

The Education System in the USA

Introduction

In the USA, children start school when they are five or six years old. Depending on the state, schooling is compulsory until the age of 16 or 18. Children younger than five can go to a nursery school or preschool.

At the age of five or six, the children attend elementary school (also known as grade school or grammar school), which last six years. The first year at elementary school is called kindergarten.

After elementary school, students attend middle school (also known as junior high school) for three years. Then they continue at high school. In some states, students have to stay in school until they are 18 years old. In other states they may leave school at 16 or 17 with parental permission.



Age	School
< 5	nursery school / preschool
5-11	elementary school
11-14	middle school / junior high school
14-18	high school / senior high school

When students in the USA say what year they are in, they usually use ordinal numbers, e. g. 'tenth grade'. (In the UK students would use cardinal numbers, e. g. 'year ten'.)

Classes

At elementary school pupils primarily learn how to read, write and count. There are about 20 to 30 pupils in one class.

At junior and senior high school, mandatory subjects are English, maths, biology, chemistry, physics, physical education and history. Schools also offer optional courses from which the

students can choose, e. g. art, modern languages, computers. Physical education is a very important subject in the United States – many students participate in sports programs.

Gifted and talented students can take advanced courses in their schools or attend additional courses at community colleges in the afternoons or during the holidays. Often such courses are later acknowledged by universities, and can facilitate early graduation.

Grading Scale

In the USA (as in other English speaking countries) letter grades are used in reports.

- A > 90 % (excellent)
- B > 80 % (very good)
- C > 70 % (improvement needed)
- D > 60 % (close fail)
- E > 50 % (fail)
- F < 50 % (fail)

In general, only grades A to C are a 'pass' – a plus (+) or minus (-) might be added (e. g. A-, B+).

Different Kinds of Schools

Most students in the USA are enrolled in public schools. These are financed through taxes, so parents do not have to pay for their children's education. About 10 % of US students attend private schools, where parents have to pay a yearly fee.

Another option is homeschooling: approximately 1-2 % of parents in the USA educate their children at home. Some reasons for homeschooling are religious views, special needs (e. g. handicapped children), or problems in traditional schools (bullying, drugs etc.). However, there is also opposition to homeschooling claiming that the students have difficulties socializing with others, that homeschooling (often carried out by the parents) is of a poor academic quality and that (especially concerning religion) extremist views might be encouraged.

School Uniforms

It is not common for students in the USA to wear school uniforms, but many schools have dress codes telling students what kind of clothing is or is not allowed in school. Some schools (especially private schools) have started to require their students to wear school uniforms in order to improve school discipline and avoid 'fashion cliques'.