



GLOSSARY OF ASSESSMENT TERMS AND ACRONYMS USED IN ASSESSING SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

Policy to Practice Study Group, Assessing Special Education Students (ASES), and
State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS)

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The State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards Assessing Special Education Students (SCASS ASES) addresses the inclusion of students with disabilities in large-scale standards, assessments and accountability systems and the effects of these systems on related educational reform efforts. SCASS ASES capitalizes on the synergy of the shared efforts of state education personnel, associate members, and partners to improve educational performance of students with disabilities through shared understanding, policy guidance, professional development, and research activities.

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Foreword

In response to the mandates and implications of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), the Policy to Practice Study Group within the Assessing Special Education Students (ASES), State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS) developed the *Glossary of Assessment Terms and Acronyms Used in Assessing Special Education Students*. The increased need for assessment literacy resulting from NCLB mandates requires general education practitioners, special education practitioners, administrators, state officers, and assessment vendors to use a common language when referencing such a vital part of student instruction. SCASS believes this resource is especially valuable when referencing students with disabilities—a population that became a required part of every school’s assessment and accountability system after July 2001. While we acknowledge the availability of diverse meanings for many of the listed assessment terms, the Policy to Practice Study Group hopes that the *Glossary of Assessment Terms and Acronyms Used in Assessing Special Education Students* will promote a common language of assessment to the benefit of future discussions related to the assessment of students and the implications of NCLB.

Glossary of Assessment Terms

Accommodations

Changes in the administration of an assessment, such as setting, scheduling, timing, presentation format, response mode or other changes, including any combination of these that does not change the construct intended to be measured by the assessment or the meaning of the resulting scores. Used for equity, not advantage, and serve to level the playing field. To be appropriate, assessment accommodations must be identified in the student's individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 plan and used regularly during instruction and classroom assessment.

Accountability

The use of academic assessment results and other academic indicators (e.g., attendance and graduation rate) to ensure that elementary and secondary schools or the local education agencies in the State are making adequate yearly progress (AYP). Common elements include academic content standards, academic achievement standards, indicators of progress toward meeting annual goals, analyses of data, reporting procedures, and rewards or sanctions.

Accountability system

A plan that uses assessment results and other data outlining the goals and expectations for students, teachers, schools, districts, and states to demonstrate the established components or requirements of accountability. Typically includes rewards for those who exceed the goals and sanctions for those who fail to meet the goals.

Achievement test

An instrument designed to efficiently measure the amount of academic knowledge and/or skill a student has acquired from instruction. Such tests provide information that can be compared to either a norm group or a measure of performance.

Adaptations

A generalized term that describes a change made in the presentation, setting, response, timing or scheduling of an assessment that may or may not change the construct of the assessment.

Adequate yearly progress (AYP)

A provision of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) requiring elementary schools, secondary schools, and local education agencies to meet the state's student academic achievement standards while narrowing the achievement gaps among groups of students, schools, and local education agencies. The definition of adequate yearly progress (AYP) must include separate measurable objectives for continuous and substantial improvement for all students, be valid and reliable, and provide a timeline

ensuring that, no later than 2014, all students will meet or exceed that state's proficient level of academic achievement on the state assessments.

Age appropriate

The characteristics of the skills taught, the activities, and materials selected and the language level employed that reflect the chronological age of the student.

Aggregation

The total or combined performance of all students for reporting purposes.

Alignment

The similarity or match between or among content standards, performance standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessments in terms of knowledge and skill expectations.

Alternate assessment

An instrument used in gathering information on the standards-based performance and progress of students whose disabilities preclude their valid and reliable participation in general assessments. Alternate assessments measure the performance of a relatively small population of students who are unable to participate in the general assessment system, with or without accommodations as determined by the IEP team.

Assessment

The process of collecting information about individuals, groups, or systems that relies upon a number of instruments, one of which may be a test.

Assessment literacy

The knowledge of the basic principles of sound assessment practice including terminology, development, administration, analysis, and standards of quality.

Assistive technology

A device or service used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a student with a disability.

Augment

Adding or deleting test items within an existing instrument to align that instrument with content standards. To customize.

Authentic assessment

The evaluation of student learning requiring demonstration of the behavior that the learning is indicated to produce.

Baseline data

The initial measures of performance against which future measures will be compared.

Benchmarks

A specific statement of knowledge and skills within a content area's continuum that a student must possess to demonstrate a level of progress toward mastery of a standard.

Bias

In a statistical context, bias is a systematic error in a test score. (See also *Test bias*).

Body of evidence

Information or data that establish that a student can perform a particular skill or has mastered a specific content standard and that was either produced by the student or collected by someone who is knowledgeable about the student.

Breadth

The comprehensiveness of the content and skills embodied in the standards, curriculum or assessments.

Child with a disability

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (2004), defines a child with a disability as a child with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments or specific learning disabilities; and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

For a child aged 3 through 9 (or any subset of that age range, including ages 3 through 5), may, at the discretion of the state and the local educational agency, include a child experiencing developmental delays, as defined by the state and as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures, in one or more of the following areas: physical development; cognitive development; communication development; social or emotional development; or adaptive development; and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* includes the following definitions for words and phrases:

Handicapped person:

Any person who has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities; has a record of such an impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment.

Physical or mental impairment:

Any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological; musculoskeletal; special sense organs; respiratory, including speech organs; cardiovascular; reproductive, digestive, genito-urinary; hemic and lymphatic; skin; and endocrine; or any mental or psychological disorder, such as mental retardation, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness and specific learning disabilities.

Major life activities:

Functions such as caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning and working.

Has a record of such an impairment:

Has a history of, or has been misclassified as having, a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

Is regarded as having such an impairment:

Has a physical or mental impairment that does not substantially limit major life activities but that is treated by a recipient as constituting such a limitation; has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits major life activities only as a result of the attitudes of others toward such impairment; or has none of the impairments defined above under “physical or mental impairment” but is treated by a recipient as having such an impairment.

(See also *Student with a disability*).

Cohort

A group of students whose characteristics and demographics make it possible to make comparisons over time.

Confidence intervals

The likely range for a specified value, given known levels of error or “mistake.”

Construct

The knowledge and/or skills measured by a specific academic assessment. For example, the construct of a mathematics test may be mathematical computations or problem solving.

Construct validity

The extent to which a characteristic being measured relates to test scores measuring the behavior in situations in which the construct is thought to be an important variable. (See also *Validity*).

Construct validity evidence

Data that illuminate the extent to which a test produces results accurately reflecting the construct that the test is designed to assess.

Content validity

The extent to which the stimulus materials or situations comprising a test call for a range of responses that represent the entire domain of skills, understandings, or behaviors that the test is intended to measure. (See also *Validity*).

Content standards:

One of two types of standards. Includes statements of the subject-specific knowledge and skills schools are expected to teach students, indicating what students should know and be able to do. (See also *Performance standards*).

Content validity evidence

Data that illuminate the extent to which the

- knowledge, skills, and cognitive demands of the learning objectives underlying an assessment are accurately reflected in the assessment; and
- assessment adequately covers the domain of knowledge, skills and cognitive demands represented in the learning objectives.

Convergent validity

The extent to which assessment results positively correlate with the results of other measures designed to assess the same or similar constructs. (See also *Validity*).

Criterion-referenced tests (CRT)

A test that measures specific skill development as compared to a predefined absolute level of mastery of that skill.

Criterion-referenced validity

The extent to which test scores of a group or subgroup are compared to other criterion measures (e.g., ratings, classifications, other tests) assigned to the examinees. (See also *Validity*).

Cues

Assistance, words, or actions provided to a student to increase the likelihood that the student will provide the desired response.

Curriculum

Knowledge and skills taught to a student.

Curriculum-based assessments

Assessments that mirror instructional materials and procedures related to the curriculum resulting in an ongoing process of monitoring progress in the curriculum and guiding adjustments in instruction, remediation, accommodations, or modifications provided to the student. (See also *Instructionally-supportive tests*).

Cut score

A specified point on a score scale. Scores at or above that point are interpreted differently from scores below that point.

Depth

The level of cognitive processing (e.g., recognition, recall, problem solving, analysis, synthesis, evaluation) required for success relative to the performance standards.

Disaggregation

The collection and reporting of student achievement results by particular subgroups (e.g., students with disabilities, limited-English-proficient students) to ascertain the subgroup's academic progress. Disaggregation makes it possible to compare subgroups or cohorts.

Errors of measurement

The differences between observed scores and the theoretical true score; the amount of uncertainty in reporting scores; or the degree of inherent imprecision based on test content, administration scoring, or examinee conditions within the measurement process that produce errors in the interpretation of student achievement.

Exclusion

The act of barring someone from participation in an assessment for reasons such as parental requests, medical condition of students, and out-of-school placements. Federal law prohibits exclusion from testing.

Exemplar

Scored student work that evidences or exhibits the ideal for a particular rubric score point.

Exemption from testing

The act of releasing a student from a testing requirement to which others are held.

Extended standards

A content standard that has been expanded while maintaining the essence of that standard, thereby ensuring that all students with significant cognitive disabilities have access to, and make progress in, the general curriculum.

Face validity

A concept based on a judgment concerning how relevant test items appear to be. Relates more to what a test appears to measure than to what the test actually measures. (See also *Validity*).

Gap analysis

An investigation of differences in achievement performance between two or more different groups of students, such as general education students and students with disabilities.

General curriculum

The knowledge and skills identified by a state that all students, regardless of disability or ethnicity, should have access to and be provided the opportunity to learn.

Grade equivalent

A score that represents the average performance of students assessed at a specific month of a school year. For example, a grade equivalent of 5.4 on the fifth-grade test would be interpreted as a score that is average for a group that has completed the fourth month of grade 5.

Grade level

The grade in which a student is enrolled or, for students not assigned a grade, the academic grade of same-age peers who are in a general education classroom.

Grade range

Two or more consecutive grade levels (e.g., grades 3-6 are an elementary grade range that includes grades 3, 4, 5 and 6).

Graduation rate

The percentage of students who graduated from high school as determined by a state-specific formula.

Gray area of assessment

The gap created when a current assessment system is unable to adequately or equitably assess students either in the general assessment—with or without accommodations—or by using an alternate assessment.

High stakes testing

A test for which important consequences are attached to the results for students, teachers, schools, districts, and/or states. Consequences may include promotion, graduation, rewards, or sanctions.

Individualized education program (IEP)

A written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed and revised to reflect the decisions made by an interdisciplinary team, including the parent and the student when appropriate. During an IEP meeting for a student with a disability (SWD), the team will identify the student's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance; measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals; a description of how the child's progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured and when periodic reports on the progress the child is making toward meeting the annual will be provided; and a statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services and a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided for the child.

Instructionally-supportive tests

Assessments that mirror instructional materials and procedures related to the curriculum resulting in an ongoing process of monitoring progress in the curriculum and guiding adjustments in instruction, remediation, accommodations, or modifications provided to the student. (See also *Curriculum-based assessments*).

Large-scale assessments

Tests that are administered simultaneously to large groups of students within the district or state.

Longitudinal methods

The comparison of measurements of the same groups of students collected at two or more points in time.

Matrix sampling

A measurement technique organizing a large set of test items into a number of relatively short item subsets. Each subset then is administered to a sub-sample of test takers, thereby avoiding the need to administer all items to all examinees.

Minimum *n*

Under NCLB, the smallest number of students a state has determined can produce statistically reliable results for a group while protecting the confidentiality of the student within the group.

Modification

A change to the testing conditions, procedures, and/or formatting so that measurement of the intended construct is no longer valid.

Multiple measures

Measurement of student or school performance through more than one form or test.

- For students, these might include teacher observations, performance assessments, or portfolios.
- For schools, these might include dropout rates, absenteeism, college attendance, or documented behavior problems.

Natural cue

Assistance given to a student that provides a flow among the expectations presented by the educator, the opportunities to learn, and the desired outcome exhibited by the student.

Norm-referenced tests (NRT)

A standardized test designed, validated, and implemented to rank a students' performance by comparing that performance to the performance of said student's peers.

Opportunity to learn

The provision of learning conditions, including suitable adjustments, to maximize a student's chances of attaining the desired learning outcomes, such as the mastery of content standards.

Out-of-level testing

Administration of a test at a level above or below a student's present grade level to enable the student to be assessed at the level of instruction rather than the level of enrollment.

Participation rate

The percentage of students within a particular group or subgroup who took a test as compared to the total number of students in the group or subgroup who could have taken the test.

Performance assessment

A task or series of tasks requiring a student to provide a response or create a product to show mastery of a specific skill or content standard.

Performance levels

A measurement that distinguishes an adequate performance from a novice or expert performance. Performance levels provide a determination of the extent to which a student has met the content standards.

Performance standards

One of two types of standards. Includes indices of qualities that specify how adept or competent a student demonstration must be and that consist of the following four components:

1. Levels that provide descriptive labels or narratives for student performance (e.g., advanced, proficient).

2. Descriptions of what students at each particular level must demonstrate relative to the task.
3. Examples of student work at each level illustrating the range of performance within each level.
4. Cut scores clearly separating each performance level.

(See also *Content standards*).

Portfolio

A collection of student-generated or student-focused evidence that provides the basis for demonstrating the student's mastery of a range of skills, performance level, or improvement in these skills over time. The portfolio evidence may include student work samples, photographs, videotapes, interviews, anecdotal records, interviews, and observations.

Portfolio assessment

An organized collection or documentation of student-generated or student-focused work typically depicting the range of individual student skills.

Readability

The formatting of presented material that considers the organization of text, syntactic complexity of sentences, use of abstractions, density of concepts, sequence and organization of ideas, page format, sentence length, paragraph length, variety of punctuation, student background knowledge or interest, and use of illustrations or graphics in determining the appropriate level of difficulty of instructional or assessment materials.

Real-world application

The opportunity for a student to exhibit a behavior or complete a task that the student would normally be expected to perform outside of the school environment.

Reliability

The consistency of the test instrument. The extent to which it is possible to generalize a specific behavior observed at a specific time by a specific student to observations of similar behaviors at different times or by different students.

Response requirements

The type, kind, or method of action required of a student to answer a question or testing item. The response may include, but is not limited to, reading, writing, speaking, creating, and drawing.

Rubric

A scoring tool based on a set of criteria used to evaluate a student's test performance. The criteria contain a description of the requirements for varying degrees of success in responding to the question or performing the task. Rubrics may be diagnostic or analytic (i.e., providing ratings of multiple criteria), or holistic (i.e., describing a single, global trait).

Secure forms of assessments

Tests that will be used repeatedly with different groups of students and must be safeguarded so all students have equal exposure to the test materials and equal opportunities for success.

Section 504

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires public schools to provide accommodations to students with disabilities even if they do not qualify for special education services under IDEA. The definition of a disability under Section 504 is much broader than the definition under IDEA. All IDEA students are also covered by Section 504, but not all Section 504 students are eligible for services under IDEA. Section 504 states:

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. (29 U.S.C. Section 794)

Stakeholders

A group of individuals perceived to be vested in a particular decision (e.g., a policy decision).

Standard error of measurement (SEM)

The average amount that scores in a distribution differ from the corresponding actual scores for a specified group of test takers. Can be used to establish a range within which a student's actual score would be likely to fall.

Standardized

An established procedure that assures a test is administered with the same directions, and under the same conditions and is scored in the same manner for all students to ensure the comparability of scores. Standardization allows reliable and valid comparison to be made among students taking the test. The two major types of standardized tests are norm-referenced and criterion-referenced.

Standards-based assessments

Assessments constructed to measure how well students have mastered specific content standards or skills.

Starting point

The accepted baseline that is referenced to determine future levels of performance or progress.

Student self-reflection

Assessment by a student of that student's own instruction or work.

Student with a disability (SWD)

(See *Child with a disability*).

Subgroup

A well-defined group of students. For example, NCLB identifies the following specific subgroups that must achieve adequate yearly progress: students of racial or ethnic minority, students with disabilities, limited-English-proficient (LEP) students, and economically disadvantaged students.

Supports

A generic term for adaptations, accommodations, and/or modifications required and used routinely by a student to perform a skill or task independently.

Test

A measuring device or procedure. Educational tests are typically composed of questions or tasks designed to elicit predetermined behavioral responses or to measure specific academic content standards.

Test bias

Created by not allowing certain groups into the sample, not designing the test to allow all groups to participate equitably, selecting discriminatory material, testing content that has not been taught, and other similar activities. Test bias usually favors one group of test takers over another, resulting in discrimination.

Test forms

Parallel or alternate versions of a test that are considered interchangeable in that they measure the same constructs, are intended for the same purposes, and are administered using the same directions.

Test presentation

The method, manner, or structure in which test items or assessments are administered to the student.

Test security

Established procedures to ensure current or future confidentiality, fidelity and integrity of a test whereby public access is limited and strictly monitored, with clearly outlined consequences for breaches in test security.

Universal design of assessment

A method for developing an assessment to ensure accessibility by all students regardless of ability or disability. Universal design of assessment is based on principles used in the field of architecture in which user diversity is considered during the conceptual stage of development.

Validity

The extent to which a test measures what it was designed to measure. Multiple types of validity exist. (See also *Construct validity*, *Content validity*, *Convergent validity*, *Criterion-related validity* and *Face validity*).

Keys to ABC's of Assessment

504	Section 504 of the <i>Rehabilitation Act of 1973</i>
AA	Alternate Assessment
ADA	<i>Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990</i>
AERA	American Educational Research Association
AASA	American Association of School Administrators
ALEPS	Assessing Limited English Proficient Students
ARTS	Arts Education Assessment
ASES	Assessing Special Education Students
ASR	Accountability Systems and Reporting
AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress
CAS	Comprehensive Assessment Systems for Title I
CAST	Center for Applied Special Technology
CCSSO	Council of Chief State School Officers
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CISA	Commission on Instructionally Supportive Assessment
CPP	Curricular Prioritizing Panel of the US Department of Education
CRESST	National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing
CRT	Criterion-Referenced Test
CSSAP	Comprehensive Social Studies Assessment Project
ECEA	Early Childhood Education Assessment Consortium
ED	United States Department of Education
EDGAR	Education Department General Administrative Regulations
EHA	<i>Education of the Handicapped Act</i>
ELL	English Language Learners
EPRR	Education Policy Reform Research Institute
ERIC	Educational Resources Information Center
ESEA	<i>Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965</i>
ESL	English as Second Language
FAPE	Free and Appropriate Public Education
FERPA	<i>Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act</i>
GEPA	<i>General Educational Provisions Act</i>
GLARRA	Great Lakes Regional Resource Area
HEAP	Health Education Assessment Project
IASA	<i>Improving America's Schools Act</i>
IDEA	<i>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004</i>
IEP	Individualized Education Program
IHE	Institutions on Higher Education
LEA	Local Educational Agency
LEP	Limited English Proficient
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
MCREL	Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory

MPRRC	Mountain Plains Regional Educational Laboratory
MRC	Materials Review Committee of the US Department of Education
MSRRC	Mid-South Regional Resource Center
NAGB	National Assessment Governing Board
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NAESP	National Association of Elementary School Principals
NASBE	National Association of State Boards of Education
NASDSE	National Association of State Directors of Special Education
NASP	National Association for School Psychologists
NASSP	National Association for Secondary School Principals
NASTID	National Association of State Title I Directors
NCAC	National Center on Assessing General Curriculum
NCEO	National Center on Educational Outcomes
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NCLB	<i>No Child Left Behind Act of 2001</i>
NCREL	North Central Regional Educational Laboratory
NERRC	Northeast Regional Resource Center
NLIST	Network for Leadership, Inquiry and Systemic Thinking
NRT	Norm-Referenced Test
NSBA	National School Boards Association
OCR	Office for Civil Rights
OERI	Office of Educational Research and Improvement
OSEP	Office of Special Education Programs
OSERS	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services
QSP	Quality School Portfolio
RFP	Request for Proposal
RLAA	Reading/Language Arts Assessment for NCLB
RRC	Regional Resource Center
SCASS	State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards
SEA	State Educational Agency
SEC	Surveys of the Enacted Curriculum
SERRC	Southeast Regional Resource Center
SWD	Students with Disabilities or Student with a Disability
TA	Technical Assistance
TAC	Technical Advisory Committee
TILSA	Technical Issues in Large-Scale Assessment
TIMSS	Third International Mathematics and Science Study
USDOE	United States Department of Education
USED	United States Department of Education