

# Research Summary

## Students' Views on Acceleration



In 2016, Western University conducted a study in collaboration with an Ontario District School Board to examine elementary school students' views on **grade-based acceleration**. Grade-based acceleration is when a high-ability (gifted) student moves into a class with older classmates.

### Research Background

Ontario's inclusive education system aims to respect diversity and support every student to develop their full potential<sup>1</sup>. To develop their potential in inclusive classrooms, some high ability students need opportunities to learn at a higher level than typical.

### What the students did

In our study, students in grades 6, 7, and 8 first shared their views on grade-based acceleration. Then, students sorted a list of their ideas into themes and rated the importance of each idea.

### What the researchers did

We interviewed 26 students and used statistical analyses to depict how students sorted and rated their ideas about moving fast learners into classes with older classmates.

Our analyses revealed students' perspectives on acceleration, and identified key strategies to promote inclusion.

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# Findings & Implications

## Key Findings

Students **acknowledged learning differences** and recognized that some students learn faster than others. Overall, students **accepted the idea of acceleration** for fast learners. They rated, **“It's not fair to keep someone at a level that they're past”** as the most important point for teachers and parents to keep in mind when considering acceleration. A few students expressed concerns about potential perceptions of unfairness, confusing equal treatment (i.e., age-based placement) with equity (i.e., giving students what they need to reach their full potential).



## Students' Views on Acceleration

Students generated 53 unique ideas about what acceleration might be like. Our analysis revealed 5 key considerations including:

1. Benefits for the fast learner
2. How the fast learner might feel
3. Benefits for others (teachers and classmates)
4. Potential barriers to acceptance
5. Uncomfortable feelings

## Strategies to Promote Inclusion

Students proposed the following strategies to include accelerated students:

- Invite them to join your group
- Get to know them as individuals
- Avoid singling out students
- Help them with school work
- Group accelerated students together, or with assigned buddies
- Structure learning activities to engage and involve all students



## Potential Implications

In general, participants in our study embraced the idea of accelerative options for high-ability students and were **ready to accept accelerated students** in their inclusive educational setting. A few participants voiced a **potential for negative attitudes** towards acceleration. Such attitudes are contrary to the philosophy of inclusive education and could be a barrier to social inclusion. Students also voiced the importance of ‘fairness’, indicating they **recognised the need for equitable opportunities**. Students could benefit from opportunities to explore the differences between equity and equal treatment.

## References

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