

A Guide to Educational Terms



Developed by:

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This booklet was designed to help parents in Connecticut understand the language used in special and general education. Sometimes during meetings or school visits, words or acronyms are used that are unfamiliar to most people. Our hope is that this guide will help you to better understand what is being said and make you feel more comfortable with the language of education.



Accommodations: Teaching supports and services that the student may require to successfully demonstrate learning. Accommodations should not change curriculum grade level expectations. Examples include, extra time for assignments or tests, the use of taped textbooks, and alternative assessment formats such as multiple choice, fill in the blank, portfolio, etc.

Accountability: Measurable proof that teachers, schools, districts, and states are teaching students efficiently and well, usually in the form of student success rates on various tests.

Achievement Gap: Persistent differences in achievement among different groups of students as indicated by scores on standardized tests, teacher grades, and other data. The gaps most frequently referred to are those between Caucasians and minority groups, especially students who are African-American and Hispanic.

Achievement Test: Tests used to measure how much a student has learned in various school subjects/curriculum.

Advocate: An individual who represents or speaks out on behalf of another person's interests (as in a parent with his/her child).

Alignment: The effort to ensure that what teachers teach is matched with what the curriculum says will be taught and what is assessed.

Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC): Any system that aids individuals who are not independent verbal communicators. The system can include speech, gestures, sign language, symbols, synthesized speech, dedicated communication aids or microcomputers.

Alternate Assessment: Alternate assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities that test knowledge of mathematics and English-language arts in grades 3-8 and in high school. These assessments, currently being developed, will be aligned to the same Common Core State Standards.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): A federal law which defines “disability” and prohibits discrimination by employers, facilities open to the general public and by state and local public agencies that provide services such as transportation.

Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA): An intensive, highly structured teaching program focusing on behavior. Behaviors to be taught are broken down into their simplest elements.

Appropriate: Able to meet a need; suitable or fitting the child’s individual needs and abilities.

Assessment: Measuring the learning and performance of students or teachers. Different types of assessment instruments include achievement tests, minimum competency tests, developmental screening tests, aptitude tests, observation instruments, performance tasks and authentic assessments.

Assistive Technology (AT): Any item, piece of equipment or product system, whether acquired commercially, off the shelf, modified or customized, that is used to increase, maintain or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.

B **Baseline:** Information on a student’s current level of performance, before intervention or instruction begins.

Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP): A plan that is put in place to teach a child appropriate behavior and social skills. It should be positive in nature, not punitive.

Benchmark: An indicator for judging performance. Schools develop benchmarks to tell what students should know by a particular stage of their schooling. For example, “by the end of sixth grade, students should be able to locate major cities and other geographical features on each of the continents.”

C **Charter School:** A self-governing educational facility that operates under contract between the school’s organizers and the sponsors (often local school boards but sometimes other agencies, such as state boards of education). The organizers are often teachers, parents, or private organizations. The charter may detail the school’s instructional design, methods of assessment, management and finances.

Child Find: An IDEA requirement that states and districts identify, locate and evaluate students, ages birth through 21, who may need special education and related services.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) : What public school students in Connecticut and other states should know and be able to do as they progress through grades K-12

Computer Adaptive Testing: A form of computerized testing that individually adapts to the ability level of the person taking the test by adjusting the difficulty of examination items depending on performance on previous items.

Complaint: A written request by a parent or other interested party to the CT Bureau of Special Education to investigate if a local school district is in violation of federal or state special education law.

Curriculum: A written plan outlining what students will be taught (a course of study). For example, the curriculum of an elementary school usually includes language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and other subjects.

D

***Data-based Decisions:** Using data that is gathered on a regular basis (and additional information, as needed) to inform planning, decision-making, and reporting.

*Sometimes called Data-Driven Decisions

Disproportionality: The over representation of a particular race or cultural group in a particular program or system.

Dispute Resolution Options: Different ways to help families and schools reach agreement, ranging from informal discussion to formal decisions (such as Mediation, IEP Facilitation, Ombudsperson).

Due Process: Action that protects a person's rights. In special education, due process applies to action taken to protect the educational rights of students with disabilities.

E

Early Intervening Services: Services and support for students in grades K-12 who have not been identified as needing special education or related services but who need additional academic and behavioral support to succeed in a general education environment.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA): The federal law governing K-12 public education in the United States, formerly known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). It requires states to ensure that their academic standards prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace, and to create accountability systems that recognize student growth and school progress toward meeting that goal.

Eligibility: To be eligible for special education under IDEA, a child must have a disability and must need special education services and related services in order to benefit from their education. An individualized evaluation must be conducted to determine if a child is eligible.

English Language Learners (ELL): A student whose first language is a language other than English and who is in a special program for learning English.

Evidence-Based Practice: Educational practices and instructional strategies that are supported by scientific research.

Extended School Year (ESY): Special education and related services that are provided to a student, in accordance with the student's IEP, beyond the normal school year and at no cost to parents. The determination of the need for ESY services for a student is determined by the PPT on an individual basis.

F

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):

A federal law that gives all parents or students over the age of 18 or attending post-secondary schools, the right to see, correct and control access to student records.

Fluency: The ability to read text accurately and quickly.

Free, Appropriate, Public Education (FAPE): One of the key principles of IDEA, which requires that an education program be provided for all school-aged children (regardless of disability) without cost to families.

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA): An assessment that looks at why a child behaves the way he or she does, given the nature of the child and what is happening in the environment. It is a process for collecting data to determine the possible causes of problem behaviors and to identify strategies to address the behaviors.

G

Grade Level Expectations (GLE): A description of what students should know and be able to do at the end of a grade level.



Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE): An evaluation performed by a certified and/or licensed professional examiner who is not employed by the school system responsible for the education of the child.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): A written education program for a child with disabilities that is developed by a team of professionals (administrators, teachers, therapists, etc.) and the child's parents. It is reviewed and updated at least yearly and describes the child's present performance, what the child's learning needs are, what services the child will need, when and for how long, and also identifies who will provide the services.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Facilitation: A student-focused process in which a trained, neutral facilitator assists the IEP team in working collaboratively to reach consensus and develop an IEP that meets the needs of the student.

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP): A written plan that describes a child's strengths and needs as well as the family's concerns and priorities for their child. It also details what services and supports need to be provided including their location and frequency.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): The federal law governing special education, originally passed in 1975, which mandates a free, appropriate public education for eligible children with disabilities. Part B of the act refers to special education services for children age three through twenty-one. Part C refers to the early intervention program for infants and toddlers with disabilities from birth through age two and their families. The Part C program in Connecticut is called the Birth to Three System.



Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): A term describes the requirement that students with disabilities are placed in general education classrooms to the maximum extent possible. Special classes or separate schools other than general education classrooms are used only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that even with aids and services education cannot be achieved.

Literacy: The ability to use language to read, write, listen, speak, view and present.

Local Education Agency (LEA): The public schools operating as independent districts in accordance with statutes, regulations and policies of the State Department of Education.

M

Magnet Schools: Alternative public schools, most of which focus on a particular area of study, such as performing arts or science and technology, but also offer regular school subjects.

Manifestation Determination: A hearing to determine if the child's behavior was caused by his or her disability. If a child with a disability engages in behavior or breaks a rule or code of conduct that applies to non-disabled children and the school proposes to remove the child, the school must hold a manifestation determination hearing.

Mediation: A voluntary process that allows parties to resolve their dispute without litigation. A qualified and impartial mediator helps parents and schools express their views and positions in order to reach a mutual agreement.

Modifications: Changes made to curriculum expectations in order to help meet the needs of the student and demonstrate knowledge. Modifications may be minimal or very complex depending on the student's ability.

Monitoring: Activities designed to ensure that specific regulations or procedures are being carried out. For example, parents may monitor the IEP written for their child. State Education Agencies are required to establish monitoring procedures to determine the degree to which local education agencies are meeting the requirements of IDEA at the local level.

O

Office of Civil Rights (OCR): A branch of the U.S. Department of Education that enforces several federal civil rights laws (such as Section 504) that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance. These laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, sex, disability and of age.

Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP): A division of the U.S. Department of Education dedicated to improving results for children with disabilities, ages birth through 21, by providing leadership and financial support to assist states and local districts. OSEP administers the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

P

Planning and Placement Team (PPT): A group of individuals including the child's parents and school professionals who determine the specific educational needs of the child and develop, review and revise a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS): An approach to addressing challenging behaviors that includes functional assessment of the behavior, organizing the environment, teaching skills regarding positive behaviors, anticipating situations and monitoring the effect of interventions, and redesigning interventions as necessary.

Post-School Outcome Goal Statements (PSOGS): Goals that a student hopes to achieve after leaving school related to postsecondary education/training, employment, and where appropriate, independent living

Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance: Statements written in the IEP that accurately describe the student's strengths, weaknesses and learning styles. Information is provided by standardized tests, informal assessment, observation and work samples.

Prior Written Notice: A procedural safeguard that says school districts must inform parents of their rights. Specifically, the school must inform parents of any actions proposed or refused by the PPT, any alternatives that were discussed, and assessment information used to make the decision—and they must do so in writing. In CT, prior written notice is included with the IEP.

Procedural Safeguards: A provision of IDEA designed to protect the rights of children with disabilities and their parents.

Proficiency: Refers to an ability or skill of a high degree.

Progress Monitoring: A scientifically based practice that continually assesses students' learning and the effectiveness of instruction.

Pupil Personnel Staff: Employees of a board of education who are assigned to the task of implementing or supervising special education programs and other related services. May also be referred to as student support services.

R Referral: A written request for an evaluation of a child who is suspected of having a disability and who may be in need of special education and related services. A referral to special education is the first step in the process of determining if a child should receive special education services.

Related Services: Transportation, developmental, corrective and other supportive services that a child with disabilities requires in order to benefit from special education. Services may include: speech pathology and audiology, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, counseling services and medical services for diagnostic and evaluation purposes, school health services, social work services in school, and parent counseling and training.

Resolution Session: A provision of IDEA '04 that requires school districts to convene a meeting with the parents and relevant members of the IEP team within 15 days of receiving a Due Process Hearing request, to discuss and attempt to resolve the issue. The meeting may not include the school district's attorney unless the parents bring an attorney. The parties may agree in writing to waive the meeting or agree to use mediation.

Response to Intervention: See Scientific Research-Based Interventions

Restraint: When a child's movement is stopped by physical force for more time than is needed for safety.



School Reform: The implementation of new organizational patterns or styles of leadership and management to bring about renewed, more effective schools. For example, reorganizing the school day or year or allocating more decision-making power to teachers, and involving parents in decisions.

Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI): Connecticut's framework for Response to Intervention (RTI). A general education model that refers to a tiered approach to instruction. This model is used to promote the early identification of students who may be at risk for learning or behavioral difficulties.

Seclusion: When a child is alone in a room, with or without staff, and they are unable to leave.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: A federal civil rights statute that protects the rights of persons with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance, which includes public schools.

SMART Goal: A goal that is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant/realistic, time-bound (e.g., Given 5th grade material, Emily will read 125 words per minute with 0-2 errors).

Smarter Balanced Assessment - An annual statewide assessment system, aligned with the Common Core State Standards in Language Arts and Math for students in grades 3-8 and 11. In CT, it replaces the CT Mastery Test (CMT) in the 2014-15 school year.

Special Education: Specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities.

Standards: In current usage, the term usually refers to specific criteria for what students are expected to learn and be able to do. These standards usually take two forms in the curriculum:

- Content standards: tell what students are expected to know and be able to do in various subject areas, such as mathematics and science.
- Performance standards: specify what levels of learning are expected. Performance standards assess the degree to which content standards have been met. In recent years, standards have also been developed specifying what teachers should know and be able to do.

Student Success Plan (SSP): A personal plan developed for each Connecticut student in 6th grade that is based on needs and interests, to help prepare the student for life after high school.

Summary of Performance (SOP): A summary of a student's skills and abilities that is written when the student is leaving school to help with services after high school.

Supplementary Aids and Services: Aids, services, program modifications, and/or supports for school personnel that are provided in general education classes or other education-related settings to enable students with disabilities to be educated with students who are non-disabled.

T

Title 1: A federal program that provides additional educational services for low income students and families.

Transition: The movement from one service, location or program to another. Young children with disabilities transition at age three from early intervention to preschool special education services or to other community settings and services (early intervention and special education). Adolescents transition from school to adult services.

U

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. Its purpose is to improve students' access to the general curriculum.

V

Vocational Education: Formal training designed to prepare individuals to work in a certain job or occupational area, such as construction, cosmetology, food service or electronics.

Additional Resources

CT State Department of Education

Bureau of Special Education

A Parent's Guide to Special Education

Web: www.sde.ct.gov (Click on Special Education)

Phone: 860-713-6543

IRIS Center for Training Enhancements

Online Dictionary

Web: <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/glossary>

Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR)

Web: www.parentcenterhub.org

Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center

Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center, Inc. (CPAC) is a statewide nonprofit organization that offers information and support to families of children with any disability or chronic illness, age birth to 26.

The center is a member of a national network of Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) currently operating in all 50 states.

Staffed primarily by parents of children with disabilities, we understand special education law in both theory and practice and offer a unique perspective that combines both empathy and insight.

CPAC is committed to the idea that parents can be the most effective advocates for their children, given the confidence that knowledge and understanding of special education law and its procedures can bring. It is CPAC's mission to support families in their efforts on behalf of their children with disabilities.



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