

THE AMERICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Please note that in the U.S., the federal role in education is limited. Most education policy is decided at the state and local levels.

The American education system requires that students complete 12 years of primary and secondary education prior to attending university or college. This may be accomplished either at public (or government-operated) schools, or at private schools.

Primary school

American children start school at the age of five. The first year at school is called kindergarten. It is required of all American children enrolled in the American education system. The second year at school is considered the first year of primary school and is referred to as first grade.

In America, the word grade has two meanings: (1) the score achieved on an exam or in a course, and (2) a year of education in primary or secondary school. Primary school most commonly consists of five years of education, referred to as first through fifth grades.

Secondary school

Upon completion of fifth grade (the last year of primary school), American children enrolled in the American education system advance to secondary school. Secondary school most commonly consists of a total of seven years, referred to as sixth through twelfth grades. The ninth through twelfth grades are most commonly referred to as [high school](#).

Upon completion of twelfth grade, American students are awarded a certificate called the high school diploma. In the American education system, students must have obtained a high school diploma before they are admitted into college or university.

* High school :

The USA high school system is unlike that of many other countries. There is little national standardization in the typical USA high school (or secondary school) curriculum. Individual states have great control over what coursework is

taught in the USA high schools within their borders, as well as in the requirements that students must meet in order to graduate with a US high school diploma. Therefore, what courses and subjects are offered at US high schools will vary depending on where the high school is located.

The coursework will also vary depending on whether the USA high school is public or private. US public high schools are operated by the government and are financed by public funds. These high schools are free to all students, even foreigners. The quality of education can vary greatly between different public USA high schools, primarily because of differences in the amount of funding that different high schools receive.

Private US high schools are operated by private individuals and are financed by private funds. These private high schools are not controlled by any government agency, but their students must still meet the minimum graduation requirements set by the state. All US private high school students must pay tuition, regardless of their nationality. Private USA high schools are popular because they offer options that are not available at public high schools. These may include advanced math and science courses, a broader selection of foreign languages, and better art, music and athletic programs.

Undergraduate school

Students who have completed high school and would like to attend college or university must attend what is referred to as an undergraduate school. These are schools that offer either a two-year degree (called an [associate degree](#)) or a four-year degree (called a [bachelor's degree](#)) in a specific course of study.

★ US associate degree : US Community colleges offering associate degree programs are operated by the local government and are financed by public funds. US junior colleges offering associate degree programs are generally privately run.

★ Bachelor's Degree : The two most common classes of bachelor's degrees awarded by US schools are the bachelor of science degree (also called the B.S.) and the bachelor of arts degree (also called the B.A.). Some schools offer only the B.A. degree, even for science majors (such as a B.A. in biology). Other schools offer both the B.A. and the B.S. Bachelor degrees. People with a bachelors degree earn substantially more than those who don't. More and more jobs and careers today require applicants to possess an accredited bachelor's degree. Some would argue that a bachelor's degree is the first step to success.

Graduate school

Students who have obtained a bachelor's degree can continue their education by pursuing one of two types of degrees. The first is a [master's degree](#). This is usually a two-year degree that is highly specialized in a specific field.

Students who want to advance their education even further in a specific field can pursue a doctorate degree, also called a [PhD](#). A PhD degree can take between three and six years to complete, depending on the course of study chosen, the ability of the student, and the thesis that the student has selected. The thesis is a very intensive research paper that must be completed prior to earning the degree. It is always required of students pursuing a PhD, and may sometimes be required of students pursuing a master's degree (depending on the school).

THE *NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND* Act

Closing The Achievement Gap : President Bush made a commitment to ensure that all children receive a high quality education so that no child is left behind. Signed into law in 2002, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) is working to bring all students up to grade level in reading and math, to close the nation's achievement gaps within a decade, and to hold schools accountable for results through annual assessments. Under NCLB, students in grades 3-8 are tested annually with one additional test administered in high school.

- **Funding:** *No Child Left Behind* gives school districts more money.
- **Flexibility:** *No Child Left Behind* gives states and school districts more control and more flexibility to use resources where they are needed most. In theory, principals and administrators spend less time filling out forms and more time helping children learn.
- **Accountability:** *No Child Left Behind* holds schools and school districts accountable for results.
- **School District Report Cards:** *No Child Left Behind* gives parents report cards so they can see which schools in their district are succeeding and why. With this information, *No Child Left Behind* gives parents, community leaders, teachers, principals, and elected leaders the information they need to improve schools.
- **Public School Choice:** *No Child Left Behind* may let parents transfer their child to another public school if the state says that the child's school is

"*in need of improvement.*" The school district may pay for transportation for the child.

- Parental Involvement: *No Child Left Behind* requires schools to develop ways to get parents more involved in their child's education and in improving the school.
- Measuring Knowledge: *No Child Left Behind* requires states to test children in reading and math every year in grades 3-8.
- Reading First: Reading First is the part of *No Child Left Behind* that is dedicated to ensuring all children learn to read on grade level by the third grade. Reading First provides money to states and many school districts to support reading programs based on scientific research.
- Teacher Quality: *No Child Left Behind* provides funding to help teachers learn to be better teachers.

On July 14th, 2005, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings released the following statement regarding the 2004 Nation's Report Card : *"Three years ago, our country made a commitment that no child would be left behind. Today's Report Card is proof that No Child Left Behind is working-it is helping to raise the achievement of young students of every race and from every type of family background. And the achievement gap that has persisted for decades in the younger years between minorities and whites has shrunk to its smallest size in history. (...) So I am pleased with today's results, but in no way completely satisfied. We are at the beginning of the journey and certainly have room for improvement, particularly at the high school level. We must support older students with the same can-do attitude that helped their younger brothers and sisters."*

TD 1

Sum up the following article :

The face of the American teacher White and female, while her students are ethnically diverse

Adapted from USA TODAY
July 2, 2003

Fifteen years ago, nearly nine out of 10 public school teachers were white, and more than seven in 10 were women. Their classrooms were mostly white as well -- fewer than three in 10 were minorities.

Fast-forward to today.

Minority students account for four in 10 public school kids. One in five speaks a language other than English at home, and one in four comes from a single-parent household.

But wait : There's still a white woman at the head of the class. She's a little better qualified, but, otherwise, the typical American teacher hasn't changed much.

While public school students have grown much more diverse, schools still rely overwhelmingly on white women to teach them. And despite decades of efforts to attract more minorities and men, they simply aren't stepping into the frame.

Experts say the lack of male and minority role models may be exacerbating a nagging achievement gap that sees fewer young men than women attending college, and a smaller proportion of black and Hispanic students succeeding than white peers.

"These kids are growing up without seeing a person of authority of their race," says researcher Beatriz Chu Clewell of the Washington, D.C.-based Urban Institute.

"The demand for male teachers is always high in public schools across America," says NEA* president Reg Weaver, who is black. "The sad reality is that a young boy could go through his entire education without ever having a teacher who looks like me."

teachers union

* NEA = National Education Association, the USA's largest

Race and ethnicity

When the government last counted during the 1999-2000 school year, about 84% of teachers were white vs. 61% of students. Black pupils make up about 17% of public school students, while fewer than 8% of teachers are black. Hispanics have risen to about 16% of all students, but fewer than 6% of teachers are Hispanic.

During the 1999-2000 school year, 38% of public schools had not a single teacher of color.

But Linda Darling-Hammond, a Stanford University professor who studies teaching trends, says the tide has shifted in the past decade.

"It's not what many people would like to see, but it's better than it used to be," she says.

While only 16% of teachers are minorities, 21% of new teachers are minorities, she says.

Some observers blame lack of diversity on a job that has lost prestige as it has become harder. Others say minority candidates simply have more opportunities.

When Evelyn Dandy went into the field 40 years ago, "being a teacher was a great thing, a noble thing to aspire to. It's not so much a noble profession anymore. Everybody is dumping on teachers."

Better qualifications

Teachers are more qualified than ever -- at last count, in 1997, 98% had either a bachelor's, master's or specialist's degree, up from 84% in 1961. But researcher Richard Ingersoll (a leading expert on teacher workforce issues at University of Pennsylvania) and others say that new, more stringent requirements under No Child Left Behind could scare off many potential teachers, including minority and male candidates.

Ingersoll fears that, while the law requires all teachers to be "highly qualified" in every subject they teach, schools won't improve working conditions and sweeten salaries to offset the burden of coursework and certification. As states suffer through their worst budget crises in decades, it's unlikely that they'll be able to cover such costs.

Males vs. females

Researchers say the dearth of male teachers is affecting boys in unexpected ways.

Sally Shaywitz directs the Connecticut Longitudinal Study, which since 1983 has followed 445 students. In the study, schools identified three to four times as many boys as girls with reading problems, but when compared, their skills were remarkably alike. Shaywitz theorizes that this is because boys are generally less attentive and get bored more easily. In the study, 90% of second- and third-grade teachers were women.

Men make up only about 10% of elementary school teachers, but nearly half in middle and high school. Men are even losing ground here, NEA figures show: In 1971, they accounted for 55% of high school teachers; now it's 41%.

Many observers say teaching will always attract more women because it allows them to follow their children's schedules, complete with summers off.

But others say low salaries keep men, as well as many women, out of teaching. The average U.S. teacher's salary is \$45,822, the NEA says. In many Southern states, salaries are less than \$35,000; these states also have the fewest male teachers. Michigan, which has the most (37%), has the fifth-highest salary of any state, \$51,317, the NEA says.

But education-watchers see bright spots on the horizon. Cities including Denver; Jacksonville, and Columbus, Ohio, have tried unique approaches to attracting minorities, working with universities to establish "professional development schools".

"There have been great strides in this area. Hopefully, this will continue," says Mildred Hudson of Recruiting New Teachers, a Massachusetts non-profit group. "Our teachers should be excellent, and they should look like America."

** Voir résumé page suivante*

“THE FACE OF THE AMERICAN TEACHER
WHITE AND FEMALE, WHILE HER STUDENTS ARE ETHNICALLY DIVERSE”

SUMMARY

The ideas that should be in the summary :

- Compared to 15 years ago, the profile of the American teacher has not changed : most teachers are female and white in the USA whereas the proportion of minorities among the pupils has largely increased.
- The American education system has failed to attract men and minorities.
- According to experts, the lack of male teachers and minority teachers may emphasize (= *accentuer*) two sorts of achievement gaps :
 - between men and women
 - between whites and some minorities⇒ The students lack the authority model of men and minorities.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

- Despite the under-representation of men and minorities in the staff, things are gradually changing : a larger proportion of minorities are among the new teachers.
- Reasons for the lack of diversity among teachers ?
 - ⇒ the job has lost its prestige
 - ⇒ it has become more difficult to teach
 - ⇒ minorities find other opportunities

BETTER QUALIFICATIONS

- Even if American teachers are more qualified than in the past, the *No Child Left Behind Act* requires them to be even more qualified.
As a consequence, it may reduce the numbers of applicants for the job.

MALES VS. FEMALES

- According to some experts, the lack of male teachers affect the boy's learning abilities. Boys are less attentive when taught by female teachers.
- The job is more attractive to women because their time-table enables them to have a family life with children.
- Low salaries do not attract men. ⇒ in the states where the wages are higher than the average, there is a bigger proportion of male teachers.

- However, there are reasons to be optimistic : some cities have set up educational programmes with universities to attract minorities.
- The objective is to have qualified teachers who represent the American population.

NB. Utilisez ces notes pour vous entraîner à faire votre résumé à l'oral et réfléchissez aux questions que soulève un tel texte (L'analyse de la situation est-elle pertinente, autres problèmes que rencontrent les minorités aux USA, comparaison avec la situation en France... + voir question ci-dessous)

Discussion Questions

What factors have contributed to Evelyn Dandy's assessment that teaching is "...not so much a noble profession anymore"? Do you agree with her? Explain.

How important is it that teachers "should look like America"? How did teacher race, gender and ethnicity affect education?

Compare and contrast the importance of teacher diversity with the importance of student diversity.

** See facts about teacher and student diversity on the following page*

Facts

How schools have changed

Recruitment of non-white teachers hasn't kept up with diversity among U.S. students :

Teacher race/ethnicity

| | <u>1987-1988</u> | <u>1999-2000</u> |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| White, non-Hispanic : | 86.9% | 84.3% |
| Black, non-Hispanic : | 8.2% | 7.6% |
| Hispanic : | 2.9% | 5.6% |
| Asian or Pacific Islander : | 0.9% | 1.6% |
| American Indian or Alaskan Native : | 1.0% | 0.9% |

Student race/ethnicity

| | <u>Fall 1986</u> | <u>Fall 2000</u> |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| White, non-Hispanic : | 70.4% | 61.2% |
| Black, non-Hispanic : | 16.1% | 17.2% |
| Hispanic : | 9.9% | 16.3% |
| Asian or Pacific Islander : | 2.8 % | 4.1% |
| American Indian or Alaskan Native : | 0.9% | 1.2% |