

Early Access For Highly Advanced Gifted Children under Age Six

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Table of Contents

Introduction/Definitions/AU Responsibilities.....	3
Purpose	4
Considering Early Access	4
Process for Early Access	5
Identification of Early Access Students.....	9
Review of 7 Step Process	12
Developing an Early Access Plan	13
<i>Resources:</i>	
The Gifted Preschooler/Characteristics of Young Gifted Children.....	14
Determining School Readiness.....	17
Commonly Used Assessments for Early Access	18
Literature Supporting Early Access	19



Introduction

House Bill 08-1021 created the opportunity for Colorado administrative units (AUs) to accelerate **highly advanced** gifted children under age 4 for kindergarten and/or under age 5 for first grade pursuant to CRS 22-20-204(2). The Exceptional Children’s Educational Act (ECEA) is Colorado’s primary law with requirements for the implementation of specific elements and procedures for gifted education programs. ECEA Rules provide AUs guidance for the implementation of **early access** as well as clarify provisions for AUs to receive state education funds for early access children.

Definitions

Early access means early entrance to kindergarten or first grade for highly advanced gifted children under age six. Children for early access are exceptionally precocious and ready for school earlier than their same-age peers. Academic achievement, reasoning ability, performance and motivation are keen compared to other gifted children.

“Highly advanced gifted child” means a gifted child whose body of evidence demonstrates a profile of exceptional ability or potential compared to same-age gifted children. To meet the needs of highly advanced development, early access to educational services may be considered as a special provision.

AU Responsibilities

The administrative unit at the school district, Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) or the state Charter School Institute **must** file a written early access addendum to the AU’s Comprehensive Program Plan in order to receive per-pupil funding for an early access student. Per-pupil funding shall only be provided to an AU if an Early Access Addendum has been approved by the Colorado Department of Education, the student meets all criterion for early access admittance and an Advanced Learning Plan is developed by September 30.

Early Admittance versus Early Access

A district shall count and receive funding for pupils enrolled in kindergarten who are five years old as of **October 1** [C.R.S. 22-54-103]. However, a district has the autonomy to set an earlier enrollment date for admittance into kindergarten. For example, if a district sets July 1 as its cut-off date for a student to be five to enroll into kindergarten, and a child will turn five in September, the district determines if the student is admitted into kindergarten. In this case, the district still receives per-pupil funding for the student because he/she will be five by October 1. This is considered early **admittance** based on the district’s enrollment policy, but not early **access**. If a child turns five after October 1 and wants to be considered for kindergarten admittance, the district may choose to admit the student and receive **no** per-pupil funding, or if the district/AU has an approved early access program plan, conduct the early access assessment process to determine if the child meets early access criteria.

Purpose

Early access shall not be an acceleration pattern recommended for the majority of age 4 or age 5 gifted children who will benefit from preschool gifted programming that responds to the strength area. The purpose of early access is to identify and serve the few highly advanced gifted children who require comprehensive academic acceleration [12.08(1)(c)].

Many young gifted children are ready for advancement in one or two areas of development. Full grade acceleration at this young age may not be appropriate; however, grade level acceleration may be considered at another point in time. Regular public or private preschools or home schooling meet the needs of the majority of gifted 4 and 5 year olds.

Early access is intended to support students who are evaluated to be exceptional in aptitude/cognitive reasoning, academics, school readiness and motivation. Longitudinal studies report that early access children excel academically, participate in extra-curricular activities, exhibit strong positive concepts; some may require acceleration again later in their educational career. The benefits to students who qualify for early access include: integrating early childhood and gifted educational programming to expand access to curriculum, instruction and assessment aligned to the child's level of challenge. Additionally, early access fosters friendships and social-emotional growth closer to the child's developmental level.

Early-entry children – those who started school early because they were ready to learn – perform as well as or better than their older classmates in a wide range of tests and evaluations. Research also shows the children are well-adjusted socially and suggests early-entry is a positive experience for the gifted child.

A Nation Empowered, 2015

“A sensitivity to the special needs of young gifted children can make a significant difference to their future development and happiness”

Joan Franklin Smutney

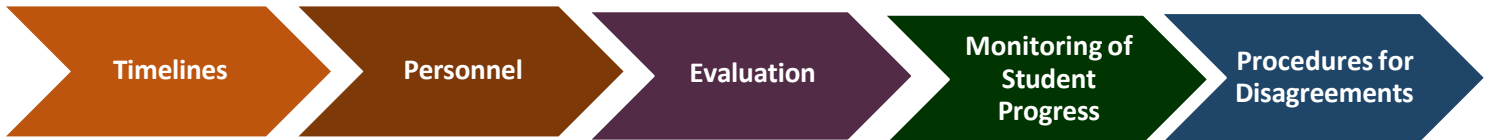
Considering Early Access

Early access is a local decision of the administrative unit. If an AU determines early access will be provided as a gifted programming service, constituent schools or districts must abide by the requirements established in the AU's Comprehensive Program Plan. When considering early access, superintendent/s, early childhood and gifted education staff should hold conversations about the meaning of early access, benefits to

a children, existing policy or procedures that support early access thinking. If an AU determines early access will be permitted, provisions are embedded in the AU’s Comprehensive Program Plan for Gifted Education pursuant to rule section 12.08. An Early Access Addendum is a supplement to the Program Plan provided to the Colorado Department of Education before the initial implementation of early access. An AU may choose to limit early access consideration to only AU residents and/or to charge a nominal fee for the assessment process.

Process

The AU shall establish a collaborative process among families, preschool, general and gifted educators and school administration for evaluating early access referrals. The process implemented shall include the following components [12.08(2)(e)-(v)]:



Timelines – [12.08(2)(e)(i)]

- Applications for early access are due by **April 1** for the next school year. Each AU shall declare when it will begin accepting applications.
- Determinations shall be made within **60 calendar days** of the AU receiving the child's portfolio submitted by the child's family or legal guardian in accordance with Section 12.08(2)(e)(iii)(A) of these Rules.
- For referrals received after April 1, the AU may, at its discretion, consider the child's information, provided the determination is made by **September 1 or by the start of the upcoming school year, whichever is earlier.**
- A student shall be age 4 by **October 1** for kindergarten; and, age 5 by October 1 for first grade.



Communication – [12.08(2)(a)]

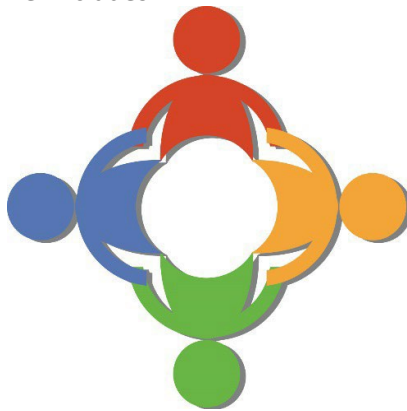
Early access communication is provided to all stakeholders via multiple platforms including but not limited to websites, brochures and/or handbooks. Communication shall include:

- Information about the criteria and process for identifying a highly advanced gifted child for whom early access is deemed appropriate, time frames, portfolio referral, deadlines, specific tests and threshold scores used to make final determinations concerning such a student;

- Professional development of educators or other means to increase the understanding of a highly advanced gifted child and the educational needs of such a student;
- A method for collaborative efforts among preschool, general and gifted education personnel and families; and
- An Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) for the highly advanced gifted child determined appropriate for early access.

Personnel – [12.08(2)(e)(ii)]

The AU shall identify personnel at the AU, district, and/or school level who will be involved in the early access process based on the following list. Designated personnel may serve in multiple capacities during the early access process. Personnel includes:



- A person designated to collect portfolio referrals;
- Educators designated to collect data used in a body of evidence including the test examiner(s), early childhood teacher(s), a gifted education resource person, and others as identified by the AU (e.g., a performance assessment team, principal);
- A determination **team** consisting of an AU level or school level gifted education resource person, a teacher in early childhood, and others as identified by the AU (e.g., principal, psychologist, counselor, family);
- A support team during transition including the receiving teacher and school administrator, families, and gifted education/early childhood personnel; and
- Other persons helpful in collecting data or making determinations, including the person who assisted in developing the screening portfolio.

Evaluation – [12.08(2)(e)(iii)]

The AU shall describe the implementation steps for early access evaluation. An AU has the autonomy to determine the procedural order of the following evaluation steps. Upon receiving an early access application, it is the discretion of the AU to request initial screening, testing, or an interview to inform a decision to accept the screening portfolio and continue with the remainder of the implementation steps. The implementation steps shall include but need not be limited to:

I. Screening Portfolio

Families are responsible for collecting the information required for an early access portfolio application and for submitting the portfolio to the appropriate AU personnel. The AU must describe the requirements for an application portfolio that shall include:

- Applicant contact information;
- A screening tool completed, individually, by the family and the child's current teacher; or, if the child is not in school, by the family and another adult who knows the child from other early childhood experiences; and
- Information about the performance of the child that provides evidence of a need for early access evaluation (e.g., work samples, data from the child's current teacher or an adult from early childhood experiences, or indicators of early access readiness factors).

I. Referral

The AU shall designate the gifted education director/coordinator, principal, or other qualified person, to accept the referral portfolio provided by the family and make an initial decision as to whether early access assessment should continue.

II. Testing and a Body of Evidence

The AU shall conduct the necessary tests and collect student information including test results accepted pursuant to Rules. The body of evidence is complete if data regarding **all** criteria and other considerations deemed necessary by the AU are compiled for data analysis and decision making.

A determination team analyzes multiple criteria from a body of evidence resulting in a student profile of strengths, needs and interests of the child.

ECEA Rules

III. Decision Making

Early access decisions will be a consensus process within the determination team that analyzes multiple criteria from a body of evidence resulting in a student profile of strengths, needs and interests of the child. Test scores alone will **not** determine early access. If the team cannot reach consensus, the building principal or the gifted education director/coordinator shall make the final decision in accordance with the AU's early access program plan.

IV. Determination Letter

A determination letter will be signed by members of the determination team and the family and forwarded for signature of the receiving teacher and principal if they are not on the determination team. Families may accept or decline the offer of early access. When a child is deemed appropriate for early access, **an Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) shall be developed according to the AU's procedures, but no later than the end of the first month after the start of school or September 30, whichever comes first.** The ALP shall include academic and transition goals. The ALP must state that the student was enrolled through early access for the years the student is in kindergarten (if applicable) and first grade, so that state auditing requirements are met and district may receive per-pupil funding.

If the determination team finds the child gifted, but does not find that the child meets the criteria for early access, the team will provide the child's school with the child's assessment portfolio for serving the area of exceptionality in the child's public preschool or public kindergarten program.

If the student transfers to another public school in Colorado during the first year of an early access placement the new AU shall maintain the placement.

Monitoring of Student Performance – [12.08(2)(e)(iv)]

The student's teacher shall monitor student performance at least every **five weeks** during the student's first year of early access. The monitoring process shall be based on the Advanced Learning Plan and performance reports shared with the families and child.



Procedures for Disagreements – [12.08(2)(e)(v)]

Procedures for disagreements for early access shall be in accordance with Section 12.06 of ECEA Rules.

Optional Fee – [12.08(2)(b)]

The AU **may** charge families a reasonable fee for assessment and other procedures performed for the purpose of identifying a highly advanced gifted child and making determinations for early access.

- The AU shall describe the fee related to the implementation of the referral, testing and/or decision making processes;
- No charge shall be assessed if the child who is the subject of such assessments is eligible for a reduced-cost meal or free meal pursuant to the federal National School Lunch Act, 42 U.S.C. §1751, et seq.

- When evaluating the need for fees, the AU will:
 - Integrate the costs of assessment and decision making into the ongoing general instructional and assessment practices conducted by early childhood and gifted education personnel to the maximum extent possible;
 - Take into account the economic circumstances of the community and applicant's family; and
- Consider test results within three months of application from outside licensed professionals paid by the family.

Funding & Reporting – [12.08(2)(c)]

Administrative units that permit early access shall receive funding from the state education fund created in Article IX, Section 17(4) of the Colorado Constitution.

AUs shall:

- Report age four and age five gifted children provided early access using date of birth, grade level placement and gifted student designations on the October Enrollment Count;
- The early access student for grades K and 1st **must** have an ALP on file by September 30 of each early access year to be verified and counted in the October enrollment. The phrase, “**grade acceleration**,” must be clearly written or marked on the student’s ALP in order to receive funding.

Identification of Early Access Students

Procedures for Body of Evidence

A comprehensive body of evidence is collected during the early access process. A body of evidence must contain both qualitative and quantitative data to measure exceptionality. An AU determines **when** the early access process will open and the order in which data will be collected. The AU should follow application timelines pursuant to Rules (see Timelines, page 5). The process typically begins when a family initiates a request for an early access application from the AU. Any family who requests an application has the right to complete and submit an application to the AU. Upon receiving the completed application, the AU Gifted Director/Coordinator may conduct a preliminary **screening**, test or **interview** to determine if the child might be an appropriate candidate for the early access evaluation process prior to the submission of a student portfolio. The family is responsible for collecting all portfolio documents.

I. Student Portfolio

The AU determines what documents should be included in a student portfolio pursuant to Rules. Documents may include but are not limited to:

- AU early access application form
- Contact information
- Copy of child’s birth certificate
- Release of student information form
- Any previous assessment data (if applicable)
- Proof of residence (if applicable)
- Application fee (if applicable)
- Letter stating the reasons for considering early access for their child
- Letter of recommendation from a previous teacher, mentor and/or coach
- Examples of reading, writing, math, problem solving and creativity ability
- Norm-referenced or standardized screening tool or questionnaire

II. Determination Team Procedures

Upon the submission of a completed application and student portfolio, a team of educators knowledgeable of gifted education and early childhood development evaluates the application using a qualitative rating scale or rubric. Based upon the subjective and objective review, the early access education team determines if the child is an appropriate candidate for the next level of the early access assessment process. If it is deemed the child is not a candidate for additional evaluation, the family/guardian is notified of the team’s decision.

III. Assessment

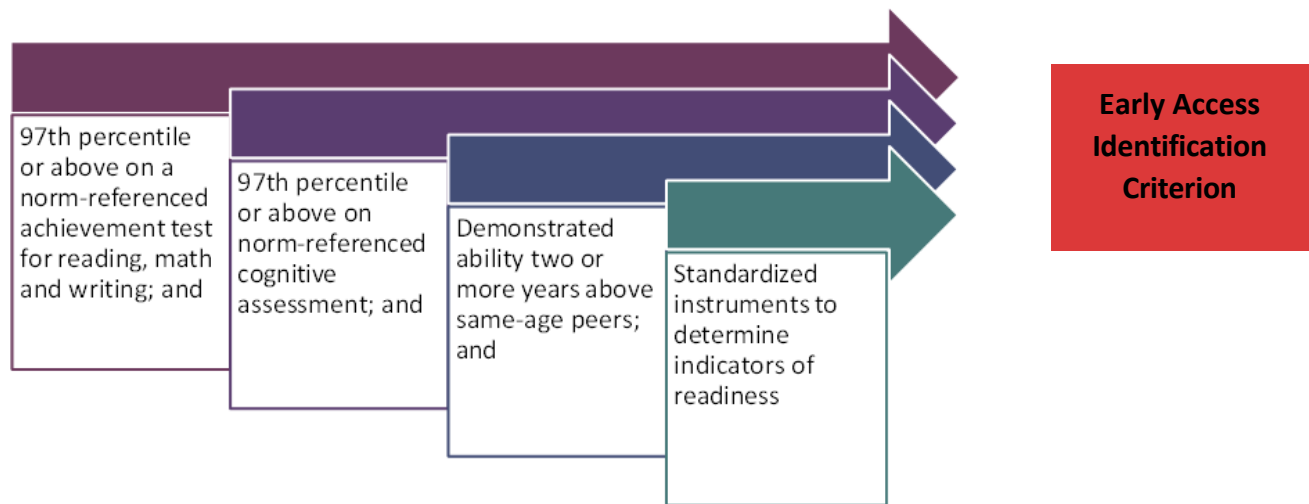
The next step in the early access process is conducting identification assessment. **See the Resource section for a list of commonly used early access assessments.** AUs may determine the order assessments are administered and stop administering assessments if a student does not obtain a qualifying score on a specific assessment. A complete assessment profile includes:



IV. Criteria for Identification

All criteria must be considered in making the determination. Test scores alone do not meet the standards of a determination. A student may score at the 97th percentile or above on aptitude and achievement tests but not have data that supports school readiness. Every child with a score above 97th percentile may not benefit from early access to kindergarten or first grade. Early access decisions will be a consensus process. If the team cannot reach consensus, the building principal or the gifted education director/coordinator shall make the final decision in accordance with the AU's early access program plan. The decision as to whether a student qualifies for early access is at the sole discretion of the AU.

The following pathway meets criteria for early access identification.



V. Support Systems

The AU shall define and implement a support system to assist in a child's success in and transition through early access by evidence of:

- A letter of determination of the early access decision signed by the family, gifted education staff, early childhood staff, the receiving teacher and building administrator indicating recognition and support of the child's placement (determination letters will be placed in the child's cumulative file);
- A transition goal in the child's Advanced Learning Plan for the first year of early access;
- Methods of communication with the student about school success; and
- Methods for family-teacher communication.

The AU will describe how families, teachers, school administrators and the learning environment will contribute to a positive support system [12.08(2)(d)(v)].

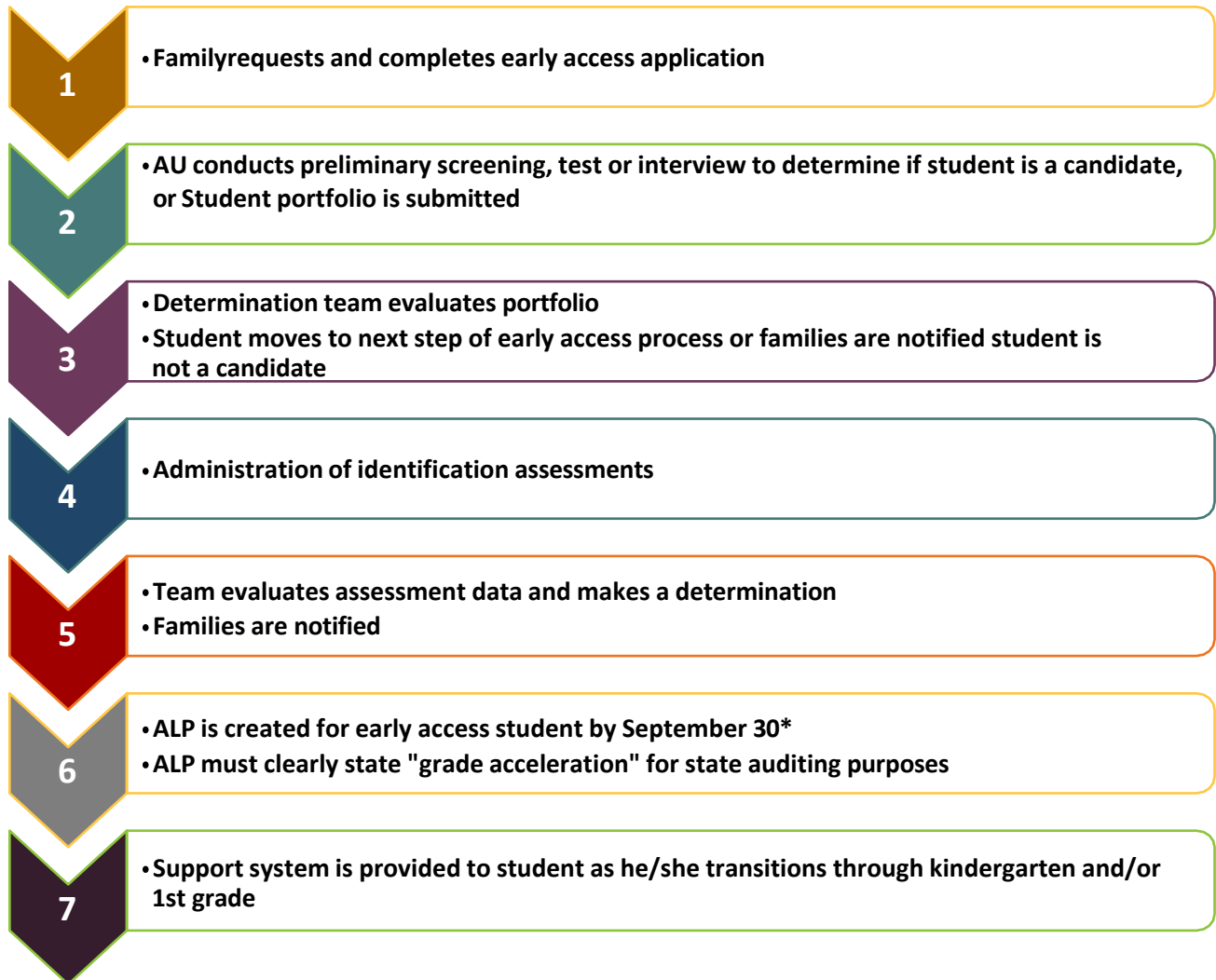
Portability and Early Access:

If the child moves from the original administrative unit of early access, the placement is maintained in other administrative units statewide.

ECEA Rules

Reviewing the Early Access Process

An AU has the autonomy to determine the procedural order of the early access evaluation process.



*For information about Advanced Learning Plans, visit the Gifted Education Website and access the ALP Guidance Document.

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/gt>

Developing an Early Access Plan

The Early Access Addendum is submitted with the **AU's Comprehensive Program Plan** or in years when the Comprehensive Program Plan is not submitted, an addendum may be submitted to the Office of Gifted Education by January 1 preceding the initial school year in which early access will be permitted. An AU may wish to consider the following steps:

- Hold conversations with the superintendent/s, early childhood and gifted education staff about the meaning of early access, benefits to children, existing policy or procedures that support early access thinking;
- Discuss local attitudes and issues about early access with stakeholder groups;
- Decide if early access will be permitted in the administrative unit;
- Verify structures for early access and needs for enhancements to the infrastructure;
- Review and identify personnel most capable to facilitate the testing, criteria and process for early access;
- Ensure training and understanding of the early childhood sensitivities for personnel involved in the process;
- With a team of local representation, determine the administrative unit's approach to communication, criteria, tools and process for making early access determinations using the ECEA rules section 12.08 as a guide; and
- Prepare and submit an Early Access Addendum to the AU's Comprehensive Program Plan.

Checklist for Key Requirements of an Early Access Plan

✓	Criteria and the process for early access are explained and accessible to families, educators and the public
✓	Professional development is provided to preschool, general and gifted education personnel, and principals
✓	Early access determinations are made through a collaborative process among families, preschool, general and gifted education and school administration
✓	If a fee is charged, there is evidence it is reasonable and there is no fee for students eligible for free and reduced lunch
✓	AU describes the methods and tools used to make early access determinations
✓	Criteria in a body of evidence include referral by a family or educator, student profile of strengths, performance, readiness, needs and interests
✓	A cognitive score of 97th percentile or above is required along with an achievement score of 97th percentile or above in reading, writing and mathematics
✓	Performance tools indicated by work samples demonstrates ability above age peers
✓	Tools are used to measure readiness, social behavior and motivation appropriate for early access

✓ A support system to assist a child's success includes: Letter of determination signed by family, gifted staff, early childhood staff, receiving teacher and school administrator support early access; Transition goal in ALP for first year; Methods of communication between school and families; How families, teachers and school will contribute to a positive support system
✓ Applications for early access are due by April 1 for the next school year
✓ Determinations are made within 60 calendar days of the AU receiving the child's portfolio submitted by the child's family
✓ Referrals received after April 1 are at discretion of AU, provided determination is made by September 1 or the start of the upcoming school year, whichever is earlier
✓ Students are age 4 by October 1 for kindergarten; and, age 5 by October 1 for first grade
✓ Personnel trained in gifted education are included in the early access determination team and qualified personnel administer required assessments
✓ Requirements for the screening portfolio are clearly stated for families
✓ A screening tool is used for family and teacher input
✓ Performance data include portfolio and qualitative and quantitative data
✓ Determinations are a collaborative consensus process
✓ Early access students have a completed ALP by September 30
✓ If a child is identified as gifted but does not qualify for early access, identification information is provide to school serving the gifted student
✓ Progress monitoring is evident at least every 5 weeks during the first year of early access and recorded in the ALP
✓ There is a procedure for early access disagreements

Resources

Characteristics of Young Gifted Students

The highly advanced gifted child is a minority even among gifted children. The child's capacity to learn is significantly advanced even beyond the average for the intellectually and academically gifted.

One strong indicator that a child may be highly gifted is the early development of speech, coupled with an unusually speedy progression through the stages of speech development. In her study of exceptionally gifted children, Gross (1993) recorded linguistic precocity far beyond even that of moderately gifted children. The gifted children were able to link words into meaning earlier and with greater degrees of complexity than were their age peers. Early and fluent speech was also linked to excellent memory. Children in the study could recite poetry, passages from books and songs before the age of two. The accelerated development of speech and language reflect not only a quickly growing vocabulary and knowledge base, but rapidly improving conceptual and abstract thinking abilities as well. Comprehension, retention, vocabulary, stored information and logical abilities are often superior.

The highly advanced gifted child is a quick learner and can be passionate about learning. Often they are self-directed, highly energetic and goal oriented. For this reason, it is difficult for them to be confined to a curriculum that doesn't meet their needs.

Families typically note that their child seemed to catch on to things effortlessly, was insatiably curious and had extraordinary memory. Families report that their child reads a wide range of books, fiction and non-fiction; and is fascinated with numbers. The highly advanced gifted child is also more likely than other children their age to have collections, especially scientific collections. Many families reported their child to be well-rounded, socially adjusted and physically developed.



In early years, the highly advanced gifted child may show signs of alertness and long attention spans. Preference for novelty is seen as early as infancy in terms of frequent desire for visual changes. They often sit, crawl and walk several months earlier than normal. High energy sometimes leads to hyperactivity when they are insufficiently stimulated. Even at a young age, these children may be aware of their own problem-solving strategies and use them to solve new problems. Handwriting is often a struggle; and they are bored with the goal to be neat. Their friends are often older children or adults. Affectively, highly advanced gifted children may show intense reactions to noise, pain and frustration. They are interested in moral and political problems and may worry about evil in the world (Winner, 1996).

Children who are highly gifted may have special problems of development that are correlated with social isolation. Most often age-mates do not share their interests, vocabulary or desire for more complex activities. These difficulties appear particularly acute at ages 4 through 9. When extremely gifted students are permitted to work and play with intellectual peers, loneliness and social isolation disappear and these children become accepted as valued classmates and friends (Hollingworth, 1929).

The Gifted Preschooler

Research on gifted children reveals that even in early childhood they display significant differences from the developmental patterns observable in age-peers of average ability.

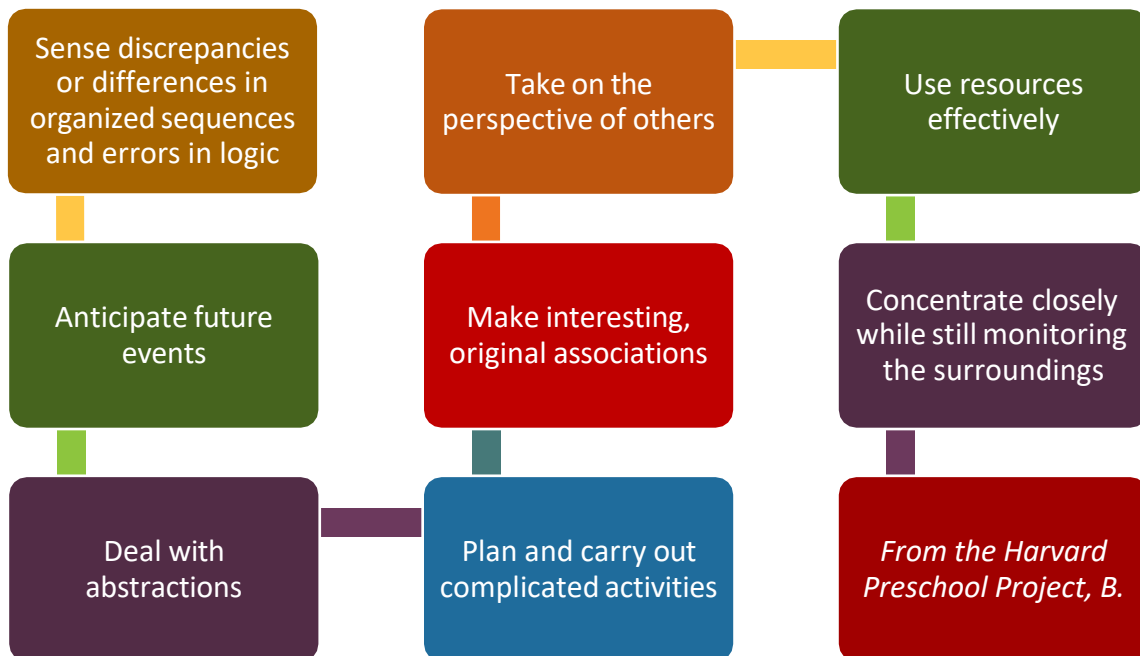
Early development of exceptional verbal ability is often considered to be a sign or characteristic of giftedness. At age 2, an extensive vocabulary and agile use of language in a young gifted child will be remarkably evident. Freeman (1985) found young gifted children to be verbally precocious in three skill

areas: talking, reading, and writing. This high verbal ability was found to be present as early as 3 years of age. Gifted preschoolers are able to convey their ideas more easily to their peers, to communicate their feelings and to give directions. Often you will find these children sought out by peers for companionship, ideas and decisions.

Kitano (1985) found that in addition to demonstrating high levels of accumulated knowledge and thinking abilities, preschool gifted children also showed evidence of pre-logical thinking, creativity, discomfort with ambiguity and spontaneous incorporation of academic activities into free play. Perhaps as a reflection of the gifted child's greater language fluency, gifted preschoolers also talk about problems, rules and goals to a greater extent than do their average ability peers.

Berninger and Abbott (1995) found that kindergarten-age children who showed signs of math precocity had more complex reasoning skills and memory skills such as verbal reasoning skills, ability to remember complex information and ability to decode other symbolic systems such as maps and written language.

Curiosity, concentration, memory and a sense of humor are seen as areas of differentiation between gifted and non-gifted preschoolers. They may respond to riddles and verbal associations because of their ability to think quickly and see relationships more than peers of the same age. One of the most outstanding characteristics of young gifted children is their high level of emotional sensitivity, which allows for the early development of values, empathy and responsibility. Gifted preschoolers show more than average sharing and helping behaviors, more reactions to others' signs of distress and more sensitivity to the needs of others.



Determining School Readiness

The Colorado State Board of Education approved definition of school readiness states:

School readiness describes both the preparedness of a child to engage in and benefit from learning experiences, and the ability of a school to meet the needs of all students enrolled in publicly funded preschool or kindergarten.

CAP4K (SB08-212) requires that all students in a publicly funded kindergarten be assessed using a state approved school readiness assessment. The purpose of school readiness assessment is to inform the development of an individual school readiness plan in order to provide a responsive learning environment for each child. Information gathered from school readiness assessments is to be used for supportive and instructional purposes and cannot be used to deny a student admission or progression to kindergarten or first grade.

The State Board of Education has approved a list of assessments to measure school readiness.

For more information on CAP4K:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/schoolreadiness/assessment>

These tools assist pre-school and kindergarten teachers to assess the following six required domains in School Readiness Legislation:

1. Social/emotional
2. Physical
3. Language
4. Cognitive
5. Literacy
6. Math

AUs are encourage to utilize these state approved assessments to support early access assessment.



Commonly Used Assessments for Early Access

Please see the Matrix of Commonly Used Assessments:

Note: The Office of Gifted Education does not select or approve gifted identification assessments. This is a list of commonly used assessments for Gifted Identification and Early Access. For data to be valid and reliable, it is important to use the most current assessment edition.

Additional Assessments Used for Early Access

School Readiness-Approved for Colorado

1. The Desired Results Developmental Profile for Kindergarten (DRDP-K)

Age: Grade K

Administration: Teacher observation

Contact: Center for Child & Family Studies at WestEd

Phone: 800-770-6339 Website: <https://www.desiredresults.us/>

2. The Riverside Early Assessment of Learning

Age: Birth to 7:11

Administration: Teacher observation and assessment

Contact: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt – Riverside

Phone: 800.323.9540 Website: riversidepublishing.com

3. Teaching Strategies Gold

Age: Birth-K

Administration: Individual

Contact: Teaching Strategies for Early Childhood

Phone: 800.637.3652 Website: teachingstrategies.com

4. Teaching Strategies Gold Survey – Kindergarten Entry Assessment

Age: K

Administration: Teacher Questionnaire

Contact: Teaching Strategies for Early Childhood

Phone: 800.637.3652 Website: teachingstrategies.com

Acceleration Guidelines

1. Iowa Acceleration Scale

Age: K-8

Administration: Team completion

Contact: Great Unlimited, LLC

Phone: 520-715-6306 Website: <https://www.giftedunlimitedllc.com/>

Literature Supporting Early Access

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