

There is large variation in student learning needs within classrooms—yet all students need appropriate challenge to learn. Research shows that grade- or subject-specific acceleration can provide the necessary challenge to academically talented students whose needs are not met in typical classrooms.

Research shows that students can better develop their talents—and do so at a younger age—when they are appropriately challenged in the classroom. Grade skipping is one of many acceleration techniques. Other forms of acceleration include early entrance to school (including both kindergarten and college) and curriculum compacting, meaning two years of a typical curriculum is covered in only one year.



	Accelerate	Do not accelerate
Academic challenge	yes	?
Opportunity to start career earlier	yes	?
Opportunity to form social connections	yes	?
Adulthood regrets about education	no	?

Although some people have expressed concern about accelerated students fitting in socially, research findings do not show greater social problems for most students following an accelerated academic path. Acceleration can even help students forge social connections. Furthermore, if students have advanced educational needs, they are at risk of not fitting in socially with same-age peers; being with older students may actually resolve social concerns rather than cause them.

Take Action

Parents and educators: When deciding whether acceleration is the right option, the student’s academic, social, and psychological needs and maturity must all be taken into consideration. Having many informed voices participate in this decision-making process—including the students themselves, parents, educators, administrators, and even psychologists—will help facilitate reaching the most informed decision.

- 1. Appropriate learning environments, motivation, encouragement, and even luck can all play a role in helping students develop and succeed.**
- 2. Tests, including IQ tests, are good at predicting later life performance.** IQ scores are highly predictive of performance in school, occupation, income, and even physical and mental health. IQ scores from childhood can even predict mortality: smarter people generally live longer, even after controlling for social class.
- 3. Higher scores are related with higher outcomes throughout the full range of ability.** Even within just the top one percent of students, higher test scores are associated with higher adulthood accomplishments and achievements.
- 4. All people have different abilities that are typically positively related and that form an overall general ability.** This means that people who tend to be good at one thing also tend to be good at other things, but they can have strengths and weaknesses in specific areas.
- 5. Early high performance in a domain predicts later educational, occupational, and creative accomplishments in that domain.** People strong in math or verbal domains at an early age tend to achieve extraordinary accomplishments in their domain of strength.
- 6. Non-verbal tests alone will not tell us if students will succeed in school,** especially when success relies on verbal skills. Non-verbal tests are also not necessarily “a more fair assessment” of academic potential.
- 7. Fewer students will be identified as gifted** when participation in a gifted program requires students to have high ratings on all criteria (for example: high test scores and high teacher rating scale scores and a parent nomination) compared to when a single criterion is used.
- 8. Classes grouped by age have huge variations in student learning needs.** This supports the need for differentiated instruction based on student learning needs, not student age.
- 9. The claim that being taught using a student’s preferred learning style leads to greater achievement is not supported by evidence.** However, there is substantial strong evidence that good teaching is effective for all students.
- 10. Current measures do not reliably differentiate academic achievement from ability,** even though we have the verbal skills to create unique definitions for each.
- 11. There is no consistent relationship between acceleration and social-emotional problems.** But the research does show that acceleration can have huge academic benefits for students.
- 12. In general, more education is better, especially if matched with student interests and passions.**

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