K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



New York Education Guide

A complete profile — schools, testing, graduation, accountability, school choice, teacher certification & financial aid, each in depth.

K12 ACADEMICS

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2026 EDITION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Everything about school in New York.

This guide profiles **New York**'s education system in seven parts, each a two-page deep dive with the key facts, plain-English explanations, and a link to the full, regularly-updated guide online. From K12 Academics, the world's largest education resource, online since 2004.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Education Overview · State Testing · Graduation Requirements · Accountability & Report Cards · School Choice · Teacher Certification · Financial Aid

SEARCH 200+ DIRECTORIES

K-12 Schools · Colleges & Universities · Vendors · Summer Programs · International Programs · Performers

Education Overview

EDUCATION IN NEW YORK

New York educates roughly 2.4 million public K–12 students across about 700 school districts — a range that runs from tiny rural districts to the New York City Department of Education , the largest school district in the United States (roughly a million students). Public education is overseen by the New York State Education Department...

WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- **Start age** — 6
- **End of compulsory age** — 16 (up to 17 in some districts)
- **Districts** — ~700, including the nation's largest (NYC)
- **Satisfying it** — Public, nonpublic, or home instruction

UNIVERSAL PRE-K

New York is a national leader in public prekindergarten . The state funds widespread Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) and full-day pre-K across many districts. New York City goes furthest, offering "Pre-K for All" (free, full-day pre-K for every 4-year-old) and "3-K for All" (expanding free programming for 3-year-olds). Head Start and...

AT A GLANCE

Compulsory	**Ages 6–16**
Districts	**~700**
Testing	**State tests · Regents**
Diploma	**Regents (changing)**
Choice	**Charters**

DISTRICTS, NYC & CHARTERS

New York's ~700 districts include the " Big 5 " city districts — New York City , Buffalo , Rochester , Syracuse , and Yonkers — plus hundreds of suburban and rural districts. New York City is a world of its own, with a citywide high-school admissions process and famous specialized high schools (Stuyvesant, Bronx Science, Brooklyn Tech...

PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN NEW YORK

- **Independent schools** — Nationally known schools such as Dalton, Trinity, Horace Mann, Riverdale Country, Brearley, and Fieldston (NYC), plus Hackley and other suburban day...
- **Catholic & parochial schools** — A very large network across the Archdiocese of New York and dioceses statewide (including the tuition-free Jesuit Regis High School)
- **Other religious schools** — An extensive Jewish day-school network — among the largest in the country — plus Quaker, Christian, and other faith-based schools
- **Specialty schools** — Montessori, Waldorf, and schools for specific learning needs

READ NEW YORK'S FULL EDUCATION OVERVIEW GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

State Testing

WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

New York is known for its Regents Examinations — subject exams in high school — plus grades 3–8 state tests, all run by the New York State Education Department (NYSED). The headline news: New York is phasing out the Regents exams as a graduation requirement , moving toward a single diploma and a "Portrait of a Graduate" framework with...

WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

- **Grades 3–8** — English Language Arts and Math each year in grades 3–8; Science in grades 5 and 8
- **Regents Examinations (high school)** — Subject exams such as English, Algebra I/Geometry/Algebra II, the sciences (Living Environment, Earth Science, Chemistry, Physics), and social...
- **NYSAA** — New York State Alternate Assessment for eligible students
- **NYSESLAT** — English proficiency test for multilingual/English-language learners

FORMAT & SUBJECTS

Regents exams are subject end-of-course tests (multiple choice plus constructed response, essays, and — in the sciences — lab-based components), given on paper on set statewide dates. Grades 3–8 tests are computer-based or paper depending on the district and year.

IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

This is changing. Through the 2026–27 school year, the current rule stands — students generally must pass about five Regents exams (score of 65) to graduate. Starting with the class of 2028 (2027–28), passing Regents exams will no longer be required to graduate. Under the NY Inspires / Portrait of a Graduate plan, New York moves to a...

AT A GLANCE	
HS exams	**Regents**
Grades 3–8	**ELA, Math, Science**
Big change	**Regents grad requirement being p...**
First affected	**Class of 2028**
Framework	**Portrait of a Graduate**
Still given?	**Yes (federal law)**

HOW IT 'S SCORED

Regents exams are scored 0–100 ; historically 65 is passing and 85+ earns "mastery"/honors distinctions. Grades 3–8 tests report four levels (Level 1–4), with Level 3+ considered proficient. As the graduation rules change, how scores are used is shifting even though the exams remain.

TESTING WINDOWS

Regents exams are given on fixed statewide dates in January, June, and August . Grades 3–8 tests are administered in the spring . NYSED publishes the exact schedule each year.

HOW TO PREPARE

- **Past Regents exams** — NYSED and many sites publish decades of released exams with answer keys — the best possible practice
- **Course-aligned review** — Regents test the course content, so strong classwork plus targeted review is the core
- **Know your class year** — What the exam means for you depends on your graduation cohort — check with your counselor

READ NEW YORK'S FULL STATE TESTING GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Graduation Requirements

AT A GLANCE

New York is in the middle of a major overhaul of its graduation requirements. Currently , students earn a diploma with 22 units of credit and by passing a set of Regents exams . But the state is phasing out the Regents-exam requirement and moving to a single, competency-based diploma under its "NY Inspires" / Portrait of a Graduate...

CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The current requirement is 22 units : typically 4 English, 4 social studies, 3 math, 3 science, 2 physical education, 1 world language, 1 art/music, half a unit of health, and electives. New credit rules are being developed as part of the transition.

TESTING TO GRADUATE

Currently, students must pass Regents exams to graduate (generally in English, math, science, and social studies, or approved alternatives/pathways). This is changing: New York plans to no longer require passing a prescribed set of Regents exams , moving to multiple measures. Students will still take exams under federal law; Regents...

DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

Currently New York offers a local diploma , a Regents diploma , and a Regents diploma with advanced designation , plus honors and seals (including the Seal of Biliteracy and the Seal of Civic Readiness). The state is moving toward a single diploma under the new system.

AT A GLANCE

Currently	**22 units + Regents exams**
Diplomas	**Local, Regents, Regents Advanced**
Big change	**Regents exam requirement being p...**
New system	**NY Inspires / Portrait of a Grad...**
First new cohort	**~grade 9 in 2027**
Confirm with	**Your district**

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

New York offers multiple graduation pathways (the "4+1" pathway options, including CTE, the arts, and biliteracy) that let students meet requirements in different ways — a preview of the more flexible system to come.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS

The new system will require students to demonstrate proficiency in state standards and the Portrait of a Graduate attributes, and includes a CTE credit (which can include financial literacy). Because this is transitional, confirm your student's exact requirements with the district.

READ NEW YORK'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Accountability & Report Cards

AT A GLANCE

New York does not use letter grades or star ratings. Instead, it assigns ESSA accountability designations — schools are either in Good Standing or identified for support — and publishes detailed report cards .

HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

New York calculates accountability indicators and assigns a designation : most schools are in Good Standing ; lower-performing schools are identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) , Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) , or Additional Targeted Support (ATSI) . There's no single grade — you read the designation plus...

WHAT GETS MEASURED

- **Academic achievement** — How students score on state tests (proficiency in reading/ELA and math)
- **Academic growth / progress** — How much students improve year to year — not just where they land
- **Graduation rate** — For high schools (the 4-year cohort rate)
- **English-learner progress** — How English learners are progressing toward proficiency
- **School quality / student success** — An extra indicator — often attendance/chronic absenteeism, college/career readiness, or similar

AT A GLANCE	
Format	**ESSA designations (tiered labels...**
Statuses	**Good Standing, CSI, TSI, ATSI**
No	**Letter grade or stars**
Tool	**NYSED data site / report cards**
Look up at	**data.nysed.gov**

FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school on New York's data site (data.nysed.gov) and its report card , which show the accountability status and the indicator results (achievement, growth, graduation rate, and more). Focus on the indicators and trend , not just the status label.

HOW FAMILIES SHOULD USE RATINGS

- **Read it in context** — A school's score reflects its students' circumstances too, not only its quality
- **Look at growth, not just scores** — Growth shows how much a school moves students — often more telling than raw proficiency
- **Check the trend** — Is the school improving over time?
- **Look past the summary** — Dig into the underlying data (subgroups, attendance, readiness)
- **Then visit** — Data raises questions; a visit answers them (see our guide on evaluating a school)

READ NEW YORK'S FULL ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORT CARDS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

School Choice

AT A GLANCE

New York does not have a statewide private -school-choice program (no ESA, voucher, or tax-credit scholarship). It does offer public choice — notably charter schools (especially in New York City) and some magnet and open-enrollment options.

THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

There is no ESA, voucher, or tax-credit scholarship for private school in New York. Families seeking a private school pay tuition (with financial aid often available — see our private-school aid guide).

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE, TOO

- **Open enrollment / transfers** — Attend a public school outside your zone, where allowed (see our finding-your-school guide)
- **Charter schools** — Tuition-free public schools of choice (where available)
- **Magnet schools** — Tuition-free public schools with a specialized focus
- **Homeschooling** — Legal in all 50 states (rules vary)

LEGAL & LEGISLATIVE STATUS

School-choice proposals appear periodically in New York but none has been enacted. Confirm the current status if you've heard of a new proposal.

AT A GLANCE

Private choice?	**No statewide program**
Public choice	**Charters, magnets, some open enr...**
Charters	**Notable in NYC & other cities**
Homeschool	**Legal (with state rules)**
Confirm with	**Your district**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Does New York have a private-school-choice program?** — No — New York has no statewide private-school-choice program, but has public charters and some open enrollment.
- **What's the difference between an ESA and a voucher?** — A voucher pays a private school directly; an ESA is a flexible parent-managed account for many approved expenses.
- **What is a tax-credit scholarship?** — Donors get a tax credit for giving to organizations that fund private-school scholarships.
- **Is there public school choice too?** — Yes — open enrollment, charters, and magnets (plus homeschooling).
- **Where do I confirm the details?** — On the official state program site (see below).

READ NEW YORK'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Teacher Certification

HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

New York teaching certificates are issued by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) . You complete an approved program, pass the NYSTCE exams and a teaching performance assessment, and earn an Initial Certificate , later advancing to a Professional Certificate .

WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- **EAS** — Educating All Students — the pedagogy/professional exam
- **CST** — Content Specialty Test(s) — for your certification area
- **edTPA** — A teaching performance assessment completed during student teaching (confirm current status)
- **Note** — New York periodically revises its required exams — verify the current set

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET LICENSED

- **A bachelor's degree** — From an accredited college or university
- **A state-approved teacher-preparation program** — Completed at a college or through an approved alternative route
- **Student teaching / clinical practice** — Supervised classroom experience
- **Pass the required exams** — See the exams section above
- **A background check** — Fingerprint-based criminal background check
- **Apply to the state** — Submit your application and documents to the licensing agency

AT A GLANCE	
Agency	NY State Education Department (N...
Pedagogy	NYSTCE EAS
Content	NYSTCE CST
Performance	edTPA (teacher performance)

OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In New York, these typically let you start teaching while completing licensure requirements — through district or university alternative-certification programs, residencies, or emergency/provisional permits. Requirements (and the exams) are...

RECIPROCITY & OUT-OF-STATE LICENSES

- **Interstate agreements** — Most states participate in the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, which eases (but doesn't guarantee) recognition of an out-of-state license
- **You may still owe exams** — States often require you to meet their own testing (or coursework) requirements, sometimes within a grace period
- **Check both states** — Confirm the specific steps with New Yorks agency and your current state

READ NEW YORK'S FULL TEACHER CERTIFICATION GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Financial Aid

THE STATE AID PICTURE

New York's state financial aid is run by the Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) . Its centerpiece is the need-based Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) , plus the Excelsior Scholarship , which can make SUNY/CUNY tuition free for eligible middle-income families.

NEED-BASED STATE GRANTS

- **Tuition Assistance Program (TAP)** — New York's main need-based grant for full-time (and some part-time) residents at approved in-state colleges — it helps cover tuition and doesn't have...

MERIT & LOTTERY SCHOLARSHIPS

- **NYS Scholarship for Academic Excellence** — Merit awards for top-performing New York high-school graduates.
- **NYS STEM Incentive Program** — Full SUNY/CUNY tuition for top students pursuing STEM who agree to work in New York.

PROMISE & FREE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS

The Excelsior Scholarship can cover SUNY/CUNY tuition for eligible New York residents under an income cap (applied after TAP and Pell), with an in-state residency/work commitment after graduation.

COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

New York's 529 College Savings Program (Direct Plan) offers tax-advantaged saving, with a state tax deduction for New York taxpayers.

AT A GLANCE

Need-based	Tuition Assistance Program (TAP)
Free tuition	Excelsior Scholarship (SUNY/CUNY...
Merit	NYS Scholarships (Excellence, ST...
529 plan	NY 529 Direct Plan
Agency	HESC
For	NY residents at in-state schools

APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- **Register with HESC** — Create the state agency's student account to track and claim awards
- **Confirm your details** — Verify residency, GPA, and enrollment as required
- **Meet any extra requirements** — Some programs need a separate form, GPA, or service commitment
- **Reapply every year** — State aid is awarded annually

DEADLINES & TIMING

State deadlines are typically much earlier than the federal FAFSA deadline , and some aid is first-come, first-served until funds run out. File the FAFSA as soon as it opens (in the fall) and confirm the state's specific priority date.

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