

---

# Teachers—Preschool, Kindergarten, Elementary, Middle, and Secondary

---

(O\*NET 25-2011.00, 25-2012.00, 25-2021.00, 25-2022.00, 25-2023.00, 25-2031.00, 25-2032.00)

---

## Significant Points

- Public school teachers must be licensed, which typically requires a bachelor's degree and completion of an approved teacher education program.
- Many States offer alternative licensing programs to attract people into teaching, especially for hard-to-fill positions.
- Job prospects should be favorable; opportunities will vary by geographic area and subject taught.

## Nature of the Work

Teachers play an important role in fostering the intellectual and social development of children during their formative years. The education that teachers impart plays a key role in determining the future prospects of their students. Whether in preschools or high schools or in private or public schools, teachers provide the tools and the environment for their students to develop into responsible adults.

Teachers act as facilitators or coaches, using classroom presentations or individual instruction to help students learn and apply concepts in subjects such as science, mathematics, or English. They plan, evaluate, and assign lessons; prepare, administer, and grade tests; listen to oral presentations; and maintain classroom discipline. Teachers observe and evaluate a student's performance and potential and increasingly are asked to use new assessment methods. For example, teachers may examine a portfolio of a student's artwork or writing in order to judge the student's overall progress. They then can provide additional assistance in areas in which a student needs help. Teachers also grade papers, prepare report cards, and meet with parents and school staff to discuss a student's academic progress or personal problems.

Many teachers use a “hands-on” approach that uses “props” or “manipulatives” to help children understand abstract concepts, solve problems, and develop critical thought processes. For example, they teach the concepts of numbers or of addition and subtraction by playing board games. As the children get older, teachers use more sophisticated materials, such as science apparatus, cameras, or computers. They also encourage collaboration in solving problems by having students work in groups to discuss and solve problems together. To be prepared for success later in life, students must be able to interact with others, adapt to new technology, and think through problems logically.

*Preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school teachers* play a vital role in the development of children. What children learn and experience during their early years can shape their views of themselves and the world and can affect their later success or failure in school, work, and their personal lives. Preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school teachers introduce children to mathematics, language, science, and social studies.

They use games, music, artwork, films, books, computers, and other tools to teach basic skills.

Preschool children learn mainly through play and interactive activities. *Preschool teachers* capitalize on children's play to further language and vocabulary development (using storytelling, rhyming games, and acting games), improve social skills (having the children work together to build a neighborhood in a sandbox), and introduce scientific and mathematical concepts (showing the children how to balance and count blocks when building a bridge or how to mix colors when painting). Thus, a less structured approach, including small-group lessons, one-on-one instruction, and learning through creative activities such as art, dance, and music, is adopted to teach preschool children. Play and hands-on teaching also are used by *kindergarten teachers*, but academics begin to take priority in kindergarten classrooms. Letter recognition, phonics, numbers, and awareness of nature and science, introduced at the preschool level, are taught primarily in kindergarten.

Most *elementary school teachers* instruct one class of children in several subjects. In some schools, two or more teachers work as a team and are jointly responsible for a group of students in at least one subject. In other schools, a teacher may teach one special subject—usually music, art, reading, science, arithmetic, or physical education—to a number of classes. A small but growing number of teachers instruct multilevel classrooms, with students at several different learning levels.

*Middle school teachers* and *secondary school teachers* help students delve more deeply into subjects introduced in elementary school and expose them to more information about the world. Middle and secondary school teachers specialize in a specific subject, such as English, Spanish, mathematics, history, or biology. They also may teach subjects that are career oriented. *Vocational education teachers*, also referred to as career and technical or career-technology teachers, instruct and train students to work in a wide variety of fields, such as healthcare, business, auto repair, communications, and, increasingly, technology. They often teach courses that are in high demand by area employers, who may provide input into the curriculum and offer internships to students. Many vocational teachers play an active role in building and overseeing these partnerships. Additional responsibilities of middle and secondary school teachers may include career guidance and job placement, as well as follow-ups with students after graduation. (*Special education teachers*—who instruct elementary and secondary school students who have a variety of disabilities—are discussed separately in this section of the *Handbook*.)

In addition to conducting classroom activities, teachers oversee study halls and homerooms, supervise extracurricular activities, and accompany students on field trips. They may identify students with physical or mental problems and refer the students to the proper authorities. Secondary school teachers occasionally assist students in choosing courses, colleges, and careers. Teachers also participate in education conferences and workshops.

Computers play an integral role in the education teachers provide. Resources such as educational software and the Internet expose students to a vast range of experiences and promote interactive learning. Through the Internet, students can communicate with other students anywhere in the world, allowing them to share experiences and differing viewpoints. Students also use the Internet for individual research projects and to

gather information. Computers are used in other classroom activities as well, from solving math problems to learning English as a second language. Teachers also may use computers to record grades and perform other administrative and clerical duties. They must continually update their skills so that they can instruct and use the latest technology in the classroom.

Teachers often work with students from varied ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds. With growing minority populations in most parts of the country, it is important for teachers to work effectively with a diverse student population. Accordingly, some schools offer training to help teachers enhance their awareness and understanding of different cultures. Teachers may also include multicultural programming in their lesson plans, to address the needs of all students, regardless of their cultural background.

In recent years, site-based management, which allows teachers and parents to participate actively in management decisions regarding school operations, has gained popularity. In many schools, teachers are increasingly involved in making decisions regarding the budget, personnel, textbooks, curriculum design, and teaching methods.

**Work environment.** Seeing students develop new skills and gain an appreciation of knowledge and learning can be very rewarding. However, teaching may be frustrating when one is dealing with unmotivated or disrespectful students. Occasionally, teachers must cope with unruly behavior and violence in the schools. Teachers may experience stress in dealing with large classes, heavy workloads, or old schools that are run down and lack many modern amenities. Accountability standards also may increase stress levels, with teachers expected to produce students who are able to exhibit satisfactory performance on standardized tests in core subjects. Many teachers, particularly in public schools, are also frustrated by the lack of control they have over what they are required to teach.

Teachers in private schools generally enjoy smaller class sizes and more control over establishing the curriculum and setting standards for performance and discipline. Their students also tend to be more motivated, since private schools can be selective in their admissions processes.

Teachers are sometimes isolated from their colleagues because they work alone in a classroom of students. However, some schools allow teachers to work in teams and with mentors to enhance their professional development.

Including school duties performed outside the classroom, many teachers work more than 40 hours a week. Part-time schedules are more common among preschool and kindergarten teachers. Although most school districts have gone to all-day kindergartens, some kindergarten teachers still teach two kindergarten classes a day. Most teachers work the traditional 10-month school year with a 2-month vacation during the summer. During the vacation break, those on the 10-month schedule may teach in summer sessions, take other jobs, travel, or pursue personal interests. Many enroll in college courses or workshops to continue their education. Teachers in districts with a year-round schedule typically work 8 weeks, are on vacation for 1 week, and have a 5-week midwinter break. Preschool teachers working in day care settings often work year round.



*Teachers instruct students in both academic and personal enrichment subjects.*

Most States have tenure laws that prevent public school teachers from being fired without just cause and due process. Teachers may obtain tenure after they have satisfactorily completed a probationary period of teaching, normally 3 years. Tenure does not absolutely guarantee a job, but it does provide some security.

### **Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement**

The traditional route to becoming a public school teacher involves completing a bachelor's degree from a teacher education program and then obtaining a license. However, most States now offer alternative routes to licensure for those who have a college degree in other fields. Private school teachers do not have to be licensed but still need a bachelor's degree. A bachelor's degree may not be needed by preschool teachers and vocational education teachers, who need experience in their field rather than a specific degree.

**Education and training.** Traditional education programs for kindergarten and elementary school teachers include courses designed specifically for those preparing to teach. These courses include mathematics, physical science, social science, music, art, and literature, as well as prescribed professional education courses, such as philosophy of education, psychology of learning, and teaching methods. Aspiring secondary school teachers most often major in the subject they plan to teach while also taking a program of study in teacher preparation. Many 4-year colleges require students to wait until their sophomore year before applying for admission to teacher education programs. To maintain their accreditation, teacher education programs are now required to include classes in the use of computers and other technologies. Most programs require students to perform a student-teaching internship. Teacher education programs are accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council. Graduation from an accredited program is not necessary to become a teacher, but it may make fulfilling licensure requirements easier.

Many States now offer professional development schools, which are partnerships between universities and elementary or secondary schools. Professional development schools merge theory with practice and allow the student to experience a year

of teaching firsthand, under professional guidance. Students enter these 1-year programs after completion of their bachelor's degree.

**Licensure and certification.** All 50 States and the District of Columbia require public school teachers to be licensed. Licensure is not required for teachers in most private schools. Usually licensure is granted by the State Board of Education or a licensure advisory committee. Teachers may be licensed to teach the early childhood grades (usually preschool through grade 3); the elementary grades (grades 1 through 6 or 8); the middle grades (grades 5 through 8); a secondary-education subject area (usually grades 7 through 12); or a special subject, such as reading or music (usually grades kindergarten through 12).

Requirements for regular licenses to teach kindergarten through grade 12 vary by State. However, all States require general education teachers to have a bachelor's degree and to have completed an approved teacher training program with a prescribed number of subject and education credits, as well as supervised practice teaching. Some States also require technology training and the attainment of a minimum grade point average. A number of States require that teachers obtain a master's degree in education within a specified period after they begin teaching.

Almost all States require applicants for a teacher's license to be tested for competency in basic skills, such as reading and writing, and in teaching. Almost all also require teachers to exhibit proficiency in their subject. Many school systems are presently moving toward implementing performance-based systems for licensure, which usually require teachers to demonstrate satisfactory teaching performance over an extended period in order to obtain a provisional license, in addition to passing an examination in their subject. Most States require teachers to complete a minimum number of hours of continuing education to renew their license. Many States have reciprocity agreements that make it easier for teachers licensed in one State to become licensed in another.

Licensing requirements for preschool teachers also vary by State. Requirements for public preschool teachers are generally more stringent than those for private preschool teachers. Some States require a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, while others require an associate's degree, and still others require certification by a nationally recognized authority. The Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, the most common type of certification, requires a mix of classroom training and experience working with children, along with an independent assessment of the teacher's competence.

Nearly all States now also offer alternative licensure programs for teachers who have a bachelor's degree in the subject they will teach, but who lack the necessary education courses required for a regular license. Many of these alternative licensure programs are designed to ease shortages of teachers of certain subjects, such as mathematics and science. Other programs provide teachers for urban and rural schools that have difficulty filling positions with teachers from traditional licensure programs. Alternative licensure programs are intended to attract people into teaching who do not fulfill traditional licensing standards, including recent college graduates who did not

complete education programs and those changing from another career to teaching. In some programs, individuals begin teaching quickly under provisional licensure under the close supervision of experienced educators while taking education courses outside school hours. If they progress satisfactorily, they receive regular licensure after working for 1 or 2 years. In other programs, college graduates who do not meet licensure requirements take only those courses that they lack and then become licensed. This approach may take 1 or 2 semesters of full-time study. The coursework for alternative certification programs often leads to a master's degree. In extreme circumstances, when schools cannot attract enough qualified teachers to fill positions, States may issue emergency licenses to individuals who do not meet the requirements for a regular license that let them begin teaching immediately.

In many States, vocational teachers have many of the same licensure requirements as other teachers. However, knowledge and experience in a particular field are important, so some States will license vocational education teachers without a bachelor's degree, provided they can demonstrate expertise in their field. A minimum number of hours in education courses may also be required.

Private schools are generally exempt from meeting State licensing standards. For secondary school teacher jobs, they prefer candidates who have a bachelor's degree in the subject they intend to teach, or in childhood education for elementary school teachers. They seek candidates among recent college graduates as well as from those who have established careers in other fields.

**Other qualifications.** In addition to being knowledgeable about the subjects they teach, teachers must have the ability to communicate, inspire trust and confidence, and motivate students, as well as understand the students' educational and emotional needs. Teachers must be able to recognize and respond to individual and cultural differences in students and employ different teaching methods that will result in higher student achievement. They should be organized, dependable, patient, and creative. Teachers also must be able to work cooperatively and communicate effectively with other teachers, support staff, parents, and members of the community. Private schools associated with religious institutions also desire candidates who share the values that are important to the institution.

**Additional certifications and advancement.** In some cases, teachers of kindergarten through high school may attain professional certification in order to demonstrate competency beyond that required for a license. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards offers a voluntary national certification. To become nationally certified, experienced teachers must prove their aptitude by compiling a portfolio showing their work in the classroom and by passing a written assessment and evaluation of their teaching knowledge. Currently, teachers may become certified in a variety of areas, on the basis of the age of the students and, in some cases, the subject taught. For example, teachers may obtain a certificate for teaching English language arts to early adolescents (aged 11 to 15), or they may become certified as early childhood generalists. All States recognize national certification, and many States and school districts provide special benefits to teachers who earn certification. Ben-

efits typically include higher salaries and reimbursement for continuing education and certification fees. In addition, many States allow nationally certified teachers to carry a license from one State to another.

With additional preparation, teachers may move into such positions as school librarians, reading specialists, instructional coordinators, or guidance counselors. Teachers may become administrators or supervisors, although the number of these positions is limited and competition for them can be intense. In some systems, highly qualified, experienced teachers can become senior or mentor teachers, with higher pay and additional responsibilities. They guide and assist less experienced teachers while keeping most of their own teaching responsibilities. Preschool teachers usually work their way up from assistant teacher, to teacher, to lead teacher—who may be responsible for the instruction of several classes—and, finally, to director of the center. Preschool teachers with a bachelor's degree frequently are qualified to teach kindergarten through grade 3 as well. Teaching at these higher grades often results in higher pay.

### Employment

Preschool, kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, and secondary school teachers, except special education, held about 4.0 million jobs in 2006. Of the teachers in those jobs, about 1.5 million are elementary school teachers, 1.1 million are secondary school teachers, 674,000 are middle school teachers, 437,000 are preschool teachers, and 170,000 are kindergarten teachers. The vast majority work in elementary and secondary schools. Preschool teachers, except special education, are most often employed in child daycare services (59 percent), public and private educational services (16 percent), and religious organizations (15 percent). Employment of teachers is geographically distributed much the same as the population.

### Job Outlook

Employment of preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary school teachers is projected to grow about as fast as average. Job prospects are expected to be favorable, with

particularly good prospects for teachers in high-demand fields like math, science, and bilingual education, or in less desirable urban or rural school districts.

**Employment change.** Employment of school teachers is expected to grow by 12 percent between 2006 and 2016, about as fast as the average for all occupations. However, because of the size of the occupations in this group, this growth will create 479,000 additional teacher positions, more than all but a few occupations.

Through 2016, overall student enrollments in elementary, middle, and secondary schools—a key factor in the demand for teachers—are expected to rise more slowly than in the past as children of the baby boom generation leave the school system. This will cause employment of teachers from kindergarten through the secondary grades to grow as fast as the average. Projected enrollments will vary by region. Fast-growing States in the South and West—led by Nevada, Arizona, Texas, and Georgia—will experience the largest enrollment increases. Enrollments in the Midwest are expected to hold relatively steady, while those in the Northeast are expected to decline. Teachers who are geographically mobile and who obtain licensure in more than one subject should have a distinct advantage in finding a job.

The number of teachers employed is dependent on State and local expenditures for education and on the enactment of legislation to increase the quality and scope of public education. At the Federal level, there has been a large increase in funding for education, particularly for the hiring of qualified teachers in lower income areas. Also, some States are instituting programs to improve early childhood education, such as offering full day kindergarten and universal preschool. These programs, along with projected higher enrollment growth for preschool age children, will create many new jobs for preschool teachers, which are expected to grow much faster than the average for all occupations.

**Job prospects.** Job opportunities for teachers over the next 10 years will vary from good to excellent, depending on the locality, grade level, and subject taught. Most job openings will result from the need to replace the large number of teachers

### Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-2016	
				Number	Percent
Teachers—preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary .....	—	3,954,000	4,433,000	479,000	12
Preschool and kindergarten teachers.....	25-2010	607,000	750,000	143,000	23
Preschool teachers, except special education.....	25-2011	437,000	552,000	115,000	26
Kindergarten teachers, except special education .....	25-2012	170,000	198,000	28,000	16
Elementary and middle school teachers.....	25-2020	2,214,000	2,496,000	282,000	13
Elementary school teachers, except special education.....	25-2021	1,540,000	1,749,000	209,000	14
Middle school teachers, except special and vocational education .....	25-2022	658,000	732,000	74,000	11
Vocational education teachers, middle school .....	25-2023	16,000	15,000	-800	-5
Secondary school teachers .....	25-2030	1,133,000	1,187,000	54,000	5
Secondary school teachers, except special and vocational education .....	25-2031	1,038,000	1,096,000	59,000	6
Vocational education teachers, secondary school .....	25-2032	96,000	91,000	-4,400	-5

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

who are expected to retire over the 2006-16 period. Also, many beginning teachers decide to leave teaching for other careers after a year or two—especially those employed in poor, urban schools—creating additional job openings for teachers.

The job market for teachers also continues to vary by school location and by subject taught. Job prospects should be better in inner cities and rural areas than in suburban districts. Many inner cities—often characterized by overcrowded, ill-equipped schools and higher-than-average poverty rates—and rural areas—characterized by their remote location and relatively low salaries—have difficulty attracting and retaining enough teachers. Currently, many school districts have difficulty hiring qualified teachers in some subject areas—most often mathematics, science (especially chemistry and physics), bilingual education, and foreign languages. Increasing enrollments of minorities, coupled with a shortage of minority teachers, should cause efforts to recruit minority teachers to intensify. Also, the number of non-English-speaking students will continue to grow, creating demand for bilingual teachers and for those who teach English as a second language. Qualified vocational teachers also are currently in demand in a variety of fields at both the middle school and secondary school levels. Specialties that have an adequate number of qualified teachers include general elementary education, physical education, and social studies.

The supply of teachers is expected to increase in response to reports of improved job prospects, better pay, more teacher involvement in school policy, and greater public interest in education. In addition, more teachers may be drawn from a reserve pool of career changers, substitute teachers, and teachers completing alternative certification programs. In recent years, the total number of bachelor's and master's degrees granted in education has been increasing slowly. But many States have implemented policies that will encourage even more students to become teachers because of a shortage of teachers in certain locations and in anticipation of the loss of a number of teachers to retirement.

### Earnings

Median annual earnings of kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary school teachers ranged from \$43,580 to \$48,690 in May 2006; the lowest 10 percent earned \$28,590 to \$33,070; the top 10 percent earned \$67,490 to \$76,100. Median earnings for preschool teachers were \$22,680.

According to the American Federation of Teachers, beginning teachers with a bachelor's degree earned an average of \$31,753 in the 2004–05 school year. The estimated average salary of all public elementary and secondary school teachers in the 2004–05 school year was \$47,602.

In 2006, more than half of all elementary, middle, and secondary school teachers belonged to unions—mainly the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association—that bargain with school systems over salaries, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment. Fewer preschool and kindergarten teachers were union members—about 17 percent in 2006.

Teachers can boost their earnings in a number of ways. In some schools, teachers receive extra pay for coaching sports and working with students in extracurricular activities. Get-

ting a master's degree or national certification often results in a raise in pay, as does acting as a mentor. Some teachers earn extra income during the summer by teaching summer school or performing other jobs in the school system. Although private school teachers generally earn less than public school teachers, they may be given other benefits, such as free or subsidized housing.

### Related Occupations

Preschool, kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, and secondary school teaching requires a variety of skills and aptitudes, including a talent for working with children; organizational, administrative, and recordkeeping abilities; research and communication skills; the power to influence, motivate, and train others; patience; and creativity. Workers in other occupations requiring some of these aptitudes include teachers—postsecondary; counselors; teacher assistants; education administrators; librarians; child care workers; public relations specialists; social workers; and athletes, coaches, umpires, and related workers.

### Sources of Additional Information

Information on licensure or certification requirements and approved teacher training institutions is available from local school systems and State departments of education.

Information on teachers' unions and education-related issues may be obtained from the following sources:

- American Federation of Teachers, 555 New Jersey Ave. NW., Washington, DC 20001. Internet: <http://www.aft.org>

- National Education Association, 1201 16th St. NW., Washington, DC 20036. Internet: <http://www.nea.org>

A list of institutions with accredited teacher education programs can be obtained from:

- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010 Massachusetts Ave. NW., Suite 500, Washington, DC 20036-1023. Internet: <http://www.ncate.org>

- Teacher Education Accreditation Council, Suite 300, One Dupont Circle, Washington, DC 20036.

Internet: <http://www.teac.org>

Information on alternative certification programs can be obtained from:

- National Center for Alternative Certification, 1901 Pennsylvania Ave NW., Suite 201, Washington, DC 20006. Internet: <http://www.teach-now.org>

Information on National Board Certification can be obtained from:

- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1525 Wilson Blvd., Suite 500, Arlington, VA 22209.

Internet: <http://www.nbpts.org>

For information on vocational education and vocational education teachers, contact:

- Association for Career and Technical Education, 1410 King St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet: <http://www.acteonline.org>

For information on careers in educating children and issues affecting preschool teachers, contact either of the following organizations:

- National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1509 16th St. NW., Washington, DC 20036.

Internet: <http://www.naeyc.org>

► Council for Professional Recognition, 2460 16th St.NW.,  
Washington, DC 20009-3575.  
Internet: <http://www.cdacouncil.org>