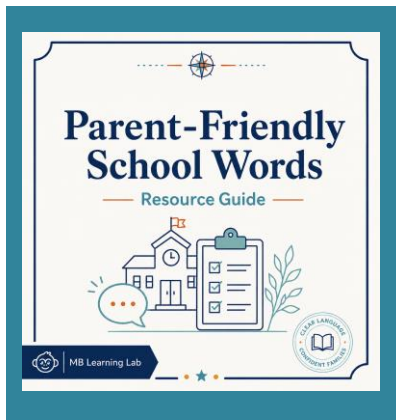




Parent/Caregiver - Friendly School Words

Monkey Buddies Learning Lab Resource Guide

chrissidennis.com — June 2026

Schools use a lot of words that sound familiar but may mean something specific inside a classroom, meeting, report, or support plan. This guide explains common school terms in plain language so families can ask clearer questions and understand what schools are trying to communicate.

Parent Reminder

You do not have to speak school language to advocate for a child. If a word is unclear, ask what it means, what it looks like, and how it affects your child's day.

Print What You Need

This guide is divided into sections so families, tutors, and teachers can print only the pages that match the conversation or concern.

Guide Sections	
Section	What It Helps Explain
Classroom & Instruction Words	Terms connected to lessons, units, grouping, and teaching choices.
Differentiation, Accommodation & Modification	A quick comparison of three terms families often hear together.
Progress & Assessment Words	Terms connected to data, grading, growth, and checks for understanding.
Support & Service Words	Terms connected to extra help, access, referral, and eligibility.
Behavior, Regulation & Attendance Words	Terms connected to classroom functioning, safety, regulation, and school attendance.
Meeting & Planning Words	Terms families may hear during conferences, team meetings, or planning conversations.

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Classroom & Instruction Words

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Section Reminder

These are words connected to how teaching is planned, organized, and adjusted in the classroom.

Word	Parent/Caregiver - Friendly Meaning
curriculum	The planned content, skills, and materials used for teaching a subject or grade level.
standard	A skill or learning expectation students are expected to work toward at a certain grade level.
learning goal	The skill or idea students are supposed to learn during a lesson or activity.
lesson	A planned teaching activity focused on a specific skill, idea, or goal.
unit	A group of lessons connected by one topic, theme, skill, or big idea.
whole group	Instruction given to the full class at the same time.
small group	Instruction or practice with a smaller group of students who need similar support or practice.
centers / stations	Classroom areas or activities students rotate through for practice, exploration, or independent work.

Parent/Caregiver - Friendly School Words

Classroom & Instruction Words, Continued

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Section Reminder

These words focus on how instruction can be supported, adjusted, practiced, or extended.

Word	Parent/Caregiver - Friendly Meaning
differentiation	Changing the path to learning so students can access the same goal in ways that fit their needs.
scaffold	Temporary support that helps a student learn a skill, then is gradually removed as the student becomes more independent.
modeling	Showing students how to do a task before asking them to try it.
guided practice	Practice done with teacher support before students work more independently.
independent practice	Practice students complete on their own after instruction and support.
enrichment	Additional or deeper learning for students who are ready to extend a skill or idea.
reteach / remediation	Teaching or practicing a skill again when a student needs more support.
extension	A task that pushes a skill farther for students who are ready for more challenge.

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Differentiation, Accommodation & Modification

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Why This Matters

These three words are often mixed together. They are related, but they are not the same thing.

Quick Compare: Differentiation, Accommodation, Modification

Term	Plain Meaning
Differentiation	Adjusting instruction, practice, grouping, materials, or support so students can access the same learning goal in different ways.
Accommodation	Changing how a student accesses learning or shows learning without changing the learning expectation.
Modification	Changing the actual expectation, task, amount, or level of work a student is expected to complete.

Plain-Language Example

If the class is writing a paragraph, differentiation might mean using a graphic organizer with some students. Accommodation might mean speech-to-text or extra time. A modification might mean writing fewer sentences or working on a different writing expectation.

Ask This	Why It Helps
Helpful question	“Are we changing how my child accesses the work, or are we changing what my child is expected to learn?”
Another helpful question	“Is this support available during instruction, assignments, assessments, or all three?”

Parent/Caregiver - Friendly School Words

Progress & Assessment Words

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Section Reminder

Assessment words are not always about grades. Many checks are used to understand what a child needs next.

Word	Parent/Caregiver - Friendly Meaning
benchmark	A check of skills at a certain point in the year. It helps show where a student is compared to expected progress.
mastery	A student understands and can use a skill with independence and consistency.
proficiency	A student is meeting the expected level for a skill or standard.
growth	Progress a student makes over time, even if the student is not yet at grade-level expectation.
data	Information teachers use to understand what a student knows, needs, or is ready to learn next.
progress monitoring	Regular checks to see whether instruction or support is helping a student improve.
formative assessment	A check during learning that helps the teacher adjust instruction.
summative assessment	A check after instruction that shows what a student learned by the end of a unit, lesson set, or grading period.
rubric	A scoring guide that explains what different levels of work look like.

Parent/Caregiver - Friendly School Words

Support & Service Words

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Section Reminder

Support words can describe extra help, access, specialized services, or the process of deciding what a child needs.

Word	Parent/Caregiver - Friendly Meaning
intervention	Extra instruction or support for a skill a student is struggling to learn.
accommodation	A change in access, timing, setting, tools, or presentation that helps a student show learning without changing the expectation.
modification	A change to what the student is expected to learn, complete, or demonstrate.
support	Help provided so a student can access learning, participate, or make progress.
service	A specialized support provided by school staff, such as speech, occupational therapy, counseling, or special education instruction.
screening	A short check used to see whether a student may need more support or more complete evaluation.
referral	A request for a school team to review concerns and decide whether more support, screening, or evaluation may be needed.
eligibility	The decision about whether a student qualifies for a specific service, support, program, or special education category.
access	A student's ability to participate in instruction, routines, materials, communication, and classroom life.

Parent/Caregiver - Friendly School Words

Behavior, Regulation & Attendance Words

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Section Reminder

Behavior language should help adults understand needs and plan support. It should not be used only to blame a child.

Word	Parent/Caregiver - Friendly Meaning
regulation	A student's ability to manage energy, emotions, attention, and behavior well enough to participate and learn.
dysregulation	When a student is overwhelmed or unable to manage emotions, energy, or behavior in the moment.
behavior plan	A plan for teaching, supporting, and responding to behavior in a more consistent way.
replacement behavior	A safer or more appropriate behavior taught to meet the same need as a challenging behavior.
escalation	When a student's stress, emotion, or behavior is increasing.
de-escalation	Support used to help a student calm, regain control, and return to learning or safety.
restorative practice	A way of repairing harm, rebuilding relationships, and helping students take responsibility after conflict.
chronic absenteeism	Missing a significant amount of school, even when the absences are excused.

Parent/Caregiver - Friendly School Words

Meeting & Planning Words

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Section Reminder

Meeting words should lead to clear action. Families should leave knowing what will happen next and when the plan will be reviewed.

Word	Parent/Caregiver - Friendly Meaning
conference	A meeting or conversation between family and school staff about a student's learning, progress, or needs.
team meeting	A meeting where school staff and family members discuss concerns, progress, plans, or next steps.
action plan	A clear plan that names what will happen, who will do it, and when it will be reviewed.
goal	A skill or behavior the student is working toward.
next steps	The specific actions the team agrees to take after a meeting or conversation.
follow-up	A planned check-in to see whether the next steps are happening and helping.
documentation	Written notes, forms, data, messages, or records that help show what has happened or what was decided.
communication log	A record of messages, calls, meetings, or notes between home and school.

Parent/Caregiver - Friendly School Words

Good Questions to Ask

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Parent/Caregiver Reminder

These questions help families move from confusing school language to clear next steps.

Question	When It Helps
“What does that mean in plain language?”	Use this when a school word feels unclear or overly technical.
“What does that look like for my child?”	This moves the conversation from general terms to your child’s actual school day.
“Is this instruction, support, an assessment, or a service?”	This helps sort out whether the school is teaching, checking, supporting, or providing a specific service.
“How will we know if it is working?”	This asks the team to connect the plan to progress, data, or observable change.
“When will we review this again?”	This helps prevent plans from being discussed once and then forgotten.