

# A Back to School Primer for Parents

Educators use many words that are unfamiliar to parents who are new to the public school system. This primer is designed to take some of the mystery out of commonly used educational terms.

**Ability Groups** – A method of creating instructional groups based on the student's academic achievement

**Assessment** – A method for determining the student's level of achievement, proficiency, or mastery of a subject

**ADD** – Attention Deficit Disorder – The term applied to a disability that is characterized by the inability to focus, pay attention to instruction, or follow instructions. **AD/HD** – Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder – refers to students who display both attention deficit and hyperactivity

**Authentic Assessment** – Assessment based on what the student does with the information gained or learned. Often production of an educational product is part of the assessment.

**AYP** – Adequate Yearly Progress – The measure of progress toward all students achieving at a proficient level in reading and math as required by the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB)

**Charter School** – A public school chartered by the state and publicly funded, but independent of the local school system and usually offers a different curriculum or program of study

**Cooperative Learning** – A plan of instruction during which the educational objective is assigned to a group of students each of whom is responsible for mastering part of the task and helping to ensure the mastery of the whole objective by the group

**Curriculum** – The framework of a program of study as well as the criteria used to evaluate the program

**DIBELS** – Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills – An individual evaluation test used to determine the development of early reading skills

**Differentiated Instruction** – A plan of instruction in which the teacher uses differing approaches as to how best to design instruction for each student. Each lesson provides several possible learning experiences for students based on the student's needs, skills, experiences, and learning style.

**District Report Card** – Each school and school district is required to inform parents and the community of the progress that it is making toward meeting the requirements of NCLB.

**DOE** – Department of Education – **MADOE** – Massachusetts Department of Education, **USED** – United States Education Department

**DRA** – Diagnostic Reading Assessment – A commercial test of student literacy skills in accuracy and comprehension. The test uses short reading passages and is individually administered.

**ELL** – English Language Learners – This term refers to any student whose first (home) language is not English.

**51A** – The Massachusetts law that requires school personnel to report any alleged or suspected instances of child abuse. The law spells out the steps that a school must take to protect children.

**504** – A federal law which spells out the rights students have to receive an education consistent with a handicapping condition which interferes with their ability to engage in normal educational activities.

**Frameworks** – A series of educational benchmarks established by the Department of Education in various curricular areas

**Gifted** – A term applied to a small number of students who have exceptional abilities in academic or physical areas

**Guided Reading** – A plan of instruction in reading in which the teacher selects materials for students to read and then guides them in the appropriate use of strategies to achieve a specific outcome or purpose. Guided reading focuses on comprehension of materials.

**Hands On** – A strategy of learning which stresses the use of manipulatives and actual objects in the learning process

**High Stakes Tests** – A test that has consequences for passing or failing the test. An example is a test that must be successfully passed before the student can proceed to the next level of education or graduate.

**Highly Qualified** – A term applied to teachers and paraprofessionals who have met standards and qualifications spelled out by NCLB

**IDEA** – Individuals With Disabilities Education Act – The federal law that defines disabilities and the public schools' responsibilities and the obligations to provide an education for those students who meet specific criteria

**IEP** – Individual Education Plan – The document drawn up by an evaluation team consisting of education specialists, parents, students (if age appropriate) and other involved parties that defines an educational plan to address the needs of the student.

**Inclusion** – A plan of instruction for students with disabilities that provides for their instruction to take place in the same classroom as their non-disabled classmates. It requires that appropriate supports be built into the instructional plan so that the disabled student can be successful.



Turn Over



**Learning Center/Resource Room** – The classroom or space where students who have been identified as needing specific instructional interventions to deal with their learning disabilities receive instruction

**Learning Style** – Each student learns in his/her own manner and has a preferred manner of acquiring knowledge. Some learners are auditory learners, others are visual learners, while still others learn best by manipulating the materials

**LEP** – Limited English Proficient – Used to identify students who have some familiarity with English but whose native language is other than English

**LD** – Learning Disability – The term applied to a number of neurological problems that can interfere with a child's ability to acquire knowledge using visual or auditory methods

**Manipulatives** – Physical materials that are used by teachers to allow students to touch, move, and organize objects to represent a problem and develop a solution to math problems

**MCAS** – Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System – The high stakes test created by the Massachusetts DOE to measure the achievement of students in various academic areas. Students must achieve at least a level of Needs Improvement in all subject area tests to receive a Massachusetts high school diploma.

**Media Center** – The central depository of all print and electronic media in a school. It incorporates the library, audiovisual, and computer resources of a school

**Multiple Intelligences** – A theory of acquiring knowledge first written by Howard Gardner. He identifies 8 different kinds of intelligences that children possess to differing degrees. Teachers are urged to recognize how a student best utilizes these intelligences and plan instruction to match the intelligences the student possesses.

**NCLB** – No Child Left Behind Act – The common name for the ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act) which is the federal law that sets the standards for ensuring that all students will meet minimum levels of achievement by 2014

**Paraprofessional** - An instructional assistant who works under the direction of a teacher or other educational professionals to provide instructional services to students

**Phonics** – A method of reading instruction that bases the decoding of words on the relationship between letters and the sounds they represent

**Portfolio** – A method of assessment based on a number of student created products relating to the mastery of a curricular area

**Reading First** – A federally funded program aimed at improving reading instruction and student achievement

**Rubric** – A plan for assessment that indicates the degree of achievement based on how well specific benchmarks are accomplished

**School Choice** – A provision in the No Child Left Behind Act that allows parents to place their child in a school other than their home school if their home school fails to make Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years

**School Council** – An educational planning group made up of parents, educators, community members, and age appropriate students.

**School Improvement Plan** – A plan developed by the school council that looks at the present status of the school and indicates any needed improvement. It also plans roles for different people, decides on a time frame and sets benchmarks that will show improvement.

**School Report Card** – An annual report to parents and the community that presents information on each school and district's achievement scores, resources, scores, dropouts, etc.

**SES** – Supplemental Educational Services – A provision in the NCLB act provided that students attending schools that are not able to make AYP for three consecutive years can receive free tutoring services (paid for by the school district). The school district must advise parents of the services via information provided in the native language of the parent.

**SPED** – Special education – A term applied to those services provided by a school district to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities.

**Staff Development Days** – Days in the school year when no classes are held so that instructional staff can receive training.

**Standardized Tests** – A term applied to tests that are given and scored in the same manner for all students. They are used by a wide variety of educational institutions with specifically designed questions that require specific answers. Comparisons with a broad based sample of other test takers with similar backgrounds allow the school to measure the level of achievement of the test taker.

**Thinking Skills** – A term applied to how students approach solving problems. A noted educational researcher Benjamin Bloom has developed a hierarchy of skills: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

**Title 1** – A federally funded program aimed at improving the academic achievement of low-income students. School systems receive funds based on the level of poverty in a community. The law requires parental involvement

**Title IX** – A federal law that requires any school receiving federal funds to meet certain requirements regarding athletics and other extra-curricular activities.

**Whole Language** – An approach to teaching reading that stresses reading instruction in a broad context of a student's entire experience with language both written and oral. Every language experience is seen as a building block leading to recognition of words and understanding their meaning.

