

**Accountability:** Accountability refers to the widespread effort throughout the United States to establish clear standards at each grade level for what students should know and be able to do and to regularly assess student progress toward these standards. Teachers and administrators are increasingly being held accountable for student progress toward meeting these standards. Test scores, which are published on the Internet and reported in the local media, are often used as the basis for rewards for teachers at schools where students do well. When student test scores don't improve at the prescribed rates, consequences (up to and including school takeovers) may be imposed.

**Authentic Assessment:** Authentic assessment aims to evaluate what students know and can do in a "real world" context through the use of projects and assignments closely linked to classroom curriculum. For example, to evaluate a student's ability to conduct original research and formulate a coherent argument, a teacher might assign a research paper. To gauge a student's mastery of mathematical or scientific concepts, the student might be asked to solve specific problems or conduct an experiment. Authentic assessments can involve a single student or a group assignment or project. They typically have a presentation component, in which students have the opportunity to share their work and their knowledge with teachers, classmates, or outside experts.

**Block Scheduling:** With block scheduling, the typical 45- or 50-minute class period is extended to allow for more involved classroom projects and -- proponents would argue -- deeper learning.

**Content and Performance Standards:** Content standards are written explanations of what students should know at specific grade levels. Performance standards are the corresponding explanations of what students should be able to do at specific grade levels. Currently, 49 states have developed standards for the teaching of core subject areas, and school districts throughout the country are working to align their teaching to these standards. The standards movement, as it has come to be known, is an outgrowth of the 1983 report "A Nation at Risk," which decried the poor state of the U.S. public education system and called for swift and dramatic action to improve our schools. Although standards are widely believed to be an effective way of bringing much-needed consistency to the teaching of core subjects, critics argue that over reliance on standardized tests -- which are typically not aligned to state content standards -- actually impedes efforts toward improved teaching and learning.

**Cooperative Learning:** Students work together in small groups to complete a task. Each team includes students of different ability levels and backgrounds, and each team member is assigned a certain job essential to the completion of the task. Cooperative learning combines the ideas of group and individual responsibility, and teaches social and intellectual skills.

**Criterion-Referenced Assessment:** A criterion-referenced assessment is one where an individual's performance is compared to a specific learning objective or performance standard and not to the performance of other students. Criterion-referenced assessment tells us how well students are performing on specific goals or standards rather than just telling how their performance compares to a norm group of students nationally or locally. In criterion-referenced assessments, it is possible that none, or all, of the examinees will reach a particular goal or performance standard. For example: "all of the students demonstrated proficiency in applying

concepts from astronomy, meteorology, geology, oceanography, and physics to describe the forces that shape the earth." Source: National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST).

**Eight-week Assessments:** Every eight weeks, students in Union City meet with their teachers to review their portfolios and discuss their progress. These meetings demystify assessment, allowing students and teachers to talk one-on-one about what constitutes good work.

**ESL:** English as a Second Language. ESL classes teach English to non-English-speaking or limited-English-proficient (LEP) students.

**High-Stakes Tests:** The term high-stakes test refers to an assessment that carries with it rewards and punishments for students, teachers, and schools or school systems. Today, many statewide achievement tests are described as "high-stakes" because results are used to determine whether a student will be promoted or will receive a high school diploma. In many states, compensation for teachers and school administrators is also based, in part, on test scores. "Poorly performing" schools risk being taken over by an outside administrator. The American Educational Research Association (AERA), the nation's largest organization devoted to the scientific study of education, along with several other leading professional organizations, has decried the use of a single test score as the basis for any high-stakes decision.

**Individual Instruction Plans:** Lessons and assignments tailored to each student's needs and strengths. With individual instruction plans, students acquire knowledge at their own pace.

**Interdisciplinary Themes:** These themes or topics tie together information from several subject areas. An example of a theme might be the American Revolution. Instead of studying the topic only through history books, students might survey the science of gunpowder and the geography of the trade routes available to the colonists. They might examine multiple viewpoints by reading literature of the period from both Britain and America.

**Norm-Referenced Assessments:** The term norm-referenced assessment refers to an assessment where student performance or performances are compared to a larger group. Usually the larger group or "norm group" is a national sample representing a wide and diverse cross-section of students. Students, schools, districts, and even states are compared or rank-ordered in relation to the norm group. The purpose of a norm-referenced assessment is usually to sort students and not to measure achievement towards some criterion of performance. Source: National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST).

**Performance Assessment:** Performance assessment, as described by the U.S. Office of Technology Assessment, is "testing that requires a student to create an answer or a product that demonstrates his or her knowledge or skills." Examples of performance assessment are many and varied. They include group projects, such as the challenge of designing a new school, individual research and science projects, or portfolios representing a broad selection of a student's work in a given content area. Unlike standardized tests, performance assessments are closely tied to classroom instruction and therefore provide teachers with more meaningful information about the strengths and weaknesses of particular students. They also allow students to demonstrate

their abilities in a more authentic setting, without the pressure and time constraints associated with standardized tests.

**Portfolio:** A portfolio is one type of performance assessment. Educators in the Pacific Northwest, through the Northwest Evaluation Association (1990), describe a portfolio as "a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection." Traditionally, portfolios have been paper-based. Increasingly, however, schools are using video and audiotapes and creating digital portfolios of student work.

**Project Explore:** This technology trial started in 1992 at Christopher Columbus Middle School. Bell Atlantic, looking for a way to test the power of multimedia, teamed up with Union City to give 135 students in 7th grade laptops for use at home. These students were tracked as a cohort, and their test scores were compared against those of their district peers without access to technology at home. The Columbus cohort scored up to 42% better on standardized tests.

**Rubric:** A rubric is a set of scoring guidelines that can be used to provide consistency in evaluating student work. Rubrics spell out scoring criteria in sufficient detail that multiple teachers applying the rubric to a student's essay, for example, would arrive at the same score or grade.

**School Portfolio:** A comprehensive framework for school improvement, a self-assessment tool, a process tool, and a communication product. School portfolios include demographic, student achievement, perceptual, and school process data, along with the school vision, a continuous school improvement plan, and leadership structure.

**Standardized Tests:** Almost every school district now administers state-mandated standardized tests. Every student at a particular grade level is required to take the same test. Everything about the test is standard -- from the questions themselves to the length of time students have to complete it (although some exceptions may be made for students with learning or physical disabilities) to the time of year in which the test is taken. Examples of standardized achievement tests in use in K-12 schools today include the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Stanford Achievement Test. Throughout the country, student performance on these tests has become the basis for such critical decisions as student promotion from one grade to the next or compensation for teachers and administrators. Eighteen states currently require students to pass a standardized test in order to graduate from high school. Standardized tests should not be confused with the standards movement, which advocates specific grade-level content and performance standards in key subject areas. Often, in fact, standardized tests are not aligned with state and district content standards, causing considerable disconnect between what is being taught and what is being tested.

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