



# UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## Education Education | USAGov

### System Structure

Compulsory education in the United States encompasses elementary school, middle school (often referred to as junior high), and high school (or senior high). The ages at which students are required to attend school vary slightly from state to state, but generally, children begin school between the ages of 5 and 8 and complete their education between the ages of 16 and 18. Public schools are free to attend, and many students receive free transportation and subsidized meals, while private institutions typically charge tuition. After completing high school, students may opt to pursue further education at college or university.

### Academic Year

The academic year is set by individual states, leading to considerable variation across the country. Generally, schools operate on a two-semester system: the first semester runs from August or September to January, while the second semester spans from January to May or June. Many universities follow this same structure, and most allow students to begin courses at the start of either semester.

### Higher Education

In the United States, there are over 4,500 colleges and universities, ranging from prestigious Ivy League schools to public colleges and smaller liberal arts institutions. College life in the U.S. is distinct, featuring sports clubs, fraternities, and sororities that play a significant role in social activities on campus.

Most colleges require students to pass an entrance exam (typically the SAT or ACT), and applicants can submit applications to as many institutions as they wish, although an application fee is usually required.

## Funding

Like many countries, American higher education institutions are increasingly pursuing commercial or corporate funding due to financial pressures.

Tuition fees vary based on whether a student is an in-state resident, an out-of-state resident, or an international student. Students can apply for different types of funding, including loans and grants, through the Federal Student Aid program.

Certain foreign nationals studying in the U.S. may also qualify for funding based on their visa status.

## Courses

American universities offer both undergraduate and graduate degree programs, with undergraduate courses structured differently than in many other countries. Typically, undergraduate programs last four years and are divided into freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior years. In the first two years, students explore a wide range of subjects before selecting a 'major'—their specialized field—for the final two years.

Some students opt for a double major or pursue an additional 'minor' in a secondary area. Graduate programs generally last between one and three years, and many colleges also provide several non-degree qualifications.

## Research

Research in the U.S. is highly esteemed, and competition for funding can be fierce. For additional information, visit [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) for details on federal funding, or reach out to a specialist organization within your research field.

## Elementary, Middle, and High School Education

American schools utilize a K-12 system, which covers compulsory education from kindergarten through twelfth grade. While some schools may have slightly different systems, the three levels of education are typically divided into:

- **Elementary School** – Kindergarten to fifth grade
- **Middle School** – Sixth grade to eighth grade
- **High School** – Ninth grade to twelfth grade

There is no federal curriculum; however, most schools adhere to a framework established by local authorities. Upon finishing high school, students aim to earn their High School Diploma. Although courses are not standardized, the diploma is a nationally recognized credential that holds significant importance for employment opportunities.

## Preschool and Childcare Options

Families relocating to the United States have various preschool and childcare options, including:

- Daycare centers or crèches

- Pre-kindergartens
- Nannies
- Au pairs

Childcare costs can be quite high, although some employers provide on-site facilities to care for their employees' children. In 2013, new initiatives were introduced to enhance access to preschools, and these will continue to be implemented over the coming years.