



K-12 Glossary

The Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) field is filled with industry jargon that can be confusing to even those who have worked in this area for a long time. Advocacy & Communication Solutions' K-12 Glossary strives to help anyone who wants to understand the K-12 world or wants to de-jargon their lexicon to make their communication as effective as possible with industry and non-industry audiences. Our glossary does not include all K-12 terms, but it does include terms useful to navigate trending policy issues. Use our K-12 Glossary to improve your communication and advocacy! If you have a question about a term that is not included, please [contact us!](#) Check out our other glossaries on [Health and Human Services](#), [Medicaid](#), [Early Care and Education](#), and [Workforce Development](#).

1. Academic standards

The knowledge and skills that students are expected to learn in a subject in each grade that are used by states and districts to measure students' progress and performance. Some states use these standards in part or in whole to evaluate teacher effectiveness/quality and/or to rank school district performance.

2. Afterschool programs

Programs that serve children outside of the regular school day that may focus on academic support, mentoring, youth development, arts, and sports and recreation.

3. Assessment

Methods or tools, such as standardized tests, used by educators to evaluate, measure, and document the academic performance, progress, skills, and educational needs of students. Standardized assessments are typically implemented statewide in order to measure and rank schools' effectiveness. Some states use results from assessments in part or in whole to evaluate teacher effectiveness/quality and/or to rank school district performance.

4. Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Educational programs that specialize in skilled trades, applied sciences, modern technologies, and career preparation that frequently offer both academic and career-oriented courses with opportunities to gain exposure to the workforce through internships and industry-certification.

5. Career pathways

An education and workforce development strategy geared toward a comprehensive look at education and training to provide an individualized plan for students to achieve their goals in pursuing college or work after graduation. Policies related to such strategies attempt to ensure students are college and career ready or have the soft skills to succeed in whatever pathway they choose.

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6. Charter school/Community schools

A non-religious public school that receives government funding but may be operated independently of traditional school districts under a contract that governs its operations. Policies related to charter/community schools vary by state but most often both types of schools (traditional and charter/community) receive their public funds for operations, transportation, and student services from the same pool of state or local dollars, which can be seen as either increasing competition or spurring poor relationships between the two entities. In addition, financial, reporting, and academic accountability requirements between traditional and charter/community schools often differ.

7. Chronic absenteeism

Policies that define how many school days a student can miss for any reason in order to monitor student attendance to address issues of low achievement, disengagement from school, course failure, and increased risk of dropping out. Definitions vary by state and these definitions often times drive how local school districts are required to track student attendance and, if needed, related interventions. Definitions also at times drive the manner in which local school districts are praised or punished (through funding, rating, ranking, etc.) relative to student attendance.

8. College and career readiness/College and career readiness tests

Standards and assessments used to evaluate whether students possess the necessary knowledge and skills deemed important for success in higher education or the modern workforce. In some states such assessments may be utilized to determine whether students are eligible for graduation, measure teacher effectiveness, or rank schools' performance.

9. Common Core

A national education policy initiative designed to maintain common standards for what skills and knowledge K-12 students should have in English language arts and mathematics at the end of each grade. The Common Core has proven to be a controversial policy, often dubbed "Obamacore," and criticized as a federal intrusion on local education. Advocates argue that the Common Core is focused on setting common standards, not on dictating how teachers and schools achieve meet those standards and that they are important for measuring students' progress nationally and globally. Some states have rejected, repealed, or made changes to Common Core specific to their state.

10. Competency based education

An individualized approach to learning that allows students to advance based on their ability to master a skill or competency at their own pace rather than following a specific lesson plan for an entire class that dictates how much time is spent on a subject.

11. Data and accountability

Set of policies, data, and practices used to collect information and protect the integrity of that information to provide a valid measurement of student achievement. This information is used to measure and hold schools and districts responsible for improving student achievement and to identify areas in need of support and improvement. Some states also use data and accountability policies in part or in whole to inform teacher effectiveness/quality and/or to rank school district performance.

12. Dropout prevention and recovery

Programs or schools that specialize in assisting students at-risk of dropping out or failing to graduate on-time that may include wraparound social services, academic supports, mentoring, and coaching.

13. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Federal law governing federal public education policy passed in December 2015, that replaced its predecessor, the No Child Left Behind Act.

14. Expulsion

The removal of a student from a school environment for an extensive period of time due to a student violating that institution's rules. Out of school expulsion has become controversial and the subject of reform in many states with legislators and some advocates pushing alternatives that would keep students in school.

15. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Federal legislation ensuring that students with disabilities are provided a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) tailored to meet their individual needs. Federal funding is attached to IDEA to assist schools in providing services for students with disabilities but it remains a subject of debate over whether such funding is truly adequate.

16. Knowledge and competencies

A style of learning that emphasizes the use of skills to demonstrate knowledge or mastery of a subject. Such strategies typically emphasize flexibility by allowing some combination of online learning, projects, community service, internships, and early college opportunities that makes academic content relevant to each individual student.

17. Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA)

Tool used to evaluate whether students entering kindergarten have the skills and knowledge necessary for success in kindergarten. Some states use results from such assessments in part or in whole to evaluate teacher effectiveness/quality and/or to rank school district performance.

18. Low-performing schools

Schools identified as poor performing based upon proficiency rates that may be eligible for funding associated with government reform efforts. Low-performing schools may often have to develop and submit specific plans for funding to improve the performance of their schools. Such reform plans may call for significant change such as changes in school personnel, conversion to charter schools, the use of management companies, or the implementation of specialized programming geared toward turning around low-performing schools.

19. Online learning

The delivery and facilitation of academic coursework via computer and electronic communication. Online learning may be utilized in a "blended" environment wherein it is combined with classroom instruction, but may also refer to online schools wherein all content is provided electronically.

20. Paraprofessional

An educational assistant in a teaching-related position within a classroom or school who provides support for licensed staff or works with students.

21. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Set of tools and ideas developed to improve student behavior by addressing problems in the classroom before they develop by focusing on conflict resolution between students. The use of PBIS is often favored over the use of disciplinary strategies that remove students from their learning environment, such as suspension or expulsion.

22. Private school

An independent, non-government school supported by a private organization, private individuals, and students' tuition. Though it depends on individual state policies, private schools typically do not have the same financial and academic reporting requirements as public schools.

23. Professional development

Specialized training to provide advanced learning opportunities for school administrators and teachers to improve their professional knowledge, skills, and effectiveness.

24. Public school

A school supported by public funds, usually a combination of federal, state, and local dollars.

25. Reading proficiency (3rd Grade/4th Grade—depends on state)

The ability to understand the mechanics of reading and understand content at a reading level higher than the students' age. Reading proficiency is used in some states to determine the progress of individual schools, teachers, or students. In some cases students may not be allowed to progress beyond the third or fourth grade if they cannot score above a specific score on the state's reading exam.

26. Restorative justice

A disciplinary approach focused on repairing relationships between students, especially those damaged by bullying, by focusing on communication and forgiveness.

27. School choice

Education policy that allows parents to select an alternative school or program for their student other than the one otherwise assigned by the district or based on geography. School choice is typically implemented through scholarships or vouchers wherein the "money follows the student." This type of policy is typically a hot topic of debate as many education advocates argue that it drains resources from traditional public schools.

28. Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM) Education/ Science, Technology, Engineering, Art & Math (STEAM) Education

Educational programming and curriculum emphasizing science, technology, engineering, math and (in the case of STEAM) art as its core focus.

29. Standardized tests

An assessment that requires all students to answer the same questions in the same way and is scored in a consistent matter to make it possible to compare the performance of individual students or groups against their fellow students. Such assessments are used to determine schools' performance and often dictate how a district/school is praised or punished in terms of funding and reform efforts.

30. State Departments of Education

State government agency, governed by the State Board of Education, responsible for overseeing and regulating the state's public education system. State departments oversee a variety of regulatory duties including teacher licensure, assessment and data collection, and the administration of school funding.

31. Superintendent

An administrator, typically employed by an elected school board, charged with the academic and operational leadership of a school district.

32. Suspension

The temporary removal of a student from a school environment due to a student violating that institution's rules. Out of school suspension has become controversial and the subject of reform in many states with legislators and some advocates pushing alternatives that would keep students in school.

33. Teacher union

An organization of teaching professionals who work to protect their rights and interests through collective bargaining, a negotiation between the school district and union over a contract that determines working conditions, compensation, and benefits.

34. Truancy

An intentional or unexcused absence from school that may result in disciplinary action or legal ramifications depending on the criteria established by state law. Definitions vary by state and these definitions often times drive how local school districts are required to report truancy and, if needed, related interventions. Definitions also at times drive the manner in which local school districts are praised or punished (through funding, rating, ranking, etc.) relative to student attendance.

35. U.S. Department of Education

Federal agency responsible for establishing national education policy, administering and coordinating federal assistance to education, collecting data on schools, and enforcing federal educational laws regarding privacy and civil rights.

36. Vouchers

Financial assistance provided by a government to allow a student to attend a school, chosen by the student or students' parents, that is not their normally assigned school. Vouchers are typically utilized to implement school choice programs and may be used to attend a variety of schools, including private, charter/community, and specialized schools/programs.

