



A Union of Professionals

Becoming a **TEACHER**





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OUR MISSION

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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Contents

Becoming a Teacher	4
Why Teach?.....	4
What Do Teachers Do?.....	6
How Much Do Teachers Earn?	8
Career Ladders for Teachers	9
How Do I Become a Teacher?	10
What Can I Do Now to Prepare for a Teaching Career?	15
Choosing What to Teach	17
Teacher Diversity	18
Financial Aid for Teachers	19
What Is a Teachers Union?	20
Resources for Teachers	22
Conclusion	23

Becoming a Teacher

Teaching, while both challenging and demanding, is an incredibly rewarding profession. As educators, teachers are the creators of tomorrow; they make critically important contributions to society by preparing students for college, careers and citizenship in a democratic society. Teachers work in an exciting and fast-paced environment where they are required to make quick decisions throughout the day; deliver effective instruction; cultivate a rigorous and nurturing climate for learning; and foster the academic, social, and emotional growth of their students. Teachers derive great personal satisfaction by improving the lives of their students. If you are interested in a personally fulfilling career helping children realize their dreams, improving our society and advancing social justice, read on to find out why becoming a teacher is the right choice for you!

Why Teach?

A career in teaching, which requires hard work and dedication, is immensely rewarding. Teachers have a direct and often profound effect on the lives of their students. For many students, teachers are among the most memorable and influential people in their lives. Likewise, many students make a large and lasting impression on their teachers.

Teachers are directly responsible for educating future generations. That's why, as an educator, it is gratifying to watch students develop and achieve academically, socially and—eventually—professionally.

Teachers are important to the health of our society. Without passionate, hardworking educators, our future would be in jeopardy. Teachers also play an important role in confronting many inequalities in our society. Poverty, racism, and all forms of bigotry and ignorance can be diminished by a meaningful, high-quality education. Ensuring an equitable education and opportunity for all are crucial components in creating a more just society and teachers are indispensable in securing this objective.



Beyond the satisfaction of preparing students for successful lives and making meaningful contributions to society, teachers have a stimulating job that requires them to utilize effective decision-making skills, work collaboratively with interesting people from a variety of backgrounds, and master and convey essential, complex subject matter in an engaging and accessible way. Teachers are dedicated to continuously expanding their professional expertise and constantly improving their craft. Outside the classroom, teachers are often compelling advocates for finding solutions to problems related to public education, child welfare and social justice.

Our society faces many challenges in the 21st century, and more and more Americans are organizing to challenge the status quo, advocating for the bold solutions our nation needs to overcome its many problems. Teachers have long been at the forefront of progressive movements, as many see the devastating effects of poverty and discrimination in their classrooms every day. Inside the classroom, teachers advocate for social justice by developing culturally competent teaching strategies, implementing curricula that value diversity and the history of American social justice movements, and by actively engaging students in discussions and projects related to current events. Outside the classroom, teachers can work through their unions and community organizations to promote solutions to issues they care about. Anyone who wants to effect change in their community, their country and the world can make a meaningful difference by entering the teaching profession.

What Do Teachers Do?

Teachers are responsible for many things that happen inside and outside a classroom. Their primary responsibility is to instruct students and facilitate learning, which is complex and demanding work. It requires engaging with students in specific subject areas using a variety of teaching techniques, maintaining a safe and welcoming classroom, developing lesson plans, assessing student progress, and interacting with parents and other members of the community.

THE SCHOOL DAY AND BEYOND:

Generally, teachers arrive at school before students to prepare for the day's lessons. During regular school hours, teachers instruct students and facilitate learning. When students leave at the end of the school day, teachers continue working. They plan for the next day. They work with students who stay after school for help. They meet with parents, principals and other teachers. They evaluate student work, including homework, tests, projects and papers. Many teachers are involved in other school-based activities, such as coaching a sports team, supervising a club or leading the school band.

Most students are on summer break from mid June until late August, although some communities start summer break as early as May, and others end break as late as September. Teachers aren't teaching every day during this time, but many still work—preparing the classroom and curriculum for the upcoming school year; teaching summer school; or participating in professional development conferences, trainings or fellowships to increase their skills and knowledge.



Share My Lesson (SML)

is steadfast in its support of education professionals in every school and for parents around the country. SML offers free access to lesson plans, professional development and classroom activities created by dedicated educators who are committed to making a difference for all students, online, 24/7.

Powered by the American Federation of Teachers, Share My Lesson is a trusted resource for quality education materials, many of which are designed to support teachers implementing standards.

Access over 300,000 K-12 resources by visiting: www.sharemylesson.com

How Much Do Teachers Earn?

Teacher pay varies greatly depending on where you live and what you teach. Different districts, states and regions compensate teachers differently. Teacher pay is strongly influenced by the cost of living in any given location.

However, most school districts tend to follow certain guidelines for setting the pay scale. For example, districts usually pay public school teachers based on their level of teaching experience. Many receive additional pay based on the amount of education they have beyond a bachelor's degree. In many districts, teachers with master's degrees earn up to twice as much as those with only a bachelor's degree. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the average teacher salary in the 2012-13 school year (the most current year with available data) was \$52,383; the average starting salary for teachers was \$36,141. Of course, salaries are constantly changing and can vary depending on where you teach; salaries tend to be higher where the cost of living is higher.

- The highest average teacher salary in 2012-13 was \$70,906 (District of Columbia), while the lowest was \$41,994 (Mississippi).
- Teachers in some of the highest-paying districts in states like California, Michigan, New York and Pennsylvania with about 25 years of experience, advanced degrees and additional school responsibilities can make more than \$100,000.

For a complete list of salaries by state, visit <https://nces.ed.gov/> and search for “teacher salaries.” Be sure to look elsewhere online for more specific information about salaries and benefits in your district.



Career Ladders for Teachers

Many districts are implementing new, innovative career ladders for teachers. Providing opportunities for career advancement is helpful for teachers who want to take on new roles and earn a higher salary but may not want to leave the classroom. While each district will offer different opportunities, several career advancement possibilities are growing in popularity nationwide.

MODEL TEACHERS: Model teachers remain in the classroom as full-time teachers. However, as seasoned educators who have demonstrated expertise in their craft, model teachers invite other educators into their classroom for observations. These individuals will learn from the model teacher, who demonstrates a particular lesson or pedagogical skill that the observing teachers can develop and implement in their own classrooms.

MENTOR TEACHERS: Like model teachers, mentors continue to teach in the classroom full time. However, in addition, mentor teachers contribute to the development of their fellow teachers, particularly those new to the profession. As mentors, they observe and provide feedback to new teachers to help them improve. In some schools and districts, mentor teachers also play a role in leading a lesson study or professional development group during the school year.

MASTER TEACHERS: The designation of master teacher is reserved for individuals who have demonstrated a consistent level of excellence in their work for many years. Master teachers play an integral role in school improvement. They help develop curriculum, mentor colleagues who need support to improve, and facilitate professional development. Master teachers continue to spend most of their work hours in the classroom; however, their responsibilities often require them to cut back on their teaching load, and to spend some time working while other teachers are on school breaks.

Of course, there are also traditional career pathways for teachers who want to continue working in the field of education but who do not mind leaving the classroom. Some teachers may be interested in becoming principals, district administrators or superintendents. Others may be interested in shaping policy as analysts, advocates, or even elected officeholders. No matter what your long-term goals may be, there is a career pathway for you in education—both inside and outside the classroom.

How Do I Become a Teacher?

Every state certifies its own teachers, so the requirements vary from state to state. It is important that you find out what the specific requirements for teacher certification are where you live. This information can be found online, or by contacting a representative at your local college's teacher education program or state education department. While specific requirements vary, some general requirements hold true for all or most states.

TEACHER EDUCATION AND ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS: All states require teacher candidates to go through some kind of teacher education program. The most common route to certification is through a traditional teacher education program at a college or university. In general, all programs include three components: required course work for the subject and grade level you want to teach; courses on pedagogy, or how to teach; and clinical experience, which is often referred to as “student teaching.” Teacher candidates who complete all the requirements of a teacher education program and graduate from a four-year college or university will be eligible for certification.

Alternatives to traditional teacher preparation programs exist, but they vary greatly in quality. For example, some colleges and universities offer online courses that prepare teacher candidates. Due to the fast growth of online courses, it can be difficult to determine their quality. If you are considering an online program to prepare for teacher certification, carefully research your options before you enroll.

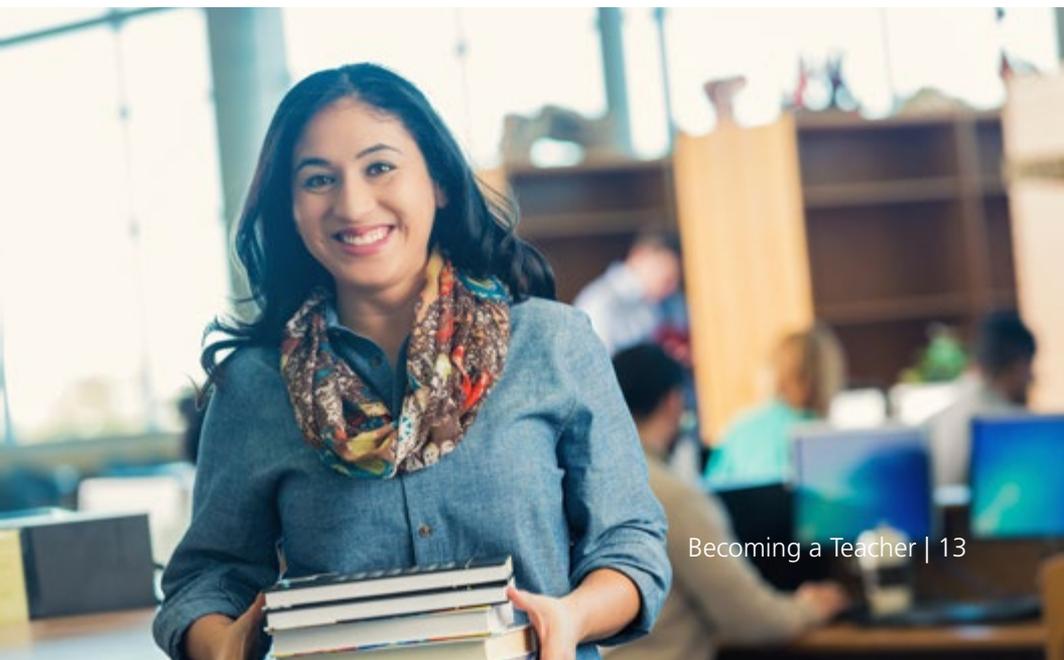
Depending on your location and needs, other alternative certification programs may be available. Alternative certification programs like Teach for America, teacher fellowships or residencies, and teacher corps programs prepare candidates to meet the requirements for teaching certification. Most of these alternative certification programs require at least a bachelor’s degree for candidates to be considered. Additionally, these programs condense years of preparation into a short time period before candidates become teachers, which can leave some teachers feeling unprepared. It is important to consider the pros and cons of any teacher preparation program before enrolling.

No matter which path you choose to become a teacher, keep the following in mind when researching and considering different teacher education programs:

- 1. ACCREDITATION:** Every reputable program is certified by one of the major teacher education accrediting institutions in the United States. It is essential that you enroll in an accredited program; most states and districts will not accept your degree or training if it was completed through an institution or program that is not accredited.
- 2. FIT:** The program you choose should provide you with high-quality course work in the area or areas you want to teach. For example, some schools may have a better reputation in secondary education than in elementary. It is important to choose a program that fits with your teaching aspirations.
- 3. CLINICAL EXPERIENCE:** It is vital for all teacher candidates to have opportunities to practice and develop their skills and knowledge in a real classroom setting with real students. While most teacher education programs will provide candidates with a student teaching experience, the best programs have multiple clinical experiences throughout the duration of the program. These programs include professors and courses that help you to build and reflect on your classroom experiences.
- 4. CERTIFICATION DATA:** Find out how graduates of the program do on state-administered certification tests and what percentage of graduates successfully receive their teaching certification. This information indicates how well the program will prepare you to fulfill the state's certification requirements.
- 5. RECIPROCITY:** Reciprocity is an agreement between states that allow teachers certified in one state to become certified in another state. If you aren't sure where you are going to be settling after completing your teacher education program, look into the reciprocity agreements your state has with other states to see where you will be eligible for certification.

CERTIFICATION: Once you have successfully completed your teacher education program, you still will need to apply for certification in the state where you want to teach. Generally, states will require teacher candidates to pass a number of tests, such as the PRAXIS series, to qualify for certification. These tests often measure academic literacy, knowledge of pedagogy, and mastery of content in the subject area you have chosen to teach. Some states are implementing new portfolio assessments, such as the edTPA, that require candidates to submit film clips, essays, and student work samples to demonstrate their readiness for certification. Again, these testing requirements vary from state to state, so be sure to check online to determine the specific requirements of the state in which you plan to teach.

Once certified, you are qualified to teach in that state’s public schools. Most licenses and certificates are granted on a provisional basis, which means they are valid for a certain amount of time—usually three to five years. To qualify for a “permanent” certificate or license, each state has additional requirements, such as obtaining a higher degree, completing additional course work and/or taking another test. For specific information about the certification process in each state, visit <https://certificationmap.com/>. Be aware that for the most current and accurate information on teacher certification, you should visit your state education department’s website.





What Can I Do Now to Prepare for a Teaching Career?

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: If you are in middle school or high school, there are a number of steps you can start taking now toward becoming a teacher. Many teacher education programs require applicants to have a high grade point average, to have taken classes in the liberal arts and to submit an application.

To prepare for a college-level teacher education program, you should:

- Take challenging courses now to ready yourself for college-level work and study;
- Take either the SAT or ACT college entrance exams;
- Seek help from your school guidance counselor or community organizations to help you through the college application process;
- Consider where you will attend college;
- Think about what you would like to teach; and
- Gain experience working with children of different ages to help determine which age group you enjoy working with the most. Volunteering at schools, babysitting, tutoring, coaching sports, camp counseling and other activities that involve working with children provide valuable experience that will help you to start preparing for a career in teaching.

To learn more about the profession, you could start by asking a teacher you know and admire about how he or she became a teacher and why.

Educators Rising

Educators Rising is an organization that seeks to promote the teaching profession by providing interested high school students with hands-on teaching experiences to start preparing them for careers in education. The organization provides detailed information about the skills high school students can begin developing to become talented teachers.

Visit www.educatorsrising.org for more details and how you can join this exciting network.

COLLEGE STUDENTS: If you are already in college and curious about a career in teaching, you should consult with your college or university's education department to learn about your school's teacher education program. If you are still at the beginning of your college career, find out what courses you will need to take to be eligible for teacher certification. If you are in your later college years and will not be able to finish your teacher certification requirements by the end of your fourth year, talk to someone in your college or university's education department about the possibility of staying in school a fifth year before graduating. It is not uncommon for teacher candidates to remain enrolled for a fifth year to complete their certification requirements. If this is not an option for you, talk to someone in the education department about graduate school or alternative teacher certification programs that will allow you to meet the requirements for certification after graduation.

COLLEGE GRADUATES: If you are a recent college graduate or a college graduate who is considering a career switch to teaching, pathways to certification are still available to you. Recent college graduates should consider an alternative teaching certification or graduate school program that will lead to teacher certification. Typically, a graduate school program will be much more costly than an alternative program; however, new teachers with master's degrees receive higher salaries and are often more prepared than individuals who participate in expedited alternative certification programs. Further, most states typically require teachers to have a master's degree to receive a permanent teaching certification. If you start your teaching career with a master's, you may not have to worry about acquiring one at a future date. For individuals later in their careers considering a new start in teaching, there are often programs that will allow you to take your expertise and job experience into the classroom. This is particularly true for career-changers who are in a STEM-related (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) profession. For more information, be sure to check out what initiatives and pathways to teaching are available in your state.

Choosing What to Teach

Deciding what field to teach in is perhaps the most important decision for a prospective teacher to make. Consider the age range of the students you would enjoy working with as well as the type of content or subjects you are interested in teaching. If you think you'd like to teach a variety of subjects, you might prefer teaching in an elementary classroom. If you would prefer to specialize in a particular subject, like physics, American history or Spanish, you would be better suited for a career teaching middle or high school students.

HIGH-NEEDS SUBJECT AREAS: You may also want to consider the demand for teachers in high-needs subject areas. Some subjects or specializations, such as mathematics, bilingual education, chemistry, physics and special education have significant shortages of teachers. Teacher candidates who are certified in these areas will often have an easier time finding a job and, in some instances, are eligible for incentives like bonus pay and/or student loan forgiveness programs.

Likewise, you may want to consider which subjects have an oversupply of teachers before committing to a specialization. Subjects such as health education, physical education, dance education and social studies tend to have too many certified teachers, which can make finding employment more difficult. Elementary education, French and English language arts tend to have a balanced supply of teachers; there aren't too many and there aren't too few.

Teacher shortages vary by location. Different regions, states and districts have different high-needs subjects. As always, it is important to learn as much as you can about the specific circumstances in your area.

Teacher Diversity

One of the most pressing issues in contemporary education is teacher diversity. As America's public school students have become increasingly diverse, the teaching profession has remained homogenous.

Promoting diversity in the teaching workforce will benefit students, teachers and other stakeholders alike by bringing new perspectives into the education community.

If you are a candidate of color interested in the teaching profession, your presence in the classroom can make a profound difference for America's students. In addition, we encourage all educators to promote historically marginalized voices in their work in and outside the classroom.

For further information you may visit:

Albert Shanker Institute

www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/teacherdiversity

U.S. Department of Education

www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/report-state-racial-diversity-educator-workforce

AFT Teacher Diversity Panel

www.aft.org/news/panel-searches-answers-teacher-diversity-challenge





Financial Aid for Teachers

Becoming a teacher takes years of college and lots of hard work. The financial costs can be high, leaving potential teacher candidates unsure about their ability to responsibly finance their training. Fortunately, there are more opportunities than ever for teachers-in-training and new teachers to reduce their financial burden.

STUDENT LOAN

FORGIVENESS: Many college students take on debt in the form of loans to finance their education. Some financial relief, called “loan forgiveness” is available to you if you plan to teach in certain high-needs subjects or in schools designated as low-income. Under the federal government’s Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program, teachers may be eligible for forgiveness up to \$5,000 if they teach for five consecutive years in low-income schools and meet other eligibility requirements. Teachers of high-needs subjects, including secondary mathematics, secondary science and special education are eligible for up to

\$17,500 if they teach for five consecutive years. For more detailed information about teacher loan forgiveness, visit <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/teacher#what-are-the-eligibility>.

OTHER INCENTIVES: Many states, cities and districts offer their own financial incentives to attract talented candidates to teaching. These come in the forms of grants, loan forgiveness and other benefits for committing to teach, often in high-needs schools or subjects. Be sure to check what incentives are available in your area.

What Is a Teachers Union?

If you choose to become a public school teacher, odds are you will have the opportunity to join a teachers union, like an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) or the National Education Association. You have likely heard of teachers unions before, but perhaps you are uncertain about what a teachers union actually does.

Foremost, teachers unions exist to advocate for teachers, students and a high-quality public education for all. Before teachers were unionized, they had virtually no job protections. They could have been dismissed immediately for any reason, including political and personal motivations. They were not guaranteed a duty-free lunch, and were often required to supervise students during planning periods and breaks. Thanks to teachers unions, this is no longer the case. A teachers union collectively bargains with school districts to set acceptable working conditions, benefits and salary schedules for teachers. The unions are also staunch advocates for a high-quality public education for all students. Historically, this has often put the teachers unions at odds with those who push privatization schemes, such as school vouchers, that do not serve the interests of all students.

As an active participant in the labor movement, teachers unions also advocate for a broad social justice agenda. Teachers unions have

championed policy issues such as universal healthcare, economic inequality, a higher minimum wage, affordable housing, immigration reform, racial equity and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) rights, among many other important causes. While some may question why the teachers union would advocate for causes outside the field of education, the unions recognize that educational access and outcomes are affected by an array of pressing social issues. Addressing poverty, economic opportunity, access to healthcare and housing, racism and other forms of discrimination will strengthen the ability of our schools to effectively educate students. Further, the unions recognize that the only way to achieve our desired policy goals is through collective action and solidarity with other social justice movements. To that end, the unions cultivate partnerships with other like-minded progressive organizations that are fighting for positive social changes throughout our country. If you are interested in promoting these or other important social causes, your union can be an effective avenue for such activism.

In addition to advocacy and collective bargaining, teachers unions provide other valuable services to their members. For example, the AFT offers high-quality professional development courses for educators, helping to support their professional growth and deepen their expertise. Unions also allow teachers to cultivate meaningful professional networks, giving teachers access to support and advice from colleagues as they navigate the field of education. Teachers unions play an important role in supporting the work of their members. Talk to your union representative or go online to learn more about what your union can do for you!

Resources for Teachers

Excellent resources are available online, particularly for pre-service and new teachers. If you are looking for more information about how to get into the teaching profession or for support on the job, consider visiting these websites:

<https://www.teach.org/>

Teach.org is a great resource for anyone interested in learning more about the teaching profession. The site features information on certification requirements, scholarships for teachers and job search support, among other helpful offerings for prospective teachers. Experienced teachers can volunteer to mentor prospective teachers by answering their questions about certification.

<http://www.teaching-certification.com/>

This website provides a wealth of information on teacher certification and reciprocity agreements. It is a helpful resource for prospective teachers interested in learning about certification, and for a certified teacher who is interested in getting certified in another state.

<http://www.scholastic.com/home/>

Scholastic provides great resources for all teachers, new and veteran, at every grade level. If you are a new teacher seeking support, these pages will be of particular interest:

- <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/collection/new-teacher-survival-guides>
- <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/teaching-strategies/new-teacher>

<http://www.edutopia.org/>

Edutopia, a site sponsored by the George Lucas Educational Foundation, contains a variety of resources for classroom teachers. For resources that specifically cater to new teachers:

- <http://www.edutopia.org/article/new-teacher-resources-toolkit>

This list is by no means exhaustive. There is a wealth of resources available on the web for teachers to use in their classrooms. If you are looking for new ideas to bring into your classroom and reinvigorate your teaching, odds are you can find them on the internet.

Conclusion

Teaching is among the most important and fulfilling careers to which a person can be devoted. It is certainly not an easy profession and often is filled with challenges. This, of course, is to be expected. As the saying goes, “Nothing worthwhile is easy.” If you are up to the myriad challenges of teaching and have an interest in improving our society and the lives of children, then the teaching profession is the right one for you.



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