down on their gatekeeping measures to keep their biases against implementing acceleration in place.

Chapter 7

Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Future Educational Policy Adoption as Well as District Level Implementation

Summary of Findings

The Accelerated Placement Act provides public school districts the legal ability to use acceleration as an academic intervention. It also provides families in Illinois the legal right to access acceleration as an academic intervention. However well-intentioned the Accelerated Placement Act seems in theory, the reality is that policy intentions are not being implemented at the ground level in the local Illinois public school districts.

In Chapter 4, the findings revealed that educational policy adoption and implementation in Illinois involves multiple stakeholders at the various governmental levels from the Illinois General Assembly down to the local school districts. Proposed as a bill by Ms. Welch and Dr. Calvert as co-chairs of IAGC's Policy and Advocacy Committee to Senator Kimberly Lightford and Representative Camille Lilly, the purpose of the Accelerated Placement Act is to guarantee that all students (not just identified gifted and talented students) in Illinois have guaranteed access to acceleration. According to 23 Ill. Admin. Code 227, access to acceleration as an academic intervention is guaranteed regardless of gender, ethnicity, English language status, special education status, geographical location, and socio-economic status (ISBE, 2021). Furthermore, the Accelerated Placement Act requires: (a) a fair and equitable decision-making process that involves multiple people including the child's parents or guardians; (b) that parents or guardians are notified of any decision of acceleration regarding their child; and (c) the use by school districts of various assessment instruments that contain multiple valid and reliable indicators. Optional for school districts to implement are (a) procedures for annually informing

the community about the district's acceleration policy and procedures; (b) a referral process for acceleration; and (c) written acceleration plan for students who are accelerated.

For Ms. Welch, the Accelerated Placement Act levels the playing field between students from wealthier school districts whose students have access to more advanced curricula as well as more opportunities to enrich their learning outside of the school setting to students in higher poverty districts who have lesser access to advanced curricula as well as enriching experiences outside of the school day. More importantly, the state legislators see the Accelerated Placement Act as a way to recruit more families to Illinois by providing coursework that will create a pipeline of highly skilled workers in the state starting from the elementary school level. In addition to equitable opportunities and a career pipeline, the Accelerated Placement Act is also successful in the following ways:

1. It was overwhelming supported by most bi-partisan legislators in both houses. As Senate Bill 1223, it passed the House of Representatives with 99 votes in favor of the bill and 11 votes against the bill (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly–House of Representatives, 2017, p. 34). In the Senate, it passed with 53 votes in favor of the bill and 1 vote against the bill (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly–Senate, 2017, p. 74).
2. The new law legally guarantees access to enriching curricula to all students at their readiness level regardless of a child's age.
3. The language of the law provides policy guidelines for school districts to follow in the creation of acceleration policy and procedures.
4. The decision of whether or not to accelerate a child no longer rests in the hands of one school administrator. Instead, the law requires that any decision about accelerating a

child is part of an equitable decision making process involving multiple decision makers, including the families.

5. The law left a lot of local control to public school districts to decide what the acceleration policy and procedures would look like in their respective district such as which acceleration options to offer and how to assess students for acceleration.

Even though there are successes to note with the Accelerated Placement Act, there are also challenges that still exist to implementing the law at the ground level of the local public school districts. In the case of the policy adoption and implementation of the Accelerated Placement Act, the stakeholders are not together in how to best service students seeking acceleration. For example, there was a disconnect among legislators in the policy adoption phase of the Accelerated Placement Act. In regard to being viewed as a mandate for Illinois school districts to implement, the majority of the House of Representatives voted for the Accelerated Placement Act to be a mandate on Illinois public schools while the majority of the Senate voted for the law to not be a mandate. For example, when SB 1223 was called to the floor of the House of Representatives for a vote on its third reading on May 28, 2017, Representative Fornter stated that if the bill passed into law, it would be a mandate on all Illinois public schools to follow. According to Representative Fornter (2017), "Is this a mandate on schools? Well, yes. But, it's a mandate in the sense that they (school districts) need to make sure they have a[n acceleration] policy." (p. 33). When SB 1223 went back to be voted on by the Senate on May 31, 2017, Senator McCarter asked Senator Lightford if SB 1223 is mandate because he was concerned about the number of mandates school districts needed to comply with within a school year. According to Senator McCarter (2017), "Senator, . . . would you consider this a–a new mandate in any way?" (p. 72). Senator Lightford said "no" because the School Management

Alliance opposes all mandates on Illinois public schools. The School Management Alliance approved this bill after the House of Representatives amended it. To Senator Lightford, the School Management Alliance would not approve SB 1223 if it was viewed as a mandate on Illinois public schools to implement. According to Senator Lightford (2017),

> I–I believe that with the amendment that satisfied the opposition, and therefore the School Management Alliance have been opposed to all mandates and I guess with this amendment, by them removing their opposition, I would argue that it's no longer a mandate. (p. 72)

Senator Lightford further stated that SB 1223 "goes along with the 77% of gifted programs in the state" (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly–Senate, 2017, pp. 67–68). The issue with this statement is that the language of the bill stated that acceleration is for all students, not just those who are in gifted programming. Furthermore, the number of gifted programs in Illinois was misquoted. Studies such as those conducted by the Untapped Potential Project and the Illinois Association of Gifted Children have documented that gifted programs in Illinois have dropped to less than 20% in Illinois school districts in recent years due to lack of state funding for gifted programming.

The rapid passage of the Accelerated Placement Act from a bill to a law in the matter of seven months leaves open the question as to how much public debate about the usefulness of the bill occurred in its multiple reading stages prior to be signed into law. The transcripts of the third readings of SB 1223 in the House of Representatives and the Senate reveal that Ms. Welch, Dr. Calvert, and a 9-year-old Illinois public school student named Oliver spoke at the first reading. ISBE and School Management Alliance were present at the first reading to hear the views of the public. Lastly, there were a few representatives that openly questioned the necessity of the Accelerated Placement Act and how school districts were to implement an acceleration policy. They raised real concerns about why a law on acceleration was needed and how school

districts were to create acceleration policies using only the guidelines in the law. For example, Representative Ives wanted to know why school districts were not implementing acceleration on a regular basis. If they did, there was no need for SB 1223. She also questioned what an acceleration program would look like in school districts if it was an unfunded mandate. Representative Flowers questioned the type of acceleration policy that would be adopted with only the language that was in SB 1223 as a guideline to school districts. Also, she was unhappy that the appeals process for families that were denied acceleration was optional for school districts to have in their policy and procedures. The concerns raised by the legislators came to fruition as school districts in this study wrote their acceleration procedures.

In Chapter 5, the confusion that legislators had when creating and adopting the Acceleration Placement Act filtered down to the school districts as central office administrators in this study tried to make sense of the new law. As a result of the confusion at the state level, the implementation of the Accelerated Placement Act at the local school district level was not uniform across the 13 school districts interviewed for this study because of their own individualized sensemaking. For example, the early entrance, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration procedures of Georgetown School District, Riverbend School District, and Hunter Woods Schools District were highlighted in Chapter 5 to show how dissimilar they were from each other.

When one looks at how the school district leaders in this study made sense of acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act, the findings have a general theme of engrained biases, misconceptions, and negative prior experiences shaping the sensemaking process. The engrained biases, misconceptions, and negative prior experiences have not been countermanded by professional development in acceleration, the Accelerated Placement Act, and/or gifted

education. For example, only one of the administrators in this study had taken undergraduate and graduate classes in gifted education and acceleration. The other 12 school administrators did not have formal professional development or collegiate coursework in gifted education and acceleration. Seven of the 13 administrators took a one-day workshop on the Accelerated Placement Act when Illinois first passed the law in 2017 to learn about acceleration and the requirements of the law. The workshop was offered by the IAGC or their local ISBE Intermediate Educational Service Center. Three of administrators chose not to attend any workshop or take any professional development on the acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act. Their preferred method of learning about acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act was just to conduct their own independent research.

With a lack of professional development on acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act, the participants' sensemaking has led to their current district implementation not to be reflective of the spirit of the Accelerated Placement Act in terms of more open accessibility to families seeking acceleration as well as to having an equitable acceleration evaluation system in place. The trouble in implementing the acceleration and Accelerated Placement Act at the local school district level is due to the following five findings on sensemaking based upon the interviews with the 13 Cook County suburban central office administrators:

1. The School District Administrators Do Not Share a Common Definition for Acceleration

The definition of acceleration is moving a student through a traditional curriculum at a rate faster than typical through the use of multiple academic interventions. However, not all the participants in this study defined acceleration in this way. For instance, Ms. Drost and Dr. Bakersfield defined acceleration as a child placed in a higher grade or subject. This limited definition narrows the definition of acceleration to only its options of early entrance, whole grade

acceleration, or subject acceleration. Dr. Banks defined acceleration as an assessment process to see if a student is 1 year to 1 ½ years ahead of their peers. Her definition is limited to the assessment cut scores she has in place as part of her district's acceleration procedures. Dr. Morgana defined acceleration as going to the next grade level's standards. For Dr. Morgana, acceleration is differentiation of the curriculum in the child's current grade level by teaching that child the next grade level's content standards. Dr. Saylor defined acceleration as to how quickly a child can absorb content. For Dr. Saylor, the rapidity at which a child can learn content is the first trigger for her that such a child may be a candidate for acceleration. Without a consistent definition for acceleration, school district leaders will be unable to comply with the Accelerated Placement Act.

2. The School District Administrators Do Not Have a Shared Understanding for the Purpose of Acceleration

The purpose of acceleration is to match the level and complexity of the curriculum with the readiness and motivation of the student. Not all the participants in this study identified the purpose of acceleration in the same way. For instance, Dr. Bakersfield stated that the purpose of acceleration is to employ Response to Intervention (RTI) to meet needs of the students at the top 5% of the RTI Model. Dr. Grant stated that the purpose of acceleration is to do constant assessments of advanced learners to make sure the Tier 1 general education curriculum is appropriate for them. Dr. Morgana and Ms. Drost stated that the purpose of acceleration is to help teachers differentiated the curriculum to teach the next grade level's standards to advanced learners. In this way, teachers are not using acceleration as their first instructional tool by having advanced learners leave the general education classroom. Without a shared understanding of the

purpose for acceleration, any acceleration procedure written will not comply with the mission and vision of the Accelerated Placement Act.

3. Most of the School Administrators Are Not In Favor of Acceleration Due to Bias, Negative Experiences, and Misconceptions

Most of the participants in this study do not favor acceleration as an academic intervention for advanced learners. These school administrators hold deep seated biases, misconceptions, and negative experiences that acceleration hurts students academically and socially in the long run. For example, Ms. Smith believes that advanced learners are not ready socially and emotionally for acceleration because of their youthful age as compared to being in the same class with older aged peers. She also believes that accelerated children plateau after they are accelerated. Dr. Banks and Dr. Young shares Ms. Smith's belief that acceleration hurts children socially and emotionally by pushing them too quickly through the curriculum. Dr. Banks further stated that accelerating students creates learning gaps causing acceleration to be "a race to nowhere." Dr. Canfield and Dr. LeBaron share Dr. Banks' belief that acceleration is a race to nowhere. Both school administrators further believe that acceleration is being pushed by parents who do not understand the purpose of acceleration. Neither school administrators feel acceleration is ever needed as an academic intervention because teachers should be differentiating the Tier 1 curriculum for the needs of advanced students in the general education classroom setting. Dr. Canfield further feels it is harmful to the self-efficacy of all students to see some students accelerated and they are not. Dr. Bakersfield stated that acceleration is viewed a status symbol among families in her district causing everyone to forget the purpose of acceleration as an academic intervention.

The only two central office administrators who were in favor of acceleration were Ms. Drost and Dr. Saylor. For both administrators, they favored acceleration as an academic intervention due to their past successful experiences with accelerating students. However, both were quick to state that acceleration only worked because there was a structured system in place to evaluate if the child was truly a candidate for acceleration.

It is important to note here that Dr. Young did have her bias against acceleration challenged when a student in her district's preschool program showed scholastic aptitude above his current grade level. She did accelerate the child with the support of his parents. Dr. Young realized that acceleration needs to be evaluated on a case by case basis and not rejected outright.

Even though most of the school administrators in this study are not in favor of acceleration due to bias, past negative experiences, and misconceptions about acceleration, acceleration may gain acceptance with school district leaders and within school districts if (a) the school district has an equitable, valid system in place to evaluate acceleration requests, and (b) acceleration requests are evaluated on a case by case basis.

4. There Is No Additional State Funding as Well as No Additional Rules and Regulations From ISBE to Help Support and Provide Guidance to School Administrators

All the school district leaders in this study stated that they are having problems trying to implement law with fidelity due to lack of financial funding from the state and a lack of detailed rules and regulations from ISBE. The lack of funding is one of the main reasons Ms. Nakoma does not have acceleration procedures in place at this time. She does not have the financial resources to hire staff and to invest in resources to create acceleration procedures. The lack of funding for the Accelerated Placement Act is hurting the other 12 school districts in this study as well. All the participants stated that district funding was being spent on reopening schools safely

with personal protective equipment as well as the purchase of curriculum and technology for remote learning. There is very little money left over for the implementation of acceleration procedures.

In addition to the lack of state funding, the lack of more detailed rules and regulations are hampering the school districts in this study from complying with the Accelerated Placement Act with fidelity. As noted in Chapter 5, none of the school administrators were aware that ISBE released one page of rules and regulations to help clarify the mandates of the Accelerated Placement Act (see https://www.isbe.net/Documents/227ARK.pdf). Unsure if they were creating acceleration procedures that complied with the law, 12 of the school district leaders in this study crafted procedures to fit their local school district's needs. These procedures too often codified gatekeeping measures the district had in place prior to the law in order to curb access to acceleration. The following figure lists the gatekeeping measures found within the acceleration procedures of 12 of the school districts in this study:

Figure 28

Gatekeeping Measures in the Participants' Acceleration Procedures

Gatekeeping Measures in the Participants' Acceleration Procedures	
• Time Restrictions on Acceleration Referrals and Applications	• Limited numbers of acceleration options
• Age limits	• Excluding offering acceleration options required by law
• Pre-Interviews	• Limit on when acceleration starts (i.e., starts only in fourth grade)
• Parent Behavioral Checklists	• Multitude of Assessments with Different Benchmarking Scores

Figure 28 (cont.)

• Required Parent Provided Documentation (i.e., student work samples, report cards, portfolios, and psychological examinations)	• Teacher Behavioral Checklists
• Limit to who can refer for acceleration.	• Parent Questionnaires
• Restrictions as to who can be part of the acceleration evaluation process.	• Limit to parent or guardian participation in the acceleration evaluation process
• Different acceleration procedures for students coming from private schools.	• Single person decision maker (i.e., building principal)
• Pre-interviews prior to starting the acceleration evaluation process.	• No appeal process

It is important to note here that Dr. Banks did call Dr. Calvert for advice and help with the creation of acceleration procedures for early entrance in her school district. Dr. Calvert stated that rules and regulations were coming, and that Dr. Banks would have to wait. Unfortunately, the mandated implementation date of July 1, 2018 did not allow flexibility in having school districts wait for more detailed rules and regulations before they had to have their acceleration policy and procedures in place by this date.

Without more detailed rules and regulations, several of the districts just relied on the fact that they had gifted programming and rebranded it as acceleration. Ms. Nakoma saw this happening in her school district as they tried to write acceleration procedures. Too often, the committee kept creating procedures for a gifted program instead of an acceleration program.

Acceptance for acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act can be garnered in the future with school district leaders if (a) state funding is allocated for implementation of the law,

and (b) ISBE releases more detailed rules and regulations to help with interpretation and implementation of the law.

5. Current Acceleration Procedures Written by School District Leaders Are Not Aligned or Correlated to the Acceleration Policies Adopted by the School Board as Well as to the Guidelines in the Accelerated Placement Act

The acceleration procedures that 12 of the school districts in this study wrote are contrary to policy adopted by their school boards and conflict the guidelines in the Accelerated Placement Act. For example, many of the acceleration procedures limit acceleration options to just early entrance, subject acceleration, and/or whole grade acceleration. However, the Accelerated Placement Act and the school board policies on acceleration state that these three forms of acceleration are just the start of acceleration options that a school district needs to consider. Dr. Grant stated that her district's acceleration procedures are limited to early entrance, subject acceleration, and/or whole grade acceleration in order to prevent the creation of accelerated "gap kids." Gap kids, to Dr. Grant, are students who have a gap in their learning due to missing curricular concepts in order to being accelerated ahead of their peers. Dr. Banks claims that the Common Core State Standards do not allow whole grade acceleration. Therefore, she is avoiding whole grade acceleration in her district and is allowing subject acceleration in its place. Dr. Canfield does not want to offer acceleration at all. She feels that advanced learners are just enthusiastic about what they are learning. This passion is being confused with being an overall advanced learner in general. Dr. Young does not offer whole grade because she feels that this form of acceleration is rushing students through the curriculum without really learning it. Dr. Sonnenberg is not offering whole grade acceleration in his school district because he stated that

the focus of the district is on keeping all students in their Tier 1 general education classroom. The needs of advanced learners will be met by differentiation in his school district.

Besides limiting the acceleration options available to families, other gatekeeping measures such as age requirements, time limits, pre-interviews, parent/teacher behavioral checklists, and parent questionnaires found in the acceleration procedures run contrary to districts' acceleration policies and the Accelerated Placement Act. The school district leaders admitted that the gatekeeping measures within their current acceleration procedures are meant to keep students from being acceleration. For example, Ms. Smith and Dr. Grant instituted gatekeeping measures to prevent students who are coming from private schools to request acceleration, especially early entrance into kindergarten. Dr. Banks employed pre-interviews as well as up to 11 different assessments that a student needs to take in order to be considered for acceleration. As Dr. Banks stated, "Right now, I'm doing my best to discourage people from any of this."

It is important to note here that all 13 school districts did not write their own acceleration policy. Instead, all the school districts adopted the acceleration policy written by PRESS. By adopting the acceleration policy from PRESS, it can be argued that the school districts in this study may not have engaged in the necessary dialogued among stakeholders needed to understand the requirements in the Accelerated Placement Act. This lack of dialogue among the various stakeholders contributes to acceleration procedures being narrowly written and understood by only a handful of district employees.

The lack of understanding and support for acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act among the Illinois school district leaders interviewed for this study is directly attributable to their lack of capacity and their lack of will. Furthermore, as individuals, they have an ingrained

implicit bias as well as explicit bias against acceleration as an academic intervention. The combination of lack of capacity, lack of will, and bias on behalf of school district leaders prevents the successful implementation of the Accelerated Placement Act for Illinois students. The current struggle to implement the Accelerated Placement Act follows what Honig saw in her research on failed educational policies during the Great Society period. According to Honig (2006),

> [S]chools and districts tended not to put programs in place in ways that faithfully resembled policy designs. . . . Researchers and others generally traced root causes of these failures to . . . individual self-interest to behave in ways not always congruous with policy designers' goals. (p.5)

This self-interest behavior to not faithfully implement the Accelerated Placement Act can be especially seen in Chapter 6 when the central office administrators gave sense on acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act to major internal and external stakeholders.

In Chapter 6, the sensegiving of the central office administrators were examined. The theme of the sensegiving among the participants in this study is one of restricting the sharing of information among internal and external stakeholders. For example, when giving sense to their respective school boards, the school district leaders briefly told school board members at only one meeting that the Accelerated Placement Act is the law and that procedures were in place to comply with the law. Some participants such as Ms. Smith and Ms. Paulson further conveyed the message was that access to acceleration by families would be restricted just as it was prior to the law, especially with early entrance into kindergarten. When giving sense to fellow administrators and teachers, the school administrators shared the message that the new law and its corresponding procedures were not going to drastically change the way the district addresses instruction with their advanced learners. When giving sense to parents, students, and the community at large, the central office administrators actively sought to make finding information

on acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act difficult for these stakeholders. Often, the participants in this study stated that information on acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act is currently passively communicated through the posting of the information on the district's website.

Recommendations

The 13 school districts in this study have a combined student population of almost 38,000 students. As of the summer of 2020, less than 10 students in all 13 school districts have accelerated a student since the passage of the Accelerated Placement Act. The paltry number of students accelerated shows that gatekeeping measures in the acceleration procedures of the school districts is working to restrict access to acceleration. It could be also argued that school district leaders are still trying to make sense of acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act with the limited guidelines given for guidance.

Even though the Accelerated Placement Act has it challenges, there are successes that cannot be forgotten. The following is a table highlighting the current successes and challenges of the Accelerated Placement Act:

Figure 29

Successes and Challenges of the Accelerated Placement Act

Successes	Challenges
1. Supported by most bi-partisan legislators in both houses. 2. Focused on recruiting families to Illinois by providing enriching curricula to all students at their readiness level to address the career readiness needs of the state. 3. Law with policy guidelines in place for school districts. 4. No age limit to acceleration. 5. Open the doors of some school districts to families seeking acceleration.	1. Confusion among legislators as to who the law covers (gifted students vs. all students). 2. Confusion among legislators as to if the Accelerated Placement Act is a mandate. 3. Voices of school administrators absent from the debates in policy setting phase. 4. Guidelines in law too vague and minimal to help school districts to create effective acceleration policy & procedures. 5. ISBE not passed comprehensive rulemaking and guidance for school districts after passage of the law. 6. Opposition by the School Management Alliance to SB 1223 removed the appeals process for families denied acceleration by school districts from the bill. 7. Unfunded mandate. 8. Some school districts are still not complying with the law.

Five recommendations are explored in this chapter to improve interpretation and implementation of the Acceleration Placement Act. The recommendations show school district leaders how they can positively improve their sensemaking and sensegiving on acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act. The goal of the recommendations is to combat the pervasive bias, negative past experiences, and misconceptions held by the central office administrators against acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act. Furthermore, the recommendations

focus on coalition building among the Illinois General Assembly and school districts leaders for the voices of the administrators to be part of the more detailed rule making on the Accelerated Placement Act.

Recommendation 1: Current Central Office School Administrators Need to Be Part of the Educational Policy Making at the Legislative Level.

One of the hallmarks of the legislative process is the open public debate on any proposed bill. The debate process allows the public expressions of opinion on the issue the bill is addressing. Legislators openly express their position and question the position of their colleagues. In Illinois, legislators debate bills during committee hearings. Any member of the public interested is having their voice heard during the committee debates can do so by filing a witness slip. A witness slip allows an Illinois resident to speak directly to all members of a committee as they determine whether the bill will go to a full floor vote (ACLU, 2021). A witness slip is filed 1 week before a committee hearing takes place (County Assessment Officers Association of Illinois, 2021). For the Accelerated Placement Act, 343 Illinois residents filed a witness slip to speak in favor of Senate Bill 1223, and four Illinois residents filed a witness slip to speak against Senate Bill 1223 (Illinois General Assembly.gov, 2017). The debate helps guide legislators in determining the appropriate courses of action to take as well as reflect the views of the public majority as well as the public minority.

The witness slips filed in favor of Senate Bill 1223 reflect that a number of educators and school administrators were registered to speak at the committee hearings. However, the reality of witness slips is that they are filed to show the legislators who in Illinois supports or opposes a bill and not necessarily filed to actually speak in front of the committee. Based on the transcripts on the third readings from the House of Representatives and the Senate when voting to pass

Senate Bill 1223, it shows that a few individuals who filed witness slips went to Springfield to actually voice their opinion to the committee. The individuals who spoke at the committee hearings were Ms. Welch, Dr. Calvert, a 9-year-old boy denied acceleration by the name of Oliver, and the School Management Alliance (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly, 2017). Not present to speak for or against Senate Bill 1223 were current school administrators. This lack of representation from current school administrators was noted by Senator McCarty during the third reading of the amended Senate Bill 1223. As stated by Senator McCarty (2017),

> When I have to go home and talk to the actual schools that have to actually implement these things, they're [school administrators] not sitting here to . . . oppose it. I know they send some people here (the School Management Alliance) to speak on their behalf, but I'm telling you, when it comes down to the local schools, they're the ones that have to do the work. (State of Illinois 100th General Assembly, 2017)

In order for educational policy to be accepted as well as implemented with fidelity by school districts, the voices of school administrators need to be heard and incorporated as part of the debate. Legislators need to hear firsthand from those who will be the first in line to implement any educational mandate they pass. In the case of the Accelerated Placement Act, legislators needed to hear the concerns about implementing the law from the 13 school administrators interviewed for this study. If they did, the legislators would have heard that school administrators view the Accelerated Placement Act as a non-negotiable mandate. The legislators would have also heard that guidelines in the Accelerated Placement Act are not enough guidance for school district leaders to figure what is needed when they create acceleration policy and/or when they create their acceleration procedures. Furthermore, legislators would have also heard the school administrators' plea for more needed funding in order to hire more educators to help differentiate for the needs of higher ability students; provide professional development in differentiated instruction to all educators to help them meet the

learning needs of higher ability students; and to purchase more resources for acceleration to help higher ability students academically succeed at their level. Lastly, the school administrators would have told the legislators that compliance with the Accelerated Placement Act is competing for their limited resources in terms of manpower and time alongside all the other educational mandates passed down from the Illinois General Assembly, especially when trying to reopen schools during a pandemic. Therefore, in order for educational policy to be effective, one must ensure that school administrators have a seat at the table when the policy creation, policy agenda setting, and policy debating is occurring at the legislative phase.

Recommendation 2: More Detailed Rules and Regulations Are Needed From ISBE on How to Implement the Accelerated Placement Act With Fidelity to Help Guide Illinois School District Leaders

The purpose of the Illinois State Board of Education is to promote and to implement "comprehensive policies, practices, and programs that ensure fair access to quality education for all students." (Illinois State Board of Education, 2018). In order to ensure an equitable educational experience for Illinois children, ISBE has the power to create rules and regulations. In other words, for any educational law adopted by the Illinois General Assembly, ISBE can further pass their own rules and regulations to help school districts understand the requirements in the law. In the case of the Accelerated Placement Act, ISBE passed a set of five initial rules on June 7, 2019 to help school districts implement the law (See Section 227.60 Accelerated Placement at https://www.isbe.net/Documents/227ARK.pdf). However, the rules do little to help school district leaders understand what they need to do. Two of the rules are mainly a restatement of guidelines in the law. For example, the first rule states that “school districts shall have a policy that allows for accelerated placement” (43 Ill. Reg. 7255). The second rule states

that the acceleration policy must identify how children for early entrance will be identified. The rule does not specify what type of assessments should be used in the identification process or what procedures the identification process must entail.

The three additional rules provide administrative guidance on the Accelerated Placement Act to school districts. For example, school districts are not required to submit their acceleration procedures to ISBE unless ISBE asks for them. Also, school districts will need to report district statistics on the demographics of accelerated students as well as the type of acceleration implemented in the district to the Student Information System (SIS). As of the 2019–2020 school year, school districts were asked to start providing district statistics on gifted students, not accelerated students. The last administrative rule is that "A school district shall post its acceleration plan on its website, if available" (43 Ill. Reg. 7255).

The problem with these initial rules and regulations are threefold. The first problem is that none of the central office school administrators interviewed for this study were aware that ISBE passed initial rules and regulations on the Accelerated Placement Act on June 7, 2019. The second problem is that the initial rules and regulation were passed almost a year after the required implementation date of July 1, 2018. By July 1, 2018, 12 of the 13 school administrators already created acceleration procedures without any guidance from ISBE. As a result, there are 12 vastly different acceleration procedures with little commonality between them. Examples of three acceleration procedures from Georgetown School District, Riverwoods School District, and Hunter Woods School District in Chapter 5 highlight the vast differences in qualify a student for early entrance, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration. Any rules and regulations to help school districts needed to be passed and conveyed to school district leaders prior to the mandated implementation date. The third problem is that initial rules and

regulations do not address the questions that school administrators currently have on acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act. Based on the interviews with the 13 central office administrators, some of the questions they still seek answers to are the following:

1. Can a school district impose age limits for students seeking acceleration?
2. What type of application form do parents need to complete when applying for acceleration? What needs to be on the form?
3. Which types of assessments and how many assessments should be used for early entrance, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration?
4. Based on the assessments chosen, what should be the target benchmark score be to accelerate a student for early entrance, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration?
5. Can the district impose time limits for applying for acceleration?
6. Can a district impose a residency requirement for acceleration?
7. Who should be on the district's acceleration evaluation committee?
8. Is an appeals process required? If so, what should the appeals process entail?
9. What forms of acceleration must a school district offer?
10. Can a school district charge parents an application fee to cover the cost of the acceleration process since the mandate is unfunded?
11. What requirements need to be in an acceleration transition plan as well as a permanent acceleration plan?
12. Can a school district deny acceleration if a child is transferring into the district from a private school?

13. Beside posting acceleration procedures on the school district's website, how should school districts effectively communication their acceleration policy and procedures to stakeholders?

ISBE needs to address these substantive questions with more detailed rules and regulations. These questions go to the heart of how school district leaders can implement acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act with fidelity. By providing clearer instructions for implementation, school district leaders can create and/or revise acceleration policies and procedures to close the policy design–implementation gap (Honig, 2006, p. 6). More importantly, clearer instructions for implementation will aid in the school administrators sensemaking and sensegiving on acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act.

Recommendation 3: Professional Development in Acceleration and Accelerated Placement Act Are Needed to Counteract Bias and Misconceptions on Behalf of the School District Leaders

In education, research has shown that school leadership is one of the most crucial factors in raising student achievement (Mizell, 2010, p. 1). For school district leaders to be as effective as possible, they must continually expand their knowledge and skills to implement the best educational practices (Mizell, 2010, p. 1). Professional development helps school administrators learn new concepts so they can continue to improve and to strengthen their practice throughout their careers. The most effective professional development engages administrators to focus on the needs of their students in order to ensure all students achieve success (Mizell, 2010, p. 1). Policymakers and state educational leaders have a responsibility to ensure that school administrators engage in continuous professional learning of district, state, and federal educational policies, laws, and procedures (Mizell, 2010, p. 2). By understanding how

educational policies and laws affect a school district, school district leaders can write more effective and appropriate procedures to apply to student learning that complies with all legal requirements. Effective and appropriate procedures will increase student achievement.

In Chapter 5, this study revealed that professional development in acceleration, the Accelerated Placement, and gifted education in general was sorely lacking among the 13 school administrators interviewed for this study. In terms of professional development, the results were as follows:

1. 1 of the 13 administrators had taken undergraduate and/or graduate class in gifted education and acceleration.
2. 3 of the 12 administrators did not take any professional development in the Accelerated Placement Act, acceleration, or gifted education.
3. 7 of the 12 administrators took a one-day professional development workshop on the Accelerated Placement Act offered through the IAGC or through their local ISBE intermediate service center. This was the one and only professional development taken to understand the new law as well as acceleration in general. There was no further training available or taken outside of this one-day workshop.

Before school district administrators can understand the purpose of the Accelerated Placement Act, consistent and ongoing professional development in acceleration is needed. They need to learn the basics by understanding of what acceleration is; its purpose in education; the multi-years of research on the benefits of acceleration; how it can be effectively used today to help students progress in their learning; and how acceleration impacts their role as an administrator. Once the basics of acceleration are learned, further professional development is needed in effectively implementing educational policy such as the Accelerated Placement Act.

This professional development cannot be run as just one day workshop. It needs to be a sustained and continuous professional development through all administrative professional organizations in Illinois such as the Illinois Principal Association (IPA) or through the Illinois Association of Regional State Superintendents (IARSS). Therefore, as new research in the field of acceleration emerges or as new rules and regulations from ISBE are released, school administrators can stay up-to-date with the latest information to help not only their higher ability students, but all students increase their learning capacity. More importantly, there needs to be professional development on confronting one's implicit and/or explicit bias on acceleration. To create equitable school districts for children, administrators must acknowledge their own biases and take steps to confront them. In this study, too many of the school district administrators held implicit and/or explicit biases about acceleration such as that it can be harmful to a child socially and emotionally or that a child will plateau later in their academic career having entered kindergarten early. Having professional development to uncover biases against acceleration will, hopefully, have administrators see untruth behind them in order for them to learn the research showing the many years of success acceleration has had as an academic intervention in the American educational system.

Recommendation 4: Oversight From ISBE Is Needed to Ensure Compliance of the Law

The mission of ISBE is to provide leadership, assistance, and resources to elementary and high school districts to help every Illinois student succeed in their post-secondary education as well as future career paths. One way ISBE can guarantee that their mission is realized is through accountability measures on local school districts. ISBE is responsible for ensuring that school districts are following all federal and state educational policies, rules, and regulations. For example, the Multilingual Department conducts monitoring of English Learner services in every

Illinois public school district to ensure districts are complying with state and federal laws in serving English Learners (ISBE, 2021). Similar compliance monitoring is needed with the Accelerated Placement Act. The goal of the compliance monitoring would not just be to see if school districts have an acceleration policy and procedures. The goal for ISBE would be to provide leadership and assistance in making sure that all school districts have a comparable or similar acceleration policy and procedures. By having comparable or similar acceleration policy and procedures, ISBE can guarantee that acceleration will be equitably provided throughout the state. Therefore, access to acceleration will not be determined based on where a student lives but based on a child's credentials to be considered for acceleration.

Recommendation 5: Central Office School Administrators Need to Be More Transparent With All Stakeholders About Acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act

Central office school administrators set the agenda for curriculum, instruction, and assessment not only for their school district but for the community at large. The climate they create for any educational initiative sets the tone of acceptance or rejection among all internal and external stakeholders. In the case of the Accelerated Placement Act, the majority of the school administrators in this study set a culture of neutrality to negativity for all major stakeholders. As revealed in their sensegiving to stakeholders, the school district leaders in this study did not want to openly advertise that the district has an acceleration policy and procedures. Instead, the administrators briefly presented the new law and its requirements to the school board, their fellow administrative colleagues, and educators. It was a symbolic display of compliance to the law (Coffey, 2015, p. 41). For parents, students, and the public at large, information on the Accelerated Placement Act and acceleration is only learned through their own investigative devices from hearing about the law on the local news stations, through word of

mouth by neighbors, or finding the information on the district's website if it was posted there. With the acceleration procedures created by 12 of the school district leaders in this study, they made sure that acceleration in all its forms would be difficult to obtain by placing gatekeeping measures such as parental behavioral checklists, parental questionnaires, age restrictions, and time limits on when to file for acceleration. The enacted gatekeeping measures in the acceleration procedures are meant to resist the Accelerated Placement Act overtly and covertly (Coffey, 2015, p. 41).

In order for the gap to close from policy adoption at the legislative level to policy implementation at the local level, the central office administrators need to be more transparent with the district's efforts to provide acceleration as a valued academic intervention. This starts with school leaders setting the agenda with the district's school board members about the importance of acceleration for all students. As representatives of the community, school board members can function as agents of change if they are shown why and how acceleration benefits children. School board members can be allies with the school district and with the public in helping to ensure that the academic as well as the social–emotional needs of all students are met through the use of acceleration as an academic intervention to continue their educational progression.

In addition to being transparent with school board members, central office administrators must be open with their fellow administrative colleagues and the teachers they serve about the benefits of acceleration as an academic intervention for children who need it to survive in school. This starts with continuous, high quality professional development on what is acceleration and why it is an important academic resource to help students have the curriculum match where they are in their learning at. Furthermore, the school district administrators need to work alongside

principals and teachers to show them how to implement fair, valid, and reliable acceleration procedures at the building level. In this way, one can have teachers and principals consistently identifying and servicing students who could be possible candidates for acceleration.

Transparency in the Accelerated Placement Act and acceleration must also happen with parents and students. This is the stakeholder group most affected by the new law and who the new law was meant to benefit. School district leaders must be the role models to show how one can open the lines of communication between the school district and families with acceleration. Instead of trying "to discourage people from any of this" as stated by Dr. Banks, central office administrators must actively make parents and students aware of the district acceleration policy and procedures. Just posting the district's acceleration policy and procedures on the district's website is not enough. Instead, central office administrators must be proactive in providing information about the Accelerated Placement Act and acceleration to families. One way this can be done is by having district level administrators collaborate with principals and teachers to examine the district's progress monitoring data to see if there are children who are consistently scoring above their grade level peers. Once such students are identified, the central office administrators can be the conduit between the families and the building level staff to provide guidance on ways to differentiate the curriculum or start the process of acceleration to meet the student's academic needs. In this way, school districts create accepting environments open to families seeking acceleration for their child. In this way, central office administrators are implementing the original intentions of the law.

The Accelerated Placement Act and COVID-19

In March of 2020, Governor Pritzker closed all Illinois schools to in-person learning (Parra, 2020). The effort to close schools undertaken by Governor Pritzker and many other

governors throughout the country was done to prevent further spread of the coronavirus. To date, 77% of the school districts in Illinois have returned to either in-person learning or hybrid learning, while 23% of school districts still remain with remote learning (Ayala, 2021). Even though not all students in Illinois are fully in-person, school districts are still finding ways to provide instruction and assessment to students while keeping everyone safe. For central office administrators, their positions have never became more important or critical than now to ensure that learning still is occurring no matter the setting students, teachers, and fellow administrators find themselves in. Furthermore, they are still expected to align curriculum to standards, lead best instructional practices, transform beliefs and practices of stakeholders, and be policy advocates and strategists with the broader public (Coffey, 2015, p. 45). Most importantly, district administrators are still expected to ensure all students are meeting or exceeding the state learning standards in their learning. Acceleration is a vital tool to helping students meet and exceed in their learning. School district leaders can lead the conversation of acceleration with stakeholders in order to make sure that the district is addressing the individual learning needs of students. In this drastically changing learning environment since March of 2020, school leaders must ensure that learning loss or learning gaps are being addressed. Acceleration is just the tool to help close that learning loss gap not just for higher ability students but for all students.

It is important to note here that besides aiding in the learning progression of the individual student, accelerating students will manifest itself in accountability measures at the district, state, and federal levels. By accelerating students, they will progress in their knowledge capacity which will result in higher assessment scores for the district.

Recommendations for Further Study

As stated in the Limitations section in Chapter 3, the focus of this study was the interpretation and implementation of acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act on central office district administrators at the elementary school level. Further research can be done on the impact of the Acceleration Placement Act on Illinois families who are seeking acceleration or who have sought acceleration since July of 2018. As stated by Ms. Welch, families in Illinois are having two different experiences since the law's enactment. Some families are finding their local school districts receptive to their requests for acceleration while other families still find the school doors to acceleration closed for discussion. It would be valuable to learn if the families for whom the law is supposed to protect are seeing a change in their local school district's attitudes toward acceleration.

Research can be done at the legislative level. Interviewing the representatives and senators who played a role in passing or opposing the Accelerated Placement Act provides invaluable insight in the legislative process of educational policy making. Furthermore, gathering qualitative data from other lobbying groups such as the School Management Alliance during Senate Bill 1223's various readings is important to hear in order to learn how their positions affected the final draft of the bill.

Additional research can be conducted on how the Accelerated Placement Act is impacting principals and/or educators. Principals and teachers are usually the first school district employees to receive the acceleration inquiries or requests from parents. It would be important to know from their perspectives if the acceleration procedures put into place by the district level administrators are working to help aid in the consideration of acceleration or is causing problems to prevent implementation of the acceleration and the Accelerated Placement Act with fidelity.

Since this study focuses on the four main acceleration forms found at the elementary level (early entrance to kindergarten, early entrance to first grade, subject acceleration, and whole grade acceleration), further research can be conducted on the impact of the Accelerated Placement Act at the high school level. It would be important to learn if Illinois high schools offer more acceleration options or engage in gatekeeping measures in their acceleration procedures. Another avenue to explore at the high school level is who are the referrers for acceleration. For example, are students referring themselves for acceleration?

Another area of research can be a more focused study on one of the acceleration options utilized most frequently by elementary schools: early entrance, subject acceleration, or whole grade acceleration. One can see how school districts are making sensing and giving sense on one of the acceleration options since the enactment of the Accelerated Placement Act.

This study focused on the experiences of Directors of Curriculum and Assistant Superintendents of Teaching and Learning who work in the suburbs of Chicago. The suburbs of Chicago is diverse in racial, linguistic, religious, national origin, and socio-economic demographics. Furthermore, the bulk of the population of the state resides in Chicago and its surrounding suburbs. Since not of Illinois has a similar demographics, research on the interpretation and implementation of the Accelerated Placement Act can be expanded to other regions of Illinois or to the entire state to see if the findings of this study would be similar or different.

Lastly, research can be done on the students themselves who have been accelerated and/or have been denied acceleration since the law passed in August of 2017. It would be insightful to hear from the perspective of students over their feelings and attitudes about being accelerated. Are they finding that acceleration is working in their favor to extend their learning

or are there problems with acceleration that need to be addressed? In the end, their voices will lend invaluable data to the field of gifted education as to if acceleration was the right academic intervention to address their learning needs.

Conclusion

Acceleration is an effective and successful academic intervention that helps higher ability learners have their academic and social–emotional needs matched at the curriculum level they are ready to learn at. A new 20-year longitudinal study released by Vanderbilt University in August of 2020 found that accelerated students felt better personal growth, purpose in life, autonomy, self-acceptance, and life satisfaction over students who were not accelerated (Ertelt, 2020). With the preponderance of research showing acceleration to be a needed and necessary academic intervention for higher ability students in all subject areas, the Illinois General Assembly passed the Accelerated Placement Act in 2017. The Accelerated Placement Act guarantees that any student in Illinois seeking acceleration will undergo a fair and reliable acceleration process with multiple individuals at the decision making table, including the student's parents. However, the translation of the law's requirements at the elementary school level is not opening the doors to families seeking acceleration as hoped by legislators and policy makers. Instead, school district administrators at the elementary level are making sense and giving sense of the new law by writing acceleration procedures to codify gatekeeping measures to make obtaining acceleration more difficult than it was before the law's existence. One of the school district administrators interviewed for this study, Dr. Grant, states that elementary schools have made sense and gave sense on the Accelerated Placement Act by creating acceleration procedures that are betting against accelerating students. According to Dr. Grant,

> You really do want to have a system that is not betting against kids. Giving kids chances to show what they can do and showing it off. Why are we having these rigid systems

> where kids . . . are not getting chances to prove themselves and go for it? It seems antithetical to our message as a school [district] that we wouldn't want kids to go for harder challenges.

In order to create acceptance for the Acceleration Placement Act, the first step is to change the mindsets of school district administrators through continuous, high quality professional development in acceleration and gifted education. The professional development will not only educate school district leaders about the benefits of acceleration, but it will also have them confront their implicit and explicit bias against acceleration. Through gaining knowledge about acceleration, the hope is that negative attitudes toward acceleration will end and the administrators will now make sense of acceleration in a more positive frame of reference. In conjunction with professional development, ISBE needs to release more detailed rules and regulations to help school district administrators make better sense of the Accelerated Placement Act as they write or rewrite their district's acceleration procedures to be more equitable in nature. With more equitable procedures in place, giving sense on acceleration to all stakeholders will create the coalition building needed to see true educational policy implementation. That is the hope for all Illinois students.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Notice of Determination

ILLINOIS

OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR
FOR RESEARCH & INNOVATION

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., MC-095
Urbana, IL 61801-4822

Notice of Exempt Determination

April 17, 2020

Principal Investigator	Anjale Welton
CC	Tara Kristoff
Protocol Title	*The Impact of the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act on the Policy, Procedures, and Attitudes of Illinois School District Leaders*
Protocol Number	20782
Funding Source	Unfunded
Review Category	Exempt 1
Determination Date	April 17, 2020
Closure Date	April 16, 2025

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) has reviewed your application and determined the criteria for exemption have been met.

The Principal Investigator of this study is responsible for:

- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the University and federal regulations found at 45 CFR 46.
- Requesting approval from the IRB prior to implementing major modifications.
- Notifying OPRS of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.
- Notifying OPRS of the completion of the study.

Changes to an **exempt** protocol are only required if substantive modifications are requested and/or the changes requested may affect the exempt status.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN
IORG0000014 • FWA #00008584
217.333.2670 • irb@illinois.edu • oprs.research.illinois.edu

Appendix B

Illinois Association of Gifted Children's Model 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 (District) 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. 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 exceptionalities, 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 days. The submission of the referral intake form by the initial referrer starts the clock on the thirty (30) day evaluation process.

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) days.

ii. Students residing in the district who are referred for evaluation for possible accelerated placement sixty (60) or more 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 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. Most current teacher of that student; and
4. 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, an 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) 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.

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) 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) 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, 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) 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. 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

Appendix C

Parent Inventory for Finding Potential (PIP) by Dr. Karen B. Rogers

Child_____ Age_____ Grade_____ Gender_____
Date_____

Please indicate how often you observe the following behaviors in your child. Check the box that indicates your response.

Behavior or Characteristic	Seldom or Never (1)	Sometime (2)	Rarely (3)	Almost Always (4)
1. Reflective –when asked a complex question or given a new task, tends to take time to think before jumping in.				
2. Connective- makes connections with what is already known or tries to apply new information to other contexts.				
3. Focused- stays attentive and alert when new or complex information is being given; long attention span.				
4. Retentive-remembers information in vast quantities easily.				
5. Enjoys School-loves attending school and even "plays" school at home.				
6. Enthusiastic- enters into most activities with eagerness.				
7. Sensitive to Problems- ready to question or change situations, see inconsistencies, suggest improvements.				
8. Abstract Thinker- makes generalizations and draws conclusions that summarize complex information easily.				
9. Persistent in Own Interests- tries to follow through on self-initiated work.				
10. Curious–pursues interests to satisfy own curiosity; wants to know why and how.				
11. Perceptive–is alert, observant beyond years.				
12. Aesthetically Responsive –responds to beauty in arts and nature.				

Behavior or Characteristic	Seldom or Never (1)	Sometime (2)	Rarely (3)	Almost Always (4)
13. Independent Thinker–follows own ideas, rather than others.				
14. Sensitive to Others- easily understands how others feel or think; easily hurt by others' negative actions.				
15. Independence–uses own set of values to dictate behavior; concerned with free expression of their own ideas.				
16. Sensitive to Ideas, Stories–upset with sad, negative, hurtful events related through some form of communication.				
17. Independent in Action–plans, organizes activities; evaluates results.				
18. Processing Speed–learns new information easily; recalls rote information rapidly.				
19. Verbal–learned to speak and read considerably earlier than agemates: uses extensive vocabulary.				
20. Fair–looks out for the welfare of others; compassionate; concerned with justice and fairness.				
21. Sense of Humor–can laugh at self, enjoys lighter moments, sensitive to hidden meanings; puns.				
22. Self-Accepting–understands, accepts own feelings, thought, and how best to learn; views self realistically.				
23. Intense–highly motivated and skilled in a specific subject area or domain.				
24. Self-Critical–mistrusts own ability; lower self-concept than agemates; hard on self in self-evaluation.				
25. Achievement Need–strong drive to be "the best," be recognized as an expert, master domain of knowledge or set of skills.				
26. Persistent in Assigned Tasks –concerned with completion and follow through when given a task to do.				
27. Elaborative–concerned with detail, complexity; involved with implications of situation.				
28. Dominant–asserts self with influence in group situations.				

Behavior or Characteristic	Seldom or Never (1)	Sometime (2)	Rarely (3)	Almost Always (4)
29. Uneven –is not balanced in skills and abilities; very good in some things but not everything.				
30. Flexible–approaches ideas from a number of perspectives; is adaptable.				
31. Structurer–shapes the environment around self so comfortable; negotiates tasks to suit own needs, interests.				
32. Risk-Taker–takes mental, emotional, and physical risks easily.				
33. Tolerant of Ambiguity–comfortable in "messy" contexts and with ill-structured tasks which seem impossible to solve.				
34. Confident–feels can produce at will; positive about own abilities.				
35. Inner Locus of Control–attributes success and failure to own efforts and ability.				
36. Fluent–produces a large number of ideas easily.				
37. Original–uses original methods; creates unusual, unique products.				
38. Imaginative–freely responds to ideas, producing mental images, fanciful insights.				
39. Physically Expressive–enjoys physical activities as a means for self-expression.				
40. Energy Level –has available pep and vigor for carrying on most activities.				
41. Task Analytic –breaks down tasks into sequential steps through backwards planning.				
42. Global Scanner –scans complex information quickly to pick out important items.				
43. Perceptual Perspective Taker–can orient self and figures in space easily.				
44. Popular–others enjoy and want to be with this person.				
45. Accepting of Others–relates to others with genuine interest, concern; seeks out others, is warm.				

Behavior or Characteristic	Seldom or Never (1)	Sometime (2)	Rarely (3)	Almost Always (4)
46. Physically Able–is coordinated, agile; participates well in organized games.				
47. Socially Mature–able to work with others; can give and take; sensitive to others' wants.				
48. Happy–cheerful; has a satisfied look on face most of the time.				
49. Emotionally Controlled- expresses and displays emotions appropriately.				
50. Stable –can cope with normal frustrations of living; adjusts easily to change.				
51. Associative–finds similarities, differences between cognitive, verbal, and visual pairs easily.				

Appendix D

Georgetown School District's Referral and Consent Form for Early Entrance and Acceleration

Student Name:_____ DOB:___/___/____

☐ Male or ☐ Female

Current/Home School: _____ Current Grade_____

Parent/Guardian Requesting Acceleration:_____

Phone Number:_____ Email address:_____

Requesting: ☐ Early Entrance to Kindergarten ☐ Early Entrance to First Grade

☐ Whole Grade Acceleration ☐ Subject Acceleration _____
(Specify Subject)

List all Siblings:

Sibling	Name	Age	Grade	Current School

Has the current school been consulted about grade acceleration? Yes ☐ or No ☐
Does the student currently have a sibling in the same grade? Yes ☐ or No ☐
Does the student currently have a sibling in the next grade? Yes ☐ or No ☐
Does the student receive any special services (ESL, OT, Speech, Health, etc.?) Yes ☐ or No ☐
If yes, please specify:
_____
_____
_____

Please list any previous schools, educational opportunities, and/or groups in which your child has participated. (*Please attach any documentation from previous schools or educational opportunities such as progress reports or teacher recommendations*.)
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Provide a brief narrative as to why you think Early Entrance/Acceleration would benefit this student.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

As a parent/guardian of the above named student, I understand that:

1. I am authorizing the Georgetown School District to screen and administer relevant assessments to determine appropriate educational placement of my child.

2. Student and parent support of Early Entrance and Acceleration is essential to achieve success.

3. If applicable, I authorize Georgetown School District to gather data from my child's previous school. A *Release of Information* is attached.

Parent Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Submit form to:
Katrin Paulson, Director of Curriculum and Instruction
Georgetown School District

_____

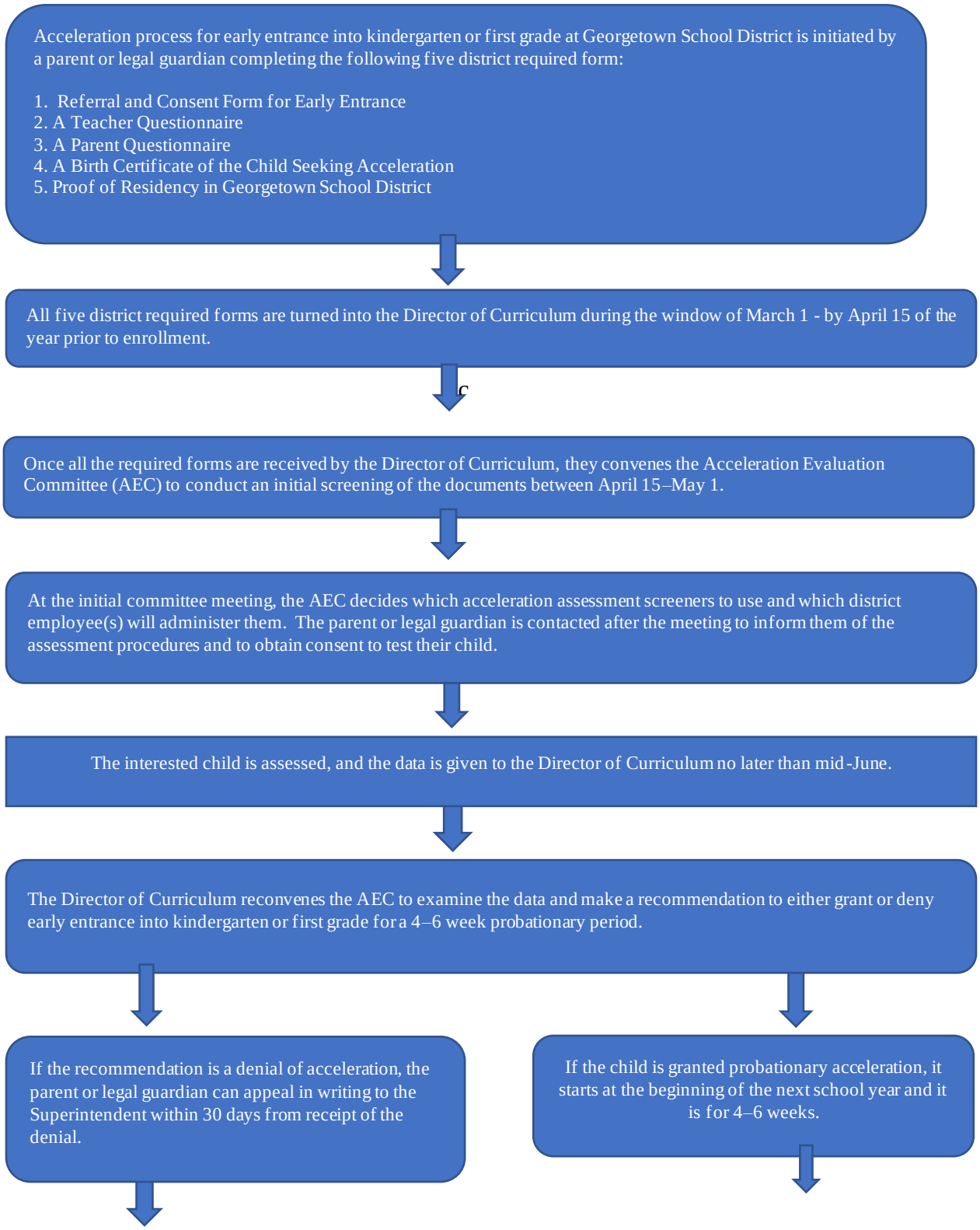
Office Use Only

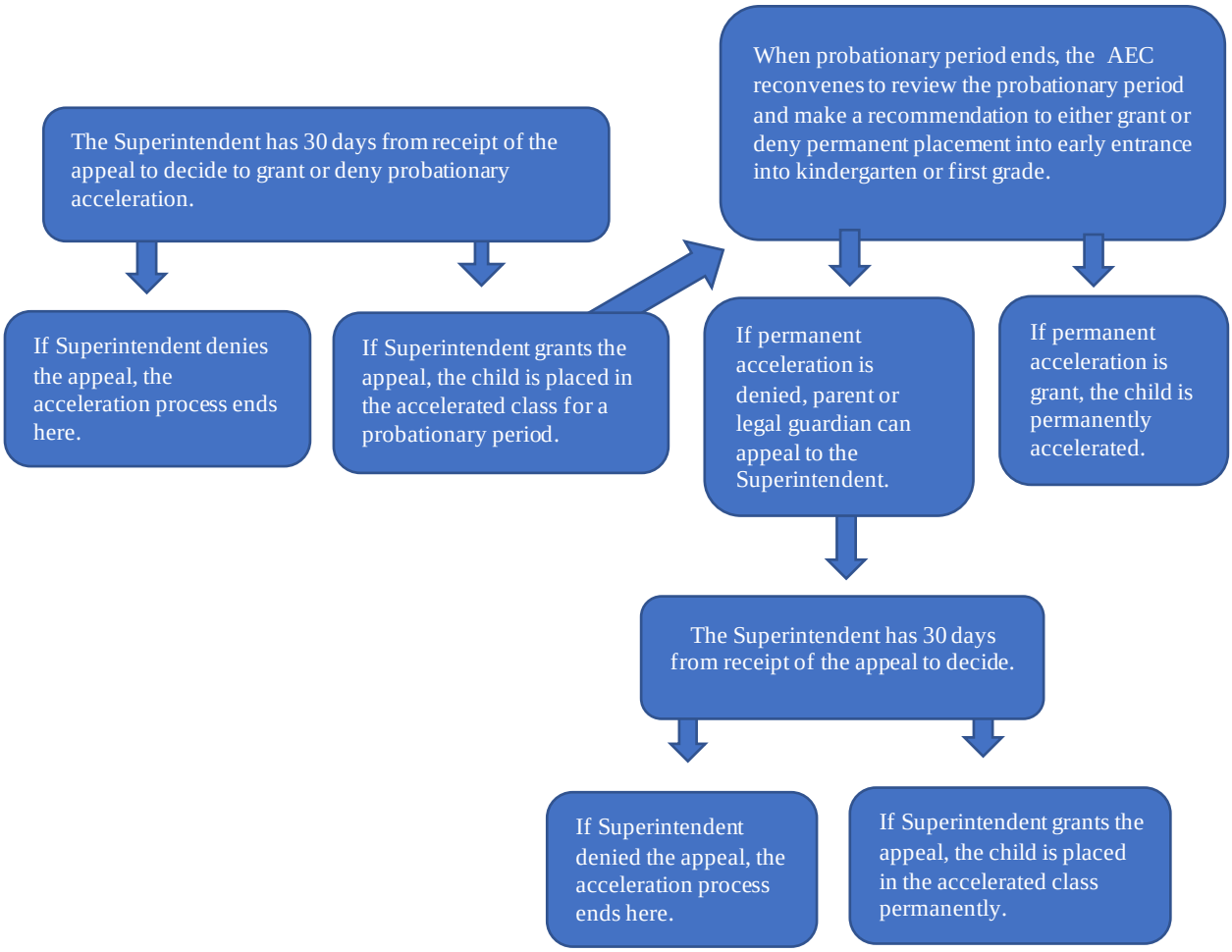
☐ Birth Certificate on file

☐ Residency approved

Appendix E

Georgetown School District's Acceleration Procedures for Early Entrance




The Superintendent has 30 days from receipt of the appeal to decide to grant or deny probationary acceleration.
If Superintendent denies the appeal, the acceleration process ends here.
If Superintendent grants the appeal, the child is placed in the accelerated class for a probationary period.
When probationary period ends, the AEC reconvenes to review the probationary period and make a recommendation to either grant or deny permanent placement into early entrance into kindergarten or first grade.
If permanent acceleration is denied, parent or legal guardian can appeal to the Superintendent.
If permanent acceleration is grant, the child is permanently accelerated.
The Superintendent has 30 days from receipt of the appeal to decide.
If Superintendent denied the appeal, the acceleration process ends here.
If Superintendent grants the appeal, the child is placed in the accelerated class permanently.

Appendix F

Riverbend School District's Acceleration Request Form

Sending an email to Dr. Sue Banks and completing this request form will initiate the process for a student to be considered for whole grade or single subject acceleration in math or reading.

Email address: _____

Student First Name:

Student Last Name:

Student ID Number:

Student Date of Birth
MM/DD/YYYY: _____

Student Address:

Does your student speak a language other than English at home?

Yes:

No:

If the answer is yes, what language does the student speak?

Does your student have an individualized education plan (IEP)?

Yes:

No:

Does your student have a 504 plan?

Yes:

No:

Circle the Grade Level for the _____School year:

PK
K
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8

Name of School the Child is Attending for _____School Year.

Choose the option below for which you are requesting consideration:

Early Start to Kindergarten
Early Start to First Grade
Whole Grade Acceleration
Single Subject Acceleration – Reading
Single Subject Acceleration – Math
Other:

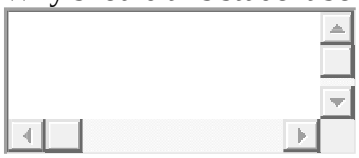
Name of Person Requesting Acceleration Consideration:

Role of Person Requesting Acceleration Consideration:
Parent/Legal Guardian
Teacher
Student
Other

Parent/Guardian Phone Number

Parent/Guardian Email Address

Why should this student be considered for acceleration?



Consent for further testing: *
I acknowledge and agree that the parent of the student is aware that the student might need to participate in further testing or meet with additional district personnel to continue the consideration for the acceleration process.

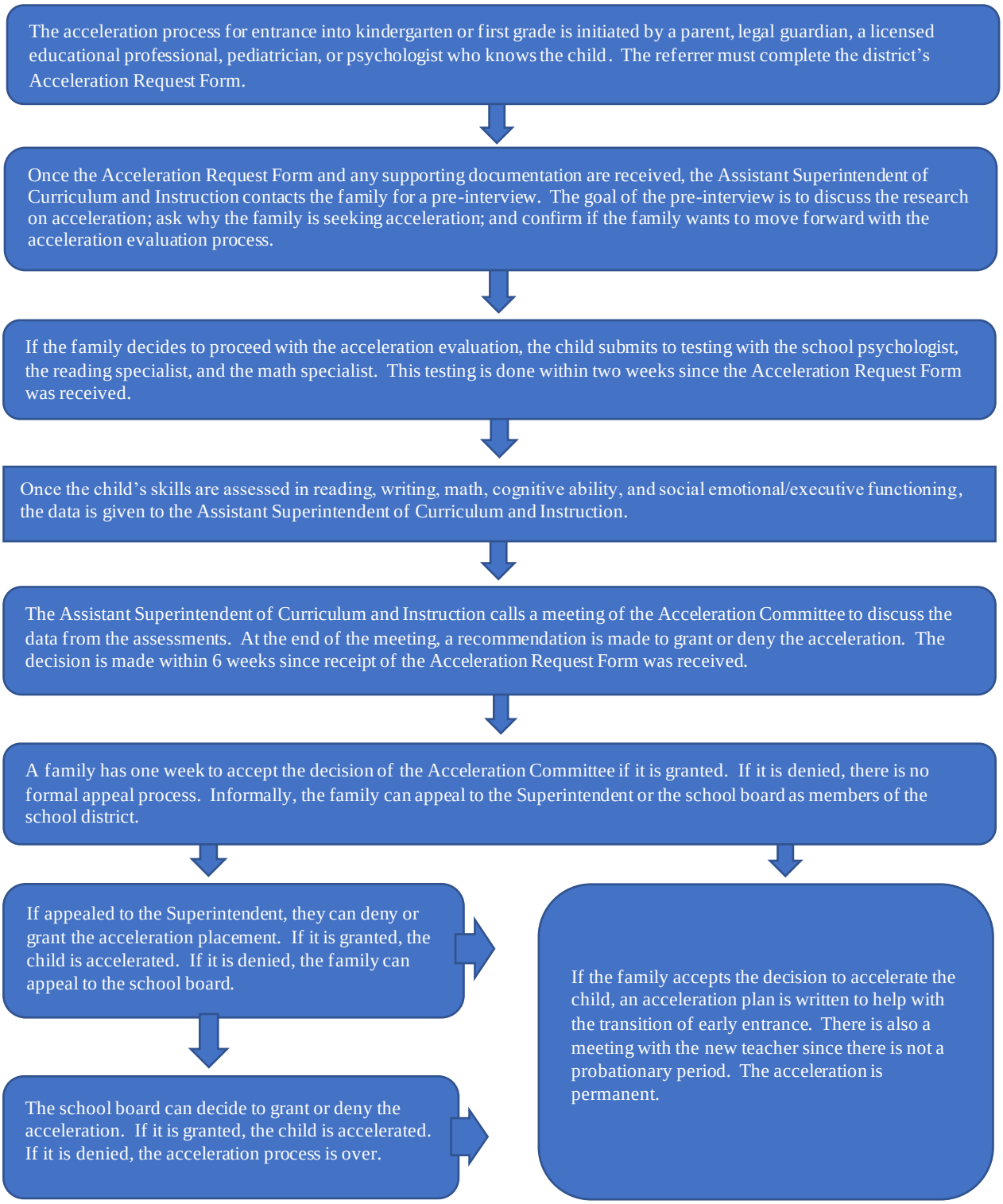
Signature:_____

Thank you for completing the acceleration request form for Riverbend School District. Please also email Dr. Sue Banks to notify us of your request. Riverbend School District will review requests and contact the family after the review to discuss the process and next steps.

A copy of your responses will be emailed to the address you provided.

Appendix G

Riverbend School District's Acceleration Procedures for Early Entrance



Appendix H

Hunter Wood School District's Early Entrance to Kindergarten or First Grade Request Form

This form must be completed and submitted to the building principal by April 15 for consideration for early entrance to kindergarten or first grade for the following school year. If a child has completed or will complete kindergarten in a non-public preschool, please complete the Hunter Woods School District's ***First Grade Early Entrance Request Form*** *in lieu of this form.*

Date: _____

Student's Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

School: _____ Current Grade: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____

Address: _____
City State Zip

Phone Number: _____

Name of Person(s) Initiating Request for Grade Acceleration: _____

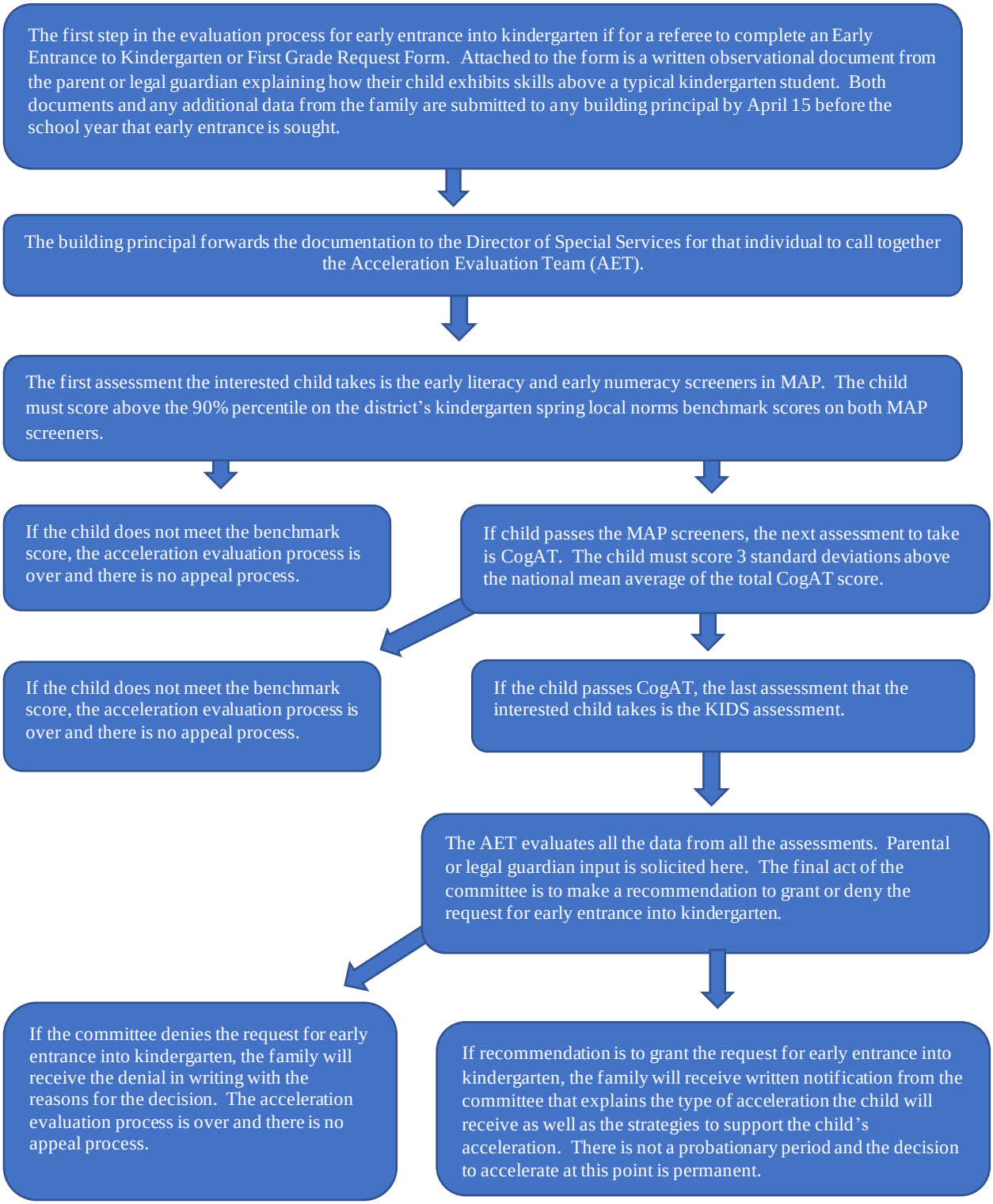
Relationship to Student: _____

Please use a separate piece of paper to describe specific observations of how your child functions at a significantly higher level and should be considered for early entrance to kindergarten or first grade. In your descriptions, please address each of the following:

1. Overall academic performance.
2. Ability to apply, analyze, and evaluate ideas at an advanced level.
3. Ability to work independently and advocate for him or herself.
4. Ability to think creatively.
5. Motivation to work on advanced material.
6. Oral and written communication skills
7. Ability to persist in the face of difficulty or failure.
8. Social/emotional development

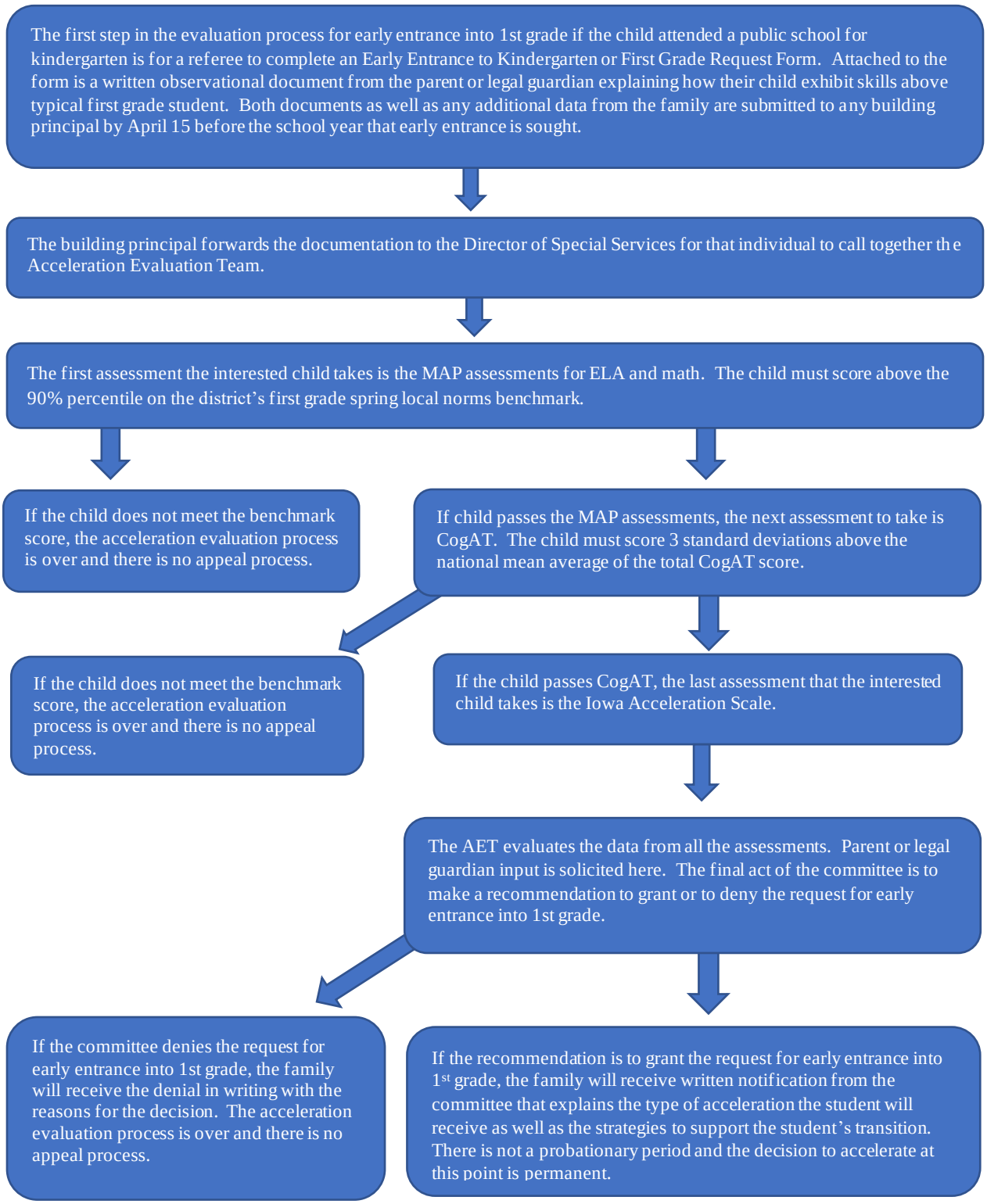
Appendix I

Hunter Woods School District's Acceleration Procedures for Early Entrance Into Kindergarten



Appendix J

Hunter Woods School District's Acceleration Procedures for Early Entrance Into First Grade for a Child Who Attended a Public School for Kindergarten



Appendix K

Hunter Woods School District's First Grade Early Entrance Request Form (Students Who Completed Kindergarten at a Private School)

This form must be completed by the principal or director of the current non-public kindergarten and submitted to Hunter Woods School District by April 15 for consideration for early entrance to first grade for the following school year, along with copies of a current progress report/report card. An end-of year report card must also be submitted by June 20 to indicate successful completion of kindergarten.

Hunter Woods School District will consider early entrance into first grade when the following criteria is met:

1. The child will turn six years of age between September 2 and December 31 of their first grade year.

2. The child attended a non-public preschool and continued their education through kindergarten at that same facility.

3. The child's kindergarten instruction was taught by an appropriately licensed teacher.

4. The child is determined by the District to have the required readiness skills for first grade.

Student's Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Non-Public School Where Student Completed Preschool and Kindergarten: _____

Non-Public School Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Non-Public School Phone Number:_____

Name of Person Completing This Form: _____

Title of Person Completing This Form: _____

Email Address: _____

By signing this form, I acknowledge that the student indicated above attended a non-public preschool and will successfully complete kindergarten at that same facility. I further

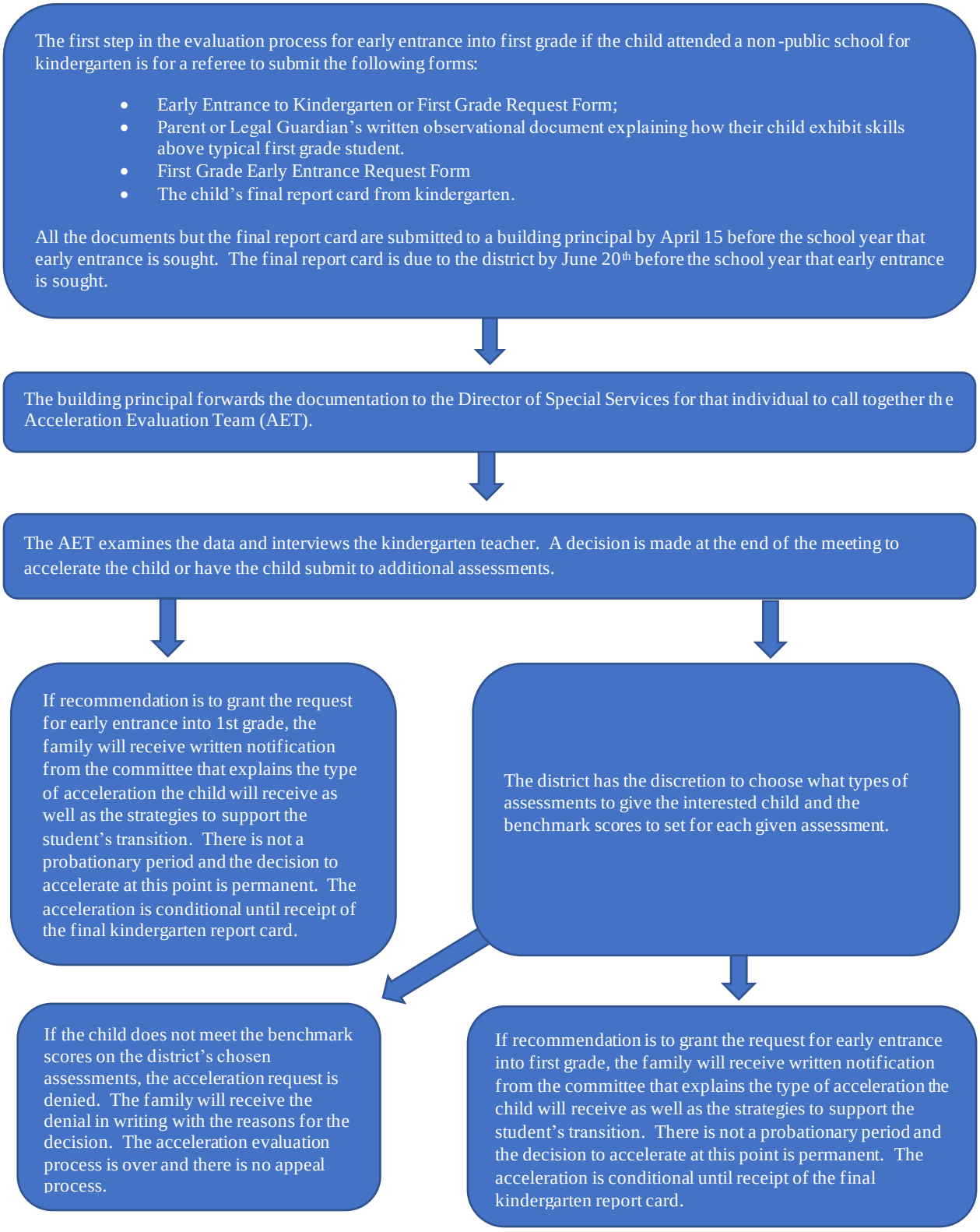
acknowledge that the student's kindergarten classroom uses materials and curriculum that are aligned to state standards and that the student's kindergarten teacher has an active professional teaching license and is endorsed to teach kindergarten by the state.

It is also anticipated that this student will successfully complete kindergarten as demonstrated by an end-of-year report card indicating the student is meeting grade level academic and behavioral expectations.

Name of parent or guardian: _____

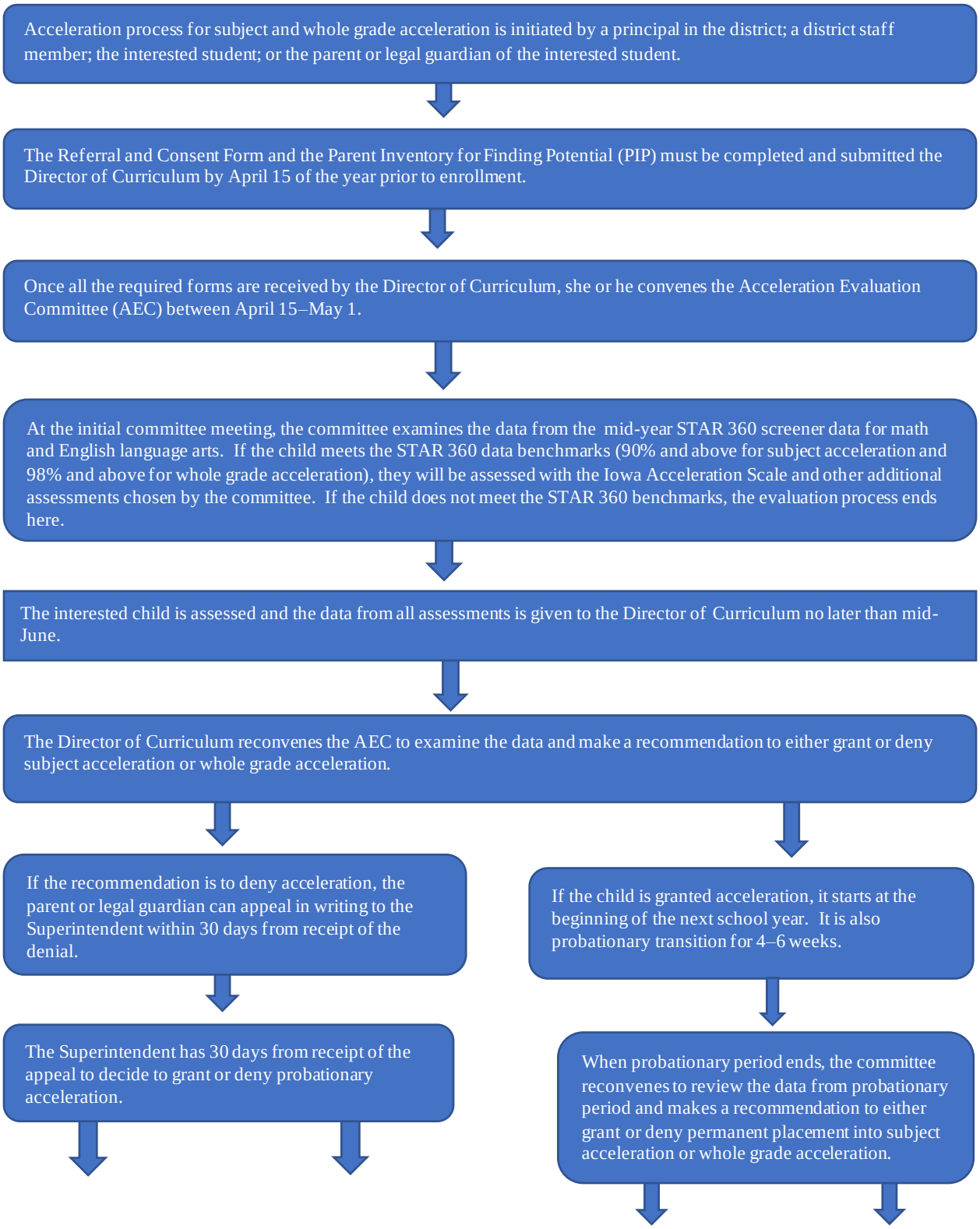
Appendix L

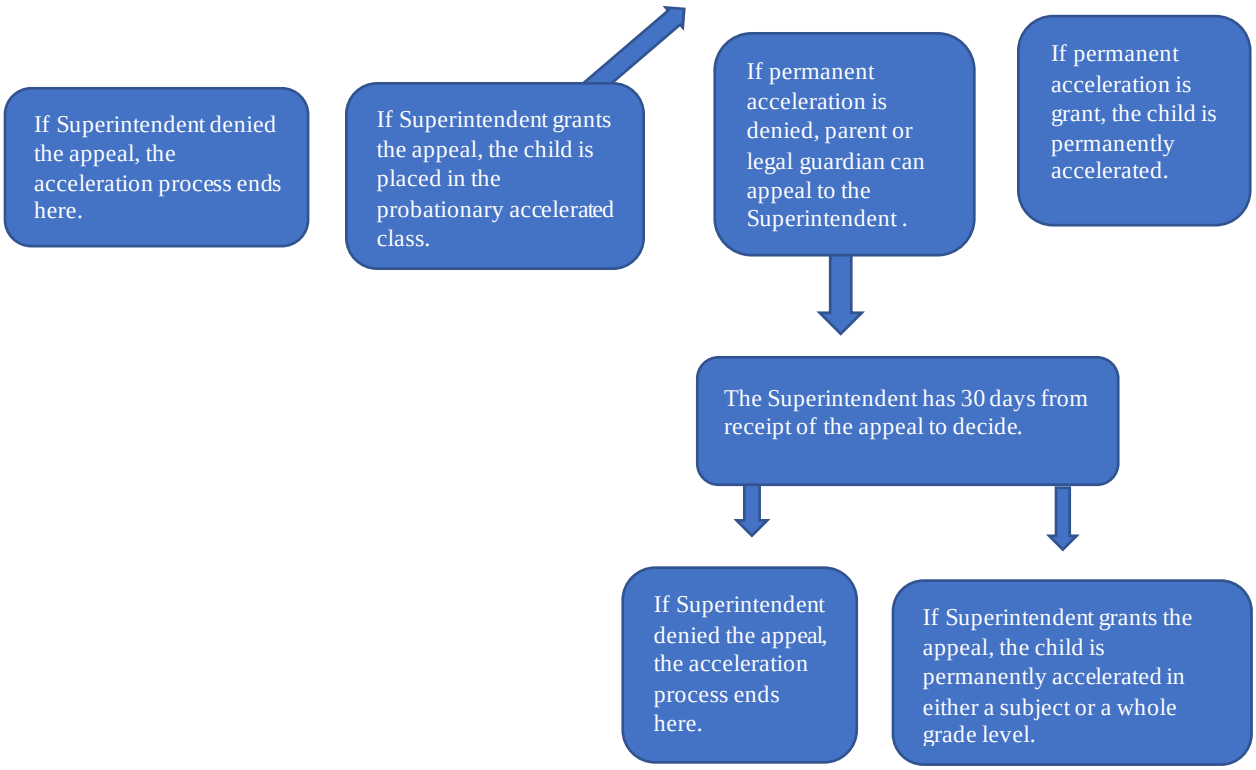
Hunter Woods School District's Acceleration Procedures for Early Entrance Into First Grade for a Child Who Attended a Non-Public School for Kindergarten



Appendix M

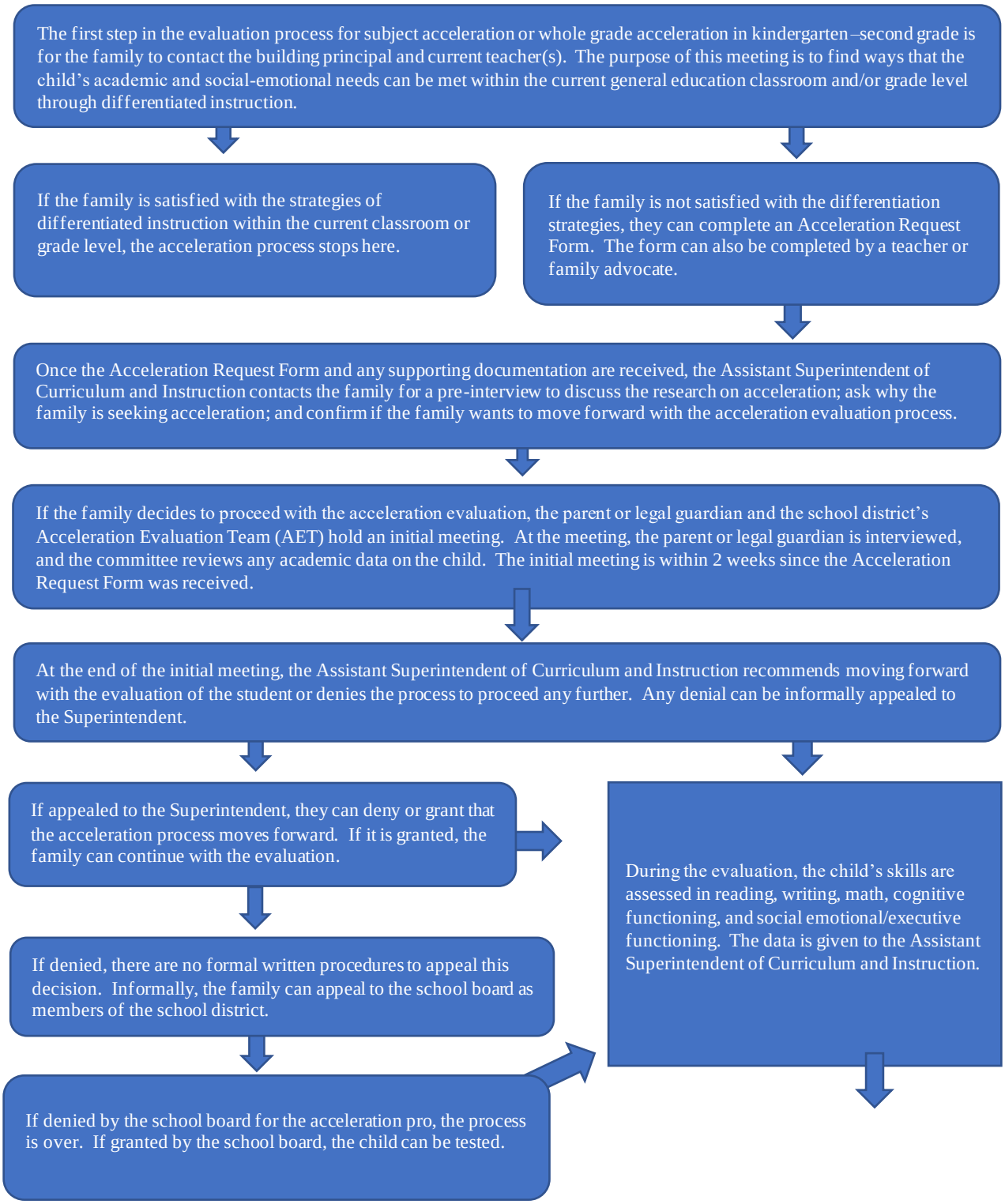
Georgetown School District's Subject and Whole Grade Acceleration Procedures

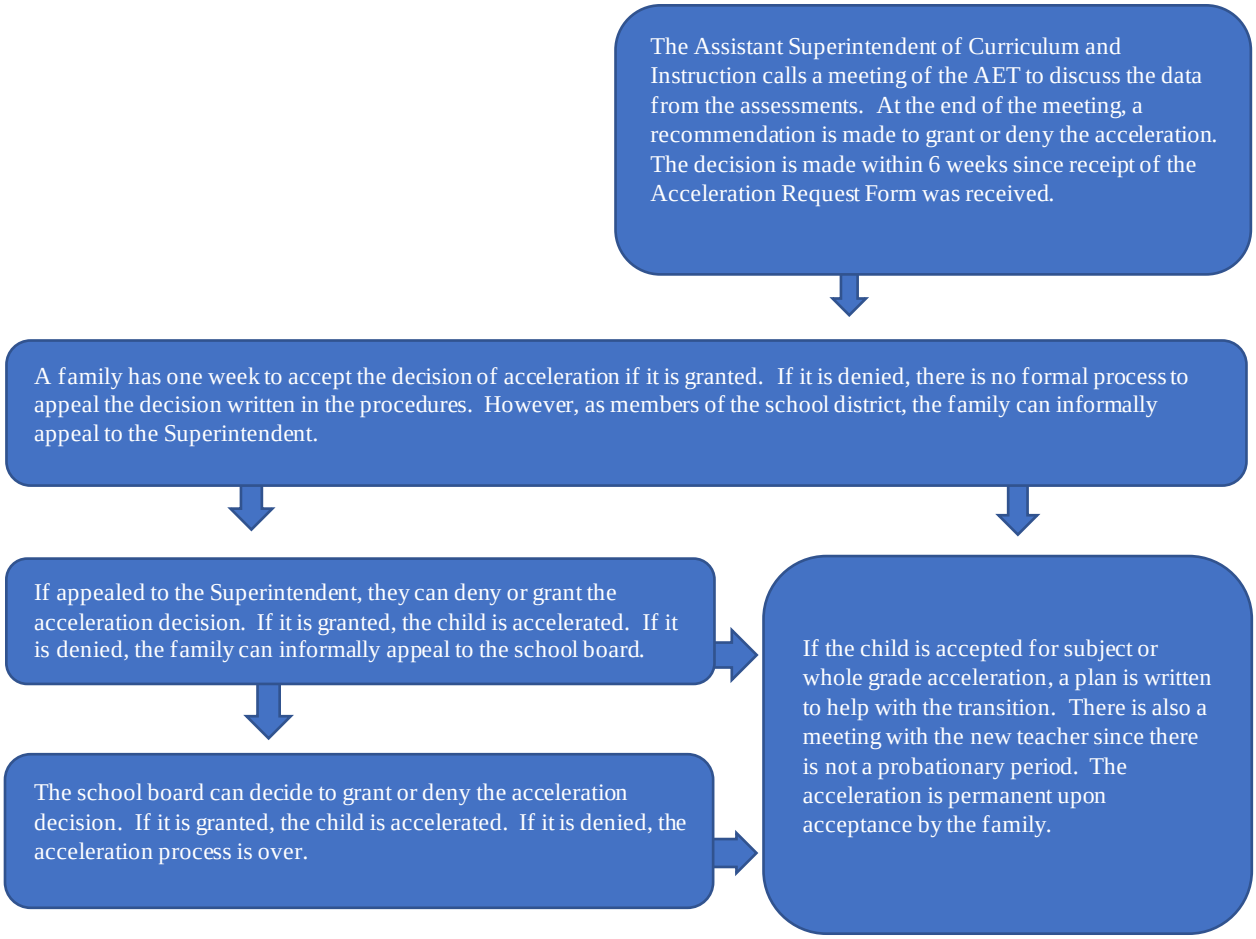



If Superintendent denied the appeal, the acceleration process ends here.
If Superintendent grants the appeal, the child is placed in the probationary accelerated class.
If permanent acceleration is denied, parent or legal guardian can appeal to the Superintendent .
If permanent acceleration is grant, the child is permanently accelerated.
The Superintendent has 30 days from receipt of the appeal to decide.
If Superintendent denied the appeal, the acceleration process ends here.
If Superintendent grants the appeal, the child is permanently accelerated in either a subject or a whole grade level.

Appendix N

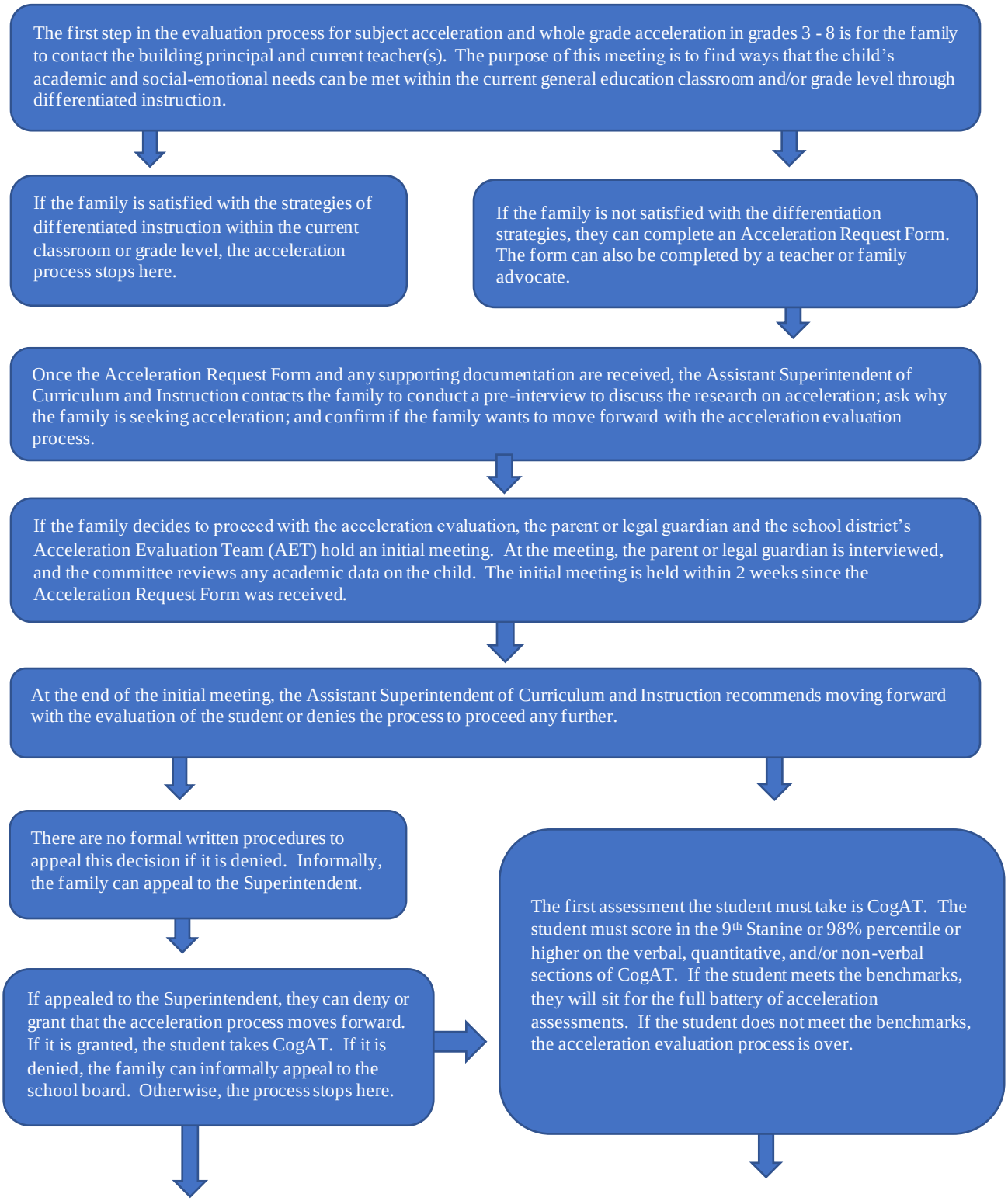
Riverbend School District's Kindergarten–Second Grade Subject and Whole Grade Acceleration Procedures

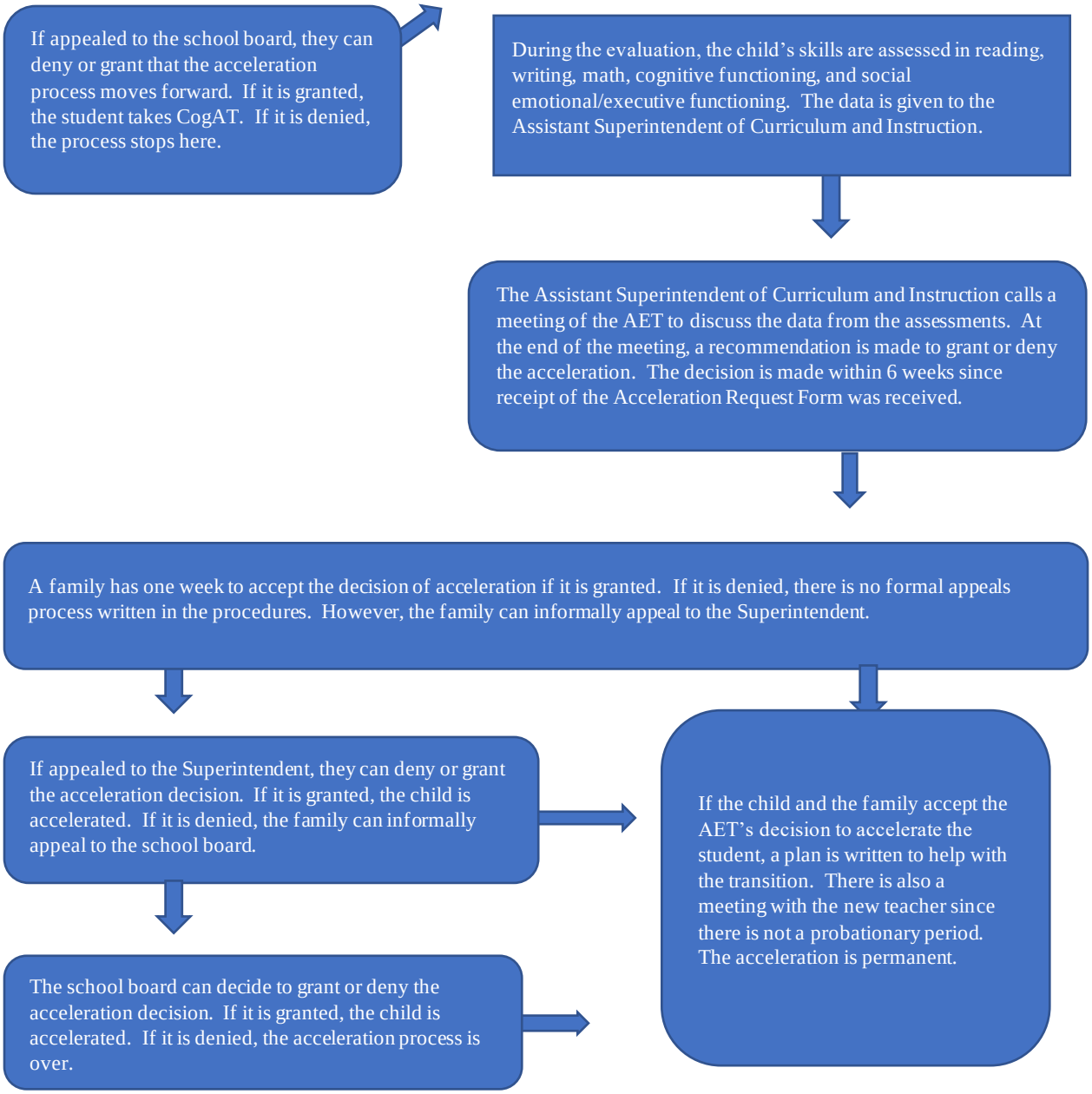



The Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction calls a meeting of the AET to discuss the data from the assessments. At the end of the meeting, a recommendation is made to grant or deny the acceleration. The decision is made within 6 weeks since receipt of the Acceleration Request Form was received.
A family has one week to accept the decision of acceleration if it is granted. If it is denied, there is no formal process to appeal the decision written in the procedures. However, as members of the school district, the family can informally appeal to the Superintendent.
If appealed to the Superintendent, they can deny or grant the acceleration decision. If it is granted, the child is accelerated. If it is denied, the family can informally appeal to the school board.
The school board can decide to grant or deny the acceleration decision. If it is granted, the child is accelerated. If it is denied, the acceleration process is over.
If the child is accepted for subject or whole grade acceleration, a plan is written to help with the transition. There is also a meeting with the new teacher since there is not a probationary period. The acceleration is permanent upon acceptance by the family.

Appendix O

Riverbend School District's Grades 3–8 Subject and Whole Grade Acceleration Procedures




During the evaluation, the child's skills are assessed in reading, writing, math, cognitive functioning, and social emotional/executive functioning. The data is given to the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction.
The Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction calls a meeting of the AET to discuss the data from the assessments. At the end of the meeting, a recommendation is made to grant or deny the acceleration. The decision is made within 6 weeks since receipt of the Acceleration Request Form was received.
A family has one week to accept the decision of acceleration if it is granted. If it is denied, there is no formal appeals process written in the procedures. However, the family can informally appeal to the Superintendent.
If appealed to the Superintendent, they can deny or grant the acceleration decision. If it is granted, the child is accelerated. If it is denied, the family can informally appeal to the school board.
The school board can decide to grant or deny the acceleration decision. If it is granted, the child is accelerated. If it is denied, the acceleration process is over.
If appealed to the school board, they can deny or grant that the acceleration process moves forward. If it is granted, the student takes CogAT. If it is denied, the process stops here.
If the child and the family accept the AET's decision to accelerate the student, a plan is written to help with the transition. There is also a meeting with the new teacher since there is not a probationary period. The acceleration is permanent.

APPENDIX P

Hunter Woods School District's Enrichment/Accelerated Placement Request Form

Date: _____

Student's Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Current Grade: _____

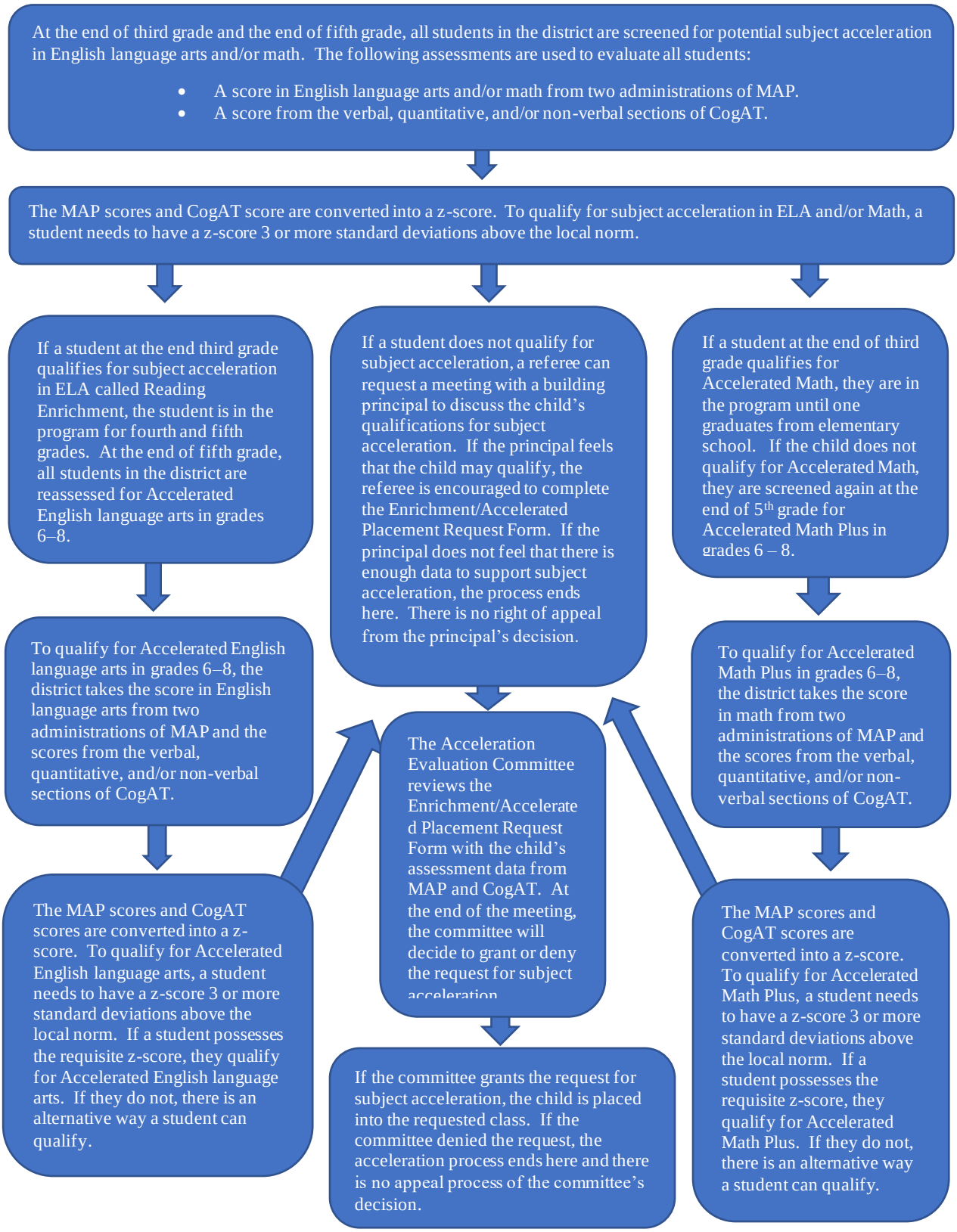
Name of Person(s) Initiating Request for Placement in an Enrichment/Accelerated Course:
_____

Relationship to Student: _____

Please write an explanation addressing: (a) why the placement criteria is not relevant to your child and should be waived; and (b) why the student should be considered for placement in an Enrichment/Accelerated course.

Appendix Q

Hunter Woods School District's Subject Acceleration Procedures in ELA or Math



Appendix R

Hunter Wood School District's Whole Grade Acceleration Request Form

This form must be completed and submitted to the building principal along with an attached narrative addressing the questions below.

Date: _____

Student's Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

School: _____ Current Grade: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____

Address: _____
City State Zip

Phone Number: _____

Name of Person(s) Initiating Request for Grade Acceleration: _____

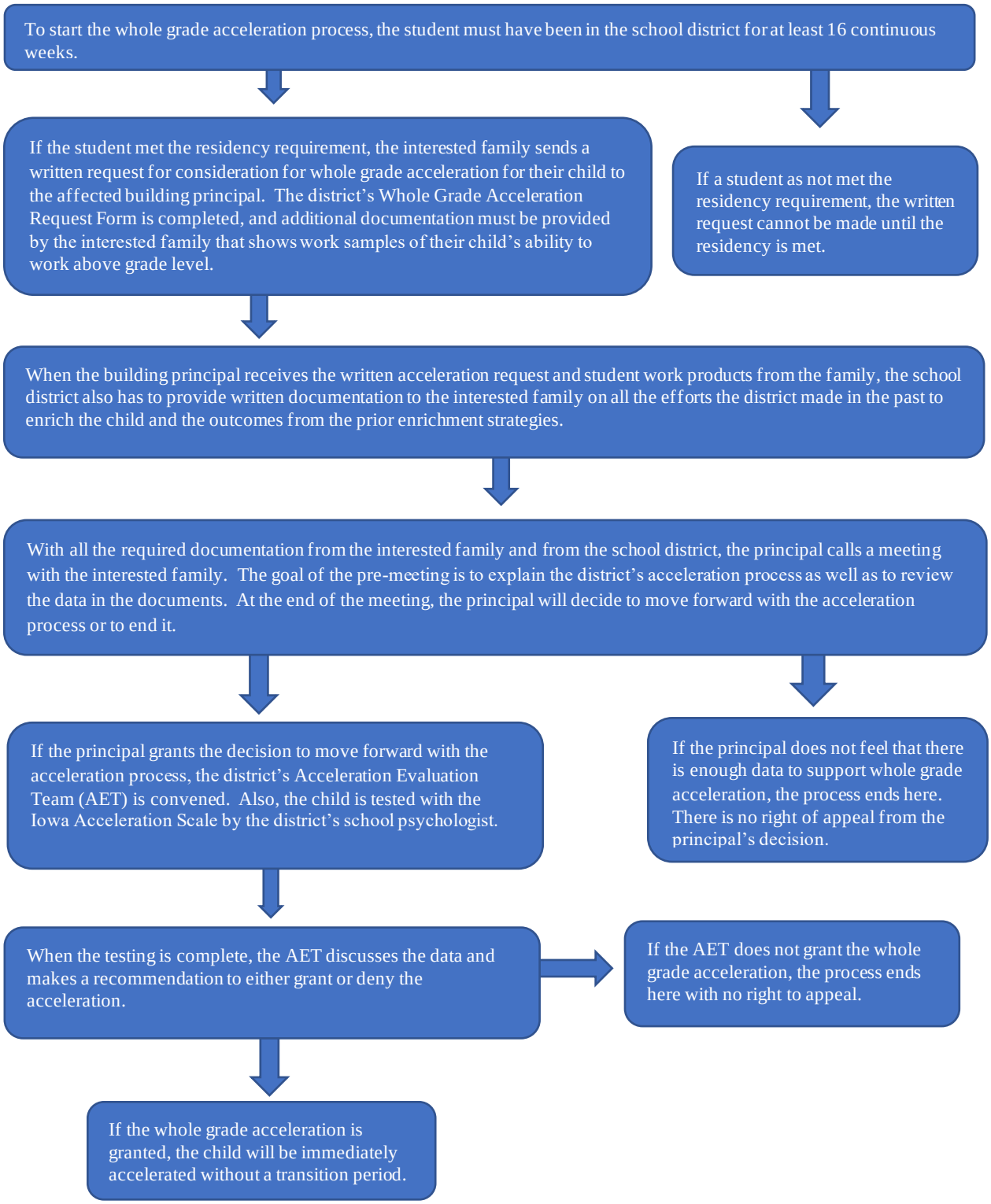
Relationship to Student: _____

Please use a separate piece of paper to describe specific observations of how your child functions at a significantly higher level and should be considered for whole grade acceleration. In your descriptions, please address each of the following:

1. Overall academic performance.
2. Ability to apply, analyze, and evaluate ideas at an advanced level.
3. Ability to work independently and advocate for him or herself.
4. Ability to think creatively.
5. Motivation to work on advanced material.
6. Oral and written communication skills
7. Ability to persist in the face of difficulty or failure.
8. Social/emotional development

Appendix S

Hunter Woods School District's Whole Grade Acceleration Procedures



Appendix T

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Participants

I. PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND OF INTERVIEWEE

1. Name of the Interviewee:
2. Position:
3. School District:
4. How long in position:
5. Demographics of District:
    a. Total student population:
    b. Communities served by the district:
    c. Race:
    d. Free/Reduced Lunch:
    e. EL:
    f. SPED:
    g. Gifted/Talented:
6. Sense Making and Sense Giving on Acceleration and the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act:
    a. How do you define acceleration?
    b. What do you think the purpose of acceleration is?
    c. How do you feel about acceleration?
    d. How do you tell others (sense giving) of acceleration? Who did you tell?
    e. When did you first learn about the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act?
    f. How do you make sense of the law?

g. What did you do to prepare for its implementation on July 1, 2018?

h. What is your understanding of what districts need to do to comply with the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act?

i. How have you made stakeholders (such as the school board) aware of the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act?

j. What has been the stakeholders' reactions to the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act after you made them aware of the law?

7. Acceleration:

a. How many students in your district were accelerated prior to July 1, 2018?

b. What was your district's acceleration policy prior to July 1, 2018?

c. What was your district's acceleration procedures prior to July 1, 2018?

d. Did the district's policy and/or procedures need to be revised to comply with the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act?

e. Who wrote the current acceleration policy?

f. Who wrote the current acceleration procedures?

g. What resources were used to write the current acceleration policy?

h. What resources were used to write the current acceleration procedures?

8. Professional Development:

a. What type of professional development did you take in gifted education?

b. What type of professional development did you take in acceleration?

c. Do you hold an endorsement in gifted education?

d. If there is an acceleration team at your district, what type of professional development did the each of the team members have in acceleration?

e. What type of training did each of the team members have in gifted education?

II. DISTRICT'S CURRENT ACCELERATION POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR ACCELERATION

(Is acceleration policy and procedures characterized by accessibility, equity, and openness?)

9. Please describe the district's current acceleration policy.

10. Please describe the district's current acceleration procedures and its guidelines.

    a. Who can refer a student for acceleration (a teacher, student, administrator, or parent)?

    b. What type of accelerations are currently offered by the district or specified in the district's policy?

    c. How does the acceleration process start?

    d. Is an acceleration evaluation team used to during the acceleration process? If so, who is on the evaluation team?

    e. Is the student who is being considered part of the acceleration evaluation team?

    f. What are the assessment(s) used to determine if a student should be considered for acceleration?

    g. What are the needed scores on the assessments that the district uses for a student to be considered for acceleration?

    h. Is there a predetermined level on a state norm reference achievement test that would have a student be automatically referred for consideration for acceleration?

    i. Is there a predetermined score on a district assessment that would have a student be automatically referred for consideration for acceleration?

    j. Who makes the decision to accelerate or to deny acceleration for a student?

    k. What is the appeals process for denial of acceleration?

    l. Is there a period of transition if a student is accelerated? If so, how long?

    m. Is there a written transition plan for the student who is accepted for acceleration?

        1. If so, who writes it?

        2. What are parts of the transition plan?

n. After the transition period and a student is permanently accelerated, is there a formal acceleration plan?

    1. If so, who writes it?

    2. What are its component parts?

    3. How often is it revisit to evaluate its effectiveness?

o. Can a student go back to the prior level of education during the transition period if the acceleration is not working for the student?

p. Can a student go back to the prior level of education after the transition period if the acceleration is not working for the student?

q. Is the process of obtaining acceleration services written in the district's acceleration policy and/or procedures?

r. How are the student's wishes considered during acceleration evaluation process?

11. Since the implementation of the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act, how many referrals were there for acceleration in your school district?

    a. Who made the requests for consideration for acceleration?

    b. How many students were accepted for acceleration?

    c. For the students accepted for acceleration, what was their grade level?

    d. For the students accepted for acceleration, what was their race?

    e. For the students accepted for acceleration, what was their gender?

    f. For the students accepted for acceleration, what was the acceleration?

    g. What types of accelerations did the school district implement since July 1, 2018?

    h. How many students have been denied for acceleration since July 1, 2018?

    i. What types of accelerations were the students denied for?

    j. Were other arrangements made for enrichment for the student(s) that was denied acceleration?

12. How is the current referral process for acceleration open to all students (regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, disability status, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, and/or school building attended)?

13. Is there additional screeners use for students who are classified as ELL, at-risk, low socioeconomic status, profoundly gifted, and twice exceptional? If so, how?

14. How has the school district ensured that the process for acceleration evaluation is inclusive?

15. How has the school district ensured that the process for acceleration is fair and objective?

16. How has the school district ensured that the process for acceleration is equitable?

17. How has the school district ensured that the process for acceleration is systematic?

III. ADMINISTRATION OF THE DISTRICT'S ACCELERATION POLICY AND PROCEDURES

18. How can parents or legal guardians communicate with school district leaders on the district's acceleration policy and/or procedures?

19. Does community at large have access to acceleration policy and/or procedures?

20. Is the acceleration policy written in other language other than English?

21. Does the acceleration policy and/or procedures address which grade-level achievement test(s) the student should take if he or she is accelerated?

22. Does the acceleration policy and/or procedures clarify transportation issues for students who are accelerated and need to travel between school buildings to have their needs met?

23. Does the acceleration policy and/or procedures address how an accelerated student maintains his or her accelerated standing?

24. Does the acceleration policy and/or procedures address how an accelerated student is assigned appropriate credit for accelerated coursework?

25. Does the acceleration policy and/or procedures address how an accelerated student obtains a mark or indication on his or her transcript showing that he or she takes acceleration coursework?

26. Does the acceleration policy and/or procedures allow an accelerated student to complete and to receive appropriate credit for content that he or she have mastered?

27. Does the acceleration policy and/or procedures provide guidelines for preventing non-academic barriers such as ensuring that an accelerated student can participate in extracurricular activities, including sports, with their non-accelerated peers?

28. Have funding revenue been examined prevent unintended disincentives such as not enough desks in the classroom or not enough materials needed by the accelerated student at a certain grade level?

29. How is the current acceleration policy regularly evaluated for its effectiveness?

30. How is the current acceleration procedures regularly evaluated for its effectiveness?

IV. GENERAL ACCELERATION POLICY AND PROCEDURE QUESTIONS

31. Does the current acceleration policy allow early entrance into kindergarten or first grade? If yes, what are the criteria to request referral?

32. Does the acceleration policy specific a certain enrollment age for early admission into kindergarten or first grade?

32. Is there a fee charged by the district for a student to be considered for acceleration?

33. Is it a requirement that a student needed to attend preschool if he or she is being considered for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade?

34. Does the acceleration policy and/or procedures address how the district will use flexible grouping to deliver instructional services to accelerated students?

35. Does the acceleration policy and/or procedures allow for sharing of resources between grade levels for serving accelerated students?

36. Does the acceleration policy and/or procedures encourage collaboration between the school district and families on information about acceleration services?

37. Does the acceleration policy and/or procedures specify or allocate funding for effective acceleration identification procedures?

38. Does the acceleration policy and/or procedures specify or allocate funding for assessments needed to identify students for potential acceleration?

39. Does the acceleration policy and/or procedures specify or allocate funding curriculum development in acceleration?

40. How are you reporting the students who have been accelerated to ISBE?

V. **ILLINOIS ACCELERATED PLACEMENT ACT**

41. How did the language in the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act guide the acceleration policy in your district?

42. How did the language in the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act guide the acceleration procedures in your district?

43. Did you and/or members of the acceleration evaluation team read the guidance document published in November of 2019 on the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act?

44. Did your district have to allocate funding for the implementation of the act?

45. Did fellow administrators know of the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act prior to its implementation date? If not, do they know of the law now and how do they know?

46. Did teachers in your school district know of the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act prior to its implementation date? If not, do they know of the law now and how do they know?

47. Did parents in your school district know of the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act prior to its implementation date? If not, do they know of the law now and how do they know?

48. Did the community at large know of the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act prior to its implementation date? If not, do they know of the law now and how do they know?

49. Did the school board members know of the Illinois Accelerated Placement Act prior to its implementation date? If not, do they know of the law now and how do they know?

Appendix U

Krusemark School District's Parent Consideration Form for Early Entrance into Kindergarten

Parent Considerations for Early Entrance into Kindergarten

Early entrance into kindergarten should be viewed as a means of meeting a child's needs. The key to determining whether or not early entrance into kindergarten is appropriate for a child is developmental readiness. Even though a child may have a lot of ability, he/she may not be ready for kindergarten. Other important factors to consider are social maturity, personal development, and gross/fine motor development.

Early entrance is designed for the exceptional child who is both academically ready as well as developmentally mature when compared to others his/her chronological age. There is a difference between ability and achievement. Some children may appear exceptional simply because of their access to opportunities (i.e., attended preschool programs, have parent(s)/guardian(s) working with them on academic contents and skills, or have access to high quality learning materials). Early entrance is designed for the child who has high ability and easily achieves when presented with new material.

Children who will benefit from an early entrance into kindergarten may not exhibit all of the characteristics listed below; however, strong candidates will exhibit more of these characteristics than other children.

Some considerations when determining if early entrance is right for a child:

- Is my child capable of working in a classroom setting with children who are one year older than he/she?
- Will my child be frustrated by this placement?
- What are the possible long-term impacts as my child progresses through elementary, middle, and high school (i.e., beginning college at a younger age)?
- Do I understand the expectations for students in kindergarten today?

What to look for when considering early kindergarten enrollment:

My child seems advanced beyond other children his/her age in these ways:

- Understands the meanings and use of words better than other children his/her age.
- Is very curious about many things and asks questions often.
- Is exceptionally good at working puzzles or solving problems.
- Has a great sense of humor and understands jokes more than other children his/her age.
- Has a good memory and remembers details of conversations or stories.
- Is interested in difficult concepts such as time and space.
- Concentrates on certain activities much longer than other children his/her age.

- Reads and understands text in picture books or chapter books.
- Figures out math-related problems better than other children his/her age

What are some important school and academic factors?

My child:

●Enjoys learning new information or skills.

●Participates in community-sponsored activities such as sports, dance, gymnastics, library, and museum programs.

●Believes he/she is capable of succeeding at new tasks.

What are some important developmental factors?

My child has the follow developmental characteristics:

●He/she has above average fine and large motor coordination (holding a pencil, skipping, hopping, etc.).

●He/she is able to use the computer to play games or find information with minimal assistance.

What are some important interpersonal skills for entering school?

My child:

●Thoughtfully considers feedback and criticism and changes behavior appropriately.

●Often behaves in a way that is positive.

●Has good interpersonal skills with children the same age, as well as older/younger children and with adults, especially in a teaching role.