

Education in the United States

Education in the United States is mainly provided by the public sector, with control and funding coming from three levels: federal, state, and local. Child education is compulsory.

Public education is universally available. School curricula, funding, teaching, employment, and other policies are set through locally elected school boards with jurisdiction over school districts with many directives from state legislatures. School districts are usually separate from other local jurisdictions, with independent officials and budgets. Educational standards and standardized testing decisions are usually made by state governments. The ages for compulsory education vary by state. It begins from ages five to eight and ends from ages fourteen to eighteen.

Compulsory education requirements can generally be satisfied by educating children in public schools, state-certified private schools, or an approved home school program. In most public and private schools, education is divided into three levels: elementary school, middle school (sometimes called junior high school), and high school (sometimes referred to as secondary education). In almost all schools at these levels, children are divided by age groups into grades, ranging from kindergarten (followed by first grade) for the youngest children in elementary school, up to twelfth grade, the final year of high school. The exact age range of students in these grade levels varies slightly from area to area.

Post-secondary education, better known as "college" in the United States, is generally governed separately from the elementary and high school system, and is described in a separate section below.

School grades

Most children enter the public education system around ages five or six. The American school year traditionally begins at the end of August or the day after Labor Day in September, after the traditional summer recess. Children are assigned into year groups known as grades, beginning with preschool, followed by kindergarten and culminating in twelfth grade. Children customarily advance together from one grade to the next as a single cohort or "class" upon reaching the end of each school year in late May or early June.

The American educational system comprises 12 grades of study over 12 calendar years of primary and secondary education before graduating and becoming eligible for college admission. After pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, there are five years in primary school (normally known as elementary school). After completing five grades, the student will enter junior high or middle school and then high school to get the high school diploma.

The U.S. uses ordinal numbers (e.g., first grade) for naming grades rather than the cardinal numbers (e.g., grade one) frequently used in Canada and Australia. Typical ages and grade groupings in public and private schools may be found through the U.S. Department of Education. Many different variations exist across the country. Students completing high school may choose to attend a college or university. Undergraduate degrees may be either associate's degrees or bachelor's degrees (baccalaureate)

Community college typically offer two-year associate's degrees, although some community colleges offer a limited number of bachelor's degrees. Some community college students chose to transfer to a four-year institution to pursue a bachelor's degree. Community colleges are generally publicly-funded and offer career certifications and part-time programs.

Four-year institutions may be public or private colleges or universities.

Most public institutions are state universities, which are sponsored by state governments and typically receive funding through some combination of taxpayer funds, tuition, private donations, federal grants, and proceeds from endowments. State universities are organized in a wide variety of ways, and many are part of a state university system. However, not all public institutions are state universities. The five service academies, one for each branch of the armed forces, are completely funded by the federal government; the academies train students (cadets or midshipmen) to be commissioned officers in exchange for a mandatory term of military service. Additionally, some local governments (counties and cities) have four-year institutions of their own - one example is the City University of New York.