

SCHOOLS AND CHILDCARE

Schooling for Children: Primary and secondary education is compulsory in the United States. This means that U.S. law compels parents to ensure that their children receive an education. State laws control the compulsory education age range, but it usually starts between 5 and 8 years of age and ends between 16 and 18 years of age. This requirement can be satisfied with enrollment in public schools, state-licensed private schools or a home school program approved by the state. “Truancy” is the term used in reference to a child who should be in school but isn’t. School attendance for children within the compulsory age range is a serious matter. Many states hold parents accountable for their children’s truancy, so parents must take an active role in their children’s education. In some states, parents can be fined or even jailed for failing to adequately supervise school-age children, which includes taking reasonable steps that their children are attending school.

School Levels: Each state has its own department of education to oversee its primary and secondary school districts. Grade levels may be clustered in different ways, depending on the state, but in general, primary education refers to the first six years of formal schooling and secondary education refers to the next six years of schooling.

Preschool: It is intended for children under 5 years of age. Preschool is not required by law, but it is commonly used as a way to encourage young children to socialize and establishes the foundation for them to succeed in a school environment. Many options exist, depending on the needs and desires of the family. Preschool may also be referred to as “nursery school” or “Pre-K” (pre-kindergarten).

Elementary School: It covers kindergarten through 5th or 6th grade, depending on the school district. Students usually begin elementary school at age 5 and stay through age 9, 10 or 11. Elementary school is often referred to as “primary education.”

Middle School or Junior High: It covers 6th and/or 7th grade through 8th grade. Students usually begin middle school at around age 10, 11 or 12 and continue through the age of 13. Middle school can be considered as primary or secondary education.

High School: It covers 9th grade through 12th grade. Students usually begin high school at around age 13 or 14 and graduate at age 17 or 18. High School is often referred to as “secondary education.” Students who graduate from high school receive a diploma and can go on to higher education (university or college) or get jobs.

Types of School: In the United States, there are two main types of schools: public schools and private schools. Public and private school cater to different students’ needs. For private schools, much of the funding comes from the students’ tuition and outside donations. Public schools do

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not charge tuition; funding is allocated by the state's department of education and the amount of money provided to each school district varies. Many states redistribute educational funds (paid through property tax collections) to help support schools that have less taxable property.

In some cities, there are separate "independent school districts" as well as "selective enrollment" schools, such as charter or magnet schools that often have smaller class sizes and strong academic reputations. While these schools are public, gaining admission is typically a competitive process.

Some school systems offer classes the year before kindergarten for children who do not have sufficient English conversation skills. There are other school systems that offer English as a Second Languages (ESL) programs during the school year for older children who need assistance with their English language skills. Check with the school district in which you plan to live and find out if these opportunities exist.

Meet with parents or guardians whose children are enrolled in the schools you are looking at or schedule a school visit with administrators to get a sense of the educational environments that you and your children prefer and more importantly, the setting in which you prefer your children will succeed.

Assessment: When enrolling your child in a U.S. school, district administrators will likely want to see documentation of your child's previous schooling. This is often provided in the form of a transcript from your child's school at home. Based upon those records, the administrators at the U.S. school will determine the equivalent grade level at which your child should be placed. This is especially important for grades 7 through 12, where your child may have already taken courses at home that will exempt him or her from repeating similar courses in the United States.

Children's Transportation: In many school districts across the United States, there are school-issued buses that pick up students and take them to their schools. Check with the main office of your school district, in advance, to determine transportation availability in your neighborhood and if applicable, routes, bus stop locations and general timelines for pickup and drop-off. Often, school districts that don't offer a bus system are in residential zones with homes within walking distance to school.

Recommendations: In order to enroll your child in a U.S. school, you will need to provide the following information during your visit with school administrators:

- Your child's official birth certificate or passport listing your child's birth date
- Photo identification of parent or guardian
- Proof of residency within the school district (e.g., housing lease, utility bill)
- Your child's school transcript or academic records
- Your child's immunization record with names and dates of vaccines (if available)