

## Background

House Bill 08-1021 created the opportunity for Colorado administrative units (AUs) to accelerate highly advanced gifted children age 4 for kindergarten and/or age 5 for first grade through an early access procedure pursuant to CRS 22-20-204(2). Early access is not 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)]. Children for early access are exceptionally gifted and ready for school earlier than their same-age peers. Academic achievement, reasoning ability, performance and motivation are keen compared to other gifted children. To meet the needs of highly advanced development, early access to educational services may be considered as a special provision.

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.

Colorado Charter School Institute (CSI) is the statewide authorizer for charter schools. In the case of gifted education, CSI acts as the administrative unit for our member schools. As the administrative unit, CSI is responsible for submitting a gifted education program plan and annual enrollment reports to the Colorado Department of Education; acting as the fiscal agent for gifted education state funds; and developing early access procedures.

CSI has only an administrative role in early access, which includes development of procedures and required forms. Each CSI school is responsible for implementing the early access identification procedure, making early access determinations, designing programs and services for students identified as gifted, and providing a dispute resolution process regarding the identification of and programming for children identified through early access. All schools within CSI are responsible to comply with this early access procedure. The decision as to whether a student qualifies for early access is at the sole discretion of the school.

It is the intent of CSI and our member schools to begin a child's educational career with a positive experience. This procedure is intended to help guide CSI schools and parents through a collaborative process that arrives at a decision that is in the best interest of the child.

## Procedure Overview

### Phase I: Application and Screening

- School communicates Early Access Timeline to community and CSI four weeks prior to the open enrollment window.
- Parent submits a completed Early Access Application Portfolio to the school's gifted education coordinator by the school's application deadline. The application deadline is considered the official date of parent referral and begins the early access evaluation process. Late or incomplete application portfolios will not be accepted.
- Upon receipt of the application, the school's gifted education coordinator communicates with the parents about the early access evaluation process.

- School personnel may conduct interviews or informal observations to collect additional information regarding academic performance and school readiness.
- The gifted education coordinator will screen the application portfolio provided by the parents and consider any additional information collected by school personnel.
- If deemed appropriate, the gifted education coordinator will schedule formal evaluation to complete a body of evidence on which to base an early access decision.
- If the gifted education coordinator determines that there is insufficient information or that the screening information indicates early access would not be appropriate, they will notify the parents of the school's decision not to grant a formal assessment and consequently that the child will not be granted early access. Parents may dispute the school's decision to deny early access by following the school's grievance policy.

## **Phase II: Formal Assessment and Determination**

- Gifted education coordinator sets appointment with parent for the child to complete aptitude and achievement testing with school personnel. Schools may charge fees for formal aptitude and achievement testing. Fees will be waived for families that qualify for free or reduced lunch.
- Qualified school personnel will conduct testing to complete the body of evidence.
- If after completing formal assessment in the required areas of aptitude and achievement, the child does not obtain scores above the 97th percentile, the school's gifted education coordinator will inform the parents in writing of the school's decision not to grant early access. Sharing this information in a meeting is encouraged.
- When a child obtains the required 97th percentile scores on the standardized aptitude and achievement tests, the school holds a determination meeting to consider the decision to grant early access request. The school's early access team reviews a complete body of evidence that includes information about aptitude, achievement, performance, readiness, social behavior, and motivation.
- The intention is for the team to reach consensus on a decision regarding the appropriateness of early access for the child. If consensus cannot be reached, then the school principal or the school gifted education lead will make the final decision. 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 a sufficient body of evidence that supports school readiness. Every child with a score above 97th percentile may not benefit from early access to kindergarten or first grade.
- Parents will receive a written determination summary that is signed by all members of the team.
- Parents may dispute the school's decision to deny early access by following the school's grievance policy.
- Parents may accept or decline an offer of early access. Students offered early access are required to participate in the school's lottery process for admission.

The State Board of Education Rules governing this procedure require the school to render a decision within 60 calendar days after receiving an Early Access Application Portfolio from the parents. Because a decision to grant early access can be made only with a sufficient body of evidence to identify the child as gifted and from which to make an informed decision related to the impact of granting early access, a school's failure to meet the 60-calendar day timeline will not default in the admission of the child for early access.

## **Evaluation Techniques and Assessment**

Assessment of young children requires expertise, consideration, and planning. Establishment of positive rapport is essential to providing a valid assessment, and time and care must be spent establishing a relationship prior to administering formal assessments. Appropriately licensed school psychologists are required to conduct the formal aptitude assessment and should plan

for several sessions to assure the child is appropriately assessed. Schools are required to use assessments listed on the CDE's [Commonly Used Assessments for Early Access](#).

## **Dispute Resolution**

In the event of a conflict between the staff, administrators, or board members of an Institute School and a parent, staff, or community member (current or former) CSI adheres to its [CSI Grievance Policy](#). In accordance with this policy, the parent must first follow the school's grievance policy in its entirety. If, after following the school's grievance policy, the parent is not satisfied with the resolution, the parent can pursue the grievance with CSI.

To do so, the parent must provide CSI written documentation of the grievance within 5 days of receiving the written resolution from the school administrator/board. CSI will review the grievance and school's proposed resolution, and to the extent practicable, provide a written resolution to the school and parent within 15 days.

For questions or to submit a formal complaint, please contact CSI Director of Legal and Policy Initiatives, Noah Kaplan ([NoahKaplan@csi.state.co.us](mailto:NoahKaplan@csi.state.co.us)).