



Collaborative for the Alternate Assessment of  
English Language Proficiency

A photograph of a teacher leaning over a desk to assist three students. The teacher is a woman with dark hair, wearing a light-colored, ruffled blouse. The students are two boys and one girl, all looking down at their work. The image is overlaid with a blue and purple gradient.

# Alt ELPA Glossary

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Assessment of English Language Proficiency**

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## Alt ELPA Glossary

**Accessibility:** The degree to which the items or tasks on a test enable as many test takers as possible to demonstrate their understanding of the target construct without being impeded by characteristics of the item that are irrelevant to the construct being measured.<sup>1</sup>

**Accessibility Features:** Embedded supports available to all students during a computer-based test (e.g., allowing students to adjust the background color or contrast of the screen).

Oftentimes, educators have to activate specific accessibility features prior to a test, based on a student's personal needs profile. Accessibility features are designed and intended to ensure students receive equitable access to tests without the distraction of features they don't need.

**Accommodations:** Change in the administration of an assessment that increases equitable access for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 plans. The use of accommodations is decided by IEP teams and educators for 504 plans. For English learners with disabilities, these teams should include an expert in the area of second language acquisition. Accommodations include, but are not limited to, a change in assessment setting, scheduling, timing, presentation format, response mode, or any combination of these changes that does not change the construct intended to be measured by the assessment or the meaning of the resulting scores.

**Aggregate Score Report:** Reports provided by states to school administrators and educators, summarizing student performance grade-level as determined by state policy. These reports provide aggregated scores at the school, district, and state level. States may add additional reports as necessary to describe regions or other institutional groupings specific to their state.

**Alignment:** The match or association between two or more elements or among content standards, performance standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessments in terms of knowledge and skill expectations.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> AERA, APA, NCME (2014). The standards for educational and psychological testing.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

**Alternate Assessment (AA):** An assessment developed for students with significant cognitive disabilities and for whom the general assessment, even with accommodations, is not appropriate and which is based on alternate standards.<sup>3</sup>

**Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC):** The different methods used to help people with disabilities communicate with others. These methods can be used as an alternative to speech or as a supplement, and can include individual methods of sign and gestures, standardized signing, symbol systems, and complex electronic devices.<sup>4</sup>

**Answer Key/Scoring Key/Key:** Specifications of the correct answer or range of correct/acceptable responses (where multiple responses are permitted) for an objective response test item.

**Artificial Intelligence (AI) Scored Responses:** Responses scored by software using one or more techniques to simulate the process and criteria used by human scorers. AI scoring is designed to generate scores consistent with those that would be produced by human scorers.<sup>5</sup>

**Assistive Technology:** Any software or device used by a student with a disability that provides the student with enhancements to, or changes methods of interacting with, the technology needed to facilitate participation in an assessment.<sup>6</sup>

**Augment:** To change test content, by adding, deleting, or customizing test items within an existing instrument to align that instrument with content standards.<sup>7</sup>

**Blueprint:** A series of documents that describe the content and structure of a test. This often includes the subareas covered by the test and the number and type of questions included.<sup>8</sup>

**Body of Evidence (BOE):** An array of information or data produced by a student or collected by someone who can establish that the student can perform one or more particular skills related

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<sup>3</sup> CCSSO (2013). Operational best practices for statewide large-scale assessment programs.

<sup>4</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>5</sup> CCSSO (2013). Operational best practices for statewide large-scale assessment programs.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.aps.edu/assessment/parcc-documents-folder/parcc-glossary-2-8-15>

to a content standard. The information or data in the BOE is judged against predetermined achievement standards.<sup>9</sup>

**Calibration:** Setting or establishing, through Item Response Theory (IRT) methods, the parameters (e.g., difficulty, discrimination) of a series of items using student responses.

**Claim:** A statement used in item development that describes student performance within each domain based on expected student performance within each domain. Based on the Alt ELP Standards and performance level descriptors, claims are paired with evidence statements that describe how each claim made will be supported and demonstrated by student responses.<sup>10</sup>

**Cognitive Interview/Cognitive Laboratory:** A session in which students are observed taking test items and are then asked to explain how they arrived at their responses. The students' explanations supplement the statistical evidence gathered about the items, testing tools, and testing systems. In general, a cognitive interview occurs prior to operational use of the items.<sup>11</sup>

**College and Career Readiness (CCR):** The content knowledge, skills, and habits that students must possess to be successful in postsecondary education or training that leads to a sustainable career. A student who is ready for college and career can qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses without the need for remedial or developmental coursework.<sup>12</sup>

**Comparability Study:** A study that compares two modes of test administration, such as a comparison of a test administered via computer versus a test administered via paper-and-pencil.

**Compensatory Model:** A scoring model that allows for high performance in one domain to compensate for low performance in another domain when determining overall proficiency (e.g., Using an average of domain scores to determine overall proficiency).

**Complexity:** The level of cognitive demand expected for a student to correctly answer a test item. For example, an item or a task requiring students to predict a phenomenon based on data

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<sup>9</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>10</sup> CCSSO (2019). English language proficiency standards for English learners with significant cognitive disabilities.

<sup>11</sup> CCSSO (2013). Operational best practices for statewide large-scale assessment programs.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.inflexion.org/download/36997/>

presented in a graph would generally be more complex than an item or task requiring students to simply describe the data presented in the graph.<sup>13</sup>

**Computer Adaptive Test/Testing (CAT):** A technology-based assessment in which the next test item or set of items is selected by a computer algorithm, based on the student’s performance on items administered earlier in the assessment. CAT algorithms allow the assessment to be individually tailored based on the skill-level of each student being tested.<sup>14</sup>

**Computer-Based Test (CBT):** A technology-based assessment in which a computer or other computing device is used to deliver a test to the student.<sup>15</sup>

**Construct:** An abstract image or underlying theoretical concept that a test is designed to measure. Although the word, construct, is increasingly used in reference to what specific items are measuring, measurement traditionally defines it in terms of what a whole test measures.<sup>16</sup>

**Constructed-Response Item/Constructed Response (CR):** A type of item requiring a student response that is in a written or spoken format (e.g., short answer, essay, research report, oral presentation). The terms open-ended and free-response are sometimes used interchangeably with constructed-response.<sup>17</sup>

**Content-specific:** The language used, orally or in writing, to communicate ideas, concepts, and information or to engage in activities in particular subject areas. Within the literature and among researchers, the term “discipline-specific” is more commonly used.<sup>18</sup>

**Content Standards:** Statements of the subject-specific knowledge and skills that teachers are expected to teach students at each grade level, indicating what students should know and be able to do.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> CCSSO (2013). Operational best practices for statewide large-scale assessment programs.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>17</sup> CCCSSO (2013). Operational best practices for statewide large-scale assessment programs.

<sup>18</sup> CCSSO (2014). English language proficiency standards (p. 211).

<sup>19</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

**Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRT):** A test that identifies a test taker’s performance in relation to a predefined measurable level of mastery of skills (as compared to norm-referenced tests which compare a test taker’s performance to the performance of other test takers).<sup>20</sup>

**Curriculum-Based Assessments:** Assessments that measure the content covered in the curriculum, to use in ongoing progress-monitoring and to inform adjustments in instruction, remediation, and student-accommodations.<sup>21</sup>

**Cut Score:** The point or points on a score scale that differentiate the interpretations made about those scoring above it from those scoring below it. Examples include pass-fail, accepted-rejected, and proficient-not proficient. Cut scores are also known as cutoff scores and performance standards.<sup>22</sup>

**Designated Features:** Additional features that can be provided to selected students during testing as a means of increasing equitable access to an assessment. Educators familiar with their students’ characteristics and needs should decide which students need these options.

**Differentiated Instruction:** Curriculum and instruction offering several different learning experiences within one lesson to meet students’ varied needs or learning styles. Also referred to as individualized or customized instruction.

**District Assessment Coordinator:** The person responsible for managing the assessment program for the LEA or district. This person—the single point of contact and/or authority representing the district in the assessment system—coordinates with the service provider and/or the client regarding aspects of the assessment program, especially test administration within the district.

**Domain:** The range of content covered by or targeted by a measure/test. The four language domains recognized by the US Federal Government are listening, reading, speaking, and writing.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> <http://ncme.org/resource-center/glossary/>

<sup>23</sup> ESSA Sec. 3113.

**Domain Scores:** A score that reflects performance on the four domains of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. These scores can be supplemented with domain-level sub-scores, which provide greater detail on domain-specific performance.

**Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA):** Passed in 1965 as part of the “War on Poverty,” the Elementary and Secondary Education Act emphasizes equal access to education and establishes high standards and accountability. The law authorizes federally funded education programs that are administered by the states. In 2002, Congress amended ESEA and reauthorized it as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).<sup>24</sup> In 2015 Congress amended ESEA and reauthorized it as the Every Student Succeeds Act.<sup>25</sup>

**ELs with Disabilities:** Students who are defined as English learners (ELs) and have a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Those with an IEP may be identified as having one or more categories of disability (autism, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment and deafness, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, other health impairment, orthopedic impairment, specific learning disability, speech language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment and blindness).<sup>26</sup>

**English Learner (EL) (formerly English language learner [ELL]):** According to the U.S. Department of Education, an English learner is an individual:

- (A) Who is 3 to 21 years of age; and
- (B) Who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary or secondary school; and
- (C) (i) Who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and
  - (ii) Who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual’s level of English language proficiency; or
  - (iii) Who is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.k12.wa.us/esea/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn>

<sup>26</sup> Liu, K. K., Thurlow, M. L., Lickteig, O., & Lazarus, S. S. (2017). Meeting the needs of ELs with disabilities in your state: Making EL exit decisions (NCEO Brief #13).



(D) Whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual—

- I. The ability to meet the State’s proficient level of achievement on State assessments described in Section 111 (b)(3)
- II. The ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or
- III. The opportunity to participate fully in society.<sup>27</sup>

**English Language Proficiency (ELP):** The ability or capacity of individuals to use the English language in order to engage in the communication of ideas, knowledge, and information.<sup>28</sup>

**Errors of Measurement:** The amount of variation, or spread, in an examinee’s test-score. A measurement error is the difference between an examinee's actual or obtained score and the unknowable “true” score. The Standard Error of Measurement (SEM) is a numerical value commonly used in interpreting and reporting individual scores and score differences on tests.<sup>29</sup>

**Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):** The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015. This bipartisan measure reauthorizes the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation’s national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students.<sup>30</sup>

**Exemplar:** Scored student work that evidences or exhibits an acceptable or particularly strong response for a particular rubric score point. Exemplars are usually used to train raters to score student performances or to illustrate an acceptable level of performance to parents and the public.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Public Law 107-110. Title IX, Part A, Sec. 9101, (25).

<sup>28</sup> CCSSO (2012). Framework for English language proficiency development standards corresponding to the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards.

<sup>29</sup> Harvill, L. M. (1991). Standard error of measurement. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 10: 33-41.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn>

<sup>31</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

**Exemption from Testing:** The act of releasing a student from a testing requirement to which other students are held. An example of an exemption would be releasing a student who is hard of hearing from taking a listening test.<sup>32</sup>

**Fairness:** Testing in which construct-irrelevant personal characteristics such as race, ethnicity, sex, or disability have no appreciable effect on test results or their interpretation.<sup>33</sup>

**Field Test:** A test administration used during the test development process to check on the quality and appropriateness of test items, administration procedures, scoring, and/or reporting. Sometimes the field test items are included as part of an operational test administration.<sup>34</sup>

**Formative Assessment:** An assessment process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning with the goals of improving students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes.<sup>35</sup>

**Grade-Appropriate:** The level of content and text complexity aligned with the college and career ready standards or similar standards' requirements for a particular grade level or grade band.<sup>36</sup>

**Grade Band:** The grade level or levels for which a particular test form or instance is designed.

**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.<sup>37</sup>

**Grade-Level Achievement Standards:** Performance standards that reflect an understanding of the results of good teaching in the general curriculum in the enrolled grade.

**Growth Indicators:** Scores that are used to measure language ability and inform program evaluation. The overall score is an example of a growth indicator. Overall scores are not composites in the traditional sense, as weighted aggregates of separate modality scores, but rather represents the total test scale score based on all items administered. Because these

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> <http://nces.ed.gov/statprog/2002/glossary.asp>

<sup>34</sup> <http://ncme.org/resource-center/glossary/>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> CCSSO (2014). English language proficiency standards (p. 213).

<sup>37</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

scores are computed differently than the modality scores, they are reported on a different reporting scale.

**High Stakes Testing:** A test for which important consequences are attached to the results for students, teachers, schools, districts, states, and consortia. Consequences may include promotion, graduation, rewards, or sanctions.

**Home Language Survey (HLS):** A survey administered to parents or guardians of every new student to collect information used to record the students whose families speak a language other than English at home. The survey also helps to identify the students who need to be assessed for English language proficiency.

**Individual Student Report (ISR):** Reports provided by states to students and their parents or guardians. Individual student reports describe student performance by modality (receptive, productive) with domain-level sub scores and an overall proficiency level. A standards-based section of the report indicates competency areas where the student will benefit from targeted instruction or intervention.

**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. An IEP for a student includes such components as instructional, placement, and assessment decisions.<sup>38</sup>

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the nation's federal special education law that ensures public schools serve the educational needs of students with disabilities. IDEA requires that schools provide special education services to eligible students as outlined in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). IDEA also provides very specific requirements to guarantee a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE). FAPE and LRE are the protected rights of every eligible child, in all fifty states and U.S. Territories.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.nclld.org/archives/action-center/learn-the-law/individuals-with-disabilities-education-act-idea>

**Instructional Minutes:** The amount of time the state requires teachers to spend providing instruction in each subject area.

**Instructional Scaffolding:** The idea that specialized instructional supports need to be in place in order to best facilitate learning when students are first introduced to a new subject and/or for the purpose of ensuring that instruction provided in English is comprehensible to English learners.

**Instructionally-Supportive Tests:** Tests that (1) supply clear and useable descriptions of what is to be assessed, and (2) provide instructionally informative results so that a student's mastery of each assessed curricular aim can be determined, and (3) guide further instruction and remediation.<sup>40</sup>

**Integrated Curriculum:** A curriculum that combines content and skills from a variety of content areas in a unified way.

**Interactive Modality:** A modality emphasizing the need for ELs to meaningfully engage with their peers, instructors, and source materials during content area instruction. It is the collaborative use of receptive and productive modalities and refers to the learner as a speaker/listener and reader/writer. It requires two-way interactive communication where negotiation of meaning may be observed. The exchange will provide evidence of awareness of the socio-cultural aspects of communication as language proficiency develops. The interactive modality includes Standards 2, 5, and 6.

**Item:** A question, exercise, task, or statement on a test for which the test taker is asked to select a response, create a response, or perform an activity that will be scored.<sup>41</sup>

**Item Acquisition:** A process for the development of test items, typically including item prototypes, definitions of item development specifications, item review procedures, schedules, quantities, and quality acceptance criteria.

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<sup>40</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>41</sup> <http://ncme.org/resource-center/glossary/>

**Item Analysis:** A part of the test development process in which the statistical properties of test items are carefully examined. Item analysis is sometimes used to determine the items that will be included in the final version of a test.

**Item Positioning:** The location in an assessment in which an item is placed, relative to the beginning of the assessment, beginning of a section (i.e., after a break), or both. Item positioning is important in building fixed-form tests as item positioning may impact student performance (e.g., a student may not do as well on some items if they are placed later in the test due to fatigue).

**Item Specifications:** A description of the major components to be included and considered in the development of test items including content, item types, cognitive complexity, rigor of the item, reading passage levels, and the use of graphics, tables, and charts.

**Learning Objectives:** Brief statements that describe what students will be expected to learn by the end of school year, course, unit, lesson, project, or class period. In many cases, learning objectives are the interim academic goals that teachers establish for students who are working toward meeting more comprehensive learning standards.<sup>42</sup>

**Linking:** The process of placing scores from two test forms onto a common score scale. When the test forms are parallel, the process is called equating.<sup>43</sup>

**Longitudinal Methods:** The comparison of assessment results or other outcomes and behaviors of the same groups of students collected at two or more points over an extended period of time.<sup>44</sup>

**Machine Scoring:** An automated system for scoring test takers' responses to items (e.g., selected response, gridded response, technology-enhanced, drag-and-drop, math equation) that can be scored as correct or incorrect.

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<sup>42</sup> <http://edglossary.org/learning-objectives/>

<sup>43</sup> <http://ncme.org/resource-center/glossary/>

<sup>44</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

**Metadata:** A term used to represent all information and attributes associated with a test item other than the item itself (e.g., item type, font size, formatting, statistics, value of weight of the item, correct response key, content standard measured).<sup>45</sup>

**Modalities:** The characteristics of the “channels,” or modes of communication through which language is used. The ELP Standards for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities describe three modalities: receptive, productive, and interactive.

**Modality Score:** A score that reflects performance on the two modalities: receptive (listening, reading) and productive (speaking, writing). Each score is classified into one of four achievement levels, where each level corresponds to a descriptor stating what students in each level know and can do.

**Multidimensional:** A test or subtest is measuring more than one construct. In English language proficiency assessment, multiple constructs can include domain (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), mode (receptive, productive, interactive), and academic subject (mathematics, science, English language arts). Multidimensional assessments require special analytic methods to correctly measure and score each construct.

**Multiple Measures:** Measurement of student or school performance using multiple methods or instruments for evaluating knowledge or skills. 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.<sup>46</sup>

**Natural Cue:** An environmental cue that allows the student to perform a task without a direct or indirect cue from an instructor.<sup>47</sup>

**Norm-Referenced Tests (NRT):** A standardized test designed, validated, and implemented to rank a student’s performance by comparing that performance to the performance of the student’s peers, or other reference group.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> CCSSO (2013). Operational best practices for statewide large-scale assessment programs.

<sup>46</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

**Objective Item:** An item type for which the possible correct responses for the student are limited and predefined. Objective items have an answer key that indicates the correct and incorrect responses. Selected-response items are considered objective items.<sup>49</sup>

**Operational Assessment:** An assessment that is developed and administered at a specified time and whose scoring results are used for the purpose of meeting local, state, and/or federal requirements.<sup>50</sup>

**Operational Item:** A test item used to contribute to a student’s test score.

**Opportunity to Learn (OTL):** The equitable provision or distribution of conditions and resources (e.g., curricula, learning materials, facilities, equipment, and teachers) within a school or classroom to provide balanced opportunities for all students to learn, regardless of disability or other student characteristics.<sup>51</sup>

**Out-of-level Testing:** Administration of a test at a level above or below a student’s present placement grade level to enable the student to be assessed at the level of instruction rather than the level of enrollment. Testing students below their grade of enrollment is not in compliance with the 1% regulation of December 9, 2003 unless it is used as an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, and has been subjected to the same requirements as those assessments (e.g., rigorous standards setting).<sup>52</sup>

**Paper-based/Paper-and-pencil:** A test form delivered in printed hard copy form rather than in a digital form.<sup>53</sup>

**Participation Criteria:** Criteria defining how ELs and ELs with disabilities participate in assessments and determining which assessments these students take. Students participate in

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<sup>49</sup> CCSSO (2013). Operational best practices for statewide large-scale assessment programs.

<sup>50</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>53</sup> CCSSO (2013). Operational best practices for statewide large-scale assessment programs.

the regular assessment, English language proficiency assessment, or alternate assessment guided by each state's participation criteria for inclusion.<sup>54</sup>

**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.<sup>55</sup>

**Performance Levels:** Broad categories that describe the results of an assessment. These levels describe the stages of English language development through which ELs are expected to progress as they gain proficiency.

**Performance Standards:** A description of the minimum performance required to judge a test taker's score to be "good enough". The description is used in a standard setting procedure to determine the cut score required to differentiate performance levels, such as pass rather than fail, eligible for certification rather than not eligible, or proficient rather than not proficient. Performance standards are also known as cut scores.<sup>56</sup>

**Performance Target:** The knowledge, skills, and abilities that are required in each domain to interact with and engage in grade-level content instruction.

**Pilot Test:** A stand-alone administration of test items, tools, or a system, to evaluate how particular items function prior to a field test and operational use. The pilot test generally occurs with a sample of students that matches the purpose of the pilot.<sup>57</sup>

**Platform:** The method or medium used to deliver presentation materials to the examinees. Platform is broadly defined to include human examiners, computer, paper-and-pencil, etc., and is specifically defined as the environment in which testing software and/or applications are designed to run.

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<sup>54</sup> NCEO (2011). Participation guidelines for new assessments: Thinking through their development (NCEO Brief #3).

<sup>55</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>56</sup> <http://ncme.org/resource-center/glossary/>

<sup>57</sup> CCSSO (2013). Operational best practices for statewide large-scale assessment programs.



**Policy Performance Level Descriptors:** Descriptors that articulate policy makers’ vision of the goals and rigor for the final performance standards.<sup>58</sup>

**Portfolio Assessment:** A collection of student-generated or student-focused work that provides the basis for demonstrating the student’s mastery of a range of skills, performance level, or improvement in these skills over time. A portfolio becomes a portfolio assessment when (1) the assessment purpose is defined; (2) criteria or methods are made clear for determining what is put into the portfolio, by whom, and when; and (3) criteria for assessing either the collection or individual pieces of work are identified and used to make judgments about performance. The portfolio evidence may include student work samples, photographs, videotapes, interviews, anecdotal records, interviews, and observations.<sup>59</sup>

**Productive Modality:** A modality that places the learner as speaker and writer for a “distant” audience, one with whom interaction is limited or not possible. It is a planned or formalized speech act or written document, and the learner has an opportunity to draft, get feedback, and revise before publication or broadcast. The productive modality requires spoken and written language skills (speaking and writing domains) and includes Standards 3, 4, and 7.

**Proficiency:** Mastery or ability to use the English language at the level required by rigorous grade-level content standards without requiring EL program support.

**Proficiency Descriptors (PDs):** A description of what performance at each level of the test should and does look like. Proficiency descriptors articulate the English language proficiency knowledge, skills, and abilities expected of students at each level (low, mid, high) for a given standard and grade band.<sup>60</sup>

**Range Performance Level Descriptors:** Descriptors that identify which aspects of an item align to a particular performance level in regard to cognitive and content rigor. These performance level descriptors are created by test developers.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Egan, K.L., Schneider, M.C., Ferrara, S. (2012). Performance level descriptors: History, practice, and a proposed framework. In G.J. Cizek, (Ed.), Setting performance standards: Foundations, methods, and innovations (pp. 79–107).

<sup>59</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>60</sup> CCSSO (2019). English language proficiency standards for English learners with significant cognitive disabilities.

<sup>61</sup> Egan, K.L., Schneider, M.C., Ferrara, S. (2012). Performance level descriptors: History, practice, and a proposed framework. In G.J. Cizek, (Ed.), Setting performance standards: Foundations, methods, and innovations (pp. 79–107).

**Rangefinding:** When conducting the scoring of constructed-response items/assessments, a process used to identify a range of student responses for each identified score point or level, articulating performance as defined by a scoring rubric.<sup>62</sup>

**Rating Scale:** A scale used to score a student’s response by assigning values to that response. These ratings are based on a scoring tool (see [rubric](#)) to ensure consistent scoring across students and raters. Rating scales include numerical scales or descriptive scales.<sup>63</sup>

**Raw Score:** The score obtained by a test taker reflecting the number of items correctly answered, or the number of points awarded during scoring, for the responses given. Raw scores often are converted to some kind of derived score, such as percentile rank, scale score, or performance level, for interpretive purposes.<sup>64</sup>

**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 and in activities not associated with the educational process.<sup>65</sup>

**Receptive Modality:** A modality that refers to the learner as a reader and listener/viewer working with “text” whose author or deliverer is not present or accessible. It presumes authentic written or oral documents where language input is meaningful and content laden. The receptive modality requires skills necessary for interpreting and comprehending spoken or written messages and includes Standards 1 and 8.

**Reference Group:** The group of students with which an individual or other group is compared in a study of differential item functioning; often, this is the largest group of students. Reference group may also refer to the group of students to which scores on a norm-referenced test are compared.

**Reliability:** The degree to which 1) the scores of every individual are consistent over repeated applications of a measurement procedure and hence are dependable and repeatable; 2) the degree to which scores are free of errors of measurement. Reliability is usually expressed in the

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<sup>62</sup> CCSSO (2013). Operational best practices for statewide large-scale assessment programs.

<sup>63</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>64</sup> <http://ncme.org/resource-center/glossary/>

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

form of a reliability coefficient or as the standard error of measurement derived from it. The higher the reliability coefficient the better, because this means there are smaller random errors in the scores.<sup>66</sup>

**Reporting Performance Level Descriptors.** Descriptors that define the appropriate, intended interpretations of what a test score means. These performance level descriptors are developed by a sponsoring agency once cut scores are finalized.<sup>67</sup>

**Response Option Distribution:** A summary of the number of students selecting each of the response options on a multiple-choice item (e.g., where “A, B, C, etc.” are used to label response choices, how many correct answers are “As”, how many “Bs,” etc.) The distribution is calculated to determine that there is an acceptable balance of correct responses among the options.<sup>68</sup>

**Response Requirements:** The type, kind, or method of action required of a student to answer a question or test item. The response may include, but is not limited to, reading, writing, speaking, creating, and drawing.<sup>69</sup>

**Rubric:** A scoring tool based on a set of criteria used to evaluate a student’s test performance. The student’s response can be compared to the descriptions contained in the rubric to determine the appropriate score to assign to the response. 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, analytic (i.e., providing ratings of multiple criteria), or holistic (i.e., describing a single, global trait).<sup>70</sup>

**Sample:** A subset of a population whose characteristics are studied to gain information about the entire population.

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<sup>66</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>67</sup> Egan, K.L., Schneider, M.C., Ferrara, S. (2012). Performance level descriptors: History, practice, and a proposed framework. In G.J. Cizek, (Ed.), *Setting performance standards: Foundations, methods, and innovations* (pp. 79–107).

<sup>68</sup> CCSSO (2013). *Operational best practices for statewide large-scale assessment programs*.

<sup>69</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

**Sample Type:** A designation given to a sample to indicate which administration rules were used (e.g., either those that did not allow accommodations or those that did allow accommodations).

**Scale Score:** A kind of score to which a raw score has been converted to a numeric scale for ease of interpretation.<sup>71</sup>

**Scaling:** The process of assigning a scale score based on a pattern of responses.<sup>72</sup>

**Score Scale:** A scale used to describe what students know and can do.<sup>73</sup>

**Scoring Rubrics:** A guide used to score a response to a constructed-response item. Scoring rubrics are also referred to as scoring guides.

**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 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (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).

**Section 508:** Section 508 is part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which requires that electronic and information technology developed, procured, maintained, or used by the federal government be accessible to people with disabilities. Section 508 requires that individuals receive information by alternative means if an agency is not 508 compliant.

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<sup>71</sup> <http://ncme.org/resource-center/glossary/>

<sup>72</sup> <http://nces.ed.gov/statprog/2002/glossary.asp>

<sup>73</sup> <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/glossary.aspx?nav=y>

**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.<sup>74</sup>

**Secure Materials:** Test materials (e.g., an assessment, administration direction, teacher guidelines) that must be protected from release, either, prior to test administration or because they will be reused in the future. Holding test materials secure is necessary to ensure the integrity of an assessment.<sup>75</sup>

**Selected-Response (SR) Items:** Items that allow the student to choose a response from a group of two or more provided responses. Selected-response items are more commonly known as multiple-choice items.

**Special Population:** A term used to identify a disadvantaged group of students. This population may include such groups as students with disabilities, low-performing students, students from low-income families, etc. Special populations often require accommodations for physical, mental, or emotional differences.<sup>76</sup>

**Standard Error of Measurement (SEM):** A test score on a standardized assessment represents an estimate of a student's unknown "true" score. If the student were to take the same test many times (hypothetically), the standard deviation of these scores is defined as the standard error of measurement (SEM) and is expressed in the same scale units as the reported test score. The SEM is used to represent the precision of the observed score. Plus and minus one SEM gives the expected range in which the student's score would fall 68% of the time.

**Standard Setting:** The process of identifying the scores (cut scores) on a score scale that defines the starting and ending points of the performance levels used for reporting test performance. For example, the process of standard setting is used to determine the lowest score that can categorize performance as proficient.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>75</sup> CCSSO (2013). Operational best practices for statewide large-scale assessment programs.

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/20/2302#48>

<sup>77</sup> <http://ncme.org/resource-center/glossary/>

**Standardization:** An established procedure that ensures a test is administered with the same directions, under the same conditions, and is scored in the same manner for all students to affirm 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.<sup>78</sup>

**Students with Disabilities:** Students who have 504 accommodation plans and students who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Those with an IEP may be identified as having one or more categories of disability (autism, deaf blind, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment and deafness, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, other health impairment, orthopedic impairment, specific learning disability, speech language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment and blindness).<sup>79</sup>

**Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities:** Students who are within one of the existing categories of disability under IDEA (autism, deaf-blindness, hearing impairment, mental retardation, orthopedic impairment, deafness, emotional disturbance, multiple disability, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, learning disability, speech and language impairment, other health impaired) whose cognitive impairments may prevent them from attaining grade-level achievement standards, even with the very best instruction.<sup>80</sup>

**Subgroup:** A well-defined group of students. For example, the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA) identifies the following specific subgroups that must achieve adequate yearly progress: students of racial or ethnic minority, students with disabilities, limited-English-proficient, English learners, economically disadvantaged students, etc.<sup>81</sup>

**Summative Assessment:** A comprehensive assessment designed to provide information about the level of student, school, or program success at a defined point in time, typically end of year. Summative tests are administered after the conclusion of instruction.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.edglossary.org/summative-assessment/>

**Target Performance Level Descriptors:** Descriptors that are used by standard setting panelists to represent just how much a threshold or borderline student in a particular performance level should know and be able to do. These performance level descriptors are created in conjunction with the Range performance level descriptors.<sup>83</sup>

**Task:** A unit of work requested from an examinee during the course of an assessment.<sup>84</sup>

**Technology-Based:** An assessment in digital form that is delivered through the use of technology, rather than administered on a paper-based form.<sup>85</sup>

**Technology-Enhanced Item (TEI):** Items administered on a computer that take advantage of the computer-based environment to present situations and capture responses in ways that are not possible on a paper-based test.<sup>86</sup>

**Test Forms:** Versions of the assessment that are considered interchangeable, in that they measure the same constructs, are intended for the same purposes, and are administered using the same directions.<sup>87</sup>

**Test Map:** Identification of the order and the manner in which test items will be positioned in a form, whether paper or digital.

**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.

**Test Specifications:** A description of the major components to be included and considered in the development of a test including content, item types, cognitive complexity, rigor of items, reading passage levels, and the use of graphics, tables, and charts. This includes written details prepared early in the test development process to describe many of the characteristics of the resulting test. Specifications typically include the content to be covered, the level of cognitive

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<sup>83</sup> Egan, K.L., Schneider, M.C., Ferrara, S. (2012). Performance level descriptors: History, practice, and a proposed framework. In G.J. Cizek, (Ed.), *Setting performance standards: Foundations, methods, and innovations* (pp. 79–107).

<sup>84</sup> Mislavy, R. J., Almond, R. G., & Lukas, J. (2004). A brief introduction to evidence-centered design (CSE Report No. 632).

<sup>85</sup> CCSSO (2013). *Operational best practices for statewide large-scale assessment programs*.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> CCSSO (2006). *Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language*.

functioning to be displayed with the content, the proportional weighting of the various content areas, the kinds of items to be used, the number of items of each type to be used, and how much time will be permitted for testing. Brief versions of the specifications are sometimes referred to as test plans or test blueprints.<sup>88</sup>

**Testing Irregularity:** Conduct by either a student or an administrator during testing that is not part of the standardized procedures established for the handling of secure test materials, and/or the established standardized test administration protocols. Test irregularities may invalidate test scores that were obtained during the irregularity.<sup>89</sup>

**Title I:** A program that originated as Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965. Its primary purpose was to ensure that all children were given the opportunity to be provided with a high-quality education. Title I is the largest federally funded education program for elementary and secondary schools. Title I is also designed to focus on special needs populations and to reduce the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students.

States that have Title I schools have several requirements to keep the funding. Schools must have a child poverty rate of at least 40% to operate a school wide Title I program. A school wide Title I program can provide benefits to all students and is not just limited to those students who are considered to be economically disadvantaged.<sup>90</sup>

**Title III:** Part A of Title III is officially known as the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act. Section 3102 lists five purposes of the law. The overarching purpose is to ensure that limited-English-proficient (LEP) students, including immigrant children and youths, attain English proficiency and meet the same challenging academic content and achievement standards that other students are expected to meet. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) must use Title III funds to implement language instruction educational programs designed to help LEP students achieve standards. The state educational agency (SEA), LEAs, and schools are accountable for increasing the English proficiency and core academic content knowledge of LEP students.

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<sup>88</sup> <http://ncme.org/resource-center/glossary/>

<sup>89</sup> CCSSO (2013). Operational best practices for statewide large-scale assessment programs.

<sup>90</sup> <http://teaching.about.com/od/s-zteachingvocabulary/g/Title-I.htm>



**Title III Accountability:** Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provides formula-based grants to states to help support the education needs of students identified as English Learners (ELs). States distribute these Title III funds to local school districts and consortia of districts through subgrants. As a condition of funding, Title III requires states to design and implement an accountability program under which districts and other subgrantees are expected to meet targets related to EL growth in both language proficiency and academic achievement.

Title III's accountability requirements dovetail with the broader academic accountability requirements established under Title I. Under Title I of ESEA, states are required to establish annual assessments to measure student academic achievement in reading and math. EL students participate in this annual testing, and their performance is reported in the "all students" category and in a special EL subgroup. The subgroup's achievement affects whether a school or district meets its accountability requirement. Under Title III of ESEA, states must establish standards and assessments related to English language proficiency (ELP) standards and assessments.

**Twinned Item:** An item designed to replace another item, measuring the same content at the same level of complexity and difficulty. These items are usually developed to provide a comparable item in another format when the original item cannot be directly translated to that format (e.g., a technology-enhanced item that needs to be rendered on paper or in braille). In some cases, when dealing with multi-point technology-enhanced items, more than one replacement item is needed to create a twin in another format.

**Universal Design (UD) for Assessment:** A framework for curriculum design, instructional processes, and tests that provides all students with equal opportunities to learn and demonstrate their knowledge and skills. The purpose is to develop tests that are accessible to as many students as possible. Universal design builds flexibility into curricula and tests at the point of development, which enhances a teacher's ability to make adjustments for different learners during classroom instruction. Using these principles, test developers consider the full range of students being tested and develop items, tasks, and prompts that measure learning for the greatest number of students without the need for accommodation if possible. Assessments

developed using this framework have been designed from the beginning to ensure accessibility by all students regardless of ability or disability. At this time, research is being conducted to better delineate how to build universally designed assessments.<sup>91</sup>

**Universal Features:** Features available to all students during testing, as a means of increasing equitable access to the assessment. Selection or deselection of these features is usually based on student preference.

**Validity:** The extent to which a test or set of operations measures what it is supposed to measure. The degree to which the evidence obtained through validation supports the score interpretations and uses to be made of the scores from a certain test administered to a certain person or group on a specific occasion.<sup>92</sup>

**Vertical Alignment:** Planning curriculum across the grade levels, from Kindergarten through high school, building upon instruction based upon standards.

**Vertical Scale:** A single scale that allows for tracking student growth and progress across grades and over time.

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<sup>91</sup> CCSSO (2006). Assessing students with disabilities: A glossary of assessment terms in everyday language.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

## Acronyms

504 - Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973  
508 - Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973  
AA - Alternate Assessment  
AA-AAS - Alternate Assessments Based on Alternate Achievement Standards  
AAC - Augmentative and Alternative Communication  
ADA - Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990  
AERA - American Educational Research Association  
ALD - Achievement Level Descriptor  
ALI - Achievement Level Indicator  
ASES - Assessing Special Education Students  
AYP - Adequate Yearly Progress  
BOE - Body of Evidence  
CAAELP - Collaborative for the Alternate Assessment of English Language Proficiency  
CAST - Center for Applied Special Technology  
CAT - Computer Adaptive Testing  
CBT - Computer-Based Test  
CC - Collaborative Council  
CCR - College and Career Readiness  
CCSS - Common Core State Standards  
CCSSO - Council of Chief State School Officers  
CR - Constructed Response  
CRESST - Center for Research, Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing  
CROS - Constructed-Response with Objective Scoring  
CRSS - Constructed-Response with Subjective Scoring  
CRT - Criterion-Referenced Test  
CSAI - Center for Standards and Assessment Implementation  
DLM - Dynamic Learning Maps  
EAC - Educator Advisory Council  
EAG - Enhanced Assessment Grant  
ECD - Evidence-Centered Design  
EHA - Education of the Handicapped Act  
EL - English learner  
ELA - English language arts  
ELL - English language learner  
ELP - English language proficiency  
ELPA21 - English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century  
ELSCD - English Learner with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

ESEA - Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965  
ESL - English as Second Language  
ESSA - Every Student Succeeds Act  
FAPE - Free and Appropriate Public Education  
FERPA - Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974  
GEPA - General Educational Provisions Act  
GRF - General Research File  
GSEG - General Supervision Enhancement Grant  
HLS - Home Language Survey  
ICCS - Implementing the Common Core Standards  
IDEA - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004  
IEP - Individualized Education Program  
IES - Institute of Education Science  
IRT - Item Response Theory  
ISR - Individual Student Report  
LEA - Local Educational Agency  
LEP - Limited English Proficient  
LRE - Least Restrictive Environment  
m-IRT - multi-dimensional Item Response Theory  
MOU - Memorandum of Understanding  
MSAA - Multi-State Alternate Assessment  
NAAC - National Alternate Assessment Center  
NCEO - National Center on Educational Outcomes  
NCES - National Center for Education Statistics  
NCLB - No Child Left Behind Act of 2001  
NCSC - National Center and State Collaborative  
NGSS - Next Generation Science Standards  
NRT - Norm-Referenced Test  
NSBA - National School Boards Association  
OCR - Office for Civil Rights  
OSEP - Office of Special Education Programs  
OSERS - Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services  
OTL - Opportunity to Learn  
PLM - Professional Learning Modules  
PD - Proficiency Descriptors  
PLD - Performance Level Descriptors  
RFP - Requests for Proposal  
RRC - Regional Resource Center



SCASS - State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards

SEA - State Education Agency

SEM - Standard Error of Measurement

SBAC - Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

SR - Selected Response

SWD - Students with Disabilities or Student with a Disability

TAC - Technical Advisory Committee

TE - Technology Enhanced

TECR - Technology-Enhanced Constructed Response (item type)

TEI - Technology-Enhanced Item

TESOL - Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

UDA - Universal Design for Assessment

UDL - Universal Design for Learning

USED - US Department of Education



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