

Session 1: Introduction to the Learning Acceleration Guide & Beginning our Acceleration Planning

August 5, 2020

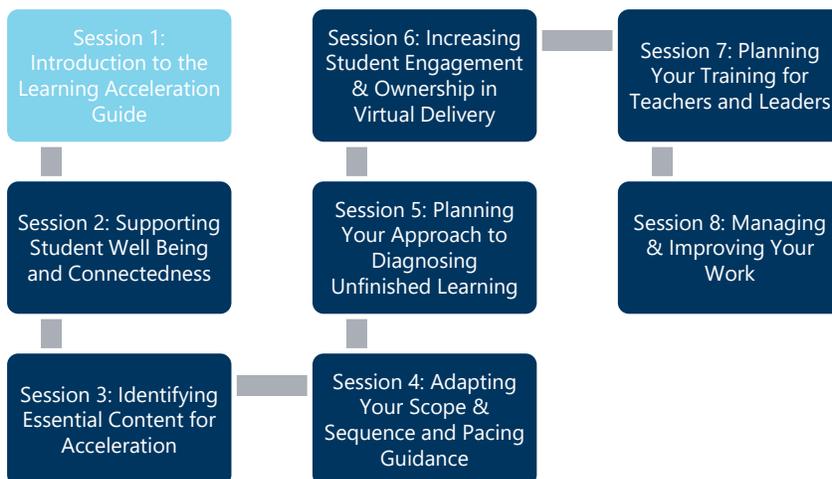
Outstanding Questions (Overall)

Use this space for outstanding questions or wonderings

Do Now (Slide 2)

- Think about your students' experiences with at-home learning. What has made you the proudest of your district's response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Again, think about your students' experiences with at-home learning. What is most keeping you up at night as you think about restarting school in the fall?

Where are We Going? (Slide 7)



Our Goals for Today (Slide 8)

- Explain why their system will take an acceleration (rather than a remediation) approach to student learning in SY20-21.
- Examine specific examples of instruction that accelerates learning by using just-in-time supports to ensure all students can engage with grade-level content.
- Explain how their system will create a plan to accelerate student learning over the next two years.
- Articulate the importance of access, implementation, and quality goals in accelerated learning work.
- Develop the roles and responsibilities of the acceleration team, as well as next steps.

Why are we accelerating rather than remediating student learning?

Framing Notes:

Reading Activity:

Excerpt from *Learning in the Fast Lane* by Suzy Pepper Rollins¹

Chapter 1. Acceleration: Jump-Starting Students Who Are Behind

I recently came into a freshman remedial class to find students busily logging in to the school's basic-skills software. Those who were deemed the furthest behind, according to a diagnostic pre-test, practiced skills that were the furthest removed from the current curriculum. Students who weren't as far behind worked on skills from the previous year or two. Any connection between the skills the students practiced, and the standards being introduced in their "regular" classes that same day was entirely coincidental. A young woman rolled her eyes at me as she entered her password on the keyboard: "We've been doing this program since 4th grade."

Hours away in a middle school classroom, bored students identified as requiring remedial interventions sat passively with their workbooks, practicing missing skills, while the higher-achieving students next door engaged collaboratively in hands-on, rigorous exploration aimed at a specific learning goal.

¹ Retrieved 3 June 2020 from: http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/114026/chapters/Acceleration@_Jump-Starting_Students_Who_Are_Behind.aspx

The traditional remedial approaches used in these and countless other classrooms focus on drilling isolated skills that bear little resemblance to current curriculum. Year after year, the same students are enrolled in remedial classes, and year after year, the academic gaps don't narrow. And no wonder: instead of addressing gaps in the context of new learning and helping students succeed in class *today*, remedial programs largely engage students in activities that connect to standards from years ago. Rather than build students' academic futures, remediation pounds away at the past. We spend significant amounts of time teaching in reverse, and then ask why students are not catching up to their peers.

This chapter provides thoughtful answers to a pressing question: *how can we help students with gaps from the past succeed today?* You will learn to provide a different, more effective type of support for struggling students that will yield immediate improvement in their academic progress, self-confidence, perseverance, and grades and test scores. In addition, you will see higher levels of participation and engagement and fewer incidences of off-task behavior.

Behind on the First Day of School

We know more about underperforming students today than ever before. Expansive color-coded spreadsheets detail every possible gap. Mountains of standardized test data reveal missed items from every subject area. Fractions, multiplication tables, parts of speech, order of operations, decimals, author's purpose, long division, branches of government, reading to infer ... the list of things students should know (but don't) is daunting.

On the first day of school, many students are already behind. Marzano (2004) shares a gut-wrenching reality: what students already know when they enter the classroom—before we have even met them—is the strongest predictor of how well they will learn the new curriculum. Concepts, skills, and vocabulary from last semester, last year, and three grades ago can haunt students' efforts to acquire new information.

It works like this. As information is being taught, students' brains try to make sense of new concepts by linking and integrating the incoming barrage of information with prior knowledge. This *schema*, or individual storage unit of information, plays a critical role in new learning. Vacca and Vacca (2002) explain that when students' brains link background knowledge with new text, students are better at making inferences and retain information more effectively. Hirsch (2003) contends that prior knowledge about a topic speeds up learning by freeing up students' working memory so that they can connect to new information more readily. In short, students with background knowledge on a given topic are likely to grasp new information on that topic quickly and well (Marzano, 2004). Conversely, a lack of adequate prior knowledge can create a misfire in the learning process.

For example, read the following short passage:

Betsy had never tackled the Cement Mixer before. Although many fears cycled through her mind, her two main concerns were handling the backdoor and the lip. Her confidence rose, however, as she reminded herself that if she could just get into the barrel she had a good chance of winning, especially if conditions were cooking. She stared out at the horizon, shook her fist triumphantly in the air, and shouted, "I'm ready for you, Meat Grinder! I can handle the biggest Macker you can deliver!"

Now, in your own words, explain what Betsy is doing. Stumped? Every word is familiar and the reading level is basic, so what's the problem?

As it turns out, Betsy is a surfer. Terms like *backdoor*, *lip*, and even *Cement Mixer* have their own special meanings in the surfing lexicon. Without prior knowledge of Betsy's particular sport, true comprehension of this text is quite difficult. If you lack a schema for surfing, reading this passage would fail to spark a connection between prior knowledge and new information, and the text would be meaningless—and you'd fall behind in class.

The Trouble with Remediation

Just as a lack of background knowledge about surfing would lead to a lack of comprehension of the passage about Betsy, students who have insufficient academic background knowledge tend to have a multitude of missing academic pieces. Remediation, the correction of deficiencies, attempts to fix everything that has gone wrong in students' schooling—to fill in all those missing pieces. Unfortunately, many of those pieces may have nothing to do with what is happening today.

Remediation is based on the misconception that for students to learn new information, they must go back and master everything they missed. So, for example, all of the students who are weak in math—probably determined through a pre-test—are herded together and assigned a teacher who will reteach them basic math skills. The students who have the largest gaps and are thus the most academically vulnerable are sent the furthest distance back.

In the end, this remedial model may produce a student who can finally subtract two fractions; unfortunately, that student may now be a junior in high school. While the rest of her classmates moved forward, she moved backward. Reverse movement at a tedious pace with little relevance to today's standard will not catch students up to their peers. In fact, this model may contribute to widening gaps, as stronger students get even stronger while the weaker ones continue to sink further.

This failure to move forward can lead to decreased student motivation. Aside from the fact that students who have already grown to dislike math now have additional classes in the subject they despise, it's difficult to feel motivated when there's no apparent progress. In addition, remedial courses typically provide a surfeit of passive, basic-skills work and little real-world relevance. Boredom and futility creep in, and students often give up and shut down.

Why Acceleration Works

The primary focus of remediation is mastering concepts of the past. Acceleration, on the other hand, strategically prepares students for success in the present—*this* week, on *this* content. Rather than concentrating on a litany of items that students have failed to master, acceleration readies students for new learning. Past concepts and skills are addressed, but always in the purposeful context of future learning.

Acceleration jump-starts underperforming students into learning new concepts before their classmates even begin. Rather than being stuck in the remedial slow lane, students move ahead of everyone into the fast lane of learning. Acceleration provides a fresh academic start for students every week and creates opportunities for struggling students to learn alongside their more successful peers.

As we know, students learn faster and comprehend at a higher level when they have prior knowledge of a given concept. The correlation between academic background knowledge and achievement is staggering: prior knowledge can determine whether a 50th-percentile student sinks to the 25th percentile or rises to the 75th (Marzano, 2004). Accordingly, a crucial aspect of the acceleration model is putting key prior knowledge into place so that students have something to connect new information to. Rather than focus on everything students don't know about the concept, however, the core and acceleration teachers collaboratively and thoughtfully select the specific prior knowledge that will best help students grasp the upcoming standard.

Although the acceleration model does revisit basic skills, these skills are laser-selected, applied right away with the new content, and never taught in isolation. To prepare for a new concept or lesson, students in an acceleration program receive both instruction in prior knowledge and remediation of prerequisite skills that, if missing, may create barriers to the learning process. This strategic approach of preparing for the future while plugging a few critical holes from the past yields strong results.

Closely related to the prior knowledge piece of the acceleration model is vocabulary development. Gaps in prior knowledge are largely related to vocabulary (Marzano, 2004). For example, if you ask a student who has a rich understanding of fractions to write down everything she knows about the topic, she would likely list terms and concepts like *improper fraction*, *denominator*, *numerator*, *reciprocal*, *mixed number*, and *parts*

of a whole. Likewise, a student asked to write down everything he knows about government would include terms like *bicameral*, *popular sovereignty*, *checks and balances*, *legislature*, and *federalism*. A sizable chunk of these students' prior knowledge consists of academic vocabulary. Therefore, a key step in the acceleration approach is to introduce new vocabulary (and review previously covered critical vocabulary that students may be missing) before the lesson begins in the core class.

Moving forward with students in an acceleration model requires teachers to carefully lay out the pieces of exactly what students need to know to learn the content at the desired pace. Before other students have even begun the unit, the accelerated group has gained an understanding of:

- The real-world relevance and purpose of the concept.
- Critical vocabulary, including what the words look and sound like.
- The basic skills needed to master the concept.
- The new skills needed to master the concept.
- The big picture of where instruction is going.

This figure, which emerged from my work developing acceleration classes with teachers and leaders, presents a comparison of remediation and acceleration:

	ACCELERATION	REMEDICATION
Self-efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-confidence and engagement increase. • Academic progress is evident. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students perceive they're in the "slow class," and self-confidence and engagement decrease. • Backward movement leads to a sense of futility and lack of progress.
Basic skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills are hand-picked just in time for new concepts. • Students apply skills immediately. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction attempts to reteach every missing skill. • Skills are taught in isolation and not applied to current learning.
Prior knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key prior knowledge is provided ahead of time, enabling students to connect to new information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically does not introduce prior knowledge that connects to new learning.
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treats relevance as critical component to student motivation and memory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance is not seen as a priority.
Connection to core class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction is connected to core class; ongoing collaboration is emphasized. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction is typically isolated from core class.

Pacing and direction

- Active, fast-paced, hands-on.
- Forward movement; goal is for students to learn on time with peers.
- Passive, with focus on worksheets or basic software programs.
- Backward movement; goal is for students to "catch up" to peers.

Synthesis (Slide 20):

How would you define acceleration and remediation?

How would you articulate WHY your organization needs to adopt an accelerated learning approach? Plan your elevator speech here:

What does accelerated learning really look like?

Notes on Model

Math: Multiplying Fractions	ELA: Raisin in the Sun

Let's Get Meta: What did we do here?

Step 1: Generate Thinking, Purpose, Relevance and Curiosity with Success Starters

Step 2: Clearly Articulate the Learning Goal and Expectations in Student-Friendly Terms

Step 3/4: Scaffold and Practice Essential Prerequisite Skills by Identifying Most Critical Gap

Step 3/4: Introduce New Vocabulary and Review Prior Vocabulary, Including the Term, Information and Picture

Step 5: Dip Into New Content to Get a Sneak Peek

Step 6: Conduct Formative Assessment Frequently in Informal, Quick Ways

Rollins, Suzy Pepper. *Learning in the Fast Lane: 8 Ways to Put All Students on the Road to Academic Success*. ASCD Member Book, 2014.

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Examples of Accelerated Learning in Action

ELA Example: (Slide 26)

Fourth graders are expected to read *Esperanza Rising*, a complex text about family, poverty, and identity. The teacher needs to ensure all students will be able to access it.

In case you haven't read it:

Esperanza Rising is a YA historical fiction novel by American writer Pam Muñoz Ryan, published in 2000. Set in Mexico and California during the Great Depression, the story follows Esperanza Ortega, who, at the opening of the novel is a wealthy girl living in a mansion with her loving family. Esperanza's father and some of his men are killed by bandits, throwing Esperanza's life into chaos. Due to a loophole in her father's will, the family's property will go to her father's step brother, Luis Ortega. Tio Luis is implicated in the murders, though not charged, and tries to manipulate Esperanza's mother Ramona into marrying him. Ramona and Esperanza escape to America with their loyal servants, leaving behind Esperanza's Abuelita because she is injured. The story centers around Ramona and Esperanza who try to make a life in a poor Mexican labor camp in Arvin, California, while waiting to be reunited with Abuelita.

Practice:

ELA
To deeply understand <i>Esperanza Rising</i> , fourth grade students might need to build their knowledge of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">•••••
To help students experience success with this grade-level text, a teacher could: <ul style="list-style-type: none">•••••

Math Example: (Slide 27)

The first-grade standards contain telling and writing time in hours and half hours using both digital and analog clocks. However this is an “Additional Cluster” and the teacher realizes the major work of the grade is actually 1.OA.A.1 - adding and subtracting within 20.

Practice:

Math
To deeply understand the concepts of adding and subtracting within twenty, first grade students might need to build their knowledge of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">•••••
To help students experience success with this grade-level skill, a teacher could: <ul style="list-style-type: none">•••••

Reflect in Breakout Groups: (Slide 28)

1. What knowledge and skills are needed to do this type of planning?
2. Who should be involved in doing this work? (And, realistically, who likely will end up doing it?)
3. What will be required to invest all educators in this approach?

How do we accelerate student learning in the next two years?

To execute on accelerating student learning, you'll want to...

-  Prioritize the most critical grade-level content for each grade and subject.
-  Identify the prerequisite knowledge, skills, and academic vocabulary that students will need to access that grade level content.
-  Plan your approach to diagnosing students' unfinished learning in that prerequisite content knowledge and those prerequisite skills.
-  Adapt your scope and sequence/pacing for each subject and grade to reflect where teachers might need to provide acceleration support.
-  Invest and train your educators in the accelerated approach and give them tools to monitor student progress.

Reflect: Of these five steps, where does your system need to start? Where do you need the most support?

How do we create a plan to accelerate student learning?

Start by grounding your decision making in a set of values that puts student learning at the forefront. (Slide 33)

Grade-level content is the academic priority.

Run every idea through a simple test: Will this help every student get back to grade level? We don't mean ignoring social/emotional or other non-academic needs; addressing those are core to setting students up for success. But more than anything else, you should prioritize accelerating students' learning by accelerating their exposure to grade-appropriate content—so that every student can get back to grade level. It won't happen in a single year, but if you don't set the goal and build a strategy around it, it won't happen at all.

Address inequities head-on.

Losing so much of this school year has likely exacerbated existing inequities and opportunity gaps in your system. Communicate about that openly and ensure that your plan for restarting school accounts for the academic and social/emotional supports students will need.

Support and assume the best of all your stakeholders.

In this pandemic, everyone has done the best they know how to do in an unprecedented situation. Assume the best of your students, families, and staff in your decision making as you plan for reopening, and ensure that you have a strong plan to provide training and support for your teachers and school leaders.

Communicate clearly.

Your families and staff might still feel overwhelmed by at-home learning, so as you think about how to prepare for next year, make sure your decisions are as clear and simple as possible. You'll also want to share how decisions have been made and who was consulted in making those decisions.

Reflect: How aligned or mis-aligned are these values to those of your system? (Perhaps rank the present state of each of these values on a scale of 1-10 to help you assess).

Create your plan to accelerate student learning. (Slide 34)

Once you've clearly articulated your values, you need to create a plan to accelerate student learning. To do this, you'll want to....

1. **Assemble a small, diverse acceleration planning team** for a series of planning sessions.
2. **Plan for several potential instructional delivery scenarios** in the 2020-2021 school year.
3. **Assemble an advisory committee** that will offer your acceleration team student, teacher, leader, and family perspectives about the choices and decisions you are making.
4. **Prioritize concretely planning to accelerate student learning** across the course of the next school year.
5. **Answer key questions** you'll need to begin planning for reopening.
6. **Start with information you already have** to answer key questions.
7. **Then, collect any additional information** that you need but don't already have.
8. **Identify challenges and opportunities**—three to five each—that your team will need to address.

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Thinking Through Logistics (slide 35)

Which Students?	Which Teachers?	When in the Day?

Setting goals to monitor progress and continually improve (Slide 36)

Throughout the series, districts will flesh out goals in each of the essential components of School Restart based on [CCSSO's guidance](#) (beginning on page 58). ²

Below, jot down notes as you see the models. This will help in the future when you develop your goals in coaching sessions.

	Access	Implementation	Quality
System Conditions (Engagement, Technology, Staffing)			
Well-Being, Connection, Capacity (Staff, Students, Student Supports)			
Academics (Curriculum and Instruction, Professional Learning)			

² For the complete set of recommendations, please see: <https://ccsso.org/blog/ccsso-releases-restart-recovery-considerations-teaching-learning>

What is our job as the Acceleration Team?

In district teams, debrief what you heard today and begin planning your next steps.

- What is our charge as the Acceleration Team?
- What components of our academic program will feel the same under this approach?
- What components of our academic program will need to change to align with this approach?
- Who do we need to have "at the table"?
- How will we hold ourselves accountable?

What's Next?

Reflect on the following questions: (Slide 42)

What is front of mind for you?

What would you like to cover in coaching?

What is your first next step?



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