

Education and Special Education

Kindergarten Teachers

Kindergarten Teachers play an important role in fostering the intellectual and social development of young children during their formative years.

Teachers act as facilitators or coaches, using classroom presentations or individual instruction to help students learn fundamental skills. In kindergarten, this includes reading, writing, foundational math skills, as well as the social skills involved in participating in classroom activities and playing and learning with peers. Kindergarten teachers will use art, music, games, computers, or various kinds of exercises and activities to prompt creative and critical thinking skills in students. They plan and evaluate all aspects of student learning, and maintain order in the classroom. They are responsible for preparing report cards, and meeting with parents and school staff to discuss student progress or any problems.

Kindergarten 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. Kindergarten teachers use play and hands-on teaching, 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.

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. Teachers may experience stress in dealing with large classes, heavy workloads, or old schools that are run down and lack modern amenities. 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.

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 a 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.

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.

Education/Training

How to Obtain:

Aspiring kindergarten teachers need to hold a bachelor's degree, preferable with a major in education or a related field such as early childhood development. 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.

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. In these systems, a teacher must complete a certain number of hours of continuing education to renew their license.

All States 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.

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 & Certification:

- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards:
http://www.nbpts.org/userfiles/File/EC_Gen_AssessAtaGlance.pdf.
- 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 takes 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.

Test registration fees vary depending on the certification, ranging from \$88 - \$145, plus the cost of any exam study aids.

National Board certification costs \$3,000, 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.