

# A Guide to Educational Acronyms: What's in the Alphabet Soup?



NATIONAL  
CENTER ON  
EDUCATIONAL  
OUTCOMES

## Dear Colleague:

You need only spend a few minutes listening to an education policymaker describing legislation to be aware of the “alphabet soup” of educational acronyms. As a former Minnesota State Senator for 10 years, and Chair of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) Education, Labor and Workforce Committee in 2001–2002, I often wished I had a resource to define, clarify, or remind me of definitions of acronyms routinely found in legislative and policy discussions.

The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) was established in 1990 to provide national leadership in designing and building educational assessments and accountability systems that appropriately measure the educational results of all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs). NCEO works with states and federal agencies on this topic and others (accommodations, alternate assessments). NCEO bridges general education, special education, and other systems to increase accountability for results of education for all students.

Whatever your role, be it as a state legislator, teacher, parent, or other, you are important to the development and implementation of sound educational policy. We hope this pocket guide will be a useful tool. In addition to this simple resource, NCEO’s website contains a wealth of valuable information: [www.nceo.info](http://www.nceo.info).

Cordially,

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## AA-AAS

### **Alternate Assessment based on Alternate Achievement Standards:**

AA-AAS is for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These assessments are based on the grade-level content covered by the general assessment, but at reduced depth, breadth, and complexity. These assessments describe achievement based on what a state determines is a high expectation for these students, and this definition is different from that defined for typical students.

Students who participate in AA-AAS are generally less than 1% of the total student population or about 9% of all students with disabilities. Learner characteristics data from many states show that most students who participate in AA-AAS have basic literacy and numeracy skills. Most of the students who take the AA-AAS (90%) have consistent communication skills. The 10% of AA-AAS students who communicate on a pre-symbolic level (without intentional use of language, pictures, objects, or signs) need opportunities to learn effective strategies, including the use of assistive devices.



## AA-GLAS

### **Alternate Assessment based on Grade-level Achievement Standards:**

AA-GLAS is an assessment that some states use to evaluate the performance of a small group of students with disabilities. Federal legislation requires that all students, including students with disabilities, be included in accountability systems. Many students can take the general assessment with or without accommodations, but some students with disabilities need alternate ways to access assessments.

Alternate assessments based on grade-level achievement standards (AA-GLAS) are for students who require accommodations that are not available on the general assessment to demonstrate skill and knowledge on the grade-level content and grade-level achievement standards, and who demonstrate achievement in different formats or contexts than are provided by the general assessment. Only a few states currently offer this option.

## AA-MAS

### **Alternate Assessment based on Modified Achievement Standards:**

AA-MAS is an assessment that some states use to evaluate the performance of a small group of students with disabilities. AA-MAS is an assessment option for some students with an IEP whose progress to date, in response to appropriate instruction, is such that the student is unlikely to achieve grade-level proficiency within the school year covered by the IEP. Students qualifying for AA-MAS may be from any disability category. Regulations on modified academic achievement standards were finalized in April 2007.

Students who are assessed with this option are required to have instruction in grade-level content. States considering this option need to make sure that strategies are in place to improve instruction and learning for the group of students who may be candidates for an AA-MAS.

## AYP

### **Adequate Yearly Progress:**

AYP is a measure of student performance used for accountability under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (currently known as No Child Left Behind). AYP is used as a measure each year for judging whether schools, districts, and states have made adequate progress against targets set for reading and math test performance as well as for other indicators (such as attendance and graduation rate). Targets must be met overall and for subgroups of students, including those with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs).

## CAT

### **Computerized Adaptive Test:**

CAT successively selects questions based on what is known about the examinee from previous questions. For example, if an examinee performs well on an item of intermediate difficulty, he/she will then be presented with a more difficult question. Or, if the examinee performed poorly, he/she would be presented with an easier question. Compared to static multiple choice tests with a fixed set of items

administered to all examinees, computer-adaptive tests usually require fewer test items to arrive at equally precise scores.

## CRT

### **Criterion Referenced Test:**

CRTs are intended to measure how well a person performs in relation to a desired performance level, rather than in relation to all other students. Most state tests are CRTs.

## DLM

### **Dynamic Learning Maps:**

The Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System will allow students with significant cognitive disabilities to demonstrate what they know in ways that traditional multiple choice assessments cannot. Instead of a single stand-alone test, the system will use items and tasks embedded in day-to-day instruction throughout the year to help map a student's learning. Under this model, a student may take 30 small, integrated assessments by the end of the year rather than one single large assessment. This allows the teacher an opportunity to adjust instruction to



support student learning throughout the year. An optional summative assessment will also be developed for states desiring a supplement to the instructionally embedded system.

DLM, led by the Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation (CETE), includes experts from a wide range of assessment fields as well as key partners: the Arc, AbleLink Technologies, Center for Literacy and Disability Studies at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill, the Beach Center for Disability at the University of Kansas (KU), the Center for Research Methods and Data Analysis at KU, the Center for Research on Learning at KU, and Edvantia. The consortium also includes 13 state partners (as of this writing). DLM is funded through a General Supervision Enhancement Grant (GSEG) from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.



**ELL**

**English Language Learner:**

Student whose first language is one other than English and who may need language



assistance to participate fully in the regular curriculum (**EL**–English Learner) (**ESL**–English as Second Language) (**LEP**–Limited English Proficiency).

## **ESEA**

### **Elementary and Secondary Education Act:**

This is the principal federal law affecting K-12 education. When the ESEA of 1965 was reauthorized and amended in 2002, it was renamed the No Child Left Behind (**NCLB**) Act.

## **GSEG**

### **General Supervision Enhancement Grant:**

Under Sec. 616(i)(2) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the U.S. Department of Education may make awards to provide technical assistance to improve the capacity of states to meet data collection requirements under IDEA. GSEG funds are supporting two consortia of states to develop alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS): Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) and National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC).

## IDEA

### Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990):

This federal law, reauthorized in 2004, is designed to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.

## IEP

### Individualized Education Program:

An IEP is developed for each student who receives special education services through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It is a document that reflects a planning process designed to describe the education plan that meets the unique needs of the child so that child will meet educational goals set for him or her. The IEP is to include an array of information that will assist in setting goals and ensuring that a school-age child has access to and makes progress in the general curriculum. It also identifies the way in which the student will participate

in the standards-based assessment and accountability system.

## IRT

### **Item Response Theory:**

This mathematical theory is used in test development to focus on the characteristics of individual items and contrasts with older methods that put more emphasis on the characteristics of entire tests. IRT uses data that show how an individual's performance on each item compares to that student's performance on the total test. IRT is important in the development of computerized adaptive testing (CAT).

## NAEP

### **National Assessment of Educational Progress:**

Also known as the "Nation's Report Card," NAEP assesses the educational achievement of elementary and secondary students in various content areas. It provides data for comparing the performance of students in each state to that of their peers in the nation.



# NCSC

## National Center and State

**Collaborative:** NCSC will build a comprehensive alternate assessment system based on the Common Core State Standards that includes project-developed tools and processes to support educators as they plan and provide appropriate instruction for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These supports will help Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams accurately identify the learner characteristics and make appropriate decisions about how each student participates in the overall system of assessments.

The organizational partners include the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) as the host and fiscal agent, along with the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (NCIEA), the University of Kentucky (UKY), University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC), edCount, LLC, and 19 state partners. NCSC is funded through a General Supervision Enhancement Grant (GSEG) from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

## **NRT**

### **Norm Referenced Test:**

This type of test determines a student's placement on a normal distribution curve. Students compete against each other on this type of assessment. This is what is being referred to with the phrase "grading on a curve."

## **PARCC**

### **Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers:**

Twenty-four states have joined together to create PARCC. The goal is to create an assessment system and supporting tools that will help states dramatically increase the number of students who graduate from high school ready for college and careers and provide students, parents, teachers, and policymakers with the tools they need to help students—from grade three through high school—stay on track to graduate prepared. The Partnership will also develop formative tools for grades K-2.

At the time of this writing there were 15 Governing States and 9 Participating States. PARCC selected Achieve as its

Project Management Partner to play a key role in coordinating the work of the Partnership. PARCC is funded through a Race-to-the-Top Assessment (RTTTA) grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.

## RTI

### **Response to Intervention:**

There are four essential components of RTI:

- A school-wide, multi-level instructional and behavioral system for preventing school failure
- Screening
- Progress Monitoring
- Data-based decision making for instruction, movement within the multi-level system, and disability identification (in accordance with state law).

## RTTT

### **Race to the Top:**

RTTT is a \$4.35 billion United States Department of Education program designed to spur reforms in state and local district K-12 education. It is funded by the ED Recovery Act of 2009.

A total of 46 states and the District of Columbia put together comprehensive education reform plans to apply for Race to the Top in Phases 1 and 2. Phase 1 winners were Delaware and Tennessee. Phase 2 winners were the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Rhode Island.

## RTTTA

### **Race to the Top Assessment Program:**

RTTTA provides funding to consortia of States to develop assessments that are valid, support and inform instruction, provide accurate information about what students know and can do, and measure student achievement against standards designed to ensure that all students gain the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college and the workplace. The two funded consortia are PARCC and SBAC (also called RTTA).

## SBAC

### **The SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium:**

SBAC is a collection of 29 states that have been working collaboratively since



December 2009 to develop a student assessment system aligned to a common core of academic content standards to apply for a Race-to-the-Top Assessment grant. SBAC will create state-of-the-art adaptive online exams, using “open source” technology. The online system will provide accurate assessment information to teachers and others on the progress of all students, including those with disabilities, English language learners, and low- and high-performing students.

At the time of this writing, there were 18 Governing States and 11 Participating States. SBAC selected WestEd as its Project Management Partner to play a key role in coordinating the work of the consortium. SBAC is funded through a Race-to-the-Top Assessment (RTTTA) grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.



## 504

### **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973:**

Section 504 is a civil rights statute that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. A 504 plan is an individual education plan for a special-needs student. Section 504 accommodation plans are developed for students with disabilities who need accommodations but do not necessarily need special education services.



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