

Glossary of Terms

NOTE: Like many fields, education has its own terminology. This glossary is intended to not only serve as a dictionary of educational terms but also as a means of becoming more familiar with key educational concepts. It is important to note however, that some terms mean slightly different things depending on the state.

21st Century Schools

A term used to describe the future of education which employs digital media, focuses on media literacy and is student-centered, focused on integrated learning for the whole student. (21st Century Schools)

Accommodations

Changes in the way tests are designed or administered to respond to the special needs of students with disabilities and English learners (EL). (Ed Source)

Accountability

The notion that people (e.g., students or teachers) or an organization (e.g., a school, school district, or state department of education) should be held responsible for improving student achievement and should be rewarded or sanctioned for their success or lack of success in doing so. (Ed Source)

Achievement Test

A test to measure a student's knowledge and skills. (Ed Source)

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

An individual state's measure of yearly progress toward achieving state academic standards. Adequate yearly progress is the minimum level of improvement that states, school districts, and schools must achieve each year, according to federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. This progress is determined by a collection of performance measures that a state, its school districts, and subpopulations of students within its schools are supposed to meet if the state receives Title I federal funding. (Ed Source)

Adopted Curriculum

Refers to the chosen curriculum of a particular school. (School Wise Press)

Alignment

The degree to which assessments, curriculum, instruction, textbooks and other instructional materials, teacher preparation and professional development, and systems of accountability all reflect and reinforce the educational program's objectives and standards. (Ed Source)

Alternative assessments

Ways, other than standardized tests, to get information about what students know and where they need help, such as oral reports, projects, performances, experiments, and class participation. (Ed Source)

Assessment

Teacher-made tests, standardized tests, or tests from textbook companies that are used to evaluate student performance. (School Wise Press)

Annual Measurable Objective (AMO)

The annual target for the percentage of students whose test scores must be proficient or above in English/language arts and mathematics. Meeting the AMO is the first step toward demonstrating adequate yearly progress under the federal law, No Child Left Behind (NCLB). (Ed-data)

At-Risk Student

Students may be labeled at risk if they are not succeeding in school based on information gathered from test scores, attendance, or discipline problems. (School Wise Press)

Average Class Size

The number of students in classes divided by the number of classes. Because some teachers, such as reading specialists, have assignments outside the regular classroom, the average class size is usually larger than the pupil-teacher ratio. (Ed Source)

Benchmarks

A detailed description of a specific level of student achievement expected of students at particular ages, grades, or developmental levels; academic goals set for each grade level. (Ed Source)

Block Scheduling

Instead of traditional 40- to 50-minute periods, block scheduling allows for periods of an hour or more. (School Wise Press)

Charter School

Exempt from many public school regulations, charter schools are accountable to the authorizing body in their state which may include state or local school boards, universities or colleges, municipalities or non-profit organizations. The "charter" usually consists of mission, approach, how they will assess learning and student population to be served. (U.S. Charter Schools)

Community-Based Learning

Students, faculty, administrators, and community members working together to create new learning opportunities within local communities but generally outside traditional learning institutions. (School Wise Press)

Content Standards

Standards that describe what students should know and be able to do in core academic subjects at each grade level. (Ed Source)

Core Academics

The required subjects in middle and high schools – usually English (literature), history (social studies), math, and science. (School Wise Press)

Curriculum

A plan of instruction that details what students are to know, how they are to learn it, what the teacher’s role is, and the context in which learning and teaching will take place. (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory)

Highly Qualified Teacher

To be deemed highly qualified under No Child Left Behind, teachers must have: 1) a bachelor’s degree, 2) full state certification or licensure, and 3) prove that they know each subject they teach. (U.S. Department of Education)

Individual Education Program (IEP)

A written plan created for a student with learning disabilities by the student’s teachers, parents or guardians, the school administrator, and other interested parties. The plan is tailored to the student’s specific needs and abilities, and outlines goals for the student to reach. The IEP should be reviewed at least once a year. (School Wise Press)

Instructional Minutes

The amount of time the state requires teachers to spend providing instruction in each subject area. (School Wise Press)

Integrated Curriculum

The practice of using a single theme to teach a variety of subjects. It also refers to an interdisciplinary curriculum, which combines several school subjects into one project. (School Wise Press)

Magnet School

A school that focuses on a particular discipline, such as science, mathematics, arts, or computer science. It is designed to recruit students from other parts of the school district. (School Wise Press)

National Assessment of Educational Progress

The only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America’s students know and can do in various subject areas. Assessments are conducted periodically in mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, and U.S. history. It is sometimes referred to as the “nation’s report card.” (National Center for Education Statistics)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Signed into law by President Bush in 2002, No Child Left Behind sets performance guidelines for all schools and also stipulates what must be included in accountability reports to parents. It mandates annual student testing, includes guidelines for underperforming schools, and requires states to train all teachers and assistants to be “highly qualified”. (School Wise Press)

Proficiency

Mastery or ability to do something at grade level. (School Wise Press)

Program Improvement (PI)

A multistep plan to improve the performance of students in schools that did not make adequate yearly progress under No Child Left Behind for two years in a row. Only schools that receive federal Title I funds may be entered in PI. The steps in PI can include a revised school plan, professional development, tutoring for some students, transfer to another school with free transportation, and, at the end of five years, significant restructuring. (Ed-data)

School Accountability Report Card (SARC)

An annual disclosure report for parents and the public produced by a school that presents student achievement, test scores, teacher credentials, dropout rates, class sizes, resources, and more. The SARC is required by state and federal law. (School Wise Press)

Sequence

The experiences built upon preceding curricular elements; continuity. (Graham School of General Studies, University of Chicago)

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

A process for helping children and even adults develop the fundamental skills for life effectiveness. SEL teaches the skills we all need to handle ourselves, our relationships, and our work, effectively and ethically. These skills include recognizing and managing our emotions, developing caring and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively and ethically. They are the skills that allow children to calm themselves when angry, make friends, resolve conflicts respectfully, and make ethical and safe choices. (CASEL - Collaborative for Academic, Social, & Emotional Learning)

Staff Development/In-Service Days

Days set aside in the school calendar for teacher training. School is not generally held on these days. (School Wise Press)

Standardized Test

A test that is in the same format for all who take it. It often relies on multiple-choice questions and the testing conditions – including instructions, time limits, and scoring rubrics – are the same for all students, though sometimes accommodations on time limits and instructions are made for disabled students. (Ed Source)

Title I

A federal program that provides funds to improve the academic achievement for educationally disadvantaged students who score below the 50th percentile on standardized tests, including the children of migrant workers. (Ed Source)

Tracking

A common instructional practice of organizing student in groups based on their academic skills. Tracking allows a teacher to provide the same level of instruction to the entire group. (School Wise Press)