High School Teachers

Summary

High school teachers prepare students for life after graduation by teaching lessons and skills students will need to attend college or enter the job market.

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What High School Teachers Do

High school teachers help prepare students for life after graduation. They teach academic lessons and various skills that students will need to attend college and to enter the job market.

Work Environment

High school teachers work in either public or private schools. Generally, they work school hours, which vary somewhat, but most also work evenings and weekends to prepare lessons and grade papers. However, most do not teach during the summer.

How to Become a High School Teacher

High school teachers must have a bachelor's degree. In addition, public school teachers must have a state-issued certification or license, which may require an academic background in the subject(s) they will be certified to teach.

Pay

The median annual wage for high school teachers was $55,050 in May 2012.

Job Outlook

Employment of high school teachers is projected to grow 6 percent from 2012 to 2022, slower than the average for all occupations. Overall growth is expected due to declines in student-to-teacher ratios and increases in enrollment. However, employment growth will vary by region.

Similar Occupations
High School Teachers generally specialize in a subject, such as English, math, or science.

High school teachers help prepare students for life after graduation. They teach academic lessons and various skills that students will need to attend college and to enter the job market.

**Duties**

High school teachers typically do the following:

- Plan lessons in the subjects they teach, such as biology or history
- Assess students to evaluate their abilities, strengths, and weaknesses
- Teach students as an entire class or in small groups
- Grade students’ assignments to monitor progress
- Communicate with parents about students’ progress
- Work with individual students to challenge them, to improve their abilities, and to work on their weaknesses
- Prepare students for standardized tests required by the state
- Develop and enforce classroom rules
- Supervise students outside of the classroom—for example, at lunchtime or during detention

High school teachers generally teach students from the 9th through 12th grades. They usually specialize in one subject area, such as math, science, or history. They may teach several different classes within that subject area. For example, a high school math teacher may teach courses in algebra, calculus, or geometry.

High school teachers may teach many grade levels throughout the day. For example, in one class they may have students from the 9th grade and then in the next class they may have students in 12th. In many schools, students are divided into classes based on their abilities, so teachers need to change their courses based on their students’ capabilities.

High school teachers see several different classes of students throughout the day. They may teach the same material—for example, world history—to more than one class if the school has many students taking that subject.

Some high school teachers instruct special classes, such as art, music, and physical education.

When they do not have classes, teachers plan lessons, grade assignments, and meet with other teachers and staff.

In some schools, there are teachers of English as a second language (ESL) or teachers of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) who work exclusively with students who are learning English. These students are often referred to as English language learners.
(ELLs). These teachers work with students individually or in groups to help them improve their English skills and help them with assignments for other classes.

Students with learning disabilities and emotional or behavioral disorders often are taught in traditional classes. Therefore, high school teachers may work with special education teachers to adapt lessons to these students’ needs and to monitor the students’ progress.

Some teachers maintain websites to communicate with parents about students’ assignments, upcoming events, and grades. For students, teachers may create websites or discussion boards to present information and to expand a lesson taught in class.

Some high school teachers coach sports and advise student clubs and other groups, activities which frequently happen before or after school.

Work Environment

High school teachers who specialize in science class may spend some of their day working in a lab.

High school teachers held about 955,800 jobs in 2012.

Most high school teachers work in either public or private schools. Some teach in public magnet and charter schools. Others teach in private religious or secular schools.

Most states have tenure laws, which means that after a certain number of years of teaching satisfactorily, teachers have some job security.

Seeing students develop new skills and gain an appreciation for knowledge and learning can be very rewarding. However, teaching may be stressful. Some schools have large classes and lack important teaching tools, such as computers and up-to-date textbooks. Most teachers are held accountable for their students’ performance on standardized tests, which can be frustrating. Occasionally, teachers must cope with unmotivated or disrespectful students.

Work Schedules

High school teachers generally work school hours, which vary from school to school. However, they often spend time in the evenings and on weekends grading papers and preparing lessons. In addition, they may meet with parents, students, and other teachers before and after school. Plus, teachers who coach sports or advise clubs generally do so before or after school.

Many work the traditional 10-month school year with a 2-month break during the summer. Although most do not teach during the summer, some teach in summer programs. Teachers in districts with a year-round schedule typically work 8 weeks in a row, are on break for 1 week, and have a 5-week midwinter break.

How to Become a High School Teacher
High 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 high school teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree. Most states require high school teachers to have majored in a subject area, such as chemistry or history. While majoring in a subject area, future teachers typically enroll in their higher education’s teacher preparation program and take classes in education and child psychology as well.

In teacher education programs, prospective high school teachers learn how to present information to students and how to work with 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](http://www.teach.org).

Some states require high school teachers to earn a master’s degree after earning their teaching certification.

Teachers in private schools do not need to meet state requirements. However, private schools typically seek high school teachers who have a bachelor’s degree and a major in a subject area.

**Licenses, Certifications, and Registrations**

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.

High school teachers typically are awarded a secondary or high school certification. This allows them to teach the 7th through the 12th grades.

Requirements for certification vary by state. However, all states require that teachers have at least a bachelor's degree. States 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 typically require candidates to pass a general teaching certification test, as well as a test that demonstrates their knowledge in the subject they will teach. For information on certification requirements in your state, visit Teach.org.

Often, teachers are required to complete annual professional development classes to keep their license. Most states require teachers to pass a background check, and 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 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 either type of program. For more information about alternative certification programs, visit [Teach-Now](http://www.teach-now.org).

**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 gain experience teaching students in a classroom setting. The amount of time required varies by state.
Important Qualities

Communication skills. Teachers must collaborate with other teachers and special education teachers. In addition, teachers need to discuss students’ needs with parents and administrators.

Patience. Working with students of different abilities and backgrounds can be difficult. High school teachers must be patient when students struggle with material.

Resourcefulness. High school teachers need to explain difficult concepts in terms students can understand. In addition, they must be able to engage students in learning and adapt lessons to each student’s needs.

Advancement

Experienced teachers can advance to be mentors or lead teachers. In these positions, they often work with less-experienced teachers to help them 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. Becoming a principal usually requires additional instruction in education administration or leadership. For more information, see the profiles on school and career counselors, librarians, instructional coordinators, and elementary, middle, and high school principals.

Pay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High School Teachers</th>
<th>Median annual wages, May 2012</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school teachers</td>
<td>$55,050</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education, training, and library occupations</td>
<td>$46,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total, all occupations</td>
<td>$34,750</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: All Occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy.  

The median annual wage for high school teachers was $55,050 in May 2012. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $36,930, and the top 10 percent earned more than $85,690.

High school teachers generally work school hours, which vary from school to school. However, they often spend time in the evenings and on weekends grading papers and preparing lessons. In addition, they may meet with parents, students, and other teachers before and after school. Plus, teachers who coach sports or advise clubs generally do so before or after school.

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Union Membership

Most high school teachers belonged to a union in 2012.

Job Outlook
Employment of high school teachers is projected to grow 6 percent from 2012 to 2022, slower than the average for all occupations. Overall growth is expected because of declines in student-to-teacher ratios and increases in enrollment. However, employment growth will vary by region.

From 2012 to 2022, the student-to-teacher ratio is expected to decline slightly. The student-to-teacher ratio is the number of students for each teacher in school. When this ratio declines, each teacher is responsible for fewer students, so more teachers are required to instruct the same number of students. The expected decline in the student-to-teacher ratio will increase demand for high school teachers.

Over the projections period, the number of students in high schools is expected to increase, and the number of classes needed to accommodate these students will rise also. As a result, more teachers will be required to teach these additional classes of high school students.

However, enrollment growth in high school is expected to be slower than enrollment growth in other grades. Therefore, employment of high school teachers is expected to grow more slowly than that of other education occupations.

Although overall student enrollment is expected to grow, there will be variation by region. Enrollment is expected to grow fastest in the South and West. In the Midwest, enrollment is expected to hold steady, but the Northeast is projected to have declines. As a result, employment growth for high school teachers is expected to be faster in the South and West than in the Midwest and Northeast.

Despite expected increases in enrollment, however, employment growth for public high school teachers will depend on state and local government budgets. When state and local governments experience budget deficits, school boards may lay off employees, including teachers. As a result, employment growth of high school teachers may be reduced by state and local government budget deficits.

Job Prospects

From 2012 to 2022, a significant number of older teachers are expected to reach retirement age. These retirements will create job openings for new teachers.

In addition to overall openings, many schools report having difficulty filling teaching positions for certain subjects, including math, science (especially chemistry and physics), English as a second language, and special education. As a result, teachers with education or certifications to teach these specialties should have better job prospects. For more information about high school special education teachers, see the profile on special education teachers.

There is significant variation by region of the country and school setting. Opportunities are likely to be better in the South and West, where rapid enrollment growth is expected. Furthermore, opportunities should be better in urban and rural school districts than in suburban school districts.

### Employment projections data for High School Teachers, 2012-22

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<td>Percent</td>
<td>Numeric</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school teachers</td>
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Note: All Occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy.
### Similar Occupations

This table shows a list of occupations with job duties that are similar to those of high school teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>JOB DUTIES</th>
<th>ENTRY-LEVEL EDUCATION</th>
<th>2012 MEDIAN PAY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career and Technical Education Teachers</strong></td>
<td>Career and technical education teachers instruct students in various technical and vocational subjects, such as auto repair, healthcare, and culinary arts. They teach academic and technical content to provide students with the skills and knowledge necessary to enter an occupation.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$51,910</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Childcare Workers</strong></td>
<td>Childcare workers care for children when parents and other family members are unavailable. They care for children's basic needs, such as bathing and feeding. In addition, some help children prepare for kindergarten or help older children with homework.</td>
<td>High school diploma or equivalent</td>
<td>$19,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elementary, Middle, and High School Principals</strong></td>
<td>Elementary, middle, and high school principals are responsible for managing all school operations. They manage daily school activities, coordinate curricula, and oversee teachers and other school staff to provide a safe and productive learning environment for students.</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>$87,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Coordinators</strong></td>
<td>Instructional coordinators oversee school curriculums and teaching standards. They develop instructional material, coordinate its implementation with teachers and principals, and assess its effectiveness.</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>$60,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers</strong></td>
<td>Kindergarten and elementary school teachers prepare younger students for future schooling by teaching them basic subjects such as math and reading.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$53,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Librarians</strong></td>
<td>Librarians help people find information and conduct research for personal and professional use. Their job duties may change based on the type of library they work in, such as public, school, and medical libraries.</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>$55,370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle School Teachers</strong></td>
<td>Middle school teachers educate students, typically in sixth through eighth grades. Middle school teachers help students build on the fundamentals they learned in elementary school and prepare them for the more difficult curriculum they will face in high school.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$53,430</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Postsecondary Teachers

A wide variety of academic and vocational subjects beyond the high school level. They also conduct research and publish scholarly papers and books.

- See How to Become One
- $68,970

### Preschool Teachers

Preschool teachers educate and care for children, usually ages 3 to 5, who have not yet entered kindergarten. They teach reading, writing, science, and other subjects in a way that young children can understand.

- Associate’s degree
- $27,130

### School and Career Counselors

School counselors help students develop social skills and succeed in school. Career counselors assist people with the process of making career decisions, by helping them choose a career or educational program.

- Master’s degree
- $53,610

### Social Workers

Social workers help people solve and cope with problems in their everyday lives. One group of social workers, clinical social workers, also diagnose and treat mental, behavioral, and emotional issues.

- See How to Become One
- $44,200

### Special Education Teachers

Special education teachers work with students who have a wide range of learning, mental, emotional, and physical disabilities. They adapt general education lessons and teach various subjects, such as reading, writing, and math, to students with mild and moderate disabilities. They also teach basic skills, such as literacy and communication techniques, to students with severe disabilities.

- Bachelor’s degree
- $55,060

### Teacher Assistants

Teacher assistants work under a teacher’s supervision to give students additional attention and instruction.

- Some college, no degree
- $23,640

## Contacts for More Information

For more information about teaching and becoming a teacher, visit

- [Teach.org](#)
- [American Federation of Teachers](#)
- [National Education Association](#)

For more information about teacher preparation programs, visit

- [Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation](#)

For more information about alternative certification programs, visit

- [Teach-Now](#)