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# Learning Acceleration Guide:

*A Compilation of Learning Acceleration  
Principles and Practices in New Jersey*

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# Learning Acceleration Guide:

## *A Compilation of Learning Acceleration Principles and Practices in New Jersey*

### Foreword

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In February 2021, the Murphy Administration announced *The Road Forward*, a series of coordinated policy initiatives that dramatically expanded the Administration’s efforts to identify and address the academic and mental health impacts of COVID-19 on New Jersey students, educators, and schools. The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) continues to build a compendium of resources to support Local Education Agencies (LEAs) as they plan for the full reopening of school for the 2021-2022 school year.

The NJDOE recognizes that addressing student learning and social emotional needs in strategic and constructive ways is essential to both the short-term response to the current pandemic and our long-term commitment to educational equity and excellence. A growing body of research suggests that it is essential to accelerate, rather than solely remediate, student learning. This signals a shift in thinking, so students are not brought back entirely to the grade level where they last demonstrated proficiency. Instead, once individual student learning needs are assessed, teachers provide targeted supports on the concepts needed to help the students engage with grade-level standards.

### Introduction

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The landscape of teaching and learning across New Jersey has shifted dramatically since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. New Jersey educators have worked tirelessly to design more equitable and responsive school systems. Collaboration with families and community members as equal partners in learning will be imperative as we move forward.

The *Learning Acceleration Guide* summarizes the developing base of literature on learning acceleration approaches and shares promising practices from New Jersey schools. It has been crafted for LEA administrators with the goal of helping teachers, support staff, families, and students emerge from these unprecedented times and start the new school year stronger than ever. LEA leaders are encouraged to consider these strategies as they plan for the 2021-2022 school year.

To be more responsive to students’ needs, many LEAs are creating extended and summer learning opportunities to facilitate learning acceleration. Many LEAs elected to leverage federal funds to create opportunities that increase the time students spend engaged in safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments, particularly for students most impacted by disruptions in learning due to the pandemic.

LEAs may be tempted to revisit the entirety of the previous year’s content for fear that it was not mastered by students. However, approaches that result in wholesale remediation or pull-out interventions can isolate students and impede their access to engaging in grade-level content. This could lead to the most vulnerable students falling further behind their peers who have consistent, uninterrupted opportunities to proceed with grade-level work (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Council of the Great City Schools, 2020).

This *Guide* has been developed using principles derived from the Council of the Great City Schools resource entitled “[Addressing Unfinished Learning After COVID-19 School Closures](#).” The resource has been adapted for New Jersey schools and intended to complement resources being released by the NJDOE and various other organizations, including Student Achievement Partners (SAP), the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the United States Department of Education that also address the challenges of prioritizing instruction, accelerating learning, and meeting the social-emotional and mental health needs of students. The common messages found across these materials illustrate a consensus in the field around the importance of safeguarding educational equity and access in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

## What is learning acceleration?

Learning acceleration is an ongoing instructional process by which educators engage in formative practices to improve students’ access to and mastery of grade-level standards. The goal of learning acceleration extends beyond recovering the ground lost to COVID-19; it must be viewed as a long-term, comprehensive framework that anchors districts’ academic, social, and behavioral interventions to the common purpose of promoting global competitiveness for all students. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that all students, regardless of zip code or circumstance, receive a high-quality education that empowers them to compete for educational and work opportunities in the increasingly global marketplace. To make this a reality for all students requires recognition of the fact that a history of inequitable access to opportunity has put students of color, low-income students, English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and other student groups on the downside of longstanding achievement gaps; accelerating learning requires policymakers and educators to reaffirm their commitment to advancing equity for all.

Accelerating learning involves examining and improving every component of the instructional cycle. Districts must ensure educators possess an advanced understanding of the [New Jersey Student Learning Standards](#) and implement those standards through high-quality, engaging lesson plans for all students. Districts must establish learning conditions, depth of instruction, scaffolding, and progress monitoring that improve students’ access to and mastery of those standards.

## What are the principles that guide learning acceleration?

The NJDOE recommends that the following four principles guide learning acceleration planning and implementation:

1. Provide conditions for teaching and learning that will foster social and emotional well-being of students, families and educators.
2. Improve equitable access to grade level content and high-quality resources for each student.
3. Prioritize content and learning by focusing on the depth of instruction, rather than the pace.
4. Implement a K–12 accelerated learning cycle to identify gaps and scaffold as needed.

While these principles reflect core aspects of high-quality instruction, they have emerged as most critical during a time when schools are determining how they will deviate from their traditional methods of addressing gaps in learning to accelerate learning. It is important to underscore that a LEA’s academic response should be seamlessly integrated with its social emotional and mental health responses.

Adherence to these overarching principles will help ensure that all New Jersey students have equal access to high-quality instruction and educational opportunity.

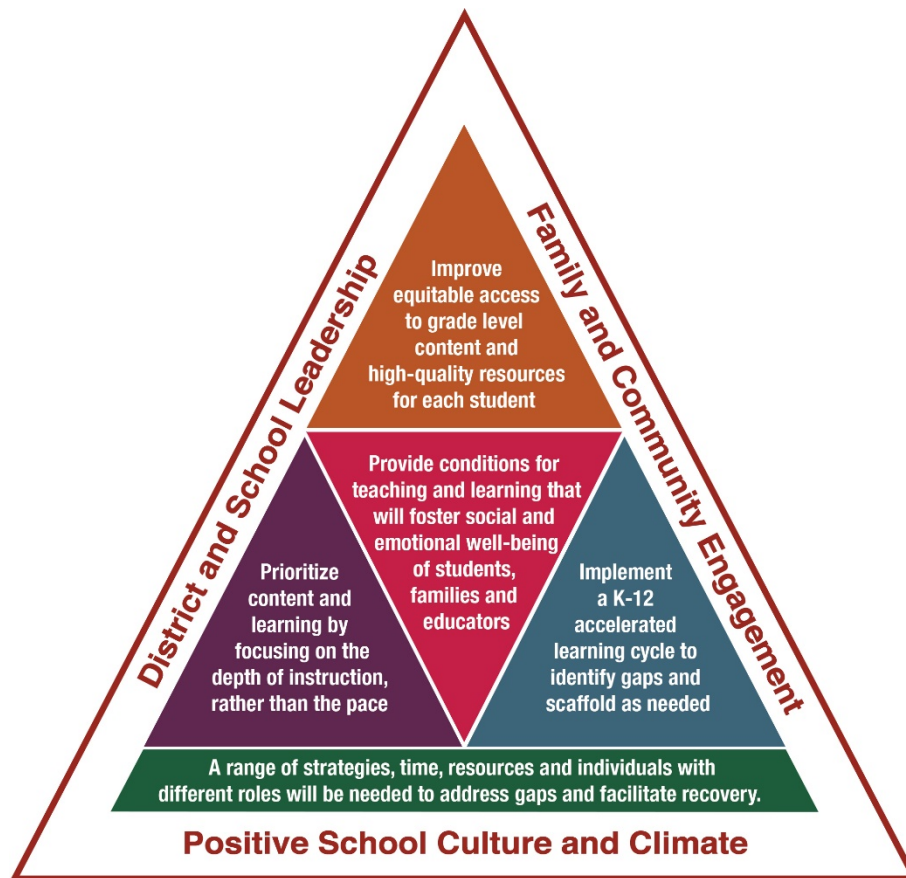


Figure 1. Learning Acceleration Principles

## Learning Acceleration Principles Graphic

The graphic is designed to illustrate the interconnected nature of the four principles. Principle 1, the conditions of learning, is featured in the center of the triangle because research indicates that in order to increase student achievement (or academic outcomes), the student’s social and emotional needs must be met (USDE, 2021, Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Principle 2, improving equitable access to grade level content and high-quality resources for each student, is at the apex of the triangle to emphasize the critical role it plays in preparing all New Jersey students for post-secondary success. The two principles positioned at the base of the triangle are foundational actions educators need to take to facilitate learning acceleration. These foundational actions are: prioritize content and learning by focusing on the depth of instruction, rather than the pace; and implement a K–12 accelerated learning cycle to identify gaps and scaffold as needed.

Surrounding the four principles is a larger triangle (in white) aligned to New Jersey’s Tiered System of Supports, emphasizing that a positive school climate and culture, strong LEA and school leadership, and family and community engagement are essential for promoting quality instruction and learning. This positioning is intentional to remind LEAs that the principles of learning acceleration should be at the core of a LEA’s implementation of their tiered systems of supports.

## Using this Guide

The NJDOE created this guide to help educators examine their existing instructional practices and policies and assist in designing systems that support learning acceleration for all students, particularly by providing extended learning opportunities in the summer and throughout the school year. The NJDOE will continue to provide additional information on how to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of students through future guidance documents and technical assistance opportunities. Within each of the four Principles of Learning Acceleration, readers will find the following sections:

- Summary: synopsis of the relevant research;
- Key evidence-based practices: ideas LEAs can implement;
- Principles in action: examples from New Jersey schools; and
- Reflection questions: optional prompts to start educator conversations.

For questions regarding the principles in action, please email [Standards@doe.nj.gov](mailto:Standards@doe.nj.gov).

## **Principle 1: Provide Conditions for Teaching and Learning that Will Foster Social and Emotional Well-Being of Students, Families, and Educators**

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### **In what ways can the larger school community work together to create social emotional and/or mental health supports and drive accelerated learning for all students?**

The emerging body of research emphasizes the critical role that addressing students' social emotional needs should play in a LEA's learning acceleration plan (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, USDE, 2021). Improving academic outcomes for all students requires attending to the social emotional needs of all students, particularly students who have experienced health, economic, and/or social trauma during the pandemic. LEAs are encouraged to explore and implement protocols for assessing students' social emotional and academic needs, evaluate resources available, and prioritize actions.

The focus should remain on nurturing strong relationships with students and their families in order to reengage students and recover from the impacts of COVID-19. Family partnerships are as vital as ever before. Families need detailed and timely information about instructional approaches and learning expectations to best serve as critical partners in decision making about what student supports are most helpful.

The Council of Great City Schools (CGCS), among other leading organizations, has voiced a significant concern that exclusive focus on remediation will only create greater inequities for students (CGCS, 2020). A fundamentally different teaching and learning strategy is required to ensure every student is on track to demonstrate mastery of grade level standards. The need has never been greater for LEAs to strategically apply targeted interventions addressing the academic challenges that students will face, as well as any trauma students have experienced from extended social isolation, the loss of loved ones, or economic instability.

### **Key Evidence-Based Practices that Maximize Students' Social, Emotional, and Academic Benefits**

#### ***Creating a Framework for Meeting Students' Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs***

For example, educators may:

- Review current methods for supporting student social, emotional, and academic needs to ensure inclusion of a wide range of services that address disrupted learning.
- Design learning environments and conditions that help students work through the traumatic experiences caused by the pandemic and thrive.
- Recognize that underserved students may have experienced a disproportionate burden of the pandemic and create additional supports and interventions to ensure they develop the confidence to take risks and achieve at higher levels.
- Design systems, policies, and procedures that reflect restorative practices rather than punitive, disciplinary actions.

- Leverage tools such as the [NJDOE school climate survey](#) to gather feedback from stakeholders to address challenges as a result of the pandemic.
- Collaborate with extended/summer learning staff and community partners to promote a coherent approach to meeting the students' social and emotional needs.
- Partner and engage with community stakeholders, including parents and caregivers, to meet students' academic, social and emotional needs.

## Principles in Action

Denville Township School District posted a short video clip, [Denville Township School TSS](#), on their district website to help family members understand how their tiered systems of supports can be beneficial to all students. In addition, it provided specific examples of how students will be supported throughout the process to meet established goals.

Lumberton Township is implementing the [CASEL framework for wellness supports](#) and is incorporating this into a culturally responsive positive behavior intervention support system.

As a community school designee, Newton Public School District is leveraging local partnerships to offer a comprehensive and integrated focus on academics, health and social services. They are partnering with community counseling services to provide additional onsite support for individual students, strategically reducing barriers such as scheduling and transportation. The district is also working with the Sussex County Hunger Coalition, who will provide an onsite market for families and will offer weekly bags of necessary food items. Newton Public Schools are expanding their role in the community and working with partners to offer a range of critical supports and opportunities.

## *Building Strong and Trusting Relationships Among Students, Families, and Educators*

For example, educators may:

- Establish systems that promote supportive adult-student relationships to ensure that all students have at least one caring adult who checks in regularly with them and their families and is able to connect them with any needed supports.
- Facilitate and/or host opportunities for students, staff, and families to connect and reflect.
- Utilize different strategies to communicate with families and staff about the importance of SEL (e.g., online newsletters, school website, nightly virtual meetings, social media).
- Partner with families by providing more information about the SEL supports and instructional approaches and learning expectations for their students and collaborative, seek more input to understand what strategies work best, include families in decision making about what strategies work best for each child.

## Principles in Action

Hamilton Township School District has implemented a home visit program, even prior to the pandemic. Students are identified as needing additional support due to a significant number of suspensions, chronic absenteeism, HIB involvement, and/or social emotional needs. School administrators, counselors, and teachers make home visits and have positive interactions with students throughout the year. These interactions focus on the primary or secondary criteria that has led to this intervention. Many students have complex issues that impede their educational success. School staff support, guide, and work with the students and families to remove as many barriers to success as possible.

### *Establishing Safe, Positive, and Stable Environments*

For example, educators may:

- Expand existing programs that have demonstrated results such as enrichment activities and experiences provided by community partners; work with them to support afterschool, weekend, and summer enrichment opportunities that can benefit more students.
- Ensure that systems are in place to identify staff or students that may be struggling and best support their needs; build supports to explicitly address the isolation, anxiety, and trauma some members of the school community have experienced.
- Acknowledge the school's critical role in the lives of students experiencing homelessness; they may be the main source of support for, physical and mental health, social, and emotional needs for those students.
- Ensure the continuity of critical support services for some students when schools are closed, offer very limited programs, or do not provide transportation.

## Principles in Action

KIPP: Cooper Norcross created a hotline for families to call if they are in need and established a family support team to help families experiencing homelessness or displacement, food insecurity, and mental health issues. They serve meals to almost one-third of families by delivering meals to their homes.

Linden Public Schools created a bilingual parent outreach team. This team of teachers were on call to help families resolve problems and navigate the complexities of virtual learning, including help with tech support, schedules, and resolving daily issues. When students were identified for missing classes or struggling academically, these bilingual support teachers arranged meetings, uncovered issues and connected families to people and resources available to help.

## ***Explicitly Teaching Critical Social, Emotional, and Academic Skills Using an Integrated Approach***

For example, educators may:

- Teach and practice social skills within the context of learning to help students respect and care for one another in an emotionally and physically safe classroom environment.
- Revise learning experiences to be asset-oriented and personalized to better meet students where they are.
- Redesign assessments to emphasize applied learning to accommodate and celebrate diverse ways of thinking and problem-solving.
- Actively engage students in meaningful and culturally and linguistically relevant learning experiences.

### **Principles in Action**

Upper Saddle River School District established a homegrown K–8 curriculum (Community Circles), incorporating social emotional learning experiences into the classroom daily. In addition, the district revised their reading and writing units of study for grades K–8 to include experiences that develop their students’ SEL competencies.

## ***Providing Access to support from School Counselors, Psychologists, and Trusted Staff Members***

For example, educators may:

- Establish building-level wellness teams to address the SEL needs of both students and staff.
- Develop a protocol for identifying and supporting students who may be experiencing social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health challenges.
- Collaborate with outside entities and agencies in order to establish partnerships to provide mental health and trauma supports to adults and students.
- Consider staffing needs that would be most appropriate in addressing the trauma and social and emotional well-being of students.

### **Principles in Action**

Mainland Regional High School District developed a School Wellness Team, consisting of a Social/Emotional Learning Coordinator, Student Assistance Counselor and School Wellness Counselor. The School Wellness Counselor is a new position that was added to the team this year to provide an additional layer of social, emotional, and academic support to students and their families as well as staff.

## *Reflection Questions*

- Does your LEA have a coherent system that incorporates the LEA staff, community partners, resources, communication procedures, protocols and processes to address social-emotional, behavioral, and mental health challenges?
- In what ways have you adapted your student support services to address the academic and social-emotional needs of all learners?
- In what ways will you inform and engage family members, students, educators, and community partners in identifying specific resources and strategies that can address challenges resulting from the pandemic?
- What type of professional learning is needed to meaningfully integrate SEL in teaching, including the skills to foster positive learning environments and utilize techniques for trauma-informed instruction?
- How might staffing and scheduling be adapted to address evolving social and emotional needs?

## Principle 2: Improve Equitable Access to Grade Level Content and High-quality Resources for Each Student

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### How can educators improve each student's access to grade-level standards through the accelerated learning process?

Research continues to show that many students across the United States do not have consistent and equitable access to grade-appropriate assignments. These studies have found that the student groups without access to grade-level content are disproportionately students of color, English language learners, and students with disabilities. When relegated to remediation without the opportunity to engage with grade-level content (using scaffolds), students will likely fall even further below grade-level expectations the following year and are increasingly less likely to have access to grade-level work in future grades (TNTP, 2018; Noguera et al., 2015; USDE, 2021). This approach can stigmatize students and reinforce inequities, unintentionally increasing the effects of interrupted learning. Instead of delaying access to grade-level instruction for some students, LEAs need to plan to accelerate learning for all students.

For many students of color, English language learners, students with disabilities, and students living in poverty, the lack of access to grade-level content and programs can hinder enrollment in advanced and rigorous coursework including dual enrollment, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) and Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs.

While COVID-19 may have further limited those opportunities, a number of summer programs have recently been developed by New Jersey LEAs using federal funding to remove barriers to advanced coursework and prepare students for advanced coursework at the secondary level. One successful model includes classes that develop the fundamental skills and content knowledge needed to succeed in upcoming courses such as honors, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Career and Technical Education programs.

While access to grade-level content is a primary component of accelerated learning, providing safe and inclusive learning environments is essential to promote learning. Students of color, students with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning students, English language learners, and students from low-income families can encounter biases inside or outside of school that communicate negative views about one or more of the groups with whom they are associated. These concerns can easily translate into lower academic performance when identity threats are activated (Steele, 2011).

School environments can be designed to eliminate sources of bias and affirmatively communicate the value they hold for each student by creating strong, trusting relationships within the school community. Culturally responsive teaching connects to students' life experiences, acknowledges diverse cultural assets, and promotes cross-cultural relationships can increase a sense of belonging for all students. The diversity students bring to the classroom add value and strength to classrooms. The invitation and acceptance of all students' voices into classrooms can create an identity-safe and engaging atmosphere for learning to take place and enables a positive school climate, particularly for traditionally marginalized students (Byrd, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995; USDE 2021). It is essential that LEAs determine

whether students and educators have access to standards-aligned, grade-appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive instructional materials to begin to meet these needs.

## Key Evidence-Based Practices That Improve Equitable Access to and Mastery of Academic Standards

### *Creating Access to and Opportunity for a Well-Rounded Education.*

For example, educators may:

- Review policies around Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Career and Technical Education pathways, and dual enrollment to remove barriers and establish programs to provide students with meaningful supports.
- Leverage opportunities for extended learning, including extended day, summer learning programs, and 1-on-1 tutoring.
  - Create summer programs that provide academic support and the ability for students to preview and be exposed to advanced content in upcoming courses.
  - Offer enrichment activities that include science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) experiences, career and technical programs, youth development, physical fitness and health education, and arts programs
  - Remove barriers by making programs free, inclusive, and supportive of families by including free transportation and meals.
- Implement policies that support the enrollment, placement, and credit accrual for students who frequently move among schools and LEAs.
- Provide push-in support or co-teaching for students with disabilities and English language learners in general education classrooms.
- Utilize evidence-based and research-based strategies to ensure that grade-level content is accessible for all students.

### Principles in Action

New Brunswick Public Schools offer academic support programs outside of school hours to provide all learners, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners, with content support by a certified teacher. They also provide an individualized learning opportunity program for English Language Learners to preview advanced content at the high school in a variety of credit-bearing courses. Summer programs are also being developed for all learners with a focus on accelerating learning via an inquiry-based approach where students will engage in exploring new ideas and developing solutions to real-world problems by making choices on how to apply what they have learned within the context of an authentic problem. A summer bridge program is also being developed for entering 9th graders to help with the transition to high school.

Due to the pandemic, Neptune Township School District started the Twilight Program to ensure equity of access to support for all students and parents. The Twilight Program is designed to aid students in Math, ELA, Science, and Social Studies and runs Monday-Thursday from 6:30 PM to 8:00 PM. During this time, teachers reteach skills, help students finish assignments, clarify directions, and talk through problems. The Twilight Program also provides equity of access for parents who need to work and cannot assist their remote student(s) during the day. Parents are encouraged to “sit-in” on a lesson and/or explanation of content. The Twilight program has built strong relationships among teachers, students, and their families.

### ***Implement Culturally Responsive Practices***

For example, educators may:

- Build upon students’ strengths, talents, skills, and interests when designing learning experiences.
- Review curricula and learning experiences to ensure they allow for diverse ways of thinking and demonstrating understanding.
- Select inclusive instructional resources and other classroom materials that reflect a wide range of ethnicity, language, ability, gender identity, and socioeconomic experiences and do not perpetuate stereotypes.
- Partner with community members to meet students and family needs in culturally responsive ways.
- Use students’ cultural references and funds of knowledge about their communities to inform instruction.
- Allow student voice and agency to better understand students’ needs and inform content, policy, and practice.

### **Principles in Action**

In Passaic Public Schools, a committee of district staff comprised of parents, Instructional Chairs, Assistant Principals, Media Specialist, SEL Coordinator/ Guidance Counselor, Assistant Superintendent and teachers are in the process of vetting mentor texts used in grades K–3. The goal of this initiative is to create and deliver a collection of culturally diverse mentor texts in English and Spanish for K–3 classrooms that reflect the diversity of the children of Passaic; promote positive identity development and empathy; amplify cultural and racial joy; and supplement existing curriculum material. The committee will identify 15–30 titles per grade, K–3 in English & Spanish for use in the upcoming school year.

### *Reflection Questions*

- What types of supports do educators need to engage in culturally responsive teaching practices?
- How can community resources be leveraged as supports that promote a well-rounded education?
- In what ways have student pathways to graduation been reimagined to best prepare all students for life beyond high school?

## Principle 3: Prioritize Content and Learning by Focusing on the Depth of Instruction, Rather than the Pace

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### How can accelerated learning experiences be designed to increase both access to and depth of understanding of grade-level standards?

In an effort to address gaps in learning, educators should resist the desire to rush to cover content from both previous grade levels and the current year. Without strategic selection of the prerequisite content and skills needed for current grade-level content, the pace required to address multiple years of learning would inevitably result in shallow engagement with the content, low standards for understanding, and low cognitive demand many students (CGSC, 2020).

The distinction between “just-in-case teaching” to “just-in-time learning” is critical to consider when evaluating curriculum and pacing guide revisions in the coming year. “Just in case” teaching revisits the entirety of content and skills from earlier grades in the chance that students may need it for grade-level work and has been found to consume a disproportionate amount of time with little impact on learning. “Just-in-time” learning concentrates time expenditure on the immediate content and skill needs that will be required to access grade-level work (CGSC, 2020).

To allow enough time for the in-depth instruction and just-in-time learning described above, it is crucial that curriculum leaders highlight what is most important to teach at each grade level in the various content areas. The NJDOE crafted the [Prerequisite Concepts and Skills documents](#) to help educators to identify conceptual understandings necessary for students to learn grade level content based on the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS). This tool is intended to support educators in the identification of any conceptual or skill gaps that might exist in a student’s understanding of the NJSLS. Based on the recommendations from Student Achievement Partners, these documents provide guidance as to which English Language Arts standards to focus on within each grade and how to allocate instructional time in Mathematics (e.g., where to place emphasis, when to combine lessons).

Student engagement has been identified as a strategy to increase student achievement. When students are given opportunities to apply their standards-based learning to authentic situations, they build deep understanding and skills, develop curiosity and interest, promote critical habits of mind, and illustrate the value of the learning beyond school. One significant way engagement can be achieved more readily is through interdisciplinary instruction, which fosters the acquisition of foundational knowledge, promotes integration of ideas from multiple disciplines and provides insight on how to apply knowledge in an authentic setting. Well-planned interdisciplinary instruction based on the NJSLS across multiple content areas is a vehicle to increase student engagement, advance a students’ understanding of how to learn, and can be a successful strategy when planning for learning acceleration (Duke, 2016; Noguera et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

### Key Evidence-Based Practices that Increase the Depth of Instruction

For example, educators may:

- Review curriculum to ensure it is tightly aligned with grade-level standards.
- Examine Prerequisite Concepts and Skills to determine where to invest time and effort.

- Adjust pacing guides to allow for additional learning time and use of challenging tasks that motivate students to persist in problem solving and “constructive struggle”.
- Identify opportunities to integrate multiple standards within a unit.
- Ensure curriculum is engaging, relevant and connected to real world issues.

### Principles in Action

Pennsauken School District identified students with learning gaps through their formative assessment practices over the 2020-2021 school year. They identified the specific math and English language arts (ELA) prerequisite concepts and skills for intensive focus, then developed afterschool programming that would address learning gaps. Rather than limit the content of the programming to strictly math and ELA content, the program designers wrapped the identified skills within engaging robotics and performing arts modules. The district is planning a similar program for the same student population in the summer for a full-day program. Instead of remediation and basic skills-focused programs, students have access to grade-level academic enrichment programs often reserved only for high-performing students.

### *Designing Learning Experiences that Activate Student Interest and Prior Knowledge to Increase Depth of Understanding*

For example, educators may:

- Make connections to what students already know while introducing new information to foster critical thinking, analysis, interpretation, and application of targeted grade-level content.
- Shift the purpose of instruction from task completion to deeper understanding and mastery of standards.
- Allow students to exercise voice and choice to demonstrate their understanding and offer opportunities for reflection.

### Principles in Action

East Orange Public Schools developed a summer enrichment program that focused on career awareness and development as well as financial literacy as a way to mitigate the social and emotional learning loss suffered by junior high and high school students. The program allowed students to study within pathways aligned to their interests: fundamentals of marketing and entrepreneurship through launching a T-shirt or personal care/makeup business; personal fitness training as a business opportunity; and social justice and civic engagement in the community. The students also received stipends for the internship-like experience supported by a local nonprofit organization.

## *Reflection Questions*

- What processes have been put in place to review the curriculum thoroughly to ensure it is standards-based, vertically aligned K–12 , and engaging for students with diverse needs and interests?
- What type of professional learning experiences are needed to increase the depth of learning for all students?
- What opportunities are there for cross-content level conversations to develop interdisciplinary learning experiences?
- In what ways might community partners contribute to the design and implementation of authentic learning experiences (e.g., inform curriculum, serve as authentic audience members, provide real-world contexts)?
- What scaffolds and varying degrees of support are needed to ensure all students can benefit from deep learning experiences that lead to mastery?
- Are there opportunities for educators to collaborate with extended learning faculty and staff (e.g., afterschool programs, summer learning experiences) to ensure continuity of efforts towards learning goals?

## Principle 4: Implement a K–12 Accelerated Learning Cycle to Identify Gaps and Scaffold as Needed

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### How can the strategic selection of prerequisite concepts and skills accelerate grade-level learning when coupled with formative practice by educators?

In stark contrast to remediation practices, accelerated learning strategically prepares students for success in the present. Rather than concentrating on all the past grade-level content that students did not previously master, accelerated learning orients students just-in-time for new learning (CGCS, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; USDE, 2021). While past concepts and skills are still addressed, they are strategically selected within the purposeful context of future learning. The NJDOE’s [Prerequisite Concepts and Skills \(PCS\)](#), derived from research around learning progressions, extracts those targeted concepts and skills that align to and bolster grade-level learning. Formative instructional practices and grade-level learning targets derived from the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS) are at the very core of the accelerated learning cycle. When educators have the knowledge, skills, and training to make high-quality evaluative judgments and plan next steps from the evidence derived from formative assessments, accelerated learning can take place.

When prerequisite concepts are placed directly in students' paths “just-in-time” for new learning and connect to prior learning, their confidence and participation increases (Marzano, 2004; Sousa and Tomlinson, 2011). Students' newfound, readily accessible knowledge increases the odds that they will know the correct responses to questions, and fear of peer reaction to an incorrect answer will decrease. Conversely, positive feedback from educators and peers ignites students' desire to keep succeeding. Spikes in self-efficacy led students to engage more, work harder, persevere, and achieve at higher levels (Pajares et al., 2006). Accelerated learning is designed to fuel new hope and motivation in students who may have become disengaged from schooling because of the pandemic, or even before.

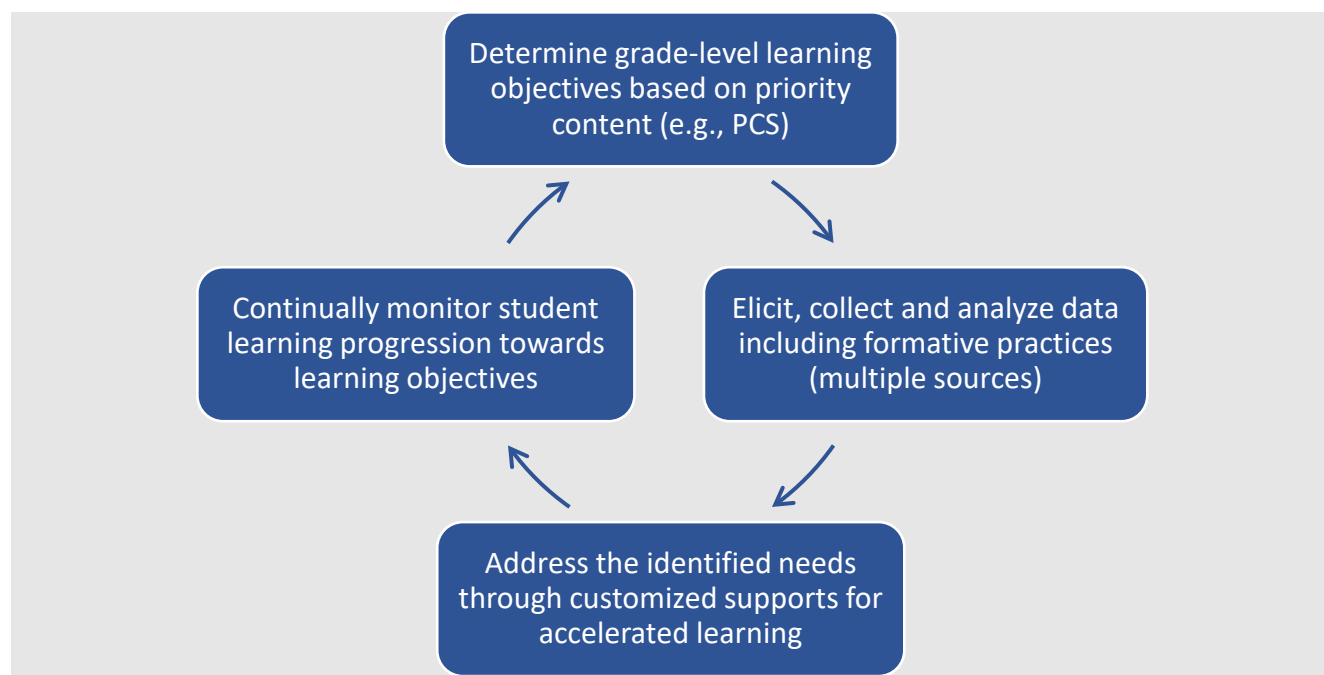


Figure 2. Learning acceleration cycle, at the curriculum unit level

## Key Evidence-Based Practices that Maximize the Effectiveness of the Learning Acceleration Cycle:

### *Determine Grade-Level Learning Objectives Based on Priority Content*

Educators, coaches and curriculum supervisors may:

- Collaborate to set grade-level learning objectives for all students and define success criteria (mastery, proficiency).
- Utilize the Prerequisite Concepts and Skills resource to identify the critical knowledge necessary to access grade level content.
- Consider the learning objectives that indicate students' proficiency or mastery of both the prerequisite and related grade-level concepts and skills.
- Communicate to students and families the learning objectives for the prerequisite and grade level content for the learning cycle or unit.

### Principles in Action

Delran Township School District focused on Student Achievement Partners' Priority Instructional Content in ELA/Math documents to adjust pacing for the 2020-2021 school year. Teams of K-12 educators convened over the summer to analyze the curriculum and adjust pacing. The district utilized benchmark assessments throughout the 2020-2021 school year for evidence of learning gaps. They integrated the priority standards and the associated prerequisite concepts and skills into their learning management system, so trends could be identified quickly and the curriculum could be adjusted to close learning gaps. The district will continue this critical work this summer in curriculum teams to adjust pacing and benchmarks focusing on the NJDOE Prerequisite Concepts and Skills.

### *Elicit, Collect, and Analyze Data Including Formative Practices*

During this phase of the cycle, educators should gather information about students' current knowledge and skills by:

- Using multiple data sources (Start Strong assessment, benchmark assessments, informal reading inventories, class discussions, graphic organizers, etc.) to identify unfinished learning of prerequisite knowledge necessary for upcoming units of grade-level instruction.
- Implementing formative practice to determine extent to which students have learned the necessary prerequisite knowledge and addressing identified gaps just before transitioning to the relevant grade-level standard(s).
- Reconsidering the instructional approach and continue implementing formative practices based on student progress and student needs if students have not met the learning objectives.
- Intentionally employing a range of multiple and diverse formative practices and assessments at the onset and throughout the learning cycle, including those that are:

- Common to the LEA curriculum;
- Elicited during classroom instruction (lesson activators and summarizers, graphic organizers, classroom discussions, classwork, teacher observations, etc.); and
- Quicker, more informal ways of identifying and addressing student misconceptions or confusion before proceeding with the defined lesson (e.g., thumbs up, 3-2-1).

## Principles in Action

Toms River Regional School District will start the 2021 school year engaged in conversations using data carousels that include student reading levels, math and ELA benchmark scores, ACCESS 2.0, and WIDA Model scores. The goal is use multiple data points to develop more comprehensive action plans to help classroom educators scaffold lessons at the student level.

### *Address the Identified Needs through Customized Supports for Accelerated Learning.*

During this phase, educators:

- Ensure the identification of students' individual learning strengths and weaknesses so that teachers can differentiate their assignments, instructional methods, and feedback in ways that address those individual needs.
  - Provide specific, actionable, and immediate feedback to students to improve their learning in relation to the learning objectives.
  - Quickly adjust instruction to meet learning needs by personalizing experiences for each student.
  - Engage students in small group work, self-assessment, peer assessment, and student-teacher conferencing to obtain feedback that can be used to adjust learning strategies in order to reach the learning objectives.
- Strategically incorporate unfinished learning activities throughout the year where and when most appropriate in the context of just-in-time instruction.
  - Avoid remediation of the entire scope of past grade-level content that students may have not mastered.
  - Use the prioritized approach and guidance to select the specific related prerequisite content needed for grade-level learning.

### *Continually Monitor Student Learning Progression Towards Learning Objectives*

This phase entails educators intentionally monitoring student progression toward the learning objective(s). The following moves support this phase:

- Actively documenting student progress toward learning objectives identifying needs and patterns of learning.
- Implementing strategies to support student self-monitoring of their successes and challenges toward meeting the learning goal.

- For striving students, chunking the concepts or skills contained in the learning goal, if necessary, to accommodate students' rate of learning.
- Establishing new goals for student learning based on learning objectives either within the same unit or for the next unit of study.

### *Reflection Questions*

- How will family members and community partners become knowledgeable about the LEA's accelerated learning approach and understand their respective roles in the process?
- In what ways have models such as extending the school day, providing high-dosage tutoring and/or summer learning experiences been considered and integrated to provide students the time they need to master the year's grade-level standards?
- What opportunities are there for educators to engage in collaborative conversations regarding effective formative practices, assessment and data literacy, scaffolding, and small group instruction?
- What types of resources might be needed to support educators and students as they engage in the accelerated learning process?
- How will you provide educators the opportunity to identify which aspect(s) of the accelerated learning cycle they will need support in and/or professional learning?
- How have students' understandings of the accelerated learning process been developed to allow them to be partners in their own learning (e.g., make decisions about how they can demonstrate their learning)?

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## Additional Resources

For additional information on New Jersey's cultural heritage commissions and associated educational resources, please visit:

- [Amistad Commission](#)
- [Holocaust Commission](#)
- [Italian-American Heritage Commission](#)
- [Latino & Hispanic Heritage Commission](#)