

Historical Timeline

- 1635 Citizens founded Boston Latin School, the oldest continuously operating school in the United States. The school is currently part of the public school system. At its founding, however, the distinction between public and private education was not particularly sharp. Like most colonial schools, Boston Latin was supported by both public and private funds. Latin grammar schools were originally designed for sons of certain social classes who were destined for leadership positions in church, state, or the courts.
- 1635 The first “free school” in Virginia opens. Education in the southern colonies is more typically provided at home by parents or tutors.
- 1636 Harvard College, the first institution of higher education in the United States, is founded in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- 1642 The Massachusetts General Court mandates that town officials make sure that parents and masters teach children to read and to understand “principles of religion and the capital laws of the country.”
- 1647 The Massachusetts Law of 1647 is passed, requiring that every town with at least 50 families hire a schoolmaster and every town with at least 100 families have a Latin grammar school to prepare students for Harvard.
- 1690 The first edition of *The New England Primer* is printed in Boston. It becomes the most widely used schoolbook in New England.
- 1693 The College of William and Mary is established in Virginia. It is the second college to open in colonial America and has the distinction of being Thomas Jefferson’s college.
- 1751 Benjamin Franklin helps to establish the first “English academy” in Philadelphia, with a curriculum that is both classical and modern. The academy eventually becomes the University of Pennsylvania.
- 1779 Thomas Jefferson proposes a free schooling plan and a two-track educational system, with different tracks “for the laboring and the learned.”
- 1783–1785 Noah Webster writes *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*, which consists of three volumes: a spelling book, a grammar book, and a reader. The spelling volume, later renamed the *American Spelling Book*, has never been out of print.
- 1787 The Northwest Ordinance includes details of territorial and state organization and asserts that since “religion, morality, and knowledge” are necessary for good government and human happiness, “schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”

- 1794 New York is the first state to establish a board of regents.
- 1801 Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the oldest art institution in the United States, is founded in Philadelphia.
- 1802 The U.S. Military Academy at West Point is established by Congress.
- 1805 The Free School Society (renamed the Public School Society in 1826) is organized initially to provide inexpensive, basic education for poor children and later all children in New York City.
- 1817 The first free public school for the deaf (the Connecticut Asylum at Hartford for the Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons) is founded by Thomas Gallaudet.
- 1820–1860 Reformers successfully establish common school systems in northern states. With few exceptions, southern states do not embrace the major features of common school reform until after the Civil War.
- 1821 The first U.S. women’s college, Troy Female Seminary, is founded by Emma Hart Willard in Troy, New York. In 1895, the school is renamed Emma Willard School in her honor. Also, the first public high school, Boston English High School, opens.
- 1827 Massachusetts is the first state to pass a law that establishes tax-supported public schools. It required that towns of more than 500 families have a public school open to all students.
- 1827 The first U.S. kindergarten is established in Watertown, Wisconsin.
- 1829 The New England Asylum for the Blind, now called the Perkins School for the Blind, opens in Massachusetts. It is the first school in the United States for children with visual disabilities.
- 1836 William Holmes McGuffey publishes his first reader. The McGuffey Readers, as they became known, are among the most influential textbooks of the 19th century.
- 1837 Horace Mann becomes secretary of the newly formed Massachusetts State Board of Education, where he worked to increase funding for public schools and training for teachers.
- 1837 Eighty students arrive at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, now known as Mount Holyoke College. It is known today as the nation’s oldest continuing education institution for women.
- 1839 The first state-funded school specifically for teacher education, originally called a “normal” school, opens in Lexington, Massachusetts.
- 1840 Bishop John Hughes begins an unsuccessful effort to secure a share of state school funds for Catholic schools in New York City. He later turns his attention to the development of a system of parochial schools.
- 1848 Massachusetts Reform School opens, which brings together the traditional education system and juvenile justice system to make “reform schools.”
- 1852 Massachusetts enacts the first compulsory attendance law.
- 1857 The National Teachers’ Association is founded. It is renamed the National Educational Association in 1870 and the National Education Association in 1908.

- 1862 The First Morrill Act, also known as the “Land Grant Act” becomes law, giving land to states for at least one college to teach higher education.
- 1864 Thomas Gallaudet’s son, Edward Miner Gallaudet, helps to start Gallaudet University, the first college specifically for deaf students.
- 1873 The first nursing school is established at Bellevue Hospital in New York City.
- 1879 Robert L. Dabney, a southern Presbyterian theologian, publishes “Secularized Education” in the *Princeton Review*, in which he argues that the family, not the state or the church, should be responsible for the education of children.
- 1881 Booker T. Washington becomes the first principal of the normal school in Tuskegee, Alabama, known now as Tuskegee University.
- 1884 At the Catholic bishops meeting in Baltimore, the Third Plenary Council decrees that each Catholic parish have a parochial elementary school with 2 years and all Catholic parents send their children to this school. The local bishop’s permission is required for an exception in each instance.
- 1892–1893 Joseph M. Rice, a physician turned educational reformer, publishes a series of articles in the *Forum* pointing out dull instruction, inept administration, and corruption in the public schools. His exposé helps spark educational reform in the Progressive era.
- 1893 The Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies recommends four programs of academic study for high school students that would discipline the mind and prepare students for life as well as college.
- 1896 In *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the U.S. Supreme Court establishes the “separate but equal” doctrine, which legitimizes racial segregation in public education.
- 1907 William Wirt is appointed superintendent of the Gary, Indiana, public schools and incorporates a variety of social, pedagogical, and administrative progressive reforms as part of the “Gary Plan” during his 31-year tenure.
- 1909 Ella Flagg Young becomes the first woman to be appointed superintendent of a large, urban school system (Chicago).
- 1911 The first Montessori schools open in Tarrytown, New York.
- 1916 John Dewey, philosopher and educational theorist, publishes *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, which advances the “progressive education movement.” He also establishes the University of Chicago Laboratory School to test his progressive ideas.
- 1917 Julius Rosenwald establishes a philanthropic organization to advance the “well-being of mankind.” The Rosenwald Fund provides substantial support for schools for Americans of African descent in the South.
- 1918 The Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education issues the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, a pamphlet that puts forth a broad, progressive vision of the American high school.
- 1925 In *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, the U.S. Supreme Court declares unconstitutional an Oregon law compelling public school attendance for nearly all children and recognizes the right of private schools to operate subject to “reasonable” regulation and the right of parents to direct the education and upbringing of their children.

- 1926 The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) is first administered.
- 1929 Jean Piaget publishes *The Child's Conception of the World* about cognitive development, which influenced American psychology and education.
- 1929 Robert and Helen Lynd publish *Middletown*, a classic sociological study that, among other things, reveals the impact of progressive educational reform on the public schools in Muncie, Indiana.
- 1934–1942 The Progressive Education Association conducts the Eight-Year Study, which compares college achievement of graduates from “progressive” high schools with that of graduates from “traditional” high schools.
- 1945 Thousands of working-class men attend college through the G.I. Bill after World War II.
- 1947 In *Everson v. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court applies the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to state actions and adopts a “strict separationist” interpretation of the clause. The Court permits busing of children at public expense to church-affiliated schools under the child benefit principle.
- 1948 The Educational Testing Center is formed through grants from the Rockefeller and Carnegie foundations.
- 1953 B. F. Skinner’s *Science and Human Behavior* is published. His form of behaviorism (operant conditioning), which emphasizes changes in behavior due to reinforcement, becomes widely accepted and influences many aspects of American education.
- 1954 The U.S. Supreme Court rules unanimously that de jure racial segregation is unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. This decision overturns its previous ruling in the 1896 case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*.
- 1955 The Supreme Court orders all deliberate speed in integration of public schools.
- 1957 Arkansas governor Orval Faubus calls out the National Guard to block nine Black students from entering Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Under pressure from President Eisenhower, Faubus removes the National Guard, leaving city police to confront a mob attempting to prevent enforcement of a federal court order to desegregate the school. After local authorities remove the students from the school, Eisenhower dispatches federal troops to enforce the court order. The students become known as the Little Rock Nine.
- 1957 Soviet Union launches the first earth satellite, *Sputnik*, which prompts a wave of reform aimed at shoring up the academic curriculum of American high schools.
- 1958 Congress passes the National Defense Education Act in order to improve instruction in math, science, and other critical subjects.
- 1960 First-grader Ruby Bridges becomes the first African American to attend William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans. She becomes a class of one, as parents remove all Caucasian students from the class.
- 1962 After 3,000 troops suppress riots, James Meredith becomes the first Black student at the University of Mississippi.

- 1962 The U.S. Supreme Court rules in *Engel v. Vitale* that state-sponsored prayer in public schools violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. The following year the Court extends the prohibition to devotional Bible reading.
- 1963 Alabama governor George Wallace submits to the federally deployed National Guard, and the University of Alabama is desegregated. In addition, the Supreme Court rules that laws forcing the reciting of the Lord's Prayer or Bible verses are unconstitutional.
- 1965 Congress passes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. It provides federal funds to help low-income students, which results in programs such as free lunches, Title I, and bilingual education. In addition, Project Head Start, a preschool education program for children from low-income families, begins as an 8-week summer program. This program continues today as the longest-running antipoverty program in the United States.
- 1966 Jerome Bruner publishes *Toward a Theory of Instruction*. His views regarding learning help to popularize the cognitive learning theory as an alternative to behaviorism.
- 1966 The federal government releases sociologist James S. Coleman's controversial report, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. The Coleman report suggests that school resources have less influence on achievement than do family background factors.
- 1969 Herbert R. Kohl's book *The Open Classroom* helps to promote open education, an approach emphasizing student-centered classrooms and active, holistic learning. The conservative, back-to basics movement of the 1970s begins at least partially as a backlash against open education.
- 1969 The National Assessment of Educational Progress measures educational achievement in 10 subject matter areas of a nationwide sample of 9-, 13-, and 17-year-old students.
- 1971 Ivan Illich publishes *Deschooling Society*, a radical critique of institutional schooling. It is among several critiques of schooling published between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s.
- 1971 In *Serrano v. Priest*, the California Supreme Court declares that the state's heavy dependence on the property tax to fund public schools violates the equal protection principles of the state and federal constitutions and sets an important precedent in a wave of school finance cases.
- 1974 Federal judge Arthur Garrity orders busing of African American students to predominately White schools in order to achieve racial integration of public schools in Boston. White parents protest, particularly in South Boston.
- 1975 The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) becomes federal law. It requires that a free, appropriate public education, suited to the student's individual needs and offered in the least restrictive setting, be provided for all "handicapped" children. States are given until 1978 (later extended to 1981) to fully implement the law.

- 1979 Concerned Women for America, one of several “religious right” organizations, is founded as an alternative to the liberal National Organization for Women. Education is one of its six core issues.
- 1980–2000 Homeschooling expands from 10,000 to 20,000 students to well over 1 million.
- 1981 John Holt’s book *Teach Your Own: A Hopeful Path for Education* adds momentum to the homeschooling movement.
- 1981 People For the American Way, a liberal advocacy organization, is founded to counter the efforts of “religious right” groups’ efforts to influence, among other things, education.
- 1982 Madeline Hunter’s book, *Mastery Teaching*, is published. Her direct instruction teaching model becomes widely used as teachers throughout the country attend her workshops.
- 1983 The report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk*, calls for sweeping reforms in public education and teacher training.
- 1986 Teacher in Space Project participant Christa McAuliffe, who was selected from among more than 11,000 applicants, is killed with six other astronauts when the space shuttle *Challenger* explodes 73 seconds after liftoff.
- 1990 The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) renames and amends Public Law 94-142, changes the term *handicap* to *disability*, mandates transition services, and adds autism and traumatic brain injury to the list of eligible disabilities. In addition, Teach For America is formed, reestablishing the idea of a national teachers corps.
- 1992 City Academy High School, the nation’s first charter school, opens in St. Paul, Minnesota.
- 1993 Jacqueline and Martin Brooks’s *In Search of Understanding: The Case for Constructivist Classrooms* is published. It is one of many books and articles describing constructivism, a view that learning occurs best through active construction of knowledge rather than its passive reception. Constructivist learning theory, rooted in the work of Dewey, Bruner, Piaget, and Vygotsky, becomes extremely popular in the 1990s.
- 1998 The Higher Education Act is amended and reauthorized, requiring institutions and states to produce “report cards” about teacher education.
- 1999 Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold kill 12 students and a teacher at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, and then kill themselves.
- 2000 Diane Ravitch’s book *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reform* criticizes progressive educational policies and argues for a more traditional, academically oriented education.
- 2001 The controversial No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is signed into law by President George W. Bush. The law, which reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, holds schools accountable for student achievement levels and provides penalties for schools that do not make adequate yearly progress toward meeting the goals of NCLB.

- 2002 In *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that the tax-funded Cleveland, Ohio, voucher program does not violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.
- 2003 The Higher Education Act is again amended and reauthorized, expanding access to higher education for low- and middle-income students, providing additional funds for graduate studies and increasing accountability.
- 2004 The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) reauthorizes and modifies IDEA. Changes include modifications in the Individualized Education Program process and procedural safeguards, increased authority for school personnel in special education placement decisions, and alignment of IDEA with NCLB.
- 2007 The House and Senate pass the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriation Bill, which includes reauthorization of NCLB. The bill is vetoed by President George W. Bush because it exceeds his budget request. Attempts to override his veto are unsuccessful.
- 2008 Barack Obama is elected the 44th president of the United States. Substantial changes in NCLB are expected eventually, but the nation's current economic problems take precedence over most other issues.