



World
Education
Services

Career Pathways in Teaching

**Putting Your International Education
to Work in the U.S.**





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Introduction

Immigrating to the United States is an opportunity to use your international training to either advance in your field or pursue a new career that builds on your education and experience. This guide will help you explore career pathways in and related to the field of teaching, as well as alternative careers in other fields where you can use your existing education and skills. You will find useful resources to help you plan for your future.



This Pathways Guide at a Glance

If you have completed your education in teaching in another country and are now starting your career in the U.S., you will need to understand to what extent you meet the academic requirements for your chosen career.

- The [Gaining Recognition for Your International Education](#) section will explain how to determine the U.S. equivalency of your degree from another country.
- The [Careers in the Field of Teaching](#) section provides examples of careers in the field of teaching that may match your qualifications.
- If you want to continue your career as a public school teacher in the U.S., you will need to obtain a U.S. license. See the [Licensing Requirements in Teaching](#) section.
- Not all internationally trained teachers decide to pursue a teaching career in the U.S., either because of the time and expense involved or because they want to pursue a different career. See the [Transferable Skills and Using Them in Related or Alternative Careers](#) section.

Let's get started!

Strategies for Success

Ask Lots of Questions

While you may have a strong idea of what your career will be in the U.S. based on the professional experience you already have, establishing yourself in a new country provides a chance to reach new goals and explore new possibilities. Analyzing your career options in the U.S. can be challenging, but if you remain flexible, you can use the education and experience you already have to build a path to success.

As you research your options, ask yourself:

- What are my short-term and long-term employment goals?
- What options are available to me based on my skills and qualifications?
- What are the steps and requirements in terms of time, costs, and additional training to pursue my goals?
- Whom can I talk to about my options?



Make a Plan

After you have explored some of the career options available to you in the U.S., it is time to make decisions and come up with a plan. In the U.S., developing your career path requires a lifelong commitment to learning, networking, and taking risks. A successful plan includes realistic steps and time frames for completion. Your plan should also make it possible for you to work toward multiple goals at once and allow for some setbacks along the way. It will take patience to reach your goals, and it is normal to change your mind or adapt to new circumstances as you move forward.

Think about the steps it will take to reach your goal. A clear goal-oriented plan may look something like this:

GOAL: Improve my language skills.

STEPS TO GOAL:

- Take an English language course that suits my needs.
- Meet with an English language conversation partner weekly.
- Learn terminology and professional language in my field.
- Read the newspaper every day.



You can use the [SMART Goal Worksheet](#) to guide you as you outline your plan.

Take the Initiative

While your academic and professional credentials are very important for your professional success, so are skills like your communication style, English language level, and ability to adapt to U.S. workplace culture. Meeting professionals in the field, joining a professional association, attending conferences, and volunteering are great ways to expand your understanding of the field, improve your skills, and network in the U.S. Finding meaningful work when you are an immigrant can take time and you may face challenges. Although many factors are out of your control, try to remain flexible, be persistent, and take the initiative. As you explore this guide, you will find a number of helpful resources that can support you.



Glossary

Academic or professional credential: The degree, diploma, certification, or license you receive when you complete a program, pass an exam, or meet a set of requirements.

Networking: Socializing and developing relationships with other professionals in your field, for the purposes of furthering your career.



Your Career Pathway in the U.S.

Like many immigrants, you may initially struggle to gain entry into your professional field in the U.S. While you may have adequate knowledge or experience, the challenge often lies in translating your skills and qualifications in a way that local employers will value and understand. You may also need further education and training, an understanding of your local labor market, and knowledge of how to navigate your options to choose a career pathway.



Your career pathway is made up of the educational and professional steps you take that open doors to new opportunities. Education and training are the building blocks of your career—when you acquire new skills, you can earn promotions and take on additional professional responsibilities.

To start thinking about your career options, you will need to understand the difference between regulated and non-regulated professions.

Understanding Regulated Professions

Each state decides which professions it will regulate and what level of formal education or training it will require for an individual to be eligible for licensure. In the U.S., specific authorities or licensing bodies are responsible for recognizing this education and training, as well as setting any other requirements. Some professions require licensure for entry to practice, and some only require licensure for performing certain professional tasks, allowing individuals to practice without licensure if they do not perform those tasks. For professions that do not strictly require licensure for practice, obtaining a license is typically still strongly encouraged. Since the time, cost, and specific requirements associated with licensing vary by state, contact **your state's licensing body for more information**.



Glossary

Career pathway: The steps you must go through to become qualified for a particular job or to advance in your professional field, including education, training, and certification.

Regulated professions: Professions that require a license or certification, usually because the work is related to public health or safety. Regulation ensures that anyone working in that profession has the knowledge and experience required to do the job safely and effectively.



Understanding Non-regulated Professions

Many occupations in the U.S. are not regulated, although certain credentials or standards of professional practice might still be preferred by employers in that field. You can prove that you meet these standards through certification processes administered by professional associations or private vendors. Certifications are voluntary credentials that you can earn to demonstrate your proficiency in a given area and which may help you secure employment or a higher salary. Certification requirements vary: some are entry level, and others demand the highest level of expertise and require licensure and many years of work experience.



In this guide, occupations that require a state certification or licensure process are clearly marked.



Can I work as a teacher in the United States without a U.S. license?

If you do not have a U.S. teaching license, your options for working as a teacher in the U.S. are limited.

The public education system in the United States is regulated, meaning that most teaching occupations in the U.S. require a license—often called a teacher certification—to practice. This is true for public school teachers at every level from preschool through high school.

- Note: Some states may offer streamlined pathways to licensure for teachers who were trained or are licensed in another country. In [California](#), for example, internationally trained teachers can apply for a preliminary Single Subject Teaching Credential, which allows you to teach for five years while fulfilling all the requirements for “clear” licensure, while [Michigan](#), [Utah](#), and [Virginia](#) recently passed laws allowing for the recognition of teaching credentials from abroad.



You do have options for working as a teacher in many private schools (and some public schools) without a U.S. license. See [The Teaching Profession in the U.S.](#) below for more information on the different types of schools in the U.S.

It's important to note that in the field of education, licensure for public school teachers is referred to as "certification." Because of this common usage, the terms "license" and "certification" are used interchangeably in this e-guide unless stated otherwise. However, teacher certification for public school teachers is not to be confused with the internal teacher certifications that some private schools, such as [Waldorf](#) or [Montessori](#) schools, may require. Private school teacher certifications are not required by law or regulated by the state, unlike the certification required for teaching in public schools.

If you have a teaching license from another country, it is not valid in the U.S. Internationally trained teachers need to meet the same requirements as U.S.-educated teachers to qualify for licensure.

Many internationally trained professionals decide not to pursue employment in regulated professions due to the challenges of relicensing. The teaching field does also include non-regulated employment opportunities, often in private schools, colleges and universities, or adult continuing education programs.

If you decide against pursuing a teaching career in the U.S., you can still work in a field related to teaching. Some related careers are discussed in the [Transferable Skills and Using Them in Related or Alternative Careers](#) section of this guide.



Relicensing: Having to meet licensing requirements in the U.S., even if you have a license from another country.



Gaining Recognition for Your International Education

Your education is the foundation of your career. While you may face challenges in getting your credentials recognized in the U.S., you do not have to start over. Exploring your career options begins with an understanding of the value of the education you have already completed as an internationally trained professional.

Obtaining a credential evaluation is often the first step an immigrant must take to gain access to educational and employment opportunities in the U.S. A credential evaluation provides recognition for your previous studies by considering the educational system in the country where you completed your studies, the status of the institution you attended, the content of the program, and any entry and graduation requirements.

In the U.S., this report helps schools, employers, licensing boards, and immigration authorities better understand your educational background compared to that of U.S.-educated candidates.

- Universities, for example, use the information to make admissions decisions and to award transfer credit or advanced standing in a program.
 - Advanced standing means you may be allowed to skip prerequisites for admission into a course or not repeat a required course, reducing the time needed to complete a degree.
 - Transfer credit means that your previous education is counted toward the total number of credits required for earning the degree.
- Employers and licensing boards refer to credential evaluations to assess whether or not you meet their academic requirements.

Unlike many other countries, the U.S. does not have a national education ministry to evaluate degrees from abroad. As a result, most academic institutions and [state licensing boards](#), as well as many employers, rely on credential evaluation services to examine and assess official documents. For teacher certification, most states accept credential evaluations from a number of agencies, but always check first with the institution that needs the evaluation to make sure that you choose an agency whose assessment they accept. If a WES evaluation is recognized and accepted, you can apply for a [WES credential evaluation](#).



Glossary

Credential evaluation: A comparison of your academic accomplishments to standards in the U.S., which determines your degree equivalency.

Degree equivalency: How a degree or diploma earned in another country compares to a similar U.S. credential.



Before requesting a credential evaluation from any agency, contact the institution that needs the evaluation so that you can understand its requirements. These institutions are responsible for the final recognition decision.

[World Education Services](#) (WES) allows you to preview the U.S. equivalency of your highest completed degree by using a [free equivalency tool](#). You may choose to utilize this free service to evaluate whether or not your degree will be found substantially equivalent to a U.S. degree before investing in an official evaluation. It may also be helpful to have an idea of the U.S. equivalency of your international credentials if you are exploring a new career pathway.

Note: This preview does not replace a formal credential evaluation that may be needed for official purposes.

To learn more, watch this informative video from WES: [What is a credential evaluation?](#)



The Teaching Profession in the U.S.

Teaching focuses on educating and guiding students in a variety of settings. Although your responsibilities will vary depending on the subject matter, age group, and classroom setting, a career in teaching guarantees you the opportunity to work directly with students to motivate and inspire them.

Working as a Teacher in the U.S.

Most teaching occurs in traditional academic settings, such as elementary (or primary) and secondary schools, colleges, and universities. Teaching can also take place in educational programs for youth or adults in facilities such as hospitals, juvenile detention centers, or prisons and in vocational training programs and continuing education programs.

Working Within Public and Private School Systems

Public K-12 schools in the U.S. are institutions that teach any combination of grades from kindergarten through grade 12 (sometimes including early childhood programs such as Head Start) and receive public funding from state, local, and federal governments. These schools are organized into administrative groups called public school districts, which may include the schools in a single town, several towns, or just a single city neighborhood, depending on the size of the local population. Public schools follow a set of rules developed **by the local school district and the state's board of education. Internationally trained** teachers need to meet the same requirements as U.S.-educated teachers, so even if you have many years of experience, you must obtain a new license (also known as teacher certification) in the U.S. if you plan to teach in a public school. Licensure is *only* required for teaching in public elementary and secondary schools and in public early childhood education programs.

In addition to local neighborhood schools, there are also the following types of public schools:

- [Charter schools](#): Public schools established to fulfill particular needs, serve specific populations, or adhere to special curricula or instructional practices. They receive public funding and support but are exempt from many school district regulations and may enroll students from anywhere in a district. [Some states](#) require charter school teachers to be certified, and some do not.



- [Magnet schools](#): Public schools that have a special educational theme, mode of instruction, subject emphasis, or other distinguishing characteristic. They can enroll students from across the entire school district. Teachers must be state certified like any other public school teacher.
- [Urban or rural schools](#): Public schools located either in underresourced city school districts or in geographically isolated areas. The children and communities in these areas typically have greater needs due to high rates of poverty and related challenges, while their schools have fewer resources available to meet those needs. Such schools may offer [hiring incentives](#) such as student loan repayment or financial assistance to attract and retain teachers.

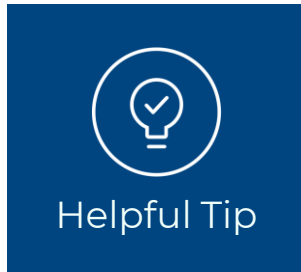
Private schools that do not receive the same degree of funding from federal, state, or local governments have more leeway to establish their own curricula and policies, including criteria for hiring teachers. Private schools generally do not require teachers to be licensed or certified, although they may prefer it.

Private schools include:

- Boarding schools: where students, and sometimes teachers, live at the school during the school term.
- Religious schools: early childhood, primary, or secondary schools affiliated with a religious organization.
- [Montessori](#) schools and [Waldorf](#) schools: guided by a specific educational philosophy and child-centered approach to learning.

Because the U.S. education system is administered at the state level, there is no national process for public school teachers to become licensed. Licensure requirements vary by state, but typically include the following:

- All public school teachers must complete a bachelor's or master's degree in education.
- If you have a bachelor's degree but it is not in education, you must complete an accredited teacher preparation program, which may result in either a master's degree or a postgraduate certificate.
- Some of these programs are considered alternative pathways to licensure, and most locations offer some version of them.
- Most states require internationally trained teachers to be tested for English proficiency.



Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of teachers in the U.S. depend greatly on areas of expertise and experience.

In general, teachers are responsible for:

- Creating lesson plans
- Teaching study and communication skills
- **Evaluating students' abilities, strengths, and weaknesses**
- Teaching lessons to classes of students or to smaller groups
- Grading assignments and monitoring student progress
- Working with students individually to help them overcome specific learning challenges

The following is an overview of what you can expect as a teacher at various levels.

Early Childhood Education or Preschool

- Preschool teachers work with children ages three to five before their mandatory elementary schooling begins. Preschool programs prepare young children for elementary school through play-based learning. There are various types of [preschools](#) to consider.

Primary and Secondary Education

- [Elementary](#) or primary school education begins in kindergarten. Typically, kindergarten through sixth **grade school teachers hold a bachelor's degree in elementary education** and instruct one group of children in core subjects, including reading, science, and math.
- Secondary school is from grade six or seven to grade 12.
 - Many communities have [middle school](#) for students in grades six through eight, although in some school districts middle school may start as early as grade four or extend as late as grade nine. It may also be called intermediate school or junior high school.
 - [High school](#) begins at grade nine and goes through grade 12.



- Secondary school teachers generally teach one or two subjects, such as math, history, science, or English. Because of this specialization, they **typically have a bachelor's degree in secondary education with a concentration in the academic subject they plan to teach.** However, it is **also common for secondary teachers to have a bachelor's degree in one of those academic subjects, followed by a master's degree or alternative postgraduate certificate in education.**
- Both primary and secondary schools are dynamic places that rely on many different kinds of professionals working together for the benefit of the students.
 - Special education teachers are trained to work with students at all levels who have physical, emotional, psychological, or learning challenges or disabilities.
 - Specialty teachers teach a specific subject to students of all grades at a school, such as music, art, foreign language, or physical education.
 - Schools may offer a range of career and technical education (CTE) or vocational education programs focusing on industries such as agriculture, health science, hospitality and tourism, or manufacturing. CTE teachers must have work experience in the subject they teach so they can impart to students the practical skills needed to work in those fields.
 - Classroom and specialty teachers often have additional responsibilities in their schools, such as coaching sports, performing administrative duties, chaperoning field trips, and leading enrichment programs.
 - Parents, volunteers, librarians, school counselors, and teaching assistants (also known as paraprofessionals, paraeducators, or teacher aides) may also assist teachers in the classroom and provide extracurricular activities, tutoring, and support.
- In every state, education is mandatory until at least age 16. Students who drop out of school before graduating with a high school diploma can return to school as adults and complete studies for a General Educational Development (GED) diploma through a school or community provider.

Post-secondary Education

- In the U.S., post-secondary education occurs after high school. It can include non-degree certificate programs, community colleges (associate degrees), and colleges and universities (bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees, or doctorates). Post-secondary education teachers, including lecturers and professors, instruct students in a wide variety of academic, artistic, and vocational subjects. Types of teachers include college and university faculty and post-secondary CTE teachers.



Adult and Continuing Education

- Adult and continuing education refers to the practice of teaching adult education courses and programs that do not lead to a certificate or degree. Adult education can help adults attain the basic skills they need—including reading, writing, math, English language proficiency, and problem-solving—to be successful workers, family members, and citizens.
- Adults also take education courses to stay current in their professional field or to pursue a personal interest. Adult and continuing education instructors may teach courses in a wide variety of subjects, including preparation for the General Educational Development (GED) exam or for college entry, as well as for professional development and career training.

Understanding Job Titles

Job titles for teaching roles can be quite diverse depending on specialty. Examples of teacher job titles include:



**ADJUNCT
PROFESSOR**



**ADULT LITERACY
TEACHER**



**ASSISTANT
TEACHER**



**ENGLISH AS A
SECOND LANGUAGE
(ESL) TEACHER**



**KINDERGARTEN
OR ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL TEACHER**



**SPECIAL
EDUCATION
TEACHER**

You may find job listings for your career under different titles. You can find some examples of these, as well as more information about your career, online at [CareerOneStop](https://www.careeronestop.org).



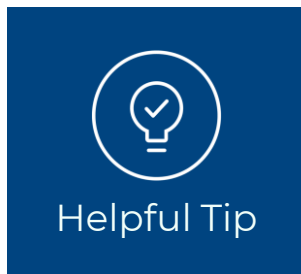
You can read more about different career options in the [Careers in the Field of Teaching](#) section of this guide.



Careers in the Field of Teaching

Once you know the value of your degree from another country, you can use the information in this section to move forward in your career.

Teaching is a growing and rewarding field that offers many exciting career options. In this section you will find some examples of teaching careers, including their key responsibilities and required academic qualifications.



Helpful Tip

Research shows that adding a U.S. degree or certification to your international education and training can significantly boost your career success in the U.S.



Degree Information

Teaching careers are available at every degree level.

Traditional Degrees

The K-12 public school system is largely administered at the state level, so there is no national process or standard for the education of public school teachers in the U.S., and educational requirements for teacher certification vary by [state](#). Teaching assistants, also known as paraprofessionals or paraeducators, do not need to be licensed and can typically find work with just an associate degree in education. Lead teachers, however, must be licensed to teach in public schools and traditionally have been required to hold a **bachelor's or master's degree in education** to qualify for licensure (except for career and technical education teachers in some states and subjects). Individuals planning to teach a certain subject, such as math, are expected to have a degree combining education and subject-specific study. **Some schools require teachers with only a bachelor's degree to complete a master's degree** in education within a certain period of time after they are hired. Even if it is not required, having a **master's degree** can [increase](#) a new teacher's starting salary by over \$5,000 per year. The financial gains are even greater for more experienced teachers, doubling to over \$10,000 more per year by the time they have been teaching for 10 to 14 years.



Alternative Teacher Preparation Programs

In addition to the traditional degree pathway, many [alternative teacher preparation programs](#) now offer other options for individuals seeking teacher certification. These programs can be local, state-level, or multistate initiatives, and their format and content can vary widely depending on [state requirements](#). Often, their goal is to attract candidates to teach specific subjects for which there are teacher shortages, or to work in underresourced schools.

Candidates are generally required to have at least a bachelor's degree in any subject, although if you are planning to teach a specific subject, such as science or history, it helps to have your initial degree in that field. Alternative teacher preparation programs typically include both coursework and a supervised classroom teaching component, many even placing a student as a part-time or full-time teacher during completion of the program. This teaching experience, sometimes called a [residency](#), is completed under mentorship of an experienced teacher. Many residency programs are designed specifically to ensure more diverse teacher workforces.

Alternative teacher preparation programs may lead to **either a master's degree** or a postgraduate certificate. Most programs can be completed in one to two years.

There are also initiatives designed to help paraprofessional educators holding an associate degree earn a bachelor's degree and become fully licensed teachers.



New Laws

A few states have recently passed laws removing the degree requirement entirely for certain groups of potential teachers. Laws regarding educational and other requirements for teacher certification are changing quickly, so check with your [state](#) for the most up-to-date information.

The following are some examples of teaching careers that you can pursue at various degree levels, beginning with an associate degree and going up to a doctorate. Licensure is required for every non-assistant teaching role in public elementary or secondary schools.



Teaching Careers

Preschool Teacher



Licensure or certification
may be required



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Caring for children ages three to five who have not yet started kindergarten.
 - Working in settings including public and private schools, childcare centers, community centers, and religious institutions.



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires an associate degree, although early childhood programs in public schools require teachers to have a bachelor's degree.



CERTIFICATION

- Certification is required in some states. Even in states where it is not required, voluntary certification could make employers more likely to hire you or offer you a higher salary.
- You may be eligible for a Preschool [Child Development Associate \(CDA\)](#) credential from the Council for Professional Recognition.



LICENSURE

- Licensure is only required for teaching in early childhood programs in public schools.

Teaching Assistant or Paraeducator



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Working under a teacher's supervision to provide students with additional instruction and support.
 - May also be called a paraprofessional or teacher aide.



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires an associate degree.



CERTIFICATION

- Some employers may require cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) or first aid certification.



LICENSURE

- Licensure is not required, even in public schools.



Kindergarten and Elementary School Teacher



Licensure required



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Instructing a class of younger students in the basics of subjects such as math, reading, science, and history.
 - Teaching students how to interact with each other appropriately and behave in a community.



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires a **bachelor's degree**.

Middle School Teacher



Licensure required



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Helping students build on the fundamentals they learned in elementary school and preparing them for high school.
 - Depending on the school, either instructing one class of students in most subject areas, as an elementary school teacher does, or teaching one subject to many different classes, as in high school.



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires a **bachelor's degree**.

High School Teacher



Licensure required



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Teaching the academic subjects and skills that prepare students to attend college or seek employment after graduation.
 - Specializing in one subject, such as science or history, and teaching several different classes and different grade levels within that subject.



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires a **bachelor's degree**.
 - Some states require that high school teachers have a degree in the subject they plan to teach.



Special Education Teacher



Licensure required



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Teaching [elementary](#), [middle](#), or [high school](#) level students who have disabilities of all kinds: learning, psychological, emotional, and physical.
 - Teaching basic skills such as reading, writing, and math, as well as literacy and communication techniques.



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires a **bachelor's degree**.

Specialty Teacher



Licensure required



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Teaching a specialty subject to multiple grade levels in an elementary, middle, or high school.
 - Specialty subjects can include [art](#), [music](#), [physical education](#), [foreign languages](#), [library](#), and [computer skills](#).



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires a **bachelor's degree**.

Career or Technical Education Teacher



Licensure may be required



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Helping [middle school](#), [high school](#), [vocational school](#), or [community college](#) students develop career-related technical skills.
 - Communicating knowledge to students clearly using tutorials, lectures, and hands-on work.



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires a **bachelor's degree**. You must also have work experience in the subject you teach.



Reading Specialist or Literacy Coach



Licensure required



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Conducting targeted literacy interventions for individual students and small groups, using research-based strategies and resources.
 - Working with classroom teachers and school administration to facilitate the coordination of reading programs.



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires a **master's** degree. You must also have teaching experience.

Substitute Teaching

Substitute teachers are called on as short-term replacements when regular teachers have to temporarily miss work. Substitute teachers may be asked to work on very short notice, often on the morning they are needed, and may be asked to teach any subject, usually with lesson plans provided by the regular teacher.

Substitute teachers may be placed in elementary, middle, or high school classrooms, and the duration of each teaching assignment may range from a single day to many months.

Required academic qualifications vary by state, ranging from just a high school diploma to a bachelor's degree. **Many states do require substitute teachers to hold some sort of credential, but because teacher certification is not required, substituting can be a way to work as a teacher while you work toward fulfilling all your requirements for licensure.**



Post-secondary Teacher, Professor, or Faculty



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Instructing students in academic and vocational subjects beyond the high school level.
 - Conducting and publishing research.
 - Working in junior or community colleges, career and vocational schools, or public or private four-year colleges or universities.



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires a master's degree to teach in community college or as adjunct faculty at a four-year college and a doctorate to work as full-time faculty at a four-year college or university.
 - Some academic departments also require professors and faculty to have work experience in the subject they teach, such as in law or medicine.



CERTIFICATION

- Certification is not required.



LICENSURE

- Licensure is typically not required.
 - However, licensure may be required for professors who will be preparing students to work in a regulated profession. For example, a university may require a professor of engineering to hold a Professional Engineer (PE) license.



Case Study: Elina



ELINA ALIYEVA
SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER

Before immigrating to the United States, Elina spent several years in her home country, the Kyrgyz Republic, as a primary school teacher. With her bachelor's degree in education and her teaching experience, Elina assumed that she would easily find work in the U.S. But her credential evaluation unexpectedly showed that her degree, while equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's degree, did not fulfill all the requirements for a major in education.

Elina learned through her public library that her state offered an alternative teacher certification program, designed to attract individuals with degrees in other areas to switch to a career in education. Elina applied to the program and was accepted, starting a residency that allowed her to teach—and earn an income—while taking courses in pedagogy and special education. After less than two years, Elina graduated from the program with a master's degree and initial teacher certification, and because so many schools in her area were in need of special education teachers, she was able to choose from several job offers.

There is a great need for certified public school teachers in the U.S., as most states are experiencing teacher shortages. As a result, many employment opportunities exist for certified teachers, especially in certain subjects. As of 2023, [45 percent](#) of public schools reported being understaffed, unable to fill an estimated 55,000 full-time teaching positions nationwide. Even when jobs are filled, it is often with candidates who lack the appropriate certification—and expertise—for the position: State data from 2021 to 2023 indicate that more than [365,000](#) staff members were employed to teach subjects they were not fully qualified to teach. The [greatest need](#) is for trained and certified teachers of special education, math, and science, as well as English language learners.



Licensing Requirements in Teaching

This section of the guide provides general information on licensing and helpful resources to guide you as you move forward.

Licensure for Teachers

The teacher licensing process in the U.S. is complex and can take years. Each state in the U.S. is responsible for the licensure (also known as certification) of public school teachers within that state, and requirements may vary. For state-specific licensure information, contact your [local licensing board](#). Typical requirements include:

- Completing an approved teacher preparation program.
 - This may be a traditional bachelor's or master's degree in education or, if you already have a bachelor's degree in a different subject, a qualifying [alternative teacher preparation program](#).
 - Career and technical education teachers in some states and subjects may be exempt from the degree requirement.
 - An increasing number of [states](#), such as [New York](#), allow students enrolled in alternative teacher preparation programs to teach full-time with a special license while completing their educational and other requirements for full certification.
 - A small number of states, such as [Michigan](#) and [Utah](#), are beginning to pass laws allowing teachers licensed in other countries to more easily obtain state teacher certification.
 - A few states, such as [Arizona](#), [Florida](#), and [Oklahoma](#), have recently removed academic requirements for certain groups of potential teachers—
in some cases eliminating the requirement for any degree at all. Check with your state for the most up-to-date information on the laws where you plan to teach.



If you have graduated from a teaching program outside the U.S., you will need to obtain a credential evaluation of your degree. The results of your credential evaluation will determine your next steps: Either you will be found eligible to proceed with the licensure process, or you may have to take some additional courses first.



Most state licensing boards accept credential evaluations from a number of providers, but check with your state before applying for your credential evaluation to make sure that you choose a provider on its list.

- Passing an exam, such as the widely used [Praxis test](#), which measures knowledge of mathematics and English reading and writing. Subject teachers may be required to take a test specific to the subject they plan to teach.
 - Some states are now passing laws amending or eliminating testing requirements under certain circumstances. Check with your state for the most up-to-date information on the laws where you live.
- Passing a criminal background check, which often includes fingerprinting.

Most new teaching licenses are granted on a “provisional” basis and are only valid for a certain amount of time, usually three to five years. Each state has additional renewal requirements for teachers seeking “permanent” certification.

Interstate Licensing Agreements: Working in Other States

The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification ([NASDTEC Interstate Agreement](#)) is a collection of more than 50 statements from various U.S. states and Canadian provinces saying which other jurisdictions’ teaching licenses each one will accept. The Interstate Agreement is designed to facilitate the movement of teachers between participating states and provinces.

- Note: The NASDTEC Interstate Agreement is not a reciprocity agreement; all statements of acceptance are only one-way. For example, Georgia might recognize teaching licenses from Connecticut, but that does not mean that Connecticut will recognize teaching licenses from Georgia.

Many states also have additional [Jurisdiction Specific Requirements \(JSRs\)](#) that interstate candidates must fulfill before their licensure from another state can be accepted. These often depend on your title and work experience and can include specific tests or coursework. Some states do offer “full reciprocity,” meaning they have no additional requirements.

Although additional conditions may need to be fulfilled, the Interstate Agreement simplifies the process for a teacher licensed in one participating state to obtain a license in another.



Other Certifications: Preschool Teachers

Some states require preschool teachers to obtain the [Child Development Associate \(CDA\)](#) Credential from the Council for Professional Recognition.

In addition, 13 states recognize the [Certified Childcare Professional \(CCP\)](#) designation from National Early Childhood Program Accreditation as an approved director or teacher credential.

The information presented in this guide should not be considered exhaustive. It is always important to consult state licensing boards and professional associations for the most recent and authoritative guidance. See the [Resources in the Field of Teaching](#) section of this guide for a list of helpful resources.



Transferable Skills and Using Them in Related or Alternative Careers

Transferable Skills

Like many immigrants, you may find that you are not considered qualified for the same job here that you had in your home country, because job titles and requirements in your field are different in the U.S. You may have a variety of reasons for choosing to pursue other options that will allow you to use your training and experience.

The key to finding alternative paths to a fulfilling career is to identify:

1. Your skills (what you know how to do)
2. Your knowledge (what you know)
3. Your competencies (what you are good at)
4. Your aptitudes (what is easy for you to learn)

All of these can be useful in a related or alternative career. These transferable skills are essential for career success and will enable you to adapt to changing circumstances, especially when your education and experience were obtained in another country.

As you identify your transferable skills, it can be helpful to think about the difference between hard skills and soft skills. Employers place great value on soft skills, such as your ability to communicate, lead others, organize projects, and work effectively on a team—skills you probably already use on a daily basis. You can also apply your more technical hard skills, such as computer skills, foreign language fluency, and understanding of specialized vocabulary, to a completely different career.

Soft skills especially depend on your proficiency in communicating in English, which can be a challenge when English is not your first language. For your soft skills to benefit you in a U.S. job search, you must practice both your written and spoken English and familiarize yourself with English terminology that is specific to your field. You may want to consider taking a course that will teach you the vocabulary specific to working in your industry. You can find some offerings for learning English for a teaching career in the [Resources in the Field of Teaching](#) section of this e-guide.



Transferable skills: Skills developed in one situation or career which can be transferred to a different one.



Are you including your transferable skills on your résumé? **Teachers typically have the following skills and expertise that could be applied to a different career:**

- Multitasking
- Problem solving
- Conflict resolution
- Leadership skills
- Public speaking
- Researching
- Instructing

Related and Alternative Careers in Teaching

If you have spent many years committed to a profession, it is understandable to feel that your career—just like your relationships, hobbies, and beliefs—is a key part of your identity. It is not unusual to experience a sense of identity loss or failure when having to **explore a new career path**. In the U.S., however, going “back to school” to switch careers is quite common.

Some of the careers described in this section require additional education or training. It is possible to find options that take only a few months, as well as more in-depth options that can take a year or more.

Why consider a different career?

- Open doors to new career possibilities.
- Earn income while you work toward your goal career.
- Grow your professional network in the United States.
- Help you gain American work experience.

Examples of Related Careers

Many careers related to the field of teaching do not require you to have the equivalent of a U.S. teaching degree. These are ideal options for internationally trained teachers who want to continue working in fields related to education but whose degrees have not been found to be substantially equivalent, or who want to work while pursuing additional teaching education in the U.S. You can search different teaching and related careers online in the [BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook](#) and at [CareerOneStop](#).



Professional network: The people you stay in contact with based on professional connections rather than personal ones.



Training and Development Specialist



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Developing, teaching, and administering employee training programs that may take place in a classroom or online.
 - Working in almost any industry, sometimes embedded in a company's Human Resources Department.



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires a **bachelor's degree**, but some employers will hire candidates with an associate degree and relevant work experience.
 - You must also have work experience in a related field, such as education, human resources, or the employing organization's industry.



CERTIFICATION

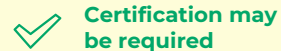
- Certification is not required, although voluntary certification could make employers more likely to hire you or offer you a higher salary.
 - You may be eligible for a [Certified Facilitator of Training](#) or [Certified Developer of Training](#) credential from the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI).



LICENSURE

- Licensure is not required.

Preschool or Daycare Center Director



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Performing administrative duties including managing staff and establishing goals, curriculum, and daily routine.
 - Ensuring licensing regulations and safety standards are being maintained.



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires a **bachelor's degree**.



CERTIFICATION

- Some employers may require a credential such as the Child Development Associate (CDA).
 - Even if it is not required, voluntary certification could make employers more likely to hire you or offer you a higher salary.



LICENSURE

- Licensure is not required.



School or Career Counselor or Advisor



Licensure required



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Teaching students academic and social skills.
 - Assisting students with career decisions by helping them develop relevant skills, choose a career, or apply to college.
 - Working in public or private schools (school counselors) or in colleges, government agencies, career centers, or private practices (career counselors and advisors and academic advisors).



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires a **master's degree** in psychology or counseling, although career and academic advisors may only need a bachelor's degree.



CERTIFICATION

- Certification is not required, although voluntary certification could make employers more likely to hire you or offer you a higher salary.
 - You may be eligible for [National Certified Counselor \(NCC\)](#) certification from the National Board for Certified Counselors.



LICENSURE

- [Licensure](#) is required for school counselors to work in public schools.

Instructional Coordinator or Curriculum Specialist



Licensure may be required



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Developing curricula and helping teachers and principals implement them in schools.
 - Instructing teachers and principals in new and alternative teaching techniques and technology and assessing the effectiveness of the changes.



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires a **master's degree**. It is also helpful to have previous work experience in teaching or school administration.



LICENSURE

- Teaching or education administration licensure is required in some states. Contact your [state](#) for more information.



Examples of Alternative Careers

Alternative careers are occupations in different fields in which you can use the skills and knowledge you gained during your teaching education and experience. Consider these types of careers if you are interested in exploring a different career path.

Editor



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Reading and revising the work of writers before it is published and making decisions about readiness for publication.
 - Correcting spelling and grammar, verifying facts, and editing writing to make content clearer.
 - Helping writers develop their ideas and adhere to the publisher's policies.
 - Editing content for magazines, newspapers, books, or websites.



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires a **bachelor's** degree.



LICENSURE

- Licensure is not required.



Human Resources Specialist



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Hiring workers for an employer by requesting and reviewing job applications and interviewing candidates.
 - Managing employee compensation, benefits, and training.
 - Helping employees resolve any conflicts that arise in the workplace.
 - Keeping employee records and processing employment-related paperwork.



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires a **bachelor's** degree.



CERTIFICATION

- Certification is not required, although voluntary certification could make employers more likely to hire you or offer you a higher salary. You may be eligible for the following certifications:
 - [SHRM Certified Professional \(SHRM-CP\)](#) or [SHRM Senior Certified Professional \(SHRM-SCP\)](#) certification from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM).
 - Any of the eight certifications offered by the [HR Certification Institute](#).



LICENSURE

- Licensure is not required.

Social Service or Community Service Manager



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Overseeing and coordinating social service programs and managing employees who provide the services.
 - Working with key stakeholders to identify and meet the needs of the community.



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires a bachelor's degree, although some employers prefer a master's degree.
 - You must also have work experience as a social worker or in a related field.



LICENSURE

- Licensure is not required.



Librarian or Library Media Specialist



Licensure or certification
may be required



RESPONSIBILITIES

- In this career, your responsibilities may include:
 - Maintaining and organizing the library's collection of books, videos, music, and other media.
 - Researching new books and other media, to decide what to purchase for the library's collection.
 - Helping people who come to the library find the information and media they seek and teaching them how to use information resources like the internet and searchable databases.
 - Planning and conducting educational and enrichment programs for children and other library patrons.
 - Training and supervising library support staff and volunteers.



EDUCATION

- This career typically requires a **master's degree** in library science, although in some states public school librarians are only required to have a bachelor's degree.



CERTIFICATION

- Some states require certification for [librarians working in public libraries](#).



LICENSURE

- Licensure is only required for work as a [public school librarian](#) or library media specialist in most states.
 - Some states may also require public school librarians or library media specialists to pass a test such as the Praxis II Library Media Specialist test.



Case Study: Issouf



ISSOUF KABORE
HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER

Issouf was born and raised in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso. He attended the University of Koudougou, where he completed a teacher training program. After teaching high school for several years, he and his wife decided to immigrate to America. When they arrived, Issouf contacted an immigrant services agency to see if he could continue teaching and learned that the process to relicense as a teacher would take more time than he was able to invest. Instead, he sought related work that matched his background and skills. His outgoing personality, engaging instructional style, and excellent communication skills made Issouf a natural candidate for work in corporate training and development. With support from a career advising program for immigrants, Issouf was able to find employment as a learning specialist with a respected local organization.



Resources in the Field of Teaching

You can explore the following helpful resources for more information on education, employment, licensing and certification, financial assistance, and workplace English to pursue a career in the field of teaching.

Educational Resources

[Teach.org](#) offers an [educator preparatory program](#) search tool. Teach.org has [information](#) on Colorado, Connecticut, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, and three areas in Texas: Dallas–Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio.

[Teaching Degree Search](#) has a teaching program search tool as well as information on a variety of education career paths, such as elementary education, special education, and instructional technology.

Some professional associations offer student resources. Examples include:

- [Council for Exceptional Children](#): offers a membership-based teacher candidate support network.
- [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#): offers a [general information](#) page for students and an [early childhood degree directory](#).

Alternative Education and Certification Programs

Note: The programs listed below are available in multiple states. Many states and cities also offer their own local alternative teacher certification programs, such as [NYC Teaching Fellows](#) in New York City. Always check what programs are available in your area.

[American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence](#) offers a state-approved route to full teacher certification in Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

[Teach For America](#) is a program that trains and places teachers for two-year teaching commitments in underserved [urban and rural communities](#) across the U.S. The



organization helps you obtain a [temporary teaching license](#). If you want to continue teaching after your two-year commitment ends, you must go through your state's required steps to achieve full teacher certification during the two years that you are teaching through Teach For America.

[TNTP Teaching Fellows](#) is a teacher training and certification program that operates in Baltimore, Maryland; Indianapolis, Indiana; and New Orleans, Louisiana, as well as in the states of Minnesota and Nevada.

[Teachers of Tomorrow](#) offers an alternative teacher certification program in nine states: Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, and Texas.

Career Resources

The [American Federation of Teachers](#) offers resource pages for [early childhood](#) educators, [preK-12](#) public school teachers, and [paraprofessionals](#).

CareerOneStop offers a variety of resources, including a [professional association finder tool](#), a [job search tool](#), and a [résumé guide](#).

[Edutopia](#), the website of the George Lucas Educational Foundation, offers professional development resources on many [topics](#), such as classroom management, social and emotional learning, and differentiated instruction.

[HigherEdJobs](#) is a website devoted to careers in post-secondary education. It includes a highly searchable database of [job listings](#) as well as other [career resources](#).

[K12JobSpot](#) and [SchoolSpring](#) are nationwide searchable databases of teaching job listings.

The [National Board for Professional Teaching Standards \(NBPTS\)](#) offers a [blog](#) with career support articles.

The [National Education Association \(NEA\)](#) offers teacher resources on [student success](#), [your rights in the workplace](#), [professional excellence](#), and [advocating for change](#).



The [Online Application System for K-12 Education \(OLAS\)](#) offers teaching job listings centered on New York state but also includes the states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Vermont. OLAS is free to use, but registration is required.

[Teach.org](#) offers information on a variety of teaching-related subjects, as well as free one-on-one career coaching.

Teachers of Tomorrow offers SimpleK12, an online [professional development](#) program combining webinars, live sessions, discussion forums, e-books, and downloadable resources.

We Are Teachers offers [career advice](#) and [“life and well-being”](#) articles that provide insight into American teaching culture.

Many other professional associations also maintain online career centers specific to certain teaching specialties or populations of teachers. Some examples include:

- [Council for Exceptional Children](#): offers a [professional resources](#) page, a [job search](#) tool, a [career learning center](#), and [early career professional resources](#) for special education teachers.
- [Latinos for Education](#): offers a [Latinx Teachers Fellowship](#) program for early career teachers and a [social network](#) for Latinos in education.
- [National Alliance of Black School Educators](#): offers a [career center](#) with a [job search tool](#).
- [National Association for Bilingual Education](#): offers a career center with searchable [job listings](#) for bilingual educators, as well as continuing education via [“digital badges”](#) that are earned through successfully completing education modules.
- [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#): offers a [career center](#) with a [job search](#) tool and career advice articles.
- [National Council of Teachers of English](#): offers a [career center](#) with a [job search tool](#) and a [career insights](#) tool.
- [National Council of Teachers of Mathematics](#): offers a [career center](#) with a [job search tool](#) and [career advice](#) articles.
- [National Science Teaching Association](#): offers a [job search tool](#), an [interview coach](#) tool, a [job offer analyzer](#) tool, and articles with [career advice](#).

Upwardly Global offers a free [career coaching](#) program for college-educated immigrants living in certain states, including training and networking opportunities.



The [U.S. Program Map](#), developed and maintained by WES, is a searchable database of more than 100 programs and services around the country that support the economic and professional advancement of internationally trained immigrants and refugees in the U.S. Programs focus on career preparation, contextualized English language learning, and licensing and credentialing guidance.

Licensing Resources

The U.S. Department of Education maintains a [map](#) with links to each state and U.S. territory's department of education and higher education agency, special education agency, and adult education agency.

The [NASDTEC Interstate Agreement](#) facilitates the movement of educators among the states and other jurisdictions that are members of NASDTEC and have signed the agreement. NASDTEC also offers maps with [teacher education](#) and [certification](#) information by state.

Upwardly Global's [Professional Licensing Guides](#) can help you understand the necessary steps to continue your career in California, Illinois, Michigan, New Hampshire, and New York.

[Education Commission of the States](#) explains how a teacher certification obtained in one state may provide eligibility to teach in another state, depending on state-specific regulations.

[Teacher Certification Degrees](#) maintains a list of links to every state's alternative teacher certification requirements.

Financial Resources

The [National Education Association \(NEA\)](#) offers a resource page on [student debt support](#) with access to a student debt navigator and information on applying for public service loan forgiveness.

The federal [Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education \(TEACH\)](#) grant provides recipients with up to \$4,000 toward their teaching education. Applicants must pledge to teach a high-need subject full time for four years after graduation, in a public elementary or secondary school serving low-income students.



[Teach.org](#) offers a searchable database of [financial aid and scholarships](#).

There are almost 2,400 [American Job Centers \(AJCs\)](#) located throughout the U.S. AJCs provide a wide variety of support and resources to help you find employment, although specific offerings vary by location.

On its [Educational Resources for Immigrants, Refugees, Asylees and other New Americans](#) page, under the heading of “Higher Education Students,” the U.S. Department of Education lists financial aid resources including information on federal student aid [eligibility for non-U.S. citizens](#). The agency also offers an online [College Affordability and Transparency Center](#), including links to [cost estimating calculators](#) and an [affordability report generator](#).

Immigrants Rising maintains lists of [undergraduate and graduate scholarships and fellowships](#) that don’t require proof of citizenship or legal permanent residency.

The [Individual Development Accounts \(IDA\) program](#) allows refugees and other Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)-eligible applicants to save money to purchase a car or a home, to start or support a business, or to pursue post-secondary education or training. The grant matches \$1 for every \$1 the client saves, up to \$2,000 for individuals or \$4,000 for households. Applicants must have been in the U.S. for less than five years and must apply to the program through a [grantee](#) organization, currently available in 15 states.

The Maryland Department of Labor maintains a list of [Education and Training Scholarships for New Americans](#). Some offerings are specific to Maryland residents, but many are open to applicants living anywhere in the U.S.

The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) offers a [Scholarship Resource Guide](#) that is updated yearly.

The [Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans](#) program awards 30 graduate education fellowships per year to immigrants and children of immigrants.

[ScholarshipsA-Z](#) maintains a list of scholarships organized by the month in which applications are due.

USAHello maintains a list of [scholarships for immigrants and refugees](#). Some of the scholarships are available nationwide, and some are state-specific.

English Resources



[English for Teaching Purposes](#) is a 13-hour free online course aimed at college- or university-level instructors.

[Voice of America: Learning English](#) features a news podcast read in simple English at three different learning levels. Each episode has a transcript that you can read along while listening. Articles and episodes on teaching-related topics can be found under the website's [Education](#) section.

SMART Goal Worksheet

Now that you have reviewed this guide, the next step is to think about your career plan. We recommend using Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-based (SMART) goals. You can use this SMART goal template to help you identify your next steps.

GOAL	SPECIFIC	MEASURABLE	ACHIEVABLE	RELEVANT	TIME-BASED
What do you want to achieve?	Who? What? Where? When? Why?	How much? How often? How many?	Can it be done?	Is it relevant to your ultimate vision?	When?



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Founded in 1974, WES is a non-profit social enterprise that supports the educational, economic, and social inclusion of immigrants, refugees, and international students. From evaluating academic credentials to shaping policy, designing programs, and providing philanthropic funding, we partner with a diverse set of organizations, leaders, and networks to uplift individuals and drive systems change.

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