

Transition Truths: Education

The Education system provides teaching and support to foster the development of knowledge, skills, values, and habits for the American people. This education, from elementary to high school, helps prepare people for employment. Education after high school is called Postsecondary Education and is a different system covered later in this tool. However, some education programs build a bridge between high school and postsecondary education. For example, students may enroll in community college classes as a high school student, as well as in vocational, career, or technical education programs. This is one example of how systems are connected and can work together.

How the System Works

The Education system consists of the people, places, policies, and programs that work together so that all children and youth can learn through high-quality experiences in schools that will effectively foster their educational growth. Middle schools and high schools fill the crucial role of helping people take a next step in their education and preparing them for education, training, and/or employment after high school.

People and Places

The people in this system are students, teachers, school board members, administrators, counselors, and policymakers who make rules about what can happen in education settings. At the federal level, the [U.S. Department of Education](#) fosters educational excellence and equal access. Some specific groups of students receive additional supports because they face disadvantages in school-based settings, such as English language learners, students with disabilities, and students in rural areas. This system's work happens in places like elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, libraries, and community centers.

Policies and Programs

The [Elementary and Secondary Education Act \(ESEA\)](#) was passed in 1965 to provide grants to school districts serving low-income students, money for library books, funding for special education centers, and scholarships for low-income college students. This law has been updated over the years, but it is still a primary way that the federal government can make sure states and school districts are delivering high-quality education to all students. In 2015, the [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) updated this law by prioritizing education issues like making sure schools prepare students for college and careers, and holding states accountable for setting meaningful goals to improve the progress of all students. A particular goal here is to improve each state's lowest performing schools (like those with high rates of high school dropouts) with specific evidence-based reforms. It is important to note that this law weighs other factors beyond standardized testing

scores when assessing a school's quality, including multiple measures of student learning and progress. In addition, the law requires schools to develop plans to reduce bullying, suspensions and expulsions, and the use of seclusion and restraint with students.

[The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 \(IDEA\)](#) is an important piece of civil rights legislation that guarantees students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. It also requires the use of an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which is a plan developed along with the youth and their family, to drive their education and related services, and that provides for due process rights to assure compliance. These programs help assess, support, and develop student success through educational supports, including special education services or accommodations, such as materials in alternate formats, extended time on testing, or speech therapy. These opportunities should be tailored to the individual's needs, preferences, and learning styles. IEPs also have a transition planning component that must begin no later than age 16, which helps students think through how their educational goals relate to their career and life goals after high school. This law also allows students with disabilities to receive education, supports, and services through age 21.

[The Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) authorizes grants for services like Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), which support many groups of people in gaining the skills they need to become employed, including through achieving educational goals. The U.S. Department of Education also issued regulations and guidance for Section 504 of the Act, which bans discrimination on the basis of disability for any entity that receives federal funding, including schools. These regulations interpret Section 504 as guaranteeing students with disabilities the right to a free appropriate public education. This includes special education services that meet individual needs.

[Individualized Learning Plans \(ILPs\)](#) are tools many states use in schools to guide youth through the process of career development. This process helps youth connect their strengths and interests to career options and make a plan for how they will prepare for the career they want. ILPs can be important for overall academic planning and for choosing the courses that are best aligned with individual goals. They are often used alongside and to enhance the quality of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities. They also help guide high school graduates who are ready to go on to college and/or their chosen careers. ILPs are not federally-mandated and vary by state. Youth can research the specific policy in their state at the **[Individualized Learning Plans Across the U.S.](#)** web map, hosted by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy.

The **[Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006](#)** solidifies the connection between education and work by increasing access to career and technical education programs. These programs often emphasize skill sets for employment in specific trades or jobs. Students may access these programs in high school as a pathway to postsecondary education and careers.

The U.S. Department of Education also funds **[Parent Training and Information Centers](#)** serving families of children and young adults with disabilities from birth to age 26. These centers connect families to training, advocacy, and other resources to ensure their children receive access to

education and other community supports.

Eligibility

Public education is available to everyone and divided into four stages:

- Pre-Kindergarten,
- Elementary,
- Secondary, and
- Postsecondary.

All states require that children be in school no later than age 6 and remain in school until they are at least 16. Education prior to elementary school, known as early learning or pre-Kindergarten, is an important preparatory experience for many young students and may be accessible to children depending on geographic location and family income. In addition, non-public education known often as private schooling is an alternative to elementary and secondary public education, which may be accessible to youth and young adults depending on family income.

Youth who are identified and assessed as having a disability typically are entitled to receive special education services through IDEA until they are 21, while some states extend services to older students. IDEA lists 13 different disability categories under which youth may be eligible for services. The disability categories listed in IDEA are autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, or visual impairment.

Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is no list of “approved” disabilities that are protected. A person with a “disability” is simply one who:

1. Has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities,
2. Has a record of such an impairment, **or**
3. Is regarded as having such an impairment.