

EXCEPTIONAL LEARNER POLICY

approved December 4, 2024

Introduction

At Dallas International School (DIS), we offer a challenging learning experience to all our students in their quest for deep academic knowledge. Both the French and International Programs with three languages since Early Childhood provide students with a high level of engagement and various opportunities to acquire the skills that our students will need to contribute to the advancement of humanity. All teachers differentiate their teaching to address the needs of all students. Differentiation allows educators to address students' different learning needs, thereby enabling each student to progress as far as possible in mastering the skills taught through our curricula. Very importantly, differentiation considers students' unique abilities and developmental pace.

Underpinning effective differentiation are a multitude of practices and relevant approaches to cater to students' different needs. At DIS, we believe in providing differentiated pedagogical approaches based on those needs. For instance, learning groups may be organized within the class dynamically and flexibly according to the students' needs in a given specific subject at a specific time. By using such an approach, educators are better able to meet the needs of each student—including those performing rapidly and/or at advanced levels—without requiring formal identification or a more substantial adjustment of the curriculum.

Identifying Exceptional Learners

The identification of an Exceptional Learner involves an assessment and analysis that must be conducted by an external educational psychologist. This assessment includes the evaluation of cognitive functioning (e.g., psychometric evaluations such as the WISC-V) and psychoaffective development, potentially supplemented by investigations into other areas (e.g., motor skills, socioemotional, creativity, etc.). To be recognized as an Exceptional Learner, a student's full-scale IQ must be above 130 (i.e., two standard deviations from the median of 100) (Pezzuti, 2002, para. 4). The prevalence of Exceptional Learners in the human population is around 2.3%.

In addition to providing a challenging academic program and pedagogical differentiation, DIS may provide one or more of the following three accommodations for Exceptional Learners:

- enrichment program
- cross-grade placement
- curriculum acceleration

Enrichment Program

Enrichment is an accommodation that can be offered at all levels and that can complement both accelerated learning and cross-grade placement, while allowing the student to remain in their class. The time saved allows them to engage in activities tailored to their interests throughout the school year.

According to Renzulli and Reis (1997), three types of enrichment effectively support the needs of Exceptional Learners:

- **Type I Enrichment** aims to enhance the student's skills through activities that stimulate curiosity and exploration, exposing them to different content and areas of knowledge.
- **Type II Enrichment**, provided in small groups, involves creative activities, problem-solving, and critical thinking in a wide range of situations, fostering learning abilities through written, oral, and visual productions.
- **Type III Enrichment** presents concrete problems solving, either individually or in small groups, placing the student in a researcher's role and challenging them to practice autonomy.

Cross-Grade Placement

In elementary and secondary schools, cross-grade placement involves identifying an Exceptional Learner's strengths and offering them the opportunity to participate in activities at a higher grade level to put newfound skills into practice and maintain their motivation. This method of adapting the educational path of Exceptional Learners provides great flexibility. Within this accommodation, Exceptional Learners can remain in grade-level courses in which they are less comfortable or struggling, while frequently participating in an activity or course at a higher grade level, thereby allowing them to enhance their knowledge and skills.

Accelerated Curriculum

An accelerated curriculum is an adjustment that allows Exceptional Learners to complete the school curriculum in less time than their peers. Curriculum acceleration can take the form of:

- **Grade skipping** at any grade level and at any point in the year (e.g., direct transition from fifth grade to seventh grade, a mid-year promotion from eighth grade to ninth grade, etc.).
- **Condensed learning**, which involves shortening a grade level or cycle by condensing learning (e.g., completing a three-year program in two years, a two-year program in one year, etc.).
Though learning is condensed, the entire curriculum for the year is covered.

While accelerating an educational path is typically reserved for students with outstanding academic performance, it can also be an appropriate accommodation for some Exceptional Learners who appear to be underperforming. These students may have gradually disengaged from learning and/or relationships with their classmates, limiting their participation in school activities. Their actual level of academic achievement is often challenging to assess and may differ from the results of psychometric assessments. That said, this level of achievement must be compatible with the possibility of advancing to a higher grade level more quickly, so it is essential to plan for grade skipping in advance with the student's family.

Policy Review and Publication

This policy is reviewed regularly through collaborative planning, and final versions for publication are sent to and formally approved by the DIS Executive Leadership Team. The latest version of this policy is made available to the DIS community through the MyDIS platform.

References

French Ministry of National Education and Youth. (n.d.). *Scolariser un élève à haut potentiel*. Paris: Author.

Pezzuti, L., Farese, M., Dawe, J., & Lauriola, M. (2022). The cognitive profile of gifted children compared to those of their parents: A descriptive study using the Wechsler Scales. *Journal of Intelligence*, 10(4), 91. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jintelligence10040091>

Renzulli, J. S., & Reis, S. M. (1997). *The schoolwide enrichment model: A comprehensive plan for educational excellence*. Mansfield Center, CT: Creative Learning Press.