Kindergarten and elementary school teachers teach basic subjects, such as math and reading.

### Quick Facts: Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2012 Median Pay</strong></td>
<td>$53,090 per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entry-Level Education</strong></td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Experience in a Related Occupation</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>On-the-job Training</strong></td>
<td>Internship/residency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Jobs, 2012</strong></td>
<td>1,519,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job Outlook, 2012-22</strong></td>
<td>12% (As fast as average)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment Change, 2012-22</strong></td>
<td>188,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### What Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers Do

Kindergarten and elementary school teachers prepare younger students for future schooling by teaching them basic subjects such as math and reading.

### Work Environment

Kindergarten and elementary school teachers work in public and private schools. They generally work school hours when students are present and use nights and weekends to prepare lessons and grade papers. Most kindergarten and elementary school teachers do not work during the summer.

### How to Become a Kindergarten or Elementary School Teacher

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

### Pay

In May 2012, the median annual wage for kindergarten teachers was $50,120. The median annual wage for elementary school teachers was $53,400 in May 2012.

### Job Outlook

Employment of kindergarten and elementary school teachers is projected to grow 12 percent from 2012 to 2022, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Growth is expected due to projected increases in enrollment as well as declines in student–teacher ratios. However, employment growth will vary by region.
What Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers Do

Kindergarten and elementary school teachers help students learn and apply important concepts. Many teachers use a hands-on approach, such as the use of props, to help students understand abstract concepts, solve problems, and develop critical thinking skills.

For example, they may show students how to do a science experiment and then have the students do the experiment. They may have students work together to learn how to collaborate to solve problems.

Kindergarten and elementary school teachers generally teach kindergarten through fourth or fifth grade. However, in some schools, elementary school teachers may teach sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. They most often teach students many subjects, such as reading, science, and social studies, which students learn throughout the day.

Some teachers, particularly those who teach young students, may teach a multilevel class that includes children who would traditionally be in different grades. They may have the same group of students for several years.

Similar Occupations

Compare the job duties, education, job growth, and pay of kindergarten and elementary school teachers with similar occupations.

More Information, Including Links to O*NET

Learn more about kindergarten and elementary school teachers by visiting additional resources, including O*NET, a source on key characteristics of workers and occupations.
Kindergarten and elementary school students spend most of their day in one classroom. Teachers may escort students to assemblies; to classes taught by other teachers, such as art or music; or to recess. While students are away from the classroom, teachers plan lessons, grade assignments, or meet with other teachers and staff.

In some schools with older students, teachers work in teams. Each teacher often specializes in teaching one of two pairs of specialties, either English and social studies or math and science. Generally, students spend half their time with one teacher and half their time with the other.

Some kindergarten and elementary school teachers teach special classes, such as art, music, and physical education.

Some schools employ teachers of English as a second language (ESL) or English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Both of these types of teachers work exclusively with students who are learning English, often referred to as English language learners (ELLs). The teachers work with students individually or in groups to help them improve their English skills and to help them with assignments they got in other classes.

Students with learning disabilities or emotional or behavioral disorders are often taught in traditional classes. Teachers work with special education teachers to adapt lessons to these students’ needs and monitor the students’ progress. In some cases, kindergarten and elementary school teachers may co-teach lessons with special education teachers.

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

**Work Environment**

Kindergarten and elementary school teachers held about 1.5 million jobs in 2012.

Kindergarten and elementary school teachers work in public and private schools. Some private early childhood education programs have preschool classes in addition to kindergarten.

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

Seeing students develop new skills and learn information can be rewarding. At the same time, however, teaching also 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’ performances on standardized tests, which can be frustrating.

**Work Schedules**

Kindergarten and elementary school teachers generally work during school hours when students are present. They may meet with parents, students, and other teachers before and after school. They often spend time in the evenings and on weekends grading papers and preparing lessons.

Many kindergarten and elementary school teachers work the traditional 10-month school year, with a 2-month break during the summer. Some teachers may teach summer programs. Teachers in districts with a year-round schedule typically work 8 weeks in a row,
are on break for 1 week before starting a new schooling session, and also have a 5-week midwinter break.

How to Become a Kindergarten or Elementary School Teacher

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

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

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.

**Pay**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers</th>
<th>Median annual wages, May 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school teachers, except special education</td>
<td>$53,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten and elementary school teachers</td>
<td>$53,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten teachers, except special education</td>
<td>$50,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total, all occupations</td>
<td>$34,750</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The median annual wage for kindergarten teachers was $50,120 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 $32,450, and the top 10 percent earned more than $78,230.

The median annual wage for elementary school teachers was $53,400. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $35,630, and the top 10 percent earned more than $83,160.

Kindergarten and elementary school teachers generally work during school hours when students are present. They may meet with parents, students, and other teachers before and after school. They often spend time in the evenings and on weekends grading papers and preparing lessons.

Many kindergarten and elementary school teachers work the traditional 10-month school year, with a 2-month break during the summer. Some teachers may teach summer programs. Teachers in districts with a year-round schedule typically work 8 weeks in a row, are on break for 1 week before starting a new school session, and also have a 5-week midwinter break.

**Union Membership**

Compared with workers in all occupations, kindergarten and elementary school teachers had a higher percentage of workers who belonged to a union in 2012.

**Job Outlook**

Employment of kindergarten and elementary school teachers is projected to grow 12 percent from 2012 to 2022, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Growth is expected due to projected increases in enrollment as well as declines in student–teacher ratios. However, employment growth will vary by region.

From 2012 to 2022, the student–teacher ratio across schools is expected to decline slightly. This ratio is the number of students for each teacher in the school. A decline in the ratio means that each teacher is responsible for fewer students, and, consequently, more teachers are needed to teach the same number of students.

In addition, the number of students enrolling in kindergarten and elementary schools is expected to increase over the coming decade, and the number of classes needed to accommodate these students will also rise. As a result, more teachers will be required to teach these additional classes of kindergarten and elementary school students.
Although overall student enrollment is expected to grow, there will be some variation by region. Enrollment is expected to grow fastest in the South and West. In the Midwest, enrollment is expected to hold steady, and the Northeast is projected to have declines. As a result, employment growth for kindergarten and elementary school teachers is expected to be faster in the South and West than in the Midwest and Northeast.

However, despite expected increases in enrollment, employment growth for kindergarten and elementary school teachers will depend on state and local government budgets. When state and local governments experience budget deficits, they may lay off employees, including teachers. As a result, employment growth of kindergarten and elementary school teachers may be somewhat reduced by state and local government budget deficits.

### Job Prospects

A significant number of older teachers are expected to reach retirement age between 2012 and 2022. Their retirement will create job openings for new teachers. However, many areas of the country already have a surplus of teachers who are trained to teach kindergarten and elementary school, making it more difficult for new teachers to find jobs.

Teachers of English as a second language (ESL) and special education teachers are in short supply. Kindergarten and elementary school teachers with education or certifications to teach these specialties should have better job opportunities.

Opportunities will vary by region and school setting. Job prospects should be better in the South and West, which are expected to have rapid enrollment growth. Furthermore, opportunities will be better in urban and rural school districts than in suburban school districts.

### Employment Projections Data for Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers, 2012-22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten and elementary school teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,519,700</td>
<td>1,708,200</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>188,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten teachers, except special education</td>
<td>25-2012</td>
<td>158,500</td>
<td>179,100</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school teachers, except special education</td>
<td>25-2021</td>
<td>1,361,200</td>
<td>1,529,100</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>167,900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

### Similar Occupations

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>JOB DUTIES</th>
<th>ENTRY-LEVEL EDUCATION</th>
<th>2012 MEDIAN PAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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>
</tr>
<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</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle, and High School Principals</td>
<td>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>High School Teachers</td>
<td>They 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.</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>$55,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Coordinators</td>
<td>They 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>Librarians</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>Middle School Teachers</td>
<td>Middle school teachers educate students, typically in sixth through eighth grades. They 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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postsecondary Teachers</td>
<td>Postsecondary teachers instruct students in a wide variety of academic and vocational subjects beyond the high school level. They also conduct research and publish scholarly papers and books.</td>
<td>See How to Become One</td>
<td>$68,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool Teachers</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>$27,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School and Career Counselors</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>$53,610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Workers</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>See How to Become One</td>
<td>$44,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>$55,060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Teachers
- 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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education and Training</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Annual Earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some college, no degree</td>
<td>$23,640</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Contacts for More Information

For more information about teaching and becoming a teacher, visit

- [Teach.org](http://www.teach.org)
- [American Federation of Teachers](http://www.aft.org)
- [National Education Association](http://www.nea.org)

For more information about teacher preparation programs, visit

- [Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation](http://www.cacep.org)

For more information about alternative certification programs, visit

- [Teach-Now](http://www.teachnow.org)

### O*NET

- [Kindergarten Teachers, Except Special Education](http://www.onet.onl)
- [Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education](http://www.onet.onl)

### Suggested citation:


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