

# GLOSSARY OF EDUCATION TERMS

**Academic Performance Index (API)** = a statewide ranking of schools based on student test scores. Most schools have an API, a state ranking, and growth targets for the following year.

**American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)** = federal funding to stimulate the economy that includes \$90.9 billion for education

**Accommodations** = changes in the way tests are designed or administered to respond to the special needs of students with disabilities and English learners (EL).

**Accountability** = people (e.g., students or teachers) or an organization (e.g., a school, school district, or state department of education) are held responsible for improving student achievement and are rewarded or sanctioned for their success or lack of success in doing so.

**Achievement gap** = observed difference on educational measures between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by gender, race/ethnicity, ability, and socioeconomic status.

**Achievement test** = a test to measure a student's knowledge and skills.

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)** = a state's measure of yearly progress toward achieving state academic standards. AYP is the minimum level of improvement that states, school districts, and schools must achieve each year as 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.

**Adoption** = the chosen curriculum of a particular school.

**Advanced Placement (AP)** = a series of voluntary exams based on college-level courses taken in high school. High school students who do well on one or more of these exams have the opportunity to earn credit, advanced placement, or both for college.

**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 educational objectives and standards.

**Alternative assessments** = ways, such as oral reports, projects, performances, experiments, and class participation, to get information about what students know and where they need help.

**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.

**Assessment** = teacher-made tests, standardized tests, or tests from textbook companies that are used to evaluate student performance.

**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.

**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.

**Average daily attendance (ADA)** = the total number of days of student attendance divided by the total number of days in the regular school year. ADA is often lower than enrollment due to such factors as transiency, dropouts, and illness. A school district's funding is generally based on its ADA.

**Benchmarks** = a detailed description of a specific level of student achievement expected of students at particular ages, grades, or developmental levels; also academic goals set for each grade level.

**Bilingual education** = a school program for students whose first language is not English or who have limited English skills; includes *Dual Language Education*, *English as a Second Language*, and *Immersion Education*.

**Block scheduling** = instead of traditional 40- to 50-minute periods, block scheduling allows for periods of more than an hour, often 90 minutes, so that teachers can accomplish more during a class session. It also allows for teamwork across subject areas in some schools.

**Bond measure** = a method of borrowing that school districts use to pay for construction or renovation projects, requiring a majority vote to pass. Property owners repay the principal and interest.

**Categorical aid** = funds from the state or federal government granted to qualifying schools or districts for specific children with special needs, certain programs, or special purposes. In general, schools or districts must spend the money for the specific purpose. All districts receive categorical aid in varying amounts in addition to general education program funds.

**Certificated/credentialed teachers** = those required by the state to hold licenses/credentials, including full-time, part-time, substitute, or temporary teachers. A teacher who has not yet acquired a certificate/credential (i.e., a state-issued license certifying that he/she has completed the necessary basic training courses and passed the teacher exam) but has an emergency permit or a waiver to teach in the classroom is also included.

**Charter schools** = publicly funded schools that are generally exempt from many state laws and regulations for school districts. They are run by groups of teachers, parents, and/or foundations.

**Classified employees** = school employees not required to hold teaching credentials, such as bus drivers, secretaries, custodians, instructional aides, and some management personnel.

**Closed campus** = this usually indicates a school has one point of entry and a sign-in procedure as safety measures. It also refers to a high school that does not allow students to leave the campus for lunch or does not allow students to come and go without permission during the school day.

**Cluster** = to place small groups of students together for instruction.

**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.

**Comparable growth** = subgroups of students in a school must improve their scores on standardized tests. They are expected to achieve 80 percent of the predominant student group's target, which is known as comparable growth.

**Content standards** = standards that describe what students should know and be able to do in core academic subjects at each grade level.

**Continuous improvement** = an ongoing effort to improve student and school outcomes, including processes that are constantly evaluated and enhanced in the light of their efficiency, effectiveness, and flexibility.

**Cooperative learning** = a teaching method in which students of differing abilities work together to complete an assignment. Each student has a specific responsibility within the group, but receives a common grade.

**Core academics** = required subjects—usually English (language arts), math, history (social studies), and science.

**Criterion-referenced test** = a test that measures how well a student has learned a specific body of knowledge and skills. The goal is typically to have every student attain a passing mark, not to compare students to each other.

**Curriculum** = the courses of study offered by a school or district. States develop a set of standards that are intended to guide curriculum and instruction. Decisions about school curriculum are generally the responsibility of the local school board.

**Data-based decision making** = using evidence, and not intuition, to inform determinations. This includes using data that are systematically gathered on a regular basis and other additional information when planning, implementing, and reporting activities often to help improve the success of students and schools.

**Differentiated instruction** (also referred to as "individualized" or "customized" instruction) = the curriculum offers several different learning experiences within one lesson to meet students' varied needs or learning styles, e.g. using different teaching methods for students with learning disabilities.

**Disaggregated data** = the presentation of data broken into segments of the student population instead of the entire enrollment. Typical segments include students who are economically disadvantaged, from racial or ethnic minority groups, have disabilities, or have limited English fluency. Disaggregated data allows parents and teachers to see how each student group is performing in a school.

**Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)** = a federal statute that funds primary and secondary education, including many Title programs, performance guidelines, and funding stipulations (known as No Child Left Behind under President Bush and awaiting authorization under President Obama).

**English learner** = a student who is not proficient enough in the English language to succeed in the school's regular instructional programs and who qualifies for extra help. (Also can be referred to as Limited English Proficient/LEP.)

**Enrichment** = additional courses outside those required for graduation.

**Formative assessment** = any form of assessment used by an educator to evaluate students' knowledge and understanding of particular content and then to adjust instructional practices accordingly toward improving student achievement in that area.

**Free/reduced-price meals** = a federal program that provides food for students from low-income families.

**General fund** = accounting term used by the state and school districts to differentiate general revenues and expenditures from funds for specific uses.

**Highly qualified teacher** = a teacher who has obtained full state teacher certification or has passed the state teacher licensing examination and holds a license to teach in the state; holds a minimum of a bachelor's degree; and has demonstrated subject area competence in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches.

**Inclusion** (or mainstreaming) = placing students with disabilities in regular classrooms.

**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.

**Instructional minutes** = the amount of time the state requires teachers to spend providing instruction in each subject area.

**Integrated curriculum** = 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.

**International Baccalaureate (IB)** = a rigorous college preparation course of study that leads to examinations for highly motivated high school students. Students can earn college credit from many universities if their exam scores are high enough.

**Intervention** = strategies or processes to address specific student learning needs or whole school improvement, i.e., before-school or afterschool programs or materials.

**Investing in Innovation Fund (i3)** = competitive grant funding for LEAs, nonprofit in partnership with LEAs or consortium of schools to expand the implementation of, and investment in, innovative practices demonstrated to impact student ach/growth, closing achievement gaps, decreasing dropout rates, increasing high school graduation rates, or increasing college enrollment and completion rates.

**Language arts** = another term for English curriculum, focused on reading, speaking, listening, and writing skills.

**Magnet school** = a school that focuses on a particular discipline, such as science, math, arts, or computer science. It is commonly designed to recruit students from other parts of a school district.

**Manipulatives** = three-dimensional teaching aids and visuals that teachers use to help students with math concepts. Typical tools include counting beads or bars, base ten blocks, shapes, fraction parts, and rulers.

**Minimum day** = a shortened school day that allows teachers to meet and work together.

**National Blue Ribbon Award** = this award honors public and private K–12 schools that are academically superior or that demonstrate dramatic gains in student achievement.

**Norm-referenced assessment** (standardized test) = an assessment in which an individual or group's performance is compared with a larger group. Usually the larger group is representative of a cross-section of all US students.

**Percentile ranks** = a way to compare a given child, class, school, or district to a national norm by using the percentage of scores in its frequency distribution which are lower than it.

**Portfolio** = a collection of various samples of a student's work that can include writing samples, examples of math problems, and results of science experiments.

**Professional development** = programs that help teachers or administrators acquire the knowledge and skills they need to perform their jobs successfully.

**Proficiency** = mastery or ability to do something at grade level. A state goal is for all students to score at least a basic level on state achievement tests.

**Program Improvement (PI)** = a multistep plan to improve the performance of students in schools that receive federal Title I funds that did not make adequate yearly progress for two years in a row. 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.

**Pull-out programs** = students receive instruction in small groups outside of the classroom.

**Pupil-teacher ratio** = the total student enrollment divided by the number of full-time equivalent teachers. The pupil-teacher ratio is the most common statistic for comparing data across states; it is usually smaller than average class size because some teachers work outside the classroom.

**Resource teachers and specialists** = teachers who work with special education students by assisting them in regular classes or pulling them out of class for extra help.

**Rubric** = a grading or scoring system that lists the criteria to be met in a piece of work. A rubric also describes levels of quality for each of the criteria. These levels of performance may be written as different ratings (e.g., Excellent, Good, Needs Improvement) or as numerical scores (e.g., 4, 3, 2, 1).

**Safe harbor** = an alternate method for a school to meet AMO if it shows progress in improving students achievement. The state, school districts, and schools may still make AYP if a subgroup fails to reach its proficiency performance targets.

**School report card** = an annual disclosure report for parents and the public produced by a school that generally presents student achievement, test scores, teacher credentials, dropout rates, class sizes, resources, and more.

**School Improvement Program (SIP)** = a tool to improve instruction, services, school environment and organization at school sites according to plans often developed by school site councils.

**School site council** = a group of teachers, parents, administrators, and interested community members who work together to develop and monitor a school's improvement plan. It is a legally required decision-making body for any school receiving federal funds.

**Scientifically based research** = research that involves the application of rigorous, systemic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to educational activities and programs.

**Socioeconomically disadvantaged** = students who participate in the federally funded free/reduced price meal program because of low family income or whose parents do not have a high school diploma.

**Special education** = special instruction provided for students with educational or physical disabilities, tailored to each student's needs and learning style.

**Staff development days** = days set aside in the school calendar for teacher training. School is not generally held on these days.

**Standardized test** (standards-referenced tests or standards-based assessments ) = 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 students with disabilities.

**Team teaching** = a teaching method in which two or more teachers teach the same subjects or theme. The teachers may alternate teaching the entire group or divide the group into sections or classes that rotate between the teachers.

**Tenure** = a system of due process and employment guarantee for teachers.

**Thematic units** = a unit of study that has lessons focused on a specific theme, sometimes covering all core subject areas. It is often used as an alternative approach to teaching history or social studies chronologically.

**Title I** = a federal program that provides supplemental funds for at-risk and low-income students to ensure they have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at minimum, proficiency on state academic achievement standards and assessments.

**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.

**Year-round education** = a modified school calendar that gives students short breaks throughout the year, instead of a traditional three-month summer break. Year-round calendars vary, sometimes within the same school district. Some schools use the staggered schedule to relieve overcrowding, while others believe the three-month break allows students to forget much of the material covered in the previous year.

Sources for the definitions above include: Ed-Data, Ed Source, School Wise Press, SEDL and Wikipedia.