

## The Education System in the United States: Pros and Cons

The education system in the United States has its roots in England. However the education system in the United States has evolved due to its unique geo-cultural and political influences. The American education system has three distinct parts: Primary Education (Kindergarten – 8<sup>th</sup> Grade), Secondary Education (9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> Grade), and Post-Secondary Education (Technical/Trade Schools, Specialized Education, and Universities). Due to cultural beliefs regarding the stages of development of children and the legal restrictions regarding the juvenile justice system. Many states have divided the primary education sector into two parts, Elementary School (Kindergarten – 5<sup>th</sup> Grade) and Junior High School (6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Grade), clustering students in age groups that foster better inter-communication during the developmental stages, while at the same time sheltering children of younger ages from children reaching adolescence. Others, due to budgetary restrictions, are combining Junior and Senior High Schools.

It must be noted that all of the fifty states in the United States have considerable autonomy over the administration of education in their state. In general, all children are required by law to attend school between ages 6-17, and may leave the education system after reaching the age of 18. Children may attend public schools, private schools, or learn at home. Nevertheless, students from all three forms of education must take and pass state proficiency test starting at the third grade. In the event a student continually fails the proficiency test, the state authority on education will evaluate the cause and refer the student to local programs intended to evaluate, improve and monitor the student's progress. If necessary the student will be referred to special education or the juvenile justice system.

In addition, technical and trade schools in the post-secondary category often do not defer educational degrees. They instead issue certificates of completion, or assist the student in preparing and passing vocational test that lead to certification in certain skilled trades (Electronics, plumbing, carpentry, freight truck driving, etc.)

### School Statistics in the United States<sup>1</sup>

Total Schools	2007-2008	2009-2010
Public		
Elementary	132,656	132,183
Secondary	88,982	88,565
Combined	27,575	27,427
Total	249,213	248,175
Post Secondary	2,004	1,989
Private		
Elementary	21,870	21,425
Secondary	5,522	5,275
Combined	2,932	2,776
Total	30,324	29,476
Post Secondary	4,547	4,753

<sup>1</sup> Digest of Education Statistics 2012, U.S. Department of Education, NCES 2014-015 December 2013

Social, cultural, legal and economic factors have greatly influenced the education system in the United States. Education at the primary and secondary school level is viewed as a constitutional right. Therefore local, state and federal governments have increased their direct supervision of the school system. Furthermore, local commerce has a vested interest in education at all levels and has also exerted direct influence over the education system. This has led to a combined effort to ensure that students in the education system are receiving the skills needed to advance the social economic base in general. Simultaneously the education community has evolved to an institution that now sees the student, no matter at what level of education, as a customer with needs, ambition, and an opinion as to what is to be<sup>2</sup>learned in school and how. This is most important at the primary and secondary school level, where parents can be directly involved in the education process.

#### Accreditation of Schools:

For Kindergarten through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, is done in accordance with state law.

For higher education (University and Vocational) there are many regional and national accreditation private associations that accredit educational institutions. There is no federal government agency that relates this. There are two basic types of educational accreditation; one referred to as "institutional" and the other referred to as "specialized" or "programmatic."

Institutional accreditation normally applies to an entire institution, indicating that each of an institution's parts is contributing to the achievement of the institution's objectives, although not necessarily all at the same level of quality. The various commissions of the regional accrediting agencies, for example, perform institutional accreditation, as do many national accrediting agencies. (U.S Department of Education, Ed.gov.com) 2.

#### Scholastic Assessment:

The National Center for Education, subordinate to the U.S. Department of Education administers an annual scholastic assessment test for K1-12 covering reading, math, science, civics, the arts, writing, economics, U.S. history and geography.

The federal government requires each state to administer its own scholastic assessment test.

For transition into university most colleges require an acceptable score (Score determined by each college) on either the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) administered by the College Board, a private organization, or the American College Testing (ACT) also administered by a private organization. In addition, many colleges require a potential student to pay an entrance examination before being accepted as a student.

Student centered learning is an innovation that evolved from the concept that students are customers. That is to say, as in any customer serviced-based business, the needs and wishes of the customer are important to the business. Hence student centered learning moves the focus of education from what the teacher and the schools want, to infusing the wishes of the student. How things are taught how education goals are met and the amount of effort and responsibility placed upon the student to achieve educational goals. The educational standards and goals are set by the state, that is not to be doubted, but how to reach those goals has always been up to the teacher and the education institution. In student centered learning the teacher moves out of the middle of learning, dictating facts and measurements of learning, to a facilitator of learning. This position requires greater communication skills for teachers and the ability to form positive relationships with individual students.

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education

Student centered learning also requires, complete transparency regarding learning standards in the long term, objective measurable measurements of learning, the sharing of responsibilities for learning between the teacher and student.

Advantages of Student Centered Learning:

- Student become more independent
- Student group work inspires teamwork and social skills
- Students learn through questioning the doctrine
- Students internalize what they have learned
- Student motivation towards learning increases

Disadvantages of Student Centered Learning:

- Deviates from the traditional forms of learning and is uncomfortable for teachers (More work)
- The teacher/facilitator must actively involve all students and vary teaching methods to suit each student
- Difficult students have difficulty adjusting to student centered learning
- Maintaining focus on learning goals and standards.

Checks and Balances of the Education System

Local state and federal government in American all have direct supervisory control of the education system. In many states, if primary and secondary schools do not meet standards, superior government may take over administration of a lower school system. Parent and business associations monitor and exert influence over the administration of schools, much as do customers in a business industry. One weakness is that many school districts are financed by local property taxes. That is to say in areas where the property values are low, the amount of tax funds available to the schools in that area are low. Therefore, parents concerned about their child's education will either move to a school district that is meeting the educational goals and standards, or find a means to enroll their child in a better school.

The careers of teachers and school administrators are directly linked to their students meeting the state educational goals and standards. If their school fails to maintain the standards, school officials and or teachers might be forced to either improve their teaching skills, or lose their teaching certifications/jobs. In most states, the chief administrator of the school system is an elected position, and re-election depends on the academic success of the school district. In addition, often, teachers are required to attend continuing education in order to retain their certification for teaching.

On the other hand, teachers unions have become very strong, and attempt to negate the checks and balances of the education system.

In post secondary education cost is the central issue. Universities are very expensive, and scholarships are difficult to get. However, the cost forced universities to be customer oriented long before primary and secondary education moved toward student centered learning. The mere size and complexity of universities in the United States, and the competition amongst universities has required them to be innovative, cooperative with government and industry, and to focus on the needs of the student.

Curriculum Composition

Standards and structure of curriculum are set by each state but must be in line with federal requirements at all levels. There is no choice of courses in kindergarten through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

In high school and college the required curriculum is structured, but students have the option of selecting courses that are not degree requirements (Art, social studies, history, crafts, and vocational shops.)

