

La Grange District 102 Talent Development Program

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"To keep a lamp burning, we have to keep putting oil in it." -Mother Teresa

Are students allowed to "tryout" an accelerated class?

Over the years, staff members and families have asked me this question (or some form of it.) To many, placing a student into an accelerated class (language arts/reading or mathematics) to try it seems logical. There are two key reasons why the D102 Talent Development Program does not include "tryouts" in an accelerated class. Being placed into an accelerated class is considered a high stakes decision. These students are removed from a classroom experience and content that the state standards and school district believe is necessary for their academic development. If a student does not meet the criteria for an accelerated class, but is placed into it, he/she could be missing instruction in necessary skills and understanding that he/she needs for continued success in school. In addition, it can be a very difficult situation (socially and emotionally) for a student if he/she is inappropriately placed. Besides the stress that can result from learning experiences that are beyond a student, academic self-esteem can be negatively affected. It is very hard on students (and families) to exit them from the accelerated class.

Although the accelerated service does not include a "tryout" aspect, D102 does recognize the importance of enrichment and engagement in school for all students. The district core curriculum is chosen purposefully to meet the needs of our population. In addition to core curriculum with extension components and additional supporting resources, classroom teachers are afforded professional judgment with their instruction and classroom grouping practices. The Talent Development staff can also serve as a resource for teachers.

The extension materials/resources that are part of the core classroom and those supplied by the Talent Development staff serve as excellent sources of information for an individual student profile. Under this process, a student would be offered a "tryout" with more complex content and/or advanced thinking skills within his/her classroom. When this approach is used, relevant data for a placement review can be collected, while avoiding the key concerns mentioned. D102 believes this is an effective way to evaluate whether an accelerated placement is appropriate. The program's multiple criterion approach to identification, multiple entry points, and a placement review process (that includes differentiated work samples from the classroom and input from families) are best practices.

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