

Education and Special Education

Elementary School Teachers

Elementary School Teachers play an important role in fostering the intellectual and social development of children during their early years. 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, and 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. They 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 utilizes props to help children understand abstract concepts, solve problems, and develop critical thinking skills. As children get older, teachers use more sophisticated approaches, such as demonstrating science experiments or working with computers. They also encourage collaboration in solving problems by having students work in groups to discuss and solve the 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.

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 viewpoints. In addition students use the Internet for individual research projects and to gather information. Computers play a role in other classroom activities as well, from tasks such as solving math problems to learning English as a second language. Teachers use computers to record grades and perform other administrative and clerical duties as well. They must continually update their skills so that they can instruct and use the latest technology in the classroom.

Teachers 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 include multicultural programming in their lesson plans, to address the needs of all students, regardless of their cultural background.

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 challenging students. Occasionally, teachers must cope with unmotivated students, unruly behavior, and violence. Teachers may experience stress in dealing with large classes, heavy workloads, or old schools that are run down and lack modern amenities. Accountability standards may increase stress levels, with teachers expected to produce students who are able to exhibit a satisfactory performance on standardized tests in core subjects. Some teachers, particularly in public schools, are frustrated by the lack of control they have over what they are required to teach.

Teachers in private schools generally have smaller class sizes and more control over establishing the curriculum and setting standards for performance and discipline. Their students may also 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.

Many teachers work more than 40 hours a week, including school duties performed outside the classroom. Most teachers work the traditional 10-month school year, with a 2-month vacation during the summer. During the vacation break, those on a 10-month schedule may teach 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.

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.

Special education teachers are not included under Elementary School Teachers.

Education/Training

How to Obtain

Aspiring teachers need to hold a bachelor's degree, with a major in the field in which they wish to teach. Most undergraduate programs require students to perform a student-teaching internship.

A master's degree in education is helpful, though it is not always required in states or districts which accept teachers who have passed state licensing requirements and/or taken a professional development program.

Many States now offer professional development schools, which are partnerships between universities and elementary or secondary schools. Students enter these 1-year programs after the completion of their bachelor's degree.

In New York State, it is possible to be an entry-level elementary school teacher with a bachelor's degree, after completing initial certification requirements (described below.) However, for permanent certification, either a masters degree, or completion of an approved teacher preparation program is required.

All states and the District of Columbia require public school teachers to be licensed, but licensure is not required for teachers in most private schools. The requirements for a state license usually include passing a test for competency in basic skills, such as reading, writing, and teaching. Many school systems are moving toward implementing performance-based systems for licensure. A teacher must complete a certain number of hours of continuing education to renew their license.

All States now 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 mathematics and science.

New York State's Professional Standards & Practices Board for Teaching offers two levels of certification for teachers:

- The Initial Certificate is the entry-level certification and is valid for five years. This certificate requires:
 - a bachelor's degree while maintaining at least a 2.50 G.P.A., and/or participation in a state approved teacher preparation program
 - passage of a liberal arts exam, an elementary teaching skills exam, and a multi-subject content specialty test
 - attendance at workshops on child abuse, and school violence prevention
 - fingerprint clearance
 - Additional requirements may apply, depending on whether an applicant is part of a state approved teacher preparation program, or is applying from out of state
- The Professional Certificate is continuously valid, as long as the holder meets the minimum number of professional development hours. This certificate has the same requirements as the Initial Certificate, and requires:
 - permanent U.S. residence or citizenship
 - 1 year of mentored experience
 - 3 years of paid, full-time teaching experience

- a master's degree or completion of a New York State Approved Teacher Preparation Program

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards offers a voluntary national certification, valid for 10 years, after which it can be renewed. Certification requirements vary based on subject, and age of student. All States recognize national certification as a supplement, though not a substitute for state licenses or certifications, and many States and school districts provide special benefits to teachers who earn national certification. In New York State, possession of national certification can help fulfill some of the requirements for state certification.

More Information on Licensing and Certification:

- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards:
<http://www.nbpts.org/>.
- New York State Department of Education, Office of Teaching Initiatives:
<http://www.highered.nysed.gov/tcert/certificate/certprocess.html>.
- New York State Teacher Certification Examinations;
<http://www.nystce.nesinc.com/>.

Average Costs:

Tuition and fees for a master's degree in education costs an average of \$7,900 per year.* Completion time is generally two years.

Licensure and certification occurs at the state level, so the cost varies. In New York State, an application for a teaching certification costs \$50, for each certification (initial, professional).

Test registration fees total \$176, plus the cost of any exam study aids.

National Board certification costs \$2,565, which includes the application processing charge, initial fee, and assessment fee.

Costs of professional development/continuing education vary.

* Note: This figure does not include federal, state, or university financial aid resources such as grants, fellowships, scholarships or work study. It also does not include vocational rehabilitation or other state resources available specifically to people with disabilities. Out-of-pocket expense may be significantly less.