

How to Become a Kindergarten or Elementary School Teacher

About this section

Kindergarten and elementary school teachers must have a bachelor's degree. In addition, public school teachers must have a state-issued certification or license.

Education

All states require public kindergarten and elementary school teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree in elementary education. Some states also require kindergarten and elementary school teachers to major in a content area, such as math or science. They typically enroll in their university's teacher preparation program and also take classes in education and child psychology in addition to those required by their major.

In teacher education programs, future teachers learn how to present information to young students and how to work with young students of varying abilities and backgrounds. Programs typically include fieldwork, such as student teaching. For information about teacher preparation programs in your state, visit Teach.org.

Some states require all teachers to earn a master's degree after receiving their teaching certification.

Teachers in private schools do not need to meet state requirements, such as certifications or licenses. However, private schools typically seek kindergarten and elementary school teachers who have a bachelor's degree in elementary education.

Licenses, Certifications, and Registrations



Kindergarten and elementary school teachers need to be able to explain concepts in terms young students can understand.

All states require teachers in public schools to be licensed or certified. Those who teach in private schools are generally not required to be licensed.

Kindergarten and elementary school teachers are typically certified to teach early childhood grades, which are usually preschool through third grade, or elementary school grades, which are usually first through sixth grades or first through eighth grades.

Requirements for certification vary by state. However, all states require at least a bachelor's degree. They also require completing a teacher preparation program and supervised experience in teaching, typically gained through student teaching. Some states require a minimum grade point average. States often require candidates to pass a general teaching certification test, as well as a test that demonstrates their knowledge of the subject they will teach. Although kindergarten and elementary school teachers typically do not teach only a single subject, they may still be required to pass a content area test to earn their certification. For information on certification requirements in your state, visit Teach.org.

Teachers are frequently required to complete annual professional development classes to keep their license. Most states require teachers to pass a background check. Some states require teachers to complete a master's degree after receiving their certification.

All states offer an alternative route to certification for people who already have a bachelor's degree but lack the education courses required for certification.

Some alternative certification programs allow candidates to begin teaching immediately after graduation, under the supervision of an experienced teacher. These programs cover teaching methods and child development. After they complete the program, candidates are awarded full certification.

Other programs require students to take classes in education before they can teach.

Students may be awarded a master's degree after completing one of these programs. For information about alternative certification programs, contact [Teach-Now](#).

Training

In order to receive certification, teachers need to undergo a period of fieldwork, commonly referred to as student teaching. During student teaching, they work with a mentor teacher and get experience teaching students in a classroom setting. The amount of time required varies by state.

Important Qualities

Communication skills. Teachers must collaborate with teacher assistants and special education teachers. In addition, they need to discuss students' needs with parents and administrators.

Creativity. Kindergarten and elementary school teachers must plan lessons that engage young students, adapting the lessons to different learning styles.

Patience. Working with students of different abilities and backgrounds can be difficult. Kindergarten and elementary school teachers must respond with patience when students struggle with material.

Resourcefulness. Kindergarten and elementary school teachers need to be able to explain difficult concepts in terms that young students can understand. In addition, they must be able to get students engaged in learning and adapt their lessons meet students' needs.

Advancement

Experienced teachers can advance to serve as mentors to newer teachers or to become lead teachers. In these roles, they help less experienced teachers to improve their teaching skills.

With additional education or certification, teachers may become [school counselors](#), [school librarians](#), or [instructional coordinators](#). Some become assistant principals or [principals](#), both of which generally require additional schooling in education administration or leadership.