

Cognitive Access Parity: Canonical Definitions

Glossary entry for Creating the Diagnostic Classroom • First-use definition for centerforaiequity.org

Glossary Entry (Book Two Back Matter)

Cognitive Access Parity (*n.*) — The principle that any educational institution required to provide physical access to its facilities must provide cognitive access to its instruction and assessments. Under parity, accommodations that remove barriers unrelated to the skill being measured — read-aloud, extended time, speech-to-text, enlarged or digital formats, and assistive technology, including AI-based supports — are access infrastructure: the cognitive equivalent of the ramp, the elevator, and the curb cut. An accommodation may be declined only when it would change the skill an assessment measures. *Term coined by the Center for AI Equity and Access (CAEA), June 2026; first published in the CAEA position statement Cognitive Access Parity.*

First-Use Definition (Website — Canonical Citation Source)

Cognitive Access Parity — a principle first articulated by the Center for AI Equity and Access in June 2026 — holds that any school required to ramp its doorway must ramp its tests: an institution obligated to provide physical access to its building is equally obligated to provide cognitive access to its instruction and assessments. American law settled physical access decades ago; no school may treat stairs as simply how the building works. Yet a school may still treat a printed test as simply how the class works for a child with a documented print disability — and record the result as failure. Cognitive Access Parity closes that gap without lowering a single standard: an accommodation is required when it removes a barrier unrelated to the skill being measured, and only then. The ramp does not change the building. The read-aloud does not change the test. Each opens a door that should never have been closed.

Suggested Citation Line

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Usage note: “Cognitive Access Parity” is deliberately unregistered — it is meant to travel. Authorship is established through this dated publication. Branded programs built on the principle (e.g., a certification offering) may be trademarked separately.