History of education in the United States

The history of education in the United States, or foundations of education, covers the trends in educational philosophy, policy, institutions, as well as formal and informal learning in America from the 17th century to today.

Colonial era

Main article: Education in Colonial America

New England

The first American schools in the thirteen original colonies opened in the 17th century. Boston Latin School was founded in 1635 and is both the first public school and oldest existing school in the United States. Cremin (1970) stresses that colonists tried at first to educate by the traditional English methods of family, church, community, and apprenticeship, with schools later becoming the key agent in "socialization." At first, the rudiments of literacy and arithmetic were taught inside the family, assuming the parents had those skills. Literacy rates seem to have been much higher in New England, and much lower in the South. By the mid-19th century, the role of the schools had expanded to such an extent that many of the educational tasks traditionally handled by parents became the responsibility of the schools.

All the New England colonies required towns to set up schools, and many did so. In 1642 the Massachusetts Bay Colony made "proper" education compulsory; other New England colonies followed. Similar statutes were adopted in other colonies in the 1640s and 1650s. The schools were all male, with few facilities for girls. In the 18th century, "common schools," appeared;
students of all ages were under the control of one teacher in one room. Although they were publicly supplied at the local (town) level, they were not free, and instead were supported by tuition or "rate bills."

The larger towns in New England opened grammar schools, the forerunner of the modern high school. The most famous was the Boston Latin School, which is still in operation as a public high school. Hopkins School in New Haven, Connecticut, was another. By the 1780s, most had been replaced by private academies. By the early 19th century New England operated a network of elite private high schools, now called "prep schools," typified by Phillips Andover Academy (1778), Phillips Exeter Academy (1781), and Deerfield Academy (1797). They became the major feeders for Ivy League colleges in the mid-19th century. They became coeducational in the 1970s, and remain highly prestigious in the 21st century.

**South**

Generally the planter class hired tutors for the education of their children or sent them to private schools. During the colonial years, some sent their sons to England for schooling.

In Virginia, rudimentary schooling for the poor and paupers was provided by the local parish. Most parents either home schooled their children or relied on private schools and tutors.

In the remote colony of Georgia at least ten grammar schools were in operation by 1770, many taught by ministers. Most had some government funding. Many were free to both male and female students. A study of women's signatures indicates a high degree of literacy in areas with schools. Georgia's early promise faded after 1800, and indeed the entire rural South had limited schooling until after 1900.

Southern states established public school systems under Reconstruction biracial governments. There were public schools for blacks, but nearly all were segregated and white legislators consistently underfunded black schools. High schools became available to whites (and some blacks) in the cities after 1900, but few rural Southerners of either race went beyond the 8th grade until after 1945.

**Women and girls**

Tax-supported schooling for girls began as early as 1767 in New England. It was optional and some towns proved reluctant. Northampton, Massachusetts, for example, was a late adopter because it had many rich families who dominated the political and social structures and they did not want to pay taxes to aid poor families. Northampton assessed taxes on all households, rather than only on those with children, and used the funds to support a grammar school to prepare boys for college. Not until after 1800 did Northampton educate girls with public money. In contrast, the town of Sutton, Massachusetts, was diverse in terms of social leadership and religion at an early point in its history. Sutton paid for its schools by means of taxes on households with children only, thereby creating an active constituency in favor of universal education for both boys and girls.
Historians point out that reading and writing were different skills in the colonial era. School taught both, but in places without schools, writing was taught mainly to boys and a few privileged girls. Men handled worldly affairs and needed to both read and write. Girls only needed to read (especially religious materials). This educational disparity between reading and writing explains why the colonial women often could read, but could not write and could not sign their names—they used an "X".\[13\]

The education of elite women in Philadelphia after 1740 followed the British model developed by the gentry classes during the early 18th century. Rather than emphasizing ornamental aspects of women's roles, this new model encouraged women to engage in more substantive education, reaching into the arts and sciences to emphasize their reasoning skills. Education had the capacity to help colonial women secure their elite status by giving them traits that their 'inferiors' could not easily mimic. Fatherly (2004) examines British and American writings that influenced Philadelphia during the 1740s-1770s and the ways in which Philadelphia women implemented and demonstrated their education.\[14\]

**Republican motherhood**

By the early 19th century a new mood was alive in urban areas. Especially influential were the writings of Lydia Maria Child, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, and Lydia Sigourney, who developed the role of republican motherhood as a principle that united state and family by equating a successful republic with virtuous families. Women, as intimate and concerned observers of young children, were best suited to this role. By the 1840s, New England writers such as Child, Sedgwick, and Sigourney became respected models and advocates for improving and expanding education for females. Greater educational access meant formerly male-only subjects, such as mathematics and philosophy, were to be integral to curricula at public and private schools for girls. By the late 19th century, these institutions were extending and reinforcing the tradition of women as educators and supervisors of American moral and ethical values.\[15\]

The ideal of Republican motherhood pervaded the entire nation, greatly enhancing the status of women and demonstrating girls' need for education. The polish and frivolity of female instruction which characterized colonial times was replaced after 1776 by the realization that women had a major role in nation building and must become good republican mothers of good republican youth. Fostered by community spirit and financial donations, private female
academies emerged in towns across the South as well as the North. Rich planters were particularly insistent on their daughters' schooling, since education served as a substitute for dowry in marriage arrangements. The academies usually provided a rigorous and broad curriculum that stressed writing, penmanship, arithmetic, and languages, especially French. By 1840, the female academies succeeded in producing a cultivated, well-read female elite ready for their roles as wives and mothers in southern aristocratic society. \[16\]

**Non-English schools**

**New Netherland** had already set up elementary schools in most of their towns by 1664 (when the colony was taken over by the English). The schools were closely related to the Dutch Reformed Church, and emphasized religious instruction and prayer. The coming of the English led to the closing of the Dutch language public schools, some of which were converted into private academies. The new English government showed little interest in public schools. \[17\]

German settlements from New York through Pennsylvania, Maryland and down to the Carolinas sponsored elementary schools closely tied to their churches, with each denomination or sect sponsoring its own schools. \[18\]\[19\] By the middle of the 19th century, German Catholics and Missouri Synod Lutherans were setting up their own German-language parochial schools, especially in cities from Cincinnati to St. Louis to Chicago and Milwaukee, as well as rural areas heavily settled by Germans. \[20\]

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Excerpt from *The New England Primer* of 1690, the most popular American textbook of the 18th century.
Textbooks

In the 17th century, the schoolbooks were brought over from England. By 1690, Boston publishers were reprinting the *English Protestant Tutor* under the title of *The New England Primer*. The *Primer* was built on rote memorization. By simplifying Calvinist theology the *Primer* enabled the Puritan child to define the limits of the self by relating his life to the authority of God and his parents. The *Primer* included additional material that made it widely popular in colonial schools until it was supplanted by Webster's work. The "blue backed speller" of Noah Webster was by far the most common textbook from the 1790s until 1836, when the *McGuffey Readers* appeared. Both series emphasized civic duty and morality, and sold tens of millions of copies nationwide.

Webster's *Speller* was the pedagogical blueprint for American textbooks; it was so arranged that it could be easily taught to students, and it progressed by age. Webster believed students learned most readily when he broke a complex problem into its component parts and had each pupil master one part before moving to the next. Ellis argues that Webster anticipated some of the insights currently associated with Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Webster said that children pass through distinctive learning phases in which they master increasingly complex or abstract tasks. He stressed that teachers should not try to teach a three-year-old how to read—wait until they are ready at age five. He planned the *Speller* accordingly, starting with the alphabet then covering the different sounds of vowels and consonants, then syllables; simple words came next, followed by more complex words, then sentences. Webster's *Speller* was entirely secular. It ended with two pages of important dates in American history, beginning with Columbus's in 1492 and ending with the battle of Yorktown in 1781. There was no mention of God, the Bible, or sacred events. As Ellis explains, "Webster began to construct a secular catechism to the nation-state. Here was the first appearance of 'civics' in American schoolbooks. In this sense, Webster's speller was the secular successor to *The New England Primer* with its explicitly biblical injunctions." Bynack (1984) examines Webster in relation to his commitment to the idea of a unified American national culture that would stave off the decline of republican virtues and national solidarity. Webster acquired his perspective on language from such theorists as Johann David Michaelis, and Johann Gottfried Herder. There he found the belief that a nation's linguistic forms and the thoughts correlated with them shaped individuals' behavior. Thus the etymological clarification and reform of American English promised to improve citizens' manners and thereby preserve republican purity and social stability. Webster animated his *Speller* and *Grammar* by following these principles.

Colleges

Religious denominations established most early colleges in order to train ministers. In New England there was an emphasis on literacy so that people could read the Bible. Harvard College was founded by the colonial legislature in 1636, and named after an early benefactor. Most of the funding came from the colony, but early on the college began to build an endowment. Harvard at first focused on training young men for the ministry, but many alumni went into law, medicine, government or business. William and Mary College was founded by Virginia government in 1693, with 20,000 acres of land for an endowment, and a penny tax on every pound of tobacco, together with an annual appropriation. James Blair, the leading Anglican
minister in the colony, was president for 50 years, and the college won the broad support of the Virginia gentry, most of whom were Anglicans. It trained many of the lawyers, politicians, and leading planters. Students headed for the ministry were given free tuition. Yale College was founded in 1701, and in 1716 was relocated to New Haven, Connecticut. The conservative Puritan ministers of Connecticut had grown dissatisfied with the more liberal theology of Harvard, and wanted their own school to train orthodox ministers. New Side Presbyterians in 1747 set up the College of New Jersey, in the town of Princeton; much later it was renamed Princeton University. Rhode Island College was begun by the Baptists in 1764, and in 1804 it was renamed Brown University in honor of a benefactor. Brown was especially liberal in welcoming young men from other denominations. In New York City, the Anglicans set up Kings College in 1746, with its president Samuel Johnson the only teacher. It closed during the American Revolution, and reopened in 1784 under the name of Columbia College; it is now Columbia University. The Academy of Pennsylvania was created in 1749 by Benjamin Franklin and other civic minded leaders in Philadelphia, and unlike the others was not oriented toward the training of ministers. It was renamed the University of Pennsylvania in 1791. The Dutch Reform Church in 1766 set up Queens College in New Jersey, which later became Rutgers University. Dartmouth College, chartered in 1769 relocated to its present site in Hanover, New Hampshire, in 1770.\[27][28]

All of the schools were small, with a limited undergraduate curriculum oriented on the liberal arts. Students were drilled in Greek, Latin, geometry, ancient history, logic, ethics and rhetoric, with few discussions, little homework and no lab sessions. The college president typically tried to enforce strict discipline, and the upperclassman enjoyed hazing the freshman. Many students were younger than 17, and most of the colleges also operated a preparatory school. There were no organized sports, or Greek-letter fraternities, but the literary societies were active. Tuition was very low and scholarships were few.\[29]

There were no schools of law in the colonies. However, a few lawyers studied at the highly prestigious Inns of Court in London, while the majority served apprenticeships with established American lawyers.\[30] Law was very well established in the colonies, compared to medicine, which was in rudimentary condition. In the 18th century, 117 Americans had graduated in medicine in Edinburgh, Scotland, but most physicians learned as apprentices in the colonies.\[31] In Philadelphia, the Medical College of Philadelphia was founded in 1765, and became affiliated with the university in 1791. In New York, the medical department of King's College was established in 1767, and in 1770 awarded the first American M.D. degree.\[32]

**Growth of public schools**

"The whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people and be willing to bear the expenses of it. There should not be a district of one mile square, without a school in it, not founded by a charitable individual, but maintained at the public expense of the people themselves."

— John Adams, U.S. President, 1785\[33]

After the Revolution, an emphasis was put on education, especially in the northern states, which rapidly established public schools. By the year 1870, all states had free elementary schools.\[34]
The US population had one of the highest literacy rates at the time. Private academies flourished in the towns across the country, but rural areas (where most people lived) had few schools before the 1880s.

In 1821, Boston started the first public high school in the United States. By the close of the 19th century, public secondary schools began to outnumber private ones.

Over the years, Americans have been influenced by a number of European reformers; among them Pestalozzi, Herbart, and Montessori.

Attendance

The school system remained largely private and unorganized until the 1840s. Public schools were always under local control, with no federal role, and little state role. The 1840 census indicated that of the 1.8 million girls between five and fifteen (and 1.88 million boys of the same age) about 55% attended primary schools and academies. Beginning in the late 1830s, more private academies were established for girls for education past primary school, especially in northern states. Some offered classical education similar to that offered to boys.

Data from the indentured servant contracts of German immigrant children in Pennsylvania from 1771-1817 showed that the number of children receiving education increased from 33.3% in 1771-1773 to 69% in 1787-1804. Additionally, the same data showed that the ratio of school education versus home education rose from .25 in 1771-1773 to 1.68 in 1787-1804. While some African Americans managed to achieve literacy, southern states prohibited schooling to enslaved blacks.

Teachers, early 1800s

Teaching young students was not perceived as an end goal for educated people. Adults became teachers without any particular skill except sometimes in the topic they were teaching. The checking of credentials was left to the local school board, who were mainly interested in the efficient use of limited taxes. This started to change with the introduction of two-year normal schools starting in 1823. By the end of the 19th century, most teachers of elementary schools were trained in this fashion.

Mann reforms

Upon becoming the secretary of education in Massachusetts in 1837, Horace Mann (1796–1859) worked to create a statewide system of professional teachers, based on the Prussian model of "common schools," which referred to the belief that everyone was entitled to the same content in education. Mann's early efforts focused primarily on elementary education and on preparing teachers. The common-school movement quickly gained strength across the North. Connecticut adopted a similar system in 1849, and Massachusetts passed a compulsory attendance law in 1852.
One important technique Mann learned in Prussia and first introduced in Massachusetts in 1848 was age grading—students were assigned by age to different grades and progressed through them. Previously, schools had often been single groups of students with ages ranging from 6 to 14 years. With the introduction of age grading, multi-aged classrooms all but disappeared.[41] Some students progressed with their grade and completed all courses the secondary school had to offer. These were "graduated," and were awarded a certificate of completion. This was increasingly done at a ceremony imitating college graduation rituals.

Arguing that universal public education was the best way to turn the nation's unruly children into disciplined, judicious republican citizens, Mann won widespread approval from modernizers, especially among fellow Whigs, for building public schools. Indeed, most states adopted one version or another of the system he established in Massachusetts, especially the program for "normal schools" to train professional teachers.[42]

Free schooling was available through some of the elementary grades. Graduates of these schools could read and write, though not always with great precision. Mary Chesnut, a Southern diarist, mocks the North's system of free education in her journal entry of June 3, 1862, where she derides misspelled words from the captured letters of Union soldiers.[43]

**Compulsory laws**

![A 1915 class at the Geyer School of Geyer, Ohio](image)

By 1900, 34 states had compulsory schooling laws, 4 of which were in the South. 30 states with compulsory schooling laws required attendance until age 14 (or higher).[44] As a result, by 1910, 72 percent of American children attended school. Half the nation's children attended one-room schools. In 1918, every state required students to complete elementary school.[45]

**Religion and schools**

As the nation was majority Protestant in the 19th century, most states passed a constitutional amendment, called Blaine Amendments, forbidding tax money be used to fund parochial schools. There was anti-Catholic sentiment related to heavy immigration from Catholic Ireland after the 1840s, and a feeling that Catholic children should be educated in public schools to become American. By 1890 the Irish, who controlled the Church in the U.S., had built an extensive network of parishes and parish schools ("parochial schools") across the urban
Northeast and Midwest. The Irish and other Catholic ethnic groups looked to parochial schools not only to protect their religion, but to enhance their culture and language.\[46\][47]

Catholics and German Lutherans, as well as Dutch Protestants, organized and funded their own elementary schools. Catholic communities also raised money to build colleges and seminaries to train teachers and religious leaders to head their churches.\[48\][49] Most Catholics were German or Irish immigrants or their children, until the 1890s when large numbers began arriving from Italy and Poland. The parochial schools met some opposition, as in the Bennett Law in Wisconsin in 1890, but they thrived and grew, in large part because of the very low salaries paid to the Catholic nuns who ran them (the nuns had taken a vow of poverty).\[50\] In 1925 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Pierce v. Society of Sisters that students could attend private schools to comply with state compulsory education laws, thus giving parochial schools an official blessing.\[51\]

**Reconstruction**

In the era of reconstruction, the Freedmen's Bureau opened 1000 schools across the South for black children. Schooling was a high priority for the Freedmen, and the enrollments were high and enthusiastic. Overall, the Bureau spent $5 million to set up schools for blacks. By the end of 1865, more than 90,000 Freedmen were enrolled as students in public schools. The school curriculum resembled that of schools in the north.\[52\]

Colleges were also created, such as Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in 1868 as well as numerous colleges sponsored by northern religious bodies.

Until recently historians believed that most Bureau teachers were well-educated Yankee women motivated by religion and abolitionism. New research has found that half the teachers were southern whites; one-third were blacks, and one-sixth were northern whites.\[53\] Few were abolitionists; few came from New England. Most were women but black men slightly outnumbered black women. The salary was the strongest motivation except for the northerners, who were typically funded by northern organizations and had a humanitarian motivation. As a group, only the black cohort showed a commitment to racial equality; they were the ones most likely to remain teachers.\[54]\n
**Impact of colleges in 19th century**

Summarizing the research of Burke and Hall, Katz concludes that in the 19th century:\[55\]

1. The nation's many small colleges helped young men make the transition from rural farms to complex urban occupations.
2. These colleges especially promoted upward mobility by preparing ministers, and thereby provided towns across the country with a core of community leaders.
3. The more elite colleges became increasingly exclusive and contributed relatively little to upward social mobility. By concentrating on the offspring of wealthy families, ministers and a few others, the elite Eastern colleges, especially Harvard, played an important role in the formation of a Northeastern elite with great power.
Progressive Era

The progressive era in education was part of a larger Progressive Movement, and extended from the 1890s to the 1930s. The era was notable for a dramatic expansion in the number of schools and students served, especially in the fast-growing metropolitan cities. After 1910, smaller cities began building high schools. By 1940, 50% of young adults had earned a high school diploma.\[1371\]

Dewey and Progressive Education

The leading educational theorist of the era was John Dewey (1859–1952), a professor at the University of Chicago (1894–1904) and from 1904 to 1930 at Teachers College, of Columbia University in New York City.\[156\] Dewey was a leading proponent of "Progressive Education" and wrote many books and articles to promote the central role of democracy in education.\[157\] He saw schools not only as a place to gain content knowledge, but also as a place to learn how to live. The purpose of education was not so much the acquisition of a predetermined set of skills, but rather the realization of the student's full potential and the ability to use those skills for the greater good. Dewey noted, "to prepare him for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities." Dewey insisted that education and schooling are instrumental in creating social change and reform. He notes that "education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction."\[158\] Although Dewey's ideas were very widely discussed, they were implemented chiefly in small experimental schools attached to colleges of education. Dewey and the other progressive theorists encountered a highly bureaucratic system of school administration typically not receptive to new methods.\[159\]

Black education

Booker T. Washington was the dominant black political and educational leader in the United States from the 1890s until his death in 1915. Washington not only led his own college, Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, but his advice, political support, and financial connections proved important to many black colleges and high schools across the country. He was a leading advisor to major philanthropies, such as the Rockefeller, Rosenwald and Jeanes foundations, which provided funding for leading black schools and colleges. Washington explained, "We need not only the industrial school, but the college and professional school as well, for a people so largely segregated, as we are.... Our teachers, ministers, lawyers and doctors will prosper just in proportion as they have about them an intelligent and skillful producing class."\[160\] Washington was a strong advocate of progressive reforms as advocated by Dewey, emphasizing scientific, industrial and agricultural education that produced a base for lifelong learning and enabled careers for many black teachers, professionals, and upwardly mobile workers, while downplaying political protests against the segregated Jim Crow system.\[161\]

Atlanta
In most American cities, Progressives in the Efficiency Movement looked for ways to eliminate waste and corruption. In schools, this emphasized the use of expertise. For example, in the 1897 reform of the Atlanta schools the school board size was reduced. The power of ward bosses was eliminated. The power of the superintendent was increased. Centralized purchasing allowed for economies of scale. Standards of hiring and tenure in teachers were made uniform. Architects designed school buildings in which the classrooms, offices, workshops and other facilities related together. Curricular innovations were introduced. The reforms were designed to produce a school system according to the best practices. The reforms were instituted by middle-class professionals equally antagonistic to the traditional business elites and to working-class elements. [62]

**Gary Plan**

The "Gary Plan" was implemented in the new steel city of Gary, Indiana, by William Wirt, the superintendent 1907-30. It emphasized highly efficient use of buildings and other facilities, and was adopted by over 200 cities around the country, including New York City. Wirt divided students into two platoons—one platoon used the academic classrooms, while the second platoon was divided between the shops, nature studies, auditorium, gymnasium, and outdoor facilities, then the platoons rotated position. Wirt set up an elaborate night school program, especially to Americanize the new immigrants. The introduction of vocational educational programs, such as wood shop, machine shop, typing, and secretarial skills proved especially popular with parents who wanted their children to become foremen and office workers. By the Great Depression, most cities found the Gary Plan too expensive, and abandoned it. [63]

**Secondary schools**

In 1880, American high schools were preparatory academies for colleges, but by 1910 they had been transformed into core elements of the common school system. The explosive growth brought the number of students from 200,000 in 1890 to 1,000,000 in 1910, to almost 2,000,000 by 1920; 7% of youths aged 14 to 17 were enrolled in 1890, rising to 32% in 1920. The graduates found jobs especially in the rapidly growing white-collar sector. Cities large and small across the country raced to build new schools. Few were built in rural areas, so ambitious parents moved close to town to enable their teenagers to attend. After 1910, vocational education was added, as a mechanism to train the technicians and skilled workers needed by the expanding industrial sector. [64][65]

**College preparation**

In the 1865-1914 era, the number and character of schools changed to meet the demands of new and larger cities and of new immigrants strange to American ways, and to adjust to the new spirit of reform permeating the country. High schools increased in number, adjusted their curriculum to prepare students for the growing state and private universities; education at all levels began to offer more utilitarian studies in place of an emphasis on the classics. John Dewey and other Progressives advocated changes from their base in teachers' colleges. [66]

Before 1920 most secondary education, whether private or public, emphasized college entry for a select few headed for college. Proficiency in Greek and Latin was emphasized. Abraham
**Flexner**, under commission from the philanthropic General Education Board (GEB) wrote *A Modern School* (1916) calling for a de-emphasis on the classics. The classics teachers fought back in a losing effort.[67]

German was preferred as a second, spoken language prior to World War I. An anti-German attitude that resulted from the war, promoted French as a second language instead. French survived as the second language of choice until the 1960s, when Spanish became popular.[68]

**The growth of human capital**

By 1900 educators argued that the post-literacy schooling of the masses at the secondary and higher levels, would improve citizenship, develop higher-order traits, and produce the managerial and professional leadership needed for rapid economic modernization. The commitment to expanded education past age 14 set the U.S. apart from Europe for much of the 20th century.[37]

From 1910 to 1940, high schools grew in number and size, reaching out to a broader clientele. In 1910, for example, 9% of Americans had a high school diploma; in 1935, the rate was 40%. By 1940, the number had increased to 50%. This phenomenon was uniquely American; no other nation attempted such widespread coverage. The fastest growth came in states with greater wealth, more homogeneity of wealth, and less manufacturing activity than others. The high schools provided necessary skill sets for youth planning to teach school, and essential skills for those planning careers in white collar work and some high-paying blue collar jobs. Economist Claudia Goldin argues this rapid growth was facilitated by public funding, openness, gender neutrality, local (and also state) control, separation of church and state, and an academic curriculum. The wealthiest European nations such as Germany and Britain had far more exclusivity to their education system and few youth attended past age 14. Apart from technical training schools, European secondary schooling was dominated by children of the wealthy and the social elites.[70]

The United States chose a type of post-elementary schooling consistent with its particular features — stressing flexible, general and widely applicable skills that were not tied to particular occupations and geographic places had great value in giving students options in their lives. Skills had to survive transport across firms, industries, occupations, and geography in the dynamic American economy.

Public schools were funded and supervised by independent districts that depended on taxpayer support. In dramatic contrast to the centralized systems in Europe, where national agencies made the major decisions, the American districts designed their own rules and curricula.[71]

**Teachers**

Support for the high school movement occurred at the grass-roots level of local cities and school systems. The federal government involvement included vocational education funding after 1916. States and religious bodies funded teacher training colleges, often called "normal schools". They morphed into state colleges with a broad curriculum after 1945.
Teachers organized themselves during the 1920s and 1930s. In 1917, the National Education Association (NEA) was reorganized to better mobilize and represent teachers and educational staff. The rate of increase in membership was constant under the chairmanship of James Crabtree—from 8,466 members in 1917 to 220,149 in 1931. The rival American Federation of Teachers (AFT), was based in large cities and formed alliances with the labor unions there. The NEA saw itself as an upper-middle-class professional organization, while the AFT identified with the working class and the union movement.[22][73]

Higher education

Main article: Higher education in the United States

At the beginning of the 20th century, fewer than 1,000 colleges with 160,000 students existed in the United States. Explosive growth in the number of colleges occurred at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Philanthropists endowed many of these institutions. Wealthy philanthropists for example, established Johns Hopkins University, Stanford University, Carnegie Mellon University, Vanderbilt University and Duke University; John D. Rockefeller funded the University of Chicago without imposing his name on it.[74]

Land Grant Universities

Each state used federal funding from the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Acts of 1862 and 1890 to set up "land grant colleges" that specialized in agriculture and engineering.

The 1890 act created all-black land grant colleges, which were dedicated primarily to teacher training. They also made important contributions to rural development, including the establishment of a traveling school program by Tuskegee Institute in 1906. Rural conferences sponsored by Tuskegee also attempted to improve the life of rural blacks. In recent years, the 1890 schools have helped train many students from less-developed countries who return home with the ability to improve agricultural production.[75]

Among the first were Purdue University, Michigan State University, Kansas State University, Cornell University (in New York), Texas A&M University, Pennsylvania State University, The Ohio State University and the University of California. Few alumni became farmers, but they did play an increasingly important role in the larger food industry, especially after the Extension system was set up in 1916 that put trained agronomists in every agricultural county.

The engineering graduates played a major role in rapid technological development.[76] Indeed, the land-grant college system produced the agricultural scientists and industrial engineers who constituted the critical human resources of the managerial revolution in government and business, 1862–1917, laying the foundation of the world's pre-eminent educational infrastructure that supported the world's foremost technology-based economy.[77]

Representative was Pennsylvania State University. The Farmers' High School of Pennsylvania (later the Agricultural College of Pennsylvania and then Pennsylvania State University), chartered in 1855, was intended to uphold declining agrarian values and show farmers ways to
prosper through more productive farming. Students were to build character and meet a part of their expenses by performing agricultural labor. By 1875 the compulsory labor requirement was dropped, but male students were to have an hour a day of military training in order to meet the requirements of the Morrill Land Grant College Act. In the early years the agricultural curriculum was not well developed, and politicians in Harrisburg often considered it a costly and useless experiment. The college was a center of middle-class values that served to help young people on their journey to white-collar occupations.[28]

GI Bill

Rejecting liberal calls for large-scale aid to education, Congress in 1944 passed the conservative program of aid limited to veterans who had served in wartime. The GI Bill made college education possible for millions by paying tuition and living expenses. The government provided between $800 and $1,400 each year to these veterans as a subsidy to attend college, which covered 50-80% of total costs. This included foregone earnings in addition to tuition, which allowed them to have enough funds for life outside of school. The GI Bill helped create a widespread belief in the necessity of college education. It opened up higher education to ambitious young men who would otherwise have been forced to immediately enter the job market. When comparing college attendance rates between veterans and non-veterans during this period, veterans were around 10% more likely to go to college than non-veterans. Most campuses became overwhelmingly male thanks to the GI Bill, since few women were covered, However by 2000 women had reached parity in numbers and began passing men in rates of college and graduate school attendance.[29]

Great Society

When liberals regained control of Congress in 1964 they passed numerous Great Society programs that greatly expanded federal support for education. The Higher Education Act of 1965 set up federal scholarships and low-interest loans for college students, and subsidized better academic libraries, ten to twenty new graduate centers, several new technical institutes, classrooms for several hundred thousand students, and twenty-five to thirty new community colleges a year. A separate education bill enacted that same year provided similar assistance to dental and medical schools. On an even larger scale the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 began pumping federal money into local school districts.[30]
Segregation and integration

For much of its history, education in the United States was segregated (or even only available) based upon race. Early integrated schools such as the Noyes Academy, founded in 1835, in Canaan, New Hampshire, were generally met with fierce local opposition. For the most part, African Americans received very little to no formal education before the Civil War. Some free blacks in the North managed to become literate.

In the South where slavery was legal, many states had laws prohibiting teaching enslaved African Americans to read or write. A few taught themselves, others learned from white playmates or more generous masters, but most were not able to learn to read and write. Schools for free people of color were privately run and supported, as were most of the limited schools for white children. Poor white children did not attend school. The wealthier planters hired tutors for their children and sent them to private academies and colleges at the appropriate age.

During Reconstruction a coalition of freedmen and white Republicans in Southern state legislatures passed laws establishing public education. The Freedman's Bureau was created as an agency of the military governments that managed Reconstruction. It set up schools in many areas and tried to help educate and protect freedmen during the transition after the war. With the notable exception of the desegregated public schools in New Orleans, the schools were segregated by race. By 1900 more than 30,000 black teachers had been trained and put to work in the South, and the literacy rate had climbed to more than 50%, a major achievement in little more than a generation.[81]

Many colleges were set up for blacks; some were state schools like Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, others were private ones subsidized by Northern missionary societies.

Although the African-American community quickly began litigation to challenge such provisions, in the 19th century Supreme Court challenges generally were not decided in their favor. The Supreme Court case of Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) upheld the segregation of races in
schools as long as each race enjoyed parity in quality of education (the "separate but equal" principle). However, few black students received equal education. They suffered for decades from inadequate funding, outmoded or dilapidated facilities, and deficient textbooks (often ones previously used in white schools).

Starting in 1914 and going into the 1930s, Julius Rosenwald, a philanthropist from Chicago, established the Rosenwald Fund to provide seed money for matching local contributions and stimulating the construction of new schools for African American children, mostly in the rural South. He worked in association with Booker T. Washington and architects at Tuskegee University to have model plans created for schools and teacher housing. With the requirement that money had to be raised by both blacks and whites, and schools approved by local school boards (controlled by whites), Rosenwald stimulated construction of more than 5,000 schools built across the South. In addition to Northern philanthrops and state taxes, African Americans went to extraordinary efforts to raise money for such schools.[82]

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s helped publicize the inequities of segregation. In 1954, the Supreme Court in Brown v. Board of Education unanimously declared that separate facilities were inherently unequal and unconstitutional. By the 1970s segregated districts had practically vanished in the South.

Integration of schools has been a protracted process, however, with results affected by vast population migrations in many areas, and affected by suburban sprawl, the disappearance of industrial jobs, and movement of jobs out of former industrial cities of the North and Midwest and into new areas of the South. Although required by court order, integrating the first black students in the South met with intense opposition. In 1957 the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, had to be enforced by federal troops. President Dwight D. Eisenhower took control of the National Guard, after the governor tried to use them to prevent integration. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, integration continued with varying degrees of difficulty. Some states and cities tried to overcome de facto segregation, a result of housing patterns, by using forced busing. This method of integrating student populations provoked resistance in many places, including northern cities, where parents wanted children educated in neighborhood schools.

Although full equality and parity in education has still to be achieved (many school districts are technically still under the integration mandates of local courts), technical equality in education had been achieved by 1970.[83]

Education in the 1960s and 1970s

Inequality

The Coleman Report, by University of Chicago sociology professor James Coleman proved especially controversial in 1966. Based on massive statistical data, the 1966 report titled "Equality of Educational Opportunity" fueled debate about "school effects" that has continued since.[84] The report was widely seen as evidence that school funding has little effect on student achievement. A more precise reading of the Coleman Report is that student background and
socioeconomic status are much more important in determining educational outcomes than are measured differences in school resources (i.e. per pupil spending). Coleman found that, on average, black schools were funded on a nearly equal basis by the 1960s, and that black students benefited from racially mixed classrooms.[85]

The comparative quality of education among rich and poor districts is still often the subject of dispute. While middle class African-American children have made good progress; poor minorities have struggled. With school systems based on property taxes, there are wide disparities in funding between wealthy suburbs or districts, and often poor, inner-city areas or small towns. "De facto segregation" has been difficult to overcome as residential neighborhoods have remained more segregated than workplaces or public facilities. Racial segregation has not been the only factor in inequities. Residents in New Hampshire challenged property tax funding because of steep contrasts between education funds in wealthy and poorer areas. They filed lawsuits to seek a system to provide more equal funding of school systems across the state.

Some scholars believe that transformation of the Pell Grant program to a loan program in the early 1980s has caused an increase in the gap between the growth rates of white, Asian-American and African-American college graduates since the 1970s.[86] Others believe the issue is increasingly related more to class and family capacity than ethnicity. Some school systems have used economics to create a different way to identify populations in need of supplemental help.

**Special education**

In 1975 Congress passed Public Law 94-142, *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*. One of the most comprehensive laws in the history of education in the United States, this Act brought together several pieces of state and federal legislation, making free, appropriate education available to all eligible students with a disability.[87] The law was amended in 1986 to extend its coverage to include younger children. In 1990 the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) extended its definitions and changed the label "handicap" to "disabilities". Further procedural changes were amended to IDEA in 1997.[88]

**Reform efforts in the 1980s**

In 1983, the *National Commission on Excellence in Education* release a report title *A Nation at Risk*. Soon afterward, conservatives were calling for an increase in academic rigor including an increase in the number of school days per year, longer school days and higher testing standards. In the latter half of the decade, E.D. Hirsch put forth an influential attack on one or more versions of progressive education, advocating an emphasis on "cultural literacy"—the facts, phrases, and texts that Hirsch asserted every American had once known and that now only some knew, but was still essential for decoding basic texts and maintaining communication. Hirsch's ideas remain significant through the 1990s and into the 21st century, and are incorporated into classroom practice through textbooks and curricula published under his own imprint.

**Policy Since 2000**
No Child Left Behind, passed by a bipartisan coalition in Congress in 2002, marked a new direction. In exchange for more federal aid the states were required to measure progress and punish schools that were not meeting the goals as measured by standardized state exams in math and language skills. By 2012 half the states were given waivers because the original goal that 100% students by 2014 be deemed "proficient" proved unrealistic.

Start times for high schools have been delayed from the earliest of the three types of schools, to the latest. The intent was to better align the school's starting times with findings about adolescent sleep cycles, which biologically tend to be later than in other periods of life.

**Historiography**

Most histories of education deal with institutions or focus on the ideas histories of major reformers, but a new social history has recently emerged, focused on who were the students in terms of social background and social mobility. Attention has often focused on minority and ethnic students. The social history of teachers has also been studied in depth.

Historians have recently looked at the relationship between schooling and urban growth by studying educational institutions as agents in class formation, relating urban schooling to changes in the shape of cities, linking urbanization with social reform movements, and examining the material conditions affecting child life and the relationship between schools and other agencies that socialize the young.

The most economics-minded historians have sought to relate education to changes in the quality of labor, productivity and economic growth, and rates of return on investment in education. A major recent exemplar is Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz, *The Race between Education and Technology* (2009), on the social and economic history of 20th century American schooling.
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**Further reading [edit]**

for a detailed bibliography see *History of education in the United States: Bibliography*

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**Journals**

- *American Educational History Journal*

**External links**

- [American Education: Colonial America](#)