

## THE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF THE USA

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the structure of the education system of the United States, its governance mechanisms, sources of funding, and key characteristics. The study examines the stages of the education system in a systematic manner, from preschool education to higher education. It also discusses the advantages and challenges of the system, including financial inequality and the high cost of higher education. The article aims to highlight the global significance of the U.S. education system.

**Keywords:** Education system, United States, K–12 education, higher education, funding, curriculum, standardized testing, GPA, universities, educational inequality

### **Introduction**

The education system of the United States is one of the most complex and diverse in the world. It serves millions of learners from various cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. One of its defining characteristics is decentralization, meaning that education is governed not by a single national authority but by federal, state, and local institutions.

"The U.S. Department of Education plays an important but limited role, mainly providing funding and ensuring equal access to education. However, most decisions regarding curriculum, standards, and policies are made at the state and local levels. This structure allows flexibility and innovation, but it also creates differences in educational quality across regions.

This article aims to examine the structure, funding, and key features of the U.S. education system, as well as its strengths and challenges."<sup>1</sup>

The education system of the United States is one of the most complex and diverse in the world. It serves millions of students from different cultural, economic, and social backgrounds. A defining feature of the system is its decentralization: instead of a single national authority controlling all schools, responsibility is distributed among federal, state, and local governments. This structure allows flexibility and innovation but also leads to differences in quality and access across regions.

### **Governance and Administration**

Education governance in the United States operates on three main levels: federal, state, and local.

At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Education plays a supportive role rather than a controlling one. It provides funding to schools and universities, enforces federal laws related to education (such as equal access and anti-discrimination policies), and collects national education data. However, it does not determine what students are taught in classrooms.

State governments have the most significant authority. Each state establishes its own academic standards, graduation requirements, and teacher certification rules. As a result, what students learn and the requirements for graduation can differ from one state to another.

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<sup>1</sup> Janet Cameron, *The English speaking world*, Black Cat, Genoa, London, 2012, p. 79

Local school districts are responsible for the day-to-day management of schools. They make decisions about budgets, hire teachers and staff, and implement policies. School boards, often elected by local communities, play a key role in decision-making.

This multi-level governance system encourages local responsiveness but can also create inequality between districts with different levels of funding.

#### Structure of the Education System

##### Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education in the United States includes programs for children before they enter formal schooling. Preschool, also known as pre-kindergarten (Pre-K), is available for children aged three to five. These programs focus on developing basic cognitive abilities, language skills, social interaction, and emotional development.

Participation in preschool is not universal, as availability and affordability vary. Some public programs target low-income families, while private preschools can be expensive.

Kindergarten is usually the first formal year of schooling and is offered in most public schools. It helps children transition into structured learning environments and introduces basic academic skills such as reading readiness and number recognition.

##### Primary and Secondary Education (K–12)

“K–12 education is compulsory in most states and forms the foundation of the U.S. education system.

##### Elementary School

Elementary education typically spans kindergarten through grade five or six. Students are taught by one main teacher who covers multiple subjects. The curriculum emphasizes foundational skills, including literacy, numeracy, basic science concepts, and an introduction to history and geography.

Teaching methods often include interactive activities, group work, and the integration of technology to support learning.

##### Middle School

Middle school, sometimes called junior high school, usually includes grades six through eight. At this stage, students begin to move between classrooms and are taught by different teachers who specialize in specific subjects.

The curriculum becomes more advanced, and students are introduced to subjects such as algebra, biology, and more detailed historical studies. Middle school also plays a crucial role in social development, as students experience significant physical and emotional changes during adolescence.

##### High School

High school education covers grades nine through twelve and represents the final stage of compulsory education.

Students must accumulate a certain number of credits to graduate. Each course completed earns credits, and students are required to take core subjects such as English, mathematics, science, and social studies. In addition, they can choose electives that match their interests, such as computer science, foreign languages, arts, or vocational training.

Many high schools offer advanced programs, including Advanced Placement (AP) courses, which allow students to earn college credit while still in high school.

Extracurricular activities—such as sports, music, drama, and academic clubs—are an essential part of the high school experience and are often considered in college admissions.”<sup>2</sup>

#### Types of Schools

The U.S. education system includes a variety of school types designed to meet different needs.

Public schools are the most common and are funded by government sources. They are free to attend and must follow state guidelines.

Private schools operate independently and charge tuition. They may have religious affiliations or follow specialized educational philosophies.

Charter schools are publicly funded but operate independently of traditional school district rules. They often experiment with innovative teaching methods.

Magnet schools focus on specific areas such as science, technology, or the arts and often attract students from across different districts.

Homeschooling allows parents to educate their children at home, following state guidelines. This option has grown in popularity in recent years.

#### Curriculum and Standards

“There is no unified national curriculum in the United States. Instead, states determine their own educational standards. Many states have adopted the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which provides guidelines for what students should know in mathematics and English language arts at each grade level.

The curriculum is designed to balance core academic subjects with broader skills. In addition to traditional subjects, schools emphasize critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration.

In high school, students have greater flexibility to tailor their education through elective courses and specialized programs.”<sup>3</sup>

#### Assessment and Evaluation

“Assessment in the U.S. education system combines continuous evaluation with standardized testing.

Teachers regularly assess students through homework, quizzes, projects, presentations, and class participation. These methods provide ongoing feedback and help track progress.

Standardized tests are administered at the state level to evaluate student achievement and school performance. These tests are often used for accountability purposes and to identify areas for improvement.

For college admissions, students commonly take standardized exams such as the SAT, administered by the College Board, or the ACT, conducted by ACT Inc.. These exams assess skills in reading, writing, and mathematics and are one of several factors considered by universities.

#### Grading System

The grading system in the United States typically uses letter grades to evaluate student performance. Each letter corresponds to a range of percentages and is converted into a Grade Point Average (GPA).

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<sup>2</sup> Omon Muminov, Ilham Tuhtasinov, Anorkhon Akhmedova, Country study, O’DJTU, 2015, p.110

<sup>3</sup> Iskhak Yakubov, English speaking countries, Oliy va o’rta maxsus ta’lim vazirligi tomonidan, p. 203

The GPA is a numerical representation of a student’s academic performance, usually on a 4.0 scale. Some schools use weighted GPAs, where more challenging courses such as honors or Advanced Placement classes carry additional points.

The GPA plays a critical role in college admissions and scholarship decisions.”<sup>4</sup>

Higher Education

Types of Institutions

The United States offers a wide range of higher education institutions.

Community colleges provide two-year programs leading to associate degrees or certificates. They are generally more affordable and often serve as a pathway to four-year universities.

Colleges and universities offer undergraduate programs leading to bachelor’s degrees. These institutions may be public (state-funded) or private..

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the education system of the United States is a dynamic and multifaceted structure that reflects the country’s diversity and values. Its decentralized nature allows for flexibility and innovation, making it one of the most influential education systems globally.

At the same time, challenges such as inequality and high costs highlight the need for ongoing improvement. Despite these issues, the U.S. education system continues to play a crucial role in shaping national development and influencing global educational trends.

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<sup>4</sup> X.A. Mamatqulov, X.B. Bakirova, Mamlakatshunoslik fanidan o’quv qo’llanma, O’DJTU, 2018, P. 143