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Five Considerations That Educators Can Employ for Accelerated Learning



As schools returned via in-person, hybrid, and virtual learning the past school year, data began to show the discrepancy and variance in skills across students. Even if the 2022–23 school year feels normal, this year will further highlight the impact of the pandemic on student learning gaps, unfinished learning, and the need for accelerated learning. Gaps in student learning are not new; however, inconsistencies in virtual learning, hybrid learning, and hours of in-person learning time offered

nationwide have widened existing disparities and exacerbated variation in student achievement, most acutely for historically disadvantaged students,^{1,2} such as students with disabilities, students who struggle, and students who are multilingual. The pandemic-driven learning loss is unprecedented, but educators have evidence-based tools that can help them plan to address these learning gaps. Prior to the pandemic, many schools

had successfully implemented Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) frameworks to address learning gaps. Driven by research on the benefits of accelerated learning, many state education agencies are supporting local education agencies in implementing MTSS coupled with accelerated learning. This document shares five considerations for applying accelerated learning to support the wide variation in student learning and improve achievement.

What Is Accelerated Learning?

Accelerated learning is a method to reduce gaps in skill mastery, connect previous grade-level skills with current grade-level standards, and support students in achieving grade-level standards. At its core, the goal of accelerated learning is to push and keep students moving forward in their current grade level.¹ Accelerated learning is an approach that assesses specific foundational knowledge and skills needed to achieve current

grade-level content, versus teaching everything at that current grade level, and provides focused instruction on key academic trajectories or the unfinished learning or learning gaps. Accelerated learning requires ongoing assessment of a student's prior knowledge and skills to design and provide high-quality learning opportunities that are personalized to support the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of the student. This learning can take place within core instruction, across a tiered instructional system.

Although organizations have recently released many reports^{3,4} and resources⁵ as a result of the COVID pandemic, the tenets of accelerated learning are consistent with evidence- and research-based instructional support to close and diminish gaps across peers prior to the pandemic and to tackle the learning gaps that occurred because of the pandemic, especially true for students with disabilities, students at risk, and students who are multilingual.



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Five Considerations for Accelerated Learning

1. Leverage MTSS Frameworks

Prior to the COVID pandemic, schools were implementing MTSS to provide academic and behavioral support to students, and MTSS is a natural framework that can support accelerated learning. Assessment components of MTSS, such as universal screening and progress monitoring, are essential to identifying students in need of accelerated learning and measuring progress toward meeting grade-level standards. Although accelerated learning should first be integrated within core instruction through differentiation and small groups, leveraging Tiers 2 and 3 intervention support may be warranted for students with greater academic gaps. The use of data-based decision-making processes will be key to target core academic instruction and intervention.

2. Plan for All Students and Implement Instructional Coaching

Planning for accelerated learning is not easy and does not happen organically. The standard scope and sequence followed in the past may not be appropriate for all students. Focus needs to remain on grade-level standards and content, but content should be streamlined to prioritize skills for long-term success and reduce redundancies in the curriculum.¹ Rather than teach skills in isolation, teachers need to combine known skills with newly

acquired skills, which can lead to greater generalization and success. Pairing new instructional content with coaching and collaboration is imperative. Teachers need support and resources to best meet student needs.

3. Adjust Instruction and Assessment

In addition to planning for streamlining content, teachers need to adjust their instruction and assessment. All students, not only students with disabilities, may need scaffolds to help bridge gaps, so teachers need to pinpoint gaps and be precise when teaching missing skills. Students need academic support that emphasizes their strengths. Teachers need to allow additional time and opportunities for students to integrate necessary prerequisite skills, while providing scaffolds for grade-level work.⁶ Teachers also need to be mindful of and incorporate culturally responsive learning as it relates to students' lived experiences. Instruction should include culturally sustaining practices that include interacting with new terms or vocabulary and concepts through different mediums.^{7,8}

4. Incorporate Universal Design Principles Into Instruction

A key component to consider in adapting instruction is using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. UDL is a process in which instruction is customized and part of planning and is proactive rather

than reactive to meeting student needs. When educators include UDL components, they are anticipating needs of students by offering different pathways to learn and show mastery of the material. UDL leads to greater ownership and collaboration of learning—teachers use data to increase student strengths and remediate individual skill areas needing improvement. When educators consider UDL, learning becomes more personalized and strategic to meet diverse student needs.

5. Utilize Out-of-School Time

Educators should use data and UDL principles within an MTSS framework to differentiate instruction and assessment, but this may not be enough to decrease academic gaps for all students. Schools may need to leverage out-of-school time, which includes using high-quality tutoring with evidence-based interventions. Partnering with community organizations and/or institutes of higher education to provide tutoring before or after school may benefit more students and continue to reduce the learning gap prior to the next school year. Schools need to leverage out-of-school time as an addition to core instruction and services within Individualized Education Programs and should not consider the out-of-school time as meeting these minutes.



Additional Resources to Examine for Accelerated Learning

- [Regional Educational Laboratory West: Improving Outcomes for Students and Educators](#)
 - [Taking a Closer Look at All Forms of Accelerated Learning in Oregon](#)
 - [Improving School Accountability Measures in the Wake of COVID-19: An Opportunity Borne of Necessity](#)
 - [Expanded Learning Time: How States and Districts Can Use Federal Recovery Funds Strategically](#)
 - [Promising Practices to Accelerate Learning for Students with Disabilities During COVID-19 and Beyond](#)
 - [Division of International Special Education and Services](#)
- State Education Agency Support**
- [Promising Practices for Accelerating Learning for Students with Disabilities](#)
 - [Accelerated Learning](#)

Endnotes

- 1 Kuhfeld, M., & Lewis, K. (2021). Student achievement in 2021-22: Cause for hope and continued urgency. NWEA Collaborative for Student Growth Brief. <https://www.nwea.org/content/uploads/2022/07/Student-Achievement-in-2021-22-Cause-for-hope-and-concern.researchbrief-1.pdf>
- 2 Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J., & Viruleg, E. (2021). COVID-19 and education: An emerging K-shaped recovery. McKinsey & Company, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/covid-19-and-education-an-emerging-k-shaped-recovery>
- 3 U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development. (2021). ED COVID-19 handbook, Volume 1: Strategies for safely reopening elementary and secondary schools. <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/reopening.pdf>
- 4 U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development. (2021). ED COVID-19 handbook, Volume 2: Roadmap to reopening safely and meeting all students' needs. <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/reopening-2.pdf>
- 5 TNTP. (2021). Learning acceleration for all: Planning for the next three to five years. <https://tntp.org/covid-19-school-response-toolkit/view/learning-acceleration-for-all-planning-for-the-next-three-to-five-years>
- 6 <https://www.cast.org/>
- 7 CEEDAR Center. (n.d.). Course enhancement modules. <https://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/cems/>
- 8 CEEDAR Center. (n.d.). Innovation configurations. <https://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/innovation-configurations/>

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