

Educational Acronyms, Program Names, and Definitions Every Parent Should Know

*by Paul Giganti, Jr., CMC Math Festival Program
pgiganti@berkeley.edu*



There are many state and federal programs that affect your child's education in school. These programs are often referred to only by their acronyms—the initial letters of their words. Teachers and school officials will often use these acronyms, such as AYP, API, CAHSEE, etc., in discussing your children's education. Knowing about and understanding these programs is important to parents who wish to understand their children's programs and progress, as well as school and district policies in education. Here are names, acronyms, and definitions of some of the important programs in education in public schools that every parent should know.

👉 Academic Performance Index (API)

API is a statewide ranking of schools from the California student STAR Tests and the California High School Exit Exam and is based on scores from 200 to 1000. California ranks schools by elementary, middle, or high school, and by comparing each school to 100 schools with similar student populations.

👉 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

The federal legislation, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), determines the minimum level of improvement schools must reach toward achieving state academic standards each year. This progress is referred to as their AYP and is determined by tests and data on students within each school. These measures of AYP determine whether a school receives Title I federal funding. In California, the measures are: 1) specified percentages of students scoring "proficient" or "advanced" on the California STAR Test; 2) participation of a least 95 percent of students on the tests; 3) California API gains; and 4) high school graduation rates.

👉 Advanced Placement (AP) program

High schools offer AP courses to students who are capable of college-level work before

entering college. By taking AP courses and then passing the corresponding nationally standardized AP test, students can enter college having already earned college credits.

👉 California Content Standards (CORE Standards)

The California Standards establish the curriculum every student in public school must learn in grades Kindergarten through high school. The Mathematics Standards list individual concepts in Algebra, Geometry & Measurement, Number, Statistics & Probability, and Mathematical Reasoning that comprise the curriculum and course of study for each grade level. The California Standards are also used to create and certify textbooks and tests in public schools.

👉 California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)

CAHSEE is an assessment that California public high school students must pass in order to graduate with a diploma. Its purpose is to test whether students have mastered the California Standards necessary to succeed as adults. CAHSEE is a pass-fail exam divided into two sections, English/language arts and mathematics. Beginning in their sophomore year and every year thereafter, students have many opportunities to pass the test.

👉 California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Tests

These are yearly assessments that public school students in grades 2–12 take in language arts and mathematics and are developed specifically to assess student performance on California's Content Standards. Students take a different test at each grade 2–7, and tests based upon specific courses in grades 8–12. The results on the yearly STAR tests are used to determine a school's AYP and API scores.

English language learner (ELL)

An English language learner is a student whose first language is not English. Sometimes ELL refers to special programs for learning English (which may be bilingual education or English as a second language).

Individual Education Program (IEP)

An IEP is a formal written education plan, created for an individual student with learning disabilities, written jointly by the student's teachers, parents or guardians, the school administrator, and other school staff. Law requires an IEP once a year for placement in special education programs. The plan sets goals and timelines, and must be tailored to the student's specific needs and abilities.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

No Child Left Behind, also known as Title I, is the current major federal education legislation program that sets performance and accountability guidelines for all schools in the United States. NCLB sets the AYP goals for individual schools, mandates annual student testing, and provides extra funding for underperforming schools that fail to meet their AYP.

Proficient (see Adequate Yearly Progress)

Also referred to as mastery, this is a student's ability to demonstrate knowledge of a skill, operation, and/or concept that is a standard at the student's grade level. State assessments score students as "advanced," "proficient," "basic," or "far below basic." NCLB requires all students to become proficient in their grade's standards by 2014.

Standardized Achievement Test (SAT)

The SAT, formally known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test, is widely used as a college entrance examination. It measures what a student has learned in Kindergarten through high school. The SAT is three hours long and has three verbal and three mathematics sections. 

Permission is granted to reproduce and share this article for instructional use by parents, guardians, teachers, and families—provided it is duplicated with full credit given to the author, the California Mathematics Council, and its Journal, the ComMuniCator.