

School Accountability Report Card

Glossary of Terms

at-risk student: Students may be labeled "at risk" if not succeeding in school based on information gathered from test scores, attendance or discipline problems.

charter schools: Public schools that run independently of school board governance, but still receive public funding. They are run by groups of teachers, parents, and/or foundations. Charter schools are free of many district regulations and are often tailored to community needs.

cooperative learning: A teaching method in which students of differing abilities work together on an assignment. Each student has a specific responsibility within the group. Students complete assignments together and receive a common grade.

core academics: The required subjects in middle and high schools—usually English (literature), history (social studies), math, and science.

credential or certificate: A state-issued license certifying that the teacher has completed the necessary basic training courses and passed the teacher exam.

curriculum: The subject matter that teachers and students cover in class.

English as a Second Language (ESL): Classes or support programs for students whose native language is not English.

Family Math: A University of California at Berkeley program that teaches families how to enjoy doing math together. Parents and children attend workshops or use the Family Math book to learn how to use everyday materials to do fun math activities.

Gifted and Talented Education (GATE): A program that offers supplemental, differentiated, challenging curriculum and instruction for students identified as being intellectually gifted or talented. (Ed Source)

immersion education: A program that teaches children to speak, read, and write in a second language by surrounding them with conversation and instruction in that language, and little else. Note that English immersion may differ from other immersion programs.

inclusion: A process whereby students who are in the special education program enroll in general education classes. The students are officially included on the general education roster and are graded by the general education teacher, while continuing to receive support from the special education teacher (compare with "mainstreaming.")

Individual Education Program (IEP): A written plan created for a student with learning disabilities by his or her teacher(s), 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.

in-service training: Classes that help a school staff reach specific goals.

interdisciplinary method: A teaching method in which teachers of core academic subjects work together and plan instruction based on a particular theme. For example, when students are learning about historic events in social studies, in English class they may study a novel set in that historic period.

IQ: Shortened term for "intelligence quotient." It is supposed to reflect a person's mental capabilities, but these tests have become more controversial in recent years. Critics claim they measure only a limited number of intellectual abilities, primarily "school smarts," while others say the tests are biased against members of some minority groups.

K-8: Schools that include kindergarten through eighth grade classes, combining elementary and middle schools.

language arts: Another term for English class. The focus is on reading, speaking, listening, and writing skills.

learning lab: A room in a school that is set aside for academic support activities for students. (See "resource room.")

library media center: A library that has benefited from an investment in computer technology, usually including the use of computers for research. The concept involves training librarians in developments in technology, adding to collections, and increasing the number of full-time, credentialed librarians.

Limited English Proficiency (LEP): A now out-of-fashion term describing students who are not yet able to read, write, speak and understand English as well as their peers at the same grade level. The new, preferred term is English learners (EL).

magnet school: A school that has as its focus a particular discipline, such as science, mathematics, arts, or computer science. Its special focus is designed to recruit students from other parts of the school district. They were created initially to remedy segregation.

mainstreaming: The practice of placing students with educational and/or physical disabilities in general education classes. This helps special education and general education students learn to function socially and academically together. The special education teacher maintains the students' attendance records and grades. (Compare with "inclusion.")

national percentile: A number that represents the percentage of students who scored at or below a given point. For example, if a student scored at the 90th percentile, it would mean that he or she scored higher than 89 percent of the students in the national norm group who took that test.

No Child Left Behind Act: Signed into law by President Bush in 2002, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) sets performance benchmarks 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".

normed score: A score that compares the performance of an individual student to the performance of a nationally representative group of students.

optional enrollment: Similar to open enrollment. A way for parents to enroll their children in schools they choose. It is based on the state laws in California that enable a parent to turn down a district-assigned school, and request an alternate placement.

Parent-Teacher Association (PTA): A national organization of parents, teachers, and other interested persons, with chapters in schools. PTA's are normally parent dominated, and rely entirely on voluntary participation. The PTA offers assistance to schools in many different areas.

peer resource program: A program that trains students to provide their peers with counseling, education, and support on issues such as prejudice, drugs, violence, child abuse, dropping out, AIDS, and peer pressure. Students are also trained to provide tutoring and conflict mediation.

phonics: An instructional strategy used to teach reading. It helps beginning readers by teaching them letter-sound relationships and having them "sound out" words. It is now the basis of the state's approach to teaching reading.

planning period: A period set aside for teachers to plan curriculum, meet with parents, and evaluate student progress.

portfolio: An alternative way of assessing students in which the teacher and student collect and organize the student's work throughout a course or class year. Grades are based on this packet of materials, which measures the student's knowledge and skills, and often includes some form of self-reflection by the student.

Reading Recovery: An individualized reading-skills program for students who are having difficulty learning to read. Teachers are trained in a year-long course that emphasizes a whole-language approach (reading within context rather than phonics) and integrates reading, writing, and listening techniques. Students who don't improve are eligible to receive 30 minutes of one-on-one instruction daily for up to 20 weeks.

reconstitution: A drastic corrective action for a school whose students have performed poorly for several years, and have failed to improve. A reconstitution is marked by the replacement of the majority of the school's staff, the hiring of a new principal, and the restaffing of its faculty from scratch. Only some school districts have adopted this method of reform.

resource specialists: Specially credentialed teachers who work with special education students by assisting them in regular classes or pulling them out of class for extra help.

resource room: A room in which students needing help with their work may go during regular class time. The resource room teacher may have special education and/or bilingual credentials. The teacher may provide one-on-one instruction or teach a subject to the students as a group. In these cases, the resource teacher grades the students' work. (See "learning lab.")

sanctions: Consequences for schools that do not meet the goals set for them by state or federal accountability programs. These can include providing free tutoring to students or transfers to higher-performing schools. The most severe sanctions often involve state takeover of a public school or district.

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

school-based (site-based) management: A plan that shifts decision-making authority from school districts to individual schools. While these types of plans vary, they usually give control of a school's operation to a school council composed of parents, teachers, and local administrators.

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.

sheltered English: A form of simplified English that includes hand gestures to help convey meaning. It is used primarily with students with limited English skills.

site-based decision-making: An approach to running a school involving the staff in all-important decisions. This includes curriculum, schedules, finances, facilities, and resources.

special day classes: Full-day classes for students with learning disabilities, speech and/or language impairments, serious emotional disturbances, cognitive delays, and a range of other impairments. Classes are taught by certified special education teachers. A student may be mainstreamed or enter a full-inclusion program as appropriate according to the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP).

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

Student Study Team: A team of educators, convened at the request of a classroom teacher, parent, or counselor, that designs in-class intervention techniques to meet the needs of a particular student. The team can consist of the primary teacher, the parent or guardian of the student, two specialists (speech therapist, psychologist, or counselor), an objective teacher (who does not teach the student in any class), and/or the principal. Six weeks after implementing a program (counseling, tutoring, or special assignments) for the student, the team reconvenes to determine if further steps, including a transfer to special education classes, are necessary.

staff development days: Days set aside in the school calendar for teacher training, sometimes on school days. School is not generally held on these days.

student teacher: Teachers in training who are in their last semester of a teacher education program. Student teachers work with a regular teacher who supervises their practice teaching.

teachers' assistants: Volunteers or parents who assist teachers in the classroom. Teachers' aides may tutor students or provide clerical assistance to the teacher.

team teaching: A teaching method in which two or more teachers teach the same subjects or theme. For example, one teacher may be responsible for teaching number skills while another teacher focuses on geometry. The teachers may alternate teaching the entire group or divide the group into sections or classes that rotate between the teachers.

thematic units: A unit of study that has lessons focused on a specific theme, sometimes covering all core subject areas. For example, the theme of inequality may be explored by studying the caste system in India and slavery in the American South. It is often used as an alternative approach to teaching history or social studies chronologically.

Title One: A federally funded program designed to improve the academic achievement of students scoring below the 50th percentile on standardized tests. It's a reference to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and it was changed several years ago. It was known as Chapter One of the same act.

tracking: A common instructional practice of organizing student groups based on their academic skills. Tracking allows a teacher to provide the same level of instruction to the entire group. Also called ability grouping.

whole language: A teaching method that focuses on reading for meaning in context. Teachers may give phonics lessons to individual students (as needed), but the majority of reading lessons emphasize teaching students to look at the wholeness of words and text. Whole language methods were prevalent in California elementary schools until the mid-1990's, and are faulted by some educators as the reason for the decline of reading skills among the state's students.

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.