

## **Schooling in the United States – Terminology**

### **Pre-school**

Also known as nursery school or Pre-K (pre-kindergarten). Pre-school is a form of early childhood education that can be public or private. It is usually for children ages three to five before matriculation into a Kindergarten within an elementary school.

### **Headstart**

This is a form of education to support disadvantaged pre-school-age children. Headstart programs are managed by local school systems and non-profit organizations, which receive federal funding. Headstart services also ensure that children with disabilities are ready to enter regular schooling. Community partnerships may be involved in Headstart programs to support health and nutrition programs for children from low-income families.

### **Elementary school**

Elementary school is also called primary education. It ranges grade levels from kindergarten to sixth grade, and usually age levels from five to twelve. In some school districts, sixth grade (ages 11-12) might be placed in a middle school.

### **Middle school, or junior high**

In the United States different localities refer to these grade levels as middle school or junior high school. In some school districts, these grade levels might range from sixth to eighth grade. Student ages usually range from 12-15. These developmental, early teenage years precede high school.

### **High school, or senior high**

High school in the United States usually includes 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Respectfully, they are often referred to as first-year (freshman), sophomore, junior, and senior years of high school. Student ages are mostly 15-18. High school is also known as secondary education.

### **Charter schools**

These schools may include any grade level from kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. They are funded by states, districts, or by a sponsor. They are considered a public alternative to public schools because they are required to follow state-mandated curriculum. The term “charter” refers to the contract which establishes the school’s organization, management, and assessment of curriculum. Politically, charter schools can be controversial because they draw students away from public schools (reducing enrollments) and are often supported by the private sector (corporations or businesses that may have other profit-making agendas), even though most charter schools are run as non-profit organizations. Advocates for charter schools, like the Trump administration, see charter schooling as a method of providing school choice, or schooling options, to parents and families – so that they can send their children to a taxpayer-funded school that is different from their geographically assigned public school. Charter schools do not require tuition.

**Private schools**

Parents or guardians may choose to send their children to private schools, which range from kindergarten through high school. Families pay tuition to these private schools whereas public schools are funded by the state and district through taxes. Private schools may be religious or secular. They can also be focused on specific types of curriculum and instructional methods.

**Magnet schools**

These subject-focused (i.e. arts, engineering, etc.) schools are funded by states and school districts. They can exist for both elementary or secondary education.

**Homeschooling**

Parents and guardians in the United States can teach their children at home – keeping them out of the public-school system. Outside of the U.S., this concept is often called “home education.” Teaching can be done by a parent, private tutors or teachers, and also by connecting homeschooled students through group cooperatives or via online learning, known as virtual schooling. In the U.S., parents who home school their children usually do so in order to maximize control over their children’s learning and development. They may also be unhappy with public or private school environments.

**Community college**

Community colleges in the United States are public institutions, which grant the two-year, low-cost associate’s degree (e.g. often the A.A. for associate of arts). The degree and course credits can usually be transferred to a four-year undergraduate program, reducing time to complete a usual four-year bachelor’s degree to two years. Community colleges provide education to many individuals who seek medical, nursing, and health technician positions in the United States.