

# Special Education Glossary of Key Terms

**S**pecial education uses a dizzying number of terms. Most of them, however, have to do with the various ways students with disabilities can learn and develop important skills. The following list offers definitions for a select but important set of these terms.

## Accommodations

are any adjustment that help a student overcome or “work around” a disability that does not alter or lower the standards or expectations for a subject or test, whatever else it changes. Specific accommodations range widely.

Providing braille readers or large-print books to a student who is visually impaired constitutes an accommodation, as do curb cuts for students who use a wheelchair. Through a student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan, classroom accommodations may be formally identified and put in place, although many teachers make informal accommodations for students in their classes all the time and naturally, whether or not the students have a disability. To learn more, go to <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/nceo/topicareas/accommodations/accomtopic.htm>.

## Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

devices are part of a holistic communication approach that integrates multiple forms of self-expression, which include devices used by students to communicate at school, at home, and in the community to convey needs, wants, thoughts, and feelings. These devices do not have to be fancy or expensive.. For example, a “picture exchange communication system” (PEC) helps students to initiate communication through the use of pictures or symbols in place of words.

Other devices include, but are not limited to, refreshable braille, communication boards, eye-gaze boards, and other assistive technologies. To learn more, go to <http://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/AAC/>.

## Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

are a set of college- and career-ready standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts (ELA)/literacy and mathematics and designed to ensure that all students leave high school prepared for career, college, and civic life. State education chiefs and governors in 48 states developed the Common Core. For information about the California Common Core State Standards, go to <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/>.

## Differentiated Instruction

is an approach to teaching and managing a classroom that allows teachers to factor the many differences within a mixed-ability classroom into planning and delivering instruction to ultimately provide multiple learning

options and different paths to learning that help students take in information and make sense of concepts and skills. Differentiated instruction provides appropriate levels of challenge for all students, including those who struggle and those who are advanced. While differentiated instruction is not mandated by IDEA, current brain research does confirm it as an effective approach for supporting the learning needs all students. To learn more, go to <http://www.ascd.org/research-a-topic/differentiated-instruction-resources.aspx>.

## Instructional Supports

represent any person, strategy, or program that, in effect, “supports” the student in learning. This broad category includes curricula that are designed for diverse learners (see *Universal Design for Learning* below); special educators, who are trained to adapt instructional materials and strategies so that students can better learn; and paraprofessionals, who assist a student in classroom activities and instruction.

To learn more, go to <http://www.intensiveintervention.org/resource/accommodations-instructional-and-testing-supports-students-disabilities>.

**Extended standards** are linked to the Common Core State Standards, but they are more focused and include the content and application of knowledge through high-order thinking skills, and



include a focus on academic and real life-application. For examples of the extended standards for English language arts, go to

- [http://wvde.state.wv.us/teach21/essd/mathk-5\\_instructionalguide.pdf](http://wvde.state.wv.us/teach21/essd/mathk-5_instructionalguide.pdf)
- [http://wvde.state.wv.us/osp/ela6-8\\_instructionalguide.pdf](http://wvde.state.wv.us/osp/ela6-8_instructionalguide.pdf)
- [http://wvde.state.wv.us/teach21/essd/ela9-12\\_instructionalguide.pdf](http://wvde.state.wv.us/teach21/essd/ela9-12_instructionalguide.pdf)

For examples of the extended standards for mathematics, go to

- [http://wvde.state.wv.us/teach21/essd/mathk-5\\_instructionalguide.pdf](http://wvde.state.wv.us/teach21/essd/mathk-5_instructionalguide.pdf)
- [http://wvde.state.wv.us/teach21/essd/math6-8\\_instructionalguide.pdf](http://wvde.state.wv.us/teach21/essd/math6-8_instructionalguide.pdf)
- [http://wvde.state.wv.us/teach21/essd/math9-12\\_instructionalguide.pdf](http://wvde.state.wv.us/teach21/essd/math9-12_instructionalguide.pdf)

### Learner Characteristics

are those unique qualities in a student that create a learning profile. Learner characteristics may include, but are not limited to, a student's expressive and receptive communication ability; need for augmentative and alternative communication use; ability to be engaged in learning environments; needs in a classroom setting; and present levels in reading and mathematics. To learn more, go to <http://www.unco.edu/cebs/psychology/kevinpugh/5-7320/ITcomponents/learner.html>.

### Learning Progressions

are the vertical building blocks that connect one grade-level's content to that of the next grade level; mastery of content within a progression leads to success in later content goals. To learn more, go to <http://edglossary.org/learning-progression/>.

### Modifications

are any of the changes made to the level and type of content to be taught (thus different from an accommodation). Modifications usually only apply to the one or two percent of students with significant disabilities who, regardless of all possible accommo-

dation, services, or supports, cannot benefit from the level and type of curriculum being offered to all students. Modifications, which must be clearly spelled out in the IEP, may apply to an instructional approach, method, material, timing, setting, and/or arrangement. Modifications need to be considered and used carefully, since students for whom material and work are modified may find that they are not ready for a program that leads to a standard diploma in high school. To learn more, go to [http://paws.wcu.edu/mherzog/617modideas\\_001.htm](http://paws.wcu.edu/mherzog/617modideas_001.htm).

### Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS)

is a whole-school/district, data-driven, prevention-based framework for improving learning outcomes for every student through a layered continuum of evidence-based practices. (See also *Tiers*.) To learn more, go to <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/ri/> and <http://www.kansasmtss.org>.

### Related Services

are any developmental, corrective, or support service, provided by trained professionals, "as may be required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education" [IDEA]. The individualized education program (IEP) team decides which related services a child needs and specifies them in the child's IEP. The law lists the following examples of related services, but does not intend

this list to be exclusive: audiology, occupational therapy; physical therapy; psychological services; medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes only; school health services; transportation services; counseling services; speech-language pathology; social work services; parent counseling and training; recreation therapy; and early identification and assessment of disabilities in children. To learn more, go to <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/rs/>.

### Scaffolding

is when teachers provide successive levels of temporary support that help students reach higher levels of comprehension and skill acquisition that they would not be able to achieve without assistance. To learn more, go to [http://www.niu.edu/facdev/resources/guide/strategies/instructional\\_scaffolding\\_to\\_improve\\_learning.pdf](http://www.niu.edu/facdev/resources/guide/strategies/instructional_scaffolding_to_improve_learning.pdf).

### Specially Designed Instruction

is any teaching method or strategy designed (1) to address the unique needs of a student that result from the student's disability; and (2) to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum. Examples include giving an audio recording of a textbook chapter to a student with a learning disability so he can both hear and read the words at the same time. To learn more, go to <http://www.education.com/reference/article/special-education1/#A>.

### Supplementary Aids and Services

are a type of support that is not a "special education and related service" but one that a child with a disability still needs in order to be educated with his or her nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. These supports "supplement" other efforts.



Some examples include adapted equipment (e.g., a special seat); assistive technology (e.g., special computer software or a communication system); a one-on-one aide; adapted materials (large-print books or books on tape); and collaboration and consultation among staff, parents, and other professionals. To learn more, go to <http://education.wm.edu/centers/ttac/resources/articles/consultcollaborate/beyondcoteaching/index.php>.

### Tiers

refer to the structural components of a multitiered system of supports that are typically represented in a pyramid showing a first level (Tier 1), which represents quality instruction for

all students; a second level (Tier 2), which consists of targeted interventions and supports for students who need extra help; and a third level (Tier 3), which consists of individualized, intensive, and ongoing supports for students at risk of school failure from either academic or behavioral challenges. The integrated instruction and intervention is delivered to students in varying intensities (multiple tiers) based on student need. (See also *Multitiered System of Supports*.)

### Universal Design

is a term used for the broad range of ideas that serve to create buildings, products, and environments that are inherently accessible to the widest

range of people possible: older people, people with disabilities, and people without disabilities.

### Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

is a set of principles—a blueprint—for developing a curriculum that creates instructional goals, assessments, methods, and materials that support learning and access for everyone. It is a flexible approach that is organized around the principles of Engagement, Representation, and Action/Expression. UDL customizes and adjusts classrooms and instruction in response to individual needs and interests. For more about UDL, go to [www.cast.org](http://www.cast.org).

## Terms related to assessments

<http://www.udl.org/>.

### Constructed-Response Questions

Assessment items—sometimes called “open-response” items—that often allow more than one correct answer; they require students to “construct” or develop their own answers without the benefit of any suggestions or choices.

### Focal Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

is a phrase in assessment construction that represents the design and progression of test questions that measure with increasing complexity a select set of skills and abilities.

### The Individual Student Assessment Accessibility Profile (ISAAP) Tool

is designed to help educators select the designated supports and accommodations that each student needs in order to access the Smarter Balanced assessments. At the following link you will find *The Smarter Balanced Usabil-*

*ity, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines* as well as the ISAAP Tool instructions and the tool itself:

<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/parents-students/support-for-under-represented-students/>

For a video overview of the ISAAP Tool, go to [http://www.californiatac.org/rsc/videos/archived-webcast\\_ISAAP-overview-and-instructions.html](http://www.californiatac.org/rsc/videos/archived-webcast_ISAAP-overview-and-instructions.html).

### Optimal Testing Conditions

are the various supports made available to students with the intent to gain the best testing performance from the student including time of day chosen for testing the student, physical positioning, providing of breaks, and language support.

### Selected-response Questions

are those assessment questions that require the student to make a selection from multiple-choice answer options.

### Test Operations

#### Management System

(TOMS) is a secure site that permits the people from local educational agencies and school districts who are the designated coordinators for California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) Coordinators to perform manage the CAASPP System, which is made up of the Smarter Balanced online summative assessments, the remaining paper-pencil tests in science, and the remaining paper-pencil primary language tests in reading/language arts. To read more, go to <http://www.californiatac.org>.

### Smarter Balanced

Assessment Consortium, is an organization that was chosen by the U.S. Department of Education to develop assessments that are aligned to the Common Core State Standards and that measure student progress toward college- and career-readiness. To read more, go to <http://www.smarterbalanced.org>.

# Terms unique to alternate assessments

## Alternate Assessment based on Alternate Achievement Standards (AA-AAS)

are the tests designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. AA-AAS are administered for ELA and mathematics and science in grades three through eight and in grade eleven. The alternate achievement standards are aligned with the CCSS and are focused on the main academic concepts from those standards. AA-AAS may cover a narrower range of content (e.g., cover fewer objectives under each content standard) and reflect a different set of expectations in the areas of reading/language arts, mathematics, and science than do regular assessments or alternate assessments based on grade-level achievement standards. For more information, go to <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/altassessment.asp>.

## Communicative Competence

represents a set of expressive communication skills that students must develop through direct instruction in order to have an effective, individualized system of communication across settings (home, school, and community). It is the basis for learning and is necessary for active community participation. Communication at some level is possible and identifiable for all students, regardless of functional "level." A system of communication may involve assistive technology or other forms of communication than oral speech. For *The Importance of Developing Communicative Competence*, go to

[http://www.iod.unh.edu/Libraries/Research/The\\_Importance\\_of\\_Developing\\_Communicative\\_Compentence\\_for\\_Students\\_with\\_Significant\\_Cognitive\\_Disabilities.sflb.ashx](http://www.iod.unh.edu/Libraries/Research/The_Importance_of_Developing_Communicative_Compentence_for_Students_with_Significant_Cognitive_Disabilities.sflb.ashx).

## Core Content Connectors (CCCs)

support aspects of a learning standard. These connectors break standards into manageable parts and create content targets that are linked to the CCSS and are typically used to plan instruction and assessments for students who will take an alternate assessment. The CCCs are less complex than the CCSS and focus on the main academic content in each subject and grade. They are aligned with learning progressions, so they help to systematically develop and deepen a student's understanding as the student moves into later grades. To read more about CCCs, go to [https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/index.php/Core\\_Content\\_Connectors](https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/index.php/Core_Content_Connectors).

## Essential

### Understandings

are the content-based alternate achievement standards adjusted as entry points for students beginning to interact with grade-level curriculum.

## Significant Cognitive Disability

is a designation given to a small number of students who from early childhood demonstrate significant limitations in of intellectual functioning and in two or more adaptive skill areas, such as daily living, communication, self-care, social skills, academics, and work. Students with significant cognitive disabilities benefit from direct, targeted, and repeated instruction over time to attain academic skills. To learn more about alternate assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities, go to <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/nceo/topicareas/alternateassessments/altAssessFAQ.htm>.

## Tiers

are used in alternate assessments and refer to efforts to structure items in tiers (levels) to increases in cognitive and language complexity and item difficulty in a test to measure a student's grade-level academic achievement against the alternate achievement standards and growth. Tiers are defined by levels of access and complexity. At an entrance level, test questions are designed to allow for the most inclusive access to the test content (e.g., simplified text). At a higher level, test questions are designed to align with grade-level Common Core State Standards content expectations.

