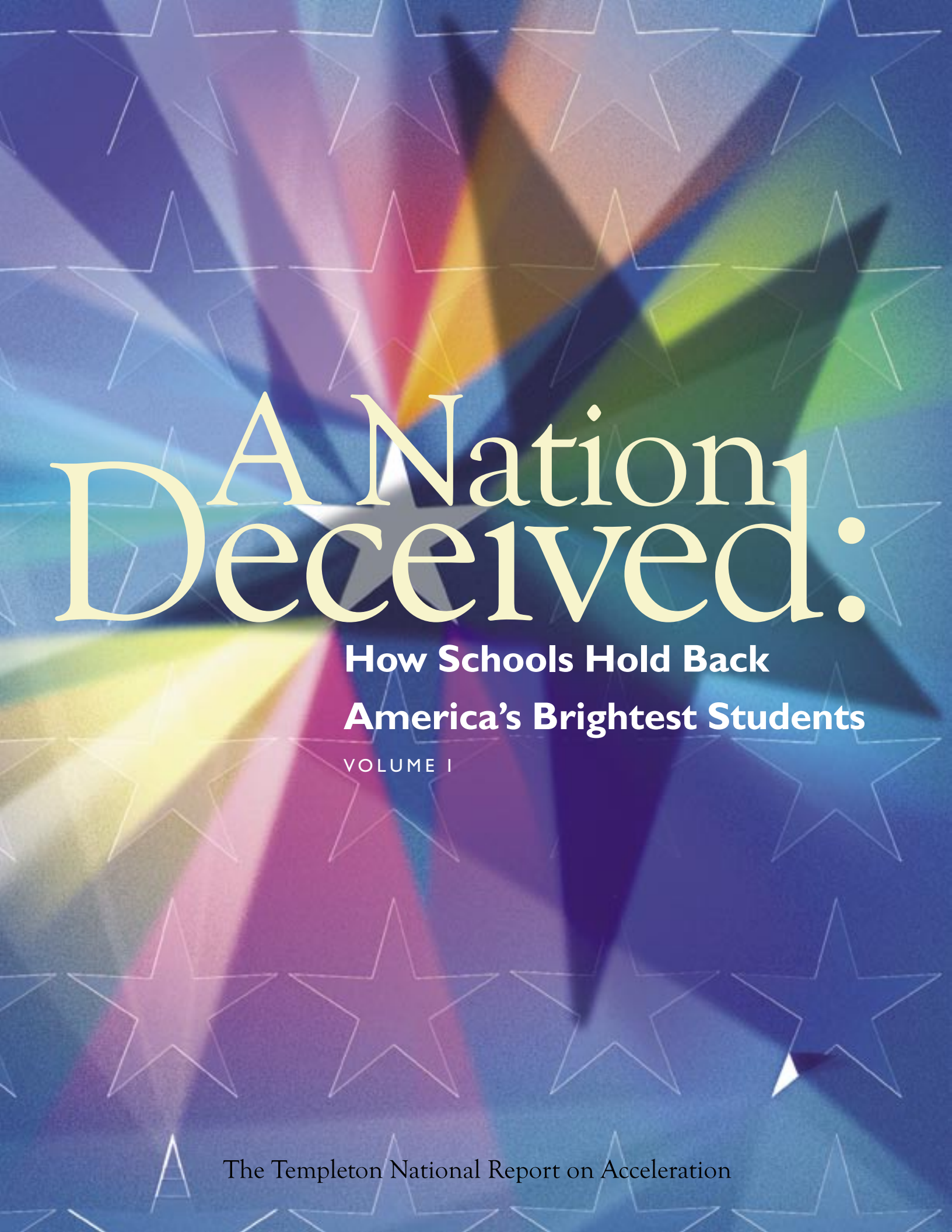


A Nation Deceived:

How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students

VOLUME I

The Templeton National Report on Acceleration

America Ignores Excellence

Is America ignoring excellence? Newspaper headlines proclaim that our nation's schools are producing weak students who lag behind age-peers in other countries. Meanwhile, there is a quieter story that's been kept in the dark—but is just as important to our country's future.

In every state, in every school, in huge cities, and in tiny farm communities, students are ready for much more challenge than the system provides.

These children perform better than any politician dares to expect. They are the top scorers, the ones who break the curve. They are the kids who read shampoo bottles at age three, and read newspaper editorials at age five. They can add up the cost of groceries faster than a cash register. They shock their parents and wow their grandparents.

But when they enter school, things change. They're often the most frustrated students in the classroom. They're bored in kindergarten, and they're bored again in first grade. Year after year, they learn little that they haven't learned already. They hope things will get better, but things rarely do. For many of them, nothing changes.

America's school system keeps bright students in line by forcing them to learn in a lock-step manner with their classmates. Teachers and principals disregard students' desires to learn more—much more—than they are being taught.

Instead of praise and encouragement, these students hear one word—no. When they ask for a challenge, they are held back. When they want to fly, they are told to stay in their seats.

Stay in your grade. Know your place.

It's a national scandal. And the price may be the slow but steady erosion of American excellence.

About the Title

The title of this report, *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students*, reflects what happens every day in our country's classrooms. When we tell ourselves that our brightest students would not benefit from acceleration, we deceive ourselves, our students, and the nation.

We know *deceived* is a very strong word. We consulted with a large number of people before deciding on this title, and we stand behind it.

This title is provocative—and accurate. This title is our honest message to America and that message is this: deceiving ourselves and deceiving our brightest students is no longer defensible.

The 20 Most Important Points from Volume II of This Report

1. Acceleration is the most effective curriculum intervention for gifted children.
2. For bright students, acceleration has long-term beneficial effects, both academically and socially.
3. Acceleration is a virtually cost-free intervention.
4. Gifted children tend to be socially and emotionally more mature than their age-mates. For many bright students, acceleration provides a better personal maturity match with classmates.
5. When bright students are presented with curriculum developed for age-peers, they can become bored and unhappy and get turned off from learning.
6. Testing, especially above-level testing (using tests developed for older students), is highly effective in identifying students who would benefit from acceleration.
7. The evidence and mechanisms are available to help schools make good decisions about acceleration so that it is a low-risk/high-success intervention for qualified students. *The Iowa Acceleration Scale* is a proven, effective instrument for helping schools make decisions about whole-grade acceleration.
8. The 18 types of acceleration available to bright students fall into two broad categories: grade-based acceleration, which shortens the number of years a student spends in the K–12 system and subject-based acceleration, which allows for advanced content earlier than customary.
9. Entering school early is an excellent option for some gifted students both academically and socially. High ability young children who enroll early generally settle in smoothly with their older classmates.
10. Gifted students entering college early experience both short-term and long-term academic success, leading to long-term occupational success and personal satisfaction.
11. Many alternatives to full-time early college entrance are available for bright high school students who prefer to stay with age-peers. These include dual enrollment in high school and college, distance education, and summer programs. Advanced Placement (AP) is the best large-scale option for bright students who want to take college-level courses in high school.
12. Very few early college entrants experience social or emotional difficulties. When these do occur they are usually short-term and part of the adjustment process.
13. Radical acceleration (acceleration by two or more years) is effective academically and socially for highly gifted students.
14. Many educators have been largely negative about the practice of acceleration, despite abundant research evidence for its success and viability.
15. To encourage a major change in America's perceptions of educational acceleration, we will need to use all the engines of change: legislation, the courts, administrative rules, and professional initiatives.
16. Effective implementation of accelerative options for gifted students with disabilities is time- and resource-intensive.
17. It is important for parents to be fully involved in the decision-making process about their child's acceleration.
18. The few problems that have been experienced with acceleration have stemmed primarily from incomplete or poor planning.
19. Educational equity does not mean educational sameness. Equity respects individual differences in readiness to learn and recognizes the value of each student.
20. The key question for educators is not *whether* to accelerate a gifted learner but rather *how*.

For more information on the research that informs these points, see Volume II of *A Nation Deceived*

America Says No

What do America's brightest students hear? Every year, across the nation, students who should be moved ahead at their natural pace of learning are told to stay put. Thousands of students are told to lower their expectations, and put their dreams on hold. Whatever they want to do, their teachers say, it can wait.

Staying put is the wise move, many school districts say. That's what is best for the child.

The problem is that it's not. Study after study tells us what so many bright but bored students already know—challenge is lacking in the regular classroom. We are deceiving ourselves when it comes to encouraging excellence. The way to promote excellence is to help it advance.

Excellence begins with one word—yes.

Yes to giving bright kids complex math problems. Yes to letting them learn another language. Yes to letting them accelerate to take classes that are ahead of their age group. Yes to letting them fly.

Instead, we say no. And by saying no, we undermine the motivation of bright students and hurt ourselves. We cling to the idea that all children are better off with children who match them in age. We don't even question it. And the cost to our country, to our communities, and to our children is enormous.

Excellence can lose its vibrancy. It can become complacence. It can become apathy. What it always becomes, if it's ignored, is less than it could be. When we say no to acceleration, we are quietly and, ironically with good intentions, lowering our national standards from excellence to baseline competence. Excellence is simply disregarded.

The Cost of Yes

What will it cost to reinvigorate excellence?

Very little. The price of moving bright students ahead is minimal. In fact, acceleration often saves money.

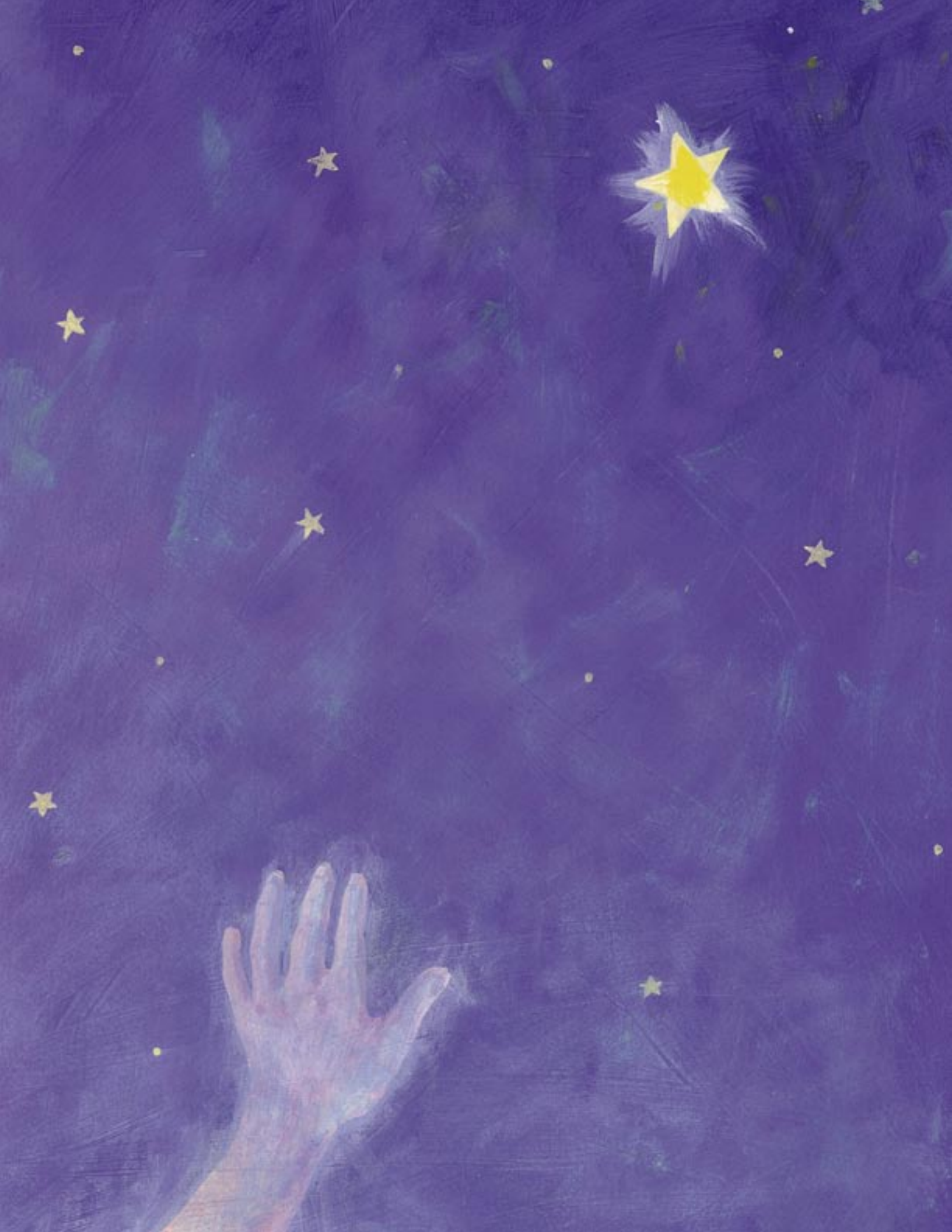
When a high school student takes college-level courses such as Advanced Placement (AP) classes, her parents save thousands of dollars, because that's what those courses would have cost at most universities.

Nationally, the parents of over 1 million students who, in 2004, took 1.9 million AP exams are saving millions of dollars in college costs each year. And, of course, getting young professionals into the community more quickly strengthens our neighborhoods and increases the tax base.

For more on what the word yes can mean to American students, read on. What yes means is a little different at the preschool, elementary school, high school, and college levels. But in almost every case, it is a great word. It's the first syllable in the long story of American achievement.

The word yes saves money, but it also saves bright young minds. And in many cases, it saves years of loneliness and social isolation for students who don't fit in with age-peers and who are hungry for friends who share similar interests.

Yes opens the door to achievement for students who long for challenge.



Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students

Parents and teachers who meet to talk about what to do with an academically advanced student will hear all kinds of advice from their school. Some of that advice makes acceleration sound scary. But that advice might be a recycling of old myths.

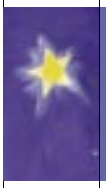
It's hard to know what's really true and what's just nonsense. Scholarly research demonstrates that much of what you hear about acceleration is false, some is partially true, and some really is true.

Myth and Truth

America has been deceived, as our title says, because we have known the truth about the effectiveness of acceleration for gifted students for decades. However, that truth has been kept from the decision-makers who set the educational policy for our country's children. Therefore, decisions about acceleration have traditionally been based upon personal biases, or incomplete and incorrect information. Amid the political wars of education, the interests of bright children have been lost.

Schools have held back America's brightest students for all kinds of reasons. The important questions now are why and how this keeps happening. From our extensive reading in current research and our interviews with leading educators who shared their experiences and expertise, we've identified twelve main reasons.

We have also provided a response to each reason, based on solid research evidence from our nation's leading universities and education experts.



What is Acceleration?

Acceleration is an educational intervention that moves students through an educational program at a faster than usual rate or younger than typical age.

Acceleration includes single-subject acceleration, whole-grade-skipping, early-entrance to school, and Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

Acceleration means matching the level, complexity, and pace of the curriculum with the readiness and motivation of the student.

It is important to define what acceleration is not. Acceleration does not mean pushing a child. It does not mean forcing a child to learn advanced material or socialize with older children before he or she is ready.

Acceleration is really about letting students soar. Acceleration is a strategy that respects individual differences and acknowledges the fact that some of these differences merit educational flexibility. It provides cumulative educational advantage.

The myth

Acceleration is not an important issue because most students don't need it.

The reality

The importance of acceleration is not driven by numbers, but by the legitimate educational needs of high ability students. Many essential educational programs respond to need not numbers. These include the Head Start Program and bilingual education. Just because most children do not need acceleration does not diminish its importance.

No system exists that allows us precisely to figure out the number of students who need acceleration, but we have two historical indicators to frame our predictions.

(1) For many years, standardized testing has provided accurate and useful information about students' readiness for accelerated curriculum and placement. Additional indicators of readiness include: motivation, daily performance, and parent and teacher observation. This is all readily available to schools.

(2) Advanced Placement (AP) courses were originally limited to a few elite schools but have expanded to serve over a million students in 60% of America's high schools. Why not every high school?

12 Reasons Why Acceleration Isn't Accepted in America

Reason #1: Teachers lack familiarity with acceleration. Educators in most schools are unfamiliar with the research evidence on acceleration's benefits.

Response: A primary goal of this report is to eliminate this barrier. This comprehensive two-volume report brings together extensive research on acceleration, and the report is available to all schools at no cost.

Reason #2: Confidence about acceleration isn't running high. K–12 educators may know about acceleration as an intervention, but they don't feel confident in using this option.

Response: We respect that all educators make decisions that they believe are in the best interest of their students. The overwhelming evidence about the many academic and social advantages of acceleration should make educators confident enough to consider acceleration.

Reason #3: Acceleration runs counter to personal beliefs. When personal beliefs conflict with research evidence, personal beliefs win out almost every time.

Response: This report invites introspection and dialogue between educators and parents, asking them to reevaluate their beliefs concerning acceleration.

Reason #4: Age trumps everything else. For many educators, age—not readiness—has become the primary determinant for grade placement.

Response: The notion that age equates to grade is out of tune with what we know about individual differences. Research reveals that gifted students are more academically and emotionally advanced than their typical age-mates. Therefore, it makes more sense to think about readiness, rather than age, as the main determinant for grade placement.

Reason #5: Safe is better than sorry. Most teachers see non-acceleration as the safer option—they feel that doing nothing is not harmful.

Response: Doing nothing is not the same as "do no harm." Choosing not to accelerate is itself an intervention. The evidence indicates that when children's academic and social needs are not met, the result is boredom and disengagement from school.

Reason #6: Acceleration is not taught in Colleges of Education. These organizations, which train teachers, do not prepare teachers and administrators to make decisions about acceleration.

Response: Abundant research material is available, yet professors in Colleges of Education do not present it to future teachers. This report will help inform them. We know that faculty respect research and we hope that they will infuse this information into their course content.

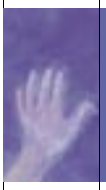
Reason #7: It's bad to push kids. Teachers and parents see acceleration as hurrying children through childhood.

Response: Acceleration is allowing a student to move at an appropriate pace. By worrying about hurrying, a chance is missed to match the enthusiastic, passionate, bright child who has the ability to move ahead with the right curriculum. They ignore the bright student's rage to learn.

Reason #8: New friends are hard to make. Educators fear that children who are accelerated will not adjust well socially to the new class.

Response: Social adjustment in a school setting is a complicated issue. Some accelerated children do not adjust easily or immediately. Children who have felt out of place with students of their own age may need time to develop social confidence.

Although the evidence on social success in accelerated settings is not as clear-cut as the evidence on academic success, it is still much more positive than negative. Acceleration broadens the friendship group. Many gifted children gravitate to older children, so making friends becomes easier.



The myth

Acceleration is for the wealthy.

The reality

Talent cuts across all demographics: ethnicity, gender, geography, and economic background. Acceleration is most beneficial to students who come from modest homes because parents who are wealthy are able to provide for their children extra opportunities that are challenging and accelerated. Acceleration levels the playing field of opportunity because any cost to the family or school is minimal.

"As an African-American

who has had considerable experience working with minority children and students from poverty backgrounds, I have always been a proponent of focusing on strengths rather than deficits in children. I support acceleration as an effective intervention for minority students as well as students from poverty backgrounds who are ready for such challenge."

Professor Donna Y. Ford, Vanderbilt University

Who should be accelerated?

In this report, we have used synonymously terms such as bright, gifted, high ability, and highly able. All of these terms indicate that the students who would benefit from acceleration are exceptional in terms of academic ability and readiness.

All acceleration requires high academic ability. Standardized test scores and teacher observations provide evidence that a student has mastered the current curriculum and is ready for faster-paced and more complex coursework. But curriculum mastery is the first of many characteristics which should be taken into consideration in deciding if a child is ready for acceleration. Parents and educators will want to think about a child's motivation, social-emotional maturity, and interests when considering if acceleration is appropriate.

There are at least 18 different types of acceleration and parents and educators may find that while one type is a good match for their child, another is not. For example, students who skip grades need emotional maturity as well as academic ability in order to be successful. With single-subject acceleration, however, the more important criterion is academic ability, and social-emotional maturity is less of a concern.

How many students should be accelerated? Today, no one has the answer to this question. We know that large numbers of students participate in Advanced Placement (AP) programs across the United States. But we have no way of knowing how many participate in other types of acceleration. And because acceleration has not been largely accepted in America's schools in the past several decades, we don't know how many could and should participate. In time, with a new acceptance of acceleration and more information available, there should be statistics to guide us in determining the prevalence.

Reason #9: Individual kids are less important than equal opportunity for all. Individual differences have been sacrificed in the political battles and culture wars about schooling.

Response: When educators confuse equity with sameness, they want all students to have the same curriculum at the same time. This is a violation of equal opportunity.

When it comes to acceleration, the majority of children do not need it. In fact, it would be a disadvantage for them both academically and socially. But for the children who need it, acceleration is their best chance for an appropriate, challenging education.

We know a lot about assessing ability and creating programming tailored to accommodate individual differences. The cornerstone of education is the flexibility to recognize the needs of the individual child. This flexibility is sometimes lost, however, when political and cultural pressures homogenize the learning needs of individuals and we pretend that there are no meaningful learning differences.

Closing our eyes to children's educational differences is neither democratic nor helpful. Every classroom teacher knows that children have distinct academic and social needs. Acceleration is a respectful recognition of individual differences as well as a means for addressing them.

Reason #10: It will upset other kids. Teachers sometimes fear that accelerating a child will diminish the self-esteem of other students.

Response: This is an important issue. Whatever we do in schools should be based on a respect and concern for all students. In fact, this level of sensitivity is one of the things that makes America special.

However, kids are used to seeing age-peers progress at different rates in many settings such as sports and music. In school, the idea of accelerating one or two children is not likely to negatively affect the class.

Reason #11: There will be gaps in the child's knowledge. Teachers are concerned that accelerated students will have gaps in their understanding of concepts.

Response: We accelerate students because they are well ahead of their age-peers in their academic development and knowledge. Gifted students are swift learners and any gaps quickly disappear.

Reason #12: Disasters are memorable. Unsuccessful cases of acceleration exist, but the numbers have been exaggerated as have the reasons for lack of success.

Response: Good news doesn't make the news. Bad news, on the other hand, sells papers and travels fast in communities. People will repeat stories or greatly exaggerate the situation about an unsuccessful acceleration, even without first-hand knowledge. Researchers acknowledge that acceleration is not perfect and some situations may be less than ideal, but such cases frequently stem from incomplete planning or negative attitudes.

We need to respect that even an intervention that is very positive is not fail-safe. A few poor decisions do not negate the importance of considering acceleration as an option. Excellent planning can minimize failures.

The bottom line: Acceleration works. It must be included in the conversation about how to educate a highly capable child. It is time we stopped deceiving ourselves and our children.

Voices on Acceleration

A Student's View

What is acceleration really like, from the inside? Alexis Hanson, who grew up in the small town of Hudson, Iowa, tells her story. Today, she is a pre-med student at The University of Iowa.

Describe your experience with acceleration.

I was grade-skipped in 6th grade, and I was subject-matter-accelerated in math from 3rd through 8th grade. I took AP Calculus, and it was a small school district so it was the only AP they had, and I entered college one year early. I feel I've been really lucky to have been able to participate in all these experiences.

Was acceleration hard for you?

My acceleration into 7th grade—in terms of the subject matter, I really had no problem with it. College presented more of a problem for me. My study skills were . . . kind of rusty, from not having to use them.

That is probably quite a bit magnified for students who haven't had the opportunity to accelerate and who were bored for more years. Emotionally and psychologically—well, I have not had too many issues there.

Did anything make your experience easier?

In 7th grade, I was accelerated with one of my really good friends from 5th grade, and that was really helpful. We were able to hang out and make friends together and face things together. I didn't have to do it alone.

Here in the NAASE* program, there's a class of twelve of us. We are housed together in the honors dorm, and that provided a community for us to share experiences.

One of the graduate students at the Belin-Blank Center was around to have biweekly meetings with us, and that was really helpful.

The other students would joke about the young ones over on our floor, but they liked us once they got to know us. Most of my friends are older than I am.

So what were the toughest parts?

I did have a couple of difficulties. All of my friends got their drivers' licenses way before I did, so they had to drive me around most of the time. Now, I tend not to mention my age when I first meet people, because they tend to look down on you, and I think that's because people are not educated about the fact that kids are able to do things and are mature.

I am excited that I do have an extra year to figure out what's actually going on when I graduate. Maybe I'll take a year off between college and graduate school, and I feel like I don't have to get into it right away.

What do you think of acceleration, overall?

It's been a wonderful experience for me, and I think it's very important to get this [information] into the community and get the word out nationwide and worldwide to let other students have this experience as well.

**NAASE is the National Academy of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering, an early-entrance-to-university program at The University of Iowa.*

Does a peer group matter?

"Early entrance to college is generally highly successful whether it's with a peer group or on your own. However, entering early with a group has tremendous advantages. It's comforting to be with other bright young people who are going through the same experiences at the same time."

Dr. Nicholas Colangelo, The University of Iowa

A Superintendent's View

Dr. Lane Plugge is the superintendent of the Iowa City Community School District, a district that is highly rated for academics, arts, and athletics.

"As a K–12 superintendent, the title of this report makes me kind of nervous," Plugge says. "I believe most K–12 districts practice forms of acceleration, but I would agree that we probably don't look at it as much as we should."

He explained why schools have been hesitant to accelerate. "We're cautious because we don't want to pressure the child," he says. "This [acceleration] is something we need to address."

Plugge says acceleration is pretty rare in his district.

"Out of the 10,500 students in our district, we only have about 5 parents that come forward during the year to talk about acceleration," he says.

If the parents don't mention it, no one does. "School personnel are reluctant to bring it up. Out of the five who come forward, two or three kids actually grade-skip."

Plugge welcomes the report because he thinks it can increase educators' knowledge and change attitudes about acceleration. "I think we know more than ever before about what kids know."

Superintendent Plugge has some advice for education researchers who wonder why teachers aren't always aware of the advantages of acceleration.

"Don't assume that the K–12 community knows about acceleration. They don't. Don't assume that issuing a report will solve all the problems. It's just the beginning."

The School Board President's View

Lauren Reece, president of the Iowa City Community School District School Board, was accelerated as a child, and her positive experience has shaped her opinion on moving students ahead.

"A school board can play a substantial role in establishing educational policy, in that the primary job of the School Board is to set direction for the district," Reece said.

Many districts have to handle bilingual students, immigrant students, poor students, and students with a wide variety of disabilities. That's where most of the conversation tends to focus today.

"More and more students have higher and higher need levels," Reece says. "These students are at greater risk, and this is certainly being confirmed by *No Child Left Behind* [federal legislation passed in 2002]. Any other issues are being drowned out."

Reece is hopeful about what *A Nation Deceived* can do. "This report can be a very strong element in changing educational direction," Reece says. "One thing that needs to happen in public school education, and it might be politically incorrect, is that we have moved so far from the idea of tracking that we're grouping kids with a huge spectrum of ability. This is not a climate where you can identify bright kids who should be moving more quickly."

Highly capable students, even if they are identified, don't get much attention. "When you're in that wide-spectrum classroom, the teacher is not able to focus on the bright kids," Reece explains. "There are other kids whose needs are just overwhelming."

Education professionals have expressed concern that the public—especially parents and teachers—are not familiar with the research on acceleration, and School Board President Reece has some strong ideas on that.

"You need to put the research out there and develop the voice of the parents in the community," Reece advises. "Parents are a little hesitant about standing up and saying, "My kid is so bright and the school district hasn't done enough."

Don't forget the school board, Reece suggests. "Develop school board members—or a school board member—who will be a voice for talented children and acceleration. Without that voice, it will be very hard to steer the conversation in this direction."

Is Acceleration Tracking?

No. Tracking, as implemented in the 1960s, referred to a rigid sorting of students by ability. It was a highly contentious educational practice. Today's ability-grouping procedures are much more flexible. In contrast to tracking or even ability grouping, acceleration is a much more individualized and fluid approach to addressing the learning needs of students based upon ability, not age.

Tracking focused on group differences; acceleration focuses on individual differences.

How Teachers Can Help

An effective teacher can help a gifted child in several key ways. First, recognize the child as academically advanced. Next, point that child to new challenges and make sure school remains a positive experience. Finally, make sure a child is accurately evaluated for readiness to be accelerated.

While popular wisdom may say gifted children can teach themselves and learn by do-it-yourself trips to the library, experts say the truth is that academically talented students need qualified, informed teachers.

"Classroom teachers are important for gifted kids, too," says Dr. Camilla Benbow, Dean of Vanderbilt University's College of Education and an authority on the gifted.

"Excellent teachers open doors to other opportunities," Dr. Benbow explains.

What Teachers Need to Know

The teacher is critical in the life of every gifted child, even when the child has informed, supportive parents.

"Parents are the primary advocates for their children, but they must work with their child's teachers and administrators to implement change," explains Dr. Susan Assouline, Associate Director of the Belin-Blank Center at The University of Iowa.

The reality for gifted children is that their needs have not been a priority for teachers. These needs have faded into the background as teachers are confronted with increasingly greater demands on their time.

Currently, the national focus is on the legislation known as *No Child Left Behind*. The emphasis is on all children meeting minimum skills. Maximizing the talents of those who are well above proficiency is not the priority. But recognizing the needs of gifted students does not mean short-changing any other students.

What Teachers Can Do

- Recognize gifted children
- Provide new challenges
- Inform child's parents about acceleration
- Minimize teaching students what they already know
- Make school a positive experience for all students . . . including your brightest

Teachers need to be aware of the research on acceleration and of the 18 types of acceleration. They need to know that there are strategies like the *Iowa Acceleration Scale* to determine whether a child is ready to be accelerated.

Interestingly, something simple but stubborn—attitude—may be the biggest problem for experienced teachers. After years of absorbing negative perceptions about acceleration, many teachers may need to reconsider their ideas. It's all about continued professional development.

All classroom teachers need to know that the overwhelming majority of accelerated students are happy with their educational experience and are well-adjusted socially. Classroom teachers can make use of the materials provided by Volumes I and II of *A Nation Deceived* to help the next highly capable student they teach.

A child's education is too important to squander because of a lack of familiarity with the truth about acceleration.

Colleges of Education: The Silent Problem

A topic few educators like to discuss is where current attitudes toward acceleration originated.

No one knows for sure, but one thing we do know is that America's teachers and administrators have one thing in common—an education degree. Colleges of Education are partners with schools in the education process. The problem is—where bright children are involved—they are silent partners.

"It's a cultural problem," explains Dr. Camilla Benbow, Dean, College of Education, Vanderbilt University. "Colleges of Education have worried a lot about social justice and equity."

"Faculty members are deeply concerned about equity in education. This theme is important, of course, but we have lost something crucial—the thrust toward excellence. For me, social justice without excellence is empty."

A cursory look at course catalogues in Colleges of Education indicates very few courses (required or elective) offered in gifted education. It appears that most course offerings are in-service, and these options are available only after a teacher or administrator has received a degree. Courses that help teachers to identify and assist the gifted students in their classrooms are very rarely a part of the degree requirement.

Gifted students are simply not part of the required curriculum, so many teachers graduate from college unprepared to make appropriate decisions about highly capable students.

While teachers and administrators are often required to take a course focusing on students with special learning needs, inclusion of gifted students in these special-needs courses is either absent or an afterthought.

The lack of focus on gifted education and excellence issues is one reason why Colleges of Education are so silent on the topic of acceleration. Given that the extensive research on acceleration has been available for many years, it is curious that such a fundamental curricular intervention is not taught as part of the preparation of educators.

"A hallmark of Colleges of Education must be that they critically evaluate and then disseminate research on various aspects of education," says The University of Iowa College of Education Dean, Sandra Damico. "Education faculties have a professional obligation to provide our future educators with the information and skills to interpret and implement best practices on behalf of all students."

"The fact that the research on acceleration is not readily part of the training of teachers and administrators," asserts Dean Damico, "is a strike against the mission of Colleges of Education."

Teachers Don't Deserve Blame

Some educational leaders are concerned that classroom teachers will be blamed for all of the problems in gifted education, just as they have been blamed for other problems.

It's not fair to blame teachers for not knowing the specifics about the characteristics and needs of gifted students or the particulars about acceleration. Universities and colleges are accountable for the preparation of teachers and principals. Society counts on these institutions to provide the most relevant information and practices. Why, then, is there such a disconnect between information and practice?

The research basis for educational practices emanates from Colleges of Education. This research should influence attitudes and practices. It is our experience that College of Education professors preach the importance of research as the basis for educational practice. When it comes to research on acceleration, however, they do not practice what they preach. They do not promote the research on acceleration as the basis for the practice of acceleration.

"What we need is not just information but appropriate professional development," says Dr. Camilla Benbow, Dean of Vanderbilt University's College of Education. "To change behaviors is very, very hard. We need to support the teachers as they change their attitudes and practices."

It will be hard to educate the nation's teachers about the extensive, positive record of acceleration, but Benbow believes it must be done.

"It's not easy. People would like to think you can change these teachers' ideas in a weekend or a week-long professional development seminar," she says. "I don't think it's that easy. Yet, just because it isn't easy does not mean we should not do it.

"Education is full of one-day workshops," Benbow says. "This is not a one-day solution."

Where Teachers Can Get Help

"That's why centers that aim to educate and train educators about academically advanced students are so critical to the nation's future," says Dr. Sandra Damico, Dean of The University of Iowa's College of Education.

"Centers like the National Research Center on Gifted and Talented at the University of Connecticut and The Belin-Blank Center at The University of Iowa are models for professional development as well as a clearinghouse for the latest research on academically advanced children, and they support teachers who want to learn how to provide appropriate challenges for these students.

"As more teachers become informed about the special challenges of teaching highly capable students, and of the various kinds of acceleration that may help these students, such centers on gifted and talented students will be there to help teachers make the right decisions," Dean Damico says.

Deans Damico and Benbow are clear on one other point. Even with the best-equipped centers for the gifted in the world, very few children will be helped without the commitment of individual teachers. Identifying a gifted child and suggesting appropriate educational choices are almost always the challenges of a single classroom teacher.

In the life of any child, a teacher is crucial. But for a gifted child, one teacher can open the door to an entirely new educational pathway by making sure that child is set on an appropriately challenging course.