



Image from: [Reading and Writing in The Brain Book: An illustrated guide to its structure, function and disorders](#)

Summary Article: **school**  
From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

term commonly referring to institutions of pre-college formal education. It also properly includes colleges, universities, and many types of special training establishments (see adult education; colleges and universities; community college; vocational education).

### **Public Schools**

In the United States, the standard school system developed from an uncoordinated conglomeration of dame schools, reading and writing schools, private academies, Latin grammar schools, and colleges into a well-organized system in which a child may progress from kindergarten to college in a continuous and efficient free public system. By 1890 there had evolved the now common twelve-grade system whereby the child enters kindergarten at the age of five, goes to grammar or elementary school for grades one through eight, high or secondary school for grades nine through twelve, and then enters college. Compulsory attendance at school has been legislated in all states, although standards of age and length of the school year vary considerably.

To meet the psychological and social stresses of early adolescence, the junior high school was introduced (1890–1920) in many systems for grades seven through nine. This organization, sometimes called the six-three-three plan, was designed to ease the transition period by having the junior high school introduce its students to many aspects of the high school, such as student government and separate classes for different subjects. Critics of the junior high school, however, contended that it merely copied the program of the high school, which they believed to be inappropriate for the age group that attends the junior high. In response, many districts have established intermediate, or middle, schools, usually encompassing grades five through eight.

To provide opportunity for advanced training beyond high school without a full college course, the junior or community college, which generally includes the first two years of college, has gained wide popularity. Not only does it prepare students for technical careers, it allows states and municipalities to fulfill their commitment to open enrollment, whereby any high-school graduate may enter a specified institution of higher education. More recently, a few high schools have combined a community college curriculum with the last two years of high school. Such a program is designed to encourage bright or disadvantaged students to remain in high school by enabling them to earn an associate degree in conjunction with a high school diploma.

Although in the United States schools are primarily the responsibility of state and local authorities, the federal government has passed a number of measures intended to assist schools and their students. The National Defense Education Act (1958) and the Higher Education Act (1965) were designed to provide financial assistance to college and university students. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965, amended 1966, 1967) was the first national general-aid education program in the United States. It provided funds for school library and textbook services, the education of poor and handicapped children, and educational innovations and construction by local school districts.

Public school services have been extended, in some communities, into the sponsorship of community centers, adult education, summer schools, and recreation programs. In addition, with the increase in the number of households where both parents work and in the number of single-parent households, programs such as Head Start have been established to care for preschool children. Special programs have been established for the deaf, the blind, and the mentally and physically handicapped and in some instances for the gifted. In large cities special high schools are sometimes set up to serve special student needs; e.g., there may be separate schools for artistic, industrial, scientific, and classical subjects. In the latter part of the 20th cent. public schools, particularly in economically depressed urban areas, suffered from economic cutbacks, an increase in student crime, and an inability to find qualified administrators and teachers. Efforts to revitalize public education systems have included such varied approaches as decentralized community control in large urban areas, privatization of public school administration, school vouchers, charter schools, and standards and testing revisions such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010, 2011).

## Parochial Schools and the English System

The free public school system is paralleled in many areas by private and parochial schools. Preparatory schools are private schools operated primarily to prepare students for college. They correspond to English public schools, which are in fact private, endowed institutions. The English system, which is roughly organized according to a six-six model, has been used as the basis for many school systems in developing countries. These educational systems usually provide primary education for children up to ages 11 or 12 and a secondary program for students up to age 18.

## Bibliography

- See Cubberley, E. P. , *Public Education in the United States* (1919, repr. 1962);
- Graham, G. , *The Public School in the New Society* (1969);
- Garr, A. , *The School in the Social Setting* (1974);
- Gutok, G. L. , *A History of the Western Educational Experience* (1984);
- J. R. Rinehart; J. F. Lee, *American Education and the Dynamics of Choice* (1991).

### **APA**

### Chicago

### Harvard

### MLA

---

school. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/school>

---



*The Columbia Encyclopedia*, © Columbia University Press 2018



*The Columbia Encyclopedia*, © Columbia University Press 2018

## APA

school. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/school>

## Chicago

"school." In *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, by Paul Lagasse, and Columbia University. 8th ed. Columbia University Press, 2018. <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/school>

## Harvard

school. (2018). In P. Lagasse & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia*. (8th ed.). [Online]. New York: Columbia University Press. Available from: <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/school> [Accessed 13 November 2019].

## MLA

"school." *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Paul Lagasse, and Columbia University, Columbia University Press, 8th edition, 2018. *Credo Reference*, <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/school>. Accessed 13 Nov. 2019.