

# NCA Glossary of Terms

<b>accreditation</b>	Recognition granted by the NCA Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement verifying that the school or district has met the specific membership standards and the specific school improvement standards.
<b>action plan</b>	An action plan identifies how and when the school improvement plan will be implemented in schools. It identifies the goals, support data, assessments, interventions, research, staff development, resources, timeline, and persons responsible for implementing the interventions and assessments contained in the school improvement plan.
<b>affective goals</b>	Student performance goals based on understandings, competencies, habits, or attitudes most directly related to the emotional and psychological attributes of students.
<b>analysis</b>	Examination of findings to determine and describe possible causes or reasons for the outcomes presented in the findings.
<b>annual report</b>	An annual report completed by member schools (usually via the Internet) to update their compliance with NCA CASI's membership and improvement criteria.
<b>articulation, horizontal</b>	Communication, policy development, curricular design, instructional coordination, assessment, and/or other coordination within grade levels and/or subject areas.
<b>articulation, vertical</b>	Cooperative planning and communication between schools, grade levels, or subject areas, which address policy development, curriculum, instruction, and/or assessment.
<b>assessment</b>	In an NCA CASI school, instruments used to collect data and evaluate student performance. Each assessment must be aligned with at least one of the student performance goals in the improvement plan. The quality of assessments is described using the terms "reliable," "valid," and "fair."
<b>assessment system</b>	A management system containing a set of assessments that is designed to collect and evaluate data about student performance.
<b>baseline student performance</b>	Student performance data collected at or near the beginning of a cycle before interventions have been implemented.
<b>capacity</b>	Five categories into which NCA membership and improvement criteria are organized: School Improvement Planning, Process of Schooling, Information Systems, Resource Allocation, and Vision, Leadership and Governance.
<b>climate, community</b>	The prevailing opinions, attitudes, and conditions in a school community pertaining to the improvement of the school educational program.
<b>climate, school</b>	The prevailing opinions, attitudes, and conditions in the school, as pertaining to the total school program and its improvement. Aspects such as as learning conditions, safety, the academic press, and any extra-classroom conditions affecting student or faculty morale, may be viewed as components of the general condition called "climate."
<b>cognitive goals</b>	Student performance goals that address the intellectual attributes of students.
<b>cognitive skills</b>	Reasoning or thinking skills such as: critical thinking, problem solving, decision-making, logical reasoning, or processing information. These are skills beyond remembering content or information.
<b>common metric</b>	A term formerly used by NCA to denote standardized assessments of student performance achievement.
<b>context bound assessment</b>	A term formerly used by NCA to denote locally developed assessments.

<b>credentialing</b>	A decision about the preparedness of a student to be successful based upon meeting the performance standard in Transitions credentialing areas.
<b>criteria</b>	Those principles, statements, or guideposts used in evaluation. For example, membership and improvement criteria for NCA CASI are organized into categories which include School Improvement Planning, Process of Schooling, Information Systems, Resource Allocation, and Vision, Leadership and Governance.
<b>cycle</b>	The five-year timeframe for an NCA school to complete a school improvement process.
<b>cycle (school improvement cycle)</b>	The NCA CASI school improvement framework and its protocol are designed for a five-year implementation cycle from start through documentation of improvement.
<b>data collection categories</b>	Classifications for organizing gathered data. For NCA purposes, there are three categories: Unique Local Insights, Data from Former Students, and Existing School Data. Existing School Data includes student characteristics, instructional practices, and school community data.
<b>data type</b>	The type of score used for a given assessment for analysis. For example, most standardized assessments report scores in percentiles, normal curve equivalents, scale scores, performance levels and others. For accurate analysis of data, users must choose which one of these data types to compare for multiple years.
<b>disaggregation</b>	The identification of subgroups within a population which meet a certain criterion (e.g. gender: male or female), so that the subgroup can be compared to the entire group or other subgroups to determine if the subgroup is receiving equitable education. Typical disaggregation categories in NCA are gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.
<b>documentation report</b>	A written report which documents the results of implementing the school improvement plan.
<b>educational program</b>	The entire set of planned and incidental experiences in which students may participate in the school.
<b>effect size</b>	A statistic preferred by NCA CASI that communicates the magnitude of growth and is therefore helpful in the school improvement process to show program improvement. Statistical significance tells us the probability that the change would be what it is. Statistical significance does NOT tell the magnitude of improvement and is therefore not as helpful in the school improvement process.
<b>employability skills</b>	A credentialing area in Transitions. Employability skills are skills that employees need to be successful in their employment.
<b>endorsement</b>	Endorsement was the recognition that has been given to schools that have successfully completed a five-year school improvement cycle. NCA had a "School Improvement Endorsement" (SI), an "Outcomes Endorsement" (OE), and a pilot Transitions Endorsement (TE). NCA CASI is moving to one school improvement framework called "Performance Accreditation" and is phasing out endorsements.
<b>environmental scan data</b>	Schools that received their endorsements during the 2000-2001 school year will start a new cycle in 2001-2002 in "Performance Accreditation." All other schools will complete the endorsement they started and will move to "Performance Accreditation in their next improvement cycle. Information or data about society and the world that faculty may use to determine the skills and knowledge students will need after leaving their school.

<b>essence</b>	<p>The essence of a goal is the conceptual center of the goal. When one is talking about a student performance goal with another person it is often assumed that the two people have the same meaning for that goal. However, often times we use the same term and have very different meanings. For example, when schools select a goal related to "citizenship" there is potential for confusion. Does citizenship mean compliance with rules? Does it mean service to others? Does it mean participation in representative governance? The concept may embody several facets, each of which would require a set of interventions and assessments different from the other facets. It is important that staff members discuss what they intend when they use the term and they need to come consensus on what the focus of the goal will be.</p>
<b>expert database finding</b>	<p>A database supported by NCA CASI and found on the Commission website. It contains essences of goals, possible assessments for those goals, and possible interventions for those goals.</p> <p>A simple presentation of the data without judgmental comments.</p>
<b>goal (student performance)</b>	<p>Goals that identify what is to be developed within students. NCA CASI has identified specific ways in which goals should be written and goal rubrics are contained in NCA's team chair and school leaders software. Sometimes student performance goals are knowledge-based; sometimes they include the ability to apply knowledge; sometimes they are directed at habits or patterns of behavior; and sometimes they are directed at attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, opinions, or feelings. Historically schools have focused on knowledge, and research on teacher-made tests suggests that teachers still focus a great deal on recall of specific information. Habits/patterns of behavior take a long time to develop. Attitudes can be difficult to measure and they sometimes enter into family arenas that schools avoid. Therefore, it is suggested that a rich source of goals is the ability to apply knowledge. This is where higher order thinking and application of knowledge takes place.</p>
<b>implications</b>	<p>The logical inferences that are suggested as a result of the analysis of findings. Implications lead to the creation of task lists: actions that must be taken as a result of the implications.</p>
<b>improvement criteria individual student intervention plan information system internal chairperson (steering chairperson)</b>	<p>Requirements that a school must meet in order to sustain its membership in NCA. These criteria are statements of exemplary practice considered necessary for the school to initiate and sustain a program improvement effort focusing on improved student performance. Improvement criteria are intended to promote continuous growth in member schools. Improvement criteria are listed in the NCA CASI Standards and Criteria booklets published by the Commission on a regular basis.</p>
<b>intervention (strategy) locally developed assessment membership criteria</b>	<p>A specific plan designed to meet the needs of an individual student who has not yet met the performance standard in a Transitions credentialing area.</p> <p>A formal system for collecting, organizing, managing, retrieving, distributing, and analyzing data. The system converts data into information that is usable by others.</p> <p>A person assigned to coordinate the activities of the steering committee during a school improvement cycle.</p> <p>Something that is done to or with students to develop something specific with those students. One might have a strategy to move to block scheduling, but what teachers do with students within the block of time is the intervention. It is the interventions that actually take place with students that will affect student performance.</p> <p>A measure of student performance developed within a school or district that cannot be used to compare student performance to other schools or districts. Locally developed assessments are often thought of as "classroom based" assessments.</p> <p>Requirements a school must meet to gain and sustain membership as an NCA CASI school.</p>

<b>mission statement</b>	A statement that identifies the priorities and educational beliefs of the school/district with regard to what is to be developed within its students. The mission must be global enough to capture the larger purpose of the organization while being specific enough to provide direction for the staff. The mission statement is a statement that provides the parameters for decision-making.
<b>multiple assessments</b>	NCA CASI requires schools to use more than one assessment to determine progress on each student performance goal.
<b>NCA CASI</b>	The North Central Association has two Commissions. The Higher Learning Commission serves colleges and universities. The Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (CASI) serves pre k -12 and special school populations. Member schools voluntarily join NCA.
<b>NCA Software</b>	NCA CASI has developed three pieces of stand-alone software. Software for team chairs and school leaders provides a toolkit for peer review chairpersons and for steering chairpersons. Profile software assists a school in constructing a school profile. Data analysis software provides a database for maintaining student performance data; it assists in determining the magnitude of growth or improvement; and it assists in the formulation of a documentation report. The license allows schools to place the software on any and all computers within the member school. All three pieces of software are provided to member schools and should be removed from all school computers if the school discontinues NCA membership.
<b>non-student performance goal</b>	A goal that references some improvement other than student performance. NCA CASI does not recommend the selection of non-student performance goals in a school improvement plan; schools often have other avenues available to meet non-student related needs.
<b>peer review chairperson/team</b>	A team comprised of educators who assists the member school in designing and implementing the NCA school improvement plan. Team members and chairpersons are selected based upon the specific expertise needed by the school and their knowledge of the NCA CASI school improvement framework.
<b>performance accreditation</b>	A rigorous school improvement framework organized around a five-year cycle of activities. Schools are expected to move toward the NCA CASI standard of increasing the proportion of students who are ready to be successful at the next transition. As schools move toward the standard they achieve increasingly higher results along the way.
<b>performance standard</b>	A specific level of achievement on an assessment or set of assessments. In Transitions schools, students must meet performance standards in order to be credentialed. Benchmarks are examples of performance standards.
<b>phases</b>	The NCA CASI school improvement framework can be organized into eight distinct phases. These phases are explained in detail in the handbook entitled, "Implementing the School Improvement Process," that was sent to every NCA CASI member school in the fall of 2000. The monograph can be downloaded at no cost from the Commission website by member NCA CASI schools.
<b>profile (school profile)</b>	A brief document that contains data about a school. The data in the profile help to guide the design of key components of the school improvement plan including: goal clarification, selection of assessments for each goal, identification of possible interventions, and the need for specific support elements to be included in the logistical/action plan.
<b>protocol (NCA CASI Protocol)</b>	A set of procedures and processes that are standard for all NCA schools. The protocol establishes a school improvement cycle of five years and requires that schools host two peer review team visits during the cycle. Additional details of the protocol can be found in the NCA CASI handbook entitled Implementing the School Improvement Process which can be downloaded at no cost from the Commission website ( <a href="http://www.ncacasi.org">www.ncacasi.org</a> ) by NCA CASI member schools.
<b>psychomotor skills</b>	Those capabilities and competencies pertaining to the motor (physical) attributes of students.
<b>quartile</b>	The frequency distribution of four intervals, each containing one quarter of the population.

<b>rubric</b>	<p>A method of measuring quality using a set of criteria with associated levels of performance. Rubric usually refers to the document upon which the criteria are listed with spaces for the recording of student scores. Some people refer to rubrics as criteria sheets or grading sheets.</p> <p>All persons within the school, and all persons in the attendance area of the school. Also, the geographical and physical environs, thereof. For selected considerations, "school community" may be considered as including some contiguous portions of the larger society, as appropriate.</p>
<b>school community school improvement cycle school improvement plan</b>	<p>The NCA CASI school improvement framework and its Protocol are designed for a five-year implementation cycle from start through documentation of improvement. A plan that includes the identification of 2-3 student performance goals, the assessments that are aligned with each of the goals, the interventions that are aligned with each of those goals, and an implementation plan.</p> <p>A brief document that contains data about a school. The data in the profile help to guide the design of key components of the school improvement plan including: goal clarification, selection of assessments for each goal, identification of possible interventions, and the need for specific support elements to be included in the logistical/action plan.</p>
<b>school profile (profile)</b>	<p>A person who takes the initiative to learn without being prompted, required, or externally rewarded. A person who has the skills to access and process the information they need for a specific purpose.</p>
<b>self-directed learner</b>	<p>A number indicating how far a specific score is from the mean score using standard deviations for the unit of measure, hence the term "standard unit." Two scores can often be contrasted by placing both of them on the same normal curve and then finding the distance between them in standard units. The NCA CASI software will convert certain student performance scores to standard scores, find the standard score difference, and interpret that difference for NCA purposes automatically.</p>
<b>standard score/standard unit standardized assessment</b>	<p>A measure of student performance which is widely recognized by the public. Standardized assessments are most often norm-referenced.</p>
<b>steering committee steering committee chairperson student performance goal</b>	<p>A representative group of people from the school and community that provides leadership and direction to the school improvement process. Each steering committee has a chairperson assigned to coordinate the activities of the committee. The committee ensures that all components of the NCA CASI process are addressed and that tasks are completed in a timely fashion.</p> <p>A person assigned to coordinate the activities of the steering committee during a school improvement cycle.</p>
<b>task list</b>	<p>A school improvement goal that addresses the skills, knowledge, attitudes, habits, and behaviors that we wish to improvement in students.</p> <p>Action items identified as a result of analysis of profile data. Activities which must be completed in order for the school improvement process to proceed successfully.</p>
<b>transitions transitions declaration</b>	<p>The exemplary stage of Performance Accreditation. Transitions is a school improvement model that focuses on each student demonstrating success in skills required at the next level of schooling or life transition. In Transitions, individual student performance data are monitored and intervention plans are constructed for students who are not successful in specified learning areas. More information about Transitions can be found on the NCA CASI website (<a href="http://www.ncacasi.org">www.ncacasi.org</a>).</p> <p>In Transitions schools, a statement that an individual student has achieved predetermined skill levels in a credentialing area.</p>
<b>triangulation</b>	<p>Comparison of multiple data sources (while the standard definition refers to a minimum of two sources, NCA prefers a minimum of three) to determine strengths and weakness of a school's performance. Triangulation assures that school improvement decisions will not be made from a single assessment which may not provide accurate data.</p>

**vision**

A document that describes in detail the components and characteristics of the school that would be required to fulfill a specific mission. A vision statement is a clear description of the kind of system that will be needed to deliver the mission of the organization.