



Education

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EDUCATION OVERVIEW

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Calendar



In most states, the school year lasts 180 days. School begins in most districts in late August or early September and continues until May or June, and most school districts have a two-week break at the end of December and a one-week break in March or April. Generally, the school day runs from about 8:00 am to 3:00 pm; however, daily schedules vary significantly from school to school.

Most elementary school students study in the same classroom all day with one teacher who teaches all subjects. The class may visit the gymnasium and library once or twice a week. Students have a daily lunch break of about 30 minutes.

The secondary school day usually consists of five to six instructional periods, with short breaks in between. Each secondary school student has a unique

schedule and set of classes, which is determined by the parents, school counselor, and student, based upon local graduation requirements and the student's interests, career goals, and academic ability. Middle and secondary school teachers remain in their own classrooms throughout the day and teach specialized subjects rather than the whole curriculum. At the end of each period, every student moves to a different classroom depending on his or her own schedule.

Students generally eat lunch in the school cafeteria. Some students bring their lunch from home, and others purchase their meals at school.

Transportation— for students attending schools located beyond walking distance from their homes, transportation via school bus is generally provided free of charge by the school district. More than half of U.S. public elementary and secondary students use this service to travel to and from school each day. Many parents drive their children to school, while many students age 16 and older drive themselves.

Extracurricular Activities— Many schools, especially at the secondary level sponsor activities such as sports, clubs, performing arts, and community service opportunities. In some school districts, prospective graduates are encouraged or required to perform a prescribed number of hours of community service.

Special points of interest:

- The year begins in August/September and goes through May/June.
- Free transportation is offered by the school district.
- The state of Texas sets the curriculum guidelines.

Curriculum

States set broad curriculum guidelines for what students should know and be able to do. School districts or schools generally select textbooks, adhering to state guidelines. Within these guidelines, schools, and even individual teachers, are generally expected to determine content details and the pace of instruction so that it is suited to the characteristics of students. Elementary schools do not generally assign students to specific teachers or classes based on their abilities. However, within clas-

ses, teachers often set up reading or mathematics groups based on student achievement levels. Students in different achievement levels may receive differentiated assignments so that they can progress at an appropriate pace in mastering the class curriculum.

At the secondary school level, each student's coursework is generally composed of courses required for graduation— with requirements varying by district and state— and

elective courses. As a statistical average, public high school students complete the following one-year-long courses between 9th and 12th grades: four years of English, four years of history or social studies, three years of science, two years of a foreign language, two years of the arts, four years of vocational, technical or business education, one year of computer science, and two to three years of other subjects.

Grading

Students receive classroom grades to describe their academic performance in each subject area. The grading system used is generally on a letter scale, with “A” being the highest and “F” being the lowest and representing failure. Letter grades are often converted into numeric “grade point averages” (GPAs) - especially at the secondary school level- to describe a student’s overall performance. In this case, A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, and F=0, with a 4.0 grade point average indicating a perfect grade record. Grading general-

ly assumes a starting point of 100, or perfect, and subtracts points for mistakes or poor-quality reasoning, rather than assuming a starting point of zero and adding points, as in some other grading systems. Typically, classroom teachers are entirely responsible for determining grades, basing their decisions on the quality of a student’s work, classroom test scores and level of participation.

A student’s promotion to the next year of schooling is based primarily on his or her

classroom grades. If a student’s grades are poor and the teacher believes that he or she is not ready to be promoted to the next grade, the student may be retained. Parents also generally play an important role in making such a decision. Students are most likely to be retained during the early grades of elementary school. Some states require students to pass an examination in order to graduate from secondary school. These examinations vary in content, format, and rigor.



School Choice

Students must pass examinations to be promoted from secondary school.

Public school districts generally assign students to particular schools based on place of residence, and those schools generally accept all students assigned to them. Nonetheless, in an effort to provide parents with more options for their children, many state governments and public school systems expand school choice through options such as open enrollment programs, magnet schools, and charter schools.

- Open enrollment programs allow parents the opportunity to choose from among all schools in their district, or even from among schools in other districts in their state.
- Magnet schools are public elementary or secondary schools that offer a specialized curriculum capable of attracting substantial numbers of students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Charter schools are public schools that provide enhanced parental choice and are exempt from many statutory and regulatory requirements. In exchange for increased flexibility, charter schools are held accountable for improving student academic achievement. The objective is to replace rule-based governance with performance-based accountability.

Private Schools

Private schools were the original schools in the U.S. and continue to provide parents a variety of options for educating their children. Private schools account for about 24 percent of all elementary and secondary schools, 10 percent of all students, and 12 percent of all teachers in the U.S. 77 percent of all private schools have a religious affiliation while the remainder are nonsectarian. Private schools are owned and governed by entities that are independent from any government- typically religious bodies or independent boards of trustees. Choice is a defining characteristic of private schools as families may choose private education, and private schools may generally choose which students to accept. Although nonpublic governance and enrollment choices are features that all private schools share, there is wide variation within the private sectors on many measures.

Private schools receive funding primarily from nonpublic sources: tuition payments and other private sources, such as foundations, religious bodies, alumni, or other private donors.

For a complete list of private schools in the Houston area visit www.houstonprivateschools.com



Language Proficiency

Students in U.S. schools represent nearly every ethnic background and nationality in the world. In the United States, English is clearly the predominant language for government, business, society, and instruction. English is taught to all students in U.S. schools, but more than 400 native languages other than English are represented in these same schools. In some schools, especially at the elementary level, students with limited English proficiency receive content instruction in their native language while they learn English. More than 9 percent of public school students (pre-kindergarten through 12th grade) are considered to have limited English proficiency.

There are approximately five million non-English speaking or limited English proficient (LEP) students who attend U.S. public schools. Although there are over 400 languages spoken by children throughout the United States, 80 percent of LEP children are native Spanish speakers. The annual growth rate of the LEP population in America has hovered at 10 percent over the past five years. To date, it is the fastest-growing student group in the country. About 52 percent of the children are born in the U.S., while the other 48 percent come to U.S. schools from other countries at different times and enter at different grade levels throughout the year. Currently, one in every nine students in the classroom is LEP and the numbers are projected to increase to one in five by they year 2030. According to a descriptive study titled *Descriptive Study of Services to LEP Students and LEP Students with Disabilities* commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education published September 2003, 43 percent of all teachers in the nation have at least one non-English speaking student in the classroom.



Special Education

A number of federal laws govern the provision of educational services to students with disabilities and specifically prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability by public entities or institutions that are recipients of federal financial assistance. The primary federal governing legislation for special education is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as amended in 2004.

About 96 percent of students with disabilities attend regular public or private schools, while only 4 percent attend separate institutions dedicated to education for students with disabilities. Among those students attending local public schools, most are educated in regular classes with appropriate aids and supports, such as designated periods of time meeting with a

qualified special education teacher. The amount of time spent outside the regular classroom varies and depends on the needs of the students. About half of all students with disabilities spend 80 percent or more of their day in regular classrooms.

96 percent of students with disabilities attend regular public or private schools.

Enrollment

Public School

To begin the process, establish which school your child is zoned to by attending the public school website (www.tea.state.tx.us). To enroll your child in the school, take the following documentation:

The **child's birth certificate** or other proof of age and identity (passport)

Social Security Number (not required, but preferred)

Proof of residential address (utility bill/ lease or deed agreement with parent's name and address)

The **child's current immunization records** (in English)

Grade transcript/Report card from previous school, if applicable

- To enroll in Pre-K the child must be 4 years old on or before September 1
- To enroll in Kindergarten the child must be 5 years old on or before September 1
- To enroll in First Grade the child must be 6 years old on the first day of school

Private School

Private schools will determine their own criteria for offering places to applicants. With limited space availability, combined with high levels of demand for certain schools in areas that typically have a large expatriate population, it can be frustrating for parents attempting to find the best school for their child.

Typically, private schools have an application deadline for new students. Once the deadline passes, schools may consider new applicants but only if there are spaces available. An interview with the Admissions Director is usually the best place to begin your application process. At this meeting you will be able to tour the school, ask questions, and review the applicable entry criteria and documentation requirements.

Documentation requirements will be similar to that required for public school, but additional emphasis will be placed on transcripts and references from previous schools attended.

Standardized testing is part of most private schools' admissions requirements. The two most commonly used independent school tests are the Secondary School Admissions Test (www.ssat.org) and the Independent School Entrance Exam (www.erbtest.org)

Parent Involvement

Parent's involvement in the schools and in their children's education is generally encouraged by principals and teachers.

Most parents attend general school meetings and parent-

teacher conferences each year, and many volunteer at their children's schools by tutoring, presenting special programs of interest, supervising students on field trips, or assisting with special events. Parents of chil-

dren with disabilities must be involved in the development of their child's specially designed instruction, which is referred to as the child's Individualized Education Program. There are also organization, such as parent

teacher associations, that work to support schools and increase the involvement of families in the educational progress of their children.



Public schools are not allowed to have a religious affiliation or teach religious doctrine.

Religion and School

The U.S. Constitution calls for a separation between government and religion; therefore, public schools are not allowed to have a religious affiliation or teach religious doctrine. They may however

teach about religions as part of academic studies such as history, social studies, or literature. Parents who desire a religiously oriented education for their children may send them to private

religious schools instead of public schools.

Technology

The use of technology is widespread in U.S. elementary and secondary schools, as well as in colleges and universities. Students use computers to write reports, collaborate with classmates, conduct research on the Internet and engage in many other activities. In the Fall of 2003, nearly 100 percent of public schools had access to the Internet, while 93 percent of public school instructional rooms had Internet access. While technology in schools has become increasingly common, several related challenges have presented themselves. These challenges include providing adequate training to teachers on how to effectively integrate technology into the curriculum and ensuring that the benefits of educational technology are available to students of all socioeconomic backgrounds.



Clothing

Most public school children are not required to wear a specific uniform. However, consult the school's handbook for information on 'dress code' rules that will apply. Typical rules address the length of skirts, prohibit

certain slogans or messages appearing on t-shirts, and ban flip-flops.

Private and parochial schools usually require students to wear a specific uniform and will pro-

vide detailed information on where to purchase the necessary items. Another good source of school uniforms will be the school PTA (Parent's Association) that will often sell second-hand/gently used uniforms.

Lunches

Most American children will remain at school to eat lunch. Typically a variety of foods, both hot and cold, will be offered for purchase on the school premises. Children can take money each day

To pay for lunch. Additionally, many schools now offer parents the opportunity to pre-pay a certain dollar amount. Check with the individual school for its procedure. Children from low income

Families will be offered free or reduced cost lunches provided through Federal funding. Children can also take a lunch from home to school.

Students will remain at school for lunch.

Early Childhood Education



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Child Care



A large portion of your child's day is spent with the day care provider you select. Take the time to be sure that you are leaving your child in safe hands. Here are a few recommendations:

- Visit several service providers so you can compare the services offered
- Ask if the child center is licensed by the state
- Ask the provider for references you can call
- Talk to other parents to find out how satisfied they are

- Ask to sit in and watch the staff interact with students before making up your mind

National Child Care Centers

La Petite Academy
www.lapetite.com

Knowledge Learning Corporation
www.knowledgelearning.com

Primrose School
www.primroseschool.com

KinderCare Learning Centers
www.kindercare.com

Childtime Learning Centers
www.childtime.com

Houston Montessori Center
www.houstonmontessoricenter.org

Special points of interest:

- Take time to be sure that you are leaving your child in safe hands.

Facilities

Downtown Houston

Crème de la Crème
www.cremedelacreme.com

Kandy Stripe Academy
www.kadystripeacademy.com

West Houston

Memorial Drive United Methodist Church

www.mdumckids.org

Grace Presbyterian Church
www.graceschool.org

Sugar Land

Children's Haven Daycare
www.chdaycare.com

The Walden School
www.thewaldenschool.com

The Woodlands

YMCA
www.southcounty-ymca.org

Children's Courtyard
www.childrenscourtyard.com

Galleria Area

Kompany Kids
www.kompanykids.com

Little Blooms Academy
www.littlebloomsacademy.com

Katy

Children's Lighthouse
<http://cincolighthouse.com>

Yellow Brick Road Preschool
www.katychurchofchrist.com

High School

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College Entrance Testing



Students planning to attend college will need to take college entrance exams during the last two years of high school. College entrance exams are set up by independent institutions and are primarily multiple-choice. The exams are designed to assess verbal and mathematical skills and are not based directly on course work. The most widely recognized are the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and the SAT II Subject Tests administered by The College Board. The American College Testing Program runs a parallel exam, called the American College Test (ACT). Both exams are recognized by accredited colleges and universities as a means of evaluating potential students.

SAT

Section	Average Score
Writing	494
Mathematics	515
Critical Reading	502

ACT

Section	Average Score
English	20.6
Mathematics	20.8
Reading	21.4
Science	20.9
Optional Writing Test	7.7

Special points of interest:

- Students planning to attend college must take the SAT and ACT tests
- International Baccalaureate Program is for students ages 16-19

International Baccalaureate Program

The International Baccalaureate Diploma Program is a comprehensive and rigorous two-year curriculum, leading to examinations for students between the ages of sixteen and nineteen. Based on the pattern of no single country, it is a deliberate compromise between the specialization required in some national systems and the breadth preferred in others. The general objectives of the IB program are to provide students with a balanced education, to facilitate geographical and cultural

mobility, and to promote international understanding through shared academic experiences. In the 30 years since its founding, the IB Diploma has become a symbol of academic integrity and intellectual promise. The student who satisfies its demands demonstrates a strong commitment to learning, both in terms of the mastery of subject content and in the development of the skills and discipline necessary for success in a competitive world.

Colleges and universities are well served by encouraging the enrollment of these able young scholars.

Schools offering the IB Program include:

Westchester Academy-Spring Branch ISD

<http://wais.springbranchisd.com>

Lamar High School-Houston ISD
www.lamarhs.com

Awty International School-Private

www.awty.org

Higher Education

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Overview



Students who have completed high school and would like to attend college or a university must attend what is referred to as an undergraduate school.

These are schools that offer either a two-year degree (called an associates degree) or a four-year degree (called a bachelors degree) in a specific course of study. That course of study is called the major. While most schools that offer a four-year degree will admit students who have yet chosen a major, all students are required to select (or declare) a major by their second year at school. Students who complete an associates degree can continue their education at a four-year school and eventually complete a bachelors degree.

- Degree-granting institutions in the United States can be called “school”, “college”, or “university”, they are used interchangeably. Colleges and institutes are in no way inferior to universities. As a general rule, colleges tend to be smaller and usually offer only undergraduate degrees, while a university also offers graduate degrees.
- An institute usually specializes in degree programs in a group of closely related subject areas (i.e. institutes of technology, institutes of fashion, or institutes of art and design).
- Within each college or university, there are schools that are responsible for the degree programs offered by the college or university (i.e. the school of arts or the school of business)

Special points of interest:

- A two-year degree is called an associates degree
- A four-year degree is called a bachelors degree
- Know which kind of college best fits your needs

Types of Colleges

State Universities or Public Universities

are founded and subsidized by U.S. state governments to provide low-cost education to residents of that state. State universities tend to be very large, with enrollments of 20,000 or more students, and generally admit a wider range of students than private universities.

Private Universities are funded by a combination of endowments, tuition fees, research grants, and gifts from their alumni. Tuition fees tend to be higher at private universities than at state universities. Colleges with a religious affiliation and single-

sex colleges are private. In general, private universities have enrollments of fewer than 20,000 students, and private colleges may have 2,000 or fewer students on their campus.

Community Colleges provide two-year associate degree programs as well as technical and vocational programs. Community colleges are community-based institutions that can be public or private. Sometimes they are called junior colleges or two-year colleges. A growing number of international students are choosing to study at community colleges.

Tuition costs are lower and many have agreements to allow students to transfer programs to move easily into the third year of a bachelor's degree at the local state university.

Technical or Vocational Colleges

specialize in preparing students for entry into, or promotion within, the world of work. They offer certificate and other short-term programs that train students in the theory behind a specific vocation or technology, as well as in how to work with the technology. Programs usually last two years or less and may be private or public.

English Language Ability

A basic requirement for successful study in the United States is the ability to communicate in English. If English is not your native language, U.S. universities and colleges will ask you to take an English language proficiency test before admitting you to a degree program.

For further information, check the admissions requirements for international students on the university's website or contact the admissions office.

TOEFL— the TOEFL test measures your ability to communicate in English in colleges and universities. It is the most widely accepted English-language test in the world. In Texas, you can take the Internet-based Test (iBT) or the Paper-based Test (PBT). TOEFL iBT measures reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills and takes approximately 4 1/2 hours. It is given on a computer 30-40 times a year at test centers throughout the world. TOEFL PBT measures listening,

structure (grammar), reading and writing and takes approximately 3 1/2 hours. It is given using paper and pencil 6 times a year at test centers where TOEFL iBT is not available.

GMAT— the GMAT exam measures basic verbal, mathematical, and analytical writing skills that you have developed in your education and work. It consists of three main parts, the Analytical Writing Assessment, the Quantitative section, and the Verbal section.

CELSA— CELSA is the Combined English Language Skills Assessment. It is a placement test use to enroll students in the appropriate ESL course. It is a computerized exam that consists of 75 multiple choice questions. There is not an audio or speaker portion of the test. Students have 45 minutes to complete the exam.

Enrollment Requirements

It is important to know the basic application requirements for colleges. Each institution will have its own set of admission requirements, but the minimum usually includes the following:

- Completed application form
- Application fee
- Proof of secondary school completion (High School Transcript)
- Standardized Test Scores (SAT/ACT)
- Letter of recommendation
- Certification of English

language proficiency

- Evidence of financial support

Each institution will have its own admission requirements.

Houston Area Colleges and Universities

Houston Community College

www.hccs.edu

Lone Star College System

www.lonestar.edu

Texas Southern University

www.tsu.edu

Texas Women's University—

Institute of Health Sciences

www.twu.edu/houston

University of Houston

www.uh.edu

Rice University

www.rice.edu

Sam Houston State University

www.shsu.edu

University of St. Thomas

www.stthom.edu

San Jacinto College

www.sanjac.edu

Houston Baptist University

www.bhu.edu

College of the Mainland

www.com.edu

The following offer online degree programs:

University of Phoenix

www.phoenix.edu

DeVry

www.devry.edu

Westwood College Online

www.westwoodonline.edu

University of Houston

www.uh.edu

Remington College

www.remingtoncollege.edu

Education Terminology

Campus– the land on which the buildings of a college or university are located

Class Rank– a number or ratio indicating a student’s academic standing in his or her graduating class

Electives– courses that students may choose to take

ESL– English as a Second Language. Specialized programs offered at select schools to accommodate the special education needs of students whose primary language is not English

Freshmen– 9th grade high school or first-year college student

Graduate– a student who has completed a course of study, either at the secondary or university level

Homeroom– In many schools, children move between classes for lessons. The homeroom is a classroom in which all students in a particular grade (or in a division of a grade) meet at certain times under the supervision of a teacher

Junior– 11th grade high school or third-year college student

Plagiarism– the use of another person’s words or ideas as your own

Prerequisite– program or course that a student is required to complete before being permitted to enroll in a more advanced program or course

Recess– a time for a break in studying. Young children usually play outside

Report Card– a written evaluation of a student’s progress in different subjects. Schools will determine a schedule when report cards are sent home

Senior– 12th grade high school or fourth-year college student

Semester– period of study lasting approximately 15 to 16 weeks or one-half the academic year

Sophomore– 10th grade high school or second-year college student

TAKS Test– The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills is based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and is part of the state assessment program

Withdrawal– the administrative procedure of dropping a course or leaving a university