

# Glossary of Terms In Primary and Secondary Education in the United States

The educational community in the United States uses a large number of abbreviations and terms that may not be familiar to foreigners. The following list contains the most commonly used terms and expressions in primary and secondary education in the United States. For further explanation reference is made to other Fulbright Center Information Sheets, published by the Fulbright Center.

## **ACT**

**American College Testing Program Assessment.** Includes tests of English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning. Used by some colleges in admission and placement purposes; administered by the American College Testing Program.

## **Alternative education**

Education for students who do not fit well into the regular school environment. Such students may include anyone from gifted students to underachievers. Alternative schools often offer small classes, more counselling services than standard schools, and options such as evening classes for working students.

## **Apprenticeship programs**

Voluntary programs that combine hands-on training and related technical instruction. May be available to secondary school students (particularly those enrolled in technical or vocational programs) age sixteen and older interested in a particular trade or occupation.

## **AP program**

Program of **Advanced Placement Courses**, generally for students in the last two years of secondary school, designed to introduce college-level material in a particular subject and prepare students to take the Advanced Placement examination in that subject. AP exams are administered by the College Board. Many colleges and universities grant limited undergraduate credit for successful completion of AP examinations.

## **Boarding School**

A school where students can live during the school year. Many also accept day students, who return home after classes.

## **Co-ed**

Co-educational, which means that the school is open to both sexes.

## **GED**

The Test of **General Educational Development**. A standardized test that can qualify adults who have not completed secondary school for a high school equivalency diploma, granted by U.S. State Board of Education. The GED includes tests on writing skills, social studies, science, reading skills, and mathematics. It is accepted by most U.S. colleges, but international applicants should check that it will also be recognized by the Ministry of Education in their home country.

## **Home and School Association**

See PTA

## **IB**

**International Baccalaureate**, a two-year pre-university curriculum, leading to examinations and the IB Diploma. Candidates select courses from the areas of languages and world literature, social sciences, experimental sciences, and mathematics as well as an elective and a course on the theory of knowledge.

## **Learning Disability**

A disorder in learning processes that leads to a major difference between achievement and intellectual ability in one or more of the following areas: spoken expression, listening comprehension, mathematical calculation, or mathematical reasoning. Some private schools specialize in teaching students with learning disabilities, and public schools may also have special programs.

**Magnet school**

A public school, usually urban, that focuses on a special curriculum and attracts students from throughout the area. For example, the school might specialize in foreign languages, sciences, or the performing arts.

**Mainstreaming**

Practice in which severely mentally or physically handicapped students spend as much time as possible in class with other students rather than in separate special education programs.

**Military school**

School following a military model to emphasize self-discipline, competition, structured learning, and leadership. Some but not all of these schools have ties with U.S. military institutions.

**Montessori method**

Established by Maria Montessori. This philosophy of learning emphasizes self-education of children through hands-on activities.

**Parochial school**

Can refer to any religiously affiliated school. Most commonly used for Catholic schools.

**Privatization**

A controversial new practice in which public school districts contract with a private organization to have the private organization administer all or part of school operations. The purpose is to improve efficiency and reduce costs.

**PSAT/NMSQT**

Preliminary **SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test**. A shorter version of the SAT administered to secondary school students each October. Helps schools provide guidance to students planning to attend college and also serves as the qualifying test for scholarships awarded by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation and the National Hispanic Scholarship Awards Program.

**PTA**

**Parent-Teacher Association**. Most U.S. schools have an organization of this kind (which may go under another name, such as Home and School Association), to allow parents to play a role in their children's education. PTA's plan school social and fund-raising events and represent the parent's interests in the school.

**Select school**

A public school, usually urban that is academically selective and attracts gifted students from throughout the area.

**SLEP**

**Secondary Level English Proficiency** examination. A test administered by the Educational Testing Service, which may be required by some schools for non-native English speakers.

**SAT – Scholastic Assessment Test** designed by the College Board to measure verbal and mathematical reasoning abilities. Required by many U.S. colleges and sponsors of financial aid programs. See also Fulbright Center information sheet number 8c 'Entrance Examinations for Study in the United States: SAT'.

**SSAT**

**Secondary School Admissions Test**. A standardized examination used by about five hundred private schools in the United States and abroad for admission or placement, administered by the Educational Testing Service. The SSAT includes sections of multiple choice questions designed to measure quantitative, verbal, and reading comprehension skills. Two levels are offered, with the Lower Level test intended for students in grades five, six, and seven and the Upper Level test for older students.

**Tracking**

Most commonly used to refer to dividing students and advising them to prepare for a trade general, business or professional career, sometimes as early as middle school. Can also refer to any separation of classes based on ability of achievement.