

Preschool Teacher

Teach three, four and five year olds how to be people. Meaningful work that the country underpays.

TYPICAL PAY

\$38,140

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$29k to \$61k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Child care centers, public school pre-kindergarten, Head Start, chu...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
 Babysit, work at a camp, volunteer in a church nursery. Real hours with small children are what get you hired.
- 2 Entry job plus a credential** About 1 year
 Most people start as an assistant while working toward the CDA (Child Development Associate) credential: roughly 120 clock hours of training, several hundred hours of hands-on experience, a portfolio, an observation and an exam.
- 3 Associate degree, if you want to lead a classroom** 2 years
 A two-year early childhood education degree at a community college. Many Head Start and higher-quality centers require it for lead teachers.
- 4 Bachelor's degree, if you want a public school** 4 years
 A four-year early childhood education degree that includes student teaching.
- 5 State teaching license** Final year plus testing
 Finish a state-approved preparation program and pass the state certification exams. In Texas, for example, that runs through an approved Educator Preparation Program and the Texas Education Agency.

Pros and cons

- + Work that matters, with results you can see in a year
- + Training is short and cheap compared to most careers
- + Jobs exist in every town in the country
- Low pay, and it does not rise much in private centers
- Many centers offer no paid sick leave or health insurance
- You will catch every illness that walks through the door

Good to know

It is a half-million person workforce

Federal occupation data counts about 555,100 preschool teachers in the United States, with roughly 65,500 openings projected each decade as people leave the field. Turnover, not growth, drives most o...

Head Start is 60 years old

Head Start began in 1965 as an eight-week summer program for children from low income families and became a permanent federal program. It is still one of the largest employers of preschool teachers...

Optional boosts

A state teaching license. Special education endorsement. Bilingual certification. Montessori certification.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education (25-2011.00)
 O*NET OnLine: Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education
 Council for Professional Recognition, which issues the Child Development Associate credential
 Texas Education Agency: educator certification

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/preschool-teacher>



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