

Education in the United States

In the United States there are programs of instruction offered to children, adolescents, and adults through schools and colleges operated by state and local governments, as well as by private groups and religious organizations. American public education is primarily the responsibility of the states and individual school districts.

Elementary Education is the earliest program of education for children, beginning generally at the age of five or six and lasting from six to eight years. In much countries of the United States a year of **kindergarten** often precedes the first grade of the 8-year elementary course. In the larger communities special classes or schools are usually provided for children who are physically or mentally handicapped. The purpose of the elementary school is to introduce children to the skills, information, and attitudes necessary for proper adjustment to their community and to society. Basically, the subjects taught are reading, writing, spelling, mathematics, social studies, science, art, music, physical education, and handicrafts. These are often supplemented with other subjects, such as foreign languages. Over the years new subject matter has made the elementary school curriculum more advanced than heretofore.

On completion of their elementary schooling, pupils continue their education in a junior high school or high school.

Secondary Education is a program of public education immediately following elementary schooling. It begins generally at the age of 12 to 14 and continues from four to six years. Some types of secondary education(such as vocational schooling) are terminal and prepare the student for employment upon graduation. Others lead to advanced training in colleges, universities, or technical schools. In the U.S., secondary education includes the junior and senior high schools. The purpose of secondary education is to expand knowledge of subjects already studied, including the systematic study of literature, foreign languages, sciences, **mathematics**, social studies, and other subjects essential for physical and intellectual development and to prepare students as future citizens. In some countries, military training is also required.

Higher Education

During the 20th century participation in higher or postsecondary education in the United States has increased as dramatically as it has in American high schools. At the beginning of the century about 2 percent of Americans from the ages of 18 to 24 were enrolled in a college. There were fewer than 1000 colleges then, with enrollment totaling about 157,000 students. Near the end of the century more than 60 percent of this age group, or over 14 million students, were enrolled in about 3500 four-year and two-year colleges. This tremendous increase does not even include the 6500 postsecondary vocational and technical institutes that enroll millions of additional students.

There are few very well known and very old colleges, such as Harvard (since 1636), College of William and Mary (1693), and Yale(1701).

In the 19th century rivalry among Protestant denominations, and competition among towns seeking a commercial edge over their rivals, were responsible for the creation of hundreds of colleges. Almost all were privately supported, and many failed to survive. Nevertheless, 573 colleges existed in the United States in 1870, a testament to civic and religious support and to the faith of Americans in the power of schooling.

Unlike in elementary and secondary education, where public support and control of schools soon became the norm, public institutions never dominated college and university education. Government officials also believed colleges served broad public purposes, such as the training of physicians or engineers.